

On the Collapse and Reconstruction of Systems of Domination: Two Brazilian Slave Revolts and their Aftermath

Veranstalter Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung

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Talk given by Karl Monsma (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul)

Because systems of domination must continually be reproduced, they are always at risk of change or, at times, collapse and revolution, but they can also be restored in new forms after such disruptions. The talk examines two episodes of slave revolt in 19th century Brazil: widespread flight during the Farroupilha Civil War in Rio Grande do Sul (1835-45), and the crescendo of flight and localized rebellion during the 1880s in São Paulo. In Rio Grande do Sul, in the far south, many slaves worked on cattle ranches or in jerked beef plants, and those who were cowboys, and thus rode horses, were the most likely to flee, either joining the Republican army, which promised them freedom, or crossing the border into Uruguay or Argentina. In the coffee producing districts of São Paulo a half century later, mass flight, localized rebellion and the support for rebellion by white anti-slavery activists forced the monarchy to abolish slavery to pacify the province. In both cases processes undermining slaveholder authority reveal much about how masters controlled their captive workers in “normal” times through varying combinations of violence and favoritism, which introduced and manipulated divisions among slaves. Elites in both contexts reconstituted racial domination after rebellion through targeted violence, in combination with other strategies. In Rio Grande do Sul, many who had fought in the Republican army were betrayed by their commander and massacred by Imperial forces. Slaveholding elites then replaced them with new captives from Africa or from other provinces. Others were recaptured in neighboring countries. In São

Paulo it was impossible to go back to slavery, but former slaves were resubordinated partly by violence against specific individuals, especially lynchings and similar events, and especially through the labor market competition of European immigrants, who arrived with passage paid by the São Paulo state government.

Further Information (PDF)
