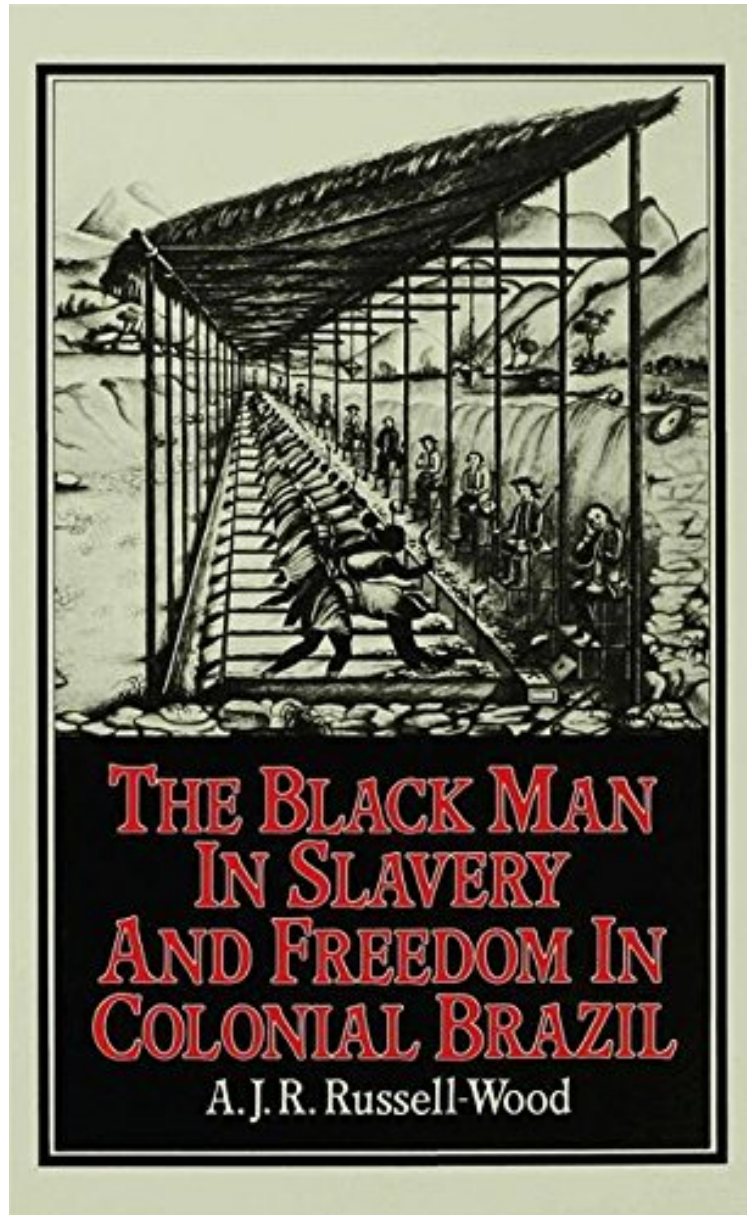


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## The Black Man in Slavery and Freedom in Colonial Brazil

*A.J.R. Russell-Wood*

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Brazil:

Slaves and freedmen of African origins in the English north American colonies and later United States have been objects of intense scholarly scrutiny, but the life-styles and contributions by their counterparts to the societies and economies of Portuguese America are generally ignored. Yet it was in Brazil that plantation slavery on a large scale was initiated in the Americas, and which absorbed greater numbers of persons of African descent than any other region of the continent. This volume seeks to redress the balance, combining largely unpublished archival sources with contemporary accounts and modern scholarship in order to present the slaves and freedmen of the colony to a wider group of readers. The author emphasises the gap between the letter of the law, official interpretations, and everyday reality. Differences of topography, the predominating commercial enterprise, chronology, and demography, were but some factors contributing to the degree of self-determination or freedom accorded to a person of African descent. There was a delicate balance between such external conditions and personal attributes in determining the roles of such men and women in a slavocratic society in which for the most part persons of European descent were in a numerical minority. This is not a history couched in terms of extremes: black or white; slave or master; European or African. Rather it is the history of a society unique to the Americas in which flexibility, permeability, ambiguities, and nuances resulted in a continually evolving and revolving play between freedom and bondage, between the individual and the greater community, between regulation and compromise, between colony and mother country. This is a history of the play of light and shade, each component changing in its relationship to the other, in its extent and in its intensity: in short the chiaroscuro which was Portuguese America - an appreciation of which is essential to an understanding of modern Brazil.