

BLACKS AND SCHOOLING IN BRAZIL: UNDERSTANDING A "RACIALIZED" HISTORY¹

*Francis Musa Boakari, Ph.D.*²

resumo

abstract

Os negros e a escolarização no Brasil: Compreendendo uma história racializada. Argumentando que a melhor maneira de tentar entender a situação do negro brasileiro é através de uma análise das ideologias hegemônicas que têm estruturado o Brasil, e assim, dimensionando as estruturas de oportunidade abertas aos membros deste grupo racial, apresento dados estatísticos e comento eventos históricos para fundamentar esta tese. Trilhando este caminho, procuro respostas a três indagações principais: Quais as características da topografia das estruturas de oportunidade disponíveis aos negros; como estas ter influenciado as diferenças entre negros e não-negros; e finalmente, poderiam os negros têm se saído melhor se as oportunidades legitimadas pela lei tivessem tido o espaço para funcionar de acordo com os códigos legais e as expectativas democráticas?

I argue that the best way to try to understand the situation of Blacks in Brazil is by analyzing those dominant ideologies which have shaped the country and consequently, fashioned out the dimensions of the opportunity structures open to the members of this racial group. Some statistical data are presented in collaboration with commented historical events, in order to build the foundations for this thesis. Accordingly, I search for answers to the following three central questions: How best can the main characteristics of the topography of the opportunity structure regarding Blacks in Brazil be described; what have the influences of this structure been on the gaps between Blacks and non-blacks; and finally, would Blacks have done better than they have, had the legally guaranteed opportunity structures been let free to function according to written laws and democratic expectations?

1 - An essential part of this paper was initially presented at the Annual Conference of the Comparative and International Education Society, Mexico City, Mexico, 19-23 March, 1997. I am still grateful to the Federal University of Piauí and my colleagues of both the Social Sciences Department and the Masters' Program in Education for making my participation at the conference a reality.

By "racialized", I refer to every attitude, all practices and the totality of social contexts where race as a biological condition, having been transformed into a social factor, is then employed in a consistent manner as implicit criterion not only for defining situations, but most importantly, for judging and rewarding (negatively or positively) individuals. It attempts to capture the essence of that situation in a specific society, where persons, as individuals and/or as members of a particular racial group, are not seen for their race (color, physical appearances and biological heredity).

2 - Dept^o. de Ciências Sociais & Mestrado em Educação - UFPI.

As the future of the world,
All we should really say is:
Give racial harmony a chance.
We believe we can make a difference,
Using our differences to build a better world.
A world not better because it is different,
But DIFFERENT because it is BETTER...

INTRODUCTION

Have the living conditions of we Blacks in Brazil really changed over the years? Based upon what can someone claim that our life situation in this country seems to be undergoing real positive changes in recent times? Apparently, over the past few decades, there are vague signs and certain indications that as members of a racial group, we have made some socioeconomic progress. That our life conditions are changing, especially when we make comparisons with those conditions under which our parents lived forty years back. We have made some relative progress in gaining access to and utilizing some of the few social goods which many segments of other racial groups in this country enjoy much more fully and generally even take for granted. Nevertheless, have our opportunity structures really changed? By opportunity structure I mean the composite of all the social niches which appear in diverse forms, presenting possibilities of participation in various manners in society, based upon sets of criteria that are predefined explicitly and are found to be within reach of all those who are supposed to participate in a particular society at a particular time in history.

The need to offer some basic explanations leads me to clarify that regarding the term "Black", I have employed it here to refer to Brazilian nationals of African descent. This choice was based upon the need for consistency in using a purely descriptive word despite the problems it might create. In Brazil, though the frequently used terms are Negro, Black and Mulatto (*moreno*), there are more than thirty other commonly used terms for members of this same group. Though my choice of an appropriate term might not satisfy everybody, let us agree to understand the word Black here to refer to all Brazilians who share in the common African heritage of being children of the *diáspora*. Whenever necessary, this word can also be substituted by the reader for his/her term of choice. The main objective of the text is to provide for some productive discussions and reflections about that minority group which has suffered, and continues suffering the most, from the policies of a racist society which consistently does not measure bounds and limits for perpetuating its practices.

In more recent years, the words race, ethnic and their varying derivatives have tended to be used interchangeably as relational (comparative) terms to differentiate between individuals and the groups they belong to from other persons and their own groups, using physical characteristics (appearances), communication instruments and styles, as well as behavior patterns. I would like to continue maintaining that this practice is unwarranted since both of these terms are indeed different in their essences and social connotations. While race more appropriately describes biological ties and hereditary group membership, based upon phenotypical and genotypical factors, ethnic as a descriptor of predominantly cultural factors, describes human groups united by such elements as language, religion, values, belief systems, shared historical experiences, as well as the production and use of material and symbolic goods. As a multi-racial and ethnically plural society, Brazil is an ideologically impregnated social context where the terms in question continue to be manipulated to the advantage of the dominant racial (European) and ethnic groups (Portuguese Brazilians, Brazilians of Italian descent, etc.). Consequently, the word ethnic and its related explanatory factors are presently preferred by the "politically correct" who choose to explain away discriminatory attitudes and behaviors which have been consistently found to be based upon racial origins.

As a Black, am I observed and judged by others as a university professor (cultural manifestations) or just as another social intruder (successful Black person)? Since experiences show that we still suffer from racial and not cultural (ethnic) discrimination, I prefer to describe "what is" and not "what could possibly be", an ideal social environment where all are respected as individual persons, but maybe minimally differentiated because of some peculiar practices.

Though race may be accepted as either a biological or even a meaningless term in describing individual human groups because of the recognition that there is only one race, that of all human beings, and that biological proofs are much more complex than ever thought of before, it is more appropriate to refer to racial rather than ethnic groups because of the historical importance of the former term which was used to justify the preconceived inferiority of non-Europeans, especially Black people. Since this misconception and its negative consequences persist, unabated though more refined, it would seem logical to maintain the term which has always adequately given form to and described these conditions whenever different peoples have had prolonged contacts, socially co-existing and having to devise mechanisms for sharing the same social goods and benefits. Such a

need may be even greater in Brazil where human group membership is predominantly based on physical appearance and not genotypical factors. Since one's phenotype, especially skin color, determines racial group membership in this society, some genotypically black persons are easily referred to as *morenos*, and not *negros* or Blacks (*pretos*) without any problems. Presently, there are over 35 different skin color generally employed to describe people. At one time, there were over 130 such colors, with black and white serving as polar ends.³

As a group, we Black people seem to be somewhat represented by some of our members among those who have "done well socially, economically, and culturally". Very recent official data regarding the national situation indicated that there were about 68 million Blacks in a total population of around 155 million inhabitants. Of these, about 7.5 million of us were part of the middle class, with average monthly earnings of about US\$2.500,00. We are reported to have the same priorities as our non-Black colleagues. That is, we want to earn more money, establish our own businesses, have a new car, travel and have our own home (*VEJA*, June 24, 1998:98-109).

The same set of data went on to show that compared to the older generations, there are more Black children and young adults finishing at all levels of the schooling process. While about 13% of Black parents did not complete elementary school, today only about 4% fall into this category. Also, about twice as many children as their parents are finishing high school and having some years of college education (*VEJA*, June 24, 1998:98-109). These may be very encouraging data. However, when we examine these achievements in the light of how long ago slavery was abolished, there would be little to celebrate. If we are still so distant from accounting for even one-half of the middle class, it means that though much has been achieved, very little real progress has been made by this segment of the Brazilian population. Above all, such data show an absolute need for examining the chances young Blacks have for becoming successful. If there are more of us with higher levels of schooling today, but this formal attainment does not seem to transfer to the marketplace, then there is a lot to explain. The need for explanations becomes an urgent necessity when we refuse to accept the

3 - Among those who have adequately discussed this question are - Roberto DaMatta, a Brazilian anthropologist in *O que faz o brasil, Brasil?*, Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1986; and David Brookshaw, in *Raca e cor na literatura brasileira*, Porto Alegre: Mercado Aberto, 1983; Cleusa Turra & Gustavo Venturi, (Orgs.), *O racismo cordial: a mais completa análise sobre o preconceito de cor no Brasil*, São Paulo, Datafolha:Folha de São Paulo, 1995.

racial factor as the persisting determinant for success among Blacks, and stubbornly maintain the democratic discourse which still pervades in all spheres of life in Brazil.

Despite the social and political domination which Blacks have had to fight against, some of our numbers, especially in certain fields, have gained some degree of **citizenship** in terms of access to social, economic, cultural and political rights and responsibilities. In no way am I sustaining that these gains have outweighed the institutional and individual "racisms" that we have to struggle against for the last four centuries in our daily lives. At this stage in our experiences with the reality of racism, I consider that it is more appropriate to refer to "racisms" in order to describe the different kinds of discriminatory treatments to which Blacks are exposed in diverse contexts. As an example, the way I am differentially treated in a hotel is different from how I am discriminated against on the streets or in the classroom. Using the plural form of the term racism is an efficient way to begin to adequately describe this very complex situation of human degradation.

We still continue to be under-represented in absolute terms when we compare the levels, qualities and extent of our gains to the continuing over-abundance of the opportunities of other racial groups in these societies. Put differently, while there are more of us today sprinkled among the predominantly white middle-class,⁴ most of our racial group members still maintain an uncontested hold in those domains which represent social domination, economic privations and political exclusion.

A fourteen year-old Black school girl understands the situation in these terms:

How difficult it is to be Black. Wherever I look, I am forced to see white people. I have to deal with their history, their conquests, their wealth, and opportunities. Unfortunately, the presence of Blacks is still maintained in between-the-lines of our history, in government institutions like prisons, in other people's kitchens, on the farms of other Brazilians and in those work places which only contribute to our invisibility! For example, while some of my white neighbors have moved to wealthier neighborhoods and/or have visibly improved their living conditions, the

4 - See especially, the VEJA edition of 24.06.98 which, carrying a cover story about this situation, entitled its article, "From racial prejudice to success: racial discrimination viewed by its victorious victims" (p. 98-109).

*economic and family situations of my Black friends seem to have become worse over the years.*⁵

In the light of such conditions, the fundamental questions which concern me in this paper are: What are the basic characteristics of the topography of the opportunity structures for Black people in Brazil? How has this influenced the racial and social gaps between the members of this racial group and especially non-blacks? Finally, have Blacks done as well as we could have, had the legally guaranteed opportunity structures been allowed to function within established law? The answers to questions such as these can never be conclusive by their very complex nature. Nevertheless, certain responses can help reveal the ramifications of the complexities involved in race relations in a multi-racial society where all social issues have social connotations.

I am of the opinion that despite the problems of the educational system, especially when we consider how as agent of socialization, it has historically been utilized for producing and reproducing the sociocultural domination of Black people, it is still through this institution that sociopolitical resurgence can be possible for most of us. Schools may continue to be damaging to the formation of positive self-images by Black people. However, the formal experiences explicitly expressed in the curriculum are the most recognized social keys for opening doors and for amplifying the limited and thorny opportunity structures which appear to allow for Black participation.

These thoughts lead me to emphasize that only a clear understanding of the dynamics involved in social and racial interactions in this country, especially as to how they affect the opportunity structures and the various ramifications involved in this process, would lead the way in grasping important social questions related to: the challenges Black children and youth face in the school place and in classrooms; the complex difficulties Black adolescents have to deal with in their socializing encounters within a society that is racist, but apparently continues to think and act otherwise; the difficulties we the members of this group face on the job market in order to break taboos and maintain our self-esteem; and the complexities of our existence as Brazilians in a society which does not become tired of letting us realize that we do not and can never really belong ...

5.- This and other similar quotations in the text, called direct interviews, resulted from investigative conversations held over the years with students of African descent from

The real social picture of Brazilian Blacks

A closer look at the conditions of the descendants of ex-slaves in this country will show that we Blacks continue to be the single most constantly represented group when negative social indicators are analyzed (IBGE, 1970, 1980, 1991).⁶ In much larger numbers, we are exposed to less schooling experiences, encounter more negative environments in the school place, consistently fail and consequently drop out of school. Our children are still best characterized by negative school performance records (MEC/SEF).⁷ We are extensively present among the under- or unemployed. At the same time, significant numbers of our group either live as hired farm laborers in the poorer regions or try to survive in the slums (*favelas*) of the large urban areas (IBGE, 1991).

According to data from the National Household Sample Survey (*Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios, PNAD*) of 1990, conducted by the government funded Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (*Fundação Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, IBGE*),⁸ and published in 1991, the national population was composed of 55.3% whites, 39.3% mulattos (*pardos*), 4.9% blacks and 0.5% yellow persons (Orientals). These official data, based upon assigned racial categories, would make Brazil a country of predominantly white European descendants. However, the criteria employed in both data collection and analyses do not seem to adequately represent how most Brazilians racially classify themselves. When people are requested to racially categorize themselves, there are growing tendencies for proportions of those officially classified as whites and mulattos to assume their condition of being Black because of parental background. Using this self-classification method, data was collected and organized, in conjunction with those of the IBGE, by *Datafolha* of the Folha de São Paulo Group. Based upon the results of the crossed analyses that followed, it was possible to conclude that Brazilians of African stock form about 59% of the total population.⁹ In a country where racial issues form the bases for dealing with any important question, this kind of discrepancy should not be surprising. Other data which follow will shed more light upon the contradictory nature of

6 -Foundation-Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (*Fundação Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística - IBGE*), Rio de Janeiro, 1970, 1980, 1985 and 1991.

7 -Federal Ministry of Education, Secretariat for Fundamental Education (MEC/SEF), Brasília, D.F., (data from 1986 and 1995).

8 -IBGE, Rio de Janeiro, 1989, 1991.

9 -Cleusa Turra & Gustavo Venturi, (Orgs.), *O racismo cordial: a mais completa análise sobre o preconceito de cor no Brasil*, São Paulo, Datafolha:Folha de São Paulo, 1995.

the reality of the lives of Brazilian Blacks as members of this multi-racial society, one which has been described by one of its foremost intellectuals, Florestan Fernandes, as a society which discriminates against its own discriminatory practices and attitudes (in its treatment of issues of interest to the Blacks).

Data from the IBGE of 1989 showed that while 89.4% of the Blacks lived in the two poorest regions (North and North-Eastern) of the country, 83% of the non-Blacks lived in the most industrialized regions. This spatial occupation pattern can help explain the access to social goods and services. Liá Rosemberg's study of 1981 threw some more light on this. According to her, underprivileged students studied in schools which were below all reasonably necessary minimum standards for continuing as formal educational environments. Such schools could be best characterized by their over-all deficiencies related to the conditions considered to be reasonably necessary, for adequately functioning as places for teaching and learning.¹⁰

The literacy rate among Brazilians between the ages of 05 and 14 was calculated to be about 48% (IBGE, 1991). Of these, 53% was made up of children of European descent. About 45% was composed of children of African origin. Black Brazilians were also reported to be twice as likely than whites to drop out of school before completing the elementary level. In some areas of the North-Eastern and Northern States, these rates can be as high as 80%. School grade retention and age-grade discrepancies were also found to be extremely higher among Black children (*VEJA*, Nº 1027, 1988).

In other words, more than half of the Black children who ought to have been in school, were not. What could they have been doing? Where would they have been? While drop-out rates among all children are said to be high all over the country, in those regions that are poor, where most of the Blacks live, generally more than 60% of an age cohort entering first grade, leaves before completing the third grade. News stories, television programs and general information about street boys and girls from all over the country consistently show that most of them are Black children. These children and adolescents include both those who have been completely abandoned and have no family ties (*criança de rua*), and the others who are only temporarily on the streets (*criança na rua*), working to help with their family's income.

Information related to illiteracy at the national level, put the rate at 20% (IBGE, 1991). While 12.6% of this proportion was made up of Brazilians of European descent, those of African descent accounted for about 30%. Data published by IBGE in 1994 demonstrated that 18.1% of all Brazilians aged 10

10 - Liá Rosemberg, *Educação e desigualdade social*, Edições Loyola, São Paulo, 1984.

and above, had one year or less of formal school instruction (functional illiterates). The non-Blacks represented 12% of this group. At the same time, Blacks were responsible for about 29% of these functional illiterates. When the variable of 11 or more years of schooling (at least completion of elementary school) was considered, only 14.1% of all Brazilians enjoyed this privilege. Nineteen percent (19%) of this group was formed by those of European origin and less than 15% was accounted for by Blacks (IBGE, 1994).

Under "normal circumstances" in most societies, the schooling experience is transferred to the job market more securely and with corresponding earnings. That is, the longer one stays in school and the higher the level of school achievement one attains, the more marketable one becomes in the work force, generally earning a better salary. In the case of the few Brazilian Blacks with some formal instruction, however, this does not seem to be a common trend. Their presence in the work force shows that apart from the school curriculum, there is a social curriculum (cultural norms, racial expectations and political interests) which prevents them from greater social participation. This seems to be even more prevailing in those professions where higher levels of schooling should make a difference. As it were, value expectations as well as stereotypical impressions and misconceptions seem to operate negatively in the case of Blacks, as far as formal educational achievements are related to work force participation and economic gains. For them, it seems that the more they study for the better paid professions, the lower their earnings are when compared to those of their non-Black professional colleagues.¹¹

A 1988 survey conducted in São Paulo (most industrialized Southern State) and Recife (most advanced North-Eastern State) by the IBGE seemed to have underlined these points very well. The data presented by *VEJA* (Nº 1027, 1988) demonstrated that the conditions of most Black workers were very negative, especially when their earning levels were compared to those of non-Black workers in the same work categories. While a white doctor earned 22% more than a Black physician; a Black teacher's earnings were 18% lower than those of his white colleague. Similarly, a Black engineer had an income 19% lower than that of a white professional colleague. At the same time, Black metal workers and bricklayers respectively received incomes 12% and 11% lower than those of white workers in the same job category. These distortions assume more negative proportions when we observe that these same data

11 - Lúcia Elena Garcia de Oliveira, Rosa Maria Porcaro and Tereza Cristina N. Araújo Costa, *O lugar do negro na força de trabalho*, IBGE, Rio de Janeiro, 1981.

showed that while Black laborers were paid 50% lower in the North-Eastern States, this difference rose to 96% in São Paulo in favor of non-skilled white workers.

Among the ten million families were reported to survive on an average monthly minimum wage of about one hundred dollars (US\$100.00), 60% was constituted by Blacks. Put in other terms, while out of every ten Brazilians four or five, depending upon the data bases, are Black, six out of every ten poor families are composed of Blacks. Also, before the age of five, Black children are 30% more likely to die from socioeconomic conditions. These include prolonged periods of unemployment, underemployment, discriminatory housing and banking policies ("unavailable loans" for small-scale business endeavors) and a social welfare system that benefits the wealthy and not the poor and very needy. Generalized market practices, state policies, cultural norms and traditionally differentiating beliefs result in strengthening and reproducing, with ever renewing subtleties, the social exclusion of Blacks.

Opportunity structures in historical perspectives

Though slavery formally ended more than a century ago, descendants of Africans in Brazil continue to suffer from the repercussions of an economic system which did not only deprive them of basic rights, but also forced society to construct negative images about them. As a result of both the general imaginary construction and depreciative frames of reference about them, they have been held "in their social place" as inferior, questionable and second-class or non-citizens. In Brazil, Blacks could be said to form the largest racial group in the national population. According to the last census in 1991, only about 13% of the population claimed to be Black-Negro, while about 36% was self-defined as mulatto or some shade of whiteness (IBGE, 1991; Turra and Venturi, 1995). In a country where racial group membership can be attributed, self-assigned, defined through the perceptions of physical appearance or social status, "blacks" may be in the minority. However, if all those who are explicitly of African descent were classified into one category, the result would indicate that more than 50% of the general population is Black. This would be in contradiction to how many Brazilians prefer to define the society they live in. Despite this, what remains important is that when we decide to neglect such a numerical representation in the general population, Blacks can still be said to form a minority group. According to Dworkin and Dworkin (1982),¹² such a group can be characterized by a common identity,

differential power relations and treatments considered to be discriminatory, pejorative and negative. The members also demonstrate some level of group awareness, generally based upon shared experiences (negative in most cases) and traces of a common history.

When we consider these factors in the context under examination, Blacks do respond positively to these variables. As minority group members, their negative differentials in social, economic and political powers are not only outstanding, but so evident that even all the efforts to explain away the causes for these constructed differences, account to little for the careful (less subjective) observer. It is this interplay between various factors that defines and shapes their opportunity structures, creating those conditions which fuel the overall negativity to which they are all exposed almost all the time in nearly all social contexts. Opportunity structures are socially, historically and culturally produced, maintained and constantly reinforced. My present concern is to understand some of the complex issues involved in this process, especially to find out how the whole situation affects young Blacks and their relationships with formal education. In order to do so, there is the need to examine how this situation has been shaped by historical developments.

Slavery was not abolished as a voluntary and beneficent act by Princess Isabel as many children are still made to learn at school. Rather, Brazil was forced into signing the Law of Abolition in 1888. Apart from the internal pressures by the Abolitionists and the increasing revolts and sabotages conducted by slaves all over the colony, Brazil was also pressured by the European markets, especially the British, to put an end to slave labor. As it were, the country was neither psychologically ready, nor structurally prepared to end slavery. The elite groups too did not seem prepared to change a system which had guaranteed them economic welfare, social prestige, political security and cultural hegemony. This might partially explain why the dominant groups preferred to pay lip service to abolition by only formally declaring the end of "slavery as an institution" without paying particular attention to the ex-slaves as persons, human beings whose changed life conditions needed appropriate institutional adaptations. It can be securely stated that

no specific attempts were officially made to incorporate the freed slaves as participating members of society. Barriers were created to prevent them from becoming fully integrated (with obligations and privileges) into the

12 - A.G.Dworkin and R.J.Dworkin, *The minority report: An introduction to racial, ethnic, and gender relations*, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1982.

existing social networks.

Further strengthening the argument that the Brazilian elite did not really intend for the freed Black slaves to be socially integrated, was the policy of inviting into the country European and Asian immigrants.¹³ Those who came did so with a variety of socioeconomic incentives to form the new labor force. Claiming that the same Blacks who only recently had worked as slaves on farms, in the towns (trades) and even in simple industrial enterprises did not have the skills necessary to do farm work or industrial labor, reasons were found for the immigrants to work as farm hands and as employees in the growing industries at the turn of the century. While some members of these Asian and European groups had houses constructed for them, others were given lots for housing or farm lands to buy at reduced prices and with many social incentives.

At the same time, some of the freed slaves stayed on the farms where they had been used as the essential elements of the farming structure, but now as poorly paid workers. Others were allowed to stay on as share-crop farmers, or as beneficiaries of the goodwill of their former slave masters. There were still some ex-slaves who moved to the towns and cities in search of newer opportunities. To all practical effects, the plights of the two groups were basically the same as those who decided to remain working on the land.¹⁴ Since they were not considered to be citizens, no specific policies were implemented to facilitate their integration as full participants in society. Lacking the most minimum of the conditions and basic rights which even the newly arrived immigrants enjoyed, they were forced to take up any and all kinds of work in order to survive. For most Blacks, this general situation has not undergone much change over the years. While lip service continues to be paid to racial equalities and the rights of every Brazilian to non-racially impregnated conditions, as well as humane and dignified treatments, the reality of the Black population remains as constant reminder of historical falsities and sociopolitical contradictions.

In 1931, the National Negro Front (*Frente Negra Brasileira - FNB*)

13 - Giralda Seyferth, "Construindo a nação: hierarquias raciais e o papel do racismo na política de imigração e colonização", In Marcos Chor Maio & Ricardo Ventura Santos, (Orgs.), *Raça, ciência e sociedade*, Rio de Janeiro, FIOCRUZ/CCBB, 1996.

14 - Ciro Flamarion S. Cardoso, (Org.), *Escravidão e abolição no Brasil: Novas perspectivas*, Rio de Janeiro, Zahar, 1988; Octavio Ianni, *Escravidão e racismo*, São Paulo, Hucitec, 1978; Jacob Gorender, *O escravismo colonial*. São Paulo, Ática, 1978; Eugene D. Genovese, *O mundo dos senhores de escravos*, Rio de Janeiro, Paz e Terra, 1979; R.B. Toplin, *The abolition of slavery in Brazil*, New York, Atheneum, 1975.

was founded as a popular movement. The objectives of the FNB went far beyond the mere recuperation of the cultural heritage of the Blacks. It served as reference for the few existing Black professionals and intellectuals. The FNB also played the important role of publicly trying to bring to national awareness, the situation of the Blacks and the injustices they had to live with in all spheres of life. These attempts to cry out loud against the discriminatory treatments to which all Blacks were exposed, were short-lived. In 1937, there was "a revolution" (Getúlio Vargas' New State Regime) which led to the banning of the FNB and all other similar organizations. The situation did not suffer any significant changes even with the founding of the Experimental Theater of the Negro (*Teatro Experimental do Negro - TEN*) in the 1940's.¹⁵

In the 1950's, two important events took place. The first was the successful holding of the First Brazilian Negro Conference (*I Congresso do Negro Brasileiro*) in Rio de Janeiro in 1950. During this conference, not only were academic theses and papers presented, but important discussions regarding the situation of Blacks in the country were also held. Though the main climate was one of concern about the need for change at both the intellectual (social darwinism) and political levels (racial discriminations), the overriding spirit was one of racial conciliation between Blacks and non-blacks; white paternalism and Black dependency seemed to be accepted as a starting point for real reconciliation (Nascimento, 1980).

The other event of the 50's decade which had significant repercussions on the daily history of Blacks was that mostly white foreign and local intellectuals at the University of São Paulo, with funding from UNESCO, turned their attention to Blacks as objects of social research within the broader field of Brazilian race relations. (It would be interesting to note that such efforts could have resulted from the publication of the United Nation's Declaration of Universal Human Rights document). The studies conducted in São Paulo, Bahia and Rio Grande do Sul, reported two constant findings - Blacks suffered differential treatments and that even though most Brazilians agreed about this, only the victims explicitly claimed the existence of racism as a consistently generalized social practice on a national scale. The victims' cries uncovered in these studies were not considered determining factors for the poverty in which most of the Blacks lived. Rather, the researchers'

15 - Abdias do Nascimento, *O negro revoltado*, Rio de Janeiro: GRD, 1980; João Batista de Jesus Felix, "Pequeno histórico do movimento negro contemporâneo", In Lília Moritz Schwarcz & Letícia Vidor de Sousa Reis, (Orgs.), *Negras imagens: ensaios sobre cultura e escravidão no Brasil*, São Paulo, EDUSP/Estação Ciência, 1996.

preferences were to discuss issues of identity construction and social perceptions as related to color-race without any clear efforts to demonstrate how socially perceived skin pigmentation adversely determined social mobility and negatively influenced human rights for the Blacks. Institutionalized racial discrimination and everyday discriminatory practices apparently remained invisible even to "professionals specialized in making objective social diagnosis".¹⁶

It can be said that apart from failing to use this opportunity to bring the racial question and its resultant problems to the fore, these studies helped underline Gilberto Freyre's thesis that Brazil was a "racial democracy".¹⁷ Though based on an idealist interpretation of colonial society and the false premise of a humane relationship between slave and slave owner, Freyre's unfounded for idea became even further reinforced. Such conceptions of reality and the attitudes they sustained, immensely contributed to the official practice of not adopting any practical institutional measures to combat either racism or any of its consequences. To demonstrate that though racism was not really a problem, but that the state was conscious of the need to build a real democracy, in which even the Blacks had to be recognized, protected and respected, a law declaring racism to be a crime, was promulgated in the late 1950's (*Lei Afonso Arinos*). The promulgation of this law raises two important questions. First, why formulate and pass a law against a non-existing problem, a non-reality? Secondly, if Brazilian social practices were really in agreement with the principles of a racially democratic and integrated social environment, would race really be an issue to be reckoned with?

Answers to these questions reside in the cultural dimensions of Brazilian society. I would therefore like to argue that following the customary practice of this country where laws are made to solve social problems without adopting practical measures to guarantee their implementation, the *Lei Afonso Arinos* was merely meant to openly declare the existence of non-existing norms and unrecognized social expectations. It has therefore turned out as no surprise that, like several other such official legislative measures, the law in question has practically remained dead on the law books. Those whom it was intended to protect against inhuman treatments and diverse kinds of social injustices,

16 - Roger Bastide, *Relações raciais entre negros e brancos em São Paulo por Roger Bastide e Florestan Fernandes*, São Paulo: Anhembi, 1955; Florestan Fernandes, *O negro no mundo dos brancos*, São Paulo: DIFEL, 1972.

17 - Gilberto Freyre, *Casa Grande e senzala: formação da família brasileira sob o regime de economia patriarcal*, Rio de Janeiro, José Olympio, (5th ed.), 1946.

simply because of their racial-physical characteristics, continued defenseless. We have continued to receive treatments which are recognized and called everything else, but racially discriminatory practices. In the society we are talking about, it seems that this kind of situation is not considered contradictory.

The decades of the 60's and most of the 70's were periods of stagnation for organized social demands because of military rule imposed in 1964. The non-elected governments guaranteed the absence of most civil liberties and social rights. For a period, dictatorial powers were wielded in order to solve the problem of those so-called guerilla attacks launched by groups linked to communist ideologies. Many idealists, especially young men and women, were either killed in urban war fields or vanished mysteriously. A large number of intellectuals, artists, progressive politicians and other civil rights advocates were forced into exile or voluntarily moved to other countries. The national motto, order and progress, had to be respected in order to preserve national integrity and foster economic growth!

However, in 1978 a wave of union demonstrations, especially in São Paulo, signaled the dawning of a new political era. These events were a sign that the military regime had outlived its purpose as faithful defender of the interests of international agencies, foreign governments and multi-national business corporations. The substitution of national interests for the privileges of elite groups could not be sustained any further. It seemed to be time to return to a more democratic environment by making way for more civil participation. Nevertheless, it still had to take about half a decade to really get this process underway. Seizing upon the occasion, a group of Blacks began an organization, the United Movement against Racial Discrimination (*Movimento Unificado contra a Discriminação Racial - MUCDR*)¹⁸ which demanded that more attention be given to their situation as members of a systematically discriminated group. Though many agreed that the war against class injustice and inequalities was important, the members of this group argued that the racial battle was also a very important issue which could not continue on the back burners of the national cry against social injustice. The fact that Blacks were consistently the most discriminated and poorest of the Brazilian poor, were questions which needed to be recognized by society at large, but above all, problems which needed urgent solutions.

18 - Movimento Negro Unificado, 1978-1988: *Dez anos de luta contra o racismo*, São Paulo, Confraria do Livro, 1988.

As far as direct gains in practical terms, such as those related to the implementation of special government policies directed to Blacks are concerned, the MUCDR like its predecessors, did not achieve much. Nevertheless, the members of this first group of Blacks to be formally organized with some national publicity after the installation of the period of political liberties (*abertura política*), did boost the moral of all the members of this racial group. The Unified Negro Movement (*Movimento Negro Unificado - MNU*), the name adopted by the MUCDR during its first annual conference in 1979, provided some awakening and impetus among Blacks to begin to examine their conditions more critically. It was suggested that these reflections should lead to the formation of organized groups involved in the struggle against all forms of racism.

As I prepare to mention some of the influences of the MNU on the Black groups at the time, I must point out that one of the problems that this group had to grapple with for a long time was the adamant prerequisite that only phenotypically recognized Blacks could join its ranks. To my mind, this was an unfortunate world view against the background of a social reality which had always prided itself on the results of miscegenation. If the MNU prevented very white mulattos from becoming members, what of those non-blacks who were really interested in the Black cause? Besides, what would the MNU answer to accusations of racism? Despite these preoccupations, the contributions of those Brazilians of African descent who made this group a reality, should be recognized for what they were, the bases for a watershed in race relations in recent times.

The organizational strategies and basic objectives (black self-esteem, self-emancipation, valorization of Black culture and demands for institutional adaptations) spread to other regions. On university campuses, among trade unionists, within workers' movements, among the Catholic laity, professional groups and other social organizations, Blacks began to form their own local groups. As a general trend, these groups were characterized by the profound interest and dedication to "the goal of doing something to change the situation" of their members. They believed that change was both a necessity and a possibility. Consequently, driven by these beliefs and holding dear to the ideals of social change, different groups got engaged in organized activities in the social, cultural, political and economic areas of Brazilian life.

These efforts can be considered as very valuable result-seeking attacks against the dominant white ideological mantle which defended (and still vehemently defends, though with more politically correct subtle methods) the thesis of a meritocratic system in a racist society. These organized groups,

through the diversity of their activities and their persistence, helped the country become more aware of the situation of the Blacks from the perspectives of Black militants and intellectuals. That the rules of the race relations game in Brazil had not changed, was the message which these groups always emphasized in their varied forms of existence and the numerously diverse activities they never got tired of organizing. Though most people still held firm to the idea of a racial democracy, it was not uncommon to discuss the second-class conditions in which Blacks continued to live and how they were denied basic rights under the guise of being poor and/or culturally different (ethnically inferior?). This strategy of blaming the victim used to explain away Black poverty and misery is a problem that continues to hamper more positive changes. It is self-fulfilling and creates an apparently self sufficient system of logical explanations.

In the eighties, though there was more widespread awareness of the silent but profoundly destructive racism of Brazil, the question still remained off limits in official circles. The absence of specific, viable and practical policies was a registered mark of the times. Questions of racial discrimination became more widely discussed, especially after May 13, 1988, when the Centenary of the Abolition was celebrated with official festivities and popular fanfares. Apart from the many official discourses on the occasion, the Federal Government established a Foundation (*Fundação Palmares*), as a means of directly channeling some assistance to poor Black communities, or indirectly giving assistance to such communities through philanthropic groups. More than ten years later, this Foundation, with direct links to the President's Office, does not seem to have gotten off the grounds. As it were, its actual president, a historical Black female militant, continues elaborating action plans and searching for government funds to support Black groups and communities.

Presently, the Palmares Foundation has as its main project, the organization of isolated rural Black communities so that they can engage in building up legal processes to define boundaries and lay claim areas of lands they have continuously occupied over the years. This is a praiseworthy project whose completion is very necessary for defining the legal status of these segments of the Black population. However, considering the amplitude of the social issues that continue to negatively affect Blacks, the Foundation could expand its institutional concerns and collaborate with other efforts to make the Abolition a concrete reality in the daily lives of the most forgotten of neglected Brazilians. Maybe in the foreseeable future, such projects can become an integral part of the working agenda of this all too important Foundation.

Also worth noting was the intensive media coverage of Black culture

and Brazil's African legacies at the time. In most cases, these were basically marketing strategies because the plight of the members of this group was not highlighted. The exploitation and social ostracism which most have to live with were not treated. Academic publications were also sponsored. Never in the history of academic research in the country had there been so many publications about the Black population. While this is being registered, it is also pedagogic to remember that most of what was published dealt with the period of slavery, the struggles leading to Abolition and the recognition that any system that transforms any humans into less than animals deserves social and moral condemnations. Basically, research directly dealing with racism as the main barrier in the democratization process of the country, was absent from the list of published works, most of which was government-funded. A quick search through the catalogues of important editing companies, especially those attached to public universities, can easily prove this observation.

After the new Constitution was promulgated later in 1988, specific and stricter laws were also promulgated the following year against outright racism. Soon after, special police departments were created to deal with all race-related complaints and crimes. These laws continue valid, while similar police departments have spread to most other cities. However, the main problem of racial discrimination remains unresolved. Since in the national imaginary frame of reference, not excluding law enforcement personnel, lawyers and judges, even the most blatant racist practice can be easily justified through such mechanisms as the appeal to tradition, the need for more adequate language use and the demonstration of caring-concern for a compatriot), so far it has proved almost impossible to find someone condemned for racism. Accusations and complaints do get registered. However, in most cases, these are never transformed into legal processes due to the "absence of proofs beyond reasonable doubt". How can I prove to people who have never experienced racist treatments that when someone who called me "*Negão*" (big negro), had treated me in a racist manner when in fact the same term can mean "my great friend who happens to be Black" or even "nigger"?

A case in point is that of the mulatto daughter of a state governor who was insulted and physically beaten up by a white woman-son team because the girl insisted on using the "social elevator" in the building where she lived. She did not seem to know that her designated social place was the "service elevator". This is the elevator that should be used by all service personnel (mostly Blacks or dark skinned mulattos) in apartment buildings in the country. It still remains to be found out how this incident finally ended. Considering that this happened to someone no less than the daughter of a

state governor, one can imagine what millions of other Brazilians have to go through everyday as can be easily found out from media coverage of life in the country. Would such incidents not warrant continued concern, scientific analyses and viable official measures which can guarantee and deliver protection against all forms of racial discrimination?

Another incident which merits special reflections involved that of a comedian accused of using obnoxious racist language in a song presented on radio and television in 1997. In his defense, he replied that he could not be considered racist not only because his mother was black, but that above all, he was only joking. Continuing his defense, he observed that other composers and singers who had composed and sang similar songs in the past had neither faced legal actions nor popular condemnation. He went on to call attention to the fact most people would understand the real intentions of his music since "everybody thinks in like manner". According to him, his intention was not to cause harm to anybody. In the end, the case was thrown out of court on the grounds that the accusation was unfounded.

Without understanding and accepting that racial discrimination is a problem, it becomes impossible to deal with it as a crime. Even more important is the fact that in such a context, to advocate for specific programs in favor of the victims of racial discrimination becomes a meaningless struggle in the eyes of many people. When some take up such a cause, they are accused of seeing racial problems where, for most other Brazilians, there are none. Such individuals are also considered to be causing problems for the smooth running of established social order. Generally, it becomes even more difficult to deal with such problems when some Blacks, mostly the very poor and less informed, who are also the most regular victims of discriminatory practices, claim that they have never suffered any social injustice because of their race-color! Despite these contradictory perceptions of Brazilian society, there is an ever increasing number of Blacks, intellectuals and social militants, generally organized as social movements, who continue to engage in the battle against racism and other forms of discriminatory practices still held to dearly by many in this country.

Very symptomatic of the opportunity structure for Blacks in Brazil of the 90's were the aftermath of the commemorations in honor of the 300th anniversary of the death of Zumbi of Palmares on November 20 in 1995. Zumbi was an escaped slave who became a Black hero of the continuous and organized fight against slavery. With other escaped slaves and social outcasts, they founded a socialist republic in the 17th century which survived numerous attacks by the Portuguese authorities. When finally vanquished after more

than 70 years, they had succeeded to gain a place in the country's history as a landmark experience in the struggles against slavery and the uncontrolled exploitation of many by a few.¹⁹

The spirit of celebration surrounding Zumbi's importance as a hero in the fight for effective citizenship by the majority, seemed to have been dampened by widespread debates about the hypothesis of an anthropologist. His claim that Zumbi was a homosexual in a country where such a choice is still considered as a deviant behavior, seemed to have served the interests of groups which did not want to see a Black person turned into a national hero. As a result, an insignificant hypothetical detail in the history of a sociopolitical revolutionary prevented the commemorations from producing more concrete results for the Black population whose youth remain in permanent search for heroes off the performing stages and soccer fields.

Though November 20 is recognized by some Blacks as the most important date in the struggle against contemporary forms of slavery, the official date for celebrating the end of this inhuman practice in Brazil is May 13. What is important about these two commemorative dates are the messages which can be interpreted as - slavery indeed has not been abolished; politically correct discourses cannot effect real changes in people's lives; and that only Black people can wrench those chains of discrimination and domination which have permanently restricted our advances within the opportunity structures in the country. As the latter expand and become more diversified, the Black population, especially large segments of its youth, seem to get more handicapped (less schooling and formal training) in fully participating in this brave new world of automation, robotics and information super-highways.

There are several organized groups involved in general educational activities with the central objectives of: highlighting the discriminatory conditions in which most Blacks live; engaging Blacks in political education processes; and encouraging them to have self-love, respect, dignity and racial pride. There are groups working in such areas as the cultural (Ilê Aiyê and Olodum in Bahia), political (Unified Negro Movement and some political parties) and in the schooling and general educational processes (university and church groups and workers' unions). In other words, these groups seem to be saying that Blacks have to help themselves because both our past and recent history show that only we can fruitfully help ourselves. A good example of these self-help activities are the projects in several cities which give academic assistance

19 - Décio Freitas, *Palmares: a guerra dos escravos*, Rio de Janeiro, Graal, 1982.

and orientation to high school students preparing for the *vestibular* (university entrance tests) as reported by ISTOÉ, July 01, 1998:59. This strategy has worked for some. However, for the large majority, it presents very serious social-psychological and cultural barriers due to existing dominated ideological frames of reference and the centrality of the government (state as embodiment of the dominant elite groups) as “savior of the fatherland”; i.e., everybody’s patron.

So far, these efforts have not consistently involved teaching whites to be anti-racist. Since racism is learnt, it is possible to be unlearned and substituted for more humane inter-racial relations. Probably, this kind of consciousness may have gotten to some officials in the educational sector. Recent government proposals to implement more appropriate and locally adapted school curriculum guidelines might lead to the inclusion of the History of the Africans and Racial Studies in school activities. This is already being implemented in such urban centers as Salvador in Bahia and Campo Grande in Mato Grosso do Sul. There are other proposals which suggest the incorporation of five transversal themes into the more established classroom subjects. The themes are - health,²⁰ pluri-cultural relations, sexual education, environmental issues and ethics.

The main issue here revolves around the question of whether the Black Brazilians are poor primordially because of race or despite their racial characteristics. That apart from race, there may be other factors which account for Black poverty. I agree that generally, a sustainable logical point of view would hold that in analyzing a social fact, any unilateral causality would be false. This is one efficient way of recognizing and dealing with the complex nature of any social phenomenon. When one depends on linear causal relationships, there is always the possibility of failing to see the trees for the forest. So far however, it seems that the interactive patterns between poverty and the members of the Black race, which bear clear signs of causality, have not been recognized by many Brazilians, including social scientists and public officials. Such a failure may explain why in a national survey conducted in mid-1995 by one of the respectable Newspaper Groups in the country, more than 80% of those interviewed stated that the racism in the country was

20 - See *Documentos Básicos: Propostas para Parâmetros de Currículos Nacionais (PCNs)*, Brasil, Ministério de Educação e do Desporto/Secretaria de Ensino Fundamental (MEC/SEF), Brasília, D.F., 1996, *Nova LDB - Lei N° 9.394/96*, Brasil, MEC, Brasília, D.F. and *Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais*, Brasil, MEC/SEF, Brasília, D.F., 1997.

cordial. How is it possible to have a racism that is "cordial"?²¹ The fact that there has always been a positive relationship between being Black and poor and illiterate is the one social constant which most Blacks continue to live with,²² and for which more coherent explanations are necessary.

Accordingly, I would maintain that it is most crucial to recognize that social phenomena can only be explained best within contexts that are specifically defined in historical, spatial and temporal terms. Above all, these contexts have to be bounded by defined cultural practices and dominant ideological frames of reference. In the light of such a world view, I think that a more effective way of carrying out the task of explaining the relationships between being Black and poor in Brazil, would be to answer those three questions which were defined as the most important above. These answers could provide fertile grounds for further reflections about race relations in this society.

In trying to answer the first question, I posit that the topographical nature of the opportunity structure in Brazil can be appropriately characterized as one that has historically presented almost insurmountable barriers for Blacks wanting to succeed socioeconomically. Besides, what have marked this situation are the attempts not to recognize that even if race were not an impediment to social mobility, it does call into play subsidiary factors whose influences contribute in preventing social advancement for the Africans of the Brazilian-Diaspora. As a case in point, before the lack of adequate schooling can account for the absence of Blacks among highly qualified professionals, we would need to find out not only the contextual references involved, but also the causes for their poor school achievements ... I believe that only such a systemic approach, making use of historical references and cultural definitions, can lead to more comprehensive explanations about the determinant roles race continues to play in the lives of Brazilian Blacks. It continuously defines, setting the bounds and limits of their opportunity structures beginning from childhood schooling experiences to the struggles on the job market. It can therefore be said that what best characterizes the

21 - Cleusa Turra & Gustavo Venturi, (Orgs.), *O racismo cordial*, São Paulo: DataFolha, Folha de São Paulo, 1995

22 - Florestan Fernandes, *A integração do negro na sociedade de classes*, São Paulo: Ática, 1986; *O significado do protesto negro*, Petrópolis: Vozes, 1990; Clóvis Moura, *Brazil: raízes do protesto negro*, São Paulo: Global, 1986; Carlos Guilherme Mota, *Ideologia da cultura brasileira, 1933-1974: pontos de partida para uma revisão histórica*, São Paulo: Ática, 1983.

topographical dimensions of the opportunity structure are the racist factors which give it social meaning and cultural significance. What makes this feature more impressive is its pervasiveness in all aspects of Brazilian life, especially when Black Brazilians are involved in the social interactions under scrutiny.

About how the general situation of the opportunity structures has affected the racial and social gaps in the country, especially those between Blacks and non-blacks of European stock, it can be said that these differences have tended to widen in recent years due to increased poverty in those regions where Blacks are concentrated. Though it is important to realize the importance of the socio-economic inequalities, there are other far more serious influences. The mere constancy of these inequalities could help lead large numbers of Blacks to believe that they have been denied success and better conditions in life because of their own shortcomings (inherited or acquired). Coupled with those who attribute failure to destiny, there are those individuals who have helped develop a vicious cycle of self-blame and negative attitudes not only about self-worth but even regarding their own capacity to make things happen. Most Blacks are hardworking and believe that they can at least continue surviving. Nevertheless, as human beings consistent experiences of failure could easily lead some to adopt a general negativity about social reality. Withdraw from society in order to preserve their dignity and mental health.

Within this climate of self-depreciation, Eurocentric values, dominant ideologies and non-black models could tend to become more important as these may be the only alternatives available. As a result, practices which might tend to look down upon that which is Black, especially our history and physical endowments, might become more common. This may be more so especially among the youth who, in their desperate search for role models and a general meaning to their existence, are only exposed to personalities, examples and possibilities with which they can neither biologically nor socially identify. It is not only the ensuing deception that should be of concern, but the possibility that some of such young individuals might also dislike themselves and other Blacks. This production and reproduction of dislike for that which these young men and women are and have, might lead to even further failure, reinforcing false notions of individual deficiencies. In turn, this whole network of constructed barriers, induced failures and falsities about the individual and other Black people are important factors which help give validity to racially based interpretations of reality. It is this falsified validity which helps sustain more negative ideas about Blacks and strongly contributes to maintaining and widening existing racial and social gaps.

In trying to answer the third and final question, I consider it

worthwhile to make two observations. In the first place, it is of vital importance to observe that what makes Brazil what it is has everything to do with its history as a society. Having been founded upon the forced coming together of three different racial groups on unequal footing under the dominating influences of one of these groups, Brazilian society stubbornly holds unto this heritage of one dominant racial group. As a consequence of this historically dominant legacy, asymmetrical racial relationships do not appear to really disturb the normal order of life in the country. What would seem strange would be the effective presence of symmetrical relationships at the both individual and institutional levels.

The second observation which also demands close attention is that Brazil has always been a society efficient at welcoming in foreigners and at institutionally doing everything possible to make the new arrivals a prosperous group. As observed earlier, these treatments were given to the immigrants from Italy, Germany and Switzerland in the 19th century. Immigrants who arrived later from the East European and Eastern Asia were not treated any differently. Most of these new Brazilians and their descendants have not only been culturally integrated, but have done well politically, socially and economically. Some may still speak Portuguese with strong accents, but they are as Brazilian, in levels of sociopolitical participation, as those descendants of Portugal's earliest agents of colonial occupation, economic usurpation and sociocultural manipulation. With these observations as general background, I will try to answer the last of our three questions.

Considering that after the indigenous Indians and Portuguese colonialists the Africans form the group of immigrants who have lived and worked the longest in Brazil, the fact that still remain the most socially non-integrated and racially the least accepted, presents a problem that needs to be analyzed. One might be led to claim that since the Africans came in as forced immigrants, and that slavery was officially outlawed barely a hundred years ago, their difficulties were much greater and as a result, they have needed much more time to become fully integrated as equal participants in the country's social life. Such an argument does seem to disregard the fact that all the other immigrants were also forced to come to Brazil.

Apart from the very few who came, saw, loved and decided to stay one, the larger majority of these men, women and children had to emigrate because of diverse factors in the social, cultural, religious, political and economic domains. It could be forwarded that they were slaves of these circumstances from which they sought liberation. They might have arrived as legally free persons, but considering the challenges they were faced with, it

could be said that they were in fact totally subjugated individuals, generally groups coerced by the new Brazilian reality. As newly arrived people, they were also absolutely dependent upon the goodwill of the earlier immigrants who interpreted and enforced existing laws and cultural norms in ways which removed barriers in their struggles to become Brazilians.

In other words, there are very strong indications that it was not only the condition of being forced immigrants, though in the slave category, that prevented the African descendants from achieving a level of social advancement and economic progress compatible with the duration of their integrative process. Having been brought in as slaves, it can be understood that in fact any modifications in their strategies for integration could only really have begun after the Abolition in 1888. For more than a century now, the free descendants of those slaves should have had time enough to acquire those social skills necessary for fuller integrative participation in the process of socioeconomic and political development; acquiring necessary information-training, contributing with required competencies, and receiving commensurate recognition and equitable rewards. However, for Black Brazilians, the search for more significant participation still remains a dream despite the fact that they have served as subjects of this society's history, the principal agents who have continuously helped to build the country to accumulate wealth. One is therefore forced to ask why such a situation still continues.

The answer to this question is twofold. A preliminary answer could rest upon the fact that even after Abolition, the African descendants remained as social outcasts, residents who were defined as non-citizens and consequently, were not cogitated in state policies. Rather, the different political, social and economic barriers which were institutionally placed in their way, were culturally augmented through explanations such as blaming the victim and self-fulfilling prophecies. A corollary of this could have rested upon the fact that the Brazilians of African descent were the most different, the most peculiar. They could never completely be mistaken for other compatriots. Their physical characteristics provided the proof needed to buttress the explanation that they were treated differently because they were in fact DIFFERENT. Having lived in the country for centuries, the most logical explanation for an argument that appealed to the factor of differences could only lay in their Negroid features (genotypic and phenotypic inheritances), which best translate into the R(racial)-Factor.

In other words, the physical characteristics of the Black people were used to construct a depersonalizing ideology about the "other", a mechanism which allowed for the physically different (skin color and facial features) to be

simultaneously transformed into an inferior and less of a human being. At the same time, this made it possible to justify the socially differentiated treatments which such an individual received as natural consequences of this whole process. In this way, while natural characteristics were utilized to explain and account for social conditions, these latter were also employed as proof of the results of a process of natural selection. In conclusion, the worldview in question went on to imply that since it was all a cyclically natural process, very little or nothing social could be done to change the situation. These historical constructions were used, and indeed are still being used, to underline the interpretation, understanding and manipulation of race relations in this country, relations which significantly determine the nature of the opportunity structures which are negatively oriented against Blacks.

These explanations have been necessary so as to emphasize the strong opinion that had the Black people in Brazil been even partially treated as other later arriving immigrants, they could have done much better than they have so far been able to do. One evidence which sustains this claim is the fact that despite all the barriers against their advancement, the very few Blacks who have succeeded politically and socioeconomically, do demonstrate that many more members of this group could have also achieved much more socially had they had other kinds of opportunities. There are strong reasons to believe that their classification as those "others", has made it possible to deny them the opportunities guaranteed to all other Brazilians under the law. Moreover, if opportunity structures had equally existed for all, and the interests of the Blacks concretely protected by the institutions, we would agree that democratic expectations could still become realities, amplifying these structures to give reasonable chances to all compatriots to more fully participate in exercising their citizenship in the world's tenth economy.

Conclusions as beginnings

Based upon my experiences as participant of the Black movement for more than a decade now, there are strong indications that we are far from a general mobilization as the Americans experienced in the 60's. In daily life, on buses, at school, at bar tables, in open-air markets, at soccer games and while participating in other social events, there are endless debates about whether racism really exists in Brazil or not. While some might argue that racism is indeed a powerful determining factor in explaining the country's social inequities, and even go on to cite some of the human and social problems caused by this phenomenon, there are still many others who prefer to negate

this interpretation of Brazilian reality. For most of such people, Brazil is "a raceless country, a society where people are skin-color-blind". That such individuals may only be acting in a politically correct manner is a question that deserves further investigation. What does not need research is the fact that it is not uncommon to hear arguments about the racial question being enriched by racist jokes and racially impregnated nicknames. Giving racial connotations to all kinds of events, circumstances and phenomena is perhaps the most constant of all that best characterize Brazilian society.

In other words, in the informal domain, many realize that racism is an issue that deserves special attention. However, in the public and institutional domains, such a consciousness seems to vanish, especially on the part of legislators and other public officials. This explains why there are no special programs, working government projects and activities aimed at dealing with the racial question. Promulgating laws against racism and other forms of discriminatory practices is an absolute necessary. Nevertheless, what is even more urgent is to guarantee that existing laws and legal orientations are respected. That when these are infringed upon, those responsible would be adequately punished. That both the letter and spirit of the laws which protect members of all social minorities would be enforced. A brief over-view of Brazilian society would lead one to argue that without concrete policies, officially backed programs and cultural activities to "deracialize this country", we may continue accumulating anti-racist laws without ever really fighting racism. Laws might help, but since we are also dealing with cultural issues, re-educational processes should occupy a special place in any attempts to bring about changes that affect real people in daily life.

After more than 110 years of a "society without slavery", the daily existence of any Black person is a permanent struggle against prejudice and differentiated treatments. Upon close examination, these experiences seem to be most logically based upon our racial heritage which creates a situation wherein those who appear to be darker skinned and are also perceived to be poor, pay much higher social prices. There are, however, an insignificant number of Blacks who have partially escaped this danger as they have gained some social mobility. To make a case for the fact that they have become successful because of individual efforts, intelligence, capacity, dedication and persistence may be an interesting explanation. However, since the opportunity structures available to Blacks are still very limited, the effects of fortuitous happenings should also be seriously considered. The persistence of blatant racial barriers which abound in all spheres of society also makes a case for circumstantial happenings to explain why some Blacks still do succeed.

It is instructive to remember that most of the successful Blacks are in the entertainment and sporting fields; exhibiting physical prowess and artistic talents. Among professionals, there are still very few Blacks in terms proportionate to their population figures. If indeed we have had more Blacks in school since the 1980's, where are they as trained professionals in our universities, law courts and hospitals? Why do Black students only account for about 2% of the total university student population in the country?

Schools might have created more places for Black children and youth. But if they cannot be made welcome to stay and fully participate in the teaching-learning experiences that are available, what changes can be expected from these socializing agents in an ever changing world? If when the very insignificantly few Blacks who become professionally qualified are not given reasonable chances to prove their capacities, how can they afford to serve as role models? When Black parents are either unemployed or underemployed, how best can they be expected to formally educate their children in a country where public and free fundamental schooling has turned into an object of scorn and a symbol for non-schooling? How can Blacks be let alone, as other compatriots are, to pave the way for their socioeconomic emancipation in a society that refuses to accept that its distorted opportunity structures can and must be modified?

For all practical purposes, successful Blacks could be seen as "token Blacks" and serve to placate this society's conscience because there is a general belief that *those blacks who really want to, can succeed in this country. Unfortunately, nobody can help those who do not want to help themselves because they are lazy and ignorant. Above all, most of them are social deviants by nature.* Even some of the so-called successful Blacks seem to buy into the logic of this argument, a position which negates not only the efforts of many Blacks, but more seriously, refuses to accept that Brazilian society is racist (ISTO É, September 04, 1996:64-80; Turra & Venturi, op. cit., especially pages 57-65).

As "pet theories", ideas which blame victims of racism have not helped to provoke more realistic analyses of the opportunity structures open to Blacks. These explanations which beg the question have strengthened dominant ideologies and helped discourage most youth from developing positive expectations about their future. School drop-out rates, youth gangs, drug use and narcotics pushing, not to mention fatal crimes, go to make a strong case for this position. While the situation remains as it is, still with millions of Blacks as unforgotten non-citizens whose increasing numbers only play marginal roles in society due to globalization and neo-liberal government

policies, Brazil will continue as one of the world's most unequal distributors of income and social goods. The country might remain economically rich in Portuguese, I have used free translations of the interviews. Nevertheless, as a multi-racial society, it would retain its basic historical characteristic as one that is humanely very poor, socially divided along racial lines and prosperous in social inequalities in favor of non-blacks.

Maybe, these are the fears expressed by a university student leader who believes that something needs to be done. She is not sure about what alternatives are best, however.

Our most important preoccupation is to stay alive. Just staying alive is already a lot. But is this enough? Our brothers and sisters are killed each day simply because they are BLACK! (Direct interview).

In this context, I think that two important contributions ought to be mentioned. One is that of Martin Luther King, Jr., in his all-famous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" of 1963, and the other appears in an interview given by Prof. Milton Santos, a Geography scholar.²³

... when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, ... see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people; ... when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentment; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of 'nobodiness' - then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience ... (p. 189).

The highest aspiration of a Black person in Brazil is to be treated just like any other human being. ... I believe that the question of the Black Brazilian is no longer an issue for the Federal Ministry of Culture. It is not a cultural subject. It is a matter for the Federal Ministry of Justice. The only viable solution is a political one (pp. 63-64).

23 - Juan Williams, *Eyes on the prize: America's civil rights years 1954-1965*, New York, Penguin Books, 1987; Turra & Venturi, op. cit., 1995.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- BASTIDE, Roger, *Relações raciais entre negros e brancos em São Paulo por Roger Bastide e Florestan Fernandes*, Anhembi, São Paulo, 1955.
- BRANDÃO, Carlos Rodrigues, *Identidade e etnia: construção da pessoa e resistência cultural*, Brasiliense, São Paulo, 1986.
- BRASIL, MEC/SEF, *Documentos básicos: propostas para parâmetros curriculares nacionais (PCNs)*, Brasília, DF., 1996
- _____, *Nova LDB - Lei N°9.394/96*, Brasília, DF., 1996.
- _____, *Parâmetros curriculares nacionais*, (vols. 1-10), Brasília, DF., 1997.
- BROOKSHAW, David, *Reça e cor na literatura brasileira*, Porto Alegre, Mercado Aberto, 1983.
- CARDOSO, Ciro Flamarion S. (Org.), *Escravidão e abolição no Brasil*, Zahar, Rio de Janeiro, 1988.
- COLEMAN, James, et. ali., *Equality of educational opportunities*, US Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Education, Washington, D.C., 1966.
- DaMATTA, Roberto, *Relativizando: uma introdução à Antropologia Social*, Rocco, Rio de Janeiro, 1991.
- _____, *O que faz o brasil, Brasil?*, Rocco, Rio de Janeiro, 1986.
- DWORKIN, A. G. & DWORKIN, R. J., *The minority report*, Holt Rinehart & Winston, N. York, 1982.
- FANON, Frantz, *The wrteched of the earth*, Grove Press, New York, 1963.
- FELIX, João Batista de Jesus, "Pequeno histórico do movimento negro contemporâneo", In SCHWARCZ, Lília Moritiz & REIS, Leticia Vidor de Sousa, (Orgs.), *Negras imagens: ensaios sobre cultura e escravidão no Brasil*, EDUSP/Estação Ciência, 1996.
- FERNANDES, Florestan, *O significado do protesto negro*, Vozes, Petrópolis, 1990.
- _____, *O significado do protesto negro*, Cortez, São Paulo, 1989.
- _____, *A integração do negro na sociedade de classes*, Ática, São Paulo, 1986.
- _____, *O negro no mundo dos brancos*, DIFEL, São Paulo, 1972.
- FREITAS, Décio, *Palmares: a guerra dos escravos*, Graal, Rio de Janeiro, 1982.
- FREYRE, Gilberto, *Casa grande e senzala*, José Olympio, Rio de Janeiro, 1946.
- FUNDAÇÃO - IBGE, *Anuários Estatísticos*, 1970, 1980, 1985, 1991.
- GENOVESE, Eugene D., *A terra prometida*, Paz & Terra, Rio de Janeiro, 1988.

- GORENDER, Jacob, *O escravismo colonial*, Ática, São Paulo, 1978.
- IANNI, Octavio, *Escravidão e racismo*, Hucitec, São Paulo, 1978.
- HASENBALG, Carlos A., *Discriminação e desigualdades raciais no Brasil*, Graal, Rio de Janeiro, 1979.
- HERRNSTEIN, Richard & MURRAY, Charles, *The bell curve*, Free Press, New York, 1994.
- IANNI, Octavio, *A idéia do Brasil moderno*, Brasiliense, São Paulo, 1992.
- JACOBY, Russell & GLAUBERMAN, Naomi, (Eds.), *The bell curve debate*, Times Books, Random House, New York, 1995.
- KING, Martin Luther, *O grito da consciência*, Editora Expressão e Cultura, Rio de Janeiro, 1968.
- MATTOSO, Kátia M. de Queirós, *To be a slave in Brasil*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1989.
- MOTA, Carlos G., *Ideologia da cultura brasileiro*, Ática, São Paulo, 1983.
- MOURA, Clovis, *Brasil: raízes do protesto negro*, Global, São Paulo, 1986.
- _____, *Sociologia do negro brasileiro*, Ática, São Paulo, 1985.
- MOVIMENTO NEGRO UNIFICADO, 1978-1988: *Dez anos de luta contra o racismo*, Confraria do Livro, São Paulo, 1988.
- NASCIMENTO, Abdias do, *O negro revoltado*, GRD., Rio de Janeiro, 1980.
- OLIVEIRA, Lúcia Elena Garcia de, PORCARO, Rosa Maria & COSTA, Tereza Cristina N., *O lugar do negro na força de trabalho*, IBGE, Rio de Janeiro, 1981.
- REX, John, *Raça e etnia*, Editorial Estampa, Lisboa, 1988.
- RIBEIRO, Darcy, *O povo brasileiro*, Companhia das Letras, São Paulo, 1995.
- ROSEMBERG, Liá, *Educação e desigualdade social*, Edições Loyola, São Paulo, 1984.
- SEYFERTH, Giralda, "Construindo a nação: hierarquias raciais e o papel do racismo na política de imigração e colonização", In MAIO, Marcos Chor & SANTOS, Ricardo Ventura, (Orgs.), *Raça, ciência e sociedade*, FIOCRUZ/CCBB, Rio de Janeiro, 1996.
- THOMAS, Gail E., (Ed.), *Race and ethnicity in America*, Taylor & Francis, Washington, DC, 1995.
- TOPLIN, R.B., *The abolition of slavery in Brazil*, Ateneum, New York, 1975.
- TURRA, Cleusa & VENTURI, Gustavo, (Orgs.), *O racismo cordial: a mais completa análise sobre o preconceito de cor no Brasil*, DataFolha: Folha de São Paulo, São Paulo, 1995.
- WEST, Cornell, *Race matters*, Vintage Books, New York, 1993.
- WILLIAMS, Juan, *Eyes on the prize*, Penguin Books, New York, 1987.
- WILLIS, Paul, *Aprendendo a ser trabalhador*, Artes Médicas, Porto Alegre, 1991.