

# John Manuel Monteiro (1956-2013): a priceless legacy for Historiography

*John Manuel Monteiro (1956-2013):  
um legado inestimável para a Historiografia*

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Perplexity, sadness, and awareness of the immense and incalculable loss were the feelings which took hold of the national and international academic community on the morning of 27 March 2013, when we awoke with the impact of the news that our ranks would never again count on the valuable and priceless collaboration of John Manuel Monteiro. A much admired, beloved, and competent professor, supervisor, researcher administrator, colleague, and friend, John left us in the golden moment of his rich and fruitful intellectual and personal trajectory. Numerous academic and administrative projects were suddenly interrupted, leaving colleagues, supervisees, and students sad and stunned by the challenge of continuing without being able to count on the person who had always known, with tranquility and security, how to point out the right directions. Like all good leaders, John delegated functions, discovered talents, and encouraged the work of students and colleagues, bringing them in to his numerous projects. He was a great builder of teams and work groups. For this reason his work will continue. The many seeds he sowed have already produced fruit and will continue to produce much more.

This is evident in the field of indigenous history, which under the striking influence of John Monteiro has been significantly renewed since the 1990s, using historical and anthropological approaches which allow new understandings of the place of Indians in our history. The irrelevant role to which historians had for so long assigned Indians could not be sustained in light of the numerous works in the interdisciplinary research line John encouraged, which revealed new realities about the Indians in their contacts in colonial and post-colonial societies. The academic trajectory of John Monteiro

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paralleled the development of this historiography which came to see the Indians as historic subjects, questioning the old concepts which reserved them the place of passive victims of the processes of conquest and colonization. Defender of indigenous causes, John was actively involved in this historiographic revision. Giving a voice and a time to Indians as historic agents was for him the task of historians, and was also intended to result in the definitive burial of a historiography which often colluded with policies which deleted indigenous identities. His performance was so fundamental in the valorization of these approaches that it is not an exaggeration to talk of indigenous history, or of Indians in history, before and after John Monteiro. While in Brazil the first initiatives to see Indians as historic agents started with anthropologists, especially Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, the great force in this area, it also has to be noted that John was among them. As a renowned historian and specialist in the history of Indians in the colony, he participated intensely, at the invitation of Manuela, in the various collective works which in the 1990s were pioneering in providing new understandings about the indigenous populations in situations of contact. He wrote chapters for two interdisciplinary collections which pointed to two significant changes in approaches to Indians in Brazil: *História dos Índios no Brasil* (1992), organized by Carneiro da Cunha, and *A Temática indígena na Escola – novos subsídios para professores de 1º e 2º Graus* (1995), organized by Aracy L. da Silva and Luís Donisete B. Grupioni. In the latter, his text, “O Desafio da História Indígena no Brasil” (The Challenge of Indigenous History in Brazil) pointed to the promising changes which had begun to occur under the influence of new historical and anthropological approaches and the political movements of the Indians themselves which opened new perspectives for historic studies about them. Monteiro also worked in the USP Indigenous History and Indigenism Group which, coordinated by Carneiro da Cunha, played an important role in the expansion of dialogue between History and Anthropology. With Manuela he coordinated a wide-ranging documentary research project involving researchers from all part of Brazil, who collected and systematized information about Indians in various records found in libraries, archives, notary offices, museums, parishes, etc. This resulted in the *Guia de Fontes para a História Indígena e do Indigenismo em Arquivos Brasileiros*, a valuable research instrument published in 1994, which has been widely used by those

studying the area. In 1994 his book *Negros da Terra – índios e bandeirantes nas origens de São Paulo* was launched. Fruit of his doctoral dissertation, this seminal work made an invaluable contribution to Brazilian historiography. Based on a large amount of documentary research interpreted in the light of interdisciplinary conceptions, John definitely dismantled the mistaken assumption that indigenous labor had been little used in the agricultural of Portuguese America. Moreover, he made the protagonism of Indians visible in the construction of colonial society in the captaincy of São Paulo, showing that the dynamic of conquest and colonization depended to a great extent on indigenous populations, whose actions were based on the dynamics of their own societies. He also began in 1994 his work in the Unicamp Department of Anthropology, where he had multiple activities, such as research, teaching and administration, amongst other things directing the Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences (IFCH), a function to which he had recently been appointed (December 2012). John was also a Cebrap researcher (1991-1998) and professor in Unesp (Araraquara, Assis and Franca, between 1986 and 1991), having coordinated the Center of Latin-American Studies (Cela) in this university.

In the 1990s there were significant changes in historical studies of Indians, with historians and anthropologists becoming increasingly close in dialogues which stimulated the production of innovative work about Indians in contact situations. John Monteiro played a fundamental role in this movement and not just in Brazil. In 1999 he was among the authors of Volume III of *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas* which, coordinated by the historian Stuart Schwartz and the anthropologist Frank Salomon, proposed an interdisciplinary dialogue, looking at the Indians of South America as historic agents.

Graduating in History in Colorado College (1978), John did a Masters (1980) and Doctorate (1985) in History in the University of Chicago, obtaining the title of *livre-docência* in Unicamp (2001), also becoming a full professor of the Department of Anthropology. A historian and anthropologist, John always worked with incomparable ability and skill in the two fields, supervising dissertations and theses in both disciplines. Interdisciplinarity was an integral part of his academic life. His supervision work in Unicamp gave rise to what some called, with his approval, the 'John Monteiro lineage' referring to

the numerous historians and anthropologists who, following the tracks he indicated, taught in universities and/or produced texts in which historic sources and anthropological data were linked and analyzed based on a combination of the theoretical methods and perspectives of History and Anthropology. Three of the dissertations he supervised received national awards.

His academic prestige and recognition went beyond national frontiers. He was visiting professor at Harvard University (2003-2004), the University of Michigan (1997), and the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (1985-1986). He was *Directeur d'Études Invité* at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), in Paris (1999). Recently he was invited to be the keynote speaker in the *First International Congress "Indigenous Peoples of Latin America, 19th-21st centuries: Advances, perspectives and challenges,"* to be held in October 2013 in Oaxaca (Mexico). His name was chosen in a vote by his peers, historians and anthropologists from different international institutions.

Like all good activists dedicated to a good cause, John also worked outside academia. He frequently gave interviews and participated in debates and meetings involving indigenous peoples who always counted on his support and encouragement. He knew the importance of reaching a large public to deconstruct prejudicial and discriminatory ideas against Indians and did not avoid participating in a wide variety of events. Various symposiums and work groups were organized and coordinated by him in large congresses and seminars, with the collaborations of historian and anthropologist colleagues. With João Pacheco de Oliveira, he coordinated various discussion groups on Indigenous History and Indigenism, in ABA, Anpocs, and Anpuh. In the latter he was a member of the directorate in four administrations and his role as a former of groups was precious. The symposium on indigenous history he organized and coordinated with colleagues and former students, since 2003, will celebrate its tenth anniversary in the next Anpuh (2013). Under his secure, competent and encouraging leadership, the group has grown and consolidated itself as the *Indians in History* GT which counts on a considerable number of collaborators who continually dialogue with each other on a list he created and administered on the Internet. Two thematic symposiums linked to the GT were approved for Anpuh 2013. Another group he coordinated which also has expanded and takes advantage of a discussion list on the

internet is CPEI (Center of Research in Indigenous Ethnology) in Unicamp, which also includes many historians and specialists in other areas. With appreciable erudition and an incredible capacity for work, John directed, suggested, and pointed out paths, respecting individualities and diverse opinions. Along with academic rigor, he was associated with kindness and gentleness, in such a way that he was able to criticize and correct, without either embarrassing or discouraging. Above all, he gave us the gift of what I consider to be one of his greatest legacies, the excellent *site* “Indians in the History of Brazil” ([www.ifch.unicamp.br/ihb](http://www.ifch.unicamp.br/ihb)), in which he gathered, systematized, commented, and continually updated precious information about the indigenous question. The site includes a vast commented bibliography about historical, anthropological and some archeological studies about Indians in Brazil, including books, journals, collections, masters’ theses, dissertations, published sources, catalogues of sources, republished works, sites, etc.

John’s rich trajectory, shared with his fellow historian, Maria Helena Machado, his wife and companion in many projects, works and events, ended suddenly, leaving plans open and numerous students, colleagues and friends sad, missing him and dazed by the task of continuing their work without the guidance of their great master. However, he planted seeds and provided tools, which will certainly continue to produce good fruit.

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