

## AMNESTIES IN BRAZILIAN HISTORY

*Amnesty in Brazil: Recompense after Repression, 1895–2010*. By Ann M. Schneider. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021. Pp. 289. \$55.00 cloth. doi:10.1017/tam.2022.132

Failed coups. Despots. Corrupt judges. Heroic legal arguments. Literary commentary. Public protests against vaccinations. Eugenics. If it were not for the title of this book, you might think Ann Schneider was writing about the contemporary United States. This would be a grave mistake, however, as the history that Schneider presents is uniquely Brazilian.

Schneider's prose is eloquent and telling, laced with captivating passages such as, "Like the shift from the poetry of a political campaign to the prose of governing, amnesty also seemed to undergo a transformation of sorts after it became law" (89). Indeed, this passage captures much of the history of how amnesty ebbed and flowed through Brazilian regimes from the fascist nineteenth-century Floriano Peixoto to today's "misogynistic, homophobic, and racist" (214) Jair Bolsonaro.

After a brief consideration of the twenty-first century "amnestied" (the term refers to both those who would become immune to prosecution and those compensated for being tortured, imprisoned, or otherwise the objects of state repression), the volume opens with a detailed accounting of the Amnesty of 1895, which highlights the legal genius of Rui Barbosa, a former revolutionary turned author of the Brazilian constitution. Writing in support of amnesty for several rebellious naval officers, Barbosa emphasized amnesty as erasure rather than forgiveness, accomplished to erase rather than admit to any guilt or debt. In other words, amnesty was not merely a pardon, but a striking of the victim's crimes from collective memory.

Yet, as much as Barbosa's arguments set precedents for later amnesties—52 of them between 1890 and 2003—Schneider makes clear throughout the volume that each amnesty is unique, reflecting broader societal concerns, preoccupations, and power shifts. Ultimately conceived of as a political tool for reconciliation and social peace, amnesty could result in Barbosa's desire for erasure and compensation, or be used against the amnestied. Whether the terms of amnesties were followed or ignored varied by the social, economic, political, and cultural positions of the amnestied, as well as how judges and commissions interpreted the laws. In 1910, for example, when several Black sailors, protesting the excessive use of whippings aboard ships, commandeered two of Brazil's most sophisticated naval vessels and held Rio de Janeiro hostage by training their cannons on the city, they were granted amnesty in a controversial move to save the city. Once amnestied, however, the Black sailors were by no means given the same treatment as the white naval officers amnestied in 1895. Instead of freedom from prosecution, many Black sailors who took part in the 1910 protest ended up impoverished or imprisoned, or were executed.

Sensitive to context, Schneider considers this case in light of the military's role in Brazilian society. At the time, it was a sink for miscreants, many of whom were sentenced to military service in lieu of prison time, and its reputation discouraged volunteers from Brazil's middle classes and elite from joining. Yet, the military boasted that its "recruits" may have entered as vagabonds and criminals, but once enlisted they learned to become honorable Brazilian citizens. Because of this, the Black sailors' mutiny was considered a shameful assault on honor in the military, supporting racist arguments based on eugenics that Brazilian society was being corrupted from within due to miscegenation. Thus, the 1910 amnesty resulted in the suspension of amnesty as a political tool until the 1930s, when it was reinstated in a more bureaucratized form and became entangled in the rise of fascism in Europe and around the world and, after World War II, in the repression of communists during the Cold War.

Schneider's account is compelling in the way she weaves various literary accounts into how amnesty enters Brazil's collective consciousness. Her discussion of Jorge Amado is exemplary. His political writing, banned across much of Latin America, ended with his eventual disillusionment, after the exiled writer realized that, as it does today, what passed for justice often depended less on evidence than allegiance.

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## CULTURAL HISTORY OF ELECTRICITY IN MEXICO

*Electrifying Mexico: Technology and the Transformation of a Modern City.* By Diana J. Montaña. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021. Pp. 373. \$50.00 cloth.  
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Mexico's energy history presents a curious paradox. Although the literature is vast and stretches back to the early decades of the twentieth century (or perhaps even the late nineteenth, if one considers some Porfirian treatises as historiography), its coverage is highly uneven. Oil has been by far, and for understandable reasons, historians' favorite topic. In particular, Mexico's oil expropriation and themes such as oil and the Mexican Revolution, oil and labor, and the oil industry have been extensively analyzed. Coal and natural gas have, on the other hand, attracted only a few enthusiasts. Electricity and the electric sector boast a sizable collection of works, focused mostly on the history of the electric industry itself. Almost entirely absent from both the historical literature on oil and electricity are studies of their social, cultural, and environmental impacts. That makes Diana Montaña's excellent cultural history of electricity in Mexico a pioneering work in the field.