Other Geographies of Struggle: Afro-Brazilians and the American Civil War

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Abstract This article approaches Brazil as a forgotten Atlantic battleground of the American Civil War. I explore armed confrontations of Union and Confederate vessels along the Brazilian coast as well as slave flight to North American ships to understand how the war inspired slaves to imagine their captivity undone in Brazil. In the 1860s, Afro-Brazilians rebelled at the sight of warships like the CSS *Sumter* in Maranhão or ran away to New England whalers in Santa Catarina, believing either that North American ships carried troops ready to uphold the abolition of slavery or that they would allow the enslaved to claim the principle of free soil. Afro-Brazilian geopolitical literacy, therefore, points to the importance of Brazil as a cradle of antislavery as well as a sounding board for a war that reverberated in all corners of the African diaspora.

On September 6, 1861, as warfare raged across the United States, the CSS *Sumter* arrived on the roadstead outside the port of São Luís, the capital of the northeastern province of Maranhão, in the Empire of Brazil. Founded by the French in 1612, conquered for Portugal in 1615, taken by the Dutch in 1641, and then reconquered by the Portuguese four years later, São Luís was a cosmopolitan island community located just two degrees below the equator. In 1861, 28 percent of the town's 31,604 residents lived in bondage alongside a sizable free population of color who daily crisscrossed narrow streets as if stitching the urban economy together.[1] Afro-Brazilians steered vessels, labored in residences, sold foodstuffs, transported cargoes, and, in the case of slaves, were boarded themselves as commodities of the internal human trade supplying

An early version of this article was presented at the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition at Yale University. I am thankful for the comments and insightful questions of Marcela Echeverri, Michelle Zacks, David Blight, and Edward Rugemer. Writing for this article has also been funded by the Institute for Advanced Study of the Americas at the University of Miami. Additionally, I am deeply grateful to Scott Heerman, James N. Green, Michael Vorenberg, Roquinaldo Ferreira, Timothy Van Compernolle, and the editors and two anonymous reviewers of *HAHR* for their useful suggestions.

1. The data used here comes from Brazil's first national census, conducted in 1872. The province of Maranhão had 359,040 inhabitants in 1872, of whom 284,101 were free and 74,939 slaves. *Pardos* (people of mixed race) and blacks comprised the majority of residents, adding up to 244,494 people. Diretoria Geral de Estatística, *Recenseamento*, 24–26.

Hispanic American Historical Review 100:1
DOI 10.1215/00182168-7993078

labor for the thriving coffee regions of Rio de Janeiro. Amid the vibrancy of waterfront life, black maritime workers would have been among the first locals to spot the *Sumter* in the port. The "American vessel" was the first Confederate cruiser to escape the federal blockade of the Mississippi River and had already made the news in Brazil as it aggressively descended into the South Atlantic.[2]

In the early 1860s, most Brazilians remained unsure about what to make of the American Civil War (1861–65). While it was initially described in the newspapers as the product of a national political crisis that had fractured the United States, it would soon become clear that the conflict's emphasis on slavery could very well influence the course of abolition in South America's largest slave society.[3] In June 1861, Emperor Pedro II declared Brazil's neutrality in the American Civil War, at once carrying on diplomatic relations with the Washington government and conceding belligerent status to the Confederacy. In other words, Brazil aligned itself with the European policy of respecting Abraham Lincoln's blockade of the South yet reconciled impartiality "with the duties of hospitality demanded by humanity" whenever faced with a Confederate cruiser on its coast.[4] Such policy complicated the Brazilian diplomatic stance by making hospitality a flexible concept. Across maritime provinces, local authorities struggled to remain neutral when confronted with Americans' polarizing views on slavery and opted instead to tread carefully the divide between the abolitionist North and the slaveholding South with which Brazil had so much in common. Thus that September Maranhão officials dismissed a formal protest penned by aggrieved US consul William Hill Grath and

2. *Jornal do Commercio* (Rio de Janeiro), 4 Sept. 1861, p. 1. Brazilian newspapers began tracking the *Sumter*'s movements in April 1861, widely reporting on its voyages to Cuba, Trinidad, and Suriname.

3. Brazilian historians have paid special attention to the role of the American Civil War in launching political discussions that culminated in the passage of the country's Free Womb Law in 1871. Moniz Bandeira, *Presença dos Estados Unidos*; Toplin, *Abolition of Slavery*; Azevedo, *Abolitionism*; Pena, *Pajens da casa imperial*; Chalhoub, *Machado de Assis*; Chalhoub, *A força da escravidão*; Salles, *E o vale era o escravo*; Machado, *Brazil through the Eyes*; Machado and Castilho, *Tornando-se livre*; Machado, "Os abolicionistas brasileiros."

4. Benevenuto de Magalhães Taques to Brazilian provincial presidents, Rio de Janeiro, 1 Aug. 1861, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro (hereafter cited as AN), Série Justiça (hereafter cited as SJ), IJ1-754. Other South American countries, including Argentina and Colombia, remained more firmly within the Union's sphere of influence but also refrained from recognizing Confederate ships as pirates. Although publicly upholding the privileges of Brazil as a neutral nation, Secretary of State William Henry Seward never ceased to urge the country to display a firmer attitude against the Confederacy.

let the *Sumter* refuel in São Luís before sailing north to Saint Thomas, in the Danish West Indies.[5]

On September 7, 1861, accompanied by fireworks and cannon salutes performed by the Brazilian navy in commemoration of their country's Independence Day, the *Sumter* finally hoisted the Confederate flag above Brazilian waters. Fully equipped for war and with nearly 200 men on board under the command of Raphael Semmes, the privateer lingered in port for nine days, securing close to 100 tons of coal and three months' worth of travel supplies. Less than two weeks passed before a Union vessel, the steam frigate USS *Powhatan*, docked at São Luís proudly floating the Stars and Stripes from her peak. Directly embroiling Brazil in the politics of wartime, Captain David Dixon Porter threatened to capture the *Sumter* and "drag it away under the purview of Brazilian fortresses and warships," but it was too late.[6] The captain learned from the Afro-Brazilian pilot who first greeted his crew at the harbor's entrance that the *Sumter* had already gone to sea, leaving behind streets overflowing with impassionate talk about the war in the United States.[7]

What Brazilians called the *Sumter* incident, Washington named the Maranhão affair. Either way, the near miss between the two ships was the first in a series of maritime incidents that transformed Brazil into a battleground of the American Civil War. Over the 1860s, Confederate cruisers and Union merchant ships bombarded each other in sight of Brazilian shores, routinely landed prisoners or procured provisions in port cities, captured and towed war prizes at their convenience, recruited crew members, and even engaged the Brazilian navy in the cross fires of sectional clashes. In the process, several American lives were lost and ships were set ablaze on Brazilian shores in clear violation of international law. The mere presence of US warships forced Brazilians to grapple with the implications of Northern antislavery and Southern proslavery internationalism at a time when abolition remained firmly outside their country's official political agenda. In the sway of such maritime skirmishes, tensions flared up between fearful masters and slaves conversant with the winds of abolitionism, revealing the fallacy of noninvolvement. For Afro-Brazilians used to probing the points of contact between Brazil and the world, naval warfare seemed to announce that change was afoot.

5. William Hill Grath to William Henry Seward, São Luís, 25 Sept. 1861, Arquivo Histórico do Itamaraty, Rio de Janeiro, Legações do Império do Brasil, Washington, DC, 233-03-11.

6. *New York Herald* (New York), 10 Nov. 1861.

7. Porter, *Naval History*, 616.

US naval incursions in Brazil left a vast paper trail in the archives of both countries. A trove of memorandums, letters, and newspapers records diplomatic disputes around the infringement of Brazil's sovereignty and Union accusations of Brazil abetting Confederate piracy.[8] Union and Confederate ship captains, for their part, have published lengthy accounts of their missions in South America, which function today at once as diaries, ethnographies of the nineteenth-century Atlantic, and full-blown nationalist pamphlets in their own right.[9] Nonetheless, embedded in these same records is yet another story that still needs to be told, one that goes beyond charting the American Civil War's importance for interstate diplomacy to fully consider it within the framework of the African diaspora. In the 1860s, the enslaved peoples of Brazil linked concrete iterations of the US conflict in the South Atlantic to the inner workings of their freedom struggles and rebelled at the sight of warships like the *Sumter* in Maranhão, ran away to US whalers in Santa Catarina claiming the principle of free soil, and widely invoked the hemispheric value of African American freedom.

This article explores the place of a divided United States in what I call the Afro-Brazilian geopolitical imagination.[10] Focusing on two major spaces and forms of slave activism in the 1860s—organized rebellion in Maranhão and slave flight to US whalers in Santa Catarina—I study how American naval presence gained new meanings in the retelling performed by slaves and free people of color in Brazil.[11] In 1861, geopolitical knowledge of the US war became a material force in Maranhão when Afro-Brazilians organized an uprising on the banks of the Mearim River, 60 miles away from São Luís.[12] The

8. On American war vessels in Brazil during the 1860s, see Hill, *Diplomatic Relations*; Ferris, "Relations of the United States"; McPherson, *War on the Waters*.

9. See, for example, Semmes, *Cruise of the Alabama*; Porter, *Incidents and Anecdotes*; Porter, *Naval History*.

10. My examination of Afro-Brazilian geopolitical literacy borrows insights from the works of social geographers and historians concerned with issues of power in the production of space. Scott, *Common Wind*; Harvey, "Sociological and Geographical Imaginations"; Linebaugh and Rediker, *Many-Headed Hydra*; Troutman, "Grapevine in the Slave Market"; McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*; O'Donovan, "Trunk Lines."

11. The 1861 Anajatuba slave rebellion has been mentioned in overviews of slave resistance in Brazil but has not received in-depth treatment. Martha Rebelatto has pioneered the study of slave flight to Union whalers in Santa Catarina, and Beatriz Mamigonian, Joseane Vidal, and Walter Piazza have written about slavery in the province. Gomes, *A hidra e os pântanos*; Rebelatto, "Uma saída pelo mar"; Piazza, *A escravidão negra*; Mamigonian and Vidal, *História diversa*.

12. The Mearim River originates in the south of Maranhão but drains north into São Marcos Bay, where it meets the Atlantic Ocean passing by São Luís.

idea that the *Sumter* would provide troops in support of black liberation in Brazil spread from "clubs"—a term applied by the police—formed by black freedmen in the capital to the inland villages of Anajatuba and Viana, traveling south on waterborne trading routes leading to a region that would ironically benefit from the global economic realignment sparked by the American Civil War.[13] In 1861, Anajatuba was a small village of 3,205 residents organized along four streets revolving around the central Rosary Church.[14] Cattle raising, alongside cotton, sugar, and tobacco growing, dominated the village's surroundings, spreading out 78 miles west toward Viana, a more significant town on the edge of the Turiaçú woodlands on the border with Pará province. With a population of 8,397, Viana sat at the heart of a network of long-standing runaway settlements, or *quilombos*, and one in every four of its inhabitants were slaves. Having proclaimed themselves free in anticipation of US armed support, Afro-Brazilians fled sugar plantations or refused to work for their masters in 1861, which makes clear that US commerce raiders and ironclad ships bore the marks of an Atlantic battle over abolition that directly implicated the Brazilian empire.[15]

Along with outright rebellion, Brazilian slaves also invoked American abolitionism by fleeing in great numbers to US whalers stationed in the province of Santa Catarina, the center of Brazilian offshore whaling. There, slaves expected to be emancipated upon stepping onto those patches of free soil floating in Brazilian slave territory. Americans had long been part of the history of Santa Catarina, where they routinely stopped during the 1850s on their journeys to the California gold rush. Now caught in the context of war, US vessels energized pathways to freedom crafted beneath the surface of daily life. Like rebellion accounts, these stories of slave flight contained in archival documents are fragmentary, transnational, and sometimes discontinuous given the violent nature of the judicial encounters shaping slave testimonies.[16] The

13. With the interruption of Southern cotton production between 1861 and 1865, Brazil became one of the biggest exporters to the British market, sending its white gold overseas directly from the slaveholding Northeast. In 1860 and 1861, only 43,000 bales of Brazilian cotton arrived in Britain each year. In 1863, the figure jumped to 56,000 bales and then burgeoned to 95,000 bales in 1864 and 138,000 bales by 1865. Egerton, "Rethinking Atlantic Historiography," 83. See also Beckert, "Emancipation and Empire," 1406.

14. Of these residents, 751 were slaves. Mattos, *Almanak administrativo*, 33.

15. Francisco Primo de Sousa Aguiar to Francisco de Paula de Negreiros Sayão Lobato, São Luís, 17 Oct. 1861, AN, SJ, IJ1-754.

16. The scholarly debate about the archive of enslavement is broad and deeply international. Some voices in this debate are Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*; Brown, "Social Death and Political Life"; Gikandi, "Rethinking the Archive of Enslavement."

Brazilian slave regime, it is true, rendered only some forms of knowledge documentable but could not craft narratives of black revolt without some degree of relation to slave epistemologies. They insinuate themselves through the records as references to alternative historical benchmarks, ways of navigating geographic space, notions of belonging, and modes of envisioning historical change.

Afro-Brazilian activism brings to the fore a kind of vernacular knowledge of the world of nineteenth-century reform organized by the themes that African descendants deemed relevant to their own freedom struggles. Such expertise defies the disciplinary and linguistic boundaries often applied to the study of abolition in Brazil, as it does not fit neatly into either national frameworks or comparative overviews assigning Brazil a peripheral role in the formation of Atlantic abolitionism. Much has now been written about the global impact of the American Civil War, but very little of this new historiography is informed by Portuguese sources relating to Brazil or takes Afro-Brazilian activism into account.[17] If there is an overarching story about abolitionism, it is the narrative of Anglo-American antislavery unfolding within a global capitalist order in which Latin America as a whole is, at best, secondary. However, as the first and longest-lasting slave society in the Americas, Brazil deserves a more prominent place in such reflections. That the enslaved in Maranhão and Santa Catarina assumed that Americans had come to Brazil as ambassadors of abolition suggests that the histories of the Lusophone and Anglophone Atlantic were much more entangled than historians have cared to notice.[18] Their movements, too, are evidence that Brazil was once an important cradle of antislavery as well as a sounding board for a war that reverberated in all corners of the African diaspora.[19]

A Forgotten Battleground of the American Civil War

In 1861, captains David Dixon Porter of the USS *Powhatan* and Raphael Semmes of the CSS *Sumter* served as two very different faces of the United

17. When mentioned, Brazil is considered in terms of its place in the world economy. See Doyle, *American Civil Wars*; Doyle, *Cause of All Nations*; Hahn, *Nation without Borders*.

18. For works that take an Atlantic approach to American Civil War history, see Rugemer, *Problem of Emancipation*; Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire*; McDaniel and Johnson, "New Approaches"; Marquese, "Civil War"; Doyle, *Cause of All Nations*; Hahn, *Nation without Borders*.

19. On the extensive historiography of slavery and abolition in Brazil, see, for example, Azevedo, *Abolitionism*; Albuquerque, *O jogo da dissimulação*; Chalhoub, *A força da escravidão*; Cowling, *Conceiving Freedom*; Alonso, *Flores, votos e balas*; Castilho, *Slave Emancipation*.

States in Maranhão. Born in Pennsylvania, Porter was the son of a US naval hero in the War of 1812 and followed in his father's footsteps when he joined the US Navy during the Mexican-American War (1846–48). In the 1860s, while on blockade duty in the Mississippi, he helped recapture the USS *Abby Bradford*, the first prize ever taken by the *Sumter*. From the crew on board the recaptured ship, Porter learned about the *Sumter*'s next movements and secured permission to chase the privateer down the South Atlantic. Whenever abroad, Porter purported to wield the national power of the United States and seriously condemned what he saw as international compliance with the Confederates' predatory warfare methods.[20] Semmes was also a veteran of the Mexican-American War, but one born into a slaveholding family from Maryland and who had gone on to become himself a slave master in Mobile, Alabama.[21] In 1861, Semmes abandoned the US Navy and received a letter of marque from the very hands of Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederate States of America (CSA). He then set out to sea aboard the *Sumter* with a firm conviction that, in order to win the war, the South needed to internationalize the conflict by attacking the Northern merchant navy abroad.

Once in Brazil, Semmes sought to cut across the country's foreign policies and to appeal to a sense of slaveholding solidarity.[22] During a personal interview with the governor of Maranhão, Francisco Primo de Sousa Aguiar, Semmes asked for safe passage with the purpose of obtaining supplies indispensable to completing his trip, thus drawing on long-established subterfuges used by mariners to overcome imperial rivalries, warfare, and prohibitions against the slave trade.[23] Slavers often claimed distress at sea to dodge into waters where the slave trade was legally prohibited, the argument of choice for Confederate privateers stopping at neutral ports in Latin America during the American Civil War.[24] In Maranhão, Semmes also presented himself as a commissioned officer of the CSA and warned Governor Aguiar that the American Civil War "was in fact a war as much [on] behalf of Brazil as of ourselves, and that if we were

20. Porter, *Incidents and Anecdotes*, 37; Porter, *Naval History*, 602.

21. Semmes rented out slaves to cut timber and owned three domestic servants in his home in Mobile. McKenna, *British Ships*, 19; Fox, *Wolf of the Deep*; Hill, *Diplomatic Relations*.

22. On the Pan-American imaginary of Southern slave masters, see Horne, *Deepest South*; Guterl, *American Mediterranean*; May, *Union*; May, *Slavery, Race, and Conquest*; Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*; Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire*.

23. The term used during the Second Reign (1840–89) for the chief administrator of a Brazilian province was *president*, but to avoid confusion I have translated it as *governor*.

24. Merchant ships sometimes had two names and two flags in order to fend off the British navy or to avoid paying taxes. Borucki, *From Shipmates to Soldiers*; Carvalho, "A rápida viagem."

beaten in the contest, Brazil would be the next one to be assailed by Yankee propagandists."[25] Semmes viewed himself as a quasi diplomat, confident in broadcasting Southern ambitions of an alliance with Brazil that could strengthen both parties against Northern militarism and British abolitionism. Brazilian authorities, however, responded dubiously to Semmes's call for unity. Governor Aguiar granted his request for entry in São Luís but "delicately insinuated" that he would prefer that the *Sumter* not salute the Brazilian flag on Independence Day, a gesture that could be interpreted as formal recognition of the Confederacy as a friendly nation.[26]

Semmes's affinity with Brazil was moderated by his belief, left unstated at the time, in Anglo-Saxon superiority, which led him to later reminisce about the "set of half-breeds" whom he had encountered in Maranhão.[27] His opponent Porter also cultivated racialized impressions of the country. For instance, he inferred from the fact that he had not been granted an official visit Governor Aguiar's sympathy for the Confederacy; during their stay in Brazil, Porter complained, the *Powhatan*'s officers communicated solely with black lower officials.[28] Brazil would have looked quite familiar to Semmes indeed, as slaveholding elites continued to fend off the international abolitionist threat through an alliance between state and capital.[29] With ready access to growing European and American markets, Brazilian coffee, sugar, cotton, and diamonds propelled slave labor to a remarkable level of profitability and gave the empire a prominent place in the expansion of the capitalist world economy.[30] Like the US South, Brazil was a thriving second slavery economy, with the particularity that its society was shaped by widespread contraband trade and illegal

25. Semmes, *Cruise of the Alabama*, 36.

26. Bueno, Paranhos, and Macedo, *Pareceres dos consultores*, 233.

27. Semmes, *Memoirs of Service Afloat*, 210. On Semmes's passage through Brazil, see Beattie, *Punishment in Paradise*. For a discussion of his proslavery view as he descended into the Caribbean to fight against "Yankees and British propagandists," see Jung, *Coolies and Cane*, 74.

28. Porter, *Naval History*, 616.

29. Historians of Brazil have long discussed the cessation of the slave trade to the country, and they have either focused on the centrality of British pressure or emphasized domestic forces like slave rebellions or yellow fever epidemics in shifting public opinion against the trade. On the first set of views, see Needell, *Party of Order*; Parron, *A política da escravidão*; Bethell, *Abolition*. For an emphasis on subaltern cultures, see Chalhoub, *Cidade febril*; Slenes, "A árvore de Nsanda"; Graden, *Disease, Resistance, and Lies*; Mamigonian, *Africanos livres*; Rodrigues, *O infame comércio*.

30. Marquese and Parron, "Internacional escravista"; Marquese, "Capitalismo, escravidão e a economia cafeeira"; Tomich, *Slavery and Historical Capitalism*.

enslavement taking place over the years that the country was legally bound to prevent the smuggling of Africans.[31]

Instead of curbing the further expansion of slavery, the abolition of the slave trade in various countries transformed South America's only monarchy into an even larger market for enslaved Africans. Alongside Cuba, Brazil received the slaves who could no longer enter the United States, the British colonies, and the independent republics of Latin America. US nationals played an important role in keeping this trade alive through the provisioning of ships, crews, capital, and a safe flag for Brazilian slavers to sail by. More than half of all illegal slave disembarkations in Brazil between 1831 and 1850 took place with some form of US participation, a rarely told tale from the golden era of the North American shipbuilding industry.[32] Moreover, coffee linked the United States to the center of the Brazilian slave economy—the Paraíba Valley, a thriving commodity-producing frontier straddling the border of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo provinces. In the 1860s, that region turned Brazil into the largest coffee grower in the world, with US middle- and working-class consumers as its primary export market.

All over the Brazilian empire, black labor sustained the position of a planter class who continuously supported state centralization. Ideologically, Brazilian elites from the Liberal and Conservative parties supported the continuation of slavery and jointly advanced the most glaring contradiction of Brazilian liberalism: a constitutional monarchy that feared the leveling potential of ideas of popular sovereignty and representative government and actively sanctioned the illegal enslavement of Africans.[33] If given the choice, both Liberals and Conservatives would have liked slavery to continue indefinitely in Brazil or, at the most, to come to an end in the distant future, gradually and preferably from a natural death.

It is no coincidence, then, that both Porter and Semmes denied the existence of Brazilian neutrality on the ground in Maranhão, pointing out that Confederates were quite popular in the empire. In the neighboring province of Pará, for example, the *Jornal do Amazonas* concurred with this assessment, reporting on the curiosity generated by the presence of the American "separatist ship" in São Luís. "Great commotion [has been] caused in this port by the arrival of the war vessel *Sumter*," noted a reporter, and "to everybody's awe here,

31. It is believed that close to 760,000 Africans arrived in Brazil between 1831 and 1856 as a result of illegal trade. Mamigonian, *Africanos livres*.

32. Marques, *United States*, 143.

33. Parron, *A política da escravidão*.

it is very comfortably obtaining coal before continuing on pirating."[34] Lodged at the Hotel do Porto, Semmes routinely ran into Brazilians who enjoyed talking about the war. He commented repeatedly on the "excited imaginations of the townspeople" of São Luís, marveling that "the whole town is agog discussing our affairs."[35] As the *Sumter*'s officers wandered "on liberty" across the urban space, Semmes observed, "nothing was thought, or talked of, during our stay, but the American war."[36]

David Dixon Porter went even further to diagnose "the people of Maranhão from the Governor down" as having gone "*Sumter* mad" in 1861. He attributed the general distrust of the *Powhatan* to the fact that "Brazilians sympathize almost to a man with the secessionists, under the impression that the South was fighting the battle of Brazil—fighting to protect their property in slaves."[37] Among those who had gone "*Sumter* mad," but in a quite different way, were the slaves and freedpeople (*libertos*) of Maranhão. Together, they organized a substantial rebellion following the *Sumter*'s departure that radiated from São Luís to the hinterlands of Anajatuba and Viana and the westward municipality of Turiaçú, a densely forested area on the border with Pará province. One of more than 60 slave uprisings to rock the Brazilian empire in the first half of that decade, the 1861 uprising emerged from the strong tradition of black associational life in São Luís.[38] Underground political clubs assembled by libertos functioned as the tip of communication networks that channeled political commentary from the Maranhão seaside to slave quarters inland. At one such meeting organized by these clubs, the slave Agostinho heard about the *Sumter*. He then rushed back to Anajatuba to alert others to the fact that freedom was on the way, for "they only waited for the war steamer to disembark her troops." Arrested and tortured at his master's request, Agostinho further revealed that "he had told his peers that they would all be free, for he had heard so from several blacks at the capital," and they only waited for American troops to come ashore.[39]

It may seem odd to us today that the *Sumter*, a ship belonging to the proslavery republic in rebellion against the United States of America, led slaves to imagine their captivity undone in Brazil. A word of caution, thus, is necessary.

34. *Jornal do Amazonas* (Belém), 16 Sept. 1861, p. 2.

35. Semmes, *Cruise of the Alabama*, 36.

36. Semmes, *Memoirs of Service Afloat*, 214.

37. *New York Herald* (New York), 10 Nov. 1861.

38. This includes an 1864 slave rebellion in Minas Gerais also sparked by the American Civil War. Furtado, *Relatório*; Mota, "O 'vulcão' negro."

39. Aguiar to Lobato, São Luís, 17 Oct. 1861, AN, SJ, IJ1-754.

Enslaved Africans and Brazilian-born blacks had geopolitical cause to favor the Union, but their interpretations of the US conflict did not always show such nuance. In the eyes of Brazilians, the open and notorious involvement of New England shipbuilders and captains in the African slave trade made it difficult to distinguish between Northern and Southern wartime ideologies. State officials would be better versed in notions of a war raging between free Northern states and the slave South, but such divisions were elusive among the population of Atlantic seaports. In 1861, even Maranhão authorities were surprised to learn about the existence of "two 'United States'" and their different flags, a notion introduced by Semmes.[40] Thus, Afro-Brazilians often followed the American Civil War with hope, picturing Americans as their all-powerful allies, undivided, in the struggle for liberty at home and abroad.

Agostinho firmly believed in this American commitment to Atlantic abolition. The creole slave of a retired elementary teacher and cattle rancher named Cristóvão de Santiago Vieira, Agostinho developed his cosmopolitan worldview without ever having left Brazil. Like so many Afro-Brazilians, he borrowed from a long-standing slave political culture crafted from the memorialization of black Atlantic history.[41] Agostinho was probably a self-hired slave who formed his opinion about the Americans as he traveled the trade routes connecting Anajatuba's rural economy to São Luís. It is also possible that he had access to rumors disseminated via newsprint. Brazil was then a semiliterate country, yet Afro-Brazilians were skilled users of written culture and participants in a gamut of informal learning activities that included divination practices and artifacts, numeracy, letter writing, and book copying, among others. The enslaved, in particular, envisioned emancipation as a measure to be actualized in written form, and they resorted to the collective reading of newspapers to determine the timing of their activism.[42] In 1864, for instance, literate slaves who read about the US war in the pages of *O Jequitinhonha* led more than 400 rebels from the neighboring towns of Serro and Diamantina in Minas Gerais, Brazil's richest

40. Porter, *Naval History*, 615. When the *Sumter* arrived in São Luís, the port admiral sent a representative on board to inquire about the ship's flag, since he did not recognize the emblem of the Confederacy. Porter, 615.

41. Afro-Brazilians had always been attuned to international events. Marcus J. M. de Carvalho recounts, for instance, that in 1846, Pernambuco authorities found references to Haiti and "English America" in the Bible of free black and enslaved followers of the creole Agostinho José Pereira, the Divine Master. Flávio dos Santos Gomes and João José Reis also explore in detail the repercussions of the Haitian Revolution in Brazil. Carvalho, *Liberdade*; Reis and Gomes, "Repercussions of the Haitian Revolution."

42. On slave literacy in Brazil, see Wissenbach, "Cartas"; Graham, "Writing from the Margins"; Mac Cord, Araújo, and Gomes, *Rascunhos cativos*.

diamond-mining region, to believe that, just like their fellow African Americans, they had been freed by Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. In 1865, slaves who "had newspapers" at a sugar plantation administered by the Carmelites in the outskirts of Belém, Pará, did the same.[43] Literate or not, Agostinho belonged to a larger political subculture that identified the American Civil War as an important step toward abolition. At the very least, we know that he worked alongside older literate slaves like Raimundo, who would have had access to press coverage of the *Sumter*'s passage.[44]

Agostinho embodied a covert system of knowledge conveyance that often overlapped with the infrastructure of slavery. His cognitive maps were not mere abstractions but rather interpretive frameworks closely intertwined with physical geography.[45] As a hired-out slave, Agostinho interacted with persons of varied social positions and thus reached across geographical, social, and cultural boundaries. Along with maroons, mobile slaves like him often initiated the streams of conversations that reached far into the Brazilian interior, where plantations connected to larger urban systems. In the case of Maranhão, sugar and cotton had to be transported from the countryside to São Luís for shipping or sold along with manioc and corn to local food suppliers enmeshed in local networks of market relations. Furthermore, slaveholders had their economic base in the country, but their social and military ties bound them to the city, where they usually maintained a second house. Planters rarely lived in the country all year round, and the servants who accompanied them to and from the city became valuable sources of news to their peers.

News of the American Civil War quickly spread from their epicenter in Anajatuba to the maroon communities of western Maranhão. In November 1861, two months after the *Sumter*'s departure, slaves in São Luís's outskirts reveled again in the certainty of freedom. This time, they talked about "a liberty that had been granted to them by an American warship that, not being able to free them the first time, will be back soon, and then freedom will be posted by

43. João Vieira Couto de Magalhães (governor) to Antônio de Macedo Costa (archbishop of Pará), São Luís, 10 July 1865, AN, SJ, IJ1-792.

44. In August 1862, the same Cristóvão de Santiago Vieira who owned Agostinho advertised in the newspaper a reward for Raimundo, who was so skilled with words that he tried to pass as a lawyer. *A Coalição* (São Luís), 7 Aug. 1862, p. 4. Agostinho spent almost more time in jail than at work for his master. After his imprisonment in 1861, he was arrested at least three more times in the next six years, on accusations of drunkenness, violating the evening curfew, and taking part in bar fights around São Luís. *Publicador Maranhense* (São Luís), 26 Dec. 1866, p. 2; *Publicador Maranhense* (São Luís), 7 May 1867, p. 2.

45. For a discussion of how the geopolitical imagination emerges from lived experiences, see Bassi, *Aqueous Territory*.

announcement on the door of the church."[46] Afro-Brazilians ushered in 1862 with renewed talk of insurrection. In the town of São Bento, those still inspired "by news of the events in America" planned to rise up, as did the maroons of the São Vicente do Céu quilombo, the greatest focus of insurrection in a province ablaze with talk of a war over slavery in the United States.[47]

Located on the eastern extreme of the Amazon basin, the São Vicente do Céu quilombo had been founded by escaped slaves who lived off mining gold in the Maracassumé River.[48] This was an area of dense equatorial forest spread along three river systems that flowed north some 100 miles to empty into the Atlantic Ocean. In the course of the Maracassumé, the Gurupi, and the Turiaçú, nature-carved groves and hamlets attracted African-descended peoples escaping slavery who eventually developed ties with indigenous peoples and local traders. As mariners in coastal Brazil, the maroons of São Vicente do Céu acted as privileged carriers of information about the Americans and played a vital role in shaping the political climate in Maranhão. Their webs of commerce and escape routes functioned as channels of communication, extending into the outskirts of the towns of Santa Helena and Viana.

In January 1862, fears of a generalized black rebellion inspired by the US war pushed provincial authorities to raid the quilombo where over 400 people were said to live. Lieutenant Máximo Fernandes Monteiro from the military colony of Gurupi commanded a force of 52 soldiers and 50 national guardsmen, who traveled on foot for days to locate the community in the woods of Viana.[49] They found the quilombo empty, though, for the maroons had been forewarned by local traders. Lieutenant Monteiro described the São Vicente do Céu quilombo as a "colossal settlement" located on top of a hill, stretching 601 yards deep and 216 yards wide.[50] Seventy-eight residential houses, one sugar mill, six ovens for processing manioc flour, one weaver's cottage, and a big house of worship decorated with a large cross and flowers comprised what was in fact a peasant settlement. Soldiers in awe of the quilombo's wealth reported seizing

46. José Cândido Nunes (sheriff of Viana) to Júlio César Berenguer de Bittancourt (chief of police of Maranhão), Viana, 4 Nov. 1861, AN, SJ, IJ1-754.

47. Nunes to Bittancourt, 4 Nov. 1861, AN, SJ, IJ1-754.

48. Cleary, *Anatomy*; Gomes, *A hidra e os pântanos*; Araújo, *Insurreição de escravos*.

49. The military colony of São Pedro de Alcântara do Gurupi was established in 1853 as a government outpost for the colonization of western Maranhão. Its mission was to safeguard navigation of the Gurupi River by extinguishing quilombos and converting local indigenous populations. Máximo Fernandes Monteiro to Raimundo Benedito Muniz (sheriff of Viana), Viana, 22 Feb. 1862, AN, SJ, IJ1-754.

50. Monteiro to Muniz, Viana, 22 Feb. 1862, AN, SJ, IJ1-754.

over 1,000 chickens, 46 dogs, 69 pans to mine gold, and 50 cauldrons along with harvests of manioc, cotton, rice, and tobacco. Following standard practice, the raid ended with the burning of all residences—though soldiers mindful of their Christian God were careful to leave the cross in the house of worship intact. Very few prisoners were taken, however. The maroons relocated to other smaller quilombos throughout Turiaçú, keeping rumors of rebellion alive in northern Brazil.

At the end of February, black unrest sparked by "the two combatants at war in the United States" spilled from Maranhão to the neighboring province of Pará, reaching the ear of the minister of justice.[51] This suggests why the new governor of Maranhão, Antônio Manoel de Campos Mello, assumed his post a month later with the promise of definitively extinguishing Viana quilombos as the paramount measure to enforce law and order during the American Civil War. "I take this matter seriously," Mello pondered, because the slave population "on which the denouement of the war of the South of the American Union is bound to make an impression is still large, since just the coming of the *Sumter* and the evilness or imprudence of some propagated dangerous ideas."[52]

During the 1860s, the American Civil War changed the context in which Afro-Brazilian resistance occurred, pushing slaves and free blacks to imagine their own struggles against bondage as enmeshed in an international context. Afro-Brazilians continued to rebel against their masters at the sight of American warships along the Brazilian coast or as news of African American emancipation spread via the sea and literate blacks with access to newspapers. The magnitude of the war conveyed the urgency of emancipation, something Afro-Brazilians envisioned not as a single act but as the product of an ongoing transnational struggle fought on multiple battlefronts. The intricacies of American sectional politics in this case lost importance in light of a broader evaluation of Atlantic geopolitics that fed into time-honored black cosmologies. Much like African Americans, Afro-Brazilians functioned within a culture of expectation that included a millenarian aspect: they viewed slavery as a constant state of "war against the whites" that was bound to end catastrophically.[53] Expecting the worst, however, did not lead to inaction. Quite on the contrary, the imminence of abolition allowed for the projection of a new future in which Afro-Brazilians would play a deeply political role.

51. Francisco Carlos de Araújo Brusques (governor of Pará) to Francisco de Paula de Negreiros Sayão Lobato, Belém, 28 Feb. 1862, AN, SJ, IJ1-792.

52. Antônio Manoel de Campos Mello to Francisco de Paula de Negreiros Sayão Lobato, São Luís, 12 Mar. 1862, AN, SJ, IJ1-754.

53. Blight, "They Knew What Time."

After the *Sumter*, Confederate vessels continued to head to Brazil in search of harbors of refuge from which to launch attacks on Union merchant ships. The sheer profit that Brazilians stood to make from outfitting and supplying Confederate and Yankee ships might have led coastal authorities to overlook the formalities of maintaining Brazil's neutral status. In 1863, the Confederate ships *Georgia*, *Alabama*, and *Florida* made their way to Bahia, and the USS *Mohican* docked first in Santos and then in Desterro, where the governor mistook it for the Confederate *Alabama*.[54] In Salvador, Bahia, American naval presence inspired Afro-Brazilian editors to release two newspapers between 1863 and 1864: *O Alabama* and the short-lived *O Mohican*, whose only declared goal was to "be in pursuit" of the political commentary published by *O Alabama*.[55] Wherever they stopped, Confederate raiders were allowed to refit and gather supplies, land prisoners, and haul prizes, sometimes beyond the limits determined by their belligerent status. Union ships, for their part, constantly challenged the limits of Brazilian sovereignty. In October 1864, the Union gunboat *Wachusett* captured the CSS *Florida* in the waters of Bahia, leaving many casualties on the Confederate side and causing a major diplomatic incident with Brazil.[56] Popular anger at the *Wachusett*'s actions prompted "a crowd of common people" to attack the American consulate in Salvador, "knocking down the American Coat of Arms, and breaking it into pieces."[57]

Thus, Afro-Brazilians continued to look to the sea for hope and to inhabit the world of storytelling and daily politics that turned Brazil into a theater of operations of the American Civil War. Their interest in the United States, however, preceded the sectional conflict. Slaves like Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua had long valued ships as interfaces with the Atlantic geography of slavery and freedom. In 1847, Baquaqua learned about US free territories from an Englishman aboard a Brazilian schooner transporting a coffee cargo to New

54. Oliver S. Glisson (captain of USS *Mohican*) to James Watson Webb, Rio de Janeiro, 23 July 1863, Yale University Library, New Haven, Manuscripts and Archives, James Watson Webb Papers, box 11.

55. "Catalogo dos jornaes bahianos," 551. *O Alabama: Periódico Crítico e Chistoso* was published by Afro-Bahian editors Aristides Ricardo de Santana, José Marques de Souza, and Francisco Alves da Silva Igrapiuna from 1863 to 1890. The newspaper chronicled with humor the daily life of Salvador and became notorious for its mapping of urban candomblés. I have only identified one edition of *O Mohican*, dating from January 21, 1864, as indicated in "Catalogo dos jornaes bahianos," 551.

56. *A Coalição* (São Luís), 22 Oct. 1864, p. 1.

57. Richard C. Parsons (US consul) to James Watson Webb, Salvador, 8 Oct. 1864, Yale University Library, New Haven, Manuscripts and Archives, James Watson Webb Papers, box 14.

York, where Baquaqua eventually escaped bondage with the assistance of the New York Vigilance Committee.[58] His peers in Brazil continued to orient their activism according to the notion of free soil and took advantage of their knowledge of wartime geopolitics to claim freedom aboard the same Union whalers targeted by Confederate privateers on the Brazilian coast. In so doing, they joined a transatlantic tradition that had shaped abolitionist politics since the Age of Revolution and extended into the era of British slave-trade suppression campaigns in Brazil. Much like Royal Navy cruisers, Union whalers came to constitute nodes of Atlantic seafaring escape, which linked black networks of communication and experience all over the Americas.[59]

"Embarking with the Americans"

Whaling ships have a well-known place in American Civil War history. Either as vectors of Union strategy (as in the Stone Fleet's blockade of Charleston Harbor) or as the floating stage for adventurous captains escaping Confederate cruisers around the world, Yankee whalers loom large in narratives of the era. In the aftermath of the war, many of them continued to descend into Brazilian waters, now connecting US Reconstruction with Afro-Brazilian freedom struggles. Whaling ships were especially numerous in Santa Catarina, a Brazilian province located midway between the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires. Bordering Argentina to the west and the Atlantic Ocean to the east, this province encompassed both a swath of continental territory and the island that housed the province's capital, Desterro (present-day Florianópolis). In 1855, this administrative and military center of the province had 5,611 residents, of which about 25 percent were enslaved.[60]

Santa Catarina hardly conjures up traditional images of Brazilian slavery. The province flourished as an important node in the domestic market for foodstuffs, exporting staples like manioc flour, sugar, and rum especially to the province of Rio de Janeiro. Although part of Atlantic commercial circuits since colonial times, Santa Catarina never developed the kind of plantation economy seen in other parts of the empire. The province's diversified economy, however, also depended on

58. The West African Baquaqua authored the only biography written by an African enslaved in Brazil (published in 1854). Law and Lovejoy, *Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua*.

59. Historians of Caribbean slavery have explored this phenomenon as maritime *marronage*: Heuman, *Out of the House of Bondage*; Scott, *Common Wind*.

60. "Mappa aproximado da população da província de Santa Catharina," in Coutinho, *Relatório do presidente*.

slavery, which existed alongside the free labor of European immigrants usually highlighted by the Brazilian historiography. Slaves and free people of color could be easily found on Desterro's streets and wharves working as vendors, stevedores, ferrymen, and artisans. Many reached the town by canoes transporting agricultural produce from rural parishes or else hired their services out to contractors linked to the intermittent movement of people and goods characterizing ports and public works.[61] Others had long been connected to the island's whale fisheries, historically the largest slaveholding enterprises in Santa Catarina.

Whale oil factories in Desterro provided for the illumination of most of Brazil's provinces and at midcentury emerged as a hub for Afro-Brazilians interested in "embarking with the Americans" who stopped there en route to Pacific fishing grounds or the American West.[62] In the late 1840s, the province received a large influx of US nationals on their way to the gold mines of California. American ships traveled west by going around Cape Horn, often docking first in Rio de Janeiro and then at Desterro. In 1849 alone, for example, 86 ships headed to California passed by the Brazilian southern coast.[63] In the next decade, Santa Catarina continued to be a popular way station for ships destined for the busy markets of Rio de Janeiro, Rio Grande do Sul, and Buenos Aires.

US whalers had hunted sperm whales off the coast of Brazil since at least the early 1800s. Sailing out of New England, they procured in the South Atlantic oil and baleen (whalebone), following the migrations of whale populations that commonly reached Brazilian waters between June and September. Like other commercial vessels, whalers also stopped along the coast of South America for replenishments, emergency repairs, or the discharge of injured sailors. While enjoying their peak in the 1850s, whaling trips, which were famous for the dangers of the hunt, became even more perilous during wartime years. Confederate cruisers like the *Alabama* and the *Florida* deliberately targeted Union whalers on the high seas, which were sunk, burned, or hauled along as prizes. Yet despite the risk of escaping to vessels caught up in an Atlantic war, Brazilian slaves could not ignore the rumors foretelling immediate emancipation. Thus, a steady stream of fugitives left masters in Santa Catarina over the 1860s, boarding Union whalers that offered them at least a way out of a slave empire, even if through participation in the harsh world of maritime labor.

61. Mamigonian, "Africanos em Santa Catarina"; Popinigis, "'Aos pés dos pretos.'"

62. Castellucci, "Histórias conectadas," 112. See also Klein, *African Slavery*. In 1855, the province of Santa Catarina had a population of 101,559 residents, 14,195 of whom were slaves. Coutinho, *Relatório do presidente*, 35.

63. Horne, *Deepest South*, 13. For a complete list of American whalers that stopped at Desterro from 1849 to 1856, see Scomazzon and Franco, *A caminho do ouro*, 143–48.

Slave runaways claiming US ships as safe havens from enslavement turned Santa Catarina's coast into an ambiguous international border shaped by the asymmetric laws concerning slavery and freedom in the Atlantic world. Taking to sea by stealing canoes or small boats and counting on the assistance of sympathizing Union captains, Afro-Brazilians manipulated the notion of free soil according to varying historical contexts. Where to go and how to get there were some of the most important pieces of information to circulate through Afro-Brazilians' covert networks of communication. Once aboard whalers, some found new lives as seamen, others reached free soil in the United States, and many more met with servitude under new masters elsewhere in the Atlantic. In practice, most slaves expected to acquire free status as soon as they stepped on American territory, despite the fact that Brazilian law never ceased to classify them as runaways. Over time, such shipboard getaways made them qualified sailors and nodes in wide networks of fugitives that extended into the hinterlands of Santa Catarina.[64]

While anchored in Brazilian ports, some American whaling ships hoping to cut costs actively sought out local slaves as crewmen. US captains often signed on entire international crews either due to high rates of desertion and death or because they had started their voyage with just enough men to make it to whale killing grounds; these foreigners were paid less than American sailors.[65] Portuguese-speaking mariners from the Azores, Cape Verde, and Madeira often joined these whaling trips, facilitating communication with Brazilians as well as entry into local underground economies in Brazil. Escaped slaves probably shared fates similar to those men without previous experience at sea who signed on as unskilled hands, cooks, or stewards in return for clothes or board. Sometimes, though, passage on a whaling ship could mean a return to the world of the Atlantic slave trade.[66] Whalers sailing south from New Bedford, Nantucket, New London, and Sag Harbor are known to have been engaged in illegal slaving voyages, their stated aim of whaling often serving to deceive British cruisers.

64. In Brazil there existed a long-standing black tradition of fleeing enslavement by seeking berths on ships. In Rio de Janeiro province, British cruisers were suspected by slaveholders of smuggling their human property; in the northern provinces, slaveholders demanded that the police scour vessels headed to Peru in search of fugitive bondsmen. José de Araújo Damim (chief of police) to José Vieira Couto de Magalhães, Belém, 3 Jan. 1865, AN, SJ, IJ1-208.

65. Creighton, *Rites and Passages*. Complaints about American whalers facilitating the flight of slaves from the Brazilian coast were part and parcel of the history of American fishery abroad as early as 1820. Castellucci, "Histórias conectadas," 112.

66. Horne, *Deepest South*.

The volume of Afro-Brazilian flight to Union whalers pushed Santa Catarina slaveholders to turn to the press in the 1860s. Weekly fugitive slave advertisements publicized escapes to national and foreign ships and warned sea captains not to assist runaways.[67] In 1865, masters from Desterro conveyed their concerns with rare clarity in a letter published in the newspaper *O Despertador*: "We have long heard complaints of slaves escaping on American ships docked at the port of Santa Cruz; and the slave who escapes on such ships is lost for his master." The slaveholders denounced "a barge from a North American ship anchored in Santo Antônio" that took away two slaves—Fructuoso and Joaquim—used to maritime work, "the first having declared long ago that he would run away with the Americans." The slaveholders went on to request fierce surveillance of US ships and to suggest that guards be sent aboard "to keep watch on the last days of each stay; otherwise, whoever possesses slaves who miss traveling will not be able to sleep in peace."[68]

The allure that American ships exerted in Brazil's southern seaports is illustrated by another episode from Desterro. In May 1866, five slave owners petitioned Governor Adolfo de Barros Cavalcanti de Albuquerque Lacerda for the return of six of their slaves who had run away on the US ship *Marcella*. The whaler had entered the port on April 4, 1866, and "with scandalous petulance enticed slaves to come serve them on board with promises of emancipation in their country."[69] These Desterro planters demanded that the imperial government force the ship's commander, Henry B. Chase, to either return their slaves or pay reparations if he ever anchored again in Brazil. Along with the petition, the slave owners sent a list with the characteristics of the six male slaves allegedly recruited by the Americans as sailors. Francisco, Luiz, Jacinto, Floriano, João, and João were young men, all between 19 and 30 years of age, at the peak of their working life. Governor Lacerda immediately wrote to the US consul in Santa Catarina, Benjamin Lindsey, asking for a crackdown on the "bad behavior" of his nation's whaling ships. Lacerda argued that American captains had made a habit of coming to Desterro to take along slaves "with the intention of changing their condition."[70]

Lindsey, himself a native of New Bedford and editor of the whaling industry's weekly newspaper, the *Whalemen's Shipping List and Merchant's Transcript*,

67. These advertisements were common in all of Brazil's maritime provinces.

68. *O Despertador* (Desterro), 27 June 1865, p. 1. For slave flight to American ships in Santa Catarina, see Rebelatto, "Uma saída pelo mar," 423–42; Piazza, *A escravidão negra*.

69. Slave owners' petition, Desterro, 31 May 1866, AN, SJ, IJ1-1003.

70. Adolfo de Barros Cavalcanti de Albuquerque Lacerda to Benjamin Lindsey, Desterro, 13 June 1866, AN, SJ, IJ1-1003.

promised to comply with the governor's terms yet admitted no wrongdoing on the part of American skippers. Slave flights, however, continued to mount in 1866. Three slaves embarked in Desterro on a ship identified as the USS *John Dowbrou* as it set off to Cape Verde, and others were captured on São Miguel Island before getting to the brigs *Spartan* and *Triton* outside the port of Santa Cruz.[71]

Still in May, the Desterro police arrested José and Vicente, both field slaves from João Florêncio Pereira of Tijuquinha who had fled to Caieira with the intention of boarding "an American ship," the whaler *Marcella*. When asked why he had run away, the creole José explained that he had planned his escape upon meeting "the fugitive black called Ignácio in the Inferninho backlands where he lives." Ignácio was a slave of Manoel Pacheco who had been in hiding for four months "in search of a different master." After some conversation, José asked Ignácio "to procure him a spot to embark with the Americans" and departed to Caieira to find someone who could negotiate this.[72]

Sprawling networks spawned by American presence cut across the legal conditions of slave, freed, and free. At Caieira, "after some asking around," José learned that Carlos Americano (Carlos the American), a resident at the Praia do Estanislau, was the main link between local blacks and US ships. Carlos Americano promptly agreed to help José and even encouraged him to bring along other slaves, with the promise that "all who went aboard would soon be free." Encouraged by the prospect of emancipation, José went back to his master's property in Tijuquinha to invite Ignácio and Vicente to join him in the escape. They then went back to Carlos Americano's house, from where they boarded Carlos's canoe at midnight after paying him 4,000 reis and surrendering to him their knives.[73] José, Vicente, and Ignácio embarked that same night on what they called "a fishing ship with three masts" docked at the port of Santa Cruz.[74]

After speaking "in a language they could not understand," Carlos Americano handed the slaves over to the ship captain, Henry B. Chase, who hid them behind barrels and lumber. Two days later, preparing to depart Brazil's shores temporarily to flaunt a visitation by local authorities, Chase then took the slaves to the Praia do Pontal, promising to come back for them in a few nights. Ignácio described the Pontal as a place akin to a quilombo, populated by runaway blacks waiting for an opportunity to sail away from slavery in Brazil. Since

71. Interrogatory of Celestino José Machado, 21 May 1866, AN, SJ, IJ1-1003.
72. Interrogatory of Ignácio, 16 May 1866, AN, SJ, IJ1-1003.
73. Interrogatory of José, 19 May 1866, AN, SJ, IJ1-1003.
74. Interrogatory of José, 19 May 1866, AN, SJ, IJ1-1003.

Captain Chase never returned to take them on board the *Marcella*, Ignácio, Vicente, and José set off on their own to Ponta Grossa, where they were arrested by the police. A man from the port of Santa Cruz had tipped the officers off by mentioning his encounter with the slaves by the docks, where they professed to be out fishing shrimp.[75] It seemed that the authorities' vigilance had finally paid off after months of raids aimed at uncovering black networks of communication organized around Santa Cruz's eateries, lodging houses, and drinking parlors.

Nevertheless, as the Santa Catarina chief of police despairingly put it, there was little hope of preventing US whaling vessels from seducing slaves along the coast "when they could offer the lure of freedom."[76] In 1867, a party sent by him aboard another American vessel anchored in Santa Cruz arrested the pardo Adriano dos Santos on suspicion of being a slave of the Cassão & Paranhos firm based in Rio de Janeiro. In May 1868, the slaves Estevão, Paulo, Joaquim, Geraldo, Domingos, Gregório, and Manoel escaped on the whaler *Highland Mary*, which was from Sag Harbor but was sailing under British colors. Estevão's owner, Maria Luiza Sabino, posted several ads in Desterro newspapers in the beginning of May that publicized his escape and anticipated his plan to "embark as free in one of the North American ships that usually put in at the Santa Cruz port."[77] Authorities finally learned about the slaves' plan from a Portuguese seaman named João Cardoso Jacques, who had deserted the *Highland Mary* after being harshly punished by captain A. B. French. Jacques revealed that the captain engaged the fugitive Fructuoso as his main recruiter on Santa Catarina's shores. This was the same Fructuoso about whom, three years earlier, slaveholders had written to *O Despertador* after he had run away from Santo Antônio and boarded the *Highland Mary* for the United States.

When he got word about the 1868 collective slave flight, Governor Lacerda sent the Brazilian warship *Henrique Dias* in pursuit of the *Highland Mary*, but the whaler successfully left the port of Santa Cruz shortly before the warship's arrival. The incident sparked outrage in the local press, which condemned Brazil's weakness in the face of the US Navy. Despite never returning to Brazil, the whaler's captain, A. B. French, was prosecuted for slave theft.[78]

It is impossible to ascertain if any of the Brazilian slaves who embarked on New England whalers ever received de facto freedom, but the stories analyzed in this section point to them finding at least more choices at sea. Slaves and free

75. Interrogatory of Ignácio, 16 May 1866, AN, SJ, IJ1-1003.

76. Quoted in Rebelatto, "Uma saída pelo mar," 437.

77. For examples, see *O Mercantil* (Desterro), 3 May 1868, p. 4; *O Mercantil* (Desterro), 7 May 1868, p. 4.

78. *O Mercantil* (Desterro), 21 May 1868, p. 4.

blacks championed the principle of free soil as a liberating mechanism and, by crossing borders, advanced claims to state-sanctioned free status and rights that challenged the limits of Brazilian citizenship.[79] Greater mobility, however, did not guarantee a new status. With their manumission never formalized, fugitives faced the perils of reenslavement or even legal prosecution for past crimes whenever they came back to Brazil. This is why the slave Fructuoso, despite having spent three years at sea as well as some time in the United States, ended up having to hide aboard a US whaler to escape capture by police officers in Santa Catarina.[80]

An Afro-Brazilian Atlantic

The examples from Maranhão and Santa Catarina demonstrate that the United States was an important element of the Afro-Brazilian geopolitical imagination, of the cognitive maps that slaves and free people of color used to navigate the age of emancipation from Brazil. For them, the Atlantic was not a transparent, readily knowable space but rather a category of social and spatial struggle, a place in constant need of evaluation. During wartime, instead of thinking from the vantage point of stability, insurgent Afro-Brazilians probed Brazil's relations with the rest of the hemisphere in terms of dangers and opportunities. Yet danger could be refigured as possibility. In their experience, the geography of domination put in place by transatlantic slavery was powerful yet porous, ready to be reinvented by those who knew it best.

Possibility manifested in unexpected ways with the appearance of American ships in Brazilian coastal waters. Much like floating embassies, such ships opened up a new interface with Atlantic geopolitics through which Afro-Brazilians wrote themselves into international disputes and linked their struggles to the realization of hemispheric freedom. Docked in the middle of slave territory, foreign ships allowed Afro-Brazilians to concretely demonstrate their geopolitical literacy to a degree that still needs to be accounted for in narratives about abolitionism in the Americas. Geography, after all, referred not only to a sense of physical materiality but also to different ways of knowing the world.[81]

Afro-Brazilian lives continue to unsettle both the stability of national identity and the framework of national histories in which they are caught. Afro-Brazilians' expectations of American support of emancipation were the product of a diasporic way of envisioning political community centered on the common

79. Peabody and Grinberg, "Free Soil," 2–3.
80. *O Despertador* (Desterro), 15 May 1868.
81. McKittrick and Woods, *Black Geographies*.

experiences of enslaved peoples in the Americas. In other words, the kind of antislavery struggles that Afro-descendants led in Brazil relied not on direct claims to national citizenship but rather on notions of belonging that cut across the racialized borders of nation-states. In the mid-nineteenth century, the uneven spread of abolition in the Americas reframed Afro-Brazilians' political culture, giving new meanings to the short- and long-distance connections that they had crafted over time. In this context, the American Civil War opened to the enslaved pathways to freedom well before it prodded Brazil's jurists and politicians to reconsider the issue of gradual emancipation in parliament.

Brazilian slaves invoked the hemispheric landscape of antislavery in order to subvert a system they knew to be transnational and deeply interconnected. By laying claim to the liberating promises of nineteenth-century abolitionism, they engaged with the broader debates of their time and offered a critique of enslavers' power that amounted in effect to an alternative story about what abolitionism meant. More than the cause of reformers or modernizing elites whose ideologies irradiated from the North Atlantic outward, abolition was also a radical grassroots movement originating in Brazil.

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