

CROSSROADS OF FREEDOM

SLAVERY
AND
POST-EMANCIPATION
IN
BAHIA, BRAZIL
1870–1910

WALTER FRAGA

TRANSLATED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

Mary Ann Mahony



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OF FREEDOM

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Slaves and Freed People in Bahia,
Brazil, 1870–1910 **WALTER FRAGA**

TRANSLATED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY Mary Ann Mahony

FOREWORD TO THE BRAZILIAN EDITION BY Robert W. Slenes

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Cachoeira, 1930 (detail). Arthur Wischral / Public Archive of the State of Bahia.
Roceiros at the Market, Cachoeira, 1930. Arthur Wischral / Public Archive
of the State of Bahia. Black family, Cachoeira, 1911 (detail).

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A Note about Currency and Orthography

Both before and after abolition and the fall of the Brazilian Empire, the basic unit of currency was the real (réis in the plural). One real would have been written Rs.\$001. The sum of 100 réis was usually written Rs.\$100. One mil-réis was equal to 1,000 réis and written Rs.1\$000. Larger sums were counted in contos de réis, each one of which was equivalent to 1,000 mil-réis. One conto de réis was written Rs.1:000\$000. (Adapted from Barickman, *Bahian Counterpoint*, n.p.)

Brazilian orthography has changed a great deal since the documents on which this book is based were produced. In keeping with current practice, spelling is modernized in the text but maintained in the original in the notes and bibliography.



MAP 1. The Recôncavo, Bahia, and Brazil in South America.



MAP 2. Cities and towns of the Bahian Recôncavo.



MAP 3. Principal plantations and rivers of the late nineteenth-century Recôncavo.

Introduction to the English-Language Edition

MARY ANN MAHONY

Slave traders transported more Africans to Brazil than to any other part of the Americas. Between about 1570 and 1857, slave ships disembarked some 4.5 million Africans in Brazilian ports.¹ Brazil was one of the first European colonies in the Americas in which enslaved Africans toiled on plantations and in mines, and it was the last place in the hemisphere to abolish slavery. The enslavement of Africans and their descendants, thus, marks Brazil strongly.

Nowhere is Brazil's African heritage clearer than in the northeastern state (formerly province) of Bahia. Enslaved African and Afro-descended laborers made Bahia one of the wealthiest plantation regions in the Americas as early as the sixteenth century. In 1870, when *Crossroads of Freedom* opens, between seventy thousand and eighty thousand Africans and their descendants lived and labored in Bahia's most important sugar-producing region, the Recôncavo. Indeed, as many as twenty-two thousand lived in the two largest Bahian sugar-producing municipalities alone—Santo Amaro and São Francisco do Conde. Although the number of enslaved laborers was shrinking in Brazil at the time because of the end of the slave trade and the passage of the Law of the Free Womb in 1871, slavery remained the dominant form of labor on Recôncavo sugar plantations until slavery ended on May 13, 1888. Even as abolition approached, these enslaved Africans and Afro-Bahians produced an average of 41,800 tons of cane sugar annually for some of the most important planters and political figures in nineteenth-century Brazil.² As Walter Fraga shows, when abolition was promulgated, ex-slaves ceased to work for the sugar planters under the old conditions. Their efforts to control their lives, exercise their newfound freedom, and change the terms of labor in the Recôncavo brought sugar production crashing down in 1888 and left planters struggling to cope financially and emotionally. *Crossroads of Freedom* tells this story.

History and Historiography of Slavery and Freedom in Brazil

Crossroads of Freedom is an important book that builds on recent developments in the historiography of slavery and freedom in Brazil and the Americas.³ The study of the history of slavery in Brazil initially developed as an effort to understand whether slavery had been a benign or brutal institution in Brazil and to determine what role, if any, it may have had in the nation's trajectory.⁴ These early scholars, whether arguing for a cruel or a paternalistic slavery, therefore, emphasized the impact of slavery as a system on the development of Brazil rather than the experience of the enslaved. Although Emília da Costa described various forms of slave protest in 1880s São Paulo, most scholars in these early generations saw abolition as something that primarily happened to slaves rather than an event that they helped to bring about.⁵

Similarly, as Fraga argues in his introduction, studies of the post-emancipation period in Brazil focused on the transition from slavery to free labor rather than on the experiences of former slaves themselves. The most influential contributions to this literature focused on the Southeast, where waves of European immigrants began to arrive in the 1880s, followed by Japanese immigrants when coffee planters found European workers unsatisfactory.⁶ Only one study of the "transition" dealt directly with the Northeast.⁷ Historians of the Northeast who studied the history of the first republican period (1889–1930) tended to address questions of rural oligarchies, messianic movements, bandits and export economies. Important as these topics were, in the North and Northeast, as in the Southeast, slaves, slavery, and slave owners disappeared into the mist of the past. The first republic was not studied as a post-emancipation period or a post-emancipation government. In some cases, the local history of slavery was denied.⁸

More recently, scholarship on slavery and freedom in Brazil has moved in new directions with significant new findings. Scholars influenced by micro-history and social history, as well as the linguistic turn in historical studies, have made slaves and freed people the subjects of history. Adopting a "history from below" approach, they argued that scholarship about slavery and freedom had treated slaves as things and denied the enslaved their humanity and agency. Jacob Gorender criticized them for making slavery seem less harsh than it actually was, but there can be no doubt that this scholarship turned the enslaved into thinking, breathing, calculating, dreaming, and planning people on the basis of previously unused archival materials. In this new direction of research, no one denies that slavery was based on coercion; rather, "both paternalism and violence are seen as complementary forms of slave control."⁹

As the social and cultural historians of slavery and freedom in Brazil began their research, they delved into police reports, criminal investigations, civil and criminal court transcripts, and ecclesiastical records, as well as other manuscript sources. They began to read documents compiled by elites “against the grain” for what they might tell us about the thoughts, feelings, and actions of subaltern subjects. They also began to pursue the oral history of subaltern groups, a methodology central to Latin American labor history but which scholars of slavery and abolition in Brazil had rarely used.¹⁰

These new historians of slavery and freedom put slaves and ex-slaves at the center of their work, but following individual and family groups of slaves, ex-slaves, and other nonelites through space and time to tease out the trajectories from slavery to freedom remained nearly impossible. Here and there, detailed documents allowed historians to reconstruct the complex experiences, sometimes over long periods of time, of individuals or small groups of ex-slaves, but not of large ones.¹¹ Most of the free and freed poor population was illiterate at abolition, and remained so well into the twentieth century. Consequently, they did not leave their own written records of their experiences. Nor were their memories recorded through a government program, as occurred in the United States.

Complicating this lacuna was the difficulty in locating ex-slaves in the records. Slave owners, of course, kept meticulous records of their property, but slaves rarely carried surnames. When they became free, some chose to adopt the ex-master’s surname, but others did not. Still others began with one name and then changed it. Brazilian naming practices are not as standard as those in Spanish America, Europe, or the United States, and could vary significantly from generation to generation. Moreover, formal marriage was not necessarily common among the Afro-descended poor, and common law marriages were not officially recognized in the documents, especially at the birth of children. Add to this the fact that many freed people concealed their enslaved pasts after abolition, and it becomes clear that discovering how individuals and family groups actually experienced the end of slavery and beginning of freedom was not easy. Tracking them was impossible until the development of easily searchable spreadsheet and database software, but it is still difficult, as I know from personal experience. The process requires hundreds of hours of research and data entry.

Walter Fraga took up this challenge, using Carlo Ginzburg’s historical method of nominative record linking, nicknamed “linking data” or “crossing data,” to bring together the fragments of information about people found in multiple different types of documents in an effort to follow them and their

families as they emerged from slavery into freedom.¹² In so doing, he brings slaves and ex-slaves out of the shadows to which the transition to free labor literature had condemned them, and he refutes the argument that slavery was so damaging and demoralizing that ex-slaves could not adapt to freedom. He does not argue that ex-slaves were necessarily successful after the end of slavery, but he shows clearly that they struggled to make their understanding of freedom real.

Crossroads of Freedom uses the methodology of microhistory, social history, and cultural history to break new ground, but it also builds on significant research on slavery and freedom in the Americas over the last several decades. A full discussion of that historiography is beyond the scope of this introduction, but a few additional words about the trends on which he builds, and to which he contributes, as they relate to Brazil, and particularly Bahia, are in order.

In 1977, when Stuart Schwartz's article "Resistance and Accommodation in Eighteenth-Century Brazil: The Slaves' View of Slavery" appeared, the notion that slaves might attempt to negotiate with their masters was controversial. The dominant view at the time considered slavery to be so brutal that the enslaved could not reproduce and mortality was extremely high. Constant surveillance, discipline, and violence were all required to keep slaves working.¹³ Resistance took the form of massive escapes or violent backlashes against brutal masters. Schwartz had already begun revising our understanding of escaped slave communities, and the document on which the 1977 article was based, a treaty presented by fugitive slaves to their master in 1879, required historians to consider the possibility that negotiation was central to slavery. João José Reis's *Slave Rebellion in Brazil*, first published in Brazil in 1986, also argued for a more subtle understanding of slavery. *Slave Rebellion* examined the most important urban slave revolt in the Americas, but it also made clear that slaves could work with minimal supervision while still planning to overthrow the system that enslaved them. Reis showed that common work experiences and a common faith could form the basis of a common consciousness among African laborers of different backgrounds, although not necessarily between Africans and Afro-Brazilians.¹⁴ In the following years, additional research on slave resistance revealed that both negotiation and conflict were central to maintaining slavery in Brazil.¹⁵ Slavery was based on violence, but, as Silvia Lara argues, that violence was not indiscriminant. Rather, in day-to-day master-slave relations it was measured, corrective and exemplary, designed to "guarantee lucrative production, survival of the slave, and the maintenance of seignorial domination."¹⁶

When Schwartz published the fugitive slaves' document, the possibility that slaves might have access to land on which to grow subsistence crops and sell the excess in local markets was still a subject of debate in Brazil. Research on what is now termed the "internal economy of slavery" was in its infancy there, although it was well under way in the Caribbean and the southern United States. In Brazil, until 1994 when Barickman published a seminal article on the subject, there was no consensus that provision grounds existed, let alone on what they meant. Indeed, in "A Bit of Land Which They Call a *Roça*," Barickman asserted that his first task was "simply to establish whether slaves on the *engenhos* [plantations] and cane farms of the Recôncavo often cultivated provision grounds."¹⁷ His answer was a definitive yes they did, and he concluded that "although factors inside and outside plantation boundaries restricted the development of the economy Bahian slaves built for themselves, they were slaves who, within the limits imposed by slavery, 'negotiated.'"¹⁸ Barickman's 1990 doctoral dissertation, revised and published in English in 1998 and in Portuguese in 2003, made clear that the economy of the Recôncavo was more complicated than previously thought. Slaves indeed had access to provision grounds, although they did not produce enough food to provide all of their needs or to make the sugar plantations self-sufficient.¹⁹

During this period, historians also began to challenge long-held assumptions that slavery was so violent and dehumanizing that slaves had been unable to form families. In the 1970s, using the methods of demography and new technologies, historians began to analyze demographic trends among the enslaved population of Brazil. Some were able to develop complex statistical portraits of communities but they tended not to discuss individuals. The issues related to names and formal marriage discussed above particularly inhibited efforts to tie together persons found in documents organized according to the masters' logic. Over time, however, historians digging in archives and building databases and genealogical charts have been able to demonstrate that enslaved men and women did form families as well as real or fictive kinship ties, although masters, the Brazilian government, and the Catholic Church did not necessarily recognize them. Some of those families now can be traced over multiple generations and studied to see how slaves worked toward the freedom of family members and planned, or tried to plan, for the day when they might eventually become free. Indeed, historians now see family ties as central to notions of freedom, and indeed, consider that they help to explain both certain forms of slave control and slave resistance.²⁰

The new methodologies and the new focus on the experiences of slaves themselves also brought significant changes to the study of abolition in Brazil.

Until the 1990s, most historians did not see abolition there as a process in which slaves or ex-slaves participated significantly.²¹ The turn to “history from below,” however, uncovered a variety of forms of slave resistance to slavery, and an active effort on the part of slaves to advance the cause of abolition. By the 1870s and 1880s, slaves, ex-slaves, and the free adult children of slaves, as well as some members of the new middle classes, were making slavery very difficult and expensive for slave owners. From São Paulo to Rio de Janeiro to Bahia, slaves worked slowly; they fled (individually or in groups; temporarily or permanently); they complained to the authorities about harsh masters; they sued masters for their freedom or they punished them for transgressing the moral economy that had developed on Brazil’s plantations. Their actions were central to the timing and character of abolition.²²

The realization that slaves were pushing for abolition, and not just passive recipients of social change, required historians to take a new look at the post-emancipation period. The new direction, in combination with dialogue with scholars of slavery and freedom in the United States and the Caribbean, put freed people and the post-emancipation period at the center of one of the most important new directions of Brazilian historiography. Scholars of the period began trying to understand what freedom meant to people who had been captives. As they did, they found that making a firm dividing line in Brazilian history between the pre- and post-emancipation periods was inappropriate at best. New research is showing that the experiences of slavery shaped ex-slaves’ understanding of both slavery and freedom, that slaves’ strategies for freedom grew out of that understanding, and that, after abolition, they tried to put those plans into practice. Among other things, scholars are showing that ex-slaves attempted to establish themselves as free citizens.²³

Despite the flourishing of literature on Brazil, and the increasing attention to both slavery and freedom in Bahia, in the mid-1980s, there remained no scholarly study of the end of slavery on Recôncavo sugar plantations from the perspective of the enslaved themselves.²⁴ In the following decade, Barickman demonstrated the attachment of Bahian sugar planters to slavery and the collapse of their sugar economy with abolition. Kim Butler compared the activities of free Afro-Brazilians in São Paulo and Salvador after abolition, and both Dale Graden and Jailton Brito studied abolition movements in Bahia. Others had shown that Bahian export agriculture diversified after abolition, but until 2004, no scholar had examined the end of slavery and the beginning of freedom on Recôncavo sugar plantations, from the perspective of the enslaved themselves.²⁵

Crossroads of Freedom fills that gap while also breaking new ground by bringing us into the world of the enslaved men, women, and children who toiled on Bahia's sugar plantation in the last decades of slavery in Brazil. Fraga asks what they thought of slavery, what their plans were for freedom, how they struggled to bring their dreams to fruition, and what happened to them. He does not show these struggles in a vacuum. Rather, he contextualizes their trajectories by introducing us to once powerful sugar planters, bankrupted and traumatized by abolition, who may have lost their wits, their property, and some of their national standing, but whose families still retained significant influence locally and regionally.

Several conclusions emerge from Fraga's history. One is that the fight to obtain material and symbolic resources on the plantations during slavery shaped ex-slaves' expectations of freedom after abolition. In concrete terms, this meant that, when freedom came, ex-slaves did not expect to give up resources they had won with difficulty during slavery. Struggles over land, over time to work that land, and over the ability to live with family, begun under slavery, continued in the Recôncavo after slavery ended. Access to land, control over time, and family connections were central to ex-slaves efforts to establish themselves as citizens in the post-emancipation period. In this way, the efforts of the Recôncavo's ex-slaves seem much like those of their counterparts in the Caribbean and the U.S. South after slavery ended.²⁶

Fraga's research lends credence to arguments by Silvia Lara and Barbara Weinstein, among others, that some of the boundaries that historians have erected between the study of slavery and the study of free labor, or between the history of people of African descent and those of indigenous people in the Americas are artificial.²⁷ *Crossroads of Freedom* can be profitably read by scholars of rural people throughout the Americas, whether descendants of Africans, of indigenous groups, or of mixed-race groups, peasants, proletarians, or semiproletarians.

Questions of Translation

Translating a work of this quality and complexity involves more than opening up a dictionary. Although the language of the original is superb, its Portuguese sentences could not simply be translated word for word into English and left to stand on their own. Retaining the flavor of Fraga's prose in translation required switching many sentences from passive to active voice, which in turn sometimes meant moving sentences around in paragraphs. Readers

familiar with the original Portuguese will, therefore, find some slight differences between the two texts.

Readers will also find that some Brazilian terms and concepts, especially those related to race, agriculture, and labor, remain in Portuguese. Fraga and I had hoped to translate all terms and concepts into English to make the text more accessible to undergraduates, but several proved unwieldy or even problematic in English. This is, in part, because usage of terms for race, agricultural property, and agricultural labor were often fluid and ambiguous in post-emancipation Bahia. Planters and their ex-slaves did not use the same terms in the same way. And as ex-slaves tried to establish themselves as free citizens, they often tried to distance themselves from slavery and any label associated with it, while planters and their representatives continued to use the language of the past. Also some of the terms have false cognates in English. Consequently, we decided to leave some terms in Portuguese, while translating others. The key to the decision was whether or not the translated term helped to clarify the text.

The terms referring to slave origin, and skin color, are a case in point. Brazilians had (and have) multiple terms for skin color, many of which also reflected a judgment about the culture or status of the individual described. Such terms were fluid, and their usage changed over time.²⁸ In the nineteenth century, slaveowners used *africano(a)* or *crioulo(a)*, terms reflecting origin, as well as *preto(a)* and *negro(a)*, to describe dark-skinned people in Brazil. Unless modified by free or freed, *africano(a)* referred to a slave born in Africa, while *crioulo(a)* usually described a Brazilian-born slave. Prior to abolition, Fraga has found that *preto(a)* referred to black slaves regardless of origin, while *negro* usually referred to freed persons. After abolition, elites and their representatives used terms like *preto(a)* or *crioulo(a)* to cast a shadow of slavery over freed people. *Preto(a)*, in particular, was a pejorative after abolition.

Unlike in the United States, Brazilians did not lump all people of African descent into a single category of black. They had numerous terms for non-whites of mixed race, generally reflecting differences in skin tone. These included *mestiço(a)*, a generic term for a mixed-race person in Brazil; *mulato(a)*, a generic term referring to a person of mixed African and European ancestry; *pardo(a)*, another term for mixed race, literally meaning brown, usually modified by light or dark; *cabra*, referring to the child of a *preto(a)* or *negro(a)* and a *pardo(a)*; and *moreno(a)*, another term for brown.

Brazilian understanding of concepts of race and skin color were and are therefore quite different from those in the United States, and although English may contain analogous terms, they do not necessarily carry the same

meaning. I have therefore kept the terms for origin and color in the original Portuguese with two exceptions: *negro(a)*, is translated to “black,” to distinguish it from the similar term in English and from *preto(a)*; and *mestiço(a)* is translated to mixed race. The glossary provides specific definitions according to the usage of the period.

Readers may also note that these terms are sometimes used as nouns and sometimes as adjectives describing color. Portuguese is a romance language in which nouns and adjectives are not gender neutral. Thus, readers will see different endings for nouns and adjectives describing men and women. When the term refers to a woman, the feminine version appears; for men, the masculine appears. Since “côr,” the word for color, is feminine in Portuguese, when the term “color” is used as an adjective, the feminine will appear.

Decisions also had to be made with regard to terms for agricultural property and professions, for which Brazilian Portuguese has a wide variety of options, reflecting the complexity of plantation agriculture. *Engenho* and *senhor do engenho*, terms respectively for “sugar mill” and the “lord of the sugar mill,” were the most straightforward. Here I chose to use “plantation” and “planter,” because at the time most Brazilian engenhos had extensive lands, cane fields, as well as processing plants. Their owners were, above all, planters and the owners of large estates with prestigious homes, many outbuildings, large numbers of slaves, and hundreds of acres of land. Where the text refers specifically to the millworks on the property, I have used the term plantation sugar mill. Such terminology distinguishes them from *usinas*, the fully industrialized central sugar mills introduced to the Recôncavo in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Other agricultural terms have remained in Portuguese. The term *roça* often referred to the small plots of land that slaves were able to farm on plantation lands belonging to their owners before slavery, but the term continued to be used after slavery ended. Sometimes the original Portuguese remains in the text but is also translated as “provision grounds,” “garden plots,” or “small plots of land.” *Roceiros*, which is sometimes translated as “peasants” in the literature, were farmers with *roças*. Fraga found that *roceiros* did not necessarily own the land on which their farms sat, but after abolition, they were not obliged to provide service on plantations and large farms, and therefore had a status different from, and higher than, someone who continued to work for the landowner. *Roceiros* paid rent of some sort when they did not own the land. Consequently, I have chosen to leave *roceiro* in Portuguese. *Morador(a)*, literally “resident,” also remains in Portuguese. Its meaning has changed significantly over time. In the sixteenth century, according to Stuart Schwartz, the term could sometimes denote an independent farmer who grew cane. By

the late eighteenth century, it referred to a “part time free laborer who lived on a fazenda [ranch/farm] or engenho [sugar plantation] and was quite distinct from the lavrador [farmer] who grew cane.”²⁹ Rebecca Scott describes moradores as tenants who farmed land in exchange for working on a plantation, and who occupied a position between peasants and proletarians.³⁰ Fraga found that morador covered a wide variety of arrangements, from permanent worker resident on a plantation to sharecropper. Many, but not all, had access to roças, although they were not as independent as roceiros. Moradores, he found, were *always* required to work several days a week for the owner of the plantation on which they lived, in exchange for the privilege of living on and farming the land. Nevertheless, they, not the landowner, owned the crops they grew.

The meaning of the words *lavoura* and *lavrador* could also vary according to context. *Lavoura* could mean “farming,” “agriculture,” “agricultural sector,” “husbandry,” or a number of other terms. Sugar, for example, was *a grande lavoura* or the prestigious agricultural sector, while tobacco was nicknamed the *lavoura dos pobres*, or the harvest of the poor in late nineteenth century Bahia.³¹ The documents frequently describe individuals as having the profession of *lavoura*, or farming or agriculture. Where that is the case, Fraga argues that these people were field hands and that is the term that I have used, if the context seemed appropriate. Other individuals are described in the documents as living from *suas lavouras*. In other words, they are clearly denoted as living from *their* crops or *their* harvest. This might mean that they were roceiros, in that the individuals in question cultivated only their own crops, but the documents often distinguish between roceiros and people who live from their crops, so I have done so as well. Finally, a *lavrador*, when used without a modifier such as *lavrador de cana* (“cane farmer”), could refer to anyone from a well-established farmer with slaves but no land of his or her own to a morador. Where the word is clearly used to refer to a well-established farmer, I have used “farmer,” where it is unclear, I have left “lavrador.”

References to consensual unions among enslaved or freed people also required decisions about translating into English. Some had to do with rendering the gendered language of nineteenth-century Brazil, which was profoundly patriarchal, appropriately in English. When this study begins, Brazilian law recognized only one form of marriage, that sanctified by the Catholic Church in a wedding ceremony. After 1891, civil marriage became the most important legal marriage, but marriage in the Catholic Church continued to be widely practiced. Throughout the period, however, large numbers of Brazilians, and probably the majority of enslaved and freed people, lived together

in consensual unions of various durations, although in some areas formal marriage was clearly practiced by the enslaved and free poor alike. Brazilian authorities, whether secular or religious, looked down upon women involved in informal arrangements, and given the approach of the author, the practice raised questions for translation. The terms “husband and wife” or “marriage,” used alone, in English, suggest a legal status that most of the relationships discussed in this book did not enjoy. *Amásio* or *amásia*, the words for male or female concubine, were the legal terms that officials often used to describe consensual unions, but they imply a prejudice that, at least in the analytical sections of the text, did not seem appropriate. Consequently, I have chosen to use the term “common law husband and wife,” as well as “consensual union” to describe the partners and the relationships. Where *amásia* was used by the authorities, however, “concubine” appears.³²

Terms for Brazilian administrative structures and legal institutions are also complex. To some degree, this was because Brazil’s government organization and legal system were strongly influenced by continental European models, and the analogous terms in English were unwieldy. But Brazil also underwent significant changes to its political system, and therefore to its administrative structures, between 1870 and 1910. When the book opens, Brazil was a constitutional monarchy, led by Pedro II, a descendant of both the Portuguese and the Hapsburg royal families. Many wealthy Brazilian planters enjoyed titles of nobility, such as João Maurício Wanderley, the Baron of Cotegipe. Administratively, the empire was divided into provinces, which were administered by provincial presidents. The monarchy fell in 1889, replaced by the first Brazilian Republic. In 1891, a new Brazilian government signed into law a new constitution that reshaped Brazilian government institutions. The emperor gave way to a president; provinces became states; and provincial presidents became governors. Barons and counts lost their titles, and were officially referred to as mister or, in some cases, colonel, reflecting membership (often honorary) in the local National Guard battalion. The new constitution also established civil marriage and civil registries of births, deaths, and marriages, where previously only ecclesiastical registers of baptism, marriage, and the last rites had existed. Brazilians who read history are accustomed to these shifts, but they can be confusing for those accustomed to a different tradition. I have chosen to allow the administrative terms to reflect the change in government systems, to emphasize that Brazil moved from a centralized monarchy to a decentralized federal republic during the period under study.

Finally, decisions needed to be made about how to handle citations of English works translated into Portuguese or works translated from Portuguese

to English. Our original thought was to transfer all possible citations to the English versions of books and articles for the facility of readers unfamiliar with Portuguese. This ultimately posed two problems, one practical and the other conceptual. First, English and Portuguese versions of a given book or article are not necessarily identical. The literature here contains two excellent examples of this: João José Reis's *Slave Rebellion in Brazil* is a revised and expanded version of the Brazilian original. On the other hand, B. J. Barickman's *A Bahian Counterpoint* does not contain all of the rich research and detail of his dissertation, but the Brazilian edition of his book does. Consequently, the two books are not strictly translations, but different editions. More to the point, Fraga used the Portuguese editions of most of the books in question and we decided that the bibliography should reflect that. We therefore left the citations used in the original Brazilian edition, but translated all titles for the convenience of readers unfamiliar with Portuguese.

Finally, a few acknowledgments. It is my pleasure to present this wonderful book by Brazilian scholar Walter Fraga to an English-speaking audience for the first time. Like many Brazilians and Brazilianists, we met while laboriously digging through precious nineteenth-century documents in the reading room of the Public Archive of the State of Bahia. In the twenty-five-plus years since I first made my way to the pink colonial building in Salvador's Baixa das Quintas, my life has been enriched in innumerable ways. I have met and worked with historians from many parts of the world. In the process I have learned more than I ever thought possible about Brazilian history, friendship, and collaboration. Thank you!

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Crossroads of Freedom is an important book: it explores the experiences of one of Brazil's largest groups of slaves just before and after abolition in a region with one of the longest and most intense histories of slavery in the Americas. It received the American Historical Association's 2011 Clarence H. Haring Prize, for the most outstanding book on Latin American history written by a Latin American author in the five years prior to its publication. I am therefore extremely pleased to present this translation to the English-speaking public. I trust that you will enjoy it.

Foreword to the Brazilian Edition

ROBERT W. SLENES

This book is at the crossroads of various paths in recent historiography.¹ Walter Fraga followed the trails of experience and self-reflection blazed by slaves, freed people, and masters, to understand conflicts and alliances in the Bahian Recôncavo (the bay on which Salvador is located, and its immediate agricultural hinterland) from the end of the nineteenth to the early twentieth century. In so doing, he abolished the radical dissociation between “slavery” and “freedom” which had led many scholars to see the end of bondage in 1888 as either the terminus of one historical road (and research agenda) or the beginning of another; for it became clear that strategies, customs, and identities were worked out before emancipation shaped subsequent tensions between subalterns and their superiors. Indeed, the focus on actual lives, lived and pondered, as a way to discover broader social logics, brought Professor Fraga to the path of microhistory, an approach that seeks “God” (evidence of larger processes of change and continuity) in the intricacy of “detail.”² This option, in turn, took him to people’s names—that is, to the method of nominative record linkage—as a strategy for tracking persons over time in order to trace individual and collective biographies. *Crossroads of Freedom: Slaves and Freed People in Bahia, Brazil, 1870–1910* is the point of encounter of these diverse but converging paths.

To say this, however, only weakly defines the book’s qualities. The crossroads in this case are exceptionally charged with power—so much so that it is difficult to do justice to Fraga’s method in a brief compass. How does one explain, for instance, the magic of chapter 2, in which the author employs detailed police documents and an exceptionally rich trial record to reconstruct the assassination, by slaves, of a priest-administrator on a sugar plantation of the Carmelite Order in 1882? Fraga analyzes and contextualizes the case so skillfully that it illuminates slave owners’ theater of dominion and

bonded workers' refusal to play their ascribed roles, at the precise moment when slavery as a labor system faced a profound crisis of legitimacy.

How does one describe, as well, the wizardry of chapter 5, in which Fraga uses very diverse sources—among them, lists of slaves in probate records, two criminal trial proceedings, and the correspondence of a sugar plantation owner—to follow a group of freedmen over time, before and after abolition, and “triangulate” their experiences from several points of view? The author looks first at an episode in June 1888 involving the “theft” (expropriation) and slaughter of seignorial cattle by a small group of freedmen still living on the property where they had recently been emancipated. He then turns to another event, equally well documented, in 1889, in which some of the same individuals can be seen participating in an association of freed people dedicated to the same end. The analysis of these cases lays bare the day-to-day conflicts between former masters and slaves over the latter group's “customary right to garden plots” (continually trampled upon by landowners' cattle) and, indeed, even reveals some of the symbolic resistance of freedmen to planter rule. (Upon reading the first version of this chapter, my colleague, Professor Sidney Chalhoub, suggested that it be titled “The Great Cattle Massacre,” since it calls to mind historian Robert Darnton's attempt to uncover—also from a banal, but culture-revealing episode—the metaphorical arsenal that printers' apprentices in eighteenth-century France drew upon to take shots at their guild masters.)³ Finally, to cite one more example among many, how might one characterize the enchantment of chapter 8, in which Fraga reconstructs the family ties of slaves and of people freed on May 13 (those liberated at abolition in 1888) on another sugar plantation, from varied sources—including an interview with a male centenarian who still remembered some of the people encountered in the written documents about the property and furnished details about their lives circa 1920?

It would not be surprising if many readers of these chapters, even those familiar with the historical method, are left with the impression that Fraga has a “strong Saint” (*santo forte*) as his counselor; after all, how else might one explain his serial discovery of so many marvelous sources, much less the uncanny skill (*feitiço*) in his analysis? In fact, however, *quem sabe faz a hora*; command of craft makes opportunity—including the possibility of “luck”—happen, and creatively puts order into the results. Professor Fraga is gifted with patience, meticulousness, and imagination to an extraordinary degree; he did not need help to open new paths (*abrir caminhos*).

And what paths they are! For the tracks and trails of this microhistory lead to new interpretive highways. The Orixás are indeed in the particular. The

crisis of the slave system reveals itself here in all its complexity, on a specific ground that is “good for thinking.” Recent studies on Brazil’s Southeast have characterized the destruction of forced capitalized labor as an eminently political process. Manifesting itself in the countryside and on the streets, as well as in official places like Parliament and the courts, this process in the Southeast destabilized the “imaginary institution” of slavery, thereby drastically reducing the “futures market” in commodified people—that is, the expectations regarding the subsequent life of capitalized labor—as is evident in the crash of the purchase market in bonded workers, from 1881 on.⁴ Fraga’s book documents a similar history in Bahia, using the tools of the social historian. It also demonstrates the economic force of slave labor in sugar. (Sugar planters in the Recôncavo not only largely depended on bonded workers until the eve of abolition;⁵ they also, for many years, were unable to attract or coerce a sufficient number of free laborers to maintain production at pre-1888 levels.) The study then shows that the crisis in the legitimacy of slavery in Bahia during the 1880s—occasioned in part by the opposition of common people to this labor system, as well as by movements of flight and rebellion among bondspeople—was broadly similar to the process occurring in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and other places.

Fraga’s book also blazes a trail into virtually unopened land: that is, into the labor systems and the experiences of workers in Bahia during the post-abolition period. It shows the relative bargaining power of freed people in this region; here, the former slaves were able to increase the number of days during the week that they could devote to their own garden plots on lands still owned by their previous masters, at least well into the 1890s. This was something that apparently lay beyond the reach of their counterparts in that other major sugar-producing region, the Zona da Mata of Pernambuco.⁶ One also observes in this early post-abolition period a significant migration of freed people from the rural Recôncavo to cities and other agricultural areas (the cocoa region in southern Bahia, for instance), which confirms this analysis; evidently, many persons found that the best opportunities for work and income lay outside the Recôncavo—a situation that, for a certain time, must have increased the bargaining power of those who decided not to move.

Migration, in any case, brought to the towns and the manufacturing sector men and women who—as Fraga shows in detail—had created community and family ties, as well as common customs and traditions of contestation, during slavery. Indeed, perhaps the most promising trail this book opens for other researchers lies in the suggestion that the lived and pondered experiences of former slaves contributed to forming the sociability

of urban workers. “It is not surprising,” writes Fraga, “that thirty-one strikes broke out in Salvador and the [towns of the] Recôncavo between 1888 and 1896,” nor that “on May 12, 1902, when calling upon the ‘Bahian people’ not to forget ‘our emancipation,’ . . . the labor leader and ex-abolitionist Ismael Ribeiro spoke out in the name of ‘my ancestors.’”

In the epilogue, Professor Fraga recalls the “inexpressible melancholy” of the Afro-Brazilian engineer, André Rebouças, in 1895, on realizing that the conquest of full citizenship for people of color in Brazil “[was] still a long way, a very long way, off, in the centuries to come.” Yet all of Fraga’s analysis reveals that projects and hopes for reform in this direction were not lacking in turn-of-the-century Bahia. Indeed, such projects and sentiments were so in evidence that they provoked strong reactions from the elite—including the attempt, ultimately successful, to empty the annual celebrations of May 13 of that demand for additional rights which had characterized them immediately following 1888. Countering the amnesia produced by defeat, Fraga’s study foregrounds struggles which did in fact exist and which could help inspire the opening of new roads toward citizenship today.

Crossroads of Freedom has its own history of converging paths. It was originally a doctoral dissertation in history at the Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp). It clearly reflects the theoretical and methodological concerns of professors and students associated with the Center for Research on the Social History of Culture (CECULT) at that university. But it also engages in dialogue with a recent international bibliography on the experiences of slaves and freed people in other historical contexts.⁷ Then too it reflects the author’s solid training in history as an undergraduate and master’s student at the Federal University of Bahia and his close interaction with young and established Bahian scholars, some of them also with doctorates from Unicamp.⁸ Indeed, at the crossroads of these and other paths, a new generation of historians is aborning in Bahia—or rather, is “taking the stage.” (I play here on the expression *baiano não nasce, estreia*—“people from Bahia are not born, they premiere.”) In this “show” of style and competence, Walter Fraga has a leading role.

—Campinas, May 2006

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CROSSROADS
OF FREEDOM

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Introduction

This study examines the experiences of the slaves and ex-slaves who lived and labored in the Bahian Recôncavo, one of the oldest slave societies in the Americas, from the last two decades of slavery through the first twenty years after abolition on May 13, 1888. The Recôncavo was one of Brazil's most important slave-holding and sugar-producing regions, but sugar was not the Recôncavo's only crop, nor did all slaves work in sugar. Sugar was, however, the region's most important crop and most slaves there worked in sugar, even as abolition approached. Examining this history, therefore, reveals the implications of abolition and the consequences of the end of slavery for a significant sector of Brazil's black population.

Until quite recently, May 13, 1888, has primarily constituted a chronological divider between two distinct periods of Brazilian history. Abolition in 1888 and the installation of the Brazilian Republic in 1889 marked the end of one era and the beginning of another. Key to this new period were a number of new elements: free labor, massive growth in European immigration to southeastern Brazil, industrialization, and organized labor. With the new focus on these factors, the legacy of slavery and the men and women who had lived through slavery abruptly disappeared from Brazilian history.

This "disappearance" of the former slaves from the study of the post-emancipation period was, in some respects, ideological, in that it was a way to show that Brazil had done away with the legacies of slavery once and for all. This racialized discourse made it possible to discuss Brazil without reference to Africans or their descendants. In other words, it silenced them.

In the 1940s, in his classic study *História econômica do Brasil*, Caio Prado Júnior argued that free wage labor had "substituted" for enslaved labor in the last years of slavery. By substituted, he meant that the period saw the emergence of capitalist labor relations and labor movements, the principal actors

in which were the European immigrants who had begun to arrive in great numbers in Brazil's Northeast in the 1880s.¹

In the 1960s and 1970s, Prado's work inspired a number of studies in Brazil of what is conventionally called the "transition from slavery to free labor." The authors of these studies also understood the end of slavery as the point of departure for the development of capitalism in Brazil. Slavery, they argued, had so damaged the minds and bodies of ex-slaves and freed blacks that they were unprepared to respond to the demands of a society based on wage labor. From this perspective, blacks, whether ex-slaves or free, appear as "things" or parts of a macroeconomic machine that marginalized them from the most dynamic process of social transformation of the period.²

Toward the end of the 1980s, as the centennial of abolition in Brazil approached, a series of studies based in research in new archival manuscript sources brought about a profound revision in the historiography of slavery in Brazil. Challenging the idea of the slave or ex-slave as "thing," these studies began to explore enslaved agency in the most diverse aspects of their daily lives.³ Previously unexplored documentary sources allowed Africans and their descendants to emerge in the historical literature as thinking beings capable of independent initiative and thoughts about how to live and resist slavery. And, above all, Africans and their descendants appeared as individuals who carried with them memories and understandings of the world learned in Africa.⁴

In Brazil, these revisionist interpretations of slavery have had significant consequences for students of the post-abolition period. Without discarding cultural and social contexts, these studies have attempted to reveal the daily experiences and the improvisation of slaves and freed people as they forged identities and developed survival strategies during and after slavery.⁵

In the 1990s, a number of studies reexamined the role of Africans and their descendants in the movements to end slavery in Brazil. Their deeper analysis of the tensions that marked the end of slavery and their connection to slaves' understanding of freedom began to reshape the historiography.⁶ Hebe Mattos de Castro's study *Das cores do silêncio* (On the colors of silence) was an important contribution in this regard, as it examined the tense discussions about the meanings of freedom that took place in the days immediately after the abolition of slavery.⁷

In the 1990s, some historians also began to broach the temporal boundary of the end of slavery in 1888 to study more systematically the day-to-day experiences of the populations emerging from slavery. For Bahia, two historians from the United States pioneered the effort to analyze the black

experience beyond the limits of abolition. In *Freedoms Given, Freedoms Won*, Kim Butler compared the post-emancipation experiences of Afro-Brazilians in two important Brazilian cities, Salvador and São Paulo. In *From Slavery to Freedom in Brasil*, published in 2006 but based on his 1991 PhD thesis, Dale Torston Graden brought a hemispheric perspective to Bahia's experiences in the post-emancipation period, especially as they related to local struggles for citizenship and access to land.⁸ In this period, the historiography of the post-emancipation period also began to include studies of the daily life, the life histories, and the memories of ex-slaves.⁹ Studies of the impact of racism and racial theories on the daily lives of Afro-Brazilians became especially important.¹⁰

This book is the heir of these historiographical debates, but it moves beyond them to explore the history of ex-slaves through their trajectories. My goal is to lift the curtain on significant historical transformations by exploring the trajectories of individuals, families, and communities. This exploration of trajectories allows us to see what those who emerged from slavery thought and felt about freedom.¹¹ They show us that the day-to-day experiences of slavery influenced choices, attitudes, expectations, and plans for freedom in the post-emancipation period in any number of ways.

Thus, this study does not examine the maintenance of, or breaks with, patterns of behavior developed in slavery. Such notions oversimplify the complex relationships and conflicts that developed in post-slavery Bahia. Rather, this study uses the dynamics of day-to-day relationships to reveal how past experiences could fuel aspirations or return as memories and recollections.

Nor does this study of trajectories aim to reveal the "behavior of the average" freed person in order to infer broader patterns of behavior or social relationships. I am not searching for models, nor do I believe that models can account for the wealth of lived experiences, the dynamics of the multiplicity of the choices that freed people made over the course of their lives. Rather, I explore how the people who emerged from slavery tried to shape the directions their lives would take in numerous creative ways despite the unforeseeable future and the limits placed on them by a society based on profound socioracial inequalities.

This study does not explore the "transition" from slavery to free labor either.¹² Aside from suggesting that the shift from slavery to freedom was a linear historical process, studies about transition focus primarily on the economic aspects of the substitution of slaves by free workers and rarely consider that most of the "free people" had once been slaves or were descended from them. Slavery was much more than an economic system; it molded behavior,

it defined social and racial hierarchies, and it shaped feelings, values, and the etiquette of command and obedience. Sharp social tensions marked slavery's end, wherever it existed, as long-held demands were unleashed and, at the same time, freedom took on new meanings and expectations. The ex-masters of Bahian slaves understood that the period was dangerous, such that they tried to reduce its complexity to a question of the "substitution" or "transition" to free labor. This study aims to go beyond such notions to consider the attitudes and behaviors of the various social actors in a very specific context—the major plantations of Bahia's Recôncavo in the last years of slavery and first years of freedom.

For some time, historians and anthropologists have been exploring aspects of the history and culture of Bahia's black population in the post-abolition period. Focusing on African heritage and/or the reinvention of such heritage in Bahia, these studies have allowed us to accumulate immense knowledge about the religiosity, family, race relations, forms of resistance, and participation in the labor market of Bahian blacks.¹³ But we know little about the destinies of ex-slaves, about their experiences and plans for freedom, their memories of enslavement, and the ways in which they related to their former owners and to the communities of which they were a part. Even the Recôncavo, which has been the subject of numerous historical studies, is still awaiting the systematic study of the populations that emerged from slavery there.

This study does not pretend to fill that void, but it does address various aspects of freed peoples' experience in the post-abolition period. Many of the questions discussed here grow out of a dialogue with the historiography about the rich and complex trajectory of the black populations after emancipation here in Bahia, in Brazil, and elsewhere in the Americas. Recent studies avoided dichotomies such as rupture and continuity or dependency and autonomy and, in so doing, broadened the possibilities for understanding the various meanings that ex-slaves attributed to freedom.¹⁴

In this study, I am trying to go beyond generalizations to perceive how the ex-slaves interacted with others—including ex-masters and members of the communities to which they belonged—as they went about their daily lives after emancipation. Doing so required building an empirical base that allowed me to see their post-emancipation trajectories. It was extremely complicated, given that the documentation produced in the years after abolition is nearly silent on the juridical status of people who emerged from slavery. Brazilian ex-slaves rarely left documents that they had written discussing their memories of slavery and their experiences of the first days after abolition, unlike their African-American counterparts, who left diaries and let-