

Da Outra América: Gilberto Freyre's Racial Formation in the United States

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Since its inception, which Brazilian social historian Gilberto Freyre, in part, ushered in, the rhetoric of racial democracy has been a pervasive element of the discussion of race in Brazil and, curiously, is often placed in opposition to race relations in another great slave-holding society in the Western Hemisphere—the United States. As historian Celia Azevedo has duly noted, “the myth of Brazilian racial paradise is . . . part of the cultural history of the United States.”¹ And, equally, the rhetoric surrounding the U.S.’s history of brutal slavery and repressive race relations has often framed the discussion of race in Brazil. In this way, *Casa grande e senzala* and Freyre’s other works were simply a continuation of a transnational dialogue that has persisted since the nineteenth century. Moreover, as several historians have proven recently, Freyre was not the first to valorize of Brazil’s African and *mestiço* past.² He did, however, reinvigorate the myth of Brazil’s unique brand of cordial race relations, becoming its most famous purveyor and heading a coterie of regionalist intellectuals who extolled Brazil’s racial harmony.

Freyre, an intellectual whose scholarly work has more or less framed the discussion of race in Brazil since the publication of *Casa grande e senzala*, spent a significant portion of his formative years in the United States and his experiences abroad greatly influenced his subsequent body of work. Freyre was born to a family of former planters in Recife’s elite in 1900, just twelve years after the abolition of slavery in 1888.

¹ Celia M. Azevedo, *Abolitionism in the United States and Brazil* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995), x.

² Hermano Vianna, *The Mystery of Samba: Popular Music & National Identity in Brazil* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Tiago de Melo Gomes, *Um espelho no palco: identidades sociais e massificação da cultura no teatro de revista dos anos 1920* (Campinas, SP: Editora da UNICAMP, 2004)

In his youth, he studied at the Colégio Americano Gilreath. As a Baptist educational institution, the school maintained a strong relationship with Baylor University in Waco, Texas, where Freyre spent his undergraduate years. After leaving Baylor, Freyre completed his master's thesis "Social Life in Brazil in the Middle of the 19th Century" at Columbia University working under the supervision of Franz Boas. Thanks to a network of scholars concerned with the role of race in the development of modern society with whom he interacted during his years in the United States, Freyre started reformulating the popular belief that Brazil possessed exceptional race relations, which later became known as Brazil's racial democracy.

The myth of a harmonious coexistence of multiple races in Brazil was and indeed has been discussed, particularly in Freyre's body of work, in opposition to contentious race relations in the United States. As Micol Seigel notes, "Academic comparisons help make race, and they should be treated by historians of ideas and of racial construction not as methodological models but as subjects in their own right." And, moreover, those scholars who have interested themselves in comparisons of the United States and Brazil have often been "agents in the construction of race and notions of national character."³ In this paper, I intend to analyze Freyre's journal entries, his scholarly and journalistic work and personal correspondence during his time in the U.S. and in Brazil, to track how Freyre's vision of race in Brazil—a vision of Brazil as a racial democracy—was shaped by his experiences in the United States.

Freyre's early years in the United States are not an unexplored topic and, in fact, several scholars have analyzed his early adulthood.⁴ Few scholars have looked

³ Micol Seigel, "Beyond Compare: Comparative Method after the Transnational Turn," *Radical History Review* 91 (2005), 62 – 90.

⁴ Jeffrey D. Needell, "Identity, Race, Gender, and Modernity in the Origins of Gilberto Freyre's Oeuvre," *American Historical Review* 100.1 (1995): 51-77.; Thomas E. Skidmore, "Raízes de Gilberto Freyre," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34.1 (2002): 1-20.; Maria Lúcia Garcia Pallares-Burke, *Gilberto Freyre: um vitoriano dos trópicos* (São Paulo: Editora UNESP, 2005).; Jossianna Arroyo-Martinez,

exclusively at Freyre's encounter with race in the United States; rather, they focus on race along with religion, sexuality, anglophilia, modernity, etc. In this paper, I will make use of many of the primary sources commonly cited by other scholars of Freyre and a few unexplored sources, but I will look exclusively at documented incidents in these sources in which Freyre encounters race in the United States and propose ways these encounters might have shaped his vision of race in Brazil. Taking Siegel's suggestion to view scholars as agents in the construction of race and national identity, I will also make use of scholarship by Freyre (e.g. his master's thesis at Columbia) and his contemporaries (along with other documents) as primary sources. In sum, this paper will track the evolution of Gilberto Freyre's racial thought in relation to the United States, a trajectory that moved from ingenuous and reactionary to a more measured comparison of the greatest slavocracies on the American continents.

Gilberto Freyre's sojourn in the United States began with his undergraduate studies at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. In Brazil, Freyre had studied at the Colégio Americano Gilreath, a school run by Baptist missionaries, where he had converted to Protestantism. He declined an offer to study at Georgetown University and instead chose the Baptist mecca Baylor University, following the example of several sons of Recife's elite. This is how Freyre ended up in Waco, a conservative, racially-segregated college town in central Texas. As his diary entries and personal correspondence reveal, this racially-charged environment would greatly shape his ideas of race.

Three years before Freyre's arrival in 1919, the public torture and lynching of Jesse Washington in Waco's town square had captured the attention and denunciation of newspaper editors across the country and world. Washington was a mentally challenged

"Tropicalizaciones y globalización: Gilberto Freyre y la migración brasileña en los Estados Unidos," *Gilberto Freyre e os estudos latino-americanos*, ed. Joshua Lund and Malcolm McNee (Pittsburgh: Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, 2006).

African-American teenager who, under coercion, confessed to murdering the wife of a highly regarded cotton farmer. Due the particular violence of the lynching and number of spectators, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People sent women's suffragist Elizabeth Freeman to investigate the incident and W. E. B. du Bois, then editor of the NAACP's magazine *The Crisis*, recounted the story of the Waco Horror to the world.⁵ Moreover, it is probable that Freyre knew of the lynching since a commission of Baylor professors publicly condemned the event.⁶

Despite being lauded as the "Athens of Texas," Waco has a long history of racially motivated mob violence and lynching and, in the 1st chapter of *First Waco Horror*,⁷ Patricia Bernstein provides several examples of other lynchings in Waco and central Texas. According to a NAACP report on lynchings between 1889 and 1918, only Georgia and Mississippi experienced more lynching than Texas.⁸ Gilberto Freyre entered this racially charged atmosphere in 1919 as an undergraduate at Baylor University and he was obviously struck by the difference between race relations in the United States and in Brazil.⁹

In one of his first diary entries in Waco, Freyre reveals his disgust with Waco's black neighborhood, which was more horrible than he had imagined they would be. "Filthy. Disgusting. A shame for this philistine civilization that, in spite of this, sends missionaries to the pagans of South America and China, India and Japan. These missionaries, before crossing the ocean, ought to take care of these domestic horrors.

⁵ For more information on this incident, see Patricia Bernstein, *The First Waco Horror: The Lynching of Jesse Washington and the Rise of the NAACP* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005)

⁶ Robert W. Slenes, introduction to *Um espelho no palco: identidades sociais e massificação da cultura no teatro de revista dos anos 1920*, by Tiago de Melo Gomes (Campinas, SP: Editora da UNICAMP, 2004), 17.

⁷ Bernstein, *The First Waco Horror*, 20-28.

⁸ National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918* (New York: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1919), 32.

⁹ In an interview with Jeffrey Needell, Freyre's wife Magdalena revealed that his experiences with racial violence in the American South appalled him. See Needell, "Identity, Race, Gender, and Modernity," 64.

They are violently anti-Christian.”¹⁰ In other words, though lacking in liberal culture and the ability to address their own domestic atrocities, American missionaries nevertheless travel abroad to civilize other cultures. They are more concerned with racialized groups in far-flung corners of the world while ignoring their own problematic race relations.

In the next journal entry, Freyre relates an occasion where, on a return from a school trip in Dallas, he stops in Waxahachie, a small town between Dallas and Waco. He smells an intense odor and is quickly informed that it is the scent of burned flesh of a black man. Freyre is shocked by his informant’s candor and the possibility of such a hideous act in a “civilized” country. “I never thought that such horror was possible in today’s United States. But it is. Here still people lynch, kill and burn blacks. It’s not an isolated occurrence. It happens fairly often,” Freyre writes.¹¹ For Freyre, the horrible living conditions of Waco’s black neighborhood and the prevalence of racially motivated violence revealed a grand hypocrisy in American society.

A reactionary and somewhat unsophisticated character marks Freyre’s initial observations of race in the United States. Freyre was still trying to reconcile his lived experiences and perceptions with the dominant racial thought in the United States and Brazil. His experiences with segregation and lynching would later express itself in *Casa grande e senzala* in the idea that race relations are more harmonious in Brazil in contrast to the general atmosphere of hostility towards blacks in the United States, which he experienced to some degree while he studied in Waco.

In the next documented racial encounter, Freyre meets another racialized group, this time Brazilian *mulatos* and *cafusos*.¹² After Freyre completed his undergraduate at

¹⁰ Gilberto Freyre. *Tempo morto e outros tempos* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria José Olympio Editora, 1975), 32. Both Needell and Skidmore advise assessing Freyre’s published diary entries critically. According to them, Freyre had a tendency to revise old writings. I concur. I myself have found significant differences between Freyre’s original master’s thesis and its Portuguese translation.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹² *Mestiços* of Afro-indigenous heritage.

Baylor, he moved to New York City where he was completed a master's degree at Columbia University. One day, while in New York, he encountered a group of *mestiço* sailors while crossing the Brooklyn Bridge. Freyre has mentioned more than once that this chance encounter, after three years of absence from Brazil, had a tremendous influence on his racial thought.

Shortly after the incident, Freyre asks his mentor and fellow *pernambucano* Manuel de Oliveira Lima in personal correspondence if he has read *The Rising of the Color Tide* and *The Passing of the Great Race*.¹³ “They are interesting studies of the race problem, mixing, etc. from which our Brazil suffers. We need to oppose the white immigrant to the ‘salto atroz.’¹⁴ The more I study the problem from the Brazilian point of view, the more alarmed I get. I noted the crew of the *Minas* the other day: 75 percent must be people of color.”¹⁵

As the quote demonstrates, the encounter with the *mulato* sailors was a question of identity for Freyre. In Brazil, he most likely would not have much paid attention to these men, but, while in a foreign country, he felt some need to identify with them. The sailors, like him, were serving as representatives of Brazil and, in the letter to Lima, Freyre could not hide his disgust that three fourths of them were people of color. At this moment in Freyre's racial formation, the fact that Brazil had such a significant *mestiço* population still alarmed him. Brazil was still *suffering* from the problem of race mixing, rather than being a source of pride, as it would become later in his scholarly works.

¹³ Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color against White World Supremacy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920); Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race; or, the Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916)

¹⁴ Freyre makes a play on words. *Salta atrás* literally means “jump back.” According to Skidmore, it is a racist regionalism for a person of mixed black and mulatto origin, in other words, a rebound from the whitening ideal. Instead of *atrás*, Freyre writes *atroz*, in Portuguese meaning inhuman, barbarous or cruel.

¹⁵ Gilberto Freyre, *Cartas do próprio punho sobre pessoas e coisas do Brasil e do estrangeiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Conselho Federal de Cultura e Departamento de Assuntos Culturais, 1978), 175.

Manuel de Oliveira Lima, himself an interesting figure, was also someone who addressed the “Negro” problem in Brazil. Lima, a lifelong diplomat and noted historian of development of Brazil’s national identity and its independence, had engaged Theodore Roosevelt in an intellectual debate on the best solution to the race problem in the United States and Brazil, arguing that amalgamation was superior to hostile separation. In a series of lectures delivered at Stanford University in 1912, Oliveira Lima makes an argument reminiscent of Freyre’s “philistine civilization” comment in regards to Waco’s black neighborhood.

In your country [United States], which the greatest progress has already been made toward the regulation of ethical problem, this racial question continues pressing, inciting violence which you, whom I may call the intellectuals and the disciples of philosophers, are the first to deplore and condemn.¹⁶

The two texts that Freyre references in the letter are classic examples of scientific racism that persisted in the United States following World War I. In *Passing of the Great Race*, the author Madison Grant gives a racial history of Europe, arguing that race was the basic motor of civilization and that, of all the human races, the “Nordic race” was the key social group responsible for much of the world’s development. In *The Rising Tide of Color against White World Supremacy*, published just four years after *Passing of the Great Race*, the author Lothrop Stoddard makes an argument similar to Grant’s, yet he applies it to the entire world. In the book, Stoddard presents a view of the world situation pertaining to race, focusing his concern on the coming population explosion among the “colored” peoples of the world and the way in which white world supremacy was being lessened in the wake of World War I and the impending collapse of colonialism. Aptly, Grant wrote an introduction to the monograph and, indeed, the two make nearly identical

¹⁶ Manuel de Oliveira Lima, *The Evolution of Brazil compared with that of Spanish and Anglo-Saxon America* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975), 39-40.

arguments. Like Grant, Stoddard was a Nordacist, arguing that the Nordic was the greatest of the three European races and needed to be preserved by way of eugenics.

Both books were enormously popular and influential in racial thought during the interwar period in the United States, particularly *The Passing of the Great Race*. Stephen Jay Gould describes *The Passing of the Great Race* as “the most influential tract of American scientific racism.”¹⁷ It was the first non-German book ordered to be reprinted by the Nazis when they took power. In fact, Adolf Hitler wrote to Grant that, “The book is my Bible.”¹⁸ In the end, both books are important as monographs that analyze the importance of race in the development of modern society, taking a social Darwinist, eugenicist stance against miscegenation and the immigration of “colored” peoples and southern Europeans.

Considering the arguments of these two books, it is understandable why the appearance of his dark-skinned countrymen caused alarmed in him. For one, Grant and Stoddard take a negative position toward miscegenation. In one of the most famous quotes from the book, Grant writes,

It must be borne in mind that the specialization which characterize the higher races are of relatively recent development, are highly unstable and when mixed with generalized or primitive characters, tend to disappear. Whether we like to admit it or not, the result of the mixture of two races, in the long run, gives us a race reverting to the more ancient, generalized and lower type. The cross between a white man and an Indian is an Indian; the cross between a white man and a negro is a negro; the cross between a white man and a Hindu is a Hindu; and the cross between any of the three European races and a Jew is a Jew.¹⁹

Despite the exceptions of the Southern Cone, which Stoddard racializes as “genuine white man’s country,” and the Caribbean, which Stoddard characterizes as “black,” Stoddard asserts that Latin America was “racially not ‘Latin’ but Amerindian or

¹⁷ Stephen Jay Gould, *Bully for Brontosaurus: Reflections in Natural History* (New York City: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 162.

¹⁸ Jonathan P. Spiro, “Patrician Racist: The Evolution of Madison Grant” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2000).

¹⁹ Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race*, 15-16.

negroid, with a thin Spanish or Portuguese veneer.”²⁰ He goes on to write that “where the parent stocks are very diverse, as in matings between whites, negroes, and Amerindians, the offspring is a mongrel—a walking chaos, so consumed by his jarring heredities that he is quite worthless.”²¹

Stoddard even discusses Freyre’s *pátria mater* Brazil’s Northeast, writing,

Brazil is, in fact, evolving into two racially distinct communities. The southern provinces are white man’s country, with little Indian and negro blood, and with a distinct ‘color line.’ The tropical north is saturated with Indian and negro strains, and the whites are rapidly disappearing in a universal mongrelization. Ultimately this must produce momentous political consequences.²²

One only wonders what was Freyre’s reaction when reading these sentences. Taking Grant’s, Stoddard’s and other scientific racist’s stance toward racial purity and miscegenation, it is easy to understand Freyre’s alarmist reaction to the sailors.

Acting as an expert on world racial data, Grant also provided statistics for the Immigration Act of 1924 to set the quotas on immigrants from certain European countries. He also assisted in the passing and prosecution of several anti-miscegenation laws, notably the Racial Integrity Act of 1924 in the state of Virginia, where he sought to codify his particular version of the one-drop rule into law. As evidenced by Grant’s career, Freyre lived in the United States during the heyday of Jim Crow and anti-miscegenation legislation, the perennial passage anti-immigration and eugenicist laws and, ultimately, the implementation of the strictest polarization of racial classifications in U.S. history.

At this moment, Freyre had adopted, at least partially, the dominant racial anxiety of scientific racists like Grant and Stoddard, and, in his journal entry, Freyre is still questioning the merits of miscegenation. These sailors, placed out of the context, appear

²⁰ Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color*, 105.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 165-166.

²² *Ibid.*, 115.

to Freyre to be shameful products of Brazilian miscegenation. Far from the unabashedly positive view of miscegenation that Freyre's adopts in *Casa grande e senzala*, Freyre is attempting to overcome his disdain, which he undoubtedly adopted from the prevalent racial thought of scholars like Grant and Stoddard, for these men. Freyre writes, "Woes of miscegenation? Yet, in an article, at my request, written for *El Estudiante*²³...the scholar John Casper Branner²⁴ praises the Brazilian *mestiços*, even when of little or no athletic appearance." By citing geologist John Casper Branner's article, which said that, despite being partially of an inferior race, *mestiços* often possess redeeming qualities, Freyre is working through his own prejudices by seeking the validation of an esteemed American scholar.²⁵ Ultimately, these sailors became symbols of his struggle to come to terms with Brazil's *mestiçagem*.

Freyre's opinion of these sailors was later influenced greatly by Franz Boas, his advisor at Columbia. Boas, who is often called the "Father of American Anthropology," is considered one of the pioneers in the field. He was especially concerned with racial inequality, which he had demonstrated was not biological in origin, but rather social. Himself a German immigrant of Jewish descent and someone well of aware of anti-Semitism, Boas considered it the scientist's responsibility to argue against myths of racial superiority and to use the evidence of his research to fight racism.²⁶ As one of the main opponents of scientific racism, Boas emphasized the role of culture and this particular idea was influential in shaping Freyre's vision of race in Brazil.

In the second edition of the English translation of *Casa grande e senzala*, Freyre writes, "of all the problems confronting Brazil there was none that gave me more anxiety

²³ A magazine for students from Latin American that Freyre co-managed while at Columbia.

²⁴ John Casper Branner, an American geologist and academic, was a friend of Oliveira Lima and subsequently Freyre. Branner served as president of Stanford University between 1913 – 1915.

²⁵ Freyre, *Tempo morto*, 68.

²⁶ See, for example, Franz Boas, "Changes in the Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants," *American Anthropologist* 14.3 (1912).

as that of miscegenation.”²⁷ He goes on to recall that his reaction to the sailors was highly influenced by foreign opinions of Brazil’s “mongrel race” and that is why they appeared to be “caricatures of men.” The tone of this passage suggests that Freyre came to believe that he erred in his disdainful opinion of his view of the *mestiço* sailors or, at the very least, a few more years of reading and education had allowed him to adopt a more nuanced opinion of miscegenation in Brazil. Freyre credited Franz Boas for disabusing him of his previously erroneous opinion of the Brazilian *mestiço*. Freyre writes,

It was my studies in anthropology under the direction of Professor Boas that first revealed to me the Negro and the mulatto for what they are—with the effects of environment or cultural experience separated from racial characteristics. I learned to regard as fundamental the difference between *race* and *culture* [italics in the original text], to discriminate between the effects of purely genetic relationships, and those resulting from social influences, the cultural heritage and the milieu.²⁸

Freyre goes on to say that the arguments made in *Casa grande e senzala* are based on this differentiation between race and culture. As Needell notes, “[b]y providing this cultural alternative to inherent African inferiority as an explanation for such differences, Boas offered Freyre a way out of the taint implied by his mulatto countrymen. Freyre would reconstruct the escape route into a triumphal entry.”²⁹

Grant and Stoddard were the type of scholars that Boas and later Freyre opposed. Freyre nevertheless incorporates elements of traditional scientific racism in his scholarly work that are very reminiscent of Grant and Stoddard. Though he questions the merits of environmental determinism, he does not completely reject either, arguing, for example, that blacks were better suited to the Northeast’s tropical climate. Freyre, like Grant and Stoddard, was fearful that an ever democratizing and modernizing society boded the end of white aristocratic supremacy. Freyre adapted others. For instance, Freyre still refers to African culture as primitive, yet he argues that, in some cases, it was superior to Luso-

²⁷ Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves*, xxvi.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, xxvii.

²⁹ Needell, “Identity, Race, Gender, and Modernity,” 67.

Brazilian custom. Thanks to Boas' guidance, Freyre wholly rejected the bulk of scientific racists' arguments, such as the supremacy of heredity in the development of a nation—essentially a classic nature versus nurture argument employed to defend Brazil's exceptionalism. On page 203, in regards to interbreeding of race, Freyre counters Grant and Stoddard's notion of miscegenation, arguing that the Portuguese arrived in the New World as *mestiços* due to Portugal's proximity to Africa. Situated in the debate between Boasian anthropology and Nordicist ideology, *Casa grande e senzala* is an answer to dominant racial thought that prevailed in scholarly circles in the interwar period. Ultimately, Freyre's opinion of the sailors and *mestiçagem* moves from disdainful to questioning to panegyric.

During the time of the encounter with the *mulato* sailors, he was writing his master's thesis under the supervision of Franz Boas. The thesis is an overview of Brazilian social history between 1848 and 1864, an imperial Brazil before the complete breakdown of sugar planters' dominance in Brazil, which marked “an era of peace, conformity, and decorum in public affairs.”³⁰ It can be viewed as his first scholarly attempt to justify his heritage (i.e. Brazil's heritage) to an American audience and to explain Brazil's unique brand of race relations in opposition to the United States' repressive slave regime. Originally written in English—a Portuguese translation was not published until 1964³¹—the thesis is based exclusively on the accounts of European and American travelers as if to prove that even foreigners were able to realize Brazil's exceptionalism.

³⁰ Gilberto Freyre. “Social Life in Brazil in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century.” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 5.4 (1922): 598.

³¹ Gilberto Freyre. *Vida social no Brasil nos meados do século XIX* (Recife: Instituto Joaquim Nabuco de Pesquisas Sociais, 1964).

In the thesis, one of his central arguments is that of all forms of trans-Atlantic slavery, particularly as opposed to the U.S. model, Brazilian slavery was the most humane. Freyre writes, “[t]he work people [i.e. slaves] of the plantations were well-fed, and attended to by their master and mistress as a ‘large family of children.’”³² It is interesting that, at times in the thesis, Freyre avoids using the charged word “slave.” “Slave” carries a moral judgment in post-emancipation societies, a judgment from which Freyre attempts to absolve his forbearers. When he does use “slave,” he palliates bondsmen’s true condition with unsubstantiated qualifications. For example, Freyre writes, “[m]y paternal grandfather—a sugar planter—was a violin virtuoso. The keen taste for music was perhaps what made Brazilian slaveholders kind and gentle.”³³ How are the treatment of slaves and slaveholder’s musical acumen related? For Freyre, the answer was self-evident and the fact that he was referencing information from his own family history bolstered his assertion.

Freyre almost makes an argument for racial democracy, framing the entire thesis as a personal clarification and justification of his elite background and Brazil’s heritage of chattel slavery. Freyre begins the thesis with a childhood reflection of asking his grandmother about the “good old days.” He writes, “[s]he was then the only one in our family to admit that the old days had been good; the others seemed to be all ‘futurists’ and ‘post-impressionists’ of some kind or other. But in studying, more recently, my grandmother’s days, I have approached them neither to praise nor to blame—only to taste the joy of understanding the old social order.”³⁴

³² Ibid., 606.

³³ Ibid., 614.

³⁴ Ibid., 597.

The entire thesis is to a certain extent self-referential. In fact, Freyre intended to publish the thesis in Portuguese under the title “Brazil of Grandparents.”³⁵ As Needell argues, “Freyre’s unqualified defense of Brazilian slaveholding as benevolently paternalistic or the reference to an ‘improved slave breed since, in many cases, the male parent was a Portuguese of the best blood’ seem allied, not with anthropologically informed history, but rather the desire to retell Brazilian history as it was in the ‘good old days’ of his grandmother.”³⁶ Freyre obviously believed his personal connection lent some degree of authority, freely mixing childhood memories with document-based historical analysis.

Freyre’s romanticized vision of plantation life in Brazil strongly influenced his opinion of the American South. Needell writes, “[t]he fundamental similarities with and contrasts to old Pernambuco that Freyre encountered in the South confronted him with the question of his national as well as his personal identity again and he bound the them together.”³⁷ After a brief stint in Europe and nearly a decade back in Brazil, Freyre was compelled to leave Brazil as a result of the 1930 revolution and he again returned to the United States. After a semester as a visiting scholar at Stanford University, Freyre, along with former Columbia colleagues Ruediger Bilden and Francis Butler Simkins, embarked on a road trip through the “Old South.”

These two men, one American and the other German, had a big influence on the synthesis of Freyre’s racial thought. Francis Butler Simkins was a historian from South Carolina who, like Freyre, was born during the post-abolition era in a region formerly marked by a plantation economy. Simkins, along with co-author Robert Hilliard Woody,

³⁵ Freyre, *Cartas do próprio punho*, 188.

³⁶ Needell, “Identity, Race, Gender, and Modernity,” 64.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

published *South Carolina during Reconstruction*,³⁸ to which Freyre references in the preface of the second edition of the English translation of *Casa grande e senzala*.³⁹ The book provides the reader with a glimpse into the worldview of a man of Freyre's cohort and a vision of South Carolinian society in terms of race. In the book, Simkins, like Freyre, is concerned with the role of the "Negroes" in the formation of his respective realm. Like Freyre, Simkins adopts a somewhat disdainful view of the growing democratization and the decline of the traditional landowning patriarchy. Though both Simkins and Freyre would have been considered liberal thinkers and revisionists in their time, both men seem most comfortable when people of Afro-descent assume subordinate, somewhat stereotypical roles. Both Simkins and Freyre glorify the pre-abolition period in their respective nations, which, for them, represented an era of stability and relatively little social upheaval.

Despite the strong similarities between Freyre and Simkins' upbringing and subsequent work, Freyre admits that *Casa grande e senzala* is more indebted to Ruediger Bilden, a former student of Boas and scholar of slavery in the Americas, particularly Brazil. In fact, it seems that Rudiger advanced the idea of Brazil being a racial democracy before Freyre⁴⁰ and Freyre cites Bilden's work multiple times in *Casa grande e senzala*.

On this road trip with Simkins and Bilden, Freyre was able to engage these two scholars and, for the last time before the publishing of *Casa grande e senzala*, note similarities and differences between the two plantations systems. In *Casa grande e senzala*, we observe Freyre's final analysis of the two societies.

In the South of the United States, there evolved, from the seventeenth century to the eighteenth century, an aristocratic type of rural family that greater bore resemblance to the type of family in northern Brazil before abolition than it did to the Puritan bourgeoisie

³⁸ Francis Butler Simkins and Robert Hilliard Woody, *South Carolina during Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1932).

³⁹ Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves*, xxvi.

⁴⁰ Ruediger Bilden, "Brazil, Laboratory of Civilization," *The Nation*, January 29, 1929.

of another part of North America, which was similarly of Anglo-Saxon origin, but which had been influenced by a different kind of economic regime. There were almost the same country gentlemen—chivalrous after their fashion; proud of their slaves and lands, with sons and Negroes multiplying about them; regaling themselves with the love of mulattoes; playing cards and amusing themselves with cock-fights; marrying girls of sixteen; engaging in feuds for the sake of a woman; and getting drunk at the great family feasts—huge turkeys with rice, roasted by ‘old mammies.’⁴¹

What emerges is a contradictory view of American slavery and Southern culture, simultaneously idealized and criticized. At times in *Casa grande e senzala*, Freyre juxtaposes the Brazilian and American models of slavery, but, more often, he highlights similarities between the two, which is somewhat a departure from past writings. In *Casa grande e senzala*, Freyre seems to be trying to reconcile the differences and highlight the parallels between the American South and the Northeast of Brazil. It appears this last trip through the American South with two scholars sensitive to race relations in the Americas was the last step for him to realize that it was only linguistic and religious differences that separated the two regions.⁴²

Thus, in Freyre’s racial formation in the United States, Freyre gradually makes steps toward a more measured view of race in the United States. In his diary entries, personal correspondence, Freyre’s responses to racial encounters are often reactionary. However, by the time *Casa grande e senzala* is published, Freyre had benefited fully from Boas’ guidance, had more time to read and reflect on his past experiences and spend more time in the United States. Thus, in *Casa grande e senzala*, Freyre’s opinions of the United States had moderated considerably.

Freyre’s vision was shaped by a dialogue—which emphasized the United States’ racial antagonism and the exceptionalism of Brazil’s race relations—with foreign and Brazilian scholars, giving *Casa grande e senzala* a decided cosmopolitan flair. Beginning with his studies in the United States, Freyre engaged in a dialogue with scholars in the

⁴¹ Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves*, 401.

⁴² *Ibid.*, xxvi.

developing and developed world regarding the issue of race in the development of their respective nations that culminated in the publication of *Casa grande e senzala*.

An analysis of Freyre's trajectory of racial synthesis in his early corpus reveals that he was tremendously influenced by his firsthand experiences in the United States, his interpretations running the gamut from reactionary to balanced. This is no trivial observation considering so many Brazilian and American scholars of race use Freyre's oeuvre and his idea of racial democracy as a point of departure for their research. Many of these same scholars have observed that the ideas of race in Brazil and the United States have influenced and been in dialogue with each other since the nineteenth century. By focusing on the trajectory of Freyre's vision of race, this paper corresponds with previous scholarship on Freyre and transnational dialogues between Brazil and the United States. This paper, however, departs from previous scholarship in highlighting the singular importance of race in Freyre's education abroad.