
REVIEW ESSAYS

DIASPORA CROSSINGS Afro-Latin America in the Afro-Atlantic

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Black behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops. By Ginetta Candelario. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007. Pp. 353. \$84.95 cloth, \$23.95 paper.

Beyond Slavery: The Multilayered Legacy of Africans in Latin America and the Caribbean. Edited by Darién J. Davis. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007. Pp. 296. \$29.95 paper.

Being and Blackness in Latin America: Uprootedness and Improvisation. By Patricia D. Fox. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006. Pp. 216. \$55.00 paper.

Divisões perigosas: Políticas raciais no Brasil contemporâneo. Edited by Peter Fry, Yvonne Maggie, Marcos Chor Maio, Simone Monteiro, and Ricardo Ventura Santos. São Paulo: Editora Record, 2007. Pp. 363.

Afro-Cuban Theology: Religion, Race, Culture, and Identity. By Michelle A. Gonzalez. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006. Pp. 202. \$59.95 cloth.

Tuning Out Blackness: Race and Nation in the History of Puerto Rican Television. By Yeidy M. Rivero. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005. Pp. 276. \$74.95 cloth, \$21.95 paper.

Afro-Atlantic Dialogues: Anthropology in the Diaspora. Edited by Kevin A. Yelvington. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2006. Pp. 513. \$29.95 paper.

As a review essay in these pages recently remarked, “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.”¹ The works under review here bear out that statement while exemplifying the many different ways that scholars today are studying people of African descent in the region. These works approach Afro-Latin America from widely varying disciplinary perspectives (sociology, history, anthropology, literature, theology, and communications) and from different geographical perspectives as well. Although some cast their analysis at the national level, others, especially the edited volumes, range broadly over Afro-Latin America as a whole. Others set the region (or specific countries) within an even broader geographical context, tracing connections, movements, interactions, and dialogues within Afro-Latin America, and between Afro-Latin America and the larger Atlantic world, particularly Africa and the United States. In so doing, they seek to conceptualize and understand Afro-Latin America as part of the black- or Afro-Atlantic.

In *Being and Blackness in Latin America*, Patricia Fox takes Afro-Atlantic connections, and the flows of people along and through them, as her starting point. Since the beginnings of the Atlantic slave trade in the 1400s, mobility and uprootedness have been basic conditions of the African diaspora. The experience of uprootedness is foundational in diaspora history, yet, she suggests, it remains poorly understood: “Representations that typically describe the sojourn of peoples of African descent in the Hispanic New World . . . emphasize enslavement, offering a picture of catatonic beings dumped into an alien and hostile environment where these *piezas de India* would endure unspeakable horrors and humiliations.” Africans and their descendants are portrayed as “pitiable, empty-handed drones in constructing the New World and its system” (151).

To counter such images, Fox “proposes to rethink Blackness as a narrative not about slavery, lack, and open-ended neediness, but rather as a journey propelled by *uprootedness* and expressed with *improvisation*, responsively shaping life strategies as much as world views and behaviors” (4; original emphasis). Beginning with the slave trade, Afro-Latin American uprootedness continues in recent centuries through intraregional labor migration, land dispossession (including, Fox notes, struggles over desirable urban real estate in Rio de Janeiro, Montevideo, and other cities), and migration to the United States and Europe. Quoting the (uprooted) Jamaican literary theorist Sylvia Wynter, she observes that “our uprootedness is the original model of the total twentieth century disruption of

1. Kwame Dixon, “Beyond Race and Gender: Recent Works on Afro-Latin America,” *Latin American Research Review* 41, no. 3 (2006): 247.

man. . . . We anticipated, by centuries, that exile, which in our century is now common to all" (20).

Bereft of home and, in the case of the slave trade, possessions, migrants and exiles had to engage in improvisation, "a gutsy intersection of skill and serendipity" (50). As Fox notes: "Those strategies in turn constitute the values celebrated and esteemed by people of African descent in specific cultural learning contests, especially those of play, of joking relationship, and of contest" (64). Afro-Latin Americans improvise with food, with clothing, with music, with jobs, with kin and family arrangements, and even with time: "What seems the anecdotal concept of 'Colored People's time' . . . might better be seen as 'off-timing,' a strategy part and parcel of improvisation." Citing Kirstin Hunter Lattany, she amplifies: "off-timing [is] a metaphor for subversion, for code, for ironic attitudes toward mainstream beliefs and behavior, for choosing a vantage point of distance from the majority, for coolness, for sly commentary on the master race, for riffing and improvising off the man's tune and making it fun" (68).

Improvisation extends to speech as well, as evidenced in poetry, song lyrics, folktales, the calls of street and market vendors, call-and-response songs, word games, and perhaps most impressive of all (at least to this reviewer), the spontaneous rhyming contests found throughout the diaspora: Argentine *payadas*, Brazilian *jongo*, Caribbean *décimas*, and U.S. rap. Yet those very achievements, Fox notes, run the risk of consigning people of African descent to the category of the "ontologically oral (mythical, sensual, whimsical) rather than textual (historical, inherently rational, planned, and projected)" (102)—the same, one might add, with off-timing and perhaps even improvisation as a whole. To what degree do these supposedly characteristic elements of blackness tend to reinforce traditional racial stereotypes? Fox is alert to this dilemma and cautions against essentializing these aspects of blackness: they describe "the *situation*—not the essence, nor the nature—of peoples contextually barred by law and custom from writing history and nation" (122; original emphasis). But still, one wonders, if off-timing and "Colored People's time" are basic features of African diaspora culture, how often will Afro-descendants be invited to business or professional meetings?

As Fox says at the outset, her mission is to explore "how discourse premises Blackness" (1), and she derives her picture of blackness from the analysis of literary texts. This raises the question, Are improvisation, off-timing, and orality as central in Afro-Latin American history, culture, and daily life as they are in Fox's texts? The short answer is yes; for specific examples, please read on. And a second question: Do representations of that history and culture in fact focus on "slavery, lack, and open-ended neediness," and portray Africans as "pitiable, empty-handed drones"?

Here I must disagree. Recent (since 1980) research on Afro-Latin American history and culture has overwhelmingly stressed black agency and creativity in a broad spectrum of areas: politics, culture, family formation, labor relations, and so on. This work is too extensive to cite here but can be found in the bibliography of two of the edited volumes under review: Darién Davis's *Beyond Slavery* and Kevin Yelvington's *Afro-Atlantic Dialogues*.²

Beyond Slavery brings together some of the best recent and current work on Afro-Latin American history. Its mission is to show how "Africans of the diaspora and their descendants influenced Latin America in multiple and diverse ways" (2), and it begins with the archetypal case of black collective action, the Haitian revolution. In a carefully nuanced essay, David Geggus explores the revolution's impacts on antislavery and independence struggles in Latin America, concluding that its effects were "often ambiguous; its repercussions, contradictory. . . . Although it destroyed the main slave market in the Americas, the revolution did little to reduce the volume of the Atlantic slave trade; while liberating a half-million slaves from bondage, it simultaneously encouraged the spread and intensification of slavery elsewhere" (32).

Camilla Townsend is more persuaded of the efficacy of slaves' struggles for freedom. By actively seeking freedom through lawsuits, purchased manumissions, flight, and military service, slaves in Ecuador effectively undermined slavery and "made it impossible for the master class to assume that things could continue as they were" (52). Ricardo Salvatore examines similar struggles in Argentina, focusing on slave and free black support for the dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas and on post-Rosas demands by Afro-Argentine writers and intellectuals for "inclusion in the body of the nation." Salvatore concludes that these efforts were unsuccessful and that by the second half of the 1800s Afro-Argentines had been "pushed . . . into a corner of invisibility and insignificance" in national life (71, 76). Dario Euraque finds that, in Honduras, people of African ancestry have been similarly marginalized in national memory and culture. Nevertheless, he argues, they played important roles in nineteenth- and twentieth-century politics, and even, paradoxically, in the "whitening" project of the late 1800s to divest indigenous peoples of their lands and adopt new mestizo identities.

2. For additional bibliography and surveys of recent scholarship, see Herbert Klein and Ben Vinson III, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Laird Bergad, *The Comparative Histories of Slavery in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Viking/Penguin, 2007); George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America, 1800–2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Drawing on their respective books,³ Eduardo Silva examines the role of *quilombos* (slave refuges) in supporting Brazilian abolitionism, and Aline Helg scrutinizes black participation in post-emancipation and post-independence politics in Cuba, and the bloody repression of the Partido Independiente de Color in 1912. In a particularly welcome essay on a little-known (at least to this reviewer) chapter of Afro-Latin American history, Aviva Chomsky traces the impacts of the post-1948 La Violencia and civil wars on the Afro-Colombian population. Because of their century-long struggle for land ownership and their long-standing participation in banana workers' unions along the Caribbean coast, Afro-Colombian peasants and workers were targeted by right-wing paramilitaries while also being caught in the cross fire among leftist guerrillas, rightist paramilitaries, and government forces. Afro-Colombian refugees from these conflicts account for an estimated one-third of the country's two to three million displaced persons—another instance of Fox's uprootedness. To represent the interests of those refugees, in 1999 activists founded AFRODES, the Association of Displaced Afro-Colombians.

Bringing us up to the late twentieth century and into the twenty-first, Sujatha Fernandes and Jason Stanyek compare hip-hop culture in Brazil, Cuba, and Venezuela. They find a range of orientations, from politically engaged rappers in Cuba to nihilist gangster rappers in Venezuela, with Brazilian rappers falling somewhere in between. Rap and hip-hop also figure in Bobby Vaughan and Ben Vinson III's analysis of Afro-Mexican migration to North Carolina (more uprootedness) and relations between Afro-Mexicans and African Americans. While some younger migrants have adopted hip-hop and other markers of African American identity, for the most part, "differences in life experiences, buttressed by cultural and historical differences, have thus far prevented a socially viable solidarity between Afro-Mexicans and African Americans." Thus "any attempts to make broad generalizations or presumptions about black solidarity should be approached with care" (231, 234).

The volume's editor, Darién Davis, contributes two essays: the first (co-authored with Judith Michelle Williams) on concepts of pan-Africanism and negritude in the region and the second on representations of black people in Latin American cinema. Both will be useful to students seeking information on these topics, as will the volume as a whole.

The contributors to *Afro-Atlantic Dialogues* share *Beyond Slavery's* interest in the history and agency of Afro-Latin Americans (or of the Afro-Atlantic, embracing the entire Atlantic world). They insist on the need

3. Eduardo Silva, *As camélias do Leblon e a abolição da escravatura* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2003); Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886–1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

to historicize their research and, as we shall see, much of this research is specifically historical in character. But just as important to them, perhaps even more so, are theoretical and methodological debates within the discipline of anthropology. This can make for occasional heavy going, as, for example, in the initial statement of the volume's organizing concept of dialogue. A "dialogic approach," we are told, "entail[s] a critical concern with the historical fashioning of anthropology's categories simultaneous with an insistence on viewing processes of multiparty interaction in the creation and transformation through history of determined material social relationships and myriad symbolic media—that is, an interrogation of the anthropological self as much as the nature of the Other; as well as an acknowledgment of the already-giveness of the anthropological encounter in terms of prior interpretations on everyone's part" (4). Despite such language, the concept of dialogue certainly has its uses. As we make our way through the book, we find that the authors have several different sorts of dialogue in mind: dialogues among scholars, among Afro-Atlantic peoples, and between scholars and the people they study.

The volume opens with a group of essays examining major scholarly debates in the field of Afro-Atlantic anthropology. Kevin Yelvington recounts the history of Melville Herskovits's lifelong project to dispel "the myth of the Negro past" by documenting (through research in Suriname, Haiti, Brazil, and other countries) the survival and reproduction over time of African cultural forms in the New World.⁴ Yelvington shows how this approach arose in part from the professional and intellectual interactions between Herskovits and his Latin American colleagues and interlocutors: Brazilian Arthur Ramos, Cuban Fernando Ortiz, and Haitian Jean Price-Mars. These men, all concerned with "the Negro problem" in their respective countries, "sought, with broadly similar theoretical lenses, to understand it vis-à-vis an orientation to African survivals and a search for the cultural origins of blacks in African preplantation-slavery 'tribal' cultures" (67). Herskovits's correspondence and exchanges with these Latin American intellectuals were of central importance in helping him to formulate his ideas and carry out his research.⁵

Herskovits's work was criticized from two different directions. Writing from the 1930s through the 1950s, sociologist E. Franklin Frazier argued that African Americans in the United States showed no evidence of African cultural influence and were completely Americanized in their cultural

4. Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941).

5. In a darker section of the essay, Yelvington also shows how Herskovits used his gate-keeping power over grants and hiring to discourage other anthropologists from encroaching on his turf. Yelvington cites the cases of Ruth Landes and several African American anthropologists who, Herskovits felt, lacked the necessary objectivity to do research on these topics (67–76).

and social practices.⁶ In the 1970s, Sidney Mintz and Richard Price accepted Herskovits's documentation of "African survivals" but argued that he had misread their meaning. Rather than evidence of the re-creation of African cultures in the New World, these "survivals" should be read as elements in new, creolized Afro-American cultures created by slaves and their descendants, who combined African, European, indigenous, and other artifacts and practices to create new and ever-evolving cultural forms (i.e., the "improvisations" discussed by Fox).⁷

In separate essays, Sally and Richard Price revisit the creolization approach of Mintz and Price, and argue against the neo-Herskovitsian pursuit of African survivals (Robert Farris Thompson, Michael Gomez, and John Thornton come in for particular criticism on this score).⁸ J. Lorand Matory also favors the idea of creolization (as do all of the volume's authors, it seems) but proposes to broaden the concept by setting New World diaspora societies in long-term historical dialogue with those of Africa. In the case of northeastern Brazil, he argues, such dialogue did not end with the abolition of the slave trade in 1850 but continued on through the 1900s, and in both directions: from Brazil to Africa, and vice versa. His essay summarizes some of the findings of his important book *Black Atlantic Religion*, which documents the transatlantic movement, from the late 1800s through the mid-1900s, of people, commodities, and ideas between Bahia and Nigeria, with powerful effects on both places. Thus, African influences on Afro-Brazilian culture did not end with the slave trade and, in an example of the *flux et reflux* (flow and counterflow) proposed by Pierre Verger, religious and ethnic identities forged in Brazil helped to shape ethnic identities and nation-building processes in Africa.⁹

Joko Sengova reports on similarities and possible connections between the Gullah and Geechee dialects of the U.S. Sea Islands and the Krio language of Sierra Leone, and on present-day contacts and exchanges among speakers of those languages. John Pulis considers the migration in 1782 of African American preacher (and British loyalist) George Liele from Georgia to Jamaica, where he established an Anabaptist congregation. Ana-

6. E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939).

7. Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, *An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1976), and *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Approach*, 2d ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

8. Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1983); Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

9. J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

lyzing the church's covenant, Pulis traces its logic, rhetoric, and theology to the great awakening that swept the North American colonies before the revolution, aspects of which Liele and other African American exiles spread through the diaspora and to Africa.

In addition to debates within anthropology, contributors note the dialogues between anthropology and other disciplines, particularly history. Archaeologist Theresa Singleton concludes that her research on slave housing on a Cuban coffee plantation could not have been carried out without contributions from ethnography (interviews with local informants) and history (documentary records from local archives). Sabihya Robin Prince similarly combines archaeology and history in her essay on Africans and African Americans in colonial New York City by drawing on the findings of archaeological research on the African burial ground discovered in lower Manhattan in 1991.

Two final essays explore the place of blackness in Colombia and Puerto Rico, respectively. Peter Wade asks how representations of Africa and blackness have varied over time in Colombia, as evidenced by changes in popular musical forms: *porro* (1930s–1940s), *cumbia*, and most recently, paralleling the Fernandes-Stanyek essay in *Beyond Slavery*, hip-hop. Arlene Torres examines how blackness was represented in a recent special exhibit on Puerto Rico at the Smithsonian Institution's Museum of American History. This leads to discussion of Puerto Rican society's long-standing uneasiness on questions of race and of the equally uneasy relationship between U.S. and Puerto Rican conceptions of race: the former based on a rigid black-white dichotomy and the latter on the idea of a mestizo nation that has transcended race.

This dialogue between U.S. and Latin American notions of race and blackness is explored in depth by Michelle Gonzalez, Ginetta Candelario, and Yeidy Rivero. Gonzalez's *Afro-Cuban Theology* situates itself squarely on the cusp of the U.S. and Afro-Latin American connection and addresses its multiple complexities. In so doing, Gonzalez aims to document and reverse a triple exclusion of Afro-Cuban voices and religious practices: from Latino theology (writings and debates among Hispanic clerics and congregations in the United States), from African American black theology, and from Cuban-American religious practice.

How did each of these omissions occur? "Often considered the younger sibling of Latin American liberation theology," Latino theology arose in the southwestern United States out of the experiences of Chicano and Mexican immigrant communities. As a result, "Latino/a theologians write about Mexico, Guadalupe, mestizaje, and the Southwest. The black Latino/a experience is strikingly insignificant within these narratives and constructions of Latino/a historical identity" (15). Similarly, black theology arose out of African American historical experiences and the United

States' black-white racial dichotomy. African American theologians are seemingly unaware of Afro-Latin American history or culture, or of the presence of Afro-Latin communities in the United States. While claiming to represent "the black experience in the United States, in fact they only represent a black experience in the United States" (41; original emphasis). Perhaps most interesting is Gonzalez's discussion of the "whitening" of Cuban Catholicism in the United States. The first wave of post-1959 Cuban migration was disproportionately white, and middle and upper class. As the migrants arrived, the Catholic Church took an active role in welcoming and integrating them into Catholic religious life. Forty years later, "we find a Cuban-American population that is much more 'churched' than the population on the island" and more orthodox (i.e., less Afro-Cuban) in its religious practices (102).

As part of her larger project of democratizing the Catholic Church and opening space for popular forms of religiosity and "the faith of the people," Gonzalez calls on all three faith communities—U.S. Hispanic, African American, and Cuban American—to recognize the beauty and power of Afro-Cuban religious practices and to include these practices and worldviews in their respective theologies: "Unless we struggle against those racist structures that distort and silence all Cubans and Cuban Americans, we are a community washed in sinfulness, denying our full humanity" (140).

On humanitarian and ethical grounds, one can only agree; but the intellectual grounding of Gonzalez's argument is less persuasive. Despite the book's title, the content of Afro-Cuban theology is not laid out in any clear or consistent way; readers may wonder, therefore, what the Hispanic, African American, and Cuban American theological communities are losing by not incorporating Afro-Cuban voices. Also, because Gonzalez's sources are almost entirely texts written by theologians and other scholars, the Afro-Cuban voices that she is so eager to include are notably absent from her book. Other than brief discussions of writers Nicolás Guillén and Evelio Grillo (129–133), we hear from no Afro-Cuban religious theorists or practitioners, and thus come away from the book with no strong sense of that rich religious tradition and what it has to offer. Readers seeking an introduction to Afro-Cuban theology will have to look elsewhere.¹⁰

Completely different in approach is Candelario's *Black behind the Ears*. Employing a variety of research methods, ranging from close textual analysis to intensive ethnography, she has produced a model study of how racial identities are constructed, reproduced, and lived in different social,

10. A good start would be David H. Brown, *Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual, and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

national, and historical settings. Like Wade and Torres in *Afro-Atlantic Dialogues*, Candelario examines the place of blackness in the Dominican Republic, a country in which concepts of race have been significantly shaped, she argues, by its relationship with two neighbors: Haiti and the United States (more Afro-Atlantic dialogue).

The book begins by using travel literature from the 1800s to argue against suggestions that anti-Haitian sentiment in the Dominican Republic is an artifact of the Rafael Trujillo regime (1930–1961). Certainly, that regime purposefully promoted anti-Haitianism, and with powerful consequences (e.g., the government's massacre in 1937 of some fifteen thousand Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans). But Candelario documents persistent distinctions by nineteenth-century visitors from the United States and Europe between "African" Haiti and "Spanish" Dominican Republic. Such descriptions were eagerly seized upon by Dominican elites, who argued their nation's European and indigenous ancestry, and by Dominican commoners as well, who contrasted their colonial history of legal and economic freedom (by 1800, the Afro-Dominican population was in its majority free peasants and smallholders) with Haiti's colonial history of plantation agriculture and African slavery. This insistence on Dominican whiteness and indigeness, and the displacement of blackness onto Haiti, continued into the 1900s. Candelario examines the reluctance of the National Museum to include exhibits or information on Africans and their descendants in the country; to this day, "the Museo is dedicated almost entirely to the collection, preservation and display of pre-Columbian artifacts" (112).

But if Dominicans cultivate white and indigenous racial identities in relation to Haiti, what happens when they migrate to the United States, where many (perhaps most) find that they are considered black? Using U.S. Census data and her own interviews, Candelario finds that most Dominicans are unwilling to identify as black. However, that tendency varies greatly in different U.S. cities, from a low of 12 percent of Dominicans identifying as black in the 1990 census in California and Texas to an intermediate figure of 27 percent in New York, to a high of 40 percent in Washington, DC. What accounts for these differences?

Here Candelario delves into the specifics of the Dominican community in Washington and its relations both with the local African American community and with the federal government. Because of federal employment opportunities and the presence of Howard University, Washington has long had the largest black middle class (in per capita terms) of any U.S. city. The presence of this African American middle class "served as an incentive to Dominican assimilation into a black racial identity" (164), an incentive that increased further in the 1970s when the city's principal employer, the federal government, started implementing affirmative ac-

tion policies in hiring and education. By 1990, Dominicans in Washington were identifying as black at a rate almost twice that for Dominicans in the United States as a whole.¹¹

Meanwhile, what about the great majority of Dominicans in the United States as a whole who choose not to identify as black but as white (23 percent) or “other” (52 percent; plus another 12 percent who offered no response) (20)? Candelario states that a “key question guiding my research was how—rather than simply why—Dominicans with facial and bodily features that show African ancestry see themselves as ‘not black’” (26). Note the counterintuitive reversal, in which “Why?” becomes the simple question, while the more complicated and potentially revealing question is “How?” I entirely agree. Not infrequently, one best explains *why* something happens by showing *how* it happens.

To see how race is constructed “on the ground,” Candelario visited Dominican beauty shops in New York City, spending six months at one in particular interviewing the employees and clients. Among all her interviewees, she found a consistent “rhetorical denigration of blackness” (230). At the same time, however, these women were no fans of whiteness, at least in aesthetic terms; indeed, “skin that was too white was considered unsightly.” When Candelario showed them photos of men and women, and asked them to select those that they found most appealing, her informants rejected those that they considered “too white” and showed a clear preference for a more racially mixed “Latin” appearance: “straight haired, tan skinned, aquiline featured” (239).¹²

Or so Candelario says. When I looked at her informants’ selections of the “most pretty” women, seven out of nine looked white to me; one looked racially mixed, and one uncertain (possibly racially mixed, possibly white). Of the women selected as “least pretty,” all looked black (see page 232 and decide for yourself). And when asked to rank photos of men, “respondents clearly preferred lighter-skinned men as reproductive partners, by more than two to one.” All the men they selected as unsuitable partners were black (248).

Just as Dominicans reject blackness and seek to escape it, so too do Puerto Ricans. But while Dominicans identify themselves as a Hispanic-indigenous people, Puerto Ricans invoke the *gran familia puertorriqueña*, a social and cultural construction that seeks to transcend racial difference.

11. According to Candelario, the number of Dominicans identifying as black fell dramatically, from 25 percent in 1990 to 9 percent in 2000 (20, 23). She offers no explanation for this decline; might it have been caused by the U.S. government’s retreat from affirmative action during those years, combined with continued immigration from the Dominican Republic?

12. Yeidy Rivero presents similar findings for Puerto Rico. On the concept of *jinchá* (too pale, too white), see *Tuning Out Blackness*, 125.

The place of Afro–Puerto Ricans in that *gran familia*, and how they have been portrayed on island television over the last fifty years, is the subject of Yeidy Rivero’s fascinating book *Tuning Out Blackness*.

Just as Dominican racial identities are the product, in part, of interactions with Haiti and the United States, so are Puerto Rican identities the product of interactions with Cuba, the United States, and most recently, the Dominican Republic. In yet another instance of uprooting and Afro-Atlantic dialogue, in the 1980s and 1990s, growing numbers of Dominican migrants (both legal and illegal) came to Puerto Rico in search of work or a route to the United States. Disregarding Dominicans’ sense of themselves as a Hispanic-indigenous people, Puerto Ricans categorized them as black and mulatto, and imposed on them the classic antiblack stereotypes of laziness, criminality, and stupidity: “By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the black and mulatto undesirable and primitive element in Puerto Rico’s society was increasingly associated with Dominican immigrants.” This in turn allowed Puerto Ricans to locate “blackness outside the Puerto Rican nation” and to reaffirm the racelessness (or, for many, the whiteness) of the *gran familia* (145).

Earlier in the century, before the arrival of Dominicans, Puerto Ricans had located blackness in Cuba, assisted in part by the blackface *negritos catedráticos* of Cuba’s nineteenth-century comic *teatro bufo*.¹³ Introduced into Puerto Rico by traveling Cuban theatrical troupes, these racial caricatures proved hugely popular and set the template for the blackface characters played on the Puerto Rican stage, radio, and television by actor Ramón Rivero. Rivero’s first such character (in 1935) was El Chico Mambí, “a negrito who stole chickens” (38). Subsequent characters in the 1940s and 1950s included Diplomacia, “an eloquent and politically informed poor black man’ who played a guitar on the streets of Old San Juan and diplomatically begged for money,” and Calderón, “a young troublemaking black man,” whose life was organized around “constant efforts to obtain money without performing any labor.” Calderón spoke with a marked Cuban accent (40, 42, 56–57).

Rivero used Diplomacia and Calderón as mouthpieces for wry satirical commentary on Puerto Rican politics and society, and both characters became legendary figures in the history of Puerto Rican comedy. But their very fame and popularity served to inscribe the message of black poverty, and in Calderón’s case, of black men, as clever, lazy, conniving tricksters (the downside of Fox’s “improvisations”). And these two, Yeidy Rivero suggests, were the most positive blackface characters on Puerto Rican television. After Rivero’s death in 1956, later *negritos* lost any redeeming content and “became playful, childish, uncultured, and laughable elements in

13. Jill Lane, *Blackface Cuba, 1840–1895* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

Puerto Rico's 1950s and 1960s mediascape" (58). Protests in the 1970s and 1980s by Afro-Puerto Rican actors finally forced blackface performers off local television.¹⁴ But opportunities for black actors remained extremely limited and were largely confined to parts as domestic servants.

Tuning Out Blackness concludes with a discussion of the breakthrough program *Mi familia* (1994–2003), the first show on Puerto Rican television to feature an Afro-Puerto Rican family. Although inspired by the success of *The Jeffersons* and *The Cosby Show* in the United States, *Mi familia* differed from those models in never acknowledging questions of race or even the blackness of its characters. As one of the show's staff observed, "there is no color [on the show]; it does not frame anything" (157). Another staff member concurred: "by chance they are negritos, but it could be a white family because racial themes are never addressed, or any type of crime. . . . You would not notice that they are negritos because they are normal" (158).

On the one hand, perhaps it is encouraging that, as long as people behave "normally," we will take no notice of their race. But what if, on those rare occasions (irony intended) when we happen to notice race and blackness, the latter is defined in terms of abnormality, deviance, criminality, and thieving tricksters? Is this the path toward the creation of the *gran familia puertorriqueña* and the full integration of Afro-Puerto Ricans into that family?

How might Afro-Puerto Rican actors and characters have achieved greater visibility, presence, and verisimilitude on island television? What if local legislation had mandated racial quotas in television hiring and casting? Such quotas are, in fact, a principal feature of the Statute of Racial Equality, a bill introduced into the Brazilian Congress in 1998 by Deputy (later Senator) Paulo Paim, an Afro-Brazilian politician from Rio Grande do Sul. Aimed to eliminate pervasive racial disparities in education, life expectancy, vocational achievement, and other areas, the bill proposed a broad spectrum of state actions and racial affirmative action, including racial quotas in university admissions, public hiring, television programming and advertising, and nominations of candidates by political parties. For several years, the bill languished in committee; then at the beginning of the current decade, for reasons lucidly explained by Mala Htun, the debate on affirmative action in Brazil began to pick up steam.¹⁵ Universities, state and federal agencies, and private companies started adopting affirmative action programs on their own, and by early 2006, it looked as

14. Rivero is slightly unclear on this point. She refers to the disappearance of blackface performers in the 1980s (104) but later mentions blackface television characters in the 1990s (150, 156).

15. Mala Htun, "From 'Racial Democracy' to Affirmative Action: Changing State Policy on Race in Brazil," *Latin American Research Review* 39, no. 1 (2004): 60–89.

though Paim's bill would be submitted to a vote in the Senate and Chamber of Deputies and might actually pass.¹⁶

In response to this prospect, 114 academics, intellectuals, and public figures sent an open letter to the Brazilian Congress in June 2006, opposing both this bill and another bill mandating racial quotas in university admissions. *Divisões perigosas* reproduces that letter and accompanies it with forty-six short essays, many of them published as newspaper op-ed pieces, all opposing the statute. Some of the essays, especially those insisting that Brazil has no racial problem, or that races have no scientific existence, are easy to dismiss. Paim and his supporters are well aware that races have no scientific existence and are social constructions. But as an abundant scholarly literature has made clear, such constructions are deeply rooted in Brazilian society and play a crucial role in determining how social goods and opportunities are distributed among its citizens.¹⁷

One must take more seriously the volume's core arguments, presented most effectively in essays by the editors (Peter Fry, Yvonne Maggie, Marcos Chor Maio, Simone Monteiro, and Ricardo Ventura Santos) and by Simon Schwartzman, Mônica Grin, Roque Ferreira, and José Roberto Militão. Rather than attempt to deny the extent of inequality and prejudice in Brazil, these authors readily acknowledge them. Indeed, the volume opens with the editors' account of delivering the open letter to Congress, where they were received by a secretary, herself Afro-Brazilian, who offered coffee to the two white members of the delegation while conspicuously ignoring the third member, Afro-Brazilian activist José Carlos Miranda: "We looked at each other with that feeling of pain and anger that accompanies these situations, and Miranda said, 'Despite this [incident], I don't believe that these bills are the solution for combating racism; to the contrary, they will produce a society divided into blacks and whites'" (13).

The volume argues that, to a degree unprecedented in world history, Brazil has succeeded in creating a society in which people do not identify as blacks or whites but rather as racially mixed *mestiços*. To require Brazilians to assign themselves to racial categories, and to provide compelling incentives for Afro-Brazilians to identify themselves as black, will impose racial divisions on Brazilian society where none previously existed. And Brazil would be doing this, the authors argue, at precisely the historical moment in which global societies have recognized race as a socially destructive, intellectually outmoded concept, and are actively seeking to move beyond it. Rather than inscribe racial differences more deeply in

16. The bill was never voted on and, as of February 2008, was still being reviewed in committee.

17. For an overview and an important addition to that literature, see Edward Telles, *Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

Brazilian life, Brazilians should adopt “the most radical anti-racist position by destroying the precepts on which ideas of race are based” (18), and by promoting social policies defined not in terms of race but class. Provision of high-quality education, vocational training, health care, housing, and other social goods to all poor and lower-class Brazilians will have powerful effects on the Afro-Brazilian population, which is disproportionately concentrated at those levels of Brazilian society, and will greatly reduce existing racial inequalities.¹⁸

I find myself in agreement with a number of these points and with Simon Schwartzman’s characterization of the statute as “a legal and conceptual monstrosity” (108). The volume’s most effective argument against the bill, in fact, might have been simply to reprint it in its entirety.¹⁹ The statute would impose a massive racial apparatus on Brazilian society, including new bureaucracies to administer its various programs and initiatives. It would also institute systems of racial quotas that, as several contributors note, were found unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court and would almost certainly prove as politically explosive in Brazil as they have in the United States.

Yet one can oppose quotas and the Statute for Racial Equality while not ceasing to feel that, to overcome deeply rooted patterns of racial inequality, Brazil needs more than class-based social policies. Especially after reading *Black behind the Ears* and *Tuning Out Blackness*, I am struck by the parallels between Puerto Rican and Dominican claims of their societies’ racelessness and *Divisões perigosas*’ insistence that Brazil has escaped the evils of racial difference, conflict, antagonism, and resentment. This argument, which traces its lineage back to Gilberto Freyre, is in my opinion, simply unsustainable. It is contradicted by an extensive scholarly literature on the racial dynamics of Brazilian society, as well as by a long history of Afro-Brazilian political mobilization provoked by the very real grievances that the Statute of Racial Equality seeks to address.²⁰

18. Strong support for this argument can be found in Cuba, where, during the 1960s and 1970s, state provision of health care, education, and employment opportunities to workers and peasants came very close to eliminating class and racial inequalities. Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba*, 259–316 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

19. For the 2006 version of the bill, see http://www.senado.gov.br/paulopaim/pages/vida/publicacoes/textos/Estatuto_da_Igualdade_Racial_Novo.pdf (accessed February 5, 2008).

20. Some representative titles are Roger Bastide and Florestan Fernandes, *Branços e negros em São Paulo*, 3d ed. (São Paulo: Editora Nacional, 1971); Florestan Fernandes, *O negro no mundo dos brancos* (São Paulo: Difusão Européia do Livro, 1972); Maria Suely Kofes de Almeida, “Entre nós, os pobres, eles, os negros” (master’s thesis, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 1972); Haroldo Costa, *Fala, crioulo* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Record, 1982); George Reid Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo, 1888–1988* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); Michael Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro in Rio*

In *Divisões perigosas'* final pages, Fry observes that "I personally do not have the least interest in organizing my life around the fact of being white" (337). I would suggest that Afro-Brazilians have similarly little interest in organizing *their* lives around the fact of being black or brown. Yet, like Fry, they have little choice in the matter: Brazilian society already organizes his and their lives around the fact of race. Like all white professionals in Brazil (and the United States, and every other country dealt with in this essay), Fry and his colleagues, like me and my colleagues, enjoy every day the immense material and symbolic benefits of whiteness. Statistical research on racial inequality in Brazil leaves no doubt whatsoever of the magnitude of these benefits, which operate with particular power at the levels of the middle and upper classes. Brazilians (and Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans, and North Americans) who cannot lay claim to whiteness face enormous barriers to entering these classes, which is why efforts to reduce racial inequality in Brazil must include both universalist social policies and racially defined affirmative action.²¹ Quotas are an extreme, rigid, and politically unworkable form of affirmative action. But other, more flexible racial remedies are available and have proven both politically feasible and quite effective in opening doors of upward mobility for members of excluded ethnic minorities.²² It would be tragic indeed if the Statute for Racial Equality discredited the broader concept of racial affirmative action, some form of which Brazil so urgently needs.

de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil, 1945–1988 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Antonio Sérgio Alfredo Guimarães, *Racismo e anti-racismo no Brasil* (São Paulo: Editora 34, 1999); Antonio Sérgio Alfredo Guimarães and Lynn Huntley, eds., *Tirando a máscara: Ensaio sobre o racismo no Brasil* (São Paulo: Editora Paz e Terra, 2000); Robin E. Sheriff, *Dreaming Equality: Color, Race, and Racism in Urban Brazil* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001); Telles, *Race in Another America*; Carlos Hasenbalg, *Discriminação e desigualdades raciais no Brasil*, 2d ed. (Belo Horizonte: Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 2005); Paulina Alberto, "Terms of Inclusion: Africa and the Politics of Belonging in 20th Century Brazil" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2005).

21. For a forceful presentation of this argument, see Telles, *Race*, 239–270.

22. See, e.g., William G. Bowen and Derek Bok, *The Shape of the River: Long-Term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University Admissions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).