

INTRODUCTION

“Fellow Citizens!” With these words, which were equal parts greeting and political statement, the abolitionist orator launched into his speech. “It is here,” the twenty-two-year-old Francisco Faelante da Camara Lima exclaimed, “in the public square, that you should assemble . . . for revolutions are born in meetings and on the streets.” “It is here,” the law student repeated, “where we need to build the altar of liberty, and avenge the injustices of tyranny and oppression.”¹ Readily crossing references to the abolition of slavery with mentions of popular political empowerment, he urged all to “rise up” and to move the nation past “its prolonged agony [of slavery].”² Standing before hundreds of people in Recife’s Boa Vista plaza on September 28, 1884, Camara Lima, and by extension the multiracial crowd of women and men, claimed their space in the body politic based on the realization of everyone’s freedom. That public abolitionist meeting, as with most over the preceding fifteen years, featured a manumission ceremony, music, and poetry readings. It was on such occasions, Camara Lima reiterated, “where a slave claims his rights as a citizen,” that the movement defined itself. His words, arising from the matrix of the abolition debates, posited a new basis for national belonging, as we know that for much of the nineteenth century, Brazilians had demonstrated their “free” and “citizen” identities on the backs of the enslaved. The public meeting, meanwhile, and the popular political activity that it channeled, also signaled another transformation arising from the matrix of the abolition debates: a growing challenge to the rules of political discourse.

For slaveholders, the abolitionist mobilizations threatened much more than a labor system; they struck at the heart of a political order built on the racialized foundations of slavery. We must remember that Brazil had come of age as a slave nation. Unlike the paths taken in most neighboring Spanish American republics—where nationhood projects involved ending the slave trade, curtailing slavery, or both—Brazil’s founding charter of 1824 sanctioned slaveholding and the African slave trade persisted into the 1850s. Altogether, a staggering five million people—ten times as many taken to the United States—arrived on its shores between the early 1500s and the mid-1800s. Almost half (42 percent) were brought over in the first half of the nineteenth century.³ In no uncertain terms, slavery and nation-building were interrelated

processes. Moreover, the nineteenth-century expansion of slavery in Brazil, as in the United States and in Cuba, happened in the aftermath of the Haitian Revolution and in connection with a larger realignment of slave-based plantation economies and capitalist modernization in the north Atlantic. Historians of this “second slavery” have productively revisited the links and points of comparisons between these large slave societies through the tools of social history and world-systems theory.⁴

Legal and cultural factors were also critical, however, to the expansion and consolidation of the Brazilian slave system. To begin with, the liberal citizenship pact entailed defending the ideal of legal equality among the free population to diffuse any racial tensions that could in turn call slavery into question.⁵ If arguably instrumental, the emphasis on legal racial equality was not totally abstract. Brazil’s free population of color, the largest in the Americas to flourish under slavery, indeed found ample pathways for garnering public standing. Representing about a third of the population (three million), free Afro-descendants joined associations and Catholic brotherhoods, formed part of militias, were active in the press, voted, held different types of public office, and owned slaves.⁶ In the civic arena, meanwhile, the foundational narratives of national identity fostered the theme of miscegenation. Whether in state or popular renderings, cultural and racial mixing defined the essence of Brazilianness. In mutually reinforcing ways, then, legal and cultural practice converged to create the impression that it was the “free” and “enslaved” categories that marked the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion—not race.

Doubtlessly, however, an abundance of research has uncovered a much more complicated picture of social reality. Race was institutionally inscribed and produced to filter out important differences in levels of belonging. The reality remained that Africans were the primary group enslaved (indigenous slavery also persisted throughout the nineteenth century, despite a ban in 1831).⁷ Furthermore, slavery shaped the construction of racial categories, becoming integral to formulations of whiteness and blackness. For free people of color, it cast a shadow over everyday life. The possibility of being illegally enslaved, for example, created a permanent vulnerability for free Afro-Brazilians, especially the poor and unprotected. These practices depended on the state’s role in legitimizing illegal enslavement, historian Sidney Chalhoub has argued; after 1831, “massive illegal enslavement gradually became an organizing principle of state formation and institution building in the country.”⁸ It was a fact that Africans were permanently deemed outsiders of the national community, even after obtaining freedom. Whereas Brazilian-born freedmen gained some electoral rights, the African-born were excluded from this means of formal participation. In effect, the seemingly race-neutral, lib-

eral constructs of Brazilian citizenship certainly operated in racialized forms, stigmatizing Africans and positing blackness as antithetical to ideas of modernity and progress.⁹

With this perspective of the deep-rooted economic, legal, and cultural pillars of Brazilian slavery, it is unsurprising that slaveowners across Brazil, and certainly in the northeast where the abolitionist street meeting from which this introduction opened occurred, denounced the movement as “a subversive threat against public order.” One described such events as spaces where “false political doctrines are spread.”¹⁰ Another expressed alarm that “these bad seeds,” referring to the political agitation, “will never bear good fruit” and that therefore “it was necessary to respond to this reactionary wave.”¹¹ If reflective of a specific moment in the arc of the emancipation debates (the mid-1880s), where slaveowners appeared as anxious as they had been about popular abolitionism, these quotes nonetheless seriously downplayed the plain fact that sugar planters had been responding “to this reactionary wave” through their own forms of public politics. Since the early 1870s, they had formed associations, printed newsletters, circulated petitions, and squeezed patronage networks to shape opinion locally and nationally. In the southeast, coffee growers had also mobilized around “agricultural clubs.”¹² If unable to stem the onset of emancipation, slaveowners moved to restrict the political arena, to portray popular political activity (abolitionism) as “unruly” and “black” despite the fact that the movement had been organized and conceptualized in national and not racial terms.

This book thus returns to the process of slave emancipation and analyzes how slaves’ struggles for freedom sparked unprecedented levels of political ferment in nineteenth-century Brazil. It offers a fresh view of abolition, citizenship, and, most important, their interrelationship by considering how the contentious forms of public politics, waged over two decades by the abolitionist and slaveholder mobilizations, redefined the terms and practices of political citizenship. It goes beyond the question of who ended slavery to reveal that the abolition debates themselves fed and reflected ongoing concerns over who would control the terms of such debate. Broad participation in the freeing of slaves necessarily implied a rethinking of—a challenge, really—to the rules of the political game. As such, *Slave Emancipation and Transformations in Brazilian Political Citizenship* establishes the struggle for emancipation as central to the longer histories of Brazilian popular political participation, rights-claiming, and opinion formation. The book spans into the early postemancipation period to underscore the processual nature of emancipation—it clearly was not linear—and to probe how the disputed efforts to establish an abolition narrative remained a contentious public practice through which to settle lingering issues over race and belonging. Notably, these early postemancipation debates

illuminate what became a longer-term facet of Brazilian democracy, where throughout the twentieth century, and especially during the 1980s and 1990s, a widespread reckoning with the legacies of slavery folded into ongoing processes of democratization. Elaborated upon in further detail in the conclusion, this entry into the relationship between slave emancipation and citizenship offers an intriguing possibility to use the Brazilian case to ask new questions about the interplay between slavery and democracy in the nineteenth-century Atlantic world.

The Club Ceará Livre abolitionist society organized the street meeting at which the young orator stoked the political participation of his “fellow citizens.” The gathering was deliberately planned for the thirteenth anniversary of Brazil’s gradual-emancipation law of 1871, commonly referred to as the Free Womb Law. The symbolic date provided the public a starting point from which to enact emancipation through a manumission ceremony as well as to judge the government on its commitment to abolition. At that point in 1884, some one million people, or about 10 percent of the total population, remained in captivity.

The law students heading the Club Ceará Livre constructed their own abolition narrative through specific rituals of the manumission ceremony and by printing a special issue of the association’s newspaper. Both efforts enhanced the processes of shared reflection and collective participation. Centered on the likes of Zeferina, Maria, and Felizardo—among the thirteen people (nine women and four men) who received certificates of freedom that afternoon—the street ceremony signaled a shift under way in the late nineteenth century where the process of manumission had evolved from a private to a public matter. Besides the protagonists of the afternoon, the newly freed and members of the Ceará Livre, it was quite possible that former slaveowners were also present. Their involvement exemplifies how these manumission performances served to integrate elite sectors into the abolitionist public. Too many examples exist, in fact, of former slaveowners who became ardent activists to consider this an uncommon aspect of Brazilian abolitionism. No one was obviously born an “abolitionist.” People became politicized through various processes, including their interactions with the enslaved as they pursued their freedom.¹³ Though not a slaveowner himself, the Pernambucan abolitionist and widely recognized leader of the national movement, Joaquim Nabuco, vividly recalled the effect of a slave’s actions in shaping his own abolitionist convictions. Nabuco had “read *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* a thousand times,” he wrote in his memoir, “but that encounter [when Nabuco was only eight years old] with a runaway slave who asked for his assistance in finding shelter had left an indelible impression.”¹⁴ It was a pivotal moment for Nabuco, created from the

slave's decision to run away. These dynamics point to how slaves' initiatives clearly shaped the political sensibilities of prominent abolitionists. We should not forget, either, that slaves' pursuits for freedom were equally as important in fostering slaveowners' own political identities, as the challenge to their authority prompted their own set of political responses to restore order and hierarchy.

If more of a historiographical than historical concern, people at the Club Ceará Livre's manumission ceremony knew that it was the slaves themselves who were most responsible for their own emancipation. This was public knowledge because abolitionist societies, in their enthusiastic promotion of manumission campaigns, proudly advertised how much they contributed toward freeing slaves. It was thus no secret that these amounts never exceeded more than 20 to 30 percent of a slave's value. Slaves knew that securing freedom opportunities through abolitionist societies depended on how much of their own money they could provide up front.¹⁵ Meanwhile, their financial initiatives comprised only part of the equation. Their persistence in exploiting interpersonal connections to gain the attention of associations like the Club Ceará Livre was determinant for making freedom possible. Enslaved women were notably adept at seizing these opportunities in urban centers like Recife, Salvador, and Rio de Janeiro. They effectively deployed "womanly" cultural scripts when pressing for their and their families' liberty; historian Camilla Cowling argues that "claiming that their children were 'rightfully theirs,' women placed maternity at the heart of their legal struggles for freedom."¹⁶ It was not surprising, therefore, that nine women figured among the thirteen people freed at the Club Ceará Livre's manumission ceremony. In pursuing their freedom, these and the thousands of other slaves active in the abolitionist mobilizations made claims on public life.

The Club Ceará Livre heightened people's perception of the public meeting by distributing its own periodical and by including a musical band. At this gathering, indicative of a nineteenth-century context more generally, oratory and the written word fed off each other. Political debates, whether in parliament or on the streets, "were oral, but often based on written statements, or soon to become written as papers."¹⁷ Both forms of expression offered the young men in the abolitionist association an opportunity to project their budding masculine reputations, illustrating how involvement in the slavery debates also became a nexus of gender formations.¹⁸ The *O Ceará Livre*, as their newspaper was called, reflected the association's national and Atlantic horizons.¹⁹ A back-page poem used the image of the rising sea to describe the spreading influence of abolitionist opinion, noting that, like "the ocean," abolitionism is washing up on "every stretch of this great nation."²⁰ Another poem symbolically grouped Recife law students' activism with the political

work of Rio de Janeiro's engineering students to proclaim the movement a national one. A third article, moreover, explained that the association's name "Ceará Livre" was in homage to the abolition of slavery in the nearby province of Ceará.²¹ A turning point in the national politics of slavery, the freeing of Ceará in March 1884 galvanized mobilizations on both sides of the issue. Abolitionist networks, including slaves of course, in Salvador, Belém, Ouro Preto, Rio de Janeiro, Porto Alegre, São Paulo, and Recife had followed these developments closely, and through celebrating Ceará, they imagined themselves ever more interconnected. The Club Ceará Livre's name thus exemplified the overlapping nature of local, regional, and national abolitionist formations. In addition, the caption appearing on this and every issue of the *O Ceará Livre*—"the last shackles were broken"—also reflected the movement's ongoing dialogue with Atlantic discourses of freedom and citizenship.²² The phrase drew from the prominent Portuguese intellectual Abílio Manuel Guerra Junqueiro, whose 1873 poem titled "A Free Spain" celebrated the First Spanish Republic and its abolition of slavery in Puerto Rico.²³ In a small but illustrative way the caption captures how the histories of emancipation in other Atlantic contexts (such as the British, French, Spanish American, and U.S.) played a part in framing the Brazilian debates.

Meanwhile, the musicians performing at the Club Ceará Livre's meeting doubtlessly livened the air. A core feature of Brazilian abolitionism more generally, the musical performances and concerts were especially key to building the movement in the national capital.²⁴ Recognizing the wide importance of the festive abolitionist contexts, cultural historians have cleverly extrapolated much from them about the dynamics of popular sociability.²⁵ That the Club Ceará Livre's meeting occurred on the anniversary of the Free Womb Law likely meant that a patriotic fervor filled the afternoon. Interestingly, over time, the musicians playing at these types of gatherings wrote songs about abolition specifically. In Bahia, for example, the Afro-Brazilian activist Manoel Tranquilino Bastos composed an abolitionist anthem.²⁶ If unable to identify the specific musicians at the Ceará Livre's event, we know from other studies on urban slavery that musicians were oftentimes barbers and that dating back to the eighteenth century, this was a slave's profession.²⁷ The musicians in this case, but also the theatrical artists in other instances, thus blended into the abolitionist public through these experiences. The collective singing reiterated the participatory style of politics associated with the movement and also offers a glimpse into how cultural performances fed the mobilizations.²⁸ Accordingly, the music and theater fostered much public mixing between free and enslaved people, significantly more so than at other types of political events of the time. Surely the participants were keenly aware that their forms of sociability deliberately appealed to some and made it reprehensible to others; the

differences between the abolitionist and slaveholder publics centered not only on slavery but also on ideas about political practice and social mixing.

In its multiple dimensions, then, the Club Ceará Livre's street meeting exemplified the dynamic nature of Brazilian abolitionism—its decentralized character, extensive interracial composition, public activism, and national and transnational formations—and illustrated its effects in expanding the boundaries of the political arena. The movement reconceptualized the political field, inventing spaces for the likes of the Club Ceará Livre, slaves, and musical bands to exert opinion. This relationship between abolitionism and wider political participation was not lost on northeastern sugar planters. From their (also public) responses it was clear that this had become more than just about determining who would control the ending of slavery. In one prominent politician's words, the need to expunge the "ignorant and reckless multitude" from political life became an urgent necessity after abolition.²⁹

We can thus begin to appreciate that the broad-based abolitionist movement rattled slaveowners' expectations about the future. When the abolitionist orator in Recife exalted the instances of "where a slave claims his rights as a citizen," he was clearly articulating a different basis for political belonging. This narrative was invented from popular engagement in the abolition debate and affirmed through novel political practices. The abolitionist public initially coalesced from the networks of people that the enslaved mobilized in their pursuits of freedom. It expanded over time, though, through the participation of myriad social groups, including musicians, typographers, raftsmen, artisans, petty merchants, and theater artists who all joined and created abolitionist societies. Journalists and law students, such as the orator from Recife, Camara Lima, were instrumental in reshaping the abolition debate as a national concern. Local and parliamentary politicians connected to this public at key junctures, and as was the case with Camara Lima from Recife or Manoel da Motta Monteiro Lopes, the Afro-Brazilian deputy from Rio de Janeiro, abolitionist activism led some into political office.³⁰

Women, doubtlessly, exercised a greater role in the abolitionist movement than in any prior political issue. Afro-descended and white women were particularly integral to manumission campaigns. Twenty-one all-women's abolitionist groups sprung up across Brazil, including Recife's Sociedade Ave Libertas.³¹ Beyond achieving more manumissions than most other associations (male or female) in the mid-1880s, the Ave Libertas could well be seen as the most important women's political association of the time. Historian Angela Alonso's detailed profile of the movement notes that altogether some 180 men's and women's groups formed across the country from the late 1860s through the late 1880s. This is a comprehensive yet also a first attempt to quantify this phenomenon on a national level, so I caution comparativists to regard this

as a still-growing estimate. The associative phenomenon spiked from the late 1870s through the mid-1880s, and notably Pernambuco contained the largest number of associations from any single province during this period, followed by Rio de Janeiro, Ceará, Amazonas, and Rio Grande do Sul.³²

The scale of cross-class, cross-race, and cross-regional ties in the abolitionist movement was therefore unprecedented in Brazilian history. It was decidedly interracial in its membership *and* politics.³³ Moreover, when considering the extent of interracial involvement in the making of Brazilian abolitionism, I note that the scope of these interactions far surpassed, for example, the interracial dynamics documented in the British and U.S. abolitionist movements, which have been hailed for their democratizing effects on their respective societies.³⁴ In Brazil, however, the interracial collaborations have almost passed as “natural,” as unrelated to political ideology. Perhaps it has been thought that the Brazilian movement included people of different races because Brazil is made of people of different races, as if the movement’s integrationist and nationalist ideologies, which were as important as its composition, could only have affected the slavery debate and not have had a broader resonance on political life. The abolitionist movement, to be sure, built on (or rather, appropriated) the discourse of interracial nationalism from the early nineteenth century. That notion had existed since at least the 1830s and 1840s in the press, literature, and state cultural projects, but it was abolitionism that imbued it with an antislavery character.³⁵

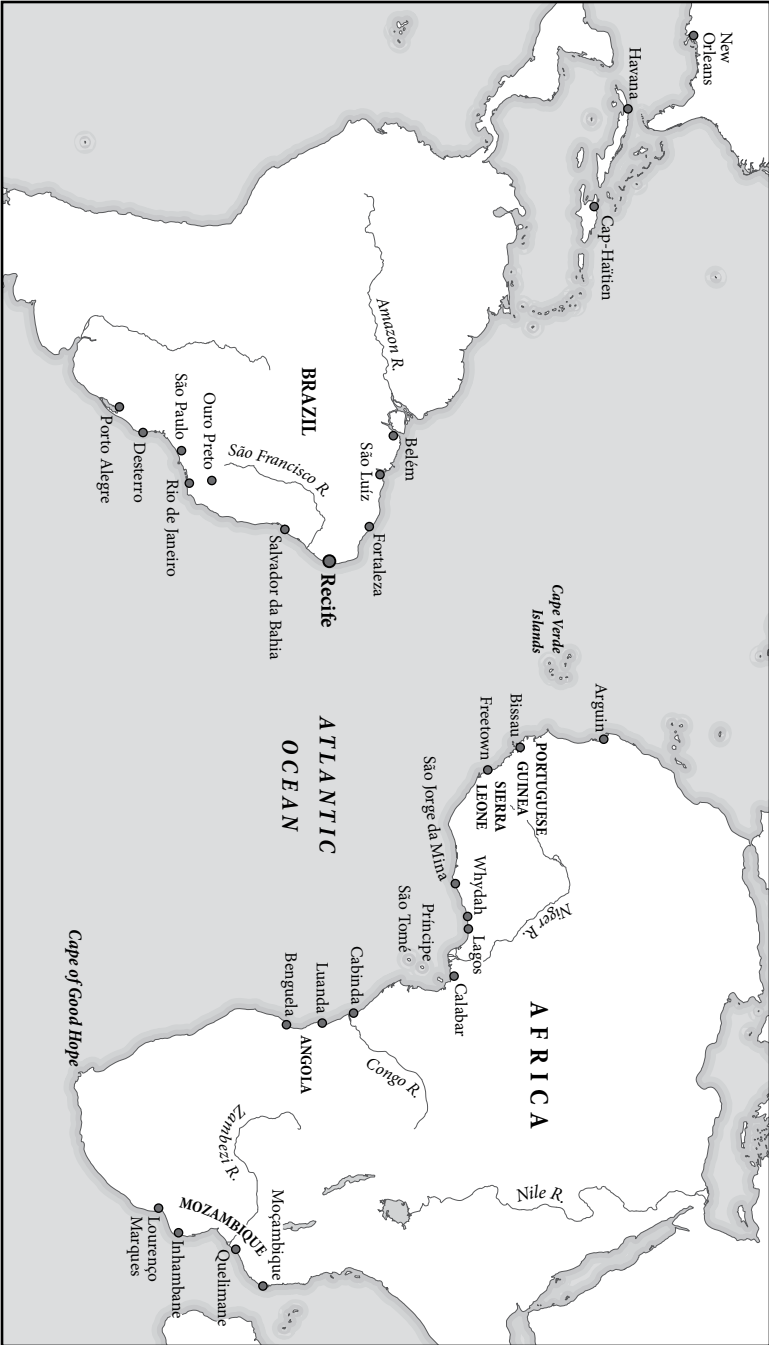
Nevertheless, more than naïve, it would be historically unfounded to suggest that aspects of racial, gender, and class hierarchies were not reproduced within these mobilizations. As with most social movements, fierce disagreements arose over tactical questions, over who spoke for and defined the movement, and over the extent of its broader aims. The hierarchical structures and power dynamics within the movement reflected social differences and patronage relations of the time. Social stratification was pronounced in Brazil, as typical of slave societies. Even within the slave population, differences in labor obligations, medical treatment, and the owner’s own social status produced internal hierarchies.³⁶ The abolitionist mobilizations, invigorated by a wider range of people than any other movement of its time, clearly did not make “equals” out of people from different backgrounds. Yet the propensity to search for the “real,” as opposed to the “false” or “opportunist” abolitionists, or for the “militant,” as opposed to the “accommodating” slave, increases the risk of descending into circular debates about who “caused” abolition and to miss in the process how the nature of the abolition debate changed the terms through which people participated in political life and recast understandings of citizenship.

STARTING POINTS

This book invites readers to think about the process of slave emancipation as part of the history of Brazilian democracy. It explores three questions: How and why did the issue of slave emancipation become and remain publicly relevant from the 1860s through the 1880s, including after abolition? How did the forms of political mobilization around the abolition debate generate new conceptions of citizenship? And, finally, how does exploring the extent of political participation experienced during this period change the way we think about the longer narrative of Brazilian citizenship? *Slave Emancipation* brings forth fresh perspectives on the periodization of abolitionism, the interplay between abolition and racial formations, and local-national political dynamics. The first point rests on a contention already suggested that the extended debates over abolition in effect amounted to a protracted and larger struggle over political belonging. The abolitionist movement invented new terms and practices for affirming citizenship. In sparking the until then broadest mobilization in Brazilian history, it provoked wholesale reevaluations over who could act politically and over where and how politics could be performed. Indeed, one historian has referred to abolitionism as an early chapter of Brazil's history of "urban radicalism."³⁷

In this longer periodization, I am diverging from conventional historiographical practice. I am not situating the "gradual" or "emancipationist" phase of antislavery as a prelude to the "immediatist" stage of abolitionism, which most date to the last nine or ten years of slavery.³⁸ Abolitionism was not a linear process where "gradualist" or "emancipationist" (pre-1871) mobilizations eventually acquired an "immediatist" or "abolitionist" character in the 1880s. Rather, the movement encompassed "gradual" and "radical" strands throughout its existence, and these different positions are best analyzed in relation to each other and in terms of the specific contexts. Neither the abolitionist movement, nor the proslavery mobilizations for that matter, would have grown to the extent that they did had they not meant different things to different people.

This longer periodization puts a different focus on the relationship between the histories of race and citizenship. It opens a greater understanding of how slaves' strategies for freedom changed over time, and how these changes in turn changed the stakes of the slavery debate. It also puts postemancipation shifts in the politics of race in broader historical context. To be sure, historians have persuasively shown that freedpeople's struggles for inclusion after abolition roused an antiblack backlash; similarly, scholars have noted that the spread of scientific racism influenced processes of black marginalization across the Americas.³⁹ However, we must consider the racialized reactions of postemancipation as part and parcel of this longer abolition struggle itself.



MAP 1.1. Recife in the nineteenth-century Atlantic world

That is, enslaved and freedpeople's participation in public politics was key to the unleashing of a countermovement for "order and progress." It was not just that all of a sudden the realities of large numbers of "free black people" made elites apprehensive. Most Afro-Brazilians had already been free for several generations. As of the early 1870s, 75 percent of Afro-descendants were free. The point is that as mass popular political participation in the abolition debates challenged the rules of the political game, the racialization of mass politics intensified. Long-standing processes of political contestation, and not just demographic issues, were key to understanding shifts in Brazilian racial structures. This longer consideration of abolition does more than simply point out that the process was steeped in a longer history than what we previously thought; it opens new vistas onto race and politics, while laying the groundwork for revisiting the relationship between abolitionist and social movements of the twentieth century.⁴⁰

Slave Emancipation takes a regional approach to national problems. I center the northeastern province of Pernambuco and its capital city of Recife as the primary points of analysis because it was there where the largest abolitionist movement outside the national capital thrived; more important, it was there where we can best glean the interactions between the abolitionist and proslavery mobilizations and their broad effects on political life. Brazil's third largest city in the nineteenth century—after Rio de Janeiro and Salvador (Bahia)—Recife was still three times the size of the city of São Paulo in the early 1870s. It was within a rich milieu of cultural and political associations, a bustling press, the law school, and a vibrant theater scene where the process of abolition most clearly produced fresh understandings of citizenship. I concentrate on Recife even though most of the enslaved people in late nineteenth-century Pernambuco toiled in the sugar belt. The effects of their actions, however, acquired a different political register once enmeshed in urban contexts, and their decisions to connect to the urban mobilizations reflected an understanding of this reality.

The northeastern inflection of this work corrects outdated perceptions about sugar planters' political formations, especially in terms of abolition. I dispel the idea that Pernambuco's sugar barons "did not vigorously resist the gradual abolition of slavery because cheap free labor was readily available."⁴¹ Beyond this, I underscore slavery's lasting political importance in the northeast, even if most slaves (80 percent) toiled in the southeastern coffee fields as of the 1870s. The regional concentration of slaveholding notwithstanding, slavery persisted in eighteen of Brazil's twenty provinces until the end. A Recife newspaper estimated the national slave population at around a half-million in the month prior to abolition, reflecting the persistence of the institution despite the pressures of the preceding decades.⁴²

I expand, however, beyond a Pernambuco case study by grappling with how local politics emerged from a relationship with national and international developments. I highlight, for example, how the publicizing of freedom lawsuits from other provinces, and the making of “free soil” territories in other parts of Brazil, raised the tenor of local debates in Recife. Accordingly, I also demonstrate how local developments from Pernambuco (e.g., the slaveholders’ agricultural conferences in 1878 and 1884 or the abolitionist electoral campaigns of 1884 and 1887) intensified political action nationally. In paying closer attention to the circulation of ideas and people, this book better situates the bidirectional flows of the local and national politics of slavery and, in effect, changes our understanding of both.

ATLANTIC SLAVERY, POLITICAL CITIZENSHIP, AND DEMOCRACY IN CONTEXT

Conceptually, this work bridges the fields of Atlantic slavery studies and the new political history of Latin America.⁴³ It draws on the latest in the Atlantic slavery scholarship that probes slavery as a political project; it studies how slaves’ pursuits for freedom illuminated the processes of socially constructing rights more generally. We know that from the early modern period, African slavery played a fundamental role in structuring polities, economies, and social hierarchies. As such, its expansion and destruction in the nineteenth century must be considered integral to political history.⁴⁴ These were links between slavery, capitalism, and political formations that Afro-American, Afro-Caribbean, and Afro-Brazilian intellectuals long made apparent.⁴⁵ The more recent literature on abolition has poignantly captured the forcefulness through which the enslaved and their allies hastened the ending of slavery.⁴⁶

Accordingly, this newer historiography has yielded novel insights into the social struggles over legal rights.⁴⁷ For example, referring to Cuban slavery, historian Alejandro de la Fuente writes: “Slave owners realized that any right that slaves could claim came at the expense of the master’s dominion and therefore at the expense of their own rights.”⁴⁸ To be sure, the continual back-and-forths about rights in the last decades of Brazilian slavery, between the enslaved’s right to freedom and a citizen’s right to property made it apparent to all that rights-claiming was a contentious matter in itself and not a fixed or predictable endeavor. Legal records in general and freedom lawsuits in particular have for the past thirty years or so illuminated previously unknown aspects of the social history of slavery. In the absence of large collections of slave narratives or oral-history projects, these documents have best revealed the enslaved’s perspectives on abolition. The richest of these studies have brought out facets of slave agency, the texture of everyday life, and from there problematized other major historiographical concerns. Scholarship on gender and manumission, for example, has focused the importance of moth-

erhood and family discourses within women's claims for freedom, which had been undertheorized in the Brazilian literature. What thus started as works on slaves' strategies for freedom therefore also became important references for thinking about gender more broadly. In this book I part from a concern with the enslaved's struggles for freedom to rethink wider developments in political citizenship.

This book also dialogues extensively with the new political history of Latin America and, more precisely, with the rich and properly historicized discussions on citizenship in the nineteenth century. This literature crystallized in Latin America during the 1980s and 1990s amid contemporary processes of democratization. Scholars have returned to the nineteenth-century histories of Argentina and Mexico, or Colombia and Peru for example, and used studies on associations, elections, the public sphere, the press, and militias to reassess how we account for the history of political struggle in Latin America. For Brazil, historians have noted greater degrees of popular political participation than what was previously assumed. Hendrik Kraay's recent work on civic celebrations in Rio de Janeiro, for example, documented that these "may have brought more people into politics than did voting or other political activities."⁴⁹ As such, this book deepens our understanding of this type of political history by probing the effects of the slavery debate, specifically on the process of citizenship.

If usually understood as a juridical prescription of rights and responsibilities, citizenship also entails a cultural dimension in that it must be demonstrated and recognized. One historian of Mexico cogently summed this legal-performative duality in writing: "del ciudadano podríamos decir . . . no nace, se hace."⁵⁰ Essentially, the citizen is not born, but rather made. It is this performative facet that political theorist Michael Saward posits as crucial to understanding citizenship. He argues that "a [legal] status must be enacted—claimed, invoked, clarified, even disputed—in order to persist and develop."⁵¹ As an analytical category, the study of citizenship offers an in-depth analysis into how institutions and social actors interact in fashioning the meanings of rights, belonging, and political participation at a particular juncture in time. This perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of political life than simply exploring citizenship as an index of electoral rights.

Meanwhile, some important caveats must be made explicit. Even though the precepts of modern liberal citizenship rest on the ideas of equality, universalism, and individualism, there is no pretense here that people participated as equals in the construction of citizenship or that changes in the legal definitions of citizenship brought disparities in race, gender, and class to an end; to the contrary, in fact, citizenship laws have been known to provide rich starting points for studies on hierarchies and inequalities. And, of course, cit-

izenship studies do not focus solely on citizens. People who were denied full or partial legal rights in nineteenth-century Brazil (e.g., the enslaved, women, and children) also made claims on citizenship and, in doing so, expanded the political field for everyone. A focus on citizenship formations thus highlights, rather than obscures, the fact that the shaping of political boundaries occurs within contexts of uneven power relations.⁵²

In dealing with the history of abolition through the prism of political citizenship, a markedly different view of Brazilian politics emerges. Whereas the tendency has been to think of a weak or largely inactive Brazilian citizenry throughout the nineteenth century, I incorporate the approaches used for other parts of Latin America to highlight the political ferment enacted through associations, the press, theater, legal arena, and elections.⁵³ We know from thinkers of the period that citizenship included activities ranging from voting and petitioning to journalism and forming associations.⁵⁴ The practices and ideals of citizenship were thus never solely defined by voting rights, though elections themselves were a regular part of the political process. I thus cross these dynamics with the developments transpiring within formal political bodies—provincial legislative arenas—to analyze the openings and closures of the political arena within their proper context. The 1881 electoral law, and all of its exclusionary features, is typically marshaled as evidence to illustrate the former claim about an inactive political body. This measure introduced a literacy requirement that drastically curtailed participation rates. It also established an onerous registration process to verify eligibility and kept an income requirement. Brazil would not return to 1870s levels of voting until the 1940s, as historian José Murilo de Carvalho has perceptibly noted.⁵⁵

However, if one considers public involvement in elections more broadly, participation actually increased in the ten years after the 1881 law. Curiously, some politicians boldly ran for office on abolitionist platforms even knowing full well that the rank-and-file abolitionist public could not vote. Yet these “abolitionist campaigns” famously brought thousands out at a time for street meetings, spurred associational involvement, and fostered intense debates in the press. In appropriating city squares and voting spaces, popular participation prompted even more debate, new debates, I would argue, about who belonged and what constituted proper forms of creating opinion. Public enactments of citizenship thus mattered significantly in Brazil, entangled as it was with the abolition question; in placing this in larger context, it bears reminding that in neighboring Argentina, where male universal suffrage dated to 1853, men still voted in relatively low numbers. They chose instead other public means through which to participate politically.⁵⁶ In mid-nineteenth-century Colombia and Mexico, civic festivals, political clubs, petitioning, and

voting were all recognized ways of expressing citizenship.⁵⁷ Thus it should not be seen as an anomaly about Brazil, nor about other parts of Latin America, that despite the sometimes low voting numbers, the terms of citizenship were contentious and widely disputed.⁵⁸

Meanwhile, it was not as if men did not vote in Brazil prior to 1881, or as if elections were irregular. Low-income qualifications and the absence of racial restrictions made the polls accessible. Prior to 1881, 13 percent of the free population voted, which was well comparable to that of several countries in the north Atlantic. For example, in England, Italy, Portugal, and in the U.S. 1888 presidential elections, 7 percent, 2 percent, 9 percent, and 18 percent of the respective populations cast ballots.⁵⁹ As numerous historians have nevertheless noted, Brazilian elections were contentious, riddled with fraud, and violent; in reality, they amounted to public displays of power. I am not in any disagreement with such characterizations. Yet, from reading comparatively, it is the case that historians of Argentina, Peru, and the United States have also used similar language to describe elections in these respective countries, making it harder to pinpoint what was specifically “Brazilian” about the generally more volatile nature of elections in the nineteenth century.⁶⁰ Brazil’s 1881 law indeed fed and reflected the growing fears of poorer freedmen playing more active roles in elections.⁶¹ Once more, however, from a comparative perspective, the decrease in Brazilian voting after 1881 actually coincides with other state-driven attempts to harness popular political participation in the Americas. This was the case in Colombia with the *Regeneración*, in Peru with the “Aristocratic Republic,” in the latter stages of the Mexican Porfiriato, and in the United States with the abandonment of reconstruction. These trends underscore that late nineteenth-century Atlantic ideals of political modernity favored “enlightened” over “mass” political participation, ideals that crystallized in response to perhaps “too much” popular political participation in the previous period.⁶² The decrease in Brazilian voting is a major, though overstated, reason why it has been claimed that political citizenship remained comparatively low until the 1930s.

In reassessing the relationship between the histories of abolition and citizenship, I am not naïvely suggesting that the ending of slavery represented an incipient or founding moment of Brazilian democracy. The histories of political citizenship and democracy are neither linear nor cumulative.⁶³ If only a starting point for further reflection, Brazilians defined democracy in the nineteenth century as “a form of government where sovereignty resides with the people.”⁶⁴ This definition, strictly speaking, provided a way to make sense of the relationship between the state and society and the terms of governance. It cannot be regarded as a measuring device to identify “true” democracies, since nineteenth-century conceptions of the “people” were necessarily partial

and exclusionary and therefore fell far short of this ideal.⁶⁵ The abolitionist movement made claims on opinion and popular sovereignty, even while “the monarch’s constitutional powers were dominant.”⁶⁶

We could debate endlessly about whether Brazil’s constitutional monarchy and the “moderating power” afforded the emperor automatically excludes Brazil from historical conversations on democracy. On this, historian José Murilo de Carvalho has noted that although the moderating power made Brazil’s system less parliamentary than that of Britain, the Brazilian emperor possessed many of the special powers also recognized in republican presidentialism, where the head of state created ministries without needing legislative approval.⁶⁷ There are, doubtlessly, theoretical and practical specificities about the Brazilian case that must be made explicit (as I do throughout this book) that influenced the political struggles over participation, rights-claiming, and access to the state. Mimi Sheller’s observation, however, for the nineteenth-century Caribbean that “democratic movements could take place even in those historical settings most riddled with social injustice, economic inequality and violent repression” is also pertinent for thinking about democracy historically in Brazil.⁶⁸ It may make some readers less skeptical about this proposition if we consider that France’s own nineteenth-century cycles of monarchical rule have not dissuaded prominent scholars from thinking about its political swings in terms of democratization and de-democratization; furthermore, such political shifts have not precluded its consideration within larger studies of citizenship and democracy.⁶⁹

My point is that although democracy is typically not a starting point for thinking about the history of Brazilian abolition, it is a conceptual framework widely (and usually uncontroversially) used by scholars who work on the politics of other places, also during the nineteenth century, that were burdened by their own “undemocratic” realities. Ultimately, this is not about affixing a “democratic” label onto this or that political tradition, for this would obfuscate what are dynamic historical processes. Instead, this book should be seen as contributing to an ongoing critique of an epistemology that primarily conceives of the histories of the North Atlantic as the centers of democracy and citizenship; that not only could such processes *not* have flourished in Latin America, but also that we could not find empirical bases for asking big questions about democracy and citizenship in the South Atlantic. Moreover, I go beyond Brazil, to emphasize that the core features of broad political participation probed here strengthen the recent findings of historians James Sanders, Michel Gobat, and James Wood on the importance of democratic ideals and practices in nineteenth-century Latin America. Indeed, the political processes in such places as Uruguay, Mexico, Chile, and Colombia were at times more modern and inclusive—according to benchmarks of the time—than were

their counterparts in Europe that are privileged in comparative studies of citizenship and democracy.⁷⁰

SOURCES AND STRUCTURE

This book delves into the workings of citizenship from an unusually rich grouping of document collections in Recife. These materials range from the second-deepest newspaper collection in the country for the nineteenth century to a more modest preserve of judicial lawsuits for freedom; from the exceptionally rare records of two abolitionist societies (spanning four years each) to compelling data on abolitionist theater. These types of sources have simply not been crossed to this extent because of archival and other research-related constraints. They facilitate pursuing connections between social and political life, local and national developments, and the cultural and legal practices of citizenship.

Newspaper research best reveals how the abolition process played out in public life. I read the two main dailies of the era, the *Diário de Pernambuco* and the *Jornal do Recife*, for a twenty-year period and supplemented these viewpoints with a thorough consultation of the ephemeral press, which amounted to another sixty to eighty publications of varying runs. The large and small periodicals alike fueled discussions, controversies, and new expectations about citizenship. Lacking specific data on circulation rates, I infer the press's importance based on its voluminous production, rich anecdotal material about public reading practices, and the cultural importance ascribed to public expression. One history of the Pernambucan press estimated the publication of some seven hundred periodicals in Recife alone from 1876 to 1900.⁷¹ Newspapers reached subscribers in rural areas. Free cane workers, slaves, and the planters' families were all cognizant not only of the news but also of the importance of establishing one's identity in print.

The oft-cited 15 percent national literacy rate is too general for our purposes and flattens the evident differences between urban and rural areas. Also, too close a reliance on literacy rates to infer the press's importance gravely underestimates the very high levels of political literacy that existed. When considering an urban context more specifically, historian Humberto Fernandes Machado documented a literacy rate of around 50 percent for the imperial capital.⁷² In parsing out the 1872 census statistics for the municipality of Recife, and in focusing on the three urban parishes of the city where most political activity centered, I found an average literacy rate of 43 percent. In the Santo Antônio neighborhood, where the presses, commercial houses, and theater were located, that number stood at 57 percent.⁷³ From even this most basic reassessment of urban literacy, we thus note that a reading public indeed existed for the dynamic press of the period.

Document collections of abolitionist societies, freedom lawsuits, and theatrical dramas complement the view into the wide ramifications of abolitionism on political practice. The lawsuits detail slaves' awareness of opportunities for freedom and call attention to the wider group of lawyers, judges, witnesses, and freedpeople who comprised the movement. My interest is admittedly more qualitative than quantitative, for I am not positing an argument that these cases caused the ending of slavery. Rather, I focus on how slaves' personal struggles became politicized and a point of departure for discussing slavery in terms of political participation. Detailed records of abolitionist societies provide another captivating angle into the mobilizations, a type of source that is rarely available for Brazilian abolitionism. Two of Recife's leading associations, the Sociedade Nova Emancipadora and the Club Cupim, furnish an extraordinary look at the workings of Brazilian abolitionism. The Nova Emancipadora's (1880–84) activities best illuminate the quotidian processes of publicizing the abolition issue. The Cupim (1884–88), a radical abolitionist society of merchants, ex-slaves, law students, and raftsmen, transported fugitive slaves from Recife to port cities along Brazil's northern Atlantic littoral. Navigating coastal currents, this interracial abolitionist society operated the largest escape network in northern and northeastern Brazil. Reckoning with these and other associational groups, not in terms of whether they caused abolition but with respect to how they produced their own versions of belonging, we see associational culture as integral to reformulations of citizenship.

The production of abolitionist theater also provides rich insights into how contemporaries developed a shared sense of the problem of abolition. It elucidates a key mode in the making of an abolitionist public as well as sheds light on how this public imagined and viewed slaves' actions within the process of emancipation. The plays open an original window into the cultural sensibilities of the period and to the important place of the theater as a place and form of politics.⁷⁴

This book situates the abolition struggles within the political realities of the time. Organized chronologically into six chapters, it begins with an analysis of how abolition became a public issue in the late 1860s and captures the broad popular participation that was important to this process. Chapters 2 and 3 trace how the competing abolitionist and planters' mobilizations repositioned themselves in the wake of the 1871 gradual emancipation law. The remaining three chapters deal with the ebbs and flows of the abolitionists' and planters' mobilizations during the 1880s. They demonstrate how debates over citizenship remained public and contentious despite the 1881 restrictions on voting. It is evident, in the last chapter especially, that the abolition issue remained central to citizenship constructs in the postemancipation era and that new discussions about belonging and equality surfaced through how people

produced a memory that either legitimized or denied the recent histories of popular political mobilizations. The book ends with a brief exploration of the public controversies that erupted in 1988 amid the centennial of abolition. It highlights how in Recife, as in the rest of Brazil, the abolition issue remains a powerful basis from which to debate the boundaries of citizenship.