*J. Lat. Amer. Stud.* **34**, 1–20 © 2002 Cambridge University Press
DOI: 10.1017/S0022216X01006277 Printed in the United Kingdom


# Raízes de Gilberto Freyre*

THOMAS E. SKIDMORE

*Abstract*. The centenary in 2000 of Gilbert Freyre's birth occasioned a number of retrospectives on his place in Brazil's history. This article focuses on Freyre up to 1933, the year in which *Casa Grande & Senzala* was published. Emphasis is given to such formative influences as his undergraduate study at Baylor University, his graduate study at Columbia University and his subsequent travels in Europe. In these years Freyre rejected an invitation to stay in the USA and strengthened his resolve to return to Brazil and make his career as a writer. The theme he soon adopted was Brazil's viability as a modern nation, notwithstanding its supposed defects of race and climate.

Gilberto Freyre is a challenging subject for scholarly analysis, though not for lack of material. Few Brazilian writers have been more discussed than Freyre. And few have talked more about their own writing. Yet the result for the post-1945 era has been surprisingly disappointing.[1] The first generation of commentary was largely laudatory, culminating in the five-hundred page multi-authored tribute *Gilberto Freyre: sua ciência, sua*

Thomas E. Skidmore is Céspedes Professor of Latin American History at the Center for Latin American Studies, Brown University.

* An earlier version of this article was presented at the VII Jornada de Ciências Sociaias UNESP – Marília, Brazil, in November 2000. My interpretation of Freyre's work rests in part on my conversations with him in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Recife in the 1960s and the 1970s. Research assistance for this article was provided by Beatriz Fontenelle Arantes. I am indebted to Alexandre Eulalio and Franciso de Assis Barbosa who years ago taught me much about Brazilian cultural history in general and Freyre in particular. Felicity Skidmore edited the paper on which this article is based.

1 There is nothing akin to a definitive biography. A start has been made in Vamireh Chacon, *Gilberto Freyre*: *uma biografia intelectual* (Recife, 1993). There is a wealth of biographical detail in Diogo de Melo Meneses, *Gilberto Freyre* (Rio de Janeiro, 1944). There is a useful chronology of Freyre's life and a bibliography of his works in Edson Nery da Fonseca, *Um livro completa meio século* (Recife, 1983). For a reprint of the prefaces by four important foreign scholars to translations of *Casa Grande*, see Ricardo Benzaquem de Araújo, 'Leituras de Gilberto Freyre', *Novos Estudos*, No. 56, March 2000, pp. 9–42. Among recent works that offer the most original insights are R.B. Araújo, *Guerra e paz: Casa Grande & Senzala e a obra de Gilberto Freyre nos anos 30* (Rio de Janeiro, 1994), Jeffrey D. Needell, 'Identity, Race, Gender and Modernity in the Origins of Gilberto Freyre's Oeuvre', *American Historical Review*, 100, no. 1, February 1995, pp. 51–77, and most chapters in Marcos Chor Maio and Ricardo Ventura Santos, eds., *Raça, ciência e sociedade* (Rio de Janeiro, 1996). In his well-argued and well-documented article, Needell offers a psycho-sexual analysis of Freyre's personality which goes well beyond my discussion of his career up to 1933.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X01006277 Published online by Cambridge University Press

*filosofia, sua arte* (1962), published to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of *Casa Grande & Senzala*.[2] That volume marked the high point of the campaign to make Freyre into a cultural icon. One eminent contributor even proposed his 'canonisation'.

Not surprisingly, that iconic status provoked a second-generation reaction, typically highly critical. Scholars such as Marvin Harris, Carlos Guilherme Mota, Jacob Gorender and Emília Viotti da Costa have all dismissed Freyre as an apologist for a reactionary agrarian society who had done little more than furnish a cover for a deeply unequal world.[3] Now, in the hundredth year since Freyre's birth, there are signs of a more measured evaluation of his work.

This paper combines two themes. One is an analysis of Freyre's career. The second is a discussion of his work as related to Brazilian intellectual history, with emphasis on *Casa Grande & Senzala* (Rio de Janeiro, 1933). I chose this as his most influential book, and one whose themes recur throughout Freyre's later work. My argument is that neither the content of *Casa Grande & Senzala* nor the nature of its reception can be understood without relating them to their historical context. As Gilberto himself observed, 'A originalidade está em combinações de um elemento novo com os velhos e não na invenção absoluta.'[4] This consideration is especially important as a corrective to the many commentators who have written about Freyre and his work as independent of time.

[2] *Gilberto Freyre: sua ciência, sua filosofia, sua arte* (Rio de Janeiro, 1962). The only contributor to this volume who raised questions about Freyre's work was, appropriately enough, João Cruz Costa, a Paulista. Benzaquen's approach is primarily that of an *explication de texte*. He focuses on Freyre's language – the metaphors, contradictions and conversational quality of the prose. He says relatively little about the use of evidence, or the relationship of Freyre's analysis to the contemporary intellectual scene.

[3] Marvin Harris, *Patterns of Race in the Americas* (New York, 1964). Carlos Guilherme Mota, *Ideologia da cultura brasileira (1933–1974)* (São Paulo, 1981). Mota's critical angle is shown thus (p. 271): 'Freyre consegue mostrar as excelências dos negros e mestiços – como que criando um novo tipo de valorização dessa mão-de-obra, para incorporação menos conflituosa às novas formas que vinha assumindo o capitalismo no Brasil'. Jacob Gorender, *O escravismo colonial* (São Paulo, 1985), Emília Viotti da Costa, *The Brazilian Empire*: *Myths and Histories* (Chicago, 1985). For a militant Afro-Brazilian critique, see Abdias do Nascimento, *Mixture or Massacre? Essays in the Genocide of a Black People* (Buffalo, 1979).

[4] Gilberto Freyre, *Pessoas, coisas e animais, 1a serie*. 2nd edition (Porto Alegre, 1981), p. 325. The succeeding volumes in Freyre's three-volume portrait of patriarchal society, *Sobrados e mucambos* (1936) and *Ordem e progresso* (1959) have played a very different role from *Casa Grande & Senzala*. They are more focused, chronologically as well as conceptually, than *Casa Grande* and are therefore, of greater use to social historians, although *Casa Grande* remains the fountainhead for all of Freyre's subsequent writing. For a further discussion of these points, see Skidmore 'Gilberto Freyre and the Early Brazilian Republic: Some Notes on Methodology', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, VI (no. 4, July 1964), pp. 490–505.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X01006277 Published online by Cambridge University Press

I focus my biographical details on the years up to 1933, and only in so far as they help us understand the influence of *Casa Grande and Senzala* in the context of the 1900–1930 cultural scene. I give special attention to the parallel between Freyre's career development and fundamental trends in Brazil's social thought. That analysis should help us understand not only why he has been such an influential figure, but also why his reputation suffered such a decline after about 1960.

In 1900, the year of Gilberto's birth, Brazilians lived in the shadow of two determinisms: race and climate. Both theories were the product of the most advanced European and North American thought of the day, and both seemed to apply par excellence to Brazil, a tropical land most of whose inhabitants were of African descent.[5] As many a foreign observer was wont to comment: poor Brazil – too few white men and too many strange diseases. The conventional wisdom at that time said that the combination would permanently handicap Brazil's development. These were the days when Italian steamship companies were advertising ship passages to Argentina with 'no stops in Brazil'.

Just a year into the new century a routine death seemed to confirm the insalubrious image of an unhealthy ecosystem. In 1901 Eduardo Prado, scion of one of São Paulo's wealthiest and most cultured families, died of yellow fever while living in Rio. Hardly a good advertisement for the capital city of the new republic. And the destructive influence of non-whites seemed to be confirmed for the elite in 1910, when the eminent English jurist Lord Bryce witnessed a naval revolt in Rio bay by virtually all-black dreadnought crews, who were able to terrify the residents of Rio with a credible threat to bombard the city. As Bryce later informed the readers of his South American travel book, Brazil had great potential but probably not enough white men to take charge.[6]

[5] This does not mean that there was no understanding, that climate and disease might not be inextricably tied together. As early as 1860, one highly scientific team of medical researchers on tropical diseases emerged in Bahia, establishing an international reputation for original research. Unfortunately, they were unable to gain national influence and their presence only lasted until about 1890. Julyan G. Peard, *Race, Place and Medicine: The Idea of the Tropics in Nineteenth-Century Brazilian Medicine* (Durham, NC, 1998). For a survey of the place of race in Brazilian research institutions in the 1870–1930 era, see Lilia Moritz Schwarcz, *The Spectacle of the Races. Scientists, Institutions, and the Race Question in Brazil*, 1870–1930 (New York, 1999). In the 1900–1930 period, there were specialists in public health who were articulate defenders of Brazil's climate. The most prominent was Afrânio Peixoto.

[6] James Bryce, *South America: Observations and Impressions* (New York, 1912), pp. 419–20. This climate of opinion about race is described in more detail in Thomas E. Skidmore, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (New York, 1974). For a revealing analysis of the 1910 revolt, see Zachary Morgan, *The Legacy of the Lash* (unpubl. PhD dissertation, History, Brown University, 2000).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X01006277 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The First World War transformed this scene. Brazil began to reexamine its relationship to Europe, previously one of deference and dependence. The fratricidal slaughter in Europe demonstrated that the most advanced (white!) nations were prepared to sacrifice millions of their finest young men on the altar of a self-destructive concept of nationality. The bloody combat and massive casualties in the European trenches, although thousands of miles away, forced thoughtful Brazilians to reconsider the foundations of their nationhood, fearing that their nation was too racially divided, and too backward, to be successful in a war of that magnitude. As a politically aware teenager, Freyre was witness to this intellectual upheaval.

This revisionist process was but one more stage in an intellectual reassessment that had been underway since the turn of the century. The focus was on the question of Brazil's viability as a modern nation. The twin determinisms of race and climate had come under fire from a succession of Brazilian intellectuals struggling to escape from the iron cage of 'scientific' predictions. It was against this backdrop that Freyre left Recife in 1918 for college study in the USA.[7]

### *Formative years in the United States*

Freyre began his university career at Baylor, a Baptist-affiliated University in Waco, Texas. He could hardly have chosen a more unlikely time or place. His sojourn in the United States came at the high point of US imperialist expansion into Latin America, which paralleled US emergence as the world's preeminent economic power. Texas itself was the creation of mid-nineteenth-century US aggression. It had merged with the USA after a war that left Mexico humiliated militarily and demoralised politically. Mexico also lost vast territories in what became the US Southwest and California. Freyre's arrival in the USA furthermore came less than two decades after the USA had forcibly established a protectorate in Cuba, another outpost of Spanish culture in the New World. The rationale for this expansionism included a US contempt for the 'inferior' races of Latin America.

The harsh contrast between the cultures of the Brazilian Northeast and of the American South did not escape Freyre. It appeared in a graphic form, for example, in his diary. While visiting a nearby Texas town, Freyre noted a strange odour in the air. Asking a local about it, he was told that the smell was left from the lynching of an African American a few days earlier. This was the kind of horror story Brazilians expected to

[7] For a more detailed treatment see Skidmore, *Black into White*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X01006277 Published online by Cambridge University Press

hear from the USA, a consideration of that kind of violence would later be central to Freyre's comparison of the two countries.[8]

Notwithstanding these occasions for culture shock, Gilberto prospered in his new learning milieu, completing his US-style liberal arts course in only two years by attending classes year-round. He won praise from key faculty, and his vast reading and highly original intellect earned him the nickname of 'genius' from his peers.

While at Baylor Freyre became the target of a curious recruitment effort. Professor of English J. A. Armstrong, impressed by Gilberto's intelligence, urged him to become a US citizen so he could apply for a Rhodes Scholarship. Freyre declined.[9] The irony in this suggestion was not lost on a young Brazilian already anxious to make his name in Brazil. Further, the goal of the Rhodes endowment, which restricted applicants to 'Caucasian males' from the English Empire, the USA and Germany, who were supposed to promote 'Anglo-Saxon values' flatly contradicted one of the central messages of Freyre's later career. This was only one in a series of important life choices Freyre made in Waco.

Another important decision concerned religion. As a seventeen-year-old in Recife, he had converted to Protestantism, very much a minority religion in Brazil. The question of his religious affiliation arose when he visited the state of Kentucky on an invitation from a fundamentalist Protestant congregation (linked to Freyre's Baptist schoolteachers in Recife). Freyre was appalled by the 'hysterical' manner of their worship. He had come face to face with the highly emotional style (spontaneous shouting, dramatic gesticulations) typical of the fundamentalist Baptists of the US South, and was sufficiently disgusted to renounce Protestantism. It turned out to be a crucial turning point, since the Brazilian culture that he was later to extol was heavily Catholic.[10]

[8] Gilberto Freyre, *Tempo morto e outros tempos. Trechos de um diário de adolescência e primeira mocidade* (São Paulo, 1975), p. 33. Needell quite rightly warns against putting too much faith in these diary entries, since Freyre had a habit of rewriting earlier works. Furthermore, much of the diary was lost or had deteriorated, leaving the question of whether the surviving entries are representative of all the original entries. Needell, 'Identity, Race, Gender and Modernity', p. 52.

[9] While in the USA Gilberto repeatedly reiterated his commitment to Brazil. Freyre, *Tempo morto*, pp. 31, 74, 97, 128.

[10] As Luis Jardim notes, Freyre's return from Protestantism had serious implications for the future. 'Sua crise religiosa de adolescência foi intensa e, sob aquelas influências, no sentido do cristianismo evangélico, que logo depois sentiria contrário ao seu brasileirismo e às suas tendências intelectuais mais profundas. Deu-se nêle um regresso não religioso, muito menos doutrinário, à Igreja, sim à tradição Católica, hispânica e brasileira, nos seus aspectos culturais – justamente os aspectos que mais o influenciariam depois, nas suas idéias de solução não simplesmente econômica ou política, mas cultural, do problema humano'. Luis Jardim, preface to Gilberto Freyre, *Retalhos de*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X01006277 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Freyre's career choice was also solidified during this period in the United States. He had probably always assumed that he would be an intellectual. The question was whether he would be a scholar or a 'writer' – in the European mode of producing elegant commentary on important issues of the day with the aim of influencing a wide readership. The catalyst was Oliveira Lima's mentorship.[11] Although a diplomat by profession, Lima's persona as it related to the young Freyre was as an accomplished and well-connected essayist with aristocratic origins in Pernambuco. His protracted absences from Brazil did not prevent him from contributing regularly to the Brazilian press and being a prolific author of books published in Brazil. Thirty-three years older than Freyre, he had spoken at Freyre's high school graduation. Oliveira Lima was captivated by Freyre's talents and, being childless, he found it easy to become Freyre's mentor. From his US base in Washington DC, he fed Freyre intellectual and career advice and suggested reading. He also introduced him to many prominent intellectuals, both Brazilian and foreign, and reassured him that he could be a great writer.[12]

The influence of Oliveira Lima's mentoring was intensified by Freyre's second US university experience. From provincial Texas he travelled to New York City and Columbia University, one of the world's top research institutions in one of the world's most cosmopolitan cities. Freyre was now to encounter US intellectual and artistic life at its best, continuing to exploit Oliveira Lima's personal introductions to help him live to the full. He read omnivorously, especially literature and literary criticism, and he took an MA degree in Political and Social Sciences after two years in New York. His most influential teacher at Columbia, as he often acknowledged thereafter, was the immigrant German Jewish anthropologist Franz Boas. Boas was at the height of his anthropological career as the leading scholarly opponent of scientific racism in the USA. His students were to become enormously influential

---

*jornais velhos* (São Paulo, 1964), xii. As Gilberto put it thirty years later: 'Passou minha fase de cristianismo romanticamente evangélico'. Gilberto Freyre, *Pessoas, coisas e animais, 1a serie*. 2nd edition (Porto Alegre, 1981), p. 36.

[11] Freyre described his long and close relationship with Lima in his preface to the posthumously published Oliveira Lima, *Memórias* (Rio de Janeiro, 1937).

[12] Interestingly, Oliveira Lima, intellectually alienated from Brazil, echoed Armstrong's view that Freyre should abandon Brazil. 'Oliveira Lima advertiu-me: 'Não pense em fixar-se no Brasil. Escritor no Brasil? É o mesmo que pretender alguém patinar em areia'.' Gilberto Freyre, *Tempo morto*, p. 133. The diary entry is identified as Recife, 1924.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X01006277 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in carrying this anti-racist message to the US academic community.[13] Freyre took it back to Brazil.

Freyre's Columbia MA thesis on Brazilian social life in the nineteenth century contained the germ of much of his future work.[14] Its description of the nineteenth-century world of his fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers was to remain his life-long vantagepoint on Brazilian history. It was also the bridge between the 'modern' Brazil that was emerging and the 'traditional' Brazil that was so typical of the Northeast – a contrast that eventually led to Freyre's 'valorisation' of the same past that so many of his Brazilian peers felt exemplified their country's backwardness.[15]

A key feature of his thesis was its focus on the intimacy of family life. Bypassing political or institutional history (as he did throughout his career), Freyre wrote instead a brand of social history unknown in the Brazil of his day (and rare in the USA and Europe).[16] He chose this path, as he explained frequently thereafter, ignoring disciplinary constraints in pursuit of intellectual independence (and, we suspect, writing that would sell).

After his highly successful study in the USA, Freyre spent two years travelling in Europe. Armed yet again with Oliveira Lima's introductions, he sought out every noted intellectual and/or writer he could find. He frequented academic and artistic haunts in Paris, Heidelberg and Oxford, speaking fluent French and English and less fluent German. His favourite stop was Oxford, whose combination of intellectual distinction and social sophistication he greatly admired. His diary and letters from these years

[13] Elazar Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing concepts of race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 76–90. Scientific racism died hard in the USA and Europe. It proved difficult for anti-racist scientists to reach any consensus, even in the face of the rising Nazi threat as related in Elazar Barkan, 'Mobilizing Scientists Against Nazi Racism, 1933–1939', in George W. Stocking, Jr., *Bones, Bodies, Behavior* (Madison, 1988), 180–205. Even after the war was over, it was a struggle for the UNESCO-sponsored scientists to formulate and defend their 1951 statement disavowing typological raciological science. Donna J. Haraway, 'Remondelling the Human Way of Life', in the same work, pp. 206–59.

[14] Gilberto Freyre, 'Social Life in Brazil in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century,' which was published in the *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 5 (Nov. 1922), pp. 597-630. A Brazilian edition is available in Freyre, *Vida social no Brasil nos meados do século XIX* (Recife, 1985), 3rd ed.

[15] The economy of the Northeast had traditionally been based on sugar. By Freyre's day the sugar industry was in decline, leaving Pernambuco, Freyre's home state, without any economic impetus. Peter Eisenberg, *The Sugar Industry of Pernambuco, 1840–1910* (Berkeley, 1974).

[16] Freyre would certainly not have argued with Tolstoy's conception of history: 'To study the laws of history we must completely change the subject of our observation, must leave aside kings, ministers, and generals, and study the common, infinitesimally small elements by which the masses are moved'. Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace* (New York, 1942), pp. 919–20. Freyre may even have been inspired by Tolstoy on this point.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X01006277 Published online by Cambridge University Press

are full of talk about writers and writing, further evidence that his heart was set on becoming one of them.[17]

*Back to Brazil*

In 1923 Freyre returned to the Brazil he had left four and half years earlier. 'Deixei o Brasil, ainda menino, e venho revê-lo homem feito. Venho revê-lo com outros olhos: os de adulto. Adulto viajado pela América do Norte e pela Europa.'[18] He now had two foreign university degrees, numerous personal intellectual contacts in Europe, and the self-confidence of having excelled abroad. Furthermore, he had made a series of crucial decisions. He had returned to Catholicism, he had rejected the lure of exile in the United States or Europe, and he had made a commitment to becoming an independent writer. Now he had to adjust to being back in provincial Recife and to the challenge of his talents not being lost to the world (as his recent mentors had predicted).[19]

Much had happened in Brazil during Freyre's absence. The literary and artistic scene had been shaken by the 1922 Modern Art Week in São Paulo, an artistic revolt against the still reigning late nineteenth-century artistic canons. There was also a Modernist movement afoot in the Northeast during the later 1920s, in which Freyre participated although contemporaries have disagreed over his exact role.[20] In addition, a series of military revolts in the early 1920s deepened political cleavages and foreshadowed the military interventions that were to disfigure Brazil's fledgling democracy and have an important influence on Freyre's career. Finally, in 1922, Brazil gained its own Communist Party, bringing a materialist ideology that Freyre would vigorously oppose for the rest of his career.

Freyre returned to journalism, resuming his regular contributions to

[17] Freyre more than once stated his intended career path: 'Se eu puder vir a ser alguém, a realizar alguma coisa, não é sociólogo nem antropólogo nem historiador que desejo ser, embora não repudie a formação científica que se juntou em mim aos estudos humanísticos, pelos cursos sitemáticos, que segui, da Biologia, Geologia, Psicologia, de Ciências Políticas, Jurídicas e Sociais. Nem a obra de minha aspiração principal não é a de pura realização científica em quaisquer dessas matérias. Nem em história ou filosofia sistemáticos. E sim obra de escritor que se sirva de sua formação em parte científica, em parte humanística, para ser escritor'. Gilberto Freyre, *Tempo morto*, 219. The diary entry is for Recife, 1928.

[18] Gilberto Freyre, *Tempo morto*, p. 125. The diary entry is for Recife, 1923.

[19] Many of his old friends found his new foreign airs insufferable. 'O Gilberto Freyre recém-chegado da Europa não deve ser apresentado como figura ideal, mas ao contrário, como indivíduo sob muitos respeitos antipático, irritante, esnobe, usando um monóculo que lhe acentuava o ar pedante, um *Derby hat*, roupas e meias inglêsas e americanas'. Diogo de Melo Meneses, *Gilberto Freyre*, p. 108.

[20] Joaquim Inojosa, *Um 'Movimento' imaginário. Resposta a Gilberto Freyre* (Rio de Janeiro, 1972).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X01006277 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the local press (which he began as a schoolboy and had continued while abroad).[21] Local booksellers being inadequate, he counted on friends abroad to keep him supplied with reading material reflecting intellectual trends in the North Atlantic World. He also became private secretary to the Governor of Pernambuco. Local politics of the 1920s were thoroughly clan-ridden, as Freyre discovered when his political patrons saw their power base rudely undermined by the Revolution of 1930. In that upheaval, Freyre's family home was destroyed by the victors and he was forced into exile.

By this point, Freyre had well in mind the book he hoped would make his name. The Revolution of 1930 and its attendant turmoil had dramatised the clash between the traditional and the modern in the ongoing creation of Brazil's national identity. It had also intensified Freyre's fear that the revolutionaries would destroy too much of a past he thought was still misunderstood. To capture the essence of that past was to be one of his principal literary goals.[22] He conducted intensive research in Europe (especially in the Portuguese archives) and the USA. Once again he maintained close contact with European intellectuals.

Freyre came back from exile in 1932, eager to find a publisher – many were little more than printers – for a manuscript that had now grown to the equivalent of a six hundred-page book. This was not the easiest of tasks. In addition to its length, the manuscript was the work of an unknown – and one from outside the Rio-São Paulo axis at that.

The publishing firm Freyre found was headed by Augusto Frederico Schmidt, himself a poet. A contemporary commentator alleged that the author had to subsidise the edition. I have no corroborating evidence for this assertion. But it is certainly known that that Freyre soon became angry with his publisher, complaining about unpaid royalties and pirated editions.[23] He was discovering the financial perils of being a free-lance writer.

Whatever his royalties, *Casa Grande & Senzala* propelled Freyre to fame. It is also the key to all his subsequent writing on Brazil, as many critics have noted.[24]

[21] The columns are reprinted in Gilberto Freyre, *Tempo de aprendiz* (São Paulo, 1979) 2 vols. The columns are largely 'light' chronicles which reflect little of Freyre's more serious thinking.

[22] For an excellent overview of Freyre's chosen topic see Stuart Schwartz, 'The Formation of a Colonial Identity in Brazil', in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (eds.), *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (Princeton, 1987), pp. 15–50.

[23] Freyre, *Pessoas, coisas e animais*, pp. 71–2. He was eventually rescued by José Olympio, the legendary Rio publisher, who took over the rights to *Casa Grande & Senzala* in 1940 and remained Freyre's principal publisher thereafter.

[24] A heavy focus on the first book has often been justified by critics such as by Antonio Pinto de Medeiros in 'Um Grande Renovador' in Edson Nery da Fonseca (ed.), *Casa*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X01006277 Published online by Cambridge University Press

*The Book That Made Freyre's Name*

Freyre proposes several fundamental theses in *Casa Grande*, which are repeated throughout the book. The most important is his argument that modern Brazil has been indelibly marked by the legacy of the colonial slave-plantation complex (especially in the Northeast) and its accompanying patriarchal family structure.[25] There is the corollary argument that any pathologies exhibited by the slave society were the result *not* of racial mixture (as the scientific racists reasoned), but of the perverse effects of the patriarchal slave system.[26] A second argument is that the Portuguese, compared to the other Europeans, were uniquely suited to colonise the New World tropics.[27] A third argument is that African slavery in Brazil was more benign than elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere, especially North America. Furthermore, the Portuguese,

---

*Grande & Senzala e a crítica brasileira de 1933 a 1944* (Recife, 1985), p. 291: 'A complexidade e dimensões do assunto fizeram do Sr. Gilberto Freyre um homem de um só livro. E esse livro é justamente, *Casa Grande & Senzala*. Todos os demais lhe são apêndices. Ampliação de capítulos ou parágrafos.' Originally published in 20 February, 1944.

[25] As a leading US student of colonial Brazil noted, ' … it was really after Freyre's book that slavery and the African were given a central place in the historical formation of Brazil. In that sense, his book marked a watershed in the integration of Brazilian history'. Stuart B. Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants and Rebels Reconsidering Brazilian Slavery* (Urban, 1992), p. 2. The reigning advocate of the racist interpretation of Brazilian history as of 1933 was Oliveira Vianna. Skidmore, *Black into White*, pp. 200–3.

[26] It should be noted that Freyre was also explicit in describing the cruel torture and sadistic punishments slaves in Brazil had to endure. He was unequivocal in downgrading the influence of race and environment. 'Além do que, confrontando-se os effeitos moraes, ou antes sociaes, da monocultura e do systema de trabalho escravo sobre a população brasileira, com os effeitos produzidos pelo mesmo systema sobre populações de raça differente e em condições diversas de clima e de meio physico – nas Antilhas e no sul dos Estados Unidos, por exemplo – verifica-se a preponderancia das causas economicas e sociaes – a technica escravocrata de producção e o typo patriarchal de familia – sobre as influencias de *raça* ou de *meio*.' Freyre, *Casa Grande & Senzala*, p. 434. Freyre frequently reiterates this point.

[27] A typical version of the argument went as follows: 'Apressam-na entre gentes mais atrasadas os Puritanos ingleses querendo conservar-se immaculados do contacto sexual e social de povos que lhes repugnavam pela differença de côr e de costumes e que evocavam à sua consciencia de raça e de christãos o espantalho da miscegenação e do paganismo dissoluto. Os portugueses, além de menos ardentes na orthodoxia que os hespanhoes e menos estrictos que os ingleses nos preconceitos de côr e de moral christã, vieram defrontar-se na America, não com nenhum povo articulado em imperio ou em systema já vigoroso de cultura religiosa e material – com palacios, sacrificios humanos aos deuses, monumentos, pontes, obras de irrigação e de exploração de minas – mas, ao contrario, com uma populações mais rasteiras do continente'. Freyre, *Casa Grande & Senzala*, pp. 85–6. This celebration of Portugal's historic role was welcome news to Brazilian readers who were used to hearing endless contemporary indictments of Portugal as one of the most backward European nations.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X01006277 Published online by Cambridge University Press

because of their previous close contact with the Moors, were less race conscious. From this argument it naturally follows, in Freyre's view, that modern Brazilian race relations are more harmonious (thus producing a 'racial democracy') than elsewhere, especially the United States. This is one of his book's best-known and most contested arguments.

The initial critical reaction to the book was extremely favourable, as can be seen in the collection of reviews reprinted in Edson Nery da Fonseca (ed.), *Casa Grande & Senzala e a crítica brasileira de 1933 a 1944* (1985).[28] This does not mean that all readers found it a seminal influence on their own thinking. In a 1944 volume containing the testimonies of 26 leading intellectuals who were asked to summarise the most important influences on the formation of their thought, only one contributor mentioned Freyre.[29]

Any analysis of *Casa Grande & Senzala* must begin with the question of methodology. Since I am a historian, it seems appropriate that I begin by discussing the book as a work of history. Freyre's approach to writing social history was avowedly unconventional. I have already noted his disdain for disciplinary categories, including those of the historian. His preface to *Casa Grande* makes this clear. Thus, it should be no surprise that his manner of handling evidence is not orthodox history. He seldom presents a clear-cut chronology, and often jumps from century to century.[30] In *Casa Grande & Senzala* his treatment is thematic, with the focus moving back and forth between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. The reader could be forgiven for concluding that the nature of slavery, the European reaction to the climate, the structure of the family, and other key factors had altered little over the three centuries of colonial life. Change, which has to be central to Freyre's story, is difficult to pin down in this scenario. Despite clear chapter titles, *Casa Grande & Senzala* was a chaotically organised compendium of intriguing information about Brazil's colonial past. In addition, Freyre rarely states his arguments directly.[31] Even a reader as fundamentally sympathetic to Freyre as Anísio

[28] 'Casa Grande e Senzala, volumão espêsso como um tijolo, aconteceu, em 1933, como algo de explosivo, de insólito, de realmente nôvo, a romper anos e anos de rotina e chão batido,' in the words of Astrojildo Pereira, 'Simples Opinião Sôbre 'Casa Grande & Senzala' in *Gilberto Freyre: sua ciência*, p. 385. In 1967 Antonio Candido referred to 'a força revolucionária, o impacto libertador que teve este grande livro'. Preface to Sérgio Buarque de Hollanda, *Raízes do Brasil:* (Rio de Janeiro, 1989), 21st ed., xxxix–xl.

[29] Edgar Cavalheiro, *Testamento de uma geração* (Porto Alegre, 1944). Freyre merits barely a mention in Sérgio Miceli, *Intelectuais e classe dirigente no Brasil: 1920–1945* (São Paulo, 1979).

[30] This problem was noted several decades ago in James Lockhart, 'The Social History of Colonial Spanish America', *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 7 (Spring, 1972).

[31] One of the few reviewers to acknowledge this feature noted: 'Talvez falte ao autor um núcleo, um centro, e há muita coisa lateral no livro. Talvez lhe falte uma "convicçao"'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X01006277 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Teixeira notes that 'nada é em Gilberto Freyre linear ou esquemático; o seu pensamento se desdobra rico, múlitplo e maduro, antes psicológico do que lógico, preferindo a aparência da contradição à simplificação empobrecedora e primária'.[32]

Freyre's proclivity for claiming his work belonged to no single discipline had a particularly curious effect, since many of the issues he considered central were subjects of undergoing intense scientific research. Race is a good example. Contemporary biologists, geneticists and anthropologists were engaged in wide-ranging research on race, often reaching contradictory conclusions. Freyre chose among these authorities, often citing Boas and frequently endorsing a neo-Lamarckian position to aid his rejection of scientific racism. Yet nowhere did he offer a systematic discussion of these scientific controversies, as would have been required of anyone assuming the role of direct participant in the scientific controversies. By ignoring the rules of normal scholarly debate he allowed himself to pick and choose among arguments without needing to defend his choice. The same can be said of the treatment of such topics as nutrition, epidemiology, and land use. In every case Freyre cites much contemporary scientific evidence, but almost never shares with the reader how his analysis of the evidence leads to his conclusions. Even though he usually stated those conclusions only by implication, he never leaves any doubt in a reader's mind about his confidence that his views on any issue represent ultimate truth.

In addition to his cavalier use of scientific evidence, Freyre has a habit of asserting *as given* arguments for which the evidence cited is thin or non-existent. One example is his claim that the Portuguese settler was better suited than other Europeans to create a viable society in the tropics. One might expect this vast generalisation to be based on a comparative analysis of Portuguese, Spanish, English and French colonisation. Instead, the reader is given only a disjointed series of references that fall well short of the minimum standards of evidence and logic needed to justify such a generalisation.[33] A related example is Freyre's assertion that the African slaves taken to Brazil were of a superior quality to those taken to English America. Again, the only evidence adduced to support this claim consists of two assessments by foreign travellers, neither of whom was a researcher.[34] Am I holding Freyre to an unrealistic standard? After all,

---

Agripino Grieco, 'Obra vigorosa de ciência e arte', in Fonseca (ed.), *Casa Grande & Senzala e a crítica*, p. 74, originally published 28 January, 1934.

[32] Anísio Teixeira, 'Gilberto Freyre, mestre e criador de sociologia', *Gilberto Freyre: sua ciência*, pp. 492–3.

[33] Freyre, *Casa Grande e Senzala*, pp. 14–17.

[34] Freyre, *Casa Grande e Senzala*, p. 338.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X01006277 Published online by Cambridge University Press

evidentiary standards for that kind of prose in the Brazil of the 1930s were less demanding, and his contemporaries did not raise this as a major criticism. This may be part of the answer, but only part.

Freyre did not, for example, offer the kind of systematic argument presented by Oliveira Vianna, the jurist-historian, who wrote on many of the same themes as Freyre. Nor did he offer as straightforward an analysis as Sérgio Buarque de Hollanda (in *Raízes do Brasil*) or Caio Prado Júnior (in *Formação contemporâneo do Brasil*), two other widely read historical interpretations published in the decade after *Casa Grade*.[35] Freyre had to be judged *sui generis*, which is what he always claimed was his due. In many ways Freyre organised his material in the manners of a fiction writer. Freyye liked to be compared to Marcel Proust, but William Faulkner may be a more apt comparison.

I believe there is something more basic going on here. We need to remember that most Brazilian readers *wanted* to believe Freyre's optimistic message, regardless of any lack of rigour in the supporting arguments. And they were not hearing it for the first time. Freyre's argument was only the culmination of stands already present in the intellectual climate – Monteiro Lobato's resurrection of Jeca Tatú; Alberto Torres's and Manuel Bomfim's nationalist rejection of scientific racism; the public health doctor's crusades to apply science to disprove the determinist dogma that had condemned the Brazilian of the interior. *Casa Grande* was written – and received – more as a manifesto than as a tightly reasoned work of scholarship.

Climate is the other great determinism Freyre targets. Here again he relied on indirection. He did not give a detailed explanation of why the 'tropical medicine' experts in London, New York and Paris based much of their speciality on erroneous assumptions, inadequate scientific information and faulty logic.[36] Instead, Freyre cited the conclusions of their critics and then devoted many pages to Brazil's benign climate and fertile soils.

The fact of the matter was that *Casa Grande e Senzala* had no story line, no dramatic events, no heroes and no villains. In fact, there were few identifiable individuals in its six hundred pages. Instead, it was crammed with such details as the names of native plants and the derivation of African religious practices. A cynical publisher, faced with the manuscript,

[35] Sérgio Buarque de Hollanda, *Raízes do Brasil*; Caio Prado Júnior, *Formação do Brasil contemporâneo* (São Paulo, 1942).

[36] The London School of Tropical Medicine, founded in 1899, marked a milestone in the development of this specialised field, which was closely linked to European colonial expansionism in Africa and Asia. David Arnold (ed.), *Warm Climates and Western Medicine: The Emergence of Tropical Medicine, 1500–1900* (Amsterdam, 1996).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X01006277 Published online by Cambridge University Press

might have noted that at least the author had served up plenty of material on two popular subjects: sex (interracial) and food. This may explain much of the book's phenomenal popular success.[37]

*Casa Grande e Senzala* did contain an enormous amount of colourful detail. It included, for example, descriptions of Brazil's astounding variety of tropical fruits, and of the uniqueness of Portuguese history (versus that of Spain). It was also a vigorous defence of the Northeast at a time when the focus of Brazil's economy had already shifted south. The total effect on the reader was rather like that of a tourist visiting a well-appointed tropical forest. As the guide, Freyre projected an exuberance and optimism that captivated the reader. He was also capable of challenging the reader with startling generalisations, as when he wrote about racial ancestry 'Todo o brasileiro, mesmo o alvo, de cabello louro, traz na alma, quando não na alma e no corpo – ha muita gente de genipapo pelo Brasil – a sombra, ou pelo menos a pinta, do negro.'[38] In that respect, Freyre's disorganised approach was an advantage. It meant readers could happily browse through the massive volume at will, picking up individual bits of knowledge as they went. Notwithstanding the prodigious research that had gone into its writing, *Casa Grande* resembled a scrapbook more than a learned volume. Freyre's refusal to conform to a normal scholarly format actually *increased* its reader accessibility. This was no accident. It was the direct result of Freyre's determination to be (and be treated as) a writer, not a professor.[39]

Several changes in the intellectual/cultural environment helped foster *Casa Grande*'s success. The first was the doctrine of medical prevention that public health reformers had been preaching since early in the century.[40] The kind of research and field work of scientific pioneers such as Carlos Chagas had helped undermine determinist theories by demonstrating that the infectious diseases which had made the interior such an enervating and dangerous place were as susceptible as diseases

[37] Certain passages about sexual practices in colonial Brazil outraged some readers and thus caused a minor scandal. *Gilberto Freyre: sua ciência*, p. 504.

[38] Freyre, *Casa Grande e Senzala*, p. 303.

[39] Freyre would have been delighted with Tolstoy's definition of his most famous work: 'What is *War and Peace*? It is not a novel, even less it is a poem, and still less an historical chronicle. *War and Peace* is what the author wished and was able to express in the form in which it is expressed'. Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, 1353. The words could have been Freyre's in describing his work. Tolstoy was one of Freyre's favourite authors and Russia was one of Freyre's favourite countries to compare to Brazil.

[40] For an excellent summary of this campaign, see Nísia Trinidade Lima and Gilberto Hochman, 'Condenado pela raça, absolvido pela medicina: o Brasil descoberto pelo movimento sanitarista da Primeira República', in Chor Maio and Santos (eds.), *Raça, ciência e sociedade*, pp. 23–40. For a more detailed account, see Gilberto Hochman, *A era do saneamento* (São Paulo, 1998).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X01006277 Published online by Cambridge University Press

elsewhere in the world to the cures of modern medicine. This was the message of the scientific expeditions sponsored by the Oswaldo Cruz Institute from 1903–1911. The outside world was also interested in the work of these scientists. As early as 1916 the Rockefeller Foundation was exporting personnel and institutional models for use in the Brazilian public health establishment.[41]

No one better dramatised the shift in opinion during these years than Monteiro Lobato, the *paulista fazendeiro* and writer-publisher. In 1918 Lobato had published *Urupês*, which included a bleak portrait of the Paulista interior. The fictional rural worker, 'Jeca Tatú', was pictured as the hapless victim of inherent inferiority. But after intensive tutorials from public health reformers, Monteiro Lobato radically changed his portrait of Jeca Tatú. Later in 1919, he depicted Jeca as the victim of neglect who had failed to benefit from such controllable factors as correct nutrition and proper medical attention. In short, there was nothing inevitable about his plight. This remarkable and very public repudiation of determinism no doubt helped prepare Paulistas for Freyre's anti-determinist assumptions,[42] although it should be noted that Freyre never had the success in São Paulo that he had in Rio and most of the rest of Brazil.[43]

Another sign of the changing intellectual climate was the growing opposition to scientific racism from a series of prominent writers. The pioneer was Sílvio Romero, the distinguished, if quarrelsome, literary critic from the northeastern state of Sergipe. Romero had died in 1913, five years before Gilberto departed for Texas, but his influence lived on. Romero had spent his career as a maverick. One target of his scepticism was the scientific racism his peers so readily embraced. As early as 1888 Romero was proclaiming that all Brazilians were of mixed blood, in spirit if not in flesh. This, of course, became a central theme for Freyre.[44]

There were two other notable critics of racism in the decades before Freyre returned to Brazil in 1923. One was the physician-essayist Manuel Bomfim, who found the 'parasitism' of the European colonisers, not the racial inferiority of the Indian or African, to be the villain of the colonial era. Finally, there was Alberto Torres, a former governor of Rio de Janeiro and justice of the Federal Supreme Court. After taking early retirement, Torres devoted himself to campaigning for a new awareness of Brazil's economic and political problems. This led him to target

[41] Marcos Cueto, 'Visions of Science and Development: The Rockefeller Foundation's Latin American Surveys of the 1920s', Marcos Cueto (ed.), *Missionaries of Science; The Rockefeller Foundation and Latin America* (Bloomington, 1994), pp. 1–22.

[42] Skidmore, *Black Into White*, pp. 180–4.

[43] Recognition of this fact and possible explanations for it were a major theme in the seminar on Freyre, held in Rio and São Paulo in August 2000. *Folha de São Paulo*, August 19, 2000.

[44] Skidmore, *Black into White*, pp. 32–7.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X01006277 Published online by Cambridge University Press

scientific racism, which he attacked as a cover for the economic exploitation of less developed countries. Torres was highly influential in the years surrounding the First World War, especially among the younger generation.[45]

Contributing to *Casa Grande*'s continuing success were several developments in the Brazil of the 1930s. An important initiative was the sponsorship of an ambitious nationalist cultural program by the Vargas government, which took power following the Revolution of 1930, first in a democratic context and later as a dictatorship. This government picked up on white Brazil's increasing fascination with Afro-Braziliana, of which *Casa Grande* was a leading example. As early as 1932, Vargas's lieutenants contacted the organisers of several Rio Samba Schools and began subsidising their appearance in the annual Rio Carnival in a clear reversal of the white elite's long standing contempt for the samba, candomblé and other aspects of Afro-Brazilian culture.[46]

Also in the early 1930s, the Vargas government created a programme to identify, protect and restore Brazilian historical monuments.[47] The latter were primarily colonial structures – churches, forts, imperial buildings – and the new attention devoted to them further publicised the colonial past depicted in *Casa Grande e Senzala*. The first director for the administering agency, the Patrimônio Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro, was the *mineiro* Rodrigo Mello Franco de Andrade. Not coincidentally, he had been one of Freyre's closest friends and greatest moral supports in the struggle to write *Casa Grande e Senzala*.

Brazilian publishers in the 1930s also contributed to the reexamination of the country's past. José Olympio, who was to become Freyre's new publisher by the end of the decade, launched a series of original monographs and reprints under the label 'Documentos Brasileiros'. Companhia Editora Nacional, the leading textbook publisher, began its extensive 'Brasiliana' collection. Both series included translations of classic travel accounts of Brazil, many of which were quoted at length in earlier editions by Freyre.

Foreign scholars such as the US anthropologist Donald Pierson and the French sociologist Roger Bastide helped to solidify the spreading elite interest in the African legacy by bringing the nascent academic disciplines of anthropology and linguistics to their conclusion that Brazil

[45] *Ibid.* His impact could be seen in the important collection whose authors identified themselves as his followers: A. Carneiro Leão et al., *A margem da história da República* (Rio de Janeiro, 1924).

[46] Hermano Vianna, *The Mystery of Samba* (Chapel Hill, 1999), p. 90.

[47] For an excellent analysis of these efforts, see Daryle Williams, *Culture Wars in Brazil: The First Vargas Regime, 1920–1945* (Durham, NC, 2001).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X01006277 Published online by Cambridge University Press

did indeed have a unique system of race relations. Successive African American visitors from the United States echoed this verdict.[48]

Other less intellectual trends events abroad also influenced the reception *Casa Grande & Senzala*. Most dramatic was the rise of fascism in Europe. Obviously, the stakes in applying race to social policy were rapidly rising.

### *Criticism sets in: was it inevitable?*

By the early 1960s, Freyre was at the height of his intellectual fame and popular prestige, not only in Brazil but also in the North Atlantic academic world. Freyre's fame had become synonymous with the image of Brazil as the 'laboratory' of harmonious race relations. The French and US translations of *Casa Grande* had made Freyre's name in those countries[49] – helped in the United States by the fact that historians Frank Tannenbaum and Stanly Elkins wrote widely read works based heavily on Freyre.[50] The latter's fame on the international scene was well illustrated by his participation in a 1955 symposium on 'The Beginning of an Atomic Age'. The other participants included Bertrand Russell, Arnold Toynbee, Carl Jung and Jacques Maritain.[51] But change was in the wind. One early sign, ironically enough, came out of a scholarly project designed to prove the validity of Freyre's thesis about Brazilian race relations. In 1950, largely under the influence of Freyre's then world-famous interpretation, UNESCO chose Brazil for its celebrated race relations research project.[52] Unfortunately, Brazil failed to match the expectations of the

[48] David J. Hellwig, *African American Perspectives on Brazil's Racial Paradise* (Philadelphia, 1992).

[49] Freyre and his publishers were acutely aware of the effect favourable opinion abroad could have on Brazilian readers. The Brazilian collection of articles praising *Casa Grande*, for example, included a large section of personal tributes to Freyre, all by non-Brazilians. Freyre worked assiduously to promote his own reputation in the USA. In 1940 Gilberto suggested to Manoel Cardoso, curator of the Oliveira Lima Library, that he write 'a book which would be half a study of the author and his work … and the other half a summary of each of my books, including the one on recipes for sweets'. Gilberto Freyre, *Cartas do próprio punho sobre pessoas e coisas do Brasil e do estrangeiro* (Brasília, 1978), p. 159.

[50] Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen, The Negro in the Americas* (New York, 1946), Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (New York, 1963).

[51] Adolfo Justo Bezerra de Meneses, 'Gilberto Freyre e uma nova visão do mundo', in *Gilberto Freyre: sua ciência*, p. 323.

[52] A. Métraux, 'UNESCO and the Racial Problem', *International Social Science Bulletin*, vol. 11, no. 3 (Autumn 1950), 384–390. This article lays out the logic behind the project. For an important recent study of the project, see the unpublished manuscript of Marcos Chor Maio, written as a doctoral dissertation at IUPERJ. For Freyre's relationship to the project, see Maio, 'Tempo Controverso: Gilverto Freyre e o Projeto UNESCO', *Tempo Social*, 11 (1, maio de 1999), 111–36. See also Verena Stolke, 'Brasil: uma nação vista através da vidraça da raça', *Revista da Cultura Brasileña* (Madrid, 1998), pp. 207-22.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X01006277 Published online by Cambridge University Press

researchers on the project. A team of eminent Brazilian and foreign anthropologists not only failed to discover a racial paradise, they found that race was contested territory, with notable evidence of discrimination. Prominent among these researchers was Florestan Fernandes, the São Paulo anthropologist/sociologist who was to become the first major revisionist of Freyre's vision.[53]

There was trouble for Freyre on another point. His response to political change – in particular his stance on anti-colonialism in Africa and military repression in Brazil – earned him the enmity of Brazilians too young to appreciate the initial phase of his enormous contribution to Brazilian culture.[54]

First were the wars of national liberation in Portuguese Africa. In the 1950s, Freyre had taken an extensive trip through the remnants of the Portuguese colonial empire. He lectured on his theory of 'luso-tropicalism', which was based on the allegedly unique ability of the Portuguese to adapt to the flora and fauna (human and otherwise) of tropical lands.[55] But this was not his only message. He also expressed his fierce loyalty to Portugal by supporting the Salazar government, which was engaged in military suppression of the rebels in Mozambique and Angola. The wars became brutal on all sides, and Freyre found himself defending Europe's last colonial power. Fairly or not, that stance earned him the reputation in Brazil of a political reactionary.

His reaction to later events in Brazilian politics reinforced that reputation. In 1964 the Brazilian military deposed President João Goulart. The coup was relatively non-violent. But in the Northeast, Freyre's home territory, the Fourth Army was merciless in hunting down, arresting and sometimes killing peasant organisers. Since these same activists had threatened the existing power structure in Freyre's Northeast, and since they were tainted by the left-wing ideology he had long fought, Freyre immediately embraced the coup.[56]

[53] The story of this attack has been told at length elsewhere. For an introduction, see Thomas E. Skidmore 'Fact and Myth: Discovering a Racial Problem in Brazil', in Calvin Goldscheider (ed.), *Population, Ethnicity and Nation-Building* (Boulder, 1995), pp. 91–117. Curiously enough, Fernandes virtually never mentioned the name of Freyre or the titles of his works in his extensive critique of the Freyrean thesis.

[54] Eduardo Portella, 'Gilberto Freyre, além do apenas moderno', *Rumos: os caminhos do Brasil em debate*, 1, vol. 1 (Dec 98/Jan 99), p. 36.

[55] Details on the background to 'Luso-Tropicalism' may be found in Omar Ribeiro Thomaz, 'Do Saber Colonial ao Luso-Tropicalismo: "Raça" e "nação" nas primeiras décadas do salazarismo', in Chor Maio and Ventura Santos (eds.), *Raça, ciência e sociedade*, p. 101. An early version of Freyre's formulation of 'Luso-tropicalismo' may be found in Freyre, *O mundo que o português criou* (São Paulo, 1940).

[56] Freyre launched a bitter attack on Dom Helder Camara, the well-known Archbishop of Recife who had sympathised with the pre-coup populist movement. The division between them reflected the deep cultural and political fault line which was widened by

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X01006277 Published online by Cambridge University Press

But it is not my purpose to deal with Freyre's political views in the 1960's. My focus here is on the fate of *Casa Grande* in the 1960s and beyond. In my judgement *Casa Grande* (and Freyre's later works) eventually came under criticism because Freyre's message had not changed with the times.[57]

*Casa Grande & Senzala*'s fate must be seen against the background of a debate underway within Brazil since the turn of the century. Far from proving that the determinisms were wrong, Freyre was celebrating their irrelevance. He buried them in a richly detailed portrait of a multiracial colonial Brazil. And he invited Brazilians to draw the conclusion that the Portuguese, along with the Indian and the Afro-Brazilian, had created an environment and a population as healthy as any in the world. Because he could look to the past with satisfaction, the Brazilian could look to the future with confidence.

But *Casa Grande* was also the victim of a world in which Freyre's views were failing to change with the academic times. He was of the generation of Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, both students of Boas at Columbia and both authors of famous national character studies.[58] He was also a contemporary of Octavio Paz, whose *Labyrinth of Solitude* had an impact on Mexico equal to that of *Casa Grande* on Brazil.[59] But by the 1970s all these works began to be considered anachronistic. Present-day scholars tend to shy away from the search for essentialist qualities, whether the product of genetics or of socialisation. Those who have not given up the search are either read more for their individual insights than for their 'scientific evidence', such as Roberto da Matta,[60] or, like Alex Inkeles, they are using more refined measurements of individual behaviour, intending to produce scientifically verifiable portrait of national character.[61]

---

the coup of 1964. For a source critical of Freyre's role, see Assis Claudino, *O monstro sagrado e o amarelinho comunista* (Recife, 1985).

[57] Freyre elevated his critical stance on modern times and ways into a book-length analysis. Among other trends of which he disapproved was modern architectural design – especially as epitomised by Brasília. Freyre, *Brasís, Brasil & Brasília* (Lisboa, 1960).

[58] Ruth Benedict's classic national character study of Japan was *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (Boston, 1946). While Mead's comparable study of the USA was *And Keep Your Powder Dry* (New York, 1942).

[59] For a comparative analysis of the impact of the two writers in their respective countries, see Thomas E. Skidmore, 'Onde Estava a 'Malinche' brasileira? Mitos de origem nacional no Brasil e no México', *Vozes*, vol. 91 (No. 3, maio/junho de 1997), pp. 107–18.

[60] Roberto da Matta, *Carnavais, malandros e heróis* (Rio de Janeiro, 1979).

[61] The saga of the quest for a 'scientific' definition of national character is recorded in Alex Inkeles, *National Character: A Psycho-Social Perspective* (New Brunswick, 1997).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X01006277 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Freyre wielded a language and a set of concepts that the twentieth century stopped using when he did not. That does not make him any less relevant for our day, however, since the echoes of that language and those concepts are still with us to a degree we might not like to admit.

*Casa Grande e Senzala* acted as a catalyst that brought to the surface a series of questions that had, since the late Empire, been troubling thoughtful Brazilians. Some of these questions, such as the possible determinacy of race and climate, have now lost all respectability in the light of modern science. But Freyre's response to them, notwithstanding his convoluted prose and ill-organised evidence, still repays careful reading. Brazil today faces different questions, both as a society in itself and a participant in the rapidly changing wider world. Gilberto Freyre remains alive in Brazilian thought, not for the answers he did or did not offer, but for the enormous confidence, ingenuity, originality and optimism with which he portrayed his Brazil.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X01006277 Published online by Cambridge University Press