

O infame comércio: Propostas e experiências no final do tráfico de africanos para o Brasil (1800-1850). By JAIME RODRIGUES. Coleção Várias Histórias, vol. 6. Campinas, Brazil: UNICAMP, 2000. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. 238 pp. Paper.

Derived from the author's 1994 master's thesis, *O infame comércio* delivers several historiographical messages that remain valuable correctives to much of the scholarship on Brazilian slavery and particularly the termination of the slave trade to Brazil. He seeks to dismantle the tautological narratives that have long described the abolition of the slave trade as first and foremost a necessary step toward the abolition of slavery. Against such visions, Rodrigues suggests ways in which historians might place the project to end the slave trade between Africa and Brazil within the broad political and social context of the first half of the nineteenth century. Although the constitutive elements of his overall argument are at times less novel than he suggests, and although many of them have received more detailed treatment in recent scholarship, Rodrigues's book is still a vital contribution to the study of the end of the slave trade to Brazil, a hoary theme in the country's historical literature.

The book's greatest strength lies in its attempts to explicate the "proposals and experiences" mentioned in its title — the ideas and initiatives that both political elites and less obviously influential groups brought to bear in the final decades of slave trafficking. Indeed, the largest portion of the book sets out the range of elite projects on the suppression of the slave trade, maintaining an emphasis on the multiplicity of elite ideas about slavery and the slave trade. Thus, when laying out some elites' misgivings about the moral "corruption" that African slaves were allegedly doing to Brazil, Rodrigues places those attitudes in telling contrast to others who embraced (if hesitantly) indigenous and other free-born Brazilian workers and were willing, he argues, to view the "national" poor as a potentially salvageable and not inherently indolent labor force (p. 45). When discussing elite initiatives about the slave trade itself, he uses an admirably wide range of parliamentary debates and other published sources. Although he notably omits the directly relevant memoir of Rio Grande do Sul abolitionist Antonio José Gonçalves Chaves, he does interweave the voices of elites from not only Rio de Janeiro but also Goiás and other relatively marginal regions of the Empire. Within those sources, he focuses on four types of

programs: those that allowed for the end of the slave traffic but did not mention general abolition, those that treated the end of the slave trade as a boon to slavery, those that sought to keep the slave trade flowing, and those that simply saw Brazilian slavery and the Atlantic slave trade as separate issues. So strict is this emphasis, in fact, that it may lead the reader to suspect that Rodrigues downplays the impact of projects that did indeed see slave-trade abolition as progress toward the end of slavery. Still, the breadth of his research, and particularly his energetic insistence on the political context of elite positions, makes his case both persuasive and historiographically refreshing.

More purely suggestive are Rodrigues's observations about the role of British pressure, on the one hand, and of non-elites, on the other, in the contested and drawn-out death of the slave trade. Because he maintains his exclusively Brazilian perspective even when considering the question of English influence, he manages to get past a purely diplomatic analysis like that of Leslie Bethell's classic treatment. For Rodrigues, British declarations and warships mattered most because of the ways they galvanized the projects that he lays out in the first two chapters. This intense pressure from the outside sharpened Brazilian elites' concerns with preserving not only national sovereignty but also social hierarchies. He notes the emergence of the slave trader as a villain in elite discourse, which works nicely with the earlier section on elite fears of slaves themselves; together, these arguments point out the Brazilian slavocrat elite's tendency to blame anyone and everyone else involved in slavery for the ills that the institution brought to the country. Rodrigues's overall take on the role of British pressure does not ultimately diverge greatly from that of other scholars who have revisited the topic in recent years. At the same time, however, Rodrigues wants to integrate a wide swath of the Brazilian population in the history of the slave trade and its demise. His attempts to differentiate the "public" who participated in the trade—from the large merchants who shipped humans as cargo to the poor workers who off-loaded the enslaved along the Brazilian coast—are evocative. He certainly does not provide the reader with the kind of links between popular actions and the end of the slave trade proposed by Sidney Chalhoub and Dale Graden, for instance, or the precise evidence of popular influences that Jeffrey Needell has demanded. Rodrigues simply urges historians to look for new ways to ground the slave trade in complex understandings of social and political realities.

Rodrigues may not be the first historian to note that Brazilian policymakers in the first half of the nineteenth century lacked a clear consensus on whether or not to end the importation of enslaved Africans-or what such a step might mean. His work is nevertheless a clarion call for a more nuanced and more Brazil-centered political history of the death of the slave traffic between Africa and Brazil. Although more speculative than definitive in some of its conclusions, *O infame comércio* remains essential reading for scholars of nineteenth-century Brazilian politics and the Atlantic slave trade.

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