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American Counterpoint: New Approaches to Slavery and Abolition in Brazil

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Brazil's Abolitionist Movement: The Remembered, the Forgotten

Jeffrey Needell, University of Florida

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In response to the call for a discussion of Abolition and memory, this presentation discusses the work of contemporary participants and historians in regard to the movement which abolished slavery in the Empire of Brazil.

The presentation begins with a brief narrative and analysis of the process of Abolitionism in Brazil, 1879-1888. It emphasizes the socio-economic context that facilitated the movement's success in the 1880s, in terms of an increasingly narrow, elite and rural investment in slaveholding and an increasingly alienated, Europeanized urban middle class. It also emphasizes the parliamentary political process impacting upon the movement, how the movement impacted upon parliament, and how, in that process, both radicalized, with the parliamentary system being compelled to contain the urban movement at the end.

The second part of the presentation focuses upon the memoirs and histories written about Abolitionism by participants. Here, the presentation emphasizes how many contemporaries narrated the movement's course entirely in terms of their own political position and how others, separated from the movement by time or temperament or training or all three, managed a more dispassionate, inclusive understanding. In tracing these variations, the presentation indicates the legacy provided by each, distinguishing between those associated with an often politicized, self-referential memory and those attempting a more balanced historical understanding. This part concludes with more extensive, comparative analyses of three critical classics by historian

participants: Nabuco's *Minha formação*, Duque Estrada's *A abolição*, and Moraes's *A campanha abolicionista*.

The presentation's concluding, third part provides a very brief sense of the historiography's direction over the last century. It emphasizes the contributions brought to us by the Marxist, subaltern, and more focused emphases of the 1960s and '70s and the last thirty years. It also speaks to the methodological difficulty of teasing out the presence of racial solidarity and racial self-identity in a society which traditionally condemned both, and in which class and racial status were often conflated. Finally, it focuses upon the progressively marginalized status of the formal parliamentary political history critical to understanding the movement's course and transformation. It suggests the significance of such elite history for an understanding of what was, in the end, an interactive political process between events and actors, with actors from both the street and the imperial institutions of the Brazilian monarchy.