

reinaba una cultura más permisiva y menos controlada por la iglesia, por la cual la mujer libre se encontraba menos sujeta a las lógicas patriarcales reinantes en Europa. Resultaban entonces, numerosas las parejas informales y los hijos ilegítimos. El bautismo aparecía como una manera de formalizar aquellos nacimientos, darles reconocimientos y derechos. Además, no eran pocas las relaciones entre colonos y esclavizadas que derivaban en la manumisión, así como los vínculos entre mujeres libres y afrodescendientes.

El último tema que aborda son las manumisiones. Estudiando una gran cantidad de casos, muestra que las mujeres eran más propensas a manumitir a sus esclavizados incluso cuando poseían menos que los varones. Asimismo, tendían a beneficiar a las mujeres esclavizadas engrosando de esa manera al pequeño grupo de libertos y al sector social de las mujeres libres.

Rico tanto en detalles como en su rigurosidad analítica, es un libro fascinante y provocativo que pone en tensión el relato dominante y que nos abre a un mundo mucho más complejo y contradictorio de lo que habíamos creído.

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BRAZILIAN ABOLITION

The Sacred Cause: The Abolitionist Movement, Afro-Brazilian Mobilization, and Imperial Politics in Rio de Janeiro. By Jeffrey D. Needell. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020. Pp. xvii, 361. Notes. Illustrations. Bibliography. Index. \$75.00 cloth. doi:10.1017/tam.2021.84

If the wars of independence ended slavery in much of Spanish America and a civil war finished it in the United States, it was legislative action that abolished slavery in the largest country of the Americas. Jeffrey Needell's book reconstructs the struggle, both in parliament and on the street, that led the Brazilian parliament to abolish slavery in 1888. Clearly written and deeply researched, this book will be of great interest to everyone interested in how slavery ended in the Western Hemisphere.

The Brazilian emperor Dom Pedro II had been prodding parliament to end slavery because it clashed with his vision of "Civilization and Progress." British pressure on the Brazilian government, which intensified after the 1860s, also led the monarchy to sponsor an antislavery bill that parliament, filled with members of the Conservative and Liberal Parties, opposed. Though radicals or reformists among the Liberals had voiced opposition to slavery, they were outnumbered by representatives of the slave-owning elite. Needell emphasizes that the agrarian elite was convinced that agriculture would fail without a constant supply of African slaves.

Needell masterfully analyzes the dynamics of a parliamentary monarchy to explain why it passed the reforms that slaveowners opposed. This is another strength of his book, which makes it useful reading for students of post-independence institutional experiments in the Americas. Even though the emperor was both head of the executive and a “moderating power,” only the parliament could enact laws. But political reality often undercut the Brazilian theory of parliamentary monarchy. The emperor exploited the ambiguities of being a “moderator” to inject himself into legislative debate. He could dismiss the cabinet until he found one capable of assembling the legislative majorities to approve his bills. The monarch could also dissolve parliament, which could lead to new elections, and thus to a cabinet that would manufacture the results to return majorities predisposed to back the emperor’s projects. After innumerable legislative debates, the emperor got parliament to approve the 1871 Free Womb Law, which freed the children of enslaved women. Needell argues that the abolitionist movement emerged after this top-down reform, not because of popular antislavery agitation.

Chapters 2 through 5, the heart of this book, explain how abolitionists, some members of Rio de Janeiro’s elites, and others based in its non-elite neighborhoods built an Afro-Brazilian movement that demanded the immediate freeing of slaves without indemnification. What is notable about this struggle, according to Needell, is that many of Rio’s residents repeatedly protested outside of parliament and other public spaces, even though the 1881 electoral reform and its literacy requirement had stripped many citizens of the right to vote.

Needell makes much of the racial composition of the abolitionists. He uses memoirs and private correspondence as well as the legislative and newspaper debates to interpret the behavior of parliamentarians and movement leaders. He argues that Africans, and especially their descendants, organized what we would call a multiracial movement in favor of abolition. Needell deftly interprets the handful of clues to infer that Afro-Brazilians fought for the liberation of slaves, even though the demands of social custom limited the nature of the Black appeals that took decades to emerge in Brazil.

The power of the street and of the press, along with the monarchy’s insistence, undermined the parliamentary consensus in favor of slavery. New and old ways of politicking split the Conservatives and Liberals, forcing them to hesitate, stumble, and regroup in unexpected ways to support antislavery bills in 1885 and 1888. Moreover, the flight of slaves from plantations, which accelerated rapidly in this decade, forced the establishment to accept that the status quo was untenable. By 1888, the abolitionists got what they wanted: an end to slavery without compensation for slave owners.

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