

## Introduction

### *A Frontier on the Atlantic*

Atop the highland plateaus of the Brazilian interior began the eastward journey of many rivers and streams. Coursing through the forest down rugged mountain slopes, they flowed beneath a lush, dense canopy of purple jacaranda, *sapucaia*, and *inga* trees. The fragrance of passionflowers filled the air, their long garlands grazing the waters running below. Begonias accented the forest verdure with their red, white, and blue blossoms. Among the trees echoed the songs of *arará* parrots, their iridescent plumage capturing the light filtering through the foliage. The hum of insects reverberated through the air. The rivers and streams snaked north and south as they continued their descent, sometimes flowing over a waterfall. The mountains ceded to gentler slopes, sand gradually replaced earth, and coconut trees soared above the banks. Finally, when an archipelago of mangroves began to dot the rivers' increasingly brackish waters, their journey was at an end. Seagulls circled above as whales surfaced to breach before swimming away toward the nearby Abrolhos islands. It was the Atlantic Ocean.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the sumptuously verdant forest through which these rivers coursed had long since vanished on much of Brazil's Atlantic seaboard. Surviving indigenous groups had retreated inland as settlements spread along the coast, among them the bustling port cities of Salvador in the northeast and Rio de Janeiro further south, where various African languages were as commonly heard as Portuguese. Sugarcane fields dotted the coastal wetlands, its cultivators voraciously consuming the forest to feed the flames of sugar production. The scars left by human endeavor were also visible further inland. In

the highlands of Minas Gerais, two centuries of gold and diamond mining that had fed the opulence of the Portuguese empire, slash-and-burn agriculture, and cattle ranching had wreaked havoc on the forest, leaving grassy patches and bare, stripped earth in their wake. It was thus startling to encounter, heading east from these lands toward the coast, a narrow strip of seemingly undisturbed forest still remaining. Here was a frontier on the Atlantic.<sup>1</sup>

“One can travel for days without discovering a single sign of life,” observed a European traveler in the region on the eve of Brazil’s independence (1822).<sup>2</sup> His solitude amidst the dense forest canopy was no illusion. For over a century preceding his journey, the Portuguese Crown, jealously safeguarding against the smuggling of gold and diamonds from the interior to the coast, had prohibited the settlement of the Atlantic littoral in southern Bahia and Espírito Santo captaincies. This prohibition had coalesced with the tenacious resistance of the region’s indigenous populations to preserve the territory against all but the most adventurous, the desperately poor, or a fugitive slave (Figure 0.1).

As the mines ran dry, however, the allure of the remaining forest and its bounty became irresistible, attracting a growing stream of settlers by the dawn of the nineteenth century. Thus, as the traveler continued his journey up the coast, he felt his solitude dissipate. He soon encountered a hamlet of Indians, and further along, the sight of manioc fields framed a small town of handsome, tile-roofed buildings and a port from where goods were shipped to towns and cities along the coast. African slaves tilled the fields as their Portuguese or mestizo master watched impassively from the house. A team of men hacked through the dense forest to clear a path from the mountainous interior to the coast.<sup>3</sup> In the decades following the traveler’s journey, this migration of settlers and their slaves into indigenous territory would permanently transform the Atlantic frontier, the remaining forest and its inhabitants removed to make way for roads and railroads, coffee and manioc. Encouraging these initiatives was the Portuguese Crown, which had relocated across the ocean to Rio de Janeiro in 1808 to flee Napoleon’s Iberian invasion and gradually relinquished its prohibition on the region’s settlement. From the comfort of its “tropical Versailles,” the monarchy welcomed settlers as a way to

<sup>1</sup> Warren Dean, *With Broadax and Firebrand: The Destruction of the Brazilian Atlantic Coastal Forest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 80, 97–102, 115.

<sup>2</sup> Maximilian Wied-Neuwied, *Viagem ao Brasil nos anos de 1815 a 1817* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1958), 184–85.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 174–75.



FIGURE 0.1 Brazil and the Atlantic Frontier. Adapted from Izabel Missagia de Mattos, *Civilização e Revolta: os Botocudos e a catequese na província de Minas* (São Paulo: EDUSC ANPOCS, 2004), courtesy of the author. Map by Bill Nelson Cartography.

introduce progress to a distant region they considered “infested” by wild Indians and vagabonds.<sup>4</sup>

Progress remained an ambiguous aspiration on national independence in 1822 and the beginning of the Imperial period (1822–89). Under the rule of Pedro I, who stayed in the former colony after his father, João VI, and the rest of the royals returned to Portugal, Brazil became the lone monarchy in a sea of Spanish American republics. The elite entrusted with chartering the course of the new nation looked with consternation upon the large African-descended, indigenous, and mixed population, whom they considered an impediment to national progress. Even so, they ensured slavery’s preservation, the bedrock of their own wealth and power. The trans-Atlantic slave trade would continue until 1850, and Brazil would garner the ignominy of becoming the last nation in the Americas to abolish slavery, in 1888.

Yet if such a reliance on slavery cast Brazil’s propensity for progress into doubt, its leaders also delineated a remarkably inclusive vision of citizenship that suggested a sanguine national future. In the new Constitution of 1824, Brazilian citizenship was extended to all those born free on Brazilian soil regardless of race or color. This included Brazilian-born slaves, once freed. Brazil’s inclusiveness stood in sharp contrast to the United States, where race was employed to deny citizenship to Indians, slaves, and freeborn blacks until the Fourteenth Amendment (1868) defined citizenship inclusively and unconditionally by birth or naturalization – and that too came with many restrictions.<sup>5</sup> Brazil’s racially inclusive nationhood was reaffirmed in 1845 when the reigning Emperor Pedro II gave his official approval to an essay written for the Brazilian Historical and Geographic Institute celebrating the nation’s origins in its unique heritage born from the mixture of the “three races” – Indian, African, and Portuguese.<sup>6</sup>

This discourse of race mixture and harmony has become a powerful if contested marker of Brazilian national identity ever since. Mobilized by Afro-Brazilian activists to argue for greater inclusion in the

<sup>4</sup> Kirsten Schultz, *Tropical Versailles: Empire, Monarchy, and the Portuguese Royal Court in Rio de Janeiro, 1808–1821* (London: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> James Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 52–63. In spite of the Fourteenth Amendment, Indians were not granted full citizenship until 1924, and Jim Crow legislation continued to deny full citizenship to African Americans.

<sup>6</sup> Karl Friedrich von Martius, “Como se deve escrever a História do Brasil,” *Revista de Historia de América* 42 (1956). The essay was originally published in 1845.

later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the idea gained international acclaim in the 1930s in its incarnation as a “racial democracy” – anthropologist Gilberto Freyre’s contention that Brazil was free of racial prejudice because of its long history of race mixture. Promoted during the nationalist fervor of the first Getúlio Vargas presidency (1930–45), this racial nationalism also served as a strong rebuke of the Jim Crow violence of the United States. Similar mixed-race national identities also emerged in other Latin American nations including Cuba, Mexico, and Colombia.<sup>7</sup>

Racialized national identities can make sense only when grounded in the historical specificities of each place. It would thus seem that the Atlantic frontier, where enterprising Portuguese descendants tilled the earth among native daughters and enslaved future citizens – in the very moment when Pedro II was praising the union of the “three races” – would offer the ideal conditions wherein Brazil’s racially inclusive nationhood could be forged. This book tells a different story. From the eve of independence in 1822 until the years following the end of monarchical rule in 1889, the Atlantic frontier became a theater of staggering anti-indigenous violence and the entrenchment of African-based slavery. Through an examination of frontier settlement in post-independence Brazil, it argues that the exclusion and inequality of indigenous and African-descended people became embedded in the very construction of an inclusive nationhood and citizenship. Far from being an irrelevant national periphery, the frontier was the very space in which the boundaries and limitations of Brazilian citizenship were defined. At the heart of these conflicts were enslaved people of African descent, whose labor enabled the opening of the Atlantic forest, and autonomous Indians – indigenous peoples who had not become incorporated into Portuguese settler society – whose lands became the staging ground of settler colonialism. These were women and men whose civic, cultural, and racial heterogeneity did not dovetail with emerging national ideas about a

<sup>7</sup> Paulina L. Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion: Black Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Thomas E. Skidmore, *Black Into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993); Peter Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture: The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Colombia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868–1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Marixa Lasso, *Myths of Harmony: Race and Republicanism during the Age of Revolution, Colombia 1795–1831* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007); Darío Euraque, *Conversaciones históricas con el mestizaje y su identidad nacional en Honduras* (San Pedro Sula, Honduras: Centro Editorial, 2004).

homogeneous Brazilian people (*povo brasileiro*); examining their lives on the Atlantic frontier allows us to see the fissures in Brazil's inclusionary nationhood.<sup>8</sup>

Focusing our attention on the frontier opens new avenues for understanding nation-building in postcolonial Brazil and other Latin American nations. At the most fundamental level, this book understands frontiers as spaces with a contested relationship to the nation-state. At the time of independence, Brazil was a vast territory consisting of disparate former captaincies and multiple frontiers, both external and internal, in a territory larger than the continental United States. With the exception of the interior mines, settlement was concentrated on the littoral. Much of the territory from the Amazon to the disputed borders with Spanish America in the far West and South was part of the new nation but in name only, under the control of indigenous populations, local and regional power networks, and competing claims of possession. As a monarchy, Brazil may have been spared the political destabilization that rocked the Spanish American republics after independence. Still, the nation-state enjoyed an uncertain presence on the frontiers, similarly to northern Mexico, the Eastern Andes, the Argentina Pampas, or Patagonia. The Atlantic frontier was no exception.<sup>9</sup>

Yet if frontiers were important features of Brazil's physical territory, the frontier as a concept did not enjoy the prominence it did in US historiography. As several scholars have noted, this was due at least in part to Brazilian historians' resistance to Frederick Jackson Turner's nationalistic, and much criticized, argument that the westward frontier and the availability of free land engendered the uniquely democratic spirit of the United States. Such an idea appeared absurd to Latin American nations wherein frontier expansion consolidated the power of large

<sup>8</sup> An earlier work on the creation of inequality on the frontier is Alida C. Metcalf, *Family and Frontier in Colonial Brazil: Santana de Parnaíba, 1580–1822* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> For example, Ricardo Donato Salvatore, *Wandering Paysanos: State Order and Subaltern Experience in Buenos Aires during the Rosas Era* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Walter Mario Delrio, *Memorias de expropiación: sometimiento e incorporación indígena en la Patagonia, 1872–1943* (Bernal, Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 2005); Erick D. Langer, *Expecting Pears from an Elm Tree: Franciscan Missions on the Chiriguano Frontier in the Heart of South America, 1830–1949* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Tamar Herzog, *Frontiers of Possession: Spain and Portugal in Europe and the Americas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); Evelyn Hu-DeHart, *Yaqui Resistance and Survival: The Struggle for Land and Autonomy, 1821–1910* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016).

landowners and encouraged exploitation.<sup>10</sup> If anything, Brazilianists preferred the *sertão* (pl. *sertões*) – the backlands, the wilderness, the uncivilized interior – whose colonial exploration and settlement became the subject of major national historiographies.<sup>11</sup> However, recent scholarship has breathed new life into studies of the frontier in the Americas. These works see both internal and external frontiers as spaces of contact, permeability, and negotiation. As one historian has described it, the frontier “encompasses the notion of the fringes of empires, wilderness, disputed territories between different groups of colonists and rival populations, and an open area for seeking resources and trade opportunities.”<sup>12</sup>

This fluidity, which allows us to account for the role of indigenous and African-descended people in shaping frontier dynamics, is essential to understanding the postcolonial frontier. Explored throughout this book are the multitude of interactions among Indians, people of African descent, settlers, and state agents on the Atlantic frontier. We will also

<sup>10</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1921); Warren Dean, “The Frontier in Brazil,” in *Frontier in Comparative Perspectives: The United States and Brazil* (Washington, DC: Latin American Program, Wilson Center, 1990), 15–27; *Contested Ground: Comparative Frontiers on the Northern and Southern Edges of the Spanish Empire*, ed. Donna Guy and Thomas Sheridan (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998), 7–10; Lígia Osorio Silva, “Fronteira e identidade nacional,” in *Anais do V Congresso Brasileiro de História Econômica*, 2003; Hal Langfur, “Frontier/Fronteira: A Transnational Reframing of Brazil’s Inland Colonization,” *History Compass* 12, no. 11 (November 1, 2014): 845–46.

<sup>11</sup> Among the classic works are Euclides da Cunha, *Rebellion in the Backlands (Os Sertões)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944); João Capistrano de Abreu, *Chapters of Brazil’s Colonial History, 1500–1800*, trans. Arthur Brakel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, *Caminhos e fronteiras* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1995). For how the *sertão* and its explorers, the *bandeirantes*, have informed modern paulista history and identity, see Barbara Weinstein, *The Color of Modernity: São Paulo and the Making of Race and Nation in Brazil* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Quote from Fabricio Prado, “The Fringes of Empires: Recent Scholarship on Colonial Frontiers and Borderlands in Latin America,” *History Compass* 10, no. 4 (April 1, 2012): 319; José de Souza Martins, *Fronteira: a degradação do outro nos confins do humano* (São Paulo: Editora Hucitec, 1997); Cynthia Radding, *Landscapes of Power and Identity: Comparative Histories in the Sonoran Desert and the Forests of Amazonia from Colony to Republic* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Juliana Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Hal Langfur, *The Forbidden Lands: Colonial Identity, Frontier Violence, and the Persistence of Brazil’s Eastern Indians, 1750–1830* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); “Frontier/Fronteira”; Richard W. Slatta, “Comparing and Exploring Frontier Myth and Reality in Latin America,” *History Compass* 10, no. 5 (May 1, 2012): 375–85; Herzog, *Frontiers of Possession*.

trace how these interactions shaped, and were shaped by, state policy and elite discourse at the local, national, and transnational levels. To do so reveals the complex ways in which the nation was formed simultaneously on the frontier and at the center. This approach allows us to depart from defining the frontier as the disorganized “margin” into which the state gradually extended its control. Rather, the frontier was the very space in which the relationship between race, nation, and citizenship were daily tested and defined; therefore the frontier itself was central to Brazil’s postcolonial history.

Such processes come into especially sharp focus on the Atlantic frontier, the once forbidden lands of the Portuguese Crown where the provinces of Minas Gerais, Bahia, and Espírito Santo converged.<sup>13</sup> As destructive methods exhausted the mines in the Minas Gerais interior, the region, its long coastline skirting one of the last remaining stretches of original Atlantic forest in southern Bahia and Espírito Santo, became the object of aggressive colonization in the nineteenth century. Elites and colonists imagined these lands as virginal and empty, but local native populations, called the Botocudo Indians (discussed later), had long been its inhabitants, engaged in their own alliances and interethnic warfare over territorial control and political power. The contact and negotiation that had previously shaped limited Indian–settler relations increasingly ceded to conflict as interest in their land and labor intensified in the late colonial period, spurring the Portuguese monarch to declare a just war against them in 1808 that would continue after independence. The Botocudo captured the grotesque fascination of Brazilians and foreigners as epitomes of the irredeemable savage who, even though native to the soil, existed outside of civilization. As such, the history of the Botocudo, who became the objects of both ruthless violence and acculturative policies, is particularly illustrative of the ambiguities and limited possibilities of indigenous citizenship (Figure 0.2).

Equally important, it was African slavery that drove the settler colonization of indigenous lands. By mid-century, slave labor would propel the region – centered on the northern Espírito Santo town of São Mateus and the southern Bahian immigrant plantation colony of Colônia Leopoldina – into a major manioc flour and coffee producer for the domestic (and occasionally international) market. A powerful proslavery oligarchy emerged that would fight abolition tooth and nail until the eleventh hour. Tracing slavery’s expansion and consolidation on the Atlantic frontier after independence shows how inseparable it was from

<sup>13</sup> Langfur, *The Forbidden Lands*.



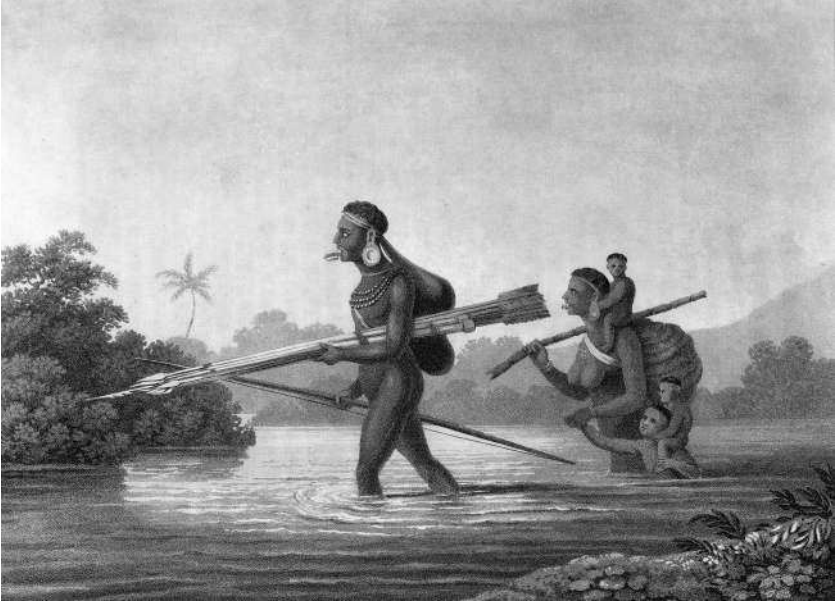


FIGURE 0.2 *A Family of Botocudos on a Journey*. Source: Maximilian Wied, *Travels in Brazil* (London: Henry Colburn & Co., 1820). Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

the violent colonization of indigenous territory. It also demonstrates how the frontier, in its incorporation into the nation, became the space wherein noncitizens were reproduced.

The impossibility of understanding frontier history without accounting for African and indigenous experiences leads us to the crux of this book. Why has Brazilian postcolonial history been so focused on people of African descent and comparably so little on the indigenous? Of course, demography can partly explain the imbalance: on the eve of independence, Brazil had a total population of about 4.4 million, of which 2.5 million were free and enslaved people of African descent, compared to the approximately 800,000 so-called “wild” or autonomous Indians. This was a precipitous decline from the estimated 5 million who inhabited it in the beginning of the sixteenth century.<sup>14</sup> Yet there are deeper

<sup>14</sup> In 1817/1818 the population estimates were for free people of color – 585,000; slaves – 1.93 million; whites – 1.043 million. According to Perdigo Malheiro’s statistics cited by Conrad, there were 259,400 “free” Indians, but the information does not specify whether or not they were settled on Indian villages, so I have opted to cite Oliveira’s figure instead. For statistics on African slaves and the slave population, see Robert Edgar Conrad, *The Destruction of Brazilian Slavery, 1850–1888* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 283; Dale Torston Graden, *From Slavery to Freedom in*

epistemological reasons that need to be addressed. Scholarly and public perception alike widely accept Brazil as Latin America's – or indeed, the Americas' – black nation par excellence, particularly given the legacy of 5 million Africans (ten times greater than in North America) who arrived on its shores during the three centuries of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. To let this figure speak for itself, however, occludes our own hand in mapping Latin America with racialized historical narratives. Many of us follow well-trodden paths, organizing our knowledge about Latin America into black and indigenous, slavery and Indian republics, Brazil and the Caribbean versus Central America and the Andes. Even as a growing body of historical scholarship has shed light on the shared experiences of the black and indigenous people throughout the Americas, these remain largely colonial in focus. In the case of Brazil, scholarship on the postcolonial period has been overwhelmingly about African-descended people and their Atlantic world connections forged by slavery, collectively reinforcing the nation's identification with blackness.<sup>15</sup>

Recognizing how such racialized narratives continue to shape our historical inquiries leads to more pernicious aspects of their very genesis. The familiar story that native populations simply “disappeared” as they were decimated by settlers and disease in the colonial period and replaced by African slaves has become the commonplace explanation for their marginal place in postcolonial Brazilian and Caribbean history. Through a close attention to postcolonial indigenous history, policy, and anti-indigenous violence, this book documents the deliberate production of indigenous “extinction” in the mid-nineteenth century by a diverse array of interests from settlers to Indian administrators and a domestic and

*Brazil: Bahia, 1835–1900* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 17–21. For the indigenous population, see Mércio Pereira Gomes, *The Indians and Brazil* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 249; João Pacheco de Oliveira, “‘Wild Indians,’ Tutelary Roles, and Moving Frontier in Amazonia: Images of Indians in the Birth of Brazil,” in *Manifest Destinies and Indigenous Peoples*, ed. David Maybury-Lewis, Theodore Macdonald, and Biorn Maybury-Lewis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 98.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America* (London and New York: Pluto Press, 2010), Chapter 2; George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America, 1800–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Barbara Weinstein, “Erecting and Erasing Boundaries: Can We Combine The ‘Indo’ And The ‘Afro’ In Latin American Studies?,” *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe* 19, no. 1 (2007). Among the recent works in the history of black and indigenous people are the various studies in Matthew Restall, ed., *Beyond Black and Red: African-Native Relations in Colonial Latin America* (University of New Mexico Press, 2005); Matthew Restall, *Black Middle: Africans, Mayas, and Spaniards in Colonial Yucatan* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013); Rachel Sarah O’Toole, *Bound Lives: Africans, Indians and the Making of Race in Colonial Peru* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012).