

Blacks Learn in Brazil They Won't Be Human Until They Become White

Written by Mark Wells

Saturday, 24 February 2007 22:55



My own research on racial exclusion in Brazil has given me ample reason to believe that this environment exists only because the majority of Brazil's *pretos* and *pardos* still don't seem to understand what their phenotype has to do with their chances for success in life.

But I must also acknowledge the fact that there does exist a consciousness amongst a proportion of *afrodescendentes* that is able to see through the smokescreen of Brazil's presumed racial exceptionalism.

For many of them, the dream of achieving an actual racial democracy is worth more than the social destruction of the country as a whole. In this sense, images and memories of the oft-cited racial antagonism that is so key to understanding American (US), South African and German societies act as a constant reminder, etched in the consciousness of the Brazilian of what a society should not be.

At best, it is an acceptable premise; at worst, it is the most dangerous form of denial, a way of fleeing from the scene of the crime. Brazil's racial exceptionalism is predicated on the continuous oppression of the would-be black Brazilian.

In order to eliminate a perceived threat to the established racial hierarchy, people of visible African ancestry must be taught to adore everything in proximity to the European ideal while despising anything that could indicate African origins. This painful denial of self is an ongoing process that has been imbedded in the psyche of the afrodescendente since the 16th century. As Nilma Gomes explains:

“This insidious process is many times incorporated by the victims themselves that go on to believe in the existence of something natural in this distancing. The *negros*, that are socially and psychologically convinced in this supposed reality, develop strategies that they believe brings them closer to the most socially desired position.

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Manipulating and altering the symbols ideologically seen as expressions of their supposed social and biological distancing from the pole of power, the standard of beauty and humanity are tasks implemented by the subjects that fall into this trap. (1)

Malcolm X once said that the worst thing that the white man ever did was to make black people hate themselves. There is ample evidence of this self-hatred in the countless comments and testimonies of *afrodescendentes* who wished their hair were straighter, their skin lighter, noses and lips thinner.

That seed of self-hatred spawns the fruit of self-hatred as the afrodescendente procures a lighter/whiter partner in order that they may "improve the race" by having lighter/whiter children whose privilege of whiteness ultimately blinds them to the injustices experienced by his/her darker parent and all those who look like them.

According to many of the widely circulated insults directed at the afrodescendente, blacks are monkeys (*macacos*), shameless, dirty and mischievous (*negro safado*), made of excrement (*negro de merda*), and disgusting (*negro nojento*). Accordingly, they still belong in the slave house (*senzala*).

This is what Denise Medeiros Rocha of Rio said to her neighbor's husband, Cláudio Costa Ferreira, on Christmas Eve of 2005. (2)

A quick Google search of all of these terms will show that they are quite common insults. For many Brazilian citizens, blacks still "aren't people", so many *afrodescendentes* will try to align themselves and their descendents with their only choice in their desire of being something in which their humanity will be respected. Again, quoting Fanon:

"I will simply try to make myself white: that is, I will compel the white man to acknowledge that I am human." (3)

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After planting the seeds of this racial hatred of self over a period of nearly 500 years, the whiter looking Brazilian *mestiço* points to his/her more African looking brother and sister and accuses him/her of being their own worst enemies.

By placing the blame on the afrodescendente, the Brazilian refuses to emphasize that it is the white Brazilian, the "holder of economic power and social prestige that has the opportunity of disseminating their racist ideology and consequently convincing a great part of the black population that their condition of inferiority is natural. " (4) In reality, racial dominance and white supremacy could not function if it were any other way.

In closing this piece, I would like to pose a question to those who continue to see the US as a racial hell while hailing Brazil as a racial paradise.

Let us imagine that neither Jim Crow era United States nor apartheid era South Africa ever existed as such. Let us imagine that these societies and any other societies that are considered to be racist actually treated all members of their multi-racial societies with complete equality.

That would mean that there would be full participation in every strata of mainstream society for all races. Then, let us imagine that Brazil continued to maintain a society in which beauty, power, wealth and success was represented by whiteness while *favelas*, ugliness, poverty and exclusion were represented by blacks.

Without a United States or a South Africa to point to as the "real" racists, and the rest of world wondering why the society was stratified in such a way, to whom would the Brazilian point in order to deflect attention away from their own racial reality?

Footnotes

(1) Gomes, Nilma Lino. *Sem perder a raiz: Corpo e cabelo como símbolos da identidade negra*. Autêntica Editora, 2006.

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(2) Magalhães, Mário. "Vizinha é condenada por racismo após soltar cão em festa". Folha de São Paulo. September 22, 2006. Available online October 17, 2006. <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/folha/cotidiano/ult95u126216.shtml>

(3) Fanon, Frantz. Black Skin, White Masks. 1967 (1952) Grove Press.

(4) Oliveira, Iolanda. Desigualdades Raciais: Construções da Infância e da Juventude. Intertexto, 1999.

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<http://www.brazzil.com/content/view/9784/80/>

In Race Matters the US Is Becoming More and More Like Brazil

Written by Mark Wells

Monday, 29 January 2007

<http://www.brazzil.com/content/view/9789/80/>

Brazil's Biggest Show on Earth Is Also a Way to Keep Blacks in Their Place

Written by Mark Wells

Wednesday, 07 February 2007

<http://www.brazzil.com/content/view/9799/80/>

Brazil's False Image of Racial Harmony Has Accomplice: the Black Population

Written by Mark Wells Tuesday, 13 February 2007

<http://www.brazzil.com/content/view/9805/80/>

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This is part ten and last of a multi-piece article.

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