

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 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 Sílvia 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 multiseccular 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.”

transformation cannot be explained by natural reproduction alone; it resulted as well from the importation of Brazilian-born slaves from regions such as Pernambuco and Maranhão, where erratic fluctuations and general decline in the sugar and cotton economies forced many slaveholders into dire economic straits. These men and women, violently torn from their families, arrived in the Paraíba Valley with long-established expectations about the contours of enslavement; the rupture in these norms intensified both individual and collective resistance, which little by little subverted the traditional equilibria of the Brazilian slave regime.³² Revolted by the possible loss of customary rights and by deteriorating living conditions, many enslaved people began to openly struggle against their masters. Some resisted physically, injuring or even murdering their overseers or owners; others fled; many more did everything within their power to achieve manumission.³³ One result was the acceleration and politicization of civil freedom suits, which became especially frequent in the 1860s as slave resistance converged with activism among abolitionist lawyers.³⁴

The end of the Civil War abolished US slavery in 1865, and Cuba's Moret law liberated newborns and the elderly in 1870, definitively isolating Brazil in the international arena. At the same time, the end of the Paraguayan War (1864–1870) added urgency to the problem of Brazilian emancipation.³⁵ In the Paraguayan War, as in the United States during the struggles for Independence and the Civil War, thousands of enslaved people were either “donated” to the army by their masters or joined the nation's fighting forces in hopes of gaining their liberty. At the same time, the African ancestry of many forced recruits awoke the fears of scientific racists, who worried that slavery was condemning Brazil to degenerate inferiority. No less significantly, the Paraguayan War's carnage, in combination with the wrenching horrors of the US Civil War, convinced many Brazilian politicians that gradual emancipation was preferable to violent conflict over the issue of slavery.

In 1867, a governmental commission elaborated a gradual emancipation project that entered into prolonged legislative discussion in 1871. Predictably, the proposal provoked fierce conflict in Congress, where pro-emancipation members of the Liberal party were only an outspoken

³² H. Mattos, “The Madness.”

³³ H. Mattos, *Das cores*; F. Gomes, *Histórias de quilombolas*.

³⁴ S. Chalhoub, *Visões*; K. Grinberg, “Manumission, Gender, and the Law.”

³⁵ V. Izecksohn, *Slavery and War*.

minority. Liberal and Conservative representatives from the southeastern coffee provinces of Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, and São Paulo – and especially those from the most prosperous and fertile micro-regions – opposed the project. Nonetheless, after four months of debate, amidst escalating tension between proslavery and emancipationist legislators and agile patronage politicking by the Baron of Rio Branco, the congress approved the Free Womb Law on September 28, 1871.³⁶ As the name indicates, the law's principal provision liberated all children of enslaved mothers born after the date upon which the law went into effect. The masters themselves could decide the fate of newborns born to enslaved mothers, choosing either to release them to “freedom” at the age of eight (in which case owners would receive a government indemnity) or to retain the children's services until the age of twenty-one years before releasing them without recompense. The Free Womb Law also created an Emancipation Fund to free an annual quota of slaves and made it mandatory for owners to matriculate their slaves in a governmental registry. That registry was a crucial escalation of the Brazilian state's power to regulate slavery, both because it established for the first time a record of who was legally enslaved and because it served to facilitate tax collection on enslaved property. Finally, the Free Womb Law formally recognized enslaved people's right to accumulate savings, whether from gift or inheritance or through independent paid work that a master permitted a slave to perform on the side. A slave could use those funds for whatever he or she saw fit, including self-purchase, without the master's intervention or impediment.

Historians still debate the practical efficacy of the 1871 law; despite its profound implications for governance and the future of captive labor, slavocrats did their best to undermine it, and abolitionists did not consider it adequate. Yet regardless of its practical implications, the Free Womb Law had a critical symbolic function, both because it limited seigneurial authority by recognizing the legal rights of enslaved persons and because it placed the Imperial government at the forefront of the emancipation process. As former minister of justice José Tomás Nabuco de Araújo Filho affirmed, “no one would ever again be born a slave.”³⁷ If the

³⁶ The Free Womb Law (Law 2040), September 28, 1871, translated in S. Peabody and K. Grinberg, *Slavery, Freedom, and the Law*, pp. 158–161. For a succinct summary of the 1871 law, see J. Mendonça, “Legislação emancipacionista.” On the approval of the Free Womb Law, see R. Salles, *E o vale*, chapter 2. On the politics of the same, see J. Needell, *The Sacred Cause*, pp. 44–45. See also C. Cowling, *Conceiving Freedom*.

³⁷ Speech by José Tomás Nabuco de Araújo Filho in the Câmara dos Deputados, September 26, 1871, in J. Nabuco, *Um estadista*, v. II, p. 845.

African traffic had finally ended, and all Brazilians would henceforth be born free, Brazilian slavery's days were numbered.

After nearly a decade of abolitionist advocacy in Brazil's courtrooms, the 1880s witnessed both a deepening crisis within the Brazilian Empire and the growth, diversification, and institutionalization of the Brazilian abolitionist movement. In 1880, abolitionists founded the Sociedade Brasileira contra a Escravidão (Brazilian Anti-Slavery Society); that same year, monarchist abolitionist leaders such as Joaquim Nabuco and André Rebouças joined with abolitionist Republicans such as José do Patrocínio and João Clapp to found the landmark newspaper *O Abolicionista*. From that point forward, abolitionist societies and papers proliferated, and abolitionist happenings were organized in theaters and clubs in Rio and throughout urban Brazil. Newspapers, demonstrations, and emancipation funds gained impressive ground in provinces outside of the southeastern coffee regions, many of which had already sold most slaves of prime working age south. In combination with enslaved people's own efforts at self-purchase (which were in many regions the most important route to freedom), and with accelerating open resistance among the enslaved, these movements succeeded in at least conditionally manumitting the vast majority of captives before 1888. In Ceará and Amazonas, all slaves were emancipated by 1884.

Emancipationist societies had called for reforms in the institution of slavery since the 1860s, but many post-1880 associations went far further, demanding immediate abolition. Similarly, while insurrections, maroon settlements, flight, and instances of violent resistance were recurrent throughout slavery's long history, they intensified in the 1870s and especially the 1880s.³⁸ During this period, slave resistance – and, as in the United States, slave flight – gained particularly strong support and legitimacy in Brazilian cities, some of which became important nodes in trajectories of escape that echoed the US underground railway.

Both the importance and the challenges of this growing abolitionist movement emerged especially clearly in 1885, when the Brazilian Parliament approved a new law regarding slave emancipation. The so-called Sexagenarian Law liberated all slaves over sixty years of age, but it also imposed restrictions, requiring freedpersons to perform three years of “free” labor and to remain in their county of residence for five years. It

³⁸ In Brazil, advocates of slavery's end can be divided into two general groups: the emancipationists, who favored a slow and gradual emancipation process; and the abolitionists, who favored the immediate abolition of slavery. See A. Alonso, *The Last Abolition*.

also (like the US Fugitive Slave Act of 1850) threatened prison time for anyone who assisted escaped slaves. The 1885 law was the last legal act related to slave emancipation before abolition, but it was also widely perceived as a conservative attempt to slow abolitionist momentum.³⁹ Historians such as Robert Conrad and Emilia Viotti da Costa concluded in the 1960s and 1970s that it had few practical effects because relatively few slaves were of such advanced age (and few among them were still able to perform productive labor). Yet recent scholarship has shown that the Sexagenarian Law in fact contributed to the manumission of many enslaved people because it – like the Free Womb Law – required the liberation of all slaves who had not been matriculated in a state registry by their owners.⁴⁰

In 1887, rural slave flights intensified, and fugitives established extensive networks in smaller cities of Brazil's southeastern coffee heartland such as Santos in São Paulo and Campos in Rio de Janeiro. In the wake of a serious crisis in military–state relations in the late 1880s, officers and soldiers of the Imperial Army, charged with capturing fugitive slaves, increasingly refused to do so.⁴¹ The Baron of Cotegipe, the conservative head of the Imperial cabinet, ordered that the enslaved fugitives and those who came to their aid – including students from Rio's Military Academy (Escola Militar) – be subdued. Over the course of 1887, conflicts brewed between the Cotegipe Cabinet and positivist and abolitionist military officials, many of whom advocated for the replacement of the monarchical regime with a republic. The panorama was one of complete uncertainty: slave revolts, proslavery forces that attempted to contain them, abolitionist civil disobedience, republican rallies, and the insubordination of the army left the monarchy in a very difficult situation. And to top it off, the

³⁹ On the actions of conservative influence on the law's enforcement, see J. Needell, *The Sacred Cause*, pp. 157–167; J. Mendonça, *Legislação emancipacionista*.

⁴⁰ R. Conrad, *The Destruction*; E. Viotti da Costa, *Da senzala*. On the recent scholarship of the Sexagenarian Law, see J. Mendonça, *Entre a mão*.

⁴¹ The military crisis centered on the role of the Brazilian military in national politics and was aggravated by abolitionist pressure as well as the positivist and republican sympathies of many young officers; though a May 1887 crisis that nearly led to the fall of Cotegipe's cabinet was averted, the crisis set the stage for army resistance to accelerating calls to contain mass flights on São Paulo plantations. In October 1887, a group of military officers from Rio's newly formed Clube Militar requested that the army should no longer be called on to capture individuals who were “peacefully fleeing the horrors of servitude.” The petition was widely publicized, demonstrating military dissatisfaction with an increasingly unpopular role. For an account of the “military question” and army resistance, see J. Needell, *The Sacred Cause*, pp. 178–181, 184; see also R. Conrad, *The Destruction*, p. 251; M. H. Machado, *O plano*, pp. 149–152.

emperor's declining health transformed the crisis of the Cotegipe Cabinet into a crisis of the monarchy itself. As rumors spread that Emperor Dom Pedro II was headed to Europe for treatment, criticism grew regarding a possible "Third Reign" of the Brazilian Empire, headed by Princess Isabel, who in June 1887 had rushed back from a European tour to temporarily take her father's place as head of government.

By this time, regions outside of Brazil's coffee lands held relatively few slaves; only coffee growers in Minas Gerais, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro continued to defend slavery and demand gradual indemnity for any "property" they might be forced to manumit. The situation became grave enough to threaten the coffee harvest; in the face of such imminent loss, even São Paulo's conservative planters began to argue for immediate abolition in hopes of accelerating European immigration and facilitating the creation of a free rural labor force. Rio de Janeiro's slavocrats became increasingly isolated in their defense of slavery as the parliamentary majority shifted to favor immediate abolition without indemnity as the only solution for the rural crisis.

The pressure on Princess Isabel was enormous. All indications pointed toward Pedro II's death abroad, though he would in fact live for three more years. Princess Isabel was neither popular nor politically adept. Despite a personal commitment to abolitionism, she hesitated to place it at the center of her governing agenda. It was only at the beginning of 1888 – in the wake of a strategically timed papal encyclical partially engineered by Nabuco, growing frustration with the Cotegipe Cabinet, and urban riots in Rio – that the princess publicly embraced the abolitionist cause, famously organizing Carnival dances soliciting donations for the enslaved.⁴²

With Princess Isabel's abolitionist turn, Cotegipe's Cabinet – in direct conflict with the military and lacking moral force – could not stand. In March 1888, Isabel substituted Cotegipe's so-called politics of the cudgel with the more moderate conservatism of João Alfredo, a politician with long experience in debates about the future of slavery. The new cabinet took office on the assumption that, in order to avoid even greater social convulsions, there was no alternative but to propose slavery's extinction.

On May 3, 1888, an abolition bill was proposed to Brazil's Parliament. The Black abolitionist André Rebouças crafted the initial draft to include elements of what he termed "rural democracy," which among other things

⁴² J. Needell, *The Sacred Cause*, pp. 193–198; A. Alonso, *The Last Abolition*, pp. 318–320; K. Grinberg and M. Muaze, *O 15 de Novembro*, pp. 103–108.

posited land reform as a crucial component of meaningful abolition. Yet the government forwarded to the legislature only those provisions that mandated the unconditional abolition of slavery without indemnity. Ten days later, ruling in her father's absence, Princess Isabel sanctioned the Lei Áurea, or Golden Law, a model of terse concision: "From this date forward, slavery is extinguished in Brazil. All contrary provisions are revoked."⁴³

The Lei Áurea formally freed somewhere near 600,000 individuals, approximately 5 percent of Brazil's population. Yet the law did nothing to promote their access to property and the full rights of citizenship; on the contrary, by designating freedpersons as Brazilians indistinguishable from those who had never been enslaved, the Imperial government paradoxically ensured that the dispossessions of slavery would continue to structure the social and economic realities of post-abolition society. In Brazil, as in the United States, full equality would remain a distant mirage for the vast majority of Afro-descendants.

AGENCY, SCALE, AND METHOD

The essays that follow explore this history, emphasizing approaches that have shaped Brazil's social, cultural, and legal historiography of slavery and its afterlives for the past four decades. This loose historiographical tradition emerged in specific geographic and thematic terrains and shares a distinctive set of intellectual and methodological commitments.

To begin to understand this school of thought, it is useful to return to an old question. Who abolished slavery? The query evokes an influential polemic unleashed fifteen years ago by Portuguese historian João Pedro Marques, whose strident call to downplay the causal significance of enslaved people's resistance in destroying the institution of slavery breathed revisionist life into a nearly fifty-year cycle of North Atlantic debates about slave agency.⁴⁴ By Marques' reading, the notion that slave

⁴³ "The Aurea Law," translated in S. Peabody and K. Grinberg, *Slavery, Freedom, and the Law*, pp. 165–166.

⁴⁴ J. Marques, "Terão os escravos." For English speakers, the debate was brought home in S. Drescher and P. Emmer, eds., *Who Abolished Slavery?* Marques' arguments especially recall Eugene Genovesie's *Roll, Jordan, Roll*. For a history of agency debates and introduction to their recent iterations – which are specifically concerned with the liberal origins of agency and presentist readings of the link between agency and resistance, see W. Johnson, "On Agency," as well as R. Follett et. al., "Slavery's Ghost." For a different strain in contemporary agency debates, see S. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*.

rebellion and resistance led directly to abolition was doubly flawed. First, enslaved rebels rarely articulated their struggles in abolitionist terms; they rebelled against the conditions of their own captivity, not the system of slavery as such. Their conscious agency, by this line of reading, did not lead directly to slavery's demise. Secondly, Marques argued that specific historical instances of large-scale rebellion could rarely be linked empirically to the advancement of the abolitionist cause: paradoxically, they often led instead to slavery's re-entrenchment. Marques thus reasoned that it would be absurd to argue that enslaved people were themselves fundamental to slavery's dissolution.

While Marques offered a useful corrective to facile narratives in which every action taken by a slave is read as a form of resistance and all Afro-descendants are understood as advocates of radical equality, his readings of agency and abolition also exposed an excessively narrow and teleological perspective. Many scholars have emphasized the constraining power of slavery's violence and called into question the ahistorical equation of enslaved agency and contemporary liberal visions of individual freedom without ignoring the deeper meanings of the histories that enslaved peoples made.⁴⁵ Others have argued for the primacy of political dynamics in the abolition process, while also recognizing the symbiotic interdependence of high politics and Afro-Brazilian mobilization.⁴⁶ Marques often mistook archival silence for quiescence and lack of stated intention for lack of causal impact, and he did not engage half a century of dense methodological debates about the sinuous interactions of structure, politics, ideas, and quotidian agency in shaping historical change.

North American historians of slavery such as Ira Berlin and Manisha Sinha have argued forcefully for a subtler and more holistic vision of historical causality, demonstrating both the depth of antislavery ideology among North America's enslaved peoples and the cumulative impact of a full spectrum of resistance practices that took place over a century or more.⁴⁷ Together, slave resistance and imaginaries of humanity and freedom were crucial not only to the direct contestation of slavery but also to the delegitimization that contributed greatly to its destruction. Similar perspectives have animated Brazilian debates about abolition, agency, and causality, laying bare tensions between renewed structuralist explanations of abolition (which echo arguments first advanced in the 1960s) and the

⁴⁵ R. Marquese, "Estrutura e agência"; R. Soares, "Nem arrancada."

⁴⁶ See J. Needell, *The Sacred Cause*.

⁴⁷ I. Berlin, *The Long Emancipation*; M. Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*.

social histories of slave agency and resistance that came to dominate Brazilian historiography after 1988.⁴⁸

The historiography in this volume does not respond directly to Marques' query; to ask "who abolished slavery" is to accept the false premises that abolition has a singular lineage and that it is necessary to choose from among mutually exclusive causal forces. Yet the polemic is important, because it places in sharp relief a vision of the temporality, content, and impact of Brazilian abolition that has emerged from four decades of socio-cultural and legal historiography. Our authors, rooted in that school, envision slavery and freedom as a spectrum rather than a dichotomy; they understand abolition less as specific event than as a multisecular historical process, rooted in the early nineteenth century and in some sense still ongoing. We are interested not only in the actions that led directly to the Lei Áurea but also in the shifting meanings of slavery and freedom, as well as the ways in which captivity shaped myriad economic, social, cultural, and political forms that long outlasted formal bondage. And we trace not only the actors who intentionally and directly contributed to the abolitionist cause but also those who shaped slavery's demise by transforming the nature of the institution and widely varying structures that undergirded it. Like any other complex historical process, Brazilian abolition should not be understood as a linear or teleological progression, a straight march that ended in legal emancipation after a pitched struggle between clearly delineated camps. On the contrary, every step forward came with disjunctive steps back: freedpeople became slaveowners, and slaves reinforced their owners' authority even as they loosened their own constrictions; emancipationists ceded ground to nationalists who saw slave labor as key to economic development; the elimination of legal Atlantic trade changed meaning in the face of illicit trafficking, re-enslavement, and hardening forms of racialization; and enforced dependency kept step with the quickening pace of manumission.⁴⁹ Abolition itself was a milestone in that rutted route to freedom, but formal emancipation was gutted by new forms of political restriction, dispossession, and racialized governance.

This historical vision has emerged from careful methodological scaling, whereby broad temporal and theoretical perspectives are juxtaposed with the microhistory of lived experience. At these junctures, we begin to

⁴⁸ J. Needell, "Brazilian Abolitionism"; R. Marquese and R. Salles, "Slavery in Nineteenth Century Brazil"; M. H. Machado and C. Castilho, eds., *Tornando-se livre*; R. Salles, "A abolição."

⁴⁹ S. Chalhoub, *A força*; B. Mamigonian, *Africanos livres*.

perceive the ways in which structures are inhabited and transformed into elements of a dynamic and contingent historical process. One of the major contributions of Brazil's historiography of slavery over the last half-century has been its systematic engagement with archives, especially the judicial archives of the Roman or civil law tradition, which are generally far richer in detail and testimony than their common-law equivalents. Unlike some of their counterparts in the North Atlantic, Brazilian slaves and freedpersons rarely left intentionally written testimonies. But legal records – read against the grain and imaginatively cross-referenced with newspapers, church and civil registries, economic records, diplomatic correspondence, and inherited oral histories and cultural forms – have allowed historians of Brazil to develop a dense vision of slavery's everyday life in remarkably varied contexts. In unearthing the trajectories, interactions, and experiences of individuals and families, we can come to understand the range of ways in which slaves, freedpersons, free citizens, and slaveholders constantly renegotiated the meaning and limits of slavery and freedom. In aggregate, those microhistories help us understand the ways in which Brazil's nineteenth-century Afro-descendant population was united not only by the experience of bondage and hard-won manumission but also by the precariousness of freedom and impotence of formal citizenship.⁵⁰ This close-up view allows us to glimpse the complex social and political relationships that undergird larger-scale historical processes of transformation and persistence.

THEMATIC RANGE

The chapters that follow engage intensely with these issues of agency, structure, and scale, across varied thematic terrains. In many cases, our authors reimagine classic motifs in Brazilian social thought, a tradition itself deeply entwined with slavery and its legacies. This is especially apparent in relation to Gilberto Freyre. Perhaps the most internationally (in)famous of Brazil's twentieth-century social thinkers, Freyre became well-known both

⁵⁰ The concept of the "precariousness of freedom" was coined by Henrique Espada Lima and amplified by Sidney Chalhoub; it has been employed both to highlight the contingencies of African and Afro-descendant liberty in the nineteenth century and to stress the tenuous post-abolition position of Afro-descendants. The concept seeks an equilibrium between recognizing the possibilities of freedom and acknowledging the reality of phenomena such as illegal enslavement, illicit re-enslavement, and forms of racism and coercion that long outlived legal slavery. H. Lima, "Sob o domínio"; S. Chalhoub, "The Precariousness of Freedom."

inside and outside Brazil for his idealized vision of Brazil's colonial past, in which the sugar plantation emerged as the cradle of what came to be known as "racial democracy," where the violence and hierarchy of slavery was mediated – and maintained – by the relational fabric of paternalism and through dense (if often forced and violent) sexual and sociocultural exchanges. Our authors are deeply critical of the notion of racial democracy, and none share Freyre's reverence for hierarchy or his normalizing detachment from slavery's violence. Yet many of our chapters emphasize the structuring force and enduring legacy of relational and patrimonial power, or they reexamine questions that first emerged in Freyre's earliest work. How did family structures and sexual relationships, slave and free, shape Brazilian slavery, emancipation, and freedom? What is the role of emotion, affection, and intimate violence in organizing, reinforcing, or eroding slavocratic and seigneurial authority? How did the informal relationships of dependency, favor, and kinship, so fundamental to Brazil's slave order, structure or vacate "freedom" and delimit the possibilities of equality after abolition? Such questions have been central not only to Brazil's historiography of slavery but also to broader Brazilian accounts of culture, state formation, and nation-building. In reopening these debates, while discarding the neo-patriarchal sensibilities that begat them, these essays intervene in discussions about Brazil's persistent inequalities, incomplete citizenships, and patrimonial forms of governance that have long outlasted slavery's formal bonds.

Readers will find many other classic debates reimaged here: the impact of shifting forms of capitalist agriculture on the intimate worlds of slavery; the influence of Afro-descendant culture – and especially Black music – on Brazil's racial and cultural formation; the history of Brazilian racism and racial ideologies; the politics of formal abolition; the ways in which the economies and politics of Brazilian slavery intersected with the transnational currents of the Atlantic world. Yet these chapters also pursue lines of inquiry that have emerged since the 1980s as significantly autonomous spheres of debate. How were the experiences of slavery, manumission, and freedom shaped by individual and collective subjectivities? How did slavery and its afterlives constrain the development of Brazilian citizenship and curtail the hegemony of Brazilian law? What historical meanings could Brazilian freedom attain, given that it was conceptualized and actualized in a terrain of slavery?

As is true in the broader Atlantic world, questions of gendered and racialized subjectivities have become increasingly central in Brazil. Gendered analysis has deep roots in the study of race and slavery in

Brazil, extending at least to Ruth Landes' *City of Women* (1947) and evident even in Gilberto Freyre's misogynistic but keen attention to women's racialized roles in patriarchal society. Research on gender, race, and slavery gained significant ground in the 1980s with a wave of innovative research on the lives of enslaved women and female slaveholders that starkly mapped the intersectional unfreedoms of urban Brazil.⁵¹ In recent decades, Brazilian research has continued to document the lives of women under slavery, but it has also accompanied the broader Atlantic field in seeking to understand how gender and sexuality shaped slavery, freedom, and their afterlives.⁵² Many of our authors contribute to this transnational project, placing the gendered dimensions of violence, relational power, labor, and the struggle for freedom at the center of the histories of slavery and abolition.

Many of the essays collected here also foreground Afro-descendant subjectivities, with particular emphasis on the need to historicize racial identities, document the quotidian practices of racism, and apprehend the enduring stigma and violence of slavery. Our authors understand racial democracy as an ideological construct and reject the normative notion that post-abolition inequalities were shaped by class rather than race. At the same time, they are also wary of ahistorical scripts of racial subjectivity, especially those grounded in the experiences of legally enforced segregation and explicit racial violence that characterized the Jim Crow South or South Africa. Instead, these essays emphasize the ways in which Brazil's particular trajectories of slavery and freedom – culminating in a racial order in which formal equality and limited forms of racial fluidity and mobility cloaked the persistence of brutal, violent hierarchies – led to distinctive forms of racism and racial consciousness. Brazilian Afro-descendants, slave and free, confronted the paradoxical coexistence of formal equality and radical subjugation in myriad ways, according to the

⁵¹ See, for example, M. Silva Dias, *Power and Everyday Life*; S. Graham, *House and Street and Caetana Says No*; Mary Karasch, *Slave Life*.

⁵² For the Atlantic world, prominent recent examples include Saidiya Hartman, Thavolia Glymph, Stephanie Camp, Tera Hunter, Marisa Fuentes, Katherine McKittrick, and Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers. For examples of the very recent scholarship, see the double special issues of *Slavery & Abolition* (28:2, 2017) and the *Women's History Review* (27:6, 2018), "Mothering Slaves: Motherhood, Childlessness and the Care of Children in Atlantic Slave Societies," edited by M. H. Machado, D. Paton, C. Cowling, and E. West. On gender and slavery in Brazil after Silva Dias, Lauderdale Graham, and Karasch, see C. Cowling, *Conceiving Freedom*; O. Otovo, *Progressive Mothers*; C. Roth, "From Free Womb"; F. Gomes, G. Xavier, and J. Farias, eds., *Black Women in Brazil*; M. Ariza, "Mães libérrimas."

degrees of freedom and autonomy they eked out from widely varying circumstances. Our chapters explore a broad range of quotidian experience of race and racism, from the domestic worlds of wet nurses and recalcitrant house-servants to the combative trenches of political journalism to the national and transnational milieu of statespeople, engineers, and artists. In so doing, they illuminate the infrastructure of Brazil's enduring racial inequalities, even as they allow us also to better apprehend alternate logics of Afro-descendant politics, survival strategies, and "self-making."⁵³

Many of the most distinctive dimensions of Brazil's Black subjectivities grew from the country's deeply paradoxical relationship with political liberalism. From its inception, Brazil's constitution (1824) formulated political citizenship as the universal prerogative of independent free men, regardless of race. Yet that formal commitment to color-blind male citizenship coexisted with racialized political practices and political cultures in which virtually every adult male noncitizen was Black or Indigenous and every Afro-descendant citizen was disproportionately vulnerable to informal but systemic denigration and exclusion. In this sense, Brazilian Afro-descendants faced in the nineteenth century a dilemma that has become endemic across the globe in the twentieth: what did the struggle for Black political equality look like when the legal foundations for racially unequal citizenship were no longer clearly visible?⁵⁴

Brazil's nineteenth-century citizenship dilemmas are related to another classic preoccupation of Brazilian social thought, taken up here in a new key: the paradoxes of a modernization process that is at once liberal and slavocratic. The contradictions of this process expressed themselves in Brazil's institutional, legal, political, and diplomatic structures, which integrated patrimonial practices and liberal forms; they were also evident in Brazil's Imperial iteration of "second slavery," which concomitantly embraced global capitalism and fomented the expansion of forced labor.⁵⁵ In this context, several unresolvable tensions emerged in

⁵³ This use of "self-making" is drawn from S. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*.

⁵⁴ Brazilian debates on this issue have tended to focus on the racist dimensions of "racial silence," in ways that speak to Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's conception of "color-blind racism." See E. Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*. See also K. Grinberg, *A Black Jurist*.

⁵⁵ On patrimonialism and the political structure of the Brazilian Empire and First Republic, see R. Faoro, *Os donos do poder*; W. dos Santos, *Ordem burguesa*; J. Murillo de Carvalho, *A construção, Teatro de sombras*, and "Federalismo e centralização"; R. Graham, *Patronage and Politics*. On "second slavery" in Brazil, see R. Marquese and D. Tomich, "O vale do Paraíba."

particular relief, even beyond the flagrant incongruity of a regime where the equality and liberty of a few were built on the civil and political negation of the many. The imperative to expand the supply of enslaved labor for the booming coffee economy grew ever more challenging as Brazil was forced – as the price of entry to an international system dominated by the British – to accept a formal ban on the Atlantic slave trade. Domestic pressure to flout the ban clashed with the perceived need to construct a modern state, founded in institutionalized power and the rule of law, a project that was also undermined by the private spheres of authority inherent to the slave system. Forced to choose between slavery and the rule of law, Brazil's governing classes chose to tolerate illegal forms of captivity on a massive scale, first by accepting the lawless continuation of the Atlantic slave trade and then by maintaining illegal captives in bondage and turning a blind eye to the illegal enslavement of freedpersons and free-born Afro-descendants. In this way, many of our chapters argue, tolerated illegality became a fundamental component of Brazil's nineteenth-century national formation, with significant implications for the legitimacy of the nation's property regimes, the hegemony of legal and judicial authority, and the construction of a doxa of impunity among the powerful.

As is true in most studies of Atlantic slavery and abolition, it has become nearly impossible to study the meaning of bondage in Brazil without considering also the significations of freedom. It no longer makes sense to conceive of a sharp transition from slave to free labor in Brazil, as if the two had not coexisted in the decades before abolition. Likewise, oppositional understandings of slavery and freedom have given way to relational analyses, a trend that has also eroded dualistic conceptions of adjacent categories such as public and private or rural and urban. In this conception, our authors especially emphasize the limitations inherent in understanding freedom only through the lenses of formal manumission or emancipation, arguing that freedom was embodied also in familial integrity, access to property or employment, and various forms of social and physical mobility – education, movement to rural or urban localities less dominated by patriarchal logics, the forging of autonomous spheres of politics, culture, and community. At the same time, moving beyond oppositional analyses also requires us to acknowledge the persistence and continuity of myriad unfreedoms. After abolition, Brazilian society remained hierarchical, patriarchal, unequal, and deeply racist; the slavery that had marked Brazil throughout the Brazilian colony and empire lived on in the normative inequity of the Brazilian Republic.

It is worth noting that there are important limitations to our thematic and geographic range. Our authors engage with important recent contributions to the economic history of slavery, the history of Brazilian capitalism, and the high politics of abolition and free labor, but those historiographical schools are not our central focus.⁵⁶ Similarly, although we place considerable and unusual emphasis on the important northeastern state of Pernambuco, and although our essays do touch on Bahia and on Brazil's southern frontier regions, many of our authors follow the Brazilian historiography in emphasizing Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Minas Gerais and Amazonia – areas central to our understanding of the interaction of regional specificities and larger historical processes in Brazil's nineteenth century – are especially important omissions.⁵⁷ We also do not include any essays focused on the impact of Brazilian practices of slavery and emancipation in Africa or in the Atlantic world.⁵⁸ While we regret these absences, we hope that readers will appreciate our choice to emphasize the depth of the sociocultural and legal historiography we do cover, and that the references in this volume will allow readers to explore these other schools of thought with the attention they deserve.

A SLAVE SOCIETY AFTER SLAVERY: FRAMEWORKS AND CHAPTERS

The idea that slavery's legacies are integral to Brazil's history as a “free” nation has deep roots. In August 1883, Joaquim Nabuco, living in self-imposed exile in London, articulated the abolitionist position on slavery's inheritance, planting the seeds for generations of reflection. *O abolicionismo*, at once Brazil's most internationally influential abolitionist tract and a foundational portrait of Brazilian national character, minced no words in portraying Brazil as a slave society internally corroded by its most formative institution.⁵⁹ Brazilian slavery, Nabuco argued, was illegitimate, immoral,

⁵⁶ Examples of recent historiography on the economic history of Brazilian slavery and capitalism are R. Marquese and R. Salles, “Slavery in Nineteenth Century Brazil”; M. Ferraro, “Capitalism, slavery”; and M. Muaze and R. Salles, eds., *A segunda escravidão*. Recent works on the high politics of abolition include J. Needell, *The Sacred Cause*; A. Alonso, *The Last Abolition*; R. Salles, “Resistência escrava”; C. Santos, “O ativismo político.”

⁵⁷ About slavery in Minas Gerais, see L. Cota, “Ave, libertas”; N. Wicks, “Pathways to Freedom.” On the Amazon, see F. Gomes, ed., *Nas terras*; J. Bezerra Neto, “Por todos os meios”; O. de la Torre, *The People of the River*.

⁵⁸ See J. Rodrigues, *De costa a costa*; R. Ferreira, *Cross-Cultural Exchange*; L. Marques, *The United States*.

⁵⁹ J. Nabuco, *O abolicionismo*. The tract utilizes repetition as a rhetorical strategy; the arguments summarized here can be found at multiple points in the text. For the most

and a shameful stain on Brazil's international image. It had created a *mestiço* (mixed-race) national population that bore the enduring cultural and biological mark of Africa, which Nabuco portrayed in deeply racist terms.⁶⁰ But, above all, slavery was a sin against the *patria* – against a mythical national whole, composed of slaves but also of freedmen and slaveowners, all of whom suffered the perversions and deformations of an encompassing slave society. So long as slavery endured, Brazil would not follow the normative tracks of economic progress: its natural environment would be devastated, its property monopolized by unproductive overlords, its human capital stunted, its capacity to modernize, industrialize, and develop consumer markets hopelessly weakened.⁶¹ The slaveholding class would render the Brazilian state patrimonial and parasitic, making a mockery of liberal ideals and the rule of law; the masses of poor laborers, rural and urban, would fail to develop as a free political class. Brazil's moral fabric would rot, as there would be no incentive for honest work or redemptive education or religion. Slavery would vilify the souls of *senhores* (masters) and degrade the enslaved; its "secretions" would channel their way into every cell of the national body.⁶²

Wherever it existed, in short, Nabuco argued that slavery had been "a wind of destruction" that spared nothing and no one.⁶³ And the very qualities that rendered Brazilian slavery more malleable than its extinct US counterpart only amplified its symbiotic corrosiveness: in the absence of a "fixed division of classes," freedpeople became masters, complicit in the ills that had brutalized them; slaveowners were the lovers, parents, siblings, and even children of the enslaved, hopelessly entwining familial sentiments and mercenary logics. The fact that blackness and slavery

succinct and comprehensive summary, see chapter XI, "A influência da escravidão sobre a nacionalidade," especially pp. 114–116.

⁶⁰ Nabuco's tract was in many ways emblematic of the racist precepts that infiltrated even the heights of abolitionist thought: Nabuco wrote of racial mixture as the "first vengeance" (137) of an enslaved African race characterized by "retarded mental development, barbarous instincts, and crude superstitions" (144); he advocated European immigration and whitening (233) and warned his compatriots that the importation of Chinese labor would reproduce the errors of slavery (137). Just as consequentially, in writing for an international audience, Nabuco generally portrayed enslaved men and women as passive and degraded victims, significant mainly for their impact on a broader *mestiço* nationality.

⁶¹ On the environmental dimensions of slavery, see J. Nabuco, *O abolicionismo*, ch. 14, especially p. 148; this dimension of Nabuco's work is analyzed in depth in J. Pádua, *Um sopro*, pp. 272–280. The argument would be taken up by many subsequent analysts, including W. Dean, *With Broadax*.

⁶² J. Nabuco, *O abolicionismo*, p. 173. ⁶³ J. Nabuco, *O abolicionismo*, p. 168.

were never entirely coterminous only rendered the Brazilian system more *hábil* (agile) and its impact more enduring and perverse.⁶⁴ Indeed, slavery had penetrated the Brazilian organism so thoroughly that formal abolition would only be the beginning: it was only “after the slaves and the *senhores* are liberated from the yoke that incapacitates both for a free life, that we will be able to embark on a serious program of reform.” And that reform would not and could not take place “to the applause of multitudes in a public plaza”; to create “a strong, intelligent, patriotic and free people,” reforms would have to be made “day by day, night by night, in the shadows, anonymously, in the intimacy of our lives, in the glow of family, with no recompense other than an invigorated conscience, moralized and disciplined, at once virile and humane.”⁶⁵

Many of Nabuco’s argumentative threads extended to form the warp and woof of twentieth-century debates about Brazil’s national formation: his arguments about slavery’s detrimental impact on the development and modernization of the Brazilian economy and class relations; his assertions about slavery’s decisive role in the development of latifundia and destructive environmental practices; his articulation of slavery’s influence on the development of patronage and patrimonial state practices; and his condemnation of slavery’s corruption of the rule of law.⁶⁶ Stripped of its moral critique, Nabuco’s evocation of the intimate bonds that undergirded slavery inspired Gilberto Freyre’s patriarchal vision of Brazilian civilization.⁶⁷ Yet, morally amplified, his vision of slavery’s destitution and disenfranchisement of the enslaved also found continuity in Florestan Fernandes’ searing analysis of Brazilian post-abolition society.⁶⁸

Nabuco’s prescience about some of slavery’s enduring legacies – from its centrality to private life to its capacity to shape international relations, from its ability to create complicity across the color and class spectrum to its potential to corrode the institutions and ideals of liberal modernity – has significantly shaped contemporary debates and is also manifest in this collection. Ricardo Salles and Mariana Muaze’s account (Chapter 3) of the intersection of coffee capitalism and family formation echoes Nabuco’s occasional glimmers of optimism, documenting the ways in

⁶⁴ J. Nabuco, *O abolicionismo*, pp. 174–176.

⁶⁵ J. Nabuco, *O abolicionismo*, pp. 251–252.

⁶⁶ S. Buarque de Holanda, *Raízes do Brasil*; C. Prado Júnior, *Formação do Brasil*; R. Faoro, *Os donos*; C. Furtado, *Formação econômica*; J. Pádua, *Um sopro*; W. Dean, *With Broadax*.

⁶⁷ G. Freyre, *Casa grande and Sobrados*.

⁶⁸ R. Bastide and F. Fernandes, *Branços e negros*; F. Fernandes, *O negro*.

which the formation of “agrarian empires” could – despite overwhelming brutalities and inequalities – open and even require spaces that allowed enslaved people to create and sustain the networks of community and kinship that undergirded Black life during and after slavery. In a darker vein, Marcus Carvalho’s analysis of the illegal slave trade in Pernambuco (Chapter 2) argues that the economic logics of slave commerce could not be separated from the traumatic experience of child slavery nor the complicity of regional planter clans – and that the political and affective echoes of such trauma and collusion were palpable long after the last enslaved children disembarked. In a similar key, Beatriz Mamigonian and Keila Grinberg (Chapter 1) document slavery’s foundational role in the development of Brazilian law and citizenship. In showing how nineteenth-century judges, juries, and superior courts undermined freedom by refusing to convict defendants of the crime of illegal enslavement, Mamigonian and Grinberg substantiate the degree to which Brazilian law and Brazilian citizenship were corroded at their inception, despite the activism of the many lawyers and prosecutors who attempted to use the courts as vehicles of freedom.

Especially haunting, 130 years after abolition, are the ways in which the essays collected here echo Nabuco’s arguments about Brazilian slavery’s flexibility, capilarity, and power to survive its own legal extinction. Brodwyn Fischer’s Chapter 7 shows how Recife remained a “slave city” long after most enslaved people had been emancipated; for Anísia, Guilherme, and Esperança – the people whose histories Fischer’s chapter traces – the possibilities of urban mobility and freedom were strictly curtailed by economic decadence, private authority, and the networks of recognition and relational power that slavery had inscribed on the urban form. Sueann Caulfield’s account (Chapter 14) of the tangled politics of intimacy and complicity that allowed Brazilian families to perpetuate slavery’s inequalities also gives vivid expression to Nabuco’s foreshadowing, illustrating how the ambiguous and informal recognition that was granted as a “favor” to the mixed-race children of elite Brazilian families ensured the persistence of patriarchy and paternalism even as it allowed for limited social mobility. Wlamyra Albuquerque’s portrait of Teodoro Sampaio (Chapter 10) captures the pathos of the free Black experience in the decades surrounding abolition more arrestingly still. By documenting the intersection of legal freedom and ascendant racism and the wrenching ideological and personal compromises that conditioned movement from slavery to freedom and from obscurity to the highest reaches of Brazil’s professional classes, Albuquerque revisits Nabuco’s notion of complicity.

But she does so with a searing awareness of the sociocultural circumstances that rendered such complicity unavoidable and the cruel blockades that blunted its efficacy as an instrument of true equality.

On the issue of slavery's legacies, Nabuco was also a touchstone for Black activist Abdias do Nascimento (1914–2011), who cited Nabuco's words in the 1968 preface to *O Negro Revoltado*: "So long as the Nation remains unaware that it is indispensable to adapt to liberty every apparatus of its organism that slavery has appropriated, slavery will endure, even when there are no longer a single slave."⁶⁹ Yet Nascimento's admiration for Nabuco was tempered by incisive critique, two elements of which have been especially important in shaping Brazilian studies of slavery and abolition in the past half-century. The first involved a sharp rebuke of white "advocates" and men of letters who claimed to speak for the Afro-descendant masses, both under slavery and beyond it.⁷⁰ Nascimento's criticism was selective – he reserved particular scorn for L. A. da Costa Pinto and Gilberto Freyre, but he cited Nabuco frequently and greatly admired contemporary allies such as Florestan Fernandes.⁷¹ All the same, Nascimento crafted a forceful argument for Black people's agency in the struggle against slavery, and he demanded equal voice for Black intellectuals as part and parcel of freedom. Nascimento also skillfully eviscerated the unity that Nabuco implied among the Brazilian people, shattering the myth of a national family in which the enslaved and the enslavers were united in both the degradation and guilt of slavery and the arduous task of post-abolition nation-building.

On all of these counts, Nascimento asserted Black subjectivity as a fundamental right and Black suffering as a unique and outrageous burden: Afro-descendants were actors in their own history, and both slavery and post-abolition destitution and prejudice had caused them deep harm that demanded recognition and recompense. Slavery in Brazil had penetrated every cell of Brazil's national body, and its legacies were

⁶⁹ A. do Nascimento, *O negro revoltado*, p. 21.

⁷⁰ See for example A. do Nascimento, *O genocídio*, p. 137.

⁷¹ On L. A. Costa Pinto, see A. do Nascimento, *O negro revoltado*, pp. 16–17; on Freyre, see A. do Nascimento, *O genocídio*, pp. 42–45; on Fernandes, see A. do Nascimento, *O genocídio*, pp. 40, 46, 82, 136, and *O negro revoltado*, p. 17. Nascimento maintained uncharacteristic silence with regard to Nabuco's complicity in the construction of Brazilian paradigms of cultural and racial mixture, even quoting Nabuco as a capstone to his withering assessment of Pierre Verger's "paternalistic" "domestication" of Afro-descendant culture: "Who can say that the Black race does not have the right to protest before the world and history against Brazil's behavior?" (A. do Nascimento, *O genocídio*, p. 122).

indeed felt by all. But it had marked Black bodies, families, and destinies in specifically devastating ways, and those harms had been perpetuated by practices and institutions that extended to Nascimento's lifetime. Though he did not use her language, Nascimento was arguing – in essence – that Brazilian slavery had what Saidiya Hartman would later term “afterlives,” which perpetuated its racially specific devastation and would not disappear without the wholesale recognition of Black voices and Black subjectivities.

Nascimento, like Nabuco, was an activist as well as an intellectual, and while his aim to upturn Brazil's worst racial inequities remains out of reach, a remarkable number of his initiatives became policy in Brazil between the 1980s and the 2010s: the breaking of racial silence (rhetorically, politically, culturally, and through the inclusion of racial statistics in national surveys); the creation of educational curricula focused on the Brazilian Black experience; the recognition of Afro-Brazilian culture and the associations that practice and promote it; and affirmative action in public education and employment.⁷² Since the 1970s, historians and other social scientists have pursued Nascimento's intellectual aims with similar energy. Brazilian historiography still does not adequately reflect Afro-descendants' historical role in Brazil; the Black experience, articulated by Black scholars, still does not occupy its rightful space in the academic world. But Black intellectuals and activists have played a crucial role in constructing the historiography of slavery, abolition, and post-abolition, and the field as a whole has embraced the challenges of documenting Black subjectivities; recognizing Afro-descendant resistance to slavery and Black agency in the social and intellectual struggles of abolition and its aftermaths; and understanding the specific historical impact of slavery and its afterlives on Brazilian Afro-descendants.⁷³

The essays collected here emerge from that movement. As noted, many of our authors work within Nabuco's tradition, interrogating the ways in which slavery and abolition shaped institutions and historical processes at the heart of Brazil's national history; family, law, gender, urbanity, rural property and labor relations, diplomacy, art, and music. In undertaking such analysis, however, they depart from earlier generations in striving to comprehend those processes through the lens of Afro-descendant experience and in arguing that slavery's legacies are separable neither from the

⁷² A. do Nascimento, *O genocídio*, pp. 137–141.

⁷³ F. Gomes and P. Domingues, *Da nitidez*; G. Xavier (org.), *Histórias da escravidão*; G. Xavier (org.), *Intelectuais negras*.

afterlives that have extended its abuses and inequities to our own times nor from the practices of resistance and contestation that continue to anchor Black struggle.

The analytical consequences of foregrounding Afro-descendant experience and agency within broader historical phenomena emerge clearly in Keila Grinberg's Chapter 5, about the origins of the Paraguayan War. Grinberg's argument centers on the ways in which conflicts over free soil contributed to the diplomatic tensions that preceded the war. Yet she makes her case with a deep awareness that those tensions were created by real people living on the borderlands of Brazil and Uruguay in an era of precarious enslavement and precarious freedom: kidnapping and illegal slave-trading would never have become matters of diplomatic tension if people such as Rufina and Juan Rosa had not risked everything to denounce criminals such as Laurindo José da Costa and the legions of complicit officials who made his actions possible. In obscuring the role of free-soil conflicts in sparking the Paraguayan War, historians – beginning with Nabuco himself – have not only underplayed the historical impact of Black agency; they have also obscured slavery's central place in one of Brazil's most impactful experiences of national formation.

On a more intimate scale, other contributors build on questions of women's experience of enslavement and racial formation that were equally fundamental to Nascimento's thought, drawing our attention to specifically Afro-descendant experiences of gender formation and precarious freedom.⁷⁴ Mariana Muaze, in Chapter 4, travels to racial democracy's darkest heart. By examining what forced wet-nursing meant to enslaved women whose own motherhood was silenced by the sustenance and affection they provided to the children of their owners, Muaze reveals the violence and dispossession that undergirded the "slavocratic habitus," and in so doing she undermines any remaining Nabuquian notion that all Brazilians were united in enduring the tragedy of slavery. Maria Helena Machado performs similar labor at the intersection of gender and freedom struggles in Chapter 6, unveiling the logics of an enslaved woman's canny dislocations, pursued according to the conflicting imperatives of family reunification and escape. Machado's exploration of Ovídia and the two Benedictas also brings alive the continuities in women's lives under slavery and freedom, which foreshadowed the specific afterlives of female bondage.

⁷⁴ In A. do Nascimento's *O genocídio*, chapter 3 focuses on the sexual exploitation of Black women.

Nascimento's influence emerges even more directly when our chapters turn to questions of agency, voice, and resistance. On occasion, this involves giving voice to forgotten and heroic articulations of Black politics. In analyzing Felipe Neri Collaço's pathbreaking journalism, Celso Castilho and Rafaella Valença de Andrade Galvão (Chapter 9) capture the defiant radical edge of Black racial thinking on the eve of abolition. In Chapter 11, meanwhile, Ana Flávia Magalhães Pinto shows the coevolution of class and racial consciousness among people of color in Rio de Janeiro, as well as the deep Brazilian roots of Black educational initiatives and the early entwining of racial and working-class solidarity. Yet even in those moments, our authors are deeply aware of the countercurrents that have worked across the decades to silence Black voices and suppress the practice and possibility of Black politics. Castilho and Galvão note the racist suppression of Collaço's demands for equality, showing vividly how elite men used Brazil's public sphere to racially degrade and punish those who deviated from the script of racial silence; Magalhães Pinto demonstrates the racial marginalization of Black actors across the political spectrum.

That kind of analytical subtlety – the determination to work in the borderlands that Nabuco and Nascimento both inhabited, to trace the historical roots of Black politics and agency without losing sight of the legacies and afterlives of slavery – may well be the most enduring mark of the historiographical tradition represented in this volume. It is certainly a guiding thread for Robson Martins and Flávio Gomes in their analysis of land and labor relations in the emancipation-era Brazilian Southeast (Chapter 8). Martins and Gomes painstakingly reconstruct the multiple ideals of autonomy, freedom, and family that animated freedpeople's quotidian choices about land and labor, even as they demonstrate how local potentates used tropes of racialized disorder to delegitimize those choices and actively limited freedpeoples' capacity to engage in commerce, move freely, and dispose of arable land as they pleased. Martha Abreu (Chapter 15) captures a similar complex duality: her comparative biographical analysis of Eduardo das Neves and Bert Williams highlights their shared liminality, demonstrating how Black musicians and performing artists created opportunities for cultural expression, artistic advancement, and racial affirmation within transnational cultural circuits that also required them to maneuver within racially oppressive norms and scripts. Daryle Williams (Chapter 13) offers the most optimistic and counterintuitive iteration of this strain of scholarship: rather than focusing on Black agency in a context of oppression, Williams instead

demonstrates that freedpeople's understandings of emancipation and its meanings were powerful enough to penetrate the consciousness of a white immigrant artist like Modesto Brocos y Gómez. By reinterpreting the iconic *Redemption of Ham* as a celebration of the possibilities created by Black women, Williams shows the power of an historical method that affirms the historical significance of Black agency through painstaking analysis of Afro-descendant world-making in the murky and ever-shifting landscape of Brazilian post-emancipation.

Williams' elegant optimism is not the dominant spirit in these pages. We wrote these chapters at a sober juncture in the historiography of slavery, post-abolition, and race relations. In Brazil, as in the broader diasporic world, a deep strain of Afro-pessimism has emerged, aiming both to give the lie to triumphal narratives of post-racialism and to call attention to the violent politics of whiteness that have emerged in response to Afro-descendant claims to equality. In this sense, Hebe Mattos' analysis of André Rebouças' tortured transnational engagement with racism and racial subjectivity (Chapter 12) serves as an epigraph for a generation of scholarship that has invested enormous hope in the history of Black freedom. In portraying an iconic Afro-descendant leader whose rupturing of the ethic of racial silence stemmed not from liberty but rather from disillusionment and despair, Mattos' chapter serves as an enduring reminder that the afterlife of hope has often been far more fragile than the afterlives of bondage in the history of modern Brazil.