Black into White

Race and Nationality in
Brazilian Thought

With a Preface to the 1993 Edition and Bibliography

Thomas E. Skidmore

For my parents
who took a lively interest
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Every author who introduces the reprint of a monograph without
revisions faces the inevitable question: what changes would you
have made, if the publisher had not offered the irresistible option
of republication in the original form? Let me suggest a few an-
swers.

The hardest task for most intellectual historians is to tie together
the ideas in question, the articulators of those ideas, and the world
in which they lived and thought—including not only their socio-
economic context, but also the cultural institutions through which
they reached their audience and the nature of that audience.

Most difficult among these connections, and the one I feel I was
least successful in making, is the one between ideas, ideologies and
intellectual consensuses, on the one hand, and the socio-economic
reality that produced them on the other hand. I claim only to have
opened some avenues of inquiry, which clearly need further explo-
ration.

We still do not understand well, for example, the socio-economic
bases of the liberal, republican ideology (which included racist
assumptions) that triumphed in the 1880s. How was that ideol-
ogy—heterodox, complex, and inconsistent as it was—related to
the growing gap between the declining agrarian economies of the
Racial Realities and Racial Thought after Abolition

On May 13, 1888, Princess Isabel, acting for her ailing and absent father, signed the law that abolished all slavery and gave no compensation to the masters. This final triumph owed more than a little to the pragmatic flexibility of the slaveholders. Antônio Prado, one of the wealthiest planters in São Paulo, for example, supported unconditional liberation in May 1888, although he had opposed outright abolition as late as 1887. The prosperous planters of the south were already looking to Italian immigrants as their labor source; and with final abolition inevitable, the landowning classes were astute enough to realize that presiding over the last act would enable them to keep political control.

Nature and Origins of Brazil’s Multi-Racial Society

As the more perceptive men of property had foreseen, abolition did not bring the economic and social transformation expected by the more naïve abolitionists. Brazil was still a predominantly agrarian economy when abolition came. Its paternalistic system of social relations prevailed even in the urban areas. This system of social stratification gave the landowners (who were white—or occasionally light mulatto) a virtual monopoly of power—economic, social, and political. The lower strata, including poor whites as well as most free coloreds, were well accustomed to submission and deference. This hierarchy, in which social classification correlated highly with color, had developed as an integral part of the slave-based colonial economy. But by the time of final abolition it was not dependent upon slavery for its continuation.

Exactly when the dependence ceased is a question that remains to be researched. The important point here is that the majority of Brazilian planters, especially those in the prosperous coffee regions of Center-South Brazil, came to understand that abolition need not endanger their economic and social dominance. This analysis proved correct. The newly freed slaves moved into the paternalistic multi-racial social structure that had long since taught free men of color the habits of deference in their relationships with employers and other social superiors. It is within this context—termed “pre-industrial” by the French sociologist Roger Bastide—that race relations proceeded after abolition.

Nineteenth-century Brazil already exhibited a complex system of racial classification. It was pluralistic, or multi-racial, in contrast to the rigidly bi-racial system of North America. The half-million slaves who were freed in 1888 entered a complex social structure that included free men of color (of every shade). Skin color, hair texture, facial, and other visible physical characteristics were the determinants of the racial category into which a person would be placed by those he met. The apparent wealth or status of the person being observed, indicated by his clothes or his immediate social company, also influenced the observer’s reaction, as indicated by the Brazilian adage “money whitens”—although the instances observed usually applied to light mulattoes. The sum total of physical characteristics (the “phenotype”) was the determining factor, although perception of this might vary according to the region, area, and observer. Brazil had never, at least not since late colonial times, exhibited a rigidly bi-racial system. There was always a middle category (called
mulatto or *mestiço* of racial mixtures. The strict observation of color-based endogamy, which became sanctified by law during the 1890's in the United States, had never existed in Brazil.

The fact that Brazil had escaped the rigid application of the "descent rule"—by which ancestry, not physical appearance (unless one "passes" for white), determines racial classification—should not be overemphasized. Origin could still be thought important in Brazil. Upwardly mobile mixed bloods often took great pains to conceal their family background. And such behavior suggests that a mulatto, whose phenotypical features had given him his desired social access, felt insecure enough to believe his mobility would have been endangered by having his social status redefined because of his family origin. But the mulatto can be said to be the central figure in Brazil's "racial democracy," because he was granted entry—albeit limited—into the higher social establishment. The limits on his mobility depended upon his exact appearance (the more "Negroid," the less mobile) and the degree of cultural "whiteness" (education, manners, wealth) he was able to attain. The successful application of this multi-racial system required Brazilians to develop an intense sensitivity to racial categories and the nuances of their application. Evidence of the tension engendered by the resulting shifting network of color lines can be found in the voluminous Brazilian folklore about the "untrustworthy" mulatto.

What were the origins of this multi-racial system? It is especially important for those who know only a rigidly bi-racial society to appreciate how a racially pluralistic society could have emerged in Brazil.

Demographic ratios offer one clue. Brazil already had a large number of freemen of color before final abolition. Slaves probably outnumbered freemen (white and colored) in Brazil in the seventeenth century; and whites were never in a majority anywhere in Brazil, until immigration markedly altered the racial balance in several states of the South and Center-South. The free colored population had apparently grown very rapidly in the

### TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region*</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Slave Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1819</td>
<td>1872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>143,251</td>
<td>332,847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>1,112,703</td>
<td>3,082,701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>1,807,638</td>
<td>4,735,427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>433,976</td>
<td>1,558,691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center-West</td>
<td>100,564</td>
<td>220,812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,598,132</td>
<td>9,930,478</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Provinces included in each region are as follows: North: Amazonas, Pará; Northeast: Maranhão, Piauí, Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Alagoas; East: Sergipe, Bahia, Espírito Santo, Rio de Janeiro, Córte (City of Rio de Janeiro, now state of Guanabara), Minas Gerais; South: São Paulo, Paraná, Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul; Center-West: Goiás, Mato Grosso.


nineteenth century. In 1819 the total population of approximately 3.6 million was slightly under one-third slave (see Table 1), probably only about 10-15 per cent of the total population being free colored. During the intervening half-century the free colored population grew to 42 per cent of the total population, while the slaves dwindled to less than 16 per cent. And by 1872 there were almost three times as many free as slave among the colored population.
The existence of this large free class of color created models for free colored existence. By the time of final abolition Brazil had already had long experience with millions of free colored; and it had had an even longer tradition stretching into earlier centuries of upward mobility by a small number of free colored. There were also established patterns of movement from slavery to freedom. It is plausible that a long-standing shortage of skilled and semi-skilled white labor in colonial Brazil forced the European colonizers to legitimize the creation of a category of free men of color who could perform these tasks. The same process probably continued into the nineteenth century.

Differential fertility was a second factor at work in helping to create the multi-racial system. The rate at which different racial groups replace themselves obviously has great influence on the pattern of race relations—rapidly increasing groups becoming a progressively larger share of the total than those that are dying out. The slave population in the United States, for example, grew at a relatively rapid rate during the nineteenth century. Census figures showed that it increased at an average rate of about 23 per cent each decade between 1830 and 1860; and since the slave trade in the United States had ended in 1808, the increase could be accounted for only by a net natural increase among the existing slave population.

In Brazil, however, the trend had apparently been just the opposite, at least before the end of the slave trade in 1850. Such a phenomenon was apparently common in those slave economies that continued to depend upon the slave trade—where the low fertility rates of slaves have been traced to distorted sex ratios (sharp excess of men over women) and high rates of morbidity and mortality. Yet one would have expected these factors to disappear in Brazil after the end of the slave trade in 1850, with the native-born blacks exhibiting a fertility ratio similar to the general population, as indeed occurred in the United States.

Such did not turn out to be the case. Even allowing for the inaccuracies inherent in the Brazilian data (such as classifying mixed-blood children differently from their mothers), demographers have concluded that the black population reproduced at a slower rate after abolition than the mulatto and the white. Spot checks suggest that this trend (considering here free blacks, not slaves) can be traced back at least to the early nineteenth century. Parenthetically, one may note that this lower fertility rate for blacks apparently contributed significantly to the "whitening" process, whose promotion became the heart of the Brazilian racial ideal that will be described below. The causes of this low fertility rate remain a matter for conjecture. One of the likeliest hypotheses is the disadvantage in mating encountered by black women.

The relative absence of sectionalism in Brazil was another factor that helped produce a multi-racial system. Slavery became a regional institution in the United States, whereas it was truly national in Brazil (see Table 1). The economic center of Brazil shifted away from the sugar-producing Northeast as a result of the gold and diamond booms of the Center-South in the eighteenth century, then continued southward with the coffee boom of the nineteenth century. As a result, by the nineteenth century every major geographical region had a significant percentage of slaves among its total population. In 1819, according to one unofficial estimate, no region had less than 27 per cent slave out of its total population (see Table 1).

By the time the abolitionist campaign began, the national slave population was concentrated—from the standpoint of absolute numbers—in the three major coffee-growing provinces of São Paulo, Minas Gerais, and Rio de Janeiro. But seen as a percentage of the over-all population within each region, slaves continued to be distributed throughout the Empire at a remarkably uniform rate. In 1872, when slaves made up 15.2 per cent of the national population, no region had 7.8 per cent of its total population still in slavery, and the highest ratio was only 19.5 per cent (see Table 1). Although several provinces did manage to achieve total abolition four years before the final national
law of 1888, race relations did not become the plaything of regional politics. No province could claim that its economic interests or its social structure had been undermined by the imposition of force from another region of the country. Obviously there must have been regional variations in race relations during the eighty years since abolition. The evidence to date, however, does not show the variations to be great enough to prevent our assuming a high degree of similarity over time and space in Brazil—at least for purposes of studying racial thought since 1870.19

The final fact is that the free colored played an important role long before total abolition in Brazil.20 Free coloreds had succeeded in gaining a considerable occupational mobility—entry into skilled occupations and even occasionally prominent positions as artists, politicians, and writers—while slavery was still dominant throughout the country. These economic and social opportunities enjoyed by free coloreds furnish proof that the multi-racial pattern of racial categorization was well established before final abolition.

Although this pluralistic scale of social classification had given Brazil a flexibility notably lacking in some other ex-slave societies such as the United States, it is essential to realize that the multi-racial society nevertheless rested on implicitly racist assumptions. The "caucasian" was considered to be the natural and inevitable summit of the social pyramid. The white European represented the ideal "somatic norm image"—the phrase coined by H. Hoetink to designate the most socially prized physical characteristics. Brazilians generally regarded whiter as better, which led naturally to an ideal of "whitening," articulated in both elitist writings and popular folklore.22

Interestingly enough, the ideal seems to have been realized in practice, as can be seen in Figure 2.1. There was a rapid increase in the "white" population of Brazil between 1890 and 1950. As defined by the official census, the percentage of whites grew from 44 per cent in 1890 to 62 per cent in 1950. The concomitant decline in the colored population was sharpest in the mulatto cate-

![Figure 2.1: Brazilian Population by Color, 1872-1950](source: Brazil, Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, Conselho Nacional de Estatística, O Brasil em Números (Rio de Janeiro, 1966), p. 25.)

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**Figure 2.1**

*Brazilian Population by Color, 1872-1950*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Mixed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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...
Second, there is empirical evidence in the census figures for the city of São Paulo (where, by the 1920's, observers were documenting a "Negro deficit") to support the conclusion that the black population had a low rate of net natural increase. This low reproduction rate can be accounted for by several factors. The slave imports (ending in 1850—although some slaves arrived as late as 1852) were largely male; and this, as long as it lasted, created a continuing sexual imbalance and a resulting low birth rate in the colored population. The miserable living conditions of most of the colored population must have further depressed the survival rate of their children—confirmed in the vital statistics for the city of São Paulo.24

There is a final explanation for the whitening effect: the way in which miscegenation occurred. If Gilberto Freyre's portrait is to be believed—and there is much corroboration from other sources—we may assume that white males must have fathered many mixed bloods, thereby increasing the proportion of lighter skinned offspring in the next generation. The ideal of whitening, as well as the traditionalistic social system, helped to prevent dark-skinned men from being such active progenitors because females, wherever possible, had powerful conditioning to choose lighter partners than themselves. In short, the system of sexual exploitation which gave upper-class (indeed, even lower-class) white men sexual license, helped to make the social reality conform increasingly to the ideal of "whitening."25

 Brazilians found this apparent lightening of the population reassuring, and their racial ideology was thus reinforced. Since miscegenation had worked to promote the declared goal, white genes "must be" stronger. Furthermore, during the high period of racist thought—1880 to 1920—the "whitening" ideology gained scientific legitimacy, because racist doctrines came to be interpreted by Brazilians as supporting the view that the "superior" white race would prevail in the process of racial amalgamation.

The immediate aftermath of abolition had seemed to confirm the die-hard slavocrats' prediction that abolition would bring social disruption.26 Thousands of slaves left their plantations and sank into subsistence agriculture wherever they could find land on which to squat, although soon many were eager to rejoin the rural work force and sought out their former masters. Others migrated to the cities, which were ill-prepared to receive an influx of unskilled labor. Some joined street gangs, whose members (capoeiristas) practiced a form of physical assault based on kicking, and terrorized the cities. Derived from Africa, it made them more than a match for any street opponent who was not heavily armed. This immediate threat to "law and order" confirmed the worst fears of many members of the elite, who found it less uncomfortable to worry about urban criminals than the social consequences of abolition. It was less the actual number of freedmen who left the countryside than the dramatization of the process that influenced public policy. Police forces were increased, and the capoeira gangs became the special target of repressive penalties in the new Penal Code of 1890, including expulsion from the country. Such violence reinforced the image of the black as a backward, anti-social element, thus giving the elite a further incentive to work for a whiter Brazil.

The unskilled who went to the cities to look for work found few opportunities. In the south they had to compete with immigrants, who were often much better equipped to survive in the urban capitalistic world. In the north, on the other hand, there were few job opportunities for anyone owing to the lagging economy. Thus the lower-class Brazilian, which included the vast majority of those dark in color, found it very difficult to rise economically. This failure confirmed the elite's conception of him as a drag on national development.

Although Brazilians often talked of their lack of racial prejudice, there were reports in the Brazilian press of alleged discrimination against blacks or dark mulattoes. The incidents involved those official Brazilian institutions likely to have contact with foreigners. The Correio da Manhã complained in 1904 that blacks were excluded from serving as guards at the Teatro Lírico, a fa-
The nineteenth century had later attempts to screen naval crews headed for the United
States.30 This unpleasant incident, the Navy supposedly screened black sailors out of the
crew which manned the ship where some of its visiting Argentine General Roca was entertained.29
The Navy had earlier experienced racial rebuffs in the United States: In 1905 a Brazilian cruiser anchored in
Norfolk, Virginia, where some of its officers were refused lodging on the grounds that they were Negro—especially
galling in view of the Navy's apparent attempt to keep the officer corps white. Ambassador Joaquin Nabuco made vigorous protests. This unpleasant contretemps in Norfolk may have influenced the later attempts to screen naval crews headed for the United States.30

VARIETIES OF RACIST THEORY FROM ABROAD

The nineteenth century had witnessed two contradictory movements in thinking about race. On the one hand, abolitionist movements triumphed throughout the North Atlantic world and finally even in the South Atlantic. Yet at the very time that slavery was receding under the impact of economic change and moral pressure, European thinkers were articulating systematic theories of innate racial differences. The era that produced Wilberforce also spawned Gobineau. Racism, which has been defined as "a rationalized pseudo-scientific theory positing the innate and permanent inferiority of nonwhites," became a formidable theory.31 Such a systematic body of racist thought did not yet exist in the Europe of 1800. By 1860, however, racist theories had achieved the blessing of scientific theory and the full acceptance of cultural and political leaders in the United States and Europe. Over the course of the century, three principal schools of racist theory emerged.32

One was the ethnological-biological school, which gained its first systematic formulation in the United States of the 1840's and 1850's.33 This "American school of ethnology" argued that human races had been created in the form of different species, a theory known as polygeny. The ethnographers Samuel Morton, Josiah Nott, and George Glidden published tomes of "evidence" (skull measurements of Egyptian mummies, etc.) to prove that the human races had always exhibited physical differences. They offered, in effect, a new version of the long-standing polygenist hypothesis about human creation. The basis of their argument was that the assumed inferiority of the Indian and Negro races could be correlated with their physical differences from whites; and that these differences were a direct result of their creation as separate species.34 The theory gained important support from Louis Agassiz, the eminent Swiss-born zoologist at Harvard who became the most famous scientific supporter of polygeny in America. Agassiz believed that the creation of separate species among animals had been required by the differing "zoological provinces" on earth, leading to the implication that the distinct species (or races) of genus homo could be attributed to the distinct climatic regions where they dwelled. Since the initial assumptions labeled the white race as superior in mental and social qualities (such as "civilization building"), white superiority was thus given scientific basis as fact.
The American school's polygenist hypothesis was soon laid to rest by Darwinian theory. But the weight of scientific evidence they compiled, indicating permanent physical—and, by implication, mental differences—proved very lasting. For the next fifty years scientists continued to produce elaborate tables of cranial measurements, skeletal structure, and disease histories, broken down by what were assumed to be scientifically definable "races." Virtually all such attempts rested on the assumption that physical differences could somehow "prove" the existence of other differences—what later would be termed "cultural." The popularizers of the ethnological-biological school were using the instruments of a new science—physical anthropology—to give a scientific basis to pre-existing prejudices about the social behavior of non-whites, as were other researchers who purported to find evidence for black mental inferiority in the results of their IQ tests. The ethnological-biological school, in short, offered a scientific rationale for the subjugation of non-whites (whether in legal servitude or not soon became immaterial).

Although the ethnological-biological version of racist thought received its earliest systematic formulation in the United States, it soon spread to England and Europe, where it gained powerful adherents; and it was primarily by way of these European converts that it reached Brazil. The small number of ethnographers and anthropologists active in Brazil during the years between 1870 and 1914 were principally in contact with French and German scientists. But one leading representative of the "American School" did have a direct influence in Brazil—Louis Agassiz. His Journey in Brazil was widely quoted in Brazil and gave much currency among the elite to the ideas of inherent racial differences and mulatto "degeneracy."

A second body of racist thought to emerge in the United States and Europe proved equally influential in Brazil. It was the historical school (well represented by Gobineau—discussed above). These thinkers also started with the assumption that sharply differing human races could be distinguished, with the white race permanently and inherently superior. But they relied primarily upon historical evidence, taking for granted that permanent physical differences had been established by the ethnographers and anatomists. Thomas Arnold, Robert Knox, and Thomas Carlyle in England, for example, interpreted history as the successive triumphs of the creative races, of which the Anglo-Saxon was pre-eminent. Gobineau and lesser known proponents of the historical school helped spread the message in Europe that race was the central factor in history.

The historical approach to racism received a further nuance in the cult of the Aryan. Propounded by such prophets as Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Aryanism became virtual dogma in Germany after the Franco-Prussian war (1870-71). Its unverifiability gave the myth a flexibility that made it easily adaptable also to England, where a belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority became the counterpart to Aryanism. This theory—that the Aryan (or Anglo-Saxon) had reached the highest level of civilization and was therefore destined, by nature and history, to gain increasing control over the world—was supported by elaborate historical monographs. Apparent exceptions to the view that non-Aryans had never produced a culture worthy of the name were accounted for by the most intricate explanations of probable Aryan participation. It need hardly be added that the definition of "Aryan" remained elusive, beginning as a linguistic category but soon being understood to mean "white native Northern European." It was also easily translatable as "Nordic," which some of its adherents preferred.

The third school of racist thought was Social Darwinism. Although it differed importantly from the earlier ethnographical-biological school described above, the two theories in the end proved reconcilable. On scientific grounds, Darwin's thesis could be accepted only by discarding the polygenist hypothesis, because Darwin argued for an evolutionary process that, by definition, began with a single species.

Darwinism could, however, be used by the polygenist racists
if they modified their theory. If evolution toward higher forms of natural life resulted from the “survival of the fittest” in a competition of varying species and varieties, it was logical to assume that different human races had gone through a similar process. In the historical process the “higher” races had been proved to predominate, making the “lower” races doomed to dwindle and disappear. Agassiz himself never accepted Darwinian theory, but most other proponents of the ethnological-biological school did so relatively quickly. As a careful student of American racism-thinking notes, “the essence of polygenist thinking about race was preserved in a Darwinian framework.” Social Darwinists described blacks as an “incipient species,” making it possible to continue citing all the evidence—from comparative anatomy, phrenology, physiology, and historical ethnography—that had previously been offered in support of the polygenist hypothesis, while at the same time providing a new scientific respectability for racist theory.

Taken together, these three schools of racist thought influenced all Brazilians who bothered to think seriously about race. Brazil lay vulnerable, like the rest of Latin America, to racist doctrines from abroad. It could hardly have been otherwise, since these doctrines were a vital part of the North Atlantic civilization so fervently and uncritically admired by most Latin American intellectuals before 1914. The more that Brazilians read the latest ideas from Europe the more they heard about the inferiority of the Negro and Indian. This was especially true at the turn of the century when the Brazilian preference for French culture led them directly to popular racist writers such as Gustave Le Bon and Vacher de Lapouge.

The theory of Aryan superiority, at least in good part, was widely accepted as historical fact by the Brazilian elite between 1888 and 1914. Some theories of “Aryanism” were vague enough to include virtually all Europeans as “Aryans,” although the subtleties of the Nordic versus Celtic distinction were awkward for a Brazilian. The vogue of northern European superiority led some Brazilian writers to endorse the theory of “Latin degeneracy”—reflected in the frequent descriptions of the Portuguese as the least progressive Europeans, given to improvidence, immorality, and indolence. This denigration of the Iberian appealed to nationalists who held strong anti-Portuguese feelings, but proved inconvenient for nationalists who also feared “Anglo-Saxon” intervention or domination. Most often, however, the latter did not bother to disown the Aryan theory, but simply pleaded with their countrymen to wake up to the Darwinian struggle being imposed by American or northern European incursions, and represented by large investments or immigrant colonies. The application of the Aryan theory to the African caused no trouble, however, because in this context “Aryan” could be readily translated into “white.” Brazilians readily repeated the charge that the Negro had never built any great civilization, citing English and European reports of the “primitive” African social structures with which white colonial governors had to cope.

Social Darwinist works, in particular, had great influence in Brazil. Virtually every Brazilian social thinker before 1914 grappled with Social Darwinism. One finds constant citations of such figures as Spencer, Le Bon, Lapouge, and Ingenieros (the Argentine racist philosopher). The Brazilians usually accepted Social Darwinism in principle, trying only to work out its implications for their national situation. But everywhere they turned, Brazilians found the prestige of “civilized” culture and science arrayed against the African. Like the dinosaur, the Negro was doomed to extinction, or at least domination, by the “stronger” and more “civilized” white races. How could a mere Brazilian argue with evolution?

**Racist Theory in Brazil**

Brazilians did not argue with evolution. Their social reality, however, was different enough from North America—let alone...
Europe—to force them to find some way to make it consistent with the theories being preached. Brazil was already a multi-racial society. Unlike the United States, there was no institutionalized color bar. Also unlike the United States, instead of two castes (white and non-white), there was a third social caste well recognized in Brazil—the mulatto.

The free man of color in Brazil was already establishing a clear place in society during the late eighteenth century, while their counterparts in the United States were facing the systematically discriminatory system (laws in the South, customs in the North) that effectively prevented their entering the established economic or social order.41 As a result, there was no tradition in Brazil of suppressing non-whites within a rigidly bi-racial caste system, and racist thought could not therefore be used to buttress such a system.

This contrast is nowhere clearer than in attitudes toward miscegenation. Americans and northern Europeans found racial intermarriage to be anathema. Although the practical question hardly arose for Europeans, for Americans it was an issue of deep significance. Americans could not avoid the historical reality that miscegenation had frequently occurred under slavery. But they could draw comfort from the fact that the mulatto offspring were rigidly relegated to the “Negro” caste. These mixed bloods were then regarded as lost to the superior race—a process which, if miscegenation were practiced on any large scale, could mean a serious threat to the numerical dominance of the “superior” race. The resulting fear of “mongrelization” was a direct result of this possibility, and was an important part of the profound psychosocial fear in the American attitude toward racial cross-breeding.42

At their most extreme, polygenists had argued that mulattoes must be sterile, since the laws of zoology taught that any animal produced by the union of parents of different species would be unable to bear offspring.43 Yet human “mixed bloods” were obviously not infertile. Since even the most fervent polygenist could hardly ignore the evidence of mulatto fertility, he usually fell back on arguing that after a single generation one of the original “pure” races would predominate, thereby eliminating the cross-strain. Such theories continued to be advanced in England and the United States in the 1850’s and 1860’s, despite abundantly contradictory evidence from the West Indies and elsewhere.44

The polygenists’ theory of mulatto infertility (or later-generation infertility) gained few adherents in Brazil. Perhaps it was so clearly contradicted by social reality that it proved impossible to assimilate. Certainly it struck too close to home. It was one thing to claim that whites (or Aryans) were superior and blacks inferior, but quite another to add that any mixture of the two was inherently pernicious. “Pure” white Europeans and North Americans could contemplate miscegenation as a problem of no immediate relevance to their societies—although to make such an attitude plausible Americans had to enforce, by legal segregation, a two-caste social structure. Brazilians had no such choice. Their society was already multi-racial, and the middle caste was precisely the social category for whom the flexibility of Brazilian racial attitudes was most important. To have accepted the description of it as “degenerate” or infertile would have threatened an established and accepted feature of Brazilian society. It would also have cast a shadow over more than a few members of the elite itself. In fact, miscegenation did not arouse the instinctive opposition of the white elite in Brazil. On the contrary, it was a well-recognized (and tacitly condoned) process by which a few mixed bloods (almost invariably light mulattoes) had risen to the top of the social and political hierarchy.

Silvio Romero’s writing in this period reflects well the inconsistencies that the juxtaposition of domestic mores and imported theory made hard to avoid. During the late Empire, he had been one of the first to argue for recognizing Brazil as the product of miscegenation. He had even predicted a happy outcome for its future ethnic evolution. In 1904 he rejected a description of Brazil by Teófilo Braga, the Portuguese intellectual and political
leader, whom he thought to have underestimated the role of the
mestiço. Yet in 1906 he classified himself as believing, along with
Gobineau, Ammon, Lapouge, and Chamberlain, that the blond
dolichocephalic peoples of northern Europe were superior to
other men. His formula for improving Brazil was to increase the
influx of Germans, who were to be spread throughout the coun-
try so that they could absorb Brazilian culture and accept the au-
thority of the Brazilian government. In 1912 he was still praise-
ing Gobineau for his “admirable, genius-like vision” and the
“wise words that merit every consideration,” and (in a violent
polemic) was carried away to the point of endorsing an extreme
version of the theory of mulatto degeneracy. He claimed that
“the most competent naturalists” had “demonstrated that races
which were too different seldom tend to cohabit, and, when they
do, they either fail to breed, or produce infertile bastards after
the second or third generation.” He included extensive citations
from Lapouge’s account of the biological corruption of the “primiti-
ve Gaulic aristocracy” by such Latin intrusions as the armies
of Julius Caesar.

It is not surprising that little rigorous analysis of racial theory
came from Brazil itself in this period. There were no higher fac-
culties except law, medicine, and engineering, and without a uni-
versity structure it was difficult for would-be scientists to find a
base of operations. (This relative absence of organized social sci-
cence was common throughout Latin America before World
War I, but Brazil was especially backward in organizing univer-
sities.)

Physical anthropology was one of the earlier recognized disci-
plines, in part due to the stimulus of a series of important expe-
ditions by foreign scientists, frequently German. In 1876 a labo-
atory of experimental physiology was founded in connection
with the Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro. The original direc-
tor, Ladislau Neto, organized a “Brazilian Anthropological Ex-
position” in 1882, a first for his country. He and the colleague
who succeeded him as director in 1895, João Batista de Lacerda,
both concentrated on the Indian, using the latest European tech-
niques of cranial measurement. But the museum lacked the funds
for field expeditions. Such trips continued to be the virtual mo-
poly of foreign visitors, especially Germans and Scandinavians,
whose published works furnished important ethnographical and
linguistic information. Another center of physical anthropology
appeared when the Museu Paulista was founded in 1893. Its
founder and first director was Herman von Ihering, an immigrant
German zoologist. The limited research there also centered ex-
clusively upon the Indian, and a similar situation prevailed at
the Museu Paraense, located at the Amazon port city of Belém
and founded by an immigrant Swiss, Emílio Goeldi, in 1885.

Together the three museums were the only centers devoted to
anthropological research and writing. All suffered from inade-
quate budgets. Equally important for the history of racial
thought, none had devoted any attention to the African in Brazil.
The “primitive” peoples studied were the remote Indian tribes.
The African “immigrant” and his Afro-American progeny aroused
no scientific interest among their staffs.

The first scientifically respectable ethnographic study of the
Afro-Brazilian by a Brazilian came not from the museums but
from a medical professor at the prestigious faculty of Bahia. In
the early 1890’s Nina Rodrigues, a young mulatto doctor, won
a chair there. By the end of the decade he had distinguished
himself as the pioneer in two fields: Afro-Brazilian ethnology and
legal medicine. Neither was recognized as a field of inquiry
when he began, but his efforts helped lay the foundations in Bra-
Zion both for. Although he died in 1906 at the age of forty-four, he
had already published many scientific papers as well as founding

* Save for Melo Moraes Filho at the Museu Nacional, who performed
pioneering work in collecting Afro-Brazilian folklore (Museu Nacional, João
Bastista de Lacerda: Conmemoração do centenário de nascimento, 1846-1946,
Rio de Janeiro, 1951, 14-15). The principal publication from Melo Moraes
Filho’s work was [Alexandre Jose de] Melo Moraes Filho, Festas e tradições
populares do Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, 1901.
the Revista Médico-Legal. He was in close contact with like-minded researchers abroad and enjoyed membership in such groups as the Médico-Legal Society of New York and the Société Médico-Psychologique de Paris. By the time of his death he had become a highly respected figure in Brazilian scientific circles.50

Nina Rodrigues, then, was the first researcher to study African influence systematically. He attempted a careful cataloguing of the precise African origins of the slaves brought to Brazil, and he tried, without the advantage of any first-hand knowledge of Africa, to identify the primary linguistic groups. He collected photographs and drawings of Brazilian objects d'art of African origin, and was also engrossed in the question of how the Africans had been assimilated in their new home. Throughout his work he stressed the importance of distinguishing clearly among major regions of Brazil when discussing the assimilation of the African.

Rodrigues and his work will be dealt with in some detail below because his scientific commitment led him, although he was a mulatto himself, into being the most prestigious doctrinaire Brazilian racist of his era. He was widely read by those seriously interested in race, and he gained great distinction; but his views remained outside the Brazilian mainstream. While few of his Brazilian contemporaries could deny concern over what Rodrigues called “this sphinx in our future—the ‘Negro problem’ in Brazil,” few were in danger of adopting racial ideas as systematically doctrinaire as his.51

Rodrigues explained to his readers that the inferiority of the African had been established beyond scientific doubt. In 1894 he dismissed the “sentimental” notion that a “representative of the inferior races” could attain in intelligence “the elevated level attained by the superior races” as “hopelessly condemned in the face of modern scientific knowledge.”52 By 1905 he was willing to grant that scientists could not agree on whether Negro inferiority was inherent or transitory. Even if the transitory hypothesis were true in theory, he concluded, European civilization was progressing too fast for it to be tested in practice.54

Rodrigues did not hesitate to follow the implications of his racial doctrines, saying (one feels with a certain relish) that his personal feelings had nothing to do with scientific theory—particularly since he had a “lively sympathy” for the Brazilian Negro.55 At the same time as his pioneering ethnographical research was generating data based on oral testimony (primarily from Bahia), he was applying the theory of racial inferiority directly to his work in legal medicine—voicing the view, with few apologies, that inherent racial characteristics affected social behavior and should therefore be taken into account by lawmakers and police authorities. In 1894 he published a book proposing that the penal responsibility of the “inferior races” could not be equated to that of the “civilized white races.” Although a few individuals might prove exceptions, especially mixed bloods, they always had the potential to regress. He therefore recommended that Negroes (by which he meant blacks) and Indians be judged to have only “attenuated responsibility,” which would apparently be a rather child-like status. Mixed bloods, not surprisingly, presented him with a problem. He got around it by dividing them into three subgroups—(a) the superior type (fully responsible, presumably including Rodrigues himself); (b) the degenerates (some partially responsible; the rest totally irresponsible); and (c) the socially unstable types who, like blacks and Indians, would bear only “attenuated responsibility.”56 Nowhere did Rodrigues explain how these graduated categories were to operate, or who was to decide the racial classification of any individual citizen. In fact, the very subdivision of categories for the mixed blood illustrated their absurdity, because the middle “castes” included precisely those Brazilians for whom the language or racial categories was most elastic. One suspects that racial distinctions might well have depended on the desire of the relevant officials to punish the accused.

In any case, Rodrigues produced a full-blown theoretical justi-
lication for considering the ex-slaves to be incapable of "civilized" behavior. Even worse, he assumed away any possible rights of the inferior: "Aryan civilization is represented in Brazil by a small minority of the white race, which in turn has the task of defending it, not only against anti-social acts—crimes—by its own members, but also against the anti-social acts of inferior races, whether they be true crimes as defined by these races or manifestations of the conflict—the struggle for existence between the superior civilization of the white race and the crude civilization of the conquered or subjugated races." Not a word about the right of the "inferiors" to be protected from anti-social acts by their superiors. Here was a vision of Brazilian society which was authentically racist—human beings were to be judged according to their supposed racial classification. Rodrigues had gone farther in his acceptance of foreign racist theories than most other members of the Brazilian elite. Significantly, however, his proposal had no influence on those responsible for the revision of Brazil's penal code in 1890. And he lamented this lack of responsiveness from legal authorities and legislators.

Genetics was not yet a well-developed science before Rodrigues' death in 1906, and respected scientists still argued over whether cross-breeding among different "races" produced "vigorous hybrids" or physical degenerates. Rodrigues leaned toward the latter position. He cited Agassiz as an authority on miscegenation, thereby associating himself with the most distinguished North American theorist of mulatto degeneracy. Elsewhere he cited José Verissimo's description of "degraded" *mestiços* in the Amazon valley, and Ladislau Neto (Brazilian ethnographer and Director of the Museu Nacional until 1893) on the supposed "atavism" of mixed bloods. Rodrigues did not go as far as Agassiz in condemning the mixed blood, but he flatly contradicted the commonly held view that miscegenation had helped the white race to adapt and survive in tropical northern Brazil. Negro influence, he said, would "forever constitute one of the causes of our inferiority as a people", and nothing could halt the "elimination of white blood" in that region. Miscegenation had merely slowed it down. Rodrigues particularly opposed the "unjustifiably" optimistic view of most Brazilians toward the *mestiço's" social value," writing a series of technical papers on such topics as "Pathological Anthropology: The Mestiços" (1890), "Miscegenation, Degeneracy, and Crime" (1898), and "Physical and Mental Degeneracy Among Mixed Bloods in Warm Lands" (in progress at the time of his death). This, of course, put him in opposition to the commonly accepted belief among the elite—that miscegenation would sooner or later lead to a white Brazil:

I don't believe in the ethnic unity or quasi ethnic unity of the Brazilian population, either now or in the future, as accepted by Dr. Silvio Romero. I don't believe in the future spread of the Luso-African *mestiço* throughout the country. I consider it improbable that the white race will succeed in imposing itself as the predominant type in the entire Brazilian population.

Rodrigues worried especially about the north of Brazil. Although the whitening process might in fact succeed in southern (temperate) Brazil, he thought the tropical north was doomed—leading him to fear the possibility of a Brazil racially divided between the white south and the *mestiço* north. Interestingly enough, he turned to climatic determinism to clinch the point. "Tropical" climes, he said, were "inhospitable to the white." A posthumous paper, although characterizing the Portuguese as "routinized and unprogressive," considered two factors more important in Brazil's development. One was the "strong barrier to the white" posed by the tropical climate; the other was the "vast degree of miscegenation which, by delivering the country to the *mestiços*, deprived it for a long period of the supreme direction of the white race. And the latter was the guarantee of civilization in the United States."

It is interesting to note that, despite his acceptance of racist theory, Rodrigues thought it very important to distinguish Brazil's ethnic situation from that of the United States. Even in the
sory history began with colonization by the Portuguese, "a people in decline."

This was a view often stated by intellectuals. In 1914, for example, a writer using the pseudonym of "João Grave" declared that "the Latin race, creator of civilizations and guide to humanity, felt exhausted of its vital fluid."\textsuperscript{65} Alcides Bezerra, a minor literary critic, explained that he believed in the "superiority of northern men over the Latin races when it comes to practical abilities." The "Aryan race" was the "lord and master of the world by virtue of its enviable spiritual qualities," and therefore, "modern civilization has to model itself after the English and North American examples."\textsuperscript{66}

To resume Soares' portrayal, events worsened as the colonizers mixed with the "indolent though shrewd" natives, then mixing further "with those unfortunate arrivals from Africa . . . descendants of the Negro race, bereft of intelligence or character, like all the sons of uncivilized Ethiopia." He quoted Le Bon on the "perpetual anarchy" that inevitably arises in countries afflicted with "an excessive number of mixed bloods." (Le Bon, in turn, had cited Agassiz on the "degeneracy produced by the miscegenation which has taken place more extensively in this country than in any other.")\textsuperscript{67} But, said Soares, "the Brazilian character is not completely lost" if his countrymen would adopt the system of American education, "which has elevated that country to the highest pinnacles." American schools were producing "the qualities of character we lack," qualities that made America a country where "there is no place for the weak." By copying these schools, Brazil might be able to govern "with an iron hand," which Le Bon had suggested as the only antidote for "the anarchy reigning in our country."\textsuperscript{68}

This contradiction in terms was typical and was followed by more. Soares noted that "the Negro race has never done anything in support of any idea—it exists in ignorance without energy and without a will." (Significantly, he did not describe these defects as inherent or irremediable.) Furthermore, he saw the "absorp-
tion of the Negro race by the white" to be "a great danger for the security of our country" because "the greater the number of mixed-bloods in a country the greater the degeneracy of the country's population"; and yet Soares condemned the "terrible humiliation" suffered by Negroes in America, "living under the constant threat of terror" or "ending up being lynched." Americans treated Negroes "as if they are not even human beings," when, in fact, "they are doubtlessly adaptable to all that country's advancements and to its astonishing civilization."69

After all this, Soares turns out to be endorsing the usual "whitening" ideal for Brazil, i.e., the man of color can be elevated—but only by a great investment of effort. The acculturation process, in his view, can transform the Negro element, if the "civilized" force were given enough time. They also must have enough leverage—that is, the number of people to be "whitened" culturally must not exceed the "civilizing" capacity of the "civilized." He did not hazard a guess as to the critical ratio.

"WHITENING," THE BRAZILIAN SOLUTION

The Brazilian theory of "whitening" has already been mentioned. Coming to be accepted by most of the Brazilian elite during the years between 1889 and 1914, it was a theory peculiar to Brazil. Seldom stated as a "scientific" formula and certainly never embraced in Europe or North America, it is worth explaining here in some detail.

The whitening thesis was based on the assumption of white superiority—sometimes muted by leaving open the question of how "innate" the inferiority might be, and using the euphemisms "more advanced" and "less advanced" races. But to this assumption were added two more. First, the black population was becoming progressively less numerous than the white for reasons which included a supposedly lower birth rate, higher incidence of disease, and social disorganization. Second, miscegenation was "naturally" producing a lighter population, in part because whiter genes were stronger and in part because people chose partners lighter than themselves. (White immigration, of course, would reinforce the resulting white predominance.)70

Obviously the optimistic conclusion to this racial analysis rested on another key assumption: that miscegenation did not inevitably produce "degenerates," but could forge a healthy mixed population growing steadily whiter, both culturally and physically. That assumption was given scientific blessing by the Director of the Museu Nacional, João Batista de Lacerda, who was the only Latin American to deliver a paper ("The Métis, or Half-Breeds of Brazil") at the First Universal Races Congress in London in 1911.71

In his paper, Lacerda first disposed of the theory that facts regarding hybridity in animals ("Galton's deductions") could be applied to humans. He then described the effects of the historical process of miscegenation between Africans and Europeans in Brazil (the Indian went unmentioned). His tone hardly has a modern ring. He pronounced mixed bloods as "obviously inferior to the blacks" as "agricultural laborers" and as having "little power to resist disease"; where their superiority lay, in his opinion, was that they were "physically and intellectually well above the level of the blacks." The whitening thesis was supported in the following manner:

Contrary to the opinion of many writers, the crossing of the black with the white does not generally produce offspring of an inferior intellectual quality; and if these half-breeds are not able to compete in other qualities with the stronger races of the Aryan stock, if they have not so pronounced an instinct of civilization as the latter, it is nonetheless certain that we cannot place the métis at the level of the really inferior races.

Having thus disposed, in his fashion, of the scientific case against mixed bloods, Lacerda then went on to support his argument with a description of the major role they had played in Brazilian history. Here his tone became less condescending. Their
influence, he said, had even increased as the “new regime [i.e., the Republic proclaimed in 1889] opened the door to all talent,” thus enabling “many able mulattos” to enter “the highest political offices” and the “highest branches of the administration.” Furthermore, interracial marriages (between mulattos and whites) “are no longer disdained as they formerly were, now that the high position of the mulatto and the proof of his moral qualities have led people to overlook the evident contrast of his physical characters, and his black origin is lost sight of in the approximation of his moral and intellectual qualities to those of the white.”

Lacerda even went so far as to assert that in Brazil the “children of métis have been found, in the third generation, to present all physical characters of the white race.” Some of them, he admitted, “retain a few traces of their black ancestry through the influence of atavism . . .” but “the influence of sexual selection . . . tends to neutralize that of atavism, and removes from the descendants of the métis all the characteristic features of the black race . . . In virtue of this process of ethnic reduction, it is logical to expect that in the course of another century the métis will have disappeared from Brazil. This will coincide with the parallel extinction of the black race in our midst.” The latter process had a special explanation. Since abolition the blacks had been “exposed to all kinds of destructive agencies and without sufficient resources to maintain themselves.” Now “scattered over the thinly populated districts,” they “tend to disappear from our territory.”

Martim Francisco, a prominent Republican politician and writer, agreed with Lacerda’s timetable. He wrote in his diary during a trip abroad in 1913 that although the Negro had been indispensable in Brazil’s agricultural growth the “caucasian blood” was “stronger” and therefore was now “dominating the Ethiopian. . . . It will win out within a century, and will later conquer the Indian.” For evidence he drew on observations in his home state: “In São Paulo, for example, thanks to the climate and a number of other anthropological factors, Negro blood disappears in the fifth generation.”72

Lacerda’s paper was criticized, however, by Brazilians who were incensed over his timetable—because his estimate of a century was too long! In 1912 he replied to these critics—showing, in fact, how little he really differed from them. He noted that the Haitian representative, “a dark Negro and an educated man,” had praised his paper, as had W. E. B. DuBois, a mestiço. Having thus established sympathy from members of those races doomed to extinction in Brazil, he then pleaded that it could hardly be a mistake to point out the existence of race mixture at home. He had been quoted out of context, he claimed, regarding the time span of a century for total whitening. Although his reply did not state that whites were already a majority, he implied as much. At the end of his pamphlet he triumphantly produced statistics furnished him by Edgar Roquette-Pinto, Professor of Anthropology at the Museu Nacional. Although the census of 1890 showed the population to be only 44 per cent white, Roquette Pinto’s figures for 1912 (unofficial) listed the white population as exactly 50 per cent. This, coincidentally, was the minimum figure Lacerda’s critics demanded. (There is no way to check accuracy of these figures, since the next census, taken in 1920, was not broken down by race.) Later, the 1940 census showed the white population to be 63 per cent of the national total. Using Roquette Pinto’s statistics further, Lacerda produced multi-colored bar graphs projecting Brazil’s racial composition up to the year 2012. During the intervening century the white population would supposedly rise to 80 per cent, while the Negro fell to zero, the mestiço to 3 per cent (from an estimated 28 per cent in 1912), and the Indian rose to 17 per cent (from an estimated 13 per cent in 1912).73

Brazilians were encouraged in their whitening ideology in this period by foreign visitors, such as Pierre Denis, who published in 1909 a widely read travel account of his stay in Brazil. He devoted a chapter to the “Negro populations,” characterizing them as “indolent” and “irregular in their work.” He found the “economic and moral inferiority of the Negro population in Brazil to be irrefutable.” Ravaged by alcoholism and a “total lack of hy-
giené,” they did not multiply “as their extreme fecundity would lead one to expect.” His conclusion must have reassured proponents of a whiter Brazil: “Doubtless it would be an exaggeration to predict their [the Negros’] imminent extinction. Nonetheless, it is probable that they are not growing at the same rate as the other elements in the Brazilian population. Their role in Brazil can only decline; they will never have decisive influence on the destiny of the country.”

His book was enthusiastically reviewed in Brazil by Tobias Monteiro, the prominent Republican journalist and former presidential aide. Monteiro reprinted Denis’ conclusion on the Negro almost verbatim, adding not a critical word. Since the reviewer had generally praised Denis for his accuracy and insight, it is logical to conclude that Monteiro shared the author’s view of the Brazilian Negro’s present and future.

Another foreign visitor who described the whitening process approvingly was the former American President Theodore Roosevelt, who had undertaken a scientific expedition with Colonel Rondon into the interior of Mato Grosso in 1913–14. Roosevelt wrote an enthusiastic article about the disappearance of the Brazilian negro in Outlook magazine in 1914, which was translated and published on the front page of Correio da Manhã, an influential Rio daily. He noted that:

In Brazil . . . the idea looked forward to is the disappearance of the Negro question through the disappearance of the Negro himself—that is, through his gradual absorption into the white race.

This does not mean that Brazilians are or will become the “mongrel” people that they have been asserted to be by certain writers, not only French and English, but American. The Brazilians are a white people, belonging to the Mediterranean race, and differing from the northern stocks only as such great and civilized old races as the Spaniards and Italians, with their splendid historic past, differ from these northern stocks. The evident Indian admixture has added a good, and not a bad, element. The very large European immigration of itself tends, decade by decade, to make the Negro blood a smaller element of the blood of the whole community. The Brazilian

of the future will be in blood more European than in the past, and he will differ in culture only as the American of the North differs.

On this issue at this time, Silvio Romero was once again in a minority. In his view, Lacerda’s paper was vulnerable because of its “optimism” in estimating only a century for the triple disappearance of the Negro, the Indian, and the mestiço. And he was contemptuous of Lacerda’s other critics: “Our representative came to truly optimistic conclusions and even then he couldn’t escape the fury of this aristocratized, Europeanized pack of present-day patriots. What a comedy!” He was appalled at his countrymen’s overoptimism in assessing Brazil’s progress in whitening. Commenting on the uproar provoked in the Brazilian press by a Belgian’s report that she had seen Negroes and mulattoes even in the larger cities in Brazil, he noted sarcastically, “Suddenly the country has aryанизed itself.”

In his História da Literatura Brasileira (1888) Romero had estimated three or four centuries for the whitening process. Now he thought it would take “some six or eight, if not more” for Indians and Negros. Furthermore, he had decided the mixed bloods would never disappear. “One would have to be completely ignorant of anthropology and ethnography not to know, first, that fundamental racial characteristics persist, and second, that mestiços crossbreed whenever they are in contact.” The total disappearance of the Indian, Negro, and mestiço could occur, Romero argued, only if all future breeding included one very light (if not white) partner. There were no statistics in Romero’s analysis. He argued from his own impressions and reading. Always the maverick, it was true to his polemical style for him to question any conclusion once it had become the established view.

COMPARISONS WITH THE UNITED STATES

A well-established way to explain Brazilian “whitening” was to contrast Brazil with the United States. As we saw above, even a
relatively doctrinaire racist thinker such as Nina Rodrigues was nervous lest he be thought to be likening Brazil to the United States. People espousing more optimistic racial views enjoyed making the comparison. Batista de Lacerda put it this way:

While the Portuguese did not hesitate to mix with the Negro to the extent of begetting a mixed offspring, the Anglo-Saxon, more jealous of the purity of his lineage, kept the Negro at a distance, and merely used him as an instrument of toil. It is a curious and remarkable fact that neither the lapse of time nor any other factor has been able to alter this early attitude of the North Americans, who keep the black race separated from the white population down to our own days. Brazil acted differently. The whites there set up a race of métis that is scattered today over a vast extent of its territory.

Lacerda’s description of the United States was, of course, nonsense. Whatever the supposed difference in racial attitudes, Americans had freely practiced miscegenation. In 1850 the Negro population of the United States was officially listed as 11 per cent mulatto, and by 1910 it was 21 per cent. And one should remember that American census-takers were probably less generous in their application of the mulatto category (as opposed to black) than their Brazilian counterparts would have been. No slave society in the Americas failed to produce a large mulatto population. It was not the fact of miscegenation but the recognition or non-recognition of the mixed bloods as a separate group that made the difference. In discussing the United States, Lacerda confused the system of legal and social segregation with supposed racial purity—actually referring to mixed bloods as a “race.” In fact, white American society had simply pushed its mixed bloods back down into the “Negro” category.

Lacerda’s faith in whitening led him even further in his comparison in the pamphlet replying to the critics of his 1911 paper. In the United States, he reasoned, the Negroes had been “expelled” from the general white community and thus forced to organize their own institutions in order to protect themselves. In their segregated state they also proved to be prolific and given to family life. Thus it was implied that the Negro element was increasing, or at least remaining stable, although no statistics were given. In Brazil, on the other hand, Negroes were disorganized, “without any kind of initiative, lost on unmarked roads like animals strayed from the fold”—making it happily inevitable that the Brazilian Negro should disappear.

The comparison with the United States was an awkward one for Brazilians. If whitening were the answer to the “race problem,” then why was the United States not better situated, since its white population was already such a numerical majority? Nina Rodrigues had pointed toward this question when he noted that a white “surplus” existed in the United States. But most Brazilian analysts preferred, like Batista de Lacerda, either to imply that miscegenation had hardly occurred in America, or that subsequent segregation had rendered impossible any future dilution of the African element. Lacerda’s conclusion was typical of most of his contemporaries: “In Brazil the race problem is being resolved without effort or difficulty, while today in the United States it still presents that country’s statesmen with an insoluble problem, clothed in difficulty and danger.”

Another comparison came from the pen of Manuel de Oliveira Lima, a widely read essayist and historian who was a career diplomat and spent the decade of the 1890’s in Washington, D.C. He subsequently published a book about America, the first chapter of which was entitled “The Negro Problem.” In it he sketched events since the Civil War, noting that “today one must confess that the Negro in America is incontestably an evil.” He then concentrated his analysis on the South, referring to it as similar to the Brazilian north. Looking back on slavery, Lima claimed that the fate of the American slave had been “infinitely worse than in Brazil.” The difference was due to “the greater weakness for emotion among the Latin race and to its lesser disdain for inferior races.” American planters lived in constant fear of slave insurrections, “which never much worried planters and plantation owners.
in Brazil” (thereby rewriting Brazilian history). Lima suggested that the key to subsequent developments was the relative racial balance of the population. Blacks could “improve in an atmosphere of whites.” But the American South had too many blacks (although its percentage was notably lower than the Brazilian northeast!), and therefore “only white immigration” along with a migration of blacks from the South to elsewhere in the nation could restore its former prosperity. He did add that Brazil also needed more immigrants, especially in view of the “relative mental backwardness and enervation of the colonizing race.” Such immigration would help to “correct the extreme miscegenation begun by the Portuguese” and would “reinforce the actual supremacy of the whites,” who still face the danger of being “drowned by the spreading of inferior races.”

Oliveira Lima’s analysis was typical of his era in several respects. First, he traced the contrast he found in race relations between countries to alleged differences in slave treatment, for which no proof was offered and which was in turn explained as a reflection of national character. Second, a passing concession was made to Aryanism by admitting the backwardness of the Latin colonizers. Third, the Negro was described as inferior but redeemable—under white tutelage and through miscegenation. Fourth, a racial balance was stressed, to be aided by increased white immigration. The over-all tone was optimistic, implying that Brazil’s more flexible national character made possible a harmonious whitening solution to the “Negro problem”—a path probably closed to Americans because of their rigid racial prejudices. Brazil could never prohibit intermarriage because the “indulgence of our attitudes and the carelessness of our customs prevents us from hostility toward the Negro on any level, even race mixture.”

Brazilian reviews of Lima’s book centered on his discussion of race. Two will be quoted here as evidence that his views were generally held. They differ from him and from each other only in terms of how optimistic they thought they should feel. José Veríssimo, the noted literary critic, praised the work and added: “I am convinced, as is Sr. Oliveira Lima, that western civilization can only be the work of the white race, and that no great civilization can be built with mixed people. I even tend to believe that the United States owes its rapid and steady development to its ethnic purity. But I wonder if obtaining it a century ahead of time was worth the sacrifice of millions of human beings. . . . ” So much for the United States Civil War.

There is no danger, as Sr. Oliveira Lima implies, that the Negro problem will arise in Brazil. Before it could arise it was already resolved by love. Miscegenation has robbed the Negro element of its numerical importance, thinning it down into the white population. Here the mulatto, beginning with the second generation, wants to be white and the white man, harboring no illusions and with some insignificant exceptions, welcomes, esteems, and joins with him. As ethnographers assure us, and as can be confirmed at first glance, race mixture is facilitating the prevalence of the superior element. Sooner or later it will permeate the Negro race here. This is obviously happening already. And when immigration, which I think is Brazil’s principal need, increases, it will, through the inevitable mixtures, accelerate the selection process. Medeiros e Albuquerque, another well-known literary critic who reviewed Lima’s book, also assumed Negro inferiority and the possibility of a whiter Brazil. He did doubt, however, that the “fusion” which had absorbed so much of the African element had produced a stable element. “One does not so easily suppress profound organic characteristics. The skin is the least important. What is not in the skin may be in the blood, the nerves, the brain. . . .” He had no doubt that Brazil would become lighter and that millions of immigrants could finish the job. But he worried whether the result would lose anything that could be called Brazilian identity. “It remains to be seen” whether “there will be anything left that will correspond historically to what is known as the Brazilian people.”

The insistent vision of a whitened Brazil also appeared in fiction. Afrânio Peixoto’s highly successful novel, A Esfinge (The Sphinx: 1911), reflected in its dialogue the racial concerns of the
Rio elite. Toward the end of the novel an older man reassured his young countryman that their land was fortunate to have been colonized by the Portuguese, without whom Brazil would lack the "beautiful Latin genius." (This rejection of Aryanism reflected Peixoto's own pro-Portuguese position.) He went on to explain that the Indian and the Negro had contributed much to his country's history, but "these sub-races tend to disappear once the white race is re-integrated into exclusive possession of the land." Then came the belief in fusion: "The Portuguese had another advantage—cross breeding with the Negro, thereby eliminating it with the successive infusions of white blood."

"The slow fusion of still imperfect mixtures, the repeated cultural selection, the forced discipline of social organization will make this mass into a strong, happy, and healthy population because the dominant traits are good. Today's promising beginning will produce a strong-willed, sensitive, and intelligent people worthy of this land and the time in which they live." The inevitable comparison with America followed. "In another three hundred years, we will all be white. I don't know what will happen to the United States, if their Saxon intolerance allows the compact nucleus of their twelve million Negroes to grow in isolation."

The comparison between Brazil and the United States did not escape visitors from North America. Some were very favorably impressed by the Brazilian solution to the ethnic problem. The whitening ideology caught the attention of an American, Clayton Cooper, who published an account of his visit to Brazil in 1917. He noted that "a new experiment among nations" was under way, "different from anything known either in the United States or in any other European nation in its colonization of people with color different from their own." An "attempt is honestly being made here to eliminate the blacks and browns by pouring in white blood. It is claimed that one factor in this process is the natural selection of the female species to choose a mate lighter in color than herself." He further reported that "certain parts of Southern Brazil where comparatively few of the negroid or dark skinned types are found, are cited as examples of the progress already made toward this daring and unprecedented accomplishment." "Many of the most highly cultured Brazilians will tell you that this country will reveal one day to all the world the one and only method of racial inter-penetration, the only one that will prevent racial wars and bloodshed." Even the biology, for Cooper, was reassuringly obvious: "It seems to be a clear case of Lamarck and Darwin's selective process. If for purely social reasons a certain type becomes fashionable, all marrying drifts that way, and finally that type prevails in the race."

Finally came the same kind of comparison so common to Brazilian observers of his own country: "Although probably the average American would express his satisfaction over the fact that our civilization places many obstacles in the way of the development of such a principle in the United States, not to recognize the seriousness of the motive of the Brazilians in this vital mixture of the races is unfortunate."

Theodore Roosevelt had a similar reaction, and reported it in detail that bears citing at length:

The great majority of the men and women I met, the leaders in the world of political and industrial effort and of scientific accomplishment, showed little more trace of Negro blood than would be shown by the like number of similar men in a European capital. Yet not only is there in some classes a considerable infiltration of Negro blood, with a corresponding tendency of the pure Negro type to disappear, but this process is regarded with hearty approval by the most thoughtful statesmen of the country. Their view, so different from our own, can perhaps best be expressed in the words of one of these very statesmen, himself of pure white blood, who said to me substantially:

"Of course the presence of the Negro is the real problem, and a very serious problem, both in your country, the United States, and in mine, Brazil. Slavery was an intolerable method of solving the problem, and had to be abolished. But the problem itself remained, in the presence of the Negro . . . .

"Now comes the necessity to devise some method of dealing with it. You of the United States are keeping the blacks as an entirely
separate element, and you are not treating them in a way that fosters their self-respect. They will remain a menacing element in your civilization, permanent, and perhaps even after a while a growing element. With us the question tends to disappear, because the blacks themselves tend to disappear and become absorbed. . . .

"The pure Negro is constantly decreasing in numbers, and after two or more crosses of the white blood the Negro blood tends to disappear, so far as the physical, mental, and moral traits of the race are concerned. When he has disappeared, his blood will remain as an appreciable, but in no way a dominant, element in perhaps a third of our people, while the remaining two-thirds will be pure whites. Granted that this strain will represent a slight weakening in one-third of our population, the result will be that in our country two-thirds of the population will have kept its full strength, with one-third slightly weakened, while the Negro problem will have entirely disappeared. In your country all the white population will have been kept in its original race strength, but the Negro will remain in increased numbers and with an increased and bitter sense of his isolation, so that the problem of his presence will be more menacing than at present. I do not say that ours is a perfect solution, but I regard it as a better solution than yours. We and you have to face two alternatives, neither of them without drawbacks. I believe that the one we Brazilians have chosen will in the long run, from the national standpoint, prove less disadvantageous and dangerous than the one you of the United States have chosen."88

The elite's faith in "whitening," so perceptively described by Teddy Roosevelt, continued during the first two decades of the Republic.89 Seen through the prism of the whitening ideology, Brazil seemed to have the best of both worlds. It had avoided the bitter racial divisions of the United States, said to have been caused by the rigid prejudices of the Anglo-Saxons—a trait supposedly absent in the more libidinous Latin Portuguese. Yet Brazil was now eliminating the inferior racial element through natural black attrition and what José Veríssimo euphemistically described as "love." So it was argued that the Brazilians would escape the determinist trap of Buckle and Agassiz in a steady ascent toward whiteness. By denying, implicitly or explicitly, the absoluteness of racial differences, this explanation offered a convenient escape from the gloomy conclusions of rigorously racist thought. Furthermore, the whitening ideology squared with one of the most obvious facts of Brazilian social history—the existence of a large "middle caste," generally called "mulatto." Within this category there were enormous variations, ranging from socially prestigious figures who could be described only as "mulatto" in the most intimate circles, to underworld criminals who would have fitted Nina Rodrigues' suggested penal category of "degenerates."

By any objective physical characteristics it was nonsense to refer to such a single category as "mulatto." Yet the Brazilians consistently did so, and their belief in such a category was an essential part of their race thinking. Given the experience of their multi-racial society, the whitening thesis offered Brazilians a rationale for what they believed was already happening. They borrowed racist theory from Europe and then discarded two of that theory's principal assumptions—the innateness of racial differences and the degeneracy of mixed bloods—in order to formulate their own solution to the "Negro problem." Not the least of its attractions was the sense of relief—sometimes even of superiority—it gave them when comparing their racial future to the United States.

To imply that all members of the Brazilian elite espoused the racial views described as the "whitening ideal" would, of course, mislead. Nonetheless, in the period between 1889 and 1914 the great majority undoubtedly did hold these views. A few, such as Nina Rodrigues, adopted the doctrinaire racist theory that differences were innate and that the process of whitening would not triumph, at least, in all parts of the country. A few others, including some German immigrants living in the southern states, held rigidly racist views and tried to segregate themselves from the native-born population. Finally, there were a few thinkers, to be analyzed later, who completely rejected the frame of reference of scientific racist theory in their search for a more authentic definition of Brazilian nationality.