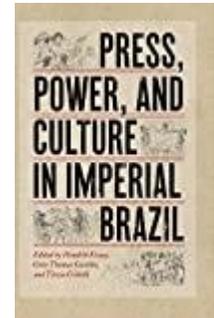




**Hendrik Kraay, Celso Thomas Castilho, Teresa Cribelli, eds.** *Press, Power, and Culture in Imperial Brazil*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2021. 320 pp. \$85.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8263-6227-8.



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Growing out of conference panels analyzing digitized nineteenth-century Brazilian newspaper collections at the 2017 meeting of the American Historical Association, this lively edited volume brings together a wide range of scholarship that closely examines the contested nature of the press and its relationship to power in the Brazilian Empire. Several of the essays by Brazilian historians have been translated from their original Portuguese and are here presented for the first time to an English-speaking audience. The volume aims to bring a fresh perspective to long-standing debates on the “public sphere” and “imagined communities,” and it succeeds through a series of dynamic essays, each exploring different facets of these issues.

A helpful and thorough introduction by the editors grounds readers in the history of the press in nineteenth-century Brazil, presents key themes and problems that cut across the individual chapter contributions, and discusses the Biblioteca Nacional’s massive open-access newspaper digitization project, the Hemeroteca Digital Brasileira

(HDB). The section laying out the historical overview is useful not only for placing developments in their larger context but also for setting the scene by introducing key figures and newspapers that appear frequently throughout the volume. The section on themes highlights questions on literacy and ways that newspapers and the “public sphere” they both reflected and helped create may have included or excluded non-readers. This section also features major changes over time in newspapers’ primary business model and the direct relationship between newspaper funding and partisan politics. In discussing the HDB, which went online in 2012, the editors explore both the possibilities afforded by the scale of this digitization work—rendering accessible online millions of pages of newspapers—and the limitations and potential pitfalls of working with this archive. Questions of archival practice have been at the forefront of historical discourse and theory in recent years; one of the chief contributions of this edited volume is an opportunity to explore and consider

the possibilities afforded by the HDB through concrete examples across many individual topics.

The topics themselves extend over a wide range of questions interrogating the same body of sources and the press itself as a construction of power; reading this volume feels akin to the delight of looking through a kaleidoscope and seeing multiple permutations of research on the same newspaper collections. The essays are organized in two chronological sections: chapters 1-4 focus on the early decades of the Brazilian Empire from the 1820s through the 1840s, while chapters 5-11 focus on the second half of the nineteenth century. Essay topics include intense political rumbles in the early decades of the empire and ways journalists consciously presented themselves as “spokesmen for public opinion” and practitioners of “civic pedagogy” (p. 45, chapter 1); disease and the migrant trade in the 1830s (chapter 4); and satirical illustrations in magazines (chapter 7)—one particularly entertaining and illuminating illustration is blown up as part of the volume’s title page. Several chapters are dedicated to emergent and developing subgenres within newspaper columns, from *crônicas* (literary commentary on the news, increasingly presented in fictional forms, chapter 5) to *apendidos* (paid articles or letters to the editor, chapter 9) and new spaces for advertising (chapter 6). Finally, while slavery is ever-present in the volume, several essays focus particularly on the topic, including chapters on the transatlantic slave trade in 1830s newspapers and their relationship to Brazilian politics (chapter 2); enslaved readers and laborers in print shops (chapter 3); and the American Civil War and transformations of capitalism in Portuguese-language periodicals published in the United States and shipped south on the steamer line connecting New York and Rio de Janeiro (chapter 10).

Of particular interest to readers of this forum is the volume’s attention to the relationships between the press and nationalism, exploring how “the press undergirded a national community, knit

together by steamship lines and mule trains and, later, railroads” (p. 14). While the themes of politics and power suffuse the entire volume, a few chapters focus explicitly on how networks of newspapers knitted together a sense of national community in the Brazilian Empire. Hendrik Kraay’s contribution (chapter 8) does so by tracing 128 letters of Bahian provincial correspondence in Rio de Janeiro newspapers over the course of a single year in 1868, arguing that the dense connections between the two regions bound “the newspaper reading public together into a shared public sphere” (p. 175). The logistics of the relationship between provincial correspondents and the presses in the capital are revealing, as letters interpreting local events in Bahia arrived in Rio de Janeiro by steamship within a week of the events themselves and were swiftly turned around and circulated back to the province—and to provinces across Brazil—in bundles of the major daily newspapers. Many of the letters focused on provincial politics, but they also included commercial news, obituaries, and a “grab-bag of trivia” of daily life, connecting expatriates in the capital to home and businesses to trade conditions (p. 187). Two graphs in this chapter highlight the frequency of provincial letters in newspapers and the speed from writing to publication. This chapter highlights the rich potential of the HDB: if troves of mid-nineteenth-century provincial correspondence—hundreds of letters each year in the main Rio de Janeiro dailies—are accessible online, with the database continuing to expand, how will the tracking and mapping of these letters, their content, and the logistics of their circulation affect how historians think about the construction of national identities? I was curious, for example, about “cross-pollination” of regional and national identities between provinces running through the Rio de Janeiro newspapers, or how this mechanism for sharing provincial news in the 1850s and 60s transformed with the installation of telegraphs in the 1870s. This is not a criticism of the chapter; rather, it is a testament to the enormous potential

of the source base that this edited volume highlights.

In the final chapter, Celso Thomas Castilho gets at a key question at the heart of discussions of national community: *whose* nation was it? He does so by examining how the Black press began using the gallery genre—a regular column dedicated to biographies of illustrious people—to claim rights and national belonging. Castilho explores the context of the transatlantic gallery genre, the founding of the Black newspaper *O Homem* in Recife in the 1870s, the press’s role in public life and racial discourse in the city, and the wider context of the abolition movement in the 1870s. The column “Illustrious Men of Color” by Felipe Neri Collaço celebrated nation making through the contributions of Black and Indigenous individuals from Collaço’s contemporaries to jurists involved in nineteenth-century independence to the military service of Henrique Dias and Felipe Camarão fighting the Dutch occupation of Pernambuco in

the mid-seventeenth century. Castilho highlights the common thread and the narrative *O Homem* built to counter racism: a story “where talented Afro-Brazilians were integral to nation building” (p. 253).

If Kraay’s chapter explores the construction of national belonging through networks and the scale of letters, Castilho’s homes in on a single column in a single newspaper and uses it to explore big themes on the intellectual history of the African diaspora and claims of national belonging that were being worked out across the nineteenth-century Atlantic world. Both approaches fit well with the larger goals of the volume to highlight the flourishing scholarship facilitated by the HDB and to critically engage with the press as a subject of historical study and not only as a generator of primary sources. The range of approaches and topics presented by this volume speaks well to both the richness of the present field and the opportunities for future research.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-nationalism>

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