

Economic history of brazil



Over the four centuries of Portuguese involvement in the Atlantic slave trade, an estimated 10 to 15 million Africans were transported to the European colonies in the Americas. Of these, over 3.5 million were taken to Brazil. Brazil was the biggest importer of slaves and took in an even greater amount than the United States. What influence did these 3.5 million Africans have on Brazil? The international slave trade that took place from 1538-1888 changed Brazil's culture profoundly. Many of Brazil's cultural identities derive from African descent such as some cuisines and musical rhythms.

With an economy based on free labour they were able to get huge economic status and finally there are African infused religions that are practiced in Brazil. It was the seventeenth-century Jesuit preacher and missionary, Frei Antonio Vieira, who said that Brazil had 'the body of America and the soul of Africa' and this description continues, to some extent, to hold true. Since Brazil was the largest importer of slaves, the effect that any group of slaves has on a country's economy, culture and religions is shown most prominently in Brazil's Culture, economy and religions.

When slaves started to be transported in large numbers starting in 1580, Africans from places such as Angola and Bantu constituted two thirds of the population of the North east of Brazil. By the start of the sixteenth century, Brazil's population of African birth or descent already topped 20,000, with Africans being imported at a rate of 8,000 per year and making up 70 per cent of the labour force. The amount of Africans greatly increased over the next couple of hundred years until the law banning slaves was passed in 1888.

Brazil was the last country to ban slaves because it had the largest free labour economy. While the slaves were in Brazil they often would play rhythms from the African tradition. The Samba is one of the first expressions of the Afro-Brazilian culture to be admired. The Samba is a rhythm which distinguishes Brazil from other Columbian countries when it comes to music. The Samba was introduced to Brazil by the slaves. The African drums also brought the Maracatu to the Congada, Cavalhada and Mozambique, sounds and rhythms that travel and conquer Brazil from end to end.

The African presence is also outstanding and fundamental on Brazilian gastronomy, with dishes such as the vatapa, acaraje, caruru, sarapatel, baba de moca, coconut candy, and many others. Another very popular dish is the feijoada, which originates from the slave-quarters. The best meat went to the masters, and the leftovers to the slaves. Sausage, dry-meat and pork were mixed with black beans and cooked in a very big caldron. The negative aspect of the African influence in Brazilian culture is that mistreated, uneducated slaves who were subject to racism were inserted into the society.

This creates a major gap between rich and poor which will later affect the economy. The slave trade in Brazil effected Brazil's economy substantially. After the slave trade, Brazil became characterized by inequalities in income, wealth, education, and economic opportunity. Brazilians suffer more than Asians, Europeans and North Americans in this respect. Brazil's social structure still has ramifications from its colonial period. During its colonial period there were great inequalities in access to land or property, and the bulk of the labour force was slaves.

The continued neglect of popular education has hindered the growth of labour productivity. Another aspect of inequality is the regional spread of wealth. The per capita income gap between the poorest state, Piauí, and the federal district is about 7: 1. The only other countries with this degree of regional disparity are Mexico and China. At the end of the colonial period, half the population were slaves⁸. A privileged fraction of the white population enjoyed high incomes but the rest of the population (free blacks, mulattos, Indians and large numbers of the whites) were poor.

Land ownership was concentrated on slave owners, thus a very unequal distribution of property reinforced a highly unequal distribution of income. There was substantial regional inequality. The poorest area was the Northeast. The most prosperous area was around the new capital, Rio de Janeiro. Those are the negative effects on the economy that Brazil experienced from supporting a huge influx of slaves. On the other hand though, the first major settlements in Brazil came as a result from the sugar cane boom in the 17th century when Brazil became the world's largest producer of sugar⁹.

It was the early sugar cane boom that made the North eastern city of Salvador the first capital of Brazil¹⁰. At the height of the sugar boom, 40 per cent of Brazil's slave population was involved in the cultivation of the cane¹¹. The Slaves had a huge economic effect on Brazil because the first sugar cane settlement became the economic centre of Brazil at the time. Without the working power of the slaves the Brazilian economy would not have been able to support itself. After sugar proved to be cheaper for

Europeans to import from the Caribbean, Brazil was no longer the world largest sugar cane producer.

The setback in sugar caused large parts of the Northeast to lapse into a subsistence economy¹². Brazil depended on sugar to have a stable economy and Brazil's economy depended on the slaves to provide a stable and constant supply of sugar cane. Brazil's next large economic boom was gold. In the 1690s Brazil discovered gold, and in 1720 they discovered diamonds. Both were found in the southern state of Minas Gerais. In the 17th century more slaves skilled in prospecting, metallurgy and extraction were demanded as gold became the source of extreme wealth in Brazil and Europe.

The total Brazilian gold shipments over the whole of the eighteenth century were between 800 and 850 tons¹³. With the exports of gold and sugar alone Brazil obtained incredible economic status and Brazil is now the number one economy in Latin America and the 10th largest economy in the world. Brazil owes it all to the slaves, because the slaves did all the work. The African slaves had an effect on Brazil's economy because of the profit obtained from free labour. Finally, the religious practices of Brazil were influenced from African tradition.

When the Africans first arrived, they were baptized into the catholic religion and pushed to pursue that faith. The conversions were rarely effective, although some Africans did convert to Catholicism, and the Africans continued to practice their religions in secret. For the Africans keeping their religion was a way of staying connected. The oral tradition was huge in Africa and for the religion to remain intact the African slaves would meet and

perform rituals and ceremonies. Eventually though, Catholicism and African traditional religions started to mix together and fuse into one religion.

Candomble, the most traditional and African among these religions, began in the Northeast¹⁴. It began in the state of Bahia, and has been synonymous of Afro-Brazilian religions in general. The religion has impacted Brazil because it is still around now, over 400 years later, with over two million followers in Brazil. A whole religion was formed from the slaves mixing their own beliefs with Europeans. The effects of Candomble are lasting. The origins of Candomble further prove the Influence that slaves have had on Brazilian religion. Candomble originated in the Northeast city of Salvador, one of the rich sugar cities.

The sugar harvests used 40% of the slaves brought to Brazil. The large concentration of slaves in Salvador brought the formation of the Afro-Brazilian religion of Candomble¹⁵. In conclusion, the International slave trade that took place from 1538-1888 had a profound effect on Brazils culture, economy and religious practises. The Afro-Brazilian culture emerged because around 3.5 million slaves were brought in to Brazil during that time period. The results of the high numbers of slaves are long lasting and the slaves' legacy and input into Brazil as a nation is profound.