

IN MEMORIAM

“BRINGING THE EMPIRE BACK IN”: CHRISTOPHER SCHMIDT-NOWARA (1966-2015) (1)

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Paris was cursed in 2015. The year began with the assassination of the editor-in-chief and ten of his coworkers in the offices of the satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, on 7 January. In other attacks that day, six others were murdered. The year came to a close a month and a half after coordinated attacks on the Bataclan nightclub and other sites on 13 November, which killed 130 innocent persons. For the small, tightknit community of historians of Spain, Cuba, and the Atlantic world, the city and the year will be associated with another, independent tragedy – the death of Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, the Prince of Asturias Chair of Spanish History at Tufts University. Professor Schmidt-Nowara was a distinguished scholar of slavery, abolition, and imperial politics of the nineteenth century. He specialized in Spain and its colonies, and he also wrote broadly and comparatively on the Atlantic world. He was temporarily residing in Paris to visit and care for his daughter. On 27 June, he died of a pulmonary embolism caused by sepsis, which was related to a short but virulent and undiagnosed staph infection. His was a life that ended too soon.

In the academic year following his death, colleagues have attempted to overcome their grief by paying homage to his life. On 23 September, Jim Amelang delivered a beautiful eulogy at a seminar at the CSIC in Madrid, which was later reprinted in the newsletter of the Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies (ASPHS) (2). On 3 October, Tufts held a memorial service in his honor, attended by family and friends. Tufts history graduate students sponsored a conference on global history in his memory on 5 March 2016. I

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(2) AMELANG (2015). For another touching tribute, see BURGUERA (2015). For a short academic biography, see MESSENGER (2015).

coordinated and participated in a panel overviewing his scholarly work at the Association's annual conference in San Diego on 18 March. From 29 to 30 April, another group of scholars gathered at the Fernand Braudel Center at Binghamton University for a conference in his memory entitled, *Atlantic Transformations: Politics, Economy, and the Second Slavery*. In late May, the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) dedicated two panels to him in its annual conference held in New York City. They were organized by his colleagues at Fordham University (New York), where he taught for ten years and served as director of the Latin American & Latino Studies Institute. The University of Pittsburgh Press, the publisher of two of his books, funded the panels.

Various projects are underway to ensure that his memory will be preserved for posterity. Tufts University is setting up a scholarship fund. Scott Eastman and Vicente Sanz, editors of the Studies in Latin American and Spanish History Series at Berghahn Books, plan to edit a volume consisting of contributions from the participants of the ASPHS and LASA panels. Dale Tomich will also publish a book that results from the papers delivered at the Fernand Braudel Center meeting. In the ensuing years, various scholars will no doubt dedicate their publications to him, and some already have (3). The roster of scholars who have delivered addresses or have already published papers paying tribute to Chris in academic settings is outstanding (4).

Christopher Schmidt-Nowara's death provoked such a tremendous reaction because he was well liked and read widely, and because he died tragically and too young. In many respects, the tributes have resembled testimonials that elder scholars receive upon retiring; the speakers address the audience in disbelief that he is not listening from the first row. His scholarship bridged academic communities previously divided by field and country, and he contributed to so many mediums. It is difficult to find all of his publication given that United States academics are not required to keep an extensive account of each piece of their work. Chris was modest and he only posted periodic lists of selected publications and recent works, allowing his scholarship to circulate freely in the marketplace of ideas. It consisted of: single-authored books (5); collected volu-

(3) TOMICH (2016); THIBAUT (2015); and the 2016 paperback version of FRADERA and SCHMIDT-NOWARA (2013).

(4) They include: Joselyn Almeida-Beveridge, José Álvarez Junco, James S. Amelang, Ina Baghdiantz-McCabe, Edward E. Baptist, Robin Blackburn, Mónica Burguera, Geraldo Cadava, Benjamin L. Carp, Celso T. Castilho, Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé, Christopher DeCorse, Anne Eller, Matthew Ehrlich, Elizabeth Foster, Josep M. Fradera, Renaldo Funesa, Albert Garcia Balaña, Luis Miguel García Mora, Joshua Goode, Stephen Jacobson, Peniel E. Joseph, Kris Manjapra, David A. Messenger, Dalia A. Muller, Barbara E. Mundy, José Antonio Piqueras, Elena A. Schneider, Adrian Shubert, Dale Tomich, and Louie Dean Valencia García. This list is by no means exhaustive. Surely, there have been other tributes, and some of his closest colleagues – including Ada Ferrer and Rafael de Bivar Marquese – will contribute articles within the collected volumes that will soon appear.

(5) SCHMIDT-NOWARA (1999b, 2006a, 2011b).

mes (6); chapters (7); articles (8), forum contributions (9), and review essays (10) in scholarly journals; and entries and overviews for reference books (11). He served on the editorial board of *Social History* and the *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*, and he coordinated three special issues for these journals (12). He even wrote one academic obituary – that of the great Cuban historian of slavery Manuel Moreno Fraginals, who died as an active academic at 81 years (13). One can only wonder just how influential Schmidt-Nowara would have become if he had enjoyed a similarly full career and had lived an additional three decades.

Professor Schmidt-Nowara was a pioneer who will be credited with “bringing the empire back in” (14) to the study of modern Spain. His first book, *Empire and Antislavery: Spain, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, 1833-1874* (1999) was based on his dissertation, the fruit of the fertile intellectual atmosphere present at the University of Michigan in the 1990s. At the time, a number of scholars – including Frederick Cooper, Anne Stoler, Thomas Holt, and Jane Burbank – led a revival and reform of the field of imperial history. Schmidt-Nowara’s dissertation on abolitionist movements in Spain and its colonies followed the work of his mentor, Rebecca Scott. Her *Slave Emancipation in Cuba* (1985) remains a classic (15). In the same year he published his book, Ada Ferrer – his colleague at Michigan and another Rebecca Scott student – published *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (16). Together, these three monographs renovated the study of Cuba within Spanish history.

Schmidt-Nowara’s *Slavery and Antislavery* was also reflective of the concerns of his other director at Michigan, Geoff Eley. When Chris was a graduate student, David Blackbourn and Eley’s *Peculiarities of German History* was making waves across history departments in North America (17). As is well known, these authors debunked the *Sonderweg* thesis, which held that Germany had gone down a “separate path” toward modernity given that its twentieth-century history differed from that of England. Instead, they posited that German

(6) FRADERA and SCHMIDT-NOWARA (2013); SCHMIDT-NOWARA and NIETO PHILLIPS (2005).

(7) SCHMIDT-NOWARA (1998a, 1999d, 2003a, 2009, 2011c, 2012, 2013b, 2014b, 2015b, 2016b).

(8) SCHMIDT-NOWARA (1995, 1998b, 1999c, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2004a, 2008a, 2008b, 2014a, 2015a).

(9) SCHMIDT-NOWARA (1999a, 2004b).

(10) SCHMIDT-NOWARA (2002, 2006b, 2010b).

(11) SCHMIDT-NOWARA (2010a, 2016a).

(12) SCHMIDT-NOWARA and BURGUERA (2004a); SCHMIDT-NOWARA (2011a, 2013a).

(13) SCHMIDT-NOWARA (2003b).

(14) I borrow this expression from SHUBERT (2016).

(15) The most recent edition of this book, originally published in 1985, is SCOTT (2000). For here last single-authored monograph, see SCOTT (2005).

(16) FERRER (1999). For her most recent work, see FERRER (2014).

(17) BLACKBOURN and ELEY (1984).

nineteenth-century liberalism – like all liberalisms – possessed its particularities, but none so striking as to predetermine the subsequent genocide. Following this work, Spanish historians sought to debunk their own *Sonderweg* of backwardness and illiberalism, elaborated as a result of the repression, poverty, and illiteracy associated with the postwar Franco regime (18). Although the history of Spanish liberalism was renowned for a peculiarity known as *caciquismo*, another distinguishing feature was its tolerance of slavery. As Schmidt-Nowara demonstrated, the rise of abolitionism within an emerging bourgeois public sphere led Spaniards to elaborate ideas relating to empire, race, and commerce. Transatlantic debates on the reform and abolition of slavery overlapped with efforts to “whiten” Cuba and Puerto Rico, to impose (or avoid) a free trade – free labor paradigm, and to a lesser extent, to bring Spanish liberalism into line with international human rights.

It is important to recognize two other major influences on Schmidt-Nowara during the formative period of his career. The first was Seymour Drescher, the dean of abolitionist studies in British history. Drescher had dedicated his life’s work to debunking the Marxist paradigm that the abolition of slavery was caused by faceless economic forces mandating that “capitalist” free labor replace “feudal” forced labor. On the contrary, he credited political ideas and social movements for the end of the heinous institution, which, at the time of its abolition, produced sugar, cotton, and rice more cheaply efficiently than free-labor systems. As a professor at the University of Pittsburg, he encouraged Schmidt-Nowara to publish in the Latin American Series of the university’s Press, which also edited the influential journal *Cuban Studies* (19). Professor Drescher and Schmidt-Nowara later collaborated in the edited volume, *Slavery and Antislavery in Spain’s Atlantic Empire* (2013) (20).

The second early influence outside the University of Michigan was Josep M. Fradera, a professor at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona, a colleague of Rebecca Scott, and later the co-editor of *Slavery and Antislavery in Spain’s Atlantic Empire*. At the time that Schmidt-Nowara was researching abolitionism, Fradera was working on the economic, fiscal, institutional, and legal foundation of the empire. Together, these two scholars led the “imperial turn” in nineteenth-century Spanish history (21). Their projects cross-fertilized one another, especially since the stability of Spain’s “second empire” depended on the institution of slavery. The ability of the metropole to provide for the

(18) These concerns were specifically addressed in a special volume of *Social History*. SCHMIDT-NOWARA and BURGERA (2004a).

(19) Another influential book of a related subject published by Pittsburgh during this period was CASANOVAS, J. (1998). Not to be forgotten is Drescher’s own first volume: DRESCHER (1977).

(20) DRESCHER (2013). Drescher not only contributed to the volume. He was also the editor of the Berghahn book series, “European Expansion and Global Interaction”, in which it appears.

(21) For this collaboration, see SCHMIDT-NOWARA (2003a).

defense and administration of Puerto Rico and Cuba, while ensuring a steady stream of tax revenues, depended upon the export of sugar and the expansion of the plantation system. Debates over forced, semi-forced and free labor – addressed by Chris – concerned the future of the plantation system and the fiscal-military sinews of empire as analyzed by Josep Maria (22).

Christopher Schmidt-Nowara's second book, *Spanish Colonialism and National Histories in the Nineteenth-Century* (2006), continued to explore the intellectual, political, and cultural universe of the Spanish empire. In this work, he brought "the empire back into" another field in Spanish history – the study of nationalism. In 2001, José Alvarez Junco, the first Prince of Asturias Chair at Tufts, had published the seminal *Mater Dolorosa. La idea de España en el siglo xix* (23). This in turn had spawned multiple studies on the subject in Spain. While many scholars (including myself) looked inward, studying the relationship between the region and the nation, Schmidt-Nowara looked outward (24). The book examines how the writing and commemorating of the early modern empire helped forge national histories in Spain and the colonies. It opens with a brilliant chapter on how various writers, propagandists, and artists narrated, commemorated, interpreted, and reinterpreted, through history and iconography, the story of Columbus and the conquest of America. It also explores a curious though revealing transatlantic political debate over the repatriation of the hero's putative physical remains. Another chapter examines how Puerto Ricans and Cubans resurrected and reified a pre-imperial past. Another explores transatlantic debates over Bartolomé de Las Casas and the uses of the Black Legend. In the book, he also addressed the Philippines, hence breaking down the divide between the American and Asian colonial worlds (25).

Schmidt-Nowara third book, *Slavery, Freedom, and Abolition in Latin America and the Atlantic World* (2011) may become his most influential over time. It is the work of a veteran scholar, who after spending years in the archives, the library, and the classroom, published a synthesis directed at a broad audience. If his early work "brought the empire back in" to Spanish history, this book helped "bring the Spanish empire back in" to discussions of slavery and abolition in the Atlantic world (26). If his early work was influenced by his mentors at the University of Michigan and their colleagues, his later scholarship

(22) See FRADERA (1999, 2005).

(23) ÁLVAREZ JUNCO (2001).

(24) For another "outward glance," see HERZOG (2003). I later attempted to look inward and outward at the same time, addressing both the region and the empire. JACOBSON (2013, 2014).

(25) For this book in the context of his life and career, see GOODE (2016).

(26) He was obviously not alone in this project. See KLEIN and VINSON (2007); BEGARD (2007); BLACKBURN (2011). Still, Schmidt-Nowara book differs from these fine volumes. The first two are written from the perspective of historians of Brazil and the British Empire. Begard's book focuses on three countries and chiefly concerns the nineteenth century, while Schmidt-Nowara takes on a broader chronological and geographical sweep.

was fruit of his participation in the Second Slavery Group, a coterie of experts gathered around the Fernand Braudel Center at Binghamton University and led by Dale Tomich, its deputy director. The group's participants included scholars of various Atlantic countries, including Cuba, Puerto Rico, Martinique, United States, Haiti, and Brazil. In many respects, Robin Blackburn's monumental, *The American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation and Human Rights* (2011) also derived from this collaboration. While reading the volume, it is easy to perceive the gentle hand of Chris, one of the acknowledged readers of the manuscript, guiding this renowned scholar of slavery through the forest of literature on Spain and its colonies. Among his many virtues as a scholar, Chris was a selfless colleague and friend, generous with his time and ideas.

Dedicated to his students, *Slavery, Freedom, and Abolition* is primarily intended as a teaching volume. It is eminently readable and handsomely edited, endowed with striking images and illustrative maps and charts. One of Christopher's greatest skills was his ability to write clearly, cogently, and synthetically. In just over two hundred pages, he succeeded in analyzing the history of American slavery from its beginnings with Columbus to its definitive abolition in Cuba and Brazil in the 1880s. Experts have also lauded many of the book's features: its ability to account for the diversity of slave experiences; the descriptions of the various roads to bondage and freedom; and its capacity to explore the links between the overlapping spheres of the different European powers in the Caribbean – Britain, France, Portugal, Spain, Holland, and Denmark. Schmidt-Nowara also drew vivid distinctions between the Hispanic and Lusophone world, on one hand, and the United States, on the other. He did this without invoking the "White Legend" of slavery – that civil-law version of Ibero-American slavery was less brutal than its counterpart in the English-speaking, common-law world (27). Latin American slave experiences were more diverse, life expectancies shorter, manumission more common, and non-violent abolitionist movements less consequential.

An unforeseen death left unfinished projects (28). To be sure, *Slavery, Freedom, and Abolition* represented the culmination of what he undoubtedly believed to be about half an academic career. We can only speculate what the second half would have produced thereafter, although we know that he had turned his attention to the revolutionary period. At the time of his death, he was working on the Blanco White brothers – Fernando and José. In the long run, he planned to write a book on Spanish prisoners of war during the Napoleonic era. He had just completed a draft of the manuscript, *A Flight to Freedom: A Spanish Prisoner in Napoleon's Europe*. For this work, he wrote a lengthy intro-

(27) His position on this subject also comes out in a lively debate with Alejandro de la Fuente published in the *Law and History Review*. See de la FUENTE (2004); SCHMIDT-NOWARA (2004b).

(28) ALMEIDA-BEVERIDGE (2016).

duction to Fernando Blanco White's chronicle of his escape from a French Prison in Shalon-sur-Saône, and his subsequent flight through Germany, Austria, and Holland. It ends in London where he is reunited with his liberal-abolitionist brother, José. Among his more arduous tasks, Schmidt-Nowara transcribed 400 hand-written pages of Fernando's barely legible and precarious English. At the present time, his colleagues at Tufts University are working with the publisher to complete the edition (29). Another project was an English translation of Joseph Blanco Whites' *Bosquexo del comercio en esclavos*. Under contract to be published by the University of New Mexico Press, his co-author Joselyn Almeida-Beveridge hopes to be able to continue the project.

Christopher Schmidt-Nowara academic legacy leaves a clear message to those of us who dedicate our professional lives to the history of nineteenth-century Spain. We now realize that it is malpractice to ignore empire, slavery, antislavery, and freedom in our research and teaching. This is not only true because nineteenth-century Spaniards lived and worked "in both hemispheres" – to borrow the expression from the Constitution of Cádiz. It is not only true because migrants, goods, capital, and labor flowed between the islands and the Peninsula. It is also true because the governance of the colonies rested upon slavery and forced and coerced labor; upon the denial of political representation to even those who possessed civil rights; and upon the exclusion of free blacks, mulattos, and *mestizos* from citizenship. It is no longer logical – or even moral – to teach a history that includes Spaniards and excludes other residents of the empire, hence reproducing the discriminatory distribution of rights consecrated in one constitution after another. In concrete terms, it is no longer permitted to teach a history of whites and exclude the *castas pardas*, free blacks, and slaves. Professor Christopher Schmidt-Nowara's greatest gift was to recuperate, at least in part, the plight and lost dignity of the many souls who for centuries had been absent from the history of Spain.

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(29) SCHMIDT-NOWARA (forthcoming).

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