

History Access Reading Group

Meet with Professor ADAM WARREN
to discuss

João Reis, Death is a Festival: Funeral Rites and Rebellion in Nineteenth-Century Brazil

Tuesday, February 20, 2007

1:30–3:30, Smith 306

This book is widely available at most bookstores and through Amazon.com.

This award-winning social history of death and funeral rites during the early decades of Brazil's independence from Portugal focuses on the Cemiterada movement in Salvador, capital of the province of Bahia. The book opens with a lively account of the popular riot that ensued when, in 1836, the government condemned the traditional burial of bodies inside Catholic church buildings and granted a private company a monopoly over burials.

This episode is used by Reis to examine the customs of death and burial in Bahian society, explore the economic and religious conflicts behind the move for funerary reforms and the maintenance of traditional rituals of dying, and understand how people dealt with new concerns sparked by modernization and science. Viewing culture within its social context, he illuminates the commonalities and differences that shaped death and its rituals for rich and poor, men and women, slaves and masters, adults and children, foreigners and Brazilians.

This translation makes the book, originally published in Brazil in 1993, available in English for the first time.

Study Questions on Reverse

Please sign up for this group by contacting History Undergraduate Advising

543-5691, histadv@u.washington.edu

Or by visiting our website and clicking on the RSVP button:

<http://depts.washington.edu/history/studying/access/reading.html>

Study Questions:

- 1.) Why was burial in churches so important to residents of Salvador da Bahia in the 1830s? What can it tell us about notions of piety and afterlife?
- 2.) How did nineteenth-century Brazilians understand the relationship between the living and the dead, and how do their beliefs differ from our own? Why did officials wish to reform death and burial practices?
- 3.) How did Catholicism change in Brazil, both as a religious belief system and as a set of religious practices? Is it possible to speak of a pure Catholicism in nineteenth-century Salvador da Bahia? Why did Catholic beliefs and practices change?
- 4.) What can this book tell us about relations between Afro-Brazilians, Portuguese-Brazilians, and mixed ethnicity populations in Salvador da Bahia? How did different groups perform their ethnic and cultural identities?
- 5.) What can funeral and burial rituals tell us about other aspects of society and everyday life in nineteenth-century Brazil?