I'LL SAMBA SOMEPLACE ELSE

ANDREW G. BRITT

A SPATIAL HISTORY OF RACE, ETHNICITY & DISPLACEMENT IN SÃO PAULO

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Cover art: Maps: (*top*) Mappa topographico do Municipio
de São Paulo, parte principal da cidade, Folha 36/24,
ca. 1930 (Museu Paulista); (*inset*) Mappa topographico
do Municipio de São Paulo, Folha 36, ca. 1930 (Museu
Paulista). Wikimedia Commons. Photo: "Stretch of
Parapuã Street." Photo archive of Célio Pires.

To Meredith

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Acknowledgments

This book is the outcome of fourteen years of research and writing. That sum sounds substantial, particularly when calculating its share of my life (one-third). At each phase of this project, however, I have grown more cognizant of the generations of contributors to the histories collected and narrated in this book. I am thankful to have engaged with the work of the historians (very broadly defined) invested in these pasts across generations and to have formed direct and meaningful relationships with multiple of those still living. I hope *I'll Samba Someplace Else* contributes to this collective body of work and the broad project of advancing reparative relationships between the present and our individual and collective pasts.

I feel fortunate to have pursued this project first at Emory University under the advisement of Jeffrey Lesser and Thomas D. Rogers. Lesser introduced me to the frenetic, magnetic city of São Paulo in 2013 at his Charme office. From then through the early research and into the present, he has helped to shepherd this project with an uncompromising commitment to unconventional thinking, uncovering original histories, and developing inventive methods of examining them. Thomas D. Rogers was the first to see this project in the form of a seminar paper. His perspicacious, meticulous, and appreciative approach to historical inquiry guided the project from its earliest stage through the present. Thank you for your mentorship, collaboration, and friendship.

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I hope this book serves as a tribute to the memory of my dad, Mike, who was an expert at telling stories that moved people, and my father-in-law, Mark, whose supreme love made so many people (myself included) feel alive and at home in the world. To the Frazier, Britt, Hubert, Dunlap, and Niblock families: Thank you for your care and encouragement over these fourteen years and beyond.

Meredith Frazier Britt decided to study abroad during college in Curitiba in 2006 and is, therefore, responsible for introducing me to Brazil. After her summer in Paraná, she told me, on somewhat of a whim, she thought we might live in Brazil in the future. Neither of us anticipated the incredible ways that Brazil would become a deep and meaningful part of our lives and those of our young children, Alex and Zannah (who loves making up words in "Por-ga-tcheez"), in the years since. Meredith and I realized her 2006 intuition in 2015–2016 by living in São Paulo and collaborating—formally and informally—on nearly all aspects of this project. Her partnership, support, and sacrifices made this book possible; her curiosity, knowledge, empathy, and sense of justice made it so much better. Thank you for twenty-three years of friendship, family, and love.

The Paradoxes of Ethnoracial Space

1958   Eu vou-me embora / Vou sambar n'outro lugar
(I'm out of here / I'll samba someplace else)

Composer Geraldo Filme repeated the same lines six times in succession: "I'm out of here / I'll samba someplace else."[1] Blending resignation and resolve, the lyrics concluded Filme's elegy to a place razed by municipal authorities in 1958 for the building of an asphalted avenue and concrete overpass in São Paulo's Barra Funda neighborhood. The full second verse of his composition, titled "I'll Samba Someplace Else," ran:

> An overpass rises, it's progress
> I can't protest
> Goodbye, to the cradle of samba
> I'm out of here
> I'll samba someplace else[2]

Known popularly as the Largo da Banana (Banana Square) and named for the commerce in fruit that took place here, this site is commonly remembered among African descendants in São Paulo as a center of samba, capoeira, and labor linked to the adjacent railway line.[3] Filme

frequented the Largo da Banana throughout his childhood in the 1930s and 1940s, a formative experience that would lead to a career as one of São Paulo's most influential samba composers and performers. Known affectionately as "Big Geraldo of Barra Funda," he would describe Barra Funda, along with São Paulo's Liberdade and Bexiga neighborhoods, as the city's "Black zone" (*zona do negro*).[4]

The second stanza of "I'll Samba Someplace Else" encapsulates the histories exhumed throughout this book. Indeed, while Filme's lyrics focused on the demolition of the Largo da Banana specifically, the destruction of that place was only one episode in a more expansive spatial history of burying and rebuilding São Paulo's "Black zone" throughout the mid-twentieth century. As Filme's lyrics imply, paved roadways dislocating a site significant to African descendants symbolized São Paulo–style progress in this era. From the 1930s to the 1980s, this type of redevelopment led to the asphalting of the city's early twentieth-century Black zone and paved the way—literally and figuratively—for the remaking of the neighborhoods of Liberdade and Bexiga into non-Black, immigrant enclaves. Residents displaced by this redevelopment, meanwhile, would reproduce that zone in the form of a "Little Africa" *someplace else.* Though seldom chronicled and sometimes altogether unacknowledged (particularly in academic literature), this spatial history sheds illuminating light on Brazil's most populous metropolis along with other ethnoracially diverse, highly stratified cities worldwide. And in key, perhaps unexpected, ways, the dynamics at play in São Paulo's mid-twentieth-century spatial history persist into the present.

THE PARADOXES

The temptation to characterize Brazilian social reality as defined by contradictions has captured the imaginations of many observers analyzing the country's distant and recent pasts. Some of the most prominent contradictions in analyses of contemporary Brazil include stark rates of social inequality, vast regional disparities, a political culture torn between authoritarianism and democracy, and urban landscapes divided between formal and informal cities.[5] Journalist and urbanist Tuca Vieira captured multiple of these contrasts in a now-iconic 2004 photo juxtaposing part of one of São Paulo's largest favelas, Paraísopo-

FIGURE I.1 · Tuca Vieira, *Paraisópolis*, 2004.

lis, and a luxury condominium complex in the Morumbi neighborhood (figure I.1). Initially printed on the front page of one of Brazil's most influential newspapers, *Folha de São Paulo*, the image circulated globally in the years following. Vieira found that some foreign observers did not believe the photo was real.[6] The "unbelievable" picture epitomized the contradictions at the core of Brazilian society, and the irresolvable—or at least perpetually unresolved—nature of those contradictions seemed to explain Brazil's persistent underdevelopment. Such contrasts were and are commonly seen as why, in other words, Brazil has failed to fulfill its potential as the so-called country of the future.[7]

Like others before it, this book also engages with contrasts in Brazil, specifically through the lens of that most intractable of contradictions, the paradox. I do not aim to show how contradictions have arrested Brazil's development, however. Instead, I advance a novel argument about the paradoxical nature of race/ethnicity and space that helps us to understand better the endurance of seemingly incompatible, yet stubbornly coeval, social realities. I develop this argument through the interwoven histories of three of São Paulo's most iconic ethnoracialized

neighborhoods: "Japanese" Liberdade, "Italian" Bexiga, and "African" Brasilândia (map I.1). From the mid-nineteenth century through the 1930s, Liberdade and Bexiga had two of the largest concentrations of residents of African descent in the city of São Paulo. They also possessed significant, in some cases sacred, sites linked to slavery, racial violence, the abolitionist movement, and Black self-determination. As noted above, samba composer and musician Geraldo Filme described these neighborhoods as key sites in São Paulo's early twentieth-century "Black zone."

An ambitious urban redevelopment scheme, led by urban planner-turned-mayor Francisco Prestes Maia, began reshaping the material and social geographies of Liberdade and Bexiga in the 1930s. Prestes Maia's project, known as the Avenues Plan, propelled extensive demolitions, higher property values, and the displacement of many local residents of African descent through the 1960s. Some dislocated residents migrated from the city center to the north of the Tietê River to a rural parish in the Cantareira Forest. There, they partnered with regional migrants to produce the neighborhood of Brasilândia, oftentimes independent of official city planners and other state authorities.

By the 1980s, Brasilândia had one of the highest concentrations of African descendants in the city and had become a locus of Black self-determination: a "Little Africa" or "Black territory," as some observers would describe it.[8] Meanwhile, in the same era, governmental authorities partnered with non-Black residents of Liberdade and Bexiga to transform the built environments of these neighborhoods to index Japanese and Italian ethnoracial identities. Bankrolled by state institutions and produced in part through the labor of ordinary residents, these twin ethnoracialization projects would fix the ethnoracial-spatial identities of "Japanese" Liberdade and "Italian" Bexiga in material space as well as popular and official discourse by the early 1980s.

The interwoven histories of Liberdade, Bexiga, and Brasilândia mirror the interlaced histories of populations of Japanese, Italian, and African descent in São Paulo and Brazil more broadly from the late nineteenth century through the present. Beginning in the nineteenth century, officials and powerful economic agents in São Paulo promoted Italian and then Japanese immigration as the means for a profitable transition from enslaved to wage labor. Newcomers from the Italian peninsula and Japan would replace Africans and African descendants on plantations in the province and later state of São Paulo, where a
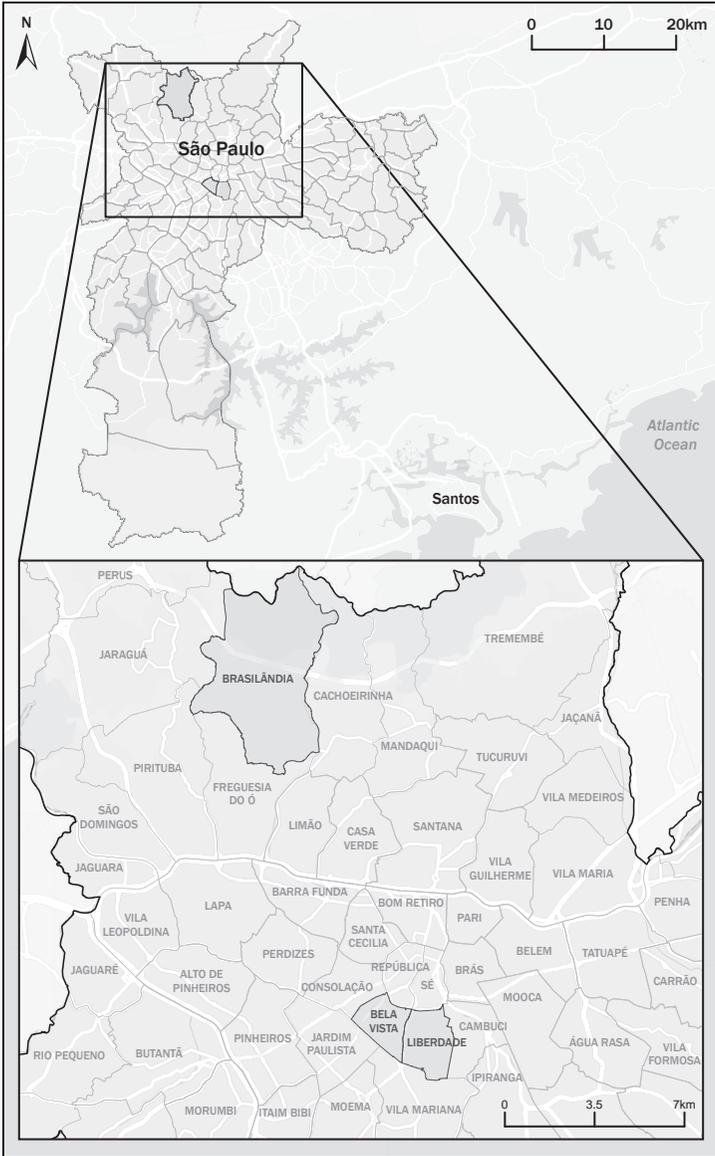
MAP I.1 · City of São Paulo by district with Brasilândia, Liberdade, and Bela Vista highlighted, 2024. Data sources: GeoSampa; OpenStreetMap (Light Gray Canvas) © OpenStreetMap contributors, Microsoft, Facebook, Google, Esri Community Maps contributors, map layer by Esri. Map by Andrew G. Britt.

nineteenth-century coffee boom had helped to concentrate the nation's largest enslaved workforce.[9] São Paulo elites also promoted Italian and Japanese immigration as a means to dilute the genetic, phenotypical, and cultural Africanness of the nation through policies they referred to as whitening (*branqueamento*).[10]

Those policies would help to fuel a powerful thread of São Paulo exceptionalism that positioned the city, which was the emerging industrial and financial capital of the country in the early twentieth century, as distinct from the rest of Brazil and especially its long-recognized hubs of African and African-descendent culture, Salvador in Bahia and Rio de Janeiro.[11] The whitening project, and the myth of whiteness that it helped to sustain, would be both pursued and contested through geographic space throughout the twentieth century, including through the construction and reproduction of these three exceptional neighborhoods.

I encountered multiple generative puzzles in the course of weaving together the cohesive, linear narrative outlined in the preceding paragraphs. I found two of these puzzles paradoxical, in the sense that their seemingly irresolvable, contradictory nature points, to me, toward broader conclusions about the relationships between ethnoracial identity, inequality, and urban space in São Paulo and beyond. These two paradoxes serve as bookends to the project.

The first paradox concerns the demographic composition of "African" Brasilândia, "Japanese" Liberdade, and "Italian" Bexiga. Despite the singular ethnoracial identities attached to them, each neighborhood possessed multiethnic, multiracial populations throughout the twentieth century. In fact, demographic evidence suggests that Japanese and Italian immigrants and their descendants did not make up even a majority of neighborhood residents in the 1970s and 1980s, when official projects transformed these neighborhoods into "Japanese" and "Italian" spaces. It is plausible that Japanese and Italian immigrants and immigrant descendants did not, in fact, constitute a majority of the neighborhoods' populations *at any point* in the twentieth century. Brasilândia, similarly, has had nearly as many non-Black as Black residents since its formal establishment in 1947. If the ethnoracial-spatial constructions associated with each neighborhood correlated only loosely to the ethnoracial composition of neighborhood residents, then how—and, crucially, *why*—did these specific, singular ethnoracial identities become attached to these urban spaces? Answering this question animated

much of the research for this project and ultimately led to the second paradox, which forms the central argument of the book.

The second paradox engages one of the most significant and enduring contradictions in contemporary Brazil: the coexistence of a postracial ideology that emphasizes interracial harmony, mixture, and equality alongside a racialized social structure of endemic inequality, anti-Black violence, and anti-Blackness. Generations of researchers, as well as activists and organizers, have puzzled over the coexistence of these competing, constitutive elements of Brazilian social reality.[12] Some of the most influential work in this century has advanced precise social scientific analyses that detail high rates of racialized inequalities and violence in multiple social domains, from health and housing to education and employment.[13] Following in the footsteps of earlier generations of researchers and activists, such studies have cast convincing and quantified doubt on the discourse of racial harmony in Brazil, famously articulated as the ideology of "racial democracy."[14] These studies have also served as support for novel federal programs designed to promote racial equality in the twenty-first century. Postracialism, nonetheless, remains a powerful, consequential ideological force in the twenty-first century in Brazil and other highly stratified societies shaped by slavery and its afterlives, including the United States.

THE ARGUMENTS

I'll Samba Someplace Else contributes to this multigenerational body of work by arguing that the reproduction of urban space in mid-twentieth-century São Paulo helped to reproduce ethnoracialized social inequalities while, simultaneously and paradoxically, also structuring postracialist discourses. I advance this argument through three principal points that weave throughout the book.

First, anti-Black violence shaped spatial change in São Paulo through dispossession, demolitions, displacement, and disinvestment during a pivotal period of the city's development and amid the ascendance and increasing contestation of the ideology of "racial democracy." For some readers, this argument may seem unsurprising, perhaps even banal. Indeed, African descendants in São Paulo have long made this critique and in myriad forms, from scholarly work and creative nonfiction to popular music. Readers will find many examples of their critiques

chronicled throughout this book. Nonetheless, this critical position has largely remained on the margins of mainstream academic and official discourses about the spatial history of São Paulo, especially, though not exclusively, in texts written in English.[15] One central objective of this project, therefore, has been to analyze the significance of anti-Blackness and urban space by locating evidence and employing methods considered authoritative in mainstream academic and official discourse.

I offer, for instance, granular though revealing archival evidence that anti-Blackness influenced the planning and execution of São Paulo's seminal twentieth-century redevelopment program, the Avenues Plan. I employ historical mapping methods to show how urban redevelopment negatively impacted neighborhoods with some of the largest populations of African descent in the city. Through oral histories I document the circulation of a racist neighborhood nickname that structured popular prejudices against Brasilândia, which by the 1980s had both one of the highest concentrations of African descendants and one of the largest populations of any district in São Paulo. I show, relatedly, that Brasilândia was among the São Paulo neighborhoods hardest hit by municipal disinvestment in the twentieth century. Such histories illuminate how anti-Blackness shaped the spatial development of twentieth-century São Paulo in consequential and enduring ways. This research thus confirms and builds on critiques about the salience of anti-Blackness in São Paulo's spatial history. The broad contours of those critiques, again, did not originate with me.

Second, some African descendants in São Paulo confronted an environment of racialized inequality and anti-Black violence, along with an official ideology of postracialism, through a distinctive set of practices that reproduced space and that were informed by a distinctive set of conceptions of space. Embodied, material practices in physical space and theoretical conceptions of space exist in a dialectical relationship and therefore constitute a spatial praxis. I term the distinctive spatial praxis developed by some African descendants in São Paulo as the *spatial praxis of belonging-as-being*.[16]

This particular spatial praxis was shaped by the racialized social and spatial dynamics of the city of São Paulo from the early twentieth century to the present. For Black residents of São Paulo, avoiding violent and unnatural corporeal death has been, as anthropologist Jaime Alves has persuasively chronicled, an ever-present struggle.[17] Their spatial praxis in what Alves has termed "the anti-Black city," however,

transcended base survival alone. Some African descendants linked survival—the ontological condition of being—to belonging *in* and *to* place. This spatial praxis secured the material foundations for survival and, at times, Black self-determination, while also asserting a claim of belonging and being in a city where officials had communicated anti-Black nonbelonging and nonbeing in multiple ways. While the context of São Paulo helped to shape the unique contours of this praxis, the praxis also drew on epistemologies of space perhaps particular to, and seemingly particularly prominent among, African descendants in Brazil. I develop this point further in the remainder of this section and the one that follows about leading Black theorist Beatriz Nascimento, who, I argue, articulated key aspects of the spatial praxis of belonging-as-being before me.

Repossession and rebuilding—discernible in Geraldo Filme's declaration, "I'm out of here / I'll samba someplace else"—lay at the core of this praxis. The vast spatial transformations in the city of São Paulo at midcentury, changes in part unleashed by the Avenues Plan, made repossession and rebuilding a necessity for many Paulistanos, especially those African descendants in neighborhoods that had been hard hit by dispossession and demolition. To echo the argument from the first point above: Dispossession and demolition were not indiscriminate. Through officials' choices of where to concentrate redevelopment, along with their rhetoric about those projects, spaces, and the bodies within them, officials sometimes asserted that Black Paulistanos did not belong in the city (anti-Blackness). The extension of that argument was that Black Paulistanos did not exist in the city: São Paulo was, in other words, a non-Black, ethnically immigrant metropolis (non-Blackness). Brasilândia was one particularly significant, though not singular, "someplace else" that African descendants in São Paulo rebuilt in the wake of the dislocations caused by this marginalizing, anti-Black urban redevelopment.

The maintenance of ties to ancestors and the ancestral also figured centrally in the spatial praxis of belonging-as-being. I show in chapter 1, for instance, that dislocated residents of African descent likely chose Brasilândia for repossession and rebuilding because the surrounding parish had deep ties to enslaved and freed African descendants in the nineteenth century. Those ties manifested notably in the toponym, or place-name, of the main road through the region: Congo Road. Popularly given in the early nineteenth century if not before, Congo Road

would endure until 1960, when São Paulo's mayor agreed to requests from non-Black residents of the region to replace the name. Memory of Congo Road would persist, however, including among the founders of a roots samba group in Brasilândia (established in 2011) who named their new collective Samba do Congo after the roadway. Earlier and later generations of African descendants similarly sought to sustain or forge ancestral ties through place-names as a part of this spatial praxis.

The final principal element of this praxis was ethnoracial inclusion. While some African descendants in São Paulo contested anti-Blackness through claims of belonging and being specific to their lived experiences, the vision that many advanced of who had the *right* to belong—at the scale of local institutions, neighborhoods, or the city as a whole—often included those not of African descent. This inclusive vision reflected, and likely was influenced by, the ethnoracial diversity of the city's neighborhoods, including Brasilândia, which, again, despite having one of the largest concentrations of African descendants in the city of São Paulo in the 1980s, still had upward of a 45 percent non-Black population.[18] One of the complicated results of this inclusive posture, I surmise, was that it helped to sustain the sociospatial foundations and ideological consonance of postracial discourses.

Third, the production of "Japanese" Liberdade and "Italian" Bexiga established what I term an *ethnoracialized infrastructure* that, paradoxically, both bolstered postracial discourses and deepened racialized inequalities. Produced through official and grassroots spatial practices, the publicly funded construction of this infrastructure transformed the built environments of Liberdade and Bexiga from the 1960s to 1980s. The changes introduced an array of features designed to index Japanese and Italian ethnoracial identities, such as cherry blossom lanterns, lampposts colored in the Italian flag, and Samurai-themed sidewalks. The resulting neighborhoods appeared as seemingly natural and timeless ethnic enclaves: material manifestations of supposedly organic settlement patterns among Japanese and Italian immigrants and their descendants that reflected high-prestige, non-Black immigrant identities. The ethnoracialized neighborhoods thus served as a concrete representation of the city's supposedly unique capacity for harmonious—though, crucially, non-Black—ethnoracial mixture. The ethnoracialization projects left few material remains from the neighborhoods' central position in São Paulo's "Black zone" in prior generations. In doing so, they contributed to rendering African descendants

less visible in the city of São Paulo: neither belonging nor being in its past, present, or future.

While these ethnoracialization projects established a material foundation of support for postracial discourses, they also participated in the reproduction of racialized inequalities in the city. That inequality was not just symbolic—about the valorization, again, of high-prestige immigrant identities over Black identity, for instance—though such racial hierarchies were and remain, of course, significant. Instead, the inequalities created through these projects were concrete, tactile, and visible: public funds supporting an ethnoracialized infrastructure of urban services and amenities—public illumination, sidewalks, parks, libraries, and more—rare in most São Paulo neighborhoods through much of the mid-twentieth century and *least* prevalent in places like Brasilândia. The ethnoracialized infrastructure created in these neighborhoods thus served to reproduce racialized spatial inequalities between neighborhoods and displace the bodies and material histories of African descendants while, simultaneously, serving as tactile support for popular, enduring discourses about São Paulo's racialized particularity specifically and Brazil's supposedly unique brand of harmonious ethnoracial mixture more broadly.

Together, these arguments offer insights into a few pivotal questions from São Paulo's past and present, including how the provincial capital of one of racialized chattel slavery's final frontiers in the Americas in the late nineteenth century became commonly and, to some, convincingly represented as a non-Black, immigrant metropolis by the mid-twentieth.[19] I show that the reproduction of space, particularly though, again, not exclusively in these three neighborhoods, helped to engender this transformation. The reproduction of Liberdade as "Japanese" and Bexiga as "Italian" from the 1930s to the 1980s helped to demarcate São Paulo in material form as a non-Black, ethnically immigrant metropolis: (seemingly) racially egalitarian yet also fundamentally distinct from the (supposed) true urban hearts of Africa in Brazil, Salvador, and Rio de Janeiro.

The displacement of African descendants to São Paulo's geographic margins deepened racialized inequalities and further excluded Black Paulistanos from certain spaces in the city. Official ethnoracialization projects in the years following exacerbated those inequalities by furnishing a substantial public investment in the creation of non-Black, ethnically immigrant neighborhoods and continuing disinvestment in

places like Brasilândia. *I'll Samba Someplace Else* thus challenges representations of São Paulo as a non-Black city by detailing how spatialized anti-Blackness contributed to the construction and concretization of this mythic representation itself.

The book also challenges representations of São Paulo as a non-Black city by recentering African descendants in the city's spatial history in the mid-twentieth century. A rich body of work has chronicled the lives of Black Paulistanos from earlier in the century, especially from the 1910s to 1937, when the Black press and associative life flourished and Black intellectuals founded seminal organizations, such as Brazil's first Black political party, the Brazilian Black Front (Frente Negra Brasileira, FNB). Headquartered in Liberdade, the FNB was forced to close after the declaration of the New State in 1937 and the outlawing of all political parties. The Unified Black Movement (MNU), founded in São Paulo in 1978 in the midst of Brazil's military dictatorship (1964–85), would help to reignite organized antiracist activism and mobilization throughout the country.[20]

I'll Samba Someplace Else contributes to our understanding of the years between the two eras of formal Black movement organizing and advances an expansive conception of the term *movement* itself.[21] Attending carefully to geographic space, this conception foregrounds the displacement of African descendants spurred by urban redevelopment in between the two seminal periods of antiracist organizing (1910s–1930s and 1978 onward) as well as the African-descendent migrants who moved to, settled in, and produced places like Brasilândia. Following their migrations and the someplace(s) else they created helps to recenter African descendants, particularly those outside the Black middle class or elite, in a period when antiracist critique and expressions of Black identity were challenged by powerful, at times repressive, promotion of ideologies of postracialism.[22] Foregrounding this history of displacement and resettlement also invites greater attention to Black self-determination as a spatial praxis, in São Paulo and beyond.

The history of producing Brasilândia is emblematic of this spatial praxis. Little published research about Brasilândia exists in English or Portuguese.[23] Several factors have obscured the recording of Brasilândia's past. A hub of informality since its settlement, Brasilândia was founded, and largely grew, off the map. The neighborhood concentrated some of the city of São Paulo's first favelas, the informal urban settlement common throughout Brazil. By the 1970s, Brasilândia would

have the largest number of favelas in the city. Because Brasilândia was settled informally, written sources about its development are not readily accessible in São Paulo's historical archives. The textual documentation I located about Brasilândia, combined with other ethnographic sources and spatial history methodologies, provides revealing insights into the neighborhood's past. Popular stigma has also kept the history of Brasilândia largely unwritten. When the name of the place appears in São Paulo's popular press, commentators frequently depict it as a hub of poverty, violence, and crime.[24] That stigma is discernibly racialized, a fact that I first discerned in warnings from strangers that my whiteness would make me unsafe in the neighborhood. Chapter 4 details the construction of this racialized stigma—which ran parallel to, and was contested by, the "Little Africa" ascription—in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The individuals and narratives I follow throughout the book aim to disrupt the popular misconceptions about this place and its residents. Those misconceptions continue to structure racial prejudices and inequalities through the present.

While *I'll Samba Someplace Else* centers on the spatialization of African, Japanese, and Italian ethnoracial identities specifically, the population of the city of São Paulo has long included, of course, many ethnoracial groups. Among these varied groups, the experiences of Indigenous peoples have closely paralleled and, in some cases, directly intersected with the same of African descendants. Readers will note those parallels and intersections at multiple instances throughout the book, including in the context of historical practices of enslavement and contemporary practices of dispossession (many of which affected Indigenous and African-descent peoples in these three neighborhoods).

Some readers will also recognize that the construction of the myth of São Paulo as a non-Black, immigrant metropolis mirrors misrepresentations of São Paulo as a non-Indigenous city. Researchers and activists, including prominent Indigenous leaders, have worked to contest this process of erasure.[25] Their arguments build on the precolonial and early colonial Indigenous origins of the settlement of São Paulo, whose first official designation, São Paulo dos Campos de Piratininga, retained the Indigenous toponym for the region. Their arguments also commonly contest the enduring misconceptions that Indigenous populations were entirely disappeared in the colonial period through genocide or assimilation and that all Indigenous people live only in rural villages or other

nonurban contexts. Demographic data provides quantified support for these observations. On federal censuses since 1991, the city of São Paulo has consistently had one of the largest Indigenous populations (in absolute terms) of any city in Brazil.[26] The city also has multiple federally designated Indigenous territories, including one in the Jaraguá district, which sits adjacent to Brasilândia.

One of the leading academic voices to counter representations of São Paulo as a non-Black *and* non-Indigenous city has been Casé Angatu (also known as Carlos José Ferreira dos Santos), an Indigenous scholar with specializations in history, architecture, and urbanism. In 1998 Angatu published *Not Everything Was Italian: São Paulo and Poverty, 1890–1915*, a seminal work tracking the quotidian lives, livelihoods, and cultural practices of non-White Brazilian populations, especially African descendants, in the city at the turn of the twentieth century.[27] By foregrounding these groups, Angatu's book counters the supremacy of ethnically immigrant, and especially Italian, populations and culture in popular and academic narratives about the city. Angatu's recent works have more even directly illuminated the presence of Indigenous people, past and present, in São Paulo and beyond.[28]

I'll Samba Someplace Else builds on works like *Not Everything Was Italian* by showing how the transformation of the city's ethnoracialized geography in the middle of the twentieth century intersected with Indigenous peoples and places. This book does not, however, offer a comprehensive analysis of Indigenous peoples and spaces in contemporary São Paulo or those groups' sociospatial relationships with African descendants. Historians of Latin America have made recent and significant contributions on these topics, including Brazilianists writing about both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I expect other researchers will continue to advance this scholarship, including, hopefully, in the context of the city of São Paulo itself.[29]

———

1989 Onde estou, eu sou
(Where I am [in space], I am [I exist])

A scene late in the 1989 film *Orí*—a collaboration between African descendant historian, philosopher, activist, and poet Beatriz Nascimento and film director Raquel Gerber—opens with an aerial shot of São Paulo's urban landscape.[30] A text overlay reads, "Saracura Valley, Bixiga,

São Paulo." The camera begins to rotate around one street corner below, anchored by the headquarters of the Vai-Vai samba school but also encompassing buzzing traffic on the nearby July 9 Avenue. Nascimento narrates this view, her voice crisp above the helicopter's hum:

> Quilombo is a history. This word has a history. It also has a typology according to region and according to chronology. Your relationship to your territory. It is important to see that today the quilombo is for us no longer a geographic territory, but a territory at the level of a symbology. We are people, we have the right to the territory, to the land. Many parts of my history tell me that I have the right to the space that I occupy in the nation. This is what Palmares was telling us. I have the right to the space that I occupy within this system, within this nation, within this geographic limit that is the captaincy of Pernambuco. The land is my quilombo, my space is my quilombo. Where I am (*estou*), I am (*estou*). Where I am (*estou*), I am (*sou*).[31]

Here Nascimento draws on her research on *quilombos*, or communities created by enslaved people fleeing from captivity, in Brazil and Angola in the 1970s and 1980s. She theorized the *quilombo* as more than a material place or settlement. In Nascimento's conception, Christen Smith explains, *quilombo* was "also a verb—the ideological practice of encampment against the oppression of slavery." Nascimento defined slavery broadly as a condition encompassing "racialized poverty, the disparagement of Black aesthetics, urban segregation, and the erasure of history," or what more recent scholars have termed the "afterlives of slavery."[32] She argued that favelas were a contemporary manifestation of *quilombos*, and through historical mapping she aimed to document how favelas in the twentieth century sat in the same geographical locations as historical *quilombos*.[33]

   Of all the potential places throughout Brazil (or beyond) that Nascimento and Gerber might have chosen for this shot in *Orí*, why did they select Bexiga and the Saracura valley, in particular? Would not another, more well-known site—remnants of the Palmares kingdom in the state of Alagoas, the Pelourinho neighborhood in Salvador, or the "Little Africa" region of Rio de Janeiro, to choose three iconic examples—better represent the sociospatial critique and interwoven claims of African-descended belonging and being that Nascimento

articulates? What spatial histories of *this* place compelled them to anchor this shot in this corner of Bexiga? The answer lay, in part, beneath that buzzing traffic on July 9 Avenue in a demolished place called Saracura.

Founded as a *quilombo* in the nineteenth century, Saracura was, by the early twentieth century, considered a neighborhood. At that time, Saracura likely had the largest concentration of African descendants in the city of São Paulo. The execution of the Avenues Plan in the 1930s, specifically the construction of July 9 Avenue, involved the demolition of Saracura and displacement of residents. Not unlike the Largo da Banana, this corner of the Saracura Valley thus symbolized the demolitions, dispossession, dislocation, and asphalting of spaces significant to African descendants throughout twentieth-century São Paulo.[34] Such erasure was perhaps especially acute at the time of *Orí's* release, coming on the heels of a state-sponsored Italianization campaign to transform the ethnoracial identity associated with the neighborhood. At the same time, the endurance of the headquarters of Vai-Vai, which remained at this site through the early 2020s, symbolized Black self-determination and the preservation of the histories and identities of African descendants in São Paulo and beyond.[35] The shot therefore captured, in short, some of the core paradoxes that structure ethnoracialized inequality in Brazil and that necessitated the spatial praxis of belonging-as-being that Nascimento here conveys.

MAPPING ETHNORACIAL SPACE IN "POSTRACIAL" SOCIETIES

This book analyzes the intersection of two discrete, though often related, processes: the production of space and the construction of ethnoracialized social difference.[36] I see the product of those intersecting processes—ethnoracial space—as a discursive and material spatial-identity construct that structures unequal social relationships. I examine ethnoracial space most commonly at the scale of the neighborhood, though similar constructions at both more localized and broader geographic frames also factor into my analysis.[37]

Prior work on urban space and race/ethnicity, much of it also often focused on the neighborhood scale, has frequently centered on North American and European cities and detailed how ethnoracial spaces result from either racist segregation or immigrant networks in so-called ethnic

enclaves. The former paradigm, centered on a Black/White conception of racialized difference, often privileges the role of institutional and state actors in enacting racist spatial programs that typically result in Black or White neighborhoods.[38] The latter, "ethnic enclaves" approach often focuses on immigrant ethnicity and deemphasizes the role of the state in favor of nonstate actors such as "ethnic entrepreneurs," whose principally economic activities (the framework holds) help to form seemingly homogenous and naturally occurring immigrant enclaves.[39]

The creation of ethnoracial space at the neighborhood scale in mid-twentieth-century São Paulo calls for an approach that integrates and transcends these frameworks. This approach holds ethnoracial space as neither naturally occurring nor the incidental byproduct of more significant, first-order factors such as immigrant and migrant settlement patterns.[40] From regions to neighborhoods, ethnoracial space was reproduced over time through specific, identifiable spatial practices and projects in contingent processes that involved contested negotiations between, perhaps most prominently, local residents and officials.[41] These practices and projects had a markedly relational character. As I elucidate in chapter 5, for example, "Japanese" Liberdade was constructed from the 1960s to the 1980s in relation and even direct opposition to representations of Liberdade as part of São Paulo's "Black zone" from earlier in the century as well as the then-contemporary migration of non-White Northeasterners into the neighborhood. Such dynamics require us to analyze the development of "Japanese" Liberdade and comparable ethnoracialized places as relational constructs produced in contact with and, quite often, in contrast to (in this case) non-Japanese social identities as well as spaces outside of Liberdade.

As noted in my discussion of the first paradox above, ethnoracialized spaces representing a singular group were also produced in spite of ethnoracially diverse resident populations. To be sure, the ethnoracial identities of local residents in ethnoracialized spaces bore some relationship to the identity commonly associated with a space. I have yet to encounter, for instance, a "Little Italy" that did not have at least some history of settlement by Italian immigrants and their descendants. However, the link between the demographic composition of a place and the identity attached to it is rarely clear-cut. Stated differently: The settlement of Italian immigrants and their descendants in a neighborhood accounts for only part of the explanation for the ethnoracialization of that neighborhood as "Italian."

My understanding of ethnoracial space encompasses both discursive and physical constructions. The former includes how ordinary residents and, at times, officials describe ethnoracialized neighborhoods, including by designating them as "Japanese" Liberdade, "Italian" Bexiga, and "African" Brasilândia. Physical constructions representative of such ethnoracial identities also figure centrally in the production of ethnoracial spaces. Sometimes the architects of ethnoracial spaces designed them with the explicit intent to index a certain ethnoracial group, such as in the Samurai-themed sidewalks that line Liberdade. At other times, seemingly mundane features of a city's built environment—ones that, on their surface, have no readily apparent relationship to race/ethnicity— can acquire a meaningful and widely held ethnoracialized significance apart from their planners' original intent.

Attending to ethnoracialized physical constructions asks us to take seriously how social identities can become fixed—even if momentarily and impermanently—in material space. This approach, in other words, invites us to pay closer attention to the tactile significance of "construction" in our understanding of ethnoracial identities as social constructions.[42] While social identities are, of course, produced through regimes of classification and performance (to take two examples), they can also be tangibly constructed—and, in the process, disembodied— through material features of the built environment. Though neither permanent nor unmovable, such constructions are stable, durable, and, at times, structural. These qualities enable ethnoracial space—and, more specifically, what I term an ethnoracialized infrastructure—to do consequential work reshaping material conditions, ideologies, and social relationships.

This conception of ethnoracial space and its significance has particular relevance to (supposedly) postracial societies. Researchers Brooke Neely and Michelle Samura make this case when they write: "At a time when the term 'post-racial' is used to signal a supposed decline in the significance of race, a spatial perspective can provide a particularly useful lens and language for locating and understanding persistent racial processes."[43] Neely and Samura focus on the twenty-first-century United States in their work, specifically the rise of postracial discourses following the 2008 election of Barack Obama to the US presidency. While such discourses have gone mainstream in the United States in the late twentieth and especially early twenty-first centuries, Brazilian state officials, academics, and ordinary citizens alike have asserted and

contested representations of Brazil as a postracial society for nearly a century. Thus, while Neely and Samura's perspective has clear relevance for our analysis of contemporary geographic landscapes in places like the United States, we can also find instructive antecedents in the socio-spatial histories of mid-twentieth-century Brazil.

The substance of and rationale supporting discourses of Brazil as a postracial society have varied across time and space. All have emphasized the relative insignificance of racialized social difference in Brazil in comparison with social class and, quite often, in contrast to the other former major slave society of the hemisphere, the United States.[44] Other prominent elements in discourses of postracialism in Brazil have included: a celebration of proximity between racial groups, racial mixture (through miscegenation and/or culture), and, at times, an imagined meta-Brazilian race; assertions about the lack of racial animus, anti-Black prejudice, and discrimination in Brazilian society; and arguments about equality between different racialized groups.[45] The prominence of these discursive threads in mid-twentieth-century Brazil, and especially São Paulo, lead me to describe the country as a "postracial" society. By doing so, I do not imply that Brazil was an actually existing postracial society in the mid-twentieth century, before, or since. Instead, I employ this term to describe a context in which individuals in an array of social positions took postracial discourses seriously, including by advancing policies designed to realize postracial ideals or taking actions under the assumption that Brazil was indeed already a postracial society.

Space has occupied a central, though somewhat ambiguous, role in analyses of racial inequity in Brazil. In one of the most influential works on twentieth-century São Paulo, anthropologist Teresa Caldeira has argued that, by the 1970s and 1980s, São Paulo had become a highly segregated "city of walls." Caldeira attends to the racialized nature of this phenomena in her analysis, though social class forms the basis of the segregation she deftly charts.[46] Caldeira's analysis indeed aligns with conclusions from common measurements of racial segregation in contemporary Brazilian cities. One of the most common methods used to measure racial segregation, the Dissimilarity Index, compares the ethnoracial composition of a single census tract with the entire city. The discrepancy between these measurements generates a value between 0 and 100, with values closer to 100 indicating a higher degree of racial segregation. In 1980, São Paulo had a value of 37 for Black-White segregation based on the Dissimilarity Index.[47] This value positioned São Paulo in a four-way tie with Rio de

Janeiro, Porto Alegre, and Belém for *least segregated* among the ten most populous metropolitan regions in Brazil. Aside from Salvador in Bahia, which had a value of 48, the range among the other nine most populous metropolitan regions was only four points (37–41).[48] These data indicate that, aside from Salvador, Brazil's most populous cities exhibited a similar degree of residential segregation in 1980.

Such conditions contrast sharply with the eight most populous metropolitan regions in the United States in 1980. None of the eight fell below 73 (the value in Detroit), three ranked above 80 (Los Angeles, Baltimore, and Philadelphia), and Chicago led the ranking at 92.[49] Such comparisons seem to indicate that racial segregation in Brazil is comparatively mild and not a determinative factor in structuring ethnoracial inequalities. Space, in other words, seems to be one of the arenas in which Brazil appears closest to an actually existing postracial society. An extension of this conclusion might be that if we want to understand racialized social inequality in Brazil, we should concentrate our analysis on more determinative factors, such as access to education, employment opportunities, health, etc.

I do not, unsurprisingly, adopt this position. I present it, nonetheless, in order to illustrate how sophisticated analyses of space, informed by racial demographic data rare throughout most of twentieth-century Brazil, can support a view of Brazil as a postracial society. The production of space is, I argue, one of the most significant and convincing ways through which the myth of postracialism is supported. At the same time, I document how space has played a determinative role in structuring social inequalities in urban Brazil as in societies like the United States.[50] Those patterns might appear less obvious because spatialized racial inequality can manifest differently across space and time. This point echoes the assertion of sociologist Edward Telles that "racial segregation in Brazil is not self-apparent and requires systematic measurement." Telles proceeds to prescribe an analysis that "neither imposes assumptions from systems of legalized black-white segregation like the United States and South Africa, nor embraces the racial democracy ideology, which obscures a true understanding of how race and class operate in Brazil."[51]

I provide examples of how spatialized racial inequalities manifest differently in Brazil compared to other contexts, including in the three neighborhoods at the core of this study. Though distinct from patterns in cities in the United States, these alternative geographies and topographies of segregation still structure racialized social inequalities.

I also suggest that residential segregation and racialized displacement are not the only means through which race and space manifest or produce inequality. Ethnoracialized space, which, again, does not hinge in Brazil on ethnoracial uniformity at the neighborhood level, also plays a significant role in structuring racialized inequalities. Though framed by the history of São Paulo, the insights gleaned from the histories of these neighborhoods speak directly to highly stratified, ethnoracially diverse cities beyond Brazil. They shed particular light on the consequential, thorny relationships between space and race in (supposedly) postracial urban contexts across the globe.

MEASURING SPACE AND RACE

There is a crucial distinction between the categories of *neighborhood*, *subdistrict*, and *district* in São Paulo. The primary subjects of this book are neighborhoods, yet neighborhoods in the city of São Paulo possess no official definition by the municipal government.[52] They are, instead, fluid sociospatial constructs produced through everyday spatial practices, large-scale projects, and much more. In the twentieth century, São Paulo was officially organized by districts and subdistricts, which often shared the same names as neighborhoods. For example, the neighborhoods of Brasilândia, Liberdade, and Bexiga are distinct from, but located within, the districts of Brasilândia, Liberdade, and Bela Vista (map I.1 and table I.1). To confuse matters further, these classifications change over time. Liberdade and Bela Vista have been districts since the early twentieth century. Brasilândia, by contrast, changed from a neighborhood into a subdistrict and ultimately a district during the mid-twentieth century. Given that neighborhoods are the central subjects of my analysis, I often omit the word *neighborhood* itself when discussing Brasilândia, Liberdade, or Bexiga. I include the word *district* when I refer to that category of official space instead of the neighborhood. Readers will note, in addition, that throughout the book I use quotations when describing the ethnoracialized identities of these neighborhoods, as in: "African" Brasilândia, "Japanese" Liberdade, and "Italian" Bexiga. I do so in order to emphasize that these are sociospatial constructs and to avoid reifying them as natural, essential, or timeless.

Above, I argue that the demographic composition of a neighborhood plays only a part in determining the ethnoracial identity attached

TABLE I.1 · Population Change by District and Subdistrict

	POPULATION BY YEAR							
	1934	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1991	2000
Liberdade	39,726	43,795	55,523	68,210	71,503	82,472	76,245	61,875
Bela Vista	43,861	47,440	46,340	57,364	64,704	85,416	71,825	63,190
Nossa Senhora do Ó	7,866	13,436	17,487	45,002	103,908	150,578	152,672	144,923
Brasilândia	-	-	19,329*	49,743*	114,855*	166,441*	201,591	247,328

Sources:
IBGE, *Censos Demográficos* (1940–2000); Azevedo, *A Cidade*, vol. II (1934), 232; *População e taxas anuais de crescimento: Município de São Paulo, subprefeituras e distritos municipais, 1950–2022*, elaborado por SMUL/GEOINFO com dados do Censo Demográfico do IBGE, Prefeitura Municipal de São Paulo, https://drive.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/cidade/secretarias/upload/chamadas/314-02_censo_r5-sub-distr_pop-abs_var-rel_1950-2022_final_1715805137.htm (accessed January 16, 2026).
*Brasilândia was a subdistrict in these years and part of the Nossa Senhora do Ó district.

to that space. However, a key facet of mapping ethnoracial space is to establish *some* understanding of how residents in a neighborhood self-identify according to categories such as race and ethnicity. The force of postracial ideologies in twentieth-century Brazil, combined with the fluidity of neighborhood boundaries and other archival challenges, make this aspect of mapping ethnoracial space a complicated endeavor. Demographic data about the ethnoracial composition of districts in mid-twentieth-century São Paulo is quite challenging to locate or to generate. These challenges owe both to the methods by which race has been measured in Brazil's federal censuses throughout the twentieth century and the small scale of the district level.

Brazil's censuses do not track race on the universal questionnaire, which collects data on all citizens, but instead on the complementary questionnaire, which samples only a segment of the population. Access to the source data—not just the summary conclusions—from the complementary questionnaire is necessary to calculate demographic data on race at the district level. For censuses before 1960, the source data from the complementary questionnaires has been lost. For the

1960 census, the source data is available; however, census authorities sampled only 5 percent of the population for the complementary questionnaire. That small of a sample size prevents us from computing ethnoracial identification at the district level with a sufficient degree of statistical confidence. In 1970, authorities expanded the scope of the complementary questionnaire, applying it to 25 percent of the population. However, Brazil's military regime in 1970 omitted race from the census based on the logic that Brazil was a postracial society and thus did not require such data collection.[53]

Race was reinstated in the 1980 census, and the complementary questionnaire from that year sampled 25 percent of the population. The source data from the complementary questionnaire is still available, and researchers from the University of São Paulo's Centro de Estudos das Metrópoles (CEM) have conducted the harmonization of the 1980 census data, a key step in demographic research. The 1980 census provides the earliest dataset, therefore, with information both usable and directly relevant to this book. That information figures centrally into chapter 5, which tracks the official ethnoracialization projects for Liberdade and Bexiga. Ideally, we would have data from prior censuses to capture a longitudinal view of how the ethnoracial composition of these neighborhoods has changed over time. The challenges outlined above, however, prevent us from gleaning such a view through the federal census. To address this limitation, throughout the book I draw on other sources of qualitative and quantitative information that illustrate the ethnoracial characteristics of a neighborhood's population. I foreground these sources throughout the text so that the reader can track the evidentiary and methodological basis for the narratives and arguments I advance.

METHODS OF SPATIAL HISTORY

This project draws from eighteen months of research in São Paulo between 2015 and 2016, along with shorter research trips from 2012 to 2023, that concentrated on archival research, oral histories, and digital historical mapping. Influenced by critical theorists of the production of space, I organized my research on these ethnoracialized neighborhoods into three categories: *material constructions*, such as "Japanese"-themed streetscapes in Liberdade; *representations*, such as an annotated map from São Paulo's Department of Urbanism; and *lived experiences*, such

as a musician's memories of founding a samba school in Brasilândia. Sources from these three categories enabled me to chart how officials and local residents planned and reproduced "African" Brasilândia, "Japanese" Liberdade, and "Italian" Bexiga over time.

Throughout the book I analyze these spatial histories with a theory of planning praxis that brings together the two major drivers of the city of São Paulo's urbanization: official city planning and the production of informal settlements. Scholars have produced extensive studies on both in Brazil, especially high modernist planning in Brasília and favelas in Rio de Janeiro.[54] São Paulo's sprawling mix of the formally planned and seemingly improvised invites an analysis that includes the range of individuals—located in an array of institutional and social positions— who contributed to sociospatial change. That analysis has precedence in the work of urban anthropologists and planning theorists who have argued that planning theory should encompass social actors beyond state-employed technocrats and private developers. James Holston, Ranier Randolph, and Faranak Miraftab, for example, have written about "subversive" or "insurgent" planning through land occupation as a means through which residents contest deeply rooted social inequality and political exclusion.[55]

I attend both to state and nonstate planning and see popular participation in the production of space as a sometimes, but not always, counterhegemonic practice. My examination of this array of planners in one frame privileges the interrelatedness between local residents and municipal officials (along with the spaces each produced). Recalling my discussion of dominant approaches to ethnoracial space above, detailing those connections calibrates the emphasis on institutional and state actors in the Black-White segregation paradigm and the privileging of nonstate actors in the ethnic-enclaves framework. This approach thus helps to integrate what are often treated as discrete and juxtaposed places—recall the Vieira image (figure I.1)—and proves necessary to chart the reproduction of ethnoracial space contingently and over time.

A range of textual and visual source material support this analysis and narrative. This material includes an extensive collection of maps of the city (with highly detailed citywide maps from 1930, 1954, and 1973); large-scale official planning projects; municipal legislation and decrees; property and real estate records; and internal documentation from urban development institutions. Of particular value from the last category are blueprints relating to over three hundred urban

development or redevelopment projects extending from the 1930s to the 1980s, most within the boundaries of the contemporary Brasilândia district, as well as case files from a selection of those three hundred. This array of source material helps to shed light on how city planning and urban redevelopment occurred in practice and shaped these ethnoracialized neighborhoods over time.

Another valuable collection of source material consisted of the expropriation records for the construction of the most significant avenues involved in the remaking of Liberdade and Bela Vista from the 1930s to the 1960s. These records come from São Paulo's Department of Expropriations, today located, perhaps tellingly, in the Liberdade district. This material helped me to identify or gather further information about significant spaces razed in the course of executing redevelopment through Prestes Maia's Avenues Plan. I also highlight patterns of expropriation and demolition in these records that show how official planners remade these historic centers of African-descendent settlement, thereby helping clear the way for the construction of "Japanese" Liberdade and "Italian" Bexiga in decades following.

I'll Samba Someplace Else also draws on in-depth oral histories, informal conversations, and regular participation in public events and gatherings within Brasilândia, Liberdade, and Bexiga. Interviewees included neighborhood residents who participated directly in projects of ethnoracialization, were involved in practices or organizations related to those processes, or who possessed valuable insights into the neighborhoods' histories. While most recorded interviews took place within homes or public spaces, several interviewees participated in an experimental method of collaborative mapping using printed maps or a tablet-based application that contained three layers of large-scale historical maps of the city of São Paulo (figure I.2). This experimental methodology yielded some novel insights. Interviewees highlighted, for example, how nonstate actors participated in the reproduction of Brasilândia, Liberdade, and Bexiga and provided further context for histories seldom registered in official documentation, like displacement. They also helped to illuminate further the ethnoracial composition of certain neighborhood spaces, whose distinctive characteristics were not easily discernible owing to the demographic limitations discussed in the prior section.

I also employed digital historical mapping methodologies (or HGIS) to chart the reproduction of these ethnoracialized neighborhoods
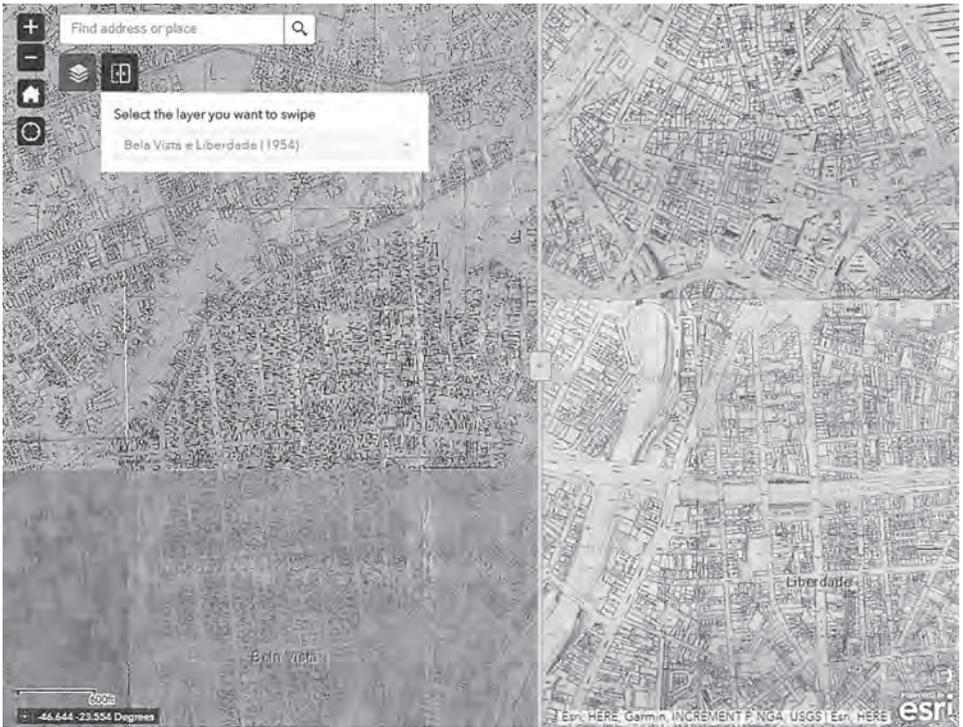
FIGURE I.2 · Screenshot of collaborative mapping application showing the Liberdade and Bela Vista districts with swipe feature activated. Users can employ the feature to visualize changes between the two layers, 1954 (left) and 1973 (right), in real time. Data sources: "Mapeamento 1954—Vasp Cruzeiro," GeoSampa, accessed June 12, 2018, https://www.geosampa.prefeitura.sp.gov.br; and "São Paulo—GEGRAN," 1973, Acervo Técnico Gegran/EMPLASA. Assembled in ArcGIS Online, Esri.

over time.[56] This methodological approach furnished an ever-growing layered digital map that I could consult in the course of reconstructing the spatial histories of these places, constructing this narrative, and, ultimately, devising the core arguments I outline above. The approach proved especially useful in developing the first point about the significance of anti-Black racism in shaping the redevelopment of Liberdade and Bexiga. Mapping sites with ties to slavery, racial violence, the abolitionist campaign, and Black self-determination—and then comparing the locations of those sites with proposed or executed demolitions for redevelopment—yielded valuable insights about the influence of anti-Blackness in the spatial management of São Paulo at midcentury.

INTRODUCTION

Much of this digital spatial analysis required substantial technical training, which hinged on substantial resources of time and, in some cases, funding. This approach was especially productive for this project, where the mapping of demolitions, for example, was pivotal to documenting how powerful discourses of both anti-Blackness and non-Blackness produced erasure through space. Platforms that offer lower barriers to entry, including pioneering Brazilian spatial history platforms like Pauliceia 2.0 and imagineRio, will, I expect, make such methodological approaches increasingly accessible to an array of researchers and enhance their interpretative, in addition to descriptive, utility.[57]

CHAPTER OUTLINE

In the first chapter, "Avenues and the Afterlives of Slavery," I chart São Paulo's position as a provincial capital of slavery in Southeast Brazil with a focus on the Nossa Senhora do Ó parish: a hub of enslavement, settlements of people fleeing captivity, and later the region where Brasilândia would be produced. I elucidate the ties that connected slavery in the nineteenth century to urban redevelopment projects initiated in the 1930s, especially Prestes Maia's Avenues Plan, which remade neighborhoods prominently associated with African descendants through asphalted avenues.

In chapter 2, "Spatial Projects of Forgetting," I excavate three significant sites demolished in Liberdade and Bela Vista. This excavation reveals how the authors of the Avenues Plan razed and remade local spaces with deep ties to slavery, racial violence, the abolitionist campaign, and Black self-determination, along with high concentrations of African-descendent populations. Through what I term spatial projects of forgetting, official city planners endeavored to render African descendants invisible in the city, thus reproducing the metropolis in a whitened image of modern progress.

In chapter 3, "Neighborhoods of Mixture and Massacre," I tell the stories of residents who migrated to and produced Vila Brasilândia beginning in the late 1940s in the wake of the displacement spurred by the Avenues Plan. I track how, throughout the 1940s and 1950s, local residents and officials negotiated the transformation of this former hub of both slavery and Black self-determination into a microcosmic "Brazil-land." That transformation aimed both to reflect and engender

a nationalist ideal of harmonious ethnoracial mixture. That celebration of mixture, however, quite often entailed the threat or practice of anti-Black violence—massacre—both in Brasilândia and beyond. While centered on Brasilândia, this chapter also details how the context of World War II and its aftermath, particularly anti-Japanese sentiment, also influenced popular ideas about ethnoracial mixture and massacre in geographic space throughout the city of São Paulo.

Chapter 4, "Belonging-as-Being: Brasilândia as 'Little Africa,'" details the ethnoracialization of Brasilândia as a "Little Africa" with a focus on the 1960s and 1970s. I foreground three processes that contributed to this ethnoracialization: a shift in dominant approaches to official urban planning in metropolitan São Paulo, the founding of a championship samba school in Brasilândia named Rosas de Ouro, and the application of a racist nickname to the region through a widely popular reality radio program. While introducing continued, novel, and significant instances of anti-Black violence, this chapter also highlights how and why Brasilândia became a privileged site through the spatial praxis of belonging-as-being among African descendants in São Paulo in these years.

In chapter 5, "Producing Ethnoracial Infrastructures: Making 'Japanese' Liberdade and 'Italian' Bexiga," I follow the actions of neighborhood residents who partnered with city officials on campaigns to ethnoracialize Liberdade and Bela Vista from the 1960s to the 1980s. Tourism-oriented economic development drove public funding for the project to make Liberdade "Japanese," while the official rationale behind producing "Italian" Bexiga centered on historic preservation. I show how these projects were conceived of and pursued in relation to earlier ethnoracial identities prominent in these spaces as well as in-migration from other regions of Brazil, especially the Northeast. These ethnoracialization projects would reinforce the social prestige of populations of Japanese and Italian descent in São Paulo, transforming places previously associated with African descendants into seemingly timeless, naturally occurring, and non-Black immigrant enclaves.

———

2013   Não vou me mudar da Brasilândia
        (I'm not leaving Brasilândia)

Behind graffitied partitions that line one of Brasilândia's oldest streets, the buildings continue to disappear (figure I.3). Most locals need no

explanation for the impetus of the demolitions, but the orange stripes on every other barrier remind them anyway. The metro is coming, with Brasilândia the planned northern terminus of the city's new Orange Line. Similar white and orange barriers enclose razed spaces on the southern end of this new line at the penultimate station in the district of Bela Vista (map I.2). Eight decades earlier, demolitions linked to avenues projects in Liberdade and Bexiga began spurring displacement that would pave the way for the creation of Brasilândia. Some of those displaced residents likely built some of the structures being leveled for the metro in Brasilândia today. I did not meet the residents of these homes, however, and I have heard that most have acquiesced to expropriation for the metro and moved—perhaps once again—to new frontiers on São Paulo's periphery. Echoes from the earlier era of transportation schemes resound in the present, even as the crumbling bricks from demolitions conspire to conceal the continuities. I ask myself: Are the dynamics of the Avenues Plan unfolding once again? Has nothing changed?

It is tempting, in fact, to see the arrival of the metro in Brasilândia as a moment of fundamental rupture in the neighborhood's history. Since the settlement of Brasilândia in 1947 and through the first decades of the twenty-first century, geographic marginality and a *lack* of integration within the city of São Paulo have largely defined narratives about this place. In the words of one local resident, Brasilândia has long been "the periphery of the periphery."[58] The arrival of the metro will, no doubt, alter this spatial dynamic, providing residents who remain with an alternative means of transportation to the clogged buses and congested roads that strain daily commutes. The unprecedented connectivity between Brasilândia and center-city districts like Bela Vista will also, of course, generate other changes whose repercussions extend beyond commute conditions and durations. The Orange Line will spur growth in local land values, new real estate development, and the installation of a more robust infrastructure of urban services long absent in the region. The metro, in other words, portends progress, with all its prices and costs.

A block north of these demolitions for the future metro station, musician Luz Nascimento regularly leads fellow members of the group Samba do Congo in a composition titled "Metrô da Brasilândia" (Brasilândia's metro).[59] Nascimento lived in the Bela Vista district as a child before moving to Brasilândia in the 1960s. She coauthored this

FIGURE I.3 · Construction partitions and half-demolished buildings in Brasilândia, November 2016. Intersection of Estrada do Sabão and R. Prof. Viveiros Raposo. The building was subsequently fully demolished. Photo by Andrew G. Britt.

samba in 2013 with Luiz do Pandeiro, an official ambassador of São Paulo samba (a distinction awarded by the governing organization of local samba schools) and a photojournalist for the regional newspaper. In the latter capacity, Luiz has snapped hundreds of photos of structures demolished for the metro. He even considered filming a music video of "Metrô da Brasilândia" in a half-razed building. Their song opens:

> I'm going to call
> Mato Grosso and Joca
> My real friends
> Who already went through this drama
>
> The people are saying
> That the metro will come soon
> And because of it
> We'll have to move

Mato Gross and Joca were the two protagonists in one of São Paulo's most iconic sambas, "Saudosa Maloca" (My beloved ruin). Adoniran Barbosa, the White child of Italian immigrants and a much revered

MAP I.2 · Map of the planned Orange Line-6 route and stations (circa 2024), connecting Brasilândia to Bela Vista, along with existing metro lines in São Paulo. Data sources: GeoSampa; OpenStreetMap (Light Gray Canvas) © OpenStreetMap contributors, Microsoft, Facebook, Google, Esri Community Maps contributors, map layer by Esri. Map by Andrew G. Britt.

musician throughout São Paulo (especially in "Italian" Bexiga), penned "Saudosa Maloca" in 1955.[60] His song chronicles the demolition of a center-city building occupied by the fictitious figures Mato Grosso and Joca.[61] In their song, Nascimento and Pandeiro summon the memory of Mato Grosso and Joca for wisdom in a contemporary moment clouded by the certainty of demolitions and prospect of displacement linked to

FIGURE I.4 · Mural in Brasilândia by JOKS, 2018.

the Orange Line. Their ambivalence about the project appears in the song's refrain, which sounds to my ears like a mix of defiant proclamation and beseeching appeal: "I'm not leaving Brasilândia / Because I know / That progress is on its way."

Residents' ambivalence about the Orange Line also surfaces in the mural obscured behind the construction partitions in figure I.3. Figure I.4 displays the mural, made by São Paulo artist JOKS, in full. A fiery metro car rips through homes on the southern side of the street. The metro follows the direction of White, wizard-like hands and a smoky green substance whose color recalls the US dollar. The car crashes into the head of the Black woman at the center of the scene. The mural presents the woman, her son, and her daughter as threatened by the Orange Line. While the metro enters the composition from the south, the woman gazes to the northern side of the street, where a skull implies impending doom and death. This family has no expectation of benefiting from the Orange Line. The composition traps their bodies, though their gazes transcend the threatened space to *someplace else* on the horizon. JOKS's mural presents progress in the form of the metro as a whitening and dislocating force for African descendants, including those who helped to build this "Little Africa" in the wake of an earlier era of displacement. The metro is not so different, the mural implies, from the asphalted avenues of years past.

Is he right? Is this, indeed, just another chapter in that same old story of "I'm out of here / I'll samba someplace else"? Or will Luz and

Luiz's cautious optimism of a new dawn—"I'm not leaving Brasilândia / Because I know / That progress is on its way"—ultimately prevail? The following pages, full of the interlaced ruptures and continuities that got us to this moment, elucidate both possible resolutions and enduring paradoxes relevant to these questions.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1   Filme, "Vou sambar n'outro lugar." All unattributed translations from
    the Portuguese are mine.

2   This song was first recorded on Barros, *Balbina de Iansã*.

3   Butler, *Freedoms Given*, 74–75; Brunelli et al., *Barra Funda*; Castro,
    Bexiga, 43–44; Azevedo, "A memória músical de Geraldo Filme";
    Azevedo, "São Paulo Negra"; Silva, "Debaixo do 'Pogréssio.'" Also
    see Filme, "Interview," 72. Renata Monteiro Siqueira has recently
    challenged the conventional wisdom of the Largo da Banana as the
    early twentieth-century cradle of samba in São Paulo, arguing that it
    became known as such only in the 1950s, almost contemporaneous to
    its demolition. She also asserts that it remained a significant site for
    samba after the construction of the overpass in 1958. See Siqueira, "O
    viaduto e o samba."

4   Filme, "Interview," 74–75.

5   For three particularly relevant examples, see Caldeira, *City of
    Walls*; Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship*; and Hagopian, "Paradoxes of
    Democracy."

6   Leandro Machado, "'Quem a polícia defende? De que lado está?',
    questiona autor de foto símbolo da desigualdade no Brasil." BBC
    Brasil, December 4, 2019. https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil
    -50666148.

7   Three different among many texts that engage with this representa-
    tion are Vieira, *História do futuro*; Zweig, *Brasilien*; Eakin, *Brazil*.

8 Rolnik, "Territórios Negros," 38; Telles, *Race in Another America*, 212; Machado, "Paisagem revelada," 63.

9 George Reid Andrews examines this process of replacement in the context of the labor market and immigration subsidies in the state of São Paulo. See Andrews, *Blacks and Whites*, 54, 59.

10 Skidmore, *Black into White*; Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*; Domingues, *Uma história não contada*; Lesser, *Immigration, Ethnicity*; Weinstein, *Color of Modernity*.

11 On Paulista exceptionalism, see Weinstein, *Color of Modernity*, esp. 28–53.

12 Indeed, analysts of race in Brazil commonly frame their inquiry in these terms. See, for example, Andrews, *Blacks and Whites*; Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*; Weinstein, *Color of Modernity*; Vargas, *Denial of Antiblackness.*

13 For example, see Paixão et al., *Relatório anual das desigualdades raciais* from 2007–2008 and 2009–2010.

14 This term is most often attributed to Gilberto Freyre based on the analysis he advanced in his 1933 book *Casa-grande e senzala* (*The Masters and the Slaves*).

15 Notable exceptions in the academic context that explicitly engage with anti-Blackness and space in São Paulo are Rolnik, *A cidade e a lei*; Domingues, *Uma história não contada*; Oliveira, "Segregação urbana e racial"; Alves, *Anti-Black City.*

16 My emphasis on belonging echoes Paulina Alberto's interpretation of Black intellectuals in São Paulo. She argues that, throughout the twentieth century, "they used dominant ideas of racial inclusiveness to place an African racial or cultural heritage at the center of images of the Brazilian nation and to assert their own belonging as African-descended Brazilians within it." Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*, 17.

17 Alves, *Anti-Black City.*

18 Butler makes a related argument: "São Paulo had no exclusively black neighborhoods. Even though physical spaces were clearly delineated between the residences and social ambits of whites and blacks, the fluidity of those barriers and the proximity of people of different ethnic backgrounds precluded the 'black worlds' found in segregated environments. This combination of factors helped steer some members of São Paulo's Afro-Brazilian community toward the goal of integration." Butler, *Freedoms Given*, 89. Similarly, Paulina Alberto charts how some Black intellectuals in São Paulo, over the mid-twentieth century, appropriated discourses of inclusion—including the "racial democracy" ideology—to contest anti-Blackness and racialized inequality and violence and assert citizenship and belonging.

19 George Reid Andrews advances a related argument about the creation of racialized São Paulo exceptionalism through the lens of labor. See Andrews, *Blacks and Whites*, esp. 88–89.

20 For example: Butler, *Freedoms Given*; Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power*; Domingues, *Uma história não contada*; Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*; Seigel, *Uneven Encounters.*

21 Alberto's *Terms of Inclusion* follows Black intellectuals in São Paulo, including former FNB members, past the declaration of the New State and into mid-century decades.

22 Hanchard writes that, owing to officials' promotion of the racial democracy ideology, particularly during the military dictatorship, "Afro-Brazilian activists had to couch their language and praxis in indirect, ambiguous, and fragmented forms under the veil of cultural practice." Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power*, 102.

23 In contrast to the circumstances for Brasilândia, readers interested in the histories of Liberdade and Bela Vista/Bexiga can find an extensive secondary literature. For Bela Vista/Bexiga: Marzola, *Bela Vista*; Lucena, *Bairro do Bexiga*; Scarlato, "Bixiga"; Bernardo, *Memória em branco e negro*; Castro, *Bexiga*; Ana Lúcia Duarte Lanna, "O Bexiga"; Schneck, "Bexiga: Cotidiano e trabalho"; Nascimento, "Lembrança eu tenho." For Liberdade: Guimarães, *Liberdade*; Handa, *O imigrante japonês*; Lesser, *Discontented Diaspora*; Kishimoto, "A experiência do cinema"; Nishida, *Diaspora and Identity.*

24 In 2023, a podcast about Nenê da Brasilândia, a supposed leader of illicit trade in Brasilândia, reached the top 10 on podcast charts in Brazil, a reflection of the enduring popular fascination with Brasilândia as a hub of crime.

25 Santos, "Ser essa terra"; Fária, "A luta Guaraní"; Oliveira et al., "Cotidiano, cultura e resistência"; Jennifer Ann Thomas, "Pauliceia indígena: A vida entre aldeias e periferia em São Paulo," *Mongabay*, April 28, 2021, https://brasil.mongabay.com/2021/04/pauliceia-indigena-a-vida-entre-aldeias-e-periferia-em-sao-paulo/.

26 According to the most recent census, São Paulo has 19,777 Indigenous residents, placing it tenth among Brazilian cities. Gabriel Croquer, "Censo do IBGE: São Paulo é a 10ª cidade com mais indígenas no Brasil; veja mapa de territórios delimitados na capital," *Globo*, August 7, 2023, https://g1.globo.com/sp/sao-paulo/noticia/2023/08/07/censo-do-ibge-sao-paulo-e-a-10a-cidade-com-mais-indigenas-no-brasil-veja-mapa-de-territorios-delimitados-na-capital.ghtml.

27 Santos, *Nem tudo era italiano.*

28 Santos, "'Ser essa terra.'"

29 French, *Legalizing Identities*; Miki, *Frontiers of Citizenship*; O'Toole, *Bound Lives.*

30 Defining "orí," Christen Anne Smith explains that the word "literally means head, but it is also a spirit in Afro-Brazilian religious tradition." Smith, "Black Feminist Model," 81. Princeton University Press recently released a new collection of Maria Beatriz Nascimento's writing: *The Dialectic Is in the Sea: The Black Radical Thought of Beatriz Nascimento*.

31 Gerber, *Orí*, 1:12:49–1:14:14.

32 Smith, "Black Feminist Model," 79; Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*.

33 Smith, "Black Feminist Model," 81.

34 That symbolism had a special significance in 1989 when Orí was released: Just a year earlier, Brazil's new constitution established a process by which the descendants of the enslaved who occupied the so-called remnants of *quilombos* could petition for formal recognition of land possession.

35 Elsewhere in *Orí*, Nascimento drew the connection between identity and territory more explicitly: "Recapturing identity through knowledge of the land . . . as a person who has migrated. *Quilombo* is a geographic space where human beings can feel the ocean . . . all of the cosmic energy enters in your body . . . I feel big here. It's a Black thing, but it's a Black thing because of the connection to the land. The black man is the one that knows the land best . . . just like the Dogon people. The Black man, the color of soil . . . the black earth exists. It is that which we fear losing the most."

36 Lefebvre, *Production of Space*; Massey, "Double Articulation"; Massey, "Global Sense of Place"; Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*.

37 I follow other scholars of race, ethnicity, and skin color in Latin America in analyzing ethnicity and race together in the same frame. See, for example, Telles et al., "Pigmentocracies," 39–40n1.

38 Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*; Massey and Denton, *American Apartheid*; Adelman and Mele, *Race, Space, and Exclusion*; Rothstein, *Color of Law*.

39 Wilson and Portes, "Immigrant Enclaves"; Portes and Manning, "Immigrant Enclave"; Zhou, "Revisiting Ethnic Entrepreneurship"; Marcuse, "Enclaves Yes, Ghettos No."

40 A pioneering study to do this in another context was Anderson, "Idea of Chinatown." A more recent intervention is Gao-Miles, "Beyond the Ethnic Enclave."

41 Illuminating works that examine constructions of racialized difference on the scale of regions in Brazil include Marcos Chor Maio, "UNESCO and Race Relations"; Weinstein, "Regionalizing Racial Difference"; Weinstein, *Color of Modernity*.

42 On the materialization of identity, see Frers and Meier, *Encountering Urban Places*. Clara Irazábal explores ethnoracialized place-making

via immigrant-themed parks in Curitiba in Irazábal, *City Making and Urban Governance*.

43 They also ask productive questions such as "What social relations and social identities are being re/produced in and through social and physical spaces? How do social relations and spatial processes affect one another?" Neely and Samura, "Social Geographies of Race," 1934, 1947.

44 Three works that make this comparison explicit are Degler, *Neither Black nor White*; Seigel, *Uneven Encounters*; Graham, *Shifting the Meaning*.

45 For a survey of these discourses, see Nascimento, *Racial Democracy in Brazil*; "The Myth of Racial Democracy," in Costa, *Brazilian Empire*; Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity*; Telles, *Race in Another America*; Antônio Sérgio Guimarães, *Racismo e anti-racismo*; Andrews, *Blacks and Whites*; Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*; Graham, *Shifting the Meaning*.

46 Caldeira, *City of Walls*.

47 This value means that on average, 37 percent of the Black population in São Paulo would need to move to another census tract for there to be an ethnoracial distribution proportionate to the ethnoracial composition of the city as a whole (25 percent Black, 75 percent non-Black in 1980).

48 For more recent figures, see Daniel Mariani, Murilo Roncolato, Ariel Tonglet e Simon Ducroquet, "O que o mapa racial do Brasil revela sobre a segregação no país," *Nexo*, December 16, 2015, https://www.nexojornal.com.br/especial/2015/12/16/O-que-o-mapa-racial-do-Brasil-revela-sobre-a-segrega%C3%A7%C3%A3o-no-pa%C3%ADs.

49 Telles, *Race in Another America*, 203.

50 This argument echoes Keisha Khan-Perry's study of racialized and gendered sociospatial exclusion in the Gamboa de Baixo neighborhood of Salvador. See Khan-Perry, *Black Women*.

51 Telles, *Race in Another America*, 196.

52 Haddad, "Sobre a divisão," cited in Hidalgo, "As divisões territoriais," 28; Dias, *Desenvolvimento urbano*. For the history of the administrative division of land in São Paulo, see "São Paulo," IBGE, accessed May 13, 2017, https://cidades.ibge.gov.br/brasil/sp/sao-paulo/historico.

53 André Marega Pinhel and Rodrigo Fernandes Silva, "The Paradoxes of Ethnoracial Space in São Paulo, 1930s–1980s: Caracterização da distribuição étnico racial da população nos distritos da Bela Vista, Brasilândia e Liberdade," Report, Cambridge, 2021.

54 Paviani, *Brasília, ideologia e realidade*; Holston, *Modernist City*; Scott, *Seeing Like a State*; Perlman, *Myth of Marginality*; Fischer, *Poverty of Rights*; McCann, *Hard Times*.

55 Randolph, "A nova perspectiva"; Miraftab, "Insurgent Planning"; Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship*.

56 Gregory and Geddes, *Toward Spatial Humanities.*

57 Based at Rice University and developed by Farès el-Dahdah and Alida C. Metcalf, imagineRio is a "a searchable atlas that illustrates the social and urban evolution of Rio de Janeiro over its entire history, as it has existed and as it has been imagined." Pauliceia 2.0 is an open-source historical mapping platform focused on São Paulo and produced through a partnership between the Federal University of São Paulo (UNIFESP), the State Archive of São Paulo, the National Institute for Space Research (INPE), and Emory University. The coordinators are Luís Ferla and Karla Donato Fook.

58 WB, interview by author, Brasilândia, São Paulo, August 28, 2016.

59 Nascimento and Pandeiro, "Metrô da Brasilândia."

60 As I discuss in chapter 5, in 1984 a bust of Barbosa was installed along May 13 Street in Bela Vista. Today, Barbosa's likeness is visible in Bexiga's crosswalk lights, and he has a street named after him.

61 Campos, *Adoniran*, 230–31.

CHAPTER ONE. AVENUES AND THE AFTERLIVES OF SLAVERY

1 FR, interview by author, Brasilândia, São Paulo, June 29, 2017.

2 Other significant texts engaged in this project include Bernardo, *Memória em branco e negro*; Castro, *Bexiga*; Domingues, *Uma história não contada*; Santos, *Nem tudo era italiano*.

3 Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 6.

4 Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*.

5 Abdias do Nascimento argued that "the Black masses in Brazil have only one option: to disappear. Whether it be through compulsory miscegenation/assimilation or, when they escape from this, through direct elimination—death pure and simple." Nascimento, *Brazil: Mixture or Massacre?*, 7.

6 Advertisements for Caninha do Ó appeared in early editions of *O Estado de S. Paulo* from the 1870s forward.

7 Morse, *Bandeirantes*; Ferreira, *A epopéia bandeirante*; Russell-Wood, "Rethinking Bandeirismo."

8 Barro, *Nossa Senhora do Ó*, 41.

9 Noelli and Mota, "Índios, jesuítas, bandeirantes."

10 Monteiro, *Negros da terra*, 239n54.

11 Barro, *Nossa Senhora do Ó*, 42.

12 Maços da população, 1765–1851, APESP, https://www.arquivoestado.sp.gov.br/web/digitalizado/textual/macos_populacao.