

Kraay, Hendrik. *Days of National Festivity in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1823–1889.* Stanford: Stanford UP, 2013. xiv + 562 pp. Table. Map. Figures. Notes. Bibliography. Index.

Like their counterparts across the Americas, nineteenth-century political elites in Brazil sought to consolidate independence and statehood by inventing traditions that would ratify the legitimacy of the Empire, as the new state was called. As Hendrik Kraay explains in this well-researched and thoughtful book, while the calendar of days of national festivity reflected, and in some cases amplified, the turbulent politics of the Empire's first two decades, by the 1840s Brazilians had established a commemorative program that would endure for the rest of the century: March 25, the day that Pedro I swore allegiance to the Constitution of 1824; September 7, Pedro's declaration of independence; and December 2, Pedro II's birthday. Together these commemorations provided a narrative of the new state's origins and affirmed the sources of its authority. Although Kraay is mindful of the dynamic relationship between rituals and their social and cultural contexts, the principal subjects here are not the rites of commemoration per se. Rather, *Days* is "a political history of the Brazilian empire as seen through the commemoration of its days of national festivity" (2–3). With recourse to newspapers, travelers' accounts, and parliamentary debates, Kraay demonstrates that "civic rituals were ways of conducting politics and occasions to debate the empire's principal institutions": the constitution and the monarchy (269). Along the way, he refines and, in some cases, revises our understanding of the Empire's political culture.

The first four chapters of *Days* trace the creation of a commemorative calendar in the first half of the nineteenth century to the beginning of its mid-century decline. Commemorations were moments that both "contributed to the population's self-identification as Brazilians and subjects of the monarchy" and afforded Brazilians opportunities to contest political authority and assert their understanding of the constitutional monarchy in both the press and the streets (4). Throughout the nineteenth century, the discourses and practices of national festivities enlarged the public, civic sphere. As Kraay also observes, "the published description of a civic ritual was often more important than how the ritual was actually conducted" (24). Days of national festivity and a burgeoning culture of newspapers thus both reinforced each other and brought into contact an official, and ostensibly monolithic, imperial political culture and the fractious partisanship that shaped politics more broadly. While in the late 1830s conservatives succeeded in restoring one of the most prominent ceremonies of the old regime monarchy, the *beija-mão* (hand-kissing), Kraay cautions against recent claims of a unified popular monarchism, particularly as a product of Dom Pedro II's coronation in 1841. Rather, he points to the ongoing tensions between the political elites' interest in cultivating popular allegiance and their perceptions of the need to discipline the ways in which Rio de Janeiro's population participated in commemorative festivities. After 1841, the routine and less passionate celebrations

of national holidays also reflected and reinforced a new political stability. The commemorative calendar, Kraay explains, focused on aspects of political culture around which there was greater consensus. The monarchy and the constitution “had gained a level of legitimacy that placed them outside the scope of political debate” (145).

In the second half of *Days*, Kraay analyzes a series of events within the longer history of imperial political culture that brought forth tensions and conflicts that the consensus around the monarchy and the constitution could not always contain. The project to erect an equestrian statue of Pedro I, the subject of Chapter 5, rekindled debates about the scope of monarchical authority and about what had been gained and what had been lost in the process of achieving independence under authoritarian leadership. Chapters 6 and 7, in turn, provide extensive examinations of various forms of elite sociability in which Rio’s residents cultivated patriotism and national identity: participating and witnessing patriotic commemoration, writing in and reading newspapers, and theatergoing. If in some cases aesthetic debates edged out ideological ones, new patriotic societies also afforded unofficial venues for the expression of civic identity.

For most of the nineteenth century days of national festivity were confined to their narrow official scope. As Kraay’s careful examination of the culture of commemorations during the Paraguayan War shows, Rio’s residents did not seek to broaden the aims of days of national festivity to either celebrate or contest the war. Even as Brazilians celebrated battle victories and the final end of the war, their investment in national festivities declined and the official, and belated, efforts to commemorate victory failed to elicit the excitement that defined the spontaneous response to the initial news. Yet, if the war appeared to leave the monarchical regime’s authority unscathed, by the 1870s and 1880s two challenges to the status quo had attached to the culture of commemoration: republicanism and abolitionism. Alternative narratives of the history of independence that had surfaced periodically in earlier decades now gained ground, as republicans hailed the late eighteenth-century conspiracy, the Inconfidência Mineira, as Brazil’s true foundational moment. At the same time, abolitionists seized upon the ceremonial practice of manumitting slaves on September 7 to advance their cause, even as the participation of slaves and people of color in commemorations emboldened those seeking change. As Kraay observes, at the same time the regime appeared to lose the confidence “to publically celebrate itself and its origins (274).” With the imperial palaces in a state of disrepair, Dom Pedro’s lack of enthusiasm for extravagant celebrations was glaring. Yet in the last year of the Empire, the political culture of commemoration was reinvigorated by abolition. Indeed, in spite of efforts to impose order upon popular festivities, some critics feared that the monarchy had become “a dangerously populist regime” (313). Kraay concludes with reflections on the legacies of the imperial political culture of commemoration in subsequent regimes. The republican elites that overthrew the Empire, suspicious of popular monarchism, both ratcheted up the disciplining of Rio’s popular classes and sought to cultivate new allegiances with

new civic discourses and symbols. In both the Empire and the Republic elites sought to deny the *povo* the opportunity to observe days of national festivity on their own terms. Kraay's insights into the ways in which the calendar of festivities focused debate on political institutions also raises the question of the extent to which commemorating the monarchy allowed elites to elide a broader social and cultural reckoning with postcolonial nationhood, Alencar's novels and the ersatz Indians of imperial iconography notwithstanding. While other scholars have studied festive culture in nineteenth century Brazil, Kraay provides an unprecedentedly comprehensive and documented study of the century's political commemorations. Although, as he notes, there is still much research to be done, particularly on provincial political culture, *Days of National Festivity* will surely be an indispensable reference for all those interested in the history of the Brazilian Empire.

Kirsten Schultz
Seton Hall University