



## RACE AND SLAVERY IN BRAZIL

*by Leslie B. Rout, Jr.*

Exactly when the first black slaves were disembarked in Brazil is unknown, but the earliest recorded shipment from Africa to Brazil was made in 1538 by Lopes Bixorda, a slave dealer in the *capitania* [province] of Bahia, eight years after the Portuguese discovery of Brazil. Finally, in response to a petition of Bahian landlords, King João IV of Portugal decreed in 1549 that each planter could import up to 120 slaves. The mass importation of blacks began from that date, and the flow would continue for 300 years.

Slavery in Brazil stemmed from the early perception by the Portuguese of Africans as useful and comparatively inexpensive labor. The Portuguese became acquainted with the black man during the period of Moorish rule (711–1249 A.D.) in Spain and Portugal. By the mid-sixteenth century, the Portuguese had already become the major suppliers of blacks for colonial Spanish America. Once it appeared that the indigenous Indians could not be effectively utilized in the canefields and sugar mills of Bahia and Pernambuco, it was only natural that a proven workman, the sub-Saharan African, would be thrown into the breach. Gradually, black slaves were utilized in an increasing number of diverse occupations, and their numbers grew correspondingly. By 1819, 66 percent of the total population of the *capitania* of Maranhão consisted of enslaved blacks and mulattoes; in Goiás, the figure was 42.5 percent, in Alagoas, 38.3 percent, São Paulo, 32.6 percent, Bahia, 30.8 percent, and Rio Grande do Sul, 30.6 percent. In sum, by the end of the colonial period, African slavery in Brazil had become a *nationwide* phenomenon absolutely essential to the economy.

In contrast, black slavery was introduced in Anglo-Saxon

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North America in 1619, and the previous experience of the Jamestown colonists with African peoples had probably been nonexistent. While it is true that black slaves could have been found in virtually all the 13 colonies prior to 1776, nowhere did the number of bondsmen exceed 30 percent of the aggregate population except in South Carolina, Georgia, Virginia, and possibly Maryland. Free whites could be found to perform most forms of manual work; forced labor was a critical necessity only on tobacco, rice, and indigo plantations.

Given these contrasts in epoch and socio-economic development, it was only natural that slavery in colonial Brazil and the United States displayed many fundamental differences. Reputable scholars have long sought to compare the two systems of slavery and, even as they noted the differences, have generalized that slavery in Brazil was more humane than its counterpart in the southern United States. Alas, nothing could be further from the truth.

### Standards and Prices

If the hapless black came across the Atlantic to Brazil from Portuguese depots in Angola, Moçambique, or Cape Verde, he had usually been baptized and branded to show that the proper excise taxes had been paid. Captives dispatched from Gulf of Guinea stations often had these functions performed only after they had completed the Atlantic passage. In any event, the newly disembarked black man was classified as a *peça da Índia* (piece of India), or some fraction of that ambiguous standard.

The ideal *peça* was a male in good health, somewhere between the ages of 15 and 35, standing five feet, six or seven inches tall. Actual conformity to this standard was rare, and so slave shippers had to fashion more adaptable criteria in offering captives to prospective customers. Two males between the

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ages of 35 and 45 came to equal one *peça*, while three youths, 8 to perhaps 15 years old, were the equivalent of two *peças*. Any number of elderly, sick, or deformed slaves might also equal one *peça*. Since the female slaves could not perform the heavy mine and field labor desired, they generally sold for less than males.

Nevertheless, the African slave was not only a human tool or beast of burden; he represented at once both labor and capital. The Brazilian colonial economy was geared to the production of raw materials for Portugal. Colonial initiative in creating iron-making, textile, and gold-manufacturing industries was vetoed by the crown, and since there were virtually no banks, the slave often became the unit of value. Hence, Pascoal de Silva Guimares in eighteenth century Minas Gerais might have had many gold coins, but he was *rich* because he possessed a retinue of 3,000 slaves. The possession of blacks became a hedge against inflation, for the slaves could always be exchanged for some material object.

The newly landed slave was called a *boçal*, a term implying that he spoke no Portuguese. A captive who either understood Portuguese or displayed a familiarity with Lusitanian customs might be labeled a *ladino*, and as such was more valuable. Slaves were also categorized according to their supposed place of origin. Those blacks allegedly emanating from Angola, the mouth of the Congo River, or Moçambique were referred to as *bantus*; these were the slaves most commonly found in Brazil. More highly regarded were those shipped from the Cape Verde-Portuguese Guinea region, while the top quality were healthy captives from Gulf of Guinea ports, commonly referred to as *Minas*.

Throughout the seventeenth century, the price of slaves rose steadily. With the discovery of gold in Minas Gerais about 1695, slave prices spiraled sharply higher; responding to colonial complaint, the Portuguese government placed a ceiling of 160,000 *reis* (or \$ US 200-250) per *peça* on newly landed slaves. This effort at price control was a futile gesture: by 1718, *peças* identified as *Minas* were selling in Rio de Janeiro for up to 360,000 *reis*.

The decline of the gold-mining industry after 1770, plus the preference in European markets for sugar from the Caribbean, were crippling blows to the Brazilian economy. The price of slaves in Pernambuco fell as low as 100,000 *reis* in 1787, but a boom in cotton production and a temporary recovery for Brazilian sugar resulted in partial stabilization around 1800. By 1810

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the general price for good quality *peças* was again climbing upward to 300,000 *reis*.

### The Variety of Slave Occupations

Pedro de Magalhães de Gandavo, who visited Brazil during the sixteenth century, proffered the following advice to future Portuguese immigrants:

As soon as persons who intend to live in Brazil become inhabitants of the country, however poor they may be, if each one obtains two pairs of one-half dozen slaves . . . he then has the means for sustenance.

Given the three to five million blacks subsequently imported into the colony, it would appear that the Luso-Brazilians took this counsel to heart. No other area of the New World received more slaves. But Magalhães de Gandavo never could have envisioned the multiplicity of occupations in which Africans would be used. Not only were they field hands, domestics, peddlers, miners, bodyguards, skilled laborers, and objects of sexual gratification, but also soldiers, overseers, and thieves. In Minas Gerais, blind whites had their slaves beg for them; both there and in Bahia, females were rented to brothels. In some cases whites lived off the proceeds gathered from renting their blacks to entrepreneurs, and occasionally slaves owned other slaves, thereby obtaining money while laboring for someone else.

The very diversity of labor performed by slaves had a tremendous impact on the kind of tasks free persons in Brazil regarded as fitting. Like the Spaniard, the Portuguese immigrant to the New World felt that he was a *fidalgo*, or "son of somebody." This sentiment made manual labor abhorrent, and as the English writer Robert Southey laconically reported of late eighteenth century Brazil, "never is it seen [that] a white man . . . [will] taken an agrarian instrument in his hands." This disdain for physical exertion extended to modes of personal travel. Only slaves and free colored walked; persons of any social stature either rode horses or were carried about in sedan chairs or hammocks. In the city of Salvador, horse-drawn carts and carriages did not supplant the sedan chair as the favored means of locomotion until 1850.

At no time prior to 1822 did the Brazilian clergy as a group

question the legitimacy of the African slave trade. That the Roman Catholic church in Portuguese America would have done so was unlikely, since the crowned heads of Portugal exercised the powers of *padroado* (patronage) over it, and the slave trade was a state-sanctioned industry. Probably most clergymen agreed that slave labor was absolutely vital, and if the Indian were to be saved, then the African had to suffer.

In 1758, Father Manoel Ribeira da Rocha published a tract condemning the Atlantic slave trade as being "against all divine and human law." But Bishop José Joaquim da Cunha de Azevedo of Bahia published in 1809 a sophisticated justification of both slavery and the Atlantic slave trade, and another priest, Junario de Cunha Mattos, became a tiger in defense of these institutions during the early years of Brazil's political independence. Throughout the colonial era individual clerics and religious orders owned slaves, while agricultural lands owned by the Church produced wealth—thanks to the sweat of their human properties.

### A Mélange of Beliefs

What the Church did conceive to be its primary mission was the conversion of the African to Catholic Christianity. Yet, provided in many cases with only a smattering of Christian doctrine, millions of blacks simply intermixed Catholic and African religious beliefs. The African deities (*orishas*) became identified with various Christian saints, and modified in their nature under the influence of fresh waves of slave importations from different sections of sub-Saharan Africa. The emerging mélange of beliefs and practices became known as *macumba* in Rio de Janeiro and Pernambuco, where *bantu* bondsmen seem to have been more numerous. In Bahia and other areas where Yoruba influence predominated, the amalgam of rites was called *candomblé*.

The Luso-Brazilian reaction to *candomblé* and *macumba* varied considerably. Some slave masters permitted the dances and chants which were inevitably a part of the ceremonies, believing that such activities helped make the slave more content with his lot. Others would not allow their slaves to participate, so such services had to be conducted in secret. Particularly in towns, ecclesiastical authorities tried to ensure that the "new Christians" did not relapse into the paganism of their ancestors. Some city councils banned public celebrations (i.e., religious singing, dancing) by all colored persons. It is very

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easy to visualize the slave at Mass, the crucifix in one hand and a *fetiché* in his pocket. He was probably not certain which artifact would provide him with the greatest aid and comfort; and given his subordinate social position, there was no reason to take any chances.

### Slavery in the Northeast

The history of colonial Brazil's slave-supported economy is a record of shifts from one export product to another. The most important was cane sugar, which was shipped to Europe from 1546 on. Grown first in what is now São Paulo state, sugarcane came to be cultivated primarily on the northeastern seaboard. The *capitanias* of Pernambuco and Bahia became the chief centers, but Rio de Janeiro, Espírito Santo, Paraíba, and Rio Grande do Norte were also significant producers. Between 1600 and 1700 some 2,925,000 tons of sugar were exported, but during the last quarter of the seventeenth century West Indian sugar began to replace the Brazilian product in European markets. By 1700, prices had fallen as much as 90 percent, and planters in Bahia and Pernambuco began moving their slaves to the gold fields of western Bahia, Minas Gerais, and Mato Grosso. Prices for Brazilian sugar remained low through the eighteenth century until the disruptive slave rebellion in sugar-rich Saint-Domingue (now the Dominican Republic) suddenly sparked a new demand for the Brazilian product in Europe.

### Slaves and Sugar

The problems of profit, production, and work regimen suggest that life on a colonial sugar plantation was less than the idyll that some writers have pictured it to be. In Pernambuco, sugar lords estimated that a labor force of at least 100 slaves was necessary for the effective operation of the plantation; and if a reasonable profit was to accrue, this labor force must annually produce about 1,138 pounds of refined sugar. With refined sugar selling for the equivalent (then) of £1 per pound, the larger planters enjoyed high profits and splendid living. A seventeenth century traveler to Brazil was astounded to find one such *senhor de engenho* living on his plantation with all the trappings of oriental pomp. He even ate his meals "to the music of an orchestra of 30 comely negro wenches, presided over by a European bandmaster."

In the sugarcane country, certain labor conditions were

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standard. During the harvest season, work began before dawn and, except for two meals, continued long after dark. After the cane was harvested and processed, there were boxes and crates to be made, rum or cane brandy to be distilled, and new fields to be planted. Controversy exists as to the adequacy of the slave's diet, but most scholars agree that manioc bread, corn gruel, perhaps a scrap of salted beef, or a few vegetables was the most field hands could expect to get.

The prevailing philosophy of slave utilization in the northeast sugar country did not encourage benevolence. Fresh shiploads of slaves could easily be obtained from Angolan or Gulf of Guinea stations and shipped to Brazil. Hence, the common practice was to work a slave to the limit of his capabilities, and after he had died, fled, or injured himself severely, buy a fresh replacement. During the eighteenth century an increasing number of *senhores de engenho* took up permanent residence in towns. As a result, the direction of the labor force was in the hands of an overseer, often a mulatto, whose interest in the slaves' welfare was likely to be slight.

More fortunate were the bondsmen living in towns like Salvador, Recife, Rio de Janeiro, or Pôrto Seguro. Here one would find slave porters and stevedores, assorted domestics, prostitutes, and some skilled craftsmen. There were also numerous males and females employed as day-laborers, whose major obligation was to supply their owners with an agreed-upon sum of money. Possessed of some freedom of movement and a choice of jobs unavailable in rural areas, the urban slave was undoubtedly better off than his plantation counterpart. Furthermore, those involved in the money economy (shoemakers, barbers, etc.) had much better prospects for purchasing their liberty than cane cutters or mill hands.

One may conclude that although the field hands (the largest body of captives) were indeed the "hands and feet of the *Senhores de Engenho*," individually they meant as much to the latter as a pair of boots, a horse, or a yoke of oxen.

### Slavery in Minas Gerais

Major gold strikes were made in the contemporary states of Minas Gerais (1695), Goias (1715, 1730, 1734), Mato Grosso (1718-19), and western Bahia (1719-20). Production was done almost entirely by manual labor, and after 1770 it declined rapidly; between 1691 and 1820, roughly 926,100 kilograms (1,019 U.S. tons) of gold were reportedly obtained.

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When news of the first gold strike in 1695 reached Portugal, thousands of peasants and ne'er-do-wells departed the homeland and joined Brazilian vagrants, plantation owners, and frontiersmen in the mining camps of Minas Gerais. But "the work of the mines was the work of Negroes," and to them went the actual task of digging. Slaves possessed of stamina were especially sought after, and in this regard, captives from the Gulf of Guinea were much preferred to either *bantus* or Indians. Between 1728 and 1748, at least 99,000 blacks were shipped to Salvador from the Guinea Coast and then overland, or by sea (via Rio de Janeiro) to the gold fields. During the eighteenth century over half a million slaves were shipped into the mineral-producing zones of the Brazilian interior.

Digging for gold was a curse for the slave. Those involved in placer mining worked constantly in water, often entirely nude, exposed to the sun, rain, and cold. Those in underground galleries had to contend with changes in temperature, the release of gases, frequent accidents, and various forms of respiratory ailments. The toll in the lives of bondsmen is said to have reached 7,000 annually, a figure which does not seem extreme in the light of observations made by several authors:

In the space of a year, 100 slaves died [in a gold mine in Goias], something which never happened to the [slaves of] plantation landlords. . . . The high death rate of African males in the gold mines was reflected in the new introduction of slaves which was continually being made. . . . The mines, insatiable . . . absorbed all the human mass brought in by the traffic.

Paradoxically, in the absence of a large number of white women, female captives of color here enjoyed unaccustomed opportunities for social and financial advancement. In Brazil the keeping of Negroid mistresses was a common practice; in the gold fields, Luso-Brazilians believed that sleeping with a *Mina* woman brought good luck. Indeed, some priests preached that a Luso-Brazilian committed no sin if he kept slave concubines, and one priest who argued otherwise was run out of town. A royal *alvará* (decree) of 1704 forbade female slaves to wear silk, gold jewelry, or facial makeup, but in Minas Gerais, this decree became still another that was generally honored with noncompliance. The gold rush in eighteenth century Minas Gerais resulted in the death of thousands of male slaves, but

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for a while the *mulata* was queen, and a few *mulatas* were able to parlay their physical attractions into freedom and wealth.

The second greatest source of mineral wealth obtained during the eighteenth century was precious stones. Lisbon first sold the diamond monopoly in 1740, and to prevent the smuggling of precious stones out of the diamond district around Tijuco allowed the purchaser to bring in only 600 registered slaves. In the diamond diggings there was supposed to be one overseer for every eight slaves, but no really effective means was discovered to eliminate theft. One diabolical security measure was to force a slave suspected of having swallowed diamonds to engulf large doses of Malaga black pepper, a substance having an awesome purgative effect.

### Slavery in Northern and Southern Brazil

In the *capitania* of Grão Pará-Maranhão, Indians constituted the bulk of the servile labor force; thus there were continuing clashes between the Jesuits, who sought to protect the indigenous Indians, and the Luso-Brazilian settlers, who wanted them as laborers. Both the Jesuits and the settlers would have preferred to have had African bondsmen, but sugarcane did not prosper in the region, and neither gold nor precious stones were to be found in the rivers and streams. Under these conditions, Grão Pará-Maranhão whites had little money to buy Africans, and many of those they did obtain were infirm or rebellious souls who could not be sold elsewhere.

The situation did not begin to change significantly until the Companhia Geral do Grão Pará e Maranhão began making regular slave deliveries in 1755. There had been perhaps 12,000 to 13,000 African slaves landed at Belém (Grão Pará) between 1692 and 1750; by 1782 an additional 30,000 had been disembarked. A few of these saw service as stockmen, cowboys, and domestics, but after 1750 most of them became field hands in the growing coffee and cacao plantations. Here, as elsewhere, slaveholders exhibited an ambivalent attitude toward the health of their properties. In 1792, for example, the idea of vaccinating slaves was rejected because officials in Belém insisted that Negroid skin was too thick to penetrate!

Further south in Maranhão, the Companhia Geral do Grão Pará e Maranhão was also responsible for economic development, but in this case the produce was not coffee but cotton. By 1818, exports from São Luís reached \$4 million annually, and between 1757 and 1823 at least 42,000 Africans arrived in order to

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cultivate the product that made Dixie famous. This sudden prosperity was not without a price; during the eighteenth century Maranhão became known as the place where slaves were most harshly treated. Available information suggests that Sundays were generally days of work. Domestic and favored concubines may have been able to extract extra privileges, "but the greater part [were] treated as slaves, that is, with little to eat and much work." By 1819, 66 percent of Maranhão's population consisted of Negroid slaves, a situation which doubtless heightened white fears and hence contributed to the territory's reputation among blacks as a species of hell on earth.

In the extreme south was the *capitania* of Rio Grande do Sul, a region long considered too cold for Africans. After 1700, a popular practice among slave owners in Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro was to banish rebellious slaves to Rio Grande, which became known as a land of "vile masters and vile slaves." As in Maranhão, economic growth did not commence until late in the eighteenth century. Cattle raising had steadily gained in importance, with Indian or mixed-blood cowboys tending the expanding herds. According to the 1775 census, there were 20,000 inhabitants (not counting hostile Indians), a fourth of whom were black and mulatto slaves working chiefly as domestics and stockmen. After 1780, however, the meat-packing industry in the towns of Pôrto Alegre and Pelotas began growing rapidly, and in two decades Rio Grande became the chief source of salted beef for Brazilian tables. This growth necessitated a rapid augmentation of the number of slaves. By 1814 the *capitania's* inhabitants numbered perhaps 70,655 souls of whom 30.1 percent were slaves, and 90 percent of these were committed to permanent service in the *charqueadas*, or meat-packing plants.

Slavery in Rio Grande do Sul was unique in that the mass of the unfree labor force was urban and industrial. The *charqueada* bondsmen worked a minimum of 12 hours a day, beginning about midnight and ending at noon. The critical factor in the system's harshness was that *charqueada* slaves worked all year round, there being no rainy or slack season that would significantly vary the rhythm of work. Perhaps the worst torture of all was that with slave costs high, the emancipation of *charqueada* workers was relatively uncommon.

According to Caio Prado Júnior, the small number of African slaves originally in Maranhão and Rio Grande do Sul, plus the sudden and rapid influx of a predominantly male slave population, prevented the creation of a mulatto contingent such

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as existed in northeastern Brazil. In both places, the Brazilian scholar argues, "the blacks were blacker, the whites whiter," and hence a harsher form of slavery developed. A more plausible explanation is that the affluent white elements in Maranhão and Rio Grande do Sul were conscious of the opulence which had characterized the earlier booms in gold, diamonds, and sugar elsewhere. Increasing demand for meat and cotton signaled the arrival of their opportunity to cash in. To insure their owners' prosperity, the captive laborers had to toil harder and faster. It is little wonder, then, that African slaves wanted no part of Maranhão or Rio Grande do Sul.

### Slave Resistance and Rebellion

Naturally, a great number of blacks rebelled against their masters, and intimidating punishments were deemed necessary. A few defiant souls were actually thrown alive into burning furnaces, and the *novena* (nine days of whippings), the thumb screw, the iron collar, the stocks, and metal weights were commonly employed. What some owners discovered, however, was that mental cruelty could produce a kind of servility that physical brutality alone might not. One Bahian planter who could not prevent his slaves from committing suicide finally solved the problem by digging up the bodies of several of those who had killed themselves, and hacking off their limbs. Thereupon he informed the assembled captives that if they chose to end their lives he would also mutilate them, and thus when they were reborn, they would come back minus an arm, hand, or leg.

Slaves, resisting, usually resorted to suicide or, more often, flight. Apprehending fugitives was a serious problem in colonial Brazil. The chief security agent, the *capitão-do-mato* (bush captain), sold his services to a group of slaveholders and received a bounty for each slave recaptured. The *capitão-do-mato* was generally a free black or mulatto—who but a colored person would make the best catcher of another black or mulatto? Furthermore, slave-catching put freed Negroids to work and enlisted them in the system. The *capitães* were known for their relentlessness and cruelty.

A few escaped slaves took up residence in urban areas, where they tried to pass as free persons. Most, however, sought to reach remote settlements of fugitive slaves, or *quilombos*. Easily the most famous and largest of these was Palmares, situated in the present state of Alagoas and established per-

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haps as early as 1612. Beginning in 1630, Palmares withstood at least 20 major attacks or sieges by the Dutch, the Portuguese, and Brazilian settlers before succumbing in 1695. At its height, Palmares encompassed some 10 subdivisions, and 20,000–30,000 persons lived within its confines. It would remain the largest independent settlement of blacks in the New World until Haitian sovereignty was recognized in 1804.

Other than Palmares, the largest *quilombos* were established in the mountains and wooded areas near several of the larger towns in Minas Gerais. An estimated 20,000 ex-captives were said to have inhabited these settlements, and they were considered “a plague scattered about the remote areas and without remedy.” Fugitives sallying from these hideouts kidnapped and killed whites and made the roads unsafe. When Lisbon finally agreed to finance a major campaign, Bartolomeu Bueno do Pardo attacked and destroyed a “quasi-kingdom of fugitive negroes” (1757), reportedly returning with 3,900 pairs of ears as proof. Subsequent attacks temporarily removed the *quilombo* menace to white rule in Minas Gerais.

For some slaves, however, the solution was planned rebellion. In both 1719 and 1724 slaves in Vila Rica de Ouro Preto, capital of Minas Gerais, plotted a giant insurrection, but these schemes collapsed because Angolan and Guinea Coast blacks could not agree as to which group would have supreme power after white rule was overthrown. Another conspiracy, formed by slaves in the town of São João del Rei (Minas Gerais) and fugitives from a nearby *quilombo*, called for a surprise attack during church services on Maundy Thursday (April 15), 1756. The execution of both whites and mulattoes was intended, but the conspiracy was discovered and crushed. Several rebellions were also attempted in Maranhão, but the best known was an Afro-Indian revolt which took place in the town of São Thomé in 1773. The rebels were annihilated.

The sugar-growing northeast also was the scene of serious challenges to white authority. In 1807, 1809, 1813, and 1816, Muslim-led slaves made determined efforts to seize local political control. The 1807 plot was scotched by informers, but both the 1809 and the 1813 uprisings resulted in the deaths of white planters and overseers, as pitched battles swirled around the city of Salvador. The 1816 affair began on seven plantations in the sugar-rich Recôncavo district, and reached “frightening proportions” before it was quelled, with hundreds of suspects and prisoners later executed, flogged, or deported to penal colonies in Africa.

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The evidence of slave resistance to Luso-Brazilian hegemony should not be construed as proof that all African captives hated their masters or planned to kill them. Some slaves were simply overawed and submitted meekly, while others chose to drown their discontent in alcohol or the mysticism and frenzy of *macumba* or *candomblé*. The lesson is that during the colonial period, a significant number of bondsmen (usually African-born) refused to reconcile themselves to white rule. Their continuing flights, conspiracies, and attacks did not effect a breakdown of the slave system, but it meant that the authorities could not afford to relax.

### Emancipation for Individuals

The only significant organizations of colored people that worked to effect the release of slaves were the black and mulatto lay brotherhoods, or *irmandades*, the first of which was founded about 1639. These were religious organizations created to strengthen the spirit of Christianity among persons of African origin, and were divided along racial and even tribal lines. Many *irmandades* assessed their membership an annual sum specifically for the emancipation of members or for the liberation of other deserving bondsmen.

While the work of the *irmandades* stood as the best example of cooperation among Negroid peoples in colonial Brazil, most manumissions were accomplished by self-purchase or through owner benefaction. In the first case, the master and the bondsman agreed upon a price for the latter's freedom, and when this sum was paid the bondsman was awarded a *carta de alforria* (letter of liberation). Most manumissions were gratuitous awards. Trusted retainers, slave concubines, and illegitimate mulatto offspring could often expect liberation in a will, or on a church holiday or a birthday, and a few even received small bequests of land or money.

But Brazilian manumittive customs also had their dark side. Many *cartas de alforria* were given to the sick, the aged, and the crippled, and for these persons release from bondage was a death sentence. If a freedman demonstrated disrespect for his ex-owner, he could be reënslaved. Another common practice was conditional release. For example, a slave would be freed in his master's will, but with the provision that he continue serving the master's heirs for life, or for a specified number of years. Under these strictures, the bondsman was only semi-free; his descendants gained the final step to emancipation.

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Many of those released had neither skills nor resources, and were bound to be ravaged by the new realities they had to face. For example, except for barbers and midwives, many slaves with skills found that they could not meet the standards of proficiency required for admittance to craft guilds. Socially, the emancipated found themselves in a state of limbo, for many whites did not recognize the colored person's change in status.

### The Status of Free Negroes

When the situation of freed persons of color in colonial Brazil is discussed, the question of *which* persons were freed takes on special relevance. Most *capitanias* did not, unfortunately, separate blacks and mulattoes in their censuses, so our information is limited, but the tremendous disproportion between the numbers of free blacks and free mulattoes requires some explanation. As I noted, white fathers often emancipated their bastard mulatto offspring. Furthermore, any mixed-blood was more likely to be Brazilian-born and acquainted with Luso-Brazilian linguistic and cultural predilections. Thus when opportunities for freedom presented themselves, the mulatto was most likely to be able to exploit them. One scholar has pointed out that among Luso-Brazilians, allowing light-complexioned slaves to perform the same heavy labor as blacks was considered disgraceful, while another has stressed the notion that "a light mulatto . . . even as a slave was more likely to receive acceptance from the white community than a free black man."

Overall, the mass of emancipated mixed-bloods and blacks possessed neither money nor powerful patrons. So society allotted to them the proletarian tasks which no one else desired. By working hard at these occupations and obeying the laws, the optimum most people of color (except for certain paramours) could expect to achieve in their lifetime was the ownership of a few slaves or a small shop. But these goals could not be gained without a good deal of physical exertion, and in colonial Brazil manual labor was performed only by blacks and slaves. Rather than "disgrace" themselves in this regard, an unusual number of freed mulattoes preferred to be vagrants. For many free persons of various skin hues, banditry, diamond smuggling, or other criminal activities were preferable; they offered the prospect of both greater financial gain and avoidance of taxes and militia service.

Legal bars and court decisions were notoriously color-oriented. In Brazil, the ticket to clerical, civil, or administrative

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appointments was proof of "cleanliness of blood" (*limpeza de sangue*), and since all persons of African origin were slaves or descendants of slaves, they were inherently "unclean."

The regionally promulgated ordinances most clearly revealed the obsession of the ruling whites with preventing Negroid social ascension. In 1719, the Count of Assumar, chief official in São Paulo and Minas Gerais, prohibited all blacks and mulattoes from owning either slaves or stores. In 1734, the governor of Rio Grande do Norte implored João V to ban mulattoes from holding any office or entering militia service. Nevertheless, it was Dom Luís de Almeida Lavradio, Viceroy of Brazil (1769–77), who approached the ultimate in upholding the principle of white supremacy. He refused to allow mulatto militia officers to approach him to pay their respects, and on the word of some Indians he relieved of command a *capitão-mor* (captain) who was suspected of being a mulatto. Possibly his most extreme act was his deposition of an Indian chief in 1771 for marrying a black woman. In ordering the red man's removal, Almeida Lavradio declared that the marriage was proof of the chief's mental derangement.

### **Black vs. White vs. Brown**

Probably the most famous nonwhites to reach positions of status in colonial Brazil were Antônio Vieira, a Jesuit priest and court advisor; João Fernandes Vieira, a governor in both Paraíba and Angola; and Henrique Dias, a black soldier who was knighted in 1652. Unquestionably of critical importance was the fact that Fernandes Vieira and Dias were the most heroic figures to emerge from the 1645–54 "War of Divine Liberation" against the Dutch in Pernambuco. Both Vieiras were European-born; in any case, no other known mulatto became governor in Brazil, and Dias was the only Brazilian black ever to be knighted. The other acknowledged nonwhites to receive civil appointments were a small group of blacks and mulattoes, chiefly in Minas Gerais, who were granted minor posts primarily because no white man would perform the chores which the jobs entailed. But too many royal dispensations would ultimately have undermined the principle of white supremacy, and such a development was unthinkable.

Acceptable pigmentation plus wealth and influence were necessary for persons who hoped to obtain the *limpeza-de-sangue* document. But how dark one could be and still "pass" varied from region to region.

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An incident reported by the Englishman Henry Koster and the French artist Jean Rugendas is the following:

In conversing on one occasion with a man of color who was in my service, I asked if a certain capitão-mor was not a mulatto man; he answered, "He was, but he is not now." I begged him to explain, when he added: "Can a capitão-mor be a mulatto man?"

This exchange has been cited as proof that unusual opportunities for social ascent existed for mulattoes in colonial Brazil. In fact, these mixed-bloods were consistently held up for ridicule and derision by the Europeans. All the mulatto could do in retaliation was to vent his rage and frustration on those darker than himself. Perhaps Koster and Rugendas should have asked themselves instead: Did Luso-Brazilians consider the *capitão-mor* in question to be white?

There were, however, a few mulattoes who realized that spurning the black man and accepting white domination was not likely to allow many of them to penetrate the upper echelons of Brazilian society. In 1798, a group of mulatto tailors, engravers, and militiamen in Salvador plotted to overthrow Portuguese rule and ostensibly to create a republic in which there would be equality of opportunity for all races. Nevertheless, as Lucas Dantas, one of the ringleaders, constantly emphasized, the primary goal was the abolition of distinctions between whites and mulattoes, rather than broad legal and social equity. Thus, as any cynic could have predicted, the only black invited to participate not only refused, but betrayed the uprising.

### **Brazil Today**

Colonial Brazil became the independent Brazilian Empire in 1822. Slavery ended in 1888. In 1889, the nation became a republic. Yet, in 1976, Brazil remains a place where the mulatto still strives to separate himself socially from the black, while the white man holds them both to be inferior.

Then as now, a mulatto with straight hair, money, and a fair complexion will marry a white woman, even one with less education and lower social status. For the attractive mixed-blood female, a white lover is generally better than a black husband. As Donald Pierson noted in *Negroes in Brazil*, the fruit of such a liaison might be illegitimate, but it would have

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a lighter skin. Thus, the mother could claim that she was "cleansing (i.e., whitening) her race." Brazilian thinkers like Nina Raimundo Rodrigues and Manuel de Oliveira Lima and several North American authors have hailed this practice, bestowing upon it the vague but appealing name: *branqueamento* (the whitening process).

In Brazil, it has been the haphazard acceptance of the mulatto that has been the most conspicuous aspect of racial relations since the days of slavery. But the growth of industrialization and the increasing urbanization have had fundamental impact. Afro-Brazilians represent roughly 40 percent of the total population. Some of them are beginning to free themselves from the psychological slavery implicit in the silent acceptance of white supremacy. One observes a more aggressive spirit among blacks and browns in the industrial cities of the south and southeast. Afro-Brazilian university students may not say "Black is Beautiful," but they no longer look in the mirror and curse their kinky hair. Slowly, the Brazilian racial outlook is changing. But how the Afro-Brazilians, 330 years after their ancestors were first transported to the New World, will proceed to work out their future, no one can say.

