

RESEÑAS

MARCOS CHOR MAIO & RICARDO VENTURA SANTOS (eds.):
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Marcos Chor Maio and Ricardo Ventura Santos have compiled an excellent volume which examines the question of race and racial relations in Brazil. The anthology, which brings together the writings of mainly Brazilian historians and social scientists, provides an interdisciplinary and diachronic approach to the issues of race, ethnicity, and nation-building. *Raça, Ciência e Sociedade* grew out of a conference held in Rio de Janeiro in May, 1995, and is divided into four thematic sections: race and nation at the turn of the twentieth century; the reinvention of race in the 1930s and 1940s; case studies of Brazilian race relations between the 1940s and the 1960s; and contemporary perspectives on race relations.

Assaulted by nineteenth-century European theories of white supremacy that condemned their multiracial nation to eternal backwardness, Brazilian elites sought to parry the blows. The essays examining racial discourse under the Brazilian Empire and Old Republic demonstrate the response by intellectuals and policymakers. John Manuel Monteiro shows how imperial officials constructed two archetypes of the Indian: the Tupi, the embodiment of the noble savage, relegated to the distant historical past; and the non-Tupi, or Tapuia, the bloodthirsty marauder inhabiting the contemporary landscape. If nothing could controvert the evidence of Brazil's historical racial mixture, then the long-lost Tupi would be heroicized for their valor. However, there was little to celebrate regarding the Tapuia—particularly when they hampered economic development. Furthermore, nineteenth-century elites, influenced by theories of scientific racism, were quick to point out that, as members of a purportedly inferior race, Indians were destined to

disappear through either death or miscegenation, which would lead to the ultimate whitening of the population.

Elite dreams and schemes for racial engineering are explored from a different perspective –immigration policy– in the essays by Giralda Seyferth and Jair de Souza Ramos. Ramos, looking at Brazilian immigration policy and debates in the 1920s, highlights elite and state officials' opposition to Asian and African-American immigration to Brazil. African-American blacks were anathema to Brazilian officials not only on account of their color, but because of their alleged truculence and militancy, so at odds with the purported docility of Afro-Brazilians. Nevertheless, although European immigration was endorsed, white ethnic enclaves, whether cultural or religious, would not be countenanced. As Seyferth's essay points out, European immigrants were not only to provide the precious *braços* for agricultural and artisanal labor; they were also expected to assimilate into Brazilian culture and whiten its racial pedigree. Thus, because they were suspect of clannishness and inassimilability, non-Catholic and non-Iberian/Italian immigrants –notwithstanding their whiteness– would become the target of nativist backlash in the early twentieth century.

Yet, for others, the very concentration of European immigration in the southern region of the country served as a disturbing reminder of the weakness of the federal government under the Old Republic (1889-1930), which spawned such lop-sided economic and demographic development. As Lima and Hochman's fine essay points out, critics of the Old Republic, such as health care officials and politicians, in disseminating the image of Brazil as a disease-ridden country ("a big hospital"), broadcast several messages: the nation's backwardness did not stem from racial or climatic determinism but rather the absence of a strong state and a federal health bureau, which condemned millions of Brazilians to sickness and poverty.

The attack on the liberal-federalist system and the popularization of the myth of racial democracy in Brazil would crystallize, of course, under the Vargas era (1930-45). Unfortunately, none of the essays documenting the "reinvention of race" during this period analyze these critical years in Brazilian history. They do, however, provide comparative studies of the cult of *mestiçagem* in other Latin American nations such as Mexico and Cuba (Martínez-Echazábal), and the ideology of Luso-Tropicalismo, propounded in the 1930s by ideologues of the Salazar regime to justify Portuguese colonial rule, and by Brazil's Gilberto Freyre (Thomaz).

The evolution of the myth of racial democracy is explored in the third section of the book, which examines social science research on Brazilian race relations from the 1940s to the 1960s. Ethnographic work carried out by Harris, Pierson and Azevedo perpetuated the myth that Brazil lacked racial

discrimination and confirmed the common misperception that class alone hampered the socioeconomic advancement of the Afro-Brazilian population (Guimares). The work of Florestan Fernandes, whose revisionist analysis most forcefully rebutted the myth of racial democracy, is highlighted by Arruda, although the essay might have benefitted from an examination of Andrews's work, which challenges some of Fernandes's conclusions.

Students of Brazilian race relations may well find the final section on contemporary issues to be one of the most rewarding. Carlos Hasenbalg's data provide irrefutable evidence of the disadvantaged position of blacks (including mulattoes) in Brazil. Livio Sansone's ethnographic study takes us beyond the official and academic discourse about race to explore the day-to-day ways in which Afro-Brazilians in Bahia experience and deploy "blackness" –a condition or space which is situational and relational. In the *botequim*, in church, or during Carnival, Afro-Brazilians can let down their guard and take pride in their racial background. On the other hand, because race becomes a liability for blacks in the job market, romantic pursuits, and encounters with the police, they will seek to downplay racial difference.

How can blacks become organized in a society that proclaims the inexistence of racism and in which, as Maggie shows, people avoid even using the term "black" or "white" to identify themselves or others because of the oppositional model it implies? A principal recourse for blacks, as Sansone points out, consists of individual rather than collective forms of resistance for day-to-day survival. Indeed, surveys conducted by Hasenbalg show that both whites and blacks shun confrontation in race relations. Perhaps, as Santos suggests, the solution lies in reconceptualizing "blackness" as a "place" demarcated by poverty and popular culture –a classification that would incorporate many Brazilians, regardless of skin color.