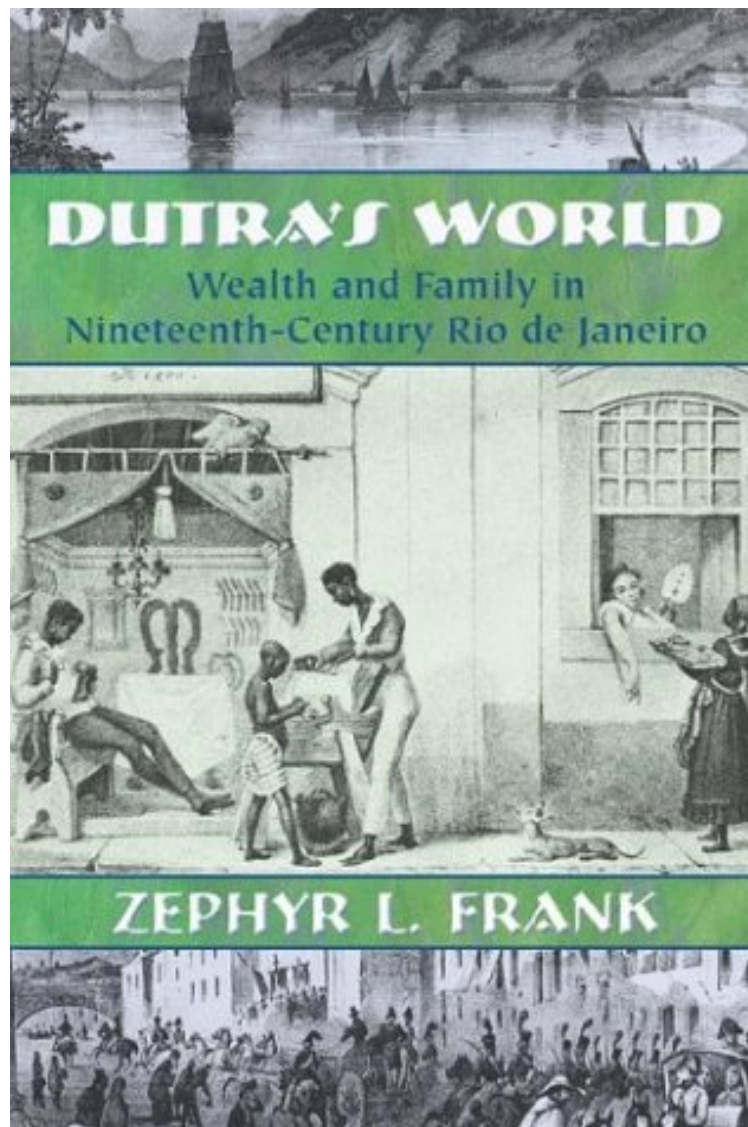


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## Dutra's World: Wealth and Family in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro (Dilogos Series)

*Zephyr L. Frank*

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**Zephyr L. Frank : Dutra's World: Wealth and Family in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro (Dilogos Series)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dutra's World: Wealth and Family in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro (Dilogos Series):

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found the following review helpful. Dutra's World By PubliusScholars have long noted the pervasiveness of slavery in the formation of Latin America. While sources typically privilege the social elites, less on average is known about the so-called "middling class". Zephyr L. Frank's 'Dutra's World,' a recent work on that very group, seeks to narrow that gap. Claiming roughly eighty percent of the free population in its corner, slaveholding pervaded all social levels. As an affordable and highly accessible form of property, Frank demonstrates that African slaves represented the only feasible road to social mobility. From 1820 to 1850, the author posits, a slavery-based economic and social order gave the middling class their best opportunity to acquire significant wealth and prosperity, regardless of their origins. However, the "ephemeral" moment of promise quickly collapsed after 1850. Unable to replicate its earlier success, the middling class nearly collapsed and lost much of its holdings to immigrants and, more importantly, the burgeoning economic elite. As a work of microhistory, 'Dutra's World' aims to illustrate the broad socioeconomic context of the "middle class" (for all purposes roughly categorized as an economic and hierarchical mid-level sort, though lacking group self-consciousness) primarily derived from analysis of estate records. The work's namesake, Antonio Jose Dutra, in many ways stands in for the class as a whole. Despite his birth as a slave, Dutra managed to acquire an impressive body of property in urban real estate and slaves within a generation. A barber by trade, Dutra's story, Frank suggests, indicates the diversity of experiences in mid-century Brazil. Economically successful by most accounts, those like Dutra typified the hardworking class most devoted to slavery. But unlike their elite counterparts, the over-reliance on slavery as an economic investment invariably stunted the middle class's ability to navigate the new economy. Propelled by the diversity of its transatlantic ties, the Brazilian socioeconomic situation exploded. Wages overall failed to keep pace with skyrocketing slave and urban real estate prices. To make matters worse, estate divisions in the middle class sector all but annihilated the group. In stark contrast, the economic elites typically improved their situations. Invested heavily in urban real estate, as opposed to slavery, elites weathered the slave trade's end without so much as a whimper. Forward thinking (economically speaking) and aggressive in its accumulation of wealth, the elite grew wealthier still, particularly when coffee exportation and railroads boomed in southeastern Brazil through the 1860s. Initially lacking any real domestic financial competition, economic elites survived long past their middling counterparts. In reconstructing Dutra's world, Frank relies on a rather impressive balance of archival and secondary sources. He rather elegantly contextualizes and sums extensive estate records in conjunction with recent literature throughout the work. While the author clearly has an abundance of material sources, he frankly admits their limitations. Perhaps the most satisfying aspect of this work (apart from its concise arguments and clear prose) is Frank's willingness to tease carefully reasoned conclusions from incomplete data. His almost daunting mastery of sources and figures enable the author to highlight often-surprising trends. Calculating slave ages belonging to elite- and middling-owners, to cite one example, is a fascinating exercise in elucidating the economic constriction of the 1850s on the latter group (p.85). The world of Antonio Jose Dutra illustrates the diversity of experiences in nineteenth-century Latin America. African slaves could, for a fleeting moment, achieve social and economic freedom. Immigrants found highly lucrative employment at the expense of the native population. Elites, as they always seem to do, managed to grow wealthier still. The lower and middle classes at once thrived and subsequently atrophied at the hands of chattel slavery--always a precarious investment to stake one's livelihood on. That is the real virtue of 'Dutra's World': a well-balanced account that demonstrates the fleeting moment of hope for the aspiring in nineteenth-century Brazil. For all of its strengths, one minor quibble is its dreadful presentation. Its rather juvenile layout is disruptive and the frequent chapter partitioning detracts from the argumentative flow. These, however, are likely beyond the author's control.

The relation of slavery to Brazil's economic and social history has long fascinated researchers. Zephyr Frank focuses on nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro, where almost half of the city's residents labored as slaves of diverse owners in a complex urban setting. Slavery persisted in the Brazilian city, in part, because it was entrenched among upwardly mobile entrepreneurs who hired their slaves out for wages, employed them in family businesses, and bought and sold them for profit. Changes in the institution of slavery and the economy of the city gradually limited access to slaves, constricting avenues of social mobility for slaveholders and transforming the lives of the slaves themselves. Frank uses the experiences of one person, Antonio Jos Dutra, as an example of a middling urban slaveholder. Dutra, a former slave himself, owned thirteen slaves whom he employed in his barbering business and musical band. Dutra's story is part of the larger picture Frank paints of those who owned slaves, how they fit into the social and economic development of Brazil, and what slaves and their owners did as slavery rose and then gradually declined in Rio de Janeiro. Frank traces social mobility, race, class, and slaveholding patterns, basing his analysis on inheritance records. Rich in detail, these records reveal layers of historical meaning regarding the accumulation of wealth, social mobility, family ties, and the social and cultural practices surrounding death.

""Dutra's World" is a very clear, concise, and nuanced analysis of slavery, social structure, economic trends, and institutions in nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro.""This is an interesting and valuable study of a more or less explored aspect of the economic, as well as social, history of Brazil in the 19th century. One has to admire the amount of work involved in locating and studying thousands of documents involved. Highly recommended.""A superb quantitative

analysis of wealthholders to an unforgettable evocation of the remarkable family established by the former slave and barber Antonio Jos Dutra."From the Inside FlapThe impact of slavery in 19th century Brazil is examined through the life of one typical slave owner who was also a former slave.About the AuthorZephyr L. Frank is assistant professor of history at Stanford University.