Children of God's Fire

A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil

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2.1. An Italian Jesuit Advises Sugar Planters on the Treatment of Their Slaves (1711)

Despite the great importance of sugar to the history of colonial Brazil, few accounts of slave conditions on colonial sugar plantations exist. Among those that do is the following excerpt from an eighteenth-century analysis of Brazil's sugar, tobacco, gold, and cattle industries which was published in Lisbon in 1711 by João Antônio Andreoni, a Jesuit father who employed the pseudonym André João Antonil. Writing as a Catholic clergymen, Andreoni revealed concern for the spiritual life of the slaves as well as their treatment at the hands of their owners. Thus his account contains his views on the religious training of slaves, their marriages or lack of them, their family life, food, clothing, recreation, and punishments. Andreoni was also a practical man, however, and his essay was in fact a series of suggestions to sugar planters on the management of their workers. Thus it also includes businesslike advice on the African origins of slaves, their alleged attributes, weaknesses, qualifications for plantation occupations, and practical advice on master-slave relationships. Andreoni's generalizations on the various racial groups in Brazil, especially the mulattos, undoubtedly echo the beliefs and attitudes of many of his white contemporaries.

Source: André João Antonil, Cultura e opulência do Brasil por suas drogas e minas (São Paulo: Companhia Melhoramentos, 1922), pp. 91-97.

**How the Sugar-Mill Owner Ought to Treat His Slaves**

The slaves are the hands and the feet of the sugar-mill owner [senhor de engenho], because without them it is not possible in Brazil to set up, maintain, and develop a plantation, nor to have a functioning mill. And whether they are available for labor in good condition or not depends on how they are treated. To maintain permanent service, it is necessary to purchase some pieces [peças] each year and to distribute them over the property: some to the mill, others to field work, woodcutting, and boat service. And since they are usually of various nations and some are ruder than others and of different physical development, this sorting out of personnel ought to be done carefully and not blindly. Those who come to Brazil are of the Ardas [Adras or Dahomeans], Minas [persons said to have been shipped from São Jorge da Mina or Elmina, a Gold Coast port], and Congo nations. Others are from São Tomé, Angola, Cape Verde, and Mozambique, the latter arriving on ships from India. The Ardas and Minas slaves are robust, whereas those from Cape Verde and
São Tomé are weaker. Slaves from Angola who grow up in Luanda are more capable of learning mechanical trades than those from the other places mentioned. Among the Congos, there are also some who are rather industrious and useful not only for field service, but also for the various crafts and for household management.

Many reach Brazil in a very rude condition and quite unable to communicate, and so they remain for the rest of their lives. Others in a few years grow skillful and learn to find their way about. They learn Christian doctrine and how to make the best of their situation: how to take command of a boat, for example, how to receive orders and to apply themselves in all the ways that are usually required of them. The women handle the scythe and the hoe, like the men, but only the male slaves make use of the axe to cut down the forests. Boilermen, carpenters, and caulkers are chosen from among the acculturated slaves, as well as the keepers of the vats, boatmen, and sailors, since these occupations require more careful attention. Newly arrived slaves who have been established on a plantation should not be sent elsewhere against their will, because they can easily succumb to grief and die. Those who are born in Brazil or are brought up from childhood in the home of the white people take on the qualities of their masters and turn themselves to good account; and any one of them is worth four new slaves.

Mulattoes serve even better in the various crafts. However, many of them take too much advantage of their masters’ favors, and thus are proud and vicious, boast of their bravery, and are prone to insolent behavior. Nevertheless, they and the women of the same color usually have the greatest opportunities in Brazil, because with the blood of the whites flowing in their veins (the blood perhaps of their own masters), they charm them to the point that some masters will put up with anything they may do and pardon them every act, and it appears that, unless they are brave enough to correct them, these mulattoes can engage in every kind of pleasure and indulgence. And it is hard to decide whether the masters or the mistresses are more at fault in this regard. Whatever the case, there are some owners among both sexes who allow themselves to be dominated by mulattoes of the worst kind, so that we find confirmed the proverb which states that Brazil is a hell for blacks, purgatory for whites, and paradise for mulattoes of both sexes—except when, as a result of some suspicion or jealousy, love is transformed into hatred and armed with every type of brutality. It is useful to take advantage of the talents that the mulattoes possess, as some people do. However, no one ought to bestow as much as a hand upon them, for in that case they will take an arm, and will then transform themselves from slaves into masters. To liberate troublesome mulatto is obviously harmful, because the money that they pay to free them is not much parted from their own bodies, and masters cannot do this in care concerning their slaves’ situations, or in the mills for iron, or in the fields or in the mills for iron. And among those who their Creator is, what they must plant each day, how many loads of firewood, concerning their masters’ servants, whether or not the soul di body. What even the most important of their masters, their failure to think about the which they must make with God’s pardon, of saying their failings. All this is due to lack instead they keep them so busy but they order the chaplain to send a larger stipend for his efforts.

Concerning food, clothing, not be denied to them, because
money that they pay to free themselves rarely comes from any source other than their own bodies, as a result of constant sins; and once they are liberated they continue to be the downfall of many people.

Some masters oppose marriage among their slaves, and not only are they not much bothered by their loose sex life, but they even clearly consent to it. In fact, they even initiate their irregular relationships, saying to them: "You, So-and-So, someday you will marry So-and-So," and from then on they are permitted to live together as though they were husband and wife. Masters claim that they do not arrange marriages among their slaves because they fear that once they have grown tired of the relationship they will murder each other with poisons or witchcraft, and there are some among them, in fact, who are well-known masters of this art. Other slaveholders, after arranging marriages for their slaves, separate them for years, so that they live in fact as if they were single, and masters cannot do this in good conscience. Others exercise so little care concerning their slaves' salvation that they keep them in the cane fields or in the mills for long periods of time without having them baptized. And among those who are baptized, many do not even know who their Creator is, what they ought to believe in, what law they should keep, how they should surrender themselves to God, why Christians go to church, why they adore the Church, what they should say to the priest when they kneel before him and he asks if they have a soul, or whether or not the soul dies, and where it goes when it leaves the body. What even the most recent arrivals learn, however, is the name and identity of their masters. And they know how many holes of manioc they must plant each day, how many bundles of sugar cane they must cut, how many loads of firewood they must collect, and other matters concerning their masters' service. And they also learn to ask his pardon when they make mistakes, to beg his mercy when he threatens them with punishment, and how to promise that they will better their ways. Their masters say that they are incapable of learning to confess, of asking God's pardon, of saying their beads, or of learning the Ten Commandments. All this is due to lack of education among the masters, and to their failure to think about the great reckoning regarding these questions which they must make with God. As St. Paul says, being Christians and failing to take care of their slaves, it will be worse for them than if they were infidels. Nor do they order them to attend mass on holy days; instead they keep them so busy that they have no time for mass. Nor do they order the chaplain to indoctrinate them, granting him if necessary a larger stipend for his efforts.

Concerning food, clothing, and moderate labor, these obviously should not be denied to them, because it is nothing more than right for a master...
to give his servants adequate food, medication when they are sick, and
the means to cover themselves decently as their condition requires, so
that they do not go about nearly naked in the streets. Work should also
be kept to a reasonable amount so that it is not more than their strength
can bear.

It is customary to say in Brazil that three "p's" are required for slaves,
that is: pão, pão, and pano [bread, a stick, and a piece of cloth]. Even
when they start out with the stick, which means, of course, punishment,
they should also offer proof to God that their food and clothing are as
abundant as their punishment often is. Slaves are often falsely accused,
and punishment is often inflicted without much proof of guilt. And even
when crimes are proved, the instruments they use to punish them with
are too harsh, for they would not employ such devices against brute
animals. Masters, in fact, sometimes give more care and attention to a
single horse than they do to half a dozen slaves. The horse receives careful
grooming; he has someone to bring him hay; he has a blanket when he
perspires, a saddle, and a gilded bridle.

The new slaves should receive special care because, unlike those older
slaves who plant their own gardens or acquire goods through their own
efforts, new slaves lack ways to make their own living. It is not right
that they should be noticed only when work is assigned, and that they
should be forgotten when sick or when clothes are passed out. Sundays
and holy days should belong to them, and when masters deprive them
of those days and make them work as on ordinary days, they suffer
greatly, and call down a thousand plagues upon them. Some masters
customarily give their slaves one day a week to plant food for them-
sewrs, sometimes ordering the overseer to accompany them so that they
will not neglect this work. This is done so that they will not go hungry,
or so that they will not go each day to their master's house to beg for a
portion of manioc flour. Not to give them flour or a day to plant it, and
to require that they work from sunup to sundown in the fields, and day
and night in the mill with little rest—how can a master who treats them
in this way be admitted to God's tribunal without suffering His retri-
bution? If to deny alms to the needy person who requests it is to deny
it to Christ Himself, as Our Lord Himself says in the Gospel, what shall
we say about a person who denies food and clothing to his slave? And
what account can he give of himself who bestows fine wool and silk and
other splendid garments upon those women who are the cause of his
downfall, and then denies four or five yards of cotton and a few yards of
rough cloth to the person who sweats away his life in his service, and
has only enough time left to himself to hunt a few roots or crabs for his
food? And if in addition to all this their punishment is frequent and

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excessive, they will either run away into the forests or take their own lives by stopping their breath or hanging themselves, which they commonly do. Or they will try to take the life of the person who has brought so much evil upon them, resorting if necessary to the arts of the devil. Or they will cry out so loud to God that He will hear them, and will do to these masters what He did to the Egyptians when they subjected the Hebrews to such extraordinary toil, sending terrible plagues upon their plantations and upon their children, as we read in Holy Scripture. As He allowed the Hebrews to be taken captive into Babylonia as punishment for the harsh captivity that they imposed upon their slaves, in the same way might He allow some brutal enemy to carry these masters to their own country where they will experience the kind of wretched existence that they impose upon their slaves.

Not to punish the excesses that slaves commit would be most offensive. However, the charges against them must be looked into so that the innocent are not punished. Once their guilt has been established, they should be whipped moderately, or locked for a time in irons or in the stocks. But to punish with violence and a vengeful spirit, with one's own hand and with terrible instruments, and to go at these poor people with fire or hot wax, or to brand them on the face, would not be tolerated among barbarians, much less among Catholic Christians. Obviously if a master treats his slaves as a father would his children, giving them what they need for their sustenance and dress, and some respite from their labors, they will also respond generously to him. Aware as they are of their own guilt, they will not be so surprised when they receive the punishment they deserve, if it is administered with compassion and justice. If after they have made some mistake, as weak people are apt to do, they go voluntarily to their master to ask his pardon, or if they seek a protector to accompany them, it is the custom in Brazil in such cases to forgive them. They are aware that here at least they possess some advantage, because otherwise they might flee to some runaway settlement in the forest, and, if recaptured, might take their own lives before their master can whip them. Or some relative might take revenge upon them, using either witchcraft or poison. To totally deny them their amusements, their sole relief in their slavery, is to wish them miserable and melancholy, apathetic and sick in body. For this reason masters should not object when on a few days each year they appoint their kings and sing and dance decently for a few hours, or when they seek some honest pleasure in the afternoon after they have passed the morning celebrating the feasts of Our Lady of the Rosary, of St. Benedict, and of the patron saint of the plantation chapel. And these festivals should be without cost to the slaves, the master himself supporting the festival
officials with his generosity, giving them some reward for their continuing efforts. Because if the men and women who organize the festivals have to spend their own money, this will cause much inconvenience and will be offensive to God, since they cannot lawfully accumulate much money of their own.

What ought to be particularly avoided on plantations is that the slaves intoxicate themselves with sour cane wine or brandy. Sweet wine, which does them no harm, is adequate, and this they can use to trade for flour, beans, sweet manioc, and potatoes.

If masters take the trouble to give leftovers from their tables to their slaves' small children, this will be enough to make them serve with good will, and to take pleasure in increasing the number of slaves, both male and female. Otherwise slave women deliberately attempt to abort themselves so that the children inside their bodies will not be made to suffer what they have suffered.

2.2. A Royal Decree on the Feeding of Slaves and Their Days Off (1701)

There is a large body of evidence that indicates that many plantation owners customarily gave their slaves no food, but instead granted them one day in the week, usually Sunday, free from plantation labor so that they might plant and cultivate their own. (See, for example, Document 4.1, Paragraphs 377ff.) The worst effects of such a policy, of course, were malnutrition and an almost total absence of free time, and, in the minds of some government and Church leaders, the inability of the slaves to attend religious services and to keep the Sabbath holy. The following decree of King Pedro II (the original is in the Arquivo Público da Bahia) shows that Portuguese authorities sometimes tried to stop this common abuse for both religious and humanitarian reasons.


To Dom João de Lencastro, Friend. I the King send you greetings. Having consulted with my Overseas Council concerning the suggestion of the Council of Missions that the sugar-mill owners give Saturday free to their slaves for the cultivation of their gardens, Sundays and saints' days thus being unencumbered so that they might take part in Christian doctrine and divine services, and recognizing that this matter is of the greatest importance and it, because the slaves that the masters are also of that they will not die. mill owners either to day in the [work] week in the event that mill Lisbon on January 31,

2.3. "I Doubt that Slaves": The Feedi

The following except century Salvador da B that the royal decree for plantation slaves enforced by that per brutal neglect, punis commonplace during slavery.

Source: Luís dos Santos V. XX cenas que da cidade de Lisboa (Salvador: Imprensa

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