

Afro-Brazilian History and Culture in Print: Surveying the British Library Collections

Reference: **2025-EI-ABH**

Supervisor(s)	Laurence Byrne, Lead Curator Latin American and Caribbean Collections Dr Iris Bachmann, Curator Latin American Published Collections
Team(s) and department(s)	Eccles Institute for the Americas & Oceania
Start date/timeframe	Earliest start: September 2025 Latest end date: March 2026
Duration	Three months (or part-time equivalent)
Part time/Full time	<input type="checkbox"/> Full time only <input type="checkbox"/> Part time only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Full time or part time Minimum days/week if undertaken part time: 2 days per week
Location/Working arrangements	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Can only be offered on site at St Pancras
Application deadline	Friday 21 February 2025, 17.00 GMT

Eligibility criteria, funding information and details of how to apply are available on the British Library website: <https://www.bl.uk/more/research-collaboration/>

Context and nature of placement project

Afro-Brazilian history and culture is central to our understanding of Brazil and the wider world. Building on the work of Afro-Brazilian activists, Brazilian society has seen a reckoning with the country's racism and colourism in recent years bringing Afro-Brazilian voices to the fore. The British Library holds extensive collections relating to, and created by Afro-Brazilians, from Brazil, Portugal, as well as material connected to colonial Brazil and the Transatlantic slave trade. Despite this, our understanding of the Library's holdings of published material in this area requires significant improvement. In the context of these current debates challenging racism and, specifically, a forthcoming UK/Brazil Season of Culture 2025-26, this is a timely project to increase access to important, interconnected, but also underrepresented areas of the Library's collection. It is envisaged that the placement student would survey the Library's holdings of published material relating to and created by Afro-Brazilians in order to produce a bibliography / research guide, as well as helping us to recognise gaps in our collection and working with the Latin American curators to identify material which could be acquired to remedy these.

The placement student may choose to focus on a specific time period or identify specific themes as part of the survey, for example:

- Afro-Brazilian religions
- Literary and creative works
- Activism (i.e. relating to dictatorship and democratisation in Brazil)
- Afro-Brazilian diaspora

This placement would represent a significant step in increasing both the visibility and accessibility of this material for researchers and the wider public. In addition, it could feed into future research and engagement activities with the potential to partner with Brazilian institutions and relating to Afro-Brazilian holdings and their links to interconnected histories and cultures in the Americas.

Tasks and outcomes

The primary focus and expected tasks of this placement will be

- To research and build a checklist of likely search terms (e.g. places of publication, publishers, subject headings).
- To work with curators in identifying problematic search terms and descriptions in line with the Library's Race and Equality Action Plan (REAP) to improve metadata
- To use this checklist to conduct a comprehensive search of the Library's holdings via the catalogue, calling up material and making visual checks.
- To identify collection gaps by cross-referencing Library holdings with available bibliographies / research guides, and the holdings of other institutions. The Library of Congress, the Handbook of Latin American Studies and BNDigital (National Library of Brazil) will be a good starting points.
- To develop a selective bibliography, which could focus on themes of literature, religion, food etc. The focus will be dependent on the findings and themes identified by the student. Existing bibliography can be used as guidance.
- To note visually interesting material for use in future Latin American collection promotional activities.
- To develop a promotional activity. This might be writing a post for the Americas blog, a staff talk, or a show and tell for staff in conjunction with the Latin American curators.

The main outcomes envisaged for this placement are:

- A significant contribution to our understanding of the BL's Afro-Brazilian related material and its relationship to wider Afro-Brazilian history.
- A finding aid for users in the form of a bibliography or collection guide.
- A list of suggested titles for the Latin American curators to acquire.
- A blog post and/or a staff talk/Show & Tell to raise awareness of the Afro-Brazilian printed collection.

Training and development opportunities

PhD placement students are welcome to access a wide range of workshops, talks and training available at the Library. Supervisors will offer advice on which opportunities may be of particular relevance. Depending on availability, these wider training opportunities may include, for example, the Digital Scholarship Training Programme, Cultural Property Training, Research Roundtables, Business & IP Centre workshops and staff talks.

In addition, this particular PhD placement will provide the following opportunities:

- develop the skills involved in managing a discrete project
- gain skills in searching for materials that are hard to identify within library collections, and skills in developing a means of making this material more discoverable and accessible to users
- contribute to the Library's Race Equality and Action Plan
- develop knowledge of current and historical publishing as it relates to Afro-Brazilians
- receive a hands-on introduction to the role of a curator at a national library, including acquiring and stewarding collection items, and engaging with audiences through finding aids, blogs and talks.
- The UK/Brazil Season of Culture will present opportunities to engage with partners outside the Library.

Required knowledge and skills

All applicants will be expected to demonstrate the following:

- Ability to communicate effectively verbally and in writing, internally and externally
- Working knowledge of Microsoft Office applications and online meeting tools
- Ability to follow instructions and policies, in particular with regard to Health & Safety and the safe use of collections
- Ability to work effectively with others while also completing tasks independently
- Clear reasons for applying to a specific placement and good understanding of the project purpose

In addition, this specific placement project requires the following:

- Portuguese language ability: good reading knowledge of Portuguese
- An interest in publishing and book history
- An interest in and some knowledge of the history of Brazil and particularly the histories and cultures of Afro-Brazilians
- Information literacy skills – i.e. experience in developing appropriate search strategies, conducting catalogue advanced searches, appraising results, and compiling bibliographies / research guide