

Part I: Discovery and Development

Covering 3,286,488 square miles—a landmass nearly as large as the United States—Brazil is the fifth largest country in the world. In 2000, Brazil celebrated its five-hundredth birthday. The arrival of the Portuguese in Brazil on April 22, 1500 began a new chapter—both tragic and vibrant—of the country’s history. By 1532, the Portuguese had established their first permanent settlement, and by 1550, the Portuguese crown recognized Brazil as an official part of its empire.

Who are the native Brazilians?

In the fifteenth century, over one hundred distinct language groups populated the region that is now Brazil. The total population of native Brazilians was between three and five million. Anthropologists divide Brazil’s native population into three broad groupings: the Tupi, the Mundrucú, and the Yanomami. The Tupi inhabited the coastal regions of Brazil and relied heavily on fishing for sustenance. The Tupi belong to a larger population of more than forty language groups throughout Latin America called the Tupi-Guarani. As



Brazil and the United States are nearly the same size. Only the United States (with the inclusion of Alaska and Hawaii), Canada, Russia, and China are larger in area than Brazil.

compared to the other two groups, the Tupi are thought to have engaged in more war-like activities. Researchers believe that ritual (human and animal) sacrifice was a part of Tupi cultural tradition—a point that would give rise to numerous myths of Indian savagery and cannibalism among Portuguese colonists. Over twenty-one Tupi-Guarani languages are still spoken in Brazil today.

The second group of indigenous people dwelled in the Amazon River basin and are called the Mundrucú. Historians believe that the Mundrucú were primarily peaceful and depended on agriculture. The Mundrucú have been widely studied by anthropologists who have found the group’s ritual life to be based on an elaborate spiritual belief system.

The best-known Amazonian group is the Yanomami. The Yanomami remain South America’s largest self-contained tribal group with a population of about twenty thousand. They live in the Amazon rainforest region to this day, where they remain relatively isolated and self-sufficient.

Portuguese Colonialism

When the Portuguese “found” Brazil, Spain and Portugal—the two most powerful European countries of the time—were both actively exploring the “New World.” Spain and Portugal explored and eventually settled in the New World to expand their empires and to spread Christianity.

How did the Portuguese settle in South America?

The Catholic Church was closely tied to the process of European expansion. The Church claimed the authority to permit or prohibit the states’ rights to “discover and acquire” lands in the New World. The Catholic Church, concerned above all else with bringing the New World into the Church, granted Spain and Portugal the right to explore the New World in a 1493 edict.

“Through our own liberality and certain knowledge and with full Apostolic power, all islands and mainlands found and to be found, discovered and to be discovered, to the west and to the south...to you and to your heirs and successors by the authority of Almighty God conferred on us through Saint Peter along with the vicarate of Jesus Christ, which we exercise on earth forever, by this present text we give, concede, and hand over to you with all their realms, cities, fortresses, towns, villages, laws, jurisdictions, and all things pertaining thereto. And to you and to the aforementioned heirs and successors, we make you, constitute you, and depute you as masters of the same with full, free, and omnifarious power, authority, and jurisdiction.... Subjecting to you, through the favor of Divine Clemency the mainlands and islands mentioned above and the dwellers and inhabitants thereof, and to bring them to the Catholic Faith.”

—1493 papal edict

One year later in 1494 the Pope issued another edict called the Treaty of Tordesillas, which granted Spain and Portugal possession of distinct regions of the New World. Much of what is today's Brazil fell under Portugal's control by the terms of this treaty.

A fleet led by Captain Cabral reached Brazil on April 22, 1500. The first Portuguese explorers to reach Brazil were struck by the lushness of the vegetation and beauty of the place. They quickly

recognized the potential economic value of the land for cultivation and the extraction of natural resources.

“I believe that if an earthly paradise exists somewhere, it would certainly not be far from these lands.”

—Explorer Amerigo Vespucci, upon visiting Brazil in 1503

Who were the early Portuguese settlers?

Portugal's new territory in the New World brought two types of Portuguese settlers: colonial officers and merchants, and Jesuit missionaries from the Catholic Church. The leaders of the colonial administration were also the leaders of the colonial economy. In colonial Brazil, economic and political power were concentrated among a very few.

The Portuguese crown, as well as its colonial representatives, were actively involved in the colonial economy. The colonial economy consisted largely of tobacco, sugar, cotton, coffee, and lumber (particularly brazil wood, for which Brazil received its name). Colonists relied widely on slave labor to cultivate colonial estates, called *fazendas*. In 1570 the enslavement of indigenous Brazilians who resisted conversion to Catholicism was legalized.



A rural Brazilian church.

Religion played an important role in Portuguese colonialism. Jesuit settlers established missions throughout Brazil. Missionaries sought to educate indigenous populations in the ways of the Church and use the native Brazilians as forced labor on large mission estates. Very few figures in the Catholic Church publicly opposed the enslavement of the native population. A priest by the name of Antônio Vieira did speak out against enslavement.

“Let free those whom you have made captive and oppressed.... Christians, God commanded me to make these matters clear to you and so I do it. All of you are in mortal sin; all of you live in a state of condemnation.”

—Father Antônio Vieira, 1653

What was the role of Catholicism in colonization?

The Catholic Church possessed considerable influence in colonial Brazil. It took the lead in establishing settlements, providing education, and subjugating (conquering) the native Brazilian population. The Church played a critical role in expanding the colony by bringing the native populations under the influence of the Portuguese settlers. Although many different Catholic sects were represented in colonial Brazil, the single most influential group was the Jesuit order.

Though the Church was indispensable to the colonization of Brazil, its influence threatened the Portuguese crown. To suppress the expanding power of the Church, the crown outlawed the printing press, which prevented the dissemination of religious materials until 1808. The Portuguese crown also prohibited the construction of new churches in some regions of the colony, and even expelled all Jesuit priests in 1759.

Despite these efforts, Catholicism permeated Brazilian society—wielding not only spiritual but great social and political power as well. Brazil has been called “The Land of the Holy Cross,” and remains the largest Catholic nation in the world.

How did the Portuguese and the indigenous groups live together?

Upon their “discovery” of Brazil, the Portuguese gave a mixed and even contradictory portrayal of the indigenous population. In one account, the native Brazilians were perceived as “healthy and innocent.”

“My captain reached a land...where he found humans as if in their first innocence, mild and peace-loving.”

—King Manuel of Portugal

An alternate account suggests that the native population was “savage, naked, fierce [and] man-eating.”

“Indians are dogs who kill and eat one another. And in their vices and dealings with one another, they are pigs.... [They are] the saddest and vilest gentiles in the whole world.”

—Jesuit Friar Manuel da Nobrega

As in other regions settled by the Europeans, mistreatment and diseases brought by the settlers decimated the indigenous population in Brazil to a point of near elimination.

Slavery and Race in Colonial Brazil

With its extensive mineral wealth and opportunities for agricultural cultivation, the Brazilian colony quickly became central to the economic vitality of the Portuguese Empire. The colonial economy required a great deal of labor to sustain itself. As the indigenous population decreased, colonists faced a shortage of labor. They solved this problem with the large-scale importation of African slaves.

Slavery led to substantial economic growth for Brazil as a whole. It established social and racial divisions that would result in an enduring pattern of inequality.

How extensive was the slave trade to Brazil?

Brazil was home to the largest slave economy in modern history. By 1580, Brazil was acquiring approximately two thousand slaves per year. A century and a half later, there were three times as many slaves as there were free Brazilians. In the 1600s, slaves traded to Brazil made up 40 percent of the entire Atlantic trade. By the 1800s trade to Brazil constituted more than 60 percent of the total transatlantic slave trade. More slaves were brought from Africa to Brazil in the transatlantic slave trade than to any other area of the New World.

The African population brought to Brazil was culturally and linguistically diverse. Though collectively identified as “black,” the slave population in fact brought a wide range of ethnic and cultural identities and lifestyles. These diverse influences would all strongly affect the cultural future of Brazil. With the arrival of African slaves, new religious practices were born, integrating Catholic and African beliefs. From musical traditions leading to the creation of *samba* (a form of Brazilian song and dance) to the religious customs creating entirely new faith practices, African cultural traditions have been among the most significant influences in Brazil’s cultural identity.

Where did the slaves come from?

The Portuguese took slaves from two broad regions of Africa. The first region was the southern coastal region from what is now Angola on the west to Mozambique in the east. This African population was comprised of dis-

tinct tribes that formed part of a larger group called Bantu.

The second region from which slaves were frequently taken was the modern-day West African nations of Senegal, Ghana, the Gambia, and Nigeria. The tribes that populated this region were extraordinarily culturally diverse. The most notable distinction lay in religious practices. Some groups practiced Islam, while others practiced traditional religions. Among the Islamic groups, the Hausa of northern Nigeria are the best-known. Of the non-Islamic West Africans, slaves were taken from tribes within the large kingdoms of Yoruba, Dahomey, and Fanti-Ashanti.

What was life like as a slave?

Slaves were sometimes taken through violent capture. Other times they were purchased or traded from African kings who had formerly employed or enslaved them or held them as war captives. Slaves endured the long voyage across the Atlantic in slave ships. Often these ships were equipped with hundreds of bunks, one stacked on top of the other; each bunk was barely big enough to house one person lying down. Slaves generally did not leave their small bunks, even to relieve themselves. Due to the poor sanitation, disease often spread throughout the ships. The slaves were fed only enough to keep them alive. Many did not survive the slave ship.

“The living, the dying, and the dead, huddled together in one mass. Some

Race in Colonial Brazil and America: A Comparison

While in the early United States any person with one black parent and one white parent was considered black, in Brazil interpretation of the same situation was open to a great deal more flexibility. If a person in the United States had “one drop” of “black blood,” he or she was considered black. If a Brazilian had the same amount of “black blood,” he or she would be considered *mulatto* or could even be called white.

Another interesting contrast lies in the type of racism practiced in the two areas throughout subsequent centuries. In Brazil, racism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was demonstrated in the effort to eliminate blackness through miscegenation (reproduction between racial groups) and integration. In the United States, the government passed Jim Crow laws to segregate the white and black populations.

unfortunates in the most disgusting state of smallpox, distressingly ill with ophthalmia, a few perfectly blind, others living skeletons, with difficulty crawled from below, unable to bear the weight of their miserable bodies. Mothers with young infants hanging at their breasts, unable to give them a drop of nourishment. How they had brought them thus far appeared astonishing: all were perfectly naked. Their limbs were excoriated from lying on the hard plank for so long a period. On going below, the stench was insupportable. How beings could breathe such atmosphere, and live, appeared incredible. Several were under the soughing, which was called the deck, dying—one dead.”

—British naval logbook after inspecting a Portuguese slave ship, 1841

Among those slaves who did survive the trip, most died within the first ten years of arriving in Brazil. Most children born to slaves in Brazil died before reaching the age of six. For those who reached adulthood, women generally lived to be thirty, and men died even earlier.

“I never walked the streets that some house did not present the moans and cries of sufferers, the sound of whips, of punishment being inflicted,”

—An eighteenth century visitor to Brazil

Life was short and hard for slaves in Brazil. They worked long hours—some as domestic servants for their masters but most as physical laborers in sugar, coffee, or tobacco fields. Slaves often worked with their feet chained together. Those who worked in the sugar fields were frequently forced to wear masks covering their faces, leaving only a small hole through which to breathe, to prevent them from eating sugar cane while they worked.

As elsewhere in the Americas, slaves resisted their owners. *Quilombos*, or colonies of runaway slaves, were formed in the interior of Brazil. The most famous of these was Palmares, where upwards of thirty thousand slaves created their own free kingdom. Palmares offered sanctuary for 65 years (1630-1695) until a Portuguese army destroyed the colony and re-enslaved the Africans.

How was race viewed in colonial Brazil?

As in colonial America, slavery in Brazil was tied to race. However, unlike in the United States, the understanding and categorization of race in colonial Brazil was very flexible. Race was not understood strictly in terms of two opposing categories—black and white. Instead, race was viewed on a continuum.

While in colonial America an individual was identified either as black or white, in colonial Brazil, many people would identify themselves somewhere between these two

Souvenirs d'un Aveugle by Jacques Arago (1839). From <hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery>.



This sketch, accompanying an 1839 memoir of one man's travels around the world, shows a slave wearing a mask and iron collar as punishment for attempting to run away. In his book, the author notes, “[Brazil is] without contradiction, the place on earth where the slaves are the most to be pitied...where the punishments are the most cruel.”

benchmarks. In Brazil, the classification of *mulatto* indicates a mixture of blackness and whiteness. It was—and is—a large and flexible category.

Miscegenation (reproduction between racial groups) was very common in colonial Brazil. Within generations of the arrival of the first slaves, there was a diverse Brazilian population consisting of some white Europeans, some blacks, a small number of native Brazilians, and a great number of *mulattos*. The degree of intermixture was both astonishing and disturbing to many outside observers.

“Let any one who doubts the evil of this mixture of races, and is inclined, from a mistaken philanthropy, to break down all barriers between them, come to Brazil. He cannot deny the deterioration consequent upon an amalgamation of races, more wide-spread here than in any other country in the world, and which is rapidly effacing the best qualities of the white man, the Negro, and the Indian, leaving a mongrel nondescript type, deficient in physical and mental energy.”

—Zoologist Louis Agassiz, 1865

What position did free blacks and mulattos occupy in society?

The matter of colonial race relations extends beyond the institution of slavery, though slavery played a decisive role. There were many free *mulattos* and even some free blacks.

Slaves were sometimes able to buy their freedom. In other cases, slave owners freed some of their slaves due to the high costs of keeping slaves or excess labor. Sometimes, a white master might take a black slave as a mistress and subsequently grant her and their children freedom. Some free black or *mulatto* women married white men and came to live among the elites.

“I have passed black ladies in silks and jewelry, with male slaves in livery behind them...several have white husbands.”

—U.S. visitor Thomas Ewbank, 1856

By 1872, the number of free blacks was twice that of black slaves. Some observers argued that Brazil was free of racial discrimination.

“Brazil is absorbing the Negro race; there is no color bar to advancement, there is no social bar to advancement.”

—Theodore Roosevelt, early twentieth century

Despite the fact that races often intermarried, and blacks and *mulattos* frequently became free Brazilians, racism continued to exist in colonial Brazil.

The Colonial Economy

The slave economy revolved around the

The Myth of Racial Democracy

In the nineteenth and twentieth century, some Brazilian whites attempted to explain away the country’s deep-seated racial inequalities by arguing that Brazil was a “racial democracy.” They claimed that an unclear “color line” and Brazil’s tolerant culture facilitated the upward mobility of Afro-Brazilians, especially *mulattos*, and noted that Brazil avoided racial segregation.

In fact, the structure of the colonial society limited opportunities for even free blacks and *mulattos* by providing fewer opportunities for employment or education. Current census data shows that both blacks and *mulattos* are discriminated against to a similar degree today. For much of the twentieth century, tireless campaigners for racial equality have sought to show that the idea of a Brazilian “racial democracy” is more myth than reality.

export of crops—most notably sugar and coffee. The production of these crops required huge amounts of land and was extremely labor intensive. Colonists owned large plots of land on which they used the labor of slaves to cultivate crops for export.

Who held power in colonial Brazil?

Colonial administrators distributed land and, as a result, most land stayed within the hands of colonial officials. Land was both the key to economic production and a demonstration of social standing, because it was distributed by representatives of the crown. Beginning in the colonial era, land became a measure of power. Large landholders held the greatest power in Brazilian society and landless or enslaved workers were the most powerless. Power would continue to be concentrated in the hands of landholders throughout the centuries to follow.

The crops produced on Brazil's large estates during the colonial era were traded across the seas, primarily to Portugal. Portugal and Brazil operated under a system of mercantilism, in which Portugal monopolized

all of Brazil's overseas trade so as to take full economic advantage of its colony. Portugal would then trade the Brazilian-grown goods to other European countries. The crown also took one-fifth or a royal *quinto* of the profits from commodities produced in Brazil.

What was the importance of sugar and coffee?

Two crops in particular were critically important to Brazil's early economy: sugar and coffee. Sugar was the first large-scale export crop and put Brazil on the map as a global producer. In 1650, sugar made up 95 percent of Brazil's total exports. Sugar had large effects within the domestic economy as well. The huge amount of labor power needed to cultivate sugar increased the demand for slaves and accelerated the rate of slave importation throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Life on sugar plantations was difficult, demanding long hours and strenuous work, most often in sweltering heat. Sugar naturally grows in tropical areas and was cultivated in the hottest parts of the country.



This undated illustration shows the quantity of coffee Brazil produced as compared to other coffee producing countries. What might have been the impact of Brazil's large-scale production on these other economies?

“[It is the Africans] by whose sad blood, and black but fortunate souls, Brazil is nurtured, animated, sustained and preserved.”

—Father Antônio Vieira

Coffee became increasingly important by the early nineteenth century. While sugar provided the first big boom for Brazil, coffee was responsible for Brazil's continued economic strength. By 1850 sugar represented only 27 percent of exports as coffee, as well as gold and diamond mining, grew in prominence. As with sugar, these products relied on the physically taxing work of forced laborers.

“Brazil is coffee and coffee is the Negro.”

—Common saying in the ruling circles of the early nineteenth century

Independence Without Protest

By the eighteenth century Brazil was considered a co-kingdom to Portugal. By the nineteenth century, the economy of Brazil was more vital to the empire than Portugal itself. Some members of the Brazilian elite questioned why they should allow Portugal to gain from their own economic strength, if Brazil did not gain in return. Why should Brazil not be its own independent country?

How did Brazil gain independence from Portugal?

Brazil's path to independence would involve little violent conflict. One violent rebellion was attempted in 1789, called the *Inconfidencia Mineira*. This rebellion was planned by a group of mostly wealthy miners and ranchers. An insider betrayed the plot to the royal authorities and several of the leaders were hanged. The most famous and unusual of the leaders was the lower class Jose Joaquim da Silva Xavier, popularly known as *Tiradentes* (tooth-puller). His execution is commemorated as a national holiday in Brazil.

In 1807, the entire Portuguese court moved from Lisbon to Brazil. The French Emperor Napoleon was in the midst of a continent-wide offensive in Europe and had begun to mobilize troops near Portugal. Dom João VI chose to govern the Portuguese empire from the safety of Brazil. In 1821, Dom João returned to Portugal leaving his son, Pedro, to look after Brazil. Dom João even told his son that if he had to choose between Portugal and Brazil, Pedro should choose Brazil.

At that time a legislative body, called the Cortes, consisting of representatives from both Portugal and Brazil, governed Brazil under the direction of the crown. This assembly feared Brazil's power would soon eclipse that of Portugal and hoped to reassert Portugal's authority over Brazil.

The Cortes began pressuring Pedro to return to Portugal with his father to unite and strengthen the crown. Pedro replied, "*Fico!*" ("I am staying!"). With that statement, Brazil broke away from Portugal. On December 1,

1822 Pedro was crowned the first Emperor of Brazil. Portugal did not object.

Like many of Brazil's transitions to come, this one was not bloody. The immediate route to independence in 1822 involved no violent uprising, no popular protest, in fact no protest of any kind. Brazil did not fight for its independence; instead, the individual who declared independence, Pedro I, declared independence from the country his father ruled.

Where did independence leave Brazil?

Given that independence came with no popular protest, the distribution of power within Brazil was left more or less unchanged. Power remained in the hands of large landowners, big merchants, and bureaucrats who continued to have close ties with the crown—now the Brazilian crown instead of the Portuguese crown. About 5 percent of the population at the time of independence could be considered elite and the remaining 95 percent were either slaves or free Brazilians living at or around a subsistence level.

As an independent nation, Brazil faced fundamental questions about its future. Ideas of what a free Brazil should become varied greatly and fell into three broad schools of thought. The first group, to which Pedro I belonged, was called the Absolutists. Absolutists hoped for an independent Brazil within an interdependent empire that would include its former colonizer, Portugal. A second group, the moderate Liberals, wished for a separate Brazilian empire that was entirely independent of Portugal. The third vision for Brazil was held by a group called the *Exaltados* (exalted ones). The *Exaltados* advocated for an independent Brazil comprised of a federation of autonomous states rather than an empire. As history would have it, all three groups would have their visions realized at one point or another.

Following independence, Pedro I ruled for fewer than nine years. In that time, he faced a series of decisive challenges, most notably a war with Argentina over disputed territory, which ultimately forced him to give up the

throne and leave for Portugal. As his own father had done, Pedro I left his son, Pedro II, in Brazil. As Pedro II was then too young to rule, a regency was appointed to rule on his behalf until he grew older. Following the wishes of the *Exaltados*, the regency attempted to decentralize the Brazilian government into a federation of states.

What was the economic strategy of the Brazilian Empire?

At independence, Brazil had not only to decide what it would look like politically, but also how it would sustain itself economically. Although it was no longer tied to the interests of Portugal, the Brazilian government continued its strategy of exporting coffee and sugar, a strategy which relied on a large labor force as well as large estates.

This was not only the easiest option to pursue but also the one most favorable to political elites, given their ties to large landowners. Once again, the pattern of large landholding remained unchanged and power continued to be concentrated among a very few.

What was the legacy of Pedro II?

Pedro II became the second emperor of Brazil in 1840 at the age of fourteen. He attempted to recentralize authority after the regency had decentralized it in the decade prior. Even as a teenager, Pedro II was thought to be fair and thoughtful. He was one of Brazil's most charismatic leaders and was well liked by Brazilians.

“My son has the advantage over me of being Brazilian, and the Brazilians respect him. He’ll reign without difficulty.”

—Pedro I

Pedro II sought to create an independent Brazilian empire. He loved Brazil and held high aspirations for his country. In order to pursue the greatness he believed Brazil could achieve, Pedro II first faced questions of who



DOM PEDRO, EMPEROR OF BRAZIL.

the Brazilians were as a people and what they were together as a nation—questions that would persist for years to come. He attempted to build a sense of nationhood amongst Brazilian citizens.

One key to the emperor's goals was a dedication to cultural affairs. Pedro II financed the study of Brazil's native populations and their cultures and learned one of Brazil's native languages. He supported literature and the arts and brought world-renowned intellectuals to Brazil.

The reign of Pedro II illustrated the historical tension between development and social equality. The emperor based his approach to building nationhood on embracing cultural contributions of a variety of people in Brazilian society, including non-whites. Nevertheless, the institution of slavery systematically exploited blacks and excluded them from economic opportunities.

What was the Paraguayan War?

In 1865, Brazil found itself in a war that would influence its course for years to come. The Paraguayan War unveiled the divisions within the Brazilian government and set the

stage for tension between military and civilian political power. When Brazil sent military troops to Uruguay to depose the Uruguayan government and install a pro-Brazilian regime, the neighboring country of Paraguay mounted a counter attack. Angered by Brazil's intervention, Paraguay was seeking to push the troops out of Uruguay. Paraguay's decision to get involved resulted in a five-year war against the combined forces of Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil, which ultimately won.

“[The war] is a nice electric shock for the nation.”

—Emperor Pedro II

The Paraguayan War was a defining moment in the history of Brazil—not because Brazil enjoyed a decisive victory over Paraguay, but because Brazil just barely won.

Given the size and wealth of Brazil compared to small and impoverished Paraguay, the confrontation should not have lasted five years. Furthermore, Brazil's eventual victory relied upon the enlistment of non-citizens—slaves. Historians have concluded that the reason for Brazil's poor military showing was a lack of communication and coordination between the government and the military. The Paraguayan War exposed the division between politicians and military personnel, a division that would only intensify through the century to follow. The military became increasingly isolated and removed from the government as a whole.

During the Paraguayan War, the popularity of Pedro II began to wane. The emperor's rule was questioned as the war dragged on without victory or defeat and no prospect of compromise.

“It is a question of honor and I will not compromise.”

—Emperor Pedro II

What role did England play in the empire?

After Brazil gained its independence, it was no longer limited to trade with Portugal.

While still trading some with Portugal, Brazil was now able to trade with whatever country offered the most competitive prices. England overtook Portugal in trade for Brazilian goods. Soon England became the primary importer of Brazilian goods and, as a result, held a great deal of leverage over Brazil.

England used this leverage to promote its own political agenda. Chief among the British government's political concerns was the elimination of slavery in Brazil. England had abolished slavery in all of its colonies by that time, and used its influence to try to bring about abolition in Brazil.

Freeing Brazil

The Brazilian government was hesitant to abolish slavery for two reasons. First, its leaders believed abolition would have to come with some sort of compensation to slave holders who would lose their slaves, which the government could not afford to pay. Second, most people believed that without slavery Brazil would have an insufficient labor force. Nevertheless, pressures from abroad and at home led Brazil to abolish slavery in 1888.

How did abolition occur?

The trend in immigration to the New World—and to the United States in particular—during the first eighty-five years of the nineteenth century missed Brazil. These waves of immigrants would have been an ideal new labor force. But immigration to Brazil was low because of the slave economy, which limited employment opportunity for newcomers. Immigration would only pick up after abolition had been achieved.

In 1831, the transatlantic slave trade was officially outlawed at England's urging. This meant that no more slaves could be taken from Africa to be brought to Brazil or elsewhere. At the same time, the possession of slaves remained legal. The law against trading slaves was not widely enforced, so the trade continued illegally.

By the late nineteenth century it became increasingly clear that Brazil would have to

do away with slavery to be accepted in the international community. To reduce the difficulties of providing financial compensation to slave holders, the government decided to introduce abolition in stages. The first step was the enactment of the “Law of the Free Womb” in 1871, which stated that all children born to slaves were free. In fact, children did not become fully free until their twenty-first birthday.

The second stage came with the “Sexagenarian Law,” which stated that slaves over the age of sixty-five were free. This law had an extremely limited impact as most slaves died well before the age of sixty. Furthermore, even if someone were to have lived to sixty-five and become legally free, there would be very few options available to him or her at that point in life. Most likely ex-slaves would not be able to find work to support themselves and would be forced to stay on the plantation where they had been slaves.

What was the importance of the Golden Law?

The third and final stage of abolition came in 1888 with the “Golden Law,” which freed all slaves. As it turned out, the Golden Law did not include any compensation for slave holders. The Golden Law also included no compensation or assistance to former slaves.

That meant that slaves were freed from slavery with no place to go and very limited means of subsistence.

Sometimes slaves remained on the estates where they had been slaves. Wage labor replaced slave labor: former slaves worked for minimal pay. But since former slaves were no longer the responsibility of the estate owners, workers often had to pay for food and shelter on the estate. Wages were so low that many former slaves remained as trapped as they had been during slavery. Many became indebted to their former owners, preventing them from starting a new life off the plantation.

From the early days following abolition, Brazil saw such extreme levels of poverty that begging became an official feature of Brazilian society. As land was concentrated among the elite and ex-slaves had difficulty acquiring a plot of land, homelessness abounded in Brazil’s cities. Some states responded by issuing a set of decrees stating the acceptable methods of begging for alms.

Abolition moved Brazil into the future and closer to the vision Pedro II had for the nation. It also exposed the persisting inequity—particularly racial inequity—in Brazilian society, and the limitations of the Brazilian government’s efforts to redress these concerns.