

## Political Dissonance in the Name of Freedom

### *Brazil's Black Organizations in the Age of Abolition*

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On September 23, 1898, Rio de Janeiro's Presidente Barroso Street was graced with the birth of future poet and samba musician Heitor dos Prazeres. Prazeres was the son of Eduardo Alexandre dos Prazeres, a joiner by trade and a clarinetist in the band of Brazil's National Guard. His mother was Celestina Gonçalves Martins, a seamstress. Prazeres' birth alone was enough to make a street of questionable social prestige one of Rio de Janeiro's most important cultural reference points. But the Prazeres family was not alone: in fact, the neighborhood was made up of many other interesting people, brimming with history. The so-called Cidade Nova, centered around the famous Praza Onze in central Rio, was characterized at the end of the nineteenth century by its expressive Black presence. It counted among its residents the well-known *tias Baianas* (literally, "Bahian aunts," Black female migrants from the state of Bahia known for their elaborate dress and protagonistic role in Afro-Brazilian religion, music, and street commerce), as well as their counterparts from Minas Gerais and the province of Rio de Janeiro. They, together with many Black families of freed- and free people who called Cidade Nova home, transformed the region into a *Pequena África* (Little Africa), which eventually extended into the neighborhoods of Saúde, Gamboa, Estácio, and Santo Cristo.<sup>1</sup>

Through their everyday practice, these people found ways to affirm themselves as legitimate residents of the city. On May 13, 1888 – the day of Brazil's final abolition of slavery and ten years before the Prazeres

\* Translated from Portuguese by Brodwyn Fischer.

<sup>1</sup> See R. Moura, *Tia Ciata*; T. Gomes, "Para além."

family would celebrate Heitor's birth – their neighbors at Presidente Barroso #36 welcomed a group of twenty-three “residents of the Cidade Nova and descendants of the Black race who, having already formed an incipient familial nucleus,” discussed the formation of the Sociedade Familiar de Dança Prazer da Violeta (Violeta's Pleasure Family Dance Society). The society's inauguration was set for June 29, 1888, the day on which Princess Isabel – who had signed the abolition decree – would celebrate her birthday. With this decision, those gentlemen and ladies, who claimed famed Black abolitionist José do Patrocínio as their “leader and undefeated liberator,” demonstrated “their jubilation in the face of this brilliant culmination of Brazilian Independence,” which allowed them to “today consider [their] Brazil – with joy, glory, flowers, and smiles – *confrère* of the great land redeemed by Abraham Lincoln.”<sup>2</sup> The list of signatories, now mostly unknown, included Agostinho José Alves, Severino de Sousa Júnior, Julio Antonio de Miranda, Guilherme Ferreira Alves, Afonso Gil da Mata, Adão de Oliveira Costa, Francelino Satyro de Alcantara, Damasio Ernesto da Fonseca, Alfredo Eloy Cardoso, Virgílio da Silva Gurgel, Raphael Guillobel, José Joaquim de Oliveira, Antonio Felix Vieira da Silva, Elisario Luiz dos Santos, Cecília Maria do Rosário, Joana Baptista, Augusta d'Oliveira Alves, Lucia Geraldina da Silva, Anaysa da Conceição, Justina Camila dos Santos, Maria Francisca Vaz, Antonia Maria da Penha, and Leopoldina Lauriana Rodrigues.

Cognizant of the moment's significance, these “descendants of the Black race” – some darker, some lighter, but all free – did not waste the opportunity to present themselves to society, as soon as possible after abolition, in terms that they understood as befitting the status of respectable citizens. They formed a union of families, they shared an interest in consolidating a space of healthy recreation for members of their socio-racial group, and they showed themselves to be tuned in to the connections Brazil was establishing with other nations. Against the grain of the racial stigmas that emerged with new force after slavery's end and tended to limit freedom's universalization, the Sociedade Familiar de Dança Prazer da Violeta, from its base in the Cidade Nova, sought to break with a series of racial stereotypes.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the Society did not conceal the side

<sup>2</sup> *Cidade do Rio*, May 19, 1888, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Studies of Black social clubs, as an expression of Black associativism, have achieved notable advances in recent years. If at the beginning the focus was on *paulista* (São Paulo) experiences from the twentieth century, work is now advancing in various other directions, both temporal and territorial. The results for Brazil's southern region especially stand out. It is important to note that the development of this research field owes itself to the articulation

they took in the political dispute surrounding the survival of Brazil's monarchy, distancing themselves from republican partisans and thus – as we shall see – attracting another set of problems.

In this way, despite general goodwill, the group was vulnerable – so much so that, whether due to obstacles created by public security agents, the princess's state of health on her birthday, some internal disarticulation, or subsequent lack of interest on the part of the newspaper, this was the only time that the society's activities appeared in the press.<sup>4</sup> All the same, historians must work with such gaps, and the society's absence from the newspapers should not be taken as proof of the dissolution of the project that had motivated its founding. The practices of sociability that had for decades brought together free people, freedpeople, and the enslaved – practices that continued throughout the region at the time of the society's founding – bear witness to the fact that the Prazer da Violeta was not an isolated phenomenon.<sup>5</sup> The trajectory of Julio Antonio de Miranda (a member of the Prazer da Violeta who had also been secretary of a group of Cucumbi dancers in the 1880s and became a typographer for the abolitionist newspaper *Cidade do Rio* in the 1890s and 1900s) provides just one example of how Black people were involved in a wide variety of associative practices, within and beyond Black organizations.<sup>6</sup>

This rapid snapshot of the activist context that surrounded the publication of the abolitionist daily *Cidade do Rio* invites further attention to the possibilities for action that were then available to free and freed Black people, as well as a re-examination of conceptual categorizations that can be used to legitimize problematic discourses involving the Brazilian racial experience.<sup>7</sup> Along those lines, this chapter is a counterpoint to generalizations established by historian José Murilo de Carvalho and others with regard to the participation of Black and poor populations in the

among individuals tied to the clubs, activists in Black social movements, members of the academic community, and governmental agencies. See J. Correia Leite and Cuti, *E disse*; U. de Siqueira, "Clubes recreativos"; F. da Silva, "Os negros."

<sup>4</sup> On the eve of July 29, 1888, the one-month anniversary of the society's founding, "the freedmen of the Lei Áurea of May 13 and the members of the Caixa José do Patrocínio [a mutual aid society]" were frustrated in their intention to greet the "Exalted Princess Redeemer" as a "consequence of a health issue experienced by that august lady" (*Cidade do Rio*, July 26, 1888, and July 28, 1888, p. 3). As Robert Daibert Júnior observes, the association between Princess Isabel's birthday and the abolitionist cause was promoted from the middle of the 1880s. See R. Daibert Júnior, *Isabel*, p. 117.

<sup>5</sup> For a synthesis, see J. Faria et al., *Cidades negras*, pp. 77–152.

<sup>6</sup> *Gazeta de Notícias*, December 30, 1886, p. 3; *Cidade do Rio*, November 30, 1895, p. 2; August 26, 1898, p. 2; December 31, 1901, p. 2; January 29, 1902, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> See J. Carvalho, *Os bestializados*.

political arena during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Such interpretations – which minimize the political significance of Black associative life – have exercised much influence over the ways in which multiple generations of historians have interpreted the trajectories of free Afro-descendants. On the basis of information uncovered about a group of Black organizations that were active in the immediate post-abolition period in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, this chapter aims to analyze anew the articulations among various efforts organized by Afro-descendants in defense of their citizenship and status as free people.<sup>8</sup>

I will meet these objectives by problematizing the similarities and differences that existed among political organizations exemplified by the Liga dos Homens de Cor (League of Colored Men); the Sociedade Cooperativa da Raça Negra (Cooperative Society for the Black Race); the Guarda Negra (Black Guard); and the Club Republicano dos Homens de Cor (Black Men's Republican Club); as well as *A Pátria – Orgam dos Homens de Cor* (a newspaper). All of these operated in Rio and São Paulo between 1887 and 1889 and had significant historical repercussions. Significantly, the name of the Black journalist and abolitionist José do Patrocínio (1853–1905) is a common (if not always sympathetic) reference in documentation related to all of these entities. In general, these organizations did not simply orient themselves around the political controversies that absorbed public attention in their day; their leaders were committed to broader projects such as maintaining Black workers' place in the free labor market, promoting the literacy of their fellow Afro-descendants, and occupying an ever-broader array of social spaces.

It is worth emphasizing that neither these broader projects nor their proponents were elevated to the status of protagonists in the republican political sphere that dominated Brazil after 1889. It is true that Black political projects continued to exist, but they figured as an empirical demonstration of the limitations of democratic possibility in Brazilian society, and their leaders were recognized at most as third-rate supporting players. For this reason, the third section of this chapter returns to a consideration of the impossibility of Black people's equitable participation in Brazil's post-abolition polity.

#### THE LIGA DOS HOMENS DE COR

In 1887, the majority of Black people was already free or freed and the legality of slavery seemed sure to be broken soon. Given that, a group of

<sup>8</sup> A. Negro and F. Gomes. "Além de senzalas."

Black individuals in Rio took the initiative to create the Liga dos Homens de Cor, in order to assure that all could enjoy the conditions necessary to fully exercise their citizenship. With the aim of “raising the moral level of men of color, and endowing them with the cooperation, mutualism and solidarity needed to enter as equals in the elaboration of wealth and the Brazilian future,” José do Patrocínio, Antonio Luiz do Espírito Santo Castro, Geraldo José Alexandre das Mercês, Agostinho José Alves, Antonio Honorato de Santa Rosa, Assindino Seveliano José Gomes, and Flávio José de Andrade – among others – assumed the challenge of moving the mission forward.<sup>9</sup>

This would not be the first or last time that a good portion of these individuals would involve themselves in associativism. Geraldo das Mercês, the Liga’s first secretary, had participated in carnival groups since at least the early 1880s, was on the board of the workers’ mutual aid society “Associação de Socorros Mútuos Auxílio Operário” in 1883, and proposed the foundation of the “Sociedade Recreativa e Instrutiva” (an educational and recreational society) in 1896.<sup>10</sup> Assindino Gomes, who took over Geraldo’s post in 1889, had been the interim secretary of the Irmandade de Nossa Senhora do Rosário e São Benedito (a Catholic brotherhood) in 1881 and would be part of the board of the Sociedade Cooperativa da Raça Negra, founded in April 1888.<sup>11</sup> As noted earlier, Agostinho Alves, who also acted as Liga secretary, became one of the founders of the Sociedade Familiar de Dança Prazer da Violeta in May 1888.<sup>12</sup> Flávio José de Andrade also participated in the Centro Tipográfico Treze de Maio (a typographer’s union named after abolition day) around this same time.<sup>13</sup>

As impressive as these associative connections are for their density and variety, this glimpse of these actors’ presence in the aforementioned spaces only captures a small segment of their trajectories. Their lives were full of intricacies, and the influences they absorbed from their presence in spaces of religion, recreation, education, and work were not mutually exclusive. Divergent paths produced distinct individuals with varying profiles. Yet in some ways these men were not so different after all – so much so that, in

<sup>9</sup> *Cidade do Rio*, August 2, 1888, p. 3; August 31, 1888, p. 1; *Gazeta de Notícias*, April 22, 1888, p. 4; May 13, 1888, p. 3; May 30, 1889, p. 2; September 1, 1889, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> *Gazeta de Notícias*, August 8, 1880, p. 3; December 26, 1883, p. 2; *Jornal do Brasil*, March 24, 1896, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Gazeta de Notícias*, July 5, 1881, p. 2; April 11, 1888, p. 2; September 1, 1889, p. 5; *Cidade do Rio*, April 11, 1888, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Cidade do Rio*, May 19, 1888, p. 1. <sup>13</sup> *Revista Typographica*, July 28, 1888, p. 3.

that historical moment, what brought them together was a shared racial identity. That is, the environment that nurtured class identities was the same one that stimulated the construction of racial identities, to such an extent that they came to underpin political platforms. What is more, this gesture toward politicizing race came as a surprise to no one. So far as I can tell, no one sought out the press because they were surprised by or wished to oppose the existence of these or other Black organizations as they emerged. Slavery was collapsing, but the practices of racialization continued to be naturalized, even as they were re-ordered. By force of habit, individuals and groups oriented themselves by racial categories. It was as simple and as complicated as that.

To a certain extent, there seems to have been support for Black people to speak out in this new context. This stands in contrast with earlier eras, when initiatives of this kind had received no support from authorities. Sidney Chalhoub has recounted the cases of the Sociedade de Beneficência da Nação Conga, the Protetora da Sociedade do Rosário e São Benedito, the Sociedade de Beneficência da Nação Conga Amiga da Consciência, and the Associação Beneficente Socorro Mútuo dos Homens de Cor in the 1860s and 1870s. These, like other Black entities, could exist informally but were condemned by the Imperial Council of State when they sought to legalize their activities, on the grounds that their members sought to organize themselves politically and economically on the basis of race and ethnicity.<sup>14</sup>

In any case, returning to what was distinctive about the Liga dos Homens de Cor: in addition to the men noted earlier, we should also note that the Liga's president – Antonio Luiz do Espírito Santo Castro – resembled José do Patrocínio in his outstanding trajectory. Thanks to a solicitation made by Liberal Party Deputy Sebastião Mascarenhas in August 1888, we know that Espírito Santo Castro enjoyed enough prominence to receive the title of commander (an important Imperial honorific). It so happens, however, that the deputy spoke up not in support of Espírito Santo Castro but rather because he considered the title an absurdity and decided to seek its annulment on the grounds that such an honor did not befit a man who was, by profession, a mere barber.

When he learned of this attack, José do Patrocínio, editor of the *Cidade do Rio*, used one of the journal's premier columns to critically and ironically opine the opposite, presenting details on Espírito Santo Castro's public trajectory. Right at the start, Patrocínio placed Deputy

<sup>14</sup> S. Chalhoub, *Machado de Assis*, pp. 240–265.

Mascarenhas' position in check, thus cornering the Liberal Party as a whole. For Patrocínio, there was a "manifest contradiction between [Mascarenhas'] solicitation and the aspirations of his party, which promises us a Democratic Monarchy. Beyond this, the solicitation is also unconstitutional, because the supreme law of the State does not distinguish among citizens except by knowledge, merits, and virtues." Patrocínio then went on to identify Espírito Santo Castro as "Black," reiterate the value of the profession of barber, and again recognize his unjustly maligned colleague as "one of the most important Liberal influencers of the second district of the *freguesia* [parish] of Sacramento." Espírito Santo Castro had always been a parish elector, had been elected a justice of the peace by popular vote in 1879, and was voted the first substitute for justice of the peace in the most recent municipal elections – "despite everything and especially despite his abolitionist views" – eventually assuming the post when the winning candidate resigned. Patrocínio pointed out that Espírito Santo Castro had been president of the Imperial Sociedade dos Artistas Brasileiras for five years; had served as a councilor of the Imperial Sociedade Auxiliadora das Artes Mecânicas e Liberais e Beneficentes for ten years; and was at the time the president of the Liga dos Homens de Cor. Remaining in the sphere of conflictual race relations, Patrocínio emphasized, finally, that "the citizen Espírito Santo Castro only refrained from exercising the functions of *subdelegado* [local police chief] during the Liberal era because he understood that his color might serve as the pretext for painful injustices, and he preferred obscurity to moral suffering brought on by a love of ephemeral positions."<sup>15</sup> Could this slight have been one of the motivations for organizing the Liga? Probably.

Along these same lines, while José do Patrocínio is already well known in studies of nineteenth-century Brazil, he still merits attention here. With the symbolic capital that he accumulated from the press and from abolitionist and republican clashes, he was another founder of the Liga dos Homens de Cor and helped to bring visibility and political relevance to the initiative. It is not unreasonable to deduce that Patrocínio's prestige contributed to the friendly, though discreet, reception given to the Liga by some newspapers. Beyond the backing received from the *Gazeta de Notícias*, which published a series of notes and announcements about the association's activities, the *Diário de Notícias* – which received a copy of

<sup>15</sup> *Cidade do Rio*, August 31, 1888, p. 1.

the Liga's statutes along with all of the city's main press outlets in April 1888 – saw fit to praise the initiative:

We received the Statutes of the Liga dos Homens de Cor, a society that aims to morally and intellectually develop the Black and mixed races and restore to them within the Brazilian community the autonomy robbed from them by slavery. The attempt is laudable and without doubt necessary as a complement to the emancipation of the race.<sup>16</sup>

Energy to promote such goals was not lacking among the other Liga participants, above all because they themselves created a context that was favorable to such agitation. In coordination with Patrocínio, Liga members participated in public and private meetings in which they were privileged interlocutors, even in the company of big shots. Admittedly, there are few registers of this activity in the newspapers. All the same, if the opportunity existed to expose their desire to “raise the level of their race through commerce, industry, instruction, and hard work” in an event such as the founding of the Guarda Negra (Black Guard) at the editorial office of the *Cidade do Rio* in September 1888, it is more than probable that they had been present in meetings called to resist the onslaughts of slavocrats and republicans after May 14.<sup>17</sup>

Curiously, José do Patrocínio did not remain in the Liga for long. An acclaimed personality, he was chosen to hand the honorific insignia “Hábito da Rosa” to the Liga's President (Commander Espírito Santo Castro) in October 1888. Yet by the time Espírito Santo Castro died in May of the following year, Patrocínio had resigned because of “growing opposition to him within the Liga.”<sup>18</sup> The explanation for this dissention has been lost in speculation involving vanities, uncertainties, and the troubled trajectory of the Guarda Negra itself.

It is important to document that the activities of the Liga dos Homens de Cor were not limited to participation in external events. They also maintained headquarters – open every afternoon – on the Rua do S. Pedro, a street in the Cidade Nova that later gave way to the Avenida Getúlio Vargas in a massive urban renewal campaign. The space was frequently used for debates, as well as for educational and training activities. According to newspaper announcements, the Liga eventually came to

<sup>16</sup> *Diário de Notícias*, April 24, 1888, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Cidade do Rio*, September 29, 1888, cited in Rebeca Bergstresser, “The Movement,” p. 177. The Guarda Negra was, as we will see, a Black pro-monarchist organization that was the object of racist polemic in the immediate post-abolition period.

<sup>18</sup> *Cidade do Rio*, October 27, 1888, p. 3; *O Carbonário*, May 15, 1889, p. 3.

hold Sunday conferences on “subjects of general interest to our society,” in which the associates themselves were charged with taking turns as orators.<sup>19</sup>

With the advent of May 13, this routine was somewhat disrupted, as Liga members were called to meet other demands. They resolved, for example, to accept Deputy Domingos Jaguaribe Filho’s suggestion that they lead a public subscription campaign to raise a statue to Freedom. As part of the unfolding of that campaign, the *Diário de Notícias* reported on the formalization of the request on May 15, 1888. Two days later, when a commission representing societies of descendants of the Black race convoked the community to celebrate slavery’s end, the Liga dos Homens de Cor would send a message to its associates asking that they report to the headquarters to discuss “urgent business.”<sup>20</sup>

Another notable aspect of the experience of the Liga dos Homens de Cor was the way in which it sought to guarantee its existence. As was signaled by the late payment reminders sent out by treasurer Antonio Honorato de Santa Rosa, it was the society’s member contributions that allowed it to develop its activities.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, extra incentives were necessary to make sure that such collective collaboration in fact occurred. One strategy deployed in order to reach stragglers was the periodic convening of general assemblies, to which members had to appear armed with their up-to-date passbooks.<sup>22</sup>

Apparently, this insistence met with some success. At the end of July 1888, under a new administration elected after Espírito Santo Castro’s death, information circulated about fully functioning night classes, aimed at primary education “for associates and male members of their families.” The students could count on classes in Portuguese, arithmetic, and geography. It should not go unnoted, however, that this was a society administered exclusively by men, and the commitment to the advancement of communities “of color” was structured exclusively around male empowerment.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, this effort to advance Black men’s

<sup>19</sup> *Gazeta de Notícias*, April 22, 1888, p. 4; May 6, 1888, p. 4; May 13, 1888, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Diário de Notícias*, May 15, 1888, p. 2; *Cidade do Rio*, May 17, 1888, p. 2; May 20, 1888, p. 3; May 27, 1888, p. 3; *Gazeta Paranaense*, May 23, 1888, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> *Cidade do Rio*, August 2, 1888, p. 3; August 30, 1889, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> *Gazeta de Notícias*, August 3, 1888, p. 4; May 30, 1889, p. 2; September 1, 1889, p. 5; *Cidade do Rio*, August 4, 1888, p. 3; May 30, 1889, p. 3; *O Paiz*, August 4, 1889, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Some Black women managed to break the fence and even become teachers during the Republic. See M. Müller, *A cor*.

education, which was renewed in the beginning of 1890, was the last action I was able to find connected to the Liga dos Homens de Cor.<sup>24</sup>

THE SOCIEDADE COOPERATIVA DA RAÇA NEGRA  
AND THE NETWORKS OF BLACK POLITICS

Returning to 1888: even before the Liga's printed statute was ready, the city of Rio de Janeiro received notice of the foundation of the Sociedade Cooperativa da Raça Negra on April 8. Its board of directors included Estevão Roberto da Silva (president), João José Tavares Júnior (vice-president), Lourenço Izidro de Siqueira e Silva (first secretary), Martinho dos Prazeres (second secretary), Manoel Fernandes Tupper (general treasurer). Striving to be a well-structured organization, it also had a council comprising Francisco Paula de Oliveira Veado, Francisco José de Lemos Magalhães, Mizael Gomes da Silva, Jorge Fortunato Martins, Assindino Seveliano José Gomes, João Guedes de Azevedo, Manoel Wenceslau do Valle Porto, Luiz Antonio Ribeiro, Manoel Justiniano de Oliveira, and Manoel Frontino.

The Sociedade emerged with three rigorously defined objectives. Priority number one was to "place the descendants of the African race on the path to work, creating for this purpose *"a register where unemployed people will be listed along with their professions and as much information as can be collected about them."* A second front was opened to "promote primary, commercial, artisanal, and agricultural education." Finally, touching on mutual aid activities, they would found a "beneficent fund and a funeral fund with 15 percent of their income."<sup>25</sup>

The fact that the Sociedade championed employment guarantees and technical capacitation for "descendants of the Black race" immediately stands out. It is also apparent that the Sociedade did not share the belief that Black people, in the abstract, were incapable of acting competently in the autonomous and competitive capitalist labor market. While a lack of education and training was an obstacle for a subset of the group, the constitution of the Sociedade was in itself evidence that another subset suffered unemployment due to deliberate exclusion. Among them were men who could certify defined trades and provide witnesses to attest their qualifications. In other words, even without access to unemployment data

<sup>24</sup> *Gazeta de Notícias*, August 3, 1889, p. 4; January 19, 1890, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Cidade do Rio*, April 11, 1888, p. 2; *Gazeta da Tarde*, April 11, 1888, p. 2. Emphasis mine.

disaggregated by race or color, these men met to protest the devaluation of Brazil's Black workers, defend their racial belonging, speak up for their own cause, and oppose white immigration policies that received strong support from Brazil's national elites.

The scenario these men faced had slightly different characteristics than those experienced by free Black men in other eras, who could conceivably diminish their exposure to prejudice by avoiding confusion with the enslaved and distancing themselves from family ties to slavery. In effect, what Hebe Mattos observed in the rural world of southeastern Brazil largely held true for urban spaces as well. As a consequence of slavery's ruin, "sociocultural categories and identities suddenly stopped making sense. Slave owners, slaves, and men who were born free or had become free no longer existed."<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, the targeting of the Sociedade's pedagogical work suggests that it prioritized the aspirations of specific professional categories, such as artisans and those linked to commerce or agriculture, even as it acknowledged the need for general primary instruction. The articulation of mutual aid practices and vocational defense was implicit.<sup>27</sup>

In the face of such details, a simple question seems appropriate: what kinds of experiences inspired these men of color to constitute an organization that was so centered on a commitment to work and technical education? Considering the ideological profile adopted by the Sociedade Cooperativa da Raça Negra, it might be logical to assume that it had some external influence, perhaps from the US Black leader Booker T. Washington, who had become well-known after assuming the direction of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, which had a heavy emphasis on industrial education. It so happens, however, that the Afro-American leader would only rise to national fame in the United States after 1895, and his international influence would only become consolidated in the early twentieth century.<sup>28</sup> So that hypothesis must be discarded.

Does the explanation, then, have local origins? Bingo! In search of information about the Sociedade's president, Estevão Roberto da Silva, I found a substantial cache of evidence that explains many of the group's choices. The first indication takes us to the year 1876, an era in which da Silva stood out among the students of the Academia Imperial de Belas Artes (the Imperial Academy of the Arts, Brazil's most prestigious Arts school) and received silver medals for his course performance. Born free in

<sup>26</sup> H. Mattos, *Das cores*, p. 309. <sup>27</sup> See C. Batalha, "Sociedades de trabalhadores."

<sup>28</sup> See B. T. Washington, *Up from Slavery*.

1848, the son of Victor Roberto da Silva, at twenty-eight Estevão was single and an elector of the *freguesia* (parish) of Sacramento. He knew how to read and exercised the trade of painter, earning an annual income of 500 mil reis.<sup>29</sup>

This same man, known as the first Black student to distinguish himself at the Academia Imperial de Belas Artes, eventually became one of the institution's most important representatives and a professor at the Liceu de Artes e Ofícios (Rio's most important vocational high school), noted for his still-life paintings. Writer Artur de Azevedo nicknamed him the "Black Diamond."<sup>30</sup> Yet before this all happened, various episodes defined his trajectory. One of the most impactful ones happened between 1879 and 1880. At the prize ceremony for students who had distinguished themselves in the Academia de Belas Artes' General Exposition, attended by Emperor Pedro II, Estevão da Silva was regarded unofficially by those in the know as the author of the "best work of historical painting." He himself believed that he would be given the gold medal after years of resigning himself to silver or lesser prizes. Yet the medal once again went to another man. Upon seeing himself deprived of the honor he deserved, da Silva protested emphatically.<sup>31</sup> According to the memoirs of his colleague Antonio Parreiras:

We were convinced that the first prize would be given to Estevão Silva. He, trembling and moved, waited. [When another name was read,] his head dropped, his eyes filled with tears. He retreated and went to stand behind all of the others. We were going to protest, but – "Silence! I know what I have to do." So commanding were the words spoken by that sobbing man that we obeyed. One by one, the prize-winners were called. Finally, the name Estevão Silva echoed in the chamber. Calmly, he passed among us. With slow steps, he crossed the room. He approached the Dias, where the Emperor was. Next, it was beautiful! That Black man raised his head haughtily and shouted loudly: "I refuse!"<sup>32</sup>

Unable to claim that Estevão da Silva's work was inferior and did not deserve first place, the professors alleged that they did not award it to him for reasons of seniority. The explanation did not convince those who followed the case. All the same, the faculty did not retreat and, "taking into account as an attenuating circumstance the intellectual poverty of the delinquent student, punished Estevão da Silva with a one-year suspension,

<sup>29</sup> *Diário de Notícias*, May 11, 1876, p. 3; July 26, 1876, p. 2; December 30, 1876, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> See J. Teixeira Leite, *Pintores negros*; E. Araújo, ed., *A mão afro-brasileira*.

<sup>31</sup> *Gazeta da Noite*, February 1, 1880, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Antonio Parreiras, cited in J. Teixeira Leite, *Pintores Negros*, p. 64.

while noting that there had been a desire to expel him immediately.”<sup>33</sup> At risk of not completing his education, Estevão da Silva sought out the aid of friends. José do Patrocínio was one of those who responded to the call. In August of that year, he donated his earnings from a public speech to “assist the painter Estevão Roberto da Silva, so that he can go to Europe and complete his studies.”<sup>34</sup>

That voyage, however, never happened: Estevão maintained steady residence at the Rua do General Camara 283 (another Cidade Nova street destroyed by the Avenida Getúlio Vargas) for the entire decade. That address, beyond serving as his home, was also his workshop, where he deployed his skills in carpentry, cabinetry, and portrait and landscape painting. Based at that address, Estevão da Silva was even block inspector for the second district of the freguesia de Sacramento.<sup>35</sup> Clearly, the event at Belas Artes did not interrupt his work as an artist and an artisan. Indeed, sometime later he became a professor at the Liceu de Artes e Ofícios, an institution that was maintained by the Sociedade Propagadora das Belas Artes (an independent beneficent society frequented by many men from the Academia).<sup>36</sup>

A dedicated painter, Estevão Roberto da Silva also devoted a great deal of his time to the activities of the city’s artisans and workers. In May 1878, he took his place on the board of the Sociedade Beneficente dos Artistas do Arsenal da Marinha da Corte (a beneficent society for artisans employed by Rio’s Navy). The following year, he ran for director of the Sociedade dos Artistas Brasileiros Trabalho União e Moralidade, a mutual aid society for artisans that da Silva was affiliated with until his death in 1891.<sup>37</sup> In the course of the 1880s, he was part of the board of directors for the União Operária in 1881 and a professor at the free school maintained by the Congresso Operário de Beneficência between 1886 and 1888.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> The passage cited here is part of the report prepared by the commission of professors responsible for deliberating on the case. J. Teixeira Leite, *Pintores Negros*, pp. 64–65; *Gazeta da Noite*, March 1, 1880, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Gazeta da Tarde*, August 12, 1880, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Almanak Administrativo, Mercantil e Industrial*, no. 36, 1879, p. 186; no. 37, 1880, pp. 190, 927, 993; no. 38, 1881, p. 727; no. 39, 1882, p. 715; no. 40, 1883, p. 765; no. 41, 1884, p. 833; no. 42, 1885, p. 812; *Cidade do Rio*, May 24, 1888, p. 1; January 11 1889, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Diário do Comércio*, December 2, 1889, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Even professors at the Escola Nacional de Belas Artes (the Academia was renamed in 1890), which was sent a set of his paintings, lamented his death. *Diário de Notícias*, November 18, 1891, p. 1; December 20, 1891, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> *O Cruzeiro*, May 23, 1878, p. 1; *Gazeta de Notícias*, September 25, 1879, p. 3; October 28, 1881, p. 2; November 25, 1886, p. 2; *Diário de Notícias*, November 7, 1887, p. 1; December 12, 1888, p. 3; *Diário do Comércio*, November 4, 1889, p. 2.

Estevão Roberto da Silva was hard-working and well-connected; he could have continued in this line of associational activism and everything would have worked out relatively well. In his individual and collective tasks, he shared his life with people who were similar to him, either because they faced difficulties linked to their lack of wealth or because they could not help but show their Black skin. All kinds of people were there, Black and white, free and freed, although the proportions varied from case to case. Together they had constructed spaces to defend the rights of the working classes. Yet it so happened that, in the course of this process, slavery's end evidenced – or accentuated – the fragilities that threatened men of color. Added to this, the expectations created around the declaration of civil equality for all Brazilians catalyzed Black and popular political agitation. It matters little that the version of history that later emerged prioritized the abolitionist activity of the elite in the lead-up to abolition. The masses who occupied the streets and appeared in public rallies in those years behaved as protagonists. The moment summoned everyone to take a stand. This is what the men who founded the Sociedade Cooperativa da Raça Negra in April 1888 were doing.

Once the Sociedade came into being, it followed a mold already established in abolitionist activities, seeking adherents through public events, during which the association's basic agenda was presented. On Sunday, April 15, the Sociedade inaugurated a series of talks, in which the orators developed theses about the “necessity and expediency of work and the benefits that result from it” and the “utility of instruction.”<sup>39</sup>

Their intentions were certainly not frustrated; with the arrival of May, on the eve of the passage of the Lei Áurea on May 13, the Sociedade had enough backing to take the lead in coordinating Black organizations promoting their own celebrations of the Imperial government's decision. An interesting detail is that they only sought out the city's mainstream newspapers to transmit what had already been decided in their assembly, which leads one to assume that they counted on other communication tools to keep their interlocutors informed. Thus we see a notice that was printed in the *Gazeta de Notícias* and in the *Diário de Notícias*:

At the invitation of the Sociedade Cooperativa da Raça Negra, delegates of various bodies representing descendants of that same race met two days ago to confer about how to thank those who worked for the glorious happening that, honoring our Nation, occurred without any perturbation of public order. They resolved to name an executive commission to coordinate the celebrations, which will present

<sup>39</sup> *Cidade do Rio*, April 14, 1888, p. 3; *Gazeta de Notícias*, April 29, 1888, p. 2.

their full program, including a Te-Deum in the Church of the venerable Nossa Senhora do Rosário e São Benedito.<sup>40</sup>

For anyone who wished to see it, this was evidently the action of a Black network that had been publicly established on the basis of the experience of Black freedom. In historical accounts shaped by the myth of racial democracy, this network could not even be glimpsed as part of the social subsoil. Yet for an attentive researcher, every new archival path reveals its presence, never far from the surface. As difficult as it is to access the intricacies of these intragroup collaborations among Black activists, we must take as a starting point their existence and their importance in the lives of many people. Such acceptance can help us to deconstruct yet again the arsenal of dogmas that have traditionally shaped our approaches to the formation of Brazilian social classes. It can also give more consistency to the innovative perspectives that are currently taking shape in Brazilian historiography.

#### THE GUARDA NEGRA

To set the parameters for this intellectual project, it is useful to place information about Rio's Black networks in conversation with what we know of Brazil's famous Guarda Negra, which was long portrayed simply as a horde of mindless thugs manipulated by opportunistic monarchists. Despite the profusion of individual activists, groups, and public activities involving the Liga dos Homens de Cor and the Sociedade Cooperativa da Raça Negra, it was the Guarda Negra that received the most political and press attention in the nineteenth century. This was also the group that has been portrayed as the fullest expression of freed and free-born Black Brazilian activism in the majority of historical narratives about the immediate post-abolition period. In the words of Flávio Gomes: "The racial question, which had apparently been made invisible during the abolitionist campaign, emerged crystal-clear from the actions of the Guarda Negra."<sup>41</sup> Except that, instead of emerging as part of a continuum of popular struggles, the Guarda Negra has often been interpreted as evidence of Black people's inclination to use violence to further their personal interests and defend those of the Princess Regent and the Empire – none of

<sup>40</sup> *Gazeta de Notícias*, May 14, 1888, p. 2; *Diário de Notícias*, May 14, 1888, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> F. Gomes, *Negros e Política*, p. 20.

which, of course, signified even a minimal capacity for autonomous thought. As Clícea Maria Miranda has observed:

In the historiography, generally speaking, the study of the Guarda Negra almost always appears in conjunction with the practice of capoeira [a martial art traditionally associated with enslaved and Black resistance] in Rio de Janeiro. This happens, first of all, because historians confuse the actions of gangs [*malts*] with those of the Guarda, perhaps because Guarda members were expert practitioners of the game of head-butts and ensnarements.<sup>42</sup>

In the nineteenth century, similar perceptions served both to nurture prejudices about the universalization of freedom and citizenship among all Brazilians and to sell the idea that the installation of a Republic would be the remedy for all of the ills created by the monarchy.<sup>43</sup> As we shall see . . .

The first meeting called to deal with the creation of the Guarda Negra da Redentora (Black Guard of the [Female] Redeemer) took place on July 9, 1888. It was left to the *Cidade do Rio* to inform the public that the encounter would take place in the home of Emilio Rouède and to list the names of the freed Blacks who would be present (unfortunately without reference to their surnames): Hygino, Manoel Antonio, Jason, Aprigio, Gaspar, and Theocrito. The occasion led to the following resolutions:

1. To create an association with the goal of presenting material resistance to any revolutionary movement hostile to the institution that just liberated the country.
2. Only freedpeople who are willing to follow the orders of a Directorship, elected by simple majority in a vote that will be carried out at an opportune moment, can take part.
3. Effective membership is restricted to those who consider the memorable act of May 13 to be a happening worthy of general admiration rather than a motive for declaring war on the humanitarian princess who brought it about.
4. To ask for the support of the Confederação Abolicionista [Abolitionist Confederation] so that its activities have ramifications throughout the Empire.

<sup>42</sup> C. Miranda, "Guarda negra," p. 28.

<sup>43</sup> Various arguments against this shallow judgment against the Guarda Negra have been presented in recent years. Outstanding examples include M. Trochim, "The Brazilian Black Guard"; F. Gomes, "No meio"; C. Líbano Soares, *A negregada*; C. Miranda, *Guarda negra*; W. Albuquerque, *O jogo*, ch. 3.

5. To ask the press to promote this sentiment with its valuable cooperation.
6. Finally, to advise in every possible way the freedmen of the interior to only work on the *fazendas* [plantations] of those who have sworn not to make war on the Empire.<sup>44</sup>

The organization's presumed membership would, once again, consist of Black men. Yet this time priority was given to freedmen, leaving no space for those among them who might have republican sympathies. With this announcement made, the second public register of the Guarda Negra's existence appeared when they bestowed the Rosa de Ouro (Gold Rose) on Princess Isabel, in homage to her "liberating action." As multiple historical narratives reiterate, on the night of September 28, the founding of the Guarda Negra was formalized during an editorial meeting of the *Cidade do Rio*, attended by abolitionists such as André Rebouças, João Clapp, Patrocínio himself, and representatives of the Liga dos Homens de Cor.<sup>45</sup> In December, the Guarda Negra returned to press prominence because of the birthday celebrations of the president of the Imperial Council of Ministers, Afonso Celso. The *Diário de Notícias* was one of the papers that reported that the Guarda Negra, "in five streetcars, appeared at the residence of His Excellency, accompanied by musical bands from the Tenth Battalion and from the police force of the Court. Sr. Clarindo Alves orated in his name."<sup>46</sup>

The Guarda Negra became notorious because of a famous melee involving men accused of being part of the Guarda and defenders of the republican cause during a political rally for republican advocate Silva Jardim in the Sociedade Francesa de Ginástica, located near the Praça Tiradentes in central Rio. That event happened on December 30, 1888. But – a curious fact – republicans sought out the pages of papers such as *Novidades*, *O Paíz*, and the *Província de São Paulo* well before that to accuse the Guard of being a "body of thugs" composed of "*capoeiras*" who were "enticed" by the government to secure the princess's throne.<sup>47</sup> Assuming reports are true, this allegation was responsible for contemporary rumors and subsequent memoirs such those of Antônio da Silva Jardim and José Joaquim de Medeiros e Albuquerque, who both had an

<sup>44</sup> *Cidade do Rio*, July 10, 1888, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> R. Bergstresser, "The Movement," pp. 175–178; R. Magalães Júnior, *A vida turbulenta*, p. 249; and F. Gomes, *Negros e política*, pp. 16–17.

<sup>46</sup> *Diário de Notícias*, December 13, 1889, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> *Cidade do Rio*, November 31, 1888, p. 1.

interest in defending an image of republican bravery in the face of great risk.<sup>48</sup> A comment in the *Gazeta de Notícias* motivated by the December incident also feeds this suspicion. Lacking any evidence of the Guarda Negra's violent nature, the author, probably the paper's owner Ferreira de Araújo, weaves his comments as though the launch of the Guarda Negra were quite similar to that of the Liga dos Homens de Cor and the Sociedade Cooperativa da Raça Negra:

The aggression suffered by the republicans who came together on December 30 to attend Dr. Silva Jardim's speech is generally attributed to the Guarda Negra. It is not clear exactly what the Guarda Negra is: it is vaguely said that it was constituted by citizens of the recently redeemed Race, inspired by an admirable sentiment of gratitude toward the Redeeming Princess, and with the aim of defending her life.

When the existence of this Guarda and these intentions were first spoken of, no one found it strange; its second sign of life, visible when the Guarda went to the home of the President of the Council to greet him on his birthday, also made little impression; these were manifestations of inoffensive and natural enthusiasm from those who had received such a notable benefit from the Princess and the head of the cabinet.<sup>49</sup>

Indifference, according to the editor of the *Gazeta de Notícias*, best characterized these occurrences. It was thus only after the meeting at the editorial offices of the *Cidade do Rio* that the Guarda Negra began to cause discomfort. It is interesting to note that this process developed in parallel with a series of intrigues surrounding José do Patrocínio. Taking for granted and highlighting Patrocínio's influence on the society of freedmen, these schemes serenely accessed the whole racist catalog to condemn both the man himself and the freedmen's collective action. Patrocínio, as usual, was not intimidated by such outrages and reacted in kind, leveling a volley of insults at republican politicians Quintino Bocaiúva and Rangel Pestana. The following passages capture the tenor of his words:

In order to extend their insult to the entire race to which I am honored to belong, the Praetorians of the oligarchy, the weevils of São Paulo's coffer, say that the Guarda Negra is a gang of paid *capoeiras*.

This is their notion of men whose honesty certainly doesn't suffer in comparison to that of parasites who want to live off the fat of agricultural cultivation and the credulity of simpletons . . . .

<sup>48</sup> A. Jardim, *Memórias e viagens*; J. Medeiros e Albuquerque, *Quando eu era vivo*.

<sup>49</sup> *Gazeta de Notícias*, January 5, 1889, p. 1.

The Guarda Negra as a gang of thugs paid by princes! With good reason this “republic” has not managed to delude the majority of the citizens of May 13 and their blood brothers.

These people believe that Blacks should follow the lawyers who argued against them in the courts of this realm, the philanthropists who beat and sold their brothers, the propagandists who even today characterize as “poor farmers” the gang that, possessing police jurisdiction in the interior, draft to military anyone to whom they owe salary and employ against freedmen the fraternity of powder and bullets.

They declared me a traitor to the Republic and, because they know I am poor and Black, they sold me to the government.<sup>50</sup>

It was no secret that Patrocínio was seen as a reference by many Black men in Rio. What was new was the fear and near panic that emerged with the prospect that such protagonism might be channeled into more incisive interventions or provoke a civil war. Comic or tragic, Brazilian history is full of events forged by the fusion of racism and speculation.

In the last two weeks of December 1888, the tension deepened further still. According to the *Cidade do Rio*, on December 23 “a group of five citizens of black color” who were taking a meal at the hotel Petit-Console were attacked with rocks and gunshots by republican activists because they had shown support for the Crown. According to reports, Clarindo de Almeida, head of the Guarda, sought to dissuade his people from any retaliation, arguing that public disorder was exactly what the neo-republicans wanted. “Our calm is yet another sacrifice made for the government that on May 13 created a homeland large enough to contain both our gratitude and the ignominy of the flunkies of slavocracy who now masquerade as republicans.”<sup>51</sup>

Yet even when published in the papers, such words did not impede the grave confrontation that occurred seven days later near the Sociedade Francesa de Ginástica. In an attempt to diminish the racial weight of the conflict, an editorial in the *Cidade do Rio* transmitted a lament that was a bit out of sync with what Patrocínio had written just days before:

Despite the Guarda Negra’s abstention, it was impossible to contain yesterday the explosion of popular rage, which has long smoldered at the heart of national character and pride, against propaganda that twice insults our fatherland,

<sup>50</sup> The phrase “they sold me to the government” was ironic, a response to the false allegation on the part of certain slavocratic republicans who sought to portray Patrocínio as a monarchist despite undeniable evidence of his critiques of the Imperial regime. *Cidade do Rio*, November 2, 1888, p. 1; January 4, 1888, p. 1.

<sup>51</sup> *Cidade do Rio*, December 31, 1888, p. 1.

demeaning the American ideal and debasing a race that, because of its generous sentiments, has managed to make itself loved to the point that we are a people almost without racial prejudice.

All the same, the tough accusations that weighed ever more heavily on the Guarda continued to be guided by the racial origin of its members, a situation that led several of its supporters to go to the papers to defend the group.<sup>52</sup> Apart from José do Patrocínio and Emilio Rouède, Clarindo de Almeida himself would write:

I read yesterday in *Novidades* and in the *Gazeta da Tarde* the tremendous accusation that those papers are making against the Guarda Negra, classifying it as an element of disorder and unrest among the population.

God Almighty, what a mockery!

Is there anyone who can prove everything these papers have said about the Guarda Negra? Is it not patent that the aim is to offend the Guarda simply because it refuses to take part in the disorder? . . .

If the Guarda Negra was a republican corporation, it would be considered the most just and patriotic creation in the world. But since the Guarda Negra is a monarchical corporation, it is considered an affront to the dignity of the Fatherland; it is the Black race that arms itself to kill the white race, making color-based hatred appear in the country, etc., etc. . . .

I affirm to my country that we do not have the objectives that they attribute to us. We are a corporation that is tied to its fatherland and wants to elevate it to the heights that 300 years of slavery prevented it from reaching.

Our aim is not to make the man of color rise up against the white man, but to restore to the man of color the right to intervene in public affairs that was robbed from him. We don't fight the republicans because they are white, but rather because they are the shame of our nation.<sup>53</sup>

#### BLACK REPUBLICANS

The existence of the Guarda Negra and the eruption of the December conflict gave impulse to the republican campaign in general, as Maria Tereza Chaves de Mello has observed.<sup>54</sup> But they also gave Black individuals and groups greater political visibility in the anti-monarchist political scene. Beginning in January 1889, the *Gazeta da Tarde* and the *Tribuna Liberal* began to reprint news (mostly from the province of São Paulo) about Black demonstrations in favor of the Republic, which served as a kind of counterweight to the Guarda Negra. This was another route

<sup>52</sup> *Cidade do Rio*, January 5, 1889, p. 1; January 16, 1889, p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> *Cidade do Rio*, January 3, 1889, p. 3. <sup>54</sup> M. Chaves de Mello, "Com o arado."

through which Black subjects made themselves visible in post-abolition political struggles.

One of the first affirmations of this sort to be reproduced in the Rio press documented an agitated gathering that was promoted in São Paulo's capital on January 7, 1888. The document produced at the end of the assembly read:

The men of color resident in this capital, recognizing that the abolition of the servile element in Brazil was done only in virtue of popular efforts, are not disposed to help anyone whatsoever in the plan to divide the country into castes, planting racial hatreds in the soil of our fatherland.

They declare, therefore, that in any emergency they will be on the side of the people.<sup>55</sup>

Days later, as news first printed in the *Tribuna Liberal* resonated in the capital, the press offered more details about another meeting among men of color opposed to the Guarda Negra, which brought together somewhere around 500 people on January 13 in the *quilombo* (maroon community) of Jabaquara, formed in the early 1880s in the vicinity of the port city of Santos, São Paulo, and led by Black abolitionist Quintino de Lacerda.<sup>56</sup> Famous abolitionists from the region were among those present at the 1889 gathering, and Lacerda maintained his leadership role. "The monarchy," he said, "is responsible for the preservation of slavery for three centuries; the monarchy is responsible for the bullets that it ordered shot at some of those present here on the famous Cubatão expedition." Eugênio Wansuit, whom the *Gazeta da Tarde* referred to as "a very intelligent Black man, a military veteran who spent four years in the Paraguay campaign," also gave a speech, in which he opposed the forced military recruitment that the Imperial government had just announced and "incited his comrades to revolt against yet another enslavement." At the end they passed a motion, supported by around 300 signatories, which – beyond reiterating previous points – protested "against those who entice the brothers of our race, forming a true farce that they call the 'Guarda Negra' wherever it is found, because they can see in that infamy the beginnings of a civil war produced by hatred between two races."<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> *Gazeta da Tarde*, January 9, 1889, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> M. H. Machado, *O plano* and "De rebeldes."

<sup>57</sup> *Tribuna Liberal*, January 15, 1889, p. 2; January 16, 1889, p. 1; *Gazeta da Tarde*, January 16, 1889, p. 2; January 17, 1889, p. 2. On the question of forced recruitment, see A. Nascimento, *A ressaca*.

In February, Black republicans from Mogi-Mirim and Campinas (also in São Paulo Province) took their turn to hold meetings. In Campinas, the gathering occurred during the Festival of São Benedito, right after the mass. The final document also positioned itself against forced recruitment and the creation of the Guarda Negra, speaking out against “racial hatred.” Still, according to a notice published in the *Diário de Rio Claro*, one speaker went so far as to state that “those Blacks who belong to the Guarda Negra deserve the stocks, shackles, and the whip.”<sup>58</sup>

In June 1889, the Club Republicano dos Homens de Cor (Republican Club of Men of Color) emerged in Rio as part of the scene generated by this dynamic. Its guiding principles were stated as follows:

1. To combat the reigning institutions in every conceivable terrain.
2. To attend all of the political gatherings that take place in this city and fight in their favor.
3. To institute a mutual aid fund and night courses.
4. To recognize as head of state the man elected by the Federal Council.
5. To promote their political cause among the Black race and make this same race believe that they are being victimized by the Crown.<sup>59</sup>

This was, then, a kind of republican version of the Guarda Negra. The founding meeting took place on June 2, 1889, at the residence of José Pedro Ferreira de Souza Coelho, on his initiative and that of his fellow republican proselytizer Deoclesiano Martyr. “Fifty-five men of color” were present, with the common mission to “politically promote republican ideas, in opposition to the reigning institutions.”<sup>60</sup> According to the *Gazeta da Tarde*, Augusto Xavier de Mello assumed the presidency of the board; José Martins Pereria assumed the vice-presidency; the office of first secretary was left to Anacleto Alves de Freitas and that of second secretary to Rodolpho Gomes; Sinerio Alves was treasurer; and Francisco Alves de Freitas would be attorney.<sup>61</sup>

The notice in the *Gazeta da Tarde* brought names to the forefront that had previously slipped under the radar in commentary about abolitionists

<sup>58</sup> *Gazeta da Tarde*, February 26, 1889, p. 2; February 21, 1889, p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> *Gazeta da Tarde*, June 3, 1889, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> *Diário de Notícias*, June 4, 1889, p. 1; *Cidade do Rio*, June 6, 1889, p. 2; *Diário do Comércio*, June 4, 1889, p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> *Gazeta da Tarde*, June 3, 1889, p. 1.

and Black political agitators. It is important to note from the start that I found no evidence that would permit me to state that the two men who hosted the meeting were Black. In truth, the fact that they were not incorporated into the club's board at the end of the meeting and the lack of direct or suggestive comments on the topic lead me to believe that they did not understand themselves to be Black (or were not considered as such). What stands out in the various documents I consulted are the ties both men had to the republican cause. Martyr, what's more, would gain quite a lot of notoriety years later for his intense Jacobin political activism.<sup>62</sup>

The comments on the members of the board, in contrast, pointed in another direction. Aside from the repeated mention of the presence of more than fifty men of color at the reunion, there are documents that inform us of some of their phenotypes. In particular, there is no doubt about Anacleto de Freitas, who in the beginning was first secretary but soon became the Club's principal public representative, eventually assuming the post of president.<sup>63</sup> Evaristo de Moraes, for example, noted that Anacleto de Freitas had been a Black ally to Silva Jardim: "In the heart of the working class, Silva Jardim also had fervent supporters, and the dedication of some men of color from humble backgrounds was especially significant. Accompanying Anacleto de Freitas, they fought in the streets for him against the Guarda Negra."<sup>64</sup>

On the basis of that platform, the Club Republicano dos Homens de Cor would make itself present in Rio's political scene during its first year of existence. Already in the beginning of July, they emitted a call in the *Gazeta da Tarde* directed to "the republican electorate of men of color":

Coreligionaries – the Board of the Club Republicano dos Homens de Cor hereby calls for the republican electorate of men of color to vote for the candidates from the party who were elected by previous acclimation.

We must not retreat before this government, which declared in the Chamber of Deputies that this movement – which today constitutes almost a national aspiration – must be exterminated; it is necessary to show that we are men ready for struggle, whether it be through ballots, through words or by force! . . .

We must not retreat in the face of this uncontrolled thuggery, which is going to appear on the day of the elections to threaten and frighten us so that we do not vote; on that day we must all be there, whether or not we are electors, to repel these villainous disruptors of public order; we must show this government that there are still, in this great Brazilian turf, men who die for a cause! . . .

<sup>62</sup> R. Magalhães Júnior, *Machado de Assis*, v. 3, pp. 283–296.

<sup>63</sup> *Diário de Notícias*, July 24, 1890, p. 1.      <sup>64</sup> E. de Moraes, *Da Monarquia*, p. 20.

We must on that day be prepared for everything and not retreat before the *capoeira's* razor or club, because our patriotic mantra will be – prevail or die!

So, to your stations!

To the ballot boxes!

Forward patriots, and we will win our sainted and just cause!<sup>65</sup>

Such mobilization, when reported in São Paulo, received intense support from another society for republican men of color. The crew of the newspaper *A Pátria*, São Paulo province's first Black paper, did not spare praise in reaction to their coreligionists from Rio. Taking advantage of the opportunity, Ignácio de Araújo Lima deployed his ink with care to show the proximity of the two experiences:

Could we men of color from the capital of São Paulo receive in silence the news that the São Paulo press has reproduced from the Rio papers, which filled us with such pleasure? No. We who yesterday raised our weak voice against the projected organization of a Guarda Negra here in the capital have long nurtured a hope with the same basis and the same ends as the one that you publicly manifested today. It is also ours, and do you know why? They call us paulistas because we have our cradle in the city of São Paulo, legendary and heroic because of the brilliant accomplishments of her sons. . . . Here in this part of South America we have our cradle, but where is our fatherland? That is the question that we cannot yet answer.<sup>66</sup>

As we can see, the republican side also fostered its network of informational exchange, which advanced both private and general interests related to the recognition of its members' social legitimacy. Seeking to widen their visibility in spaces that brought together men of letters and politics, the Club continued to participate in various public events.

On the hundredth anniversary of the French Republic, on July 14, the Club's members organized themselves both to stage a procession and to give speeches at the commemorative session that took place at the Brazilian Congress, in an event promoted by the Centro Republicano Lopes Trovão. But their interventions were not characterized solely by moderation and restraint. It is practically impossible not to suspect that, on that same day, the Club's members had also been involved in a series of fights that took over the main streets of the city (Ouvidor, Uruguaiana, Gonçalves Dias), which resulted from clashes between monarchists and republicans. Just as had occurred in December, those who narrated the facts were incapable of specifying which group initiated the verbal and physical attacks. Many "long lives" to the monarchy and others to the

<sup>65</sup> *O Paiz*, July 3, 1889, p. 3.      <sup>66</sup> *A Pátria*, August 2, 1889, p. 2.

Republic were heard, soon accompanied by brawls. Among the wounded were at least two men of color: Aristides, “*pardo* [brown], 15 years old, a butler, resident at Formosa Street #13 and wounded in the foot”; and Pedro Justo de Souza, “Brazilian, 24 years of age, single, an employee of the sweet shop on Estácio de Sá Street and resident on the largo de Catumbi #72,” who declared that he was a member of the Guarda Negra.<sup>67</sup>

The public recognition of this event cemented still more the end of José do Patrocínio’s ties to the Guarda Negra. In a feature article entitled “To Men of Color,” Patrocínio (still editor of the *Cidade do Rio*) expressed his disillusion with the paths taken by the group. Showing a somewhat utilitarian understanding of the Guarda Negra’s legitimacy, he ended up reproducing various accusations that he had contested over the previous year. The arguments he employed, however, bordered on nonsense. The first established a relationship between the restitution of D. Pedro II’s health and the security of the Empire:

The recovery of the Emperor, who took it upon himself to save his dynasty, the political evolution that took place, cooling the hatreds and restoring calm to the political movement, have restored society to its normal state. Since the cause has disappeared, so too must its effects cease.

He thought it strange, for this reason, that the Guarda Negra had continued and, what’s more, “been diverted from its noble and generous end by individuals who sought to use it as a ladder for positions.” As if this weren’t enough, with the aim of explaining the reasons behind this easy distortion, Patrocínio ratified the opinion that freedpeople lacked their “share of education,” which left them “more at the mercy of conspiracies that serve the interests of individuals who, calling themselves friends of the Blacks, take advantage of their courage and selflessness.” That is to say, there was no vestige here of the erstwhile conscientious citizens of May 13. Finally, Patrocínio called on “men of color with more instruction” to “convince their less fortunate brothers that they would soon be condemned to a form of captivity even worse than yesterday’s; that of public hatred.”<sup>68</sup>

Once Patrocínio wrote that, it was no use for him to take up the subject again five days later with the pretext of recalling how laudable the initial phase of the Guarda Negra had been.<sup>69</sup> The Guarda was already

<sup>67</sup> *Gazeta de Notícias*, July 15, 1889, p. 1; *Gazeta da Tarde*, July 15, 1889, pp. 1–2.

<sup>68</sup> *Cidade do Rio*, July 15, 1889, p. 1. <sup>69</sup> *Cidade do Rio*, July 20, 1889, p. 1.

condemned in the eyes of the community. This break, in turn, seems also to have been decisive in relation to Patrocínio's ties with other Black organizations with a clearly political character.<sup>70</sup> He was disaffiliated from the Liga dos Homens de Cor in the first half of 1889.

If the good health of D. Pedro II was not enough to cause the dissolution of the Guarda Negra, the proclamation of the Republic was also not understood as a cue for the Club Republicano dos Homens de Cor to disperse. In March 1890, its members appeared at the reception that marked Foreign Relations Minister Quintino Bocaiúva's return to Rio. Their internal affairs also functioned smoothly.<sup>71</sup> At that point, names of new associates beyond the original board members began to appear, such as Thomaz José da Silva, Antônio José Ferreira, Joaquim Euclides de Miranda, Vitor Gustavo da Paixão, and Ezequiel Alves da Silva.<sup>72</sup>

Lamentably, though, in line with the tendency that had been reinaugurated with the 1889 Liberal cabinet of Afonso Celso, the interest that political and media big shots had taken in the actions of both republican and monarchist men of color were in frank decline. Specifically, the republicans who rose to power with the coup of November 15 1889 had no reason to care about what the "Black and *mestiço* [mixed-race] men" who fought against the Guarda Negra and the monarchical government wanted or did not want.

All the same, one month after the first anniversary of the Republic's proclamation, Anacleto de Freitas sought out the *Gazeta da Tarde* to extend an invitation to "all men of color to appear tomorrow, at 4 in the afternoon, in the Largo de Santa Rita, in order to deal with a matter pertaining to your well-being."<sup>73</sup> Something tells me that, clinging to his truer dreams, Anacleto nurtured some hope of seeing his expectations attended to by the First Republic's *donos do poder* (men who controlled power). This must have been what allowed the activity surrounding the Club Republicano dos Homens de Cor to exist for a bit longer, even with the deepening of the marginalization they underwent after 1891. In 1892, for example, Anacleto and other associates of the Club were accused of being involved in a street disturbance motivated by ethnic and racial conflicts.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>70</sup> José do Patrocínio continued to maintain ties with the Irmandade de Nossa Senhora do Rosário e São Benedito, as was evidenced during the commemorations of May 13, 1902: *Cidade do Rio*, May 15, 1902, p. 1.

<sup>71</sup> *O Paiz*, March 8 and 10, 1890, p. 1.      <sup>72</sup> *O Paiz*, March 10 and 29, 1890, p. 1.

<sup>73</sup> *Gazeta da Tarde*, December 7, 1890, p. 3.      <sup>74</sup> *O Tempo*, January 10, 1892, p. 1.

After that episode, news about the Club becomes even more sporadic in the papers, even as reports increased of Anacleto de Freitas' imprisonments and involvement in street brawls. He was then accused of being a *capoeira* and of making fun of army battalions, even though he seems himself to have been a military man, having once been identified as a sergeant of the army's First Artillery Battalion.

But even with all of this mess, Anacleto de Freitas would work hard to reactivate the organization in August 1893.<sup>75</sup> Some setback, however, seems to have forced him to change his plans, to the point that he presented a public manifesto breaking politically with the republican government.<sup>76</sup> Unlike other times, Anacleto did not share the Jacobinism that Deocleciano Martyr manifested in his defense of Marechal Floriano (a leader of the republican faction that defended military nationalism). This lack of connection, plus the absence of Silva Jardim as a possible source of support beyond his ties to militarism, severely reduced Anacleto's chances for legitimate participation in that political environment. Here perhaps lies part of the explanation for his ostracism.

In light of this series of mishaps, it was painful to discover evidence of one final act undertaken by the members of the Club Republicano dos Homens de Cor in 1893, when they offered "to their worthy President, citizen Anacleto de Freitas, a gold mechanical pencil in celebration of November 15."<sup>77</sup> I write that it was painful because everything indicates that this event, on the anniversary of the Republic, did not create a glorious reversal of fortunes for the Club. I could not find any further archival trails.

#### CONCLUSION

It does not seem appropriate to close a chapter that is grounded in the potential of available archival sources with such a sensation of lost perspective. The likely demise of the Club Republicano dos Homens de Cor was not a door that slammed shut. More than representing the end or failure of a general collective experience, the Club's history reinforces the need to perceive voices that, while often stifled in their own times, still produce echoes in the archival documentation. These echoes, if taken seriously, lead us to other Black experiences, daily affirmations of esteem

<sup>75</sup> *O Tempo*, August 23, 1893, p. 1; August 30, 1893, p. 2.

<sup>76</sup> *O Tempo*, September 2, 1893, p. 3. <sup>77</sup> *O Tempo*, November 18, 1893, p. 2.

for life and desires for a future that was different than the present tense with which they struggled. This attentiveness to the analytic possibilities of echoes and silences is a defining trait of the investigative paths through which the study of freedom and post-abolition has consolidated itself in Brazil. In a country that is still majority Black, investment in the possibility of finding Black people's trajectories in the most varied contexts – far beyond slavery – has spurred a profound renovation in Brazilian historiography and an amplification in its appeal, especially among those who are themselves the subjects of this history.