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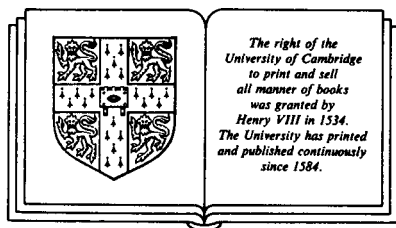
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A TROPICAL BELLE EPOQUE

*Elite culture and society in
turn-of-the-century Rio de Janeiro*

JEFFREY D. NEEDELL

Department of History, University of Florida



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For my mother, Novella C. Belden

For many years, I planned to dedicate my first book to you.

Now I bring you this work; with whatever shortcomings it may have, it is the first, and it should be yours. You taught me the most important things.

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“... science has nothing to do with the usefulness or perversity of institutions. The social side of things is not proper to it, only the mechanical. Moreover, there is a principle of solidarity that links all the institutions of a country, the lottery and engineering.”

Machado de Assis, “Balas de Estalo”

“Everything that is of the same time bears a resemblance; the artists who illustrate the poems of an epoch are the same whom the finance corporations employ.”

Proust, *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*

“... attempt to capture the portrait of history in the most insignificant representations of reality, its scraps, as it were.”

Benjamin, *Briefe*, II

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Preface

Brazil cut her formal bonds to the Portuguese empire in 1822, only to continue in an informal economic colonialism long established with Britain. This neo-colonial economic status, increasingly strengthened over the course of the nineteenth century, was but one of a number of bonds to the global economic and political center ringing the North Atlantic. My concern is with the place of culture in this neo-colonial context.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the role of culture of European derivation in the social and economic structure of what was then Brazil's capital, Rio de Janeiro. I will focus on the group most involved with such culture, the Carioca elite, and on the period in which that culture enjoyed its florescence, 1898–1914 – the *belle époque*. The argument to be made is that elite culture and society served to maintain and promote the interests and vision of the elite, and that cultural paradigms of aristocratic European derivation were adapted in the Carioca milieu to those ends.

The present study, while focussing on the *belle époque*, will also encompass a study of elite socio-cultural trends over the nineteenth century, with emphasis on the Second Reign (1840–89), as the necessary historical context within which bases of *belle-époque* culture and society developed. In many ways, this is a history of institutions, both formal and informal, which were part and parcel of enduring tendencies in Brazilian society.

I undertook this work to explore two problems: one concerns culture and colonialism; the other, urban culture. As a student of colonialism in Latin America and Africa, I had come to see a common pattern in the relations between the colonized and the colonizers' culture that played out in three steps: conflict, adaptation, and rejection. The first represents the clash of cultures during the phase of conquest and colonial establishment; the second, the phase in which the colonized accept the

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colonists' hegemony and seek to rise by playing within the new rules of the game; the third, the phase when, after reaching the limits imposed by colonialism, the colonized react in frustration and disappointment, and, using elements of the hegemonic culture and remnants of their own, seek to remake their world, usually by way of anticolonial struggle and a self-consciously nationalist culture.

Such general notions describe only in the roughest terms the process in French and British Africa, say, or British India; in Latin America, they are only suggestive. Matters in this hemisphere are complicated by Latin America's distinct experience of colonialism, which ended sooner, and neo-colonialism, which actually paralleled the historical development of European high imperialism, coming to fruition in the period 1880–1914. Thus, what one has in this study is an attempt to analyze a “neo”-colonial culture going through the second phase of cultural colonialism described above. Culturally speaking, the differences seemed less important than the similarities to which the era was witness. I wanted to explore the nature and impact that such acceptance and adaptation of metropolitan culture would have at its high point. And I wanted to do so not from the surface, where so many of us have talked about “copying,” and “cultural dependency,” but from the inside, where foreign elements must commingle and join in a vital way with native ones.

The urban cultural impulse came from an idea in José Luis Romero's study of Latin American urban history,¹ in which he pointed out the ideological purpose of the urban metamorphosis that changed the cityscape of so many Latin American cities in the period 1870–1914. I was struck with his idea that a city might be remade to make an ideological point and to emphasize certain cultural values. Rio de Janeiro, along with Buenos Aires and Mexico City, is one of the cities that best illustrates Romero's point. I was interested in seeing how and analyzing why. The importance and meaning of such a shift, in the context of this truly crucial era of Latin American history, seemed compelling.

These starting points are the origins of the work to follow – they brought me to the general argument noted in the first three paragraphs above and they help to explain the organization of this study. I attempt to move from the most obvious material and institutional aspects of the elite's world to the more intimate and then the more intellectual. Given the cultural argument made, one will not be surprised to find the impact of metropolitan culture strongest at the more formal ends of the cultural spectrum (architecture and urban planning on the one hand, and

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literature and literary life on the other) and most elusive and complicated in the more informal, more “anthropological” region in between (the domestic ways of the elite). I have emphasized individuals’ lives and experiences throughout, as the best way in to this past and, in the case of certain people, as unifying aspects to the disparate matters addressed. If something like a full sense of what the elite’s world was emerges, and how and why it was, I shall be content. The theoretical points will have necessarily been made on the way.

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Acknowledgments

By its nature, work of this sort is labor essentially carried out alone. However, although the choices, research, and style are one's own, one is aided in all of it by many others – if one is fortunate. I have been very fortunate. It is a pleasant obligation to acknowledge here those who have helped me on my way.

I first thought of this study in a graduate seminar taught by Richard M. Morse at Yale. Since the day I proposed the idea to him, Dr. Morse has steadfastly supported me in my endeavors to realize it with encouragement, criticism, introductions, suggestions, and good, hard questions. Indeed, some of the most personally satisfying parts of the pages that follow were written in answer to questions he raised. I am grateful for the pleasure of learning with him.

Other colleagues spurred me on: Richard Halpern and Dana Brand at Yale; Larry Jensen and Wylann Solomon at Yale and Stanford. Harold Mah has been a good listener, as has Richard Silver. Dain Borges has me in debt for good talk about theoretical and historical problems; Daniel Donaghy for searching methodological questions on my arrival in Rio. Samuel Adamo's research and commitment during our year in the archives were an inspiration.

Such an inquiry as this cannot succeed without the generosity and interest of people in the host country. I was particularly fortunate to be an *afilhado* of the Centro de Estudos Históricos of the Casa de Rui Barbosa in Rio. This favor I owe to Américo Jacobina Lacombe. Once there, I was welcomed and helped immeasurably by the Centro's director, Francisco de Assis Barbosa, who always found time to advise me and made possible most of the interviews so important to my work. Both in 1979–80 and in 1983, I was made to feel *à vontade* by staff and colleagues alike, among them José Murilo de Carvahó, Rosa Maria Barboza de Araújo, and Sérgio Pechman.

Others opened doors for me, as well. Isac Volchau, Tito Urbano da

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Silveira, Maria Lêda de Moraes Chini, Diomar Silva Ramos, and especially, Esmeralda Peçanha de Paiva Coelho welcomed me to the Colégio Pedro II; Irmã Carmem Maria welcomed me in the Collège de Sion; and Hilda Alves de Souza did me the honors at the Automóvel Club do Brasil. José Honório Rodrigues introduced me to the Academia Brasileira de Letras; Janice Monte-Mór, Esther Bertolotti, and their staff made the Biblioteca Nacional and its periodicals accessible to me; Raul Lima introduced me to the Arquivo Nacional and Celina Moreira Franco to the Centro de Pesquisas e Documentação, at the Fundação Getúlio Vargas. At various times I also benefited from the advice and criticism of Plínio Doyle, José Gabriel Calmon da Costa Pinto, Alexandre Eulálio Pimenta da Cunha, Eulália Maria Lahmeyer Lobo, Antônio Dimas, Walnice Nogueira Galvão, Florestan Fernandes, Roberto Schwarz, Otávio Velho, and Gentil Luíz Faria. In 1983, I relied on the good graces and collegial support of the staff of the Museu da República, especially Lauryston Guerra and Izabel Salles Serzedello.

Certain staff people were indispensable for my success, especially in the Biblioteca Nacional, the Arquivo Nacional, the Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro, and the Real Gabinete Português de Leitura. Often, I never learned their names, as in the Biblioteca's Seção de Manuscritos, where the staff of 1979–80 was graciously professional. In the Biblioteca's Seção de Periódicos, I can at least thank two by their given names, Maria Lúcia and Lineo. In the Arquivo Nacional, I remain grateful to Ana and Eliseu Araújo Lima; in the Biblioteca of the Casa de Rui Barbosa, I am thankful to Maria Celina do Amarante; and in the U.S. Consulate in Rio, I was often indebted to Ilsa Viegas.

My debt to the fourteen people whom I interviewed is especially marked. Their grace and hospitality as they welcomed me into their homes and allowed me to ask about their families, their friends, their city, and their impressions compel my profound gratitude. Each, a survivor of the era of which I wrote, gave me more than facts and impressions of the vanished city – they gave me something of its nuance. Their names are listed as they should be, as formal sources at the end of the book. I grieve that some of them are no longer here to read my gratitude. To all of these people, who consented to interviews with an unknown foreigner, I am very thankful and appreciative. I cannot expect that they would have agreed with all of my conclusions, but I know that they would have respected the thought and care with which I have arrived at them.

Since my return and through the years of writing and revision, I have profited immensely from the interested and critical reading of John

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Such research and writing as this depend on the financial and institutional generosity of others. I am grateful to be able to write of the support of those who sustained me and, more recently, my wife, and thus gave me the opportunity to pursue and complete this study. I enjoyed a "Mini-Grant" for summer research in Rio (1978) from the Council for Latin American Studies at Yale. My year abroad (1979–80) was made possible by a Full Grant from the Fulbright-Hays Commission and a Dissertation Fellowship from the Social Science Research Council. The SSRC also made my attendance possible at a conference on Latin American social history in New York (May 1980) and extended write-up support to me on my return to Stanford. It is a special pleasure to mention the support of the Danforth Foundation, whose flexibility with my Fellowship made my last two years of graduate work relatively free for research and writing. I am indebted to Stanford's Department of History and Center for Latin American Studies for technical expenses, to the Center for a congenial place to work, and to the generosity of the Mary McLeod Lewis Memorial Fund for a year of write-up support. Last, I thank the University of Oregon's Graduate School for a Summer Faculty Research Award, which facilitated travel to Rio in 1983.

In concluding, I have families to thank. My mother, brother, and two sisters stood by me with faith and love through all these years, despite my constant absences and time-consuming preoccupations. I would like to state again how much their confidence in me and their affection have meant to me over the years of work away from them. I hope that, when they read this study, something of the pleasure it has offered me will be shared.

My other family is the gift of my wife, Maria de Fátima Lima Maia

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de Needell. Her brothers and sisters and their families have taught me much about Brazil, and have shown me its greatest treasures – the warmth and generosity of its people, and their sensitivity to the difficulties and pleasures of life. Their acceptance and affection continue to quicken my attachment to their country and my abiding desire to return. I would hope that some day something born of my time with them in Rio will appear in Portuguese. Nothing could please me more than to share with them something that they helped me to create.

Most women enjoy courtship, their wedding, and their first years of marriage alone with their husbands and families. My wife, Fátima, has had this study along with us as an awkward guest since the day we met. She has welcomed it with grace and understanding, made me happy, and supported my efforts with untiring faith, patience, and, in desperate circumstances, her skill, strength, and resolve. She has done all of this while enduring exile from her own country and the absence of her family and friends, and while undertaking the successful conquest of a new language and culture. I write this not to say that I am grateful – that must continue to be shown in better ways – but to bear witness to her part in what I have been able to do in the pages that follow.

Washington, 1987

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A note on Brazilian Portuguese orthography and usage

I follow standard scholarly usage here by employing modern Brazilian Portuguese spelling, except in citations, where the original orthography is respected. This will result in considerable variation, both in letters and diacritical marks. Regarding names, I follow Brazilian usage in referring to persons by the names by which they are generally known after my initial reference, in which I generally try to give all of their names, bracketing those left aside in normal use. In the citations, the first citation of a work will have all of the author's names and the full title (but no subtitle) of the work; thereafter, I employ only the author's last family name(s), except in the case where several authors with the same family names require that initials be used to distinguish between authors. The bibliography at the end of the book is organized according to the author's last family name, except in those cases where another family name is commonly cited instead (e.g., Nabuco [de Araújo] is used there instead of Araújo, in the case of Joaquim [Aureliano Barreto] Nabuco [de Araújo]). In the cases where the author's given names are generally used instead of his family names, I will cite by the last family name, since this is what is generally used in the library catalogues (e.g., Sousa is used here instead of Cândido, in the case of Antônio Cândido [de Melo e Sousa]).