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Free Africans and Concessionaires, Rio de Janeiro, 1860

Peer-Reviewed Dataset Article

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Description

This dataset is drawn from an enhanced transcription of "Relação de todos os Africanos livres que até o presente data ainda se acham sob a responsabilidade dos particulares a quem foram confiados. Extrahidos em o mez de Março de 1860" [Registry of all Free Africans who up to the present moment are found to be the responsibility of the private individuals to whom they were assigned. Taken in the month of March 1860], an 111-page hand-written nominal registry of 849 private concessionaires (also known as "guardians") and 1,342 Free Africans (also known as *emancipados* or Liberated Africans) residing in Brazil in early 1860.

The “Free Africans” enumerated in the original source held a special legal status of freedom shared by perhaps 185,000 other Africans in nineteenth-century Atlantic slave societies.¹ That status was codified in bilateral treaties, maritime laws, and national laws that extended liberty to illegally enslaved Africans intercepted by anti-trafficking patrols on sea or land.² In the Brazilian case, the key legal benchmarks of the suppression of the transatlantic trade that framed Free African status were: the Anglo-Portuguese treaties of 1815 and 1818, a Portuguese royal decree of 1818, an Anglo-Brazilian treaty of 1826 (taking effect in 1830), and then, definitely, Brazilian national laws of November 7, 1831, and September 4, 1850, as well as supplemental regulations of 1834, 1835, 1853, and 1864.³ Approximately 14,000 illegally landed Africans (out of a total of three-quarter million clandestine imports between 1810 and 1856) acquired Free African status in Brazil. Those who survived initial rescue and a subsequent emancipation were assigned to compulsory apprenticeships in private households, religious orders, or so-called Public Establishments. This March 1860 manuscript lists 1,342 such Africans originally emancipated between 1834 and 1849 who remained under apprenticeship in private households in Rio de Janeiro, nearby Niterói, and towns in the interior.⁴

Although the unsigned tabular registry has been separated from its cover correspondence, it is certain that the document is a copy of a nominal return drawn from official logbooks known as Livros de Matrícula maintained by the Brazilian justice ministry and acquired by William Stafford Jerningham, secretary of the British Legation in Rio de Janeiro. Since the mid-1850s, British diplomats had pursued an aggressive posture towards authorities in the Brazilian justice and foreign ministries to implement fully the provisions of Decree 1.303 [December 28, 1853] providing final freedom for Free Africans consigned to private individuals for 14 years or longer.⁵ In May 1860, the British minister plenipotentiary William Dougal Christie informed Lord Russell of a list drawn up by Jerningham of 1,301 free blacks assigned to private individuals and four thousand more consigned to government agencies.⁶ This nominal return of 1,348, archived in the diplomatic records of the Legation at Rio and now held at Kew (FO 128), is surely the same list referenced by Christie. Supplemental diplomatic records indicate that Jerningham was colluding with Balbino José da França Ribeiro, the clerk of the Brazilian government's Curadoria

¹ Domingues da Silva, Daniel, David Eltis, Philip Misevich, and Olatunji Ojo, “The Diaspora of Africans Liberated from Slave Ships in the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of African History* 55, no. 3 (2014): 347–69.

² For global perspective and bibliographies, see Richard Anderson and Henry B. Lovejoy, eds., *Liberated Africans and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807-1896* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2020).

³ Two standard works on the abolition of Brazil trade are: Leslie Bethell, *The Abolition of the Brazilian Slave Trade: Britain, Brazil and the Slave Trade Question, 1807–1869* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) and Jaime Rodrigues, *O Infame Comércio: propostas e experiências no final do tráfico de africanos para o Brasil, 1800–1850* (Campinas: Editora da UNICAMP, 2000). Free Africans have been studied extensively by Beatriz Mamigonian; see, for example, *Africanos Livres: a abolição do Tráfico de Escravos para o Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2017).

⁴ The actual number of entries is 1,348, but six have been identified to be duplicates.

⁵ Various dispatches from Jerningham to British Foreign Office and Brazilian justice and foreign ministries. The National Archives of the UK (TNA): FO 84/993 and FO 84/994.

⁶ Christie to Russell, 17 May 1860. The National Archives of the UK (TNA): FO 84/1116 ff. 60-67.

dos Africanos Livres, whose handwriting is identical to the unsigned return of March 1860. Himself appearing in the registry as a concessionaire with responsibilities for three Free Africans, França Ribeiro appears to have been one of several Brazilians with access to the Free African logbooks selling information to midlevel British diplomats, who then supplied details to their superiors. While this general existence of secret informants is documented in the historical record and modern historiography, prior to this publication of this dataset, the specific contents of the Jerningham registry mentioned by Christie went unknown.⁷

Organized roughly in alphabetical order by each private concessionaire's given name and gender (i.e., for any given letter of the Roman alphabet female concessionaires appear as a group after the grouping of male concessionaires), the registry lists the complete name of a concessionaire, a residence, and the given name(s) and nation(s) of the African(s) under compulsory tutelage. The African names (exclusively Christian or Classical first names, without any reference to a birth name) had been assigned by clerks of the Brazilian justice ministry at the moment of original emancipation, up to twenty-five years prior. Similarly, the listed "nation" (*nação*) reflected the understanding of that clerk (sometimes working alongside multilingual African or Brazilian aides) of the liberated African's place of origin, ethnic polity, and/or the originating port of embarkation. While that *nação* may have been more Atlantic than African, it remained a persistent identifier of African birth. For Free Africans, specifically, the *nação* was joined by a case name and matriculation number to make a persistent identifier.⁸ The 1860 registry contains 276 unique *nações*; that number assuredly overcounts nations as some are surely spelling variants or alternative names to others in the dataset.

Additional transcribed information includes the number of years since the original concession and the annual fee (labeled as a "salary") paid by the concessionaire to the Brazilian government, to be held to offset the costs of the African's eventual "re-exportation." The original source contains a total of 843 unique private concessionaires; six entries list more than one name for the concession. Therefore the dataset contains 849 unique concessionaires associated with 1,348 unique Africans. Of the total number of named concessionaires identified to date in the historical record and appearing in the Free Africans of Brazil Database,⁹ this represents about 40%. Of the Free Africans in the same database, the 1860 list represents 15% of the total. However, if the comparison group is limited to Africans emancipated before mid-1850 (when the Brazilian Government ceased new apprenticeships to private individuals) the figure increases to 21%. Refining further to Africans emancipated by the Anglo-Brazilian Mixed Commission (1830-1844) and judges in Rio, the figure approaches 25% of all identified Free Africans appearing in the Free Africans of Brazil Database.

⁷ Bethell, *Abolition of the Brazilian Slave Trade*, 351-52; Joaquim de Paula Guedes Alcoforado, "História sobre o infame negócio de africanos da África oriental e ocidental, com todas as ocorrências desde 1831 a 1853," transcribed by Roquinaldo Ferreira, *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos* 28 (1995): 219-29.

⁸ This distinction between Atlantic and African "nations" is discussed in Flávio Gomes, "Atlantic Nations' and the Origins of Africans in Late-colonial Rio de Janeiro: New Evidence," *Colonial Latin American Review* 20, no. 2 (2011): 213-231, DOI: 10.1080/10609164.2011.587266.

⁹ Daryle Williams, *Free Africans of Brazil Database*, emancipados.enlaved.org.

With sex imputed to both concessionaire and Free African, based on the given names, the dataset permits multiple queries and visualizations on the sex ratios among concessionaires and Free Africans as well as between the two groups. When queried relative to “salary,” the dataset also permits analysis of correlations of gender and valuation. Whereas time of service does not directly document the age of the listed African nor the total time of residence in Brazil, a duration of work experience and acculturation (to 1860) can be inferred. Finally information on residence invites the mapping of Free African geographic dispersal, especially the Brazilian capital city.

Drawing from the Free Africans of Brazil Database, all concessionaires are listed alongside the project-assigned unique identifier. Among the Africans, a positive match in the Free Africans of Brazil Database has been made in approximately 90% of the entries, reflected in columns for unique identifiers as well as historical case name and matriculation number. These identifications provide information on life and labor experience as a Free African far richer than the registry's snapshot of a moment in time. With such a high positive identification rate for the Africans, the 1860 registry in this enhanced machine-readable form permits multiple queries into the longer life arcs of Free Africans and private households in Brazil in the period 1834 to 1865, when all surviving Free Africans were released from their apprenticeships.

As an enhanced transcription that draws from an original source with a primary unit of analysis as the private concessionaire and his or her obligations to tutelage and an annual fee, “Free Africans and Concessionaires, Rio de Janeiro, 1860” dataset is silent on Free Africans under the tutelage of public establishments, including the thousands liberated after the law of September 4, 1850, as well as those who had died, disappeared, or been emancipated prior to March 1860.

Dates of Data Collection

2009-2020

Dataset Languages

English (dataset), Portuguese (original source)

Geographic Coverage

Rio de Janeiro (city), Brazil; Rio de Janeiro (province), Brazil; Niterói, Brazil; Macaé, Brazil; Minas Gerais, Brazil; São Paulo (province), Brazil; Pará, Brazil; Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil; Santa Catarina, Brazil

Temporal Coverage

1834-1860

Document Types

Census or Register

Freedom or Emancipation Document

Ship Registry or Manifest

Sources

[Balbino José da França Ribeiro.] "Relação de todos os Africanos livres que até o presente data ainda se acham sob a responsabilidade dos particulares a quem foram confiados. Extrahidos em o mez de Março de 1860." The National Archives of the UK (TNA): FO 128/48 ff. 289-37.

[Reginaldo Moniz Freire.] "List of Private Concessionaires who pay wages to the Government for the hire of Free Africans," 10 March 1865. The National Archives of the UK (TNA): FO 84/1244 ff. 68-85.

Williams, Daryle, *Free Africans of Brazil Database*. 2021.

https://projects.kora.matrix.msu.edu/files/16-49-126857/Free_Africans_of_Brazil_Overview2020.pdf.

Methodology

The original 1,348 entries, organized in a loosely tabular manuscript, were transcribed by the dataset creator into a Google Sheet. Sex was imputed by given name. The spreadsheet went through a close reading, filtering, and sorting to identify and correct spelling errors, especially in names and nations. Reconciling against another nominal list of Free African concessionaires secretly acquired by British diplomatic agents in March 1865,¹⁰ as well as digitized volumes of the *Almanak Laemmert*, additional errors of spelling and gender in the original manuscript were corrected in the digital transcription. The given names of titled nobles were imputed from external sources, preserving the original registry's honorific titles in a new column that does not appear in the 1860 manuscript. Residential addresses were cleaned and clarified, especially for the numerous locations outside of Rio de Janeiro city.

Associated Case, Matriculation Number, and Unique Identifiers are imputed based upon positive identification in the Free Africans of Brazil Database. When positive identification was not possible, an unconfirmed unique identifier was assigned, for possible future update.

Date of Publication

May 2021

¹⁰ [Reginaldo Moniz Freire.] "List of Private Concessionaires who pay wages to the Government for the hire of Free Africans," 10 March 1865. The National Archives of the UK (TNA), FO 84/1244 ff. 68-85.

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Data Links

Dataset Repository: Harvard Dataverse <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/XMDKGB>

Linked Data Representation: *Enslaved.org* [Summary Visualization](#)

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