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Introduction

> The bourgeoisie . . . has been the first to show what man's activity can bring about. It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals; it has conducted expeditions that put in the shade all former exoduses of nations and crusades.
>
> —KARL MARX AND FRIEDRICH ENGELS, 1848

SLAVE LABOR WAS central to the making of the modern world. It gave Europeans the means to occupy and develop the Americas. The trade in slaves helped merchants accumulate capital that was reinvested in agriculture, industry, and infrastructure. Slave plantations produced the sugar, cotton, and coffee that propelled the industrial revolution in the North Atlantic countries. As the nineteenth century progressed, slaveholders acquired new lands and more slaves. They deployed the powers of the state to build sprawling inland empires and protect their property. The power of the lash ensured that enslaved people would keep working until their deaths.

The United States and Brazil, the two major independent slave societies in the Western world, were the main beneficiaries of the expansion of slavery. By the 1850s, at the apex of the system, the former enslaved approximately four million people, the latter nearly two million. Slavery fueled the economies of both countries, producing valuable agricultural commodities for the global market. Slaveholders wielded great political power in both states, occupying key positions in their central as well as local governments. Whereas societies like Haiti and Jamaica experienced economic decline after emancipation, American and Brazilian elites grew richer and more powerful by exploiting enslaved Africans and their descendants.

Its efficiency and profitability notwithstanding, slavery eventually collapsed in these two countries. The United States, shaken by a bloody separatist war and the mass flight of enslaved people from Southern plantations, led the way in the mid-1860s. Brazil, agitated by a mass abolitionist movement that included free and enslaved people, followed suit in the late 1880s. But neither of these two societies was caught off guard. On the contrary, as slavery unraveled in the western hemisphere, Americans and Brazilians came together to stimulate and direct this transformation. This book traces how a cosmopolitan group of antislavery reformers connected these two emancipation processes to boost capitalist development in both countries. It argues that modern capitalism emerged not from the remaking of slavery in the nineteenth century but from its unmaking. Between the 1850s and the 1880s, American and Brazilian antislavery reformers succeeded in creating economic systems that surpassed anything that slave societies had ever created.

The crisis of slavery in the Western world was intertwined with the expansion of industrial capitalism. Previously restricted to a few regions of the North Atlantic, such as the textile-producing centers of Lancashire and New England, industrial capitalism began to expand by the middle of the nineteenth century. Railroads reached into the interior of continents, and steamships crossed oceans, transporting countless human beings and commodities. Nation-states at once regulated their economies, protecting certain industries and building infrastructure, and tore down barriers to the movement of capital, labor, and goods. Pressured by labor shortages or workers' demands, trying to catch up with domestic or international competitors, or simply enthusiastic about the newest inventions, entrepreneurs applied science and technology to production. As time went by, steel, fertilizers, the assembly line, streetcars, petroleum, telegraphy, harvesters, futures markets, electricity, and many other innovations revolutionized the global economy.

Of course, the rise of industrial capitalism was not a story of unmitigated prosperity. Periodic busts—the most dramatic being the long depression beginning in 1873—were constitutive parts of this capitalist boom. In the long run, however, crises led to more innovation and greater growth. For developing countries disadvantaged by Great Britain's free-trade policies, periods of recession offered a valuable opportunity to refashion national economies and create new international networks. Economic nationalism and new forms of

cosmopolitanism sprang up at the expense of British interests in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Perhaps more important, a highly unstable economic system made an almost inexhaustible workforce available to the owners of capital. Having their livelihoods constantly disrupted by boom and bust cycles, massive contingents of working people entered the ranks of the proletariat. Although uneven and protracted, proletarianization was a global phenomenon that accelerated as the nineteenth century progressed. New technologies, integrating markets, changing legislation, expanding credit mechanisms, demographic pressures, recurrent wars, and environmental degradation combined with periodic economic collapses to dissolve traditional communities. As the historian E. P. Thompson puts it, "The experience of immiseration came upon them in a hundred different forms."[1] And so immiserated human beings had no choice but to search wherever they could go for someone who would pay for the labor power contained in their arms and legs.

A group of American and Brazilian reformers sought to make their societies compatible with and integrated into the brave new world opening before their eyes. These men were bourgeois modernizers, determined to swiftly develop productive forces within their countries and simultaneously speed up the flow of commodities, capital, ideas, and human beings across international borders. They were immersed in what the historian Eric Hobsbawm describes as "the drama of Progress, that key word of the age: massive, enlightened, sure of itself, self-satisfied but above all inevitable."[2]

Living in the richest and most expansive slave societies in the Western world, these modernizers singled out slavery as the main impediment to the full development of their countries. Unimpressed by the slaveholders' achievements, they argued that slave labor was backward and irrational. Fearlessly, they insisted that the downfall of slavery and the triumph of free labor in the form of the wage system would lead to the emergence of unparalleled agroindustrial empires. These changes, they believed, would promote investment, attract immigrants, and encourage innovation. The new order would redistribute labor and capital in more rational ways. For these reformers, antislavery was not a romantic quest to free an oppressed race; it was rather a modernizing project that would build strong nation-states and prosperous capitalist economies.

The modernizers pointed to several problems that made slavery into a burden in the age of industrial capitalism. They often compared slave societies with free societies. The United States was a case in point: Brazilian as well as American antislavery reformers used the census, travel narratives, and even

the writings of Southern proslavery ideologues to demonstrate that, in the antebellum period, the free North was superior to the slave South in manufacturing output, population growth rates, transportation and urban infrastructure, literacy levels, educational facilities, number of registered patents, and more. Even in agriculture, the enterprise that Southerners were most proud of, the North displayed advantages. Antislavery reformers pointed out that the free states were well ahead in the number of farms, improved acreage, average value per acre, value of farming implements and machinery, productivity per acre, productivity per worker, and total agricultural output.[3]

To claim, like many proslavery ideologues did, that slavery was indispensable to produce the commodities that made the world go round seemed ludicrous to these modernizers. They understood capitalism as a system whose main feature is constant change and adaptation. They argued that alternative fibers could replace cotton, alternative stimulants could replace coffee, and alternative sweeteners could replace cane sugar. More important, they believed that wage earners could replace slaves in plantation agriculture, producing even more cotton, coffee, and sugar than slave labor produced. Their goal was not to uproot plantation agriculture in Brazil or the United States but to make it more dynamic and efficient, while better integrating agricultural commodities into national and global networks of trade, production, and consumption.

As for the apparently declining postemancipation Caribbean, the antislavery reformers were confident that vast, diverse, and autonomous countries such as Brazil and the United States would not suffer the fate of colonial islands. In fact, these modernizers contended that it was slavery that made plantation areas play the role of colonial societies, sacrificing their own development to supply manufacturers—especially the British—with cheap agricultural commodities. Antislavery reformers lamented that slaveholders were attached to the power of human muscle, unable to take full advantage of the mechanical advancements of the age. They understood that although planters could (and sometimes did) adopt industrial technology on their plantations, they had little incentive to save the labor of enslaved people, who received no wages and held no formal rights. Worse, slave societies were unable to invent and produce the technologies they needed, having to constantly import machines and implements from free-labor societies. In short, the modernizers saw slavery as a counterproductive embarrassment.

American and Brazilian antislavery reformers felt that the institution of slavery held their enterprises and their societies back in an age of progress. They argued that slavery had to be eliminated so that industrial capitalism

could flourish in plantation areas. Surveying the problem of slavery in the British West Indies, the historian Thomas Holt writes that "while historians might conclude retrospectively that slavery was logically compatible with capitalism, the men who fashioned the emancipation law completely rejected that notion."[4] The same was true for the men who forged the process of emancipation in the United States and Brazil.

American Mirror traces how, as the problem of slavery shook their countries, American and Brazilian antislavery reformers acted concertedly to turn upheaval into opportunity. This transnational modernizing collaboration crossed four decades, beginning in the 1850s, when the United States was about to erupt into a destructive conflict over the extension of slavery, and triumphing in the late 1880s, when Brazil completed its gradual emancipation process. In addition to famous antislavery activists, like John Greenleaf Whittier and André Pinto Rebouças, this reform movement included broader social forces that opposed slavery, bringing together businessmen, diplomats, engineers, journalists, lawyers, merchants, missionaries, planters, poets, politicians, scientists, students, and teachers.

However diverse their backgrounds, the main characters in this book shared important attributes. They belonged to ascending national bourgeoisies, having much of their training, businesses, and political activities connected to growing urban centers such as New York, Rio de Janeiro, Chicago, and São Paulo. They nonetheless maintained ties to the rural world, seeking to export to plantation areas the expertise and technology developed in the cities. In the United States, they usually supported the Republican Party. In Brazil, most were dissidents within the Liberal Party, and some were members of the Republican Party. Most of these antislavery reformers were entrepreneurs of some sort: they devised infrastructural projects, produced agricultural commodities, engaged in foreign commerce, managed factories, published periodicals, and established private schools. They were also brokers, connecting people with shared interests and similar ideas across the hemisphere. This book traces their trajectory and influence. It shows how, by building networks between the United States and Brazil in the age of emancipation, they triumphed where proslavery advocates failed.

A new wave of scholarship posits that by the middle decades of the nineteenth century American slaveholders had risen as modern capitalists and powerful

policy makers. Southern proslavery advocates apparently found no match for their influence at home and abroad. Slaveholders' success in covering the Mississippi Valley with cotton plantations and influencing the American government, some historians claim, served as a model for planter elites elsewhere.[5] When scholars look at the second largest slave society in the Western world, they argue that the success of American slaveholders reassured Brazilian planters that unfree labor would indefinitely expand. Powerful Brazilians thus embraced the strategies and worldviews of the slave South.[6] Proslavery forces emerge from this scholarship as hemispheric hegemons.

American Mirror challenges the argument that proslavery advocates offered viable projects of national development or international cooperation. The analysis of US-Brazilian relations demonstrates that, among several other frustrations, powerful Southerners utterly failed to attract the most obvious partner to the proslavery cause. The argument that slave labor was the basis of modern civilization, and that without it the United States and Brazil could not produce their main staples, did little to allure Brazilian planters, who had been experimenting with free labor since at least the 1840s. Moreover, Brazilians understood that the cotton-producing American South had little to offer them in terms of products, technology, and expertise. Further souring this relationship, Southern proslavery expansionists treated Brazil as an inferior society available for manipulation and conquest in the decades leading to the American Civil War and during the conflict. Not surprisingly, Brazilian elites kept their distance from the slave South.

Antislavery Northerners, on the other hand, succeeded in befriending slaveholding Brazil. Frustrated by the reactionary stands of Southern cotton planters before and after the secession crisis, Northerners found in the Brazilian slave society a new chance to vindicate their vision of gradual emancipation. Thus, the same people who attacked and ultimately crushed slavery in North America took a constructive approach to the process of slave emancipation in Brazil. Recognizing an opportunity to form profitable alliances, reform-minded Brazilians—a group that included wealthy slaveholders—did not hesitate to welcome Northern influence. It was clear to anyone willing to see it then that the free North was at the forefront of innovation. The Brazilian elite understood that whereas Southern slaveholders were desperately fighting for a lost cause, Northern antislavery reformers were shaping the future in their own image.

In addition to addressing the failure of proslavery projects, this book engages with the growing historiography on the abolitionist struggle in the

western hemisphere. Questions pertaining to the broadening of the public sphere, the strengthening of republicanism, the emergence of social movements, and the advancement of civil and political rights occupy the most recent works on antislavery in Brazil and the United States. Scholars propose that the campaign against slavery in these countries was a constitutive part of a Western phenomenon inaugurated by the political revolutions of the late eighteenth century and advanced by nineteenth-century popular struggles. They further argue that the fight against slavery anticipated trends that would give rise to the discourse on human rights.[7]

Although a valuable contribution to the study of political change, this scholarship overlooks the importance of antislavery movements to the making of capitalism. *American Mirror* contends that the struggle against slavery in the United States and Brazil was a constitutive part of "the drama of Progress." The need to expand markets, build infrastructure, integrate the countryside with the city, spread technical education, and set up industrial enterprises animated the antislavery reformers. The most consequential legacy of antislavery in the western hemisphere was an economic order based on the exploitation of wage earners. Whereas democratic participation and human rights remained distant aspirations for millions of impoverished people in their countries, American and Brazilian antislavery reformers succeeded in expanding capitalist production and trade.

This book also contributes to discussions of American foreign relations in the period extending from the Civil War to the Spanish-American War. For decades, the so-called Wisconsin School set the tone of the debate, arguing that overproduction in the post–Civil War era inexorably led Americans to aggressive commercial expansion and imperialist intervention abroad.[8] In response, a new wave of works proposes that the road to imperial expansion was not predetermined. Scholars now argue that uncertainty and improvisation marked American actions in the global arena during the second half of the nineteenth century. Americans demonstrated a pungent anxiety about their marginal role in a globalizing order and found themselves playing by the rules of stronger powers, especially Great Britain. Unable to defeat the Old World empires, scholars conclude, the United States increasingly became more similar to them. As time wore on, Americans embraced an Anglo-Saxon identity that distanced themselves from Latin America.[9]

The current approach to foreign relations tends to obscure Americans' role in refashioning capitalism in Latin America and Latin Americans' creative

appropriation of American capital and expertise. This book incorporates a Latin American perspective into the making of American foreign relations. And it does so by examining how class interests aligned across national borders. It shows that the demands and interests of the Brazilian planters helped shape the ascent of the United States to global power in the late nineteenth century. By advancing the modernizing projects of the Brazilian elite, American antislavery reformers were able to forcefully challenge European empires and strengthen capitalist enterprises at both ends of the hemisphere.

Situated at the intersection of studies on proslavery politics, abolitionism, and foreign relations, *American Mirror* proposes that antislavery reformers engaged in a transnational process of class formation, which tied seemingly disparate groups such as manufacturers in the American North and planters in the Brazilian southeast. In addition to expanding markets for their products abroad, these groups collaborated in the search for new ways to control and exploit the working masses. The great transformation that these modernizers brought about in the late nineteenth-century world was the widening of the divide between a cosmopolitan coalition of owners of capital and a growing class of impoverished workers.

By investigating how the American North engaged with the Brazilian slave society, this book shows that antislavery laid the groundwork for a long-term and highly profitable partnership between capitalists from the most powerful countries of the western hemisphere. However influential Americans became among Brazilian elites, the United States established neither a formal nor an informal colonial relationship with Brazil during the nineteenth century. And precisely because they did not have the upper hand in their relationship with Brazil, Americans learned invaluable lessons in capitalist expansion. Together, American and Brazilian antislavery reformers elaborated newly efficient forms of labor exploitation in Brazil's coffee regions, making Brazilian coffee planters all the more powerful. In the process, American manufacturers acquired an avid consumer for their products, and American merchants secured a reliable supplier of cheap coffee.

American influence also helped Brazil in its long effort to counter British imperialism and limit its reliance on British capital. Shrewdly, antislavery Northerners presented themselves as a benign alternative to British abolitionists, who had long been flexing their imperial muscle against Brazil's

interests.[10] Instead of patrolling the Brazilian seacoast with warships and imposing invasive treaties on Brazil, as Great Britain had done for decades, the American North offered technology and expertise that would ease Brazilian planters' reliance on slave labor. Working alongside Brazilian reformers, Northerners were able to portray the United States as a modernizing force and challenge the overbearing influence of the British Empire in the western hemisphere.

Free labor in the form of the wage system was not the natural or inevitable replacement for slave labor. The working poor in the nineteenth century tried to push freedom well beyond the point that elites wanted it to go, seeking to acquire land, tools, or anything that would give them a high degree of independence. This tendency contradicted projects to build expansive trade networks, large-scale commercial agriculture, and advanced industrial enterprises. Thus, in reaction to the workers' struggle for self-sufficiency, other forms of unfree labor, like peonage and convict labor, were tested in communities of ex-slaves in the Americas and expanded in Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe throughout the nineteenth century.[11]

Yet despite persisting pockets of unfree labor that endure today, wage labor eventually became the fulcrum of capitalism, spreading from the cities to the countryside, from the center to the periphery, conquering all branches of the global economy. For half a century after the historian Eric Williams published his seminal *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944), some remarkable studies sought to explain why the battle against slavery gave rise to a mode of production based on wage labor. Either by engendering new forms of labor discipline, imposing urban interests on rural societies, encouraging inland and overseas migrations of formally free workers, or liberating capital and commodity flows, the dismantling of slavery resulted in a labor system that forces the majority of humanity to sell their labor power to a minority who owns plantations, mines, factories, or other productive facilities. Far from representing the ultimate salvation of the working class, the wage system serves well the interests of powerful capitalists.[12]

Because of their agricultural might, long dependence on slave labor, and aspirations to develop and integrate vast territories, the United States and Brazil became prime testing grounds for the deployment of formally free workers—white and black, native-born and immigrant—to advance capitalist enterprises. As antislavery reformers from these two countries came together,

the question became how to make the slaves' cause into the capitalists' cause. Hence, their transnational antislavery struggle went hand in hand with projects to concentrate capital, develop infrastructure, privatize natural resources, strengthen corporations, foster domestic and international commerce, regulate labor migration, and defeat working-class movements. In the end, antislavery reformers contributed to making the free poor and freedpeople into wage earners and building capitalist enterprises that slave societies could not have dreamed of creating.

Drawing on the scholarly tradition initiated by Eric Williams, this book examines how the transition from slave to free labor advanced capitalist relations of production in the United States and Brazil. Antislavery reformers did not envision free labor as self-reliance and small proprietorship. These modernizers took advantage of the crises of emancipation in the largest slave societies of the Western world to advance an economic system based on the concentration of capital in the hands of very few and the destitution of the working masses. With a few exceptions (who usually saw the problem too late), the antislavery reformers who appear in *American Mirror* were not concerned about the well-being of slaves, proletarians, or any member of the working class. The central argument of this book is that these bourgeois modernizers, in their struggle against slavery, were in fact making, normalizing, and entrenching free labor in the form of the wage system.

Born in the coffee-growing region of São Paulo to a planter family, José Custódio Alves de Lima studied at Syracuse University in New York during the 1870s. In 1878, he wrote that "the American Union is a mirror in which the Brazilian must look if he wants to contribute his part to the material development of the country."[13] The mirror metaphor comes in handy when exploring relations between the United States and Brazil in the second half of the nineteenth century. For Northerners, Brazil became a mirror of what the American South could have been if only cotton planters had accepted the supremacy of free labor and had embraced gradual emancipation. For Brazilians, the American North and its extension to the American West became a mirror of what Brazil could become if coffee planters made the right choices, phasing out slavery while modernizing and diversifying the economy.

The mirrors in this story also offer a reflection on transnational history. Auspiciously, the transnational approach has already entered the academic

mainstream. This trend has revitalized the discipline, and excellent studies have been published during the last two decades. Yet, with few exceptions, transnational historians, while emphasizing exchange and mobility, give little thought to broader processes simultaneously shaping the lives of different societies around the globe. In other words, transnational studies are very effective at describing the circulation of people, commodities, ideas, and technologies, but rarely discuss structural changes such as the emergence of the modern state or the consolidation of the capitalist mode of production.

Seeking to understand structural changes as well as mobility and exchange, this book draws on works that have applied the principles of political economy to transnational analyses. According to Richard Franklin Bensel, political economy "is a combination of *economy* and *state policy*," forming "a dynamic organizing structure within society that shapes the potential replication of social groups and activities, and thus determines the developmental trajectory of the nation."[14] The most successful works of transnational history show that, under capitalism, the *economy* engenders a global market, recruits highly mobile workers and experts, and creates industrial centers along with suppliers of raw materials. They further demonstrate that, in the modern world, *state policy* continuously responds to the policies of other states and the pressures of international movements and institutions. As a result, the *transnational political economy* emerges as a dynamic organizing structure within a connecting world that shapes the potential replication of—national and international—social groups and activities, and thus entangles the developmental trajectories of different nations.[15]

This book is divided into two parts. Part I moves from the height of proslavery expansionism in the United States, in the 1840s, to the beginning of gradual emancipation in Brazil, in the early 1870s. Chapter 1 discusses how proslavery Southerners' foreign policy alienated the Brazilian elite and ruined any possibility of a proslavery alliance emerging. Antislavery Northerners, on the other hand, succeeded in bringing Brazilian society closer to the Union by portraying Brazilian slaveholders as progressive planters willing to phase out slavery and modernize their economy. Chapter 2 shows how shared anti-British sentiments created an alliance between Brazilian Liberals and American Republicans during the American Civil War. Whereas American diplomats took the Brazilian side in the geopolitical imbroglios of the time, American

entrepreneurs invested in transportation infrastructure in Brazil and the two countries established steamship communication. Chapter 3 focuses on the influence of Massachusetts intellectuals on Brazil in the late 1860s. Relying on friendly antislavery figures from the American North and attentive to what had happened to the American South, the Brazilian political elite embraced a project of conservative modernization.

Part II extends from the beginning of Reconstruction in the United States, in the late 1860s, to the remaking of labor on the Brazilian coffee plantations after the Golden Law, in the late 1880s. Chapter 4 examines three groups of Americans who settled in the Oeste Paulista, the fastest growing coffee-producing region of Brazil, after the American Civil War. They were ex-Confederates who took up mixed commercial farming, manufacturers from the American North who established industrial enterprises, and Protestant missionaries who built private schools for the planters' children. All of them contributed to the modernizing projects of the local elite. Chapter 5 reconstructs the trajectories of Brazilian men who visited, studied in, or worked in the United States during the 1870s. Enjoying the hospitality of Northern capitalists, Brazilian observers celebrated the consolidation of wage labor and bought into Liberal Republican projects to favor big capital in North America. Chapter 6 addresses the seemingly contradictory connections between an expanding market for slave-grown Brazilian coffee in the United States and the American contribution to slave emancipation in Brazil. Whereas the coffee trade became a most lucrative enterprise for American businessmen and the temperance movement used coffee to discipline the working class in American cities, Brazilian planters used money from the coffee trade to improve their plantations and complete the transition to wage labor.

Neither in the United States, where slave emancipation happened suddenly and violently, nor in Brazil, where all the major industries relied on slave labor until emancipation came, did the demise of slavery create a profound crisis. On the contrary, thanks to the work of antislavery reformers, the postemancipation history of these two countries was one of immediate and continuous economic advancement. From the outbreak of the secession crisis in the United States to the signing of the Golden Law in Brazil, American and Brazilian antislavery reformers worked side by side to create economic systems based on industrial technology, scientific expertise, and wage labor. They did not wait for slavery

to crumble, but intentionally replaced it with a more dynamic and efficient mode of production. The accomplishments of this transnational group of modernizers confirmed what Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels had already seen in 1848, when they wrote that "the bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society."[16]

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