



BOOK REVIEW

JEAN, MARTINE. *Policing Freedom. Illegal Enslavement, Labor, and Citizenship in Nineteenth-Century Brazil.* [Afro-Latin America.] Cambridge University Press, Cambridge [etc.] 2023. xvii, 347 pp. Ill. Maps. £85.00. (E-book: \$110.00.)

Among many items in the private collection of Pedro II, former emperor of Brazil, there are two albums titled “Galeria dos Condenados” [the Convicts’ Gallery], with dozens of photographs of prisoners incarcerated at the Casa de Correção of Rio de Janeiro – the first penitentiary in Latin America. These pictures reveal only fragments of the lives of men and women, like Adelino Mwissicongo, who survived the Atlantic crossing between Africa and South America and were held captive and incarcerated in Brazil. Both the penitentiary and the albums reveal the efforts of Brazilian statesmen to include their country among the alleged civilized nations during the age of penal reform, despite the continuation of slavery until the late nineteenth century. In contrast, the real-life stories behind the photographs of Adelino Mwissicongo and his fellow convicts illuminate the brutal backstage of nineteenth-century Brazilian civilization.

Jean’s *Policing Freedom* investigates the Casa de Correção of Rio de Janeiro, focusing on the intersection between illegal enslavement, racialized citizenship, and punishment and their entanglement with the transition between slavery and freedom in the Atlantic World. After introducing the reader to the Convicts’ Gallery in her introduction, Jean presents her ambitious research agenda to inscribe the racialized and gendered lives of enslaved Africans into the global history of capitalism, labor, and prisons. According to the author, Brazil offers an unparalleled experience for historians who wish to investigate the connections between slavery, human trafficking, and modern prison systems. At the same time, Jean writes a microglobal and biographically centered history focused on the stories of African men and women who lived their lives under shackles and behind bars. The author confronts this theoretical and methodological challenge in her five chapters, with different results in each of them.

The first chapter offers an overview of Brazilian politics during the 1820s and 1830s, in the aftermath of the independence process. By analyzing the political struggle behind the making of state institutions, Jean reveals that moderate antislavery liberal statesmen first suggested the construction of a penitentiary according to their concept of nation. Penal reform was part their political agenda, which included the decentralization of state institutions, the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade, and the incorporation of Indigenous peoples and freed people of African descent as citizens. In the mid-1830s, political turmoil contributed to the rise of reactionary proslavery statesmen who established an agenda that contributed to the expansion of the illegal slave trade and the plantation economy and, at the same time, reinforced state repressive institutions. Although envisioned by moderate

liberals, the construction of the Casa de Correção took place during the political hegemony of the Conservative Party, between the late 1830s and the early 1850s. Despite their differences, Jean argues that both anti-slavery and pro-slavery advocates shared the same beliefs about social control of subaltern racialized peoples, and imagined the penitentiary as a symbol of modernity and an instrument to discipline the free poor into workers.

The second insight presented by Jean is the contiguity between the carceral architectures of slave ships and the penitentiary, and the connections between the illegal Atlantic slave trade and the Casa de Correção of Rio de Janeiro. In the second chapter of her book, the author moves back and forth between the macropolitics of slavery and the microhistory of confinement and labor during the construction of the penitentiary. Jean investigates the experiences of enslaved and free people of color, convicts, vagrants, and especially liberated Africans – men and women who were victims of illegal trafficking and enslavement, freed by British or Brazilian authorities, and then subjected to a period of apprenticeship. As Jean argues, the population of liberated Africans offered the Brazilian government an opportunity to implement policies of social control and discipline during the transition from slave labor to wage labor. Under this transitional regime, liberated Africans were subjected to forced labor, and many contributed to the construction of the Casa de Correção, while others were incarcerated in the same institution due to their insubordination. The population of liberated Africans offered the Brazilian government an opportunity to establish policies to encourage labor discipline among free poor people. By following the steps relating to liberated Africans in the Casa de Correção, Jean reveals a microspatial experiment during the transition from slavery to freedom in the Atlantic World.

In the third chapter, Jean deepens one of her methodological objectives by connecting different scales of analysis. Under international pressure and threatened by the British Royal Navy, the Conservative government finally abolished the Atlantic slave trade in 1850. The inauguration of the Casa de Correção offered them an opportunity to advertise Brazil as a civilized nation and establish a microscale policy to contribute to the transition to wage labor in their country. Yet, their efforts to exclude enslaved workers from the penitentiary failed, revealing the limits of this emancipation agenda during the mid-nineteenth century. In contrast, the fourth chapter of the book investigates a specific initiative to educate abandoned minors in the penitentiary. Although, unlike previous chapters, this chapter offers no integrated analysis of different scales, it contributes to a larger discussion about the intersection between gender, race, and citizenship between the abolition of the slave trade in 1850 and the promulgation of the Womb Law of 1871.

In her fifth and final chapter, Jean offers the best example of her microglobal and biographically centered history by narrating the stories of Adelino Mwissicongo and other incarcerated Africans whose lives illuminate the misdirection of Brazilian politics in the late nineteenth century. Born in West Africa, Adelino Mwissicongo survived the Atlantic crossing and arrived at the Brazilian coast, where he was rescued and freed in 1850. As a liberated African, he first arrived at the Casa de Correção as a construction worker. After the end of his apprenticeship, he returned as a convict in 1866, sentenced for robbery. As Jean argues, his biography from

slavery to apprenticeship, and from freedom to incarceration, reveals the tragic fate of many Africans and their descendants in Brazil. At the same time, each turning point in his life is connected to the larger story of the Brazilian Empire and the Atlantic World between the 1850s and 1860s. Under international scrutiny due to emancipation in the United States and British antislavery politics, Brazilian statesmen established a series of reforms, including the end of apprenticeship and the definitive emancipation of liberated Africans, and the promulgation of the Womb Law. During this period, the Casa de Correção became a microcosm of Brazilian society, where men and women of African descent like Adelimo Mwissicongo disputed their own notions of freedom. In the end, however, conservative politics prevailed. In the final decades before emancipation, the penitentiary became an institutional experiment to subdue poor people under a new regime of social discipline, labor exploitation, and sub-citizenship.

In her conclusion, Jean reaffirms her premises and provides the reader with an opportunity to evaluate her accomplishments. According to the author, *Policing Freedom* was inspired by an eclectic theoretical and methodological framework that combines the perspectives of global history and microhistory, and contributes to the global history of prisons and capitalism. Although the author refers to the concept of second slavery – that connects industrial capitalism to the expansion of agricultural frontiers in nineteenth-century Brazil, Cuba, and the United States – the book mentions economic variables only during the analysis of the transition between slave labor and wage labor in the Casa de Correção. Second, *Policing Freedom* presents an important case study for the history of prisons, but it misses an opportunity to draw a comparison between Brazil and other national/regional experiments (including contemporary slave societies like the American South) with a transnational or global perspective. None of these comments diminishes the achievements of Jean's book, especially her efforts to write a microglobal history of labor, incarceration, and politics in the nineteenth-century Atlantic World. They reveal only the challenges of Jean's ambitious agenda to integrate different scales and variables with a global historical approach.

In conclusion, *Policing Freedom* offers important contributions to the historiography of slavery and the slave trade, the lives of liberated Africans, and the intersection between national politics and the making of criminal justice and prison systems in nineteenth-century Brazil. Among those contributions, it is worth highlighting the connection between the illegal transatlantic slave trade and Rio de Janeiro's Casa de Correção, and Jean's hypothesis that the Brazilian racialized police and prison system matured in the age of slavery, and not in the aftermath of emancipation. Finally, *Policing Freedom* invites other scholars to learn about the Brazilian experience and accept her challenge to envision a global history of capitalism, labor, and prison that includes the life experiences and perspectives of subaltern people.

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