

THE ROLE OF NEGROES IN THE ETHNIC FORMATION OF CEARÁ: THE NEED FOR A REAPPRAISAL

BILLY JAYNES CHANDLER *

1. INTRODUCTION

The ethnic formation of Ceará has received considerable discussion in scholarly works dealing with that area, particularly with respect to the role of the indigenous peoples, the Indians. Emphasis in such discussions has been placed on the miscegenation of these peoples with the settlers of Portuguese stock. Such an emphasis may have resulted in a relatively high degree of distortion, largely because the roles of peoples of African descent in the formation of the cearense have been but seldom mentioned and even less investigated. The purpose of this article, accordingly, is to present data concerning the roles of that race in the formation of the cearense and to make suggestions as to their relative significance.

2. TREATMENT OF NEGROES IN CEARENSE STUDIES

Heretofore, the history of Negroes in Ceará has been limited largely to the background of the campaign to liberate slaves, a noble cause which reached its peak in the early to mid 1880's. Little attention, on the other hand, has been given to the actual role of

* The author is Associate Professor of History at Texas A&I University, Kingsville, Texas, USA.

blacks in the society of Ceará over the course of its development.¹ Indeed, most of those who have written on Ceará either ignore Negroes — except, as stated previously, for the abolitionist campaign — or affirm that Negroes played little or no role in the development of Ceará. In this latter case, examples are numerous. Among the older works, Cruz Filho's *História do Ceará* declares that the African element entered into the formation of the cearense to the exact proportion of 8.65%.² I am inclined to wonder how Cruz Filho arrived at such an exact figure, but, be that as it may, it is a very small one. Gustavo Barroso in *Terra de Sol*, to cite another, presents a more judicious view of the matter but also appears to conclude that the presence of the cabra, mulato, and Negro in Ceará has been of very minor significance, especially when compared to whites and Indians.³ In both of these works, little else appears concerning Negroes, a fact which alone would leave the reader with the impression that there was never in Ceará a sufficient number of people of African heritage to bear mentioning, again except in connection with the abolitionist movement.

Two more recent references to the matter indicate that this by now well established tradition continues to be the accepted view in cearense studies. First, in the often cited and esteemed history of Ceará by the cearense historian, Raimundo Girão, one finds only a few lines on Negroes in the chapter on the ethnic formation of the area. After an extended discussion of Indians, Girão writes: "Daí porque a percentagem do sangue africano é pequena dentro das veias do cearense. E também porque, humilde e pouco, o negro não pôde subir na escala social, ficou em baixo, sem ânimo de interferir na misclagem da étnica cearense. O Ceará, na realidade nunca foi uma negreia."⁴ And, more recently, the cearense sociologist, Mozart Soriano Aderaldo, reaffirmed the tradition more clearly in stating that "O Ceará é uma clareira na confusão racial do Brasil. A miscigenação entre nós se limitou ao português ambicioso e sensual com o índio matreiro e desconfiado. E a raça se tem conservado sem novos enxertos que a desfigurem."⁵ Finally, on a broader scale, Gilberto Freyre, in writing of the Northeastern sertão in general, has lent his weight to the belief that Negroes and the institution of slavery were of little significance in the formation of the people and culture of that area.⁶

3. BACKGROUND OF THIS PRESENT STUDY

I became aware of this generally accepted tradition in regard to the ethnic formation of Ceará when conducting archival and field research a few years ago on the society and history of the Sertão dos

Inhamuns, located in Southwestern Ceará. Noting the presence in Ceará of significant numbers of persons with recognizable Negroid features and delving into census figures — most of which give data on racial classification — I came to believe that the tradition might be worth an examination. Data were gathered during 1965-1966 in Fortaleza and Rio de Janeiro and again in 1969. It became apparent that the usual views of the roles of Negroes in Ceará were based more on popular assumptions than scholarly research. This is not, of course, to subject to criticism those historians and other scholars who have echoed the tradition (and least of all those previously cited in this article), for, after all, there did not exist the necessary studies of the matter for general historian and others to consult. It is then for the purpose of initiating a discussion and partially remedying a deficiency by offering a preliminary inquiry into the subject that this present study is offered.

4. CENSUS DATA

The starting place for the historical study of the role of Negroes in the formation of cearense society and culture appeared to be the attempt to determine how many persons of recognizable Negroid ancestry existed in the area in the time of its development. In other words, just how much Negroid blood flowed into the veins of cearenses when the society was being formed? How aggressive were blacks in propagating their own kind and in infiltrating other racial stock? Fortunately, adequate data exist in various censuses from the 19th century to answer these questions in a fairly conclusive manner, such data from the 19th century affording a good picture of the society in an advanced state of formation in view of the fact that it immediately followed the century of principle colonization. Data extracted from four censuses from the 19th century — including the earliest available censuses of Ceará — and reproduced in the appended tables show the probable number of cearenses identified as possessing recognizable Negroid stock. In the tables, in addition, all of those identified by census reports as possessing recognizable Negroid stock (pretos, mulatos, pardos) are combined to produce a composite figure indicating the proportion of persons of probable whole or partial Negroid heritage in the total population. Readers are referred to the data in the appended tables for full information; a brief summary of this data is presented in the following table.

SUMMARY OF APPENDED CENSUS DATA

Year of census	Population of Ceará as reported	Pretos, par- dos, mulatos	Proportion of total population of pretos, pardos and mulatos (%)
1804	77,369	47,033	60.0
1808	120,386	68,440	56.9
1813	149,285	98,412	65.9
1872	689,773	368,100	53.4

5. ANALYSIS OF CENSUS DATA AND SUGGESTIONS FOR
FURTHER RESEARCH

From the foregoing census data, we may draw the following conclusions.

a. Persons considered to be of recognizable Negroid stock (either whole or partial) consistently comprised near one half of the total population of Ceará. b. Such consistency indicates that rather than being an impassive element losing out racially to whites and Indians, Negroes were an aggressive group actively propagating their kind and infiltrating other racial groups. c. Persons of either whole or partial Negro ancestry constituted a numerous and proportionally important element in the ethnic formation of Ceará.

I am aware, of course, of problems in using census data, and the defects of such data from the 19th century are well known. Also the imprecision of racial classification by untrained census takers and as well the lack of precise definition of the racial categories employed are major problems. All of these defects have to be recognized in judging the validity of our data. In particular there is considerable difficulty concerning the racial classification of "pardo", a category utilized in our censuses of 1804 and 1872. In later censuses, to be sure, pardo came to be virtually synonymous with mestiço and could include various mixtures of white, Indian, and Negro ancestry, the word itself essentially signifying dark or brown-skinned. Fortunately, however, we have two other censuses — those of 1808 and 1813 — in which the term is not employed and in which the more precise ones of *Indio* and *mulato* are used; and the similarities of the per-

centages of these two censuses with the other two should be noted. Note also that in the census of 1872, caboclo — meaning of at least partial Indian ancestry — is included as a classification; thus opportunities were afforded to distinguish between dark-skinned persons of probable partial Indian ancestry and dark-skinned persons of probable partial African descent. With these things in mind, then, the use of the term "pardo" in the censuses we employ may be less of a problem than on the surface it would seem to be. When even inadequate census data then show a consistently clear pattern throughout the century — as our data do — a good case is established for a high degree of its general validity. ⁷ After all is said and after all due allowances have been made for the deficiencies of the data, we are led to the conclusion that the role of Negroes in the formation of the cearense has been considerable and deserves far more attention than it has received to this date.

Let me make a few suggestions as to the direction of future research on the ethnic formation of Ceará. Attention, in the first place, needs to be given to the origins and racial cultural characteristics of those peoples who entered and settled Ceará from the late 17th century forward. It is known generally that they came from the Northeastern coastal area and its immediate interior, and this fact alone would seem to suggest that Ceará possessed a large Negro element from the beginning, simply for the reason that its settlers came from areas where slavery was of significance and where Negroes often made up large proportions of the general population. In a consideration of the ethnic formation of Ceará, moreover, Negroes should be regarded as a general element in the movement of peoples to the area and in its subsequent development and not linked only with the institution of slavery and the abolitionist campaign, for the appended census data make it clear that by the early 19th century free persons of full or partial Negroid ancestry greatly outnumbered the enslaved ones. Thus — and this is the crucial point — the history of Negroes in this area is not chiefly that of a numerically insignificant enslaved group existing in a state of sexual lethargy but rather of a general element which was playing a vital and active role in the formation of the general population and its culture.

This present study, unfortunately, deals with the numerical significance of Negroes in Ceará and not with their contribution to culture. This is, nonetheless, another area which deserves attention. Negroes as slaves — apart from that more numerous population of free Negroes — to suggest one area of research, — may have had a greater influence on the elite class of Ceará than has been supposed, as a result of the fact that slaveholding among that small but pri-

vileged class was widespread. Hence, many of the influences of slaves on the elites indicated in the work of Freyre probably were present in Ceará as well. The relationship between the casa grande and the senzala undoubtedly also existed on the fazendas of Ceará. One of the great fazendeiros of that area, José do Vale Pedrosa (of the Feltosa parentela of the Inhamuns), possessed on his death in 1843 some 263 slaves or more, a clear indication that Negroes and slavery were not insignificant in the Inhamuns portion of Ceará.⁸

To suggest a related matter, that body of African survivals and folk culture described by Freyre probably was present in Ceará and merged into the general culture. The origins of folk culture with respect to its ingredients are not always easy to determine (as the work of George Foster, among others, points out⁹) but reason would suggest that African survivals may be more numerous in cearense culture than has been believed. Conversely, the Indian contribution to both the culture and physical stock of the cearense may have been exaggerated. The Indians of this area, never very numerous, were of a relatively low cultural level and quite fierce, qualities which limit peaceful contacts.¹⁰ (Note in the appended censuses that Indians and caboclos, when included as separated categories, are given as few in number when compared to Negroes and others of partial Negroid stock except in the traditional Indian communities such as Viçosa, Messejana etc.).

Finally, a word of caution. There is no suggestion here that peoples of Negroid African stock and their cultures have ever had as much importance in Ceará as they had in the old sugar growing (zona de açúcar) Northeastern coastal region, for obviously they have not. To be sure, persons of Negroid ancestry from that area and elements of their culture penetrated the sertão and helped to mold the society and its people; yet, in the sertão they, along with settlers of other stock, battled with the physical environment and they, with the others, produced a society of the sertão which has its distinctive characteristics. Ceará is not a replica of Bahia or Pernambuco. But, with this said, in the matter of significant Negroid participation in the formation of its psycal stock — and quite likely its culture as well — it appears that Ceará shares with these areas greater similarities than have heretofore been recognized in cearense studies. The tradition that the cearense and his culture are derived almost wholly from the Indian and the Portuguese (and consequently that Negroes contributed almost nothing) — the prevailing view among cearense scholars to date — needs to be examined and reassessed, and it is hoped that this modest contribution may serve as a point of departure.

APPENDIX

TABLE 1
CENSUS OF 1804

Note: The last column in each table shows the percentages of persons of full or partial Negroid stock in the total population. These percentages are the result of my calculations.

Vila	Branços	Pretos e pardos livres	Pretos e pardos dos escravos	Totals	Pretos e pardos (%)
Aquiraz	2,679	2,145	702	5,526	51.5
Aracati	2,339	1,490	1,102	4,931	52.6
São Bernardo	3,753	2,769	943	7,465	49.7
Icó	3,822	3,522	1,507	8,851	56.8
Crato	6,797	12,793	1,091	20,681	67.1
São João do Príncipe	5,301	3,231	1,856	10,448	49
Granja	1,047	1,656	799	3,502	70.1
Sobral	2,781	4,193	2,978	9,952	72
Campo Maior	1,757	2,986	1,270	6,013	70.8
Totals	30,336	34,785	12,258	77,369	60.8

Source: "Mapa da população da Capitania do Ceará Grande, apresentado a Sua Alteza Real, no mês de junho de 1804, pelo seu Governador da mesma Capitania — João Carlos Augusto de Oeynhausén", in "Administração de João Carlos Augusto Oeynhausén no Ceará (Documentos da Coleção Studart), *Revisita do Instituto do Ceará*, Vol. 39 (1925), p. 279. A note accompanying this census states that results from the villas of Indians were not included.

TABLE 2
CENSUS OF 1808

Vila	Branços	Índios	Mulatos	Pretos	Totais	Pretos e mulatos (%)
Fortaleza	3,726	174	4,645	1,079	9,624	59.5
Aquiraz	3,788	538	2,262	2,939	9,527	54.6
Aracati	2,371	79	1,054	1,829	5,333	54.1
São Bernardo	5,287	43	3,181	2,276	10,787	50.5
Icó	7,018	220	7,243	3,217	17,698	59.1
Crato	3,694	178	4,378	3,485	11,735	67
Campo Maior	1,868	120	2,812	1,715	6,515	69.5
São João do Príncipe	3,535	117	2,536	1,372	7,560	51.7
Sobral	3,636	397	8,589	2,007	14,629	72.4
Granja	1,883	79	1,790	1,172	4,924	60.2
Vila Nova d'El-Rei	3,014	381	2,866	1,362	7,623	55.5
Arronches	75	867	350	123	1,415	33.4
Messejana	41	1,185	250	84	1,570	21.2
Souré	33	546	133	55	767	24.5
Monte Mor o Novo	805	126	1,659	155	2,745	66
Viçosa Real	1,437	4,666	1,583	248	7,934	23.1
Totais	42,221	9,716	45,322	23,118	120,386	56.9

Source: Luiz Barba Alardo de Menezes, "Memória Sobre a Capitania do Ceará", *Revista do Instituto Histórico, Geográfico e Ethnográfico do Brasil* Vol. 34, n.º 1 (1871), Mappa n.º 3, following, p. 273. I corrected minor errors in the totals.

CENSUS OF 1872

TABLE 4

Freguesia	Branços		Pretos		Caboclos		Totals dos (%)	
	Escravos	Livres	Escravos	Livres	Escravos	Livres	Escravos	Livres
S. José da Fortaleza	9,304	9,304	8,533	906	1,398	1,016	42,2	21,372
S. José de Aquitaz	6,002	6,002	6,088	215	606	669	51.1	13,632
N. S. do Rosário do Aracati	6,614	6,614	3,439	715	906	906	57.4	17,645
N. S. da Expectação do Ico	5,144	5,144	7,881	716	66	66	64.3	14,592
S. Gongalo da Serra dos Cocos do Ipu	9,335	9,335	11,604	1,053	1,980	1,980	54.1	24,669
N. S. de Assumpção da Vigosa	6,495	6,495	8,278	285	4,283	4,283	45.2	19,683
Santo António de Juxerambim	7,058	7,058	8,091	497	182	182	56.2	16,525
N. S. do Rosário de São João do Príncipe	2,733	2,733	6,559	212	79	79	71	9,704
Totals	9,304	9,304	7,624	492	1,016	1,016		

Villa	Branços	Índios	Mulatos	Pretos	Totais	Mulatos e pretos (%)
Villa Nova d'El-Rel	589	873	4,979	672	6,240	90
	200		323			
Arronches	200	873	324	6	1,403	23.5
	110	1,273	351	6		
Messejana	110	1,273	353	32	1,768	21.8
	30	805	16	10		
Souré	30	805	244	26	1,131	26.1
	1,433	481	260	36		
Monte Mor o Novo	1,433	481	2,318	126	4,807	60
	1,732	4,259	71	374		
Viçosa Real	1,732	4,259	2,389	500	8,500	29.5
			1,823	160		
			78	448		
			1,901	608		
Totais	41,659	9,196	68,025	13,179	149,285	65.9
			6,336	10,872		
			74,361	24,051		

Source: Mappa da população da Capitania do Ceará extrahido dos que derão as Capitães mores em o anno de 1813.

This is a document in the Biblioteca Nacional, Seção de Manuscriptos, Ceará, Lata 1.ª, Doc. n.º 3. A note on the document states that in some villas the capitães-mores included Indians in the totals for whites. No figures were given in this census for the Villa of I.6.

TABLE 3
CENSUS OF 1813

Vila	Livres Escravos Totais	Branços	Índios	Mulatos	Pretos	Totais	Mulatos e pre- tos (%)
Fortaleza	L	5,304		4,972	1,385		
	E	5,304		703	451		
	T	4,621	334	5,675	1,836	12,815	58.6
Açuíraz	L	4,621	334	2,737	3,108	10,800	54.1
	E	2,613		1,798	1,812		
	T	2,613		320	933		
Aracati	L	5,849		2,118	2,745	7,476	65
	E	5,849		2,567	1,134		
	T	5,849		530	892		
São Bernardo	L	1,502		3,097	2,026	10,972	46.5
	E	1,502		24,180	5,191		
	T	1,502		666	1,028		
Crato	L	1,770		24,846	6,219	32,567	95.4
	E	1,770		3,034	354		
	T	1,770		155	922		
Campo Maior	L	3,281		3,189	1,276	6,235	71.6
	E	3,281		1,770	475		
	T	3,281		570	925		
São João mo Príncipe	L	2,692	219	2,340	1,400	7,003	53
	E	2,692		9,347	788		
	T	2,692		1,068	1,091		
Sobral	L	1,316	219	10,415	1,879	15,202	80.9
	E	1,316		1,559	275		
	T	1,316		93	463		
Granja	L	589		1,652	738	3,706	64.5
	E	589		4,801	185		
	T	589		178	487		

Freguesia		Branços	Pardos	Pretos	Caboclos	Totais	Pretos e pardos (%)
N. S. da Penha do Crato	L	4,565	8,488	1,743	2,947		
	E		717	311			
	T	4,565	8,905	2,054	2,947	18,471	59.3
	L	4,853	5,767	746	2,484		
	E		537	246			
S. José de Granja	T	4,853	6,304	992	2,484	14,633	49.9
	L	9,947	15,274	865	1,381		
	E		1,210	881			
N. S. da Conceição do Sobral	T	9,947	16,484	1,846	1,381	29,658	61.8
Provincia do Ceará	T	268,836	339,166	28,934	52,837	689,773	53.4

Source: Data extracted from *Recenseamento da População do Império do Brasil... de 1872* (6 vols., Rio de Janeiro, 1873-76), Vol. 3, pp. 1-176. The freguesias selected for inclusion here were chosen on the basis of being the sites of the older municipalities in Ceará. For reasons of conserving space, I have not presented the results from every freguesia in the province. The totals, however, are for the entire province.

NOTES

1. On the abolitionist movement in Ceará, see Raimundo Girão. *A Abolição no Ceará* (Fortaleza, 1956), and, for a recent summary, Robert Conrad *The Destruction of Brazilian Slavery* (Berkeley, 1972) pp. 170-189. For a brief study of slavery and abolitionism in one area of the province, see my *The Feitosas and the Sertão dos Inhamuns: The History of a Family and a Community in North-east Brazil, 1700-1930* (Gainesville, 1972), pp. 146-156.
2. (São Paulo, 1931), p. 80.
3. (6th ed., Fortaleza, 1962), p. 136.
4. *Pequena História do Ceará* (2nd ed., Fortaleza, 1962), p. 100.
5. "Recebendo Parsifal Barroso no Instituto do Ceará". *Revista do Instituto do Ceará*. Vol. 81 (1967), p. 293.
6. Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves* (New York, 1946), pp. 154-155, 399-400. To cite another similar treatment, see Djacir Menezes, *O Outro Nordeste* (2nd ed., Rio de Janeiro, 1970), pp. 43-68 specially p. 51.
7. The 1940 census, to cite one from the 20th century, shows that pretos and pardos continued to comprise a large percentage of the population of Ceará. Percentages of these two racial groups combined from selected municípios are as follows. Aquiraz: 61.2; Aracati: 42.8; Crato: 41.3; Fortaleza: 44.5; Granja: 50; Icó: 20.8; Ipu: 49.1; Quixeramobim: 54.3; Sobral: 65; Tauá: 49.3. The foregoing figures are mine, based on data extracted from *Recenseamento Geral do Brasil 1940*. (Vol. 1, pt. 6, Rio de Janeiro, 1950).
8. Chandler, *Feitosas and the Sertão dos Inhamuns*, p. 147
9. See Foster's *Culture and Conquest* (New York, 1960).
10. On the Indians of Ceará, see Carlos Studart Filho, *Os Aborígenes do Ceará* (Fortaleza, 1956).