

Dutra's World: Wealth and Family in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro. *By Zephyr L. Frank.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004. 230 pp. Illustrations, figures, tables, bibliography, notes, index. Cloth, \$45; paper \$22.95. ISBN: cloth 0-8263-3410-5; paper 0-826-33411-3.

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In *Dutra's World*, Zephyr L. Frank explores the central paradox of Brazilian modernization during the nineteenth century: that increasing inequality followed it. The trend is illustrated in the difference between the life of Antonio José Dutra, an African slave, and the lives of his descendants. Their stories are told in the context of nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro society. In the process, Frank examines the social and economic structure of that time, analyzing wealth accumulation, death, dying, family structure, and gender.

After living as a slave in the 1810s, Dutra probably had the opportunity to buy his freedom with money he had accumulated by working in Rio de Janeiro, mainly as a barber and a small-time entrepreneur. By the time of his death, he had amassed significant assets, including thirteen slaves. However, his descendants did not enjoy similar opportunities.

Frank compares two different periods of nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro. Although slavery was an established institution during the first fifty years, the urban environment offered opportunities, such as easy access to credit, for freed slaves to achieve upward mobility. In some cases, they acquired slaves themselves. During the second half of the century, wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few, and after slavery was abolished in 1888, the population descended from Africa had to compete on unfavorable terms with European immigrants. The author notes that "the world of the 1890s was much better in normative terms without slavery, but, in practical terms for middling wealthholders and freedmen alike, it may have been indifferent or worse" (p. 14).

Frank drew from more than a thousand post-mortem inventories, distributed over five periods: 1815 to 1825, 1845 to 1849, 1850 to 1860, 1868 to 1873, and 1885 to 1889.

He is careful, however, to observe the limits of what these documents can tell him about the residents of the city.

Nevertheless, Frank analyzes in some depth the assets that contributed to their wealth, tracing changes in the composition and concentration of their wealth. Financial assets, especially stocks and bonds, underwent more growth in later years, but they were distributed more unequally. Slaves were more important both to individuals with fewer holdings and to women in the mid-nineteenth century. Almost everyone in the middle-income groups had at least one slave, evidence of the diffusion of slavery throughout the society. Indicators for wealth concentration were strong among those inventoried, although it is not clear that they were able to increase their wealth over the course of the century. The fact that Dutra's pathway to wealth was no longer possible in the second half of the nineteenth century does not mean that other routes did not exist. Without the need to buy their freedom, Afro Brazilians had a head start over the previous generation. Additional studies of the period are needed to demonstrate Frank's provocative thesis that slaves of the earlier period had a better chance of achieving upward mobility.

The reader learns few details of Dutra's early life in Brazil, such as the time of his arrival, the identity of his master, how he managed to achieve his freedom, and his experiences during his first years of freedom. Nor has the author provided any documentation to prove that Dutra obtained his freedom through his own efforts.

Some of Frank's assertions are controversial, such as his claim that there was considerable growth in the city's slave population (p. 6). Frank refers to the census of 1821 and 1849, but he apparently did not consult the census for either 1834 or 1838, which indicate a smaller rate of growth. Historical demographers point out that the census for the decades of 1830 underestimated population growth, while the census for 1840 overestimated these numbers. This gap becomes apparent from figures showing that the total population of the city increased from 206,000 in 1849 only to 275,000 in 1872, and that the slave population underwent a reduction in absolute terms. Since the later census was more refined, it seems unlikely that the capital of the empire grew so little during the years between 1849 and 1872.

Another point of controversy is that the vision expounded of the Paraíba Valley already in decadence in the 1860s (pp. 90–1) is questioned in recent literature, especially

by Robert Slenes (see his “Grandeza ou decadência?” in *Brasil: história econômica e demográfica*, 1986, pp. 103–55). A final caveat is that Brazilian readers might think that the book’s title refers to the family of former president Eurico Gaspar Dutra, who was born in the nineteenth century.

Frank points out a number of ironies in this account of Dutra’s life (p. 168). For one thing, even though slavery was an institution based in exploitation and coercion, some former slaves were nevertheless able to make their fortunes once they were emancipated. For another, fortune, like freedom, can be unstable. Economic changes throughout the century brought about rapid deterioration in the fortunes of middle-income groups and led to the concentration of wealth with the development of the coffee economy and the transformation of social institutions.

This book is a useful first step toward understanding the development of Brazilian society in the nineteenth century, but the topic awaits further research by historians of the period.

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