Quality, Nation, and Color: Constructing Identities in Central Brazil, 1775-1835

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Abstract

Brazil is but one region of the Portuguese Atlantic world in which elites from Europe discriminated against people of indigenous and African descent. Although the origins of prejudice and discrimination may be found in early colonial Brazil, we can also observe patterns of social relations based on older Iberian concepts of "race" preserved in Brazil's interior in the former captaincy of Goiás, now the modern states of Goiás and Tocantins. In the eighteenth century, Goiás had been one of the richest captaincies of Brazil due to its gold mines. As in other captaincies of Brazil, the Portuguese had transferred their traditional values and hierarchical social structure from Portugal to this remote region, where they justified their rule and defined those they governed utilizing a number of criteria to distinguish themselves from the strangers in their midst and win others to their side as loyal allies of the Crown. In doing so, however, they rarely invoked "race" in the modern meaning of the word. Instead, Luso-Brazilian elites focused on their own religion, quality, and white color that differed from the slave origins, darker colors, or foreign background of others. Although we are limited to documents produced by the literate Luso-Brazilians of the Captaincy for status values and definitions of "the other," occasionally, we also obtain insights into how indigenous people defined "the other" or how freed Africans self-identified in black lay brotherhoods. One result of such flexible categories is that Portuguese governors did not always privilege white men in Goiás and even allied with free men of color and indigenous women against local whites. But this was typical of colonial Brazil in which a talented few could escape the limitations of their low status or slave origin, but the status of their ethnic or racial group remained unchanged.

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approach continue to inform the work of current scholars. Three of these premises are discussed in some detail: first, that "Anglo" and "Latin" America constituted two separate entities; second, that race relations in each area were fundamentally different; and third, that differences in modern race relations could only be explained by their divergent "slave systems." The most accomplished scholarly articulation of this position for Brazil is Hanchard, Michael G., Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil, 1945–1988 (Princeton, 1994). Key Words: Identity, national identity, identity formation mechanisms, nation-building strategies, identity politics. 1. Introduction. Recent political arena suffers under hesitation and contradictory trends between globalisation and multiculturalism and between localisation and ethnic identities, and seeks monoculturalism in respect of countries and people with similar culture coming together in cultural, social, economic co-operations and strategic alliances with those of different cultures and various civilizations that tend to be left outside of these co-operations because of their `. diff... Family, ethnic group, society, community, nation and civilization are 'granted' identities and are created within the socialization process. They are exclusive because of their inborn character.