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Paulina L. Alberto and Eduardo Elena
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Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina

This book reconsiders the relationship between race and nation in Argentina during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and places Argentina firmly in dialogue with the literature on race and nation in Latin America, from where it has long been excluded or marginalized as a purportedly white, European exception in a mixed-race region. The contributors, based both in North America and Argentina, hail from the fields of history, anthropology, and literary and cultural studies. Their chapters collectively destabilize widespread certainties about Argentina, showing that whiteness in that country has more in common with practices and ideologies of *mestizaje* and “racial democracy” elsewhere in the region than has typically been acknowledged. The chapters also situate Argentina within the well-established literature on race, nation, and whiteness in world regions beyond Latin America (particularly, other European “settler societies”). The collection thus contributes to rethinking race for other global contexts as well.

PAULINA L. ALBERTO is Associate Professor of History and Romance Languages and Literatures at the University of Michigan.

EDUARDO ELENA is Associate Professor of History at the University of Miami.

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Notes on the contributors

Paulina L. Alberto (Ph.D. University of Pennsylvania, 2005) is Associate Professor in the Departments of History and of Romance Languages and Literatures (Programs in Spanish and Portuguese) at the University of Michigan. She is the author of multiple articles on racial activism and racial ideologies in modern Brazil and Argentina, and of *Terms of Inclusion: Black Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (UNC Press, 2011), awarded the Warren Dean Memorial Prize by the Conference on Latin American History (2013) and the Roberto Reis Award by the Brazilian Studies Association (2012). Her current research on the (in)famous *porteño* street character Raúl Grigera (“El Negro Raúl”) explores the power of racial stories to construct “whiteness” and “blackness” in twentieth-century Argentina and to shape individual fates.

Eduardo Elena is Associate Professor of History and Research Director for Latin American Policy at the Miami Institute for the Americas at the University of Miami. He is the author of *Dignifying Argentina: Peronism, Citizenship, and Mass Consumption* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), which was awarded the 2013 Book Prize in the Social Sciences by the Southern Cone Studies Section of the Latin American Studies Association. His work on the political, economic, and cultural history of Peronism and midcentury Latin America has appeared in numerous journals and edited volumes. Building from his research on consumption and the study of race and nation, he is currently investigating steam-age globalization in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Argentina.

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a Nation: A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880–1955 (Duke University Press, 2010). She has also written numerous articles on rightist movements, anti-Semitism, gender, and women in Latin America. Currently, she is researching the Junta de la Victoria, a women's antifascist group in Argentina that sent aid to the Allies during World War II, at the regional, national, and transnational levels.

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Lea Geler is Researcher at Argentina's National Council for Scientific and Technological Research (CONICET) and at the Interdisciplinary Gender Studies Institute (IEGE) of the University of Buenos Aires. Using a historical-anthropological approach, her work focuses on Afro-descendants in Buenos Aires from the nineteenth century to the present, exploring questions of Afro-Argentine memory, of (self-)representation, and of race, nation, class, and gender in Argentina. Geler is the author of *Andares negros, caminos blancos. Afroporteños, Estado y Nación Argentina a fines del siglo XIX* (Prohistoria, 2010) and is coeditor (with Florencia Guzmán) of *Cartografías Afrolatinoamericanas. Perspectivas situadas para análisis transfronterizos* (Biblos, 2013). She has also published numerous articles in journals including *African and Black Diaspora*, *Horizontes Antropológicos*, *Tabula Rasa*, *Memoria Americana*, and *Boletín Americanista*, and in several edited volumes.

Gastón Gordillo is Professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia. He has conducted ethnographic research on space,

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George Reid Andrews is Distinguished Professor of History at the University of Pittsburgh, where he has taught since 1981. His publications include *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires, 1800–1900* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo, Brazil, 1888–1988* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), *Afro-Latin America, 1800–2000* (Oxford University Press, 2004), and *Blackness in the White Nation: A History of Afro-Uruguay* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010). His forthcoming book is *Afro-Latin America: Black Lives, 1600–2000* (Harvard University Press, 2016).

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Preface

This book is the outcome of many years of conversation among the editors, contributors, and various audiences and readers. Most of the chapters first took shape in a series of panel presentations delivered at the Latin American Studies Association conferences in Toronto (2010), San Francisco (2012), and Washington, D.C. (2013). The volume's authors have also shared their research with colleagues in venues across Argentina as well as with students, activists, and wider publics there and elsewhere. Along the way, we encountered a spectrum of reactions to our project: from enthusiasm and encouragement, to thoughtful critiques, to skepticism and even hostility. Indeed, the range and intensity of these responses not only helped us sharpen our arguments and reframe our assumptions, but they also strengthened our conviction that questions of race and nation in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Argentina merit rethinking.

If the subjects treated in this volume touch a nerve for some readers, it is surely because the chapters reconsider the conventional wisdom about Argentine politics, culture, and society held by many commentators in Argentina and abroad. Raising questions about the racial dimensions of inequality, identity, and power in Argentina is itself controversial. And even among those who agree that those are crucial questions, disagreements persist over how best to pose and answer them. To pick one telling example, the very title of this book, *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina*, may provoke some unease. In the United States, references to *race* as a social dilemma or as an academic area of inquiry are commonplace. Yet in contemporary Argentina, the term *raza* carries a strongly negative connotation and is thus far less frequently invoked: indeed, it is common for *raza* to be placed within quotation marks even in the writings of researchers who use the concept to expose problems of discrimination. This circumspect treatment of *raza* is intended to emphasize its socially constructed, rather than essential or biological, character (despite the fact that other social constructs like *género* [gender] and *clase* do not require this kind of

treatment), or to signal the concept's status as archaic and somehow foreign to Argentina. The pages that follow devote considerable attention to unraveling the many languages of race in Argentina employed since the early twentieth century and assessing their political implications. But even as our title embraces the unquoted use of *race* common in the US academy, the volume takes as its premise the idea that Argentine conceptions of race should not be approached as exotic or benighted deviations from a norm (based, as so many other things, on US and Western European models).

Instead, our goal is to facilitate discussion across geographic borders and disciplinary or conceptual boundaries, generating a sharper understanding of how race-related ideas and practices – especially those surrounding the production of “whiteness” – have molded modern Argentina and other nations across the world. In keeping with this impulse, the volume not only reaches out to experts in the study of Argentina and Latin America but also to scholars of other world regions and to curious readers of all backgrounds and levels of expertise. This approach may occasionally lead us to explain things that seem obvious to Argentines or to experts on the region, but it has the virtue of bringing new participants into the discussion. As the lively community and the exchanges that defined this project come to a close (at least for now), we hope that the finished book will spark further debate, comparison, and questioning in the classroom and beyond.

The making of this edited volume was a collective endeavor in more ways than one. We are grateful for the support received from everyone at Cambridge University Press, first and foremost our editor Deborah Gershenowitz and her assistant Dana Bricken, whose encouragement and vision helped shape the book in important ways. The three anonymous readers selected by Cambridge University Press deserve special recognition for their close readings and their excellent recommendations for how the book might reach its fullest potential. Early in the production process, Kristin McGuire employed her copyediting prowess to ensure that the authors were all on the same page. And, of course, we thank all the contributors to this volume for their cooperation and for their good-tempered responses to our seemingly endless revisions and e-mail queries.

One of the pleasures of undertaking this project was the many opportunities it offered to expand our intellectual community, whether by meeting new people or having new conversations with colleagues and friends. Audience members at talks in Argentina and elsewhere provided invaluable feedback that guided this book to completion. The project also gave us the chance to exchange ideas with a number of researchers who took part in the original LASA panels or who were involved in early versions of the manuscript. Alejandro Frigerio, Valeria Manzano, John Charles Chasteen, Ana Vivaldi, and James Shrader deserve heartfelt recognition for their contributions to the realization of this book. We look forward to upcoming studies by these and other colleagues who will no doubt continue to expand the field in exciting ways. Given the number of people who generously gave their time to discuss and read our work,

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we have incurred debts too numerous to be properly accounted, but we gratefully acknowledge the comments offered by Sueann Caulfield, Matthew Countryman, Mark Healey, Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, and Ashli White.

Paulina Alberto wishes to thank Eduardo Elena for agreeing to embark on this exciting but laborious journey, and for cheerfully keeping us on course through some of its rough patches. We began this project just as I was finishing my monograph on Brazil, and though I had been looking over my shoulder to Argentina for quite some time, the idea of retraining myself as a historian of Argentina seemed daunting. I can imagine no better guide through the peculiar landscape of Argentine historiography than Eduardo. Working closely with Eduardo and the volume's contributors over the past five years and exchanging ideas and arguments has been an incredible education. I cannot thank these colleagues enough for their generosity of spirit. I am also grateful to the friends and colleagues who wished me well in my (only partial) change of course and helped me think through the connections between projects old and new: George Reid Andrews, Rebecca Scott, Sueann Caulfield, Barbara Weinstein, Jeff Lesser, Jerry Dávila, Marc Hertzman, Keila Grinberg, and James Green. Warm thanks go to Mariela Rodríguez and Lea Geler for their invitation to team teach the seminar "Nación, 'Raza', y Mestizaje en América Latina" at the University of Buenos Aires in 2014, and to the undergraduate and graduate students who made it such a lively place to work through many of the ideas that animate this volume. The departments of History and of Romance Languages and Literatures as well as the College of Literature, Science, and Arts at the University of Michigan provided important funding for this project and made my extended stay in Argentina possible. My friends and family, for their part, made that time a delight: Julieta Pereira, Zulma Alberto, Fernando Skiarski, the whole Rafaela crew, my parents Néstor and Ana Berta de Alberto, my sisters Cristina and Mariana, as well as Matías Salmoiraghi and the inimitable Luca. My deepest love and gratitude go to my husband Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof for his seemingly unending stores of wisdom and patience, and to little Lalo and Pía, for making any place we go together feel like home.

Eduardo Elena wishes to thank the volume's contributors for making this project so intellectually stimulating. I have learned a great deal from you all. Paulina Alberto in particular has helped steer me through unfamiliar waters, and without her expertise and bighearted guidance I would have surely lost my way. I began this process with a mixture of curiosity and ignorance about the study of race in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Argentina – and, truth be told, a healthy skepticism, born from frustration with how some in the US academy use race to constrict and "orientalize" the study of Latin America and the Caribbean. Thanks to my fellow contributors I now see more clearly how to transcend these limitations, while also gaining in the process a richer understanding of Argentina's past and present. I am grateful to have received the backing, financial and otherwise, from the University of Miami, above all from my wonderful colleagues in the History Department and Center for Latin

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American Studies (now the Miami Institute for the Americas). I wish to recognize Hugo Ratier, Lila Caimari, and Nicolás Quiroga for their insights as specialists and for the opportunities to share my work. *Mil gracias* to the family and friends who have always been at my side, including those in Argentina and Uruguay who hosted me and challenged my thinking: Jorge Elena, Elena Milla de Elena, Victoria Basulado, Vania Markarian, Juan Santarcangelo, Leandro Delgado, and Fanny Cassinoni. Final thanks are reserved, as always, for Ashli White and my daughter Paulina for being constant sources of ideas and inspiration.