

Slavery in Brazil

Brazil was the American society that received the largest contingent of African slaves in the Americas and the longest-lasting slave regime in the Western Hemisphere. This is the first complete modern survey of the institution of slavery in Brazil and how it affected the lives of enslaved Africans. It is based on major new research on the institution of slavery and the role of Africans and their descendants in Brazil. Although Brazilians have incorporated many of the North American debates about slavery, they have also developed a new set of questions about slaveholding: the nature of marriage, family, religion, and culture among the slaves and free colored; the process of manumission; and the rise of the free colored class during slavery. It is the aim of this book to introduce the reader to this latest research, both to elucidate the Brazilian experience and to provide a basis for comparisons with all other American slave systems.

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To
Samantha Olivia Klein

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Preface

In recent years, there has been an outpouring of studies on the institution of slavery and the role of Africans and their descendants in Brazil. The earliest work on slavery in Brazil and the Afro-Brazilian experience was much influenced by anthropologists, whereas the more recent studies have seen an impressive participation of economists and sociologists along with the ongoing work of historians. Just as U.S. scholars were much influenced by the work of Brazilians in the 1950s and 1960s, for example, today Brazilian scholars are very aware of the new work done in the United States in the past four decades. Although the Brazilians have incorporated many of the North American debates about slavery in the United States, they have also developed a new set of questions about slaveholding and its distribution in the population as well as the nature of marriage and family among slaves. In fact, one could argue that the Brazilian historians and economists are doing more studies on their institution of slavery than is now occurring in the United States, despite the imbalance in the size of the historical profession in the two countries.

Ever since 1988, the centenary of abolition in Brazil, there has been an outpouring of new studies in theses, articles, and books. This has been the work of several distinct regional Brazilian schools of historical analysis. Along with the traditional political and social studies of the Bahian school, there has now emerged the original quantitative work of the São Paulo school of economic historians, the demographic historians of Minas Gerais, and the social historians of Rio de Janeiro. Although sometimes local historians have worked in isolation on given themes, more and more there is cross-fertilization, with Bahian historians using Paulista models and Paulistas replicating *Carioca* studies. All of these investigators have

created an extensive new literature on the functioning of slavery and the role of free colored in eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Brazil. Finally, thanks to the efforts of CAPES of the Ministry of Education, almost all recent theses and dissertations are now online and can be accessed at two different websites.¹

It is the aim of this study to introduce the reader to this latest research, to elucidate the Brazilian experience, and to provide a basis of comparisons for all other American slave systems. The organization of the book is somewhat unusual, as we have tried to provide both a chronological framework and a structural analysis at the same time. To understand slave life in Brazil, it is essential first to understand how and why the Portuguese used slaves as a primary labor force within this Portuguese colony and independent nation. Thus, Part I provides a chronological analysis of the political economy of slavery in Brazil from its founding until the late-nineteenth century. Our emphasis in these chapters is to provide an understanding of the timing and evolution of the various economic sectors that used slave labor. The concern here is with the macroeconomic changes and developments. Part II deals with the slaves themselves in their daily lives. The second half of the book is synchronic in nature, emphasizing the demographic, social, and political aspects of slave and free colored life and culture. Even here, however, we are concerned with relating underlying economic patterns with these structural changes and delineating regional and temporal variations. The last chapter returns to a more strictly chronological approach but tries to provide as broad a model as possible to incorporate the multiple experiences that made up the long process of transition from slave to free labor in Brazil.

Certain qualifications should be made at the outset about the limits of our study. Although American Indians were enslaved by the Portuguese and used in commercial export industries in the first century of the colonization, we will only concentrate on the enslaved Africans and Afro-Brazilians. Amerindian slavery lasted a short time and has been only moderately studied, and it was the Africans and their descendants who were the primary servile labor force that dominated and defined Brazilian slavery for most of its history. Next, because of varying terminology applied in the several languages to Afro-Americans, readers should be

¹ The first gives full access to some 606 master's theses and 127 doctoral dissertations (as of August 30, 2008) at <http://www.dominiopublico.gov.br/pesquisa/PesquisaPeriodicoForm.jsp>. The second website is maintained by CAPES directly with complete search facilities and is found at <http://bdtd2.ibict.br>.

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aware of our definitions. We use the term *pretos* or “blacks” to refer to persons defined by the society as having only African ancestry. In contrast, the term *pardos* or “mulattoes” refers to persons of mixed African and European or even African and Amerindian or Asian background. *Afro-Brazilian* is the term used to designate persons born in America who are defined as blacks and mulattoes. *African* is used here only to define persons born in Africa, and the term *Creole* is used to designate a person born in the Americas. We use the term *colored*, as in free colored, as inclusive of both blacks and mulattoes regardless of their place of birth. Finally, the *free colored* sometimes can be divided into those born free (*livres*) or those who were emancipated in their own lifetime (called either *forros* or *libertos*), a distinction of importance made by Brazilians in the slave period.

In writing this book we have had the support of many colleagues. Iraci Nero da Costa, Stanley Engerman, Stuart Schwartz, Mariza Soares, and João Reis kindly critiqued the manuscript for us. As ever, we owe a special debt to our editor, Frank Smith, who encouraged us to write this work in the first place.

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