
Ricardo, Manoel Joaquim

(?-1865), an African-Bahian entrepreneur,

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<https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.013.74913>

Published in print: 01 June 2016

Published online: 31 May 2017

A version of this article originally appeared in *The Dictionary of Caribbean and Afro-Latin American Biography*.

belonging to a small group of freed Africans who, in addition to manumission, were also able to achieve a strong socioeconomic prominence in nineteenth-century Brazilian slavery society.

Ricardo was of Hausa origin and became a captive probably during the Fulani jihad (1804–1810). In West Africa, a main consequence of this war was the defeat of Hausa kingdoms and rise of the Sokoto Caliphate. But the conflict would also have repercussions for the other side of the Atlantic, such as the dramatic increase in the transport of defeated Hausas to Bahia as slaves. The arrival of large numbers of Hausas, many of whom were seasoned in war, is also related to a series of early-nineteenth-century slave revolts and conspiracies in the province of Bahia.

Ricardo remained a captive for more than three decades, until his master manumitted all of his sixteen slaves in his will. As with most transplanted Africans, Ricardo's Catholic names were inherited from his master, a prosperous slave trader and shipowner. But unlike most captives, Ricardo managed to engage in the activities of a merchant while still a slave. Rent and import contracts in his name indicate that he was a well-established merchant in Salvador, capital of the province of Bahia, years before being freed. Apart from his businesses in Brazil, Ricardo would eventually invest in slave trading and other profitable activities on the African continent.

The prosperity Ricardo enjoyed is attested by the large house he occupied until his death, which included slave quarters. Many of Ricardo's slaves were listed as wage-earners (*escravos de ganho*), urban slaves who generated good incomes for their masters by selling diverse goods, from food to fabrics, throughout the streets of Salvador. In turn, wage-earning slaves shared a small part of the master's profits. As a result, in the long run, many were able to save enough money to purchase their own freedom.

Ricardo's relatively comfortable lifestyle in Bahia was disrupted by the 1835 slave and Muslim-led uprising known as the Malê Revolt. The provincial government promptly issued a law targeting African residents, leading to mass imprisonment, confiscation of property, and deportation to Africa. Although passed under the pretext of containing the threat of future revolts, the law also clearly responded to the lobbying of the local elite resentful of the socioeconomic rise of African freedmen. Not directly charged, Ricardo nevertheless had to employ ingenious maneuvers to avoid penalties of the new law. These included the purchase of property in the name of his Brazilian-born children and redirecting investments to the purchase of slaves, one of the few remaining legal economic activities for freed Africans.

Historians have catalogued several cases of freed Africans who would prosper by engaging in slave owning and trading activities. But, as João José Reis (2013) points out, what makes Ricardo's case more interesting is that he belonged to a lesser-known group of people who acquired slaves while they were still themselves enslaved. Religion is another significant topic in Ricardo's life. Likely a Muslim by origin, he was a self-declared Catholic, but also maintained close connections to Candomblé, an Afro-Brazilian syncretic religion centered on the cult of the Yorubá pantheon of deities known as Orishas. Ricardo's wife was the godmother to a *Ialorixá* (priestess) of the prestigious *terreiro* (temple) Casa Branca.

Ricardo was also friends with the freed African and Candomblé priest Domingos Sodré, who was imprisoned in 1862, accused of witchcraft. Although historiography has not found empirical proof of Ricardo's direct involvement with Candomblé, oral tradition suggests that he was the founding *balalorixá* (priest) of the highly regarded Oxumaré temple in Salvador. He is also linked to the founding of the Alaketu temple. It is plausible that Ricardo tried to keep his Afro-Brazilian religiosity out of the spotlight. Devotees of Candomblé usually had to perform prayers in secret in order to avoid police repression. This was the case even more so in the anti-African atmosphere after the 1835 revolt. Regardless of his true faith and ethnic origin, upon his death in 1865, Ricardo was given a full Catholic burial equivalent to those received by Euro-descendant members of the Bahian elite.

When Ricardo died, his fortune included the ownership of lands, three houses, and twenty-seven slaves. As such, he occupied a rare position among the narrow economic elite of Bahia, consisting mostly of Euro-descendants born in freedom.

Historiography regards Ricardo as one of the few African freedmen who managed to overcome socioeconomic obstacles inside Brazilian slavery society. Oral tradition also acknowledges him as a religious and political pioneer whose legacy still lives on. For, while publicly adhering to Catholicism, he provided essential material support and social prestige to the creation and survival of Candomblé in Brazil.

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