CHAPTER TWO: The Brazilian Navy Through 1910: Slavery in Everything but Name

In 1904, as Mayor Pereira Passos was overseeing Rio de Janeiro’s most intense urban reforms, Brazil launched another ambitious modernization program, this one focusing on its navy. That year, an unlikely alliance between national politicians and naval leaders resulted in a large-scale naval renovation project that resulted in the purchase of 14 state-of-the-art battleships from English shipyards. By 1910, the Brazilian Navy was transformed from a global non-entity to a serious naval power.¹ The jewels of this new Brazilian fleet were the dreadnoughts São Paulo and Minas Gerais, which at the time represented the most destructive ships in the world. With these massive new battleships, Brazilian political and naval leaders hoped, their country would finally gain international respect and surpass rival Argentina as Latin America’s great power.²

While Brazilian politicians and naval leaders zealously sought to update the navy through technology, they made no such efforts to improve the backward recruitment and brutal treatment of their sailors. The navy was a cruel, racist and unforgiving institution. Though slavery had been abolished in 1888, slave-like conditions and practices nonetheless persisted in the navy well after this date. Given these oppressive conditions, it is little wonder that the sailors who rebelled in November 1910 declared in one manifesto that they were protesting against “the slavery as practiced in the Brazilian Navy.”³ Ironically, of the four battleships seized by the rebels during their revolt, three had


² For two photographs of the Minas Gerais, see Images 6 and 7 in Appendix B, page 152.

³ Morel, A Revolta da Chibata, 86. “a escravidão na Marinha Brasileira...”
been imported that same year from England, including the potent dreadnoughts Minas Gerais and São Paulo. Modernizing the Brazilian navy, long a dream of the country’s naval and political leaders, ironically exposed that the brutal treatment of sailors remained unchanged from a past era.

Patterns of Recruitment in the Brazilian Navy

The Brazilian Navy in the 19th and early 20th century held a dual function. First, it served as a symbol of the nation’s aspirations for international respect and regional dominance, particularly in the first decade of the 1900s. Simultaneously, it represented a “proto-penal institution” to deal with the nation’s undesirable population – namely, the unemployed, criminally-prone, dark-skinned urban poor. Brazil’s navy was not unique in this respect – indeed, many other Latin American countries imbued their national navies with similarly opposing goals. As military historian Peter Beattie notes, militaries in Latin America during the 19th century period “performed seemingly contradictory functions by enforcing royal law while collecting, watching over, and employing males considered criminal, menacing, or, at best, unproductive.”

Until 1836, Brazil did not even have a permanent standing navy to achieve these goals. That year, the first formal national naval companies were founded. Though the naval ranks grew quickly, from 37 men in 1836 to 1,094 in 1850 and 3,074 in 1884, officers struggled continually to fill their ranks. This fact was primarily due to the navy’s reputation for brutality and inhumane conditions. In

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4 Both Morgan and Beattie use the term “proto-penal” to describe the navy during this period in Brazilian history.
5 Beattie, Tribute of Blood, 17.
7 Beattie, Tribute of Blood, 192. Indeed, the Brazilian Navy held such a strong reputation for violence that parents would often threaten misbehaving children with the prospect of naval service. Martins reprints one such threat that was common during this period: “I’ll send you to the navy to straighten you out…this little rascal needs a few good chibatadas [whippings] on the back!” Hélio L. Martins, A revolta dos marinheiros, 1910. (Rio de Janeiro: Serviço de Documentação Geral da Marinha, 1988), 124. “Mando-te para a Marinha para até corrigir, é da golilha naval que este mau elemento precisa, com umas boas chibatadas nas costas!”
the half-century from 1836 to 1884, approximately 1 in 5 sailors died while on active duty. Of these deaths, just 2.2% occurred in battle, while 89.3% resulted from disease – a testament to the horribly poor conditions of everyday service. Moreover, as Beattie notes, a sailor who served during this period was far more likely to die in service than to receive a pension. Given these conditions, enlisted men unsurprisingly deserted service with great frequency; some years, as many as ten percent of the navy’s sailors abandoned their posts.

From 1836 to 1888, 15,317 men served as sailors in the navy. They entered service through one of three paths: the naval apprenticeship schools, by volunteering, or through forced recruitment. The table below shows the proportion of sailors that entered the ranks through each path during this period:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method of Recruitment</th>
<th>Number of Men</th>
<th>% of Recruits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship Schools</td>
<td>8,586</td>
<td>56.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced Recruits</td>
<td>6,271</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the data show, apprenticeship schools were the primary means of recruitment in the Brazilian Navy under the monarchy. The first of these was founded in 1840, and by 1875, there were twelve throughout the country. These schools recruited boys between the ages of 10-18 – often orphans and vagrants – and placed them on the path to becoming sailors. Though their purpose was

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10 Beattie, *Tribute of Blood*, 192. From 1836-1884, the navy enlisted 14,435 men, and during this period there were a whopping 6,568 instances of desertion. Of these deserters, slightly over half (3,529) were forced back into service (though Beattie notes that a small percentage returned voluntarily).
12 Nascimento, “Do convés ao porto,” 77-78. The author notes that these age restrictions on apprentices varied throughout the 19th century. There were monetary incentives to encourage a steady flow of boys into the apprenticeship schools: a parent received $100,000 milréis for volunteering his son, and a police officer gained a $4,000 milréis bonus for succumbing any criminal or vagrant children to naval service. In this latter case, the apprenticeship schools were not
ostensibly to teach young boys reading, writing and naval skills, the apprenticeship schools in fact offered only the most rudimentary training – they were hardly schools in the modern sense of the word. As Zachary Morgan notes, the ultimate goal of the apprenticeship schools was to create a pipeline of hardy and subordinate sailors for service in the lower ranks of the Brazilian Navy. Volunteering for naval service, meanwhile, was essentially unheard of; just one out of every 33 sailors during this period joined the Brazilian Navy of his own free will.

A third, increasingly common means by which naval leaders filled their depleted ranks was through forced recruitment. The Brazilian Navy had a long history of employing this practice, predating even the formation of naval companies in 1836. As practiced during the monarchy and early Republic, forced recruitment essentially amounted to sweeping the streets of Brazil’s major urban centers (particularly Rio de Janeiro) for the poorest and most marginalized male populations. These forced recruits comprised vagrants, orphans, petty criminals, and the unemployed – many of Rio’s poor that were also affected by Pereira Passos’s urban reforms.

A large portion of the boys and men recruited for service were the sons of ex-slaves or ex-slaves themselves. After arresting these men for petty criminal charges such as drunkenness, loitering, or practicing capoeira (Afro-Brazilian martial arts), authorities would turn them over directly to the navy, where the new recruits would traditionally receive the base rank of grumete (cabin boy).

Though forced recruits comprised 41% of all enlisted sailors from 1836-1888, evidence suggests that...
this practice became more common in the later years of the 19th century. In 1888, for example, 1,006 new men joined the Brazilian Navy; of these, 42.8% came from the apprenticeship schools, while 50.8% were forcibly recruited.19

Indeed, at its core, the navy represented a “proto-penal institution,” an alternate means for the state to deal with lesser criminals and other so-called undesirable types that overcrowded or eluded Rio’s woefully underdeveloped criminal justice system.20 Rather than lock up thousands of dangerous, dark-skinned, and supposedly inferior undesirables in jail cells, the authorities forced them into naval service. This was a particularly convenient arrangement for Brazilian politicians of the period, who faced the twofold problem of overcrowded penitentiary systems and understaffed fleets in the navy.21 Indeed, in the words of one modern historian, recruitment practices during the monarchy and early Republic meant that ships in the Brazilian navy were essentially “transformed into a type of movable prison.”22

While forced recruitment was expressly banned with the proclamation of the Republic, these recruitment practices nonetheless continued in full force.23 In 1907, Brazilian naval historian Artur Jaceguai wrote that, continuing with the practice under the monarchy, naval authorities continued to rely on forced recruitment as the primary means of manpower, drawing heavily “from the

19 José M. de Carvalho, Forças armadas e política no Brasil (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor, 2005), 21. Of the 1,006 new sailors in the navy that year, 64 volunteered, 431 came from the apprenticeship schools, and 511 were forcibly recruited. That same year, there were 360 desertions.
23 Beattie, Tribute of Blood, 99. Though it would appear that there exists no data that could conclusively prove this claim – under the Republic, official statistics of the navy’s recruiting practices were no longer kept – Morgan convincingly posits that forced recruits comprised “approximately the same percentage of sailors in 1910 as they had in the 19th century.” (Morgan, “Legacy of the Lash,” 163, fn. 2) He continues by mentioning a diverse range of sources that support this assertion: “anecdotal descriptions in the popular press and in travel guides; memos from foreign military attachés back to their countries; naval photographs; the memoirs of retired officers,” and even the 1895 modernist novel, Bom-Crioulo by Adolfo Caminha. (Morgan, “Legacy of the Lash,” 34). Beattie reprints several popular cartoons from the Republican era that also clearly depict the continuation of impressment during this period. One 1893 cartoon has the caption, “Recruitment has been the terror of many people, and it continues to bring luck.” Beattie, Tribute of Blood, 110-111.
malefactors and riffraff of the large coastal cities.”24 A naval officer in 1911 openly characterized Brazilian naval crews as “the drain of society.”25

In sharp contrast to the navy, Brazil’s army increasingly moved to guarantee its soldiers basic rights, training and humane treatment during the late 19th and early 20th century. The Military Recruitment Law of 1874 technically abolished corporal punishment throughout the armed forces, but it was actively enforced only in the army.26 By the late 19th century, a large majority of the army’s recruits were skilled adult volunteers – a significant difference from the navy, where officers actively coerced and enlisted untrained men and boys into service.27 With a 1908 military law, the Brazilian Army shifted to adopt European models of military citizenship in a further effort to professionalize its soldiers. As a result, a standing body of professional soldiers was created, terms of service were reduced, and forced recruits became far less common.28 While this law had a relatively strong effect in the army, in no way did it lead to any meaningful reforms in the navy.29 By 1910, the Brazilian army could be accurately characterized as modern and humane; conversely, the navy remained a brutal and backward institution both in the recruitment and the treatment of its sailors.

**A Sailor’s Plight: Racism and Inhumane Conditions**

Given the fact that enlisted sailors were recruited largely from Brazil’s population of disenfranchised urban poor, it is little surprise that Brazilians of color were heavily overrepresented

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26 Morgan, “Legacy of the Lash,” 39. This law also abolished the position of personal servants to military officers; as will be shown below, this practice was again enforced only in the army and not in the navy.
in the lower ranks of the navy. According to José Eduardo de Macedo Soares, who served as a naval officer in various capacities (including first and second lieutenant) from 1902 to 1912, the crews in 1910 comprised approximately 50% negros, 30% mulatos, 10% caboclos (people of mixed African and indigenous descent), and 10% “brancos or almost brancos.”

In sum, between 85-90% of the sailors in the Brazilian navy were of African ancestry. This figure was substantially larger than the percentage of non-whites in the army or in the Brazilian population on the whole.

While marginalized lower-class Afro-Brazilians were heavily represented in the crews of the navy, the officer positions were staffed exclusively by powerful white elites. The Brazilian navy was arguably the most segregated institution in Republican Brazil. As the Estado de São Paulo summed up matter-of-factly in 1911,

“The officer was never a sailor. The sailor will never be an officer…in order to become an officer, one must belong to the well-off bourgeois, have money to defray the costs of training at the Naval School, and be as little mestiço [mixed-race] or as white as possible.”

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30 Soares, Política versus Marinha, 85 n. 1. Though dark-skinned Brazilians were overwhelmingly forced into service by the navy’s targeted recruitment policies, once on board ships, all sailors suffered similar brutality. In a fascinating section, Zachary Morgan shows that white sailors in the Brazilian navy during this period were punished and whipped just as frequently as their Afro-Brazilian counterparts; as he states, “they were treated wholly without privilege” and “simply lost the benefits of their whiteness.” Morgan, “Legacy of the Lash,” 7, 11.

31 Morgan catalogs the race of all sailors who were tried in Rio for crimes between 1860-1893. Of the 344 men disciplined during this period, 14.5% were white, 77.1% were non-white (including pardo, preto, caboclo, and other less common terms for people from mixed racial ancestries), and 7.6% unknown. Though these statistics are clearly more accurate than Soares’s more general estimates, Morgan’s figures are probably less indicative of the racial composition of Brazilian crews in 1910 for two reasons. First, Morgan’s figures only refer to men tried for crimes, not the overall number of enlisted men. Second, the swell of Afro-Brazilian migration to Rio de Janeiro and other urban centers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries suggests that the proportion of Afro-Brazilians in naval crews was likely higher in 1910 than it was twenty years earlier. Morgan, “Legacy of the Lash,” 77.


33 Morgan is one of several historians to make this claim. Morgan, “Legacy of the Lash,” 4.

Peter Beattie notes that the navy’s officer corps “remained a more exclusive bastion of ‘whiteness’” than that of the army; thus, compared to the army, the navy had more white officers and more black sailors.\(^35\)

Though no official barriers blocked nonwhites from becoming officers, subtle segregationist practices had a long legacy in Brazil. A 1782 law of the Royal Naval Academy required that its officers either be from the nobility or the sons of military officers, which all but limited these positions to whites. This statute went unchallenged throughout the 19th century.\(^36\) Similarly, no law required that sailors be black, yet the state’s targeted recruitment methods, coupled with the legacy of slavery and its devastating effects on Afro-Brazilians, produced crews that were nearly 90% nonwhite. As one observer noted in the early 1900s, outside of the white officers, “the navy was all black.”\(^37\) Notably, this did not result from strict racially-based laws, but rather from *de facto* segregation.\(^38\)

Naval commanders and their sailors were also sharply divided by social class. Virtually all of the white officers came from an exclusive naval aristocracy, and they guarded their prestige fiercely. Many also graduated from the prestigious law schools of Recife and São Paulo, which served as intellectual hotbeds for influential officers and cadets of the era. \(^39\) According to Soares, “The naval official corps was always, at the very least, a part of the most elite of high society in Brazil.”\(^40\) To these proud, intellectual, and upper-class white officers, the disenfranchised and largely illiterate

\(^{36}\) Morgan, “Legislating the Lash” [journal], paragraph 10.
\(^{38}\) It is telling to compare this mindset to racial attitudes in the United States during this period. Historically, white American politicians relied heavily on laws to enforce segregation, from Jim Crow laws in the South to racially-divided ranks in the armed forces until 1948. In contrast, Brazil tended towards *de facto* segregation in the navy and in its general race relations. Yet as the case of the navy clearly shows, a lack of racist legislation hardly precluded discriminatory practices in Brazil. As whites in Jim Crow South did by enacting racist laws, white officers in the Brazilian navy maintained hegemonic control over their overwhelmingly dark-skinned subordinates.
\(^{39}\) Freyre, *Order and Progress*, 402.
\(^{40}\) Soares, *Política versus Marinha*, 90. “A oficialidade de marinha sempre foi, ao menos, uma parte das mais escolhidas da alta sociedade do Brasil.”
dark-skinned sailors seemed impossibly distant and inferior. The prevalence of scientific racism
during this period only reinforced the patronizing attitudes that officers took towards their sailors.

Thomas Holloway, the foremost scholar on Brazilian prisons and crime during 19th century
Brazil, highlights a significant change in the treatment of Afro-Brazilians during this period. Under
slavery, Holloway argues, Afro-Brazilians were normally controlled by private means – that is,
through the slave master. As slavery was gradually phased out through the latter half of the 19th
century, this arrangement changed significantly. Increasingly, Afro-Brazilians increasingly became
incorporated into the public sphere in Brazil’s burgeoning cities: São Paulo, Bahia, and especially Rio
de Janeiro. For political and social elites intent on modernizing Brazil’s image, this development was
a serious threat. Thus, Holloway argues, Afro-Brazilians were increasingly controlled not through
private means (namely, slave masters), but through public ones – the police force, prisons, and
especially military service.41

Regardless of their race or how they entered service, all Brazilian sailors on board the ships
were afforded minimal rights and forced to endure inhumane conditions. During the monarchy, all
enlisted men had lacked the right to vote; the 1891 Republican Constitution, though ostensibly a
progressive document based on the American model, explicitly continued this disenfranchisement of
Brazilian sailors.42 An average term of enlistment in the navy lasted from nine to fifteen years.
However, if a sailor committed any act of indiscipline, he was forced to start a new term of service.
As a result, many men were forced to serve in the navy for decades on end – indeed, occasionally for
their entire adolescent and adult lives.43 The food served on board was generally rotten and served in
meager portions. Most oppressive of all, officers used the chibata as punishment for most disciplinary

Holloway’s work and its relation to the navy during this period.
42 José Murilo de Carvalho, Cidadania no Brasil (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2001), 40.
43 Morgan, “Legacy of the Lash,” 38. The author notes that some men literally served from childhood until age 60 or
later. Many disciplinary breaches also warranted monetary fines, which were usually enforced by forcing sailors to work
for a period of time without pay.
breaches – not just for desertion or violence, but also for less serious instances such as public drunkenness or perceived insubordination. Despite laws to the contrary (described below), officers frequently punished sailors for serious crimes with 250 or more consecutive lashes.

A firsthand account of the chibata in action reveals its sheer brutality. Eurico Fogo, who served as an enlisted sailor from 1898 to 1910, provides a chilling description of a typical whipping. The incident took place in 1910 on board the Minas Gerais, which would take part in the November Revolt later that year:

“The torturer took up a stiff, medium weight hemp cord, pierced with small steel needles… The ship’s crew was ordered on deck to view the shackled prisoner. The commander, after a moment of silence, read a proclamation of the sailor’s crime. The shackles were removed from his wrists and he was suspended – stripped from the waist up – from the iron structure that secured the ships [sic] ballast. Then…the master of the tragic ceremony began to apply the blows. The blood ran. The beaten man moaned, pleading, as the torturer continued enthusiastically with his inhumane task. The drummers played with fervor, drowning out the man’s screams. Many officers averted their faces…. As the enlisted men dispersed, repulsed and profoundly indignant, they murmured among themselves: ‘This will end!!’”

Notably, many officers found the whipping so horrific that they had to turn away, suggesting that the officers performed such brutal acts not out of sheer sadism but rather out of perceived necessity – namely, to maintain order on their ships. Fittingly, the man whipped in this particular case was sailor Marcelino José Rodrigues, who ultimately participated in the November uprising later that year. Though sailors could technically appeal abuses to naval courts, these legal venues were a façade of justice – naval officers were essentially free to whip their sailors as they saw fit.

45 Of the 344 men who were tried for crimes from 1860 to 1893, 59% had been whipped previously, and on average, these men had received 226 lashings. Morgan, “Legacy of the Lash,” 103. Other anecdotal instances of officers punishing their sailors with hundreds of consecutive lashings: Morgan, “Legacy of the Lash,” 103 (275 lashes), O Correio da Manhã, 26 November 1910, 1 (330 lashes), O Correio da Manhã, 25 November 1910, 3 (350 lashes), and the largest amount cited by any source, Morgan, “Legacy of the Lash,” 57 (500 lashes).
47 In the first 50 years of the monarchy, for example, only one officer was tried for brutality; he had administered 500 lashes to a sailor. His case was quickly dismissed. Morgan, “Legacy of the Lash,” 57.
In fact, the *chibata* merely represented the most intense in a litany of brutal punishments in the Brazilian Navy. Federal Decree 8,898 of 1883 provided a grotesque list of the possible penalties that an officer could inflict upon his sailors. In increasing order of severity, the decree listed the following possible disciplinary measures: 2 to 6 hours in the *golilha* (an iron collar affixed to a wall and placed around the prisoner’s neck, forcing him to stand completely upright), 2 to 6 days in prison below deck in irons; 3 to 5 days in solitary confinement with bread and water and without irons; the same punishment, but with irons; and finally, 6 to 25 lashes with the *chibata*. Remarkably, with this act, the federal government explicitly named and sanctioned all of these practices for use in the navy. The fact that officers routinely surpassed even the most severe of these punishments attests to their furious obsession with maintaining order on their ships.

How did a sailor’s life in the Brazilian navy actually compare to that of slaves in pre-abolition Brazil? Firsthand accounts indicate that these practices were remarkably similar; indeed, the *chibata*, the *golilha*, and several other forms of corporal punishment were direct vestiges from slavery days. Robert Conrad, an authority on Brazilian slavery, notes that the *chibata* was an “ordinary form of punishment” for many masters.

Though the *Lei Áurea* officially brought slavery to an end in 1888, slavelike conditions persisted in the navy. As Zachary Morgan notes, “Men impressed into work, who lack means to leave the service of their lords or state, who are whipped both as a means to improve their labor output and to serve as a symbolic threat to others, are acting as slaves.” He continues by clarifying that, despite the fact that sailors in the Brazilian Navy received a minimal salary, it would be

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Inaccurate to describe these men as free wage laborers.\textsuperscript{51} In a very literal sense, Brazilian sailors during the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century were slaves to their officers.

Naturally, racism played a crucial role in the way that officers interacted with their sailors. Lieutenant Soares exemplified the prevailing racist attitudes of the time among naval officers. Soares blamed the 1910 revolt, and indeed all “evil in Brazil,” on “the moral qualities of race” - specifically, the African elements present in the country. “Negros,” he stated, “are anemic, of poor breeding, possessing all of the depressing signs of the most backward African nations.” Soares cited the prevalence of Afro-Brazilians in the enlisted ranks as the navy’s gravest problem:

The first impression that a Brazilian crew produces is one of decadence and physical incompetence…Profundely ignorant of any notion of comfort, our sailors dress poorly, do not know how to eat, [and] do not know how to sleep. Irresponsible and lazy, their race carries the defect of being incapable of progress… Illiterate, without the reins of religion…the majority of sailors have a culture most favorable towards vice and crime.\textsuperscript{52}

This patronizing attitude that officers had towards their supposedly inferior sailors once again recalls slavery. As Soares and many other naval officers felt, Brazil could not possess a modernized and respectable navy given their crews’ current demography. Indeed, during this period in Brazilian history, naval officers often banned their sailors from leaving their ships in foreign ports. This practice kept with the national mission of projecting an image of Brazil as a white and “civilized” nation.\textsuperscript{53}

The Legal History of Corporal Punishment: Attempts to Abolish the “Indispensable” Chibata

\textsuperscript{51} Morgan, “Legacy of the Lash,” 243-234. In a brilliant section, Morgan takes Orlando Patterson’s broad definition of slavery as advanced in \textit{Slavery & Social Death} and applies it to the men enlisted in the Brazilian Navy. “Too often,” Morgan writes, “historians of slavery exclude whole areas of study by applying too narrow a definition of the term slavery.”

\textsuperscript{52} Soares, \textit{Politica versus Marinha}, pp. 85-86. “A primeira impressão que produz uma guarnição brasileira é a de decadencia e incapacidade physica…Profundamente alheios a qualquer noção de conforto os nossos marineiros vestem-se mal, não sabem comer, não sabem dormir. Imprevidentes e preguiçosos elles trazem da raça a tara da incapacidade de progredir.”

\textsuperscript{53} Beattie, “Adolfo Ferreira Camina,” 91.
Naval officers were so convinced of the social and racial inferiority of their crews that they relied overwhelmingly on corporal punishment to maintain order on their ships; this remained the case even after it was officially banned on several occasions. Soares, who served as an officer for a decade, justified this practice by invoking racist theories of the time. “[A]s long as these current customs on board our ships continue,” he wrote in 1911, “the chibata is literally indispensable. Outlawing it would threaten the lives of our officers and open the door to indiscipline.” Only the “fear of punishment,” Soares argued, could effectively control the supposedly inferior dark-skinned sailors and maintain order in the navy.54 Officers held two strong yet opposing emotions towards their sailors; they patronized them but also greatly feared insubordination and uprisings. To address both issues, however, officers responded by relying even more heavily on the chibata.

As Zachary Morgan notes, the legal history of corporal punishment in the Brazilian Navy is essentially an academic matter, as naval officers ignored the laws that banned the chibata for nearly a century.55 The 1824 Imperial Constitution clearly decreed the end of corporal punishment. “From this day forth,” it stated, “the lash [chibata], torture, branding and all other cruel punishments are abolished.”56 Yet the following year, on July 23, 1825, an imperial decree allowed for naval officers to give 100 lashes to deserting sailors. As Morgan notes, this decree was not a formal amendment, but rather treated the chibata as if it had never been abolished in the first place.57

In 1861, Decision 396 represented the first attempt by Brazilian politicians to limit the chibata specifically in the navy. The law set clear guidelines: a commander could give his sailor only 25 lashes a day; the punishment had to be carried out in front of the assembled crew; and the crime for

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54 Soares, Política versus Marinha, pp. 88-89. “enquanto persistirem os costumes e a moral atualmente reinantes nos navios, a chibata é literalmente indispensável. Proíbl-la é ameaçar a vida dos oficiais e abrir a porta à indisciplina.”
which the sailor was being whipped had to be announced. As has already been shown, this regulation was also routinely ignored.  

With the founding of the Republic in 1889, Brazilian lawmakers, overcome with a progressive zeal, issued a decree explicitly abolishing corporal punishment in the navy. This decree was just the third of the young regime, and it was issued on the second day of the Republic, no less: November 16, 1889. Once again, the decree did not stand. Much as Soares would argue twenty years later, officers vociferously asserted that they could not maintain order on their ships without corporal punishment. Just five months later, on April 12, 1890, the National Congress voted to legalize the *chibata* once again. This was the last legislation passed relating to corporal punishment in the navy until the *Revolta da Chibata* erupted in 1910.

No Brazilians of the era denied that corporal punishment was an inhumane practice. One former naval officer explicitly singled out the “degrading punishment” of the *chibata* as a direct legacy of slavery, “one that disgracefully represented an aberrant tradition of class difference” in the Brazilian Navy. As another officer shamefully admitted in 1878, Brazil lagged far behind European countries in the treatment of their sailors: “Among us there is still much degrading castigation that should be eliminated…these are the vestiges of feudal discipline.” Indeed, by the proclamation of the Republic, corporal punishment was a thing of the past in navies throughout the North Atlantic:

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58 Morgan, “Legacy of the Lash,” 134
59 Morgan, “Legacy of the Lash,” 136. The decree created a Correctional Company to discipline sailors with no more than 25 lashes. As its rationale, it stated that, “within a restricted limit, it is a necessity recognized and demanded by all of those who exert authority over sailors.” Caminha, *História Administrativa do Brasil*, 323. “dentro de um limite restrito é uma necessidade reconhecida e reclamada por todos que exercem autoridade sobre os marinheiros.”
60 Martins, *A revolta dos marinheiros*, 93-94. Notably, obscure naval codes in the period since 1890 allowed for the use of corporal punishment; however, it is dubious whether these codes had legal precedence over national legislation.
Spain had abolished such practices in 1823, France in 1860, the United States in 1861, Germany in 1872 and Great Britain in 1881.63

Though Brazil could claim nearly a century of legislation explicitly abolishing corporal punishment, the practice remained widespread throughout the navy. As if addicted to a powerful drug, naval officers recognized the problems of the *chibata* but remained incapable of kicking the dangerous habit once and for all. Clearly, no law or decree could effectively abolish corporal punishment in the Brazilian Navy. More drastic measures would be necessary – measures that the rebels of November 1910 were willing to take.

The International Arms Race & Brazil’s Naval Renovation Project

At the turn of the century, the Brazilian navy was in a state of serious disarray. Its ships consisted of a ragtag assortment of antiquated sailboats, steamers and ironclads.64 Its most powerful ship, the *Riachuelo*, had been built in 1883 – indeed, it was the fleet’s only battleship.65 As one naval historian frankly stated, the Brazilian fleet prior to 1910 was “a shameful patchwork-quilt navy, and made of rotten patches at that.”66 From the end of the Paraguayan War in 1870 until 1910, the Brazilian navy remained completely idle in formal combat, and this disuse was reflected in the decrepitude of these motley vessels. Indeed, during this forty-year period, the only major activity that the Brazilian navy saw was a serious of armed insurrections; remarkably, there were ten separate uprisings in the armed forces from 1889 to 1910 alone.67

In the North Atlantic at the turn of the century, a new battleship called the dreadnought was revolutionizing the navies of Europe and the United States, allowing these countries to build up

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their fleets to be more powerful than ever before. First developed by the British in the shipyards of Newcastle, the dreadnought represented the pinnacle of naval destructive power. First, it was an “all-big gun ship”; its 10- and 12-inch guns were substantially larger than those of all previous generations of ships. The dreadnought was also an incredibly versatile weapon; it could attack enemies effectively at long distances, but also had massive armor to protect against close attacks. As the first ship ever powered by steam turbines, it possessed great speed and agility. When the British Royal Navy launched its first dreadnought in February 1906, it ushered in a new age of naval warfare. As one British admiral admitted in a private letter, the new dreadnought technology rendered the rest of the Royal Navy “obsolete at the moment that it was at the peak of its efficiency.”

By 1906, navies around the world were already scrambling to modernize the armors and artillery in their own fleets in accordance with these latest developments in England. The great international naval race had begun.

Coinciding with this revolutionary development in naval technology was an increased emphasis on the navy as a symbol of international power and prestige. More than ever before, the power of a country’s navy represented the power of the country itself. The Russo-Japanese War from 1904 to 1905 confirmed this belief; thanks to superior naval technology, the Japanese routed the numerically superior Russian fleet. From 1907 to 1909, President Teddy Roosevelt’s “Great White Fleet” – composed of four squadrons of 16 battleships and their escorts – circumnavigated the globe, sending a clear message of America’s naval power to the world. Among the dozens of stops made by the fleet was Rio de Janeiro, from January 12 to 22, 1908. Brazilian naval and political leaders welcomed the fleet enthusiastically, firing 21-gun salutes and throwing several extravagant

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68 Qtd. by Morgan, “Legacy of the Lash,” 175.
banquets for their esteemed foreign guests. Throughout this visit, Brazilians fawned enviously over the military might of these American battleships and the national power that they conveyed.\footnote{Notably, the American ships were relatively dated compared to the new dreadnought technology of the time. Still, there were stark contrasts between the American and Brazilian navies at this time. When a torrential rain struck Rio de Janeiro, the Brazilian formation, in the words of one journalist, was left “shamefully scattered” while in the American fleet, “their impeccable formation was maintained so perfectly and correctly that it seemed not to have felt the stormy weather.” Da Cunha, \textit{A revolta na esquadra brasileira}, 20 – “’vergonhosamente esparramados,’’ “parecia nem ter-se apercebido do mau tempo, tão perfeita e correta continuava a sua impecável formação.’”}

In December 1904, Brazilian politicians began their pursuit of another form of modernization, entering this international naval arms race in earnest. That month, Republican politicians and leaders in the navy finally overcame their decade of political estrangement and collaborated to pass the ambitious Naval Renovation Program. The program called for a complete overhaul of the Brazilian navy. The \textit{Esquadra Branca} (White Fleet), as the new navy would later become called – almost certainly in direct imitation of the American Navy – fulfilled two crucial goals for naval and political leaders.\footnote{No existing literature proves (or, for that matter, even proposes) that Brazilians dubbed their new ships the “White Fleet” in imitation of the American Navy. However, given the strong influence of American diplomatic power on Brazil during this period – not to mention the fact that Roosevelt’s world-famous fleet visited Rio in January 1908, as Brazil’s ships were being completed in England – it seems certain that Brazil’s new fleet was named directly after its American counterpart.} First, in keeping with the prevailing civilizing mission of the Republican era, the new fleet would greatly improve the country’s international image. Moreover, since the end of the Paraguayan War in 1870, Brazil had held a position of naval inferiority to Chile and Argentina. The naval renovation project, therefore, would establish Brazilian military supremacy in South America, particularly over longtime rival Argentina.\footnote{Livermore, “Battleship Diplomacy,” 32.}

Thus, in 1904, the National Congress placed an order for 27 new ships from the Vickers-Armstrong Company in Newcastle, England.\footnote{Da Cunha reprints the original December 14, 1904 Congressional decree that called for the purchase of these ships. Da Cunha, \textit{A revolta na esquadra brasileira}, 22.} With the development of the dreadnought in 1906, however, Brazilian politicians immediately adjusted their order, ultimately requesting only fourteen...
ships of far greater size and destructive power, including two of the massive new dreadnoughts.⁷⁵

These ships came at an enormous expense to the Brazilian government – each dreadnought alone cost over 2 million pounds, while a pair of 3,150 ton cruisers were another 1 million pounds combined.⁷⁶ Remarkably, the cost of the two dreadnoughts alone represented nearly 20% of the entire national income in 1906.⁷⁷ As the ships were being built in England, a prominent naval periodical from London placed Brazil’s purchases in global perspective: “Never has the navy of a minor power loomed so large on the international horizon as that of Brazil during the past year. The reason is that this nation has had the audacity to order…[two] warships equal in fighting value to anything afloat or building.”⁷⁸

The two crown jewels of the Esquadra Branca were the pair of dreadnoughts, the Minas Gerais and the São Paulo. As Brazilian newspapers proudly announced, these two represented the first such ships that Britain had sold to a foreign nation. At the time of their construction, they were considered to be the most powerful and technologically advanced ships ever constructed.⁷⁹ Each weighed 19,280 tons – over three times as much as the next largest ship in the navy. Each dreadnought also featured twelve 12-inch cannons, representing the most powerful naval guns in the world, and had 42 cannons total. Advanced hydraulic systems even allowed up to ten of these 12-

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⁷⁵ Da Cunha, A revolta na esquadra brasileira, 24. The author again reprints the relevant Congressional decree, dated 23 November 1906.
⁷⁷ Silva, Contra a Chibata, 27 reprints statistics showing that Brazil’s national income in 1906 was £20,000,000. Scheina 86 states that the three dreadnoughts (including the Rio de Janeiro, a third dreadnought that Brazil ultimately sold back to England) cost Brazil £6,110,000. Given that the Rio de Janeiro was somewhat larger than the São Paulo and Minas Gerais at 27,000 tons, it is likely that Brazil bought these two ships for somewhat less than £4,000,000. Primary correspondence from British executives at Armstrong and Vickers reveals that the Brazilians paid for the new ships in cash, almost certainly profits from coffee.
⁷⁹ Martins, A revolta dos marinheiros, 22.
inch cannons to be fired on either broadside at a time.\textsuperscript{80} Remarkably, the sum purchase of the
_Esqaudra Branca_ from Great Britain briefly catapulted Brazil’s national fleet from a complete non-factor in geopolitics to the third most potent in the world, behind England and Germany.\textsuperscript{81} This massive purchase sparked an intense naval rivalry among Argentina, Chile and Brazil. The geopolitics of South American “battleship diplomacy” during this period essentially represented a smaller-scale version of the naval arms race that was simultaneously unfolding among the powers of Europe, Japan, and the United States.\textsuperscript{82}

On April 18, 1910, the _Minas Gerais_ anchored in Rio’s Guanabara Bay, setting off a frenzy of national pride. Thousands of _cariocas_ thronged the docks and streets of Rio (including the luxurious, recently-completed _Avenida Central_ in the city center) just to catch a glimpse of the massive new battleship. A Rio newspaper account captured the pandemonium:

> The arrival of the _Minas Gerais_ yesterday was the great event that sent a vibrant surge of patriotism throbbing throughout the entire national soul… All of Brazil greeted the gigantic figure of the colossus of the South American seas, the supreme symbol of our own power, the concrete expression of our nation’s energy…\textsuperscript{83}

As the Brazilian papers were quick to note, the dreadnought was both larger and more powerful than two prominent foreign ships currently stationed in Guanabara Bay, the American armored cruiser _USS North Carolina_ and the German battleship _Kaiser Karl VI_. The cannon-fire from the _Minas Gerais_, the article continued dramatically, brought the nation “a new voice, a new consciousness.”\textsuperscript{84} All at once, Brazil had a claim to international respectability. “[T]he new Brazil, opulent and powerful, is following the route of progress and civilization with the same distinction

\textsuperscript{80} Morgan, “Legacy of the Lash,” 174.
\textsuperscript{81} Morgan, “Roots of a Rebellion,” 3. As he notes, this ranking is based on sheer tonnage of ships in a given country’s navy, not in terms of the country’s overall manufacturing of ships.
\textsuperscript{82} Livermore, “Battleship Diplomacy,” 3; Reckner, _Great White Fleet_, 38-39. Livermore provides the best summary of this important but short-lived South American naval rivalry.
\textsuperscript{83} _O Paiz_, 19 April 1910, 1. “A chegada do Minas Gerais, eis o grande acontecimento que ontem fez palpitar numa vibrante emoção patriótica toda a alma nacional…foi o Brasil inteiro que saudou no vulto agigantado do colosso dos mares sul-americanos o símbolo soberano da sua própria pujança, a expressão concreta de sua energia de nação.”
\textsuperscript{84} _O Paiz_, 19 April 1910, 1. “uma nova voz, uma nova consciência.”
that the first of its dreadnoughts – among the first dreadnoughts in the world – entered the shining waters of Guanabara.”

To the thousands spectators in Rio, the Minas Gerais represented an undeniable affirmation of their country’s newfound status as a major world power.

Manning the Dreadnoughts: Naval Training and Seeds of the Revolta da Chibata

Yet along with visions of modernity, the Minas and the other new ships from Britain also brought an added burden for those Brazilian sailors destined to man them. Indeed, it was no coincidence that, of the four crews that rebelled in November 1910, three served on board ships that were part of the country’s naval renovation project: the Minas Gerais, the São Paulo, and the Bahia. Brazilian politicians once again aimed to modernize their country by borrowing foreign models and technologies while disregarding those people that they would affect most directly. The new ships from England, which arrived in 1910, intensified the already harsh workloads for sailors, giving the reclamantes one more motivation to revolt.

The new British ships required sailors who were well-trained in the latest naval technologies. This included numerous fields of expertise, from skilled mechanics and electricians to artillery and torpedo specialists. Most important of all were firemen, who stoked the massive boilers that allowed for the unprecedented speeds achieved by these cutting-edge vessels.

Historically, Brazilian ships had not required technical expertise – only sheer manpower. This reality was reflected in the minimal training that the navy provided to sailors. According to naval historian Artur Jaceguai, in 1895, “through lack of physical and technical training, nine-tenths of our seamen and cabin boys in the regular navy are still in the apprentice class.”

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85 O Paiz, 19 April 1910, 1. “...o Brasil novo, opulento e poderoso que vai na sua rota de progresso e civilização com a mesma gallardia com que o primeiro de seus dreadnoughts – o primeiro dos dreadnoughts do mundo – entrou nas águas espelhantes da Guanabara.”
86 Soares, Política versus Marinha, 82.
87 Jaceguai, De Aspirante a Almirante, 48. Qtd. by Freyre, Order and Progress, 401.
any able-bodied man off the street could serve on a ship effectively. Indeed, this was a major reason that the navy’s forced recruitment of disenfranchised Brazilians throughout the monarchy and early Republic was so effective. However, when the nation’s naval technology was revolutionized in 1910, the navy remained stubbornly wedded to its old recruitment and training policies.

In 1909 and 1910, a large portion of the Brazilian navy (including a large percentage of officers and over 1,000 sailors) relocated to Newcastle, England in preparation for the completion of Brazil’s new ships. Most of the sailors remained there for at least seven months, while some stayed for over a year. During this time, they acquainted themselves with the new fleet and received training from British naval officers. Ostensibly, they gained the necessary skills to man these complex new vessels. In actuality, they received minimal training; instead, they learned far more of revolutionary ideology and workers’ rights by being exposed to the politically empowered British sailors – arguably the most organized sailors in the world. This period of time in England played a crucial role in developing Brazilian sailors’ revolutionary sentiments, a topic that will be discussed further below.

The majority of Brazilian sailors returned to Rio de Janeiro still woefully unprepared to operate these new ships. This table, reprinted from a 1910 article in the Rio paper *Jornal do Comércio*, compares two sets of data: the projected number of trained sailors needed to run all of the ships in the Brazilian Navy, and the actual number of men enlisted:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Projected</th>
<th>Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Firemen</td>
<td>944</td>
<td>465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artillery men</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helmsmen</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torpedo specialists</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Servants</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

88 Morgan, “Roots of a Rebellion,” 3.
89 Morgan, “Roots of a Rebellion,” 14-17.
As is clearly shown, a vast majority of enlisted men lacked the necessary training to run these advanced new ships efficiently. Most problematic was the dearth of firemen. According to former Lieutenant Soares, these specialists represented “the essential spirit of modern vessels,” and added that the navy could not properly function with fewer than 2,200 firemen. As the data show, the Brazilian Navy in 1910 scarcely had one-fifth of this number.

To make matters worse, the officers were hardly sufficiently trained to run the ships either; many had fought in the navy since the Paraguayan War in the 1860s, and their expertise was correspondingly dated, despite their training in England. Though he was probably speaking in hyperbole, Soares asserted that Brazilian officers of the time were, to a man, unable to pilot one of the new British ships. To compensate for this serious lack of trained personnel, naval commanders hired foreign specialists (including a number of British firemen), but these supplementary forces were hardly numerous enough to address the significant problem of undertrained Brazilian crews.

Furthermore, the sailors aboard the new ships were not just seriously lacking in proper training, but also undermanned. Official naval statistics projected that the dreadnoughts *Minas Gerais* and *São Paulo* each required 887 sailors to function effectively. Martins, a prominent naval historian, estimates that this figure was slightly higher, stating that a similar ship in the United States would have been manned by a crew of nearly 1,000, with a majority of them being trained specialists. In contrast, he notes that the two dreadnoughts were manned by 500 sailors each.

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90 Data is derived from an undated article in the *Jornal do Comércio*, reprinted in Martins, *A revolta dos marinheiros*, 90. Some rows have been omitted in the table above.
91 Soares, *Política versus Marinha*, 77-78.
93 Soares *Política versus Marinha*, 85.
94 Soares *Política versus Marinha*, 77-78. Interestingly, Soares notes that the British sailors on board the *Minas Gerais* “received separate rations, more plentiful and of better quality than those given our own seamen,” suggesting that this unequal treatment provided the sailors with a further rationale to revolt.
95 Da Cunha, *A revolta na esquadra brasileira*, 42.
Even before the new ships arrived, enlisted men in the Brazilian navy already faced long terms, harsh punishments and inhumane conditions. In 1910, with the arrival of the *São Paulo, Minas Gerais, Bahia*, and eleven other ships, Brazilian officers expected their sailors to run complex new machines effectively despite a lack of experience and insufficient manpower. It is little wonder, then, that the revolt occurred the same year that the Naval Renovation program was completed. The introduction of these new ships into the navy truly pushed Brazilian sailors to their breaking point.

Notably, the revolt of 1910 was not an isolated event; well prior to this uprising, Brazilian sailors had made numerous demands and movements to protest their abject conditions. On December 13, 1891, the crew of the *Primeiro de Março* (a small four-cannon gun-ship) mutinied against its officers in protest of maltreatment. With help from loyal sailors, the officers quickly suppressed the revolt, and dozens of men were imprisoned and expelled from the navy as a result.  

In 1904, there was another uprising of enlisted sailors against their officers, this one on board the *Benjamin Constant* while it was stationed in Gibraltar. Once again, the major grievance was excessive corporal punishment; once more, the movement was rapidly and brutally crushed by the naval authorities.

With the introduction of the new British battleships in 1910, tensions between sailors and their officers became completely unmanageable. From June to November 1910, a group of oppressed sailors took a seditious route to disrupting the status quo in the navy. In a naval excursion to Chile later dubbed the “Division of Death,” sailors on board these ships clearly foreshadowed the November Revolt. On June 16, 1910, Brazil sent three ships – the *Bahia, Tamoio* and *Timbira* – to Santiago as part of an international effort to celebrate the centennial of Chile’s independence.

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97 Martins, *A revolta dos marinheiros*, 95. Indeed, several sources reveal that during the November Revolt, the *São Paulo* and *Minas Gerais* were manned by just 500 and 370 men, respectively. For a more detailed explanation of the number of men on board the new ships, see page 60 in Chapter Three and page 139 in Appendix A.


round-trip voyage, which lasted until November, was marked by a rash of disobedience from enlisted sailors and corresponding brutal punishment from the officers. For example, on board the *Bahia* during these five months, the ship’s 288 sailors committed a combined 911 disciplinary breaches – a remarkably high number even by the brutal standards of the Brazilian Navy. Common among these violations were excessive drinking and insubordination towards officers, and most of them were punishable by the whip.\(^{100}\)

These conditions prompted strong resentment from the crew of the *Bahia*. Midway through the voyage, an ominous message was slipped under the door of the ship’s commander: “[D]o not mistreat the crew of this ship…We are neither thieves nor bandits. We wish for Peace and Love. No one is the slave of the officers, and we have had enough of the *chibata*. Be careful!” The message was signed by the “Mão Negra” (the Black Hand); this was later discovered to be sailor Francisco Dias Martins.\(^{101}\) On November 19, the ships returned to Guanabara Bay in Rio. Three days later, Martins would lead the crew of the *Bahia* in revolt. Finally, after decades of oppression and thwarted attempts at reform, Brazilian sailors would finally make their grievances known to the rest of nation and to the world.

\(^{100}\) Morel, *A Revolta da Chibata*, 59-60. For the number of disciplinary breaches on board the *Bahia*, Morel cites an article from the *Jornal do Comércio* drawing from the records of the second-in-command on board the ship at the time.