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Author(s): Stanley R. Bailey
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The Race Construct and Public Opinion: Understanding Brazilian Beliefs about Racial Inequality and Their Determinants[1]

Stanley R. Bailey
New Mexico State University

Researchers hold that the racial democracy ideology fosters a rejection of discrimination-based explanations for racial inequality, thereby affecting antiracist mobilization. This study finds that Brazilians understand the discriminatory basis of inequality and that an attitudinal dimension associated with racial democracy strongly increases the likelihood of that understanding. Negative stereotyping produces a smaller opposite effect, and "race" is not a significant predictor. Finally, Brazilian and American racial attitudes differ considerably in explaining black disadvantage. These findings question perceptions of Brazilian racial attitudes and the efficacy of dominant theories for their analysis, suggesting a context-driven approach to theorizing and for antidiscrimination strategizing.

The literature on Brazil identifies the myth of racial democracy as comprising the "national commonsense" on "race" (Hanchard 1994, p. 74; see also Azevedo 1975). This myth provides the ideological framework for understanding attitudes toward racial issues in present-day Brazil and throughout most of the 20th century. Gilberto Fryere (1959), the myth's original elaborator, claimed that the idea of racial or ethnic democracy encapsulates the belief that in Brazil, because of the blurring of group boundaries through miscegenation, "Men regard each other as fellow citizens and fellow Christians without regard to color or ethnic differences" (1959, pp. 7–8). This ideology may be most generally defined as an "antiracialism imagery" principally characterized by a negation of the contin-

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uing existence of discrete "races" (Guimarães 1999, p. 62). The construction is partly a reaction to U.S. "racialism," defined as the belief in the existence of races (Appiah 2000).[2] Ferreira da Silva writes, "The prevailing racial discourse in Brazil celebrates the fact that, unlike the U.S., [Brazil] lacks a clear-cut criteria for racial classification" (1998, p. 203).[3]

In that context, marked by pronounced racialized inequality,[4] researchers view this imagery as "fostering a false concept of the reality of Brazilian race relations" (Fernandes 1969, pp. 138–39), leading to the denial of racial discrimination (e.g., Winant 1999). Guimarães comments, "The anti-racialist imagery of the negation of the existence of 'races' later prompted the negation of racism as a social phenomenon" (1999, p. 62). The myth of racial democracy is described, for example, as an ideology of nondiscrimination (Dzidzienyo 1971) and the prejudice of not having prejudice (Fernandes 1969; Guirmarães 1999).

This Brazilian commonsense on race appears to provoke two specific assumptions regarding racialized inequality: (1) the problems of blacks must be due to their own incapacity and irresponsibility;[5] (2) whites are exempt from moral obligation or responsibility regarding racial inequality (Fernandes 1969, p. 138; Hasenbalg and Huntigton 1982, p. 82; Twine 1998, p. 77; Hasenbalg 1996, p. 163). Furthermore, the myth is specifically charged with neutralizing antidiscrimination strategies, as well as with discouraging black identity formation (Twine 1998; Degler 1971; Hanchard 1994; Burdick 1998). The end result is the perpetuation of the status quo.

Outside Brazil, there is a growing body of research addressing beliefs about racial inequality and their consequences (Schuman and Krysan 1999; Sears, Sidanius, and Bobo 2000; Schuman et al. 1997; Tuch and Martin 1997; Sidanius and Pratto 1999). This focus is primarily due to the view that explanations for racial inequality condition the attitudes of

[2] See also Waters (1999) who uses the interplay of "racialism" and "a lack of racialism" to contrast U.S. understandings of race with those of first generation West Indian immigrants.

[3] For more on the use of U.S. "race relations" as the oppositional backboard for the development of Brazilian racial imagery, see Skidmore (1993) and Wade (1997).

[4] In 1988, black males earned on average only 47% of the average white male income (Hasenbalg 1999).

[5] Choosing the terms to discuss racialized dynamics in Brazil is a challenge. The context is considerably less characterized by racialized social groups in the sense of subjective group membership than the United States (Ferreira da Silva 1998; Segato 1998). Researchers often collapse the brown and black census color categories to form a unified black category. One criterion guiding this operation is that persons classifying in these two categories occupy similar positions of socioeconomic disadvantage in comparison to those in the white category. I employ at times a black/white dichotomy supported in that criterion and not on the basis of subjectively defined group membership.

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individuals and groups toward strategies for confronting black disadvantage (Apostle et al. 1983; Kluegel 1990). This literature divides explanations into two categories: individualist accounts and structuralist accounts (Kluegel 1990; Bobo and Kluegel 1993). The former posits that racial inequality is due to blacks themselves (a type of victim-blaming) and is associated with inaction regarding that inequality. The structuralist category holds that there are external factors systematically disfavoring the disadvantaged individual, for example, racial discrimination. This latter category is linked to support for transformative actions. Differing racial ideologies influence explanations, such as racial prejudice (Sears, Henry, and Kosterman 2000; Kinder and Sanders 1996) and assertions of group-based social hierarchy (Bobo 1988; Sidanius and Pratto 1999).

In addition, sociodemographic variables such as race and education level may determine which explanation an individual or group believes (Hughes and Tuch 2000; Kluegel and Bobo 1993; Kluegel 1990; Bobo and Kluegel 1997). It follows that mapping the way individuals and groups explain racial inequality and the determinants of those explanations could aid in understanding the influence of dominant racial ideologies. Moreover, this knowledge should contribute to envisioning possible context-specific strategies for confronting black disadvantage.

This article examines the ways Brazilians explain stratification along color lines and the determinants of those explanations, employing data from the only national representative survey on racial attitudes. In addition to the long-standing view of racial democracy as leading to a denial of racial discrimination, I consider an alternative view. In doing so, I examine the hypothesis that an attitudinal dimension associated with the racial democracy myth may, to the contrary, be positively associated with an awareness of racial discrimination and inequality. Furthermore, I explore negative black stereotyping in Brazil and how it may influence explanations, as well as evaluate the effects of a race construct, among other socioeconomic variables. In addition to advancing the understanding of Brazilian public opinion on racial issues, this article evaluates the empirical fit of two dominant theories utilized in other contexts for understanding racial attitudes.

BRAZILIAN RACIAL ATTITUDES AND THE MYTH OF RACIAL DEMOCRACY

Historical Background

Gilberto Freyre (1946) is credited with popularizing the notion of racial democracy in Brazil in the 1930s. Confronted with scientific racism beliefs in the superiority of a white race and that "mixed" blood created degen-

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eracy, Freyre proposed instead that "cross-breeding" produced hybrid vigor in humans, thereby enabling a bright future for the otherwise condemned "dark" Brazilian nation. He emphasized an uncommon flexibility on the part of Portuguese colonizers that made possible extensive miscegenation,[6] and he claimed that "mixed" Brazilians (of three races: Africans, Europeans, and Indigenous) gave birth to a new metarace, constituting a new world in the tropics (Freyre 1959).

In this ideological construct, miscegenation became the motor behind Brazilian racial dynamics and racial democracy. Due to the extensive mixing, potential group boundaries blurred, rendering racism in the manner of U.S. segregation and polarization unintelligible. Unlike nations where ethnic and racial identities were stubbornly ascribed or asserted, in Brazil a universal national identity transcended particularist racial identification. What in other societies were considered incompatible social segments, and where group interests were national organizational principles, in Brazil they were united into Brazilianness. In sum, Brazilians viewed their society through "anti-racialism" lenses, as opposed to those of "racialism" in the United States (Guimarães 1999).

However, even within this context marked by the racial democracy discourse or antiracialism, it was not generally disputed that darker-skinned individuals occupied a disadvantaged socioeconomic position in relation to those of lighter skin color. The power attributed to the racial democracy ideology was thought to reside in the explanation it provoked for this gap. As Hasenbalg and Huntington write, "The popular Brazilian ideology of racial democracy holds that there is no prejudice or discrimination against non-whites in Brazil, certainly not when compared to the United States" (1982, p. 245). Instead, the black-white gap must be primarily due to other factors, such as an epiphenomenon of class (Pierson 1967; Wagley 1952). Therefore, it was concluded that if a black individual was differentially unsuccessful in improving his or her social position, that individual was primarily at fault (Fernandes 1969; Hasenbalg and Huntington 1982). Hasenbalg and Huntington claim that this individualist interpretation of racial inequality was held "by whites and non-whites alike" (1982, p. 256).

Contemporary Brazilian Attitudes about Race

Since these earlier writings on the myth of racial democracy, many studies have been published challenging a non-race-based interpretation of inequality, documenting links between color and socioeconomic status un-

[6] For a contrasting view of miscegenation as based on violence and exploitation, see d'Adesky (1998).

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explained by human capital models (e.g., Oliveira, Porcaro, and Costa 1983; Hasenbalg 1999). However, considering that ideologies can exist above and beyond scientifically endorsed interpretations of social phenomena (Sidanius and Pratto 1999, p. 104), the question remains whether or not the racial democracy ideology continues to exercise its confounding influence on public opinion, that is, to provoke a denial of the discriminatory basis of racial inequality, thereby legitimizing the racial status quo. I examine this construction's present-day influence according to two perspectives, as a legitimizing myth or as a utopian dream.[7]

Racial democracy as a legitimizing ideology.—Recent research heavily endorses the view of racial democracy as an "anti-racialism imagery" that fosters a denial of racial discrimination (Winant 1999; Guimarães 1999; Nobles 2000; Marx 1998). Hanchard claims, "What remains from the previous belief system of racial democracy . . . is the denial of the existence of the ongoing racial oppression of Afro-Brazilians" (1994, p. 56). This newer body of literature clearly repeats at least two specific effects of this ideology on beliefs about racial inequality. First, white Brazilians deny racial discrimination. Winant writes that "there is little evidence that white racial attitudes are changing significantly in Brazil. . . . Whites continue to uphold the familiar position: 'Racism does not exist in Brazil'" (1999, p. 110). Second, Brazilians classified as black also continue to deny discrimination due to the confounding effects of racial democracy. Twine writes, "Despite a body of social science literature documenting racism, this mythology of the Brazilian racial democracy is still embraced and defended by non-elite Brazilians" (1998, p. 8).[8]

In addition to conditioning a non-race-based explanation for racial inequality, the belief in racial democracy is seen as neutralizing other issues regarding race, such as antiracism strategies. Twine argues, "continued faith . . . in racial democracy is a primary obstacle to the development of a sustained and vital antiracist movement in Brazil" (1998, p. 8). Burdick identifies the black movements' common argument: "The lack of popular black participation in the black movement can basically be understood as due to vague, distant, or secondary awareness of color prejudice" (1998, p. 139).

Therefore, racial democracy acts as a type "legitimizing ideology" (Sidanius and Pratto 1999) producing an individualist interpretation of racial

[7] In doing so, I follow the lead of Segato (1998; see also Sheriff 2001) who asked whether the racial democracy orientation in Latin America is a "misleading myth or a legitimate utopia?" (Sheriff 2001, p. 130).

[8] Twine's category "non-elite" refers "particularly to Afro-Brazilians" (Twine 1998, p. 8).

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inequality. It diffuses racial mobilization and protects white privilege through confounding perceptions of racial discrimination.

Racial democracy as a utopian dream.—There is an alternative view of the racial democracy orientation and its contemporary effects. A growing number of scholars believe that the myth of racial democracy may have a positive side—its status as a utopian dream of sorts that speaks to a vision of Brazilian society as one based on a "myth of an interrelating people" (Segato 1998, p. 137; Reis 1997; Souza 1997; Fry 1996; Sheriff 2001; Sansone 1998; de la Fuente 1999; Nogueira 1985). Many Brazilians, for example, view the U.S. history of interracial conflict and separation as absurd and posit that there are no essential differences between individuals of a white, brown, or black category (Sheriff 2001). Racial rifts should have no place in Brazil. This is so much so that even positive racial identification is viewed with "ambivalence, confusion [and] antipathy" (Nobles 1995, p. 9), an antiracialism stance.[9] Although skin-color inequality exists in Brazil, the racial democracy orientation may constitute a moral high ground common to all Brazilians that both recognizes and repudiates discrimination: "[Racial democracy] summons the collectively-held notion of the moral force of a shared heritage, a common family, a unified nation. Racism is repugnant. It is immoral. It is, above all, un-Brazilian" (Sheriff 2001, p. 221). Similarly, but earlier, Oracy Nogueira wrote, "[Racial democracy] has a positive side, when taken as a proclamation of an ideal or a contrasting value with which or inspired in which it is possible to criticize the existing conditions" (1985, p. 26).

Therefore, beyond an ideology leading Brazilians of varying degrees of African descent to believe that they live in a racial paradise or to legitimize white privilege, racial democracy may reflect a deep-seated belief in the desirability of a society that is not segmented along racial lines and in the essential equality of all peoples. As such, this "anti-racialism imagery" may provide Brazilians the yardstick with which to measure their unequal statuses, thereby enabling a structuralist account.

Negative stereotyping.—What both views of racial democracy agree upon is the existence of negative stereotyping associated with the darker end of the color spectrum embedded in Brazilian culture (Sheriff 2001; Winant 1999). Color is lived as a continuum (Wagley 1952; Harris 1970), and the darker end of the continuum is considered unflattering. It is associated with low-status traits: lack of education, crime, violence, sexual promiscuity, laziness, and a general lack of civility. Much of this dynamic is attributed to the ideology of "whitening" (Skidmore 1985; Degler 1971; Hanchard 1994). Whereas racial democracy may celebrate mixture, whit-

[9] For more on how Brazilian national identity conditions positive racial identification, see Skidmore (1985, p. 16), Segato (1998, p. 137), and Hanchard (1999, p. 4).

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ening orders the outcome of that mixture, placing superior value on white features. The mass media and school curricula reinforce this message (Nobles 1995, p. 18). "Negroid" features take on an air of distinct negativity: *cabelo ruim* (literally "bad hair"), *nariz chato* (flat nose), *labios grossos* (thick lips), all common descriptors in everyday language, are traits that are considered undesirable (Sheriff 2001). As a result, later in life, color plays a role in the job market, as well as in the marriage market, for example, where lighter-skinned individuals may have the advantage because of their supposed *boa aparência* (nice appearance).

Negative stereotyping is not restricted to Brazilians of the white category and may invade the psyches of Brazilians of all colors. The most perverse effect of stereotyping may be on persons of varying degrees of African descent: "Naturally, the hierarchical ordering of people in terms of their proximity to whiteness helped in the disdain that darker-colored people show of their African origin" (Rout 1976, p. 132; see also Hanchard 1994, p. 60). This dynamic is certain to affect issues of self-esteem, as well as to act as a disincentive to the construction of "African-related subjectivity" (Segato 1998, p. 131). Because this subjectivity may be discouraged by negative stereotyping, persons of varying degrees of African descent may not see themselves as a group, and therefore they may not construct a view that outside factors are acting on the grouping as a whole. This would condition an individualist account of racial inequality.

PREVAILING THEORETICAL FRAMINGS OF EXPLANATIONS

To situate the Brazilian context in terms of general theory on racial attitudes, I review two competing framings that dominate the literature on the determinants and importance of explanations for racial inequality: sociocultural theories and variants on realistic group conflict theory. Although the reach of these theories extends beyond the U.S. context, I examine their application in the United States as a point of comparison with Brazil. Two central factors influence case selection. First, the U.S. case dominates the literature on the study of racial attitudes using survey methods. Second, the applicability of these theories to the Brazilian context appears initially plausible based on a perceived commonality of the two cases—both societies were actively engaged in the African slave trade, and skin-color in both societies continues to affect social mobility to the disadvantage of citizens with varying degrees of African descent (Andrews 1992).

There is ample data in the United States regarding public opinion and explanations for racial inequality. Perhaps the most striking characteristic of these opinions is the divergence in responses given, polarized along

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racial lines.[10] The 1994 General Social Survey, for example, poses the following question: "On the average, blacks have worse jobs, income, and housing than white people. Do you think these differences are mainly due to discrimination?" Of white Americans, 68% said no, while 67% of black Americans responded yes. Blacks overwhelmingly point to discrimination; whites overwhelmingly point away from the role of discrimination. There is, however, disagreement as to what motivates this racial divide.

Sociocultural Approaches

Sociocultural approaches explain racial attitudes as configured through a gradual socialization process that results in negative affect toward outgroups (Allport 1954; Meertens and Pettigrew 1997; Kinder and Sanders 1996). One example of an updated version of this approach is "symbolic racism" (Sears 1988).[11] Symbolic racism posits that children acquire racial prejudice that is normative in their social environment, later carrying a "solid core of prejudice" into adulthood as antiblack affect. Symbolic racism is "a blend" of that antiblack affect with another element: "the kind of traditional American moral values embodied in the Protestant Ethic" (Kinder and Sears 1981, p. 416). This framing seeks to explain the adjustment in white Americans' attitudes from the pre– to post–Civil Rights era. A central element of this change was the belief among whites that the transformations of the Civil Rights era brought an end to the systematic discrimination suffered by blacks. It follows, according to this view, that blacks are no longer especially handicapped by racial discrimination, but that they still do not conform to traditional American values (Sears et al. 2000, p. 77). Consequently, those persons influenced by symbolic racism tend to offer an individualist explanation for black disadvantage.

Group Conflict Theories

A second approach comprises the variants on group conflict theory (Bobo 1988; Sidanius and Pratto 1999; Jackman 1994). These framings generally posit that traditional prejudice has little to do with explanations for black disadvantage. Rather, the attribution by whites of a lack of motivation by blacks as causing racial inequality (an individualist account) is a jus-

[10] Dawson (2000, p. 350) writes that the consensus of American researchers is that "racial attitudes are structured across racial groups."

[11] Although symbolic racism is essentially a confrontation of the U.S. context, researchers employ sociocultural approaches outside the United States—e.g., Meertens and Pettigrew (1997) in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the Netherlands.

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tification for white privilege or the product of a legitimizing ideology of social dominance (Sidanius and Pratto 1999). Sidanius and Pratto claim that in situations of group-based dominance, the dominant group holds a hierarchy-enhancing ideology that legitimizes their dominance. These authors state, "socially constructed groups . . . at different points along the social power continuum are naturally expected to differentially endorse legitimizing ideologies in relatively predictable ways" (1999, p. 123). In Bobo's (2000) formulation, whites perceive blacks as competitive threats for valued social resources, status, and privileges, and they defend their privileged position through blaming blacks for racial inequality.[12] It is generally the case, then, that conflict theories posit black/white divides as regards explanations for black disadvantage. Sidanius and Pratto also explain that legitimizing ideologies can lead subordinates to agree with hierarchy-enhancing interpretations of inequality, victims of a type of "false consciousness" (1999, p. 106).

HYPOTHESES

Both sociocultural and group conflict theories, if employed in the Brazilian context, would generally posit racial divides in Brazilian public opinion. According to the sociocultural approach, the divide would consist of whites induced by prejudice into blaming blacks for their own disadvantaged position. Symbolic racism does not discuss black public opinion, but a default position would appear to project black support for a structuralist stance (because blacks are not equally affected by antiblack affect). Group conflict theories would posit whites blaming blacks for racial inequality based on strategic efforts to maintain and justify white privilege. Blacks would most commonly hold an opposite position, attempting to delegitimize white privilege. The Brazilian literature does not posit a clear racial divide. Based on general theory, I hypothesize:

HYPOTHESIS 1.—*Brazilian explanations for racial inequality are divided along racial lines.*

The dominant literature in Brazil, simply stated, posits that Brazilians of both the white and the black categories deny the discriminatory basis of racial inequality. Thus, my second hypothesis:

HYPOTHESIS 2.—*Brazilians reject a discrimination-based or structuralist explanation for black disadvantage.*

My third hypothesis addresses the specific effect of an attitudinal dimension associated with the ideology of racial democracy as a determinant

[12] Bobo's formulation appears more U.S. context specific, whereas Sidanius and Pratto explore other contexts in addition to the United States.

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of explanations for racial inequality. The dominant Brazilianist stance, on one hand, and the alternative view, on the other, would posit completely opposite effects of this attitudinal dimension. The former, again, continues to hold that the racial democracy ideology fosters a denial of racial discrimination (i.e., a rejection of the discrimination-based or structuralist interpretation). The alternative approach views the racial democracy orientation as a moral high ground that produces a clear awareness of racial discrimination (i.e., support for a structuralist stance). The dominant view fits well within group conflict theories as regards the white grouping where racial interests orientations, such as the racial democracy construct, would prompt that category of persons to deny that racial discrimination is behind racial inequality (the individualist stance). The dominant Brazilianist stance fits perfectly one conflict theory version (Sidanius and Pratto 1999) claiming that subordinates may at times side with the dominant group in endorsing dominant legitimizing interpretations. From group conflict theories and the dominant Brazilianist stance, I derive my third hypothesis:

HYPOTHESIS 3.—*An attitudinal dimension associated with the myth of racial democracy decreases the likelihood of a structuralist explanation for racial inequality for Brazilians of both the white and the black categories.*

Last, I form a fourth hypothesis based on sociocultural framings and the Brazilianist literature regarding the effect of racial prejudice. As discussed, sociocultural theories posit that whites blame blacks for black disadvantage (the individualist account) induced by antiblack affect or racial prejudice. This literature may also speak to the Brazilian context where negative stereotyping of individuals categorized as black, a type of prejudice, is very commonplace, possibly inducing an individualist account for inequality. These possibilities lead to my final hypothesis:

HYPOTHESIS 4.—*Negative black stereotypying decreases the likelihood of a structuralist explanation for racial inequality on the part of Brazilians self-identifying in the white category.*[13]

DATA AND MEASURES

I employ data from a 1995 face-to-face survey on racial attitudes conducted by the Datafolha Instituto de Pesquisas.[14] Data are based on a

[13] However, as discussed above, negative black stereotyping may also be commonplace among persons self-classifying in nonwhite categories in Brazil, complicating this hypothesis.

[14] Datafolha Research Institute is the survey unit of the *Folha de São Paulo*, one of Brazil's major newspapers.

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multistage national probability sample. The sampling frame is the entire urban population 16 and older.[15] Municipalities were selected at random from within representative socioeconomic levels, regions, and size strata. Successive random samples were then taken of neighborhoods, then streets, and then individuals. The full sample consists of 5,014 persons sampled across 121 municipalities (Turra and Venturi 1995).[16]

Survey participants were asked to respond to the following question: "Blacks in Brazil were freed from slavery about 100 years ago. In your opinion, who is most responsible for the fact that the black population still lives in worse living conditions than the white population?"

1. the prejudice and the discrimination that exists among whites against blacks
2. blacks that don't take advantage of the existing opportunities
3. both
4. don't know

I use the responses to this question to construct the dependent variable: explanation for racial inequality. I consider response "1" indicative of a structuralist explanation for racial inequality and response "2" indicative of an individualist account (as a binomial categorical variable where 1 = structuralist and 0 = individualist). I classify the "both" response as a structuralist explanation (see Schuman and Krysan 1999), and I treat the "don't know" responses (5%) as missing data. Interviewees offered other responses freely, which I collapse into one of the two central categories that I evaluate as most appropriate.[17] Fully 84% of responses fell into one of the two structuralist ("1") or individualist ("2") responses before any collapsing of categories.[18]

I construct the independent race or color variable in three ways,[19] all based on a self-identification question listing the following categories:

[15] In 1991, 76% of the population was considered urban (Telles and Lim 1998).

[16] The data set roughly match data from the 1991 census on important variables, including race, age, and sex (Telles and Lim 1998).

[17] "Other" responses collapsed into the structuralist stance are (*a*) "the government," (*b*) "lack of opportunities," (*c*) "the society/the system." "Other" responses collapsed into the individualist stance are (*a*) "the prejudice of blacks," (*b*) "there is no difference/ blacks and whites have the same opportunities."

[18] Bobo and Kluegel (1993, p. 444) state that, contrary to the way differing explanations are treated in surveys and in the literature, these are not mutually exclusive. However, the Brazilian survey question uniquely allows respondents to express whether or not they consider both explanations important. Only 8% of respondents chose the "both" option.

[19] I at times treat color and race as interchangeable for the sake of statistical comparison with the United States. However, as I explain in the following sections, I do not believe these are interchangeable as regards the cognitive understandings they may organize.

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white, brown, and black.[20] In a first model, I collapse brown and black to form a single black category, opposing it to the white classification (set up as dummy variables where 1 = white). In a second model, I employ all three categories in a three-color design: white, brown, and black (white acts as the reference category in this model). A final model employs questions in which respondents of the (noncollapsed) black category were filtered out, leaving the white and brown categories to form a two-color design (as dummy variable: 1 = brown).

Next, I create two attitudinal variables using scale construction techniques—principal factor analysis with iterations (and a Varimax rotation).[21] Employing five questions, my goal is to define two attitudinal dimensions: an attitudinal complex associated with the myth of racial democracy and one representing negative black stereotyping. The first dimension attempts to tap a part of what is at the core of the views on the influence of racial democracy—the significance attributed to skin color. The second dimension represents a type of sociocultural prejudice against individuals classified as black embedded in Brazilian society. Significant loadings on two factors differentiate the dimensions.[22]

The dimension associated with racial democracy consists of three questions, each with three possible responses:

1. If you had a black supervisor, you . . .
   a. would not mind
   b. would be bothered, but would try to accept it
   c. would not accept it and would look for another job
2. If several black families moved into you neighborhood, you . . .
   a. would not mind
   b. would be bothered, but would try to accept it
   c. would not accept it and would want to move out of the neighborhood
3. If your child wanted to marry a black person, you . . .
   a. would not mind
   b. would be bothered, but would try to accept it
   c. would not accept it and would not allow the marriage

Responses to these operational items should draw on an area of the individual's attitudes toward persons classified as black. The questions address the realm of interracial intimacy and social distance. The racial

[20] I exclude the amarelo (Asian descent) and the Indígena (Indigenous) categories. These two categories combined make up about 1% of the national population (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics 1999).

[21] See similar techniques in Bobo and Kluegel (1997) and Sears et al. (2000).

[22] The first factor has an Eigenvalue of 1.46, and the second of .67.

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democracy myth, understood most generally as an "anti-racialism imagery" (Guimarães 1999, p. 62), should lead Brazilians to downplay the significance of race in these areas. Leslie (1999), for example, in his study of racial attitudes using survey methods, equates the myth of racial democracy with "liberal social attitudes towards black Brazilians." Choosing the "wouldn't mind" category ("a") insinuates such a "liberal" or "anti-racialist" orientation. The "would not accept it" response ("c") clearly indicates a nonacceptance of individuals classified as black in those realms, underlining a conflictual segmentation of the society along racial lines. The "b" option represents an intermediate position. Both divergent views of the racial democracy orientation discussed earlier are consistent with the conceptualization of racial democracy as an "anti-racialism imagery," and hence the attitudinal dimension I create that is associated with that imagery would infer positive ("a") responses. The "legitimizing ideology" stance leading Brazilians to believe they actually live in a racial paradise produces a belief that skin color *is* insignificant—liberal attitudes toward the black category are already the status quo. The alternative view of racial democracy's influence as a sort of utopian creed would also be consistent with the positive responses ("a") because the orientation envisions the *desirability* of (or anticipates) the insignificance of skin color—liberal attitudes toward the black category *should* be the status quo. However, these two divergent interpretations of the racial democracy myth would differ radically regarding the predicted effect the attitudinal dimension associated with this myth would have on the dependent variable. On the one hand, if the attitudinal dimension constitutes part of a legitimizing orientation, it would produce a denial of racial discrimination (individualist account). On the other hand, if it is associated with a utopian creed, the dimension would provoke a recognition of racial discrimination (structuralist stance).[23] The factor loadings on these questions are highly significant: (1) 0.67, (2) 0.77, and (3) 0.55.[24]

The second orientation, negative black stereotyping, is constructed on two questions: "I will read you some popular expressions, and I want you to tell me if you agree with each one or not. Do you agree or disagree? Completely or in part?"

1. A good black is a black with a white soul.
2. The only things blacks are good at are music and sports.

[23] Leslie utilized similar questions to operationalize a racial democracy orientation, e.g, "I consider marriage between persons of different races natural," and "If there were a black candidate who was qualified to be president of Brazil, he/she could be elected" (1999, p. 366).

[24] The loadings on this first factor for the other two questions are 0.04 and 0.11.

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These items are recognized sayings in Brazil. Choosing the "agree" response indicates an individual endorsing a negative image or stereotype of individuals classified as black. Agreement should lead an individual to blame those of the black category for racial inequality, based on a view of these individuals as possessing less than ideal social traits (see Kluegel 1990). The factor loadings on these variables are highly significant: 0.60 and 0.62, respectively.[25]

Sociodemographic independent variables are educational level, represented by three dummy variables: persons who have not completed primary school (low [omitted]), those who have completed primary but have not completed secondary school (medium), and those who have completed secondary school or more (high); age: (*a*) 16–17, (*b*) 18–25, (*c*) 26–40, (*d*) 41–55, and (*e*) 55–98; income, measured by monthly salary midpoints in *reais*: (*a*) $75, (*b*) $263, (*c*) $563, (*d*) $1,126, and (*e*) $2,500;[26] and sex is a dummy variable denoted by male.

FINDINGS

Sociodemographic Determinants

Contradicting my first hypothesis (hypothesis 1), in contrast to the racial division in public opinion in the United States, bivariate results reveal that Brazilian explanations are not segmented along color or racial lines. Table 1 shows that white and black categories have equal propensities to endorse a structuralist explanation using a two-color model of racial classification. White and brown categories appear slightly more likely than the black category to endorse the structuralist stance using a three-color model. Contradicting the second hypothesis (hypothesis 2), table 1 also shows that Brazilians overwhelmingly endorse a structuralist account (72%). As points of reference, and suggesting both the validity and reliability of the dependent measure and the lack of a race or color effect,[27] table 2 compares the question utilized in this analysis to similar questions addressing explanations for racial inequality from a 1986 election survey in the city of São Paulo and a 2000 racial attitudes survey in Rio de Janeiro. All three surveys reveal the same pattern: endorsement of discrimination-based explanations and the lack of a significant race effect.

However, education has been shown to increase the likelihood of a

[25] The loadings on the second factor (the three racial democracy items) are 0.10, 0.06, and 0.09.

[26] The *real* (plural—*reais*) is the Brazilian currency. In April of 1995, one real was $0.90 (U.S.).

[27] Convergent validity and interitem reliability.

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TABLE 1
PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF EXPLANATIONS FOR RACIAL INEQUALITY BY COLOR/RACE, BRAZILIAN ADULTS

	Two-Color Model		Three-Color Model		
Explanation	White	Black	White	Brown	Black
Discrimination (structuralist)	72	72	72	74	67
Motivation (individualist)	28	28	28	26	33
N	2,344	1,914	2,344	1,346	568

SOURCE.—Datafolha Instituto de Pesquisa.
NOTE.—$N = 4{,}258$ for both models.

structuralist explanation (Apostle et al. 1983; Kluegel 1990), and persons self-classifying as white tend to be significantly more educated than those in the black and brown categories in Brazil. Hence, an education effect may be offsetting a greater propensity of the white grouping to endorse an individualist account. Also, older persons are more likely to offer individualist accounts than the young (Sniderman and Hagen 1985; Kluegel 1990). Table 3 presents binomial logistic regression results of the determinants of explanations for racial inequality where sociodemographic measures comprise the independent variables.[28] I utilize the three-color classificatory method in which white is the omitted reference category. Coefficients confirm that education increases support for a structuralist account, and they show that age decreases support for the same. There is no color category difference controlling for education and other variables.[29]

Analyzing the antilogs of the coefficients in table 3 provides an intuitively meaningful interpretation of the logistic regression equation. These are interpreted as the odds ratios, or the ratio of the odds for persons who differ by one unit with respect to an independent variable, holding the others constant. Thus, for example, for each additional age level, the odds of holding a structuralist explanation are decreased by about 12%, holding constant all other variables. Regarding the educational level categories, the odds of individuals with at least a medium educational level endorsing a structuralist explanation are about twice the odds for persons with low education (precisely 1.89 for persons with a medium education and 2.11 for persons with a high level of education).

[28] Due a lack of information to correct for design effects, I place the threshold of significance at the 0.01 level.

[29] I also ran a model with the white/black two-color classificatory method. Race continued to be insignificant.

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Attitudinal Dimensions

Table 4 presents logistic regression results that include the two attitudinal variables addressed in my remaining hypotheses: the effects of the orientation associated with the racial democracy myth (hypothesis 3) and of negative black stereotyping (hypothesis 4). In this model of determinants, age has lost its significance (see Bobo and Kluegel 1997, p. 119). Educational categories continue to differ significantly, and the two attitudinal dimensions show high levels of significance.[30] Importantly, the race variable is not significant. This racial category item is a two-color variation where white is the reference category (brown = 1). The black category is not included because that category of individuals was not asked all of the questions that comprise the attitudinal scale variable. Recall, though, that in the model presented in table 3 using the three-color construct, both brown and black categories did not differ significantly from the white category in explanations for inequality.

I interpret the antilogs of the coefficients in table 4. Regarding educational level, the odds that persons with at least a medium education will support a structuralist stance is about half again as large as the odds that persons with a low education will do so, holding all other variables constant. The odds of holding a structuralist stance are increased by 115% with a one-unit increase in the dimension associated with racial democracy, holding all other variables constant, thereby not supporting the central hypothesis (hypothesis 3). Finally, for each additional level of negative stereotyping, the odds of holding a structuralist explanation are decreased by about 29%, supporting the final hypothesis (hypothesis 4). Although negative stereotyping is significant in decreasing support for a structuralist stance, the more important effect is the positive one exercised by the attitudinal dimension associated with racial democracy.

We can also convert expected odds into percentages, choosing specific values of the independent variables. Table 5 presents the effects of educational level and attitudinal stances on explanations for racial inequality for males of the white category with mean income and mean age (these four variables [sex, race, age, and income] were not significant). For example, among white males with mean age and income, and possessing a low education, 82% of those with the highest level of the dimension associated with racial democracy and the lowest level of negative stereotyping support a structuralist stance. By contrast, only 20% of individuals with those same personal characteristics but differing attitudinal scores, the lowest racial democracy attitudinal dimension and highest negative

[30] Negative stereotyping, the dimension associated with racial democracy, and whether a structural or individualist explanation is offered are only weakly correlated (< .25 in all cases).

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TABLE 2

A Comparison of Questions and Percentaged Frequency Distributions from Three Survey Instruments, 1995, 1986, and 2000, Brazilian Adults

Survey	Responses	%Agree	
		Whites	Blacks
National Survey on Racial Attitudes, 1995:*			
Blacks in Brazil were freed from slavery about 100 years ago. In your opinion, who is the most responsible for the fact that the black population still lives in worse living conditions than the white population?	The prejudice and the discrimination that exists among whites against blacks	72	72
	Blacks that do not take advantage of the existing opportunities	27	27
Election Survey, 1986:†			
Some people say there is discrimination against blacks and mulattos in employment—that it is much more difficult for them to get a good job than for whites. Others feel that to progress in life, everything depends on the person and has nothing to do with the color of one's skin. In your opinion, is there discrimination against people of color, or is the opportunity to advance in life equal for whites and blacks?	Discrimination exists	67	67
	Equal opportunities for whites and blacks	33	33

Racial Attitudes Survey, Rio de Janeiro, 2000:[‡]			
Some studies show that in general black persons have worse jobs, salaries and education that white persons. I am going to mention some reasons that people say explain that situation.[§]	Racial discrimination impedes blacks from getting good jobs and better their lives (agreement)	77	86
	Blacks are less motivated than whites (agreement)	16	13

SOURCES.—1995 national survey by Datafolha; 1986 Election Survey adapted from Hasenbalg and Silva (1999); and the 2000 attitudinal survey by CEAP, a Brazilian black movement, and DataUff of the Federal Fulminense University.

* $N = 5{,}014$.

[†] $N = 551$. No information is provided concerning sampling method, but it may be assumed non-random.

[‡] $N = 1{,}200$. Based on a state-wide probability sample, Rio de Janeiro.

[§] The two responses listed are from two different survey items showing agreement responses. Therefore, they do not sum to 100%.

TABLE 3
LOGISTIC REGRESSION—DETERMINANTS OF STRUCTURAL EXPLANATION FOR RACIAL INEQUALITY, BRAZILIAN ADULTS (THREE-COLOR CLASSIFICATION)

Independent Variable	*b*	SE	e^b
Education level:[a]			
Medium	.6382*	.0886	1.8931
High	.7480*	.1489	2.1127
Color:[b]			
Black	−.1559	.1081	.8557
Brown	.1452	.0839	1.1563
Age	−.1290*	.0355	.8790
Male (0 = female)	−.1025	.0760	.9026
Income	−9.70e-06	.0001	.9999
Intercept	1.1241	.1344	. . .

SOURCE.—Datafolha Instituto de Pesquisa.
NOTE.—$N = 3{,}784$.
[a] Omitted level is low.
[b] Omitted category is white.
* $P < .001$.

stereotyping, offer a structuralist account. Finally, 69% of males self-classifying in the white category with the same personal characteristics but with mean scores on the attitudinal scales claim that discrimination explains racial inequality. These results show the importance of three determinants (educational level, a racial democracy attitudinal dimension, and negative stereotyping) for offering a structuralist explanation for racial inequality.[31]

DISCUSSION

All evidence points to Brazilians strongly endorsing a structuralist explanation for racial inequality. According to the data, 72% of Brazilians deny that persons categorized as black constitute the problem and look directly to discrimination on the part of persons in the white category to explain racial inequality. My findings also indicate that public opinion regarding racial inequality is not divided along color category lines in Brazil. Overwhelming and (statistically) equal majorities representing the two- and three-color constructs reject individualist explanations. Furthermore, I find that an attitudinal complex reflective of racial democracy beliefs increases support for the structuralist or discrimination-based stance, dis-

[31] I also tested a region variable with four divisions (South, Southeast, Northeast, North/Midwest) in all the models. This variable was not significant, in contrast to the United States, where a North/South region variable is significant (Schuman et al. 1997).

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TABLE 4
LOGISTIC REGRESSION—DETERMINANTS OF STRUCTURALIST EXPLANATION FOR RACIAL INEQUALITY, WHITE AND BROWN BRAZILIAN ADULTS

Independent Variable	*B*	SE	e^b
Education level:[a]			
Medium	.3730*	.1012	1.4520
High	.3441	.1654	1.4110
Brown (white = 0)	.1210	.0874	1.1290
Age	−.0455	.0401	.9545
Male (female = 0)	−.0994	.0856	.9054
Income	−.0002	.0001	.9998
Negative black stereotyping	−.3365*	.0309	.7143
Racial democracy dimension	.7670*	.1209	2.1533
Intercept	−1.8600	.3828	. . .

SOURCE.—Datafolha Instituto de Pesquisa.
NOTE.—$N = 3{,}255$. Blacks were filtered out of the negative stereotyping items.
[a] Omitted level is low.
* $P < .001$.

tancing this orientation from a "legitimizing ideology" interpretation. However, darker skin color continues to be the receptor of negativity, and this stereotyping produces a negative effect on the structuralist explanation for racial inequality.

The importance of these findings is best demonstrated comparatively. Brazilian racial attitudes differ considerably from American attitudes for explaining black disadvantage in their respective societies. The support that Brazilians, categorized as black or as white, show for a structuralist stance is strikingly high relative to the United States where public opinion favors an individualist interpretation and is rigidly divided along racial lines. On the one hand, 68% of white Americans reject discrimination as the cause of black disadvantage in the United States in comparison to 28% of Brazilians classified as white regarding racial inequality in Brazil. On the other hand, 68% of black Americans affirm that discrimination is the cause of black disadvantage in the United States in comparison to 72% of Brazilians categorized as black regarding their own unequal status. The opinion of blacks in both contexts is similar, but whites differ greatly in the United States and Brazil, the latter offering a structuralist account, and the former an individualist explanation. How might one conceptualize this consensual structuralist view of Brazilian public opinion concerning racial inequality?

Race-Centered Framings

There is some support for a sociocultural approach in the Brazilian case. My findings show that stereotyping increases support for an individualist

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TABLE 5
PERCENTAGES OFFERING STRUCTURALIST EXPLANATION FOR RACIAL INEQUALITY BY THREE ATTITUDINAL AND EDUCATIONAL LEVELS FOR WHITE MALES WITH MEAN INCOME AND MEAN AGE

Educational Level	Highest Racial Democracy and Lowest Stereotyping	Mean Racial Democracy and Mean Stereotyping	Lowest Racial Democracy and Highest Stereotyping
Low	82	69	20
Medium	86	76	26
High	86	76	26

SOURCE.—Datafolha Instituto de Pesquisa.

account. Similar to the findings in the United States, this phenomenon of stereotyping is consistent with a sociocultural explanation attributing these sentiments to preadult socialization. However, the theoretical fit ends there. First, sociocultural framings are group-oriented theories. The race construct is decisive, and it is the white group that harbors antiblack racial animus. In Brazil, the effect of stereotyping is independent of color. Second, the effect of prejudice, although statistically significant, is not a dominant factor affecting Brazilian public opinion on racial inequality, as it is in the United States according to sociocultural framings. The individualist account it motivates is far outweighed by a structuralist account on the part of Brazilians classified in both the white or black categories. This structuralist consensus constitutes an anomaly for the sociocultural approaches.

The variations of group conflict theory are not consistent with the data. Cognizant of racial inequality, Brazilians in the white category do not offer a justifying explanation for their privileged position. Rather, they delegitimize white category privilege by endorsing a structuralist account. Brazilians classified as black are not induced into "false consciousness," nor do they join with a white category in legitimizing inequality; rather, they are strident in pointing to white discrimination for their inequality. These responses do not fit group-specific interests interpretations.[32]

A central emphasis of sociocultural approaches and group conflict theories is that group orientations mold racial attitudes (Dawson 2000). These

[32] Sidanius and Pratto (1999) do raise the possibility that an apparent hierarchy-attenuating ideology may, in reality, prove hierarchy enhancing. It is difficult, though, to imagine how a racial commonsense that specifically conditions a strong awareness of white discrimination could be hierarchy enhancing. However, the manner in which they suggest such a hypothesis be tested is so contextually tied to racial politics in the United States, both conceptually and in terms of its operationalization, that it cannot, at present, be so tested in Brazil. This issue, however, would benefit from further research.

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theories conjure up very strong divisional boundaries between and around racialized social groups. In his formulation of differing types of racial boundaries, Banton describes the United States as characterized by "hard" boundaries (1983, pp. 125–26). Numerous researchers echo this characterization, such as Kinder and Sanders, who claim, "blacks and whites [in the United States] look upon the social and political world in fundamentally different and mutually unintelligible ways" (1996, pp. 287–88). Considering the inefficacy of the race construct to predict attitudinal stances regarding explanations for racial inequality in Brazil, I suggest that these race-centered theories do not adequately interpret beliefs about racial inequality in the Brazilian context.

Race-Decentered Framings

Is it possible to understand attitudes toward black disadvantage without stipulating a decisive effect of the race construct? If so, such a non–group-based direction may help in theorizing the Brazilian context. I contend that what is lacking in the race-centered perspectives is a more nuanced approach that explicitly takes seriously differential racial boundary salience and its cognitive consequences (Handelman 1977; Brubaker 2002; Loveman 1999). That is, all stances reviewed thus far take racial group membership and subjective racial identities as givens, an element that compromises their explanatory power for the Brazilian case.

To explicate the effects of differential boundary salience on explanations for social group inequality, Kluegel and Smith (1986) provide an example of an analogous process of the formation of inequality beliefs concerning gender discrimination. They find that although blacks and women in the United States held similar subordinate positions in the hierarchy of inequality, the views of men toward the causes of women's inequality differ radically from whites' views of black disadvantage. Specifically, men and women tended to offer a consensual structuralist account of gendered inequality in equal and majority numbers. However whites and blacks offered opposing accounts of racial inequality. In other words, gender was not a determinant of beliefs about gender discrimination, while race was a decisive determinant of beliefs about racial discrimination. In discussing this comparison, the authors (Kluegel and Smith) conclude that the lack of a gender effect was due to a "lesser degree of salience of the group membership," along with a general lack of segregation and a lack of negative affect between women and men (Kluegel and Smith 1986, p. 241; see also Smith and Kluegel 1984; Gurin, Miller, and Gurin 1980; and Waters 1990).[33] These conditions for a consensus between subordinate and

[33] Regarding the effect of boundary salience, Waters explains that white ethic identi-

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superordinate groups regarding a structuralist explanation for the disadvantaged position of the subordinante group appear consistent with the Brazilian context, especially as concerns boundary salience and group membership.[34]

Racial Boundary Salience in Brazil

The Brazilian context is known for ambiguous racial or color boundaries (e.g., Harris 1970). Racial ambiguity may be defined as "the failure effectively (and successfully) to maintain the line separating blackness and whiteness" (Ferreira da Silva 1998, p. 213). Alternatively, Harris describes "ambiguous racial calculus" in Brazil as a situation where the "ego lacks a single socio-centric racial identity" (1970, p. 2). Both definitions of boundary ambiguity are complementary and point to a context where skin-color dynamics may be characterized by "a lesser degree of group membership salience" (Kluegel and Smith 1986) or by a lesser degree of "racial subjectivity" (Ferreira da Silva 1998).[35]

Several empirical measures approximate this lower salience of racial group membership. First, in Brazil, how a person is categorized by a third party regarding his or her color or race might be quite different from how this individual views himself or herself (Pacheco 1987; Sansone 1996; Telles and Lim 1998). In a more defined system where race is a first-order or primary construct of social structuring and identification, such as in the United States, this would probably not be the case (Davis 1991; Harris and Sim 2000). Tapping this dynamic, we can compare two surveys, one in the United States and the other in Brazil, in which respondents' racial category placement was recorded through both self- and interviewer-classification. The cross-tabulation of these two items in each context reveals that in the Unites States fully 99% of the individuals who self-identified as black were classified as black by interviewers (Harris and Sim 2000). In contrast, in Brazil, only 58% of those who self-identified as black (*preto*) were similarly classified by interviewers (Turra and Venturi 1995). These

fication in the United States leads to a "lack of understanding of the ethnic or racial experience of others" (1990, p. 160), especially regarding obstacles to social mobility. Stated alternatively, she finds that ethnic boundary salience among U.S. whites influences an individualist account of racial and ethnic inequality.

[34] For a discussion of the Brazilian context as characterized by both a relative lack of segregation or separation and by "interracial intimacy," see Ferreira da Silva (1998) and Segato (1998).

[35] The term "lesser" (as well as ambiguous) implies a point of comparison. Kluegel and Smith (1986) utilize racial group membership in the United States in their comparison as exemplifying a high degree of group membership salience. This article utilizes that same comparison.

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results appear to indicate contrasting strengths of racial group membership definition.[36]

Further addressing the ambiguity of racial boundaries in Brazil, table 6 presents three items from a representative survey on racial attitudes in the state of Rio de Janeiro. The first two items refer to opinions concerning one's ancestry. On the one hand, respondents self-classifying as brown and black were asked if they had white ancestors (item 1). Of the former, 80% said "yes," and of the latter, 59% said "yes." On the other hand, 37% of persons self-classifying in the white category and, again, 80% of respondents self-classifying in the brown category, claimed to have black ancestors (item 2). Although this author knows of no comparable questions asked in the United States, these figures are significant for understanding the ambiguity of the Brazilian context in contrast to that society where ancestral recognition is conditioned in large part by the hypodescent rule (Davis 1991).

A final approximation of boundary salience in Brazil stems from asking respondents if they believe that the black category has its own customs or traditions, or if there is no difference between the customs and traditions of that category of individuals and those of the rest of the population (item 3). Two-thirds of all Brazilians claim that those classified as black do not differ from the rest of the population regarding customs and traditions, including 62% of persons self-classifying as black. Again, this author knows of no comparable item used in the United States,[37] but this question in Brazil suggests, again, the negation of "hard" boundary construction, in this case, based on particularist cultural repertoires.[38]

How can one interpret this apparent lower salience of subjective racial boundary formation? One important element that may separate Brazil from "hard" boundary construction involves the cognitive processes supporting interpretations of diversity based on color as opposed to on race. Nogueira (1985) theorized this contrast in the following way: Brazil's color awareness responds to "*marca*" or appearance, as opposed to "*origem*" or ancestry, the explicitly racial U.S. version. The difference between the

[36] See also Jenkins (1994), Brubaker and Cooper (2000), Omi and Winant (1994), Appiah (2000), and Segato (1998) for discussions of the importance of the interplay of internal and external boundary definition for racial identification formation.

[37] Affirming the importance of notions of ancestry and culture for clear racial boundary definition, Ferreira da Silva states, "In the United States racial subjectivities are produced in abstract terms—through the reconstitution of a (racial) line of descent, and via the view that blacks have a separate culture" (1998, p. 228), which she contrasts to Brazil.

[38] Brazilians appear not to deny African-based cultural expression; rather, they may not view it as a particular domain of Brazilians classifying as black (Ferreira da Silva 1998). Some researchers attribute this dynamic to strategic elite or government cooptation (Hanchard 1994).

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TABLE 6
Items Approximating Racial Boundary Salience by Percentages, Brazilian Adults, 2000

Item	Self-Classification		
	White	Brown	Black
1. Have white ancestors	...	80	59
2. Have black ancestors	37	80	...
3. No black specificity in customs and traditions ...	68	65	62

Source.—2000 attitudinal survey by CEAP, a Brazilian black movement, and DataUff of the Federal Fulminense University.
Note.—$N = 1{,}200$.

two may be subtle, but not unimportant. On the one hand, distinctions based on discrete racial identities may create caste-like or essentialist distinctions, that is, hard boundaries where groups seem to "naturally" differ (Sidanius and Pratto 1999, p. 123) and form social groups of recognized membership. On the other hand, as Banton claims, "Where classification is by appearance, the categories [boundaries] will be variable and will rarely form the basis for the formation of social groups" (1983, p. 30).[39]

When socially constructed boundaries are porous or ambiguous, their significance may be reduced as markers of discrete, self-identifying social segments with diverging worldviews (Kluegel and Smith 1986; Smith and Kluegel 1984; Waters 1990). However, other-classification, color categories, or discrimination based on imputed characteristics can exist beyond particularist group subjectivity. Racial discrimination and prejudice are about how others categorize an individual and not primarily about how an individual chooses to self-identify (Wade 1997, p. 72; Telles and Lim 1998).

Contrasting race-centered notions, I suggest that when boundaries are ambiguous, as in Brazil, their divisional power in the cognitive domain may be compromised. Lessened boundary salience may create a situation that results in the inability of the color construct to predict attitudinal stances. In other words, racial or color boundaries in Brazil may not mold cognitive processes along group membership lines, at least not in ways predictable from the dominant theories I reviewed (see Segato 1998, p. 148).[40]

[39] See Loveman (1999), Handelman (1977), and Brubaker (2002) on the social scientific distinction between groups and categories in race and ethnic theorizing.

[40] The lack of significance of the color construct for predicting attitudinal stances, or the cognitive domain, does not negate its significance for structuring socioeconomic outcomes.

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What most significantly molds attitudinal stances in Brazil, at least as regards explanations for racial inequality, is educational level and the racial democracy orientation. Regarding education, its positive correlation with a structuralist interpretation is consistent with the literature on racial attitudes in other contexts (Schuman et al. 1997). This finding points to the possibility of increasing support for structuralist explanations if the educational system is improved and becomes more universally available in Brazil.[41] As concerns the determinacy of the racial democracy or antiracialism orientation, a closer look at the questions and positive responses that comprise that attitudinal dimension suggests what may be denoted as a utopian stance, that is, the desire for the insignificance of skin color in the neighborhood, at work, and even in the marriage market. I suggest, based on the responses to these questions and on the overall effect of the racial democracy attitudinal dimension (as well as on the items in table 6 and on the literature that emphasizes the universalizing tendency of Brazilian national identity) that what the racial democracy worldview may represent for Brazilians is the desirability of a society not segmented along racial lines nor according to racial identification. This does not mean that Brazilians believe they actually live in a "racial paradise" (Guimaraes 1999, p. 37), but, rather, that "raceless" (de la Fuente 1999) organization may be the goal of this society that views "Brazilianness" as its only legitimate organizing principle.

THE ANTIDISCRIMINATION BATTLE

Where does this framing of Brazilian public opinion lead this society in terms of its struggle against racial inequality? As noted, the importance of an explanation is theorized to be the action or inaction that it may provoke on behalf of solution strategies. The attitudes of white Americans, for example, blaming black Americans for their disadvantaged position has led to opposition to strategies that confront black disadvantage (Kluegel 1990). Schuman and his colleagues conclude in their exhaustive study of racial attitudes in the United States: "We have seen . . . that the majority of whites deny the importance of discrimination and place most of the burden for black disadvantage on blacks themselves. . . . Given these findings, we have little reason to expect that . . . [policies] characterized as giving any hint of preference to blacks . . . will have much support in the white population" (Schuman et al. 1997, p. 171).

There was a time when white Americans appeared cognizant of their

[41] The validity of the educational-level variable as an unambiguous measurement of class position is unclear due to the insignificance of income for predicting attitudinal stances in all models.

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responsibility for black disadvantage. Schuman and Krysan (1999) claim that in 1963 a Gallup poll reveals that 70% of whites felt that whites were more to blame for the situation of blacks than blacks themselves. Just five years later, this figure had dropped 42 percentage points, to where in 1968 only 28% of whites blamed whites and 72% of this group blamed blacks themselves. Although the authors suggest possible reasons for this negative evolution or involution in white attitudes,[42] most important for the purpose of comparison with Brazil is that present-day attitudes in Brazil appear very similar to those of the Civil Rights era in the United States as regards a societal consensus blaming inequality on racial discrimination. Brazilians, then, may be in a unique position that could motivate public debate on the issue of racialized inequality.

However, I do not mean to suggest that Brazil is at a point where it can now follow the historic footsteps of the American Civil Rights era. A blanket reading of the Brazilian situation from a North American experience followed by an application of the North American model may be an inadequate way to approach or predict the Brazilian course (Fry 1996; Segato 1998; Camara 1998; Ferreira da Silva 1998; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1999). Where racial boundaries are ambiguous and the sentiment toward the social desirability of a society not organized around particularist racial identification is strong, non-race-targeted approaches to confronting racial inequality (Wilson 1987; Sansone 1998), as well as the use of strategic issue framing (Bobo 2000; Sniderman and Carmines 1997) may be more appropriate.

A race-decentered approach to confronting racialized inequality would differ from U.S. practice, where subjective racial identity definition and mobilization are vital elements of social organization and antidiscrimination strategies. From the perspective of viewing subjective racial definition as the sine qua non of antiracist struggle,[43] the situation of ambiguous racial boundaries in Brazil must be overcome. Apparently echoing a similar view, Talcott Parsons wrote, "I take the position that the race relations problem has a better prospect of resolution in the United States than Brazil, partly *because* the line between white and [black] has been so rigidly drawn in the United States because the system has been sharply polarized" (1968, pp. 352–53, emphasis in original).

This rigidity, though, was significantly structured through the particular U.S. history of state-mandated segregation and discrimination (de la Fuente 1999; Ferreira da Silva 1998). "This assumption that racial mobilization is the only legitimate way to struggle for racial equality . . .

[42] See also Kinder and Sanders (1996, pp. 98–106).

[43] For a critical evaluation of this type of race-centered perspective, see Segato (1998), Ferreira da Silva (1998), and Sansone (1998).

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was born out of . . . North Atlantic ideologies . . . and is based on the peculiar historical experience of racial segregation in the United States" (de la Fuente 1999, p. 47). That history provided the space and context for the development of rigid boundary construction, including racial subjectivity (Ferreira da Silva 1998; Segato 1998), and also provided the target (Jim Crow discrimination) that facilitated racial mobilization. This clear division of space and identity, as well as target identification, is not a part of Brazilian history, or of that of many other Latin American countries. Notwithstanding, the logic behind Parsons's historic statement continues to express an outlook that is supported by some Brazilianists (e.g., Winant 1999; see Banton 1999).[44] Winant states, "The public articulation and exploration of racial dualism [in Brazil] would itself be a major advance. Many black people undoubtedly still succeed in denying the significance of their racial identity. They are 'avoiders,' as Twine . . . documents at length. Their ability not only to deny, but to *avoid* their own racial identity is aided by the tremendous depth of the ideology of racial democracy. What good is an ideology, after all, if it cannot effectively identify its adherent's identity?" (2001, p. 256, emphasis in original).

Academics, activists, and organizations both inside and outside Brazil attempt to overcome a history of ambiguous racial boundaries through black identity mobilization and the unification of all Brazilians with some degree of African descent as a step toward struggling against racism (Nobles 2000; Sansone 1998).

However, as a result of the lack of that "peculiar historical experience" on the structural front, and of the antiracialism or racial democracy ideological component, this racial mobilization outlook has faced resistance and ambivalence from Brazilians of varying degrees of African descent (Burdick 1998; Hanchard 1994; Nobles 2000). Attempts to explain this ambivalence have many times not focused on the differential histories or structural components; rather they point to the ideology of racial democracy and its confounding effects on Brazilians they classify as black. These interpretations claim that this category's denial of racial discrimination explains the lack of antiracist mobilization and the lesser degree of black identity formation. My data clearly suggest that this line of reasoning needs revision. The myth of racial democracy, as a racial commonsense stemming from Brazil's racial history, may indeed play a role in inhibiting the creation of particularist black identification, but not due to confused reasoning power on the part of Brazilians with varying degrees of African descent. My research suggests two other factors. On the one hand, the racial democracy orientation engenders a vision of a deracialized utopian

[44] Banton (1999) criticizes the underlying assumptions in the work of Winant, which appear to "sanctify" a particular U.S. history of racial formation.

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society where skin color is not an organizing principle (Sheriff 2001; Segato 1998); on the other hand, negative stereotyping continues to be embedded in Brazilian culture. The former may motivate the rejection of particularist racial identification on the grounds that "Brazilianness" is all that should matter. The latter reduces the positive symbolism that particularist black identification might be afforded (Nobles 2000). These appear to be contradictory tendencies, but, nonetheless, form part of the complex Brazilian dilemma.

However, these factors should not be evaluated as precluding antiexclusionary strategies. In his revisionist examination of the myth of racial democracy, de la Fuente (1999) argues that this myth can be and has been harnessed in ways that protect and promote subordinate populations (see also Segato 1998). For example, he argues that this ideology is inclusionary in principle, thereby restricting the political options of white elites and providing the grounds on which the excluded can demand full participation: "[The myth of racial democracy] embodies a set of socially acceptable ideals that can be turned into opportunities for participation and advancement by those at the bottom of the socio-racial hierarchy" (de la Fuente 1999, p. 68). Furthermore, non-race-specific coalitions, such as women's groups (Lovell 2000), labor unions, and urban social movements (Bacelar 1999; Maggie 2001), that mobilize around issues perhaps disproportionately important to Brazilians of varying degrees of African descent may find fertile ground in a context oriented by the racial democracy perspective. One especially notable example is the Movement of Landless Workers (Segato 1998). Segato cautions, "introducing segmentation by race into those popular fronts would not only be spurious but would also have disastrous consequences" (1998, p. 136). Directly opposing the stance of Parsons (1968) and Winant (2001), Marvin Harris and his colleagues write: "We fail to see why Brazil cannot destroy racism without destroying its unique system of ambiguous and flexible race-color boundaries" (Harris et al. 1995, p. 1614). Placing both stances in perspective, Segato concludes, "If we decide that the founding myth of Latin American nations is mere deception, then we have to endorse the notion that only after establishing segregation as the point zero of racial truth can we initiate a truly antiracist politics. . . . Conversely, if we see, from a Latin American perspective, segregation . . . as a dystopia of conviviality, we are compelled to envisage alternative political roads" (1998, pp. 130–31).

CONCLUSION

In sum, Brazilians are aware that discrimination continues to play a central role in reproducing inequality. I propose that efforts to confront

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Brazilian racial dynamics and the reality of racial inequality both theoretically and practically will have to take into account the myth of racial democracy not as a strategic deception, but as a historically conditioned national commonsense that tends toward ambiguity rather than subjective racial definition. Treating the latter as the *sine qua non* of either race theorizing or antiexclusionary strategizing may lead to a lack of efficiency on both fronts in Brazil, as well as in other similar contexts.

A few of points of caution are in order. First, the data employed in this analysis are cross-sectional. These results do not address more historic configurations of Brazilian racial attitudes. Second, the survey was administered to urban adults. These data do not directly address attitudes in rural Brazil, where much of the historic and contemporary ethnographic studies on racial identification were and continue to be conducted. Finally, the very use of survey methodology in contrast to ethnography to study racial attitudes in Brazil may account for some of the contrasting results presented here.

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