

COMMENTARY

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Back to race, not beyond race: multiraciality and racial identity in the United States and Brazil

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Abstract

In contrast to discourses of multiraciality as leading to a future beyond race, this commentary looks at how multiracial discourses and symbols underline race. Taking an overview of multiracial discourses and identities in relation to Blackness in the United States and Brazil, this commentary examines the deployment of multiraciality to maintain white supremacy. Under global capitalism, United States multicultural discourses, and Latin American foundational narratives, multiracial peoples are often propped up as a solution to racism, the eradication of race, or reduced to racial binaries centering whiteness. The section ends with considerations of how fears of racial passing and fraud coincide with multiracial identities. Questions for further consideration on the nexus of political identities and racial identities are proposed in relation to multiraciality.

Keywords: Multiracialism, Brazil, United States, Blackness, Racial identity, Multiculturalism, Racial democracy, Postracial

Introduction

From Olympians Sydney McLaughlin of the United States and Marta Vieira da Silva of Brazil to Brazilian actress Camila Pitanga and United States actor Dwayne “the Rock” Johnson to Vice President Kamala Harris, multiracial public figures are heralded as proof of racial progress or harmony. Yet, how public figures racially identify themselves does not always comport with their representation (Mitchell, 2020). The leveraging of mixed-race figures to project national and transnational identities of racial harmony results in lingering historical inequities and diminished calls for structural change. Rather than undoing the continuance of race, constructions of multiraciality reinforce presumptions of racial difference and racialized ways of thinking (Aspinall & Song, 2013). The elevation of multiraciality as an emblem of multiculturalism falls short of a future beyond race. If anything, multiracial symbols demonstrate that the yearning for a future beyond race notably asserts how race still defines our everyday lives. What if there is a growing de-emphasis on personal multiracial identification in favor of a collective identity based on political identity? In terms of racial belonging, questions circle on how racial identity is personally chosen or chosen by others. While there is an extensive global history of racial mixing, the significance of multiraciality is striking in this moment due to

increases in racial data collection and shifting of racial boundaries and ways in which people racially self-identify (Masuoka, 2018; Telles & Sue, 2009). While the United States has historically denied racial mixture in its national identity, racial mixture plays a fundamental role in Latin American narratives denying racism. Notably, there are political and cultural shifts from assigned racial classifications viewed as unalterable to racial classifications determined by self-identification and viewed as unfixed (Masuoka, 2018). In the United States, multiracial individuals tend to hold political interests, ideologies, and racial attitudes aligned with nonwhite groups (Davenport, 2018). The growth of the U.S. multiracial population presents a possible intensification of a linked fate, which maintains that individuals feel tied to their racial group and that what happens to a group impacts the individual. This sense of a shared collective identity and struggle presents an understanding of multiracialism as a potential basis of solidarity. In particular, the historical inclusiveness of Blackness is crucial to racial consciousness in the midst of persistent socioeconomic and political racial disparities. The prediction that multiraciality leads towards a dropping behind of nonwhite racial identification and into an assimilation of whiteness (Alba et al., 2018; Lee & Bean, 2012) does not account for the political saliency of race. In Brazil, the adoption of racial mixing as a progression towards whitening (Loveman, 2014; Nobles, 2000) appears to be waning based on the latest census data and shifts in racial identification (Bailey et al., 2018). This potential pivot away from whiteness portends a renegotiation of racial belonging. Whiteness has been the foundation of the nation-state. White supremacy organizes racial hierarchies and proximity to whiteness dictates life chances, housing, education, employment (Lipnitz, 2006). The alliance of non-white identification among multiracials denaturalizes whiteness as desirable.

Rather than assimilation to white norms or the irrelevance of race, multiracialism points towards the intensified salience of race. Multiracial individuals sit between boundaries of racial identities, belonging, and notions of authenticity. Competing understandings of race as phenotypically, genetically, politically, or socially constructed play parts in this reshaping of racial identifications. Mixed-race groups become the sparks for molding or hardening the borders and structures of racial hierarchies (Daniel, 2006; Sims & Njaka, 2020; Song, 2003). Within multiracial populations, are there shifting racial identifications, the creation of new identities, or the solidification of previous racial identities?

This commentary, in particular, takes up multiracial Blackness to focus on how discourses and imagery of multiraciality are sometimes empty celebratory symbols or actual challenges to power structures. The article will begin with the linkages between racial constructions and nation-states to consider how multiraciality has been viewed as both markers and threats to progress. The commentary will focus primarily on the United States and Brazil to explore how systemic racism and myths of racial inclusivity work through discourses of multiraciality. Finally, contemporary considerations of racial passing for Black and the malleability of race will argue that racial boundaries are not eroding, but rather shifting. Using multiraciality as a lens potentially enables an expansion of race along solidarities and coalitions and can be used to frame debates on racial identity, measurements of racial progress, and the negation of racism and racialized histories.

Shifting racial constructions and the state

Race is an idea emerging from processes in which groups of people were sorted into fictive biological categories with differential relationships within governmental, economic, social, and cultural structures. This understanding of race shuts down the notion that race is naturally and genetically ascribed immutable form of categorization that differentiates humans into different ranks (Fields & Fields, 2014). Racemaking is embedded within European empires and the diffusion of such ideologies across the globe (Bonds & Inglewood, 2016; Du Bois, 1920; Pierre, 2013). Whiteness became the flattening of differences combined with assertions of superiority (Horne, 2020). The development of European empires and the transatlantic slave trade gathered the world into global intimacies (Lowe, 2015). Even in majority nonwhite nations, global racial knowledge nonetheless positions nonwhite subjects as inferior within a world system built upon white capitalist orders.

Race is a pretense of hierarchal justification. The very idea of mixed-race relies on the presumption of stable and pure races. Racial mixture then is the traversing of socially constructed racial boundaries. Therefore, race, gender, and sexuality are intertwined as reproduction itself is a racial project (Moutinho, 2004; Roberts, 1997). Differences such as race, gender, sexuality, and class are not predetermined but rather intertwined products of historical processes. The notion of appearance, immutable traits, blood, and genes become markers and gradation of racial purity that will then be passed down to future offspring.

Histories of nation-building are also histories of racemaking. The nation-state plays a key role in making race (Bailey et al., 2018; Loveman, 2014; Marx, 1998; Omi & Winant, 2014). In the Atlantic World, defining racial mixture was fundamental to Indigenous dispossession, legal constructions of slavery, and citizenship. For example, the *casta* system in the Spanish colonial Americas expressed racial and gender orderings. The *casta* system was visualized in paintings from eighteenth-century Mexico and Peru. The paintings depicting a man, woman, and children served to justify and maintain the colonial ordering of freedoms, privileges, and rights (Carrera, 2003). Racialized beliefs flowed between British North America, Latin America, and the Caribbean with legal limitations linked to racial categorizations. Settler colonial uses of racial fractioning sought to restrain the rights of mixed-race individuals from white subjecthood from taxes to voting to marriage to public office to property ownership to holding public office. At the same time, proximity to whiteness often increased the likelihood of social privileges in comparison to those without known European heritage in both North America and Latin America (De la Fuente & Gross, 2020; Furtado, 2009; Livesay, 2018; Small, 1994; Wilkinson, 2020). Through grouping populations, monitoring populations, excluding certain populations, and allocating resources to others, the nation-state facilitates the meaning of race. These racial legal regimes all have shared histories of racial mixing with differentiated strategies towards controlling mixed-race populations. Yet all share the goal of white control and power. The United States and Brazil elucidate the inconsistent nature of racial construction alongside persistent antiBlackness and white supremacy.

Race is not just a sociopolitical construction. It is a lived experience that is an important factor in our daily lives because of how the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class are embedded within institutions and frameworks ranging from

legal systems, education, housing, media systems, and our intimate relationships (Collins, 2002; Crenshaw, 1989; Hordge-Freeman, 2015). Knowing that race is socially constructed does not negate the material impacts of racism. White supremacy and racial hierarchy legacies from colonial periods are very much alive today with the reverence towards European descended phenotypes and family histories, whether it be towards who is considered beautiful or intelligent in advertising imagery to sports media discourse to beauty queens to who has a seat at the table in corporate boardrooms. Those who are nonwhite occupy an inferior status across the Americas. Racial projects determine access to political, social, and material resources. Historically, the enterprise of racial categorization has been in the service of racism. Race is a fiction too, but the effects of racial classification in daily life have always been entirely real. Can a reshaping or maintenance of racial classification act in service of anti-racism? The deployment of multiracial symbolism and discourses play key roles in racial structures and perceptions of racial progress or an eventual future beyond race.

In the United States, multiracialism sits among histories of local, state, and national regulations of race, citizenship, and enslavement. Whiteness emerged as a category resulting from slavery, colonization, Indigenous policies, and immigration restrictions which rendered material benefits for those recognized as white. Land ownership, citizenship, and rights were determined by whiteness and therefore, white Americans have maintained a “possessive investment in whiteness” (Lipsitz, 2006). Slippery racial statuses in the colonies before the eighteenth century and the messiness of such racial categories afterward reveal the instability between ideas of bodily differences and the instability of race as a primary signifier of difference (Block, 2018). The first United States census was conducted in 1790 and has been conducted every ten years since then. Since citizenship was deeply racialized, the earliest distinctions were primarily between free and enslaved and boundaries between white and nonwhite (Haney-Lopez, 2006). Race was determined primarily by the enumerator and thought to be fixed.

By 1850, the fractioning of racial mixture was formally acknowledged in the United States. In the nineteenth century, racial science theorists thought of racial mixing as the encounter between two stable essences that would be diluted or kept pure. Yet, race is not only visual. Proof of family histories and lineage also determine race. To test racial scientific theories to ascertain the growth or decline of racial groupings, and account for so-called degeneracy, the United States census created categories of black/white mixture. In the late nineteenth century, categories such as quadroon and octoroon appeared but referred to subgroups of the Black category. “Mixed-bloods” described as American Indian-white mixtures appeared as its own multiracial category. By the 1930s, all categories of Black/white mixture were removed from the United States census. Racial categories fluctuated according to political, economic, and social imperatives. The inconsistencies in racial categorization illustrates the constructed nature of race. Ultimately, white supremacy organized racial hierarchies. Mixed-race categories reinforced racial hierarchies and ultimately cemented nonwhiteness as a marker of differentiation. (Hochschild & Powell, 2008; Nobles, 2000). Nonetheless, categorization constructs a lexicon of difference and uses this difference as a form of dehumanization and determining who is valued and who is not.

Multiraciality as marker of progress and as threat to the nation

In the United States, a sense of national progress relied on the expansion of white supremacy. The myths of white purity alongside the aversion and denial of racial mixing buttressed the imagining of the United States as a white nation. In the United States, fears of racial passing alongside the one-drop rule reflected fears of diluting white purity (Hobbs, 2014). The erosion of racial boundary policing marked multiraciality as marker of assimilation into larger white groups (Daniel, 2002). Therefore, much of the U.S. discourse around multiraciality centers on assimilation and integration. Populations with non-white parentage are largely excluded from these discourses as well as academic studies (Rondilla et al., 2017). Discourses, studies, and imagery of mixed-race peoples focus primarily whiteness with another race (Mahtani, 2014). Social, cultural, and economic capital often line up with proximity to whiteness. In the United States, discourses of racial mixing tend to focus on partial white mixture due not only to the size of the population, but also to the ways in which the emphasis on white purity and segregation and the uses of whiteness as a barometer of integration.

In Latin America, ideologies of mixture also focus on partial white mixtures with Black and Indigenous populations. This settler colonial framework envisions a whiter population as a result of mixing. In the framework of settler colonialism, the elites envisioned the result of this mixing process as a homogeneous 'White-European' population. For example, in twentieth century Brazil, the heteropatriarchal process of whitening reflected anxieties over European immigration and the role of Afro-Brazilians and European immigration in a postabolition context. Whitening in the form of racial mixing became the solution to Brazil's fear of Blackness and associations with unruliness and degeneracy. As a strategy for whitening the population, the national archetype model eventually became the mixed-race figure (Loveman, 2014). By the 1940s, national narratives of a hybrid meta-race stood in contrast to United States emphasis on white racial purity. In Latin America, mixed-race is central to nation-building and national narratives (Telles & Sue, 2009). While many Latin American censuses previously included ethnic and racial category questions, by the mid twentieth-century political reasons dictated the removal of racial categorization (Loveman, 2014). Only in the past few decades, have the majority of Latin American nations included racial and ethnicity categories on their censuses. As a result of growing international and domestic attention on inequality discourses and galvanized by Black and Indigenous social movements, (Paschel, 2016), debates on shifting national identity and racial belonging have emerged from the census and racial policies.

In both the United States and Brazil, self-identified white populations are decreasing at the same time as there is an emboldening of white supremacy. While fears of racial degeneracy and white disappearance harken back to eugenicist discourses (Diwan, 2007; Obasogie, 2017; Roberts, 2011; Stepan, 1996), recent intensified racial anxiety relates to a recalibration of racial identification and consciousness alongside demographic shifts. For the first time in history, the United States census showed a non-Hispanic white demographic decline, with numbers decreasing from 2010 to 2020. The largest population increase was among multiracials. This increase in multiracials is also potentially gained from people previously identifying as white to a category of more than one race (Tavernise & Gebeloff, 2021). Multiracial individuals are one of the fastest growing

groups with a measurement of 9 million people in 2010 to 33.8 million in 2020, a 276% increase (Jones et al., 2021). As a marker of racial progress or as the materialized fear of white supremacy, the demographic changes with increasing self-identified multiracials signify the continuing salience, rather than waning of race.

In Brazil, the 2010 census was the first time that the majority of the population self-classified as nonwhite. The self-identified white population dropped from 53.7% in 2000 to 47.7% in 2010. The census recorded the Brazilian population as 43.1% *pardo* (brown), 7.6% as *preto* (Black), Indigena as 0.5%, and *branco* (white) and *amarelo* (yellow translating as Asian), at 47.7% and 1.1% respectively (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), demographic census 2010 (available at <https://sidra.ibge.gov.br/pesquisa/censo-demografico/demografico-2010/inicial>). The changes in Brazil are a result of a shift from a tendency for Brazilians to identify as white towards a move to nonwhiteness. The slanting towards nonwhiteness alongside intensified Afro-Brazilian political mobilization unsettles whiteness as the ideal. The pivot towards nonwhiteness counters the theological desire of multiraciality leading to an eventual whiteness. Rather than racial mixing as dissolving race, the increasing nonwhite identification points towards a reorientation of race. If both Brazil and the United States move towards a nonwhite/white schema, multiracials will play a key role in this dynamic and a reshuffling of racial boundaries.

United States racial identification and the state

Fear of a threatening mixed-race nation coincides with the waning of the domain of an unquestioned whiteness. Prior to abolition, popular literature often depicted images of the mulatta figure (mixed-race women of European and African descent) as tragic due to her enslaved status (Raimon, 2004), the postabolition mulatta was often presented in white authored media and literature as hypersexual and threatening. As her body endangers the perceived white purity of the nation, her tragic demise stems from her sexual impulses and desire for social mobility (Mitchell, 2020). After Reconstruction and the disentanglement of enslavement with Blackness, the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson case legitimized the one drop rule of hypodescent alongside Jim Crow segregation. While the one-drop rule function to maintain white supremacy and notions of white supremacy, it also induced solidarity and coalitions across Black communities. The United States has also compared itself to South America in ideas of racial stock and racial purity. In the United States, political leaders, scientists, and writers decried the threat of racial mixing and desegregation in the United States with the fear that the population would become like South American racially mixed populations (Brito, 2016; Oh, 2017; Seigel, 2009). By World War II, racial differences became more important than ethnic differences among whites. The collective experiences, privileges, and benefits of whiteness cultivated solidarity among whites based upon preserving their own status and thereby, renegotiating who can be included under the umbrella of whiteness (Lipsitz, 2006).

Following the *Loving v. Virginia* (1967) Supreme Court decision that repealed anti-miscegenation laws, a “biracial baby boom” (Root, 1996) brought about an increase in a self-identified multiracial population, a further politicization of mixed-race identities, and a growing prevalence of mixed-race images and figures. Utilizing the *Loving* decision, conservatives also amped up colorblind ideologies (Pascoe, 2009). They used the

case to downplay the significance of race and racism and promote the erosion of race conscious policies. By the 1980s, neoliberal politics and the rise of Reaganism rolled back civil rights gain, attacked racial policies such as affirmative action, and retrenched segregation, and drove housing, employment, and housing disparities. Multiracial children became symbols of the insignificance of race. In the 1990s, organizations such as Project RACE, headed by white mothers, insisted on a separate multiracial category (Ibrahim, 2012). Despite divergent experiences of multiracial persons, the only commonality for this category and identity was having ancestors from multiple racial groupings. Writing against centuries of discourse placing mixed race peoples and experiences as dysfunctional or a problem, psychologist Maria Root's seminal 1993 "Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People" affirmed racial self-identification and multiracial identities as rights. But, this focus on personal identity did not adequately engage with collective racial group models of justice and equity. The focus on the right to personally identify emphasized individual identity rather than structural and institutional racism (Sexton, 2008). Some multiracial identity activists pushed for a standalone category. But, Black civil rights leaders and political leaders had concerns that mixed Black people may avoid identifying as Black and thereby decrease Black population numbers used for congressional redistricting and resource allocation. Meanwhile, conservatives such as United States Speaker of the House of Representatives Newt Gingrich advocated for a multiracial category to dissipate resources and weaken racial policies such as affirmative action. Rather than a distinct multiracial identity, the United States census reached a compromise with multiracial activists and civil rights organizations, and political leaders to have census takers check more one or more rather than a standalone multiracial category (Williams, 2006). Yet, the hopes of a post-racial future are often channeled through the mixed-race body, particularly female bodies. For example, the 1993 *Time* magazine cover of "the New Eve," a computer-generated image of a woman depicting the future of America through racial mixing fuels the popular imagination of a raceless society through mixing and the role of women as the reproducer and symbol of the nation.

By the 2000s, the image of the mixed-race person in the United States transformed from tragic, horrific, and marginal to symbols of racial transcendence, harmony, and individualism (DaCosta, 2007; Joseph, 2012). Nonetheless, mixed-race women remain heavily sexualized as the primary site of interracial desire and harmony (Mitchell, 2020). While a small enumerated population, mixed race bodies and interracial couples became marketed as cool and the face of the future. Although mixed-race individuals and communities are often presented as a novelty in the United States, racial mixture is anything but new. In particular, the histories of enslavement and hypodescent rules rendered the mixed histories of Black identity and politics as invisible.

United States predictions that race is over in the millennium

As discussed above, the 2000 census became the first time that persons could check more than one racial category box. 6.8 million people in the United States identified as having two or more racial identities. "Race is Over," declared the 2000 headline for *The New Republic* article penned by Harvard University sociologist Orlando Patterson (Patterson 2000). This new vision arose from demographic shifts from increasing immigration from non-European nations and growing patterns of children born from interracial

unions. United States census director, Joseph Prewitt remarked that “as the classification system gets fuzzier and blurrier, we’re going to have to re-create ourselves as a society without using a set of social policies which are based on race” (Kasindorf & El Nasser, 2001). Projecting the end of race, these predictions foresaw the discourse around President Obama’s 2008 election campaign. In this case, his multiracial ancestry became imagined as part of what one of his speeches marked as a “more perfect union.” The perfect union is part of the hope for an Obama phenomenon in which Obama as a mythic mixed-race savior solves racial tensions and brings everyone together (Jolivet 2012) played a key part in the postracial fantasies of the early 2000s. President Obama repeatedly referenced his upbringing by white grandparents in Kansas while on the campaign trail. Obama’s white family and his parents’ interracial marriage made him palpable for white Americans and dominant ideas of progress. This same background made him initially less trusted among African American communities, assuming that he would have less understanding of African American experiences. In other words, as noted cultural critic Stanley Crouch (2006) asserted, “What Obama Isn’t: Black like Me.” Michelle Obama’s African American Chicago South Side upbringing and her familial history as the descendant of enslaved African Americans functioned to authenticate Obama’s Black identity (Dariotis & Yoo, 2012). Through the lens of white power structures, multiracialism here then is so not much revolutionary, but actually invigorates white supremacy. Multiracialism bolsters narratives of colorblindness and a future beyond race while at the same time maintaining structures and power of whiteness.

While the diminishing white population in the United States could result in a reshuffling of racial boundaries, racial lines are not so blurred to demarcate who is marked for violence, death, incarceration and who falls out of ideals of citizenship, morality, bodies, and conduct dictated by white norms. Bonilla-Silva’s (2018) proposal that the Latin Americanization of the United States will facilitate the thriving of colorblind racism as whites and honorary whites formed from a reordering of racial hierarchies assert beliefs of racial equality while perpetuating the given racial order. Subjects racialized as non-white face discrimination. While historically, multiracials in the United States have also been a source of fear and anxiety due to threats of tainting racial purity or blurring racial boundaries. As Hernández (2018) shows through her study of court cases, multiraciality or personal racial fluidity are not superseded by collective identities and processes of marginalization. Rather, discrimination experiences are rooted in nonwhiteness. The notion that multiracials are exceptional perpetuates a mythical mixed-race savior rhetoric exemplified by the ‘Obama phenomenon’, where racial tensions disappear because of his election (Jolivet, 2012). Rather, Obama like other Black multiracials were presented in media and political discourse as exceptional and as transcending Blackness (Joseph, 2012). The very desire to transcend Blackness also points to the very basis of antiBlackness with Blackness as an ailment or problem to be overcome. During President Obama’s tenure, the hope for a postracial United States gave way to deep seated racial resentment throughout his administration. With Donald Trump’s election in 2016, hope for a postracial United States had dissipated into visible and open racial hostility.

Multiracial persons are often used as proof of this progress or as threats to the nation, especially Black identified multiracial persons in positions of power. Instead multiracial symbolism illustrates the bounds of racial progress and inequities. As multiracials are

put forth as the fruit of racial progress, the mistreatment and inequities facing Black communities problematizes this same progress narrative. The hope of a postracial future, or one in which race ceases to matter, did not materialize with the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States. While both President Barack Obama and Vice President Kamala Harris identify as Black, they both acknowledge their upbringings with non-Black mothers in both inside and outside the United States. Marked as exceptionally American and exceptionally un-American, media and political discourse centered on their multiracial ancestries, their childhoods outside the United States for President Obama in Indonesia and Vice President Harris in Canada, and the immigrant parentage of President Obama's Kenyan father and President Harris's Indian mother and Jamaican father. With the backlash to President Obama, the rise of Donald Trump, and the galvanization and mainstreaming of white supremacy in the public sphere, the fiction of a postracial United States accompanying the election of Barack Obama was not recycled in the same way after the election of Kamala Harris as Vice President. Harris, a Black identified daughter of South Asian and Jamaican immigrants, married to a Jewish man and part of a blended family, certainly provides different optics and her symbolism is significant. Yet, looking at the United States historical context, the cyclical nature of gains and inclusion is usually met with cycles of violence and repression.

Brazilian promises of multiraciality

In Brazil, the promise of multiraciality as creating a racial paradise is upended by its history and present moment of white supremacy. Brazil is not unique or exceptional in its use of multiraciality as an exemption from racism. But, undergirding Brazil's use of multiraciality is the accompanying ideology of whitening. An obsession with entering modernity and civilization akin to Europe dominated much of Latin America from Argentina to Brazil to Mexico. *Blanqueamiento* and *branqueamento* (Spanish and Portuguese for whitening) were whitening ideologies that sought to physically transform the nation's demographics. The choices were the systematic physical and cultural erasure of African and Indigenous descendant communities in Argentina or the gradual extinction through racial mixing such as in Brazil. After the abolition of slavery in Brazil, the government undertook a formal whitening policy by recruiting European migrants considered to be white (Santos, 2002). Influenced by Social Darwinism and eugenics and a desire to dilute the African and Indigenous populations, the Brazilian government prioritized European immigration and resource subsidization to whiter regions from 1889 to the 1920s. Brazil was not unique in this predicament. Other nations such as Argentina explicitly invited European migrants as vessels of progress to civilize the nation and wipe out the perceived barbarism of nonwhite and mixed populations. The whitening ideology was the solution to Brazil's race problem and the belief that eventually, Blacks would disappear after several generations of racial mixing with whites. The painting "A redenção de Cam" (Ham's redemption) (1895) visualizes this hope of a future beyond Blackness with the illustration of a recently emancipated Black grandmother praising God for removing the stain of Blackness in her family's future. Next to her sits her *mulata* daughter holding a whiter child alongside her European immigrant husband. As whiteness and any proximity to whiteness are deemed superior, government officials, scientists, and

elites believed that racial mixing would save Brazil's racial future. Beyond race in Brazil in the nineteenth century signified a racial future of whiteness.

By the 1930s, the Brazilian elite sought a new path of unification for Brazil and attempted to reconcile European scientific theories to create a civilized nation (Santos, 2002). A recasting of *mestiçagem* (racial mixing) became the solution to Brazilian national identity. Brazilian anthropologist Gilberto Freyre argued that racial mixing would create a racial democracy and racial harmony between Black, Indigenous, and white groups. In his seminal work, *Casa Grande e Senzala* (1933), romanticized colonial nonconsensual sexual relations. Basing his theories in comparison to the United States segregation, Freyre touted Portuguese openness to racial mixture and Black female sensuality and sexual availability. This rewriting of historical narratives placed Brazil as a site of exceptional racial harmony and "tropical hybrid vigor." Despite an emphasis on racial mixing and fluidity, there is nonetheless a clear racial hierarchy based on proximity to whiteness and distance from Blackness and Indigeneity. President Getúlio Vargas brought Freyre's ideas into the Brazilian state. Through an emphasis on mixture and nationalizing Afro-Brazilian cultural forms such as samba and capoeira, the Brazilian state de-emphasized distinct racial identities in favor of a racial democracy. Freyre, along with Brazilian state actors, promoted Brazil as free from the racism that afflicted the United States. By the 1950s, Brazil's international reputation for racial harmony prompted the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to study how Brazil might function as a model for a world recovering from World War II (Maio, 2001). Brazilian state discourse long promoted itself as a racial democracy in contrast to the United States. Again, this premise of racial democracy rested on the national identity of *mestiçagem*. Yet, the racial project of whitening the nation through European immigration and the dilution of Black and Indigenous populations still prevails in Brazilian spheres (Loveman, 2014). Brazilian racial identification relies on phenotype rather than familial lineage. Therefore, there are strong disincentives to identify as Black. I would also argue that gender and sexuality, and ideas of morality place certain groups into white and nonwhite categories. The Brazilian icon of the *mulata* (a woman of African and European descent) is sensualized as a national symbol of *mestiçagem* in literature, samba songs, liquor bottles, and tourism shows. This national sexual objectification is exemplified during the annual Mulata Globeleza competition in which samba dancers competed for the honor of dancing seminude on television during Carnaval season (Corrêa, 1996; Pravaz, 2003). Not until 2017 was some clothing used during the spectacle. Yet, Afro-Brazilians are largely absent from universities, upper class apartments, and magazine covers. To be preto (Black) is stigmatized as inferior, ugly, and uncivilized and subject to discrimination and death in contrast to branco (white) as the longstanding ideal. Pardo (brown) represents mixture. As reinforced by Brazilian whitening ideologies, this term does not carry the same negative connotations as preto. Outside of official census categories, a colloquial terminology reinforces the whitening ideology with closer to white and distant from Black as more desirable, and despite the range of color terms, clear social distinctions of nonwhiteness are made (Sheriff, 2001). The continuum of terms to mark gradations from preto also shows the desire to avoid this label. In Brazil, while racial boundaries might appear to be more porous and there is a saying that "money whitens," the investment in whiteness nonetheless is based upon exclusion. The

pact of whiteness requires constant validation and reaffirmation of whiteness as racial capital such as through access to education, housing, employment, and considerations of who is beautiful, refined, and moral (Sheriff, 2001; Roth-Gordon, 2017).

Contesting racial democracy

Across Latin America, pushes for race-based policies arose from the galvanization of Latin American Afrodescendant and Indigenous movements in the 1990s and early 2000s (Htun, 2004; Loveman, 2014; Paschel, 2016). By 2001, a dramatic shift from the denial of racism to acknowledging racism occurred at the International Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa. As the fruit of decades of organizing, Afro-Brazilian protestors debunked the myth of racial democracy. President Cardoso (1995–2002) commented that his family lineage had a *pé na cozinha* (foot in the kitchen), a common saying to acknowledge how white Brazilian men had sexual relationships with enslaved Black women. President Cardoso's comments illustrate the ubiquity of the perception that all Brazilians are racially mixed and how these myths obscure legacies of colonial violence. Yet, unlike the white Brazilian elite, President Cardoso was uniquely positioned as a trained sociologist who had researched racial inequalities. He became the first president to acknowledge Brazilian racism and the need to implement racial policies. The presidential administrations of Lula da Silva (2003–2010) and Dilma Rousseff (2011–2016) implemented university affirmative action policies alongside laws mandating the teaching of Afro-Brazilian history. These administrations chipped away at myths of racial democracy and racial mixing in favor of race-conscious policies to achieve greater racial equity. These state policies addressed inequalities between white and nonwhites in Brazil, bringing about new debates on racial categories and national identity. Part of the uproar to implementing race-conscious policies was the assertion that due to racial mixture, who should qualify for affirmative action (citation). In Brazil, quotas are targeted at individuals who self-classify as *pardo* (brown), *preto* (Black), or *Indigena* (Indigenous). Some universities use the broader political category of *negro*. *Negro*, a term of political racial consciousness, combines *preto* and *pardo* under a unified category. Black movement activists argue that Brazilians of African descent should recognize themselves and each other as *negro*. But, who determines who is *negro*? To determine who is *negro*, some universities also established panels to determine racial membership based on photographs and in-person interviews. In a much publicized case from 2007, Brazilian magazine *Veja* ran the headline “*Raca Não Existe*” alongside the images of two identical twin brothers, sons of a black father and a white mother. Both self-declared as *negros* for admission under the quota system at the Universidade de Brasília (UnB), but only one brother entered under quotas. The brother denied admission appealed his case to the admissions committee and was later verified as *negro*. Prominent geneticists, such as Sergio Pena, have also declared that since many Brazilians are genetically mixed, racial policies should not be implemented to eventually reach a color-blind society (Pena & Birchall, 2006). The challenges in determining racial membership reinvigorated debates that racial policies should not exist in the first place due to Brazil's racial fluidity and blurred racial lines. Yet, the celebration of diversity and mixture nonetheless obscures racism and Brazil's case is but of one iteration of interconnected post-racial and multicultural episodes in the Americas (Da Costa, 2016). Insisting on Brazil's

colorblind racial democracy, conservatives attacked that centering race would import United States style racism and were antithetical to a Brazilian national identity based upon *mestiçagem*. President Lula da Silva (2003–2010) and President Dilma Rousseff's (2011–2016) policies such as poverty reduction programs, quotas, and the extension of labor rights to predominantly Afro-Brazilian female domestic workers, among others helped create upward mobility for millions of low-income groups, Afro-Brazilians, and Indigenous peoples. Nonetheless, the stigmatization of nonwhiteness and longstanding structural racism was not enough to overturn inequalities. Despite the perception that nonwhites were undeserving recipients of benefits, whites benefited the most from these programs and policies (Mitchell-Walthour & Santos, 2022; Pereira, 2016). Yet, it is precisely the perceptions of these gains for nonwhite Brazilians and the implementation of race-conscious policies that unleashed the racial backlash leading up to Jair Bolsonaro's election in 2018. Enduring antiblackness and a focus on whiteness as symbolic of progress and order go hand in hand with the fear of a majority Black nation (Alves & Vargas, 2020). Within hours of his inauguration on January 1, 2019, he attacked race-conscious policies such as affirmative action and Indigenous and Afro-Brazilian land rights. Like the United States, the white resentment of a perceived loss of entitled social and economic status, galvanized the far-right into power. In Brazil, the far-right attacks universities primarily in the social sciences and humanities. As a means to continue to deny the existence of racism in Brazil, President Bolsonaro and his appointees upset the progress made in previous presidential administrations to combat inequality. Addressing massive budget cuts for the humanities and social sciences, Brazilian Secretary of Education, Abraham Weintraub, used the term *vira-lata* (mutt) (Andrade, 2019) on multiple occasions to emphasize Brazil's mixed-race population and declaring that there is no racism in Brazil since "we are all mutts." This line of thinking that racial mixing equals the absence of racism in Brazil is a persistent narrative. Asserting that his own family had Black and Indigenous heritage and he could show evidence with a DNA test, Weintraub showcased his family as truly Brazilian. He accused discussions of race as a threat to the nation and a need to return to seeing Brazil as a mixed-race nation. Avoiding racism and white supremacist ideologies and inequities while reasserting racial elements again places race as biological rather than a system of structures. In November 2020, Vice President Hamilton Mourão claimed that "racism doesn't exist in Brazil" in response to protests over the brutal killing of João Freitas, an unarmed Black man, by security guards at a grocery store (Mazui, 2020). President Bolsonaro claims that racial tensions are foreign to Brazilian history (Chade, 2020). The denial of racism alongside racial violence is a hallmark of Brazil's racial democracy and antiblackness.

Racial shifting or passing?

In Brazil, the line between pardo and branco became a politically contested boundary and flouted Brazil's traditional ideas of racial fluidity. The hysteria around accounts of racial fraud also served as delegitimizing conservative strategy. Account of racial fraud also brought into question who is considered pardo. A few Black student groups also expressed concern that brancos were posing as pardos to gain unfair access to coveted university quota slots. Determining racial group membership whether through family lineage or appearance is of key concern. In a similar vein, in the early 1990s, the United

States *Malone v. Civil Service Commission* and the 2016 dissent of the *Fisher v. Texas* case also pointed to fears of reverse passing as Black and if ancestral nonwhite heritage would be used to game a system of policies to explicitly address racial inequities through defined racial boundaries. In the United States., passing for Black is illustrated through the infamous case of Rachel Dolezal, a white woman passing for Black, who led a chapter of the historically Black organization, the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). In academia, Andrea Smith, a white woman passed for Native American, and Jessica Krug, aka Jess La Bombera, posed as Afro-Latina. These are not symbols of racial fluidity, but rather a performance of multiraciality. During the last Brazilian election in 2020, approximately 4,580 electoral candidates changed their racial identification from white to Black after the implementation of campaign financing geared towards Black candidates (Romero, 2021). Some candidates cited their raised racial consciousness as reasons for a shift towards identifying as Black. Common to all of these cases is the use of multiraciality and the wider co-optation of understandings of mixture within African diasporic and Indigenous communities. While persons who have no known nonwhite ancestry can temporarily live their lives as white or perform as another race, the same is not true for individuals who, based on their features or family lineages that have been racialized as nonwhite. Despite these material consequences of nonwhiteness, there is continued apprehension surrounding racial fraud and white persons' appropriation and stylization of multiraciality. While questions about racial fluidity and malleability of racial identity largely ignore the continued perseverance of a racial hierarchy based on white supremacy in the Americas. In both the United States and Brazil, persons of African descent are subject to discrimination, but multiracial and lighter-skinned Black persons have historically greater access, visibility, and resources than darker-skinned Blacks (Goldsmith et al., 2007; Norwood, 2014; Hunter, 2007; Kopkin & Mitchell, 2020; Monk Jr., 2016; Telles et al., 2015). Yet, in comparison to individuals and communities racialized as white, these advantages pale in comparison. In the United States, multiracials, whether by appearance, familial connection, or in the infamous case of Cleon Brown, a white man who shared that he had Black ancestry through a genetic test, are also targets of employment and housing discrimination when nonwhiteness is revealed (Hernández, 2018). While there are outlier cases of racial fraud, the real challenge is white supremacy that places ownership of resources, spaces, and stories.

Conclusion

Both Brazil and the United States are experiencing desires to return to an innocent past and the purposeful denial of racism combined with attacks on racial justice protests, rollbacks of racial policies designed to combat inequities, and the continued systemic violence against nonwhite peoples. Accusations that discussing race will generate racism alongside stances of colorblindness and calls for censoring knowledge produced by non-white scholars are all strategies of maintaining power. The calls for a return to ideals of Brazilian racial democracy and an origin narrative of harmonious comingling and racial mixture or a return to an uncorrupted historical narrative in which racism and slavery did not play a major role as demonstrated by former President Trump's 1776 Commission. These calls for a return to national values, unencumbered by race, are in fact responses to explicit racism, racial violence, and social movements that question these

same narratives. While the United States has a long history of mixed-race populations, the United States treats such populations as new phenomena and as proof of racial progress. Brazil meanwhile cites mixed-race populations as part of its national heritage and as evidence of its lack of racism.

Within recent patterns of increasing nonwhite identification, a resurgence of white supremacy using the language of patriotism took hold. From acts of violence to the highest political office, the surge of white patriarchal regimes has expanded. Both U.S. President Donald Trump and Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's supporters make a stake for nationalism in "Make America Great Again" and "Brazil for Brazilians" refrains. These nationalistic sentiments highlighted a repossessing of the nation solely for white Americans and white Brazilians or those who aligned themselves with racial hierarchies. At the same time, the refutation of this stake in white supremacy and systemic racism also facilitates its very spread. In both countries, the hostilities towards teaching histories of people of African descent and Indigenous heritage undergirds the denial. The intensive attempts to repeal gains for Black, Indigenous, women, and low-income groups are part of longstanding exclusions. Across the Atlantic, the United Kingdom Brexit case and the popularity of Le Pen in France also have responded to demographic changes and a perceived loss of white social and political status. The borders of national belonging and citizenship are tied to the idea of a past racialized national identity while continuing to mobilize race and ethnicity as dangerous threats to national cohesion. The fear of non-white nations emerging from decolonizing collective uprising and liberation resulted in far-right backlashes from 2016 onwards in the United States and Brazil. These cases are not intermittent phenomena but rather central to the underpinnings of the concept of race itself. Despite the strong global hold of white supremacy, multiraciality can potentially disrupt these powers systems through the countering of white absorption. With resistance to racial disparities and growing racial consciousness, a shift towards non-whiteness in Brazil and the United States is occurring. While in a few cases, there might be a perceived temporary gain from nonwhiteness, white-identified individuals do not bear a stigma of non-whiteness. In particular, an embrace of Blackness is reshaping collective political identities. Rather than asserting an honorary whiteness (Bonilla-Silva 2018) or membership in a buffer class, there is a turn towards state recognition of Black identities and a recasting of multiracial symbolism to also assert Black identities. In the United States, this pivot towards Blackness offers an antidote to the embrace of a multiracial whiteness in which non-white individuals secure investments in the tools and practices of white supremacy (Beltrán, 2021). In Brazil, the dominant ideologies of *mes-ticagem* have historically triggered a disidentification with Blackness to garner some of the privileges of whiteness. The shifting pattern to identify as nonwhite prompts a reassessment of racial identities and a decentering of whiteness. In both nations multiracialism rooted in social justice must take the form of multiple solidarities Black and brown communities. With 23andme commercials advertising finding your roots, makeup lines that use celebrities ancestral lineage such as L'oreal to television shows with genetic testing reveals, genetic testing stands to reify racial essentialism while also redirecting conversations of a postracial society. Genetic testing breaks down together the notion of pure races and the novelty of multiracialism. Future research directions might examine how the framing of genetic testing and racial mixture supports a discourse of beyond

race without dismantling racist structures. Historically, national racial projects have limited the rights and resources of nonwhite groups. In this moment of intensified white supremacy, a redirecting from multiraciality as whitening to multiraciality as part of a purposeful vision of racial recognition and anti-racism could powerfully challenge white dominance. It is impossible to move beyond race without grappling with how racialized histories chart our present. The narratives of an Americas beyond race converge on multiple narratives such as that of United States postracial exceptionalism and Brazilian racial democracy. The end of race is often confused with racial fluidity or racial ambiguity. Race has not disappeared and the mechanisms of racial oppression remain in place. Ultimately, the discourse of beyond race is a tool of whiteness.

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