

BEYOND RACE AND GENDER

Recent Works on Afro-Latin America

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- AFRO-LATIN AMERICA, 1800–2000.* By George Reid Andrews. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. Pp. 304. \$19.95 paper.)
- RACE IN ANOTHER AMERICA: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SKIN COLOR IN BRAZIL.* By Edward E. Telles. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. Pp. 336. \$35.00 cloth.)
- LYDIA CABRERA AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN AFRO-CUBAN CULTURAL IDENTITY.* By Edna M. Rodríguez-Mangual. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. Pp. 216. \$59.95 cloth, \$24.95 paper.)
- AFRO-CUBAN RELIGIOSITY, REVOLUTION, AND NATIONAL IDENTITY.* By Christine Ayorinde. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004. Pp. 320. \$59.95 cloth.)
- LAUGHTER OUT OF PLACE: RACE, CLASS, VIOLENCE AND SEXUALITY IN A RIO SHANTYTOWN.* By Donna M. Goldstein. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. Pp. 378. \$60.00 cloth, \$27.50 paper.)
- NEITHER ENEMIES NOR FRIENDS: LATINOS, BLACKS, AFRO-LATINOS.* Edited by Anani Dzidzienyo and Suzanne Oboler. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Pp. 336. \$85.00 cloth, \$26.95 paper.)

A powerful black cultural renaissance is flowering in the Americas—Afro-Latin America is on the map. The black presence in Latin America—which until recently was socially invisible as blacks were cleansed from the sociological landscape—is more visible than ever. The cultural, historical, and sociological relevance of Afro-Latin America is now the subject of vigorous examination. Across Afro-Latin America—from Cuba to Colombia to Brazil—strong, positive, black-based social movements are creating new democratic space in their respective struggles for human rights protection, social equality, and democratic reform. After centuries of being relegated to the margins of Latin American societies, black communities throughout the region are challenging social hierarchies that produce structural inequalities. In the academy,

the Afro-Latin contribution to art, literature, race and gender models, social movements, the environment, and history, as debated within an Afro-Latin context, is changing Latin American and Africana studies.

While accurate census data are hard to come by, it is estimated that there are about 150 million people of African descent in Latin America, thus representing about one-third of the total population.¹ At present strong black movements exist in Latin American countries with varying degrees of organization. Many of these movements are fighting against police brutality, disappearances, extermination, coerced sterilization, poverty, and other systematic abuses. Positively, they are fighting for legal recognition and basic socio-political rights. In general these movements are striving for social and economic development, equality before the law, democratic reforms, human rights, and citizenship. The history of these communities, their levels of empowerment, and their social standing vis-à-vis the overall population vary from country to country; it is true, however, that these communities share many similar problems. This essay is focused on cutting edge scholarship that examines the Afro-Latin problematic from various disciplinary perspectives such as history, cultural studies, sociology, and anthropology.

George Reid Andrews's *Afro-Latin America* is a compelling historical narrative focused on the struggles of Afro-Latin Americans (1800–2000) for democratic participation, social equality, human rights, and citizenship. Such a work is long overdue. Perhaps not since Leslie B. Rout's *African Experience in Spanish America*, Franklin Knight's *African Presence in Latin America*, and Minority Rights Group's *Afro-Latin America: No Longer Invisible* has anyone focused on the collective struggles and problems of Afro-Latin communities in the Americas from a comparative perspective.

While there are no new or novel questions posed, the ones raised are relevant, important, and are dealt with superbly. The author provides a tight analysis and synthesis of some of the key political issues facing Afro-Latin Americans. Andrews moves from country to country with ease as he situates the various struggles of Afro-Latin communities within the fluid parameters of Latin American history. By doing so, he demonstrates his fluency in the sociological language of plantation slavery, slave resistance, caste laws, racial and gender discrimination, miscegenation or *mestizaje*, and Afro-Latin social movements. He mainly focuses on Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Costa Rica, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Panama, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela. There are also important discussions on Mexico and Uruguay.

1. Rodolfo Oviedo Monge, "Are We or Aren't We?" *NACLA Report on the Americas* 25, no. 4 (1992): 16.

It has been argued that the history of the African Diaspora in Latin America is inseparable from the history of the national and regional societies of which it is part. And, like Afro-North Americans who forced the United States to broaden the parameters of democracy, Afro-Latin Americans are challenging forms of inequality and discrimination and escaping the barriers that centuries of racism and poverty have imposed, thereby transforming these societies and making them more inclusive.

What was the cultural, political, and economic context in which the history of the African Diaspora unfolded? Also, how did the Diaspora transform Latin America, turning vast areas of it into Afro-Latin America? In surveying and answering these questions, Andrews focuses on a broad spectrum of institutions and collective strategies that Afro-Latin Americans used in the collective struggle to construct their lives. On the one hand, blacks in Latin America formed their own independent associations, such as runaway slave communities, black militias, religious groups, and mutual aid societies. On the other hand, they forged tactical alliances with whites, Indians, and mestizos to create multiracial movements that had a profound effect on the region. The independence armies, the national liberal parties of the 1800s and early 1900s, the labor unions of the same period, and the popular parties of the mid-1900s were broad-based movements that included the core participation and support of Afro-Latin Americans.

Culturally, Afro-Latin America has had—and still has—a powerful impact on Latin American societies. African-informed music, dance, and corporal movements (samba and capoeira in Brazil; *rumba* and *son* in Cuba; *candombe*, *milonga*, and tango in Argentina and Uruguay; and merengue in the Dominican Republic) were all rejected by the ruling cultural elites in the 1800s as primitive, barbaric, and bordering on the criminal, yet they were embraced as national symbols in the early 1900s. Through these social and cultural practices, Afro-Latin peoples significantly shaped and defined the national identities of many Latin American societies and the effect is widespread today.

Along with an excellent historical analysis and synthesis of Afro-Latin America, Andrews concentrates on the current black social movement histories (1990s) of key countries like Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Panama. His work highlights how these movements have transformed the region by placing racial and gender discrimination on the political table to be discussed by governments, nongovernmental organizations, and multilateral institutions. Black movements across the region have forced governments to address the needs of their communities based on the understanding that racial and gender discrimination are structural problems that impede social and economic development. This represents, according to Andrews, a paradigm shift in how Latin Americans think about race.

Edward Telles's *Race in Another America* is an impressive comparative analysis on the maintenance of racial boundaries and forms of racial discrimination that focuses mainly on Brazil and the United States. Race, according to Telles, is an important organizing principle in both Brazil and the United States, though in different ways. Both Brazil and the United States, two of the largest countries in the western hemisphere, have large African American populations. Brazil has a black or mixed-race population of roughly 80 million, almost half of the total population of 173 million people.

The African American population in the United States is estimated to be roughly 30 million, or 12 percent of the total population of 270 million. Both countries have had long and difficult experiences with slavery, race relations, and racial discrimination. By focusing on the United States and Brazil, Telles attempts to develop a global theory of race relations by making a systematic international comparison on the relevance of race and racial boundaries. He poses two main questions: What does the United States-Brazil comparison say about the construction, maintenance, and manifestation of racial boundaries in contemporary society? And to what extent, where, and why do societies as different as Brazil and the United States set racial boundaries?

Brazil has recently experienced a dramatic change in race relations as the issue of race and racial discrimination is now squarely at the center of policy debates and discussions. Like never before, politicians, the media, civil society, and Afro-Brazilian groups are having far-reaching and critical discourses on the meaning and significance of race in Brazil. Also, for the first time in Brazil's history, broad-based social policy has begun to promote social advancement of blacks and mulattos through affirmative action programs.

Methodologically, Telles employs important quantitative data from several Brazilian national censuses, annual household surveys, and attitudinal studies as he explores the form and substance of race relations. Analytically, terms like segregation, race mixture, or miscegenation are replaced with horizontal relations; similarly, social exclusion and marginalization are replaced with vertical relations (horizontal relations refer to levels of sociability or social distance or how social groups construct space, and vertical relations refer to forms of poverty, income, or economic inequality).

In U.S. sociological circles, vertical relations are seen as the consequence of horizontal relations. In order to better understand Brazil, Telles argues that horizontal and vertical dimensions of race relations must be separated. By making this separation, the author locates and distinguishes those points or boundaries in which race relations in Brazil may be more or less exclusive than previously thought, in comparison to the United States. In other words, the nature of discrimination at each level, i.e.,

residential housing and segregation, intermarriage, on the one hand, and racial inequality and development, on the other, may be based on separate logics. By separating these indicators, Telles demonstrates that discrimination on one level is not equal or the same on another.

He identifies three crucial factors responsible for profound racial inequality in Brazil: hyper-inequality, a glass ceiling, and a racist culture. First, hyper-inequality leads to vast differences in income, material wealth, and access to social capital, which in turn affects life chances, education, health, housing, and patterns of social justice between whites and nonwhites.

Second, the glass ceiling is most obvious in Brazil's elitist educational arrangements, where whites are the leading beneficiaries, and where blacks and browns are excluded largely due to economic reasons. Education is reserved for the middle and upper classes, and since nonwhites do not constitute the middle class, they are not able to attend university.

Third, the façade of racial democracy cleverly masked the inner logic of Brazil's racist culture through hegemonic discursive practices and institutions that deny racial discrimination while simultaneously advancing racial inequality—from vertical relations such as hiring and promotions to horizontal relations such as hanging out with friends or dating. However, despite profound racial inequality, Telles points out that there is substantial intermarriage and residential proximity between whites and nonwhites. Unlike in the United States, race mixture in the intimate and residential realm is more likely. Therefore, miscegenation in Brazil is not simply an ideology.

The relative degree of racial exclusion on the horizontal and vertical dimensions of discrimination between the United States and Brazil is as follows: in the United States a large number of blacks are the bottom of the political economy, while at the same time there is a growing black middle class. In Brazil mulattos and blacks are effectively excluded from the middle class and are found almost exclusively at the bottom.

Integration and assimilation at the horizontal level coexist with high levels of racism and racial inequality at the vertical level in Brazil. Telles's research demonstrates that miscegenation does not undermine racial hierarchies. More intermarriage and less residential segregation do not mean that Brazilians are less racist than North Americans. Telles argues that in the United States, horizontal and vertical relations created rigid black-white boundaries, racially coded friendships, extreme spatial separation, and discrimination in the labor market, thus producing a socially identifiable black consciousness, which in turn facilitated an organized resistance to racial inequality.

In contrast, Brazil's horizontal and vertical systems have peacefully reproduced racial inequality, but undermined organized black identity and resistance. So while Brazil's horizontal system is seen as less racist

(i.e., miscegenated), it has facilitated vertical racial domination (i.e., educational disparities). White privilege is reproduced through the defense of class interest, which the mainly white middle class uses to secure and maintain domination over wealth and resources. In other words, fluid horizontal relations facilitated vertical relations by allowing the reproduction of stark racial inequalities to continue, until recently, without effective state intervention. In both countries state intervention has varied over time and space and their effects in each period played a crucial role in shaping race relations. Telles closes with an examination of the ways in which anti-racist laws and affirmative action are currently unfolding in Brazil.

Edna M. Rodríguez-Mangual, in *Lydia Cabrera and the Construction of an Afro-Cuban Cultural Identity*, explores the diverse ethnographic and literary works of the Cuban intellectual Lydia Cabrera. Spanning several decades before and after the revolution, Cabrera's works are largely considered "the bible" on Afro-Cuban culture and religion. Breaking with traditional conventions on Cuban studies, Rodríguez-Mangual argues quite convincingly that Cabrera's work functions as an alternative to the ethnography of Fernando Ortiz, an important intellectual who coined the term "transculturation" and who is known for his writings on Afro-Cubans. Although Ortiz first employed the term, it is Cabrera who had a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the concept, according to Rodríguez-Mangual. It is argued that Ortiz's works were ethnocentric, based on the gaze, and rooted in traditional anthropological discourse of the times.

Rodríguez-Mangual is interested in the ways in which power intertwines with discourses of individual and national identity. She argues that Cabrera sought to redefine, if not reposition, the identity of marginalized Afro-Cubans into the broader frame of Cuban national identity. In making these claims, Rodríguez-Mangual challenges the traditional hegemonic discourse regarding the representation of Afro-Cuban identity, religion, and culture.

Lydia Cabrera, the youngest of eight children, was born on May 20, 1900 in Havana, Cuba; however, official documents state that she was born in 1899 in New York. Cabrera's interest in Afro-Cuban culture was probably sparked by her black nanny and seamstress who provided rich stories and tales on Afro-Cuban experiences during her early childhood. In the later 1920s, Cabrera moved to Paris where she studied art at L'Ecole du Louvre. While there she began to reflect on how Cuban national identity was influenced by African culture. Direct influences on Cabrera included Wilfredo Lam, the Cuban painter, and Aïme Césaire, the Martinican poet, among others. Cabrera was against the Revolution of 1959, as well as Castro and the scientific Marxist-Leninist principles of socialism. She left Cuba for Miami in 1961, where she died in 1991.

Is Cabrera simply a translator of Afro-Cuban “folklore” from her privileged position as a white, upper middle-class woman? According to Rodríguez-Mangual, Cabrera’s texts represent an alternative discourse to the standard homogenous interpretations of Cuban national identity. She explores the sharp relational tension between the ethnographic and the literary in order to demonstrate how Cabrera blurred lines between fact and fiction. As a writer of both ethnography and “fiction,” Cabrera’s fiction is based on the oral stories told to her by Afro-Cubans. Cabrera’s literary and ethnographical works affirm Afro-Cubans as subjects of agency through a discourse that opens space organized around Afro-Cuban ontology.

Relying on Foucault, Rodríguez-Mangual argues that Cabrera articulates a voice of resistance from within the discourses of power. Cabrera’s works precede the transformations occurring in modern cultural studies by revealing the rigid construction and artificiality of anthropological text by challenging the authority of scientific discourse in all of her narrations. In doing so, Cabrera does not solidify cultural codes but presents them as mutually contesting while simultaneously breaking away from the paradigm of traditional cultural studies. Cabrera, then, is able to recreate the voice of the Other and articulate a more radical subjectivity.

Implicitly, Rodríguez-Mangual is suggesting that Cabrera’s texts represent an alternative representation of Afro-Cubans. However, due to her stance regarding the revolution and the calculus of revolutionary politics in Cuba, Cabrera’s works were not available, if not fully appreciated, until recently in Cuba. Cabrera’s works, therefore, should be critically reappraised in the context of Afro-Latin and Afro-Cuban studies, as they represent a critical alternative to standard anthropological discourses as well as a repositioning of the Afro-Cuban voice.

Afro-Cuban Religiosity, Revolution, and National Identity, by Christine Ayorinde, examines the ways in which Afro-Cuban religions form part of, or are excluded from, Cuban national identity. Using a variety of print sources as well as interviews, her research provides a broad historical survey on how different ruling elites—from the colonial period to Cuba’s current revolutionary government—have responded to Afro-Cuban religious expressions. The main focus, however, is the connection between the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and its sociological consequences for Afro-Cuban religions. Has the revolution embraced Afro-Cuban religions such as Santería, while simultaneously exploiting it as a commodity to earn dollars? What is the tension between Cuban national identity and blackness, and how is it resolved?

According to Ayorinde, in attempting to create a new revolutionary identity in the form of *cubanía* or *national identity*, which was meant to be more inclusive, the revolution created instead a form of artificial homogeneity. The revolutionary government was not able to develop a

national policy that was balanced or unbiased towards Afro-Cuban cultural expressions. While celebrating a racial synthesis, cubanía privileged whiteness and a Western aesthetic, a revolutionary racial mixing that celebrates difference while negating, co-opting, or diluting Afro-Cuban culture.

Despite attempts by the revolution to deal with racial inequality, many Afro-Cubans still face forms of racial discrimination, although black consciousness and cultural expressions are on the rise across the island. According to Ayorinde, along with Santería there is a small but blossoming Rastafarianism movement, and the Nation of Islam is now established on the island. Rap music, in various expressions, is also emerging as a cultural force. These cultural forces, however new, are situated within a pan-African framework and represent a critique and challenge to the official ideological discourse that dismisses racism or camouflages racial discrimination.

The revolution has created space for traditional cultural expressions such as Santería, which is now an essential component of Cuba's national identity. The question is, How will the revolution respond to Rastafarianism, the Nation of Islam, hip-hop culture, and other forms of blackness? A more nuanced discussion and greater attention to these questions would have added a more critical perspective to this important study.

Laughter Out of Place: Race, Class, Violence and Sexuality in a Rio Shantytown is a bold, powerful, and gripping ethnographic study that focuses on the lives of poor, domestic women workers who deploy humor and laughter as strategic forms of resistance in their day-to-day struggle for survival. It is mainly focused on black women who struggle against personal and structural forces to maintain their human dignity and sanity in a society that reproduces glaring racial, gender, and income inequalities. On one hand, these stories are cruel, inhuman, and beyond the scope of human imagination, while on the other, they represent real life in the favela. The reader is forced to ask, what is funny about rape, gang murders, police brutality, child abuse and abandonment, and prison life in Brazil? Such grim realities are explored in order to demonstrate how marginal communities operate as exploited subjects within networks of regional and global economies. Based on extensive ethnographic research, Goldstein creates a rich sociological tapestry focused on how humor and jokes are used by poor women, and in doing so she provides a glimpse into the multiples ways in which these women understand and experience their lives.

Set against the backdrop of a shantytown in Rio de Janeiro, Goldstein's razor sharp study explores how humor represents an oppositional narrative to middle- and upper-class ethos. The commentaries of subordinated classes, as expressed through their humor, represent important cultural messages that serve as critiques of social conditions.

Humor, as well as laughter, it is argued, are social and power relations that act as fugitive forms of communication. They serve as vehicles for grassroots therapy and express brutally oppressive, harsh social conditions. Black humor, wit, and sharp tongues are oral histories as well as cultural weapons for poor urban women from the favelas who do not have access to centers of power or not involved in Brazil's formalized protest movement.

Like a griot tale, these stories represent an oral history of contemporary urban women; the narrative structure hones in on the lives of poor, black, semi-literate women who are largely removed or silenced from public discourse in Brazil. This ethnographic narrative focuses mainly on an Afro-Brazilian named Gloria, her family, and her network of friends and employers. Goldstein sees her research as an ethnographic snapshot of contemporary class relations in urban Rio. At its core, the narrative reveals how poor black women negotiate treacherous economic-sexual exploitation and commodification, racist dehumanization, and devaluation, as well as differential democratic systems, while simultaneously providing for their families and holding them intact.

The horrors of the daily grind in the favelas, while deeply disturbing, are beautifully constructed in order to emphasize how raw violence and state neglect affect poor communities in urban Rio. The narrative structure is tight: it has multiple layers, depth, and texture. Gloria, the main protagonist, cares for an extended family of roughly fourteen children in a Rio shantytown, fictitiously renamed Felicidade Eterna; her life is chronicled as a domestic worker in Zona Sul, an upper-middle-class neighborhood in Rio where she spends twelve to fourteen hours working each day. Gloria's life is beset with tragedy: two of her daughters were widows with children before they were twenty (both husbands by age twenty-five had been killed in violent, gang-style executions), two of her daughters were raped, and a son was killed in a gangland shootout with police.

Goldstein asks why so many young men in Rio's shantytowns die violent deaths. In answering this question, she meticulously explores the unequal layers and distribution of violence on Rio's poor, the differential application of laws for poor and middle- and upper-class citizens, and the ways in which poor communities construct alternative forms of justice that fill the gap left by the state. The construction and extension of citizenship and democracy is linked to the lives and experiences of poor people. Citizenship is constructed according to social class, race, gender, and location. Using Pereira's "elite liberalism" thesis, Goldstein posits that civil rights in Brazil are extended based on race, class, gender, and other factors (e.g., neighborhood, profession, or skin color). Therefore, human rights violations, like police abuse and gang terror, represent forms of state repression specifically targeting the poorest citizens.

The expression of this hegemonic discourse, which is rooted in “get tough on crime” politics, allows citizens across the social spectrum—rich and poor, white as well as black—to approve or sanction such measures. However, the law and order discourse and the use of violence are unidirectional and reserved only for the poorest. The unidirectional violence administered by both police and gangs has a disproportional effect on young, poor (black) men in Rio’s shantytowns. Moreover, the laws, rules, and other form of human conduct within the favelas are established based on the ideas of alternative forms of justice. To illustrate, a “good” gang member who saves a young woman from rape or punishes her abuser is “respected.” Against this sociological tapestry, Goldstein argues that the unequal extension of democracy and citizenship (human rights) is rooted in a highly skewed and unequal economic system, thus producing alternative forms of justice.

Given its anthropological and ethnographic underpinning, one question arises: Is Goldstein’s research an updated version of Oscar Lewis’s “culture of poverty”? Lewis focused on poor urban families in Latin America, and in many ways his research was controversial because it was seen as “blaming the victims,” condescending, and reproducing the same negative stereotypes it was trying to combat. However, Goldstein’s book is about how unequal power relations structure social inequality and the ways in which poor urban women create forms of resistance through the use of humor. While her research explores some gritty, thorny, and problematic issues, which are toxic, it does not “re-victimize” the victim.

Neither Enemies nor Friends: Latinos, Blacks, Afro-Latinos is an important and timely anthology written from a comparative hemispheric standpoint that examines the significance of race or “racialization” in the two Americas. It is a collection of sixteen short essays written by scholars and activists who discuss the multiple ways in which people of Latin American descent in the United States are challenging the traditional binary racial paradigm. Who are Afro-Latin Americans? Do blacks in the Americas have a greater common experience resulting from slavery? Given the ever-changing nature of racial and ethnic identification, what are the goals, prospects, and obstacles for coalition-building between and among racialized minorities in U.S. society today? Along with presenting a synthesis of the current debates on the social construction of race and blackness in the Americas, the essays in this anthology examine how Afro-Latin social movements and other nonwhite actors are reshaping the social geography of race and ethnicity.

Throughout the Americas—from Los Angeles to Rio de Janeiro, from the Bronx to Salvador da Bahia—brown and black peoples are challenging racial inequality while at the same time constructing alternative models for political participation. The struggle to be full citizens,

on the one hand, and the day-to-day human rights violations faced by African-Americans, Afro-Latinas/os, and Latinas/os, on the other hand, only serve to reinforce the shared experiences of brown and black peoples in both Americas. The book argues that deeply entrenched racial and social prejudices and other forms of discrimination are the foundations for the de facto disenfranchisement of the hemisphere's populations; moreover, understanding the hemisphere's racial ideologies and how the processes of globalization affect national economies (e.g., glaring poverty and wide-scale human rights violations) serves to highlight the urgent need for constructing a common paradigm of social action in the Americas.

The main focus of the anthology is the construction of race and the significance of racial categories as transnational concepts, the meaning of blackness in the Americas, diasporic consciousness, social movements, and the implications and consequences of black Latina/o political alliances in the United States. Some of the themes include the Afro-Ecuadorian struggle for social justice; how race is socially lived in Peru; transnational blackness and consciousness in Honduras; Afro-Mexicans and social invisibility; race and citizenship in Brazil; socio-racial hierarchies, identity, and power among Haitians in South Florida; racial profiling of African-Americans and Latinas/os; racial politics and coalition-building in Los Angeles; and the social responsibility of the Latina/o scholars in the United States.

This anthology is a significant contribution to the literature. It expands the parameters of many of the current debates taking place in Latin American, Latina/o, and African American studies by placing issues of race, race relations, identity politics, and social movements in a transnational framework, rather than placing them within a national context. This anthology reflects the direction in which the literature is headed, as more comparative studies of race, race relations, diasporic consciousness, and social movements situated within a transnational framework are desperately needed.