

INTRODUCTION

Slavery and Freedom in Nineteenth-Century Brazil

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There was sun, abundant sun, on that 1888 Sunday when the Senate approved the abolition decree and the Princess-Regent signed it. We all went to the streets . . . [W]e all breathed happiness, everything was ecstasy. Truly, it was the only day of public delirium that I can remember.¹

With these words, Brazilian novelist Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis described May 13, 1888, the day that ended legalized slavery in his country. Brazil was the last nation in the Western hemisphere to abolish slavery; it had also been the largest and the most enduring slave society in the Americas. For more than 350 years, from the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in the early sixteenth century until abolition, slavery shaped Brazilian history across nearly every region of its continental geography. Over those centuries, nearly five million enslaved Africans arrived in Brazil, more than 45 percent of the total number of persons forcibly brought to the Americas.² In the years that followed that sunny May 13 of abolition, Machado de Assis himself would be witness to the brevity of its joy and to the immense challenges of Brazilian freedom. The scale of those challenges was such that, a scant decade after abolition, Machado de Assis' friend Joaquim Nabuco would write: "Slavery will long remain Brazil's defining national feature."³ Well over

¹ Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, *Gazeta de Notícias*, May 14, 1893.

² According to the most recent available estimates in the Slave Voyages Database, 4,864,373 enslaved captives disembarked in Brazil, out of a total of 10,538,225 who disembarked across the Americas (including the Caribbean). This amounts to 46.2 percent. Website database accessed on July 24, 2020: www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates.

³ Joaquim Nabuco was a historian, diplomat, politician, and abolitionist who played a key role in Brazil's antislavery campaign and was perhaps Brazil's most important abolitionist voice in the transatlantic circuit. When the Brazilian Empire gave way to the Republic in

a century later, the power of those words persists: slavery and its legacies remain Brazil's most formative elements.

SLAVERY AND RACE RELATIONS IN HEMISPHERIC CONVERSATION

There is no question that the marks of slavery are still vivid in Brazilian society. Long before the term “afterlives of slavery” became current in the North Atlantic, generations of Brazilian historians wrote prolifically and creatively on the profound and lasting impact of African slavery (and its many forms of violence) on every dimension of Brazilian life.⁴

These legacies have been explored from multiple angles and through many discrete histories.⁵ Some scholars have opted to study flight, revolt, and the formation of maroon communities (*quilombos*), emphasizing issues of agency, resistance, and resilient forms of cultural-political self-determination and historical memory. Others have emphasized the ways in which enslaved persons and their descendants forged spaces of humanity, solidarity, and voice within institutions such as the family and religious brotherhoods. Afro-descendant cultural and artistic production is so central to Brazilian cultural history writ large as to be inseparable. Polemic multigenerational debates have focused on the role of slavery in the history of the Brazilian economy and of Brazilian capitalism, focusing especially on plantations, mining, the domestic agricultural economy, and the slave trade itself. Ever since Joaquim Nabuco first linked slavery to Brazil's character as an independent nation, scholars have explored slavery's formative influence on Brazilian state-building and institutional life, with particular influence on the law, the military, the political dynamics of the Brazilian Empire, and the contested dimensions and boundaries of civil, political, and social citizenship. At the other end of the spectrum, historians have long explored slavery's deep imprint on Brazil's intimate and material cultures and on the ways in which Brazilians remember their

1889, Nabuco went into bitter and nostalgic exile, which greatly colored the work from which this quotation is taken (J. Nabuco, *Minha formação*).

⁴ Saidiya Hartman coined the term “afterlife of slavery” in *Lose Your Mother*, with specific reference to slavery's power to structure political, social, institutional, cultural, and social violence and inequality in the contemporary world. The term has since entered general academic usage as a way of describing slavery's enduring influence, especially through racialized forms of violence, inequality, and injustice.

⁵ For overviews of the Brazilian field in English, see J. Hébrard, “Slavery in Brazil.” See also H. Klein and F. Luna, *Slavery in Brazil*; R. Slenes, “Brazil”; H. Klein and J. Reis, “Slavery in Brazil”; S. Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants and Rebels*, pp. 1–38.

past. The range of additional topics is seemingly endless: slavery's influence on Portuguese imperial politics and on Brazil's international and borderland politics; slavery's role in shaping Indigenous history; slavery's place in Brazil's urban evolution; slavery's influence over public health and medicine. Throughout, scholars have explored the histories of slavery, manumission, and fragile freedom in order to understand the Brazilian histories of race and color, as well as the enduring ways in which they have structured both Brazilian inequality and Brazilian national life. This dense and sophisticated historiography continues to develop theoretically and methodologically and occupies a central place in Brazil's broader intellectual sphere.

The transnational and comparative study of slavery has deeply influenced the evolution of this diverse field, which has in turn shaped debates about the meaning of race and the nature of racial inequality in Brazil and across the Americas in the twentieth century. Brazilians and US travelers, journalists, intellectuals, artists, and statespeople have thought comparatively about slavery and race relations since at least the mid-nineteenth century. But the transnational historiography really began in the 1930s, when the publication of Gilberto Freyre's *Casa Grande e Senzala* sparked an intense debate about the comparative history of slavery in the Americas.⁶

Many have misread Freyre's complex and multifaceted analysis, equating it with the notion of "racial democracy." The term itself has deep and diverse origins within and outside of Brazil, and Freyre only began to use it after World War II.⁷ Even then, he employed it sparsely and ambiguously; while Freyre was willing to promote "ethnic and social" and later "racial" democracy as Brazil's most salient and original contribution to world civilization, he deployed the idea to describe not liberal egalitarianism (which he openly despised) but rather racial fluidity and sociocultural, sexual, and affective connection within a structure of racial and patriarchal hierarchy. Although Freyre was raised by a traditional family in post-abolition Recife, his eclectic analysis was also deeply rooted in his experience as a student at Baylor and Columbia between 1918 and 1923, and it reflected intense engagement with overtly racist strains of US southern historiography as well as the better-known influence of Franz Boas (with whom he never studied closely).⁸

⁶ G. Freyre, *The Masters* (first published in Portuguese in 1933).

⁷ On the evolution of the term "racial democracy" in Brazil, see A. S. Guimarães, "Democracia racial" and "A democracia racial revisitada." On the idea of racial democracy in the Americas, see P. Alberto and J. Hoffnung-Garskof, "Racial Democracy."

⁸ On Freyre's experience in the United States, see M. Pallares Burke, *Gilberto Freyre*; M. Pallares Burke and P. Burke, *Gilberto Freyre*.

All the same, Freyre did formulate an enduring and deeply influential historical account of Brazilian civilization that emphasized the formative (if subordinate) influence of enslaved Africans on Brazil's sociocultural, material, and intimate life. Frank Tannenbaum's *Slave and Citizen* (1947) systematized the legal and religious dimensions of Freyre's argument and expanded it to a trans-American comparison, arguing that Brazilian and Latin American institutions had created a moderate slave regime that favored manumission, recognized the spiritual humanity of enslaved persons, and promoted pacific relations between masters and slaves.⁹

Tannenbaum's perspective, amplified in North America by Stanley Elkins, was highly criticized almost from its inception.¹⁰ Ironically, some of the earliest empirical contestations sprung from a UNESCO-sponsored social science research initiative inspired by Brazil's supposed racial harmony.¹¹ These critiques merged with a wave of Marxist historical scholarship that, following Brazilian historian Caio Prado Junior and Eric Williams, emphasized slavery's capitalist logic and profound brutality.¹² In the 1960s, Brazilian scholars such as Florestan Fernandes, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Octavio Ianni, and Emilia Viotti da Costa explicitly countered both Freyre and Tannenbaum's portrayals of Brazilian slavery and race relations, producing studies that focused on the intrinsic violence of the slave system and became fundamental to the academic contestation of what had by then become the full-blown myth of racial democracy.¹³ In subsequent years, Carl Degler would produce the first comprehensive historical comparison of race relations in Brazil and the United States, calling into question Tannenbaum's optimistic views of the benign nature of Brazilian slavery and racism and helping to consolidate the comparative historiography.¹⁴

In 1988, the centennial anniversary of Brazilian abolition, the English-language scholarship on comparative slavery was still significantly shaped

⁹ F. Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen*. For an analysis of the impact of Frank Tannenbaum's work on Gilberto Freyre, see A. S. Guimarães, "A democracia," and A. de la Fuente, "From Slaves to Citizens." For comprehensive comparative analyses of American slaveries, see R. Marquese and R. Salles, eds., *Escravidão e capitalismo*; H. Klein, "A experiência."

¹⁰ S. Elkins, *Slavery*.

¹¹ C. Wagley, *Race and Class*; L. Costa Pinto, *O negro*; T. de Azevedo, *As elites*; R. Bastide and F. Fernandes, *Relações raciais*; M. Chor Maio, "O projeto." For analysis of the UNESCO project, see A. S. Guimarães, "Preconceito de cor" and "Baianos e paulistas."

¹² C. Prado Júnior, *Formação do Brasil*; E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*.

¹³ See F. Fernandes, *A integração*. A number of other important works emerged in this period, including F. Cardoso, *Capitalismo e escravidão*; O. Ianni, *As metamorfoses*; and E. Viotti da Costa, *Da senzala*.

¹⁴ C. Degler, *Neither Black nor White*.

by the debates that had begun with Tannenbaum. In Brazil, however, the anniversary helped to accelerate and consolidate a transformative wave of new scholarship on race and slavery that had begun to take root in the 1970s. Heavily impacted by Brazil's Black movement, in conversation with new and innovative social histories of slavery in the United States and the Caribbean, and influenced by new methods of economic, socio-cultural, and legal history, Brazilian scholars complicated and questioned many of the paradigms that had been most central to both the Tannenbaum debates and Marxist and revisionist analyses of race and slavery.¹⁵

This scholarship, and especially its sociocultural strain, first acquired broad visibility in the English-speaking world with the publication of *The Abolition of Slavery and the Aftermath of Emancipation in Brazil* (Duke University Press, 1988).¹⁶ In five linked essays, Rebecca Scott, Seymour Drescher, Hebe Maria Mattos de Castro (now Hebe Mattos), George Reid Andrews, and Robert Levine explored abolition, rural freedom, urban industrialization, millenarian rebellion, and Brazil's place in the comparative history of Atlantic slavery. Their work was especially notable for its rejection of once-hegemonic arguments about elite control, the passivity or irrational violence of the enslaved, and an abolition process driven by the modernizing force of agrarian capitalism. The collection also problematized the very notion of freedom: Rebecca Scott's opening salvo challenged historians to embrace new sources and interpretive methodologies in order to deepen their understandings of the complex geographical and social configurations of slavery and emancipation, the intricate interplay of dependency and resistance in the post-abolition period, and the legal and institutional dimensions of unequal citizenship.

¹⁵ In the context of the centennial anniversary of Brazilian abolition, several books were published, such as H. Mattos, *Ao sul*; S. Lara, *Campos da violência*; J. Reis, ed., *Escravidão e invenção*; J. Reis and E. Silva, *Negociação e conflito*. The *Revista Brasileira de História*, the most prestigious history journal in Brazil, published a special issue that became a fundamental reference on the theme (8:16, 1988), organized by Silvia Lara with articles by Eric Foner, Katia Mattoso, João José Reis, Sidney Chalhoub, Luiz Carlos Soares, Maria Helena Machado, Horácio Gutierrez, and Robert Slenes. Also in 1988, Portuguese translations were published of S. Schwartz's *Sugar Plantations* and R. Scott's *Slave Emancipation in Cuba*. On Brazil's Black movement, see P. Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*; F. Gomes and P. Domingues, eds., *Experiências da emancipação*; A. Pereira and V. Alberti, *Histórias do movimento*; M. Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power*.

¹⁶ This book was first published as a *Hispanic American Historical Review* special issue in 1988 (68:3).

When *Abolition* was published, a new generation of Brazilian scholars, immersed in their country's exhilarating political transformations, was already rising to Scott's challenges. Historians such as Celia Azevedo, Sidney Chalhoub, Maria Helena Machado, Marcus Carvalho, Silvia Lara, Hebe Mattos, and João José Reis forged new paths in slavery's sociocultural history, even as others built on foundational works by foreign scholars such as Philip Curtin, Warren Dean, Peter Eisenberg, Mary Karasch, Katia Mattoso, Nancy Naro, Stuart Schwartz, Robert Slenes, Stanley Stein, and Scott herself to propose new demographic, legal, economic, and political paradigms.¹⁷ Since then, in what has become a remarkable collective project, hundreds of researchers have systematically revised Brazilian interpretations of nearly every dimension of slavery, emancipation, and post-abolition, with a particularly revelatory impact on our understanding of everyday violence, resistance, agency, family, race, manumission, the slave trade, law, and citizenship. This body of scholarship is deeply rooted in the archives, intensely engaged with transnational historiographies, and unusually imaginative in its engagement of nontraditional sources of individual and collective experience. Slavery and abolition has arguably become the most dynamic historical subfield in Brazil and has provoked wide-ranging reevaluations of slavery's modern legacies and afterlives.

This transformation has had a significant impact on the English-language historiography of Brazil. Many Brazilian historians who came of age in the 1980s have spent extended periods in the United States and Europe, and several publish regularly in English. Their students – now leading scholars in their own right – often conduct portions of their training and postdoctoral work in the North Atlantic and collaborate closely with colleagues around the globe. Foreign Brazilianists build their scholarship in conversation with Brazilian innovations, and many – perhaps most notably Herbert Klein, Robert Slenes, and Barbara Weinstein – have provided vital syntheses of recent scholarship for English-speaking Atlantic World scholars.¹⁸

¹⁷ C. Azevedo, *Onda negra*; S. Chalhoub, *Visões da liberdade*; M. H. Machado, *O plano*; M. Carvalho, "Hegemony and Rebellion"; H. Mattos, *Ao sul*; J. Reis and E. Silva, *Negociação*; S. Lara, *Campos da violência*; P. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*; S. Stein, *Vassouras*; W. Dean, *Rio Claro*; P. Eisenberg, *The Sugar Industry*; M. Karasch, *Slave Life*; K. Mattoso, *To Be a Slave*; N. Naro, "The 1848 Praieira Revolt"; R. Slenes, "The Demography and Economics"; S. Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations*; R. Scott, *Slave Emancipation*.

¹⁸ See H. Klein and F. Luna, *Slavery in Brazil*; H. Klein and J. Reis, "Slavery in Brazil"; R. Slenes, "Brazil"; B. Weinstein, "Postcolonial Brazil."

Still, Brazilian scholarship remains considerably less accessible to outsiders than that of the Anglo, Hispanic, or Francophone Atlantics. Ironically, this is partially due to the sheer enormity and magnetism of the Brazilian historical field. Like their counterparts in the United States, Brazilian historians often structure their work around deep national intellectual traditions and internal scholarly debates, which can render their findings opaque for outsiders. Linguistically accurate translations often fail to convey historical and historiographical context or to fully expose the stakes of Brazilian scholarly debates. Brazilian authors generally publish their work individually or as the “Brazilian contribution” to collective projects organized around transatlantic themes. There are very few publications that allow English-language readers to directly experience the range, richness, and methodological sophistication of the Brazilian conversation – to grasp, in short, that there is a complex, multifaceted Brazilian school of slavery and abolition studies. As a partial consequence, Brazil is consistently underrepresented in English-language debates about Atlantic slavery and abolition, both as a site of experience and as a source of interpretation. Brazil was by far the most numerically important destination for enslaved Africans, but the United States and the British Caribbean wield far more influence on the transnational historiography.

This volume emerged in response to this paradox, and thus it is in part a work of translation – not only of words, from Portuguese to English, but also of experiences, memories, and understandings of slavery and post-abolition that are at once deeply familiar and surprisingly alien to scholars of other histories of captivity and freedom. Our authors research and write in both Brazil and the United States and approach this work of translation from multiple transnational perspectives. We do not aim to provide a survey of Brazil’s multiseular experience as a slave society, nor do we claim to represent every dimension of Brazil’s broad scholarly field. We intend, rather, to spark transnational debate about a few of the strongest currents in Brazil’s contemporary historiography. This collection offers multifaceted histories of Brazilian slavery’s final surge and prolonged abolition over the course of the nineteenth century, written with a particular sensibility to the long afterlives of captivity and to the constrained and precarious freedoms they engendered. We highlight, above all, the contributions of the sociocultural, legal, and economic historians who have sought answers to broad historical and theoretical questions in the everyday lives of enslaved Brazilians and their descendants.

CHRONOLOGIES OF SLAVERY AND FREEDOM

The chapters that follow assume some familiarity with the basic contours of Brazilian slavery, emancipation, and abolition. Our work of translation thus begins with a brief overview of Brazil's final eight decades of captivity.

When did Brazilian abolition begin? The notion that the abolition process spanned Brazil's entire nineteenth century might seem to fly in the face of economic and demographic realities. Brazil's independence from Portugal, in 1822, occurred in the initial stages of a nineteenth-century coffee boom that transformed the Brazilian Southeast and dramatically accelerated commerce in enslaved Africans.¹⁹ All told, more than 1,800,000 enslaved Africans arrived on Brazilian shores between 1801 and 1850; together, they comprised more than a third of the total number of laborers forcibly brought to Brazil.²⁰ In this context, Independent Brazil, like the United States, was conceived as a slaveholding nation.

Yet that history can obscure emancipation's deep roots in Brazilian soil. In stark contrast with the United States, newly independent Brazil had the largest freed African and free Afro-descendant population in the Americas. Due in part to comparatively high rates of manumission (the highest in the Americas, peaking at around 4 percent per year), that number continued to grow over the course of the nineteenth century. Even with the mass expansion of the slave trade before 1850, the rate of population increase among free Blacks was greater than that among the enslaved. By 1850, the number of free Afro-descendants had surpassed the number of enslaved persons. By the time of the 1872 census, free Afro-Brazilians comprised the largest single sector of the Brazilian population: out of a total of 9.5 million inhabitants, 4,200,000 (or 43 percent) were free people of African descent, in contrast with 1.5 million enslaved people and 3.7 million whites. While many of these manumissions were complex and incomplete, leading to something far short of full freedom, they cumulatively forged a world in which enslavement and African descent were not coterminous.²¹

Just as importantly, the political process that would eventually lead to the abolition of slavery in 1888 began at least eight decades earlier, when

¹⁹ R. Marquese, "Capitalism, Slavery."

²⁰ These estimates are from the *Slave Voyages Database*, for all known transatlantic slave arrivals in Brazil (www.slavevoyages.org). For discussion, see H. Klein and F. Luna, *Slavery in Brazil*.

²¹ H. Klein and F. Luna, *Slavery in Brazil*, pp. 78, 253–254.

the Napoleonic invasion of the Iberian Peninsula drove the Portuguese royal family and thousands of their courtiers across the Atlantic to Rio de Janeiro in 1807–1808. The Court relied on British protection to flee and was obliged in return to open Brazilian ports to British commerce and acknowledge the need to adopt “the most effective means to achieve the gradual abolition of the slave trade in the full extension of its dominions.”²² In practice, neither the treaty nor British patrols of the Brazilian coast contained the traffic in enslaved Africans. Yet the Congress of Vienna reinforced the European commitment to ending the slave traffic: Britain and Portugal both signed the treaty prohibiting the trade north of the equator, provoking protest from traffickers based in Rio de Janeiro and Bahia.

Brazilian independence inaugurated a new chapter in this process. Founding father José Bonifácio de Andrada e Silva argued, in the 1823 Constitutional Assembly, for the need to “abolish the slave trade, improve conditions for those now in captivity, and promote their gradual emancipation.”²³ Many enslaved people eagerly wielded the political language of the Age of Revolutions, demanding liberty and citizenship.²⁴ Yet the Brazilian elite considered slave traffic essential for the development of the coffee economy, which was already emerging as Brazil’s economic motor, and had no intention of loosening the hierarchical power structures born of slavery. Britain conditioned its recognition of independent Brazil on a commitment to end the slave trade, and the Brazilian Parliament was forced to cede ground: on November 7, 1831, they formally banned the slave trade and barred the entry of enslaved Africans onto Brazilian territory.²⁵ Yet elite commitment to slavery was stronger than the rule of formal law: despite an initial surge in enforcement and recurrent English attempts to contain “piracy,” at least 700,000 enslaved Africans were illegally brought to Brazilian shores in the 1830s and 1840s.²⁶ When Brazilian authorities intercepted such Africans, their freedom was radically circumscribed: they were classified

²² Treaty of Friendship and Alliance between Great Britain and Portugal, signed at Rio de Janeiro, February 19, 1810, *Oxford Public International Law*, 61 CTS 41–1. <https://opil.ouplaw.com/view/10.1093/law/ohr/law-ohr-61-CTS-41-1/regGroup.1/law-ohr-61-CTS-41-1>.

²³ J. B. De Andrade e Silva, *Representação à assembleia*.

²⁴ K. Schultz, *Tropical Versailles*.

²⁵ Law of November 7 1831. Brasil, *Coleção de Leis do Império do Brasil – 1831*, vol. 1, p. 182. Available at www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/lei_sn/1824-1899/lei-37659-7-novembro-1831-564776-publicacaooriginal-88704-pl.html.

²⁶ *Slave Voyages Database*, estimates of all slaves disembarked in Brazil from 1831 to 1850.

as “liberated Africans,” legally free but nonetheless obligated to work for local authorities or specially designated masters. It took more than fourteen years for most of them to attain autonomy and freedom, and often they were forced to labor far beyond the legal limit and could only (and only exceptionally) attain their freedom in the courts.²⁷

The complicity of Brazilian authorities in the illegal slave traffic led to escalating tensions with Great Britain. In 1845, the British Parliament approved the Aberdeen Bill, legalizing the seizure of any Brazilian ship involved in the slave traffic, regardless of circumstances and even in Brazilian territorial waters. In 1850, under British threat, Brazil passed Law 581, which extinguished the trade in enslaved Africans and authorized the confiscation of recently arrived Africans, even if it did not criminalize those who purchased the illegally enslaved. Although there are records of slave cargoes landing in Brazil as late as 1856, and although the vast majority of those illegally involved in the “infamous commerce” escaped sanction, the 1850 law in the end succeeded in definitively ending the trade.²⁸

The 1850 law unleashed profound changes in Brazil’s demography, as well as in its political, social, and economic life. Above all, the cessation of the Atlantic trade provoked an acceleration of domestic slave trafficking; in the economically stagnant Brazilian Northeast, legions of enslaved people were sold against their will to fuel the labor demands of the rapidly expanding coffee plantations in the Brazilian Southeast.²⁹ The end of the Atlantic traffic also resulted in scarcity and rapid inflation in the value of slave property, which in turn led to a rapid concentration of slaveholding. Before 1850, slave purchase had been widely accessible among the free population, including freedpeople and poor laborers; when the Atlantic slave trade ended, slaveholding became increasingly the privilege of large landholders who were well integrated in the export economy.³⁰

In the 1850s and 1860s, the number of enslaved people who openly sought their own liberty grew substantially. This was especially true in the Paraíba Valley, site of Brazil’s largest coffee plantations.³¹ In that region, before 1850, at least half of the enslaved labor force had been born in Africa. Ten years later, the figure was only 20 percent. This rapid

²⁷ B. Mamigonian, “Conflicts.”

²⁸ J. Rodrigues, *Infame comércio*; B. Mamigonian, *Africanos livres*.

²⁹ R. Graham, “Another Middle Passage?”

³⁰ Z. Frank, *Dutra’s World*; R. Salles, *E o vale*.

³¹ On the historiography of plantations in the Paraíba Valley, see R. Marquese and R. Salles, “Slavery in Nineteenth Century Brazil.”