

The Defiant Life and Forgotten Death of Apulco de Castro: Race, Power, and Historical Memory

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Introduction

At 4:30 in the afternoon on 25 October 1883, in front of police headquarters in Rio de Janeiro, Apulco de Castro, a well known public figure, editor and publisher of the newspaper *O Corsário*, was murdered.¹ The killing took place in broad daylight in plain view of the Chief of Police, who watched along with a crowd of onlookers as a group of junior army officers in civilian disguise stabbed and shot the victim. Although the identities of the perpetrators were well known, no one was ever brought to trial or punished. The assassination was followed by several days of rioting in the streets of Brazil's capital city during which authorities made hundreds of arrests. A week later as large crowds gathered for the Seventh-Day Mass for the victim there were more disturbances followed by considerable discussion and political tension in the following weeks. Yet today the name of Apulco de Castro is all but forgotten, and the few times his career is mentioned he is dismissed as nothing more than an unprincipled scandalmonger whose killing, if not legally justified, was the expected result of his misuse of the press.

It is necessary to recall the dramatic events surrounding the murder in more detail, but the larger purpose of this paper is to begin to explore why it took place. What had Apulco de Castro done, or what had he published in his newspaper,

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that led to his demise? What was it about him and his use of the press that cost him his life? Finally, why is this incident and its aftermath, so significant at the time, virtually absent from the historical memory of Brazil?

O Corsário was launched on 2 October 1880, and through the three years it was published Castro established a reputation as someone eager to launch verbal assault on political and personal malfeasance by those in authority, as well as corruption, degradation, and immoral activities by those both high and low in the social hierarchy. Soon the four-page newspaper, published twice a week until June 1881, then three times a week (Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays) thereafter, grew to have a circulation of some 20,000 copies, suggesting it had considerable appeal among a broad sector the city's literate population. "Everyone read it," a contemporary journalist recalled, even if they bought it on the sly and perused it in private. According to another publication critical of the political establishment of the time, "Apulco de Castro had admirers; he had buyers."² In persisting in merciless campaigns based on the motto that eventually graced its masthead, "Organ of Social Moralization," as well as verbal attacks on many institutions and individuals, from the leaders of *capoeira* gangs to the Emperor Pedro II himself, Apulco de Castro made many enemies. Later commentators have suggested, without going into detail, that because he offended the honor of the Army, members of that institution took decisive action to defend the reputation of the institution which they embodied.

Originally from Bahia, Apulco de Castro had worked for some years as a typesetter before establishing *O Corsário*. Little is known about his personal background, other than that his father was a free man of the working class. As he wrote in 1881, "Citizen workers, I was born in your midst, and have lived with you. My father was a worker (*operário*), as I still am. I know very well the sacrifices necessary for us to earn enough to live the rough life we live."³ Like many other working journalists in Rio at the time, such as Ferreira de Menezes and José do Patrocínio of the *Gazeta da Tarde*, he had some degree of Afro-Brazilian ancestry. Unlike many others of his ethnic category and social rank; however, he publicly identified himself as a "man of color" (*homem de cor*), and eventually as "black" (*negro*).⁴ While he seldom wrote about his racial identity, he considered it important. As we shall see, as the end approached he predicted that he would be killed because he was a black man.

In view of the ethnic history of Brazil, and the mythology that has grown up around the concept of so-called racial democracy and the advantages supposedly enjoyed by those of mixed race and intermediate social status, the case of Apulco de Castro is instructive. Later commentators have said that he was killed because he dared to offend the honor of the Army, and he said he would be killed because of his race. While there may be a kernel of truth in both those assertions,

the details show a more prosaic sequence of events, one no less instructive for what it tells us about race, power, and historical memory in Brazil.

The Murder

In the early evening of 9 October 1883, nearly 3 weeks before Castro was killed, a uniformed group of officers and men of the first light cavalry regiment, which served as the palace guard of the Emperor Pedro II, broke into the printing office of *O Corsário* at 52 rua São José, and left it in ruins. They also broke into an adjacent residence, destroyed the furniture there, and beat an occupant bloody. In the following days police made no move to pursue the perpetrators of the attack, but posted a guard at the print shop after the fact.⁵

About 3 o'clock in the afternoon of 25 October 1883, Castro entered the headquarters of the civil police on rua do Lavradio, saying he had received death threats and requesting police protection. While he was in the station conferring with police chief Belarmino Peregrino da Gama e Melo, suspicious groups totaling perhaps 100 rough-looking men gathered in and around adjacent buildings. Police chief Melo did not have a force at hand to subdue such a crowd; the five urban guards and ten military police soldiers at his disposal were inadequate to the task.⁶ But based on the earlier attack on the print shop and Castro's plea for protection, he suspected that officers of the first light cavalry regiment were involved. The cabinet of the imperial government happened to be meeting in the nearby headquarters of the ministry of the interior, so Melo sent one of his *delegados* (the second in command at police headquarters) for instructions from Minister of Justice Manoel Pinto de Souza Dantas, under whose supervision all police activity in the imperial capital was carried out. The latter conferred with Minister of War Rodrigues Júnior, and they sent word back to Melo advising him to avoid a confrontation with the army. Concluding that the only way to avert bloodshed was to appeal to the army high command to bring the junior officers outside his office under control and provide safe conduct for Castro, Melo sent a messenger to army headquarters on the Campo de Santana (now Praça da República). In response Captain João Antônio de Ávila, personal aide to the army commander, reported to the police station.

Ávila conferred with several men he knew who were lingering outside the police headquarters. They assured him that they would take no action as long as Castro was under his protection. The army captain then took responsibility for guarding Castro, who left police headquarters in his company. Ávila hailed a cab in the street, but they had barely started off when a group of men in civilian clothes whose faces were covered with large artificial beards stopped the car-

riage and attacked Castro with daggers and pistols. Mortally wounded, he was taken from the carriage into the lobby of the police headquarters, and within a few minutes expired. A subsequent medical inquiry determined that he died as the result of 16 wounds, including 10 stabbings (all from behind, two of which penetrated the thorax), five cuts, and one gunshot wound.⁷

The attackers escaped unhindered among the large crowd of onlookers that had gathered during the time when the journalist had first sought protection and after rumors spread that something was going on. According to official statements, the injuries that Captain Ávila suffered during the incident kept him confined to his quarters incommunicado for several weeks. Police chief Melo was dismissed two days later, during the widespread rioting that broke out in the aftermath. A formal investigation in March 1884 concluded that 11 army officers had committed the crime, but in late November 1884, more than a year after the attack, the public prosecutor submitted a report concluding that evidence from eyewitness testimony diverged on crucial points, and that there was insufficient evidence for prosecution. A judge then dismissed the charges. None of those implicated were ever arrested or brought to trial.⁸

Apulco de Castro had a popular following and they took to the streets. For several nights after the assassination, crowds roamed the downtown area engaging in various forms of violent protest. According to a German visitor Carl von Koseritz, who witnessed these events, demonstrators destroyed street lamps to shouts of “long live the revolution,” and were met by “detachments of urban guards armed, not very urbanely, with rifles,” while a “military police cavalry cleared the streets at a gallop, with sabers drawn,” and plainclothes secret police agents beat demonstrators back with their clubs. One group of protesters found two large barrels in São Francisco square, to which they attached straw torches, set them afire, and rolled the flaming barrels noisily down rua do Ouvidor, the main location for upper class shopping and socializing in downtown Rio, shouting for businesses to close. “Vagrants and *capoeiras* joined the street urchins, and when the urban guard appeared they faced a hail of stones from the crowd.”⁹ Late on 29 October, four days after Castro’s assassination, a group attempted to set fire to the building housing the Ministry of Justice on Lapa Square. When the mob attacked the building where the Imperial Cabinet was meeting, the ministers of state had to make their escape by the back doors.¹⁰

Although handbills appeared calling for the public to converge on São Francisco Square in the heart of the downtown area, they mentioned no political cause or group. From what the authorities could conclude, the protesters blamed the police for not preventing Castro’s death and for not arresting the perpetrators—a reasonable position in view of notoriously public circumstances surrounding the affair. The government finally got the upper hand by 29 October, according to

the newly installed police chief Tito Augusto Pereira de Matos, as the holding cells of the downtown guard stations were “stuffed to overflowing with those arrested.” By 30 October more than 300 arrests had been made, and Matos issued an edict prohibiting all public gatherings “in the streets, plazas, and public buildings.”¹¹ He recognized that the murder of Castro was the spark that set off the riots, but in his estimation those involved were no more than ruffians and *capoeiras* engaging in disorder for its own sake, looking for an excuse to “sow terror in the population.” For several years prior to the Castro affair, Matos had noticed “vices latent in a certain social stratum, predisposed to explosions whenever an opportunity arises.”¹² The possibility that the demonstrators might have been frustrated over the public unpunished murder of a man they admired did not enter into Matos’ public position on the matter.

A newspaper closely associated with the social and political elite of Rio de Janeiro was not so dismissive of the rioters motivations, nor of the underlying social and political implications of what had transpired. In assessing the public disturbances once calm had been restored, the *Jornal do Commercio* declared that “we can see here the beginnings of very serious events.” This quintessential establishment press organ, while recognizing that the problem did not come from any organized movement nor political party, had a more ominous explanation: “If anything threatens us, let us frankly admit, it is a social revolution brought about by the boiling up of the social scum that is in constant fermentation in the depths of the population of all large cities.” As a solution, the paper urged “energetic and severe repression immediately, while there is still time. . . . To be soft is not to be merciful, if it must later be turned to unavoidable hardness. It is easy to nip a mutiny in the bud through the use of sufficient force; later it will be necessary for rivers of blood to flow.”¹³ In other words, the furious social outburst following the assassination of Apulco de Castro revealed the destructive potential of the urban rabble, and made the maintenance of a ruthlessly repressive apparatus essential for the preservation of the state and the social sectors in whose benefit the state operated.¹⁴ In a similar assessment, an army general who witnessed these events noted in private correspondence that “the public congregates, there is talk of the Corsário murder, stones rain on streetlamps, the police arrive, some are wounded. This is how revolutions begin.”¹⁵

The newly appointed chief of police was anything but soft, and he was given free rein to deal with the rabble in the streets. Matos decided that a sustained police dragnet was necessary to restore calm to the city, and by mid-December more than 1,200 arrests had been made in continuous sweeps. The house of detention was bursting at the seams, and on 14 December the prisoners rioted, breaking down the interior walls separating holding cells and making every effort to break through the outer walls and escape en masse.¹⁶

On 31 October the family of Apulco de Castro sponsored a seventh-day mass in the Sacramento church, a parish church in the heart of the city, scheduled for 8 o'clock in the morning. At 9 o'clock on the same morning, just a block away in the more imposing church of the Third Order of São Francisco, a similar mass was sponsored by the Luso-Brazilian Abolitionist Society, of which Apulco de Castro had been a member. More than a thousand people attended these events, and the threat of another public disturbance was sufficient for the police to recommend that businesses in the downtown area close for the day.¹⁷

The Legacy

One of the remarkable aspects of this incident is how little it reverberates in the historical record. While not utterly forgotten, mention of Apulco de Castro appears here and there literally as a footnote to history, or as a minor matter of local and superficial interest. Many of these occasional references depend on a version of the explanation offered most famously (and then not very famously after all), by Euclides da Cunha, in his well-known study of the backland rebellion in the 1890s, *Os Sertões*. It seems that one of the leaders of the murder party was none other than Antonio Moreira César, who as a colonel in 1897 was killed as he led the doomed third expedition against the *Jagunços* of Canudos, the community led by Antonio Conselheiro in the backlands of Bahia. In his biographical sketch Euclides noted that Moreira César, a captain in 1883, “was the most daring, most merciless of the group, and perhaps the first to stab the victim in the back” as Apulco de Castro left police headquarters under the protection of the Army itself in the person of Captain Ávila. Euclides then offered the following context:

A journalist, or rather a madman, acting in the most reckless fashion due to the laxity of repressive laws, created permanent scandal with intolerable insults in the Court of the old Empire [i.e., Rio de Janeiro]. And since some of the indecorous commentary had fallen on the Army, as well as reaching all social classes from the last citizen right up to the Monarch, the case was unfortunately resolved by a few officers using, as a last resort, the terrible and desperate justice of lynching.¹⁸

Euclides da Cunha was a 17-year old secondary school student at the time of Castro's murder, and we can fairly surmise that his later characterization of the editorial line of *O Corsário* came mostly from other sources closer to the events.

The Rio press provided Euclides with plenty of raw material for this critique, by suggesting that despite the horrific and very public circumstances of his demise, Castro, in effect, deserved his fate due to his merciless personal attacks on public figures and institutions of all classes, from the whores and pimps in the back alleys of Rio to the Monarch himself. The *Revista Ilustrada*, itself replete with satire and innuendo, said of Castro that “he respected nothing. The honor of the family, the decency of women—he defamed and slandered everything. Never have we seen someone take up the pen so intent on giving offense, expressly to give insult. It was a bit too much. The facts of such a violent retaliation, while not justified, are explicable.”¹⁹ The *Rio News*, an English-language newspaper catering to the foreign business community, characterized Castro’s paper as “a virtual corsair in politics, a libertine in morals. . . . It attacked private characters without scruple, it denounced public officials without fear, and it pandered to the debased and prurient desires of men without shame.”²⁰ The most complete modern accounting of the affair, by chronicler Raimundo Magalhães Jr., characterized Castro as a “scandalous pamphleteer and harsh critic who used, like no one else, the most sordid language and injurious and abusive vocabulary of all the press of the Empire.”²¹

A Death Foretold

Another remarkable aspect of this historical incident is how little evidence or interpretation is based on a reading of the contents of Castro’s newspaper. (A reasonably full press run, first in hard copy and more recently on microfilm, has been on the shelves of the National Library in Rio de Janeiro ever since it appeared on the streets.) A look at the pages of *O Corsário* shows that, indeed, Apulco de Castro launched sharply worded personal attacks on the individuals and institutions he chose to take on, often using harsh language not commonly seen in print at the time. It also shows that, unusual among public figures in Brazil in his era, he identified himself as a black man, what today would be called an Afro-Brazilian. Many examples might be brought to bear to illustrate his self-characterization and his journalistic style, because Apulco de Castro was the main, if not the only, writer for the paper, which like many periodicals of the period was more an organ of opinion and commentary than a source of news in the modern sense. But because the few mentions of his murder in the literature stress that he had offended the army, it is appropriate to focus here on the culminating events of October 1883.

It turns out that there was a mundane, straightforward basis for the animosity between certain members of the first light cavalry regiment and Apulco de

Castro. It stemmed not from general critique by Castro against the army as an institution, nor unspecified attacks on the honor and respect due to the armed defenders of the nation. Rather, it was Castro's willingness to take up the cause of the proprietor of a boarding house to whom an officer of that unit had run up a large debt that he tried to avoid paying. The dispute was compounded when members of the first light cavalry brought shame to the uniform by their public behavior abusive of their authority and status as the personal guard of emperor Pedro II. During the three years of its existence, *O Corsário* had launched many campaigns against what Castro saw as abuse of authority, immorality, corruption, and dereliction of duty, often using sharp words and personal invective. He did this to make good on the subtitle that appeared in the masthead of every issue of his paper: "Organ of Social Moralization." By Castro's criteria, this was one more skirmish in his ongoing campaign to bring the behavior of those who held positions of public respect and trust into line with the expectations of their status.

Since this case led directly to Castro's death, it is worth pausing to look at the sequence of published notices and commentary on it. The first salvo was a short note that appeared on 25 September 1883, a month to the day before the murder, in the section of the paper where items were published "on request" [*A Pedidos*]:

First Light Cavalry Regiment

A favor is requested of an officer of this corps, that he present himself at a tavern on rua da Quitanda, to resolve a small matter. He should do this as soon as possible, or else his full name, the origin of the debt, his letters, documents, and excuses will all be published in the columns of this periodical. And the attention of the [Commanding] General will be called to an individual who wears the insignia of an officer of the army and who lives off of tavern keepers and other people who have the misfortune of trusting him.²²

The amount mentioned was a considerable sum, at a time when a free artisan in Rio de Janeiro might earn a wage of two mil-réis (2\$000) per day. This first note brought no response, so on 29 September Castro upped the ante, this time not in the *A Pedidos* section, but in an announcement in the body of the paper providing more particulars, but still not revealing the name of the offender. It was addressed to the commander of the offender's unit, in the hope that military

discipline would be brought to bear to resolve this offense to the honor of the institution:

To His Excellency Antônio Nicolao Falcão da Frota, Colonel Commandant of the First Light Cavalry Regiment:

A tavern keeper on rua da Quitanda had the misfortune of giving credit in the amount of 156 mil-réis to an officer of your unit, when he was a resident on the aforementioned street. After his bill had reached that amount, however, the officer moved out of the neighborhood, and later from the said street. In vain the tavern keeper exhausted all peaceful and persuasive measures to obtain payment for the value of his services, but as payment the officer only gave him lamentations and excuses, always setting a new deadline for payment!

One day when his patience was spent, the poor creditor told the officer he was going to take him to court. The Son of Mars then, on 3 November 1882, sent a document in which he promised to pay 25 mil-réis monthly until his debt was cleared. To this day, 28 September [1883], he has not made even a single payment! The tavern keeper, convinced that the officer of the first light cavalry regiment would never pay the bill, concluded that by calling him to account through these columns he might get his desired money!

Do you know, Mr. Commander, what the officer under your command then did? Arming himself with a whip, he went to the tavern, the same one where in other times he had assuaged his hunger and that of his family, intending to whip the tavern keeper, which he was not able to do because other people intervened. This officer, no doubt, thinks that the whip intimidates, and with it, creditors are frightened off. How he deceives himself!

Now we will not cease to call this to the attention of not only Your Excellency, but also of His Excellency the Commanding General of the Army.

The morality and discipline of the Brazilian army demand that Your Excellency oblige this officer to pay the debts he has contracted in the tavern, especially when these debts are legalized by signed and sealed documents, written in the very hand of the debtor, an individual who wears the insignia of officer rank.

That's all for today, to be continued in other issues until we are satisfied. We prefer to spend 200 mil-réis of our own volition than have 156 mil-réis be taken from us.²³

At a time when a significant proportion of the population of Rio de Janeiro were slaves still subject to arbitrary and punitive physical abuse, when many members of the free lower classes were descended from slaves and were of some degree of African ancestry, the whip was a brutal reminder of the hierarchy of social status and coercive power. Threatening a person with a whipping carried strong connotations of the relationship between transcendent authority of the master and the subjugation of the slave. Still receiving no satisfaction, on 6 October Castro republished this statement in its entirety, changing the 200 mil-réis in the last sentence to 500 mil-réis.²⁴

In the next issue of his paper Castro reported on a separate incident, accusing troops of the first light cavalry regiment, the personal guard of emperor Pedro II, of abusing their status in a most egregious way:

Attention: We ask that measures be taken by the proper authorities to deal with a sad scene that took place on the 5th of the current month, on Guarda Velha Street. The cavalry troops of the emperor's guard attacked passersby, demanding money, and if they were not satisfied in their demands, they threatened people with their swords.

Shame of shames!²⁵

In the same issue, Apulco de Castro published the last of an occasional series of "Letters to Grandfather" (*Cartas ao Vovô*), implicitly but obviously meant as public letters to Emperor Pedro II himself, and also obviously meant as humorous prose with a sharper purpose. Like others in the series, this "letter" used the form of mock deference of a child to a respected patriarch to comment on events of the day, and call on the "Grandfather" to take action as circumstances might merit. In this instance, the topic was the unacceptable behavior of the Emperor's personal guard noted above, which took place while the miscreant troops accompanied Pedro II on a formal visit to a Pedagogical Exposition on Guarda Velha street, as follows:

Letter:

Most knowledgeable grandfather: Health, fat, and happiness is what I wish for you with all my heart. I begin these ill traced lines today by complaining about your precious guard unit, which is making so much noise in this heroic city of Saint Sebastian.

Lately you've been going to the pedagogical exposition, to do whatever you do to the beauties with the legs. You go in, and your guardsmen stay outside, doing the most devilish deviltries. Even the officers join in the dance, grandfather.

One of those days your guard turned into a gang of Calabrian bandits, thieves, attacking any who passed by, invading taverns to ask for money by force, and committing the biggest nonsense.

What a scandal, dearest grandfather of my tender affection! What an unprecedented scandal! Even the officers and cadets of your guard!

When I heard about this, grandfather, I crossed myself with my left hand!

It really is necessary to pull some ears in your guard, little grandfather. On the day of these disorders, all Guarda Velha Street was alarmed. Doors closed and the residents went into complete panic.

Our Lady agape! Rest assured, grandfather, that whenever I pick up my pen to write critically of you, I feel uncomfortable.

Your guard is a thief, a troublemaker, a drunk. . . . Many times I feel like defending you, but what can I do in face of the facts? Can I deny the evidence?

I hope that grandfather can correct himself and his own and then, when you [again] become morally correct, you can count on my friendship and assistance.

That's all I have to say for now, hoping that I don't have any more reasons to censure you so sharply.

Your grandson of heartfelt affection,
Corsário²⁶

And in the same issue of 9 October 1883, Castro again decried the debt to the tavern keeper, warning other merchants to watch out for members of the Emperor's Guard:

First Light Cavalry Regiment

The scoundrel of an officer of that corps has not made one move to pay the tavern keeper on Quitanda Street.

Nor has the commanding officer, to whom the creditor appealed, seen fit to safeguard the honor of the unit which he heads. The commanding general of the army also has not sought to discover who is the officer of the first light cavalry regiment who welshes

on debts and then cynically comes up with documents promising what he does not fulfill.

Even the officers of this unit, who well know which of their comrades dishonors them, placing in question which of them it is who eats at the expense of others, thus bringing suspicion on all of them, have not obliged this scoundrel to settle his accounts, nor have they made any protest, to make public which of them it is who eats on credit at the tavern in question, only to then try to pay with a coin which should only be circulated on his own face—the whip.

In view of such indifference, what should the victim of this theft do?

The only recourse is to spend more money, but then expose the little officer of the first light cavalry as the cheat that he is.

Tavern keepers! Butchers! Bakers, alert!!! When you see someone with insignia showing him to be an officer in the first light cavalry regiment, be careful. If it is not the culprit, it could be another one of equal character.²⁷

That evening, the offices of *O Corsário* were invaded by a group of uniformed officers and men of the first light cavalry regiment, who did enough damage to make the printing equipment unusable. Castro had access to another printing press, and on 11 October, without missing an issue, he published a 4-page sheet without the usual masthead plate, which was apparently lost or damaged in the attack on the print shop of 9 October. In this “Bulletin” Castro for the first time publicly identified the officer who still owed the debt to the tavern keeper: Alferes [Lieutenant] Firmino Garges Bellegard.²⁸ He also reported on the explicit racial epithets shouted in the streets by the soldiers involved, using the editorial “we” to refer to his own person:

The bandits openly declared their intention to kill us, to the point that when they did not find any of our employees [on the premises] they almost killed a poor man who lives next to our print shop, and beat women and children that they found.

Cannibals!

The first cavalry regiment, the special corps of the king of Brazil, soldiers paid by the people, are nothing more than a gang of scoundrels [*safados*].

The officer Firmino Garges Bellegard, together with his colleagues, got together the force to attack us by surprise.

Cowards!

And this gang of more than 100 men shouted in São José street:
 “Where’s the *negro*? We want to show him that *we are men!*”

Really: More than 100 men to show one *negro* that they are men!!!!!!²⁹

On October 23, 1883, two weeks after the attack on his print shop and two days before his assassination, Apulco de Castro published what he called his apotheosis. In it he predicted his own death, the demise of an uppity black man whose campaign to right several wrongs committed by members of the same army unit, and whose refusal to back down in the face of brutal intimidation, made him a marked man:

The first light cavalry regiment tells anyone who will listen that Apulco Castro must be killed, especially if he continues to publish *O Corsário*. . . . We prefer to die run through by the villainous sword of the king’s guard than to flee, denying our glorious past and all the sacrifices made in achieving our victories.

And then, when inexorable history focuses on our times it will have to say that a regiment that guarded Pedro II, composed of a thousand troops, armed itself with swords, hatchets, clubs, etc. to kill: a *negro*!!! That *negro* is Apulco Castro, editor and publisher of *O Corsário*! And with that we do not need history to say anything more on our behalf. Our apotheosis is written.

. . . .

Despite being *negro*, we must show that we are not afraid of the heroes of uniform and sword! . . . You may drink the blood of the *negro* as you promise, but you will know that the *negro* is a man who does not fear the mob!³⁰

Why was Apulco de Castro Forgotten?

And yet, “inexorable history,” in focusing on his times, has relegated Apulco de Castro to the margins, and has certainly not come to the conclusion that he was killed because of his race. Consideration of why Castro’s life and the circumstances of his death and the aftermath do not figure more prominently in Brazil’s historical narrative is tantamount to attempting to prove a negative: By the nature of the question, there is likely to be little direct evidence as an

answer. Nevertheless, given the importance of the incident at the time some consideration is necessary.

One remarkable aspect of the storm of press coverage in the aftermath of the murder is that no one was willing to identify publicly those who wielded the knives and shot the pistols as the persons responsible for the act, despite the very ostentatious destruction of Castro's print shop by soldiers two weeks previous, and by what had been published in *O Corsário* itself. In its edition of 13 October the *Revista Ilustrada* had depicted the attack of 9 October in explicit detail in its popular center spread for the week, satirizing the "bravery" of the uniformed troops who "penetrated the enemy fortress" of the unoccupied print shop where they "put to the sword all the furnishings and equipment—for want of anything better."³¹ In the immediate aftermath of the murder only one newspaper, the *Folha Nova*, dared to "lift the corner of the veil" by saying that "some attribute the attack to the army. The army of Brazil must reject such an accusation, because even when some of its members carry revenge to such an extreme, the army [as a whole] cannot let responsibility for such a crime, which is an insult to our civilization, fall on itself."³² *Folha Nova* subsequently dropped such language, and other papers did not use it.

After much trading of accusations and recriminations in the public forum, mentioning various actors in the drama but carefully avoiding any identification of the perpetrators, *O Brazil*, the official newspaper of the Conservative party, published a ditty that captured the tenor of public discourse, as follows:

Who killed Apulco?

The city is incredulous.

Who killed him? the police chief is asked. No one!

Who killed him? the minister of justice is asked. No one!

Who killed him? the prime minister is asked. No one!

Who killed him? the officer who took charge of him is asked.

No one!

Who would dare to kill him in broad daylight, in front of the forewarned police, the cabinet assembled, and the armed forces at the ready? No one! answers public opinion. It is thus evident, certain, and historic: The publisher of *O Corsário* was not murdered; he killed himself!

No one disputes this; it echoes in the depths of everyone's souls; it is the muzzle covering all mouths; the cover of all consciences.³³

Captain Ávila, for his part, subsequently issued a statement suggesting that the mules pulling the carriage were too weak to pull away quickly, leading the *Revista Ilustrada* to joke that since no bipedal animals had been arrested, perhaps the two quadrupeds should be charged with the crime.³⁴

The *Revista Ilustrada* is also the source of a compelling suggestion as to why this case was relegated to the status of an inconsequential incident deserving little more than a brief note, where it has long remained. In the issue of 10 November 1883, just two weeks after the murder and riots, Ângelo Agostini, editor and cartoonist of this popular weekly, titled his illustrated satire “Effects and Consequences of the Glorious Date of 25 October.” The youthful jester figure *Agostini* created to embody the magazine declared that he “continued to enjoy the most perfect health, thanks to not having experienced”—now using the clinical language of the autopsy report on the body of Apulco de Castro—“the effects of any cutting, perforating, or bruising instrument.” Agostini further noted that the other periodicals of Rio de Janeiro “also still enjoy good health, thanks to the prudent application of the cork to the tips of their pens” while dealing with the murder of Apulco de Castro, “without going to the *heart* of the matter.” Neither participants nor commentators were willing to point a finger directly at the members of the first light cavalry regiment, for fear of incurring a similar fate. “It seems that it is inconvenient for the truth to come out,” Agostini continued, but despite this, “today there is no one who does not know who is the father of the sons of Zebedee,” meaning that the identity of the perpetrators was well known, but no one wanted to say it in public.³⁵ The murder had the effect not only of silencing a critic of the abuse of authority who had clearly exceeded what those offended by that criticism considered to be acceptable limits.

This egregious public act of deadly violence also had the effect of making clear to others how high the cost was for such offense. Other commentators thus expressed themselves with due prudence, and by mid-November the case was finally pushed off the front pages.

From the perspective of Apulco de Castro’s place in “inexorable history,” another panel in the same illustrated commentary was even more prophetic. In it Agostini depicted a book entitled “History of Brazil: Annals of Events in the Capital of the Empire.” On the table in front of the book miniature figures dressed variously in the topcoats of public figures or the uniforms of both police and army, together wield a large broom. With it they are sweeping away the lines of text on the page labeled “25 October 1883.” Contemplating this figurative act of erasing the official record of what happened on that day is a morose image of *Clio*, goddess of history. The caption of the allegorical scene reads: “But in the pages of history! What kind of broom will be able to sweep away such shame? A cork in it. We almost forgot that corks are the order of the day.”

Ângelo Agostini, like Joaquim Serra of the *Folha Nova* and their colleagues in other newspapers understood the limits on commentary that was critical of institutions and individuals who were capable of committing murder to defend their status, and who because of that status could do so with impunity. Unlike Apulco de Castro, they were willing to work within those limits.

In a more general interpretive framework, we might relate the relegation of Apulco de Castro's life and death to a footnote on history to the concept of the Brazilian as *Homem Cordial*. This idea was introduced by, and associated with, the writings of historian Sergio Buarque de Holanda, particularly in his now-classic *Raízes do Brasil*.³⁶ The idea is that "The Brazilian," i.e., the elite white male Brazilian, can afford to be cordial to his peers and magnanimous to his inferiors, because he sits securely at the top of various hierarchies. These are mutually reinforcing status hierarchies of wealth, power, race, and gender. In order to persist, such hierarchies need to be recognized and accepted as legitimate by those occupying the various levels in them. This need for acceptance extends to those who might be critical of the hierarchies and their consequences, and who might resent their positions in the scale. Submission implies acceptance, even if on a negative basis. In order for them to be maintained, unacceptable violation of the norms governing such hierarchies requires the offender to be excluded from them, or eliminated. The other face of cordiality is ruthless enforcement of the limits of acceptable participation in the system.

During the era when Apulco de Castro lived and died, there were men who were *not* at the top of all of these hierarchies, particularly the racial pyramid, but who have come down in history as heroes of the age. I refer to such men as José do Patrocínio (whom Apulco de Castro satirized as the "*Preto Cínico*," [Cynical Black], a play on his surname, and derided as the "*Abolicionista-Môr*" [Head Abolitionist] of the time) as well as André Rebouças and Luis Gama—identified as Afro-Brazilian then and now; as well as Machado de Assis (recognized as mulatto) and Euclides da Cunha (of indigenous ancestry, who referred to himself in private correspondence as a *caboclo* and *bugre*, a derogatory term for Indian).³⁷ While recognizably not at the top of the racial/ethnic hierarchy these figures did conduct themselves by the rules of the *Homem Cordial*, by showing due deference to their social superiors, seeking patronage from them, and working within established political, legal, and cultural institutions. Thus they were not only accepted in their day, but they have been approved by history, and the memory of them lives on.

Apulco de Castro, as evidenced by the legacy he left in the pages of *O Corsário*, was educated (by what process is unknown), well informed, articulate, passionate, and firm in his convictions. But he knowingly broke the rules of comportment demanded of subordinate figures in the Brazilian hierarchies

of race and authority. He openly, persistently, eloquently, and often viciously challenged established institutions and the individuals who occupied positions in them and who benefited from the hierarchies. He was a threat because he had a voice, through his newspaper, and a popular following, in his thousands of readers. Knowing he was marked for death, he persisted to the end, and paid the ultimate price. And he and his voice were then implicitly and quietly erased from the historical memory of Brazil.

NOTES

1. Some confusion has crept into the spelling of the name. Even while he was alive his first name was sometimes rendered by others as Apulchro. See, e.g., *Almanak Laemmert, 1883* (Rio de Janeiro: Tipografia Laemmert, 1883), p. 850, which lists the print shop of “*O Corsário*, de Apulchro de Castro” as one of 52 such establishments in Rio at the time. Subsequently his first name occasionally appears incorrectly as Apulcro. Castro himself used both Apulcho Castro and Apulcho de Castro in published bylines, but never Apulchro. The standard (post-1942) modernization of the spelling of Brazilian Portuguese is Apulco, as used here.
2. Ernesto Mattoso, *Cousas do meu tempo (reminicências)* (Bordeaux: Gounouilhau, 1916), pp. 29-30; *Revista Ilustrada*, 31 October 1883, p. 2.
3. *O Corsário*, 31 October 1881, p. 3, col. 3.
4. See, for example, “Aos homens de cor,” *O Corsário*, 31 December 1881, p. 3; and the statements immediately preceding his death, discussed below.
5. This incident is depicted in *Revista Ilustrada* (Rio de Janeiro), 13 October 1883, pp. 5-6, and described in *Jornal do Commercio*, 11 October 1883, p. 2, as well as in *Folha Nova*, 10 October 1883, p. 2.
6. *Revista Ilustrada*, 31 October 1883, p. 2.
7. These events are described in detail in *Jornal do Commercio*, 26 October 1883, p. 1. The autopsy report is in *Gazeta de Notícias*, 27 October 1883, p. 1. The results of the police medical examination (*corpo de delicto*) is in *Gazeta de Notícias*, 29 October 1883, p. 1.
8. Melo’s statement of his version is in the *Jornal do Commercio*, 31 October 1883, p. 2. The closing of the case is reported in *Gazeta de Notícias*, 29 November 1884, p. 1 and *Jornal do Commercio*, 29 November 1884, p. 1.
9. Carl von Koseritz, *Imagens do Brasil* (São Paulo: Martins, 1943) [1886], pp. 233-235, 238-239. For more on capoeira gangs in 19th-century Rio and police efforts to control them, see Thomas H. Holloway, “‘A Healthy Terror’: Police Repression of Capoeiras in Nineteenth Century Rio de Janeiro,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 69:4 (November 1989), pp. 637-676; and June E. Hahner, *Poverty and Politics: The Urban Poor in Brazil, 1870-1920* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), pp. 56-60.

10. These riots, unreported in the historiography of the era, are described in *Jornal do Commercio*, 27 October 1883, p. 1; *Gazeta de Notícias*, 29 October 1883, p. 1; *O Brazil*, 30 October 1883, p. 2. Another foreigner who witnessed these events was Hastings Charles Dent; see his *A Year in Brazil* (London: Paul, Trench, & Co., 1886), p. 190. The riots were part of a pattern of popular protest in Rio de Janeiro beginning with the violent demonstrations against a tax on streetcar fares on 1 January 1880, and continuing sporadically through the social history of the city since that time. See Sandra Lauderdale Graham, "The Vintem Riot and Political Culture: Rio de Janeiro, 1880," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 60:3 (August 1980), pp. 431-449; Teresa Meade, "'Living Worse and Costing More': Resistance and Riot in Rio de Janeiro, 1890-1917," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 21:2 (May 1989), pp. 241-266; June E. Hahner, *Poverty and Politics: The Urban Poor in Brazil, 1870-1920* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986); and José Murilo de Carvalho, *Cidadania no Brasil: O longo caminho*, 3rd ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2002), pp. 72-73.
11. *Jornal do Commercio*, 31 October 1883, p. 2; José Aurélio Saraiva Câmara. *Um soldado do império: O general Tibúrcio e seu tempo* (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1978), p. 278.
12. *Relatório do Chefe de Polícia do Rio de Janeiro*, 1883, pp. 4-5 [annex to *Relatório do Ministro da Justiça*, 1883 (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1884)].
13. "Distúrbios," *Jornal do Commercio*, 30 October 1883, p. 1.
14. For a general history of the development of the police institutions in Rio, in dynamic tension with the social history of the city, see Thomas H. Holloway, *Policing Rio de Janeiro: Repression and Resistance in a Nineteenth-Century City* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993). The murder of Apulco de Castro is discussed in passing on pp. 262-265.
15. José Aurélio Saraiva Câmara, *Um soldado do império: O general Tibúrcio e seu tempo* (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1978), p. 278.
16. The prison riot is reported in *Relatório do Chefe de Polícia do Rio de Janeiro*, 1883, p. 43 [annex to *Relatório do Ministro da Justiça*, 1883 (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1884)].
17. The public invitations to the masses were published in the *Gazeta de Notícias*, 30 October 1883, p. 3; and 31 October 1883, p. 3. They also appeared in the *Jornal do Commercio* on those days. The crowd attending is reported in José Aurélio Saraiva Câmara. *Um soldado do império: O general Tibúrcio e seu tempo* (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1978), p. 280.
18. The text quoted is in *Os Sertões*, 5th ed. (São Paulo, 1914) p. 263. In 1883 Euclides da Cunha was a student in the Colégio Aquino in Rio de Janeiro. In 1885, at age 19, he entered the engineering course at the Escola Politécnica, and in 1886 entered the Praia Vermelha military academy as a cadet. In most editions of Da Cunha's *magnum opus* the year appears as 1884, and it reflects how little memory there was of the incident by the early twentieth century that the mistake persisted through subsequent editions. This error was corrected in a definitive recent edition: *Os Sertões (Campanha de Canudos)*, edited with notes, preface, and chronology by Leopoldo Bernucci (São Paulo: Atelie Editorial, 2001), pp. 425-6.

19. *Revista Illustrada*, 31 October 1883, p. 2.
20. *The Rio News*, 5 November 1883, p. 2, where several articles on the affair, translated from other Rio newspapers, also appear.
21. Raimundo Magalhães Jr., “A trágica aventura de Apulco de Castro,” in *O império em chinelos* (São Paulo: Civilização Brasileira, 1957), p. 208-28. Similar but briefer negative characterizations of Castro and his demise are in Raimundo Magalhães Jr., *Deodoro: A espada contra o Império*, 2 vols. (São Paulo: Nacional, 1957), I, p. 180; Raimundo de Menezes, *Crimes e criminosos célebres* (São Paulo: Martins, 1950), pp. 59-64; Nelson Werneck Sodré, *História militar do Brasil*, 2nd ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1968), p. 145; Nelson Werneck Sodré, *História da imprensa brasileira*, 3rd ed. (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1983), p. 231; and Pedro Calmon, *Princesa Isabel, a Redentora* (São Paulo: Editora Nacional, 1941), p. 138. More recently a leader of the *Movimento Negro* in Rio de Janeiro lamented that in contrast to the image we have of Luis Gama, André Rebouças, or José do Patrocínio, Apulco de Castro “chose the path of baseness, swindling, personal aggression, and giving offense, as a way of making a living.” Joel Rufino dos Santos, “O caso do jornalista Apulco de Castro,” *Anais da Biblioteca Nacional*, 116:7 (1996), pp. 98-103.
22. *O Corsário*, 25 September 1883, p. 3. The original term for the establishment is *taverna*, which could be applied to a business mainly for drinking, but also a place where meals were served. It is clear from context that the office in question regularly took his meals at the *taverna*, but resided elsewhere. The *A Pedidos* columns in many Rio newspapers at the time provided space to anyone willing to pay the price per line of text. Items were often published anonymously or over pseudonyms, with no effort to authenticate the veracity nor censor the contents. They were widely criticized as vehicles to publicize scandal and spread rumor, and critics suspected that the purpose was often extortion or blackmail.
23. *O Corsário*, 25 September 1883, p. 3.
24. *O Corsário*, 6 October 1883, p. 3.
25. *O Corsário*, 9 October 1883, p. 3. This incident was also reported in the *Gazeta da Tarde* of Rio, on the same day, and other papers in the city.
26. *O Corsário*, 9 October 1883, p. 2. To show the flavor of the prose, the original language is as follows:
 Carta: Sapientíssimo vovô—Saúde, gordura e felicidade é o que lhe desejo de todo o coração. Princípio hoje estas mal traçadas regras queixando-me do seu rico piquete, que faz tanto barulho nesta heróica cidade de S. Sebastião.
 Você costuma ultimamente de ir à exposição pedagógica para o que fazer às belas das gambias. Entra, e o seu piquete fica de fora fazendo umas diabruras de todos os diabos. Até os oficiais entram na dança, vovô.
 O seu piquete um dia desses transformou-se em uma troça de bandidos da Calábria, de salteadores, atacando a quem passava, invadindo os botequins para pedir dinheiro à força, praticando os maiores desatinos.
 Que escândalo, caríssimo vovô das minhas entranhas! Que ináudito escândalo! E os oficiais de seu piquete e os cadetes!
 Quando soube de tal, vovô, benzi-me com a canhota!

É preciso dar uns puxões de orelha no seu piquete, vovôsinho. No dia do sarilho, a rua da Guarda Velha ficou em completa alarma: as portas fecharam-se e os habitantes da dita ficaram em completo pânico.

Nossa Senhora da boca aberta! Fique certo o vovô, que todas as vezes que lanço mão da pena para escrever contra si, fico incomodado.

O seu piquete é um ladrão, é um turbulento, é um bêbado. . . . Muitas vezes tenho ímpetos de defendê-lo; mas o que posso dizer perante os fatos? Posso então negar a evidência? Espero que ainda o vovô possa corrigir-se e corrigir os seus e então, quando estiver moralizado, conte com a minha amizade e o meu auxílio.

Aqui fico por hoje, desejando não ter mais ocasião de fazer-lhe tão acres censuras.

Seu neto das entranhas, Corsário

27. *O Corsário*, 9 October 1883, p. 3.
28. Confirmation that the root of this crisis was the failure of this officer to pay his bill to the boarding establishment comes from the personal correspondence of General Antônio Tibúrcio, who wrote to a friend on 26 October, the day after the murder, that “soldiers counting on impunity, who arm themselves with daggers to cover for a bandit who does not want to pay his debts, are not worthy of having men of good will come to their defense.” José Aurélio Saraiva Câmara. *Um soldado do império: O general Tibúrcio e seu tempo* (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1978), p. 277.
29. *Boletim do Corsário*, 11 October 1883, p. 1. I have retained the Portuguese *negro* in these translations. Alternatives would be to use the English term “Negro,” now outdated, or “black man,” which carries a slightly different connotation. While *negro* does not always imply a negative epithet, it was clearly meant as such in the shouts of this group of uniformed soldiers that went looking to teach Apulco de Castro a lesson in reinforcement of Brazil’s racial hierarchy. The original text is as follows, with emphasis as shown:
Os bandidos manifestaram abertamente a intenção de assassinar-nos, tanto que não tendo conseguido encontrar nenhum de nossos empregados, quase assassinaram um pobre homem, que mora na vizinhança de nossa oficina e espancaram mulheres e crianças que encontraram.
Canibais!
O 1º regimento de cavalaria, o corpo especial do rei do Brasil, os soldados pagos pelo povo, não passa de uma troça de safados!
O oficial Firmino Garges Bellegard, de parceria com os seus colegas, arregimentou força para imprevisivelmente nos atacar! Cobardes!
E essa troça, superior a 100 homens, gritava na rua de S. José: “Onde está o negro? Queremos mostrar-o que *somos homem!*”
Realmente: mais de 100 indivíduos para mostrar a um negro que são homem!!!!!!
30. *O Corsário*, 23 October 1883, p. 1-2. The original language is as follows:
O 1º regimento de cavalaria ligeira diz a quem queira ouvir que Apulcho Castro ha de ser assassinado, máxime se continuar a publicar o *Corsário*. . . . Preferimos morrer atravessados pela espada faccinora da guarda do rei, do que fugir, desmentindo o nosso glorioso passado, que tantos sacrifícios nos custou a conquistá-lo.

E depois, quando a inexorável história ocupar-se dos nossos tempos, há de dizer que um regimento que guardava o rei Pedro II, composto de mil praças, armou-se de espadas, machadinhas, cacetes, etc., etc., para matar a... um negro!!!

Esse negro é Apulco Castro—o redator-proprietário do *Corsário!*

E com isso não precisamos que a história diga mais nada em nosso abono.

Está escrita a nossa apoteose! . . .

A pesar de sermos negro, havemos de mostrar que não tememos os heróis de farda e espada! . . . Bebam embora, como prometem, o sangue do negro, mas ficarão sabendo que o negro é homem que não teme a multidão!

31. *Revista Ilustrada*, 13 October 1883, pp. 5-6.
32. “O atentado de hontem,” *Folha Nova*, 26 October 1883, p. 1. “Lift the corner of the veil” is from José Aurélio Saraiva Câmara. *Um soldado do império: O general Tibúrcio e seu tempo* (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1978), p. 276.
33. *O Brazil*, 13 November 1883, p. 1, col. 3; reprinted in *Gazeta de Notícias*, 14 November 1883, p. 2, col. 8.
34. *Revista Ilustrada*, 10 November 1883, pp. 5-6; 22 November, p. 8.
35. The biblical reference (Mark 10:35) is to Zebedee, father of Jesus’s disciples James and John the Evangelist, and suggests something that is obvious to all.
36. Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, *Raízes do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1936). In the preface to the second edition, 1947, Holanda specifies the idea; the third edition of 1956 (pp. 283-314) includes an exchange between Holanda and the historian, poet, and literary scholar Cassiano Ricardo, developing the concept further.
37. Thomas E. Skidmore and Thomas H. Holloway, “New Light on Euclides da Cunha: Letters to Oliveira Lima, 1903-1909,” *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 8:1 (July 1971), pp. 41, 49.