

Document collections of abolitionist societies, freedom lawsuits, and theatrical dramas complement the view into the wide ramifications of abolitionism on political practice. The lawsuits detail slaves' awareness of opportunities for freedom and call attention to the wider group of lawyers, judges, witnesses, and freedpeople who comprised the movement. My interest is admittedly more qualitative than quantitative, for I am not positing an argument that these cases caused the ending of slavery. Rather, I focus on how slaves' personal struggles became politicized and a point of departure for discussing slavery in terms of political participation. Detailed records of abolitionist societies provide another captivating angle into the mobilizations, a type of source that is rarely available for Brazilian abolitionism. Two of Recife's leading associations, the Sociedade Nova Emancipadora and the Club Cupim, furnish an extraordinary look at the workings of Brazilian abolitionism. The Nova Emancipadora's (1880–84) activities best illuminate the quotidian processes of publicizing the abolition issue. The Cupim (1884–88), a radical abolitionist society of merchants, ex-slaves, law students, and raftsmen, transported fugitive slaves from Recife to port cities along Brazil's northern Atlantic littoral. Navigating coastal currents, this interracial abolitionist society operated the largest escape network in northern and northeastern Brazil. Reckoning with these and other associational groups, not in terms of whether they caused abolition but with respect to how they produced their own versions of belonging, we see associational culture as integral to reformulations of citizenship.

The production of abolitionist theater also provides rich insights into how contemporaries developed a shared sense of the problem of abolition. It elucidates a key mode in the making of an abolitionist public as well as sheds light on how this public imagined and viewed slaves' actions within the process of emancipation. The plays open an original window into the cultural sensibilities of the period and to the important place of the theater as a place and form of politics.⁷⁴

This book situates the abolition struggles within the political realities of the time. Organized chronologically into six chapters, it begins with an analysis of how abolition became a public issue in the late 1860s and captures the broad popular participation that was important to this process. Chapters 2 and 3 trace how the competing abolitionist and planters' mobilizations repositioned themselves in the wake of the 1871 gradual emancipation law. The remaining three chapters deal with the ebbs and flows of the abolitionists' and planters' mobilizations during the 1880s. They demonstrate how debates over citizenship remained public and contentious despite the 1881 restrictions on voting. It is evident, in the last chapter especially, that the abolition issue remained central to citizenship constructs in the postemancipation era and that new discussions about belonging and equality surfaced through how people

