A Brief History of Brazilian Slavery

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Estimated Number of Enslaved Africans Transported by Destination, 1451-1870

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th># Enslaved Africans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British North America</td>
<td>339,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish America</td>
<td>1,552,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Caribbean</td>
<td>1,665,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Caribbean</td>
<td>1,600,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch Caribbean</td>
<td>500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish Caribbean</td>
<td>28,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>3,464,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old World (Portugal &amp; Spain)</td>
<td>175,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Atlantic Slave Trade, 1701-1820

[Map showing the routes of the Atlantic Slave Trade from Africa to the Americas, including British North America, Spanish America, British Caribbean, French Caribbean, Dutch Caribbean, and Arabia.]
A Brief History of Slavery in Brazil

1500 – Portuguese Explorer Pedro Alvares Cabral reaches Brazil and claims it for Portugal.

1538 – First known shipment of enslaved Africans is taken to Brazil.

1570 – Mass importation of enslaved Africans begins.

1800 – Brazil had c. 1 million slaves; largest number in any colony of the Americas.

1850 – Slave trade from Africa to Brazil ends; internal slave trade increases.

1888 – Abolition of slavery in Brazil
Brazilian Slavery: 16th – 19th centuries

- From the mid-16th century onward and for all of the 17th century, enslaved Africans worked on sugar plantations in the captaincies of Bahia and Pernambuco (NE Brazil).
- During the 18th century, slave labor was used in gold and diamond mining in the captaincy of Minas Gerais (SE Brazil).
- During the 19th century, slave labor was primarily used for coffee production in the provinces of central and southern Brazil (Rio, Sao Paulo).
The Scope of Brazilian Slavery

Brazil had the largest and longest slave trade in the Americas.

- It was the largest importer of enslaved Africans of any country in the Americas (c. 3.5 million).
- It had the longest history of slavery in the Americas (1538-1888).
- It also likely had the largest number of runaway slave communities (quilombos/mocambos)
  - Quilombo of Palmares in captaincy of Pernambuco/Alagoas (NE Brazil)
  - Late 1550s/early 1600s – 1694
  - Zumbi, king, killed by Portuguese November 20, 1695. This date is celebrated as the Day of Black Consciousness)
Racial Democracy in Brazil: Reality or Myth?
European Immigration after Abolition

- Subsidized immigration of European immigrants was encouraged to southeastern Brazil during the 1880s.
- This was viewed as a way of developing the country and whitening it demographically.
- In 1887 almost 56,000 European immigrants arrived in Brazil.
- By 1914, 2,700,000 European immigrants had entered Brazil.
- Most immigrants came from Italy. Large numbers also came from Portugal, Spain, and Germany.
Gilberto Freyre: Miscegenation and Brazilian Nationalism

- Gilberto Freyre’s book *The Masters and the Slaves* (1933) transformed the concept of miscegenation into a positive national characteristic and the most important symbol of Brazilian national culture.
- Freyre was also the primary person responsible for developing, expressing, and popularizing the idea of racial democracy in Brazil.
- This idea dominated Brazilian race thinking from the 1930s to the early 1990s.
Freyre and Racial Democracy

- Freyre claimed that Brazilian society was free of the racism that affected the rest of world.
- Freyre argued that Brazil was unique among western societies for its smooth blending of European, Indian, and African peoples and cultures.
- Racial miscegenation (mixture) was a central element of Freyre’s view that Brazil was characterized by harmonious race relations.
- Freyre also drew on longstanding beliefs that Brazil had a more benign system of slavery and race relations than the U.S., particularly when compared to U.S. racial segregation and racist violence (KKK).
Donald Pierson’s Perspective on Race in Brazil

- Freyre’s theories received great attention and academic support in the 1940s.
- In his 1942 book, *Negroes in Brazil*, U.S. sociologist Donald Pierson reported that race did not seem to affect social relations, based on his study of Salvador, Bahia.
- Pierson concluded that Brazil was a “multiracial class society” that was in the process of breaking down racial differences and assimilating the descendants of African slaves.
The Ideology of “Racial Democracy”

Is anyone familiar with the Brazilian ideology of racial democracy?

- This ideology (system of ideas) defines Brazil as a land in which blacks and whites live together in harmony in conditions of almost complete equality.
- It also posits Brazil as a society that is non-racist.
The Ideology of “Racial Democracy”

According to George Reid Andrews, RD asserts that Brazil is a land “entirely free of legal and institutional impediments to racial equality, and largely (particularly in comparison to the United States) free of informal racial prejudice and discrimination as well. The nation offers all its citizens, black, brown, or white virtually complete equality of opportunity in all areas of public life: education, politics, jobs, housing…Thus, Afro-Brazilians enjoy opportunities to better themselves, and the freedom to compete against their fellow citizens in the contest for public and private goods to a degree unknown in any other multiracial society in the world.”

- George Reid Andrews, Blacks and Whites in Sao Paulo
Getulio Vargas played a key role in making racial democracy the official form of Brazilian nationalism.

- He was elected president in 1930.
- In 1937, he announced a new constitution that gave him full dictatorial powers.
- Vargas remained in power until he resigned in 1945.
- He was later elected in 1951 and remained president until 1954.
Vargas’ Corporatist Dictatorship & “Racial Democracy”

- Was closely involved with the development of Brazilian nationalism.
- Was amenable to a view of the nation as a racial democracy that included and incorporated everyone.
- The state was seen as the provider for all Brazilians, of any color, according to corporatist categories that did not include race.
- Ultimately, Vargas’ version of populist cultural nationalism foregrounded cultural unity based on racial democracy and silenced dissident voices for the good of the nation.
The Black Brazilian Front (Frente Negra Brasileira, FNB)

- The FNB was the most important black organization in the first half of the 20th century.
- It had nationalistic and anti-immigrant tendencies.
- It sought the integration of blacks into Brazilian society through social mobility.
Meeting of the Frente Negra Brasileira, Sao Paulo, c. 1932
The FNB/Black Brazilian Front

- FNB members supported Vargas’s rise to power, believing that he destroyed the party of the rural oligarchy, which they regarded as the “bulwark of the aristocratic class of former slaveholders.”
- Vargas shut down the FNB in 1937 when all political parties were closed by the government.
- Black political organizing was curtailed from this time until the late 1970s.
Racial **Democracy** and the Military Dictatorship (1964-1985)

The concept of racial democracy reached its peak as a dogma under the military dictatorship which ruled from 1964 to 1985.

In a 1977 speech to the Brazilian Congress, Senator Petronio Portella proclaimed:

“We have all inherited common attributes and what we are building – socially, economically and culturally – proves the correctness of our rejection of the myths of racial superiority.”
The 1970 World Cup
Pelé – Edson Arantes do Nascimento
In its 1970 report to CERD, Brazil’s military government proclaimed that racism did not exist in the country.

Brazil’s foreign minister declared:

“I have the honor to inform you that since racial discrimination does not exist in Brazil, there is no need to take sporadic measures of a legislative, judicial or administrative nature to assure the equality of races in Brazil”

* CERD (Committee for the Elimination of Racism)
1972 Report on Race

In a 1972 addendum to the 1970 report, the Brazilian government reported:

1. The climate of peaceful and friendly interrelations that is one of the outstanding features of Brazilian culture has not only been manifested but improved.

2. It is impossible to provide statistical data since the last [1970] census did not ask for indications of race.

3. It should be mentioned that miscegenation is rapidly increasing.
Critiques of “Racial Democracy”

1. Argument that RD is a dominant ideology and myth.
2. Emphasis on lack of legalized racial segregation and legalized racial discrimination overlooks racial discrimination in Brazil.
   • *de jure* vs. *de facto* racism

3. High incidence of miscegenation does not necessarily indicate less discriminatory racial attitudes.
Activists and Scholars Challenge “Racial Democracy”

- Since the early decades of the 20th century, black activists have challenged racism and racial discrimination in Brazil.
- Since the 1950s, scholars have challenged Brazil’s national image as a racial paradise.
- A new generation of black activists began to challenge racism in the country from the late 1970s on.
Critiques of Racial Democracy

According to black feminist scholar and activist Lelia Gonzalez:

“The notion of racial democracy, developed by Gilberto Freyre in the 1930s, has constituted the public and official view of this [black] identity. Accordingly, blacks are citizens like any other citizen and, as such, are not subject either to prejudice or discrimination. The Brazilian images of carnival and soccer are widely used (especially abroad) as ‘concrete proof’ of Brazilian ‘racial harmony.’ What does predominate in Brazil’s ‘racial democracy’ is the prejudice of not being prejudiced.” (1995: 313, original emphasis)
Brazilian Racial Etiquette

“This etiquette dictates strongly against any discussion, especially in a controversial manner, of the racial situation, and thus it effectively helps to perpetuate the pattern of relationships that has been in existence since the days of slavery. Traditionally the blacks are expected to be grateful to the whites for kindnesses shown to them and to continue to depend on the whites acting as patrons and benefactors to them; it is also expected that the blacks will continue to accept the whites as the nation’s official mouthpiece, explaining to outsiders the ‘unique’ nature of Brazilian race relations. The etiquette also decrees that official platitudes used to describe the Brazilian situation, like ‘racial democracy’, are to be accepted without question, while critical analysis or open discussion of this delicate subject are strongly discouraged.”

- Anani Dzidzienyo, The Position of Blacks in Brazilian Society (1971)
Conclusion

We can also assess whether racial democracy is a reality in Brazil by thinking about the popular saying:

“We don’t have a racial problem. In Brazil, blacks know their place.”