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Laird W. Bergad

Excerpt

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CHAPTER ONE

FROM COLONIZATION TO ABOLITION

PATTERNS OF HISTORICAL
DEVELOPMENT IN BRAZIL, CUBA,
AND THE UNITED STATESBRAZIL¹

Portuguese colonization of Brazil in the early sixteenth century was part of a long history of overseas expansion initiated in the early fifteenth century along the western coast of Africa. Portuguese merchants, often with ties to the crown, had established extensive seagoing commercial connections with the Islamic cultures of the North African Mediterranean dating from the thirteenth century. The Portuguese were skilled shipbuilders and ocean navigators, and through international trade they were well acquainted with a vast array of products from Asian spices such as cloves, peppers, and sugar to sub-Saharan gold and ivory. The techniques of sailing and navigating the comparatively difficult waters of the Atlantic were very different from those required to sail the Mediterranean. But during the fifteenth century, Portuguese sailors gradually became acquainted with the wind patterns and nuances of sailing into the Atlantic world.

In 1415, the Portuguese conquest of Ceuta, an Islamic commercial center on the Mediterranean coast of North Africa, opened sailing routes southward along the West African coast. Exploration was gradual, and it was not until 1487 that the Portuguese reached the Cape of Good Hope and opened routes to Asia through the Indian Ocean. Although they had little success, or even interest, in penetrating the African interior, the Portuguese established a series of trading depots (*feitorias* or factories) on key points along the coast. The purpose was to

¹ The major issues concerning slavery in each country are not considered at length in this chapter because they are the focal points of the rest of the book.

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engage in trade for gold, ivory, slaves, and other products. They also began sailing farther into the Atlantic as wind patterns and ocean currents continually took them further westward before turning toward the south. These westward journeys led to the discovery, conquest, and settlement of various island groups that became the first European Atlantic colonies: Madeira, the Azores, Cape Verde, and São Tomé. It was on these islands, especially Madeira and São Tomé, that the first experiments with African slave-based sugar plantations were carried out.

In 1500, a large fleet heading for Asia left Lisbon following previously charted routes, sailing first toward the west before heading south. Commanded by Pedro Alvares Cabral, the fleet sailed further west than any previous trading mission and made unexpected landfall in north-eastern Brazil near the contemporary city of Porto Seguro. These new lands were claimed by Portugal, although little effort was made at settlement as the Portuguese were much too preoccupied with their extensive African and Asian commercial interests. Nevertheless, Brazil attracted some attention largely because of dyewoods, which could furnish a very marketable and lucrative red/purple dye ultimately destined for European textile centers such as Amsterdam.

The indigenous population was culturally and linguistically diverse, as was to be expected in such an extraordinarily large geographical area. There were no great imperial centers or overarching political entities such as Aztec Mexico or Inca Peru, which fell to Spanish conquerors in the 1520s and 1530s. Although Spanish explorers penetrated the Amazonian lowlands to the east of their Andean settlements, and explored the Río de la Plata region, they encountered little in the way of mineral resources or preexisting civilizations that could be systematically looted, and thus had little interest in what would become Portuguese Brazil. Other European powers, however, did manifest interest, particularly the French, whose overseas expansion had been marginalized because of Spanish domination over the West Indies and access routes to mainland Central and South America, and Portuguese control of the African and Asian seagoing routes. French merchants entered the dyewood trade and on occasion established small settlements such as that in Guanabara Bay, contemporary Rio de Janeiro.

The Portuguese crown did not have the resources to directly control Brazil. The Brazilian littoral was explored, and on occasion missions penetrated the interior. But these found no gold of any significance and no great civilization that could attract them. There was concern about

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countering the French, and finally in 1532 the first official Portuguese settlement was established at São Vicente, the future São Paulo. But rather than taking direct control on the Spanish colonial model, the Portuguese decided to award fifteen huge swaths of land paralleling the equator and running from the north to the south of the colony, called captaincies (*capitanias*). These were bestowed upon private individuals in the hope that these grantees (*donatários*) would devote the resources necessary to maintain Portuguese sovereignty. Few were ever settled or successful, and only two, São Vicente in the south and Pernambuco in the north, maintained some permanence, largely because of the gradual development of an economic base, the cultivation of sugar cane and sugar export to Europe.

The Portuguese had extensive experience with sugar cane cultivation and sugar manufacture in Madeira and São Tomé, and their technologies, organizational methods, credit, and marketing infrastructures were transferred to these Brazilian settlements. African slaves were at first quite marginal, and indigenous slavery was the initial labor foundation upon which the sugar economies developed. But high death rates and the frequent large-scale abandonment of plantations made indigenous labor untenable, and the Portuguese turned to Africans.

By the middle of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese crown had made a decision to devote energies and resources toward the establishment of direct control over the fledgling colony. The *donatário*/captaincy system had been a failure, and in 1549 the first colonial governor was named to attempt to administer Brazil. Tomé de Souza was charged with building a colonial administrative capital at the mouth of the Bay of All Saints, which became the city of Salvador, Bahia. Ecclesiastical authorities, mainly the Jesuit order, established a presence in various regions throughout the colony, and this aided in the construction of some degree of nominal Portuguese control on various parts of the long Brazilian coast. The conflict with the French was ongoing, and they even established a major settlement in Rio de Janeiro in 1555. But by the mid-1560s they were expelled after a long Portuguese military campaign, and a second royal captaincy was officially established at Rio. The French, nevertheless, maintained a presence in Maranhão in the north of the country until the early seventeenth century, and founded the city of São Luis.

Thus, Portuguese colonial Brazil gradually emerged in fits and starts. There were no great wars of conquest as was the case with the Spanish, and this was largely because of the absence of any great

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imperial civilizations or large deposits of mineral wealth. In some ways the gradual occupation of various coastal regions of Brazil was similar to the process of British colonization of North America. Colonial Brazil by the early seventeenth century was more an archipelago of coastal settlements than any unified geographical entity. Centers of Portuguese control revolved around areas where economic activity and preoccupation with taxation by the crown were strongest. In Bahia and Pernambuco, slave-based sugar export economies and colonial institutions developed. Sugar was also produced in the two other significant population centers, Rio de Janeiro in the center and São Vicente in the south. But most people were engaged in subsistence activities geared toward survival or small-scale local trade rather in the production of commodities for European markets. Cattle and other animals were raised, manioc root was cultivated, and a variety of foodstuffs were produced on small farms rather than the large *fazendas* or plantations that have become the paradigm of Brazilian history. The population of Brazil in 1600 is difficult to determine, but it has been estimated that there were around 100,000 people in this vast territory, of whom 30,000 were of European descent and the rest of African, indigenous, or mixed origin.²

During the first half of the seventeenth century political conflict defined the development of northeastern Brazil, although its impact was not as significant for the scattered settlements in the center and southern coastal regions of the country. The Portuguese and Spanish crowns were united from 1580 until 1640, and this facilitated Brazilian access to Spain's markets. But the union created enmity with the Dutch, who emerged during the sixteenth century as a naval power that rivaled and challenged the virtual Portuguese monopoly on African and Asian commerce. Raids on Portuguese settlements along the African coast began in the 1590s, and in 1604 Salvador was attacked. In 1624 the Brazilian capital was successfully seized by the Dutch, although the occupation was ended in the following year. However, in 1630 Pernambuco was conquered, and a huge swath of northeastern Brazil, from Ceará in the north to the São Francisco River in northern Bahia, was brought under Dutch control. This included the richest areas of the Brazilian sugar economy, which was modernized under Dutch tutelage.

² Roberto C. Simonsen, *História Econômica do Brasil (1500–1820)*, 6th ed. (São Paulo: Editora Nacional, 1969) (Coleção Brasileira, Série Grande Formato, v. 10), pp. 88, 271.

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To guarantee slave supplies to the Brazilian northeast, the Dutch also successfully occupied the key Portuguese slave trading ports of Luanda and Benguela in Angola during the early 1640s.

The struggle to oust the Dutch in the northeast was the principal focus of the Portuguese colonial government in Brazil until their successful expulsion in 1654. But the center and south of the colony were only marginally affected by the war in the north. Isolated by the great distance from the colonial capital in Salvador and the Dutch-occupied regions of the northeast, the small population nuclei along the littoral developed separately, and in many ways independently. The relatively large indigenous populations of southern Brazil attracted missionary activity, mainly the Jesuits, and this was especially the case in the São Paulo region. The town itself was established in the mid-1550s and served as a base not only for missionary work but also for exploration of the vast Brazilian interior. A very different culture developed from that of northern or even central Brazil, and there was a great deal of cultural mixture, to the point that often Europeans or their mixed-race descendants adopted Tupi-Guarani (the dominant indigenous regional language) rather than Portuguese as the vernacular.

Slave-raiding missions and the constant search for rumored mineral wealth gave rise to *bandeiras*, or expeditions to the uncharted interior, which could last for years. The Spanish discovery of silver at Potosí in Bolivia (then known as Alto Peru) in the 1540s was well known, and there was the hope that Brazil possessed similar mineral deposits. In the second half of the seventeenth century, placer gold deposits were discovered in the distant and mountainous interior region that would become Minas Gerais. By the 1690s, long after the Dutch had been expelled, word spread that gold had indeed been discovered in significant quantities, and this news sparked a gold rush to the interior that transformed nearly every aspect of colonial society.

People poured into the mining regions in the early eighteenth century from all of the coastal population centers in the north, center, and south of the country. The fundamental institutions of colonial Brazil – slavery, export-oriented economic structures, political/administrative controls – were transferred to the interior of the colony for the first time. Infrastructural linkages emerged from coastal regions to move people, cattle, and consumer goods into the mining zones and to transport gold dust and bullion to the coast and export to Europe. From the north, these routes led from Bahia and Pernambuco along the São Francisco River. From the south, there was a long and tortuous network of trails

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that snaked up and over the Serra de Mantiqueira, the steep and difficult-to-penetrate mountain range that parallels the Brazilian coast from São Paulo to Rio de Janeiro, and then into the central mountain range, the Serra do Espinhaço, of Minas Gerais where the gold fields were located. The discovery of gold in faraway Goiás and Mato Grosso, and of diamonds to the north in the Diamantina district, intensified these processes.

The spread of cattle ranching, mule rearing, and foodstuff production to provision the mines and provide transportation affected areas as far north as Maranhão and as far south as Rio Grande do Sul on the border of what is today Uruguay. But perhaps most dramatic was the growth of the port city of Rio de Janeiro and towns nearby such as Cabo Frio, Angra, and Paratí, which served as centers of an active contraband trade. These areas supplanted Salvador and Recife as Brazil's major import/export centers as the economic importance of the center and south of the country surpassed that of the northeastern sugar districts. Because of the gold cycle, Brazil was transformed from an archipelago of settlements into a colony in which diverse and vast regions were connected to one another for the first time.

There are no reliable statistical data that may be used to calculate the population of Portuguese Brazil at the onset of the mining boom in roughly 1700. It is likely that there were some 200,000 to 300,000 people, probably about a third of them of European descent, a third slaves, and another third of mixed race or indigenous origins. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the Brazilian population exploded because of immigration, a dramatic escalation of the African slave trade, and natural reproduction. There are no reliable immigration figures, or estimates of rates of population increase among the different Brazilian racial groups. But it is known that some 1.7 million slaves were imported to Brazil between 1700 and 1800. The overall population at the turn of the nineteenth century has been calculated at between two and three million people, an obviously imprecise estimate. But what ought to be emphasized is that the mining boom, the expansion into the interior and south of the country, and the end of the northeast's dominance in Brazilian history was accompanied by huge demographic changes. The eighteenth century was indeed one of radical transformation in the colony from every point of view.

The mining boom waned by the middle of the eighteenth century as gold reserves were gradually exhausted in region after region. The northeastern sugar economy suffered as well, principally because

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of competition from British and French Caribbean sugar producers – Jamaica, Barbados, and Haiti – which supplanted Bahia and Pernambuco as the largest sugar-producing economies in the world. But the shift in the economic and political matrix of colonial Brazil toward the center and south was highlighted by the transfer of the capital from Salvador to Rio de Janeiro in 1763.

The second half of the eighteenth century was a period of great transformation in Brazil. With the decline, not disappearance, of export products such as sugar and minerals, new economic activities emerged. Widespread food production and cattle ranching grew to provision the urban nuclei in the center-south of the colony that had developed during the mining boom. There was also the beginning of small-scale manufacturing such as textile and iron production and the emergence of new crops like cotton, coffee, and rice. Additionally, the formation of joint state/private capital enterprises charged with developing particular economic activities, such as cotton production, was a characteristic of this period; these were related to the reforms initiated by the Marquis of Pombal, who virtually ran the Portuguese government from 1750 until 1777 as secretary of state for overseas affairs. Pombal sought not only to revitalize the Brazilian colonial economy, but also to reassert Portuguese control, which had diminished during the mining boom because of a high degree of local autonomy. His efforts at directing the Brazilian economy, raising taxes, and controlling trade – much like the Bourbon reforms in Spanish America – provoked a nationalist reaction and the first stirrings of Brazilian national identity and sentiments for independence. An anti-colonial conspiracy seeking independence for Brazil known as the *Inconfidência Mineira* was discovered in Minas Gerais in the late 1780s, involving some of the most notable families of the region. It was brutally repressed.

The European crisis that followed the French Revolution of 1789 and the rise to power of Napoleon Bonaparte had profound consequences for Portugal and Brazil. The Napoleonic Wars, purportedly to spread democracy and freedom throughout Europe on the French model, spilled into Portugal in 1807 with a full-scale French invasion launched across northern Spain. In part this was because of the strong English influence and presence in Lisbon, for the British-French conflict was at the center of the European wars. When a French seizure of Lisbon was deemed inevitable, a British fleet evacuated the Portuguese monarch Dom João and the royal family, along with some 15,000 members of the political and economic elite. The destination was Rio de Janeiro, and

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the arrival and tenure of the Portuguese king between 1808 and 1822 changed the fundamental dynamics of Portuguese colonialism and paved the way for eventual Brazilian independence.

Under British pressure Dom João dismantled colonial monopolies on trade, and Brazil's economic system was opened to unrestricted commerce with friendly countries, which meant Great Britain. British merchants established a critical presence in Brazil's major commercial centers and came to play an important role as creditors and marketers to Brazil's import and export trade throughout the nineteenth century. The lifting of trade restrictions and of prohibitions on manufacturing led to an upsurge in exports of sugar and cotton as well as the expansion of coffee production in the valleys to the north and west of Rio de Janeiro. There was also a substantial increase in the importation of British manufactures, as well as increased indebtedness to banking and other commercial lenders.

The end of the European wars in 1814 created the possibility of Dom João's return to Lisbon, but he decided to remain in Rio and in 1815 elevated Brazil to the political status of a kingdom united with Portugal. This was not accomplished without conflict between Portuguese and Brazilian interests, and a separatist rebellion broke out in northeastern Pernambuco in 1817. Although it spread to neighboring provinces, it was successfully repressed by Portuguese troops. Yet Dom João was soon forced to turn his attention to Europe because of a wave of liberal political revolt that swept Spain and Portugal. In 1820, a liberal revolution triumphed in Portugal and established a government nominally representing the absent king. Dom João was forced to return to Lisbon or risk losing his position and reluctantly left Brazil in 1821. On his departure he designated his son, Dom Pedro, to act as prince regent in Brazil.

The Portuguese government attempted to reestablish direct control over Brazil by abolishing the kingdom status that had been declared in 1815, and indeed Portuguese troops were sent to Rio de Janeiro to enforce the return to colonial status. There was great resistance among local elites throughout the country, and Dom Pedro, responding to Brazilian pressures, made the decision to move toward independence, which was declared in 1822. Although there was armed conflict with Portuguese troops, formal recognition of Brazilian independence by Portugal occurred in 1825. Dom Pedro I became the emperor of a constitutional monarchy. Then, in 1831, he was forced from his throne and departed for Portugal, leaving behind his five-year-old son,

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Dom Pedro II, as heir to the Brazilian empire. The period between 1831 and 1840 is known as the Regency, as Brazil was governed by three regents who ruled in the name of the young emperor, who assumed the throne as emperor of Brazil in 1840.

In 1819, when a census was conducted on the eve of independence, Brazil had a population of about 3.6 million people, of whom about one-third were slaves of African descent. The population was distributed fairly evenly throughout the coastal regions and Minas Gerais in the interior. About 38 percent of the total population lived in Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo provinces in the south and center of the country. Nearly 30 percent resided in Bahia, Pernambuco, and Maranhão in the northeast. The slave population was also fairly evenly distributed, with 35 percent of all slaves residing in Minas, Rio, and São Paulo. Bahia, Pernambuco, and Maranhão together had about 34 percent of all slaves in Brazil. The geographical distribution of the population would move toward the south and center provinces by the time of the next Brazilian census in 1872.

Although the age of coffee had begun during the late eighteenth century, and production grew markedly after the 1808 free trade edicts, sugar remained Brazil's principal export until the 1830s. The older regions of the northeast, Pernambuco and Bahia, continued as major producers along with Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Gold and diamond exports continued at reduced levels, while cotton, tobacco, cattle by-products, and rubber found their way to European markets after 1850. A significant, if unknown, share of the national economy was oriented toward domestic markets. Food and small-scale textile production led the way. Cattle ranching, with its low demand for labor, and dairy-food production were widespread in nearly every region of the nation where there were natural pastures. But after 1840, coffee exports destined for U.S. and European markets dominated Brazil's export economy. Production spread from the Paraíba valley districts to the north and northwest of Rio de Janeiro into the state of São Paulo in regions contiguous to Rio, and then west to the frontier areas of São Paulo, which became the center of the nation's coffee production in the second half of the nineteenth century. Significant production also took hold in the southeastern regions of Minas Gerais known as the Zona da Mata.

As in the case of all of Brazil's previous export cycles, slaves provided the labor foundation upon which the coffee economy was constructed. The demand for labor increased markedly with the penetration of coffee

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into the Paulista frontier regions, and this resulted in an escalation of the transatlantic slave trade to Brazil, especially in the 1830s and 1840s. This was also a period during which the British pressured Brazil to end slaving and even forced several bilateral treaties that theoretically banned the African trade. Frustrated with Brazil's unwillingness to enforce these laws, British warships began their own systematic enforcement, and by the early 1850s the Brazilian slave trade was forcibly halted. With labor demands continuing upward, two solutions emerged for the coffee planters of southern Brazil. The first was the development of an internal slave trade from the northeastern and northern states to São Paulo. The second was the gradual turn to foreign immigrant workers from southern Europe, mainly Spain and Italy, although immigration escalated significantly only after the final abolition of slavery in 1888.

After 1850, there was a great deal of technological and infrastructural modernization in southern Brazil. New machinery for processing coffee was imported or manufactured locally. Port facilities in Santos, which served São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, and Recife, were improved to handle the increase in trade. Infrastructural links were forged to interior producing zones and market areas for imported goods. An all-weather road was built from northern Rio de Janeiro state to southern Minas Gerais. Railroad construction began in the 1850s, financed by British capital and utilizing British technology. Rubber and cotton production played a critical role in Brazil's export economy and was concentrated in the northern states of Maranhão and Amazonas. These activities also spurred the modernization of port facilities and internal infrastructure to facilitate exports.

Imperial Brazil under the tutelage of Dom Pedro II functioned as an oligarchic state in which the national government brokered conflicts between regional elites but geared its policies to favor the elites of the powerful southern states of Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo. Elections were held for positions in state and local government, but the electorate was miniscule, limited by property qualifications and literacy requirements. More important to the structures of power were kinship networks, personal connections among the economic and political elites, and old-fashioned political patronage. The Catholic Church did not play the same kind of pivotal role in politics or society as was the case in Spanish America, and the military was under the tight control of the monarchy until the Paraguayan War, or the War of the Triple Alliance, which raged between 1864 and 1870. In this dreadful war, in