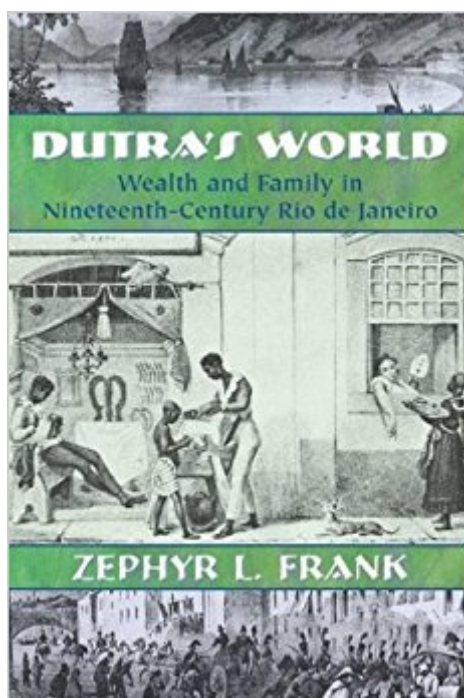


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Dutra's World: Wealth And Family In Nineteenth-Century Rio De Janeiro (Diálogos Series)



Synopsis

The relation of slavery to Brazil's economic and social history has long fascinated researchers. Zephyr Frank focuses on nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro, where almost half of the city's residents labored as slaves of diverse owners in a complex urban setting. Slavery persisted in the Brazilian city, in part, because it was entrenched among upwardly mobile entrepreneurs who hired their slaves out for wages, employed them in family businesses, and bought and sold them for profit. Changes in the institution of slavery and the economy of the city gradually limited access to slaves, constricting avenues of social mobility for slaveholders and transforming the lives of the slaves themselves. Frank uses the experiences of one person, Antonio Jos   Dutra, as an example of a middling urban slaveholder. Dutra, a former slave himself, owned thirteen slaves whom he employed in his barbering business and musical band. Dutra's story is part of the larger picture Frank paints of those who owned slaves, how they fit into the social and economic development of Brazil, and what slaves and their owners did as slavery rose and then gradually declined in Rio de Janeiro. Frank traces social mobility, race, class, and slaveholding patterns, basing his analysis on inheritance records. Rich in detail, these records reveal layers of historical meaning regarding the accumulation of wealth, social mobility, family ties, and the social and cultural practices surrounding death.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Scholars have long noted the pervasiveness of slavery in the formation of Latin America. While

sources typically privilege the social elites, less on average is known about the so-called "middling class". Zephyr L. Frank's 'Dutra's World,' a recent work on that very group, seeks to narrow that gap. Claiming roughly eighty percent of the free population in its corner, slaveholding pervaded all social levels. As an affordable and highly accessible form of property, Frank demonstrates that African slaves represented the only feasible road to social mobility. From 1820 to 1850, the author posits, a slavery-based economic and social order gave the middling class their best opportunity to acquire significant wealth and prosperity, regardless of their origins. However, the "ephemeral" moment of promise quickly collapsed after 1850. Unable to replicate its earlier success, the middling class nearly collapsed and lost much of its holdings to immigrants and, more importantly, the burgeoning economic elite. As a work of microhistory, 'Dutra's World' aims to illustrate the broad socioeconomic context of the "middle class" (for all purposes roughly categorized as an economic and hierarchical mid-level sort, though lacking group self-consciousness) primarily derived from analysis of estate records. The work's namesake, Antonio Jose Dutra, in many ways stands in for the class as a whole. Despite his birth as a slave, Dutra managed to acquire an impressive body of property in urban real estate and slaves within a generation. A barber by trade, Dutra's story, Frank suggests, indicates the diversity of experiences in mid-century Brazil. Economically successful by most accounts, those like Dutra typified the hardworking class most devoted to slavery.

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