

# **In Between Two Slaveries: The Experiences of African Americans in Brazil after the Civil War**

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## **Introduction**

In the immediate aftermath of the American Civil War, approximately 2000 to 4000 white Southerners set out to reconstruct their racial mores of white supremacy in Brazil where slavery was still a leitmotif of the economy, society and culture (Hill 1932: 239; Goldman 1972: 10; Jarnagin 2008: 26). Most often, they were comprised of family members and acquaintances that were eager to dissociate from the political influence of Radical Reconstruction conducted by white and black Republicans. Along with the Reconstruction Amendments, the rise of racial egalitarianism also provoked fear of so-called ‘African despotism’, declaimed upon by Robert August Toombs (former Secretary of State of the Confederacy) in his letter to John Cabell Breckinridge (former Secretary of War of the Confederacy), written on 30 April 1867 (Brito 2015: 150). Although they were primarily white, some blacks were also involved in the emigration, leaving the South for Brazil with their white counterparts.

At the very least, the historiography of Confederate immigration confirmed that these blacks were former slaves who followed their masters to Brazil and yet their experiences in a foreign slave society remain obscure (Brito 2015: 163-164). However, it is certain to argue that their experiences were structured in conformity with two historical agents — Southerners and Brazilians —, involving various forms of social relations within the limits of Brazilian slavery. In this context, the aim of this article is to highlight the protagonism of these African Americans, scouting out their social circuits, relationships and intellectual connections. Understanding their role is pertinent because it helps to explain the dynamics of slave dominion in Brazil. Furthermore, this study is modeled on the perspective of the work of the Brazilian historian Maria Helena Machado who has shed light on the web of paternalistic relationships between slaves and masters in Campinas and Taubaté in the state of São Paulo in the nineteenth century and in so doing, denominated the slave as a ‘social agent and historical subject’, pointing out the relevant task of recuperating their behaviors in their multiplicity of forms and historic configurations of globality (Machado 2018: 17-18).

The debate sparked by Machado is to expound upon the *experience* of slaves and this

article thus follows her interpretation although it focuses on newly freed African Americans instead of slaves, in which, the former was relocated into the midst of Brazilian slave regime. More specifically, this study shall argue that analyzing their trajectories in Brazil may contribute to our understanding of the dynamics of slavery in an international perspective. Above all, it will attempt to answer the following questions: Why would some freed African Americans leave the post-slavery South for a country where slavery still existed? Were they subject to compulsory labor and/or racial discrimination? Were their freedoms protected?

This article is based on the hypothesis that various kinds of paternalistic relationships that connected former slaves and former masters existed, such as in the case of Steve Wasson who was under the tutelage of his former master and faced racial discrimination in Brazil. However, with the support of white Brazilians, he managed to acquire land and also benefit from social advantages forbidden to many Brazilian ex-slaves and as such, he became more autonomous even within a slave society. Clearly, there was a mixture of different social and racial elements lurking beneath these relationships, showing how diverse and intricate the history of slavery in the Americas could be through a cross-border perspective. To explore my hypothesis, this study employs various secondary sources as well as a newspaper, an unpublished family autobiography and a memoir. It is important to emphasize that these few existing sources document only a fraction of this diverse history. Yet while it is regrettable that existing documents are sparse, this does not impede the possibility of contributing to the underrepresented history of African Americans in Latin America.

## **1. The US Colonization Projects of African Americans in Latin America**

This study aims to highlight the narratives of African Americans. However, it is first necessary to reflect on the broader range of historical circumstances in which the United States developed diplomatic relationships with Latin American countries in the antebellum period and during the Civil War. President James Monroe initiated his own foreign policy in 1823, notoriously known as the Monroe Doctrine, as an isolationist project in order to confront European imperialism, regarding intervention by traditional powers as a serious obstruction to the consolidation of independent states in the Americas. At that point, the US attempted to establish cross-border connections with Latin American countries to stimulate commercial relationships and thereby intensify its territorial expansion (Schultz 2000).

It is also noteworthy to indicate that one of the main impulses behind the ideology of US expansion by white Southerners was their desire to obtain alternative territories to expand African-American slavery: such was the case in the 1850s with the Amazon project suggested by oceanographer Matthew Fontaine Maury, and in other initiatives elaborated by the American Colonization Society (Eisenberg 1982: 49). Of various attempts evoked to expand African-American slavery to Latin America, Peter Louis Eisenberg has shown that a

number of countries were, indeed, coveted by pro-slavery Southerners:

Some Southerners were ambitious to find new territories for slavery beyond their national frontiers. They supported private military expeditions to annex Baja California (1855), Nicaragua (1855) and Honduras (1860), led by adventurer William Walker from Tennessee. All these expeditions failed and Walker was finally shot by indignant Hondurans. Other Southerners also thought of helping pro-slavery Cuba free from Spain with the support of presidents Polk and Franklin Pierce and then annex it to the US but this plan did not work either. (Eisenberg 1982: 58-59)

Clearly, it was not until the matter of slavery began to heat up between pro-slavery Southerners and anti-slavery Northerners that colonizing projects aimed at expansion of slavery blossomed. To point out their deficiencies, Northern abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison, Arthur Tappan, Frederick Douglass and the American Anti-Slavery Society criticized the appropriateness of the traditional institution of slavery and denounced human bondage and racial discrimination as morally objectionable, causing concern among Southern slave owners who thus looked to Latin America as a potential site for their territorial expansion of slavery (Luz 1968: 58; Fredrickson 1987).

During the Civil War, there was still no inhibition about the potential deportation of African Americans when a new project emerged with much more relevance in the Lincoln administration, causing debates among Democrats and Republicans regarding the fate of freed slaves. Most tellingly, despite his endeavor to end slavery and his valiant image as a great liberator of slaves, the renowned president was not an abolitionist, and from the moment he took office in 1861 he made it clear that the emancipation of slaves meant, in parallel, their deportation. To Lincoln, deportation was necessary because it reflected his preoccupation with racial miscegenation or the fusing of races that would result from emancipation, and thus he schemed to send freed slaves to South America as an ideal destination, affirming that 'room in South America for colonization, can be obtained cheaply, and in abundance; and when numbers shall be large enough to be company and encouragement for another, the freed people will not be so reluctant to go' (Sampaio 2013: 170).

Under this slapdash project of deportation, Brazil turned up as a potential destination: during the war, in 1862, James Watson Webb (then American minister plenipotentiary to Brazil) introduced his Amazon project to president Lincoln, underlining that its tropical climate would be ideal for freed slaves and their descendants. Furthermore, Webb emphasized the image of the supposed lack of racial prejudice in Brazilian society, indicating that African Americans could obtain their political rights and even ascend socially (Sampaio 2013: 116, 130). Indeed, the main impulse behind Webb's speculations was the desire to expatriate all blacks for the sake of white supremacy. But his plan never

saw the light of day, as there was no consent from the Brazilian government because of the problems of language and culture, as well as the fact that Brazil desired white immigrants. By the time President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on 1 January 1863, he signaled his resignation to the presence of black population in the US due to the lack of support by the Brazilian government and, thereby, 'evolve' them for future integration into American society (Horne 2007: 181-183).

## 2. The Case of Zell in Cuba after the Civil War

In order to preserve the unequivocal theory of white supremacy or, alternatively, prevent the danger to the nation that would result from racial miscegenation after the abolition of slavery, various colonization projects for African Americans were presented in the political arena. In practice, their plans were never accomplished, although there were some interesting cases in which African Americans actually left the US for Latin America after the Civil War. Their trajectories are underrepresented in the historiography of slavery, but what is nevertheless clear is that they were former slaves who followed their masters to countries such as Cuba and Brazil. Thus, in this section my study will explore their narratives, attempting to understand the shaping of their experiences within cross-border perspectives.

To begin with, it will highlight the case of the slave Zell, who migrated to Cuba with his master's family after the Civil War in 1865. Indeed, his experience occupies a curious and anomalous position in the history of slavery as he migrated to a country where slavery still existed. A native of Louisiana and denominated *esclavo* by his mistress Eliza MacHatton, Zell played prominent roles in the MacHatton's sugar plantation near Havana, as he was allotted to have 'control of a dangerous weapon, an ancient blunderbuss, as well as a pocket watch with which to mark his duties and those of others' (Guterl 2008: 111, 104). Moreover, he acted as a 'critical liaison' between Eliza and her labor force (Cuban slaves and Chinese coolies), learning their languages even as they learned his (Guterl 2008: 104). By all accounts, Zell was not an ordinary black person compared to other African Cubans in the region as he was allowed to take control of a weapon and administer the plantation. That, in turn, suggests that the MacHatton family had strong faith in him.

Zell's dedication reached its pinnacle when in 1868 he was asked by Eliza to take charge of the plantation at the outbreak of the Ten Year's War, when a section of Cuban elites and slavers declared independence from Spain. Shocked by the war and fearful of the specter of murder and violence, Eliza returned to the US and Zell stayed on in Cuba, marrying an African Cuban woman named Maud at some point in his life (Guterl 2008: 109-110). The return of Eliza to the US brings to the fore a series of questions about the fate of Zell in Cuba, but according to the recent study by Matthew Pratt Guterl, his trajectory, by and large, remains unknown. Eliza preserved every possible shred of paper relating to her experience

in Cuba but to point up its deficiency, she did not keep much on Zell, despite the fact that she recalled in her memoir, *From Flag to Flag* the many letters she had received from him (McHatton-Ripley 1889: 295; Guterl 2008: 111).

In scrutinizing Zell's case, it should be noted that a certain kind of algebra was, in a sense, at work behind his cross-border experience. Needless to say, the lure of greater profits from Cuban slavery schemed by the MacHattons led to Zell's emigration, probably against the grain of his intentions yet eventually he adopted the strain of 'cosmopolitan' slavery thought reflected by the Southern slaveholder's worldview. The term was emphasized by Guterl, considering the international connections that Southerners established with their Latin American counterparts, especially Cuban slaveholders, during the first half of the nineteenth century. Cultural and social idiosyncrasy, clearly, varied among them, but despite their differences, Guterl underlined that they shared the same ideology of the appropriateness of slavery, indicating that some of them were 'culturally hybrid philosophers of chattel bondage' who could 'transcend the divides between the United States, the Caribbean, and Latin America' (Guterl 2008: 6-7). In other words, some Southerners and Latin American slaveholders were constituted with multinational identities to enforce the real bedrock of African slavery throughout the Americas in order to construct the 'slave imperialism' stressed by the historian Gerald Horne (Horne 2007: 123).

Nonetheless, it is incontrovertible that the propagation of slavery in the Americas led by Southerners ended in failure, with the abolition of slavery in 1865 and Radical Reconstruction contributing decisively to the demise of plans for expansion by Southern slave holders. The case of Zell and MacHattons, however, contradicts this generalized image of the complete end of slavery, showing that some Southerners attempted to recreate their paternalistic life, taking flight to Cuba and grabbing by force their former slaves after the war. Probably, the case of Zell is the only one unveiled in Cuba in which a former slave migrated there with his master's family.

On the other hand, in Brazil, historians have succeeded in finding a few cases of African American immigration although they have not been able to contribute more than identifying their names. Their descriptions are intrinsically obscure compared to Zell's. Tellingly, the most detailed case is of Steve Wasson who presumably obtained notoriety and wealth through the lumber company abandoned by his former master James Harrison Dyer, in the Vale do Ribeira region in the state of São Paulo that this study will now turn to.

### **3. The Experiences of African Americans in Brazil**

In this section, this study will explore the experiences of African Americans in Brazil, especially in the state of São Paulo, in which the circumstances of former slaves varied. Generally, their status and rights derived not from autonomy and freedom, but from the restraints and control exercised by their masters. As was the case for Zell, they likewise

remained with their masters after their arrival, setting out for the Southern colonies known as the Norris Colony in the Santa Bárbara region and the McMullan colony in Juquiá, Vale do Ribeira region — both in the state of São Paulo.

It is noteworthy to underline that these masters, the so-called *confederados*, made some significant contributions to the host society, promulgating the use of the American plow for local planters along with the production of upland cotton and Georgia watermelon. Furthermore, over the long course of their endeavor, the city of Americana was established in 1875 in their honor (Jones 1998: 319). They also played prominent roles in the spread of Protestantism, acting as mediators between Brazil and the US to receive and assist American missionaries and establishing various churches and religious schools like Colégio Piracicabano in Piracicaba in the state of São Paulo and Mackenzie Presbyterian University in the city of São Paulo and the Institute Presbiteriano Gammon in the state of Minas Gerais (de Oliveira 1995: 162-165). Their apparent contributions were widely reflected in the historiography of Southern US immigration to Brazil, although the narratives of African Americans were largely underrepresented.

Brazilian and American scholars such as William Griggs (1982, 1987), Eugene Harter (1985), Gerald Horne (2007), Wlamyra Albuquerque (2009), Luciana da Cruz Brito (2015), Cyrus Dawsey and James Dawsey (1998) have briefly explored the history of African Americans in Brazil. Nonetheless, their studies have not been able to contribute more than identifying their names although Griggs was the only one who elucidated more about them, especially Steve Wasson. While researching Frank McMullan's colony in Juquiá, Griggs highlighted his relationship with his former master, examining fleetingly their lives and experiences in the colony. Nevertheless, as Griggs' main objective was to explore the history of the colony, his narrative of Steve is sparse and much is still unknown about him.

Hence, in order to explore more about Steve, Brito's words are helpful for understanding his experience. As she points out:

we do not know the details of the lives of African Americans who migrated, nor whether their status as freedmen was respected in a pro-slavery country. We also do not know whether they remained under the tutelage of their former masters or whether the new environment helped them to become more autonomous, despite real obstacles they certainly encountered, such as language and racial prejudice. (Brito 2015: 163-164)

In this context, a dialogue with two historical agents — white Southerners and Brazilians — is important to scrutinize their experiences, questioning whether they were subject to any compulsory labor and racial discrimination or were more autonomous despite the overlapping obstacles. As we shall see, Steve Wasson had some kind of reciprocal relationship with his former master and Brazilians, demonstrating that African Americans in

Brazil were not all necessarily located at the rock bottom of society. Meanwhile, some of them presumably remained as chattel, serving their former masters until their death. While the sources related to African Americans in Brazil are sparse and they document only a fraction of their experiences, this section nevertheless reveals a different kind of cross-border narrative.

( 1 ) African Americans in São Paulo and the Colonization Plan of the Confederados

According to the memoir of Milton Norris Adams — one of the descendants of William Hutchinson Norris, the founder of the Norris Colony — John Absalom Cole and his family came to Santa Bárbara with their former slaves after the Civil War. Their names were Chany and Silvy and it is believed that they were living with Cole's family until the moment Silvy started to live in a cabin on the farm of another Southern family called Fenley, remaining there until her death in the early 1900s. Meanwhile, Chany ended up marrying an African Brazilian woman from Santa Bárbara, settling down together somewhere in the region<sup>1)</sup>. Along with Cole, another former Confederate soldier J. H. White, followed by his wife and four freedmen, came to Brazil as well as the Reverend Alexander L. Blackford who arrived with his daughter and a freedwoman (Brito 2014: 182). In 1867, James Harrison Dyer and his family, accompanied by their former slave Steve Wasson, settled in Frank McMullan's colony in Juquiá.

As we have seen, only a few African Americans migrated to Brazil, making their presence almost unnoticeable compared to the thousands of white Southerners who settled in the same country. It is noteworthy to stress, however, that these Southerners were white supremacists, denying that blacks were, in any real sense at all, part of the human community and, in effect, some of them schemed to expatriate a large number of African Americans to Brazil. Former Confederate medical officer James M. Gaston and former Alabama state representative Charles Gunter wanted to take advantage of Brazilian slavery to expatriate a large contingent of freedmen that had rich knowledge of cotton production (Brito 2014: 179-182). Nevertheless, their plans never saw the light of day, as the Brazilian government, in fact, did not approve the entry of any freedmen on the basis of section seven of the Feijó Law (7 November 1831) which read: 'No freed man shall be permitted, unless he is a Brazilian, to disembark in the ports of Brazil for any reason whatsoever'<sup>2)</sup>.

Clearly, the exorbitant plan of Gaston and Gunter had been developed as an extension of the colonization plan elaborated by Maury and Webb that we saw in the first section of this article. However, section seven of the Feijó Law did not completely bar the immigration of ex-slaves. Concerning the anomaly of these African Americans and questioning the enigma of their entrance seems implausible, but we may gain some insights by unraveling the story of Steve Wasson, the 'Emperor Jones' who obtained fame and fortune in Juquiá.

(2) The Case of Steve Wasson

Steve Wasson followed his master James Harrison Dyer and his family — wife Amanda Webb, sons Wiley and James, daughter Harriet as well as son-in-law Columbus Wasson from whom Steve adopted his surname — to Frank McMullan's colony in Juquiá in 1867 (Griggs 1982: 159). Secondary sources help to confirm that Steve was originally one of the slaves of Wiley Dyer who was the father of James and following the sudden death of Wiley in 1847, Steve was inherited by James in November 1848. Wiley's will recorded that Steve was seventeen years old at the time of his death, therefore, by the time of Steve's arrival in Brazil in 1867, it is estimated that his age was 36 or 37. Besides Steve, Wiley owned four more slaves — Robert, Ann, Louis and Clark — and they were inherited by John D. G. Adrian, Harvey L. Dyer and Wiley M. Dyer (Wright 1954: 32). Given the small number of slaves, it is possible to infer that the Dyer family was not necessarily wealthy, considering that they migrated to Texas from Georgia in 1847 to clear new lands. After four years, in 1851, James and his brother Simpson built a dam and a mill on the Brazos River, which streamed around the contours of Hill County, located in the center of the state. Their business was propitious and thanks to its success and enthusiasm, James became the first County Judge of Hill County in 1853 (Griggs 1982: 6-8).

Before the outbreak of the Civil War, on the issue of slavery, James was not indifferent to the debates of the time, supporting the Democratic Party and sharing the philosophy of his Southern counterparts that the Constitution guaranteed the union of the states, maintaining equally their sovereignty. In this way, if there were a disruption between the states over the expansion of slavery, secessionists would have the right to secede from the Union (Griggs 1982: 49-50). After the war, however, thanks to the extreme agony of the defeat of the Confederacy and the constant fear of Yankee reprisals, Brazil became a safety valve for the Dyer family and they decided to move there following the emissary Frank McMullan who was, in fact, James' nephew (Wright 1954: 140; Griggs 1982: 122). The family, including Steve, settled down in Juquiá and, according to Griggs, in considering the sentiment behind the mind of Steve and his relationship with James, he was led to conclude that:

Steve and Judge Dyer probably had much in common despite their racial and cultural differences and for that reason were very close. Both realised that Steve might not be able to enter the country when they landed in Brazil; laws there prevented blacks from emigrating but both believed that the chance was worth the risk. (Griggs 1982: 163-164)

During the initiation of the colony, however, McMullan contracted an illness that worsened over time, eventually dying on 29 September 1867. The leader's sudden death shocked the colonists and James tried to take control of it along with George Barnsley, a doctor from Georgia. Nevertheless, a majority of the colonists loathed James and were



upset with his defiant attitude, supporting a rival, William Bowen, as their new leader (Griggs 1982: 279-295). In the end, James and his family, including Steve, ended up leaving the colony, settling in another region of Juquiá where they eventually bought land rich with fine trees on the banks of the Una do Prelado River, located between Peruíbe and Iguape. In so doing, they established a sawmill company called Dyer and Wasson Lumber Company with the support of Barnsley in 1868. Their objectives were to explore for gold and transport wood to Rio de Janeiro via the port of Iguape. Steve worked as an administrator while Columbus was in charge of setting up business contacts and charter a steamship in order to ship their products<sup>3)</sup>. At about the same time, Barnsley expressed positive expectations for the business, writing in a letter to his father on 24 May 1868, that Dyer and his partners were ‘now on the road to vast fortunes’ (Griggs 1982: 297).

Nonetheless, two incidents impacted James’ family and his business. On the one hand, for unknown reasons, Amanda passed away on 4 July 1869 (Wright 1954: 140). Her sudden death exacerbated James’ motivation to continue, apparently causing extreme agony in his heart and mind. On the other hand, three years after her death, their steamship was caught in the midst of a storm and sank, causing great damage to the company and making it hard to continue. Disappointed and facing a bleak situation, James and his family decided to return to the US, leaving the sawmill, land and other assets that they could not carry with them to Steve in 1872. Accustomed to an arduous life as a former slave and already adapted to the new environment, Steve was ready for his new life. After the family’s return, he reestablished the business and eventually became a leading figure in the region, marrying several times and leaving many descendants. Over time, his surname ‘Wasson’ even became Brazilianized, turning into ‘Vassão’ (Griggs 1982: 359-360, 377). According to Barnsley, Steve:

worked his mill, made money enough to live on, had [as] many wives [...] as a tolerably well off Turkish Pasha, and died highly respected. If he had been educated he might have turned out [to be] a Barão [baron] of Brazil. At any rate, he ruled all that section and had a good time. He always held that he was a true American. (Griggs 1982: 377)

### (3) The Singularity of Steve Wasson’s Experience

The case of Steve raises questions about how an African American managed to thrive in a foreign and, above all, slave society. To reflect on this, it is important to highlight the presence of an individual called Joaquim Adorno, who was a white Brazilian that helped Steve reestablish the sawmill business and also obtain authorizations in legal matters to legalize the land left by James. In fact, Joaquim agreed to help Steve in exchange for half of his land and when the legalization process began, Adorno’s first son was born who was named João Adorno Vassão (There is a school named after him in Juquiá called Escola

Estadual João Adorno Vassão to this day), adopting Steve's surname as a 'trading name' in order to facilitate the company's business. Thus, Steve was able to legally continue his sawmill while Joaquim tried to improve his new land, selling parts of it and buying others in Rabelo and Pocinho located on the outskirts of Barra do Juquiá (Vassão 2004: 7, 9-10).

It is important to note that this legalization process was essential and even inevitable for Steve, since he was, in fact, illegal in Brazil, infringing the law of 7 November 1831, which prohibited the entry of any foreign freedman into the country. However, in considering his case, it is plausible to infer that Steve was privileged compared to many Brazilian freedmen. While there are historians such as Manolo Florentino and José Roberto Góes (1997) who consider the Brazilian slave system conducive to the social mobility of freedmen in different dimensions such as access to freedom and land, there are historians such as Hebe Mattos (1998) and Zephyr Frank who offer more critical interpretations regarding the complexity of freedmen's social mobility. Frank's study, for example, shows that in state of São Paulo, where the expansion of coffee plantations resulted in price increases and the eventual consolidation of land ownership by wealthy planters throughout the nineteenth century, it was more difficult for freedmen to settle themselves as smallholders, or nearly so (Frank 2014). Thus, despite being a foreign freedman and illegal in the country, Steve could obtain land that resulted in his social mobility by owning 'property' while many native freedmen, in effect, could not.

Moreover, reconsidering Brito's words, we do not know if African Americans in Brazil 'remained under the tutelage of their former masters or whether the new environment helped them to become more autonomous, despite real obstacles they certainly encountered, such as language and racial prejudice' (Brito 2015: 163-164), Steve's case demonstrates that he was certainly under the tutelage of his master and encountered obstacles for not being able to legalize his land. However, with the support of a white Brazilian, he managed to continue his business, acquiring land and also benefitting from social advantages and as such, he paradoxically became more autonomous in a slave society.

As we examine the characteristics of his social singularity, Steve's case alerts us to another question concerning his metamorphosis of racial consciousness. On this point, it is plausible to assume that what was at stake was his strategy of 'passing' in Brazil. As Ira Berlin (1976) argued, in order to protect themselves from 'racial trials', secretive forms of passing by mixed-race people (white and black) before the Civil War were common in the South. Although we have no historical evidence to confirm if Steve was of mixed-race, we can infer that, in theory at least, he was afraid of re-enslavement or even condemnation as he was living in Brazil illegally. Hence, to protect himself from these threats, he managed to turn 'white' by taking advantage of the land left by James and whether on purpose or by chance, getting acquainted with Joaquim to legalize his property. Additionally, the decision to remain in Brazil was also Steve's strategy of resistance against James. Although Griggs pointed out that they were 'close' (Griggs 1982: 164), it is plausible to infer that Steve thought he would never achieve his true freedom while remaining with his former master. Thus, he remained in pro-slavery Brazil which, paradoxically, turned out to be beneficial

for him thanks to the land and support by a white Brazilian.

Moreover, concerning the experience of Steve turning ‘white’ in Brazil, it is useful to understand how white Brazilians looked at him in racial perspective. It is clear that in Brazil, as long as you were not a slave, free blacks had political and civil rights guaranteed by the Constitution of 1824 (Carvalho 2003: 29; Mattos 2009: 358). On the other hand, rigid definition of racial categories that would become the ‘one-drop rule’ in the twentieth century existed in the US and African Americans as a whole never had political and civil rights until the Reconstruction Amendments. Thus, it shows how Brazil and the US differed in their racial thoughts and it is plausible to infer that white Brazilians such as Joaquim Adorno did not see Steve with much disdain and he was adapted into the racial thought of Brazilian society. In fact, if Steve returned to the US where slavery was abolished it would be unbeneficial for him because of the horror of the Ku Klux Klan and the Jim Crow laws that were established there.

After the legalization of his lands, Steve’s trajectory becomes largely unknown, although according to Lineu de Freitas Vassão — a descendant of João Adorno Vassão —, his countless descendants ‘spread throughout the states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais’ and as time went by, ‘they dissipated all of his inheritance, dividing up his lands and selling small plots and lots’. Elsewhere, however, Vassão indicated that Steve was highly respected by local people who regarded him as “‘Sir” Vassão’ (Vassão 2004: 1, 10). It is also striking that, in considering this strain of social and racial relationships between white Brazilians and African Americans, two branches (white and black) of the Vassão family emerged, making it paradoxical at the time because a white person deliberately adopted the name of a freedman during a slave regime.

Much of the relationship between these two Vassão families remains dubious, but considering some facts on the part of the (white) Vassão family, it is possible to deduce that they were presumably influenced by Steve’s religious views to some extent. According to Griggs, Steve was ‘deeply religious’ (Griggs 1982: 163) thanks to James and his family who were fervent Protestants and although Catholicism was deeply rooted in Brazil, his belief in Protestantism did not seem to die out, thereby affecting somewhat Joaquim and his son João. This is confirmed by the fact that João’s sons, Amantino and Olympio, became relevant figures in the Presbyterian Church of Brazil, founded in 1862 by an American missionary named Ashbel Green Simonton. As a matter of fact, Amantino became pastor of the Church in Rio de Janeiro, while Olympio worked as a columnist for the newspaper *Brasil Presbiteriano*. Along with the Reverend Willes Roberto Banks, they served as pioneers in the dissemination of Protestant doctrines to the people of the Vale do Ribeira until well into the beginning of the twentieth century. Today, according to the description of Olympio Adorno Vassão (another descendant of João Adorno Vassão and the first mayor of the city of Juquiá), his surname was adopted by a number of people who are affiliated to the Presbyterian Church of Brazil (Vassão 1980: 5-6, 79).

## Conclusion

This article examined the protagonism of African Americans in Latin America, analyzing various expatriation plans elaborated by Southerners and the Lincoln Administration during the Civil War to preserve the unequivocal theory of white supremacy or, alternatively, prevent the danger to the nation that would result from racial miscegenation after the abolition of slavery. Their plans, however, were never accomplished, although there were some cases in which African Americans left the US for Cuba and Brazil after the war. Their trajectories are underrepresented in the historiography of slavery, and therefore this study aimed to shed light on their histories, attempting to understand their social circuits, relationships and intellectual connections within a cross-border perspective.

While there are better known histories of African-American migration and exile such as the Black Refugees of the War of 1812 and the activities of the Underground Railroad that resulted in a number of runaway slaves to Canada, this study demonstrated the circumstances that led African Americans to immigrate to pro-slavery countries. The context behind the Black Refugees and the Underground Railroad are often used to demonstrate slaves' valiant effort for freedom while Zell, Steve Wasson and others, are contradictory to the general perception of slavery. So then why would some freed African Americans leave the post-slavery South for a country where slavery still existed? Hypothetically speaking, there were different kinds of paternalistic relationships that connected them and their former masters, in which, a mixture of duplicity and opportunism formed the basis for such endeavors. Simply, we can infer that former masters did not want to lose their 'property', taking their slaves by force with little room for them to not obey. But eventually, so far as the cases of Zell and Wasson are concerned, their masters returned to the United States and they remained in Cuba and Brazil. Probably, one of the impulses behind their staying, was the desire to obtain their own wealth and possibly even slaves just like a number of 'black masters' did in the Antebellum South as Michael P. Johnson and James L. Roark (1986) have shown. The truth is, their real intentions remain obscure although their cases clearly demonstrate how diverse and intricate the history of slavery in the Americas could be in a cross-border perspective.

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## Notes

- 1) *Two Norrises Go Home Again*, Memoirs of Confederados Families, box 1, file 17, p. 12, Confederados Collections, Auburn University Special Collections and Archives, Auburn, Alabama.
- 2) *Coleção de Leis do Império do Brasil* (1831) (section 7), Secretaria de Estado dos Negócios da Justiça: Rio de Janeiro. [https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/lei\\_sn/1824-1899/lei-37659-7-novembro-1831-564776-publicacaooriginal-88704-pl.html](https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/lei_sn/1824-1899/lei-37659-7-novembro-1831-564776-publicacaooriginal-88704-pl.html) (2022年1月31日アクセス)
- 3) ‘Emperor Jones em Jequia’, *Letras e Artes: Suplemento de “A Manhã”*, June 3, 1951, p. 8.

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