

Deconstructing Master Narratives

Recent Anti Racial Discrimination Agendas and policies in Cuba and Mexico

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This presentation seeks to analyze the role that the agenda and the policies of the Cuban Socialist and Mexican Neoliberal governments designed in the last decade are playing in the struggle and persistence of racism in Cuba and Mexico. The following questions guide the research summarized in this presentation: What have been the particularities of the Cuban and Mexican agendas and policies in relation to racism in the last decade? What have been the preliminary consequences of these state agendas and policies in the treatment of racism as a problem? What challenges related to racism will the Cuban and Mexican governments face in the future?

In responding these questions, the presentation will be structured in four parts. The first one describes the particularities that have characterized the governmental agenda related to racism as a public problem in both countries. The second part provides a historical background of both governmental policies regarding racism. In the third section, I analyze the preliminary results of both governmental policies against racism. Finally, I evaluate the racism-related challenges that both governments should face in the future.

Decolonizing Knowledge: Shifting the Terms of Education and Afro-Brazilian Inclusion

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In the last 15 years throughout Latin America, the discussion of multiculturalism and policies of inclusion targeting indigenous and afro-descendant populations has entered popular discourse and state policy with renewed vehemence. Such policy aims to address historical inequalities and provide equal opportunities for marginalized populations. Yet, current scholarship reveals the circumscribed nature of 'inclusion' these interventions offer, especially considering these policies incorporate afro-descendant, indigenous, or "local" knowledges into neoliberal development projects. These inclusionary interventions leave the question of what exactly these populations are being included into unexamined. In the Brazilian case, state-formation projects have long targeted Afro-Brazilians and their cultural forms, revealing contested struggles over the meaning, place, and import of "race" and afro-descendants within the national formation. My paper examines how the Orùnmilá Cultural Center in the state of São Paulo strives to go beyond addressing inequality through access to and inclusion into an already defined system—educational, economic, political, and cultural. Examining how they go beyond the terms of affirmative action and other education policy, I show how they claim representation to push the substance and practice of inclusion to engage forms of knowledge,

embodied learning, and values written out of narratives of progress and modernity. Orùnmilá's cultural work revalues Afro-Brazilian cultural practices as sites of knowledge-production to challenge racial inequality by shaping other ways of understanding history, progress, value, and collectivity. As such, their politics challenge unequal histories of power underlying the very meaning of knowledge that counts in understanding the making of modernity, race, and development.

In the Land of Gold and Diamonds, Dangerous Mulattoes and Decadent Whites:
European Travelers' Observations of Miscegenation and Race Stratification in
Nineteenth-Century Minas Gerais, Brazil

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The first half of the nineteenth century was a pivotal time in the formation of class and racial stratification in the Brazilian province of Minas Gerais. The decline of the "gold cycle" in the Brazilian economy and ensuing economic transformations in the previously metal and diamond driven mineiro region precipitated changes in the class and race structure of its society. The early nineteenth century also witnessed an influx of European travel writers to Brazil, who often visited Minas Gerais in the course of their journeys and commented extensively on its people and the ways they interacted with one another, and with the writers. The travel accounts thus produced provide a highly subjective, yet informative window into the society of Minas Gerais in this period. More crucial however, because the writers comment extensively on the race of their subjects and on what they perceived to be the ambivalent effects of slavery upon Brazilian society, these writings provide rich material for the examination of nineteenth-century European attitudes toward race, and toward racial stratification and mixture in Brazil. In my paper, I examine several Brazilian travel accounts published by Britons, Germans and Frenchmen in the early nineteenth century and discuss the three main manifestations of racial observation contained in these accounts: a fascination with racially mixed individuals, a fetishization of racially mixed, or "mulatta" women, and lengthy commentaries on the danger posed to white "civilization" in Brazil by the large populations of blacks and racially mixed people.

The Master-Slave Dialectic in the Caribbean

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In his Notes on Dialectics, CLR James declares that Hegel's analytical method was 'universally valid'. This paper seeks to interrogate that claim specifically with regards to Hegel's master-slave dialectic and politics of slavery and freedom from the perspective of black existence in the Caribbean. In the section of the Phenomenology of Spirit which explores self-consciousness and freedom GWF Hegel employs slavery/servitude (knechtschaft) as a metaphor to define the limits of self-certainty and to explore the development of a free consciousness within the realm of socialized reason. James' The Black Jacobins and Frantz Fanon's Black Skin, Masks

each offer an understanding of consciousness and the relationship with a struggle for freedom from a Caribbean perspective which challenge the narrative offered by Hegel. This poses a problem for both thinkers as in many ways they both at times seek to employ a "Hegelian" dialectical method in their work. James' text offers a detailed narrative of the Haitian Revolution, which employs race and class as categories of analysis in an attempt to demonstrate the universal capacity of a will to freedom. Frantz Fanon's text, specifically his critique of Hegel's notion of recognition, asserts the specificities of a master-slave relationship which is circumscribed by racism and colonialism while fundamentally pursuing the idea of universal notions of spirit and freedom. Both these texts reveal the limited capacity of Hegel's master-slave dialectic with respect to thinking about the history of slavery in the Caribbean and they tentatively ask the question "Does the master-slave dialectic matter in the Caribbean?" Yet reading these texts in conjunction with the Phenomenology of Spirit demonstrates not only the limits (and non-universality) of Hegel's master-slave dialectic but also offers clues to the prepossessing nature of the text.