

## The majority of blacks in schools of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Minas Gerais

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### Abstract

The period between 1820 and 1850 marks the beginning of the construction and structuring of a public education policy that aimed at educating the people of the province of Minas Gerais. The present article analyzes the relationship between this process and the most expressive segment within the demographic structure of the province at that time, namely, the population of free blacks. In order to conduct this analysis, we have sought reference in a census documentation that attempted to cover the whole population of Minas Gerais districts, making a record of children attending school. Based on these numbers, we built a racial profile of schools, comparing it with information gathered from other documents (teachers' lists, travelers' accounts, memoirs), which pointed to a majority of blacks in elementary schools. The interpretation we give to the presence of blacks in schools of Minas Gerais indicates that this institution was one of the elements utilized by that group to establish their position inside the social sphere. In this respect, the text highlights the fact that schooling acquired specific meanings among the black population; more specifically, it represented their insertion into the literate culture, and a way of signaling their distancing from the world of slavery, and was also a demonstration of their mastery of the codes of conduct of free people.

**Keywords:** History of education – Blacks – Minas Gerais – 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the profile of the population was an element that set Minas Gerais apart from other Brazilian regions, and this was related to the way in which slavery was established there. Such singularity is highlighted by historiography, which has been calling increased attention to the majority of blacks in the population of Minas Gerais:

During the mining boom of the eighteenth century, the importation of African Slaves and the subsequent development of a large-scale free black and mulatto population defined the racial characteristics of the *capitania*. With the downturn in mining after 1750, slave imports slowed and then ceased by the 1780s. Slaves and free blacks and mulattoes together were always the majority of the population during the eighteenth century, but with the decline in

the slave population after 1786 free peoples of color became the largest population sector. (Bergad, 1999, p. 217)

Slavery played a central role in the composition of the profile of Minas Gerais population and, even in the periods when there was a slowing in the importation of African slaves, the natural growth of the black population conferred a singular profile to the demographic structure of Minas Gerais.

Historical research has evidenced these features and challenged the traditionally construed view of the black population, which is generally depicted as a group that found itself under a situation of relative social isolation, linked only to slavery. These descriptions began to be questioned and studies began to demonstrate that blacks were in touch with the most aspects of social life and, as far as possible, disputing the various spaces.

With respect to the population of Minas Gerais, one of the research sources that have helped the most in the studies is the voyagers' accounts. The work with this material reviews that one of the aspects that were most noticeable to foreigners traveling through Minas Gerais was the racial composition of its population.

In *A província brasileira de Minas Gerais* (The Brazilian Province of Minas Gerais), a travel account published by Halfeld and Tschudi (1998), the population of Minas Gerais is described in the following manner:

[...] a large part of the population of this province is composed of free blacks, of people mixed of blacks and whites, and of whites and blacks with Indians, involving all kinds of mixing among these three races. Pure whites represent a relatively small fraction of the total population. (p. 106)

These Europeans recorded the numerical superiority of blacks and a high number of these individuals as free people. This assessment was corroborated by other foreigners that traveled around Minas Gerais since, according to Ilka Boaventura Leite (1996), this surprise with the features of the population is a constant in travel accounts:

During the whole 19<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of travelers arriving in Brazil were surprised by the large number of blacks in comparison to the number of whites. Despite being aware of some estimates of population supplied by the first travelers or through information circulated in their countries of origin, they

were struck by the preponderance of blacks on the streets, shops, houses, and anywhere else they went. They noticed that apart from slaves there were also free blacks and a significant group of mulattoes and of people mixed of mulattoes with whites and Indians. (p. 10)

In Brazil, and particularly in the province of Minas Gerais, travelers were quickly thrown into a reality that presented blacks as a wide majority of the population, and those individuals were to be found in the most varied social places. As pointed out by the German Hermann Burmeister (1980), who was in Minas Gerais at the end of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

[...] as we move towards the interior of the country, however, the preponderance of the black and mixed population increases, and at a removed village we can already see a deputy sheriff or judge, a head master or a priest as a mulatto or black. (p. 271)

Blacks and mulattoes were found in the most varied roles, including the school as teachers. The look of the traveler is of surprise before such social arrangement, but is a testimony to the blacks' presence and ability to circulate around Minas Gerais society. Within this situation we have to put into question the traditionally accepted view of the school, which is usually treated as a space occupied exclusively by white pupils. We have to consider to what extent the features of the population were reflected on schools, making them spaces as diverse as the society of that time.

The numerical superiority of the blacks is an index that points to the need to take into account the aspects related to population in the approaches to understand the process of formation of education in Minas Gerais. However it is also necessary to consider characteristics related to the development of education in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Historiography has been showing that Minas Gerais was one of the Brazilian regions that stood out in relation to the development of initiatives in the educational field. Proof of that was the sanctioning of Act number 13 which in 1835 established the pioneering status of elementary instruction as free and mandatory. The Empire Constitution had established only that instruction was to be free, but the Province of Minas Gerais went beyond that and established it not just as free but also as mandatory, to the point of determining penalties for those who disregarded this obligation.

When we consider the reality of education in Minas Gerais it becomes clear that such law was something that remained within the sphere of intentions, since the government did not have at its disposal the means necessary to fulfill it. Even considering that free and mandatory education were symbolic elements, we have to recognize the role played by education in the imagination of those responsible for the establishment of legislation, in other words, the idea that education was an important instrument to civilize the people (Faria Filho; Gonçalves, 2004).

It is therefore necessary to recognize that the establishment of free and mandatory education was an important initiative towards the development of education. However, apart from this legal initiative there are others that also indicate the importance of education to the process of organization of society in Minas Gerais. Among them there was the creation of the Normal school for the education of teachers, the attempts to improve on the pedagogical methods in order to reach a larger number of students, the expansion of schools for women, and the growing investment in spreading schools throughout the various regions. It is therefore a period in which there was increase in legal and material support with the purpose of expanding and spreading elementary education among the population of Minas Gerais.

Faced with this situation one can ask what was the population that should be educated? Or rather, what was the level of participation of the black population in this movement of spreading education throughout Minas Gerais? Or still, what was the level of approximation between the profile of the population and the public found in the schools of Minas Gerais?

To try and answer these questions we shall analyze a set of documents related to public instruction, with emphasis on lists in which teachers registered their students, classifying them on racial bases. We shall also use a group of name lists of inhabitants which since the 1830s recorded the population of some of the districts, noting which children were enrolled at school. Using teachers' lists and name lists we shall try to produce a race profile of schools of Minas Gerais during the first decades of the provincial government, and we shall compare this information with other sources that will also allow us to assess the level of participation of blacks in educational spaces. Within these sources special place is occupied by the reports of travelers who were in Minas Gerais during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## **The race profile of schools based on teachers' lists**

During the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the provincial government of Minas Gerais demonstrated concern with a systematic action in the field of education, and developed a series of initiatives that shaped themselves into a policy for public instruction. One of these initiatives was the increased control of public and private classes with a view to put in place devices that made it possible to learn the educational reality of the province and also to understand the needs for the expansion of the coverage of the public instruction service.

One of the consequences of this process was the requirement that the teachers giving public or private classes should send to the government their student lists. These should contain the children attending schools and some of them also brought the race condition of the students. The number of lists that included race information is not particularly significant, but it represents an important starting point to assess the level of relationship of blacks with schools in Minas Gerais.

The lists containing records of students' race refer to fourteen public and private classes from various locations in the province. Nine of them were schools of elementary instruction, and five of them were Latin and Rational Philosophy classes. They came from the following districts: seven from Vila de Paracatu do Príncipe, one from Arraial de Desemboque, one from Arraial de Nossa Senhora da Boa Morte, and Five from Colégio de Bom Jesus de Matosinho in Congonhas do Campo.

The way in which the record of race information appears in these lists varies, but takes place on the basis of some specific categories. In general, three groups of individuals are recorded – two of them common to all lists: the whites and the browns. Besides these, there is another group called by different names, and appearing in some lists as creole, and in others as blacks, Negroes or mixed race.

The teachers records reveal certain hierarchy in the organization of the lists, with the whites usually represented first, then browns, and then those called blacks, creole and similar terms.

The regularity of this hierarchy in the group of lists suggests that race was a component of pedagogical practice, and that teachers had different expectations regarding black students and white students. For the sake of analysis, we have grouped together the data relating to blacks, browns, and *cabras* to compose the

race group represented by the Negroes, but we have not failed to record this terminological diversity, trying to capture the meaning of each of these terms used to qualify the black population.

We can find in the lists quite subtle elements to corroborate these suspicions. In the list of Thomas Francisco Pires, a teacher who had a school of first letters in Vila de Paracatu in 1823 there were 31 pupils, and he recorded them by name, surname, race, and level of school development. These are the information contained in the list by this teacher, and only in three cases we find an assessment in which he makes reference to the qualities of his pupils. Two white pupils were qualified on the basis of their ability in letters, as in the case of Joaquim de Mello Franco, “white, already writes in fine letters and reads very well round letters, after one and a half years of schooling, and is very agile for letters and already counts”. Such positive assessment is repeated for another white pupil, and there was a third pupil, a brown one, who was assessed differently by the teacher. He is regarded as stupid, with abilities solely for agricultural activities (tillage): “Jose Ferreira Lima, brown with one and a half years of schooling, cannot read for being very stupid and for not having any skills except for tillage”.

It may be that the pupil José Ferreira Lima had to develop his agricultural activities in parallel to his studying, and that influenced his teacher’s judgment to the point of seeing him as a “stupid” individual, inapt for the development of school activities. At any rate, the way in which the teacher builds up his assessment is strange, taking in fact the form of a sentence that points to a decision about the potential of the student.

This kind of assessment appears again in the records by a teacher named Thomé José dos Santos Batalha, also from Vila de Paracatu, dated 1823. Only the brown and creole pupils were disqualified, like Euzebio de Mattos Lima, “a creole without any skills, after four and a half years of schooling cannot read at all, and writes very badly”, or still Antonio Soares Roiz, “brown, with no skills, since he understands nothing despite being at school for more than a year”. In the list by this teacher white pupils do not receive this kind of assessment, and four of them were praised for “learning to read and write fluently”. No black pupil received this kind of distinction; on the contrary, they were in most cases recorded as having “no skill” (as in the case above) or “reading and writing badly” or “poorly”.

The number of lists we used does not allow a conclusive analysis with respect to the manifestation of racial prejudice in the pedagogical practices of schools in Minas Gerais in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, the frequency with which negative and positive assessments are distributed among the various race groups is an important element in the evaluation of school practices during this period. Additionally, we also have to consider that racial prejudice was very much present in the society of Minas Gerais, being unlikely that it should be absent from school spaces where, as the lists indicate, there was a gathering of the various groups that comprised the population of Minas Gerais.

This approximation between the profile of the population and that of the schools can be seen in Table 1, in which we attempted to highlight the race profile of each one of the classes of the teachers of elementary instruction who recorded the pupils' color. The lists use three forms of classification of race groups and, in general, blacks are represented by two terms: brown, which appears in all lists, and another term which is variable (creole, mixed race, black, Negro). For the purpose of presenting the data we have kept the term brown and used creole as a way to collect all the other terms directed to black people.

**Table 1:** Race profile of pupils in elementary instruction

Teacher's name	Place	Pupils			Total
		Whites	Browns	Creoles	
Joaquim Antonio de Aguiar (private teacher)	N. S. da Boa Morte	02	04	-	06
Manoel Assunção Ferreira	Vila de Paracatu	03	03	-	06
Manoel Pereira de C. Gomes	Vila de Paracatu	08	08	03	19
Thomas Francisco Pires	Vila de Paracatu	13	14	04	31
Tomé Ferreira Brito (private teacher)	Vila de Paracatu	03	05	01	09
Thomé José dos S. Batalha (private teacher)	Vila de Paracatu	22	31	08	61
Domingos da Costa Braga	Vila de Paracatu	07	01	01	09
Antonio Alvim de Mello (private teacher)	Distrito de Redondo	43	02	01	46
Antonio Vieira A. da Cunha	Vila de Desemboque	17	11	01	29

Source: Minas Gerais Public Archives (*Arquivo Público Mineiro*) - IP 3/2, box 01.

From the nine lists of classes of elementary education, five were private and four were public. They come from different places, five of them being from Vila de Paracatu. In five classes the pupils recorded as black (browns and creoles) appear in numbers superior to whites, and in one of them they are in the same proportion; in only three of them there is a majority of whites.

The numerical superiority of black pupils deserves the utmost attention, because although this group of lists is not representative of the whole province it is an important record of the behavior of blacks towards the educational process. At the same time, we should pay attention to the fact that the representation of blacks and whites is not strongly uneven in the classes that register a small number of pupils. In other words, in classes with less than ten pupils, as the one in Nossa Senhora de Boa Morte, or in Paracatu (in the class of the teacher Domingos da Costa Braga), or still in the class of the teacher Tomé Ferreira Brito, the superiority of one of the groups is not marked, and the number of black and white pupils is similar. The same can be seen in the classes for which blacks are the majority, since despite their numerical superiority there is not a large difference with respect to whites.

The class of teacher Antonio Alvim de Mello is the only one in which we find a significant disproportion towards one of the groups, since from a total of 46 pupils only three were black. It is the only list in which we could say that black pupils were underrepresented and in accordance with the view traditionally given by historiography that tends to record the presence of blacks in school as something sporadic or casual (Fonseca, 2007).

Nevertheless, in order to understand the underrepresentation of blacks in this list we have to consider that this was one of the most important schools of the province: the school at Bom Jesus de Matosinho, which had a highly elitist profile, congregating pupils from the most diverse regions of the country either as a boarding school or as a day school, and having a profile similar to that of the famous School of Caraça, which was run by priests of the same congregation. From the 46 pupils appearing in the teachers list in this school, 21 came from Minas Gerais, and 25 from other provinces, particularly São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

The group of the nine lists by teachers of first letters working in Minas Gerais during the 1820s and early 1830s reveals that blacks comprised the majority of pupils in these classes, and even when they were not a majority, they were present in numbers close to those of white pupils.

This reality is modified when we look at the lists with pupils attending the levels of schooling above elementary education. Among the lists that recorded pupils' race, five referred to higher levels of schooling, and in these we find a race profile that is different from the one described for schools of first letters. The five lists present data relative to two schools: one of a Latin teacher from the town of Paracatu in 1823,



and four from the school at Bom Jesus de Matosinho in 1831, from which three were Latin classes and one was a class of Rational Philosophy.

The Latin teacher of the town of Paracatu was identified only by his first name, João. His was a public school with a total of 18 pupils: five browns and thirteen whites. The lists from the school at Bom Jesus de Matosinho represent classes given by four teachers, and they refer to First Year Latin Grammar, with 43 pupils; Second Year Latin Grammar, with 19 pupils; Third Year Latin Grammar with 14 pupils, and Rational Philosophy with 18 pupils. Blacks are underrepresented in these classes, and there is a large disproportion between them and pupils recorded as white: there are 94 pupils overall with only one being recorded as brown.

Therefore, the underrepresentation of blacks in the lists related to secondary schooling is quite high, indicating that there was a degree of opposition between the pupils profile in these classes and the one comprising the whole of schools of elementary education.

The data referring to secondary schools must be seen as pointing to the existence of a difference between the profile of these schools and that of schools of first letters. In other words, taking into account the data from the teachers' lists and the opposition between classes of first letters and of secondary schooling we can see a trend toward the inversion of the race profile of schools, which are marked by a majority of blacks at the elementary level, and that changes in higher levels of teaching to a predominance of whites.

### **The race profile of schools in Minas Gerais based on the name lists of inhabitants**

The name lists of inhabitants constitute a documentation that refers to the first attempts to count the population of Minas Gerais. It is a set of list that record the population of several places in Minas Gerais based on household sampling. Based on households, the name lists recorded the *name* of each of the members of the household, the *quality* (white, black, brown, creole, African, Indian), the *condition* of the individual (free or slave); the *age*, *marital status* and *occupation*, that is, the activity conducted by each of the persons listed. To make the information contained in this documentation more clear we transcribe in Table 2 the record of one household from the district of Cachoeira do Campo from 1831.

**Table 2:** Record of household in Cachoeira do Campo (1831).

Inhabitants	Quality	Situation	Age	Marital Status	Occupation
Thereza de Jesus	Brown	Free	42	Widow	Cotton spinning and sewing
Felisberta Antonia Pereira	Brown	Free	16	Single	Cotton spinning and sewing
Maria Antonia Pereira	Brown	Free	14	Single	Cotton spinning
Luiz Antônio Pereira	Brown	Free	7	.....	At first letters school
Narcizo Antônio Pereira	Brown	Free	5	.....	....
Emericiana	Creole	Slave	28	Single	Cotton spinning and cooking
Gabriela	Creole	Slave		...	...

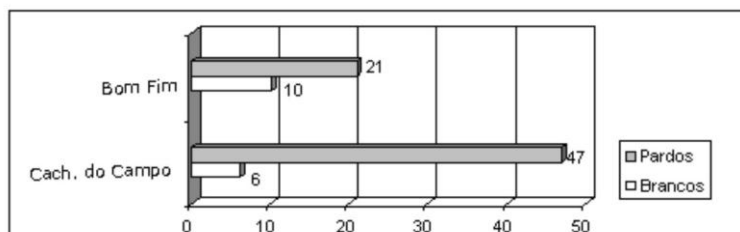
As it can be seen from the household record transcribed above, in the field referring to occupation some of the name lists recorded individuals in the process of schooling. Therefore, the selection of these lists makes it possible to draw a race profile of schools in a way similar to the one used for the records produced by teachers, for when we cross the information contained in the *occupation* field with that referring to *quality*, it is possible to gather the race group of each individual marked as a pupil.

To create such race profile we have selected the lists that recorded at least 24 children at school, because according to the legislation at the time that was the minimum number established by the government to justify the opening of a public class in a district in Minas Gerais. This criterion was applied to the name list produced in the early part of the 1830s, implying the selection of lists from eleven districts. Ten of these districts were located in the central region of the province, and only one of them in the southern region (São Gonçalo). In order to guarantee a higher degree of control over the data we eliminated the district from the South, and used only the ten districts from the central part of the province, which belonged to the Counties of Ouro Preto and Rio das Velhas. They are: São Bartolomeu, Cachoeira Campo, Catas Altas, Passagem de Mariana, Itaverava, Redondo, Bom Fim (County of Ouro Preto), Matosinhos, Santa Luzia, Caeté (County of Rio das Velhas).

In some of the name lists the race of children recorded as enrolled at school was noted using only two terms: whites and browns. It is the case of districts such of Cachoeira do Campo and Bom Fim, where the black population was subdivided into four different classifications (blacks, browns, creoles and *cabras*), but for the school we only have the term browns. As pointed out by several researches (among them Mattos, 1998; Lima, 2003), brown is a form of designation of the black population,

and its meaning goes way beyond miscegenation, since it is possible to find individuals that were classified in some documents as brown and in others as black or creole. Indeed, this is the case of some of the pupils appearing in teachers' lists and in the name lists of inhabitants that we used.

**Gráfico 1:** Número de alunos nas listas nominativas de Bom Fim e Cachoeira do Campo – por raça/cor.

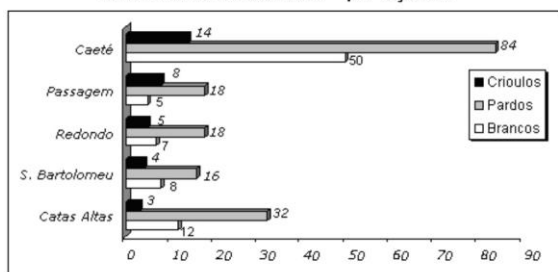


**Fonte:** Listas nominativas de habitantes.

In the districts that recorded only whites and browns attending schools of elementary education, we have an absolute superiority of the so-called browns, which comprised 87.2% of pupils from Cachoeira do Campo and 67.7% of pupils from Bom Fim.

In the majority of districts included in our sample the race classification of those at school was based on the use of a larger number of race categories. In five districts we find the more traditional categories used for the population at that time, that is to say, the classification that subdivided the group representing blacks into browns and creoles<sup>1</sup>:

**Gráfico 2:** Número de alunos nas listas nominativas de Caeté, Passagem, Redondo, S. Bartolomeu e Catas Altas – por raça/cor.



**Fonte:** Listas nominativas de habitantes.

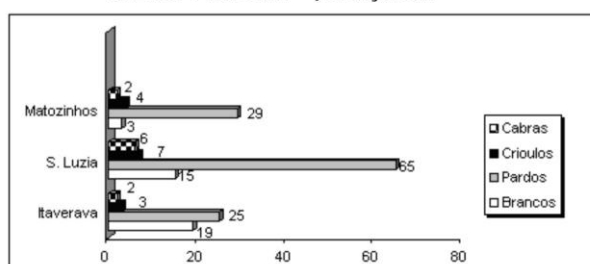
In the districts in which the recording of children was made based on the more traditional categories, in which blacks were subdivided into two groups (browns and creoles), there was an absolute predominance of the latter among those listed as

<sup>1</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, creole was a term employed to designate blacks born in Brazil.

being at school, that is, in all districts blacks comprised the majority of pupils. This becomes clear when we bring together the data referring to creoles and browns, which in almost every district represented nearly three quarters of pupils: in Catas Altas they represented 74.4%; in São Bartolomeu 71.4%; in Redondo 76.6%; in Passagem 83.8%; and in Caeté 66.2%.

We also have a group of name list that displayed a form of recording that was still more diversified, having in addition to the three types of classification already seen a group of black children recorded under the term *cabra*. This term is of difficult meaning, but there are clues to the fact that it was a way to designate blacks who had a situation close to slavery, that is, children of ex-slaves (Fonseca, 2007):

**Gráfico 3:** Número de alunos nas listas nominativas de Matosinho, S. Luzia e Ituverava – por raça/cor.



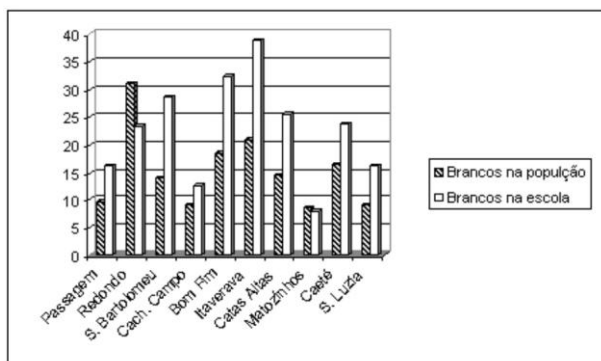
Fonte: Listas nominativas de habitantes.

When we collect the data referring to blacks we have confirmation of their numerical superiority in the schools of elementary education, since in Ituverava they were 61.2%; in Santa Luzia 83.8%; and in Matosinhos 92.1%.

The data relative to blacks and whites that were recorded in the name lists as attending schools of elementary education follow the characteristics of the population, in other words, the majority of blacks in the population was mirrored in the elementary school, which was mostly attended by children from this race group. Clotilde Paiva (1996) used census data referring to the 1830s to establish an estimate of the free population of Minas Gerais, reaching the number of 269,916 individuals. According to her, this population was composed by 59% of blacks (browns, creoles, Africans) and 41% of whites. When we add to the free population the number she presents for the stock of slaves – 127,366 individuals, almost half of the free population –, there remains no doubt about the hegemonic presence of blacks in the population of Minas Gerais.

The fact becomes even more evident when we compare the data about the population with those referring to the schools, as shown in Figures 4 and 5, in which we present the percentages of whites and blacks in the population and in each of the schools for each of the districts we are analyzing:

**Gráfico 4:** Nível de presença dos brancos na população e nas escolas (%).

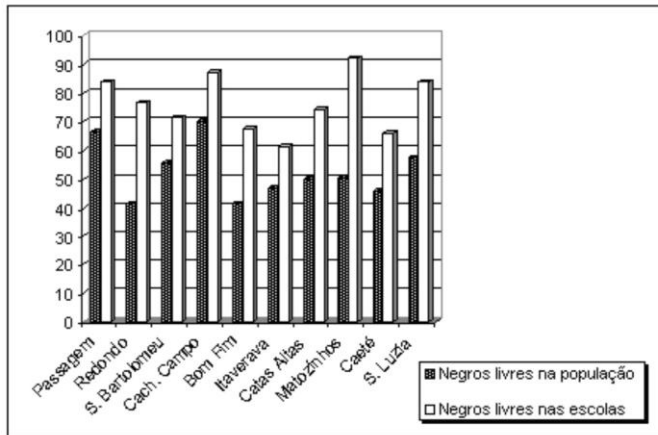


**Fonte:** Listas nominativas de habitantes.

Whites have a degree of participation in the population that remains largely below 20%. The district of Redondo is the only exception with 31%. The participation of whites in the population was small, and their presence in schools was in general little above their participation in the population. Only in the districts of Redondo and Matosinhos their presence in the population was larger than their participation in the school. In all other districts their presence in schools is higher than the one found with respect to the population.

When we consider these data regarding now the free black population we find even more regularity, since blacks show a level of participation in schools superior to their presence in the population for all districts.

**Gráfico 5:** Nível de presença dos negros livres na população e nas escolas (%).



**Fonte:** Listas nominativas de habitantes.

The free black population was the dominating segment in the demographic structure of Minas Gerais, and the districts taken for study here demonstrate it very clearly. In none of the districts blacks comprised less than 40% of the population, reaching sometimes a level close to 70% in districts such as Cachoeira do Campo e Passagem. Another segment that stood out was that of black slaves, which in average were around 30% of the population in each of the districts. However, when comparing the data related to school and population we disregarded the slaves, since they were prohibited to attend public classes, and were not present in the name lists as students. Regarding the level of presence in schools we find even more regularity than the one described for whites, since in every district the presence in schools is superior to the one we find in the population.

Therefore, the data contained in the name lists confirm what we have already described based on the teachers' lists, in which we found a majority of blacks in classes of first letters. That which was observed in the teachers' lists is here seen in even more detail in the name lists of inhabitants, in which we could observe a numerical superiority of blacks in schools and the closeness between these data and those referring to the population, in other words, the profile in schools was as diverse as that of the population. Amidst such diversity the data relative to free blacks deserves special note, since they were present in schools in percentages higher than their presence in the population.

The behavior of the black population towards schooling is a challenging issue, but these data may indicate that in Minas Gerais that was the group which tried more effectively to be in contact with schools of elementary instruction. This can be

understood as an attempt to establish themselves within the social sphere, and also as manner in which some segments of the black population signaled their distance from the world of slaves or their command of the codes of conduct of free people. That is to say, it may be that free blacks – a group of people that could always be mistaken by slaves – were those that more rapidly understood the social value of the school experience, and made use of it as a mechanism of socio-racial affirmation.

This hypothesis gains strength when we consider the contrast between the profiles of schools of elementary instruction and of secondary schools. When we analyzed the teachers' lists we observed a majority of blacks in classes of first letters, and we noticed that there was an inversion in the race profile of pupils when the higher levels of schooling were considered. The lists in which teachers recorded their pupils in classes of Latin and Rational Philosophy indicated the existence of a race profile contrary to that of elementary instruction, that is to say in the latter there was a majority of blacks and in the former whites dominated.

We used as a criterion for the selection of name lists the presence of at least 24 individuals classified as being in elementary education, which was the minimum number specified by the law in Minas Gerais for the existence of a public class. Students enrolled in higher levels of education were not considered in the criterion for the selection of lists, but they were recorded in them. Those responsible for creating these lists attributed the connection with elementary education the status of an occupation, and acted similarly towards those attending higher education, which were recorded as students.

The number of those recorded as students is not high, and some of the districts, such as Bom Fim and Matosinhos, do not registered any individuals in this situation. The name lists that recorded them never have more than seven students. A more accurate view of these data is given in Table 3, which shows the number of students in the districts that recorded individuals in this situation<sup>2</sup>.

**Table 3:** Number of students in the name lists

Place	Students
District of Passagem	04

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<sup>2</sup> We have not included the data from the district of Redondo, because in the name list for this district the school of Bom Jesus de Matosinhos was recorded as a household, and all its pupils, including those in classes of first letters, were recorded as students.

District of São Bartolomeu	01
District of Cachoeira do Campo	03
District of Itaverava	06
District of Catas Altas	06
District of Caeté	07
District of Santa Luzia	05

Source: Name lists of inhabitants

We have not made an evaluation of name lists based on the recording of students since, as we have already noted, priority was given to individuals enrolled in elementary education. Therefore we have no means of assessing the significance of these data as regards the whole province. However, judging by the form in which classes were distributed during the first years of the provincial government in which elementary education existed at a precarious level with respect to the demand, it is possible to imagine that it should be still more precarious with regard to higher studies, which were certainly even less widespread.

Bringing together the people classified as students in all name lists gives a total of 32 individuals. From these, only 6 were not classified as white, receiving the denomination of browns. These numbers show a dominance of whites at this level of schooling, which can be taken as corroboration of what had already being indicated by the teachers' lists, namely, an opposition between the race profile of the public in elementary education and that of the universe represented by students in secondary education.

This inversion indicates that blacks were more closely connected to the elementary level of schooling, and that whites dominated at higher levels, which represented the path to higher education. Therefore this fact can also be taken as an indication of the different attitudes of these two groups regarding the process of schooling. Whites used schooling as an element to consolidate their situation as elite, and to that end they tried to go through all levels of the process of formal education. Blacks, on the other hand, made use of schooling as a way to acquire a social situation that would put some distance between them and the world of slavery, and for that purpose insertion into elementary schooling was enough as a way to access the literate culture.



## Concluding remarks

The set of data we exhibited and interpreted based on demographic aspects of Minas Gerais allows us to say with some degree of security that there was a correspondence between the characteristics of the population and the public of the schools. This can be seen with respect to race elements, whose main feature was the diversity of the public in the schools, with emphasis on the majority of blacks in elementary education. Thus, elementary school can be understood as an instrument of social affirmation for some of the segments of the black population that sought greater insertion in the social sphere.

The demographic aspects of the society of Minas Gerais can also be related to the process of social organization in what concerns the establishment of limits between the different race groups. This fact would be related to the configuration of the race profiles in the schools which, at the elementary level, was characterized by a majority of blacks and in secondary schooling by a larger number of whites. This inversion can be interpreted as an indication of a difference in attitude between those two groups regarding the process of schooling, in other words, whites used school as a space of formation and of legitimating their situation as elite, whilst blacks saw in it a way of affirmation and socio-racial promotion, something that made it unnecessary (if at all possible) to go beyond elementary schooling.

Therefore, we can say that the traditional forms of understanding the schooling process, presupposing the absence of blacks from school spaces, are not confirmed in the case of 19<sup>th</sup> century Minas Gerais. The presence of individuals that came from the race group represented by blacks was at times quite significant in schools of elementary education. This was observed in the census documentation, in the teachers' lists, and also in other sources, such as the journal of German traveler Hermann Burmeister (1980), who was in Minas Gerais around the 1850s and made the following comment about one of its districts: "in Congonhas there was a *black school master* that enjoyed very high reputation, but his institute was private and attended by colored children" (p. 271, our emphasis).

In the journal of a female student from a Normal School in Diamantina at the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century we find a passage in which there is a description of the school that resembles the traveler's report. It is the diary of Helena Morley (1998) which, among other things, tells of her experiences in Normal School. Although this

documental record is relatively removed from the period under analysis here, it confirms what we observed for the period of the first decades of the provincial government.

Helena Morley (1998) describes her first experience as a teacher at the age of fifteen when she replaced a teacher, and records her perception of the school with particular attention to the racial situation of the pupils: “what will become of me if I am forced to leave the School, my studies, my colleagues, and everything else to go and teach stupid black boys in Rio Grande?” (p. 275)

The inexperience and low expectation of the Normal School young lady with respect to the pupils made her give up after the first day of work. When telling the school master – who was also her aunt – that she could not replace her she heard the following answer to the name of another teacher she proposed to substitute her: “What? You’re not coming back? So you want to disappoint me, and convince me that a mulatto girl such as Zinha is more capable than you?” (p. 279).

The teacher named Zinha was the one who became the substitute of Helena Morley’s aunt at school and, at least while the substitution lasted, we had a situation similar to the one described by the Burmeister traveler: black students had a teacher of their same racial condition.

The traveler’s description and that of the Diamantina Normal School student confirmed what we had already observed in the census documentation and in that of the public instruction, that is, classrooms in which blacks were the majority or even the totality of pupils.

The history of education has described this situation in very different way, and sometimes overlooks the issue of the race profile in schools as a research problem, reaching the point of denying the relation of blacks to school spaces. This attitude present in educational historiography is based on a disregard of blacks as subjects. Indeed, this is an attitude that runs through the whole historiography, since according to Correa (2000),

[...] any interpretation of blacks in Brazilian historiography is destined to approach them from the condition of slaves [...], thus, the historical circumstances of blacks have conditioned their subjectivity to that of the slave. (p.104)

The association of blacks and slaves is manifested in educational historiography from an interpretation that conceives as impossible the relation between blacks and the processes of formal education. For historiography, and for educational historiography in particular, blacks and schools tend to be thought of on the bases on relation in which one element excludes the other, in other words, the members of this group, even when they are free, can only be understood based on the conditions and limits imposed by an idea of slavery that reduces them to the condition of objects. Therefore, if on the one hand blacks are not seen as subjects, the school on the other tends always to be depicted as an institution that fosters cultural development and modernization. In this way, these two elements could only be thought in terms of exclusion, that is to say, it would be inconceivable a process of schooling of blacks and that the school could have any meaning to the members of this group. It would therefore be paradoxical to think about the relation between blacks and the schooling processes.

This conception seems to be at variance with the reality of the province of Minas Gerais, a fact that can be deduced from the data indicating the regular presence of blacks at schools in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We cannot extract from such presence definite conclusions about the meaning that schooling acquired amongst the black population. That would have to be investigated in specific studies. Nevertheless, the data we used indicate that in a society in which slavery set precise limits for blacks, the school could become an important strategy for social affirmation.

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