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Scientia Vinces: A Political-Educational Project in the Creation of the University Of São Paulo (1934)

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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

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Scientia Vincet: A Political-Educational Project in the Creation of the University Of São Paulo (1934)

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Abstract

The founding of the University of São Paulo in 1934 was due to a convergence of political and educational projects in a particularly complex context in the history of Brazil. On the one hand, there were several intellectuals who had proposed the reformulation of education in the country for the preceding decade; on the other hand, a political rupture in the Brazilian Republic caused the reorganization of power. The motto *Scientia vincet—Through science you will win*—synthesizes, at the same time, an aspiration for knowledge as an instrument of personal and social growth, as well as the desire to enable the triumph of political groups who had been militarily defeated. As a backdrop to this political scene, one can identify aspects of modernity that reached the country in the first decades of the twentieth century: mechanization of productive activities, industrial production, urbanization, and cultural manifestations.

Keywords: University of São Paulo, Manifest of the Pioneers of 1932, education in Brazil, Brazil in modernity, political-pedagogical project

***Scientia vinces*: Un proyecto político-educativo en la creación de la Universidad de São Paulo (1934)**

Resumen

La fundación de la Universidad de São Paulo, en 1934, fue resultado de la convergencia de proyectos políticos y educativos de diversos orígenes en un contexto particularmente complejo de la Historia de Brasil. Por un lado, hubo un acervo crítico de intelectuales que, desde la década anterior, proponían la reformulación de la educación en el país; por el otro, una ruptura política en la República brasileña provocó la reorganización del poder. El lema *Scientia Vincet*—A través de la ciencia vencerás— sintetiza, al mismo tiempo, una aspiración al conocimiento como instrumento de crecimiento personal y social y el deseo de hacer triunfar, a través de ese mismo conocimiento, a los grupos políticos recientemente derrotados militarmente. Como telón de fondo de este escenario político se pueden identificar aspectos de la modernidad que llegaron al país en las primeras décadas del siglo veinte: mecanización de las actividades productivas, producción industrial, urbanización, manifestaciones culturales.

Palabras clave: Universidad de São Paulo, Manifiesto de los Pioneros de 1932, educación en Brasil, Brasil en la modernidad, proyecto político-pedagógico

***Scientia vincet*: un projet politico-pédagogique dans la création de l'Université de São Paulo (1934)**

Résumé

Les perspectives critiques sont récurrentes dans l'histoire de la recherche en éducation depuis les années 1960. Dans cet article, nous examinons ce que peuvent être les histoires critiques de l'éducation au XXI^e siècle, alors que le scepticisme à l'égard des vérités acceptées est répandu et que l'analyse critique est devenue essentielle aux pratiques d'évaluation néolibérales. Cet article identifie quatre éléments clés d'une telle recherche – la critique, la vérité, la méthode et le public visé – et soutient que les histoires critiques actuelles doivent s'intéresser à ces éléments. En utilisant les perspectives des études autochtones, il propose des réflexions sur la manière dont de telles histoires pourraient être construites. Bien qu'il ne fournisse pas de réponses définitives, il souligne des considérations importantes pour la conception d'une recherche critique, notamment le type de récits produits, la position du chercheur, l'inconfort généré et la manière dont les publics potentiels sont impliqués. En conséquence, cet article pose la question de savoir si une recherche peut être

véritablement critique si elle ne provoque pas d'inconfort chez le chercheur, ou ne provoque pas d'actions réparatrices ou transformatrices.

Mots-clés : Université de São Paulo, Manifeste des Pionniers de 1932, l'éducation au Brésil, Le Brésil dans la modernité, projet politico-pédagogique

Introduction

In 1932, the creators of the “Manifest of the Pioneers of New Education” observed that, throughout the forty-three years of the republican regime in Brazil, reformist initiatives in the economic and educational spheres remained dissociated (Manifesto, 1984, p. 407). The diagnosis of the panorama of Brazilian education indicated both disarticulation and fragmentation. There was neither “unity of plan” nor “spirit of continuity” (Manifesto, 1984, p. 407). In response to this fragmentation, intellectuals identified obstacles to the establishment of a “school organization system” (Manifesto, 1984, p. 407) capable of responding to the demands of modernity and attending to the country’s specificities. The ineffectiveness of reform projects would get replicated during the various debates that occupied the political scene throughout the twentieth century and in these first decades of the twenty-first century. However, the identification of the phenomenon and the formulation of the problem appeared systematically with the “pioneers” in 1932, as well as the guidelines for overcoming a situation that was already perceived as chronic at the time.

The context that followed the Proclamation of the Brazilian Republic (1889) was marked by the affirmation of oligarchies that rose economically during the imperial period, especially linked to coffee production. Coffee producers in the western region of the state of São Paulo and in the south of Minas Gerais went through the transition from slave labor to wage labor in Brazil, a gradual process that would culminate, in 1888, with the abolition of the slave regime. Some authors (Bacha, 2004, p. 11; Furtado, 1989, p. 176) attribute the significant growth in coffee production in Brazil from 1840 onwards to the increase in global demand, mainly in European countries and the United States, which started introducing mechanization in industrial production. From 1865 onwards, the region encompassing São Paulo and Minas Gerais consolidated itself as the largest Brazilian coffee producer, overcoming the older coffee growers and moving the axis of production from Rio de Janeiro and the Paraíba River Valley to the interior of the territory. The new coffee producers were less resistant to technological advances and achieved a considerable increase in the scale of production, which generated demand for more labor. While slave labor became increasingly scarce—due to a series of legal restrictions—there were government incentives for European immigration. The transition to salaried work was inevitable, and the coffee economy was decisive for introducing free labor in Brazil. One of the results of this change was the expansion of

the Brazilian consumer market since per capita income increased by more than 100% during the 19th century. (Furtado, 1989, p. 177)



Fig. 1. Expansion of the coffee economy in the nineteenth century. Source: <http://www.multirio.rj.gov.br>

São Paulo in the Transition from the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Century

Historians and economists identify the period from late nineteenth to the early twentieth century as the transition from an agrarian country (with economic practices linked to colonial dynamics) to a country open to new technologies and with an export economy at a global level. The process also marked important changes in the center-periphery relationship: the economic axis was transferred to the interior of São Paulo, and São Paulo—a peripheral and economically marginal village throughout the colonial and imperial periods—progressively became an urban center and a city of vanguards. The new coffee farmers accumulated capital that would become, over the first decades of the twentieth century, one of the sources of financing for the industrial economy, which boosted the urban development of the center-south axis and marked the beginning of modernity in Brazil. According to a survey carried out in 1836, the city's factories followed the colonial standard, since “the value of a slave with qualifications or imported articles was higher than the cost of land, local household furnishings, or services.” (Mota, 2003, p. 252) This situation would be subverted from 1882 onwards, thanks to the foundation of the

Economic Society for the Benefit of Agriculture and Industry of the Province, with library, maps, models, and machines offered by a notable scientist born in Santos and trained in Coimbra, the future minister José Bonifácio. (Mota, 2003, p. 252)

Until the end of the third quarter of the nineteenth century, the city of São Paulo was a peripheral village that stood out for its agricultural production of cotton, fabric factories and artisanal embroidery, alongside strong local trade characterized by the activity of women and mixed-race people. From a set of orchestrated actions deeply related to the rise of the modern coffee economy in the state, the city went through a process of capitalization, “extending its dominance over the rural area in the form of loans,” and “connecting to the centers of world trade, as a connection point for broader systems” (Mota, 2003, p. 253). The new coffee growers no longer lived in the farm’s main house, but rather in the city’s two-story mansions. It is in the city that this new aristocracy acted politically and economically, interfering in power relations and state regulation of economic activity.

In the years between 1880 and 1901, there was a transfer throughout the state of profits from the coffee economy to investments in the manufacturing sector, such that industries multiplied throughout the interior of São Paulo. Those who left their impressions of the city at the beginning of the 20th century noted the “importance of this new urban function” (Petrone, 1954, p. 127). The Argentine Manuel Bernardes characterized the city of São Paulo as “a true industrial and economic metropolis of the state, and perhaps of the Union” (Bernardes, 1908, p. 193), in line with what Mota called the “construction of the modern city” (2003, p. 255). On the eve of the Proclamation of the Republic (1889), the city underwent a sustained period of modernization:

Its kerosene lamps had been replaced in 1872 by gas lighting [...] and in 1887 the first 606 lamps were already doubled, in addition to 1,430 buildings being connected to the network. In 1888, the first electric lights were switched on in the city center, precariously. The municipal slaughterhouse was opened in 1887 and in 1890 a second market was opened, putting an end to the popular stalls. (Mota, 2003, p. 254)

In the years between 1880 and 1901, profits from the coffee economy were transferred to investments in the manufacturing sector throughout the state, multiplying industries throughout the interior of São Paulo. The data presented by Bandeira Júnior (1901, p. XXVI) show exponential growth of heavy industry in the state of São Paulo, which had increased in size by 100% in a period of just nine years, numbers characteristic of the boom in the coffee economy.

Interval	(n) Factories
Before 1880	16
From 1880 to 1889	16
From 1890 to 1894	21
From 1895 to 1901	39
Total	92

Source: Petrone, 1954, p. 101.

If the phenomenon coincided with the emergence of mechanization processes—from that point on, increasingly universal—it was also an offshoot of the hegemony of coffee growing groups. This is because the coffee companies were concentrated in São Paulo (quickly surpassing production in the state of Rio de Janeiro, which housed the federal capital). In this regard, the report highlighted the variety of industrial production in São Paulo, even in the nineteenth century, in a way that

comparing from an industrial point of view, the State of São Paulo with the other States of the Republic, it seems to us that we can affirm that it is the only one that maintains manufacturing establishments in all sectors, some of which only exist here, not only in the case of all of Brazil, as well as South America. (Bandeira Jr., 1901, p. X)

The emphasis was on the period following the Proclamation of the Republic, an event often associated with the abolition of slavery and industrialization, which would have inaugurated Brazilian modernity (Mota, 2003, p. 255). Contemporary reports also suggest the relationship, so that “from the smallest and most insignificant machines, even the most important engines are in motion.” These, in turn, drove “hundreds of other machines” operated by “thousands of workers of both sexes” (Bandeira Jr., 1901, p. XIII).

Period reports in general used to attribute to the region, and mainly the city of São Paulo, the condition of modernity, which was associated with the dominant aspects of a “civilizational tone” according to a spirit of the time marked by European canonical values. The aspects encompass urbanization, the mechanization of work, the availability of electrical energy, and hygiene initiatives. These are aspects of a civilization project that began to be recognized in the city by the outsider, and also desired by the city itself as part of an identity construction. Thus, the foreigner Bernardes predicted that, within two years from 1908 (the date of publication of his “traveler's report”), São Paulo would have “one million meters of pavement built”, which would result in streets in which one could “fly in automobiles” (Bernardes, 1908, p. 194), a city whose authority was engaged in a great “construction work” so that, at that

moment, it was “one of the most beautiful, most attractive and most hygienic of the (American) continent” (Bernardes, 1908, p. 193). At the same time, the Brazilian Bandeira Jr. associates “work, beauty, art, and hygiene” (Bandeira Jr., 1901, p. IV) with the supposed progress of civilization, identified with the “privileged spirits” of some rulers and entrepreneurs.

São Paulo had entered the “civilized world” through a series of appropriations of Western culture. Alongside the attributed “entrepreneurial spirit” of São Paulo natives, a force of convergence towards “modernity” was imposed, namely, European immigration (Bandeira Jr., 1901, p. XX). The ingenuity required by the project of modern Brazil involved, on the one hand, the presence of populations of European origin, especially Italians, who were qualified essentially as artists, “whatever their way of life or struggle for existence” (ibid.). At the same time, there was the perception that economic prosperity and scientific development walked together, and therefore public capital was invested in:

loans intended for schools, for supplies of drinking water, for exhibitions, for colonization, for prisons, for hospitals, for railways, for the exploration of the territory, for creating the meteorological service, for drawing up geographical and geological charts, for studying rivers to navigate them or place bridges over them [...]” (Bernardes, 1908, p. 198)

The particular situation of economic growth, urban development, and technological appropriation was accompanied by a hegemony of São Paulo elites linked to coffee within the scope of national politics. The distribution of power in the recent Brazilian Republic had moved along with the economic axis. The center-south hub of coffee production, a region that rose during the nineteenth century since the transfer of the Portuguese court to Brazil (1808) during the Napoleonic wars, surpassed the Northeast, a region that had developed during the colonial period with sugar production. Power had also shifted in the center-south itself throughout the nineteenth century, gradually migrating from the Paraíba Valley to the west of São Paulo and to the state of Minas Gerais (Fig. 1), as the economic axis—now with the new coffee growers—moved. They quickly adopted mechanization in production, employed free labor (mainly Italian immigrants) and, by controlling central power, began to benefit from government policies that favored the cultivation and commercialization of their product. After the Proclamation of the Republic in Brazil (1889), the power project linked to the coffee economy came to fruition with the “Coffee-with-Milk Policy,” characterized by the alternation between the elites of São Paulo and Minas Gerais, a period which lasted from 1894 to 1930. For reasons of space and to better explore the theme of this article, we will not dwell on the mechanisms that supported this dynamic.

This convergence between economic and political centrality, with its scientific-technological components and its identification with modernity, carried with it important cultural changes that reflected new aspirations; not only of the coffee growing elite, but

also of different groups, formed within a thriving urban center and around a new national project. From bachelors linked to the long-standing Faculty of Law of Largo São Francisco, founded in 1827, to the intellectuals who promoted the Modern Art Week in February 1922, to liberal professionals and the middle classes who were at the same time the engine and the product of urban development, these groups had common traits that led them to converge on a Brazil project that fundamentally differed from the current project. The transformations in the Brazilian economy and society—and especially in São Paulo—led to decisive changes in mentality, highlighting concepts of culture, education, science, and university. In 1808, the establishment of the Portuguese royal court in Brazil and, consequently, the transfer of the Portuguese government to Brazilian lands, led to the creation of the first higher schools. Helena Sampaio observes that

for more than a century [...] until 1934, the higher education model was training for traditional liberal professions, such as law and medicine, or for engineering.
(Sampaio, 1991, p. 1)

Certainly, research aimed at technological development was one of the components of the debate about universities at the beginning of the twentieth century. The models proposed in the 1920s and 1930s, in various parts of the country, corresponded to the expectation of modernity that was creeping in through urbanization and mechanization in some locations. Solutions to the demands of the twentieth century would come from a policy of scientific development, in which research should have “a space more distant from practical results” [...] with “freedom of experimentation and thought” (Sampaio, 1991, p. 8). In the new project, research was no longer an appendix in professional training institutions, and the university proposal emerged with the task of “housing science, scientists, and humanities in general and promoting research” (Sampaio, 1991, p. 8).

A New Project for Brazil

The year 1930 was particularly important in the sense of catalyzing stimuli that were only occurring in an embryonic way. Júlio Prestes (1882-1946), president of the Republic elected in the context of the “Café-com-Leite,” was prevented from assuming the presidency in a coup d'état that brought Getúlio Vargas (1882-1954) to power, with the support of dissident oligarchies that were dissatisfied with the predominance of São Paulo. Seven years later, Vargas' government would become an autocracy. The 1930 event marked the rupture of São Paulo's hegemony in the national government, but, at the same time, it gave birth to the meeting of different groups that made up São Paulo society in a political-cultural coalition. These groups were influenced by the educational reform proposals that flourished across the country, in deep connection with the development of industry and the demands brought about by “modernity.” In this context,

the theme of education has acquired relevance in the formulation of national public policies. The young Brazilian republic had inherited from the colonial and imperial past a slave-based social structure and an oligarchic political system, in which basic education was intended only for the elites. In general, workers were understood *en masse* to be disciplined to maintain order (Gomes et. al, 2023, p. 2), and resorting to state violence was not uncommon (Gomes et. al, 2023, p. 2). Such a scenario always tended to reproduce a “school education for the few” (Gomes et. al, 2023, p. 3), in which not only the insufficiency of schools and teachers was evident, but first of all, the absence of education in state policy.

The transition from colony status to independent nation status in 1822 did not result in changes in the state’s relationship with university education. Likewise, the Proclamation of the Republic in 1889 did not change the dynamics of professional training in Brazil. Aimed at the middle classes of the population, the “model of training for professions, in isolated colleges, prevailed” (Sampaio, 1991, p. 3). The creation of two Law courses—in São Paulo and Olinda—in 1827 should not, in this context, be understood as a factor of rupture, but, rather, as a concern

of constituting a cohesive, disciplined elite, devoted to the reasons of the State, which would put itself at the head of business and could, little by little, replace the traditional bureaucracy inherited from the Johannine (imperial) administration, rather than by the concern to train jurists who reproduce the political ideology of the emerging National State. (Adorno, 1988, p. 236)

The idea of universal education (that is, to which everyone should have access) was born in Brazil in the first decades of the twentieth century—in contrast to countries in Spanish America, in which the routine had consisted of a broad implementation of educational policies and the creation of universities since the sixteenth century—and resulted in different proposals in the different states of the Federation. Of these, in 1927, the reforms proposed in Rio de Janeiro by Fernando Azevedo and in Minas Gerais by Francisco Campos stand out. Both identified “previous efforts in educational terms as unsuccessful, describing the Brazilian educational framework as chaotic” (Vidal & Faria Filho, 2002, p. 33). The diagnosis, in both cases, pointed to

the lack of materials, the inconsistency of methods, the inadequacy of facilities and the inefficiency of teaching caused by high illiteracy rates (around 80%). (Vidal & Faria Filho, 2002, p. 33)

In Rio de Janeiro, Fernando Azevedo's reform proposed a complete break with all previous initiatives, considered out of date in relation to social changes and not based on science. Educator and sociologist Fernando Azevedo (1894-1974) completed his training in the states of São Paulo, Minas Geraí, and Rio de Janeiro. Azevedo also played an important role in government education departments, both in São Paulo and in Rio de Janeiro. He would later teach sociology of education and anthropology at the

newly founded University of São Paulo. At the time he proposed the reform, he held the position of General Director of Public Instruction of the Federal District (1926-1930). At that time, the federal capital was Rio de Janeiro. Still in 1926, he published the “Education Inquiry,” research commissioned by Julio de Mesquita Filho, director of the newspaper O Estado de São Paulo. This was one of several actions that led to the founding of the University of São Paulo in 1934. Two ideas present in both the reform proposal and the Manifest of the Pioneers can summarize Fernando Azevedo's thinking: a necessary change of mentality “to solve the urgent problems of Brazilian educational reality” (Penna, 2010, p. 30); and the need to discuss purposes, understanding education as “a problem of a philosophical and political order” (Penna, 2010, p. 30).

Science, based on research qualified by the scientific method, should be the basis of the new educational project. Following historical materialism, Azevedo equated education with work, stating that, as much as work, education is historically produced. The school should, therefore, represent a microcosm of society, reproducing “the totality of social experience” (Brito et al, 2017, p. 99). It should contain doctors' offices, cinema, radio, covering all aspects of the life in which the child was growing up (Brito et al., 2017, p. 99). Based on this foundation, we can list the three assumptions of Azevedo's school: universalization for all children; the articulation between education levels; and adaptation to the environment, with significant distinctions between urban and rural schools. Such a school organization implied the “radical reorganization of the entire school apparatus” (Manifesto, 1984, p. 408), which would entail a complete replacement of the “traditional school” by the “new school” (Manifesto, 1984, p. 408).

In Minas Gerais, on the other hand, the reform intended to operate as “innovation within tradition” (Brito et al, 2017, p. 99), with the creation of a “modern school,” but this implied concessions to traditional models, including the Catholic-based school. The lawyer, professor, and jurist Francisco Campos (1891-1968) was also a politician linked to the Minas Gerais Party. In 1926, deputy Francisco Campos was appointed Secretary of the Interior by Minas Gerais governor Antonio Carlos. In this context, he promoted educational reform in the state. Later, he joined the movement that broke São Paulo's hegemony and brought Getúlio Vargas to power in 1930 and would become minister of education in the new government.

The Francisco Campos Reform stood out for providing, at a legal level, organicity to the school culture of secondary education, homogenizing the school culture of Brazilian secondary education by officially establishing administrative and didactic-pedagogical procedures for all gymnasiums in the national territory (Dallabrida, 2009, pp. 186, 188). Unlike Fernando Azevedo's project, the Francisco Campos reform was implemented in 1931, with Campos heading the Ministry of Education and Public Health of the Getúlio Vargas government. This consisted of reorganizing teaching units, establishing uniform formal procedures without, however, interfering in a substantive way with school content. At the same time, the Reform had the support of sectors of the Catholic clergy,

and represented a reflux in secular education, a provision of the first Constitution of the Brazilian Republic, promulgated in 1891. The result was an education with a strong elitist character, both from a curriculum perspective and from an assessment perspective. Furthermore, the reform did not consider the specificities of the agrarian sector, still the majority in the country. Despite the limitations, the idea of an educational reorganization, providing uniformity and organicity to existing practices, represented a fundamental advance: it was responsible for creating a Brazilian education system, something unprecedented in 400 years¹ of settlement in Brazil.

The differences between the proposals of Azevedo and Campos were the expression, in the educational arena, of the political polarization and ideological debates that dominated the Brazilian—and world—scene in the transition from the 1920s to the 1930s. On one hand, there was a group of progressive intellectuals centered around the defense of the unity of national education and secular teaching, such as Anísio Teixeira, Lourenço Filho, Carneiro Leão, and Fernando Azevedo himself, representatives of the so-called *Escola Nova* [New School]; on the other, a conservative group, marked by the presence of Catholics, which defended the implementation of a reform in teaching structures that did not alter some substantial elements, such as social differentiation and religious orientation, which echoed Francisco Campos' positions. The two groups met, in December 1931, at the IV National Education Conference. The Conference had been meeting since the 1920s and was promoted by the Brazilian Education Association. Under the theme “The main guidelines for popular education,” the purpose of this fourth edition was to develop an education project for the country, which did not happen due to irreconcilable political differences.

From that impasse resulted the so-called Manifest of the Pioneers of New Education, produced by the party group for broad reformulation, which intended to publicize and follow up on the debates. Written by Fernando de Azevedo, Anísio Teixeira, and other intellectuals of the time, the document presented “an idea that it would be possible to have a strong national education policy with decentralization in its execution” (Cury, 2014, p. 50). The idea of a centralization of educational policies, combined with the autonomy of the states in their execution, would be recovered in the Federal Constitution of 1988. Cury observes that at the time of the Manifest's creation, there was a tendency to political centralization in the country (Cury, 2014, p. 50), with the Vargas government seeking to reduce the power of the regional oligarchies (that had resulted in the Coffee-with-Milk Policy agreements). In a way, the purpose of creating a national education system aligned with the purpose of strengthening the federal government. This political project was linked to an economic project for

¹ Unlike Spanish colonization in America, guided from its first moments by the creation of schools and universities aimed at local elites, Portuguese colonization in Brazil did not create educational institutions aimed at training the local ruling classes. Their children were sent to Europe to complete or accomplish their studies in full. The first university would only be founded in Brazil in 1920, the University of Rio de Janeiro, created by federal Decree n. 14.343.

recovering the sense of nation, and as a way of producing a new model of development (Bresser-Pereira, 2012).

Based on the diagnosis of “fragmentation” and “disarticulation” of Brazilian education, the pioneers proposed “unity of plan” and “spirit of continuity” (Manifesto, 1984, p. 407), which should result in a system suitable for both the specificity of the Brazilian case and the modernity that reached the country. These elements also crossed the concerns of the “moderates,” linked to Francisco de Campos. The difference, expressed in the Manifest’s text, consisted of the search to “transfer the solution of school problems from administrative terrain to political-social plan.” (Manifesto, 1984, p. 408). In this sense, the proposal presented itself as radical since it proposed changes that affected the structure of society itself. Such an “educational reconstruction plan of such great scope and vast proportions” (Manifesto, 1984, p. 423) should result in a “modern school equipped with all the resources to extend and fertilize its action in solidarity with the social environment” (Manifesto, 1984, p. 423). Such a school had universal education as its principle, encompassing all social layers and affecting them according to their specificity. Modernity was perceived as the urgency imposed on the country, with the advance of industrialization in the first decades of the 20th century, deepened with the import substitution industry after the beginning of the First World War. In such context, the idea of an educational system based on scientific principles emerged and, in parallel, the notion of an education with scientific and technical bases, overcoming “excessively literary training” (Manifesto, 1984, p. 418).

But the Manifest also echoed the malaise of civilization between its lines, highlighting “the tragic complexity of the problems posed by modern societies” (Manifesto, 1984, p. 424). The concern appears in another text by Azevedo, in which he analyzes the inner restlessness of human beings in the face of the achievements of civilization: a certain mechanistic foundation dominated knowledge, and the so-called “positive spirit” would have got carried away by the “cult of experimental science” (Azevedo, 2010, p. 13). Anchored in “empiricism,” this positive science would promote “tacit or confessed skepticism, even cultivated as a mental attitude” (Azevedo, 2010, p. 13). Such an inflection of the human spirit would have been the result of the crisis of idealism, which led to the advent of radical realism. Without space for philosophical debate, the imperative of machines would prevail:

The spirit that was proud of its scientific discoveries and its technical applications would have thought that it had enriched itself and was going to enrich itself further. The clearest consequence of this progress was the appearance of a new order of phenomena, which turned against the creative power that had made it possible. The world of machines organized itself, invaded everything. Little by little existence was dominated by the demands of the monster. It was supposed to help us to subdue nature; but it has subjected man to itself and leaves them no time for the purely spiritual life. (Azevedo, 2010, p. 13)

The memory of the First World War and the mass destruction promoted by the advancement of weapons science recommended a cautious look at technological advancement. Azevedo interjected the need for the mediation of ideas, based on qualified reflections in scientific spaces that were not limited to empirical investigation, but were dedicated to ontological reflection. The pioneers of the Manifest observed that higher education in Brazil was restricted to “liberal professions” (engineering, medicine, and law) “without extending its strictly professional purpose to scientific and cultural horizons” (Manifesto, 1984, p. 419). Instead of this organization of higher education, as disjointed and fragmentary as that of basic education, it was proposed:

the simultaneous or successive creation, in each university framework, of faculties of social and economic sciences; of mathematical, physical and natural sciences, and of philosophy and letters which, taking into account the variety of mental types and social needs, should open up to the universities that are created or reorganized an increasingly vast field of scientific investigations. (Manifesto, 1984, p. 419)

University education conceived in this way had a character of depth and universality, capable of leading to the “constant improvement of human knowledge” (Manifesto, 1984, p. 420). Science, no longer “subordinated to the technique or art it serves” (Manifesto, 1984, p. 420), should be the engine of the University’s functioning. In the spaces of the University, “political, social, moral, and aesthetic ideals” should be created and disseminated (Manifesto, 1984, p. 420), favoring the elaboration of a nation project. At this point, a convergence began between the political project of the pioneers and the alliance that had been formed in São Paulo following the rise of the Getúlio Vargas government.

The University of São Paulo (USP) Project

The political project that created the University of São Paulo is not dissociated from the set of foundations and practices that dominated the national scene in the first years of the Vargas Era.² However, the USP should not be confused with these Vargas Era practices, as the USP also represents a regional reaction to the current government. In this sense, the São Paulo project could be called an “anti-project”: it was a movement of different social groups, momentarily united against a government with a centripetal tendency and representing a regional reaction to the loss of political hegemony. In 1932, the São Paulo Revolution broke out, an armed reaction to the seizure of power by the Vargas group in 1930. The result was the military defeat of São Paulo, but, at the

² The period between 1930 and 1945 is called “Vargas Era.” Between 1930 and 1934, the provisional government took place, which followed the coup d’état; between 1934 and 1937, a democratic government was in force under the Constitution promulgated in 1934. Finally, between 1937 and 1945, the country lived under a dictatorship, with the revocation of the democratic constitution and the imposition of a constitution with an authoritarian bias in 1937: the outcome occurred in 1945, when Vargas was deposed, with the redemocratization of the country.

same time, the rebel's pressure resulted in the government promulgating a democratic Constitution in 1934.³ In the field of ideas, São Paulo residents resumed the national debate on Brazilian education, especially the ideals of the Pioneers' Manifest, which would result in the foundations of the University of São Paulo, created in 1934.

According to Motoyama et al, after the military defeat,

the leaders of the state of São Paulo realize that the country's political hegemony would not be regained so easily by them. They then look for another path: an educational project to form an intellectual elite capable of imposing itself as a national leader. To achieve this objective, one of the priorities would be the training of teachers for secondary, normal, and higher education. (Motoyama et al., 2006, p. 123)

"São Paulo Communion" [*Comunhão Paulista*] was the name for the convergence of diverse groups (such as coffee growers, industrialists, and independent professionals) around a national project to be proposed and led by the state of São Paulo. Its communication and propaganda outpost was the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo*, led by Júlio de Mesquita Filho. In a speech published in *O Estado de São Paulo* on April 24, 1934, Júlio de Mesquita Filho declared that the project of the "state group" was directed towards the "definitive installation of democracy in Brazil" and towards the restoration of the "democratic principles of the Republic" (OESP, 04/24/1934). This statement led Irene Cardoso to state that the "State [newspaper] group" considered itself as the São Paulo Communion itself. And still,

the path to the political realization of the fundamental project of political regeneration of nationality proposed by the São Paulo communion is education and, within it, the most important element, the University. (Cardoso, 1982, p. 41)

The University would, therefore, be responsible for forming a ruling elite that would lead a process of "regeneration of nationality" to be disseminated among the middle classes, understood as a "current of opinion" (Cardoso, 1982, p. 42), although they had only graduated from secondary education. The ideal of a university would be formulated and made known by this press, whose main editors were Júlio de Mesquita Filho himself (secretary of the newspaper), Nestor Rangel Pestana, and the intervenor of São Paulo⁴ Armando de Salles Oliveira, all of them moving in a "universe similar both political and ideological" (Cardoso, 1982, p. 43). At the same time, there was a general recognition of the disarticulation and fragmentation of Brazilian Education, incapable of providing answers to the questions brought by modernity, characterized by the

³ The 1934 Constitution, which established a brief democratic period in the Vargas Era, resulted largely from the pressure exerted by São Paulo in the 1932 civil war. Historiography on the subject considers that, although defeated militarily, the São Paulo group emerged morally victorious.

⁴ In charge of the government of the state of São Paulo, appointed by the then President of the Republic Getúlio Vargas.

accelerated process of urbanization and industrialization. In this sense, the diagnosis, and proposals of the “pioneers” of 1932, with their “national reconstruction plan of great scope and vast proportions” (Manifesto, 1984, p. 423), provided important elements for the São Paulo political project. In this plan, the University assumed a fundamental social role: in addition to the empirical science that served the demands of technological advancement, it was necessary to cultivate social and political values to form a thought that could guide Brazilian society in its specific contours. In the state of São Paulo at the turn of the nineteenth century to the twentieth century, colleges and higher education schools were founded, which, although isolated, reflected a proto-policy of higher education, aimed mainly at the “development and to the progress desired by bourgeois society in São Paulo”—hence the emphasis on “professional areas” (Motoyama et. al., 2006, p. 124). As the first decades of the twentieth century progressed and following recent political events—the coup d’état of 1930—and social demonstrations—the Manifest of the Pioneers of 1932—people began to defend “the creation of a university to provide a framework for this policy” (Motoyama et al., 2006, p. 124). It was necessary to create an intellectual elite, for which free university courses were proposed and aimed at social classes in general, although they were accessible, in most cases, to social elites. In one way or another, education was perceived as “a way for São Paulo to regain the country’s political hegemony” (Motoyama et al., 2006, p. 124).

The project for the foundation of the University of São Paulo was composed by Fernando Azevedo at the request of Júlio de Mesquita Filho and Armando de Salles Oliveira. The combination of these names at the origin of the foundation reflects the breadth of the project, which articulated the reforming project for national education expressed in the 1932 Manifest and the aspirations of São Paulo's ruling classes. On January 25, 1934, the date on which the city of São Paulo celebrated 380 years of its foundation, the federal intervener of the state of São Paulo, Armando de Salles Oliveira, signed Decree 6,283, which created the University of São Paulo. The introduction to the text of the law expresses the zeitgeist of the proposals in vogue in Brazil at that time, in their deep articulation with the São Paulo regional project:

[...] considering that the organization and development of philosophical, scientific, literary, and artistic culture constitute the foundations on which the freedom and greatness of a people are based; considering that, only through its institutes of scientific research, of high studies, of free, disinterested culture, can a modern nation acquire awareness of itself, its resources, its destinies; considering that the formation of ruling classes, especially in countries with heterogeneous populations and diverse customs, is conditioned on the organization of a cultural and university apparatus, which offers opportunities to everyone and processes the selection of the most capable; considering that, given the level of culture already achieved by the State of São Paulo, with Schools, Faculties, Institutes of professional training and

scientific research, it is necessary and opportune to raise the preparation of man, professional and citizen to a university level [...]. (Decree 6,283, caput)

This series of “considering” summarizes the concerns on the agenda at the national level, in strict articulation with the São Paulo project; that is, the belief in the need for a science guided by a broad cultural training and not just the acquisition of technical skills; the perspective of scientific development as a demand of modernity; and the need for university organization as an aspect of the training of ruling elites—hence the need for a university policy for teacher training. In addition to pointing to the position of the state of São Paulo as a hub for technical and technological training, this last “considering” points to the future composition of the University itself, which included pre-existing colleges and higher schools, such as the Faculty of Law of São Paulo at Largo São Francisco, the Faculty of Medicine, the Polytechnic School, the Higher School of Agriculture, among others. As a hub for aggregating courses, the Faculty of Philosophy, Letters, and Human Sciences (FFLC) was created, dedicated to research in basic science and social and human sciences and to the training of teachers that would be responsible for the training of the middle and the ruling classes. The FFLC was understood as “the heart of the university, as an integrating center, and catalyst of the idea of a university” (Paula, 2002, p. 156).

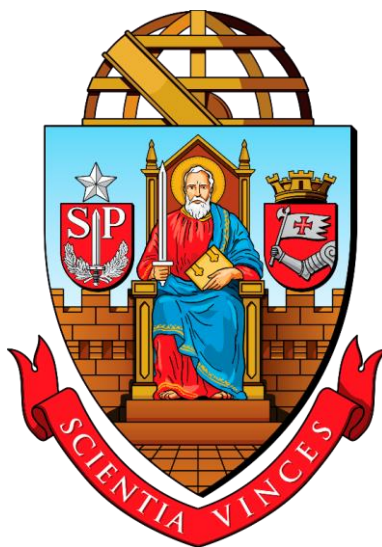


Fig. 2. Coat of arms with the emblem of the University of São Paulo

The coat of arms created for the University of São Paulo (Fig. 2) can be considered as a symptom of this set of ideas about education, and particularly the São Paulo

project. In force to this day, it contains a chair, a representation of the authority inherent to the university institution since its creation in the Middle Ages, and one of the common representations of Paul of Tarsus, who gives his name to both the state and the university sitting on it, wielding a sword and a text from Holy Scripture, both representing the strength of his word. Flanking the figure of Paul seated on the chair, and supported on a wall, are the symbols of the state of São Paulo and the city of São Paulo. Finally, the Latin couplet *scientia vincet*, "Through science, you will win," reinforces the role of science, understood as a broad manifestation of the human spirit, in the development of the nation. The motto also supports the understanding that the São Paulo project, which had been defeated by federal forces in the military sphere, could triumph in the cultural sphere.

Approved by Federal Decree 39 of September 3, 1934, the statutes of the University of São Paulo, in accordance with the project and the chosen symbols, listed the following purposes:

- 1st – Promote scientific research and stimulate literary and artistic production;
- 2nd – Transmit, through teaching, knowledge of cultural value;
- 3rd – Train technicians and professionals in activities with a scientific, literary or artistic base;
- 4th – Disseminate sciences, letters and arts;
- 5th – Encourage cooperation in intellectual work." (Decree 39, Art. 1st.)

Based on the appreciation of science as the foundation of social and economic development, with a view to responding to the challenges of modernity, the statutes outlined a university with integration into society and the capacity to intervene in the formulation of national policies. Created by a decree of January 1934, the USP had its statutes approved by a decree of September 1934, which bears the signature of the new government led by Getúlio Vargas. The choice of the rector of USP was the prerogative of the state governor, which had two fundamental consequences: 1) The rector, aligned with the highest authority in the state, was politically strong but did not always have legitimacy among his peers at the University. Such a situation resulted in the enclosure of schools, colleges, and institutes, which began to make their decisions in a decentralized manner. 2) The advent of a dictatorial regime, as occurred from 1937 onwards, placed the University under the direct influence of the central government, since governors began to be chosen by Getúlio Vargas himself. The situation would only end in 1944, when the Vargas regime lost support and the country was being prepared for a democratic transition.

In February 1944, decree law no. 13,855 transformed the USP into a state authority, an important step towards university autonomy. The decree provided for the creation of the Administrative Department. In the following years, it was divided into several

administrative bodies within the USP. Despite the internal disputes of the 1950s and 1960s, this situation tended to prevail until 1968 when the military dictatorship (1964-1985) promoted a reform that strengthened the rector's power "to the detriment of the different collegiate bodies, and heavily hierarchized the teaching career" (Carlotto, 2024, p. 90). As a result, the administrative power of the University was concentrated at the top of the career ladder, which gave great power to full professors. The University's central administration now has "agenda-setting power over different units, formulating a teaching, research and extension policy for the university" (CARLOTTO, 2024, p. 91). Furthermore, the rectors of the period had a strong connection with the military government.

With democratization (1985 - present), the University's statutes underwent a reform, which resulted in reducing the power of governors over choosing rectors and, at the same time, making their appointment conditional on their political career at the University and no longer outside it. It was 1987 that characterized the expansion of the participation of the University's units in choosing the rector, with the establishment of the triple list that conditioned the governor's decision. The processes that led USP from 1934 to the present day involve advances, setbacks, and many political conflicts, both within and outside the University. The 1988 Constitution, currently in force, resumed important implicit aspects of the founding of USP, although based on rearrangements that incorporated successive reforms and contemplated different interests.

In the structure of the statutes approved in 1934, it was already possible to identify the three pillars on which the University of São Paulo would be based: teaching, research, and extension, which became norms for all Brazilian public universities after the 1988 Constitution.⁵ The university, thus conceived, would be an important agent for the formation of social entities, the exercise of influence over the political class, and the impetus for economic activities. Some aspects of this university's action on Brazilian society can be identified in teaching and research initiatives throughout USP's history.⁶

On the other hand, successive reforms incorporated centralizing characteristics and expanded the hierarchy at the University, which resulted in a concentration of power in the higher spheres of academic and political influence. University autonomy has been repeatedly threatened, especially through the budget. This is the case of the Constitutional Amendment Proposal promulgated on September 8, 2016, which allows the Union to freely dispose of part of its revenue and extends the mechanism to states, municipalities, and the Federal District. University autonomy is, therefore, not a purely philosophical or ideological aspect that guides academic or political decisions; it is

⁵ According to Article 207 of the Brazilian Federal Constitution, "universities enjoy didactic-scientific, administrative and financial and asset management autonomy, and will obey the principle of inseparability between teaching, research and extension." https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/constituicao/constituicao.htm

⁶ See Motoyama et. al., USP 70 anos: Imagens de uma História Viva, org. Shozo Motoyama, São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 2006.

inseparable from national promotion policies for science, and largely depends on the allocation of resources to universities.

The triumph of the original project—winning through science—depended on a device that would also become fundamental for Brazilian universities: university autonomy, guaranteed in the USP Foundation Decree. University autonomy was aligned to São Paulo Communion's expectations; that is, remaining outside the federal government's zone of influence. Article 24 sets out the principle of autonomy, thought, administration, and finance which would be taken up by the Federal Constitution in force today:

The University of São Paulo has legal personality, scientific, didactic, and administrative autonomy, within the limits of this decree, and, once an asset is established, with the income from which it is maintained, it will have complete economic and financial autonomy. (Decree 6,283, Art. 24)

The development of the nation would take place through the action of an intellectual elite, which should be formed from the best resources available in global education. This was understood as a synonym for European education, which, in the dominant conception, not only represented modernity and development but was also the only one capable of providing answers to the dilemmas of modernity and development. The newly emerged Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences, and Letters was responsible for articulating the other faculties and schools, bringing together diverse areas of knowledge, and providing scientific training in a broad and humanistic sense. The university would receive teachers working in European universities (Fig. 3). The sociologist Georges Dumas, from Université Sorbonne, and the journalist Julio de Mesquita Filho, director of the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo*, maintained a connection for the transit of professors from Europe to USP. The connection with science meant entry into modernity from the perspective of European culture, an aspect always present on the Brazilian horizon in those first decades of the twentieth century.

In 2016, three books containing the contracts of these first teachers and researchers were discovered in the São Paulo State Public Archive (APESP; Fig. 4), in the 1930s and 1940s (APESP, Reference code 10G4/ Higher Education). The agreement with European universities ensured the sending of teachers, which would guarantee “quality teaching” at the institution. Teodoro Ramos, originally from the Polytechnic School and first director of FFCL, hired the first teachers. The first wave of foreign teachers was composed by thirteen intellectuals, of which six were French, four Italian, and six German. Claude Lévi-Strauss was just twenty-six years old when he was hired and was a secondary school teacher in France. French professors were predominant in the Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences, and Literature. These French professors were responsible for shaping their students' instruction and worldview. In that regard, the term “mission” is revealing. When the Portuguese court was transferred to Rio de Janeiro in 1808, King D. João VI contracted the French cultural mission to create the Royal School of Sciences, Arts, and Crafts. The same concept and the same

terminology—a French mission—would end up being retaken in the context of sending professors to the universities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in the 1930s and 1940s. In the foundation of a Brazilian university culture, traces of colonialism remained as deep as it was persistent.

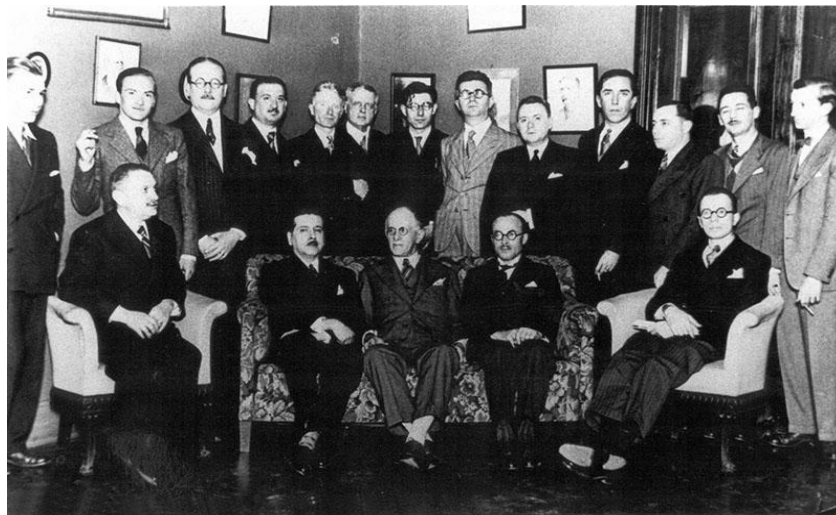


Fig. 3. Portrait (1934). Standing, left to right: (1) non-identified person, (2) non-identified person, (3) René Thiollire, (4) Moura Campos, (5) non-identified person, (6) Afonso Taunay, (7) Etiène Borne, (8) Paul Bastide, (9) Paul Hugon, (10) Júlio de Mesquita Filho, (11) André Dreyfuss, (12) non-identified person, (13) Vicente Rao. Sitting, left to right: (1) non-identified person, (2) non-identified person, (3) Reynaldo Porchat, (4) non-identified person, (5) Theodoro Ramos. Photo: Collection CAPH / FFLCH

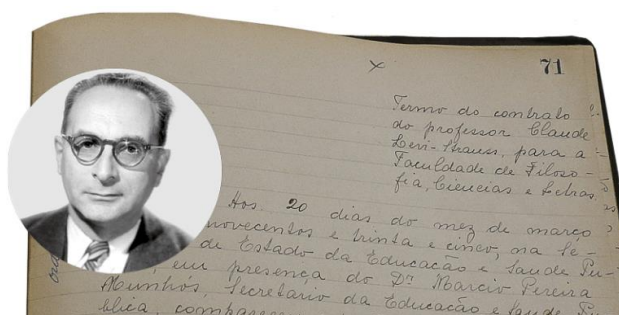


Fig. 4: Detail of book containing Claude Lévi-Strauss's contract - Photo: Marcos Santos/USP Imagens

Despite the intellectual weight of French influence in the first decades of the Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences, and Letters—and with developments in subsequent

decades—the German model predominated in the organization of the University. Established with the founding of the University of Berlin in 1810, the German model corresponds to the implementation of the conception of Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), who advocated that freedom and independence [*Freiheit und Selbstthätigkeit*] were the *sine qua non* conditions for the flowering of science (Wilhelm Von Humboldt, p. 235). Although the University is close to the state for organizational and operational reasons—inherent to the institution— “the Academy should only try to do science” (Wilhelm Von Humboldt, p. 238). Such a university organization also ensured the autonomy of aggregate faculties and schools, as guaranteed in the Sole Paragraph of Article 3 of the USP Foundation Decree (Decree 6,283, Art. 3rd, Sole Paragraph), and in clear opposition to the French model formulated under Napoleon Bonaparte and in which there is a greater centralization of university life in the state bureaucracy.

Conclusion

At the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, Brazil began to participate in what the West called “modernity.” Processes of mechanization, urbanization, and industrialization contributed to a coffee economy that produced a hegemonic ruling class in the first years of the Brazilian Republic. In this context, the rise of the state of São Paulo resulted in the status of metropolis for its capital and in cultural manifestations such as the Modern Art Week of 1922. The political coalition that took power in 1930, with the implementation of the regime of Getúlio Vargas, interrupted São Paulo's dominance, but also sought to implement projects in the country.

In the educational sphere, some ideas that had gained ground in the previous decade ended up being brought together in the Manifest of the Pioneers of Education, in 1932. The intellectuals at the forefront of the document, especially Fernando Azevedo, identified the need for a national education system, and the formulation of educational policies according to the needs of the 20th century. The need to attend to the demands of modernity and to break with the colonial educational model—still enforced in Brazil— was the condition for the emancipation of society.

São Paulo's reaction to the implementation of the new government would come through an alliance between different social groups around a project that should 1) contemplate modernity through research and innovation; 2) train the country's ruling classes through teacher training; and 3) mediate between the academic environment and the social environment through a policy of continuous university extension. The result of this “São Paulo Communion” was the founding of the University of São Paulo, a project to reestablish the hegemony of the state through culture—*scientia vincet*—but was also linked to national projects created in the previous decade and synthesized in the Manifest.

In fact, a good part of the country's ruling classes ended up graduating from the University of São Paulo. Science as an autonomous manifestation of the human spirit

had also an important political dimension, and one group eventually managed to impose its hegemony “through science.” At the same time, the research carried out in its faculties and schools would be decisive in many moments for Brazil's economic development. Furthermore, many of the social policies implemented over the last ninety years originated at USP. But the training of researchers and teachers has tended, over the years, to reproduce the social structure of São Paulo during the Communion era. University graduates comprised an economic, social, and/or intellectual elite, and were formed in a fundamentally European culture, which resulted in a nation project that was not actually convergent with most of the society.

Currently, there remains a Brazilian educational system, although with serious issues to be examined, especially at the administrative level. It is broad enough to encompass the universality of citizens, as the “pioneer fathers” wanted, but the university often finds itself completely disconnected from this mass of students and society in general. The teachers who were supposed to form society in accordance with the values of 1934 were never enough to provide universal education, which suffers from chronic management and financing problems.

We must add to the equation the fragmentation that took over USP from a very early age: despite the excellence of teaching and research, the faculties and schools became unaware of each other, and the *alma mater* became one among other university units. The preservation of the principle of autonomy and the tripod that defines its action have been the main banner of USP and universities in general in the face of recent government policies. But support from society is the fundamental aspect of the University's survival, especially at a time when the very legitimacy of the institution is being questioned by political and social groups.

The complexity that characterizes the founding of USP underlies the moment in Brazil's history itself. The country experienced industrial development, with the growth of urban centers and the demand for solutions to new problems. In that context, education was thought of as the fundamental aspect of a series of necessary reforms. The proposals of the Pioneers of 1932 and the São Paulo project of political and cultural hegemony would end up converging in a proposal inspired by Enlightenment principles and having science as its *leitmotif*. Ninety years later, in an environment that requires new ethics for postmodernity, reforms are implemented in Brazilian universities, but the dilemma of quality public education aimed at all citizens—the core of the Pioneers' thinking—persists and continues to be one of the greatest challenges for the nation.

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