

ANDRÉ JOÃO ANTONIL (1649–1716)
CULTURE AND OPULENCE OF BRAZIL (1711)

They say that the first discoverer was a mulatto who had been at the mines of Paranaguá and Curitiba. He had gone to the *sertão* [hinterland] with some Paulistas to fetch Indians, and on reaching Mount Tripuí, he went down to the stream, today known as Ouro Prêto [Black Gold], with a wooden bowl to get water. After scraping it along the riverbank, he saw that it contained some nuggets . . .

The insatiable thirst for gold impelled so many to leave their lands and take to such arduous roads as those leading to the mines that it would be difficult to calculate the number of persons who are now there.

Every year, great numbers of Portuguese and foreigners arrive with the fleets to go to the mines. From the cities, towns, coastal regions, and *sertões* of Brazil go whites, mulattoes, and blacks, and many Indians whom the Paulistas make use of. There is a mixture of people of every condition: men and women, young and old; poor and rich; nobles and plebeians; laymen, clerics, and religious of various orders . . .

With regard to temporal power, there have so far been no restraints or even a moderately well-ordered government. Only a few laws are kept, pertaining to the claims and the allotment of the washings. Beyond this, there are no ministers or justices who handle or might have authority to handle punishment of crimes, which are not rare, particularly homicide and theft.

Since the land that gives gold is completely barren of everything needed to sustain human life, as are most of the routes leading to the mines, one cannot imagine what the miners suffered at the beginning for lack of provisions. More than a few were found dead clutching an ear of corn as their only sustenance. However, as soon as the abundance of the gold extracted became apparent, and the largess with which everything sent there was paid for, lodging places were built and soon merchants began to send to the mines the best that arrived by ship from Portugal and other parts: not only provisions but also luxuries and elaborate clothes, as well as a thousand trinkets from France which also found their way there. In this regard, all parts of Brazil began to send everything the soil produces, with profits not merely large but excessive.

The fame of mines so abundant in Brazil attracted men of every rank and from all places, some with means and others vagabonds. Those of means, who came by much of their wealth through prospecting, behave as a result with hauteur and arrogance; they always travel accompanied by bands of musketeers who need little pretext to commit any violence and to take great and thunderous revenge without any fear of the law. Gold induced these men to gamble unrestrainedly and to spend enormous sums of frivolities without blinking – to buy, for example, a Negro trumpeter for a thousand cruzados, or a mulatto woman of easy virtue for double that price to compound with her continual and scandalous sins.

Taken from André João Antonil, “The Discovery of Gold,” in *Early Brazil: A Documentary Collection to 1700*, edited by Stuart B. Schwartz and translated by Clive Willis and Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 298–303.