

Seeking Refuge Under the Southern Cross: The Causes of Confederate Emigration to the Empire of Brazil

Roberto N. P. F. Saba

Settled in Brazil since the beginning of 1865, a family of immigrants from the American South offered their hospitality to the “Late Surgeon of the Confederate Army,” James McFadden Gaston, a native of South Carolina who began promoting emigration as soon as the Civil War ended. Although Gaston regretted that Mrs. Malone, a “rather delicate” lady, “was doing the cooking and housework for the family with her own hands,” he was happy to notice that, by moving to Brazil, her family had acquired “a type of independence to which every Southern heart aspired, and which can only be enjoyed now by a separation from those who hold us in subjection.”¹ At around the same time, another Confederate officer, Major Frank McMullan—a former filibuster from Texas who had participated in William Walker’s expeditions to take over Nicaragua during the 1850s—wrote to a friend that he had found “the real South—this new land under the Southern Cross where a gentleman is treated like a gentleman and there are thousands of rich acres waiting for us progressive farmers.” Brazil, as McMullan put it, was “the empire of freedom and plenty.”² Seeking independence and freedom, thousands of defeated Confederates decided to follow the advice of emigration promoters such as Gaston and McMullan; running away from their worst nightmares, they left their beloved Dixie behind “to commence the world as it were anew.”³

The exact number of southerners who moved to Brazil is almost impossible to calculate given that few of them had passports and Brazilian officials did not begin keeping records of immigration until 1884. Historians today estimate that Brazil attracted between 4,000 and 20,000 southerners in the years following the Civil War; in any event, this was one of the largest foreign migrations of Americans in history. While historians have pointed out some of the factors that attracted these people to the Empire of Brazil, none of them have formulated a comprehensive explanation of the view that Southern émigrés had of Brazilian society at the moment of emigration. In this article I attempt to get to this view through an analysis of a number of works produced between 1865 and 1867 by Southern travelers who explored the Brazilian territory. Creating a phenomenon that contemporary newspapers styled “Brazil Fever”, these texts were written to advertise the Empire for an audience willing to find a new country in which to live.

Roberto N. P. F. Saba earned his BA (2007) and MA (2010) in History from the University of São Paulo and currently is a PhD candidate at the University of Pennsylvania. The author would like to thank Steven Hahn, Robert St. George, Stephanie McCurry, Eiichiro Azuma, Vanessa Ogle, Kevin Waite, Mollie Lieblich, and Emma Teitelman for all their suggestions, questions, and comments.

¹ James McFadden Gaston, *Hunting a Home in Brazil. The Agricultural Resources and other Characteristics of the Country. Also, the Manners and Customs of the Inhabitants* (Philadelphia: King & Baird, 1867), 368-369.

² Sarah Bellona Smith Ferguson, “Emigration to Brazil in 1866-67,” unpublished manuscript (1935) quoted in William C. Griggs, “Settling: Migration of the McMullan Colonists and Evolution of the Colonies in Brazil” in *The Confederados: Old South Immigrants in Brazil*, ed. Cyrus B. Dawsey and James M. Dawsey (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 51-52.

³ Gaston, *Hunting a Home in Brazil*, 290.

The men who wrote such texts had been deeply involved in the Southern struggle for independence from the Union; they only left the South when the demise of the Confederacy was a *fait accompli*, seeking a refuge where their compatriots could live in peace.⁴

While exploring Brazil, Southern emigration agents kept looking back to the causes that had led them to leave their country. Gaston, who had arrived in Brazil in September 1865, was feeling deeply melancholic on New Year's Day, 1866: "the old year of 1865 has come to a close," he reflected, "and the events which have transpired shroud the retrospect with gloom and sadness. Horrible in their reality, and almost maddening to the thought, I would gladly if it were in my power cease to think of what is past." Defeat was the cause of his sorrow. The year Lee surrendered to Grant was a turning point in the lives of Gaston and thousands of other southerners who were decided not to submit to Yankee rule and racial equality. They were terrified by "the disturbed state of society" in the American South and could not help but "feel very anxious for the present condition and the future well-being of those near and dear" to them.⁵

The disheartening anxiety that white southerners felt was a consequence of the humiliation that their people had endured since the Union Army invaded the South and their social system collapsed. As another emigration agent, Lansford W. Hastings, put it, "several years' connection with the Confederate army had, long before the fall of Richmond, fully convinced the writer, as well as many others, that the Confederate cause was hopeless, and that dire disaster and humiliating social conflict were inevitable, all of which, the result has clearly demonstrated." Hastings was a prominent land surveyor who had plotted to separate California from the Union during the Civil War. When the Confederacy fell, he decided to take the only path that would save his people from degradation at the hands of vengeful Yankees and freedpeople. Hastings believed that, by resettling to Brazil, southerners would avoid the appalling outcome of the Civil War: "a settled purpose exists on the part of thousands of our best citizens to seek in foreign climes, that security of person and property, justice and equality, which are denied them in the land of their nativity."⁶ While Unionists had recently "accomplished all for which they fought, and now have everything their own way," defeated Confederates were suffering due to the fact that "they have lost their property, their cause, their all." Hastings believed that "the ties that bound them to their native land are effectually severed; accumulating political disasters have completely obliterated the last glimmering ray of their lingering hope; why should they, how can they remain?"⁷ The success of the Union Army, the consolidation of the Republican Party, and the destruction of planters' mastery over the black laborers represented ultimate catastrophe for most Southern whites. Hence, men like Hastings and Gaston decided to leave.

⁴ For historical interpretations of Confederates' decision to relocate to Brazil, see Blanche Henry Clark Weaver, "Confederate Emigration to Brazil," *The Journal of Southern History* 27 (1961): 446-468; James L. Roark, *Masters without Slaves: Southern Planters in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Norton, 1977), 120-131; Eugene C. Harter, *The Lost Colony of the Confederacy* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985); Cyrus B. Dawsey and James M. Dawsey, "Leaving: The Context of the Southern Emigration to Brazil," in *The Confederados*, ed. Dawsey and Dawsey, 11-23; William Clark Griggs, *The Elusive Eden: Frank McMullan's Confederate Colony in Brazil* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987); Gerald Horne, *The Deepest South: The United States, Brazil, and the African Slave Trade* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 198-221; Laura Jarnagin, *A Confluence of Transatlantic Networks: Elites, Capitalism, and Confederate Migration to Brazil* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008), 181-228; Matthew Pratt Guterl, *American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 79-85.

⁵ Gaston, *Hunting a Home in Brazil*, 298-299.

⁶ Lansford Warren Hastings, *Emigrant's Guide to Brazil* (Mobile: 1867), 3.

⁷ Hastings, *Emigrant's Guide to Brazil*, 294-295.

In the months that followed the downfall of the Confederacy many southerners seemed decided not to submit to the conquering Yankees. Some refused to walk under the American flag, others insisted on using Confederate insignia, while others defiantly walked around singing rebellious songs. The incorrigible pessimists withdrew from political and social life altogether. Alcohol and opium helped many to temporarily forget the Southern tragedy. Some found comfort in Jesus Christ. Others started writing diaries and memories, trying to reinvent their stories. Voluntary expatriation was an alluring option for those who strongly clung to concepts of Southern honor. Episcopal Reverend Ballard S. Dunn—Rector of St. Phillip’s Church, New Orleans, and late of the Confederate Army—traveled to Brazil days after surrender and tried to convince his fellow countrymen to do the same.

Those who oppress you, are energetic, aggressive, ambitious, and ravenous. In them you see foulness of life, and cruelty of policy, methodized into a system; consecrated by their religion; and these must be gratified; peacefully, and unresisted if possible, violently, and with the sword, if necessary. The power that now holds you, like so many captives, bound to the stake, while it decides, as barbarians have done before, whether it is better to burn, flay alive, or release; while we see in it none of the elements of permanency, or stability, is appalling enough; in the hands of such as are sufficiently vigorous and unscrupulous to set it in motion. Then why should we remain in a country, where we find that there is neither present, nor prospective, security, for life, liberty and property? Where we are painfully conscious of the fact, that our chiefest privilege is, to pay exorbitant taxes, to meet the demands of the debt incurred in our subjugation; and to pay the enhanced salaries of those who have grown glorious by butchering our kindred, destroying our cities and towns, our fields and firesides; and insulting our women, as they robbed, and turned them, and our little ones, out into the storm and night?⁸

Many white southerners believed they could not stay one more day in North America. They had been subjugated by the army, which killed their relatives and ravaged their lands, enslaved by the party that illegally liberated their slaves, oppressed by the radicals who usurped federal power, and humiliated by those who had been their chattel property. When expressing Southern émigrés’ deepest fears, Gaston was even more explicit than Dunn, simply mentioning that his “great anxiety” was “in regard to the future conduct of the negroes in the country.”⁹ For those that emigrated, leaving the postwar South meant avoiding subjection to conquering Yankees and racial warfare against freedpeople.¹⁰

⁸ Ballard S. Dunn, *Brazil, the Home for Southerners: Or, a Practical Account of what the Author, and Others, who Visited that Country, for the same Objects, saw and did while in that Empire* (New York: George B. Richardson/New Orleans: Bloomfield & Steel, 1866), 4-5.

⁹ Gaston, *Hunting a Home in Brazil*, 222.

¹⁰ On the trauma of defeat, see Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 11-21. On Southern planters’ loss of mastery, see Roark, *Masters without Slaves*, 68-108. On slaves’ rebellious actions against the masters during the Civil War, see Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 218-309. On African Americans’ struggles to transform Southern society during and after the Civil War, see Steven Hahn, *A Nation under our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 62-159.

Running away from the revolutionized American South, Southern émigrés looked for a country in which they could find stability. Before the Civil War, southerners had built their own conceptions of Brazilian society based on travel narratives. In general, they considered Brazil the most progressive and best-organized country in all Latin America. In 1858 the prominent Southern writer J. D. B. De Bow published a twenty seven-page commentary on the work of two Northern protestant missionaries who lived in Brazil during the 1840s and 1850s. According to De Bow, the Brazilian monarchical constitution of 1824 was “the most liberal ever adopted in any other part of America except the United States.” Religious liberty, *habeas corpus*, trial by jury, free press, among other political and civil rights, were secured in that country. As a result, he continued, “Brazil has grown in power and wealth, and her people have remained in the enjoyment of equality and justice.” Besides having a liberal constitution, Brazil had acquired respect abroad, was investing in internal improvements, had been living undisturbed by sectional revolts, was free from virulent party spirit, had established public instruction, and was concentrating its energies on “the peaceful triumphs of agriculture and legitimate commerce.” The Empire, De Bow concluded in 1858, was destined in due time “to take position in the first rank of nations.”¹¹

Southern emigration agents who decided to explore Brazil after the Civil War gathered information from the available analyses of Brazilian institutions. From the works of the Irish writer William Scully, Dunn learned that the Empire was ruled by “some of the most patriotic and large-minded statesmen to be found in the world.” These statesmen were part of a meritocratic nobility that was “temperate, generous, charitable, attached to their sovereign, and courteous to their inferiors in society.” Consequently, Brazil enjoyed a “wise and vigorous administration,” being highly placed “among civilised nations.”¹² Exploring Brazil under the name of the *Southern Emigration Society of Edgefield*, South Carolina agents Major Robert Meriwether and Dr. H. A. Shaw observed that the Empire had a “harmonious, steady, just and powerful” government, whose main patron was “a wise and magnanimous ruler, sprung from an intellectual and illustrious race,” always concerned with “the advancement of the interests and glory of his country.”¹³ The fact that southerners saw Brazil as a politically advanced country, however, did not lead them to conclude that it was a democratic society. On the contrary, Hastings clarified, “distinctive lines are drawn between different grades of society.”¹⁴ The land surveyor believed that it was the combination of advanced institutions and aristocratic rule that guaranteed order and happiness in the Empire.

Traumatized by the actions of the United States Federal Government since the election of Abraham Lincoln, southerners searched specifically for one thing in Brazil: security for their property rights. Dunn emphatically noted that, in the Empire, “the rights of property, as guaranteed in the constitution, are carried out to the letter.” Not even a man “with the highest

¹¹ J. D. B. De Bow, “The Empire of Brazil—Its History, Statistics, and Future,” *De Bow’s Review and Industrial Resources, Statistics, etc.* 24 (1858): 4-6. For a thorough historical analysis of the political organization of imperial Brazil, see Miriam Dolnikoff, *O Pacto Imperial: Origens do Federalismo no Brasil* (São Paulo: Globo, 2005).

¹² Dunn, *Brazil, the Home for Southerners*, 248-253. William Scully was an Irishman who established himself in Rio de Janeiro as the editor of the *Anglo-Brazilian Times*. Among other works, he published *Brazil; its Provinces and Chief Cities: the Manners and Customs of the People; Agricultural, Commercial, and others Statistics, taken from the Latest Official Documents* (London: Murray, 1866).

¹³ Robert Meriwether and H. A. Shaw, “Shall Southerners Emigrate to Brazil?,” *De Bow’s Review. Journal of Literature, Education, Agriculture, Commerce, Internal Improvements, Manufactures, Mining and Statistics* 2 (1866): 37.

¹⁴ Hastings, *Emigrant’s Guide to Brazil*, 156.

title of nobility,” would ever “presume to enter the humblest dwelling, without first asking permission; and should permission be withheld, he does not enter, except at his own peril.” This security existed because, in Brazil, every man was “lord supreme, in his own domicile; however humble or lowly it may be.” Therefore, the reverend concluded with satisfaction, “there exists no country under the sun, where the rights of the citizen, and the foreigner, are more happily conserved than in Brazil.”¹⁵ Writing as if he were a Brazilian citizen already, McMullan depicted the imperial government as the most perfect on earth: “we have the best system of government known to man; while it combines all the elements of strength requisite to insure its stability against every emergency, it *guarantees* PRACTICAL EQUALITY to ALL its citizens, and administers justice with a firm and willing hand.” Despotism, for these émigrés, was embodied by the Republicans and abolitionists who took control of the American Union in the 1860s. The Empire of Brazil, differently, was the bastion of order and legality, where men of property were protected from intervention from above and disorder from below. “We have a monarchy (thank God!) in name, and a TRUE *Republic* in practice,” McMullan concluded.¹⁶

Social and political order existed in Brazil because there a true aristocracy formed by powerful planters was free to conduct business and take care of those who depended on them. This was what Gaston thought he witnessed when visiting the most important coffee plantations in the country. The emigration promoter was impressed with the local arrangements he found at Ybicaba, the *fazenda* of Nicolau José de Campos Vergueiro, whose “father was a man of considerable note, and was for a time regent of the empire.” At that coffee plantation, Gaston thought to have encountered the proper lifestyle for an honorable gentleman.

This fazendeiro combines all the various interests that conduce to the comfort of his family and the welfare of the large number of [free] colonists and slaves who are dependent upon his supplies. His extensive fazenda is emphatically a self-sustaining establishment, and he lives within himself to a very large extent. He grows his own beef and mutton, as well as his hogs, and his table is always supplied with the best that is found anywhere in the country. Of course, there are many things which must come from other parts, and he avails himself of all the importations that render a household comfortable, or a table desirable.¹⁷

The idea presented in these accounts was that Brazilian gentlemen were, in fact, masters of their own worlds. Southern émigrés reasoned that, if the imperial planter class could keep such a neat order on their own estates, they would be prepared to maintain a stable society in which everyone knew their proper place. “The Brazilian gentleman is worthy of his appellation in every sense; he is sociable, affable and courteous,” Hastings noted. “The middle classes are respectful and polite, and the slaves faithful and obedient; the domestic Indians are also faithful and valuable servants.” The Brazilian ladies, the land surveyor continued, “are affectionate wives and devoted mothers, rather secluded and retired in their manners, but sufficiently communicative

¹⁵ Dunn, *Brazil, the Home for Southerners*, 39.

¹⁶ Frank McMullan, “Official Report of Messrs. M’Mullan and Bowen, of Texas, to the Minister of Agriculture” (Rio de Janeiro, May 24th, 1866) in Dunn, *Brazil, the Home for Southerners*, 179. On the meanings of Republican antislavery policies, see Heather Cox Richardson, *The Greatest Nation of the Earth: Republican Economic Policies during the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 209-250.

¹⁷ Gaston, *Hunting a Home in Brazil*, 108. For an analysis of daily life on the coffee *fazendas*, see Robert W. Slenes, “Senhores e subalternos no Oeste Paulista” in *História da Vida Privada no Brasil. Império: a Corte e a Modernidade Nacional*, ed. Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1997), 233-290.

and social among acquaintances.”¹⁸ In other words, everything fit together very well in the Empire: gentlemen, the middle class, slaves, Indians, and ladies—all sections of Brazilian society—seemed content to play their assigned roles.

The imperial social order reminded Southern émigrés of a world they believed they had lost in the Civil War. Visiting the *fazenda* Sta. Theresa in the interior of Rio de Janeiro, which was owned by a colonel of the Brazilian Army, Dunn indulged in a moment of nostalgia:

It is on a beautiful rivulet, surrounded by gigantic mountains, that stand like so many grim sentinels, keeping guard over the “sweet home” of refinement, and the fruitful *fazenda* that nestle at their feet. Col. Werneck is a gentleman of the olden school, and dispenses a magnificent hospitality, in the olden style; reminding me, almost painfully, of the palmy days of my own native Virginia, now gone, I fear, nevermore to return.¹⁹

Military defeat and the disruption of their way of life led many Southern writers—amongst whom the former president of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis, was the most prominent—to reinvent the past of their region. The image of a romantic antebellum South, where honorable gentlemen peacefully ruled over land, labor, and their families emerged as soon as the war ended. Ideologues such as Edward Pollard and D. H. Hill spent the rest of their lives claiming that Yankee triumph in the war and slave emancipation completely destroyed a harmonious world. Later on, the narratives these men created would become the foundation of the myth of the Lost Cause. Such reactionary writers, nonetheless, managed to stay in the United States and ultimately had to accept reunion. Southern émigrés, on the other hand, took a more radical stand. They were not satisfied in simply creating the myth of a lost world. They were decided to carry to South America the project of resurrecting their romanticized antebellum lifestyle. Dunn assured his readers that the mountains of Sta. Theresa as well as the Brazilian imperial state existed exclusively to protect the planter class. Emigration promoters were convinced that Brazil would be just like their imagined antebellum American South: a patriarchal society in which white men of property were supreme rulers of all people below them.²⁰

What further elated the emigration agents was that the Brazilian aristocrats they admired were interested in supporting the settlement of Southern people in the Empire. Upon arriving in Brazil, the Southern immigrant was to find “a liberal Minister ready to welcome, and a population to greet him, and a Sovereign to offer him the powerful protection of his government.”²¹ National as well as local elites demonstrated great interest in the fate of the defeated Confederates. A delegation of planters from the town of Araraquara, province of São Paulo, gave Gaston a welcome address which expressed “the desire that you may find what you seek; and thus, that your worthy fellow-citizens—our brothers of the American Union—may adopt our country for their country.” The Araraquara coffee planters, sympathetic to the cause of the southerners, pleaded with Gaston to choose their town as a place to resettle: “remain then, doctor, amongst us, as also your friends, that you may succeed in obtaining lands, which will be

¹⁸ Hastings, *Emigrant's Guide to Brazil*, 158.

¹⁹ Dunn, *Brazil, the Home for Southerners*, 111.

²⁰ On the emergence of the Lost Cause in the immediate postwar South, see David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 255-264. On Southerners' ideals of patriarchy, see Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

²¹ Shaw and Merriwether, “Shall Southerners Emigrate to Brazil?,” 37.

suitable for you energetic farmers and mechanics; and rest assured that we will receive you as brothers receive brothers.”²² The defeated Confederates were pleased to hear from the Brazilian leading men that they would receive fraternal protection once they settled in the land of the Southern Cross. It soothed the agents’ anxieties to know that, in Brazil, Southern gentlemen would be sheltered by their equals.

In addition to describing the refined and welcoming ruling class of the Empire, Southern agents sought to convince their compatriots that Brazil was a highly fertile country destined to become the world’s greatest agricultural power. Hastings was delighted to explain to his readers that “Brazil possesses natural capacities for productions, the most varied and luxuriant,” including “cotton, coffee, sugar, tobacco, cacao, tea, india-rubber, mandioca, rice, corn, beans, peas, potatoes, spices, medicinal plants, and a wonderful variety of tropical fruits.” Meriwether and Shaw found that “the vast domain of Brazil contains the most fertile soil in the universe, and more cheap lands to allure the emigrant than any other nation under the sun. . . . ‘The cattle upon a thousand hills’ are hers, and may be yours, and such cattle as man never beheld in any other clime.”²³ McMullan also elaborated an enthusiastic description of Brazilian lands, remarking that “here almost everything grows, and grows well, too, that is calculated to minister to the health and comfort, not to say luxury, of man.” Fascinated by Brazilian fertility, southerners concluded that “there is not another nation under heaven which contains so many of the elements of greatness *within itself* as Brazil.”²⁴

Because the Civil War had shattered cotton production in the American South, European manufacturers were forced to look for supplies of the valuable raw material elsewhere. Financed by British capital, farmers in Egypt, India, and Brazil quickly converted their lands to cotton cultivation. Emigration agents believed that Southern planters, who had specialized in producing cotton before the war broke in the United States, could use their experience to become the leaders of the cotton boom in Brazil, where they would be able to reestablish their global agricultural supremacy free from Yankee interference. Gaston repeatedly claimed that, “the advantages for the culture of cotton in this country gives it a preference to the southern part of the United States.” Brazil possessed “the most fertile, healthful, and accessible” lands in the world and was soon going to surpass the Mississippi River Valley in cotton production. “Note this, ye planters of cotton in the Southern States,” Gaston exclaimed, “if cotton can be relied upon here to yield an average crop without labor, what may be expected from proper preparation of the soil for receiving the seed, and thorough working of the ground during the early growth of the plant.”²⁵ Dunn believed that “the same amount of labor that it requires to prepare one acre for the plow in the Mississippi bottom, would prepare three times that amount, as a general thing, throughout this entire region. The soil is very fertile, and also very friendly to cultivate.” Traveling around the Brazilian interior he saw “specimens of cotton in the field, equal to any I have ever seen in the United States.”²⁶ A superb opportunity was opened to those who were

²² Manoel Francisco Oliveira, Francisco Correa de Arruda and José Aranha do Amaral, “Address of Welcome, Araraquara, October 29, 1865” in Gaston, *Hunting a Home in Brazil*, 152-153.

²³ Shaw and Meriwether, “Shall Southerners Emigrate to Brazil?,” 36-37.

²⁴ Frank McMullan, “Official Report of Messrs. M^oMullan and Bowen, of Texas, to the Minister of Agriculture” (Rio de Janeiro, May 24, 1866) in Dunn, *Brazil, the Home for Southerners*, 153, 174-175.

²⁵ Gaston, *Hunting a Home in Brazil*, 330, 106, 109, 168. On the expansion of cotton production in Brazil, India, and Egypt during the American Civil War, see Sven Beckert, “Emancipation and Empire: Reconstructing the Worldwide Web of Cotton Production in the Age of the American Civil War,” *The American Historical Review* 109, no. 5 (Dec., 2004), 1405-1438.

²⁶ Dunn *Brazil, the Home for Southerners*, 45, 55-56.

recently ruined by the Civil War: Brazil had perfect conditions to reach the highest level of agricultural grandeur, McMullan affirmed, it just had to be “populated by an industrious, intelligent agricultural people, from the Southern States of North America.”²⁷ Defeated Confederates were confident that on the fertile lands, where Brazilian *fazendeiros* had produced coffee and sugar for centuries, they could find enough resources to produce the commodity that had once made them the richest planter class in the world. It was hoped that the land of the Southern Cross become the new Cotton Kingdom if specialists settled there.

Emigration agents believed that their people could develop the immense Brazilian territory in the same way white settlers once developed the Deep South. Nonetheless, in order to do so, they needed one essential element: slavery. Since Brazil became an independent nation, Americans knew that slavery was the basis of that society. Southern reviews were full of accounts of Brazilian slavery since at least the 1830s. Writing in 1838, Judge William Harper of South Carolina affirmed that, “the only portion of the South American continent which seems to be making any favorable progress, in spite of a weak and arbitrary civil government, is Brazil, in which slavery has been retained.”²⁸ As years went by and the defense of slavery hardened in the American South, the image of Brazil became more positive. Writing in 1849 for the *De Bow’s Review*, Ellwood Fisher observed that, “it is remarkable that Brazil and the United States, the only two nations on this continent where African slavery prevails, are the only two who have succeeded in the establishment of stable and flourishing social and political institutions.”²⁹ Therefore, when Gaston decided to move to the Empire of Brazil he knew that among the many advantages offered by that country—such as a stable government, a patriarchal social order, and fertile lands—“the additional element of slave labor here is likely to afford results that cannot be secured by hired labor in the Southern States.” The emigration promoter ensured his readers that “so soon as the [Brazilian] negroes have become acquainted with the proper mode of working the cotton, we may anticipate yields of this staple exceeding any that have ever been realized in the United States.”³⁰ When leaving behind the war-ravaged South, defeated Confederates, such as Gaston, Dunn, Hastings, Shaw, Meriwether, and McMullan, carried with them Southern proslavery ideology.³¹

Upon arriving in Brazil, Southern agents realized that slaves were all around them. “The large number of negroes,” Gaston remarked as soon as he disembarked in Rio, “that are seen upon the streets, both male and female, with marks of tattooing upon their cheeks ... indicates that the African slave-trade has been carried on with this country very actively at a comparatively recent period. Most of them appear strong and active.” In Brazilian towns, slave men were usually seen “carrying immense burdens,” while slave women were “engaged in traffic of various kinds,” selling fruits, vegetables, fish, fabric, pots, etc. Besides providing every kind of urban service, slaves were fundamental for agricultural production in Brazil. Southern emigration promoters were satisfied to see how much work blacks performed on the *fazendas*.

²⁷ McMullan, “Official Report of Messrs. M’Mullan and Bowen,” 153.

²⁸ William Harper, “Memoir on Slavery,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, vol. IV, no. X (1838), 238.

²⁹ Ellwood Fisher, “The North and the South, Part 3,” *De Bow’s Review, the Commercial Review* 1 (1849): 310.

³⁰ Gaston, *Hunting a Home in Brazil*, 106.

³¹ On the ideology behind the expansion of Southern plantations, see Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 37-70. On the antebellum proslavery argument, see John Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic: Vol. 1, Commerce and Compromise, 1820-1850* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 192-285. On the similarities between American and Brazilian slaveholders’ worldviews, see Eugene D. Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), 95-102.

Gaston watched “the burning of a ‘roça,’ or new ground,” where “all negroes were posted at regular intervals to guard the progress of the conflagration.” This activity was part of establishing new coffee plantations: under the supervision of the overseers, the slaves would “go into the virgin forest, clear it up after the style of the country, and plant young coffee trees.” In addition to working on the fields, rural slaves worked in brick and tile factories within large *fazendas*, took care of the livestock and the gardens, and cooked for and cleaned the big house. In some interior rivers, Gaston voyeuristically watched “negro women in various stages of nudity, washing clothes.” Slaves were so abundant in Brazil, the Southern visitors claimed, that local slaveholders were glad to lend some of their blacks to be used by the expeditions: “seven negro men and one negro women (as a cook) accompanied us,” Gaston recalled, “to subserve the various objects connected with the examinations of the lands and the care of the stock.”³²

The Brazilian newspaper *Diário de São Paulo* was almost entirely right when it stated that “the spectacle of slavery, which so much impress strangers, will be viewed with indifference by those emigrants from the Southern States of the Union, that until very recently held slaves, and for this object sustained the greatest struggle which the world has seen.” The only error in such statement was that Southern émigrés were not indifferent about Brazilian slavery; rather, they were pleased to find that the Empire continued to prosper under the leadership of planters who owned human beings of African descent. Southerners were glad to observe the life of rich Brazilian slaveholders such as Miguel Antonio Jorge, who, according to McMullan, was “the largest planter of the Ribeira [Valley], owning large quantities of slaves, and probably several hundred thousand acres of land. He has a spacious dwelling, an iron sugar-mill, a saw-mill, grist-mill, distillery, &c., &c.; and is quite fixed, after the Brazilian style.”³³ Dunn was excited when describing his visit to the plantation of “the very intelligent and scientific Dr. Antonio Olinto Pinto Coelho da Cunha.” Formerly engaged in mining for gold, Cunha eventually concluded that, “the surest way to obtain a rich yield of the precious metal, was to bring his slaves down to the choice lands of Espírito Santo, and open a coffee fazenda.” He did so and succeeded. Most remarkable, however, was the way Cunha treated his property: “he employs little or no corporeal punishments among his slaves; believing that kind, firm treatment, giving them plenty to eat, is the surest way to get them to perform their duty in that state of life which it has pleased God to call them, and for which these child people were created.”³⁴

Emigration agents believed that Brazilian planters were doing the right thing when trying to improve forms of maintaining their slaves under chains. They claimed that rational slave management was a humane form of labor control, and deeply regretted the fact that the war and emancipation had destroyed a supposedly harmonious relation between masters and slaves in the American South. Gaston was extremely pleased when, at the coffee plantation of Vergueiro, he saw that “the negro quarters are adjoining the residence of the family, and enclose a large court, in the centre of which is a belfry, and a lock-up for such as become unruly. There is a hospital department, with an office, where medicine is dispensed by the physician when his visits are required.”³⁵ The South Carolina agent was also positively impressed by the good quality of the slaves’ clothes: “So far as I have had an opportunity of examining the clothing of negroes, the men wear a substantial shirt and pants of coarse cotton, and it is rare that one has been seen with ragged clothes. The women usually wear lighter material, and it is not uncommon to see a female

³² Gaston, *Hunting a Home in Brazil*, 9, 12, 16, 19, 69, 124-125, 203, 232, 266-267, 281, 284, 292, 329.

³³ McMullan, “Official Report of Messrs. M’Mullan and Bowen,” 166.

³⁴ Dunn, *Brazil, the Home for Southerners*, 112-113.

³⁵ Gaston, *Hunting a Home in Brazil*, 105.

servant about a house with an old calico dress, which has doubtless been cast aside by the white women of the family.”³⁶ Commenting about a slave boy named Joaquim, owned by the *fazendeiro* Bennaton, Gaston remarked that “he is out this morning with white pants and his hair combed and braided in the most approved darkey style.”³⁷

Emigration agents were enthusiastic about what they interpreted as Brazilian planters’ absolute mastery over their slaves. “I was particularly impressed here,” Gaston commented about one *fazenda* he visited, “with the freedom which was allowed some negro children in coming into the room occupied by the family, and with the attention given them by the Major. Having no children of his own, he seems to make pets of these little darkies.” While depicting Brazilian planters as benevolent slaveholders, observers such as Gaston also made clear that the same men who treated slave children like domestic animals knew very well how to use instruments of torture when necessary. Gaston recalled that, “at some places the sound of the shackles has been heard when the negroes were assembled.” He further explained that “in some instances the shackles are put on their ankles only at night to keep them in their quarters, while in others they are kept on while at work as a matter of punishment, and I saw at one fazenda a very old woman with shackles on her ankles while she was employed in stirring the coffee that was drying.” Sheer brutality was applied side by side with techniques of rational management and paternalistic attitudes. In order to ensure that the black population would remain subjected, the Brazilian planter class made sure to oppress their souls as well as their bodies. But men such as Gaston, who held that slavery rested “upon a basis that is tenable in a moral, political, and social point of view,” did not feel disturbed by what they saw.³⁸ After all, most nineteenth-century Southern whites agreed with Hastings that, “whether there is a certain menial class of men designed by nature as ‘hewers of wood and drawers of water,’ in my opinion admit of no discussion.”³⁹ When looking at the Brazilian plantations, these writers saw what they imagined had once been their own world, now destroyed by war and emancipation: an organic society where white masters took care of—and, when necessary, brutally punished—a race of people created by God to serve the needs of those who held property and power.

The revolutionary actions of African Americans during the Civil War had proven that Southern slaveholders’ dream of mastery had never been as concrete as they thought. Nevertheless, Southern émigrés were willing to try once again to build a world based on the enslavement of black laborers. Even though the project of building a slaveholding nation in North America had failed miserably, emigration agents remained attached to what they believed was the best way to organize society. To the contentment of defeated Confederates, in Brazil they would once again be able to acquire human property. Dunn reassured prospective settlers that all immigrants could emulate the lifestyle enjoyed by the Brazilian *fazendeiros*: “any foreigner, no matter where he may be from, can hold as many slaves as he is able to buy, or as much property, of any description, as he is able to pay for.” According to the reverend, all Americans who settled in the Empire convinced themselves that Brazilian planters lived a superior way of life, better adjusted to the requirements of order and civilization than the social

³⁶ Gaston, *Hunting a Home in Brazil*, 134.

³⁷ Gaston, *Hunting a Home in Brazil*, 99. On efforts to reform slave management in the antebellum South, see Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 3-112. On slave management in the Empire of Brazil, see Rafael de Bivar Marquese, *Feitores do Corpo, Missionários da Mente: Senhores, Letrados e o Controle dos Escravos nas Américas, 1660-1860* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2004), 259-298.

³⁸ Gaston, *Hunting a Home in Brazil*, 123, 134-135, 228; Hastings, *Emigrant’s Guide to Brazil*, 215.

³⁹ Hastings, *Emigrant’s Guide to Brazil*, 215.

organization imposed to the entire United States after the Union triumph in the Civil War. He claimed that even men who posed as abolitionists in America were seduced by the Brazilian *modus vivendi* once they moved to the Empire. "I know a Massachusetts Yankee," Dunn confided, "who refuses to be naturalized, and yet he owns several slaves." Therefore, Confederates should not hesitate when planning to relocate to Brazil: "I know many southern gentlemen who have bought large numbers of slaves, and much real estate, during the last year."⁴⁰

Gaston confirmed Dunn's assertions when he described the positive surprise he had when visiting a settlement of European immigrants in the province of São Paulo:

We stopped upon the road to-day at an inn (*hospidaria*) kept by one of these German families, who had collected a considerable property in a few years, and they now have a plantation with several slaves, in connection with a thriving house of entertainment for travelers. Most of those who entered business with some of the *Fazendeiros* as colonists, have since attained to a moderate competency, and settled themselves upon small farms or engaged in mercantile business.⁴¹

The presence of black slaves in Brazil notwithstanding, that country would not be attractive unless Confederate émigrés had the means necessary to acquire human property. Aware of this problem, Hastings drew his readers' attention to the fact that slaves were rather inexpensive in the Empire. "Considering the comparative scarcity of slaves," the land surveyor explained, "they are very cheap; excellent, able-bodied men and women can be purchased at prices ranging from three to six hundred dollars each." Similar to the antebellum South, slaves in Brazil were "frequently sold at auction," but they "were generally sold very low." Moreover, Hastings was "informed that they could often be purchased on very reasonable terms at private sale." Slaves were so cheap in the Empire that even the free and landless poor Brazilians, who had to work the lands of major planters, did not have to do it by themselves provided that "most of them own some slaves, and they are also employed upon the place."⁴²

Besides guaranteeing that immigrants could legally acquire slaves in Brazil for a reasonable price, emigration promoters had to convince white southerners that people of African descent would remain under control there. Hastings thus spared no effort in order to reassure his compatriots that they should "not be alarmed because of the existence of that peculiar class, in that country ... especially, as there, they are slaves, while here [in the United States] they are free." Ex-slaveholders who fought "Negro Equality" in the postwar American South had nothing to fear about living among approximately two million blacks in the Empire of Brazil; after all, "most of our people do not object to the presence of slaves, however numerous; their absence is their chief cause of complaint, and of their present distress."⁴³ By the 1860s, the Brazilian nation still firmly held on to the only form of labor that, from the perspective of most Southern white men, could flourish in a vast country producing valuable agricultural commodities for the world market.

⁴⁰ Dunn, *Brazil, the Home for Southerners*, 40.

⁴¹ Gaston, *Hunting a Home in Brazil*, 204, 103.

⁴² Hastings, *Emigrant's Guide to Brazil*, 213. For an analysis of the Brazilian domestic slave trade, see Herbert S. Klein, "The Internal Slave Trade in Nineteenth-Century Brazil: A Study of Slave Importations into Rio de Janeiro in 1852," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 51 (1971): 567-585.

⁴³ Hastings, *Emigrant's Guide to Brazil*, 215.

Emigration promoters were nonetheless aware of the fact that, since Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, Brazil alone among independent nations of the Western world maintained slavery. Critics of emigration to Brazil argued that, if there really were advantages in the permanence of slavery in that country, they would soon disappear given that the land of the Southern Cross was already involved in a complicated war against Paraguay and would soon be taken by internal restlessness concerning slave labor. On July 28, 1865, the Virginia newspaper *Norfolk Post* asserted that everyone knew that southerners were selecting Brazil as a place to relocate "because slavery is the corner stone of that empire, and there they can enjoy the privileges of the peculiar institution denied them in this country." Although the editors did not condemn the principles of those who were decided to leave the United States, they believed that the émigrés were simply "jumping out of the frying pan into the fire." The Southern states were now at peace while Brazil was "liable at any moment to become the theatre of civil or foreign war. She is at present a slave power, and the only one worth naming in Christendom; but how long do these people think she will be permitted to continue as such?" With the whole civilized world free from slavery and serfdom, the *Norfolk Post* continued, "it would not surprise us if such weighty arguments were brought to bear against Brazil within a very few years, as will force her Emperor to imitate the examples of Russia and the United States, and then slavery will cease to exist everywhere." Those who were moving to Brazil "for no other purpose but that they may enjoy the privilege of owning their own servants" should know that slavery "ere long be is defunct in Cuba and Brazil as it now is in the United States."⁴⁴

Such seemingly unavoidable reality led emigration promoters to contend that, even if the Empire of Brazil eventually decided to emancipate the slaves, it would remain the best place on earth for Southern whites. The emotional conclusion of Gaston's work stated exactly this idea:

To our Southern people the empire of Brazil embodies the character and sentiment among the better class of citizens, very much in keeping with our standard of taste and politeness. It has grown out of the consciousness that worth makes the man, and doubtless connected with the same relative status of races that was formerly a line of distinction between the black and white population with us. Though slavery may be destined to cease in Brazil at some future day, by gradual emancipation, yet the elements of society which have resulted from the mastery of the white man will never be erased entirely from the people. There is dignity and a hospitality among these people that correspond in many respects to the Southern gentleman in former times. We find people in Brazil capable of appreciating the Southern character, and ready to extend a cordial greeting to all who come.

I HAVE SOUGHT AND FOUND THEM A HOME.⁴⁵

Confederate emigration to Brazil was a movement of slaveholders who could not accept their loss of mastery in the American South. If slavery would eventually die out in the Empire, emigration promoters believed that the powerful Brazilian aristocracy would do everything to guarantee that the transition from slave to free labor would never bring about the same kind of disturbance that destroyed the planter class in the United States. Southern émigrés were

⁴⁴ "Treason's Saturnalia," *The Norfolk Post*, July 28, 1865, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85038624/> (accessed April 4, 2012).

⁴⁵ Gaston, *Hunting a Home in Brazil*, 373-374.

confident that “the mastery of the white man”—which they regretted was lost in the American South—would forever be preserved in the Empire of Brazil.⁴⁶

In the land of the Southern Cross, Confederates sought more than a home; they sought refuge from a civilization that had shattered the remains of aristocratic rule, transformed extensive agriculture, and forbade men from owning other human beings. Brazil, a country in which social inequality prevailed, was seen as the perfect place for diehard Confederates. There they planned to continue the struggle to defend their lifestyle from transformative historical forces. Recollecting the events that followed the attack on Fort Sumter, Dunn remarked that the death of his compatriots had not been in vain: “they live in our hearts, till life and memory perish. . . . And then, when we are about to follow them, we will charge our little ones to continue to honor and revere the memory of the heroic dead.”⁴⁷ If Dunn had his way, the Confederacy would be resurrected in Brazil, upheld by thousands upon thousands of white men who would teach their sons and grandsons that to die for the maintenance of inhuman exploitation and brutal inequality was an act of heroism.

When moving to Brazil, white southerners thought they would once again be part of a privileged group of human beings entitled to oppress those who did not own land, labor, or their own bodies. Not surprisingly, upon arriving in the Empire, southerners assumed that they had finally found independence and freedom: a peculiar form of independence, which guaranteed rights for very few and bondage for the majority; a strange form of freedom, which presupposed that all people were not created equal and that the law was a privilege to protect property-owning white men. Southern émigrés believed with fervor that they had once again found the way of life they loved at the moment they crossed the equator and realized that “one now looks in vain for the north star; it is no longer seen, every thing has become southerner. The southern cross now becomes our guiding star.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ On the process of slave emancipation in Brazil, see Robert E. Conrad, *The Destruction of Brazilian Slavery, 1850-1888* (Malabar: Krieger Pub. Co., 1993). For a comparative analysis of the process of emancipation in Brazil and the United States, see Steven Hahn, “Class and State in Postemancipation Societies: Southern Planters in Comparative Perspective,” *The American Historical Review* 95 (1990): 75-98.

⁴⁷ Dunn, *Brazil, the Home for Southerners*, 11-13.

⁴⁸ Hastings, *Emigrant's Guide to Brazil*, 233.