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Chapter 3 Summary

The Forging of a People

 This chapter focuses on the start of Brazil, beginning on March 9th 1500. King Manuel of Portugal allowed Pedro Alvares Cabral to search the world for gold, and his ship finally arrived on the coast of Brazil on April 23rd. Once arriving on the shore, they encountered the natives and exchanged gifts. This first encounter with the native Brazilians began the long period of Portuguese control over these people, which is described in the different sections in the chapter.

 The first subsection describes the Indians, bandeirantes, and Jesuits. Once colonization began, Portugal sent their prisoners to the land to help colonize by forming relationships/raping the native women. Outside of prisoners, Portugal began to set up trading posts, King Joao III “…divided up the coast into fifteen captaincies, and leased them to twelve donatarios, who were given administrative powers and lands following a regime used previously in the Atlantic islands,” (Reid 31). Although only 2 of these captaincies ended up prevailing, the authority over the natives changed the dynamic between the Portuguese and natives. Natives came to be seen as savages, and needed to be enslaved or taught the ways of God, as the Jesuits enforced. The bandeirantes helped with this cause by trapping other natives to become slaves in exchange for Portuguese protection.

The next subsection described the slavery and sugar. The sugar crop itself came from the Portuguese, as they tried to grow it everywhere they went. While some colonies weren’t ideal for this crop, Brazil’s geography and location was very beneficial for both the crop growth, exports, and imports of slaves. The imports of slaves became so great they soon replaced the work of the natives, and most of the agriculture was done through African hands.

In the subsection proceeding this, titled “Children of God’s fire”, Reid shows the treatment and life of the slaves. Much of the slaves were forced to convert to Catholicism, as the Portuguese convinced them their hard lives were comparable to Jesus’. What else was mentioned was the slave population, where Reid explains “Because of the sexual imbalance among the Africans who were sent to Brazil, with two men for every woman, the slave population did not reproduce itself; instead, it was constantly replenished by new arrivals,” (Reid 43-44). This type of population would make it easier for slaves to be seen as a piece of equipment rather than people. Therefore, the life expectancy and literacy rate of slaves were much lower than that of American standards.

The last two subsections describe the gold rush and the patriarchal society that came with the induction of Portuguese influence on Brazil. The *paulistas* were successful in finding the source of gold in Brazil, in a location now referred to as Minas Gerais (general mines). With the discovery of gold came the rush of Portuguese miners to Brazil, and cities became more developed to provide for this massive influx of people. Reid states “The main towns began to grow; by the mid-1770s, Salvador’s population was over 36,000, bigger than any city in British North America except Philadelphia (40,000) while Recife, the fourth city, may have been bigger than Boston,” (49). As these cities began to develop, the strongest buildings in these areas remained the church. As more immigrants from different countries came to Brazil, they began to colonize in different areas, but the main purpose of society was searching for quick and easy money.

Reflection

 I really enjoyed reading this chapter. I felt as though it was important to understand the beginnings of the country so that we could better understand why things are the way they are today. Like the laws in America being so hard to change due to the system we had set up during our colonial period, the political system could not be explained in Brazil without first looking at how the Portuguese influenced the natives of this country.

Work Cited

Reid, Michael. Brazil: The Troubled Rise of a Global Power. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2014. Print.