

CELSO CASTILHO: *Slave Emancipation and Transformations in Brazilian Political Citizenship*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016; WALTER FRAGA: *Crossroads of Freedom: Slaves and Freed People in Bahia, Brazil, 1870-1910*. Duke University Press, 2016

Crossroads and Transformations: New Scholarship on Abolition and the Post-Emancipation Period in Brazil

While Brazilian historiography has spent the last two or three decades interrogating the contours and the aftermath of the 1888 abolition of slavery, new generations of scholars continue to claim that the period still bears a number of uncharted “crossroads” and “transformations” that need to be mapped. Focusing on the Northeastern province of Pernambuco, Castilho’s study proves this claim by setting abolitionism against the background of broader struggles over political citizenship in mid-to-late-nineteenth-century Brazil. He argues that this movement not only galvanized political debates in the 1870s and 1880s, but also challenged the established rules of political discourse, ultimately redefining nineteenth-century Brazilian democracy to make it more inclusive. In this sense Castilho embraces the work of Latin Americanists like Hilda Sabato, James Holston, or James Sanders, who argue that the conduct of politics through non-conventional channels of political mobilization and discussion, such as clubs, associations, and cultural activities, provided effective ways for popular groups to participate in Latin American politics. Castilho’s analysis is persuasive, as he shows how the participation of slaves, free Afro-Brazilians, and women and men of varied social strata in abolitionist activities did shape and radicalize the movement, motivating ever-greater circles of Brazilians to political action. The money that abolitionist societies gave to enslaved individuals to pay for their freedom, for example, was only a fraction of the manumission cost – the bulk of it was usually paid for by the slaves themselves. Both free and enslaved women are shown here as leading figures in the movement, in what constitutes a new and enlightening analysis.

On the other end of the social spectrum, *Slave Emancipation* imbricates organized abolitionism and party politics in an original and refreshing way. It sheds light on the famous Pernambucan abolitionist Joaquim Nabuco, and on less famous individuals like Monteiro Lopes, the first national representative to publicly embrace his African ancestry. While Nabuco’s silence about abolitionism when he was elected to Parliament in 1878 illustrates the existence of pro-slavery voices in the Liberal Party, his electoral difficulties still in the mid-1880s, when abolitionism was already a massive movement, point out to the problems the Brazilian political system faced in accommodating interests opposed to the

planter elite. Ultimately, abolition arrived by Imperial decree on May 13th, 1888, and in retaliation the planter elites ousted the Emperor to install a conservative Republic only one year later. By the early 1890s, episodes of alleged aggression carried out by black Brazilians against members of the Republican party were used to remember abolition as a moment of chaos and race war (pp. 187-188). This is how the Republicans sought to neutralize the empowerment that popular groups had experienced in the era of abolitionism.

Throughout the book, Castilho paints a rich and penetrating portrait of abolitionist activities in the press, in theaters all over the nation, in public ceremonies of manumission, in literature, in the underground railroad to Ceará, and in the legal system, as lawsuits for manumission were a key tool used to erode the edifice of slavery. Organized abolitionism emerged in the 1860s, expanded in the 1870s, and flourished in the 1880s, when it was radicalized to a great extent both in Pernambuco and nationally. The brief discussion of Monteiro Lopes, the first nationally-elected representative to openly affirm his black identity in the late 1870s, allows Castilho to make another central point: Brazil's abolitionist movement was multi-racial, as evinced by the diverse participants in abolitionist activities all over the nation, in contrast to the more restricted abolitionist movements of the USA or the UK (pp. 10, 195).

Walter Fraga's *Crossroads of Freedom* can be characterized as more of a social history. Echoing Rebecca Scott's inquiry into the meanings of freedom for the ex-slaves, Fraga explores the trajectories of individuals, families, and communities, in the passage from slavery to the uncertain world of freedom in Bahia's famous sugar-producing Recôncavo region.

On the one hand, he emphasizes the weight of generations-old arrangements between masters and slaves in framing freedom's meaning. As abolitionism spread throughout the country, traditional arrangements over the cultivation of provision grounds and other "acquired rights" came under increasing pressure, and expectations about the upcoming changes made slaves and planters scramble to re-define the rules governing labor, residence, and proper behavior. The early section of the book contains the brilliant chapter two, one of the best, where Fraga analyzes the oral myth of a friar who allegedly kept a female slave prisoner to satisfy his carnal appetites. Fraga then reconstructs the real case behind the myth. Ultimately, he shows that the story illustrates the tension that punctuated the last years of the peculiar institution of slavery.

On the other hand, Fraga also makes an effort to argue that, while life under slavery framed the aspirations of the freed people, they also envisioned, and fought for, new definitions of citizenship. Thus, the author deftly analyzes how freed people distanced themselves from personal subjugation by rejecting labor contracts that they saw as abusive, by defending their right to keep cultivating

their *roças* or provision grounds, or by rejecting the racial epithet of *preto*, a marker of slavery. In a refined study of a single sugar mill, Fraga shows how about one-third of all slaves working at the large *engenho* Pitinga under slavery continued to reside there after 1888 (p. 199), although they moved “as far away from the master’s house as they could while still remaining on the property as a way of limiting their former owners’ interference in their lives” (p. 170). This was a common occurrence throughout the region, given the traditional *roças*, the existence of multi-generational families, and the practice of Afro-Brazilian religious cults in the old plantations.

Others, however, made use of their newly gained right to free movement. This happened gradually over the years after 1888 and not all of a sudden, as the masters feared. In an original and insightful strategy of analysis, Fraga studies a sample of data from the Holy House of Mercy Hospital that allows him to establish that about 64 percent of all patients were Afro-Brazilians who had been moving around the Recôncavo parishes in the early 1900s, and that about 36 percent of the patients had migrated from plantations to local cities such as Santo Amaro or Salvador in recent years (pp. 219, 221). The author’s discussion of Salvador’s municipal registry of domestic workers between 1887 and 1893 is also insightful: this rich collection of documents constitutes a major contribution to the literature on post-emancipation Brazil. It also points out the former masters’ typical response to emancipation: they complained about the ex-slaves’ rejection of work, opted for vagrancy laws, and resorted to using the police as a mechanism for social control.

As a translation from an award-winning PhD dissertation originally written in 2004, a conversation with the more recent works of Hebe Mattos, Maria Helena Machado, Elione Silva Guimarães, or Flávio Gomes on the post-emancipation period is sometimes overlooked in *Crossroads of Freedom*. This is tackled in the introduction, but not satisfactorily resolved throughout the book, in my opinion. The excellent translation has made the book readable for English-speakers, sometimes by substantially altering its original structure. Therefore, one wonders why a deeper discussion is not incorporated with recent scholarship for a second, updated edition of this book. However, this criticism is not meant to diminish the quality and the breadth of the research behind this book. While Castilho’s *Slave Emancipation* finds a suggestive new flavor in a wine that we thought we knew, Fraga’s *Crossroads of Freedom* brings us a fabulous bottle that was missing in our wine cellar.