

Item #11

Anonymous, “The Fact Remains that They Are Black,” in *Children of God’s Fire: A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil*, edited by Robert Edgar Conrad (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 203-210.

5.1. "The Fact Remains that They Are Black": Racial Attitudes in Eighteenth-Century Portugal and Brazil

The following selection is the full text of an anonymous pamphlet which the British historian, Charles R. Boxer, purchased from a Lisbon bookseller in 1962 and two years later published in English translation in the British scholarly journal, *Race*. Originally published in Lisbon in 1764 under the title *Nova e Curiosa Relação*, this pamphlet might best be evaluated by its modern discoverer. "One of the few works printed in the eighteenth century which criticize the mistreatment of Negro slaves in Brazil," wrote Boxer in his introduction, ". . . this little pamphlet accurately reflects the climate of opinion in the Portuguese-speaking world at the time that it was written. It shows that there were a number of people (here represented by the Lawyer) who were aware of the evils inherent in any system of slavery. It also shows that the views of these enlightened people were not shared by the great majority of their contemporaries (here represented by the Miner), with whom it was an article of faith that the black man was born to serve the white, and that the latter could do what he liked with his own. The allegations made by the anonymous author concerning the ill-treatment of Negro slaves in colonial Bahia are amply borne out by the testimony of reliable and contemporary observers, as I have shown elsewhere." All of the brief insertions contained in the text in brackets, except the final one, have been adopted from Professor Boxer's original footnotes.

Source: C. R. Boxer, "Negro Slavery in Brazil: A Portuguese Pamphlet (1764)," *Race: The Journal of the Institute of Race Relations* 5 (1964), 38-47.

❧ *New and Curious Relation of a Grievance Redressed, or Evidences of the Right Adduced in Favour of the Black Men in a Dialogue between a Lawyer and a Miner*

Miner: Learned Sir, I come here to sit at your feet and seek your advice concerning a most important matter.

Lawyer: Sit down, dear Sir. The problem is whether my scanty qualifications will be sufficient to advise you as wisely as I hope to do.

Miner: The fact is that I have a Negro whom I suppose must have been sent into this world for my Purgatory.

Lawyer: Well, let us continue; for it is always true that whoever deals with youths and with slaves needs patience.

Miner: Slowly, learned Sir. That patience is necessary in dealing with youths, I agree; for after all they are somebody's children, and they are

white like ourselves. But I cannot endure to hear it said that patience is necessary in dealing with slaves; for after all they are Negroes, and as their owner has bought them for money he can do whatever he likes with them.

Lawyer: You seem to be very offended with the Negroes; but, withal, however, one cannot deny the truth.

Miner: I am going to deny everything.

Lawyer: Whew, Sir! That is crazy! How can you deny that which is right?

Miner: Yes, Sir. If it is anything in favor of Negroes or slaves, I deny it absolutely.

Lawyer: Truly you seem to be of a terrible disposition. But I presume that the ill behavior of one of your slaves has annoyed you so much that you feel compelled to give vent to this great excess. However, I hope that, all passion spent, you will be prepared to agree with me, if perchance you should understand and realize that what I am going to say is the truth.

Miner: Agreed. You have your say, and we will see if I can agree with it.

Lawyer: Now, Sir. One of the reasons which you give me for being patient with youths is that they are somebody's children?

Miner: Yes, Sir.

Lawyer: Well, then. This reason is equally applicable to our being patient with slaves, as they are also somebody's children.

Miner: But with a difference. For we whites are descended from Adam, and the Negroes are descended from Cain, who was black, and who died cursed by God himself, as the Scripture relates.

Lawyer: It is certain that all the whites are descended from Adam, and it is equally certain that all rational beings are likewise descended from him, whether they are black, or dark, or swarthy, or red, or green, or blue etc. Whatever color a man may have, it is certain that he is a son of Adam. Even according to what you yourself say, the blacks are descended from Adam. For if the blacks are descended from Cain, and Cain was the son of Adam, it follows that they likewise descend from and are sons of Adam. Now that Cain was accursed is scriptural truth; but that he was a Negro, and the Negroes are his descendants—I would like to know where you found this information?

Miner: It is something which I have always heard ever since I was a boy.

Lawyer: Ah, well, in that case you are bound to believe in a lot of foolish things! If you are one of those people who implicitly believe

whatever they have heard tell since boyhood, then there will hardly be anything so ridiculous but that you will believe it.

Miner: But this is something which is staring one straight in the face.

Lawyer: What, Sir! Since you quoted the Bible at me, listen to this. It is certain, and a scriptural truth, that all men, women, and children were drowned in the universal flood, with the exception of only eight persons who were left alive: Noah, his wife, their three sons, and three women who were wives of the said sons. It is also certain that the Bible does not state that any of them were black. Therefore, the blacks are not black because they are descendants of Cain.

Miner: Well then; why have they got that color, and not we?

Lawyer: That problem, my good Sir, is a very intricate one and hard to resolve. Very learned men have exhausted themselves in trying to find the reason for it, and up to now we still do not know.

Miner: I have heard say that the blackness of the blacks is due to their being born in a very hot climate, and much nearer the sun.

Lawyer: That is a boys' tale. If that was really so, then anybody who was born in the country of the blacks would be black, while on the other hand everybody born in the country of the whites would be white. However, this is not so, since we see that black parents always give birth to black children, whereas white parents always give birth to white children. This is something which we can see at every turn. In Ethiopia itself, where nearly all the natives of the country are black, there are villages of very white people, and the climate is the same all over. So we have not yet been able to ascertain the reason for the blackness of the black people.

Miner: Whatever the reason may be, the fact remains that they are black.

Lawyer: And what do you deduce from that?

Miner: I deduce that the Negroes are not people like ourselves.

Lawyer: Sir, the blackest man in all Africa, because he is a man, is just as much a man as is the whitest German in all Germany. There have been very famous black men and women, of whom we read in History. From the Bible, we learn of the wisdom and greatness of the Queen of Sheba. One of the Magi, who worshipped the Babe born in Bethlehem, was a black. Saint Elesbaan, the Emperor, and his daughter, the Princess Saint Ephigenia, were both Ethiopes and both black. Saint Benedict was black, and so were many others who could be named. What does not Portugal owe to the blacks in its conquests in Brazil! They were the ones who threw the Dutch out of Pernambuco and Rio de Janeiro [the Dutch occupation was confined to northeast Brazil and did not include Rio de Janeiro]; and Lord the King Dom Pedro II granted

a habit of the Order of Christ to a black, who on that occasion successfully led the others [it was King John IV, not Pedro II, who knighted the black military leader, Henrique Dias]; for that great king did not wish that the accident of color should deprive him of the honor to which his merits entitled him. And what have you got to say in view of these facts?

Miner: In this way you are arguing that a black is just as good as white.

Lawyer: Undoubtedly he is, in the sense in which I am speaking.

Miner: Well, if the blacks are just as good as we are, what is the reason that they are our slaves, and we whites are not their slaves?

Lawyer: I now see that you are very far from perceiving the truth. Sir, the blacks are not our slaves just because they are black. The Moors can likewise be enslaved, and what is more they are not black. Mulattoes, Kanarese, Chinese, and others can be enslaved, and they are not black. Once upon a time the Tapuyas of Pará were reputed as slaves, and what is more they are not black. I have seen in this city a boy who was about ten years old, with all the features of his face and the shape of his hair just as if he was a black, but his hair was very blond and his body exceedingly white, yet this boy [an albino] was a slave. So that it is not owing to their color that the blacks are enslaved. There are other lawful and political reasons why they can be enslaved. Once upon a time the Romans enslaved all their prisoners of war, and this custom formerly prevailed among some of the European nations; but this abuse is now extinct. Only the Moors still treat the Europeans whom they capture as slaves.

Miner: I am amazed at what you have told me about this matter, but I have always observed that in Brazil the Negroes are treated worse than animals, being punished very severely, and called by very insulting names, yet withal the blacks endure this.

Lawyer: From what I can see, you must be a miner, and have lived in Brazil. However, you must now have the patience to listen to me. All those punishments and insulting, or rather, scandalous names, if they exceed the limits of needful correction are all sinful, criminal and unjust.

Miner: Oh now, you must be joking! On a certain plantation in Bahia, I saw two Negroes killed in one day, their master standing by and ordering them to be flogged to death by other slaves. And on a farm in Rio de Janeiro, I saw a master kill a Negro with his own hands. Moreover, none of these men were punished for killing their slaves, nor did anybody take the slightest notice of it. For after all, if they killed the Negroes, they were the ones who lost their money thereby, and a man can do what he likes with his own.

Lawyer: Excuse me, Sir, because I simply must tell you that I cannot believe everything you say. I do not doubt but that those sugar-planters killed their slaves, in fact I can very readily believe it. But what I cannot believe is that they went unpunished for those crimes, save only if the crime was not known; and in that case, what you have told me proves nothing to the point. It is also quite true, as you say, that these men lost their money when they killed their slaves. But what do you mean by this? Do you mean to imply that they did not commit murder? That they should not be severely punished? That they were not cruel? That they did not commit mortal sin? Ah, Sir! how badly do they treat the wretched slaves in Brazil! But who treats them thus? Avaricious people! Godless people! People with the hearts of wild beasts!

Miner: How I would like, learned Sir, to see *you* trying to cope with 100 or 200 disobedient, treacherous, lazy, and thieving slaves, and to see how you would treat them then.

Lawyer: I would probably treat them worse than does anybody else there. But what each one of us ought to do, is to treat his servants with charity, with zeal, and for the love of God. Whoever does not have the patience to take trouble with slaves should seek some other way of life. For it is more important not to offend God than to gain profit from any worldly concern whatsoever.

Miner: I see that you have become a missionary in favor of the Negroes; but this is because you have no experience of what they are really like. In short, Sir, let us drop this futile argument and come to the point of the purpose for which I came; although I can see from our preliminary discussion that you will decide against me.

Lawyer: I can assure you, and if necessary on oath, that I will never advise you to do anything that will go against my conscience, nor have I done so in anything that I have told you hitherto.

Miner: Learned Sir, the fact of the matter is that I have a Negro whom I bought about ten or eleven years ago. At first he served me as he ought, and in view of this I promised him that if he would continue to serve me well, I would give him his freedom at the end of ten years.

Lawyer: So far you did, if not what you were obliged to do, at any rate something just and praiseworthy. For I assure you that I cannot help feeling sorry for the wretched slaves who have to toil all their life in perpetual bondage.

Miner: What would you do, Sir, if you saw the Negroes in Brazil working almost continually day and night, and this while going naked? As a rule, they are only given a little bit of manioc flour to eat; and they have Sundays and some Saints' days off, so that they can earn something to keep themselves from starving.

Lawyer: Although I have never actually seen such, I am reasonably well informed about the hardships that those wretches endure. But let us come to the principal point of your visit.

Miner: As I was saying, seeing that the Negro served me loyally and readily in everything, and that even after my promise his zeal was still greater, I secretly resolved never to give him his certificate of manumission.

Lawyer: This was quite contrary to all justice. The very reason that you were the more obliged to keep your word to free him, you used as an excuse to go back on your word.

Miner: Even so, am I obliged to keep a promise which I made to my own Negro?

Lawyer: If your promise, or your word, was given for a just cause, who can doubt it?

Miner: But surely there is no reason why I should not deceive my own black?

Lawyer: On the contrary, Sir! We are always obliged to keep faith with everyone without exception.

Miner: Oh, nobody can tell me that! For in this way, I would be placed on a level with a Negro.

Lawyer: Then do you think that the privilege of being white gives you the right to lie as much as you like? But let us leave this matter and come to the point of your visit.

Miner: The Negro, seeing that I was not performing what I had promised, began to cool off in his zeal to serve me; and he displeased me so much that I resolved to sell him as a slave in Brazil, with the sole object of getting him killed by the harsh punishments in vogue there. The Negro, perceiving this, and having been so advised by others, went and enrolled as a Brother in one of their Brotherhoods, which they say has the privilege that the blacks belonging to this Brotherhood cannot be sold as slaves for overseas [probably the Brotherhood of the Most Holy Rosary of Our Lady of the Black Men of São Salvador da Matta of Lisbon]. However, I, as soon as I heard of this, gave him a severe beating; and notwithstanding this, I resolved to sell him secretly and send him to Minas Gerais. However, last Sunday I went to confession and telling this to the confessor, he raised objections to it, telling me that I could not in conscience do such a thing. I now come to sit at your feet, so that you may reassure me on this point.

Lawyer: Sir, your confessor, like a wise and prudent man, has already told you what you ought to do. I can only add two words in confirmation of what he has already said. It is certain that anyone who disobeys the laws which the sovereigns lay on their vassals commits a mortal sin. The

privilege, which our lord kings granted to the blacks of that Brotherhood is a law by which our monarchs order that such Brothers cannot be sold as slaves for overseas. It therefore follows that whoever violates this privilege commits a mortal sin. This is most certain; and thus it seems to me that this is a case of restitution, both to the said Brotherhood, in so far as it is concerned with that Brother, as with the said Brother, in so far as he is concerned as a member of the said Brotherhood.

Miner: Well, learned Sir, does this mean that I am not master of what is mine?

Lawyer: You can be, yes Sir, and you are; but with those restrictions and conditions stipulated by just laws.

Miner: I have a friend, who has done the same thing, and nothing of all this happened to him.

Lawyer: Of all this what?

Miner: There was no talk of sinning nor of restitutions.

Lawyer: I confess and believe that it is likely that your friend did not make restitution. But I would like you to tell me how you know that he was under no obligation to make restitution, nor did he sin?

Miner: Because in that case there would be many sins and much to be restituted.

Lawyer: And who doubts it? Sir, what I feel is that you want to find someone who will approve of all your desires, or rather all your excesses. However, I will say what I believe: what you ought to do, is to fulfill your promise; or, at the very least, inflict no further affliction on your slave, who is sufficiently unfortunate in being one. It is a very common error to believe that the blacks were born solely in order to serve as slaves, but Nature itself loves men of all races without distinction. The way in which many masters treat their slaves is unjust. The latter ought to be punished when they do wrong, but the punishment should be in proportion to the fault. Children are likewise punished by their parents, but in moderation. I do not argue from this that slaves who disobey their masters should not be punished at all, but I only affirm that the punishment ought not to degenerate into cruelty. A conditional promise has the force of law. You promised to free your slave if he continued to serve you well; he not only continued to serve you well, but better still. You are, therefore, obviously bound to free him. You are likewise bound to respect the privilege which he enjoys as a member of his Brotherhood. Hence, if you take my advice, you should either give your slave a certificate of manumission, or else you should treat him kindly, so that he does not lead a dog's life. In this way you will avoid sinning before God, and do what you ought to do.

Miner: Tell me, learned Sir, won't it be enough if I give this Negro his freedom in fifteen or twenty years time?

Lawyer: Better late than never. But tell me, how old is this Negro?

Miner: When I bought him he would have been about twenty-eight years old. I have had him about fourteen or fifteen years [earlier he said ten or eleven], so he must be over forty years old now.

Lawyer: And you want to give him his certificate of manumission fifteen or twenty years hence? In other words, when he will no longer be able to work at all! In this way you are not doing a favor to your black, but merely trying to escape the responsibility of feeding him when he can no longer work. And in that case you are not only very far from keeping your promise but you are rather behaving in a tyrannical way. Now tell me, what can be more contrary to reason, than to make use of a man as a slave for so long as he can work, and then when he can no longer do so, dismiss him and let him die of hunger! In short, I have told you what I think, and now you can go and do what you like.

Miner: I soon saw at the beginning that you would give your decision in favor of the Negro. How is it possible that you, being a white man and a learned one, should favor Negroes rather than white men! I cannot conceive what ground or reason you have for this.

Lawyer: The reason on which I ground myself is following the truth. For I look more to my conscience than to my convenience; and for this reason I have always disabused those persons who come to seek my advice.

Miner: I have heard what you say and I will do what I think best. Excuse me, Sir, here are eight testoons, which may serve to buy a watermelon as a dessert for your dinner.

Lawyer: Thank you kindly, Sir. I remain ready to serve you in any way I can be of use.

LISBON

In the office of Francisco Borges de Sousa

Anno MDCCLXIV

With all the necessary licenses.