

BEYOND **Racism**

**RACE AND
INEQUALITY IN
BRAZIL, SOUTH
AFRICA, AND THE
UNITED STATES**

EDITED BY

- Charles V. Hamilton
 - Lynn Huntley
 - Neville Alexander
 - Antonio Sérgio
Alfredo Guimarães
 - Wilmot James
-

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BEYOND
RACISM

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Preface

Lynn Huntley

After two centuries of such dramatic and spectacular progress, the divide between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the marginalized, that continues to exist—and in fact, to widen—puts to serious question the nature and quality of our humanity. That these inequities—amongst nations and within single nations—still correlate so strongly to racial differences demeans us all.

—*Nelson Mandela*

This volume is a unique collage of perspectives on the causes and consequences of gross disparities in power and well-being between “persons of European or African descent or appearance” in Brazil, South Africa, and the United States. The awkward phrase in quotation marks describes people who, in common parlance, are often labeled “white” or “black.” Its use signals that perceived “race” is a subjective idea, variously understood, constructed, and maintained to forge group and individual identities and apportion rights and privileges in these three nations and others around the globe. Although all human beings are the same beneath the skin, and “race” as a scientific matter has little meaning, perceived differences in race, color, or phenotype have long furnished the method and rationale by which disparities in power and well-being between and among these groups have been perpetuated.

Much of the existing literature about “race relations” in Brazil, South Africa, and the United States mines the subject in country-specific terms. It is useful to focus upon the exceptionality of discrete nations. Such close-up examinations of culture, history, resources, governance, and other variations that comprise the world’s tapestry of diversity are

vital to understanding disparities and the processes by which they are sustained or can be dismantled.

This volume adds a comparative and transnational perspective to country-specific analyses. When one sees familiar problems dressed up in different national garments, new questions, factors, explanations, trends, linkages, and implications emerge. A comparative lens enriches by adding fresh thinking and perspective to our understanding. We may be enabled to see in the experiences of other nations and peoples that to which we have become blind in our own.

Though different, Brazil, South Africa, and the United States share a family resemblance. All were colonized by Europeans who sought to preserve for themselves and those who looked like them rights and privileges denied by law or custom to nonwhites. They created in each country a hierarchy of power in which white skin color, race, and other characteristics perceived to be European were valued. People of African descent or appearance were devalued and deemed fit to serve only as cheap, exploitable sources of labor. In this sense, use of perceived race or color to disadvantage some and benefit others was functional for Europeans. It allowed them to have their own form of “affirmative action,” monopolize power, and destroy or marginalize the darker-skinned competition.

Overlapping with the color/race hierarchy in each country was a gender hierarchy with white men at the top. Women of all derivations were denied equal treatment and rights. Women of African descent were doubly disadvantaged—by race and gender—and subject to rank sexual exploitation by white men in order to create more people marked by their skins for enslavement and/or subordination.

As the twenty-first century begins, the over 125 million people of African descent who reside in these nations remain disproportionately numbered among the poor and disadvantaged, a legacy of the inequality and material disparities so diligently constructed in the past. It is a legacy that each of these nations is now forced to confront. For even as racism and discrimination are deeply etched features of life in each nation, as entrenched are efforts by people of African descent or appearance and their allies to end racism and discrimination and attain their place as full, equal, contributing members of society. Archbishop Desmond Tutu said it best: “Freedom will break out. People are made for it just as plants tend toward the light and toward the water.”

This volume provides an overview of how “race” is constructed in these countries and samples some of the key ideas and strategies being used to move toward more egalitarian social orders. There is a lack of

symmetry in these efforts. The countries are at different phases of development and evolution as modern states. A comparison does not imply similarity where it does not exist; it may underscore differences.

South Africa, the newest substantive democracy in this trilogy of nations, has had less than a decade of postapartheid governance. But it is a nation rooted in racism and discrimination. Race in one form or another has been at center stage since the first Europeans landed. South Africa's long history of efforts to overcome apartheid and "Free Nelson Mandela" is known around the world.

The volume describes some of this history, but its primary focus is on current efforts to redress the inequality that is racism's legacy, trends in the political and economic arenas, and the debates, perspectives, and dynamics that will likely shape the nation's future. Written by leading scholars and activists, the pieces on South Africa provide an insider's view and explore *quo vadis* for this nation. South Africa has come to embody fond hopes that human beings can overcome and move beyond racism to construct fairer, more open, and nonracial societies built less around difference and more around common aspirations. It remains to be seen, however, whether this nation—with its grand experiment with racial reconciliation—can marshal the resources needed to address staggering social problems that mar its prospects for a bright future. And, to a large extent, South Africa's prospects revolve around the extent to which the white minority, which still exercises enormous sway in the economic arena, can adjust to and cope with the imperative to share power, resources, and space with those who only a few years ago were treated as "disposable people."

By way of contrast, the people and government of Brazil are just beginning to publicly acknowledge that appearance or racism contribute to the nation's color-coded power hierarchy and help to sustain disparities and inequality. Brazil is one of the world's ten largest economies and has the largest population of people of African descent or appearance outside the continent of Africa. Still largely invested in its image of itself as a "great racial democracy," and awakening from a period of military governance that ended in 1985, national and public efforts to define, identify, and combat racism and discrimination are at an early stage. Brazil has only recently begun to look outward and recognize that, like its companions South Africa and the United States, it must find ways to expand opportunities.

The pieces about Brazil offer a glimpse of the impact of miscegenation and raise important questions about the effects that the absence of a *de jure* system of racial discrimination after the abolition of slavery had

on identity formation and mobilization for social change. In Brazil, miscegenation and efforts to “whiten” the population were deliberately promoted, and on the surface, social relations appear to be more “cordial” than in the United States or South Africa. The pieces invite the reader to think about the intersection of race and gender in the three nations and explore the close linkage between racism and sexism that too often goes without note. The volume considers whether eased social relations in Brazil have real substance or are merely a measure of the harshness of police repression, the daily fight for survival, underdevelopment, and resignation to suffering by the mass of poor Brazilians. The reader will also be forced to grapple with the age-old canard of whether it is “race *or* poverty,” rather than “race *and* poverty,” that causes the color-coded disparities in status. The emerging literature about racial inequality and the black movement in Brazil is presented, bringing new questions to traditional analyses of social relations in that nation.

Although the United States is often cited as the world’s oldest democratic state, in fact it was not until the demise of legalized discrimination against African Americans, women of all races, and other groups that the government could claim to have even begun to make real the nation’s promise of fairness and justice for all of the governed. As the twentieth century ended, the nation had a variety of laws, public policies, practices, and experiences in trying to dismantle its system of second-class citizenship for blacks, women, and other vulnerable groups. African Americans have benefited from the civil rights movement’s transformative impact in many ways, but, as a group, remain disproportionately mired in poverty and disadvantage. The volume considers the history of this movement, the responses to contemporary efforts to reverse many of the civil-rights-era policies and advances, and the nature of coalition politics among many American stakeholder groups. Women of all races, Latinos, Asians, immigrants, and others are reshaping the nation’s historically dominant bipolar intergroup-relations paradigm.

The sections of the volume related to Brazil are in some ways the least elaborated due to the relative lack of social upheaval, limited debate and policy development to combat racism, the durability of denial, and the as yet small intellectual and activist community striving to promote truth-telling in order to effect transformation. But Brazil is an important counterpoint to the other two nations. It illustrates the complexity of racial identity, the role of color and other appearance-related factors in the practice of racism, and how race, poverty, and gender-based disadvantages intertwine.

South Africa, Brazil, and the United States are three nations with many critical choices to make about what they wish to be and the paths that must be followed to achieve national redefinition. They are nations that are wavering between old patterns and new possibilities, between white supremacy and sexism and promotion of human rights for all, and between insularity and aspirations to world and regional leadership.

Brazil and South Africa are among the world's most unequal societies measured by wealth and income maldistribution. But inequality is also pronounced in the United States. And there are emerging transnational trends and developments that are increasingly interacting with national efforts and prospects for movement beyond racism and toward human rights.

The technological revolution and the globalizing forces that it has unleashed have spawned some of these trends. Worldwide migration is at record levels. This is especially evident in the United States, which is projected to become a "majority minority" nation by the middle of the twenty-first century, and in South Africa, the preferred destination of many diverse African peoples from elsewhere on the African continent. The migration of peoples into all three countries and internal demographic and migration patterns pose new problems and imperatives with which these nations must grapple.

The emergent global economy is growing stronger each day. Depending upon where one looks or when, global economic integration may strengthen, disrupt, or limit the capacities of government to respond effectively to social welfare needs or plan for orderly national development. It may exacerbate or lessen the divide between the "developed North" and the "developing South." It may also create new incentives for the people in all of these countries to overcome racism, reduce inequality, and broaden investment in the human capital of diverse peoples. There is growing evidence that capital does not long remain in venues where social disorder and tensions are high, and a trained and healthy work force, expanding consumer base, democratic and participatory government, and other trappings of stability are wanting. Globalization may furnish incentives for Brazil, South Africa, and the United States to take more seriously the need to enhance the education and productive capacities of marginalized and poor people, including people of African descent, not only out of altruism or a concern for fairness, but rather, enlightened self- and national interest.

The international human rights and global women's movements will also likely gain newfound influence as time goes on, since global problems call for solutions of commensurate scope. Domestic efforts to

advance the well-being of people of African descent, women, and other vulnerable groups in each country may benefit from this international engagement. Certainly in the international effort to overturn apartheid, one can sense the potential power of international human rights and women's rights movements.

Capital and people are flowing across national boundaries at unprecedented rates. The idea of democracy has taken hold in all three nations. In the cases of Brazil and South Africa, where so many are so poor and have limited material stakes in the mainstream of society, the effort to combat racism and inequality is increasingly seen and understood to be a central part of democratic consolidation. In the United States, as well, where high levels of voter apathy and special-interest politics are reshaping political dynamics, efforts to mobilize members of historically excluded groups to participate in electoral politics may result in gridlock and/or a progressive shift toward more inclusive and substantively representative government.

These points are explored in this volume's comparative papers on education, international human rights remedies for discrimination, economic costs of racial discrimination, and affirmative action. This is an exciting and fluid time at which to consider how nations and their peoples can effect social, political, and economic transformation.

While it is clear that there is no one solution to the problem of racism and discrimination—it is but a variant of prejudice that can have many subjects—it is also clear that there are as many diverse solutions. What is too often lacking is the will to do that which is needed to effect change.

There are several areas that the volume's editors would have liked to mine more fully, but could only touch upon lightly. The concerns of women, e.g., the struggle for equal rights, pay and education, violence against women, reproductive health, work and family issues, and the differential impacts that racism and sexism have on this half of humankind are subjects of enormous complexity and importance that cry out for in-depth examination and treatment. Likewise, the role of police violence, imprisonment, and repression directed toward men of African descent—especially in the United States and Brazil—are issues of great importance, among others, on which the volume cannot adequately focus.

Nor are we able in this volume to tackle issues related to development and economic policy in an in-depth way. Economic growth must be the point of departure upon which efforts to reduce inequality among groups must be based in each nation. However, as several pieces in the

volume note, growth without targeted and complementary efforts to help excluded groups gain the ability to take advantage of enhanced opportunity or resources is unlikely to eliminate racially identifiable inequality. This is why comprehensive antipoverty *and* antidiscrimination measures must be mounted simultaneously to lessen inequality. Dr. Bernard Anderson, a former assistant secretary in the United States Department of Labor, underscored this need with these words:

The relationship between economic growth and the reduction of income inequality is not just theoretical but is based on actual United States' experience. African Americans bear a relationship to the American economy much like that of the caboose on the train. When the train speeds up, the caboose speeds up, and when the train slows down, the caboose slows down. But in the natural order of things, the caboose never catches up with the engine. . . . Economic growth reduces income inequality, but economic growth alone won't produce a desirable level of parity in the distribution of income.

Finally, a word about the Comparative Human Relations Initiative, under whose auspices this volume was developed, is in order. The Initiative is a multiyear, multidisciplinary effort begun in 1995 to bring people from Brazil, South Africa, and the United States together to learn from each others' experiences in combating discrimination. It held a number of meetings of activists, scholars, and policymakers in the three nations. Partnering with nongovernmental organizations and leaders in the three nations, the Initiative published several reports that comprise the *Beyond Racism, Embracing an Interdependent Future* series, and three books, *Grappling with Change*, *Between Unity and Diversity*, and *Tirando a Máscara, Ensaio sobre o racismo no Brasil* (*Taking Off the Mask, Essays on Racism in Brazil*). This comparative anthology is part of this body of work.

Special appreciation is due to the Ford Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Levi-Strauss Foundation, and the Coca-Cola Foundation for their support. The other editors of this volume—Charles V. Hamilton, Wilmot James, Neville Alexander, and Antonio Sérgio Guimarães, consultant Steve Suits, and my colleague Janet Keene—have labored long and hard to bring this volume into being and deserve special commendation.

Significant progress has been made in the twentieth century toward eradication of white supremacy, an ideology that was the order of the day as the century began. We hope that this volume will make a contribution to critical thinking, renewed resolve, and serious continuing

efforts to rid Brazil, South Africa, and the United States of the antiquated and false ideas that link color, race, gender, and other superficial traits with intelligence or merit. All human beings have rights simply by virtue of our sentience. We are all the same beneath the skin.

Lynn Huntley

Director

The Comparative Human Relations Initiative

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Race and Racism in Historical Perspective: Comparing the United States, South Africa, and Brazil

George M. Fredrickson

FOR MORE THAN fifty years, scholars from various disciplines have been comparing the history of group relations in societies that have traditionally used skin color as a marker of rank or status. None of these societies have attracted more attention than the United States, Brazil, and South Africa. The bulk of this work has compared or contrasted the American case with only one of the others; only rarely have all three been treated at the same time. This scholarship has yielded some significant insights but has also generated much controversy, resulting in periodic revisions and reevaluations.

New historical knowledge and methods have not been the only reasons for the protean nature of the comparisons. Color-coded group relations in all three of these societies have been changing in palpable ways in recent decades, sometimes relatively suddenly as in the United States in the 1960s and South Africa in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Long-term trajectories, projected on the basis of an understanding of earlier conditions and trends, have often failed to make such changes fully comprehensible and have obliged comparative historians to reevaluate the past in the light of the present. In the case of Brazil, an accumulation of evidence suggesting that there are now significant levels of prejudice and discrimination against people with African ancestry has forced the reconsideration of a past that hitherto had seemed almost idyllic in contrast to the blatant racism that historians had found in South Africa and the southern United States.

Like all history, comparative history is influenced by the location of the historian in time and space. When Americans write about race in Brazil or South Africa, even if they do not make explicit comparisons with the United States, their work often searches implicitly for analo-