

BLACK JACOBIN, BLACK GIRONDIN? RECONSIDERING LUIZ GAMA IN HISTORY AND POSTERITY

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ABSTRACT

The article presents a reconsideration of the ideas and activism of Luiz Gama, through an intermittent comparison with Thomas Paine, returning attention to aspects of Gama's thought that are misunderstood, underappreciated, or obscure. Taken together, Gama's four causes—antiracism, freethinking, abolitionism, and republicanism—were rooted in a commitment to democracy not unlike Paine's. Having documented the unity of Gama's thought, the article offers an interpretation of his posthumous celebration as a rare black hero in a part of Brazil that publicists were eagerly recasting as “white” while explaining Gama's remarkable, if incomplete, success in life and gesturing toward his contemporary relevance.

KEYWORDS

Radicalism - antiracism - freethinking - abolitionism - republicanism - democracy

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JACOBINO NEGRO, GIRONDINO NEGRO? RECONSIDERANDO LUIZ GAMA NA HISTÓRIA E NA POSTERIDADE

RESUMO

O artigo apresenta uma reconsideração das ideias e do ativismo de Luiz Gama, por meio de uma comparação intermitente com Thomas Paine, retomando a atenção para aspectos do pensamento de Gama que são mal compreendidos, subestimados ou obscuros. Juntas, as quatro causas de Gama – antirracismo, livre-pensamento, abolicionismo e republicanism – estavam enraizadas em um compromisso com a democracia não muito diferente do de Paine. Tendo documentado a unidade do pensamento de Gama, o artigo oferece uma interpretação de sua celebração póstuma como um raro herói negro, em uma parte do Brasil em que os publicistas estavam ansiosamente reformulando como “branca”, enquanto explica o notável, embora incompleto, sucesso de Gama em vida e aponta para sua relevância contemporânea.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Radicalismo – antirracismo – livre-pensamento – abolicionismo – republicanism – democracia

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It is no accident that the American revolutionaries, and the British “Jacobins” who migrated to France because of their political sympathies, found themselves moderates in France. Tom Paine was an extremist in Britain and America; but in Paris he was among the most moderate of the Girondins.

– Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolutions, 1789-1848*

But Paine not only told his readers that poverty was incompatible with felicity and civilization. He told them that the light of reason had dawned in men like themselves to end poverty, and that the Revolution showed how reason must triumph. He was the least romantic of rebels. Self-evident, practical, artisan common sense would transform the world. But the mere discovery that reason can cut like an axe through the undergrowth of custom which kept men enslaved and ignorant was a revelation.

– Hobsbawm, reviewing *Man of Reason: The Life of Thomas Paine*, by Alfred Owen Aldridge

On such political issues as republicanism and universal suffrage, Paine was more consistently radical even than many Jacobins.

– Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America*

Se negro sou, ou sou bode
Pouco importa. O que isto pode?

– Luiz Gama, *Primeiras trovas burlescas*

Luiz Gama, born in 1830 in Salvador, was the son of an African freedwoman and an especially shiftless member of the city's high society. Sold into slavery by his father at age ten, he was taken south—first to Rio de Janeiro, then to São Paulo—where coffee plantations were spreading across the countryside. As a house servant and a slave cobbler in the city of São Paulo, he learned to read and, having proved he had been

illegally enslaved, won back his freedom, then served in the provincial armed forces for six years. During this period, he came to be employed as a scribe, initially on a part-time basis, then full-time, work that was complemented by voracious reading, in ancient and modern history, in literature, in philosophy, theology and scripture, and especially in the law. By the late 1860s, he had been admitted to the bar as a solicitor—a position he used to win the freedom of hundreds of slaves—and claimed a place on the radical edge of the Liberal Party, anticipating the emergence of a movement aimed at eliminating the monarchical government his country had inherited from Portugal. Dying in 1882, before the victory of either cause—the abolition of slavery or the proclamation of the republic—his funeral was reportedly the grandest yet seen in São Paulo, the apotheosis of a former captive occurring at a time when interested parties believed slavery would last another decade or more.³

At first glance, comparing Gama and Thomas Paine would seem inapposite. Born in Thetford, England, in 1737, the son of a corset-maker and grandson of a shoemaker—both Quakers—Paine had no personal experience of enslavement, nor was he victimized by the racism Gama spent much of his life confronting. Whereas Gama did not live to see to the ending of Brazilian slavery or the fall of the Braganza monarchy, Paine became the foremost pamphleteer of not one but two revolutions, the North American war of independence from Great Britain and the French struggle against absolutism and feudalism, and for republican liberty, equality, and fraternity, as the author of *Common Sense* (1776) and *The Rights of Man* (1791), respectively, each of them bestsellers. A third pamphlet, *The Age of Reason* (1794), challenged conventional religious belief, especially biblical literalism, bringing him ill repute among the

3 The first book-length biography of Luiz Gama was Mennucci, 1938; Azevedo, 1999, is the most complete (but see also Azevedo, 2010, chap. 2, and Pinto, 2018, chap. 2). Among studies by literary scholars, there are Martins, 1996, and Ferreira, 2019, among other works. Ligia Fonseca Ferreira has also edited three volumes of Gama's writings (2000, 2011, 2020), which update, but unfortunately do not bring to fulfilment, Fernando Góes's abortive attempt at a complete works (1944), a project recently taken up by Bruno Rodrigues de Lima, who has published four volumes of a projected eleven-volume series (2021a, 2021b, 2023a, 2023b). This essay, first written in 2020, is thus the smallest part of a spate of recent scholarly works on Gama, and it is surely the slightest of them.

more moderate of his old friends in North America, who accused him of blasphemy. Nevertheless, Paine remained committed to the broader democratic cause, embracing social rights and the redistribution of wealth in a fourth great work, *Agrarian Justice* (1797). Gama's published work, while sharing a similar democratic unity—as shall be seen—never matched Paine's in its reach, the bulk of it appearing in newspapers, often pseudonymously, and only in recent years beginning to be collected and published in the systematic fashion with which the Thetford-born pamphleteer's works have long been treated. Even in death, the contrasts seem to outweigh the commonalities: Paine died in obscurity in 1809, just north of New York City—a far cry from the public outpouring of grief that followed Gama's passing in the city of São Paulo seventy-three years later.⁴

Yet a pairing with Thomas Paine may be an apt starting point for revising understandings of Gama's life and thought (more so than comparisons, such as with the escaped slave turned abolitionist icon Frederick Douglas, that might highlight obvious similarities of experience). In the first place, the comparison with Paine foregrounds the religious skepticism that the Brazilian freethinker shared with the author of *The Age of Reason*, an outlook shared with his earliest biographers but lost to subsequent scholarship. Focusing on Gama's ideas also sheds new light on his antiracism, not so much understudied as misunderstood, rooted as it was in a universalist rejection of the poisonous concept of race rather than the embrace of an African-diasporic "racial" identity. The comparison with Paine also highlights Gama's broader radicalism, as Elciene Azevedo has done so well for his courtroom activities. Ultimately, Gama's four causes—antiracism, freethinking, abolitionism, and republicanism—were united by a belief in democracy: in the practicality, and the practical necessity, of free and equal people everywhere governing themselves. Clear in an international, intermittently comparative perspective, that unity was made obscure for posterity by his legatees. At a midrange between the clarity

⁴On Paine, I have relied upon Keane, 1995; Foner, 1976.

of the one and the obscurity of the other lie explanations for Gama's remarkable, if incomplete, triumph in life.⁵

Gama's Four Causes

The starting point for examining Gama's antiracism are the poems in his *Primeiras trovas burlescas*, published in two editions during his lifetime.⁶ In the second edition's central text—"Quem sou eu?"—one finds a brilliant sendup of Brazilian racism and the presumptions of a mostly mixed-origin society to judge anyone's worth by skin color, which literally does not matter. The most important part of the poem hinges on the word *bode*, a slur for a man of African and European ancestry:

Se negro sou, ou sou bode
 Pouco importa. O que isto pode?
 Bodes há de toda a casta,
 Pois que a especie é muito vasta...
 Há cinzentos, há rajados,
 Bayos, pampas e malhados,
 Bodes negros, bodes brancos,
 E, sejamos todos francos
 Uns plebeus e outros nobres,
 Bodes ricos, bodes pobres,
 Bodes sabios, importantes,
 E tambem alguns tratantes...
 Aqui n'esta boa terra,
 Marram todos, tudo berra⁷

Alongside similar satires and self-descriptions, *Primeiras trovas burlescas* features earnest evocations of black beauty (in "Minha mãe" and "Meus amores"), but it is Gama's refusal of what Emilia Viotti da Costa

⁵ Azevedo, 1999, chap. 4, and 2010, chap. 2.

⁶ Gama, 1859, 1861.

⁷ Gama, 1861, p. 141-142.

identified as the “protocol and etiquette of race relations” in nineteenth-century Brazil that stands out, part of a larger refusal on the part of the Salvador-born ex-slave. That refusal—to remain politely silent on matters of ancestry and appearance among free-born Brazilians—was not merely something Gama put on the page; it was also a challenge to be enacted in public performances that contemporaries would remember well into the twentieth century. In one such episode, Gama was confronted in the street by an irate grandee, forced by Gama’s lawyering to release a man he held in illegal captivity and now addressing his antagonist in person as “*seu bode*,”—as he had in insults published in the press—to which Gama replied, “*Eu não sou bode, sou negro. Minha cor não nega. Bode é V. Exa., que pretende disfarçar, com essa cor clara o mulato que está por baixo.*” Another remembrance of Gama’s imputations of blackness, involving a judge described as a “*pardavasco ilustre*,” was recorded by Alberto Faria in the 1920s.⁸

In Gama’s prose writings, one finds comparatively few overt manifestations of his antiracism beyond his utter opposition to slavery. There is, however, his characterization of the entire issue as the “*melindrosa presunção das cores humanas*” in a letter to a friend. Publicly, in Gama’s defense of José do Patrocínio, he identified their shared “*negridão da [...] pele*,” then argued that intelligence, patriotism, valor, nobility of character, and honor have no color. A century after Gama’s death, scholars began to impute an identity with Africa, or even an “African-ness” to him, the literary scholar Ligia Fonseca Ferreira writing that he was motivated in everything he did “*pela ancestralidade, pelo sangue africano que lhe corre nas veias.*” However, the seemingly strongest evidence for such identification, the pseudonyms “Getulino” and “Afro,” are best understood as pen names meant to allow São Paulo’s few readers to identify their author, a rare black man of letters, while Gama’s poetic references to the African continent are outweighed by his claim, to a group of mildly reformist slaveholding

8 Costa, 2000, p. 241-242, 316; Mennucci, 1938, p. 92-93; Faria, 1927, p. 352. See also Leite, 1930, p. 30-31, 35-36.

planters, that “*emancipação pronta, e sem indenizações [...] importará a restituição generosa do que os nossos avós roubaram.*”⁹

But what is truly striking, given the times—though overlooked entirely in the existing scholarship—is Gama’s refusal of the very idea of race, the word *raça* appearing only once in prose writings he published under his own name between the 1860s and his death in 1882: a sarcastic reference to “*minha ilustre raça*” in an uproarious reply to a detractor’s clumsily racist insult.¹⁰ Returning to his poetry, the word “*raça*” is used a mere four times in *Primeiras trovas burlescas*, despite the abundance of suitable rhymes. Tellingly, none of the four appear in Gama’s self-descriptive poems or his

9 Luiz Gama to Lucio de Mendonça, São Paulo, 25 July 1880 (in Mennucci, 1938, p. 19–26; Góes, 1944, p. 177–182; Ferreira, 2011, p. 199–203; and Lima, 2021b, 60–68); L. Gama to “Ilustrado redactor,” São Paulo, 1 Dec. 1880, in *Gazeta do Povo*, 1 Dec. 1880, p. 2; L. Gama to José Vergueiro (presidente, Sociedade Democratica Constitucional Limeirense), São Paulo, 18 Feb. 1869, in *O Ypiranga*, 21 Feb. 1869, p. 2 (emph. added). For imputations of an “African identity” on Gama’s part, see, e.g., Azevedo, 1999, p. 66–75, and esp. Ferreira, 2011 (quote on p. 99). Alberto Faria, writing of Gama’s contributions to *O Ypiranga*, notes his “conhecido pseudônimo Afro” (1927, 346). That “Afro” as a pen name had little significance for Gama as far as identity is concerned is further suggested by him using it in relation to his legal defense of the planter João Franco de Moraes Octavio (a slaveholder, of whom more below): Afro (pseud.), “Ribeirão Preto,” in *A Provincia de São Paulo*, 30 Apr. 1879, p. 2; cf. Lima, 2021, p. 25–29, and esp. 2023a, p. 41. The similarly transparent pseudonym “Getulino” referred to the Getulian people, or Gaetuli, of ancient North Africa.

10 L. Gama, “Ao illm. sr. Adolpho Sydow,” in *A Provincia de São Paulo*, secção livre, 23 Nov. 1877, p. 2. The volumes of Gama’s complete works published to date feature two pseudonymous items in which the word *raça* appears (Lima, 2021b, p. 105–106, 239–241), both first published in pay-to-print sections of daily newspapers. The first, an open letter signed by “Spartacus”—a pseudonym long identified with Gama—was almost certainly written by him. It was published under the heading “A questão de raças” (in *Gazeta do Povo*, 17 July 1880, sec. “Publicações pedidas,” p. 2), but the text itself does not use the term; what I presume happened is the newspaper’s editors or typographers added a heading of their own to an untitled open letter, as when the title “Luiz Gama ao publico” was given to one such letter he signed with his own name (in *Gazeta do Povo*, 25 Sept. 1880, sec. “Publicações pedidas,” p. 2). In the second, a murdered girl was identified as “aquela cristã de raça preta” by “Leão da terra de S. Bento” in “Despertador moral,” *A Provincia de São Paulo*, 24 Nov. 1880, secção livre, p. 1. This latter pseudonym and its variations (“Leão da terra de S. Bento” was apparently a misprint, corrected to “Leão da torre de S. Bento” in “Despertador moral [III],” in *A Provincia de São Paulo*, 25 Nov. 1880, secção livre, p. 1) have not been identified as one of Gama’s until very recently, when Lima included four items published under that signature in volume 8 of his complete works (2021b, pt. VIII). Those items may have been written by one of Gama’s allies or followers, but its language does not seem to match Gama’s in my view.

odes to black beauty. More tellingly, in two of these cases, the term is used by a third person who is meant to be the object of ridicule, while one of the other two clearly does not refer to supposed black-white difference but rather to European nationality, a case in which the poet perhaps could not resist the word's cadence. Finally, the fourth usage appears in a narrator's ironic advice to a friend pursuing the homely daughter of a titled man of dubious origins. It advises the mercenary suitor: "*Cerra os ouvidos/ Aos que murmuram,/ Parvos, beócios/ Que a raça apuram.*"¹¹

It would seem, then, that race itself—as opposed to racism, of which he was keenly aware—did not exist for Gama, except as an idea to be ridiculed. He was a man of color, the proudly dark-skinned son of an African-born woman, and he was Brazilian by birth, by ancestry on his father's side, and by acquired emotional attachment — as his participation in patriotic societies suggests¹² — but race did not figure as a category of analysis or identity for him. Humanity, for Gama, as for the Greeks he so admired and according to the natural-law philosophy he drank deeply of, was one. In that rejection of race, even as racist ideas fastened themselves on his world in an ugly, increasingly scientific fashion, lies one of Gama's potentially greatest, if heretofore unrecognized, contributions to Brazilian social thought.

Having seen through the fiction of race, it must not have been very difficult for Gama to dispense with the religious pieties of his age. Already in *Primeiras trovas burlescas*, there are mocking portrayals of gluttonous clergymen and greedy sacristans. Among the "*Máximas às Pressas*" he contributed to *O Polichinello* were "*A escravidão nasceu da moral religiosa; e tem sido tolerada por todas as seitas,*" and "*O Cristianismo é uma religião para os miseráveis; uma distração para os ricos; e o comercio da igreja.*" In a more serious tone, he defended the long-suffering people of Franca against an overbearing priest. Occasionally, in his contributions to the press and surviving records of his courtroom arguments, one finds

11 Gama, 1861, p. 43, 83, 75, 182. The word "raça" appears once more in the post-1861 poetry collected in Ferreira, 2000, p. 281, as "felina raça" (feline breed, i.e., cats), a zoomorphic characterization in a poetic grotesque of an unnamed priest.

12 Pinto, 2018, p. 91, 112n15.

religious imagery employed to reach readers and sway juries, but it was almost purely rhetorical, as were sarcastic references to his “*religioso*” and “*cristianíssimo*” antagonists in freedom suits. Gama’s use of typically Catholic imagery can also be contrasted with his identification with dissident sects, as when he called himself a Quaker or Ebionite, the latter (from the Hebrew *ebyōn*, meaning “poor”) referring to an early Christian-Jewish sect that denied Jesus’s divinity, the former, the radically egalitarian nonconformism in which Paine’s father had raised him, and which would in turn play a fundamental role in the development of North Atlantic antislavery.¹³

Regarding religion, Gama’s correspondence is telling. Addressing Lucio de Mendonça in 1880, Gama showed more than a hint of pride at his mother refusing Christianity and preventing him from being baptized as long as he was under her care. Ten years earlier, addressing his son, he had recommended two books, the Bible—reading of which was hardly encouraged by Catholic authorities—and Ernst Renan’s iconoclastic *Life of Jesus*, while warning against organized religion: “*Sê cristão e filosofo; crê unicamente na autoridade da razão, e não te alies jamais a seita alguma religiosa. Deus revela-se tão somente na razão do homem, não existe em Igreja alguma do mundo.*” Gama was not an atheist, but neither did he believe in the divinity of Jesus or in anything else in the way of dogma. Rather, his position seems to have been very close to Paine’s deism; that is, he appears to have believed in a single Creator of nature, and with it of natural law, while rejecting religious hierarchy and, indeed, all earthly hierarchy.¹⁴ At the time of Gama’s death, and for decades thereafter, his skepticism was common among educated men in São Paulo; his freethinking was thus so obvious to his earliest biographers that it scarcely

13 Gama, 1861, p. 123, 140; *O Polichinello*, 23 July 1876, p. 7, and 29 Oct. 1876, p. 6 (attributed to Gama in Ferreira, 2011, p. 286); *Radical Paulistano*, 29 July 1869, p. 2; Afro (pseud.), “Franca do Imperador,” São Paulo, 20 Mar. 1874, in *Correio Paulistano*, 21 Mar. 1874, p. 3; Azevedo 1999, p. 237–238 (“religioso” and “cristianíssimo”); Luiz Gama, “Pela ultima vez,” São Paulo, 2 Dec. 1869, in *Correio Paulistano*, 3 Dec. 1869, p. 1.

14 Gama to Mendonça, 25 July 1880; Luiz Gama to “Meu filho” (Benedicto Gracco Pinto da Gama), [São Paulo?], 23 Sept. 1870 (in Mennucci, 1938, p. 145; Góes, 1944, p. 184; Ferreira, 2011, p. 193; and Lima, 2023a, p. 150–151).

required explanation. Since then, scholars have made passing mention of Gama's anticlericalism, but without fully appreciating the worldview of which it was a part, no doubt influenced by the momentous changes in Brazilian religiosity and attitudes thereto that have characterized the last hundred or so years.¹⁵

Gama's freethinking dovetailed with his politics, for as he summed them up, following a longer exposition replete with references to man's free origins in nature and a Creator's design for liberty and democracy:

"Desejo ardentamente a prosperidade do meu país. Almejo a proscricção do cetro e do azorrague. Quero que a grandeza da minha pátria tenha por garantia a liberdade, e que todos os brasileiros, apagadas as classes e as hierarquias, possam dizer perante a América inteira: Acima de nós, Deus tão somente!"

That said, effecting these changes would not fall to God, but to the civic-minded:

"Tenho que as sociedades são vítimas de três calamidades indistintas: a religião, o rei, e a escravidão. Trabalhar por extingui-las é um dever imprescindível do cidadão: cumpromo-lo."¹⁶

Gama's abolitionism is the best-studied aspect of his life and is likely to remain the least controversial, now that Elciene Azevedo's work has cleared the boards of the notion that his activity through the courts was somehow preliminary to a more radical abolitionism that took hold after his death and was unrelated to his earlier efforts. While Gama worked within the legal system, his freedom suits brought manumission and slave

¹⁵ See Azevedo, 1999, p. 56; Ferreira, 2000, p. xli, xlv; Ferreira, 2011, p. 287; Ferreira, 2007. Ferreira implies that Gama lost his faith as a result of exposure to Renan's ideas; it seems more likely, based on Gama's earlier writings, that he found in Renan's book confirmation of ideas he already held, perhaps partly inspired by his own readings of the Bible, as well as his long observation of the social relations he found himself in but not of, perhaps as early as the years in which he was illegally enslaved.

¹⁶ Gama to Vergueiro, 8 Feb. 1869 ("Desejo..."); Luiz Gama to "Meu nobre amigo," in *Gazeta do Povo*, 16 July 1881, p. 1 ("Tenho...").

self-purchase from the field of customary and legal practices dating back to Portuguese colonialism to that of nineteenth-century abolitionism and its presumption of natural rights and human equality. By insisting before the bar on the illegality of the enslavement of Africans imported after ineffectual early nineteenth-century laws ostensibly aimed at the Atlantic slave trade and the further illegality of their descendants' enslaved status, Gama threatened the basis of Brazil's slave system, as his opponents recognized, for his case would mean that most of the country's slaves were free Africans or their free Brazilian-born descendants. Moreover, though the courts were the focus of Gama's antislavery efforts, his performances before them were intended to draw general publicity, attracting additional support. This aspect of his lawyering was complemented by his fundraising and resorting to the press. As early as 1869, more than two years before the imperial legislature's stinting approval of free-womb legislation, Gama was calling for an immediate end to slavery: "*Lavemos de nossa bandeira política esta pasta de lama que a deturpa. Abaixo a escravidão!*" By the 1880s, he was calling for direct action and, indeed, for revolution: "*eu amo as revoluções; e julgo ser um ato sublime dar a vida pelas ideias.*" Along the way, Gama applied the same skepticism to the vogue for Comtian-cum-Spencerian positivism and accompanying faith in tidily progressive change managed from above—deployed, in this context, to support a glacially paced process of preparation for eventual emancipation—as he had for traditional religious belief, decrying

"os divinos positivistas aconselhando nos prudência [...] pregando a submissão dos aflitos, e desculpando, e justificando, e santificando as culpas dos senhores [...]. porque a escravidão deve ser abolida suave, branda e docemente [...] com o lento desenvolvimento das leis sociológicas. Ah! meu amigo, isto seria a triste manifestação da filosofia da miséria, se não revelasse, às claras, as misérias filosóficas dos positivistas."¹⁷

17 Azevedo, 1999 and 2010; Gama to Vergueiro, 18 Feb. 1869; Luiz Gama to "Meu caro [José Ferreira de] Menezes," São Paulo, 28 Jan. 1881, in *Gazeta da Tarde*, 1 Feb. 1881, p. 1 ("eu amo..."); Luiz Gama to "Meu caro [José Ferreira de] Menezes," São Paulo, Jan. 1881, in *Gazeta da Tarde*, 7 Jan. 1881, p. 1 ("os divinos..."). Two weeks before the last of these publications, in language that must have been especially galling to his positivist opponents, Gama referred similarly to their "*conselhos evangélicos, escritos por ateus*," and "*maravilhosa compreensão dos áureos princípios, e práticas salutaras—da*

The latter was part of a larger inter-republican conflict, which pitted Gama against other leaders of the provincial Republican Party, many of them planters who sought support from their fellow slave-owners and a tightly controlled transition to free labor. This transition was to be carried out by European immigrants, who were envisioned as progenitors of the citizens of the federal republic-to-be. The fact that several of these spokesmen had been close collaborators lent this conflict a personal dimension. As old comrades shed youthful attachments to abolitionism in favor of planter-friendly federalism, Gama held true to the democratic republicanism he had proclaimed as early as the mid-1860s, when he declared in 1866, "*Sectário acérrimo das instituições libérrimas [...] aceito a democracia até as suas ultimas consequências.*" Nationally, this meant rejecting the 1824 Constitution, with its amalgam of monarchy, state religion, and supposedly representative government: "*Quero uma constituição democrática e americana, que seja a encarnação dos inalienáveis direitos do homem, fonte inexaurível de públicas liberdades e não esse disforme agregado de grosseiros absurdos.*" Internationally, it meant defending the Mexican Republic and Benito Juárez following the execution of the would-be Emperor Ferdinand Maximilian Joseph, as well as looking further north, to France and the United States. And so, on September 4, 1878, Gama saluted the eighth anniversary of France's Third Republic with a celebration of the "*lutas homéricas*" that culminated in the "*emancipação do povo*" in 1793, through revolution, which gave rise to "*nacionalidades livres*" in America and Europe, while in Brazil, "*súbditos felizes... sonham com a infalibilidade do Rei,*" and "*os republicanos são os Serafins da paz,*" the latter another criticism of São Paulo's foremost republicans, whose antimonarchism was platonic, at best.¹⁸

salvadora política positivista," calling them "*os evangelizadores do positivismo.*" "A emancipação," in *Gazeta do Povo*, 18 Dec. 1880, p. 2.

18 "Afro" (pseud.) to Diogo de Mendonça Pinto, in *Diário de S. Paulo*, 18 Aug. 1866, p. 1 ("Sectario..."); Afro to "Ilustrado redactor," in *Diário de S. Paulo*, 20 Sept. 1866, p. 2 ("Quero..."); Afro in "Á pedido" section, *O Ypiranga*, 11 Aug. 1867, p. 3; Luiz Gama to "Cidadãos Franceses," São Paulo, 4 Sept. 1878, in *A Província de São Paulo*, 8 Sept. 1878, p. 2. In 1878, and likely as late as his death in 1882, Gama could not have known that the Republican Party, the party of Abraham Lincoln—whom he ranked, as we shall see, with John Brown, Spartacus, and the historical Jesus as a revolutionary—was retreating

Rather than viewing these four aspects of Luiz Gama's life and thought—republicanism, abolitionism, freethinking, and antiracism—as distinct, they are best conceived as complementary. All were grounded in post-Enlightenment commonsense beliefs in natural rights and human equality, radical in nineteenth-century Brazil, but accessible to the country's literate minority through the printed word and to its non-literate majority through the intuition of right and wrong supposedly common to all creation. For Gama, they added up to a belief in democracy as rule by the people, with precedents going back to the ancient world: democracy, then and in the historical present, was, in Gama's words, the "*monomania arrasadora de plebeus altivos*." As in antiquity, such people would need their tribune. On these bases, there appears to have been some self-description in Gama—who once wrote privately, "*sou estimado e muito pela plebe*"—naming his only son Benedicto Graccho ("black tribune of the people"), as well as a parallel between that characterization and a passage in one of his texts in which, having evoked past "*revoluções da liberdade*," he proclaimed, "*Quero ser [...] como John Brown, como Spartacus, como Lincoln, como Jesus*."¹⁹

Problems of Posterity

Luiz Gama died of complications from diabetes on August 24, 1882. The following afternoon, crowds of thousands accompanied his coffin from his home in Brás to the Consolação cemetery. As they passed through the city, bearing the banners of abolitionist groups, masonic lodges, mutual-aid societies, and other associations, the downtown was otherwise quiet, the city's merchants having shut their doors in tribute

ever-more quickly from its post-Civil War commitment to a democracy that would include freedmen in the former slave South. In 1870, as Radical Reconstruction appeared to be consolidating itself in the former Confederate states, he had referred to the United States as the "*melhor porção da América, que é e há de ser o farol da democracia universal*." L. Gama to José Carlos [Rodrigues], São Paulo, 26 Nov. 1870, in Ferreira, 2011, p. 194-196, and Lima, 2023a, p. 167-171.

19 *O Polichinello*, 21 May 1876, p. 5; Gama to Rodrigues, 26 Nov. 1870; Gama, "A emancipação," in *Gazeta do Povo*, 18 Dec. 1880, p. 2.

and to allow their employees to attend the commemoration, among representatives of

“todas as classes sociais, desde o humilde escravo, que não sabia nem podia conter as lágrimas de que a saudade e gratidão lhe inundavam os olhos, até as pessoas mais gradas d’esta cidade, magistrados, lentes, advogados, comerciantes, toda a imprensa da capital, acadêmicos e o exm. vice-presidente da província.”

The cortege grew as new groups joined along the way, including members of the Nossa Senhora dos Remedios brotherhood, a mostly Afro-Brazilian sodality led by Antonio Bento de Souza e Castro, a former magistrate of Portuguese ancestry and loyal Conservative recently converted to abolitionism, soon to assume Gama’s role at the forefront of São Paulo’s antislavery movement. Among the others falling in were likely at least some members of the Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Homens Pretos brotherhood. It may have been members of the two sodalities who carried Gama’s coffin during the last stretch of its journey, a group of men identified only as “pretos” in one account refusing to allow anyone else to shoulder it past a certain point (in another, Martinho Prado Júnior, a slaveholding planter and sometime political ally of Gama’s, was among the last to bear that burden, alongside “*um pobre negro esfarrapado e descalço*,” the two equal in their grief). A few paces inside the cemetery walls, the coffin laid in its tomb, Climaco Barbosa, an abolitionist colleague of Gama’s, offered a final homage “*ao grande democrata*.”²⁰

A year later, to the day, a similar group retraced some of the same steps taken by the procession of 1882. It too included the banner-bearing members of abolitionist societies, masonic lodges, the Nossa Senhora dos Remedios brotherhood, and other groups. Before Gama’s tomb, Barbosa spoke once more, as did many others who had been close to the late hero. Twenty-nine slaves received their freedom papers before the procession

20 *A Província de São Paulo*, 26 Aug. 1882, p. 2; *Correio Paulistano*, 26 Aug. 1882, p. 2; Raul Pompeia, “Última pagina da vida de um grande homem,” São Paulo, 3 Sept. 1882, in *Gazeta de Notícias*, 10 Sept. 1882, p. 1.

turned back toward the city's downtown, stopping along the way to hear a somewhat different speech, prepared by a Portuguese-born laborer, proud "*de vir saudar a memória de Luiz Gama, o grande proletário.*" The worker praised his host country, saying he was pleased "*de ver que no Brasil as procissões religiosas começavam a ceder o passo às procissões cívicas, verdadeiras festas do progresso e da liberdade.*"²¹

It was not to be, however much it might have pleased Luiz Gama to see religious celebrations give way to assemblies of free and independent holders of equal rights under natural law. Instead, even in 1882, conventional religious observance and imagery had impinged upon commemorations of the life and death of the great freethinker. While there is no indication of a final confession or last rites—much less a deathbed conversion—Gama's wake was described in conventional Catholic terms, complete with an altar and candles, his friend and admirer Raul Pompeia indicating that Gama would have preferred to have his corpse "*bucolicamente estendido ao ar livre,*" amid "*natureza viva e selvagem.*" But that was beside the point: the purpose of the wake was to provide comfort to friends and family, especially Gama's wife, who held to her society's conventional faith and affiliations, as did Benedicto Graccho, notwithstanding Gama's paternal caution twenty-two years earlier.²²

Perhaps mindful of Gama's thoughts on the matter, his family arranged for the traditional seventh-day mass to be a subdued affair, held in Brás rather than in the city center and without the usual canticles and other devotional music. The thirtieth-day mass, on the other hand, was offered "*por alma do finado*" by members of the Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Homens Pretos brotherhood in their colonial-era church. Masses were also celebrated in Rio Claro and São José dos Campos, and would be held in the port of Santos in years to come. Along the way, Gama was remembered as "*um anjo baixado*" and a "*triste santo*" in life,

²¹ *A Província de São Paulo*, 28 Aug. 1883, p. 2.

²² Pompeia, "Última página." For evidence of Claudina Gama's religiosity: *Almanach Administrativo, Commercial e Industrial da Província de São Paulo para o anno de 1885*, p. 154; *Correio Paulistano*, 8 Feb. 1890, p. 1.

now "*Cercado de anjinhos/ Ao cântico dos passarinhos/ Foi saudar ele a Deus.*"²³

In time, São Paulo's abolitionist movement took on a more conventionally religious character with the rise of Antonio Bento to preeminence. By 1884, his position was unrivaled, as the most eloquent of Gama's lieutenants had moved to Rio de Janeiro or otherwise stepped aside. This shift led to a muffling of republican voices within the abolitionist camp in São Paulo, with the partial exception of Santos, abetted by the mainstream republican leadership's opposition to immediate and unconditional emancipation until late 1887.

Meanwhile, to inanities the likes of poetry describing Gama greeting God to the chirping of tiny birds, were added increasing volumes of the far more pernicious race talk the fallen hero had rejected in life. "*Hoje chora e com razão a raça escrava*," declared the student newspaper *O Embrvão* one month after Gama's death. A year later, it was Gama's close collaborator Brazil Silvado who proclaimed, "*não conheceu S. Paulo mais valente e decidido defensor da raça escravizada!*" For Eugenio de Magalhães, meanwhile, Gama had been "*Um dos raros heróis de tão pujante raça.*" Five years later, amid celebrations of the abolition of slavery, Gama was remembered as "*o grande tribune da raça negra no Brasil*" and the "*fogoso tribuno da raça negra*," the latter in an article in *A Província de São Paulo* in which his professional talents were ranked second to those of Américo de Campos, a nullity at the law, but as a journalist closer than Gama to the anti-radical republicanism characteristic of that newspaper. From there, it was a short step to tributes to Gama's having made "*sacrifícios altruísticos, em prol da sua oprimida raça*," and to his having "*votando-se todo, em plena virilidade, a redimir os da mesma raça e semelhante desgraça!*" "*Toda a aspiração de uma raça visceralmente livre rugiu-lhe no sangue*," was among the accolades marking the centennial of his birth (*O Estado de S. Paulo* thereby anticipating the view expressed by

23 *Gazeta do Povo*, 30 Aug. 1882, p. 2; *A Província de São Paulo*, 21 Sept. 1882, p. 3; *A Província de São Paulo*, 16 Sept. 1882, p. 3; *Gazeta do Povo*, 16 Sept. 1882, p. 2; *Gazeta do Povo*, 6 Sept. 1882, p. 1; *Santos Commercial*, 20 Aug. 1895, p. 2; Alfredo Cardoso de Abreu Peroba, "A Luiz Gama," in *Gazeta do Povo*, 28 Aug. 1882, p. 2.

Ligia Fonseca Ferreira some eighty years later, that Gama was driven in all he did “*pela ancestralidade, pelo sangue africano que lhe corre nas veias*”); “*aquele que tanto lutou pela raça negra*,” was how Gama was described on the anniversary of his death later that year.²⁴

As his religious iconoclasm was obscured in smoke and incense, and the most important aspect of his antiracism was swamped by race talk, Gama’s republicanism met a similar fate. Upon coming to power in 1889, São Paulo’s republican leaders were loath to recall they had been outflanked by a more principled antimonarchist, who left stinging portrayals of their prevarication, while Gama’s admirers had no reason to identify their hero with a movement that, by the late 1890s, seemed to have led inexorably to oligarchic confederalism rather than democracy. And so, Gama could and would be increasingly identified as an abolitionist—and not as a republican or a freethinker—and as representing a “race,” both abolitionism and Gama’s “race” belonging to an increasingly distant past, the good cause having won, and São Paulo coming to be thought of as a “white man’s country.” Safely dead, with posterity having shorn his image of any radicalism that might have purchase in the present, Gama could even be celebrated as *paulista*—as of São Paulo—the organ of the ruling Republican Party ranking him alongside Antonio Bento as “*dois méritos paulistas que tanto contribuíram para a abolição dos escravos*.” In 1909, amid the early stages of a campaign to erect a monument in Gama’s honor, the effort was said to serve two purposes: “*perpetue a memória do preclaro abolicionista e ao mesmo tempo represente a infinita gratidão dos paulistas a raça que fez a lavoura de São Paulo e que tanto contribuiu para que nos colocássemos a frente dos Estados da federação brasileira*.” Once again, Gama was to be celebrated as an abolitionist, while his “race”—a distinct “them” whom paulistas, as “us,” now thanked—belonged to the past, when it “*fez a lavoura de São Paulo*,” now tended by mostly European

24 Fabio Adrião, “Luiz Gama,” in *O Embryão*, 28 Sept. 1882, p. 1; Brazil Silvado to the editors, São Paulo, 23 Aug. 1883, in *Gazeta de Notícias*, 24 Aug. 1883, p. 1; Eugenio de Magalhães, “Luiz Gama,” in *Jornal do Commercio*, 25 Aug. 1883, p. 1; F. Rangel Pestana, “A Americo de Campos,” in *Diário Popular*, 14 May 1888, p. 1; *A Província de São Paulo*, 19 May 1888, p. 1; *Correio Paulistano*, 24 Aug. 1895, p. 1; Faria, 1927, p. 339; *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 21 June 1930, p. 3; *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 27 Aug. 1930, p. 5.

immigrants and their children, who likewise formed much of the labor force in the manufacturing, transportation, and distribution enterprises that—with coffee agriculture—propelled the state ahead of the country's other provincial units. Acquiescent to this framing were black leaders the likes of Theophilo Dias de Castro, of the Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Homens Pretos brotherhood, who for years had sought to cultivate public memory of Luiz Gama as an abolitionist—but not a republican—and a representative of “*a raça que a pertencemos*.” Token recognition and continued patronage (Dias de Castro was a minor state functionary) were the terms of their inclusion, anticipating the position of some figures in the much-studied Afro-Brazilian press of 1920s and 1930s São Paulo.²⁵

By the centennial of Gama's birth, he could be celebrated even among the most racist of paulista intellectuals, such as Aureliano Leite, who argued that Gama's greatness stemmed from his having been enslaved, as a representative of a “*povo desgraçado*” rather than a “*raça feliz*” who rose up to fight against slavery; had Gama been born after abolition, “*não passaria dum preto pernóstico*,” like other descendants of slaves, supposedly unfit for freedom and withering away under the influence of strong drink. Instead, slavery provided Gama—“*metade ariano, metade preto*”—with the motivation and opportunity for greatness. With slavery and its greatest antagonist gone, Gama could be safely remembered as a historic rarity, a “*negro genial*” whose kind would not be seen again, not by Leite's like and lights, certainly not in São Paulo, by then well along in its regionalist self-fashioning as the “whitest” and most modern of Brazilian states. Gama had thus become, in the words of a reporter for São Paulo's largest-circulation newspaper, “*uma das figuras mais notáveis do nosso passado*,” and so he was to be honored on that basis; beyond that, his life appeared to have no purchase in the present.²⁶

25 *Correio Paulistano*, 13 May 1898, p. 1; *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 1 July 1909, p. 4. On the racist regionalism of “white” São Paulo and its presumed superiority to Brazil's other regions, see esp. Weinstein, 2015. On the black leader Theophilo Dias de Castro, his collaborator José Cupertino, and others, see, in addition to the *O Estado de S. Paulo* article just cited: Pinto, 2018, p. 279–282; Pinto, 2010, p. 125–136 (quote on 127). For “terms of inclusion,” Alberto, 2011.

26 Leite, 1930, p. 25–26; *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 27 Aug. 1930, p. 5.

Within a generation of Gama's death, then, he had become a saintly figure even to the most racist of figures in São Paulo's regional intelligentsia. Along the way, amid the religious enthusiasms of his legatees and a profusion of race talk, there emerged an abiding emphasis on Gama's abolitionism to the exclusion of his other causes. The democratic unity of his life and thought was thereby forgotten in the very society in which it had been assembled.

Explaining Gama's Trajectory

Explaining Luiz Gama's achievement in his time is tricky. There are many points in Gama's life at which it could have taken a radically different direction. Indeed, one could say that the letter providing virtually everything we know about his early life was emplotted with that design in mind. At age ten, when Gama was brought to São Paulo, he came close to being sold in Jundiaí and Campinas, which would have likely led to him ending his days as a plantation slave. Instead, after several potential buyers backed out upon learning Gama was from Bahia—where slaves earned a reputation for rebelliousness over the preceding decades—he spent the rest of his childhood and his adolescence in urban captivity, with its relative freedoms and opportunities. Another key turning point came when Gama was seventeen and his master took in a student as a boarder. This student befriended Gama and began teaching him to read, literacy then becoming critical to Gama's obtaining proof of his free birth. Once free, Gama was again fortunate in his connections, especially in attracting the attention of Francisco Maria de Souza Furtado de Mendonça, chief of police and law professor, who employed him as a scribe, and whose library seems to have been fundamental to Gama's intellectual self-fashioning.²⁷ Alongside these pivotal moments, one might add others related to the trade Gama practiced while a young slave. As a cobbler, his was a semi-skilled occupation that lent itself to thinking and reading, tending toward heterodox ideas and political radicalism, as Eric Hobsbawm and Joan Scott famously documented in their study of radical and dissenting shoemakers,

27 Gama to Mendonça, 25 July 1880.

the latter a category that also included Paine's paternal grandfather, the Quaker cordwainer identified in local documentation as William Payne.²⁸ Learning the trade from a Brazilian-born man of color, likely a former slave himself, Gama would have spent much of his time outside of his master's house and beyond his supervision, with opportunities to practice the lessons in basic literacy he received from his master's boarder and, just as importantly, to work secretly at obtaining the unspecified documentation that proved his enslavement was illegal.²⁹ Indeed, even before his beginning to learn to read, Gama's apprenticeship as a cobbler would have provided opportunities for quiet observation of and reflection upon the society he found himself in, to a degree unmatched even by other semi-autonomous urban slaves, from fellow artisans in noisier, more strenuous trades to the *quintandeiras* so critical to urban provisioning.

However, even under conditions of perfect quiet, ease, and autonomy, few would achieve as much as Gama did. Without deep reserves of determination and intelligence, he would have been unable to advance much past basic literacy on his own or to prove his free status, more than a thousand miles from the city of his birth, where he had last enjoyed freedom. And while he was undoubtedly helped in the latter quest, his self-schooling in the law—to say nothing of his broader self-education—would have been beyond the reach of many, if not most, people in his situation.

Yet here the individual again meets the social. For all of Gama's evident brilliance, he would not have been admitted to the bar had there been a surfeit of practicing lawyers in São Paulo in the 1860s. Instead, graduates of the São Paulo Law School pursued other callings, from careers in state administration to investment in coffee agriculture. The result, as described by a petty functionary to the judge who received Gama's initial petition to serve as a solicitor, was that the pace of legal activity was "*moroso*." This existing need for legal counsel thus created

²⁸ Hobsbawm and Scott, 1980; Keane, 1995, p. 16.

²⁹ L. Gama to Adolpho Sidow, São Paulo, 20 Nov. 1877, in *A Província de São Paulo*, 21 Nov. 1877, p. 3; *A Província de São Paulo*, 26 Sept. 1888, p. 2; *Almanach Administrativo, Commercial e Industrial da Província de São Paulo, para o Anno de 1887* (1886), 144; *Correio Paulistano*, 3 Sept. 1879, p. 2.

an opportunity for a scribe turned self-taught lawyer, even one of Gama's ancestry, appearance, and formerly enslaved status.³⁰

Having been admitted to the bar, Gama soon established himself as a leading lawyer, nearly as well known for his work as a defense attorney as for his freedom suits. In at least one case, he successfully defended a client charged with murder after an in flagrante arrest, a defense that *A Província de São Paulo* deemed brilliant. Such cases earned him a reputation well beyond legal circles, as one of his fiercest opponents recognized, admitting there was no one who was unaware of his work as an attorney, "*não há dúvida*."³¹ While Gama seems to have favored working on behalf of the poor and seemingly powerless—slaves, the conditionally freed, immigrants, and others the likes of a black teamster he identified as a "*miseró proletário*"—he was perfectly comfortable defending the relatively well-off against official caprices, as when he successfully presented a writ of habeas corpus on behalf of the planter João Franco de Moraes Octavio, at which time his client was almost certainly a slaveholder, and probably a sizeable one.³²

Gama's lawyering evidently opened many doors. Through the 1870s, the frequency with which he was called upon to serve as an agent for business interests and the collection of funds for the deserving poor alike is suggestive of a reputation for honest dealing.³³ By the end of that decade, he had become a well-compensated lawyer. According to a partial, block-by-block electoral roll from 1880, his known annual income exceeded that of any man in his subdistrict, including the planter son of a member of Brazil's titled nobility (5:000\$000 versus 2:000\$000), and was

30 Azevedo, 1999, p. 192n7.

31 *A Província de São Paulo*, 26 Oct. 1879, p. 2; Sydow to Gama, 21 Nov. 1877.

32 Luiz Gama, "Processo vira-mundo," in *Gazeta do Povo*, 23 Apr. 1881, p. 2 ("miseró..."); *Jornal da Tarde*, 10 May 1879, p. 2; "Habeas-corpus no Ribeirão Preto," in *A Província de São Paulo*, 11 May 1879, p. 2; João Franco de Moraes Octavio, "Cousas da justiça dos homens," *São Paulo*, 9 March [sic] 1880, in *A Província de São Paulo*, 9 May 1880, p. 2. Octavio was a slaveholder as late as 1887: *A Redenção*, 6 Jan. 1887, p. 3.

33 E.g., *Correio Paulistano*, 13 Aug. 1871, p. 2; *Correio Paulistano*, 12 Nov. 1871, p. 2; *Correio Paulistano*, 1 June 1872, p. 2; *A Província de São Paulo*, 18 July 1875, p. 3; *Jornal da Tarde*, 11 May 1879, p. 3.

more than three times that of a fellow solicitor in a neighboring subdistrict. Indeed, in the partial listing for Norte da Sé published in the *Correio Paulistano* of 11 December 1880, his income was exceeded only by that of two physicians (6:000\$000 each) and a law professor (10:000\$000). Gama had come a long way since his days as a scribe twenty-six years earlier, at the monthly equivalent of 300\$000 per year.³⁴

With increased earnings came modest amounts of property, comfort, and standing. While the property included, for a time, a piece of commercial real estate—apparently not much more than a storefront—Gama's most important possession was his home on the outskirts of São Paulo, a country house of sorts on a lot large enough for him to grow fruits, vegetables, and flowers on his own. He was also a shareholder in the water and sewerage company organized in São Paulo in the late 1870s. Gama's small stake, equivalent to 1% of his annual income and just 0.4% of what the largest investors committed, was no doubt needed to guarantee future service, but it was also a token of civic belonging, his name appearing on the initial list of 294 stakeholders, a group that included much of what passed for a local aristocracy. Gama's natty dress was another mark of his arrival, one remarked upon by posterity, and a necessary part of his self-representation—especially in courtrooms, where his appearance might help sway juries.³⁵

Unknowable is the degree to which Gama's success as a lawyer resulted from masonic networks and the freemason's commitment to patronize his brother mason, all else being equal, but freemasonry was clearly important in other aspects of his trajectory and potentially influential in additional ways as well. In the Loja América, the lodge that he helped build, Gama would have found a space where his religious freethinking was not so extraordinary. The Loja América was likewise an important institutional support for his abolitionist lawyering, just as its members were

34 *Correio Paulistano*, 11 Dec. 1880, p. 2-3; *Correio Paulistano*, 21 Nov. 1854, p. 1.

35 *Correio Paulistano*, 24 Jan. 1879, p. 4; *Jornal da Tarde*, 1 Apr. 1879, p. 2; "Meu charo [José Ferreira de] Menezes," São Paulo, 13 Dec. 1880, in *Gazeta do Povo*, 14 Dec. 1880, p. 2; Pompeia, "Última página"; *A Província de São Paulo*, 18 July 1878, p. 2; Valentim Magalhães, "O castor de Luiz Gama," in *Gazeta da Tarde*, 28 Mar. 1881, p. 2; Oliveira, "Um centenário de Luiz Gama (IV)."

individual supporters, and the masonic lodge seems to have provided a model for early emancipationist groups. Lodge-sponsored schools for workers, slaves, and poor children, meanwhile, provided a role for Gama as a teacher, reinforcing his belief in education and rational self-improvement generally, while expanding his following in poor and working-class circles.³⁶

The latter brings one to the associational life in which Gama was able to ground his militancy in São Paulo. Gama was an officer of a mutual-aid society as early as 1862, when he was elected president of the Sociedade Artística Beneficente, the name of which identified its members as artisans. The son of a close collaborator recalled the *Círculo Operário Italiano* as being especially important when it came to abolitionist fundraising, but Gama also obtained support from the *Club Gymnástico Português* and at least one carnival club, the exquisitely named *Sociedade Carnavalesca Os Girondinos*, sometimes called the *Clube dos Girondinos*, founded by a group of shop clerks. In these popular associations, Gama found confirmation of his democratic ideal, expressed in the maxim, “*A melhor forma de governo é a que ensina aos homens a governarem-se.*” For these were voluntary societies—most of which purported to be representative of and responsive to larger social groups—formed through free association and run by their membership more or less democratically. Something similar can be seen in the radical republican and abolitionist *Gazeta do Povo*, founded and run by typographical workers, a reading man’s trade that had counted Gama as a member in the 1860s, when he served as an apprentice typesetter for *O Ypiranga*. It is little wonder that the *Gazeta do Povo* was the São Paulo newspaper most closely identified with Gama in the last years of his life.³⁷

36 Gama to Rodrigues, 26 Nov. 1870; Azevedo, 1999, esp. 199; Americo Brasiliense de Almeida Mello to José Fernandes da Costa Pereira Junior, São Paulo, 7 Nov. 1871, and attachment, in *Correio Paulistano*, 10 Nov. 1871, p. 2; Luiz Gama to “Meu caro redactor,” São Paulo, 9 Nov. 1871, in *Correio Paulistano*, 10 Nov. 1871, p. 2-3; *Correio Paulistano*, 1 Aug. 1872, p. 2; *O Ypiranga*, 16 June 1869, p. 4; *Correio Paulistano*, 3 Apr. 1870, p. 1; “O Cocheiro” in “A pedido,” *Correio Paulistano*, 10 Mar. 1871, p. 2; *Correio Paulistano*, 20 Feb. 1874, p. 1.

37 Luiz Cuyabano, “Sociedade Artística Beneficente,” in *Correio Paulistano*, 23 July 1862, p. 3; Mennucci, 1938, 133 (citing Antonio dos Santos Oliveira); *Círculo Operário Italiano* announcement, in *A Província de São Paulo*, 14 Aug. 1881, p. 3; *A Província de São Paulo*, 20 Aug. 1881, p. 2; *A Província de São*

But while Gama was firm in his beliefs—in his republicanism, abolitionism, freethinking, and antiracism—he was by no means sectarian. Rather, his ability to work with different groups is a further explanation of his rise to prominence. His utter opposition to organized religion did not prevent him from collaborating with Catholics and Protestants on matters related to abolition; the members of Afro-Brazilian sodalities remained admirers and allies despite his religious iconoclasm, while perhaps appreciating his referring to the brotherhood of Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Homens Brancos as that “*dos homens de todas as cores*,” mocking the rival confraternity’s claim to purity and superiority. A republican through and through, Gama nevertheless cheered when a bill cleared committee in the monarchical legislature containing a measure that extended the right to hold higher office to freedmen, which the *Gazeta do Povo* called “*a realização do princípio da soberania do povo entre nós*,” predicting, “*O futuro fará o resto*”; Gama also gratefully accepted collaboration in his abolitionist efforts from committed monarchists. Often at odds with São Paulo’s republican leadership for its moderation and accommodation to planter interests, Gama nevertheless spoke alongside Martinho Prado Júnior in support of more moderate republicans in January 1880, before a mass demonstration of solidarity with the Revolta do Vintém, at a time when Prado was still the owner of large holdings of slaves. At that moment, it would seem, what mattered was that unprecedented masses of people had taken to the streets and that they might be steered to join Gama and Prado in opposing the monarchy.³⁸

In potentially insurrectionary circumstances, then, Gama was a revolutionary, as was Prado—who saw the January 1880 uprising as

Paulo, 23 Aug. 1881, p. 3; *Gazeta do Povo*, 22 Feb. 1882, p. 1; *Correio Paulistano*, 22 July 1876, p. 2; Gama to Vergueiro, 18 Feb. 1869 (“A melhor...”). On the *Gazeta do Povo*: Freitas, 1915, p. 261-262 (and cf. *Jornal da Tarde*, 21 Sept. 1879, p. 2); *Gazeta do Povo*, 7 Jan. 1880, p. 2; Andrada, 1939, p. 220. Gama’s work typesetting is noted in Gama to Mendonça, 25 July 1880.

38 Oliveira, “Um centenário de Luiz Gama (IV)”; Gama to Rodrigues, 26 Nov. 1870; *O Polichinello*, 29 Oct. 1876, p. 3; *Gazeta da Tarde*, 3 Jan. 1881, p. 1; *Gazeta do Povo*, 29 Dec. 1880, p. 2; *Gazeta do Povo*, 7 Jan. 1880, p. 2; *A Província de São Paulo*, 8 Jan. 1880, p. 2; *Jornal da Tarde*, 8 Jan. 1880, p. 1; Martinho Prado Junior, “O sr. dr. Martinho Prado Junior,” in *A Província de São Paulo*, 9 Jan. 1880, p. 2; *A Constituinte*, 10 Jan. 1880, p. 1-2.

auguring “*uma fecunda serie de vitórias do povo contra o governo*”—while in quieter times he was a critic, a polemicist, an organizer, and an indefatigable advocate for freedom through the law. His position was as radical as possible in the society he lived in, but there was little of Robespierre about him—none of the self-regarding fanaticism that greased the working of the guillotine. Indeed, while Gama was vocally supportive of the Mexican republic, he regretted Maximilian’s execution, which was consistent with his opposition to capital punishment on moral, natural-law grounds, and which bears comparison with Paine’s opposition to the execution of Louis XVI. Here too, in Gama’s principled consistency, was another key to his success.³⁹

In a final turn from the individual to the social, Gama seems to have drawn strength from his relationships with Rio de Janeiro-based republicans, who were generally less compromising—and less compromised—when it came to slavery. In São Paulo, he was an agent for Rio’s *A Republica*. Visiting Rio, he was saluted by that newspaper as “*um dos homens a quem mais deve a causa da emancipação no Brasil*” and a “*distintíssimo democrata*.” Gama’s closest ally in Rio seems to have been the journalist José Ferreira de Menezes, the founder of the *Gazeta da Tarde* and a fellow abolitionist and republican, with whom Gama had become dear friends when Ferreira de Menezes was a law student in São Paulo. But Gama was also close to Lucio de Mendonça, like Ferreira de Menezes, an abolitionist and republican born in Rio de Janeiro who finished his education at the São Paulo Law School. It was Mendonça who, in 1880, wrote the earliest biographical sketch of “*um nome de que se ufana a democracia brasileira*,” predicting that if “*o grande momento*

39 Rossel (pseud., Martinho Prado Júnior), “Acautele-se o povo,” in *A Provincia de São Paulo*, 4 Jan. 1880, p. 2; Afro in “*Á pedido*” section, *O Ypiranga*, 11 Aug. 1867, p. 3; Afro, “*Pena de morte*,” *Democracia*, 25 Jan. 1868, p. 1. Gama’s opposition to the death penalty was matched by his opposition to the corporal punishment of enlisted men: Luiz Gama, in “*Ao governo*,” in *Gazeta do Povo*, 16 Jan. 1881, p. 2.

político desta terra" were to come in Gama's lifetime, "*seu futuro... há de ler-se [...] nas laudas da nossa história*."⁴⁰

Luiz Gama did not live to see the great political movement envisioned by Lucio de Mendonça—the fall of the monarchy—or the abolition of slavery, much less the eclipse of racism and superstition that would represent the victory of his two other causes. Compared to Paine's "share in two revolutions," then, Gama's life's work may seem rather small, though helping start the movement that abolished slavery in its last American redoubt, where it was more integrated into the fabric of national life than in any other country, must surely count for something, if only as a posthumous victory. The support of São Paulo's nascent civil society and its plebs generally were sufficient for Gama to become a popular tribune, but they were not enough for him to win. Yet in some ways his accomplishment was all the greater, for his militant self-fashioning occurred in personal and social circumstances much less favorable than Paine's. As one of his followers remarked, comparing him to the man to whom Paine had dedicated *The Rights of Man*, Gama "*tinha o caráter e seria capaz de ter a energia de Washington. Não teve o 'meio'*." By that, Alberto Torres meant that in other circumstances Gama might have been the father of a new republican nation, born out of what would have been the last Atlantic revolution. Had such a revolution occurred, it would have had to be more radical and more democratic than any of the eighteenth-century revolutions.⁴¹

40 *A Republica*, 6 Dec. 1871, p. 4; *A Republica*, 28 Jan. 1872, p. 2; Luiz Gama to "Meu charo [José Ferreira de] Menezes," São Paulo, 25 Dec. 1880, in *Gazeta do Povo*, 26 Dec. 1880, p. 2; Lucio de Mendonça, "Luiz Gama," São Gonçalo, 21 Aug. 1880, in *Almanach Litterario de S. Paulo para 1881* (1880), p. 61-62.

41 Keane, 1995, p. 283, quoting Paine to Washington, 16 Oct. 1789, "A share in two revolutions is living to some purpose"; Alberto Torres, "Sementes de boa planta," *A Noite*, 24 Nov. 1915, p. 1. In the lines just quoted, Torres—usually characterized as belonging to the political right by the time of his writing—to some degree prefigured C.L.R. James's marriage of great-man history and Marx's famous dictum from the Eighteenth Brumaire: "Great men make history, but only such history as

These are, of course, counterfactuals so outlandish as to be absurd, but they serve to return attention to Gama's likeness with Paine. Politically, each in their own worlds, the two men were *sui generis*, neither Jacobin nor Girondin—nor Montagnard, nor *enragé*—but radicals and democrats, Paine helping to rehabilitate the very word democracy at a time when it was most often used pejoratively, Gama decrying its qualification even by the adjective “constitutional.” Indeed, Gama—like Paine—was a radical because he was a democrat, a sincere believer in human equality and in the ability of free people to reshape their social relations guided by reason. There was no posturing when Gama declared of slaves suing for their freedom, “*Valho tanto como eles.*” Their rights were, or should be, the same as his, and all should have a share as rights-bearing individuals in defining the terms of their civil and political life, a universalism extended by Gama to include Africans born under Portuguese rule in Africa, for whom he sought the same protections as European-born Portuguese. In social and economic terms, like Paine in *Agrarian Justice*, Gama anticipated confronting the holders of great landed wealth, writing Ferreira de Menezes in 1880, “*o futuro será uma nova era; o resultado de uma memorável convenção, ou de uma grande catástrofe; os sucessos resultam das circunstâncias; estas têm a sua origem nas variedades do tempo. Como os barões da idade média hão de cair os landlords.*”⁴²

As these lines suggest, Gama possessed a sense of historical movement, of history as progress, that was of a piece with his post-Enlightenment belief in natural law. He could not have imagined that in the third decade of the twenty-first century, the most basic civil rights enacted through the eighteenth-century revolutions—to not be deprived of life or liberty without due process, to freedom from cruel and unusual punishment, and to security in one's person and home—would elude

it is possible for them to make. Their freedom of achievement is limited by the necessities of their environment.” James, 1963, p. x.

42 Gama to Vergueiro, 18 Feb. 1869; Spartacus (pseud.) to “sr. dr. chefe de policia,” in *Gazeta do Povo*, 13 June 1881, p. 2; Afro I.: (pseud.), “Aos portugueses,” *Gazeta do Povo*, 1 Nov. 1881, p. 2; Gama to “Meu charo [José Ferreira de] Menezes,” São Paulo, 25 Dec. 1880, in *Gazeta do Povo*, 26 Dec. 1880, p. 2 (emph. for English in orig.; and cf. “Desideratum democratico” [by José Ferreira de Menezes], in *Gazeta da Tarde* [Rio de Janeiro], 2 Jan. 1881, p. 1).

citizens of the very states where those revolutions were believed to have triumphed. It would astound him to find that the case still needed to be made, in the United States, Brazil, and elsewhere, that black lives matter. The recrudescence of superstition and the cancerous persistence of racism—entangled in the making of twin U.S. and Brazilian presidencies in the late 2010s—would be similarly shocking to the self-taught lawyer, who had seen through both conceits as a young man and believed that their fatuousness should be universally apparent.

Gama's central cause—the democratic aim into which his four causes were woven—remains to be struggled for, then, nearly two hundred years after his birth. As bleak as present conditions may seem, they are positively cheery compared to the personal circumstances in which Gama began his political life, though one must acknowledge the twentieth century's erasure of the comforting certainties of natural law and unceasing progress. Now necessary, alongside the civil and political freedoms to which Gama and Paine dedicated their lives, are social rights of far greater reach than those to which Jacobin leaders grudgingly acceded or which *enragés* promised the *sans-culottes*, but essential to any imaginable democracy in our time. If human civilization is to have a future—indeed, if the conjugation of the two words is to be more than a sick joke—it would seem that the unity of these rights and freedoms must not only be fought for, but won.

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