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## **Rio's Cemetery of "New Blacks" Sheds Light on Horrors of Slave Trade**

**By Tom Phillips  
The Guardian**

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dec/20/rio-cemetery-of-the-new-blacks-brazil](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/dec/20/rio-cemetery-of-the-new-blacks-brazil)**

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*Tooth analysis shows Africans taken from wide area ranging from Sudan in the north-east to Mozambique in the south*

**Locals called it the "cemetery of the new blacks," but in truth it wasn't much of a cemetery. Devoid of headstones, wreaths or tearful mourners, this squalid harbourside burial ground was the final resting place for thousands of Africans shipped into slavery.**

**The new world greeted them with a lonely death in an unfamiliar land.**

**For decades the cemetery and those buried there between 1760 and 1830 were forgotten, hidden under layer after layer of urban development.**

**But 15 years after the cemetery's fortuitous discovery -- during the renovation of Petrucio and Ana de la Merced Guimaraes's family home when builders unearthed a series of muddy skeletons -- academics now believe they have evidence of the true reach of the slave trade.**

**The study of teeth from 30 partial skeletons has hinted that slaves arriving in Rio – many of whom were sold on to work in coffee and sugar plantations or gold mines – came from a much wider geographical region than once thought.**

**Archaeologists and anthropologists studying bone and tooth fragments are shedding light on the horrors of a trade that saw at least 3 million slaves shipped from Africa to Brazil between 1550 and 1888, when the practice was officially abolished.**

**"It was ugly: a dump into which bodies were thrown and burned," said Sheila Mendonça de Souza, a bio-archaeologist studying the cemetery in Rio de Janeiro, once one of the busiest slave ports in the Americas.**

**"People weren't buried in tombs, they were tossed away into mass graves."**

**Della Cook, a biological anthropologist from the University of Indiana working on the burial ground, said: "There is a lot of scholarship on slave cemeteries and the slave trade in North America but very little in South America, which is one of the things that makes this site fascinating.**

**"We have historical records but we haven't been able to look before at the people themselves."**

**Using strontium isotope analyses of tooth enamel -- a technique that helps detect where a person was raised and has previously been used on samples from burial sites in the Caribbean and Mexico -- academics were able to confirm the large area from where the "new blacks" came.**

**"What we got was essentially the entire range of strontium isotope values," said Cook. "It surprised us that the spectrum was so broad."**

**The results indicated that slavers had "waded way into the interior" of Africa rather than restricting their search to coastal areas, Cook added. [Read this full [article](#) at *The Guardian* online >>>].**