



## **SAMBAS AND HANDCUFFS – THE REPRESSION OF SAMBAS DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY (1800 – 1899). A LOOK THROUGH NATIONAL JOURNALS<sup>1</sup>**



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### **INTRODUCTORY NOTES**

This work, inserted in a more comprehensive research on samba in the national press of the nineteenth century (1800 to 1899), seeks to investigate which elements were involved in the arrests related to the performance of samba. The methodology adopted consisted of a systematic search for the term "samba" in the Digital Newspaper Library of the National Library, followed by a process of selection and cataloguing of the results, in order to eliminate duplications and errors. After this stage, 1,088 records were obtained, of which 4.59% correspond to news that mention arrests, composing the database of this research. The scarcity of academic works that address the intersection between samba and prisons in the nineteenth century, evidenced by searches carried out in databases such as SciELO, CAPES and Google Scholar, demonstrates the relevance of this study for the construction of samba historiography. By analyzing this theme, we will contribute to a deeper understanding of the social and cultural dynamics that have shaped the history of the musical genre in Brazil.

In the context of slave-owning Brazil, the cultural manifestations of the enslaved, such as samba, were viewed with suspicion, even forbidden by law in some cases by the elites and often associated with disorder and criminality. This is an important mark, as it will go through almost the entire period of the research.

**Keywords:** Samba. Criminalization.

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## OBJECTIVE

The present research aims to identify and analyze the discursive and ideological elements present in the news that reported arrests related to the performance of sambas in the nineteenth century, in order to unveil the social representations of samba and the possibilities of motivations behind the criminalization of this cultural manifestation.

## THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Muniz Sodré (1998), in his analyses of the development of samba in Rio de Janeiro, brought fundamental contributions to understanding the complexity and historical resistance of black people to maintain samba. By highlighting the negotiation strategies used by black people to keep samba alive, even in the face of a context of oppression and marginalization, Sodré highlights the agency and creativity of these historical subjects.

By stating that samba is the meeting of diverse practices of African origin, Sodré invites us to look at this cultural manifestation as a result of complex historical processes, marked by the African diaspora, slavery and the construction of a black identity in Brazil. This perspective is fundamental to denaturalize samba and recognize its African roots and its importance as an expression of resistance and cultural affirmation.

Prohibited by law at various times in the history of our country, samba is a reflection of the resistance of black people. In fact, the Penal Code of 1890, by criminalizing practices such as batuque and sambas, aimed to control and marginalize the black population. This prohibition, although often not explicit, as Danilo Ramos (2022) indicates, did not prevent samba from remaining alive, becoming a symbol of resistance and cultural identity.

In this context, we see the development of what was conceptualized as mass incarceration of black people, while futile motives could lead black people to prison, either for vagrancy (post-slavery) or for the justification of imprisonment of freed slaves, such as a free African going out at night and not carrying a Brazilian citizen card, as presented by Sidney Chalhoub (2010).

These legislative fragments lead us to consider the historicity of the mass incarceration of black people in Brazil, as a process that occurred over time in which, regardless of the mode of production, the black population has always been the target of the national prison system, according to the considerations of Juliana Borges (2018).

In our writings, we consider the guidelines of Danilo Ramos (2022a) on the importance of seeking the "unsaid" in the sources, with the aim of rescuing the memory of black people through newspapers. To this end, we carried out a critical analysis that takes into account elements such as the ownership of the journals, the target audience, the

period of publication, the language used and the themes addressed. This analytical approach is based on authors such as Tânia de Luca (2005), Letícia Krilow (2019) and José Barros (2012), who deepen the complexity of the topic.

When analyzing the sources, we opted for a non-linear approach, favoring the fluidity of the discussion rather than a rigorous chronological sequence. In addition, we made linguistic adjustments to the sources, replacing archaic terms and adapting the language to contemporary Portuguese, with the aim of making reading more accessible. In view of these considerations, we will move on to the analysis of the sources.

### **"ALL WERE DETAINED FOR PARTICIPATING IN A SAMBA" – THE REPRESSION OF SAMBAS UNDER THE VIEW OF NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS**

The first occurrence of a case involving a samba that resulted in imprisonment, in our research, dates from October 8, 1851<sup>4</sup>. A defendant was taken to a jury for having caused a "noise" near the house of a sub-delegate. What draws attention in this case is the place where the incident occurred: a samba. This information suggests that the accused could have been participating in a samba and that the noise was motivated by this activity, leading him to prison after the jury's decision. This fact highlights the possibility of arrests related to events such as sambas at that time, specifically in the state of Pernambuco.

The recurrent arrest of groups gathered in sambas caught our attention when analyzing the sources of this work. In order to illustrate how the police interfered in these events and promoted arrests, we present below some examples extracted directly from the documents consulted.

In the public jail, the following individuals were arrested on the 16th of this month, by order of the sub-delegate of the 2nd district, Firmino Pinto Vianna: Manoel Gonçalves, Elias Alves do Nascimento, Francisco Felippo, Cassiano Gomes da Silva, Francisco Gomes de Lima and Joaquim Vicente Lopes. All were detained for participating in a samba. In addition to them, Alfredo de Souza, Rosa Maria da Conceição and Bernardina Maria da Conceição were arrested for theft.<sup>5</sup>

What an absurdity! - According to information from the police, Mr. Sub-delegate of Boa Vista put in jail, the day before yesterday, no less than twenty-two individuals who were disturbing public tranquility, probably at a large samba ball. May he continue with this zeal.<sup>6</sup>

And by order of the 3rd district, José Joaquim dos Santos, João da Cunha de Maria, Archoujo Manoel Bezerra, Domingos Amancio Ferreira, M. Noel Mendes do Nascimento, Vicente Rodrigues Pessoa, Manoel Oleiro, Antonio Ferreira dos Reis, Manoel Cisco de Souza, José Ignacio dos Santos, Manoel João Martins, José da Silva and Porfiro Cornubia were arrested for participating in a samba.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Diário de Pernambuco (PE), n. 227, p. 2, 08 out. 1851.

<sup>5</sup> Liberator: Organ of the Sociedade Cearense Libertadora (CE), n. 152, p. 2, 17 jul. 1883.

<sup>6</sup> Jornal do Recife (PE), n. 248, p. 2, 28 out. 1879.

<sup>7</sup> O Cearense (CE), n. 180, p. 1, 22 set. 1882.

In an article about these arrests, the newspaper *Diário de Notícias do Pará*, in 1888, states that sambas were allowed only in the countryside, suggesting that this practice was not considered appropriate for urban centers and, consequently, was not seen as civilized. This view reflects the debates of the time about the construction of a "civilizing" project inspired by European models, in which culture of African origin had no place. See the article.

SAMBA - The sub-delegate of Sant'Anna, the night before yesterday, ended a samba in Travessa da Estrela, between the streets of Indústria and Marechal Hermes. There, together with the 2nd delegate, he arrested all the dancers and musicians who crowded the place, as this type of meeting is only allowed in the woods.<sup>8</sup>

It is a mistake to think that there was no resistance to the arrests or attempts to resist them. There are several reports of episodes in which physical fights occurred in an attempt to avoid arrest or prevent the end of samba. In this way, we can say that samba was already an entertainment rooted in Brazilian culture, so much so that there are records of police officers participating in these events. Next, we will present a news article in which the author shows concern about the impunity of the police officers who refused to end the samba. He argues that these officers should be punished for disobedience, since they are members of the police force.

It is the arrest of the sergeant and police officer Horácio José Gonçalves de Britto and Egydio Francisco do Nascimento, in flagrante delicto of insubordination and disobedience to the order that was transmitted to them by the sub-delegate Constâncio Gomes de Sá Barroso, so that they would not continue with a samba dance that they were promoting.

As they refused to surrender, there was resistance and, in the end, they were arrested and taken to the presence of the district judge, who questioned the police officers who led them and the witnesses, in addition to hearing the prisoners themselves. The judge ordered that a report be drawn up, determining that the case be forwarded to the Public Prosecutor's Office.

First, it is necessary to analyze whether the non-compliance with the order of the sub-delegate, related to the samba, constitutes the crime of disobedience, provided for in article 128 of the penal code.

The news about the punishment of the police officers who refused to end the samba reveals the complexity of the relations between power, law and culture in a given historical context. The decision to punish the police officers, in addition to having implications for the careers of these officers, raises questions about the nature of police authority and the limits of individual freedom, that is, certain spaces such as the sambas were not places to be frequented by police officers, according to the authorities of this institution.

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<sup>8</sup> *Diário de Notícias (PA)*, n. 221, p. 2, 02 out. 1888.

In some records, we find evidence of the existence of a network of negotiations that allowed both the realization of the sambas and the faster release of their organizers when detained. An example of this is an article in the newspaper *Pedro II do Ceará*, dated 1859, which narrates the case of Félix Teixeira de Barros. Arrested several times for disorders and resisting arrest during an attempt to end a samba, Félix was released the next day.

Let's go to the story of this old case of recruitment, in which the Presidency ordered the arrest of Félix Teixeira de Barros, accused of leading riots and already imprisoned several times. Upon learning of Félix Teixeira de Barros' behavior, the president ordered the delegate to recruit him by force. However, the chief refused to comply with the order, claiming that several people, including women and children, had been exempted from the draft. It was evident that not only did the president ignore these exemptions, but he also trusted the delegate who claimed them. Even so, the recruitment order for Félix Teixeira de Barros was maintained. Despite this, he continued to cause disturbances. The order of recruitment about Félix Teixeira de Barros was thus notified: despite having been warned, he continues to commit new and repeated disorders. On November 5 and 21, the lieutenant commander of the detachment informed the presidency that Félix had been arrested two more times: once for insulting a cadet of the detachment and once for leading a group that resisted the police by trying to disperse a samba dance. The day after this last occurrence, he was released by the police chief. In view of this, and considering the seriousness of the situation. In view of this, suspecting the good faith of the delegate and the veracity of his allegations, the president ordered that he be forcibly recruited, reserving the right to judge the alleged exemptions. However, as Mr. Avião Peixoto's allegations have never been proven, the people of Ceará do not believe the word of the delegate, who showed himself to be protective of a troublemaker. In addition, the fact that Félix Teixeira de Barros was forcibly recruited does not mean that he is guilty. They are different issues. The president's objective was to verify the veracity of the allegations of exemption and, for this, he ordered the arrest of Félix and sent him to the capital. However, when the delegate was dismissed and replaced by another trusted one, the judgment of the exemptions did not take place and the recruitment was canceled. This case demonstrates how an act that should have public order as its sole objective was transformed into revenge and political persecution. It is regrettable that they try to deceive the people of Ceará, who have nothing to hide.

Regarding these negotiations, we can highlight that, in a specific cut, the use of liberated festivities, such as baptisms, for the realization of sambas, is presented as a strategy. We infer from this that black people took advantage of the officially released spaces to perform their sambas.

(...) Popular meetings are being organized and, to justify them, they find any pretext, such as a baptism or something similar. A few days ago, a certain José Garauna, a protégé of Jerônimo José Figueira de Mello, taking advantage of the baptism of his son, organized a great samba with the authorization of the delegate Antônio Raymundo. During the party, there was a lot of confusion, fights and offensive chants, resulting in the aggression of a soldier and, tragically, the death of a three-year-old girl. The child's mother, pursued by an enemy who sought revenge, took out her anger on the innocent girl. The commander of the detachment arrested everyone involved in the samba, including the murderer, but two days later everyone was released, except for the woman who killed the girl. The protection of the "chimangos" is evident! In the face of this chaotic situation in Sobral, we ask Dr. Marcelino to intervene and use his influence to prevent the electoral preparations from degenerating into conflicts and tragic consequences. We do not wish to repeat the tragic events of 1855, but we fear for the future if things continue along this path.

Candidates for the provincial elections are already preparing, each with their own chances. Sincerely, J. Bolax.<sup>9</sup>

We highlight that we found news that evidence the occurrence of crimes in spaces where the samba took place, in the example above we noticed the murder of a child. The sambas, as complex and diverse places of sociability, the sambas were also the scene of aggression among the participants. This reality distances us from the romanticization of the phenomenon and confirms the existence of several facets with regard to social relations in these environments. Next, we present an article that reports a crime that occurred during a samba.

Jury Court - Under the presidency of Dr. Joaquim Barbosa Lima, with Dr. Pedro de Queiroz acting as prosecutor and Lesko Peixoto as clerk, the court held a session yesterday. There were 39 jurors present. The defendant Alexandre José de Carvalho, denounced on August 2 under article 205 of the Penal Code for having seriously injured João Ferreira do Valle while leaving a samba dance in Cortiço do Figueira, appeared at the court bar. He was sentenced to the minimum sentence provided for in the aforementioned article, 14 months in prison and a fine. The defense lawyers were doctors Teófilo Rufino and Aleixo Anastácio Gomes. There were no more cases to judge, the president closed the session.<sup>10</sup>

In the sources researched, we identified one that corroborates the perspective presented at the beginning of this article: the importance of analyzing the "unsaid". The news about the arrest of a person in a samba, in addition to evidencing an isolated fact, suggests the existence of a broader context, with possible political discussions in these events. The author, by mentioning the presence of figures who "go to the tribune" in the sambas, reinforces the idea that these spaces are also arenas of debate and sociability, where political ties are established. This occurrence highlights samba's ability to promote social interaction and political network-building. Even the prisoner shouted the need to respect his speech. We reproduce this source below.

In a very busy inn on Rua do Príncipe, last night, there was a big samba dance. You know what a samba is, don't you?  
At these balls, there is always a gifted speaker, a popular leader who delivers fiery speeches to the crowd.  
In the samba of Rua do Príncipe, the speaker abused his prerogatives and was arrested.  
As he was taken to prison, he shouted:  
"Restrict freedom of expression! What an absurdity! (emphasis added)"<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Pedro II (CE) , n. 1967, p. 3, 19 nov. 1859.

<sup>10</sup> O Cearense (CE) , n. 186, p. 2, 01 set. 1883.

<sup>11</sup> Jornal da Tarde (RJ) , n. 32, p. 2, 05 fev. 1881.

To conclude our analysis of the sources, we present a report that reports the arrest of more than twenty people during a samba event. The author is surprised by the persistent joy of these people, even in the face of an adverse scenario. From this observation, we can consider the search for joy in the midst of difficulties as an ancestral strategy of resistance of the black population. Without romanticizing this reality, we realize that this ability to find joy in challenging moments was fundamental for the survival and perpetuation of black culture, including samba, to the present day.

From our perspective, the cases of imprisonment related to the practice of samba find a parallel in the concept of "necroleisure", coined by Danilo Ramos. Following Kabengele Munanga's line of thought, Ramos demonstrates how the State, both in the colonial and republican periods, exercised strict control over the lives and modes of leisure of black people. For the author, the police apparatus, as the armed wing of the State, had the power and the willingness to repress cultural manifestations of African origin, even if this implied taking black lives.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The analysis of samba-related prisons in the nineteenth century, in a context marked by slavery and racial inequalities, allows us to recognize samba as a fundamental leisure technology for the black community of the time, as well as a cultural expression that promoted sociability and (re)existence. By poring over these news, we are able to unveil a crucial aspect of the history of Brazilian black culture, understanding samba not only as a musical genre, but as a set of social and cultural practices that allowed the (re)existence of the black population. This research contributes to the deconstruction of Eurocentric narratives and to the appreciation of black culture, highlighting the importance of protecting and promoting the various Brazilian cultural manifestations as objects of the historiography of leisure studies, evidencing the racial profile as a starting point.



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