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Books Reviewed

June E. Hahner, *Poverty and Politics: The Urban Poor in Brazil, 1870-1920*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986.

June Hahner's wide-ranging new book demonstrates that the oft-repeated lament that Brazil "has no memory" need not be taken at face value. Hahner's extensive archival research has uncovered a wide variety of new evidence on many of the less traditional topics in Brazilian labor history, such as diet, slum housing, disease, culture, and popular disturbances. This is encouraging news since there is a great need for specialized monographs on such subjects if we are to better understand Brazil's urban working people.

While far from definitive, June Hahner has creatively martialed a wide variety of evidence bearing on the daily life of working people in turn-of-the-century Rio de Janeiro. While casting her net more broadly on occasion, Hahner deals primarily with the Federal District which stands out, once again, for its distinctiveness vis-à-vis the rest of Brazil. With close to 500,000 residents in 1890 and 1,150,000 by 1920, Rio de Janeiro's social and political dynamics were shaped by its unique bureaucratic and commercial functions.

In her discussion of census results between 1872 and 1920, Hahner pays particular attention to the varying distribution of men and women across different occupational groups. She also reminds us that a too literal reading of this material can lead to great errors. Indeed, the faults and vices of the published census results makes it all the more imperative that someone undertake the pilgrimage through the archives to find, if not the originals, at least more disaggregated census data. In the case of the 1920 census, this reviewer has found that unpublished district-level data was provided to at least one municipal government in São Paulo.

The most interesting material in the book deals with the relationship between carioca working people and various late nineteenth-century social and political movements, such as abolition, the nativist middle-class "Jacobinos," and "worker-"oriented electoral politics. She provides further information on the individuals who established the multitude of "workers' parties" in the 1890s, about whom we have known little in the past. She shows quite clearly the leverage offered workers by the far more open and competitive political conditions in the Federal District. In doing so, she also illustrates the ways in which this plebeian identify made the workers' definition as a separate class more difficult.

Hahner's treatment of popular politics is a small part of a more ambitious effort to portray the private and public lives of urban working people. Unfortunately, Hahner's descriptive and impressionistic "slice of life" lacks a sustained and coherent analytical argument, even for Rio de Janeiro. While giving coherence to a scattered and incomplete documentary record, the great weakness of such a composite portrait can be seen by analogy to research in agrarian social history and rural societies. However well-meaning, our understanding of rural social dynamics is not advanced by simple notions of peasants versus landowners. We need to know exactly what type of country people and landlords we are dealing with, keeping an eye to the great differences within each group and from one region to another.

Hahner is very much aware that printers, stevedores or factory workers are not the same as day laborers or artisans. However, she does not systematically explore these differences and establish the social and economic dynamics that flow from these realities. Hahner's adoption of the concept of "poverty," a very modern notion, as a unifying theme, is also highly problematic. Despite the title of her book, many of the groups she deals with do not in fact constitute part of the "urban poor." Moreover, her topically-organized discussions often violate chronological, geographic, and occupational specificity by mixing years, places, and distinct groups of urban working people.

Recent research in Brazilian labor history has moved away from precisely this sort of impressionistic generalization. Indeed, Hahner would have gained immeasurably from consulting Eileen Keremitsis's 1982 Ph.D. dissertation on "The Early Industrial Worker in Rio de Janeiro, 1870-1930" (Columbia University). Keremitsis broke with globalism and made a compelling case for the importance of occupational diversity in her quantitative treatment of company employment records. She provides fascinating information on the origin, composition, pay scales, work week, and internal hierarchies among the textile workers of Bangu, the streetcar drivers of the Light company, and local shoemakers of Rio.

A grasp of the peculiarities of a given industry or a particular factory helps makes analytical sense of patterns of worker organization or agitation. We can take, as an example, the generalized strike of some 20,000 workers in Rio in 1903 discussed briefly by Hahner. Bangu's 1212 workers did not join their striking fellow textile operatives because their employer did not join in the general wage cut being enforced across the industry. Moreover, Bangu's isolated location and company-town environment allowed the employers a more rigid control over their workforce and thus made participation in any strike far more difficult.

The stance of official neutrality adopted by the tram drivers' union in 1903 also makes more sense when we understand the better paid and more stable workforce of the Light company. As Keremitsis reports, streetcar drivers seldom struck in Rio, but when they did, the movements tended to be well-organized, of short duration, and successful. Unlike textile workers, the drivers were better able to defend their interests because of the leverage

offered by the enormous disruption entailed by any mass transit strike.

Emphasizing popular disunity, Hahner concludes that the "diffuse lower classes . . . possessed little class consciousness or solidarity." At best, the urban poor are seen as sharing "class feeling [but] not class consciousness." Sensitive to the more particularistic identities of the popular classes, Hahner wisely rejects any schematic notion of "class consciousness." There is no reason to expect to find an over-arching class identity under any but the most unusual of circumstances. Popular self-perceptions need not be dealt with as an either/or choice. Rather, even the most parochial feelings of skill, occupation, ethnicity, or even location can lead, at moments of mass mobilization, to the development of a more generalized class identity among urban workers.

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Stuart B. Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society: Bahia, 1550-1835*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

In this complex and important book Stuart Schwartz presents an intricate discussion of the Bahian sugar industry and its "social relations" as a microcosm of the evolution of Brazilian economy and society. The book is organized in seventeen chapters divided into four parts, which include three chapters on "Formations, 1500-1600;" five chapters on geography, technological aspects of sugar production in Brazil, labor needs and the division of labor in sugar, credit, profits and losses in business; six chapters on sugar society, including planters, cane farmers, wage workers, slave workers and the slave family; and three chapters on changes in the period from 1750-1835. Schwartz focuses on "work...as the most important determinant of a slave society" (p. xiv). Slavery for Schwartz was not an absolute institution with "freedom" as its exact opposite. Instead, Schwartz argues that the actual organization of production and the skills and cooperation needed for it resulted in "conditions...that mitigated or modified that situation.... Although cruel coercion was always present, the demands of sugar production created the need and opportunity for other methods of extracting labor, even skilled labor" (p. 131).