

**Title:** *From Slavery to Abolition in Peru: Four recent contributions.*, By: Ramirez, Susan E., Colonial Latin American Review, 10609164, Dec96, Vol. 5, Issue 2

**Database:** *Academic Search Premier*

## **FROM SLAVERY TO ABOLITION IN PERU: FOUR RECENT CONTRIBUTIONS**

[Find More Like This](#)

Agentes de su propia libertad. Los esclavos de Lima y la desintegración de la esclavitud, 1821-1854. By CARLOS AGUIRRE. Lima: Fondo Editorial Universidad Católica, 1993. Pp. 333.

Slavery and Abolition in Early Republican Peru. By PETER BLANCHARD. Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1992. Pp. xx, 247.

Paying the Price of Freedom: Family and Labor among Lima's Slaves, 1800-1854. By CHRISTINE HUNEFELDT. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. Pp. xi, 269.

Safari africano y compra-venta de esclavos para el Peru (1412-1818). By FERNANDO ROMERO. Lima: IEP-UNSCHE, 1994. Pp. 275.

Four recent books present a comprehensive and progressively more intimate view of slavery and slaves in Peru. One focuses on the slave trade starting as early as the Arab expansion across Northern Africa in the seventh century. A second summarizes the evidence on abolitionist sentiment. The last two use scores of stories of individuals to show how the slaves themselves were agents of their own freedom. The foci and methodologies of the four volumes also illustrate how historical writing styles have evolved in the last few decades.

Chronologically first, Fernando Romero's book, *Safari Africano y compraventa de esclavos para el Peru (1412-1818)*, begins the story with the history of the importation of slaves into Peru. In his effort to "understand the traffic in slaves in its entirety" (9), Romero writes a book that places the Peruvian slave trade in its broader Atlantic and Mediterranean contexts. Despite the earliest date in his title, he starts his story in the seventh century with the Muslim Arab expansion (29). He sketches the spread of Islam into northern Africa and the Portuguese expansion (starting in 1412), down the coast of west Africa, giving full play to characters such as Prince Henry and Prester John. The Portuguese, he reminds readers, were interested in trade with the Orient. They eventually dealt in cotton, wax, ivory, iron, gold and slaves, although Prince Henry had not originally contemplated trafficking in the latter. Slave trafficking began in earnest in 1441, when António Gonçalves began to imprison non-believers (the infieles).

Romero then discusses the introduction of slaves (mostly African blacks, but also possibly Arabs [Berbers, Moros, Loros and Judios]) into Peru (39,89). He does this on two levels. On the one hand, he discusses policy shifts and licenses and contracts that affected the legal supply of slaves. On the other, he presents every available documentary notice of slave participation in the conquest (starting with

Francisco Pizarro) and settlement, the civil wars, and the wars of Independence. He also notes that slaves worked in commercial agriculture, in the mines, as artisans, and in domestic service. Romero documents all this using mostly secondary sources and published primary manuscripts.

One significant contribution to the historiography of the slave trade to Peru is his presentation of import figures and the discussion of the contraband trade. His data, which would have been more accessible if organized into tables or as an appendix instead of embedded in prose, strongly suggest that illegal introductions vastly outnumbered legal imports during several epochs. Significantly distorting the traditionally-accepted population figures of black slaves in Peru are the numbers imported through Chile, Buenos Aires, Brazil, and (Carlos Aguirre would add), Colombia.

The second book, Peter Blanchard's *Slavery and Abolition in Early Republican Peru*, is a well-documented, institutional study that shows that abolition was not a calculated result of a Peruvian campaign or of the expanding influence of liberals and modernizers. Instead, it resulted from the availability of alternative workers and new sources of capital, the British antislavery crusade, and the resistance of slaves themselves, who ran away, purchased their own freedom, and challenged owners in court.

His study begins with data from the late eighteenth century and a panoramic view of the various legal decrees and law codes, presented almost year-by-year and administration-by-administration, that contributed to the ending of the institution. The various legal dispositions were not unidirectional. Crown, as well as later republican policy, shifted back and forth: at one point limiting slavery, at another facilitating its extension. This official vacillation reflected the realities of a complex situation: one in which slaves represented essential labor, significant capital, and social status; one in which the slave holders were influential and the state was often weak; and one in which there often was a scarcity of labor (because *serranos* [highland native peoples] would not work on the coast), free wage labor was expensive and limited, and to which European immigrants failed to come in meaningful numbers.

In addition, Blanchard presents readers with a view of the importance of slavery in the rural areas, even those outside Lima's hinterland, something that none of the other three authors do. But rural slavery declined over time, although numbers to prove this are illusive, difficult to compare, and sometimes even contradictory. Eighty percent of the over 41,000 registered slaves in 1821 were engaged in agriculture, especially in sugar cane cultivation and processing, on relatively large estates. Unfree agricultural workers fell to only 40 percent between 1839-1850 in the Province of Lima. But numbers Blanchard presents later in the book suggest that rural workers (perhaps not all of whom were agricultural hands) rose again to 68 percent (670 of 990) in 1851. Nevertheless, relying heavily on the *Temporalidades* records of Jesuit estates (which may or may not have been typical of other rural properties), he finds that slave workers faced harsher conditions than did their urban counterparts, a conclusion seconded by both Carlos Aguirre and Christine Hunefeldt for the Province of

Lima.

Blanchard's research makes several other important points, of which only a sample can be mentioned here. He discusses the Peruvian case in terms of new economic conditions. Did abolition result from the spread of capitalism as individuals realized that slavery slowed capital formation and tied it up in immovable labor or did slavery and capitalism accommodate one another as Manuel Moreno Fraginals found in Cuba? The Peruvian case, argues Blanchard, supports Moreno Fraginals' argument. Peru was economically weak and chaotic, geographically remote, politically unstable, and, therefore, with little industrialization. Secondly, he concludes, as do Aguirre and Hunefeldt, that Ramon Castilla's abolition decree was almost inconsequential. It affected barely 1 percent of the Peruvian population. The end of slavery was politically expedient, a result of political opportunism, even a surprise; it had little impact on Peru, as slaves were replaced with serranos, coolies and immigrants. Abolition caused some marginal dislocations in agriculture but freed up capital, which the government, flush with guano revenues, made available at 300 pesos for each of the 25,505 freed slaves, for new investments and modernization. Finally, he discusses the difference between theory and practice. For example, he interprets the willingness of individuals to marry as a sign of their confidence that family ties would be respected; yet, in practice, separation frequently occurred.

The last two books: Aguirre's *Agentes de su propia libertad*, and Hunefeldt's *Paying the Price of Freedom* pick up where Blanchard ends, emphasizing practice as opposed to edicts and proclamations and institutional structure. Both authors offer more intimate portraits of slaves struggling to attain freedom. Aguirre's tome is a dense, innovative, comprehensive, well-written and researched treatise on slavery in Lima between 1821 and 1854. He characterizes the process as a "disintegration", a word that comes closer to conveying reality than the word "abolition", which traditionally brings to mind the history of abolitionists in Brazil and Britain. In fact, he traces, with numerous tables and graphs, the gradual decline of slavery. His attention to the opportunity structure for rural and urban slaves in the auto-manumission process is enlightening. He found that urban slaves had more opportunities to earn and save money than their rural counterparts, with the exception of domestic servants. These, he found, had no (an exaggeration?) mobility and no (absolutely none?) chance to accumulate capital, unless we are talking about females who were favored by the owner for one reason or another and knew how to take advantage of the situation.

Likewise, his close study of almost thirteen hundred letters of manumission from the notarial records in Chapter 6 underscores the slow but steady nature of the decline. This analysis also reveals that the once-accepted paternalistic descriptions of slavery and the stereotyped picture of the relatively benign slave condition (attributed to slave owners by Blanchard in Chapter 3 of his book) are myths. These images had led Aguirre to expect to find a high percentage of unconditional grants of freedom as a result of the supposed respect and affection masters and mistresses felt for those who served them. Reality, he found, was different. His data show that three-quarters of the slaves bought their own

freedom. Only a quarter received voluntary manumission and these grants often were conditional. Slaves had to fulfill various obligations (to serve until they attained a certain age or until their owner died) before being set free. These letters also show that three out of four of those mentioned were women.

Aguirre's penchant for numbers and his empiricism also focuses attention on the question of political power and its use by owners to prevent universal emancipation. He analyzes data (61) showing that slaveholding was widespread in Lima. In this urban setting, he found, based on population figures for the parish of Santa Ana in Lima in 1808, that slaves were not concentrated in elite hands, but distributed widely among many sectors of urban society. Only five parish residents, for example, owned over 20 slaves each; a middle group whose members owned 6-14 slaves each constituted 16.5 percent of the same population. But those owning 1-5 slaves made up 80.3 percent, the vast majority. Information from a later time (1852-1854) suggests that slave owners were a diverse lot: that a farmer owned the highest number of slaves, followed by a merchant. Small holders included matmakers, a professor of medicine, a water carder, an Indian, a chicha (maize beer) maker, and a shoe maker, among many others (64). Such identities do not suggest that these slave holders were particularly powerful people. At first glance, then, these findings call into question the conclusion by Blanchard that slaveholders wielded considerable political clout. On closer analysis, however, the basis for the difference is obvious. Blanchard refers to large holders, the hacendados, whose fortunes were closely tied to large estates that depended on slavery as a labor force. They mounted an early counterattack against San Martin's antislavery decrees (Chapter 3). Later, they used their wealth and the government's need for loans from private citizens to exert influence. They must not have resided in the parish of Santa Ana. Only one of Aguirre's parishioners was a farmer (agricultor). Thus, an important element in the discussion of emancipation is largely absent from Aguirre's (and Hunefeldt's) analyses. They leave out the relatively politically powerful and conservative elements of society who opposed emancipation.

As Blanchard does, so Aguirre also talks about slavery as part of a larger debate. In another chapter, he takes particular issue with Pablo Macera, a respected and prolific Peruvian historian, who has argued that abolition was an inevitable consequence of global capitalist development. Such an argument reduces the actors' roles and makes slaves pawns of external forces. Aguirre rejects the passive victim stereotypes and convincingly shows how individual slaves' actions affected their fate, that of society, and the forms of domination. He expands on Robert Scott's notion of everyday forms of resistance, which was so briefly mentioned by Blanchard, with multiple examples of crimes, flight, sabotage, desertion, theft, disobedience, noncompliance and incivility.

An extension of this debate is his Chapter 7 on cimarronaje (maroonage) (based, in part, on 121 cases of runaways between 1840 and 1846) and bandolerismo (brigandage). He attributes flight to harsh conditions or treatment that exceeds the threshold of the acceptable (do we hear echoes of "moral economy" here?) and a "counter ideology" that questioned the values of the dominant culture (244). Flight was a way to undermine the power of the master class and it

severely weakened the hacienda-based economy of rural Lima. This phenomenon was most common right after the wars of Independence, during unsettled times, but continued to exist into the middle of the nineteenth century. Runaway slaves then turned to such mechanisms as highway robbery (among others) as a means to survive; thus, the intimate linkage between maroonage and theft. Such experiences, he contends, are not just safety valves (269), but ones that opened slaves' eyes. As a result, they elaborated an ideology to justify their actions: the cruelty and abuse of the owners or their agents, and, by extension, slavery itself, were visualized as unjust acts. Such ideas justified their flight. It followed that flight was a reconstitution of justice, not a violation of it (272).

He ends the discussion with the topic of outright slave rebellions, citing some of the same examples used by Blanchard (e.g., the uprising on the hacienda San Pedro). He acknowledges that uprisings, usually on haciendas, were few in number. Causes included the harsh conditions on the estates, a situation that violated in some way norms that the slaves considered acceptable. Hunefeldt takes this explanation one step further, attributing the relative lack of slave rebellion to a lack of a common identity.

Hunefeldt's work, the last of the four books reviewed here, uses some of the same examples (138) and reaches many of the same conclusions as Aguirre. Yet, her fresh and well-written book, as the title suggests, is exceptional for the familiar tone and intimacy with which she portrays the everyday trials and tribulations and achievements and debacles of her subjects. Unlike Blanchard and Aguirre, who state that there was no abolitionist movement, Hunefeldt states that liberalism and the abolitionist movement were weak and vacillating. She downplays these intellectual exercises. Her main thesis can be summed up by paraphrasing her own words: Castilla did not give slaves their freedom, they had been purchasing it all along with their own labor. Processes and ideologies, she reminds readers, are historically constructed; they cannot simply be erased by decree. She puts the decrees and laws into human terms by showing their effect(s) on real people. Although going over some of the same material as do the other three authors, she adds nuances to the story by focusing on family life, individual strategies for emancipation (changing jobs and owners, making payments on credit, negotiating their price, requesting transfer to the city, marrying, entering into debt peonage arrangements, and using slave brokers, church mediation, and the courts), and gender.

On the last issue, she contends that women had greater success in the process of manumission. Perhaps because they were less useful in a rural setting, they were often the first of a family to leave the rural estate for the city, where they had more options to acquire work and accumulate capital. Sex with the owners could also be used to advantage by the females involved. But not all marriages proved successful. Wife abuse, adultery, and even abandonment occurred. If a married situation proved too stressful, slave women were known to seek refuge in the house of the master.

Given the topic it should not be surprising that the four books overlap. As noted

above, Blanchard, Aguirre, and Hunefeldt use many of the same records and archives and, therefore, share many examples. Conclusions, though given different weight by each author, coincide in some respects and differ in others. They agree that conditions were harsher for rural slaves than urban; that the church ameliorated the conditions slaves faced, especially in the cities. They note that violent, concerted resistance was infrequent, short-term, and localized, and certainly that the everyday forms of resistance were commonplace and significant in the struggles for freedom. All, save Romero, emphasize resistance and the empowerment which that struggle yielded. Thus, thoughtful readers will have to revise, if they have not already done so, their stereotypes of the seemingly powerless. Legal proclamations and codes played a role in some circumstances. Romero and Blanchard give them more space than either Aguirre or Hunefeldt. All agree that although Castilla's decree was an important benchmark, it otherwise proved almost meaningless. Yet they also disagree: on whether or not to distinguish the often disjointed and sporadic abolitionist pressure of some bureaucrats, judges, congressmen, newspapermen, and lawyers as a movement. They disagree on the degree to which the system of slavery was benign. Blanchard accepts it as benevolent as compared with slavery elsewhere. Aguirre's study of letters of manumission finds it to have been less benevolent than the stereotype led him to expect.

Despite such differences, these four books together appear to provide the most comprehensive study of slavery and abolition to date, especially for Lima and its hinterland. Yet, other data suggest that these findings really are of limited significance if viewed in the context of the entire country. Hunefeldt justifies her regional focus with data that show that of the one hundred thousand slaves who ever came to Peru, 40 percent either stayed in Lima or over time relocated there. That still leaves 60 percent in the provinces. Such figures make the question of representativity of these studies a question. Other figures, published by Blanchard (163) for the immediate pre-emancipation years, indicate that there were 329 urban and 670 rural slaves in the Province of Lima in 1851. If we assume that these numbers proved steady, or declined slightly, or even if they are rounded up to 1,000 (from the total of 990) and divided by the total number of slaves for whom the government paid compensation after emancipation (25,505), then the stories of slavery in Lima and its hinterland told by Aguirre, Hunefeldt, and to a lesser extent by Blanchard, represent only about 4 percent of the slave population. Under what conditions did the other 96 percent of the slaves live? The research reviewed here suggests that the slaves in Chincha, Lambayeque, or other areas, did not have the same life chances as those in Lima. These considerations then underscore the need to study the provinces. To what extent did the provincial slaves resist, given the physical distance between them and their government-appointed defenders and spokesmen? Is the close link between Lima and its hinterland generalizable to provincial capitals and the rest of the agricultural zones where slavery was the rule? Is the story of a relatively successful struggle in Lima applicable to the rest of the country? I ask these questions not to criticize the work of the authors reviewed here. Each carefully delineated the geographical limits of his or her study and, given the rigorous level of the basic research that went into the books, we can see that the history of emancipation in one area was already enough to keep these historians busy for

years. No, I point this out to advertise the need to study the blacks in the provinces, building on the few examples of provincial estate slavery provided here. Research that describes the process elsewhere in Peru and tests hypotheses will allow readers to reach a more balanced and general view of Peruvian history.

Finally, a second topic for further research is the study of the aftermath of abolition, which was touched on summarily in two of these books. Such a study would help round out characterizations of the lives of coolies, peasants, and urban wage laborers and provide information for comparison and contrast with similar studies of urban and rural labor elsewhere in the Americas.

~~~~~

By Susan E. Ramirez De Paul University

---

Copyright of Colonial Latin American Review is the property of Routledge and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.