

RACE IN ANOTHER AMERICA

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SKIN COLOR IN BRAZIL

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Chapter Nine

RETHINKING BRAZILIAN

RACE RELATIONS

THE BASIC contributions of this book have been to develop a more informed and complete understanding about race relations in Brazil through a systematic analysis of empirical data and to interpret those findings in the context of evolving Brazilian ideologies and understandings of race. At the most general level, while nineteenth-century scientific theories of white supremacy have since become discredited, such ideas remain deeply embedded in social thinking in Brazil. Race continues to carry meanings about one's worth and proper role in Brazilian society. Guided by ideas of racial hierarchy, Brazilians, like North Americans, impose racial categories on their fellow humans and treat them accordingly. As a result, nonwhites in Brazil are more than three times as likely as whites to be poor or illiterate, and white men, on average, earn more than twice as much as black and brown men; such differences have persisted for at least the past forty years.

Although this is a familiar story for observers of U.S. race relations, actual Brazil-U.S. differences are much more complicated. Product of a particular set of demographic, cultural, economic, and political forces, Brazilian race relations must be understood in their own context, rather than as a variant or a stage of U.S. race relations, which have nearly become a universal model for *the* sociology of race relations. The Brazilian case emerged from a nation building project which stressed integration through race mixture, rather than segregation. Relatedly, many other aspects of race in Brazil stand apart from the North American case although the persistent social practice of racial discrimination is similar. The dynamics of race in Brazil differ sharply from the models and theories that social scientists have assumed.

A DIALOGUE WITH EARLIER STUDIES

Social scientists have been interested in understanding race in Brazil for decades. I began in chapter 1 and showed, throughout subsequent chapters, that the social science literature is marked by two generations of

research that produced nearly contradictory findings about the extent of racism. The first generation, from the 1930s to 1960s, showcased the wonders of Brazil's miscegenation, while ignoring or downplaying inequality and racism. The first generation consisted mostly of North Americans who examined racism in the North and Northeast, although they were inspired by the master scholar and shaper of Brazilian national identity, Gilberto Freyre. The first generation could find stark contrasts between Brazil and the formally racist Jim Crow system of the United States at the time. They observed much more fluidity in racial classification and marriage and friendships among persons of different colors in Brazil and concluded that there was little racism and certainly no color line in Brazilian society. They concluded that Brazil, unlike the United States, was well on its way to integrating the descendants of African slaves.

By contrast, the second generation, beginning in the 1950s, focused on Brazil's racism and racial inequality while refuting or ignoring Brazil's miscegenation. They disagreed with the first generation and concluded that racism was widespread and profound, rivaling systems of racial domination throughout the world. They discovered pervasive prejudice and discrimination, relatively rigid white-nonwhite distinctions and limited white relations with blacks and browns. The second generation was exclusively Brazilian at first, knew less about the United States than the first generation, and focused on the South and Southeast. Some of the difference in their conclusions can therefore be accounted for by their comparative knowledge and regional focus. Although they were aware of the dismantling of the ongoing formal segregation in the United States, they seemed to be less concerned with explicit comparisons to the United States. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, though, both Brazilian and U.S. researchers further supported the second-generation findings, often through statistical analysis of racial inequality using national-level data sets. As a result, an emerging binational consensus accepted second-generation findings, and by default, many discredited the findings of the first generation.

Despite such contrasting conclusions, I find support for many of the findings of both generations. By dividing race relations into two dimensions, I show that the second generation's conclusions about racial discrimination and inequality—the vertical dimension—coexist with many of the first generation's findings of fluidity and interracial sociability—the horizontal dimension. Thus, I believe that the major difference in the distinct conclusions for the two generations of race relations scholars was their respective analytic emphasis on either horizontal or vertical race relations. By concentrating on one or the other dimension or one or another region, I believe that their explanations were consequently incomplete in explaining Brazilian race relations in the broad sense.

By limiting their analysis to the horizontal dimension of sociability, the earlier generation concluded that race relations were much better in Brazil than in the United States. Like the dominant North American sociological theories, they believed that relatively high levels of intermarriage and low levels of residential segregation were key determinants of the extent to which nonwhites would assimilate or be accepted by whites. They were optimistic that racial inequalities were temporary, as Brazilian society had avoided the egregious racism and profound racial distance of the United States. For the first generation, differences in social status by race were believed merely to reflect the recency of slavery, but the horizontal integration they perceived suggested to them that Brazilian society would soon change, as racial inequality would diminish with successive future generations. The Brazil they described thus offered liberal North Americans a hope that race differences could be transcended.

On the other hand, the second generation presented a Brazil that was marred by racism. They emphasized the vertical dimension of inequality as they perceived much mobility in the industrializing South and saw recent European immigrants leapfrog over blacks and mulattos in the labor market. By overlooking horizontal relations, they suggested that race relations in Brazil were as bad as those of the United States. In this book, I have largely sought to reevaluate these studies, which covered racial classification and vertical and horizontal relations.

I began in chapter 1 by calling the possible coexistence of such phenomenon “the enigma of Brazilian race relations.” In this chapter, I seek to reconcile the findings of those two literatures and integrate them with other features of the Brazilian system. I first summarize some of my main findings regarding racial classification and vertical and horizontal relations. I then attempt to show how the horizontal and vertical components fit together in the Brazilian system. Finally, I discuss their implications for culture, politics, and a black social movement. As throughout the book, I emphasize comparison with blacks and whites in the United States.

RACIAL CLASSIFICATION

Race relations of both the horizontal and vertical kind first depend on how persons get classified into particular categories. Although social meanings based on race are omnipresent, memberships in particular categories are often not fixed. This is particularly true for the Brazilian case where racial classification is especially ambiguous or fluid. The way persons classify each other and identify themselves are sometimes contradictory and also vary depending on the social situation. Furthermore, racial

terms are numerous and are often inconsistently applied. That fluidity also reflects considerable cultural integration of Brazilians of all colors. By contrast, race in the United States has historically been defined by hypodescent rules, where anyone with a small amount of black ancestry is considered black. Such rigid or essentialistic definitions in the United States are slowly changing in the direction of greater ambiguity, but they are far from being as fluid as in Brazil. Relatedly, racial self-identity is not a core component of identity for many Brazilians as it is in the United States, and there is little sense of solidarity with or *belonging* to a racial group.

Brazilians often prefer the notion of color rather than race because it captures such fluidity. Nevertheless, the Brazilian notion of color is equivalent to race because it is associated with a racial ideology that ranks persons of different colors. Whether one uses color or race, persons are typically racialized, and their perceived status depends on their racial or color categorization. External definitions of race are especially important because they often impart power and privilege in social interactions to lighter-skinned persons. According to the general Brazilian societal norm, bodily appearance—influenced somewhat by gender, status, and the social situation—determines who is black, mulatto, or white. The Brazilian system of whitening has long allowed escape from the stigmatized black category, in which many persons with African ancestry identify or are classified in intermediate as well as white categories. On the other hand, while some persons may be able to escape being black or nonwhite, others cannot. Some remain black or brown no matter how wealthy or educated they become. An apparently more recent phenomenon is that of darkening, reflecting a growing racial consciousness.

In Brazil, the existence of a mulatto category is both cause and consequence of an ideology of miscegenation and not an automatic result of the actual biological process of race mixture. Miscegenation does not create mixed-race persons, as the U.S. case shows. There, mixed-race persons are simply “black.” In the Brazilian ideology, mulattos are valued as the quintessential Brazilians in national beliefs, although they are often marginalized in reality and are much more similar to blacks than to whites in the Brazilian class structure. Racialization occurs on a color gradient where the meanings attached to different skin colors account for different levels of discrimination. Blacks (pretos or negros) in popular conceptions of the term are those at the darkest end of the color continuum, but in an increasingly used sense of the term (negro), it includes mulattos or browns as well. Traditionally, black refers to a small proportion of the national population but in the newer rendition, it may refer to roughly half of the population. The Brazilian system therefore does not have clear rules for defining who is black, and avoidance is often attainable, at least in name. Ambiguity thus allows many Brazilians to switch

TABLE 9.1
Postabolition racial classification in Brazil and the United States

Social dimension	Brazil		United States
	Mulattos	Blacks	Blacks (inc. mulattos)
Distinction from whites	Ambiguous	Clear ^a	Clear
Black consciousness	Low	Moderate	High

^aBut very ambiguous distinction from browns.

identities instead of being confined to discrete categories. On the other hand, one's appearance constrains millions of Brazilians to being black, defined in either its more or less restricted form.

Table 9.1 summarizes many of the classificatory distinctions between Brazil and the United States. I highlight two points in the table that are important for understanding cross-national differences in racial classification. First, while classificatory distinctions from whites are often ambiguous for millions of Brazilians who straddle the white-mulatto categories, millions of others do not have the possibility of ever being classified as or treated as white. There is virtually no ambiguity when making distinctions between white and black (preto), or in many but far from most cases, between white and brown. In the U.S. case, as I previously mentioned, mulattos are clearly distinguishable from whites on the basis of hypodescent rules, as they are classified as black. On the other hand, they constituted a separate category from blacks earlier in U.S. history and continue to receive better social treatment than dark blacks. Also, the extent of black consciousness varies widely in Brazil and the United States. Roughly speaking, there is little sense of a black consciousness for mulattos in Brazil and a moderate sense for blacks (pretos) in Brazil. We know this, for example, by the proportion of self-described browns and blacks that accept the term negro for themselves. Racial identity is not usually salient, although racial categorization by others is. By contrast, racial consciousness is much stronger for blacks (including mulattos) in the United States, where race is a core component of identity.

VERTICAL RELATIONS

Brazil's major problem today is social, more than political or economic. Democratization has become consolidated as there has been a smooth transition to the election of a leftist president, and the economy, despite hyperinflation and negative growth in the 1980s, has resumed a path of

steady (but slow) growth. However, the distribution of societal wealth is arguably the most unequal in the world. Moreover, nonwhites are at the bottom of Brazil's grossly distorted economic pyramid. As a result, the vertical exclusion of mulattos and, especially, blacks is greater than vertical exclusion for blacks in the United States. Although their importance was denied in the past, the profound racial inequalities of Brazil are now well known.

I have identified three factors that are primarily responsible for Brazil's profound racial inequalities: *hyperinequality*, a *discriminatory glass ceiling*, and a *racist culture*. Brazil's hyperinequality underlies many of Brazil's social problems and has led to a huge gulf in the average incomes of whites and nonwhites, creating substantial differences in material wealth, social status, and access to social capital. That inequality is not merely material but also encompasses inequality in power relations, justice, subjective sense of worth, and ability to participate in social life, including work, education, health, and housing. A highly unequal Brazilian educational system is most responsible for Brazil's world-class inequality, and inequality is greater in places where there are more nonwhites.

Brazil is a middle-income country by world standards, but its hyperinequality has forced at least one-third of its population into poverty. This includes about half of blacks and browns. On most indicators, Brazil now has the highest income inequality of any major country in the world, with South Africa as the only major country that occasionally competes with it on that score. Brazilians in the top 10 percent of the income structure currently earn, on average, twenty-eight times more than average persons in the bottom 40 percent. The greater racial income inequality of Brazil compared to the United States is thus largely, but not exclusively, due to the more unequal income structure of Brazil. On the other hand, Brazil is no South Africa, where the poor are almost entirely black. Many poor Brazilians are white, although poverty is disproportionately nonwhite.

The primary social cleavage in Brazilian society is between a small middle class, which is almost entirely white, and the poor and working-class majority, which is multiracial but disproportionately nonwhite. Although the white middle class is able to maintain separation from darker persons through a socioeconomic hierarchy that has long been among the most unequal in the world, this is not solely a class boundary. Race is fundamental to determining who gets into the middle class. An informal but highly effective discriminatory glass ceiling prevents lower-class blacks and browns from entering the middle class much more so than their white lower-class counterparts. Thus, the socioeconomic position of nonwhites in Brazilian society is due to both class and race.

Alarming, the glass ceiling is hardening with Brazil's development. In recent decades, Brazil's university system has greatly expanded, and the skill and educational levels required for middle-class jobs has grown. At the same time, inequality between whites and nonwhites in access to the middle class has grown, largely because of a growing racial gap in college attainment. Higher education in Brazil has expanded significantly throughout the past four decades, and whites have mostly been its beneficiaries, leading to the widening racial gap. Because education is so tightly correlated with income in Brazil, higher education for blacks and browns is fundamental if they are to enter the middle class in significant numbers.

An almost entirely white middle class uses race and class to reduce competition for middle-class status. This system provides the privileges of access to and deference from a large, inexpensive, and mostly non-white servant class. The low cost of labor for the middle class also allows them to pay for private education for their children and ignore the public educational system. By greatly reducing the competition from the masses of Brazilians that attend the poor public schools, private schooling greatly enhances their chances for entering the public university, Brazil's most important passport to middle-class status. At the same time, this educational cleavage greatly impairs the ability of the mostly non-white lower classes ever to become middle class. White privilege is thus advanced through a defense of class interests, which the predominately white middle class uses to secure and maintain control over societal wealth and resources and to reduce competition for their social positions.

Blacks and browns are nearly absent from the middle class, although the experiences of the few have demonstrated that racism persists independently of class. The few middle-class blacks and browns continue to suffer from discrimination in ordinary everyday interactions, and in some cases, they are not able to benefit from their class privilege, as they must face constant skepticism and doubt about their position. At the other end of the class structure, poor whites, by contrast, can more often pass beyond the barriers that eliminate competition for societal wealth and resources than can poor browns and blacks. Although racial distinctions are more ambiguous than the United States, the white-brown distinction is fairly rigid for the middle class, especially where the proportion of the population that is white is greater. Thus, as one ascends into the middle class, racial boundaries harden.

Many whites in Brazil continue to be poor or working class, and thus there is a large supply of white persons who compete with browns and blacks to enter the middle class. This may include phenotypically light-brown persons who may sometimes be accepted as white or nearly white, especially in regions where whites are a numerical minority. Poor whites

who are often neighbors, friends, and even relatives (including siblings) of blacks and especially browns, are more likely than nonwhites to squeeze through social barriers to high-status positions. Poor whites tend to be preferred to poor browns and especially blacks in schooling and in the market for middle-class jobs, especially when middle-class whites are not available. Aside from being granted greater social prestige on the basis of their appearance, poor whites also have greater access than nonwhites of similar social standing to the networks and patronage that are important in the Brazilian labor market.

Race is an easy marker for class exclusion, creating a class structure in which blacks and browns are kept in the lower ranks. Race and class thus both become important signifiers of status in a status-conscious society. Racial and class hierarchies are encoded in informal rules about social interaction and are considered natural, in which one's status or position in the hierarchy is assumed to give one greater rights or privileges. Either factor clearly limits mobility or social acceptance. Race and class together severely impair it.

Although hidden behind the façade of miscegenation, a racist culture is ubiquitous in all social interactions among whites, browns, and blacks in virtually all social situations. It is based on a web of beliefs that subordinate positions are the proper place for browns and blacks and that social spaces that involve control and access to resources should be occupied by whites. From vertical relations like hiring and promotions to horizontal ones like hanging out with friends or enduring the dating market, slights against blacks and browns accrue to the many other slights that preceded them, often harming the self-esteem of brown and especially black persons. Such treatment intensifies with each successively darker shade of skin color.

This racist culture is reinforced, naturalized, and legitimated by the media and popular culture through humor and common dictums, such as "everyone knows their place" or, more crudely, "each monkey on its branch." These sayings provide the possibility of a widely recognized racial hierarchy that is perceived as natural. As long as society's members internalize that system, Brazilian racial domination persists with a minimum of conflict and without the need for segregation. Although most white Brazilians deny they are racist, there is a widely held sense that the favored position of whites in Brazilian society is a natural fact. Despite the positive value given to racial democracy and miscegenation, the holders of these values do not perceive an inconsistency between the cordiality among different racial-group members and their ideas of the proper place of nonwhites in the hierarchy. Cordiality and the claim of racial democracy can smoothly coexist with the racial hierarchy as long as nonwhites accept their place in the system.

Finally, it is important to note that mulattos are less discriminated against than blacks, as the human-capital models have strongly suggested. Mulattos are also socially closer to whites, as indicated by evidence for marriage and residence. Thus, they are more likely to benefit from the material and symbolic benefits of social proximity to whites, including greater access to patrimony and social networks. Their racial status is more flexible than blacks since their ability to become white sometimes increases with social mobility, especially in places where there are relatively few whites. However, most mulattos have similar class positions as blacks, but their advantages—as conferred by a system of whitening—help explain why mulattos are often unwilling to identify as negro or with the black movement.

HORIZONTAL RACE RELATIONS

Despite Brazil's profound racial inequality, this study has also shown that there is substantial intermarriage and residential proximity between whites and nonwhites. Thus miscegenation in Brazil is not mere ideology. Race mixture occurs in the intimate and residential realms of Brazilian life much more than in the United States, where the worlds of blacks and whites are clearly segmented. In this sense, Brazil is very different from the United States. Although U.S. society is changing—as white attitudes towards blacks soften—behavioral indicators like intermarriage and residential segregation show the persistence of a wide racial gap in that country. As many have noted, black-white interactions in Brazil do not have the tension, hostility, and suspicion often found in such relations in the United States. While the social systems of both countries successfully integrated descendents of European immigrants, the Brazilian melting pot has been more successful at integrating the African-origin population at the horizontal level. These social facts are positive signs that Brazilian race relations are comparatively mild. Much higher rates of intermarriage and lower rates of residential segregation than the United States today suggest weaker racial boundaries in Brazil. This is especially true among the poor and among persons of proximate color in Brazil.

The miscegenation ideology therefore reflects reality to a significant degree and should not be dismissed as merely ideology. Rather, it needs to be accepted as a key explanatory variable for understanding other dimensions of Brazilian (and perhaps other Latin American) systems of race relations. The Brazilian nation as imagined by its elite in an earlier period reflected Brazilian experience which in turn has had great implications for the way the country has evolved. But greater race mixture and fluid race relations are not of much consolation to the majority of Brazil's

TABLE 9.2
Postabolition race relations in Brazil and the United States on vertical
and horizontal dimensions

<i>Social Dimension</i>	<i>Brazil</i>		<i>United States</i>
	<i>Mulattos</i>	<i>Blacks</i>	<i>Blacks (inc. mulattos)</i>
Relative degree of current racial exclusion			
Vertical	Moderate-high	High	Moderate
Horizontal	Low	Moderate	High
Historical excl./incl. in state intervention			
Vertical	Exclusion (whitening)		Exclusion (Jim Crow)
	Neutral (racial democracy)		Inclusion (affirmative action)
	Inclusion (affirmative action)		Neutral (color-blindness)
Horizontal	Inclusion		Exclusion (Jim Crow)
			Neutral

nonwhites who are poor or nearly so. Racism and racial inequality, along with a highly unequal class structure, persist in excluding black and mixed-race persons from enjoying the opportunities afforded by Brazil's economic development and its emerging citizenship rights. Thus, the Brazilian case shows that fairly high rates of intermarriage and low levels of residential segregation do not necessarily imply greater acceptance of outgroups, contrary to the assumptions of sociological theory. Such theory is limited by its strict adherence to a U.S. model, whose racial logic cannot be generalized.

I summarize the relative degree of racial exclusion on the vertical and horizontal dimensions between the United States and Brazil in table 9.2. Vertically, mulattos and especially blacks are highly excluded from the Brazilian middle class. In contrast, while a large number of blacks occupy the lowest strata of U.S. society, there is also a fairly large middle class, especially in recent years. Whites are four to five times as likely to hold middle-class positions in Brazil, while they are between one and two times as likely to be in the middle class in the United States. As data for intermarriage show, horizontally, Brazilian mulattos have close social re-

lations with whites, especially those of their social class, when compared to Afro-North Americans. By contrast, U.S. blacks continue to experience high levels of residential segregation from whites and rarely intermarry. Brazilian blacks are intermediate in terms of intermarriage, although their residential segregation from whites is clearly in the moderate range, closer to Brazilian mulattos than to U.S. blacks. Ultimately, the U.S.-Brazil difference is an issue of racial boundaries, which vary on the horizontal and vertical planes. On the horizontal plane, racial boundaries in Brazil are much more easily traversed than in the United States. However, on the vertical dimension, racial barriers are more insurmountable than in the United States.

EXPLAINING CROSS-NATIONAL RACE-RELATIONS DIFFERENCES

Before analyzing how vertical and horizontal relations coexist, I explain why such distinct characteristics evolved in the United States and Brazil. Why are there such large cross-national differences on both the horizontal and vertical dimensions? These are not the outgrowth of natural processes, but I believe they are largely the result of respective state actions. States have been particularly powerful actors in shaping social boundaries, including those by race. The U.S. and South Africa experiences certainly suggest that states themselves are powerful enough to create major changes in race relations. Even major structural forces, like industrialization, have relatively little influence on race relations, compared to state imposition of segregation or, in a positive sense, affirmative action, or the more subtle shaping of ideology by the state. The evidence in this book similarly suggests that state interventions have helped shape distinct configurations of race relations in the two countries, although they were also constrained and influenced by other variables such as demography, earlier ideologies, and personal identities.

State actions in Brazil and the United States have varied over time, but their effects in each time period have had a lasting influence in shaping the current system of race relations. I summarize these in the bottom half of table 9.2. Beginning with the then accepted scientific proof of the 19th century that whites were biologically superior to nonwhites, Brazil and the United States both responded by actively seeking ways to diminish the influence of nonwhites. North Americans created a system that sought total racial segregation for its white majority from nonwhites. The United States instituted formal racial segregation, especially through racial classification, antimiscegenation laws, and discriminatory housing practices, separating the lives of blacks and whites in the United States until the mid-1960s. Segregation left a persistent and wide racial divide

at the horizontal level. Segregation also led to the creation of parallel institutions by blacks themselves and to strong and separate racial identities. Officially, formal segregation in the United States lasted from 1896 (*Plessy vs. Ferguson*) to at least 1954 (*Brown vs. the Board of Education*), although segregation laws persisted until the mid-1960s. Since then, a series of federally instituted policies not only ended formal segregation, but through affirmative action and the voting rights act, they sought to promote the nonwhite population on the vertical dimension. This led to a very large increase in the size of the black middle class and racial inequality that is currently much less severe than Brazil's. However, the U.S. state hardly promoted improvements in the fluidity of horizontal relations. Despite the civil-rights reforms of the 1960s, taboos against intermarriage and residential mixing, as well as the one-drop rule, strongly persisted with the legacy of segregation. Even antisegregatory housing laws since the 1960s are poorly enforced, and consequently, extreme residential segregation between blacks and whites persists.¹

By contrast, the Brazilian state eschewed segregation but rather promoted intermarriage through both its whitening and racial-democracy ideologies. Before that, race mixture was greater in Brazil than the United States throughout the colonial period because of the much greater predominance of males over females among the European colonizers. This demographic fact set the stage for what would happen to race in the early Brazilian republic and thereafter. In response to nineteenth-century scientific racism, the Brazilian elite decided to promote further miscegenation, but with the massive infusion of white blood drawn from millions of European immigrants. They sought to design a white nation through European immigration and its optimistic prediction that white genetic traits would predominate in race mixture, eventually whitening the black element out of its mostly nonwhite population. As scientific theories about race began to be discredited, the Brazilian state began to promote a self-image of a racial democracy that was based on miscegenation, a large dose of African culture, and an aversion to racism. These factors would become central to Brazilian national identity. Brazil stressed racial integration, although in the more abstract sense of peoplehood, nation, and culture, rather than inclusion in the polity or in the sense of equal opportunity. At the same time, the Brazilian state failed to redress racial inequality until very recently. As a result of such comparative actions, Brazil now has greater racial inequality than the United States but it is more horizontally integrated.

The greater vertical inequality of Brazil may also be explained by economics, coupled with state decisions. In the labor market, employers in places like Brazil with large amounts of "surplus labor," often have a wide choice among potential workers. In those areas, elimination of workers on

the basis of race may not affect competitiveness if several potential employees are perceived to be equally qualified. Similarly, Brazilian elites have generally disregarded basic education, instead pouring valuable resources into higher education for the middle classes. They have had little concern if a large segment of the population receives little schooling, because they regarded quality education for only a small segment of the population as necessary for development. As a result, racial inequality is further enhanced. For the majority attending public schools, the few available resources go to white students for regional, economic, and directly discriminatory reasons. Thus, to the extent that labor and educational markets remain poorly developed in the context of racist social behavior, this vicious cycle becomes a machine for perpetuating racial inequality.

Rather than examining the nineteenth-century causes of either adopting segregation or miscegenation, this book has instead focused on the contemporary consequences of the respective systems. However, given some debate about what led multiracial countries to implement legal segregation or not, it is worth adding my opinion to the fray. I believe that the reasons for the divergent routes taken by state elites in the United States and Brazil were affected by a mix of factors, including politics and labor-supply concerns, but mostly racial identities and sensibilities. The role of politics takes center stage in a well-known account that compares Brazil with the United States and South Africa,² but the author of that study discards the other equally plausible reasons. In the first place, Brazil was able to attract an alternative labor supply from Europe, whereas the U.S. South, where the large majority of blacks resided, could not. To keep wages down and therefore remain competitive, southern employers may thus have encouraged state repression of black labor for its expanding cotton industry.

The sensibilities of the Brazilian elite seem to have been especially important. The barriers to implementing segregation in Brazil, despite political or economic reasons, would have been greater than in the United States or South Africa, because Brazil had no tradition of a sharp classificatory color line that was necessary for segregation, and a large part of the white population, including many members of the elite, were themselves products of miscegenation. Many nonwhites had become well integrated into national culture and in horizontal social relations. A system of segregation would thus seem unworkable if there were no clear place to divide the population by race and undesirable because it violated cultural norms or excluded many members of the elite.

DEVELOPMENT AND RACE RELATIONS

Traditional sociology often looked to economic development as the primary engine that would bring major societal change. Classical sociology believed that, with development, ascriptive characteristics like race would become less important, and modern societies would come to depend on universalism and rationalization in their valuation of others. Van den Berghe (1967) made a particularly ambitious effort to predict the nature of race and racism as societies went from paternalism to competitive race relations. His model theorized that racial inequality would decline as societies shifted from ascription to achievement, and consequently, greater labor-market competition between whites and nonwhites would lead to greater racial antagonism and to whites limiting their personal contacts with nonwhites. Although he did not have strong evidence to support his claims, Van den Berghe's theory was particularly elegant and, despite its inaccuracy, ventured to make unambiguous claims about changing race relations on the horizontal and vertical planes. Challengers to this conventional view never stated their theories so clearly but generally seemed to expect no change, believing that race would continue to be functional to capitalist and industrial development.

Using a framework similar to Van den Berghe's, I investigated the effect of development on horizontal and vertical race relations in recent Brazilian history and presented some comparative data for the United States. Figure 9.1 plots my conclusions and those by Van den Berghe, who used Brazil and the United States as well as South Africa and Mexico as his exemplary cases. By drawing a two-dimensional graph with the degree of horizontal exclusion on the *x* axis and vertical exclusion on the *y* axis, I illustrate the simultaneous effect of development on the two race-relations dimensions. Van den Berghe expected exclusion on the horizontal plane to grow with development. The lighter line plots this prediction for Brazil and the United States. The darker lines plot actual changes based on evidence from this book. In Brazil, exclusionary horizontal relations hardly changed at all from their previous moderate range. In the United States, there were slight declines in horizontal exclusion, but interracial sociability between blacks and whites there remains extremely limited. Whereas Van den Berghe expected that high levels of racial inequality would be reduced with development in both countries, racial inequality hardly changed in Brazil (on most indicators) while it dropped significantly in the United States. Thus, it seems that economic development had little to do with this, but rather the comparative differences seem to be explained by U.S. government intervention designed to reduce racial inequality in the form of affirmative action compared to the lack of similar action in Brazil.

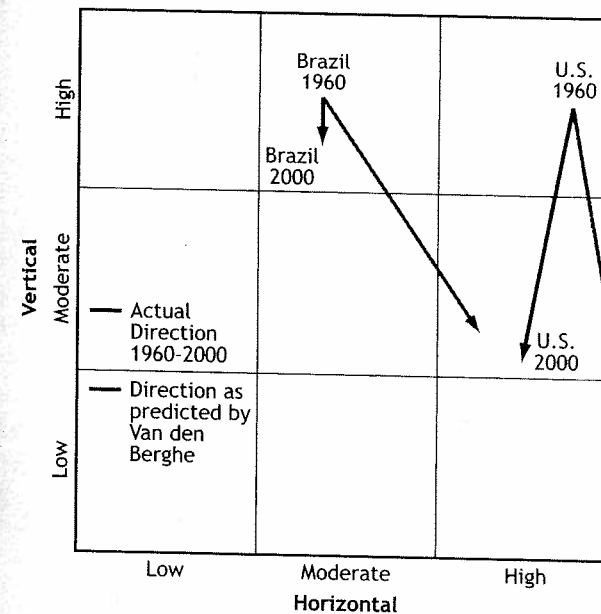


FIGURE 9.1 Black-white social distance in the United States and Brazil on vertical and horizontal dimensions: 1960–2000.

RECONCILING VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL RELATIONS IN BRAZIL

I have shown in this book how integration or assimilation at the horizontal level coexists with a high level of racism and racial inequality in Brazil. But how can they? If there is so much intermarriage, how can there be discrimination? Based on the U.S. model with which I began chapter 1, sociologists have theorized that such inclusive horizontal relations would indicate low levels of racism and racial inequality. This is the logic of assimilation theory. However, racial inequality in Brazil continues to be high for the more than one hundred years since the end of slavery and, despite economic development and miscegenation, is growing in important respects. Thus, the Brazilian case presents an apparent paradox for understanding race relations. Miscegenation does not undermine the racial hierarchy. If racism is so intense as to keep blacks and mulattos in the lower rungs of the labor market, even more so than in the United States, how is it that sociability across racial lines is so much greater than in the United States? How do these coexist in practice? When persons are racist, can they be selectively racist, that is, more racist in vertical than in horizontal relations?

More intermarriage and less residential segregation do not necessarily mean that Brazilians are less racist than North Americans overall but it seems that they are to the extent that racial systems can be limited to horizontal relations. Racial differences in social interactions seem to have distinct meanings for Brazilians compared to North Americans. Racial intermarriages are stigmatized today as they were in the past in both countries, but the policing of the intermarriage taboo through social sanctions is much greater in the United States. Racial intermarriage is highly taboo in the United States, but the greater permissiveness of intermarriage in Brazil does not negate the maintenance of the racial hierarchy. The fact is that whiteness in Brazil continues to confer advantages, even in the close relation of intermarriage. A racial hierarchy is maintained in Brazil in several ways.

Interracial sociability has little effect on dominant-group whites, so that it does not threaten their status position. The status of the white middle and upper classes and their social distance from nonwhites, unlike poor whites, is maintained through Brazil's hyperinequality. Brazil's highly unequal class hierarchy thus reinforces the racial hierarchy, limiting middle-class-white interaction with nonwhites. Most intermarriage is among the poor, which also has lower residential segregation and experiences less rigid racial distinctions. By contrast, interracial sociability exists mostly as ideology for the middle class, except in hierarchical relations, which characterizes the interactions that the vast majority of middle-class whites have with blacks and browns. Middle-class whites treat nonwhites in a cordial manner at the same time as they keep them from becoming class equals.

Also, interracial sociability varies by region and whites are concentrated in the mostly white southern half of Brazil, further limiting their interaction with nonwhites. Also, the white-nonwhite line is especially rigid and exclusive there, especially for the middle class. Thus, for the roughly 75 percent of whites that lives in the more developed South or Southeast, white contact with nonwhites is limited by the small size of the nonwhite population and especially sharp racial boundaries. On the other hand, for dominant-group whites in predominately nonwhite regions, racial distance is maintained by a steeper class hierarchy, characterized by more paternalistic social relations and greater racial inequality than in the South or Southeast.

However, cross-national differences remain for even the white middle class in predominately white regions. In Brazil, they are more likely to marry nonwhites than similarly positioned North Americans. This suggests greater tolerance for blacks and especially mulattos in Brazil, even among dominant-group members, not to mention the large number of poor and working-class whites. While such levels of intermarriage may

signify healthier race relations for Brazilian society on the horizontal level, racism does not vanish for those individuals involved. Rather, a system of status exchange often operates in relations between interracial couples and in the dating market prior to marriage. In those contexts, whiteness is a valued property that can be traded for greater diligence, devotion, class status, or other benefits provided by the darker spouse. The very belief that whitening through marriage is desirable for dark-skinned persons is based on the racist assumption that it will improve darker persons, both biologically and socially, but status exchange ensures that this system also works for light-skinned persons. Finally, the racial hierarchy within these marriages themselves often endures. Although explicit racism is often submerged in such relations, it is able to raise its ugly head at any time.

The Brazilian case also shows that racial discrimination and inequality persist despite the absence of extreme residential segregation, as in the United States. Residential segregation, then, is not a linchpin of racial inequality, as some analysts have suggested it is for the United States. Extreme segregation, as in the United States, is simply not necessary to maintain high levels of racial inequality, as the Brazilian case shows. Blacks and whites may live next door to each other and even intermarry, but racial ideologies continue to be a highly salient feature embedded in social practices, which in turn, act to maintain racial inequality. For middle-class whites, though, residential exposure to nonwhites is limited, especially for those who live in predominately white regions. It is important to note that such whites comprise the bulk of the Brazilian elite today.

Although race is important in both systems, the boundaries that keep blacks and mulattos in subordinate vertical positions are more class-related in Brazil than they are in the United States. A system of gaping economic inequality in Brazil serves to keep nonwhites from competing with middle-class whites and generally limits interracial contacts to those where there are large status differences. Class boundaries are considered legitimate and are policed socially and by the state, whereas explicit racial boundaries are not. Most notably, the public education system is one of the most unequal in the world and the justice system ardently defends middle-class interests. However, race is an unspoken feature of this boundary making by class. The justice system, for example, represses the poor and is especially likely to target blacks. In the United States, racial boundaries have historically been explicit and largely accepted. Policing of racial boundaries, by either the population or the state, has historically been considered legitimate in the United States. Despite these differences, though, the racial hierarchy is ultimately reproduced in both countries.

Horizontal racial boundaries have been much more permeable in Brazil. Unambiguous racial boundaries keep whites and blacks in the United

States from marrying or living next to each other and these boundaries are largely maintained through social conventions and taboos. Moreover, U.S. segregation directly created rigid black-white boundaries through classification rules and established separateness in social relations. Since then, racial boundaries have become self-reinforcing through high rates of endogamy, extreme spatial segregation, racially coded friendship networks, a sense of groupness by race and, to a larger extent than in Brazil, shared cultural symbols by race. While such forces in the United States may have created greater racial polarization, they also have facilitated organized resistance to racism by the formation of highly salient identities based on race. In Brazil, greater sociability of persons across racial lines, especially for persons of the same social class, often led to residential, friendship, and familial ties among persons of different colors. Also, the lack of classificatory rules and the celebration of a mixed-race type also led to the blurring of racial divisions in Brazil. While such relations represent a positive feature of Brazil's human relations, they also weakened the possibility of group solidarity, therefore undermining a potential foundation for mobilizing to combat racism.

POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

Brazil's racism and racial inequality are peacefully reproduced, for the most part, largely because of miscegenation. Thus, it is important to understand horizontal and vertical relations as parts of a system of racial domination, rather than simply as separate entities. While Brazil's fluid horizontal relations may be interpreted as signs of a less racist system, they also facilitate vertical racial domination. This system is efficient largely because it is powered by miscegenation rather than the more primitive motor of segregation. Indeed, the Brazilian system has been able to use miscegenation or fluid horizontal race relations to allow racial injustices and inequalities to persevere without state intervention, for a relatively long period of time. Brazilians have been able to point to their miscegenation as proof that there is little or no racism in their country, therefore diverting scrutiny away from racism as the source of Brazil's racial inequality. Good horizontal relations, in a sense, have been used to cover up bad vertical race relations.

Until very recently, the Brazilian state has also been able to avoid interventions that redress racial inequality, because it has used the nature of its racial system to diffuse black resistance. Specifically, the ideology and fact of race mixture have impeded the ability of Brazil's black movement to fight against racism and become strong enough to influence state decisions for developing antiracist social policy. Elites have resisted black-movement

demands with rationales based on miscegenation contending that: race mixture is proof that there is no racism; state actions on behalf of racial groups are not possible because race mixture has blurred racial distinctions; and race-specific interventions would only harden or polarize racial boundaries that were smoothed over by centuries of race mixture. Although Brazil's system grew mostly out of historical constraints rather than elite designs, it nevertheless resulted in a more effective system for maintaining racial domination.

In response, the black movement asserts that miscegenation devalues and even seeks to destroy blackness and prevents the formation of black identities needed to sustain an effective antiracist movement in pursuit of a true racial democracy. The belief in whitening divides a potentially unified black movement into blacks and a larger number of dark-skinned persons that can escape the black category. At the same time, racial democracy in the past paralyzed the black movement by denying the existence of racism. In the past, elites labeled black-movement resistance as racist itself and even seditious because it sought to create racial divisions in a society that was presumably free of racism. Relatedly, Brazilians have trumpeted the historical existence of nonwhites among the elite, a far more common occurrence in the past, as blanket proof that blacks are not discriminated.

Ironically, antiracist resistance in Brazil has also been impaired by the absence of extreme segregation, as in the United States. North American segregation sharply delineated black-white differences and thus facilitated antiracist organizing by creating racially bounded social networks; parallel institutions such as churches, banks, and universities; unambiguous rules for racial classification; and distinct cultural forms, including language and religion. Afro-North Americans could easily recognize a shared sense of racial exclusion, and parallel institutions allowed for the formation of a black leadership class. In Brazil, political organizing on the basis of class has been the historical trend, in which class identities have been stronger than racial-group identities. The relatively proximate residential and familial social relations among persons of different colors but of the same class have facilitated interracial class organizing, but arguably, at the expense of a popular black movement.

CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

Brazil's history of race relations has cultural consequences that are also quite distinct from those in the United States. In its nationalist modernizing project since the 1930s, Brazilian elites promoted racial democracy and African culture as part of the national culture. Brazilian elites

TABLE 9.3
Postabolition cultural dimensions of race relations in Brazil and the United States

Social dimension	Brazil		United States
	Mulattos	Blacks	Blacks (inc. mulattos)
Cultural distinctions from whites	Low	Low-Moderate	Moderate
Continuity with Africa	Moderate	High	Low
State intervention in promoting African culture	Moderate	Moderate	None

commoditized and commercialized African culture, taking advantage of the fact that a significant number of African-born Brazilians survived into the twentieth century as did close contacts with West Africa. Although blacks and mulattos were often its purveyors, Afro-Brazilian culture was shared across society with little regard to racial distinctions. Although a stronger sense of African-based culture is passed down among some black (preto) families, especially in places with predominately black populations like Salvador and in *quilombo* communities, there have not been institutional mechanisms like segregation to reproduce it as a racially separate realm. Blacks participate more in so-called Afro-Brazilian culture than whites or mixed-race persons, although nonblacks are also involved to a considerable degree. The primary racial divide is thus between blacks and nonblacks in culture, even though it is between whites and nonwhites socioeconomically. But the cultural divide by race is relatively small compared to that in the United States. In sum, cultural integration of whites, browns and blacks is clearly greater in Brazil.

U.S. blacks (and whites for that matter) seem to have less direct cultural continuity with Africa,³ but segregation has had the unintended consequence of shaping racially differentiated cultural forms and attitudes. As a result, U.S. blacks are often distinguished from whites not only by color or ancestry but on the basis of language, religion, spirituality, family life, and political and racial attitudes. This is much less the case in Brazil. Although aspects of Afro-North American culture can certainly be traced to Africa, black culture was mostly made in America, and particularly, in segregated black communities. North American society provided a weak structural basis for ethnic preservation of African culture, but extreme segregation permitted an evolution of distinctive subcultures by race built upon a few remaining vestiges of the original culture.⁴ Thus, despite closer ties to Africa, the Brazil case demonstrates how racial distinctions do not necessarily evolve into cultural differences, leading a

prominent analyst of Brazil to call the Brazilian system "blackness without ethnicity."⁵ These comparative cultural features of race relations are summarized in table 9.3.

THE BLACK MOVEMENT AND THE END OF RACIAL DEMOCRACY

Despite the absence of a mass-based mobilization, Brazil's small black movement has recently been able to influence state actions, by scoring four major victories. It has (1) debunked the racial-democracy ideology among the general population, (2) changed elite thinking on race along the white-negro lines, (3) engaged the Brazilian government in discussing public policies that redress racism, and (4) has begun to secure public policies designed to make real impacts on racial discrimination and inequality. The recent successes of the black movement are particularly significant because, unlike other social movements, their precepts challenge the very essence of Brazilian nationhood. The black movement has long been considered "un-Brazilian," as Gilberto Freyre once stated. Whereas the idea of a Brazilian nation is built on the concept of a united and racially tolerant people forged through miscegenation, the black movement poses a countervision based on racialized identities to oppose racism and racial inequality. Despite these gains, the black movement has not yet been able to achieve at least two other challenges it has laid out for itself: creating a mass movement and, relatedly, constructing a popular negro identity. These are often presented as interrelated phenomena.

Leaders of the black movement sometimes argue that their inability to produce a mass movement is fundamentally due to their inability to transform individuals who are disparaged for their color into negros, who will affirm their blackness and confront the forces that subordinate them. Thus, they insist on constructing essentialized black-white identities among Brazilians and shun popular forms of racial classification. Their negative categorization and social treatment by others notwithstanding, why should many dark-skinned Brazilians identify as negro if a whitening ideology allows them a more positive identity in either a more acceptable color category or as part of a unified national category? Similarly, why accept a political racial identity if they can partake of Brazilian culture at least as much as members of the dominant white category and even socialize to a great extent with whites, thus allowing many of them a sense of inclusion?

Thus, a paradox for Brazilian democratization is: How does it ensure appropriate citizen rights for millions of persons that are victims of racism but that, for a series of reasons, will not mobilize against it? How then does the small black movement create a broad constituency to defend appropriate

inclusionary mechanisms? Race relations depend on how persons are categorized, a process in which more powerful persons ascribe and impose categories on others. However, the extent to which these forces can be changed may depend on the capacity of those categorized as subordinates to recognize such categories as part of their own identities. Who else, besides the victims of racism, are likely to organize and demand effective measures to combat racism? The Brazilian classification system presents special challenges in this sense. For the black movement, how do they organize persons under a category that is both highly stigmatized and can be escaped from? In Brazil, blacks can become mulattos and many mulattos can become white, or at least *moreno*, a uniquely deracialized category.

The U.S. civil-rights movement created a model for a mass black movement and a leadership based on identity politics, but this was largely because of segregation. In the United States, segregation made "black" a permanent status, and so the only possibility was to remain black. Segregation had created institutions for the forming of a strong leadership class as well as a fairly self-contained black population. Moreover, it had become apparent to virtually all blacks that legal segregation was blatantly offensive and defied their democratic rights. By contrast, conditions for Brazil's black movement are far different. Structural conditions in Brazil, while they promoted miscegenation, impaired the formation of a mass black movement to effectively demand significant social change. Also, mass social movements in the style of the Afro-American civil-rights movement have not developed at all in recent Brazilian history, except perhaps among rural landless workers. Nevertheless, a small but growing number of the victims of racism has been able to affirm their blackness and lead social demands to redress racism. At least in the current context of democratization and the coincidence of favorable forces, a mass movement has not been necessary for creating the recent antiracist victories. Black-movement gains in recent years have depended on its ability to use the media and make foreign and domestic human-rights alliances, as well as the relative openness and interest on issues pertaining to race and racism by President Cardoso himself. However, the black movement's manipulation of Brazilian government sensitivities in international politics may be the most important factor.

RACE AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

In the past, the idea of racial democracy in Brazil represented an antithesis to segregation that was able to deny racism, noting how miscegenation and Luso-Brazilian culture had uniquely softened the racial antagonisms found in other societies. Racial democracy could be sold in a world

where large and often powerful multiracial nations had egregiously racist systems throughout the twentieth century. At home, the contradiction between the ideology of racial democracy and the practice of racism was managed by elites, both wittingly and unwittingly, by constantly reminding the population of how racially democratic Brazilian society was compared to the polarized and egregious U.S. and South African systems. By affirming its nonracialism, racial democracy served the expressive purpose of integration for Brazilian nationalism, but it mostly failed as an instrument for attenuating or ending racism. In social interactions, whiteness would continue to be valued and blackness devalued, although Afro-Brazilian culture and the racial democracy ideology became widely cherished symbols of Brazilian nationalism for at least half a century.

A reputation for racial tolerance continues to be important for the Brazilian government, which strives to continue setting itself apart from the United States (and other countries) on race issues, especially as it seeks to become an international leader and ally itself with nonwhite countries. Its reputation for racial tolerance has long been parlayed as social capital for fostering such ties. However, the presence of black-movement leaders in high-level international forums since the late 1990s, has devalued that capital. Together with an international human-rights and antiracist movement, the black movement has been able to trade on the antiracist reputation that the Brazilian government greatly values, especially in the context of its democratic opening and their government's growing commitment to international human-rights norms and laws. Racial democracy had long been accepted in the international community as describing Brazil's unique system of racial tolerance, but it has been unmasked largely through the black movement's activism in international forums.

Brazil must now make special efforts to maintain any reputation for racial tolerance. Brazil's international reputation for racial tolerance reached a saturation point by the 1990s, as the United States and South Africa had both terminated their unabashedly racist systems and adopted antiracist ideologies. As a result of this and the unmasking of its racial democracy, Brazil's reputation for racial tolerance thus lost currency in international circles. Like all other multiracial countries, except perhaps the hegemonically powerful United States, which generally dismisses world opinion, Brazil would be called to implement international conventions for combating racism. To be at least as tolerant as other multiracial countries these days, it is not enough to simply have an antiracist ideology or to have no explicitly racist laws, as even the United States and South Africa now meet these conditions. It requires, at minimum, active state intervention for combating Brazil's informal racism and severe racial inequality which has by now become common knowledge in diplomatic circles. Otherwise, Brazil risks becoming the new international pariah of

racial inequality. To maintain some reputation of racial tolerance in the arena of foreign diplomacy, even if less than in the past, Brazil has had to choose to either admit to a history of racial intolerance and institute policies to redress racism or maintain its historical denial of racism. The latter would seem unsustainable for very long.

THE FUTURE

Brazil's future in diminishing racial discrimination and inequality will largely depend on the black movement's ability to exert pressure on the new government. Using international mechanisms will surely be an important part of this strategy. Nation-states increasingly need the support of their populations to further their foreign-policy agendas, especially as domestic NGOs have gained a limited but growing role in foreign policy circles. On the other hand, states can also decide to shut themselves off from the international community, although this is increasingly risky and unlikely for Brazil. Thus, it is important that the black movement continues its attempts to mobilize the victims of racism. There are signs that the black movement is being successful in slowly increasing its ranks, although there seem to be limits to reaching their presumed constituency, particularly the large mixed-race population. Although many ordinary dark-skinned Brazilians continue to avoid classification as black, they seem to increasingly recognize the burdens of being black, which itself is important for mobilization to redress racial discrimination.

Today, Brazil's racism is widely recognized, the black movement has become acknowledged as legitimate defenders of human rights, and research on race relations has become an important part of Brazilian academe. These represent a historical turnaround for Brazil. At the same time, race mixture and long-standing nonracialism continue to be valued as a unique and positive feature of Brazilian culture. Nonetheless, racial discrimination persists. For nonwhites, whitening through race mixture and even self-classification continues to offer the possibility of individual improvement, and whites continue to enjoy the privilege of racial status. Thus, the terrain on which race is understood in Brazil has shifted away from the racial-democracy era in many fundamental ways, although it is still informed by its values. However, discriminatory social practices continue to be largely informed by the even earlier white-supremacy phase of Brazilian race thinking. Brazil's new era of affirmative action will hopefully bring further positive change.