



Introduction

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Introduction

by
Helen I. Safa

The Americas have long been an arena for extraordinary mixtures of cultures and peoples born of diasporas from Africa, Asia, and Europe. These mixtures have given rise to different racial constructions, known in the Caribbean as *creolization* and in Latin America as *mestizaje*, that have been used to syncretize and refashion race and ethnic mixture into distinct forms of national identity. Although these constructions continue to carry the burden of their not-so-distant colonial and racist past, they contrast markedly with the bipolar black-white construct still operating in the United States. This issue addresses some of the ideological and structural factors responsible for the different racial constructions operating in Latin America and the Caribbean and in the United States and their impact on the pattern of race relations and the form of national identity in the different regions. The focus is on the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking areas of Afro-America—that is, on the countries with sizable black populations. The articles in this issue concern Brazil and Colombia and, in the Hispanic Caribbean, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. Racial constructions in the United States will be examined chiefly in this introductory essay and in the two articles on the redefinition of racial identity resulting from West Indian and Dominican immigration.

This seems a particularly appropriate time to address the debate on national identity, given the negative reaction to immigration and affirmative action in the United States today on the part of those who feel that core American values are being undermined by minorities and immigrants who insist on maintaining their cultural distinctiveness in language, religion, and

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other areas (Schlesinger, 1992). Welfare reform, restrictions on immigration and the legal rights of immigrants, the dismantling of affirmative action, and opposition to racially and ethnically based political redistricting are all measures designed to reaffirm white hegemony in the United States. They represent what Winant (1994) has termed a crisis of white identity. What are the challenges to the bipolar model of racial construction in the United States, and is it moving closer to the more fluid model of *mestizaje* in Latin America and the Caribbean? A comparison of different approaches to racial and ethnic mixture may help us learn better ways to address these issues from both a policy and an academic perspective.

The contrast between the racial constructions of Latin America and the Caribbean and in the United States has been analyzed from various perspectives, focusing on religion, slavery, racial demography, and other factors as explanatory variables (e.g., Harris, 1964; Tannenbaum, 1946; Degler, 1971; Hoetink, 1967). As Harris (1964) notes, in the United States, the binary contrast between black and white is based on a rule of hypodescent, whereby any person with African ancestry is categorized as a member of the African American racial group and thereby excluded from the definition of whiteness fundamental to U.S. national identity. This model of racial construction has made race a fundamental division in U.S. society and encouraged the formation among African Americans of a separate racial identity that is often lacking in Latin America and the Caribbean. African Americans in the United States tend to view the lack of a distinct racial consciousness among Afro-Americans¹ in Latin America and the Caribbean as a denial of racial pride, because, for the latter, national identity often takes precedence over racial identity. The official discourse of national identity in Latin America and the Caribbean incorporates Afro-Americans through *mestizaje* or race mixture, which assigns blacks and lighter-skinned mulattos a lower but accepted place in a hierarchical social order. Even before independence, the people of most Latin American and Caribbean countries distinguished themselves from their European colonizers on the basis of their mulatto, *mestizo*, or *creole* identity,² that is, as “new” and culturally and biologically mixed peoples. Particularly with the consolidation of nationalism in the twentieth century, the intermediate stratum produced by racial mixture came in such countries as Brazil to be not only recognized but often glorified as a national symbol. What factors help account for the contrast between this inclusionary, hybrid concept and the rigid bipolar racial construction of the United States?

Both national identity and race are social constructs, defined not by biology or pure, bounded repertoires of culture but by a fluid and changing history in which official and subaltern representations of national identity vie

for hegemony. Like ethnicity, they are, therefore, negotiated phenomena. They should be analyzed from a constructivist perspective that examines not only the structural dimensions of racial hegemony, focusing on issues of inequality and discrimination in employment, education, housing, and so on, but also its ideological elements—involving struggles over meaning and identity (Winant, 1994). The biological foundations of race have been largely discredited, but the meanings attached to racial constructions linger in the popular imagination, linking racial characteristics to behavior in a hierarchical order to justify white superiority. In both the United States and Latin America and the Caribbean, whiteness has been identified with progress and modernity and blackness with backwardness and inferiority in religion, language, family forms, and even expressive culture such as music and dance (Quintero, 1996). Despite some progress in dismantling the structural determinants of racial inequality in the United States in schools, jobs, and voting rights through the civil rights movement, the symbolic meaning of race is still being challenged in both regions today.

Although *mestizaje* affirmed race mixture, it maintained white superiority through a hegemonic discourse of *blanqueamiento* (whitening). This discourse encouraged the biological and cultural assimilation of Afro-Americans and Indians by intermarriage with whites and the adoption of white European norms and values. Intermarriage contributed to a racial continuum based on phenotype that made it difficult to isolate a bounded, recognized Afro-American or Indian group and inhibited the formation of a separate cultural identity. The racial continuum also made it more difficult to raise racial consciousness and politically mobilize blacks, because the emphasis was on individual mobility through whitening rather than on group solidarity. Separate black institutions in churches, schools, newspapers, and other areas such as existed in the United States had no parallel in Latin America and the Caribbean. Racial polarization was further diffused through social whitening (Wade, 1993), which enabled upwardly mobile blacks and mulattos who adopted white norms and living standards to be accepted as members of the elite.

The importance of class status in these racial constructions has caused some scholars to argue that in Latin America and the Caribbean, class supersedes race (e.g., Harris, 1964; Wagley, 1958; Fernandes, 1969). Certainly, class distinctions are more fundamental here than race is in the United States, but because of the ideological elements attached to them, racial constructions in the region cannot be reduced to class differences. As Lovell and Wood demonstrate in their article on Brazil in this issue, even when income is held constant, there are differences between whites and nonwhites in education, jobs, life expectancy, and other critical variables.

I would argue that *mestizaje* and hypodescent represent two different mechanisms for the maintenance of white superiority, one by inclusion and hegemony and the other by exclusion or domination. Relying on Gramsci (1971), Winant defines hegemony as “a system in which politics operates largely through the *incorporation* of oppositional currents in the prevailing system of rule, and culture operates largely through the *reinterpretation* of oppositional discourse in the prevailing framework of social expression, representation, and debate” (Winant, 1994: 29). Hegemony incorporates and reinterprets; domination represses, excludes, or silences opposition and difference. Dominance characterized the U.S. treatment of African Americans in the period before the civil rights movement and legitimated state-regulated racial segregation in marriage, residence, occupation, education, public transport, and other public institutions. Laws against miscegenation in the United States were not declared unconstitutional until 1967 (Spickard, 1989). One critical difference between the bipolar system and *mestizaje* is, therefore, the level of degradation associated with race mixture.

As Winant (1994) has shown, the United States is also moving from domination to hegemony in response to the legal and moral demands of the civil rights movement, which has sought to confer equal rights of citizenship on African Americans and other minority groups. But hegemony does not fit well with hypodescent, which establishes a firm color line and excludes all nonwhite groups from the concept of national identity, thereby inhibiting the incorporation of contestatory elements. On the contrary, the bipolar system encourages the politicization of identity among subordinated racial and ethnic groups—not only African Americans but native Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans, who are increasingly using hypodescent to their own advantage. For example, Hawaiians voted to expand the definition of their people to anyone with a drop of Hawaiian “blood,” whereas previously only those with at least 50 percent Hawaiian blood had been eligible for certain land trust benefits (Winant, 1994: 61). The increasing numerical and political strength of nonwhite groups and the demands they are making on the state are undermining white superiority in the United States and helping to provoke the crisis of white identity. In Latin America and the Caribbean, *mestizaje* is increasingly being questioned as racial consciousness is aroused through migration, economic crisis, democratization, and the politicization of racial identities.

HEGEMONY AND MESTIZAJE

As in the United States, definitions of race and national identity in Latin America and the Caribbean vary over space and time, with white hegemony being stronger in some periods than in others. In her essay in this issue, Martínez-Echazábal demonstrates a general historical shift in emphasis from biological determinism to cultural hybridity, focusing on mestizaje as a way of maintaining white racial hegemony. Social Darwinism, or scientific racism, was the late-nineteenth-century ideology that viewed all races, including Afro-Americans and Indians, as inferior to whites, who were considered the pinnacle of progress and Western civilization. Influenced by these Eurocentric ideas, Latin American and Caribbean scholars advocated whitening their populations biologically by encouraging white immigration—a strategy that met with relatively little success except in Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, and southern Brazil. In all other countries with sizable black populations, almost all of them having been brought to the New World as slaves, elites pursued race mixture as the next-best strategy for diluting blackness both biologically and culturally.

Cultural criteria became as important as phenotype in defining national identity. As national identity was consolidated in the twentieth century, Afro-Americans and indigenous people were incorporated into the nation-state if they adopted the Spanish (or Portuguese) language and Catholic religion. Physical differences were deemphasized through the creation of a culturally homogeneous national identity based on mestizaje, to which all racial groups were expected to conform. Blacks were not permitted to mobilize on the basis of racial identity. The separate black enclaves of runaway slaves, known as *cimarrones* in the Hispanic Caribbean and *quilombos* in Brazil, in which African languages and cultural patterns could be retained, were viewed as a threat to the cultural homogeneity required of new nations attempting to unify heterogeneous populations and therefore crushed or marginalized (Price, 1979).

Incorporation into the nation-state had an important gender dimension, partly because of the shortage of white women among Spanish and Portuguese settlers. The only interracial unions condoned were those between white men and black women, and these often took the form of consensual unions rather than legal marriage. In this way, patriarchy maintained white supremacy, while consensual unions were seen as evidence of black family disorganiza-

tion or backwardness. Consensual unions, common on the slave plantations of Brazil, Cuba, and elsewhere, are still the most prevalent form of union among the rural and urban poor in many of these countries.

Family-owned plantations in this area were hierarchical structures characterized by paternalism dispensed by the *hacendado* to his family, domestic servants, skilled craftsmen, and field hands, each group progressively darker in skin color but ideologically framed as part of one large family as epitomized in the Brazilian Gilberto Freyre's classic *The Masters and the Slaves*. The idiom of kinship tended to subdue racial and gender hierarchies. These hierarchies were maintained through endogamous marriage codes mandated by the church, which in colonial Brazil insisted on the racial and class equality of marriage partners, unequals being restricted to concubinage or consensual union (Nazzari, 1996). Interracial unions were most often between a man of lighter skin and higher status and a lower status woman of color, whose position and offspring were legally and socially subordinate to those of his legal wife. Interracial marriages in Cuba required special approval from the state and were later barred (Martinez-Alier, 1974). Consensual unions were often the product of rape or seduction and highly unstable; to this day, they are a mark of low status and family disorganization.

Concubinage and, later, consensual unions thus served to distinguish hierarchical racial categories associated with colonizer and colonized, or slave and free, much as Stoler (1989) has shown for colonial rule in Southeast Asia. However, the high frequency of consensual interracial unions and the mechanisms devised to incorporate their illegitimate mulatto offspring into the dominant white society suggest a greater blurring of racial boundaries between white colonizers and black slaves (or indigenous colonized) in Latin America and the Caribbean than in Southeast Asia or in the United States. Interracial unions and their offspring coupled with liberal laws of manumission helped to produce a much larger percentage of the free colored in Latin America and the Hispanic Caribbean than in the United States, where interracial unions were largely prohibited and severe restrictions were imposed on the legal status and social mobility of the free colored. The free colored, as the products of interracial unions, constitute the origin of the intermediate mulatto stratum in Latin American and Caribbean society.

The urge to assimilate blacks in Latin America and the Caribbean rather than reject them, as was done in the United States, can also be explained by the pressing need for national unity in the face of Spanish and Portuguese colonialism and U.S. and European imperialism, as Torres-Saillant argues in this issue. The need for national unity was even greater in the Caribbean than in Latin America because of these countries' small size and their long period of European colonialism (independence in the Anglophone Caribbean did not

come until 1962). United States hegemony was also stronger, with continued occupation of Puerto Rico after 1898, and repeated military interventions in Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic, where a popular uprising was crushed as late as 1965. In addition, the threat posed by the neighboring black republic of Haiti caused Dominicans to identify blackness with that country, seen as the antithesis of civilization (see Baud, 1996). Dominicans of mixed descent were officially called "indios," a euphemism designed to suggest their descent from the long-since-extinguished Taino, the indigenous inhabitants of Hispaniola. As a result, the Dominican Republic is often seen as the most negrophobic of all Caribbean societies, although Torres-Saillant attributes this image more to official discourse than to popular belief.

Demographic factors also urged assimilation of blacks. The proportion of blacks in Latin America and the Caribbean was much greater than in the United States, where the lesser importance of plantations and slavery, slaves' natural increase after the nineteenth century, and the abundance of poor white labor (Harris, 1964) brought an earlier end to the slave trade. Brazil and the Caribbean received 80 percent of the 10 million slaves imported, and non-whites continue to constitute nearly half of the Brazilian population and about a third of that of Cuba, compared with 12 percent of the population in the United States. Their numbers and the important role Afro-Cubans played in the Cuban wars of independence from Spain in 1898 help explain why Cuba was the only country to grant black men universal suffrage after independence. In the United States and Brazil they were effectively disenfranchised in the postemancipation period. de la Fuente argues in this issue that citizenship and suffrage gave Afro-Cubans an important political tool for participating in the nation and countering white hegemony despite their low status. After U.S. occupation and a tightening of racial restrictions, Afro-Cubans formed their own political party, and its being declared illegal led to open rebellion and a "race war" that was brutally repressed. The Cuban race war of 1912 is the clearest indication of the emphasis placed on cultural homogeneity in the Caribbean and of the way in which hegemony turned to domination when threatened by the formation of racial or ethnic blocs.

Mintz (1974) argues that the apparent ease with which blacks were absorbed into the Hispanic Caribbean is due to an "assimilation model" that discouraged the formation of a separate Afro-American cultural identity in favor of a homogeneous national identity that crosscut racial and class lines. The assimilation model was based on the early development of family-owned plantations in which there was a more equal ratio of whites to blacks, the early formation of a free colored or mulatto group born largely of race mixture, and more liberal rules of manumission than existed in the Anglophone Caribbean (Hoetink, 1985). The results of this model can be seen in

the predominance of the Spanish language and Catholicism in the Hispanic Caribbean compared with the multilingual and diglossic speech communities and proliferation of established churches and syncretic Afro-Caribbean sects in the Anglophone areas of the region (Alleyne, 1996). Catholicism encouraged more liberal laws of manumission based on the humanity of slaves in contrast to the chattel slavery practiced in the Anglophone Caribbean and in the United States. Its hierarchical nature facilitated the incorporation of “lower order” Afro-Americans and Indians, whereas the more egalitarian Protestant churches encouraged the formation of separate sects.

The nationalism that emerged from this assimilation model in Puerto Rico, with variants extolling peasant culture in Cuba and the Dominican Republic, emphasized the “white” phenotype of peasants as opposed to the black slaves of the plantation, who were seen as somehow less authentic. The Puerto-Rican-as-*jíbaro* trope was designed earlier in the nineteenth century by a liberal segment of the young, ascendant elite who chose to be “ambiguously inclusive of the racially mixed peasant majority” to bolster their case against the increasing foreignness of the Puerto Rican elite in this period (Scarano, 1996: 1402). The traditional values of rural society embodied in the symbols of “white” male peasants emerged full-blown after the U.S. occupation of Puerto Rico in 1898 and of the Dominican Republic in 1916 as a way of countering U.S. domination and emphasizing “civilized” Spanish values (Baud, 1996). The harmonious character of Puerto Rican culture expressed by the *jíbaro*—the symbol of the Popular Democratic party, headed in the 1940s through 1960s by Luis Muñoz Marín, the island’s first elected governor—was reinforced by the popularization of the term *la gran familia puertorriqueña* to blur racial and class inequalities.

Racial distinctions were much sharper and less paternalistic in the Anglophone Caribbean, where absentee-owned plantations fostered much greater social distance between whites and blacks. Planters continued to identify with England as the mother country to a much greater degree than their Spanish counterparts in Latin America and the Caribbean and, therefore, failed to develop a sense of national identity that could be transmitted to slaves and other subordinate groups. As in the United States, strict laws on manumission and on interracial unions prevented the development of a strong intermediate stratum of free colored or mulattos until after emancipation. However, the emergence of a brown (and now black) political elite in the postindependence period along with the reduction and political marginalization of the white population strengthened the black racial identification of islands like Jamaica and Barbados, while in Trinidad and Guyana a growing East Indian population vied for hegemony.

Another critical difference between *mestizaje* and racial binarism is in the size, importance, and recognition of a racially mixed intermediate stratum originating during the slave period with this free colored group. Degler (1971) has termed this the "mulatto escape hatch" because it makes mulattos more acceptable to whites than blacks and distances them from blacks by offering them greater opportunities for social mobility. The numerical strength of nonwhites in Brazil, who during the nineteenth century, constituted approximately half the population, required the white elite to incorporate the mulatto segment through greater opportunities for upward mobility as well as modes of representation such as the cult of the mulatta, elevated to a national symbol. This served to divide mulatto from black and to strengthen the hegemonic discourse of whitening in Brazilian society.

Census data now show, however, that for at least the past 40 years, Brazil has suffered from systematic racial inequality; both blacks and mulattos do less well than whites on indexes of infant mortality, life expectancy, education, occupation, housing, and income (Wood and Carvalho, 1988; Hasenblag and Silva, 1992; Lovell, 1991). In their article in this issue, Lovell and Wood show that the greatest gaps are between whites and nonwhites, thus undermining the concept of the mulatto escape hatch. In terms of everyday life, mulattos may still feel less discrimination than blacks, particularly if they are of higher socioeconomic status, but the reality of socioeconomic exclusion deprives both blacks and mulattos of the rewards that whites enjoy. Socioeconomic exclusion helps account for the recent rise in black consciousness in Brazil.

COUNTERHEGEMONIC CHALLENGES

The white superiority inherent in the official discourse of *mestizaje* has not gone unchallenged. Black counterhegemonic movements in Latin America and the Caribbean have a long history, including the establishment of maroon communities during slavery, the Haitian revolution, the massive slave revolt in Bahia in 1835, and the Cuban race war. Racial consciousness is rising today in various countries because of democratization and the opening of civil society; the class and racial polarization brought on by economic crisis; and international migration, particularly to the United States, where many Afro-Americans have had to confront their blackness for the first time.

Although blacks in different areas of Latin America and the Caribbean varied in their degree of assimilation to European culture, black identity was never institutionalized as was that of indigenous people, even in areas such as the Colombian Chocó, where they were physically isolated from Colombian

society. Arocha argues in this issue that blacks in Colombian society have been made invisible by their loss of ethnic distinctiveness through enslavement in the seventeenth century and Colombia's overwhelming preoccupation with mestizo identity. The treatment of Afro-Colombians as "ordinary citizens" (Wade, 1993: 36) because they are linguistically and culturally less distinctive than Indians has made it more difficult for them to legitimate and garner outside support for their territorial claims to long-held land in the Chocó. As in Brazil, however, political and economic factors have promoted black racial consciousness in recent years. As Arocha notes, these factors include economic competition brought on by the opening up of the territory to natural-resource exploitation by largely foreign interests and political changes linked to the constitutional reform that pressured the state to recognize blacks as a separate ethnic group similar to indigenous peoples. The need to safeguard land rights in the Chocó required recognition of cultural specificity and black political organization, which has been hampered by state resistance.

Wade (1995) argues that the rise of black consciousness in Colombia suggests that mestizaje is not as strong a deterrent to racial mobilization as was once thought. The geographic isolation of the Chocó has undoubtedly contributed to Afro-Colombians' sense of common identity, but black consciousness has arisen in cities outside this region as well. Mobilization makes them less invisible but, at the same time, may contribute to an essentialization of race and black culture that fosters greater racial polarization not only between blacks and whites but also between them and indigenous groups. The deteriorating relationship between blacks and Indians in the Chocó, which as Arocha notes is promoted by the state and external economic forces, only weakens their defenses against encroaching foreign interests and against white superiority.

Wade and others point out that Afro-Americans need a sense of their own value to counter the stigma continually associated with blackness and the white superiority implicit in mestizaje. Omi and Winant (1986) term this *strategic essentialism*, whereby subordinate racial groups are forced to band together to defend their interests. Essentialism is clearly evident in black nationalist movements in the United States, ranging from Pan-Africanism and cultural nationalism to the Nation of Islam. It is apparent in *cimarronismo* in Colombia, in *quilombismo* in Brazil, and in the Abeng movement in Jamaica, all of which have taken the runaway slave as a symbol of resistance and the continuity of African tradition (Wade, 1995: 344). For blacks in all the Americas, long denied an identity and culture of their own, the construction of a separate identity is an important element in countering white racial hegemony.

Differences persist among scholars of the Caribbean regarding the degree of continuity of African traditions in popular culture, language, religion, and family and kinship systems; the issue divides, for example, Mintz and Price (1992), who argue for a creole culture born of this interethnic and interracial mixture in the Americas, and Alleyne (1988; 1996), who sees African survivals in language and religion and thus more autonomy for Afro-American culture. The issue is important for ethnic mobilization, because how else can Afro-Americans construct a unifying base from which to challenge the white superiority of *mestizaje*? As Wade (1995) maintains,

Ideas about essences and ancestral history are bound to be important in ethnic mobilizations and challenges to mobilizations, but the significance attached to them may be lessened by an emphasis on the objective at which people are *aiming* rather than the place from which they *have come*. (p. 573)

In Brazil, the reemergence of civil society during the *abertura* (opening) encouraged the politicization of racial identities (Winant, 1994). The Movimento Negro Unificado (Unified Black Movement; MNU), created in 1978, along with other black organizations, attacked *mestizaje* and racial democracy as a fraud designed to perpetuate the deep racial inequality of Brazilian society. Although the leadership of these black-consciousness movements is largely made up of middle-class mulatto intellectuals, the politicization of black identity through cultural groups known as *Afoxes* that draw on Afro-Brazilian religious roots has begun to attract a mass audience. These groups attack not only structural inequality but the meaning of race and racial identity by affirming a rich black heritage that has been diluted by *mestizaje*. The current economic crisis in Brazil, which as Lovell and Wood show has led to increasing racial as well as class inequality, has undoubtedly contributed to increasing racial consciousness as well.

Hanchard (1996) notes that Afro-Brazilian movements still lack national institutions whose explicit purpose is the politicizing of racial inequalities. His model is clearly U.S. based; in this country both the civil rights and the Black Power movement have built on the strengths of separate black institutions in churches, schools, and other areas. The black movement in Brazil has been plagued by fragmentation, partially growing out of political party affiliation, and what Hanchard sees as an overemphasis on "culturalism" and what others have called essentialism. Although cultural practices such as Afro-Brazilian music and religion have been among the few avenues for the expression of black identity and autonomy, Hanchard argues that their transformation into national cultural symbols has divorced them from their original cultural and political context. As samba schools and *candomble*

ceremonies become articles for white consumption, they cease to be centers of black resistance and identity.

This conflict between appropriation and autonomy poses a dilemma. Autonomy lends strength to ethnic mobilization but risks essentialism; appropriation often leads to integration into the dominant society and the loss of specific markers of ethnic identity. As Hanchard (1994: 140) observes, "In multiethnic, multiracial polities where the most powerful members of a dominant racial group seek to *lead* as well as *rule*, the process of rearticulation is crucial to the maintenance of racial hegemony." In short, hegemony requires rearticulation, while dominance or rule maintains exclusion.

There are many examples of popular culture in Latin America and the Caribbean that have been appropriated from Afro-American roots—the samba in Brazil, the rumba in Cuba, and reggae in the Anglophone Caribbean. In the United States as well, African American cultural practices such as jazz and blues have been reinterpreted and commodified by the dominant white culture. In a similar vein, integrationist measures sponsored by the civil rights movement and affirmative action have undermined the separate black institutions that gave cohesion to the African American community. Does this mean that integration is a deterrent rather than an impetus to racial equality?

Reinterpretation may lead to distortion, as Pacini Hernandez demonstrates, in this issue, in her analysis of the popularity of Afro-Cuban music in the United States today. Afro-Cuban music received considerable support during the revolution but became a political victim when it was marginalized by the U.S. embargo and by the existing Latino networks in the United States, which often play down the Afro-American heritage of Latino culture. In contrast, the representation of Afro-American authenticity contributed to the appeal of Afro-Cuban music within the world music industry, which was particularly attracted to music of the African diaspora. As its international visibility has grown and Cuba's economy has become increasingly in need of U.S. dollars, the possibility increases that Afro-Cuban music will be simplified and whitened to conform to more universal and standard Latino tastes. In short, as the Afro-Cuban music industry engages with the structurally and culturally diverse Latino and world music industries, its expression of racial identity and its images of racial authenticity have been interpreted quite differently by each sector. Commodification has now reached global proportions.

Despite the vitality of Afro-Cuban expressive culture and the socioeconomic gains made by Afro-Cubans during the socialist revolution, some argue that Cuba continues to suffer from racial inequality (e.g., Moore, 1989; McGarrity and Cárdenas, 1995). As de la Fuente notes in this issue, the Cuban

socialist state, in keeping with its Marxist tenets, thought that racial (and gender) inequality would be reduced with the removal of class barriers in education, occupation, and residence, but racism has persisted in the preference for white skin and the acquisition of "white culture." Afro-Cubans have been consistently underrepresented in the Communist party and other political power structures. Parents continue to disapprove strongly of interracial dating (Fernandez, 1995), and marriages have for the most part remained racially endogamous; the 1981 census reveals that 93 percent of white heads of household have married someone of their own race, while the corresponding figures for blacks and mulattos are about 70 percent (Reca et al., 1990). Many of the strong advances in education, health, and occupational mobility for Afro-Cubans during the revolution are being eroded by the severe economic crisis of the special period that Cuba entered in 1990, after the dissolution of its ties with the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Cubans who receive remittances from relatives abroad are better able to function in the new dollar economy, and because few blacks emigrated, blacks are again at a disadvantage. Thus, it would seem that racial polarization is growing as socioeconomic inequalities and hardship increase. Whether this contributes to increasing racial consciousness on the part of Afro-Cubans is still a matter of debate.

CHALLENGES TO HYPODESCENT

The United States is now more multiracial and multicultural than ever. The number of mixed-race people prompted a multiracial solidarity march in Washington, D.C., in July 1996 to pressure the federal government to add a "multiracial" category to the next census. The government's reluctance to recognize an intermediate racial category again demonstrates the binary conception of race and national identity, which makes intermediate categories invisible and unacceptable to both blacks and whites. Now, many African Americans are opposed to a multiracial category because they feel it will dilute their numerical and political strength. They have internalized the binary model of racial hegemony on which U.S. racism is predicated and thus have contributed to the reification of black culture and identity.

But, as I have suggested, hegemony cannot function on the basis of bipolar racial constructions. The multiracial category is growing as Latinos, Asian Americans, and other nonwhite minorities resist binary division and classify themselves as "others," in effect creating a new, growing tripartite division in the census. Resistance to this binary form of racial classification by

nonwhite immigrants has led to a heightened sense of ethnic identity that not only challenges white hegemony but also distinguishes them from African Americans, producing new ethnic blocs of Latinos, Asians, and others. As Oboler (1995) points out, the adoption of a common name is inseparable from the process of political mobilization but in itself demands a level of homogenization that borders on essentialism.

Latinos, as the fastest growing minority in the United States, have used language as a primary tool for unifying such disparate elements as Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, and more recently arrived Dominicans, Cubans, Salvadorans, Peruvians, and others (Flores and Yudice, 1993). Race is not a unifying factor because of the different racial constructions of these groups and their need to differentiate themselves from African Americans, with whom conflicts as well as critical alliances abound. Nuyorican language, literature, music, and political process borrow heavily from the African American experience, resulting in a new blend of language and popular culture that some Puerto Ricans reject as degrading (Seda Bonilla, 1970). This double rejection—both by the homeland and by U.S. mainstream culture—has contributed to increasing racial consciousness among Nuyoricans and other Puerto Rican migrants and to increased political awareness of their Afro-Caribbean heritage (Flores and Yudice, 1993: 188). Nuyoricans reject assimilation as well as “uncritical cultural preservation” by asserting a new hybrid culture with marked Afro-Caribbean roots, just as they reject the dominant racial categorization by classifying themselves as “others.”

The way in which racial identity may be redefined as a result of immigration is analyzed by Duany in his essay comparing Dominicans in New York and Puerto Rico. The fiction of seeing Dominican *indios* or mulattos as nonblacks cannot be maintained in New York, where Dominican mulattos are seen as black and are often experiencing racial consciousness for the first time. Even in Puerto Rico, which tends to blur distinctions between mulattos and whites, Dominicans are conflated with blacks because of their poverty and illegal status, again demonstrating how cultural and class characteristics as well as phenotype determine Latin American racial constructions. While based largely on socioeconomic competition, racism against Dominicans in Puerto Rico (and conflict between Dominicans and Puerto Ricans in New York City) again demonstrates the inferiority associated with blackness in *mestizaje* as well as the fragility of Latino unity.

Generational change is also important because of the continued identification of first-generation migrants with their home country. Foner shows in this issue that even black West Indians are likely to cling to their ethnic identification as a way of distinguishing themselves from African Americans

because of their low status in the United States. However, with the growth of a second generation, which is already full blown among West Indians and Puerto Ricans and is beginning among Dominicans, racial consciousness may increase through a process that Portes (1994) has called segmented assimilation. Upwardly mobile second-generation migrants may attempt to maintain their specific national ethnic identity, but many second-generation migrants who are dark skinned and of lower socioeconomic status identify with African Americans, imitating their hairstyles, clothing, music, and language and adopting their oppositional lifestyle. Thus, class as well as skin color plays a part in migrants' ethnic and racial identity. Portes's data, although not correlated with race, suggest a growing bifurcation among second-generation Latino and West Indian migrants marked by class, cultural, and racial differences, similar to a process occurring even earlier among Puerto Ricans (Safa, 1981). It would seem that privileged lighter-skinned migrants may be re-creating the mulatto escape hatch described by Degler (1971) and that this concept may be of growing importance among migrants here, as it loses validity in Brazil.

Skidmore (1993) and Winant (1994: 164) suggest that the growth of racial consciousness in Latin America and the Caribbean and the demand for a recognized intermediate stratum in the United States imply that the two models of racial construction are converging. The rise of the black middle class and the continuing salience of skin color for stratification in the African American community (Keith and Herring, 1991) suggest that, even among African Americans, an intermediate stratum is stronger than ever. But, Harrison (1995: 59) argues that although the emergence of intermediate, buffer groups (chiefly among immigrants) in the United States may appear to reflect society's democratization of race, the same pattern does not readily apply to African Americans and other racial minorities, all of whom are still classified as nonwhite. Meanwhile, the growth of racial consciousness in Latin America and the Caribbean is leading some to question whitening as a strategy for upward mobility and changing the meaning of race there as well. Whether racial inequality and white superiority can be more successfully challenged through racial politicization and polarization than through racial integration remains to be seen.

NOTES

1. I use the term *African Americans* to refer to people of African descent in the United States and *Afro-Americans* to refer to the larger group of the African diaspora in the Americas.

2. *Mestizo* refers to a mixture of white and Indian, *mulatto* to a mixture of white and black, and *creole* to all the people of European descent born in the New World (cf. Scarano, 1996: 1398).

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