

### Chapter 3: The Forging of a People

The story of Brazil begins March 9th, 1500. As 1500 men under the command of Pedro Álvares Cabral set a course across the sea, at the time, Portugal was the world's premier seafaring nation and one of the first to establish colonies in the Atlantic islands. Cabral's intended destination was India but the fleet swung west and made landfall in Brazil.

Both the natives and the Portuguese were inspired by one another, trading gifts and watching each other's actions. The Portuguese held mass on the beach which would later turn out to be the doom of the natives. At the beginning, the natives were cordial, intermixing and intermarrying with settlers. In 1549, the king opted to turn Brazil into a colony, and a governor was sent, and a capital was established in Salvador. In 1555, the French attempted to create a colony, but with the help of the natives, they were quickly expelled by the Portuguese.

The natives were most impacted by religion and disease, which infected almost everyone, the first smallpox outbreak occurring in 1562, killing 30,000 in Bahia alone. Soon, the Jesuits attempted to convert the savage natives into God-fearing slaves. This was not met without opposition, and many rebellions occurred, but all were struck down. The population of natives in 1500 varied between 2.5 and 3 million. By 1800, their population was just 600,000. The Tupi legacy can still be seen in language and culture today.

Sugar played a huge role in the formation in the early stages of Brazil, being brought from South Asia by Muslims and eventually to America by early settlers. In fact,

between 1570 and 1670's, Brazil was the number one exporter of sugar to America. With these new plantations, a new workforce was needed, thus the transatlantic slave trade was born, marking the first international slave system. Sugar quickly became the economic system in Brazil, each mill being worked by 60-200 slaves. It was said by Luis Vahia Monterio in 1729 "the most solid properties in Brazil are slaves, and a man's wealth is measured by having more or fewer, for there are lands enough, but only he who has slaves can be the master of them." Brazil would import more African slaves over a longer period than any other country, bringing in 12.5 million Africans between 1500 and 1866.

In the early 17th century, a landowner could recover the cost of a slave in roughly 15 months, and the slaves soon turned to God as a way out. It was told to them by their masters that in return for serving us with a good will, the slaves would find their tables turned in the afterlife. Much as they saw the natives as barbaric, the Portuguese masters were much worse, sometimes punishing male slaves with castration and very commonly the whip.

Brazilian slavery also had many differences from that of the United States. Many artisan jobs, many superior ones, were filled by slaves, and during this time, Brazil quickly established a large class of free blacks. A census of Rio de Janeiro in 1808 found that of a 2 million population, 28 percent were white, 38 were slaves, 28 were free blacks, the rest being natives. The second major difference was the acceptability of racial mixing which led to no major socio-economic status due to color. In fact, many free blacks themselves owned slaves. Racial segregation rarely existed, but racial

prejudice was high. Much like native culture, african culture blended into mainstream brazilian culture. By the early 18th century , a gold rush began and Portuguese flocked to brazil to stake their claim. These mining towns were melting pots of whites, free blacks and slaves.

Brazil was, even today, one of the most tolerant in spanish america, both religiously and racially. The Portuguese crown left little room for education in brazil, so the new influx could not rebel. It's borders were set through the treaty of madrid, and the gold rush it to thank for creating the footprint of a new nation.

I enjoyed reading about how Brazil came to be and was amazed about how much slavery impacted the country. I had heard about slavery in South/Central America, but had no idea the extent that it had or the role it played. Brazil has a fascinating past that is unique to itself.