

Licentious Liberty" in a Brazilian Gold-Mining Region: Slavery, Gender, and Social Control in Eighteenth-Century Sabara, Minas Gerais

Kathleen J. Higgins

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To studies of Brazilian slavery this book adds a new dimension by showing how it developed in a region where mining was the chief commercial activity and how important a role gender played in this frontier setting in creating opportunities for slaves to achieve some measure of autonomy, compared with slaves who worked in sugar-cane and coffee-growing areas. The interactions among masters, slaves, and royal officials were profoundly shaped by the accessibility and widespread dispersal of gold deposits, the emergence of small urban centers in which commercial activities thrived, the sexual division of labor among slaves working in mining and commerce, and the changing sex ratio within the population of free white colonists settling in the region. Focusing attention on the changing status, autonomy, and influence of nonwhite women, the author argues, is one of the most effective ways of understanding the economic, demographic, and cultural evolution of the slave society as a whole.



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