

The 12th Annual Gilder Lehrman Center International Conference at Yale University
Co-sponsored with the Council on Latin American and Iberian Studies at Yale

American Counterpoint: New Approaches to Slavery and Abolition in Brazil

October 29-30, 2010
Yale University
New Haven, Connecticut

The Free Afro-Brazilians in a Slave Society

Herbert S. Klein, Stanford University

Available online at <http://www.yale.edu/glc/brazil/papers/klein-abstract.pdf>
© Do not cite or circulate without the author's permission

Portuguese America produced the largest free colored class under slavery in the Americas. Long before the abolition of slavery or even the abolition of the slave trade, free colored outnumbered slaves in Brazil. By the time of the first census of 1872 there were 4.2 million free Afro-Brazilians, compared to 3.5 million whites and 1.5 million slaves. These free colored could be found in every province of the empire and in every municipality from the most urban to the most rural. In many northeastern provinces they formed the majority of the population and even in new commercial agricultural frontier areas such as São Paulo they resided everywhere. The aim of my essay is to describe the origin, characteristics, development, and relative importance of this group under slavery and suggest its impact on the slave system and racial and social stratification within Brazil both before and after final slave emancipation in 1888.