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The Making of a Field*Afro-Latin American Studies*

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This volume seeks to introduce readers to the dynamic and growing field of Afro-Latin American studies. We define that field, first, as the study of people of African ancestry in Latin America, and second, as the study of the larger societies in which those people live. Under the first heading, scholars study Black histories, cultures, strategies, and struggles in the region. Under the second, they study blackness, and race more generally, as a category of difference, as an engine of stratification and inequality, and as a key variable in processes of national formation.

There are sound historical reasons for both approaches. Of the 10.7 million enslaved Africans who arrived in the New World between 1500 and 1870, almost two-thirds came to colonies controlled by Spain or Portugal (Borucki, Eltis, and Wheat 2015, 440; see also Chapter 2). It was in those territories that slavery lasted for the longest periods of time in the Western Hemisphere, spanning over 350 years. Africans began arriving at the islands of the Caribbean in the early sixteenth century, and slavery was not finally abolished in those islands until 1886, when the last slaves were emancipated in Cuba. Two years later, Brazil became the last country in the Americas to abolish slavery; today it is home to the second-largest Afrodescendant population in the world, exceeded in size only by Nigeria. Close to a million Africans arrived in Cuba during the nineteenth century and over two million in Brazil, a process that helps explain the profound influence that African-based cultural practices have exercised in the formation of national cultures in those two countries and around the region more generally.

Yet it was not until quite recently that the scholarship on race, inequality, and racial stratification in Latin America had grown enough to

develop the sorts of questions and debates that sustain and constitute a field of study. Writing in 1992, Thomas Skidmore, at that time the leading scholar of Brazil in the United States, noted that one could “count on the fingers of one hand the . . . authors who have done serious research on post-abolition race relations.” Skidmore was talking specifically about Brazil, but his observation could be applied to Spanish America as well. Throughout Latin America, scholars interested in Afro-descendant peoples had focused almost entirely on the period of slavery, “as if the topic of race ceased to have any relevance . . . after slavery ended” (Skidmore 1992, 8).

During most of the 1900s, the idea that race was not an important dimension of Latin American societies was widespread in the region. National ideologies of racial inclusion, discussed in depth in Paulina L. Alberto and Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof’s contribution to this volume (Chapter 8), argued that Latin American societies had transcended their colonial histories of state-mandated racial inequality to become, in the 1800s and 1900s, “racial democracies” governed by social norms of racial harmony and equality. National politics in the region were driven not by racial tensions and divisions, it was argued, but by conflicts and negotiations among competing social classes. For most observers of the region, the central questions of the twentieth century were how to achieve self-sustaining economic growth and development, and how to allocate power and resources among elites, middle classes, workers, and peasants.

As we write in 2017, that panorama has shifted dramatically. Formerly considered “irrelevant,” race is now at the center of research on Latin American societies (see, e.g., Wade 2009, 2010, 2017; Gotkowitz 2011; Hernández 2013; Loveman 2014; Telles and PERLA 2014). This has been especially the case with Afro-Latin American topics. As the chapters in this volume abundantly show, over the last thirty years scholars have produced a rich outpouring of research and writing on time frames ranging from the period of colonial slavery to the present day. This shift occurred partly in response to the realization, articulated by postcolonial scholars, that race is central to historic and contemporary processes of coloniality (Quijano 2000; Mignolo 2005). Just as important, however, were the political and social changes taking place in the region.

The field of Afro-Latin American studies has developed in tandem with, and to a large degree in response to, a wave of racially defined social, cultural, and political movements that, taking advantage of democratization processes since the 1980s, have transformed how Latin Americans think about their region, culture, and history. Building on

social sciences research that has documented persistent racial inequality across time, these movements have challenged traditional discourses on race and nation that depict the region as racially egalitarian and harmonious. They have also demanded legislation and specific policies to address discrimination and inequality, and their efforts have produced results. Starting with the Nicaraguan constitutional reform of 1987, which recognized the existence of minority communities on the Atlantic coast, legal instruments that ban discrimination and acknowledge the multiracial character of Latin American societies have proliferated. In 1988 the Brazilian constitution banned discrimination and recognized the rights of former runaway slave communities (*quilombos*) to their ancestral lands. Other countries (e.g., Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras) followed suit and now recognize collective rights for the population of African descent, while others (Argentina, Colombia, Cuba, Panama, Uruguay) explicitly condemn discrimination because of race (see Chapters 5, 7, and 13). Activists also targeted the national censuses and demanded the inclusion of ethno-racial categories to counter the traditional invisibility of these groups. While in the 1980s only Cuba and Brazil collected information concerning individuals of African descent, by the 2010s Afrodescendants were counted in seventeen of the nineteen countries in the region (Loveman 2014).

International organizations and agencies have acknowledged the importance and scope of these movements and taken concrete institutional steps to address issues of racial justice in their activities. Examples include the Rapporteurship on the Rights of Persons of African Descent and against Racial Discrimination created by the Organization of American States in 2005, and the Gender and Diversity Division created by the Inter-American Development Bank in 2007. The Division's mission is to "promote gender equality and support development with identity for African descendants and indigenous peoples in the Latin America and the Caribbean region" (IADB 2017). The United Nations Development Program sponsors a project on the Afrodescendant Population of Latin America and monitors racial discrimination in the region through its Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). In 2010 the US State Department created the Race, Ethnicity, and Social Inclusion Unit, which coordinates US diplomacy on social inclusion and racial equality issues in the Western Hemisphere. Three years later the United Nations approved resolution 68/237, which proclaims 2015–24 as the International Decade for People of African Descent. International development agencies have also included metrics of racial inequality in

their development benchmarks, giving additional visibility and support to race justice agendas.

All of these actors – activists, government officials, representatives and employees of international agencies and organizations – have contributed to the growth and development of Afro-Latin American studies as a field. Their programs and demands have shaped how scholars study Afrodescendants in the region. The chapters in this volume illustrate the richness and disciplinary variety of this scholarly production.

THE ORIGINS OF AFRO-LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

Early studies of the history, behavior, and culture of Afrodescendants in Latin America were very much attuned to the voluminous scientific literature that, in the second half of the nineteenth century, sought to demonstrate and document the biological foundations of black inferiority. The combination of anthropometric measurements feeding a variety of indices of human worth, evolutionary theories, and the social Darwinist belief that human history was centrally about the inevitable competition of racial groups, some of which were destined to perish and live under the control of the fittest – all of these turned Latin America into an area of special interest for “scientific” studies of race. The region’s high degree of miscegenation or racial mixture was seen as a clear indicator of racial degeneration and social decadence, a point emphasized by the pioneering scientific racists Arthur de Gobineau and Louis Agassiz when they (independently) visited Brazil in the 1860s (Skidmore 1974).

In an effort to better understand that degeneration and decadence, a handful of Latin American scholars and writers – for example, Raimundo Nina Rodrigues (1900) in Brazil, Fernando Ortiz (1906, 1916) and Israel Castellanos (1916) in Cuba – carried out research on what they viewed as black “pathologies,” gathering information on turn-of-the-century Afro-Latin American religious life, criminality, and family structure. Much of the information reported by those writers is still useful to scholars today, but the racial attitudes embodied in their work, and widely diffused among the region’s elites, left little room for black participation in national life.

This was very much in keeping with the oligarchical political and social structures in force in most of Latin America at that time – indeed, scientific racism was a primary support of elite arguments that the racially mixed masses were incapable of playing a responsible role in national life (Figueras 1907; Ingenieros 1913; Valenilla Lanz 1919; Viana 1922).

During the 1910s and 1920s, however, workers' movements and middle-class reformist movements began to demand a greater role in national politics; at the same time, nationalist pressures grew for the construction of new national identities based not on ideas and models imported from Europe, but on the actual historical and present-day experiences of Latin Americans as a people. These political developments set the stage for a major revision of racial thought in the region, in the form of the concept of "racial democracy" (see Chapter 8). Where the scientific racists had either rejected the notion of black contributions to national life, or had treated those contributions as almost entirely negative, writers and intellectuals associated with new ideologies of racial inclusion – Gilberto Freyre in Brazil, Fernando Ortiz in Cuba, José Vasconcelos in Mexico, Juan Pablo Sojo in Venezuela – acknowledged the role of Africans and their descendants in creating new, distinctly Latin American national cultures, societies, and identities. Those cultures and societies were neither African nor European in form or content. Rather, they were a mixture of African, European, and Amerindian elements, combined in a centuries-long process of cultural and racial mixture that had produced something completely new in world historical experience: a "New World in the tropics," in Freyre's formulation, or a new "cosmic race," in the language of Vasconcelos.

The willingness of the proponents of racial democracy to acknowledge black contributions to national life opened the door to greatly expanded research on Afro-Latin American topics. This was most notably the case in Brazil, where Freyre (1933, 1936), Arthur Ramos (1937, 1940), and Edison Carneiro (1936, 1937), to mention only the most prominent names, spearheaded a wave of research on Afro-Brazilian history and culture in the plantation zones of the Northeast. Some of their findings were presented at two Afro-Brazilian Congresses held during the 1930s (Congresso Afro-Brasileiro 1937, 1940), which in turn stimulated more such work; a small core of scholars started working on racial questions in the southeastern state of São Paulo in the 1940s (Nogueira 1942; Bicudo 1947; Bastide and Fernandes 1953). In Cuba, the Sociedad de Folklore Cubano and the Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos, both founded by Fernando Ortiz during the 1920s and 1930s, respectively, carried out research on black contributions to Cuban culture and national identity, much of it published in Ortiz's journal, *Estudios Afrocubanos*. Similar institutions were created in Venezuela (the Servicio de Investigaciones Folklóricas, established in 1946), Colombia (the Instituto Etnológico Nacional, 1943), and Brazil (the Comissão Nacional de Folclore, 1947).

In other countries, individual scholars – Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán (1946, 1958) in Mexico, Aquiles Escalante (1964) in Colombia, Armando Fortune (Maloney 1994) in Panama, Ildefonso Pereda Valdés (Carvalho Neto 1955) in Uruguay – carried out pioneering research.

These early efforts tended to focus on black religion, dance, linguistics, and other cultural forms, or on community studies. For the most part they left aside questions of racial inequality or discrimination, largely accepting the argument that Latin America's historical experience of racial and cultural mixture had eliminated racism and prejudice and produced societies that offered equal opportunity to all. There were some dissenting voices, however, particularly in the black newspapers of the region, which noted sharp disparities between semi-official ideologies of racial equality and the empirical realities of discrimination, prejudice, and black poverty (de la Fuente 2001; Andrews 2010; Geler 2010; Guridy 2010; Alberto 2011; see also Chapter 6). Those voices in the black press were joined in the 1930s and 1940s by Communist activists in Brazil, Cuba, Venezuela, and other countries, who made anti-racism a central plank of their party programs, and then in the 1940s and 1950s by a handful of intellectuals and scholars who increasingly questioned whether Latin American societies were in fact racial democracies. Most of these critics were Afrodescendant: in Brazil, Edison Carneiro, Clóvis Moura (1959, 1977), Abdias do Nascimento (1968; *Quilombo* 2003), and Alberto Guerreiro Ramos (1957); in Cuba, Gustavo Urrutia, Alberto Arredondo (1939), Juan René Betancourt (1945, 1954, 1959), Serafin Portuondo Linares (1950), and Walterio Carbonell (1961); and in Colombia, Aquiles Escalante (1964), and Manuel Zapata Olivella (1967).

In Brazil, some of the racial democracy critics were white, particularly in São Paulo, where French sociologist Roger Bastide had encouraged his students Florestan Fernandes, Oracy Nogueira, and others to study Brazilian race relations, and Fernandes had gone on to train his own students, Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Octávio Ianni, to do the same. These white intellectuals enjoyed much greater legitimacy and received far greater public and scholarly attention than their black colleagues. Black critics of racial democracy were more likely to occupy marginal positions in academic and intellectual life, both because of their racial status and because of their questioning of one of the core components of national identity. They were also more easily dismissed as poorly adjusted malcontents with personal axes to grind. White critics, by contrast, acted from seemingly disinterested motives; the previously mentioned white Brazilians, far from being socially or professionally marginal, were affiliated

with the most prestigious institution of higher education in the country, the University of São Paulo.

Still, even if white critics of racial democracy received more attention than black ones, neither group had much immediate impact on mainstream scholarly institutions in the region, which remained for the most part indifferent to Afro-related themes. Despite the undeniable progress that had been made since the 1930s in studying black history and culture, by the 1970s the quantity of scholarly literature available was still miniscule, in relation either to studies of black history and culture in the United States or to studies of Amerindian populations in Latin America. During the last forty years, however, the situation has changed dramatically, as the chapters in this volume make clear.

Why this explosion of work on Afro-Latin America? One reason is undoubtedly the growth in Latin American higher education more generally. Since 1960, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela, and other countries have invested enormous sums in expanding their university systems; inevitably this expanded those countries' research capacity as well (Balán 2013). But after years of relative indifference to Afro-Latin American topics, why did researchers start turning toward black history and culture as an area of study?

That turn took place in part because of thickening scholarly networks and dialogues between Latin America and the United States, particularly around questions of slavery and race. In response to the rise of the civil rights and Black Power movements, scholars in the United States were paying increasing attention to questions of race, producing classic works that are still obligatory reading today (Woodward 1955; Stamp 1956; Davis 1966, 1975; Franklin 1967; Wilson 1978). As US scholars thought about their country's racial past and present, many pushed on to ask how the US experience of slavery, or of the post-emancipation period, or of present-day race relations, compared to similar experiences in Brazil, Cuba, and the British Caribbean. At the same time, newly trained US historians of Latin America wrestled with the other end of the comparison: how did the racial experiences of Latin America compare to those of the United States? A few undertook research comparing the two regions (Tannenbaum 1946; Elkins 1959; Harris 1964; Klein 1967; Degler 1971; Hoetnik 1973). Most, while motivated by comparative interests, focused on Latin America, and usually on the experience of slavery. The result was a surge of scholarship during the 1970s that, while small in relation to the amount of work being done on the United States, nevertheless represented a marked increase in scholarly attention to Afro-Latin

America (e.g., Knight 1970; Hall 1971; Conrad 1972; Bowser 1974; Skidmore 1974; Toplin 1974; Whitten 1974; Dean 1976; Rout 1976).

Those early comparative studies were based on the belief that race relations in Latin America were more harmonious than in the United States and that this difference was the product of dissimilar histories of race and slavery. Scholars such as Frank Tannenbaum and Stanley Elkins had fully absorbed the racial democracy arguments that Latin American intellectuals had articulated in the 1920s and 1930s. They studied Latin America, but they did so in order to understand and find solutions to race problems in the United States. The same belief animated some of the first studies about racial inequality in Latin America, sponsored by UNESCO in the 1950s. In a world besieged by racial conflicts, these studies sought to understand how Brazil had succeeded in creating a functioning racial democracy. In the process, they made two key contributions to the field. First, they highlighted the need to study contemporary race relations (not just slavery) in the region. Second, their findings generated a healthy skepticism concerning some of the central claims of the proponents of racial democracy.

This skepticism informed the work of a new generation of Latin American scholars, some of whom had studied in US universities. In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, these scholars produced their own readings of the Afro-Latin American past and present (Fernandes 1965; Costa 1966; Carvalho Neto 1971; Moreno Fragnals 1978; Silva 1978; Hasenbalg 1979; Colmenares 1979; Deive 1980; Nistal-Moret 1984; Friedemann and Arocha 1986; Reis 1986; Machado 1987). As they did so, they engaged not just with their North American counterparts but also with the black political movements that were forming in various countries of the region during the 1970s and 1980s. Those movements, discussed in depth in Chapter 7, had major impacts not just on the politics of the region but on its intellectual and scholarly life as well.

BLACK MOBILIZATION AND THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

On December 5–7, 2000, more than 1,700 activists and government representatives from all over the Americas convened in Santiago de Chile. They were attending the Regional Conference of the Americas, in preparation for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance that would take place in Durban, South Africa, a year later. It was a landmark event. On the one hand, the

widespread participation of activists and community leaders illustrated how much the movement for civil rights and racial justice had advanced in Latin America since the collapse of most authoritarian regimes in the 1970s and 1980s (Andrews 2004, 2016; Yashar 2005; Hernández 2013). On the other hand, the event marked the public acknowledgment by state authorities that racism is a major problem in the region, demanding a serious policy response. As the conference's concluding declaration stated, "ignoring the existence of discrimination and racism, at both the State and the society level, contributes directly and indirectly to perpetuating the practices of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance." Racism and discrimination were characterized as historical products of "conquest, colonialism, slavery and other forms of servitude" but, taking a cue from scholarship on contemporary engines of racial stratification, the declaration noted that the effects of these processes persisted and "are" – in present tense – "a source of systemic discrimination that still affects large sectors of the population" (UN General Assembly 2001).

In order to combat the effects of racism, discrimination and racial injustice in the region, the Conference approved an ambitious "Plan of Action" (UN General Assembly 2001). This plan had deep implications for the field of Afro-Latin American studies, for several of its measures were linked to the production and dissemination of knowledge concerning people of African descent in the region. The plan "urged" states to compile and disseminate statistical data on racialized groups. This information would serve as the basis for programs of inclusion and access to basic social services and economic opportunities, including policies of affirmative action. Some of the items in the plan concerned education in fairly concrete ways. The parties agreed on the need to create educational and research programs about Africa's contributions to history and civilization, as well as to disseminate information against racial stereotypes and myths. The plan asked states to include the study of racism in university curricula and to organize courses on racism and discrimination "for prosecutors, law enforcement officials, members of the judiciary and other public employees." Attention was also given to the media, to its role in disseminating racial images and information and to the need "to ensure the fair and balanced presence of people of African descent" in it.

One of the key contributions of the Santiago Conference is that it sanctioned and normalized the category of "Afrodescendants" as a group with legal, cultural, and ethical implications in the arenas of international justice and human rights (Laó-Montes 2009; Campos García 2015).

It also helped consolidate and make visible a transnational network of race-justice activists that was able to exercise pressure on national governments for the adoption of specific policies against racism and discrimination. As part of these efforts, activists not only deployed knowledge produced by academics, as was notably the case in Brazil during the 1980s and 1990s (Htun 2004), but they also produced, systematized, and disseminated important new knowledge concerning their communities. As activists formulated demands in the areas of health care, education, environmental justice, job training, gender violence, poverty eradication, and police brutality, among others, they were compelled to gather and produce valuable information concerning Afrodescendants and their cultures and living conditions across the region. On top of that, the movement itself has become a subject of intense study, prompting numerous studies about race and mobilization in contemporary Latin America (Escobar 2008; de la Fuente 2012; Martínez 2012; Pisano 2012; Rahier 2012; Pereira 2013; Valero and Campos García 2015; Paschel 2016).

This volume constitutes yet another example of the impact of activists from the Afrodescendant movement on the field of Afro-Latin American Studies. Our book has been conceived and executed in conversations between academics and activists. These exchanges took place in two landmark events sponsored by the Afro-Latin American Research Institute at Harvard University, in collaboration with the University of Cartagena, in 2015 and 2016. The events gathered prominent figures of the Afrodescendant movement, many of whom had attended the 2000 meeting in Santiago, to assess the implementation of the Plan of Action, its successes and failures. Part of the agenda, however, was also to analyze the impact of the movement on the field of Afro-Latin American studies, in order to articulate new research questions and agendas. Just as we attempted to evaluate the outcomes of the Santiago meeting, we sought also to evaluate the trajectory of this field of study that, not coincidentally, has come of age along with the consolidation and expansion of the Afrodescendant movement. The field has grown enough to sustain specialized journals such as *Estudios Afro-Asiáticos*, *Afro-Hispanic Review*, *Revista Afro-Asia*, *América Negra* (published in Colombia from 1991 to 1998), and *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*; to allow for the publication of several synthetic overviews (Andrews 2004; Wade 2010; Gates 2011); to sustain specialized research units such as the Afro-Latin American Research Institute (ALARI) at Harvard University; and to populate the *Afro-Latin America* book series at Cambridge