

Review of Beattie, Peter M. *Punishment in Paradise: Race, Slavery, Human Rights, and a Nineteenth-Century Brazilian Penal Colony*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.

In 1881, the Ministry of Justice in Brazil requested that military commanders conduct a survey on the island of Fernando de Noronha, an Atlantic archipelago off the coast of Bahia that served as the main destination for convicted enslaved and free blacks and civilians in nineteenth century Brazil. Government officials requested a survey in 1881 to include information regarding convicted slaves on the island and, in response, military commanders on the island gathered information about the convicted slaves on the penal colony and created categories in the survey that included information such as slaves' names, former masters, African or Brazilian province of origin, crime committed, and special notes regarding their skills (177-200).

The 1881 Slave Survey on the penal colony of Fernando de Noronha raises several questions for historians regarding race, slavery, punishment, and human rights in nineteenth century Brazil. For example, since the island housed both free and enslaved convicts, how did officials differentiate in their treatment between enslaved and free individuals? How did meanings of freedom and unfreedom change for convicted enslaved and free blacks and civilians on the island? Why was it important to list the "former master" as a category on the slave survey since convicted slaves were sentenced to lifelong incarceration on the island?

In *Punishment in Paradise: Race, Slavery, Human Rights, and a Nineteenth-Century Brazilian Penal Colony*, Peter M. Beattie examines the lived experiences and voices of convicted enslaved and free blacks and civilians in the penal colony of Fernando de Noronha. For example, in reference to the 1881 Slave Survey, Beattie closely examines this document and answers some of the above questions through his analysis of it. Beattie states that the survey reflects the lived experiences of free and unfree members of the colonial Brazilian penal colony on the island of Fernando de Noronha. In his analysis, he states that it demonstrates African migration through the slave trade since many convicted slaves' origin listed was "Benguela, Congo, Mozambique, and Mina" (182). Further, Beattie points out that the indication of the convicted slaves former master paradoxically ties convicted former slaves to their masters, placing them in a limbo "between free and manumitted" (182-3). In short, Beattie demonstrates that the 1881 Slave Survey allows us to examine the lived experiences of enslaved and free convicts on the island and to glean telling information about their lives in nineteenth century Brazil.

Beattie, a historian of Latin America and the Caribbean and an Associate Professor at Michigan State University, provides insightful examinations into the Brazilian penal colony of Fernando de Noronha in *Punishment in Paradise* as exemplified in the above anecdote. He explores archival sources such as slave surveys, island matriculation records, legal codices, and travel accounts to examine the penal colony as a lens through which to better understand society, punishment, and race and slavery in imperial Brazil. By examining the island, the people on it, and the ways that it functioned, Beattie ultimately positions Fernando de Noronha as a larger metaphor for Brazilian society, culture, and history in the nineteenth century.

This book review examines Beattie's *Punishment in Paradise* as a significant contribution to fields of study on the southern Atlantic world, legal history regarding human rights, punishment, and justice, and nineteenth century race and slavery in Latin America. This review is organized into three sections in order to explore *Punishment in Paradise*: first, it examines the author's central arguments and the thematic organization of the book; second, it discusses key sources and an example of significant findings from the author's research; and, third, it analyzes the book's historiographical genres and contributions to secondary literature. By analyzing these features of *Punishment in Paradise*, we are able to better understand the

important ways that race and slavery, punishment, and human rights developed in imperial Brazil in the nineteenth century.

Beattie introduces readers to Fernando de Noronha by providing two contradicting narratives that describe the island. The first narrative he presents is by a Brazilian singer, Severino Perigo, who states in a song that the penal colony was a “depraved prison,” where you “get clapped in fetters,” and “if you cry, you get flogged” (1-2; 4). Beattie finds, however, that the dismal image presented by Perigo is countered by a travel account by American novelist, Frank de Yeaux Carpenter. According to Carpenter, the island was far from a labor intensive and abusive prison. Instead, on a trip that he took to Brazil, he stated that the island was more similar to an “ocean resort” for convicted enslaved and free blacks and civilians. Beattie attempts to mitigate these two conflicting perspectives of the penal colony, and whether the island was a tropical resort for convicts or a “depraved prison” serves as the driving question to his research that sets the tone of the rest of *Paradise in Punishment*.

Beattie grapples with these contradicting accounts of the island by stating that Fernando de Noronha played a significant role in defining Brazilian culture, society, and history in terms of race, freedom, and punishment. Beattie argues that the penal colony serves as a reflection of Brazilian life in the nineteenth century for a number of reasons. For example, he states that it provides a “broad panorama of justice in Brazil” because record keeping on the island was meticulous and descriptive as to the types of crimes that convicts committed, their trial details, and their personal traits (4). Detailed documentation like island matriculation records and other sources from the penal colony allows us, he argues, to better understand the everyday lived experiences of convicted enslaved and free blacks and civilians. Further, Beattie argues that since the island was dependent on an agriculture-based labor system by the convicts, it serves as a metaphor for Brazil as a “small-scale plantation” through which we can analyze race, slavery, and freedom in its context (4-5). For an example, he states that military commanders on the island faced similar struggles as plantation owners and overseers on mainland plantations in Brazil. Therefore, he states that it is possible to examine Fernando de Noronha as a microcosm of Brazilian slave society and asserts that it serves as “an exaggerated metaphor” for society, culture, race, and slavery in imperial Brazil.

Within these overarching claims that the island can serve as a lens through which to view nineteenth century Brazil, Beattie further seeks to examine the lived experiences of individuals on the island. For example, he argues that the people on Fernando de Noronha were inherently interconnected despite apparent social, legal, and racial distinctions in their identities. By examining the island as a miniature Brazil that reflects large sweeping social and cultural aspects of Brazilian mainland life, Beattie examines the lived experiences of the convicts on the island and argues that they make up a group of marginalized and subordinated people who he terms as the “intractable poor” (5). According to Beattie, the “intractable poor” refers jointly to the marginalized persons on the island based on how they were categorized in matriculation records, namely “convicts, slaves, military enlisted men, indians, and free Africans.” Since the term “intractable poor” refers to a range of diverse historical actors, Beattie clarifies that he does not suggest they were equal in legal, social, or cultural terms. Rather, he states that their identities were interconnected due to their shared vulnerabilities to coercive labor and abuse within the penal colony. Further, he states that their place within the respective categories of “convicts, slaves, military enlisted men, indians, and free Africans” reflect degrees of unfreedom that they confronted as convicts.

Beattie goes on to emphasize that convicts’ identities, categorizations, and degrees of unfreedom were not only interconnected, but overlapping, as well. Beattie states that convicts

moved among categories as they interacted with one another and argues that this overlapping identity movement can be termed “category drift” (6). To elaborate this point, island commanders sent slave convicts to serve at military outposts, as well as convicted free individuals to labor on indigenous villages. As these distinct groups interacted and became interconnected, Beattie argues that their categories of “slave, freed African, free civilian, indian” became blurry and somewhat indistinct, and mutually reinforcing, as well. Beattie further argues that by examining the interrelated and overlapping nature of the convicts’ identities and shared experiences as the “intractable poor,” it is possible to better understand how Brazilian society transitioned from slave to free labor and from colony to empire. In short, as mainland Brazil underwent drastic political transformations, ordinary individuals’ identities as enslaved, freed African, or free civilian became more fluid, interchangeable, and less distinct on Fernando de Noronha.

Beattie argues that the interconnected and overlapping vulnerabilities of convicts on the island also illuminates the ways in which people in power on Fernando de Noronha understood and attempted to define the “intractable poor” into specific categories. For example, he states that convicts were stereotyped as unsavory, dangerous, and rough (6-7). Examining characterizations of the convicts by accounts of officials on the island, travel accounts by foreign visitors, and island records that include categorizations for the convicts reflects the ways that people understood and constructed ideas of the marginalized groups of people on the island. Convicts on Fernando de Noronha and those in power continually negotiated, redefined, and “drifted” among the definitions and hierarchies of race, slavery, and status as they navigated categories of the “intractable poor.”

Beattie organizes *Punishment in Paradise* in thematic sections to provide a close examination of his above mentioned arguments and to elaborate on major themes such as race, slavery, punishment, and the interconnected nature of marginalized groups on the island of Fernando de Noronha. For example, in chapters one and two, he examines the features of the island’s landscape and its role in the Brazil’s history during the nineteenth century, respectively. For example, in chapter one he describes the landscape of Fernando de Noronha, describing it as “isolated” and takes the reader through a tour of the island’s geography to illuminate what an arriving convict in the nineteenth century might have witnessed. In chapter two, Beattie explains that the island played an important role as Brazil gained its independence in the nineteenth century and transitioned to an independent imperial country. For example, political transitions on mainland Brazil had important implications for the islands convicts. Emperor Pedro II dramatically shifted national policy on capital punishment during his time in power by commuting the majority of death sentences for convicted enslaved and free blacks and civilians. This shift in Brazil’s political history is especially significant regarding the change in slave population on the island in the later half of the nineteenth century. Before Pedro II commuted the majority death sentences of slaves to life sentences of labor to Fernando de Noronha, slaves convicted of serious crimes like homicide were typically put to death.

In chapters three, four, and five, Beattie examines various ways that labor was stratified on the island, how convicts negotiated and defined their conceptions of their new social status, and the influence of gender, relationships, and family units. For example, Beattie demonstrates throughout these chapters that while the colony organized social stratification on the island based on work assignments for convicts and that while convicts aspired to social statuses in the penal colony like work overseers, conceptions of social status from their lives before conviction shaped how they created social networks based on freedom, status, and gender. Specifically, in chapter four, Beattie examines the traits of convicts in their distinct categories as noted in matriculation

records that recorded their names, ages, provinces of origin, and crimes, and emphasizes the social networks formed between social groups of the “intractable poor” within the penal colony. Further, in chapter five, Beattie examines the roles of gender and sexuality on Fernando de Noronha by exploring religion, gender segregation, and the policing of convict family and marital units.

In chapters six, seven, eight, and nine he examines themes that shed light on the lived experiences of convicts in relation to quality of life, punishment, slavery, and human rights. For example, in chapter eight, Beattie explores the 1881 Slave Survey in depth and examines the role of manliness and personhood in slave convictions. For example, all slaves sentenced to Fernando de Noronha in the 1881 survey were convicted of homicide, often of their masters (termed “mastercide”). When slaves were tried for violent crimes, courts considered them as men able to be tried as persons at court. However, when slaves were involved in civil disputes, they were not granted personhood at law and remained chattel property without legal voice. Beattie connects this competing version of legal personhood and manliness as reflected in the matriculation records in nineteenth century Brazil. His observations on legal personhood build upon antebellum United States and Caribbean scholarship, also, by historian Ariela Gross who makes similar arguments about slaves’ legal personhood in the United States’ Old South (Gross, 2000). Later, in chapter nine, Beattie examines institutional reform on the island and mainland Brazil in relation to death sentences, flogging, and race and slavery and links transformations of race, segregation, and abolition on the mainland to the penal colony.

Beattie underscores his central arguments and his thematic organization in the text with a thorough examination of rich primary sources from Fernando de Noronha, mainland Brazil, and the Atlantic World in *Punishment in Paradise*. He uses archival records such as legal codes, island matriculation documents, travel accounts, infirmary records, surveys, and more. On the island, Beattie states that because Fernando de Noronha was a government penal colony, it retained remarkably well kept record keeping tools as it monitored convicts coming in, their names, ages, physical descriptions, place of origin, crimes, and additional notes about the slaves’ disposition or skillset. Matriculation records and the aforementioned 1881 Slave Survey are useful in that they provide a glimpse into the lives of the enslaved and free convicts on Fernando de Noronha and also the ways that individuals in power (i.e. government officials, military commanders, the Ministry of Justice, etc.) formulated categories to define the convicts on the island. Sources outside the island and broader to nineteenth century colonial and imperial Brazil include legal codices like the *codigo criminal* of various years in Brazil that reflected changes in Brazilian law regarding convictions for slaves. For example, through Beattie’s use of the *codigo criminal*, we see a transition in that slaves were decreasingly sentenced to death and increasingly sentenced to life in prison with hard labor and regular flogging through Pedro II’s reforms (178). Another valuable source that Beattie uses to construct Fernando de Noronha on a global stage is travel accounts from foreign visitors. Beattie uses these travel accounts to examine various cultural impressions of the island and to mitigate competing and contradicting accounts of it (94, 97, 125-129).

Beattie’s archival sources led to significant findings in his research on Fernando de Noronha and this book review provides an analysis into one of Beattie’s thematic topics – social and cultural life on the island – in order to illuminate an example of his significant findings. For example, Beattie states that scholars have examined crimes and trials of convicted enslaved and free blacks and civilians, but few examined their lived experiences after sentencing on the island. An exploration of Beattie’s treatment of the little developed theme of social and material life in

secondary literature reflects broad historical themes of quality of life and the lived experiences for convicts on the island.

In his examination of social and material life in the penal colony, Beattie challenges a historical trope that life on Fernando de Noronha was a beautiful landscape cursed by sinful and despairing convicts. The trope originated mostly from travel accounts of the island by visitors from the United States and Europe framing it as a tropical paradise plagued by dangerous and unsavory people. In their accounts of the island, it is a place of *Punishment in Paradise*.

Beattie takes issue with this historical trope and dismantles it by arguing that while the island was a place of coerced labor, some respite existed for convicts. He argues that convicted slaves were not constantly flogged, convicted free men were not always shackled, and that, despite power abuses and the vulnerability to coercive labor, leisure time existed that offered a break from the penal colony. Beattie asserts that the development of an intricate social and material leisure life was vital in the formation of important social networks and a sense of self for the convicts (139-147). For example, Beattie examines an example of a travel account that reflects the potentially attainable “elite status life” for convicts on the island. The author of the travel account, Captain Raphael Semmes, part of the United States confederacy during the Civil War, described being greeted by a convict and dining with another convict at a military commanders’ home when he docked his boat at the island to trade goods (125-129). This interaction of convicts being included in foreign transactions, as diplomatic go-betweens, and partaking in dinners at an island commander’s home reflects a hierarchical status among convicts on the island often based on the types of crime they committed. For example, Semmes stated that the commander of the island told him that the convict dining with them was only convicted of forgery rather than a violent crime. However, such elite roles and experiences as exemplified by the convicts in this instance were unlikely extended to political prisoners who commanders feared would incite rebellions, for example.

Regarding material life on Fernando de Noronha, Beattie examines their quality of life in relation to access to health care, clothing, and shelter. For example, Beattie states that records from the colony’s infirmary in 1850 revealed that it provided 308 treatments to patients for ailments such as floggings, ulcers, and urinary infections (139). By examining the quality of life for convicts on Fernando de Noronha outside of their coerced labor and abuse and in the context of social and material life, Beattie illuminates some of the lived and shared experiences of the convicts that reflects his central arguments of “category drift” within the “intractable poor.”

Beattie’s arguments, research sources, and significant findings position him in a number of complementary historical genres. *Punishment in Paradise* fits into several historical genres, namely the comparative, Atlantic (and more specifically southern Atlantic), cultural and social, and micro history genres. For example, Beattie joins cultural and social historians as he explores the experiences of marginalized peoples in nineteenth century Brazil, specifically convicted enslaved and free blacks and civilians, to reconstruct his narrative of race, slavery, and punishment on Fernando de Noronha. He uses primary sources that reflect the lived experiences of the convicts, how they formed, negotiated, and redefined their identities, and their interpersonal relationships on the island. Further, Beattie constructs his exploration of Fernando de Noronha by framing it within the genre of microhistory storytelling. Beattie uses the penal colony as a microcosm for Brazilian imperial and colonial society and culture.

Beattie provides a fascinating example of race, slavery, punishment, and human rights in nineteenth century Brazil that adds a new dimension to understanding these themes in historical secondary literature and which previously had been largely unexplored by scholars in the context of the lived experiences in punishment in the southern Atlantic. For example, Beattie states that

while scholars of nineteenth century Brazil have paid considerable attention to the legal history of convictions by examining the accusations, trials, and testimonies of convicts, few explored what happens to the enslaved and free convicts after their trials (4-7). Further, Beattie also states that his scholarship adds to a growing, yet “shallow southward reach of Atlantic history” (3). In these regards, Beattie adds a new understanding not only to Brazilian history, but also to secondary literature on the southern Atlantic and the lived experiences of an “intractable poor” marginalized groups of people after their trials and testimonies finish on the mainland.

Further, Beattie builds on scholarship from a broad range of fields like history, sociology, and psychology. For example, Beattie’s research stands alongside works by Latin American scholars like Andres Resendez, Simon Newman, Rebecca Scott, Graham Nessler, and Trevor Burnard and John Garigus whose research explores slavery along a spectrum of coerced labor in the Atlantic worlds (Resendez, 2016; Newman, 2013; Scott, 2014; Nessler, 2016; Burnard and Garigus, 2016). Beattie contributes to this secondary literature by examining the convicts on Fernando de Noronha – whether enslaved, freed, or free – as interconnected and overlapping based on their degrees of unfreedom and vulnerability to coerced labor.

In the realm of sociology and psychology, Beattie shares the opinion by David Garland regarding penal history and traditions, and brings works by scholars such as Erving Goffman and Lewis Coser to the forefront of his research (Garland, 1990; Goffman, 1961; Coser, 1974). For example, in his examination of heterosexual relationships on Fernando de Noronha and the reasons that government officials encouraged migrations of family units with convicts, Beattie explores Goffman and Coser’s twentieth century theories regarding “total” and “greedy” institutions (8-11; 103-4). For example, Beattie invokes their discussions of “total” institutions as places that make families and institutions like asylums incompatible, and “greedy” institutions as places that “cultivate individuals whose authority could not be preserved without institutions leadership support” (8-11). Beattie builds on these examinations of institutions by looking at nineteenth century institutions in Brazil like the penal colony in *Punishment in Paradise* and concludes that Fernando de Noronha demonstrated a more porous and “less totalizing” experience for convicts than the institutions described by Goffman and Coser in the twentieth century.

In conclusion, Peter Beattie provides a fascinating glimpse into the penal colony of Fernando de Noronha in nineteenth century Brazil. He reveals through meticulous research that the social, cultural, and material lived experiences on the island were not limited to the small Atlantic archipelago. Instead, he demonstrates that Fernando de Noronha and the shared experiences of convicted enslaved and free blacks and civilians reflected the larger Brazilian nation in many ways. Importantly, he emphasizes that convicts negotiated and renegotiated their identities as an “intractable poor,” “drifted” between various categorized identities, and defined their degrees unfreedom on the island in ways that reflected the development of a Brazilian history. In all, Beattie successfully makes the case that the island serves as a lens through which to view Brazil’s larger national history.

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