Early Colonization

On April 22, 1500, the thirteen-ship fleet under Pedro Ivares Cabral anchored off the mouth of the Rio Buranhm (sweet bark in Tup) on the Bahian coast. The chronicler of the discovery, Pro Vaz de Caminha, wrote that immediately they saw men walking on the beach, and by the time a longboat reached the shore twenty or so had assembled. Entirely naked and dark skinned, they laid down their bows and arrows as a sign of peace, while responding to offers of Portuguese hats by giving over a parrot-feathered headdress and a long string of white seed pearls. Thus did the cultural exchange begin that would evolve over the next five centuries into the distinctive Brazilian culture.

In the nine days that the Portuguese stayed at the anchorage they called Porto Seguro, the natives were fascinated by the Catholic Mass, the iron tools, and alcoholic drink. Their seeming receptivity and lack of religious symbols that the Portuguese could understand caused Caminha to predict that these people quickly would turn Christian.

The natives helped fill a ship with fine-grained timber, dyewood, and presumably some of the *buranhm* wood or bark that gave the river its name. Cabral sent the ship back to Lisbon with Caminha's oft-quoted letter to the king, the first report on Brazil to reach Europe. As the rest of the fleet set sail from what Cabral called the Island of Vera Cruz for the Cape of Good Hope, two male convicts were left on the shore. Rather than execute such *degredados* (outcasts; see Glossary), the Portuguese were instinctively creating an advance guard that would learn the local language and via intermarriage would give them in another generation the means to penetrate both the indigenous societies and the Brazilian land mass.

After so many years of remarkable contacts with newly discovered lands, the Portuguese were a bit blas about the news of this land of parrots, naked people, and brazilwood. At that time, peppers, spices, and silks were worth more than such exotica, and those products came from India and lands farther east.

With the exception of the New Christian (Jewish converts) investors, Brazil received little attention from Lisbon for three decades. The investors scouted and defended the coast and shared with the crown their monopoly contracts to harvest the brazilwood. The Portuguese monarchs followed the practice of holding legal title to lands and to certain commodities but issuing to others licenses to profit from these lands and commodities at their own expense, or with the backing of other investors. The custom was akin to the Castilian practice of *adelantado* (awarding of conquistador status--see Glossary) that developed during the reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula from the Moors, whereby the crown commissioned an agent to conquer a certain area at his own expense in return for rights to land, booty, and labor. The combination of royal licenses and private initiative that worked so well for Portugal along the African coast and in India was reshaped for Brazil.

But soon other Europeans were challenging Portugal's claims to exclusivity. Spanish
captains edged their ships down the coast and up the Ro de la Plata. From 1504 onward, French vessels from Brittany, Flanders, and Normandy were active in the dyewood trade. The reddish-purple dyes made from the wood brought good prices from tapestry and textile makers, and the French court ignored Portuguese protests. The Portuguese sent out naval expeditions to destroy French vessels and outposts, but by 1530 it was clear that mounting an effective coast guard along thousands of kilometers with countless coves, anchorages, and bays would be impossible; Portugal either had to take active possession or lose out to more interested rivals. Portugal took two steps, one immediate and the other long term. It dispatched a strong fleet under the command of Martim Afonso de Sousa, who was instructed to clear the coast of interlopers and to establish a permanent settlement. The result was Brazil's first European town, So Vicente, established in 1532.

The crown also may have wanted to follow up on the adventure in 1524 of Aleixo Garcia, a Portuguese shipwrecked on the southern coast who led about 2,000 Guaran on a raid against Inca border towns in what is now Bolivia. Sousa sent a government-sponsored expedition (entrada) back over Garcia's route, only to meet death at the hands of the Carij tribe of Indians. Such feeble results did little to attract investors, so the crown turned to the hereditary donatory captains system that had succeeded on the islands of Madeira and the Azores. Under this system, each donee was responsible for colonizing his own captaincy at his own expense. To help the lord proprietor attract settlers, he was given permission to issue land grants (sesmarias). This step was significant because it twisted a medieval Portuguese practice that placed conquered lands in the hands of peasants into one that gave some families holdings larger than Portugal's provinces. This practice in part led to the establishment of latifundia (see Glossary) in Brazil.

Nonetheless, the nobles were not interested in risking their lives or fortunes in a land of "naked savages," and most of those who received the grants were too ill-prepared, ill-financed, and ill-connected to succeed. The northern four captaincies never went beyond the planning stage, and the rest flourished or failed depending on the management skills and competence of the donatro in dealing with the native Brazilians. Sousa, who obtained the grant to So Vicente, prospered because he took advantage of Joao Ramalho, a castaway who had married the daughter of the chief of the Goiana Tupiniquin. Because of Ramalho, who lived until 1580, the Portuguese were able to obtain Indian labor, foodstuffs, and women. With his help, it was possible to establish a town at the village of Piratininga, which in time would grow into the metropolis of So Paulo. He was the key player in the Portuguese alliance with the Tupiniquin, who protected the colony from other Indians and who formed the basis for the future military power of the bandeirantes. The lack of European women facilitated assimilation and acculturation with the Indians. With the steady miscegenation, a substantial population of Tup-speaking mestizos (mestios or mamelucos—see Glossary) came into being.

Also important for So Vicente's success was Sousa's ability to attract investors for sugar mills, including an investor from Antwerp, which became the center of the European sugar market. Although Pernambuco in later years surpassed So Vicente in sugar production, its early success fixed Portuguese control on what centuries later would be the agricultural
and industrial core of Brazil.

Similarly, the affluence of Pernambuco Province centering on Olinda resulted from successful interaction with the natives, the ability to draw investment capital (often from Italian merchants), and capable settlers. The donatario, Duarte Coelho Pereira, had married into the well-connected Albuquerque family, which helped him attract colonists and financial support to set up sugar mills. But he was especially fortunate because his brother-in-law, Jernimo de Albuquerque, had married the daughter of chief Arcoverde (Green Bow) of the Tobajara, thereby sealing an alliance that gave the Portuguese supplies of food and workers. The alliance also gave Coelho Pereira the military superiority to eventually defeat the French and their Indian allies. As the brazilwood stands were cut down, they were replaced with sugarcane plantations, which by 1585 were served by more than sixty mills or engenhos. The captaincy was so successful that there was reputedly more luxury in Pernambuco than in Lisbon. This strong beginning would make it the northern focal point of Portuguese America.

Porto Seguro failed to prosper as a captaincy. The constant fighting with the local Aimor people may have been related to the presence of many married Portuguese couples and, consequently, little intermarriage with the natives. Likewise, Bahia failed at this stage because its donatario lacked managerial skills. Many of the Portuguese there were veterans of India, where abuse of the natives was routine. The Tupinamb finally tired of the mistreatment, and many of the Portuguese at Bahia, including the donatario, were captured and ceremonially killed and eaten. Ilhús, Espírito Santo, São Tom, Santo Amaro, and Santa Anna also failed because of poor management and hostile relations with the natives. The coast was now exposed to French incursions.

Such an outcome was not what the crown had in mind, and it decided wisely to listen to warnings. Rather than replace inept donatrios with others, the king established direct royal control, except over Pernambuco and São Vicente. The crown may have acted at this juncture for several reasons: the Spanish discovery of the famed silver mountain at Potos (1545), the decline of the Asian spice trade, and the crown's practice of reclaiming royal control after some years of leasing its rights. The enhancement of royal power was part of the general Iberian pattern of establishing royal control over the sprawling colonial ventures. In a larger sense, renewed royal control appears to have been linked to a new conservatism in Catholic Europe. The Council of Trent (1545-63) defined church dogma and practice, religious tolerance faded, and the Inquisition was emplaced in Portugal in 1547.

The king named Tom de Sousa the first governor general of Brazil (1549-53). He ordered Sousa to create a capital city, Salvador, on the Bahia de Todos os Santos (Bay of All Saints) and to spread the royal mantle over the captaincies, defending the weaker ones and reestablishing the failed ones. Because Indian attacks were blamed for the failures, Sousa's orders amounted to a declaration of war on the indigenous peoples of Brazil. If they could be defeated, the French would have no allies and so would be less of a threat. In addition, Sousa was to increase royal revenues. The twin objectives of control and revenue were
characteristic of royal policy for the rest of the colonial era.

Bahia, as the city and province would be known, was selected for its central location and its fine bay, and because the crown had purchased it from the heirs of the donatario. Sousa built fortifications, a town, and sugar mills. His knottiest task was forming a policy on the Indians, whose status remained unclear. Although he had treasury and coast guard officials with him, their roles were oriented toward Portuguese colonists and European interlopers.

As early as 1511, the crown had placed the Indians under its "protection," and it ordered Sousa to treat them well, as long as they were peaceful, so that they could be converted. Conversion was essential because Portugal's legal claims to Brazil were based on papal bulls requiring Christianization of the Indians. However, those who resisted conversion were likened to Muslims and could be enslaved. In fact, as historian Sergio Buarque de Holanda showed, by identifying Brazil as a destination of the wandering Apostle St. Thomas the Portuguese settlers were able to argue that all natives had their chance to convert and had rejected it, so they could be conquered and taken captive legitimately. Thus, a distinction was made between peaceful, pliable natives who as wards deserved crown protection and those resisters who wanted to keep their independence and on whom "just war" could be made and slavery imposed.

The dual mission of the governors was contradictory; how could they stimulate the economy using slave labor while converting the natives? To carry out the pacification and conversion of the natives, the crown chose the new Jesuit order of the Society of Jesus, which was international in membership and military in structure and which had the task of defending and spreading the Catholic Counter-Reformation. The Jesuits had a major impact on Brazil, despite their small numbers--128 by 1598. The Indians responded to the Jesuits with initial acceptance, then regression, evasion, and enmity. The objective of the Jesuits was to Europeanize the Indians by resettling them in Indian villages (aldeias). In a recurring pattern, the first aldeia near Bahia (1552) soon disintegrated as the Indians who survived the European-born diseases faded into the interior beyond the Jesuits' reach.

Europeanization was overcome by a sort of Brazilianization, as the Jesuits blended Indian songs, dances, and language into the liturgy and as the colonists adopted native foods, women, language, and customs. However, the first bishop of Brazil (1551), Dom Pro Fernandes Sardinha, objected to the Jesuit accommodation with indigenous culture. He threw the weight of his authority behind subjugation and enslavement. At issue was the nature of the future of Brazilian society. The bishop, who had served in Goa and ironically had taught Ignatius Loyola, the Jesuit founder, insisted that Europeanization must precede baptism. He believed Brazil, like India, should have a dual society made up of heathen natives ruled by a small number of Portuguese.

The conflict between the Jesuits and the bishop had far-reaching significance for Brazil's future. To get away from his direct grasp, the Jesuits shifted their attention to the south, where they formed, in 1554, the aldeia of So Paulo de Piratininga on the plateau at the headwaters of the Rio Tiet high above So Vicente. Father Jos de Anchieta's mission village later became known as the city of So Paulo. The crown seemingly favored the Jesuit
approach because it recalled Bishop Sardinha. En route back, Sardinha was shipwrecked and then killed and reportedly eaten by Caet people.

In 1557 the crown sent out a new bishop and a new governor to consolidate royal control and to bring organization to the far-flung settlements on the verge of collapse. The new crown representatives supported Jesuit methods and returned the Jesuits to Bahia. By protecting the Indians who lived in aldeias from enslavement, the crown representatives made the Jesuit towns more attractive. The pool of slaves available to the colonists dwindled, causing such protests that Mem de S (governor, 1558-72) approved a "just war" against the Caet to punish them for killing Brazil's first bishop. However, the "just war" soon got out of hand as the closer and undefended aldeias were raided for slaves. The conflict damaged native trust in the missions, and the epidemics of influenza, smallpox, and measles in 1562 and 1563 decimated the Indian population and increased colonist competition for laborers. The famine that followed the waves of disease prompted starving Indians to sell themselves or their relatives in order to survive.

This situation led to a policy under which the Indians were considered free but could be enslaved in a sanctioned "just war," or for cannibalism, or if rescued from being eaten or enslaved by other natives. Government-sponsored expeditions (entradas) into the interior, sometimes ironically called rescues (resgates), became slave hunts under the guise of "just war." The Paulista expeditions (bandeiras), one of the major themes of Brazilian history in the 1600s and 1700s, would develop out of this practice. The eventual exploitation of the interior and the development of gold and gem mining in Minas Gerais, Gois, and Mato Grosso have roots in the voracious appetite of coastal plantations for slave labor.

As Indian resistance, social disintegration, and flight into the interior increased in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese began to import more African slaves. In 1570 there were 2,000 to 3,000 such slaves in Brazil; by 1587 there were 14,000. Considering that the European population in 1570 was 20,760 and in 1585 was 29,400, the growth of African slaves from 14 percent of the number of whites to 47 percent is striking. Much of the commentary on native slavery holds that the Indians were unfit physically to be slaves, when actually it was their strong resistance to slavery and the colonial competition for their labor that led to the African slave trade. Also, the focus of many historians on Bahia and Pernambuco has left readers with the impression that Indian slavery gave way to African slavery throughout Brazil by 1600. This was not the case. Indians continued to be enslaved in Par, which caused the depopulation of much of Amaznia by the mid-eighteenth century.