

## Laird W. Bergad's Response to Douglas Libby Book Review

In his review of my *Slavery and the Demographic History of Minas Gerais, Brazil, 1720-1888* (*American Historical Review* 107:1 (2002) pp. 258-9) Douglas Libby asserts that there are serious flaws in the basic arguments and methodologies used in the book. He contends that I ignore regional variations in slave demography, despite the lengthy textual analyses of numerous statistical tables and figures documenting changes in local economies and in the demographic characteristics of the slave and free populations during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Libby observes that the book 'lacks originality.' The presentation of a nuanced analysis of the largest slave data base ever constructed for the Americas consisting of detailed demographic data on over 110,000 slaves derived entirely from manuscript sources apparently went unnoticed. This data base was constructed from archival sources in three distinct geographical and socioeconomic areas precisely because of the academic debates on regional slave demography in the extant literature. Additionally, the book presents and analyzes a whole series of new economic data from manuscript archival sources never examined or presented by historians.

The supposed flaws in my arguments and methodologies seem to revolve around Libby's contention that the 1831-2 nominal population lists demonstrate different results on the percentage of Africans found in the slave population of exactly ONE Minas district. The example given is the 1831 data for Diamantina, (administratively different from, and not, the Diamond District as Libby states), which indicate that 51% of all slaves were Africans, compared with my data which reveal that 37.5% of all slaves were Africans between 1830-4.

First, the 51% African figure was derived from Clotilde Paiva's doctoral dissertation "População e Economia nas Minas Gerais do Século XIX" (1996 University of São Paulo) -- page 210, appendix 2, table 1 -- which is based on the nominal lists for 1831. Paiva computerized these materials and graciously provided me with the raw data files. In this statistical table Paiva emphatically notes that the sample for Diamantina was based on 2,757 slaves and that data for 6,381 slaves or 67% of all slaves, was missing. Libby forgot to mention this fact. Conclusions on the African slave trade to Minas based on a sample of incomplete data on less than 3,000 slaves in one locale in one year are questionable.

Second, Libby does not take into consideration the age structure of the sample. If Africans were older, they would have been imported in a previous period. Third, there are serious problems with the coding of the 1831 data set itself, which I have carefully analyzed separately. It is not certain if the word *preto*, which means black in Portuguese, was in fact taken for 'African.' If it was, the African origin data are entirely erroneous since color and origin are not synonymous. It also ought to be noted that only 5% of the total Minas Gerais slave population lived in the *Comarca do Serro*, where Diamantina is located, according to the 1833 census, also computerized and made available by Paiva.

With respect to the data I present, Libby read the wrong table (D.4). The inventory-derived data for Diamantina (Table D.3) indicate a constantly falling ratio of African to Brazilian-born slaves from the 1790s when some 89% of all slaves in the sample were African-born, to the 1830s when their portion had fallen dramatically to 34% (not 37.5%).

Libby has chosen one static piece of highly questionable data as the sole evidence for my supposed argumentative and methodological flaws. He has not considered other critical data on the demography of slavery in this region, and throughout the rest of the province, especially the dramatically growing population of young children and the constant decline in the sex ratio. I

might add that the dimensions and timing of the very small-scale slave trade to Diamantina are specifically discussed in the text (p. 112-3).

In this regard Libby mentions, without documenting it, a source indicating that 45% of Africans exported from Rio between 1818 and 1831 went to Minas. Even if true, this may be entirely meaningless depending on the volume of the trade. Regardless, I note in the book quite emphatically (pages 144-6), a small-scale trade in African slaves to Minas during the 1820s. This, however, was dwarfed statistically by the numbers of slaves born in the province.

Finally, Libby accuses me of a “lack of attention to...sources” since for him I have not extracted enough information from the over 10,000 post-mortem inventories examined. In fact, as I make crystal clear in the introduction, my intent was to focus upon specific variables in the voluminous sources consulted, and to leave a whole series of issues, themes, and data out of this study. I spelled out clearly what this book set out to do and the topics it would and would not address. Rather than recognizing any of this, Libby has chosen to make unsubstantiated claims, as well as distortions of the material presented in, and even outside, of the book.

None of this surprises me. Libby’s review is driven by personal animosity resulting from my presence as a Fulbright Fellow at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais in 1992, where Libby works, and when I began research on this book. Libby was originally to participate in this project which I solely designed, but he did absolutely nothing in the five months I was there working every day in archival collections throughout Minas Gerais. He subsequently formally quit the project and announced to me that he was going to do his ‘own’ project. This, to my shock at the time, blatantly plagiarized the methodology I developed for working with these sources, and even the data gathering and entry design which I collegially shared with him before my departure from Brazil in 1992. This resulted in an ugly confrontation by mail in which I made it very clear that I would not tolerate this kind of unethical professional behavior. The correspondence, which I have preserved, is available upon request to anyone with doubts.

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