

Way down south

Alan P. Marcus

Confederate Exodus:

Social and Environmental Forces in the Migration of U.S. Southerners to Brazil.
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reviewed by Jeremy Black

Seeing themselves as members of a nation of immigrants, Americans tend to underplay their part in emigration. Americans may know about the repatriation that gave rise to Liberia in the early nineteenth century, but the extent and variety of movement from the United States to elsewhere is overlooked. Much is taken out of the equation by its being a case of movement to territories that became part of the United States or already were, notably to the West, but also to Hawaii and Alaska. Yet many Americans went abroad elsewhere, not just to contiguous Canada and Mexico but also across the sea.

Return migration to Europe was a factor from the start, particularly to Britain: think of Puritans to Interregnum England in the 1650s, the significant Loyalist diaspora in the 1780s, and others later for the full range of factors that encouraged migration, from need to inclination and all the variants of the two. American culture is as much about Benjamin West, James Abbott McNeill Whistler, Henry James, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot as about others who stayed put.

On the global scale, American emigration has been and remains significant. Some relocations are permanent, some temporary and/or part-time. Nevertheless, emigration from what is the world's third most populous country should be considered in terms of a wider diaspora rather than as an insignificance. Thus, there are important American communities in London, Paris, and Israel, each with a different trajectory.

Politics played a role in emigration, most notably with the Loyalists, who provided an American color to the palette of settlement in

many parts of the British Empire, including Nova Scotia and Bermuda. Escaped slaves who had sided with the British were part of this diaspora, some of them eventually ending up in the new colony of Sierra Leone.

There was also emigration in the aftermath of the American Civil War. The new order was unwelcome to most Southerners, but the majority chose to express their hostility by opposition to Reconstruction. Others took a more drastic approach, as Alan P. Marcus discusses in his excellent book *Confederate Exodus*, which details a Confederate diaspora. Southern exiles looked to settle in a range of countries, a fact providing, for example, the plot of Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Five Orange Pips" (1891), which deals with an exile in England. Indeed, as evidenced by stories involving Mormons, Molly Maguires, and Confederates, Doyle was very interested in the theme of American expatriates in England.

More urgently, Mexico, which has frequently been a source of American anxiety, both real and fantastical, became a possible base for a Confederate *revanche*, with several prominent Confederates finding shelter there. John Bankhead Magruder became one of Emperor Maximilian's major generals, and President Grant saw Napoleon III of France, Maximilian, Mexican conservatives, and Confederate exiles as the key elements in a far-ranging geopolitical and ideological cabal directed against Mexican liberals and (his view of) American interests.

In Brazil, it was not *revanche* but the attempt to settle in a slave society, one that was more promising than the Spanish colony of Cuba, that drew Confederates. Marcus skillfully examines the links between Brazil and the settlers, and, as with immigration to the United States, individual and communal relationships were significant. As he shows, these included Baltimore's commercial world, Freemasonry, and Protestant ties. Marcus includes an interesting discussion of writers who influenced the emigrants, not only Southern ones but also other American commentators and their Brazilian counterparts. As he shows, various writers' touted different arguments in favor of migration, including ones surrounding race, slavery, and agro-economics, but this inconsistency

helped ensure that the great variety of population, landscape, and culture found in Brazil could be leveraged by differing advocates for migration. Opportunities for white, Protestant, American progress in Brazil appeared certain and, indeed, providential. At the same time, in Brazil, the *Confederados* were but a small part of a wider Western immigration of whites that the Brazilian elite actively encouraged.

Marcus's book is an example of a type of scholarship that is all too rare in the American discussion of the Atlantic world, that of historical geography with a strong sense of place and networks. The study of spatial links is crucial to history as an intellectual subject, one in which America had a distinguished past. This was, however, largely discarded after World War II. Harvard, a key source of scholarship and a model for others, dismantled its Department of Geography in 1948 and was followed by other prominent institutions such as Stanford. With such a lead, it was not surprising that many state and local education systems also dropped a subject now held to be irrelevant. Although there were (and remain) significant exceptions, the teaching of geography was largely relegated to the elementary level. American intellectual life has been much impoverished by this change. In place of the sense of specificity that comes with spatial awareness, there is a broad-brush ignorance in much of the discussion, even polemic, that passes for intellectual commentary and academic enterprise, with many ill-informed comments about geopolitics and, more particularly, the West or the Atlantic world. In reality, the very different physical and human geographies are relevant, whether, for example, discussing the American South or Brazil. Marcus is good at explaining why particular sites and areas in both Brazil and the South were significant.

Not rushing to implement modern judgments is also important. As Marcus shows, alongside integration for the *Confederados* came a complex pattern of ideas, many of which conflict with current suppositions and values. This is true in both the United States and Brazil. He is perceptive about the usage of the Confederate flag by *Confederados*, reading in

that symbol a multifaceted sense and presentation of identity, thereby avoiding the rush to criticism that the flag generally triggers. As Marcus points out, the Confederate flag flies at Campo cemetery alongside the American and Brazilian flags. In large part, this is because the syncretic and elastic elements that evolved out of the Confederate community in Brazil came to embody cultural interpretations that are far more Brazilian than they are American or Southern. At the same time, as he notes, the Confederate flag has become contentious of late with some Brazilians.

The task Marcus confronts is to consider ideas. It is a fruitful one. The drive here to examine the geographical backdrop as well as the historical ideas is useful, and, one hopes, can be part of a broader debate on American emigration.