Comparative racisms: What anti-racists can learn from Latin America

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Abstract
There has been extensive debate about the putative imperial dimensions of critical race studies in Latin America. The concern is that US racial discourses, identities and anti-racist strategies are being incorrectly applied to, if not forced upon, Latin America. Those who disagree with this position, including ourselves, argue that it is legitimate to take insights and understandings gleaned in the USA as tools for understanding and challenging racism in Latin America. However, we also believe that the exchange of ideas regarding effective anti-racist strategies should flow in both directions. Therefore, in this article we change the direction of the traditional dialogue by discussing ways in which research in Latin America can inform the theoretical foundation of anti-racism in other countries, such as the USA. Specifically, we discuss the implications of current strategies of race mixing, minimization of racial consciousness, colorblindness, multiculturalism and racism literacy for current theories of anti-racism.

Keywords
anti-racism, ethnicity, Latin America, multiculturalism, race, USA

There has been extensive debate about the putative imperial dimensions of critical race studies in Latin America. The concern is that US racial discourses, identities and anti-racist strategies are being incorrectly applied to, if not forced upon, Latin America. Is it appropriate to refer to self-identified mixed-race Latin Americans as
‘black’ or ‘Indian’? Should the language of US anti-racism, which includes terms such as white supremacy and segregation, be used to describe the racial terrain in Latin America? Is the encouragement of black and indigenous movements in Latin America productive? Sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant (1999) have argued that US perspectives on race represent merely another dimension of ‘cunning imperialist reason’. Latin America is being pressured to emulate not only US models of capitalism, modernity and democracy, but also its less-than-laudable politics of race.

Those who disagree with this position, including ourselves, argue that it is legitimate to take insights and understandings gleaned in the USA as tools for understanding and challenging racism in Latin America. Theoretical models, concepts and political tactics can be inappropriately applied to different contexts, but this certainly is not inevitable. In fact, ideas, directions, clues and insights generated in one region may prove useful in another part of the world, especially when applied with a learned sensitivity of the particularities of the place, both from which the lessons were generated and to which they are being applied. Just as it has proved beneficial to take theoretical and political insights generated in Europe to better understand and navigate capitalism and modernity elsewhere in the world, it is equally suitable to use knowledge garnered in US anti-racist endeavors to situations beyond its borders. Indeed, it seems arbitrary to suggest that intellectuals and activists can draw on the traditions of Weber and Kafka, but not on those of DuBois and Morrison. To dismiss exchanges based on these latter traditions as ‘brutal ethnocentric intrusions’ or the advancement of ‘racistoid perspectives’ (Bordieu and Wacquant, 1999) seems crude and reductive at best.

Largely overlooked in the heat of this debate have been the insights that Latin America may offer the ongoing struggle against racism in the USA and elsewhere. This article hopes to enliven this nascent discussion (see Sawyer, 2003; Telles, 2004; Wade, 2004), and perhaps, in the process, alleviate some of the feelings of US imperialism given the North–South direction of the didactic process in recent decades. In other words, rather than focusing on what the US experience can teach Latin America (the emphasis of much of the scholarship in the past few decades), we wish to elaborate on the lessons race and ethnic studies in Latin America may hold for anti-racists in the USA. Fortunately, many putative solutions to racism currently touted in the USA are not untested propositions. Although unbeknownst to many proponents of these anti-racist proposals, their ideas have circulated and have undergone empirical scrutiny for well over a century in other parts of the hemisphere.

Below, then, is a discussion of some of the key findings from the contemporary scholarship on race in Latin America. This overview is not meant to be a review of the increasingly vast literature on the topic; instead we seek to highlight those findings that are of particular relevance to ongoing policy and academic debates in the North Atlantic. To scholars of race in Latin America, this selected summary offers an original synopsis of literature on race and racism in the region.
Our intended audience, however, is not foremost Latin Americanists but rather North Atlantic scholars and policymakers, who could benefit greatly from a better understanding of the Latin American experience with race.

**Race mixing and mixed-race identities have not proven successful anti-racist strategies**

In the United States it is often implied, if not explicitly stated, that race mixing will disarm racism (AMEA, 1997–2006; 2 Daniel, 2002; D'Souza, 1995; Gay, 1987; Fernández, 1996; Harris, 1964; Kalmijn, 1998; Nakashima, 1992; Patterson, 2000; Zack, 1993). Social pundit Dinesh D'Souza argues, in *The End of Racism*, that ‘the country is entering a new era in which old racial categories are rapidly becoming obsolete. The main reason for this is intermarriage’ (1995: 552). Writing in *The New Republic*, under the headline ‘Race Over’, the Harvard sociologist Orlando Patterson asserts that the color line will not be an issue much longer since ‘migratory, sociological, and biotechnological developments’ are undermining race (2000: 6). Cultural and biological race mixing, coupled with new biotechnological methods to change hair texture and skin color, enabling African Americans to ‘enhance their individuality’ by ‘opting for varying degrees of hybridity’, will ultimately change the future of race (Patterson, 2000: 6).

The outlook is clear to Patterson: ‘By the middle of the twenty-first century, America will have problems aplenty. But no racial problems whatsoever’ (2000: 6). By 2050, ‘the social virus of race will have gone the way of smallpox’ (2000: 6).

The ‘race mixers’ basic thesis is that, if racial identities and the physical markers of these traditional categories are eroded, giving way to multiracial identities and a racial continuum, then racial discrimination will fade. It is promised that the racial hierarchy will evaporate if Americans emphasize their commonalities (rather than their differences) with their compatriots by embracing *café-au-lait* identities and attempting through miscegenation (or biotechnology), to produce greater numbers of mixed-race (or hybrid-looking) subjects. Reginald Daniel, for one, sees multiracial identities as enabling ‘whites and blacks and everyone in between to transcend their separate and hostile worlds. . . . Such a transformation in thought and behavior would move the US closer to the ideal of a land of equal opportunity for all’ (2002: 194). Susanne Heine, a guest editor for *Interracial Voice*, also sees multiracial practices as a powerful tool for dismantling the racial hierarchy. ‘Interracial marriage’, she asserts, will make:

‘Black America’ just one more of history’s footnotes. . . . With each new wave of immigrants who cause new mixes to arise, ‘Black America’ and ‘White America’ will continue to fade into each other, atrophying and losing their steam, even as ‘America’, the one, the real and the only, that Destiny has as her ultimate design, begins taking shape. (2006: 3–4).
In sum, US advocates of race mixing clearly anticipate that such practices will lead to the disappearance of racism in society.

In Latin America, intellectuals, governments and ordinary citizens have long promoted *mestizaje* (race mixture) as the means for transcending race and producing national cohesion. For example, early 20th-century Mexican social scientists and policy makers vigorously advocated for race mixing in order to erode racial divisions, which they viewed as impeding national cohesion and development. As Alan Knight notes, the Reforma was concerned that Mexico had ‘failed to create a genuine, unitary nation – after the model of France, Germany or Japan, nations from which “there arises a solemn cry of shared blood, of shared flesh, that cry which is above all else, since it is the voice of life, the mysterious force which pulls material together and resists its disintegration”’ (citing Manuel Gamio, Knight, 1990: 88). The need to build a unified nation thus rested on the creation of a mixed-race population.

The Revolutionary vanguard argued that national unity was only possible where citizens shared, or at least believed they shared, the same blood. Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio, contended the Yucatán was unique in that it had achieved ‘that racial homogeneity, that unification of physical types, that advanced, happy fusion of races [which] constitutes the first and most solid basis of nationalism’. And it was ‘the task of the Revolution…to replicate that outcome nationwide’ via race mixing (cited in Knight 1990: 88). Mexico’s ‘unification must be achieved around the mestizo element’, demanded Luis Cabrera, by ‘dissolving the Indian element into the mestizo element’ (cited in Knight 1990: 85–6).

The utopian faith in race mixing reached its zenith in the writings of Aristedes Rojas and Gil Fortoul in Venezuela and Andrés Molina Enríquez and José Vasconcelos in Mexico. Not only would race mixture create the requisite biological homogeneity for successful nation building, but it would also produce a superior, more fraternal, ‘cosmic’ race. In 1925, Vasconcelos, setting the scene for the rise of the mestizo race, predicted: ‘What is going to emerge out there is the definitive race, the synthetical race, the integral race, made up of genius and the blood of all peoples and, for that reason, more capable of true brotherhood and of a truly universal vision’ (1997[1925]: 20).

In many areas of the region, race-mixing projects proved successful. On the level of personal identity, whites in Latin America tend to assert a mixed-race heritage. Regarding national rhetoric, whites also tend to include Africanness and/or Indianness, albeit in very paternalistic ways, in narratives of national heritage. One well-publicized example occurred when Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso was running for re-election in 1995. A self-identified white, he declared that he had ‘one foot in the kitchen’ – meaning he was of African descent. In a random survey in the state of Rio de Janeiro in 2000, 52 percent of self-identified whites claimed to have some African or indigenous ancestry, and 66 percent of self-identified blacks claimed to have some European ancestry (Telles, 2004: 93). Further evidence of the impact of
mestizo practices is the strong embrace of mixed-race identities and the concomitant reluctance of mixed-race individuals to identify as Indian or black. In Venezuela, estimates put the mixed-race population at 70 percent (Herrera Salas, 2007; Wright, 1990). In Mexico, roughly 90 percent of the population is considered mestizo, although official statistics on race have not been collected since 1921. In the case of Brazil, 50 percent identify as white, 45 percent as mixed, 4 percent as black, 4 percent as Asian and 0.4 percent as Indian (IBGE, 2000).

Despite the race-mixers’ predictions, both past and present, the official encouragement and popular embrace of mixed-race practices and identities have not ended race or racism in Latin America. To be sure, blackness and Indianness as habitable identities have been dramatically weakened; however, this café con leche reality has not led to the demise of race. As one Afro-Cuban doctor noted: ‘Race is a problem here. Race mixture only creates other categories and a means to whiten your children. But everyone knows that it is best to be white and worst to be black’ (Sawyer, 2006: 124). Similarly, in Venezuela, despite the pride of a café con leche mixed race identity, Venezuelans want to have as little café and as much leche as possible (Herrera Salas, 2007; Wright, 1990). In other words, far from diminishing racism, mixed-race identities have been claimed as a strategic measure to escape blackness and Indianness (Burdick, 1998a; Degler, 1971; Goldstein, 2003; Sue, 2010; Twine, 1998).

Furthermore, scholars of race in Latin America have argued that the region’s emphasis on race mixture has masked race-based inequalities and discrimination (Hasenbalg and Huntington, 1982; Twine, 1998), allowed prejudice to go unchecked (Robinson, 1999; Sagrera, 1974), and produced a feeling of relief among whites, exempting them from the responsibility of addressing racial inequalities (Hasenbalg, 1996). Additionally, others believe it has inhibited demands for indigenous and black rights and access to resources (Mollett, 2006). To take one example, Charles Hale (1999) found that discourses of mestizaje and hybridity closed discussions of collective rights and racism just when these discussions were beginning to make a difference in Guatemala. Confirming Hale’s observations, Tilley noted that the budding Mayan movement has stimulated a more politically potent backlash anchored in the widely accepted belief that race mixing has eroded racial distinctions. That is, ‘collective Mayan protest was [portrayed as] nonsensical and specious, even racist [because] Indian and Spanish races had long ago been ‘forged’ into one’ (Tilley, 2005).

Unfortunately, then, the promotion of race mixture, as well as identification as mestizo and white by individuals of African and indigenous descent, have not delivered the blow to racism that many have predicted. Studies of Latin America show that race continues to be socially significant even though racial identifications and locations are smooth gradations rather than entrenched positions (Martinez Novo, 2006; Sawyer, 2006; Telles, 2004; Wade, 1993). Racial inequalities flourish despite the fact that race mixture and interracial marriage have been commonplace and officially encouraged for more than a century.
Fantasies of black and Indian erasure run deep in US culture. In contemporary times this desire not only surfaces in the calls for race mixing but also among those who view non-national collective identities as retarding self-actualization. Shelby Steele (2002) considers such ‘group identities’, namely blackness, as oppressive, corrupting and one of the primary causes of contemporary racial inequalities in the USA. In his opinion, blackness is a ‘little gulag for the black individual’. Group identity anchored in race is the ‘terrible enemy’ of black development. Black pathology, an alleged cause of post-Jim Crow racial inequality, is the product of inhibited black individuality, which is rooted in the collective identity of blackness. Non-national collective identities, he believes, set in motion a social dynamic that leads one to being ‘unsupported as an individual’. ‘Nothing in his [sic] society asks for or even allows his flowering as a full, free, and responsible person’ (2002: 41). And blackness, in Steele’s opinion, is a major contributor to this anti-individual ‘gulag’.

Not only is the popular press littered with such calls for the end of blackness, but similar arguments can also be found in more highbrow scholarship. To take one example, Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu’s (1986) thesis of black educational underachievement, or what they call the ‘burden of acting white’ (1986: passim), continues to be upheld as conventional wisdom in the field of education studies. It is argued that a primary reason that ‘caste-like minorities’, both in the USA and elsewhere, tend to have poor academic achievement, is due to their racial identities. Educational achievement is defined as white, and consequently caste-like minorities allegedly sabotage themselves and their peers in defense of their racial identities. According to Theodore Cross and Robert Bruce Slater, editors of the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, black underachievement is due to the putative fact that ‘among young black men, in particular, studying hard and getting good grades are disparaged because these efforts are looked upon as ‘acting white’ (1995: 10).

Latin America provides, in many respects, a perfect test case for this thesis. For instance, in Brazil, one finds a ‘caste-like’ minority that does not have a collective racial identity. In fact, as discussed above, most Brazilians of color identify as mixed race and, rather than shunning whiteness, see whiteness as something positive. They aspire to whiten themselves biologically, socially and culturally. The following excerpt taken from an interview with Gabrielle (a 32-year-old Afro-Brazilian and the mother of three) and her common-law husband (a 28-year-old Euro-Brazilian day laborer and basket maker), is a common example of how whiteness is hyper-valued:

It’s not that I felt better than blacks, but I used to talk to my mother like this: ‘Mother, when I get married I will marry a white man’. My mother used to ask me, ‘Why?’ I used to answer, ‘Because I don’t want my children to be dark like me’. Then I used to say that, ‘If I found a white man to marry, I would marry him so that my
kids wouldn’t be little darkies’... This just reminded me that many darkies used to try to ask me out, but I wouldn’t date them – no way... I was only really thinking of the children. I used to think, ‘Okay, let me marry a person lighter than myself, because if I marry a dark person like myself, it’s going to be all dark – the little children’. But I was still thinking of the children, right? ‘So let me marry a lighter one because then my children will come out cuter’. (Warren, 2001: 243)

Similar findings can be seen with some Indigenous populations. In Mexico, it has been found that Indians are often embarrassed about their identities, have a strong sense of Indian inferiority, openly express preference for light skin, blue eyes and blond hair, and prefer to identify as mestizo (Friedlander, 1975). And yet contrary to what the burden of acting white thesis would predict, the absence of collective black or Indian identities and concomitant fear of being labeled ‘white’ has not translated into higher levels of educational achievement. In fact, the educational gap between blacks and whites is far greater in Brazil than in the USA (Telles, 2004; Warren, 1997).

More broadly speaking, there is no evidence that the absence of black and Indian collective identities has diminished racism or enhanced the individuality of non-whites. Throughout Latin America, racist stereotypes are ubiquitous. Blackness and Indianness, and those mixed-race subjects whose bodies signify such ancestry, are associated with criminality, laziness, inferior intelligence, primitiveness, ugliness, hyper-sexuality and immorality (Friedlander, 1975; García, 2005; Hanchard, 1994; Purcell, 1993; Sawyer, 2006; Twine, 1998; Vaughn, 2001; Wade, 1993; Warren and Twine, 2002). Institutional racism is equally, if not more, entrenched than in the USA (Hasenbalg, 1996; Telles, 2004; Warren and Twine, 2002). According to official Brazilian census data, race has a significant independent effect on infant mortality, life expectancy, education, occupation, housing and income (Skidmore, 1993). In addition, non-whites disproportionately suffer from excessive crime and violence, abuse by police and government officials, lack of basic infrastructural services and an absence of basic human rights (Telles, 1995). In the media, politics and among the economically well-to-do, whites are over-represented. This is the racial outcome in a region where race mixing and mixed-race identities have long made black and Indian identities virtually non-existent. The Latin American experience, thus, poses a serious challenge to those who define race-based collective identities as anti-individual gulags and favor their demise as a solution to racial hierarchy.

**Race avoidance – also known as colorblindness – has not been a successful pathway to greater racial equality**

A corollary of the black gulag thesis is the argument that color-consciousness, especially race-cognizant social policies such as affirmative action, enable and perpetuate racism. The ‘fixation on color’ not only animates ‘identity politics’, those putative anti-individual collective identities discussed above, but also
exacerbates racial divisiveness by stirring up white guilt, resentment and animosities. Racial classifications ‘pit members of one group against another, poisoning the racial atmosphere’ (Thernstrom and Thernstrom, 1997: 528).

Some have even argued that race-conscious data-gathering is inappropriate and problematic. This was the position of advocates for the Racial Privacy Initiative, which would have banned the state of California from gathering race and skin color data had it passed in 2003. This initiative was widely supported by the multiracial movements discussed above. One supporter wrote: ‘Stopping the state from collecting racial data is the right step to take toward a race-blind society. It sends the signal that the state does not see people as simply black, white, Latino, Asian or other, and neither should its citizens’ (Daily Californian, 2002). University of California Regent Ward Connerly took a more anti-empirical stance in support of the initiative:

Race advocates most especially rely on racial data to underscore their claims of institutional racism based on the ‘disparities’ noted in the data. This is how they make their case on ‘racial profiling,’ hate crimes, and racism in law enforcement. More young black men in prison, based solely on the data, serves as an illustration of institutional racism. In short, data are the lifeblood of the grievance industry. (Connerly, 2003: 3–4)

According to this line of thinking, to combat racism, it is preferable to avoid using race as a category of identity, public policy or social analysis. It is assumed that the primary problem in the USA is not racial discrimination, but rather, color-conscious discourses and policies that, among other things, encourage ‘group think’ and draw attention away from the true culprit, namely black pathology. Racism, having been sufficiently diminished, continues only because of the obsessive fixation on race. Indeed, if non-whites would stop dwelling on the relatively insignificant racist barriers they face and, instead, devote their energies to the business of improving themselves and the lives of their children, existing racial disparities in education, employment, health and wealth would evaporate.

It is important to note that there are also academics and political strategists on the Left who make the case against race. For either sociological convictions or tactical considerations, it is argued that class, rather than race, should be emphasized. The classic example is William Wilson’s book, The Declining Significance of Race (1978), which called for the elimination of race-based policies because class was considered more foundational; class is the real source or cause of division and inequality. In Wilson’s mind, addressing social policy in a racial framework ultimately distracts or hinders the kinds of reforms that benefit minorities. In his later work, The Truly Disadvantaged (1987), Wilson again reaffirmed his position that the problems of the truly disadvantaged in US society require the implementation of non-racial policies. This sort of class-reductive, anti-race analysis of social problems has heavily informed the US Democratic Party’s platform and political
strategy for the past 30 years. In fact, Wilson served as one of President Bill Clinton’s chief advisors on race and social inequality.

In Latin America, colorblindness and the privileging of class-based policies, has long been the preferred strategy for dealing (or not dealing) with race. Legally codified racism, like that which existed in the USA during the Jim Crow era, was largely unknown in the history of Latin America. The power of the colorblind rhetoric in the region can be seen in an excerpt from a Peruvian Government report submitted to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) in 1974: ‘since there does not exist, nor has there ever existed, any racial discrimination in Peru, no legal provisions exist on the subject and, obviously, no study or report is called for on racial discrimination in Peru’ (cited in Banton, 1996: 96). Similarly, the government of Venezuela told the ICERD that it was difficult to provide information on something that did not exist. Venezuela officials further justified their anti-race position by stating that ‘there is a risk that specific mention of racial discrimination would create a problem that had not existed before’ (cited in Banton, 1996: 96).

At the popular level, a great deal of social pressure encourages individuals to conform to a colorblind or anti-race social etiquette. In her ethnography of a largely non-white shantytown in Rio de Janeiro, Robin Sheriff found, as have other ethnographers (Burdick, 1998a; Duany, 2002; Oboler and Dzidzienyo, 2005; Sue, 2009; Twine, 1998; Wade, 1993), a tendency to ‘refrain from discussions of racism even in the contexts of community and family’ (Sheriff, 2001: 62). In fact, ‘very few informants…were able to recall hearing stories about the slavery era, although the grandparents and great-grandparents of a number of the older people I knew had been slaves’ (2001: 65). Sheriff continues:

Most people told me…that their parents had talked about neither slavery nor racism when they were growing up. When I asked younger informants in their teens and twenties if their parents had ever discussed racism with them, they rarely elaborated, saying simply, ‘No, they never talked about it’ or ‘They don’t dwell on it’. (2001: 66)

The colorblind ideology has an equally strong grip on thinking in Mexico, shown in this statement by a dark-skinned 56-year-old Veracruz fisherman: ‘Racism is never spoken of, nor is color, nor is race. I believe the Mexican is not racist. He never has been and he never will be’ (interview with the second author). The privileging of class over race has been a consistent presence in Latin America, and manifests both in popular understandings of inequality as well as the actual policies developed to combat such inequality. For example, in Venezuela, individuals substitute economic-based explanations for race-based explanations of discrimination by arguing that they do not like blacks because they live in poverty, as opposed to their being black (Herrera Salas, 2007; Wright, 1990). Similarly, it has been argued that indigenous peoples occupy a disadvantaged position in the social hierarchy because of their unequal position in the economic structure (Stavenhagen, 1969, 1975, 1996). Furthermore, the popular phrase in Latin
America that ‘money whitens’ suggests that ultimately, class triumphs over race (Degler, 1971; Harris, 1972[1952]).

Given this cultural landscape in which colorblindness is the norm, it is not surprising that race-based identities and race-conscious public policies are rare to non-existent. Indeed, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some nation states in Latin America banned the use of racial categories altogether (Loveman, 2001). In Bolivia, post-Independence politicians sought to ban the term ‘Indian’ and replace it with ‘Bolivian’ (Abercrombie, 1991). Similarly, Peruvian President Juan Velasco, on the ‘Day of the Indian’ in 1969, prohibited the use of the word ‘Indio’, replacing it with campesino (peasant) (Garcia, 2005: 74). In Cuba, Jose Marti and others worked to define the nation as ‘raceless’, and hence, inclusive of all Cubans (Appelbaum et al., 2003: 7). During the revolution, Afro-Cuban communities were dismantled because their very existence defied the newly constructed nation’s vision of colorblindness. A 1965 law placed the supervision and control of Afro-Cuban societies under the Ministry of the Interior, the organ charged with preventing crime and counter-revolutionary activities (de la Fuente, 2001). As de la Fuente notes, ‘any attempts to incorporate race into the political agenda was deemed to be counterrevolutionary – a divisionist act’ (de la Fuente, 2001: 18).6

Given anti-race sensibilities, many countries have omitted the race question from their census for almost a century (Loveman, 2001). The government of Puerto Rico attempted to eliminate references to race from most public documents because, according the director of the Office of the Census of the Puerto Rico Planning Board, ‘the Commonwealth’s constitution prohibits discrimination by race or color’ (Duany, 2002: 252). The Mexican government offered the following justification for dropping the race question from their census in 1930:

Since Independence . . . our social stratification . . . has stopped obeying ethnic categories, in order to become subject to economic categories. […] Very few individuals have knowledge of the ethnic characteristics of their grandparents and none of their great grandparents. [Thus] individuals cannot give accurate data about their race or degree of mestizaje [racial mixture]. […] In this context, the data on race has become progressively inaccurate, to the point of being meaningless. In view of the above, the Department of National Statistics, having consulted with the most competent specialists on this matter, has decided to omit race from the census. (Mexico, Departamento de la Estadística Nacional (1932: 54) cited in Loveman, 2001: 327)

Only very recently have countries begun to reintroduce, or introduce for the first time, a race question on their censuses (Telles, 2007). When the race question was added again to the Brazilian census in 1991 (one of the earliest reintroductions), many were outraged, arguing that the collection of data on race was unscientific, anti-Brazilian and racist. Most infamously, the University of Columbia trained sociologist, Gilberto Freyre, argued that the ‘question was unnecessary, because Brazilians were simply Brazilians. Each had transcended his or her consciousness of
racial origin and become a member of the Brazilian ‘meta-race’ (1979: 3). The color question threatened what he considered Brazil’s ‘vanguard’ status as a nation given its successful ‘assimilation of people of color’ (1979: 3). In his opinion, the race question would animate racial identities and thus fragment a racially unified nation along racial lines.

In sum, Latin America has, for at least a century, embodied the neoliberal anti-racist platform which has dominated the political mainstream in the US over the past 30 years: a colorblind ideology manifesting weak to non-existent race-based collective identities and low, if any, emphasis on race matters in everyday discussions, public policy or social analysis. Yet the results do not encourage emulation. Anti-race consciousness and colorblind social policy have not led to greater racial equality. De-emphasizing racism, present or past, has not borne the end of race. In fact, when comparing racial inequality trends in the USA versus Brazil from 1960 to 1996 (the time of race-based affirmative action in the USA), racial inequality in occupation dramatically declined in the USA, while significantly increasing in Brazil (Telles, 2004: 254). Furthermore, the Latin American case demonstrates that the implementation of purely class-based policies does not eliminate racial inequality – the prime example being socialist Cuba (de la Fuente, 2001; Sawyer, 2006).

The negation of race has meant the virtual absence of a political space of withdrawal and group formation where ‘subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses’ and ‘formulate oppositional interpretations of their needs, identities and interests’ (Singh, 2004: 65). Without such a space, it has proven extremely difficult to build an intellectual or political movement that could ‘reconstruct a modern political imagination that [has] been so thoroughly distorted by racist presumptions’ (2004: 78). Or, as Eugene Robinson, a Latin American correspondent for the Washington Post discovered, ‘getting rid of racial identity is no panacea. In Brazil… it left those at the bottom of the ladder without an identity to hold them together and push them forward, without a group. It left them weaker, more helpless, more isolated. It left them alone’ (1999: 266).

**Liberal, power-evasive articulations of multiculturalism have not reduced racial hierarchies**

Multiculturalism in the US can be traced back to the early 20th century, when select philosophers and writers made calls for cultural pluralism (Bourne, 1916; Kallen, 1915, 1956). These early efforts went largely unheeded because the ideals of assimilation and Eurocentrism were hegemonic until the early 1960s (Banks, 2006). Only when confronted with decolonization movements abroad and the civil rights movement domestically were these prevailing ideologies sufficiently dislodged to create space for multiculturalism to begin shaping public policy, business and government administration, education, the media and quotidian identities and practices. Indeed by the 1980s, multiculturalism, or at least elements of it, had become widely institutionalized, especially within the sphere of education policy.7
Although many multicultural theorists have advocated for a multiculturalism which identifies and directly challenges systems of racial inequality and societal oppression (Banks, 2006; Banks and Banks, 2004; Bennett, 2003; Gay, 2000; Mattai, 1992; Modood and May, 2001; Nieto, 2008; Sleeter, 1996; Sleeter and McLaren, 1995), in practice, multiculturalism often has been transformed into a power-evasive, ‘heroes and holidays’ approach. This form of multiculturalism is illustrated by Genieva Gay (2000) in her tour of a ‘culturally responsive’ classroom where:

one is bombarded with an incredibly rich and wide range of ethnically and culturally diverse images. Maps of the world and the United States are prominently displayed on the front wall under the heading ‘We Come from Many Places’... A display in another corner of the room is labeled ‘Our Many Different Faces’. It includes a montage of close-up facial photographs of the members of the class. (2000: 39)

A number of multicultural education and critical race theorists have critiqued this form of multiculturalism, which Sleeter and Grant (1999) have labeled the ‘four Fs’ or ‘fairs, festivals, food and folk tales’ (1999: 132), on at least two grounds.8 First, in the process of valorizing cultural differences, whiteness is re-centered as the norm (e.g. distinctions between ‘Mexican’ music and ‘normal’ music) and essentialist clichés about different groups (e.g. ‘Chinese value the group over the individual’) are reproduced.9 Second, celebrations of diversity are frequently premised on very superficial, if not naive, conceptualizations of culture. Culture is reduced to customs or folkloric practices. More complex understandings of culture, which include discursive regimes, interpretative frameworks, epistemologies, habitus and semiotics, and the relationship of culture to social, economic and political orders, are rarely considered. This surface handling of culture enables, among other things, extremely selective engagements with difference – selectivities that ‘embrace cultural and other parameters of diversity but do so in ways that leave hierarchies intact and, in this sense, are... power evasive’ (Frankenberg, 1993: 143). In short, there is little or no thought given to different kinds of difference and the differences such distinctions might make.

A number of scholars have noted how liberal humanistic philosophical traditions frequently intersect with these folkloric, power-evasive formulations of multiculturalism. For example Parekh (2000) found that the liberal assumption that ‘insists that human beings are basically the same in all societies’ lends itself to the inference that ‘their differences are shallow and morally inconsequential’ (2000: 114). Along these same lines, Frankenberg (1993) observed that many white women in the USA understood race as ‘a secondary characteristic...to an essential human sameness’ (1993: 147–8). Not surprisingly, liberal, power-evasive articulations of multiculturalism harmonize well with the liberal state that is ‘group blind’ and cannot ‘see’ things such as color or ethnicity (Modood, 2005: 137). Despite the efforts of multicultural education theorists and others to move multiculturalism beyond its liberal, power-evasive forms, the Four ‘Fs’ have prevailed.
Latin America’s long-standing history of experimentation with various forms of multiculturalism can provide insights for US scholars by highlighting both pitfalls and potentially promising avenues for the re-formulation of multiculturalism. Since the 1920s a liberal, power-evasive multiculturalism, which treats culture in shallow, folkloric terms, has existed in much of Latin America as part of corporate, government and education policy. Throughout the region, intellectuals and political activists began to realize that the theretofore Europhile, eugenics emphasis on whiteness was not up to the task of nation building because it was unlikely to resonate with the general population, which was of predominant African and indigenous descent. In Mexico, for example, revolutionaries noted that Indians lacked ‘the essential sentiment of the citizen, that political solidarity which is the very base on which the principle of nationality rests’ (Knight, 1990: 84). Therefore, a new narrative of nation was coined – one that would have currency with the most significant racial subalterns of the region: Indians and blacks.

In the new articulations of nation, racial diversity was defined as an asset rather than a blemish or barrier to development, modernity and civilization. Throughout most of the region, things black and Indian were embraced and celebrated as a component of a nation’s culture, history and population. Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre, in a landmark article titled, ‘On the Valorization of Things Black’ (1926), challenged what he characterized as the ‘phony and ridiculous’ Europhile version [of nation] that “hid” the real Brazil, personified for him by black musicians’ (cited in Vianna, 1999: 9). He proclaimed that ‘black song form, black dances, mixed with traces of fado...are perhaps the best thing Brazil has to offer’ (cited in Vianna, 1999: 9). When Getulio Vargas became President in 1930, this manifesto became official ideology; samba, a musical form coded as black, was heralded as a Brazilian icon. In Mexico, indigenous culture was defined as ‘the true base of nationality’ (Brading, 1989: 85); ‘Indian customs, music, dance and rituals were rehabilitated and woven into a new tapestry of folkloric nationalism’ (Knight, 1990: 82).

In a dramatic reversal, then, Indians and blacks went from being positioned as the principle obstacles to national development, to their soul and salvation (Abercrombie, 1991). Rather than trying to minimize racial diversity, many Latin American countries started competing for the title of most diverse. Novelist and anthropologist José María Arguedas, who best represented the multicultural turn in Peru, proudly declared that ‘there [is] no country that is more diverse’ (Garcia, 2005: 73).

And yet, for the most part, the multiculturalism of this era was beholden to its parent, mestizo nationalism. The undergirding epistemology of this strain of multiculturalism was not aimed at creating strong subaltern identities and communities but rather eliminating or submerging them to the broader communitarian identity of the hybrid nation. More crudely put by Luis Cabrera, the end goal was to ‘dissolve the Indian element into the mestizo element’ (cited in Knight, 1990: 85). Or, in another version, the aim was to ‘mestizo-ize the Indians and, at the same time, to Indianize the mestizos, to create a national synthesis on the basis of
reciprocal contributions’ (Knight, 1990: 85–6). Thus, multiculturalism was subser-
vient to the greater race-mixing goal of forging national homogeneity out of racial heterogeneity. Nations celebrated diversity but in a way that promoted the idea of a future homogenized, hybrid race. This is why, to quote María Elena García, ‘national integration and diversity’ were no longer regarded as ‘clashing themes, but rather two grand melodies that could be harmonized’ (García, 2005: 73).

However, multiculturalism during this time was not always in tune with or subservient to mestizo nationalism. There were ruptures, tensions and contradic-
tions. For example, within some revolutionary circles in Mexico, it was believed that national unity could and should be built by producing an ‘Indian population that was “educated, bilingual, and politically mobilized” rather than ‘remaining marginalized, uneducated, monolingual and politically inert’ (Knight, 1990: 80).

Ultimately most of the departures from mestizo nationalism were contained by everyday racism or what Alan Knight (1990) termed the ‘ladino backlash’, which was, and continues to be, rooted in ‘anti-Indian prejudice’. Thus, even though Indian and black ‘culture’ was officially exalted in many countries of the region, the ‘intractable racism’ that saturates most of Latin America resulted in the steady erosion of Indian and black identities, cultures and communities. Charles Hale (2006) notes how this dynamic worked in Guatemala, a latecomer to multicultur-
alism, where Mayans’ attempts to push multiculturalism in directions that threat-
ened racial hierarchies and ideals of liberalism were met with acts of genocide. Thus, any illiberal tendencies or possibilities of anti-racist multiculturalism were largely overwhelmed by mestizo nationalism and the sociopolitical realities of racism.

Rather than mitigating racism, these early experiments with multiculturalism ultimately helped to animate racial hierarchy. Even though the cultural contribu-
tions of racial subalterns were widely lauded, these contributions were deemed secondary in quantity, quality and kind. Europeans were still considered largely responsible for the legal systems, political economies, languages and religions of the region. Non-whites supposedly gave dance, culinary arts, music and select words. Blacks and Indians were now counted, but only as supporting actors. They added a certain spice or interesting particularity to the white substance of the nation. Diversity narratives were stories about what Latin American white elites, as the representatives of citizenship, normalcy and nation, had gained from the coloreds in their midst. Not only was the racial order reaffirmed, but African and indigenous peoples were reduced to ossified clichés or what Barry Troyna in the UK phrased ‘the three S’s’ (saris, samosas and steel bands) – the battery of exotic images of subaltern peoples and their ‘cultures’ that do nothing to address the realities of racism and unequal power relations (cited in Gillborn, 2005: 114).

Multiculturalism in this era was notoriously power evasive. If racism was addressed, it was relegated to the past. In Mexico, conquest became a Hollywood tale of the evil Spanish oppressing the noble Indians. Indulging in anti-colonial sentiments predictably slipped into an avoidance of any critical exam-
ination of the heirs of this conquest. Moreover, Indians and blacks were relegated
to being objects of the past. As Bonfil notes: ‘The Indian presence as depicted in murals, museums, sculptures, and archaeological sites...is treated essentially as a dead world’ (1996: 55). Similarly, an Afro-Cuban musician observed: ‘Our culture is presented as primitive, backward, anachronistic, not as a living, breathing culture and struggle that defines us as a people’ (cited in Sawyer, 2006: 127).

More common than displacing racism to the distant past is the sanitization of history as well. To take one example, observe how Gilberto Freyre portrays slavery in the foundational text of Brazilian multiculturalism, *The Masters and the Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization* (1986[1933]):

Of the female slave or ‘mammy’ who rocked us to sleep. Who suckled us. Who fed us, mashing our food with her own hands. The influence of the old woman who told us our first tales of ghosts and bicho [bogeyman]. Of the mulatto girl who relieved us of our first bicho de pe [jigger], of a pruriency that was so enjoyable. Who initiated us into physical love and, to the creaking of a canvas cot, gave us our first sensation of being a man. Of the Negro lad who was our first playmate. (1986[1933]: 278)

Obviously, such multicultural frameworks do not invite critical reflection of slavery and its contemporary iterations. Instead, the centrality of whiteness is reaffirmed and slavery is sanitized beyond recognition.

The liberal, power-evasive articulations of multiculturalism have further bolstered white supremacy by suggesting that diversity practices have effectively dealt with racism. This logic was evoked in 1991 by a Mexican delegate to the United Nations on the topic of racism. He argued: ‘Manifestations of racial discrimination normally emerged when one ethnic group claimed superiority over another. Such a situation was made impossible in Mexico by the multicultural and multi-ethnic composition of society, of which the indigenous population formed the very basis.’

Hence multiculturalism had putatively made racism impossible.

The Latin American experiment with a liberal, power-evasive mode of multiculturalism confirms many of the worst fears of US multicultural and critical race scholars. However well-intentioned diversity projects may be, ultimately they are doomed if they are deferential to liberalism and do not address issues of power. Meaningful progress cannot be achieved without a critical analysis of the centrality of race to the ideals and perceptions of normalcy, beauty, competence, intelligence, modernity and citizenship. Racism cannot be dismantled if history is denied, forgotten or cleansed. In short, Latin America demonstrates that multicultural projects that are beholden to an ideal of universal sameness, are ahistorical and fail to explicitly challenge racism, can be easily drawn into the logics of white supremacy. Therefore, the Latin American experience with this brand of multiculturalism highlights how it can obscure and animate rather than unsettle racial inequality. The empirical evidence supports those who argue that the modern state must develop a multicultural society that moves away from assumptions of
‘a single and universally valid model of a properly constituted state’ by devising a political structure that is tailored to its histories, cultural traditions and diversity (Parekh, 2000: 195).

This being said, it is important to recognize that in the 1980s and 1990s, Latin America began experimenting with another version of multiculturalism that challenges certain liberal philosophies and is less power evasive. The more contemporary wave of multiculturalism has come about because of anti-racist and human rights movements, neoliberal economic reforms, democratic political reforms, and the influence of international and domestic non-governmental organizations. In many parts of the region there has been a break from formal equality in the direction of what Modood (2005) calls the ‘plural state’. The multicultural nature of many Latin American societies has been formally recognized (Gow, 2008; Hooker, 2008; Ramos, 1998). In a number of countries’ constitutions, Indians, and in some cases blacks or maroon societies, have been granted distinctive rights to land, cultural protection, social services and education. For example, in Venezuela, constitutional changes that reference ‘native’ rights (but not those of Afro-descendants) were approved by a popular referendum in 1999 (Hooker, 2008; Stavenhagen, 2002). In Peru, bicultural and intercultural educational programs have been implemented (Golash-Boza, 2008). In Bolivia, the government has combined multicultural constitutional changes with a decentralization of the state (Sieder, 2002). Most recently, the administration of Bolivian President Evo Morales has advanced an anti-racist, non-Eurocentric form of multiculturalism.

Along with cultural-group-recognition-type reforms, racism and racial inequality have come under attack. Public institutions, policies and legislation aimed at combating racial discrimination have been developed and implemented in countries such as Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama and Peru (Hooker, 2008). In Brazil and Colombia, policies such as affirmative action have been instituted to redress racial discrimination against Afro-descendants (Escobar, 2008; Hooker, 2008).

The relatively recent nature of these reforms means that there is little empirical research or consensus on the effects of this version of multiculturalism (Hooker, 2008). Given the outcome of the earlier articulations of multiculturalism, there are, not surprisingly, a number of skeptics. Charles Hale (2006) defines contemporary multiculturalism as ‘neoliberal multiculturalism’, viewing it as beholden to ‘global capitalism’ and therefore largely gutted of any progressive potential. Nestor Canclini sees recent forms of multiculturalism as dovetailing with the fragmentary, atomizing impulses of postmodernity, diminishing the possibility of revolutionary metanarratives and national unity (2001: 83–5). Analisa Taylor (2005) worries that recent reforms will not have much of an effect until the conception of ‘culture’ moves beyond an understanding of ‘uses and customs’. Finally, guided by their recent empirical analysis of indigenous people in Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru, Hall and Patrinos (2005) conclude that between 1994 and 2004, while some improvements have occurred in human development outcomes, there has not been a substantial reduction in indigenous poverty (2005: 10).
Despite these findings and theoretical concerns, we are cautiously optimistic about these recent experiments with multiculturalism primarily because they challenge liberalism on certain fronts and are less power evasive than earlier versions of multiculturalism. Racism, for the first time, is officially problematized rather than denied. Governments are beginning to gather quantitative and qualitative data on race and racism. Anti-racist counter-publics are growing. Ultimately, however, whether the skeptics prove correct or not, it is clear that Latin America will continue to provide a well-spring of data about multiculturalism and its anti-racist effects.

**Understandings of race and racism – or racial literacy – are learned**

A significant obstacle for the progression towards racial equality in the USA is the low level of racial literacy among whites. Countless studies have found that whites tend to perceive only blatant, explicitly codified forms of racism. Thus, the myriad of forms that racism takes is invisible to the majority of whites. In other words, whites do not perceive racism as being salient in contemporary US society because the forms of racism that they recognize – Klu Klux Klan organizations, cross-burnings, legal apartheid and explicitly derogatory language – are less mainstream than they were a generation ago (Blauner, 2001). Bonilla-Silva (2003) refers to this phenomenon as ‘racism without racists’. This is especially problematic, because today racism tends to largely be covert, institutional and apparently non-racial (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). Consequently, whites consider even modest interventions to ‘level the playing field’, such as affirmative action, as forms of reverse discrimination (Omi and Winant, 1994: 128). Indeed, many whites consider themselves racially disadvantaged. In the film, *Brazil Abroad* (Warren and Zanotti, forthcoming), one student at the University of Washington remarked that, unlike Brazil: ‘[I]t’s an advantage to be black in the US. If I, as a white person, were in black skin, my educational and employment opportunities would be much greater.’

Anti-racists contribute to the low racial literacy of whites by failing to dispel the myth of standpoint epistemologies. It is frequently assumed that an individual’s structural position produces particular knowledge and insights that are inaccessible to persons in different locations. For example, Patricia Hills Collins argues:

Black women intellectuals are central to Black feminist thought for several reasons. First, our experiences as African-American women provide us with a unique standpoint on Black womanhood unavailable to other groups. It is more likely for Black women as members of an oppressed group to have critical insights into the condition of our own oppression than it is for those who live outside those structures. (2000: 412, emphasis ours)

Similarly, Blauner argues that ‘blacks are inevitably more sensitive than whites to the nuances of racism’ (1990: 163). Thus, a racial subaltern is assumed to have higher racism literacy by virtue of their structural location. Likewise, whites are
racially illiterate because they are the benefactors of racism. Although scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins do assert nuances to such claims, the more simplified and mechanistic version of this form of thinking permeates popular thought.

A common way of expressing this position was articulated by one of the black participants in the film, *Color of Fear* (Wah et al., 1994): ‘He [a white man] doesn’t have to think about racism... they [whites] don’t have to deal with that from day one.’ It is as if oppression determines, if not mechanistically generates, a particular consciousness. Conversely, it is assumed that whites do not understand, and can never understand oppression, because they do not experience racism. Moreover, whites often use this popular understanding of how racial literacy is acquired to avoid taking responsibility for their low levels of racial literacy. In interviews with white college students in the US, Bonilla-Silva (2003) continually heard the ‘I am not black, so I don’t know’ line. Similarly, a white woman from the Bay Area in California reflects: ‘Sometimes I feel that that’s kind of patronizing... It bothers me to hear a man, for instance, call himself a feminist, when I think, “How can he understand what it’s like to be a woman?” and sometimes I think that my sensitivity is, is kind of displaced, that I can’t really understand what it’s like to be black’ (cited in Frankenberg, 1993: 165).

Latin America offers a plethora of evidence that such a thesis of subjectivity formation is wrong (Bailey, 2004). Even though non-whites in Latin America experience racism from day one, their racial literacy is low. To many non-whites in Latin America, as with US whites, racism is only visible when it manifests in very limited, explicit forms. For example, Jorge, a 20-year old Afro-Brazilian, infers there is no racism in Brazil:

> The plantation owners used to prohibit blacks from entering their homes. Blacks had to remain in the slave quarters. [Whites] didn’t want to mix with them... Blacks were not allowed inside of their homes, no! Blacks had to eat outside. Now, today, we don’t have racism anymore because blacks can enter the kitchens and eat in the homes of whites. (Twine, 1998: 33)

Similarly, John Burdick found that many poor women of color in Rio de Janeiro ‘tended to view color prejudice in distant and nebulous terms’ (1998b: 141). In general, it is not appreciated how ‘race [is] an element underlying inequality’ (Telles, 1994). Observe how Helena, a 22-year-old black tutor in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, does not interpret her class subordination as being connected to racism:

> If I were to rank my problems from one to twenty, with one being the worst of all my problems, racism would be number eighteen or nineteen. Racism just isn’t something I’m greatly concerned about. I have bigger problems, such as putting food on the table, getting into a university or getting a decent job. (cited in Warren, 2001: 270)

Thus, many, if not majorities of, non-whites in Latin America rarely interpret their capacity to get a job or put food on the table as being intimately entwined
with racism. Lacking institutional and informal exposure to teachings of racial literacy, there is scant understanding of how race, both its contemporary and historical forms, is directly linked to the particular configurations of the labor market, social welfare, taxation policies, housing, educational opportunities, and so forth. In short, like US whites, they do not link race to economic and social marginalization.

What the Latin American situation powerfully illustrates, then, is that racial literacy is acquired and learned, rather than an automatic outcome of one’s racial location. The failure to grasp this truth undermines the tremendous amount of cultural, institutional and intellectual work that continues to go into the production of high racial literacy in various subaltern communities. Communities, such as US blacks, are not appreciated for their sociological wisdom. Their agency and labor are reduced to a mere reflex to oppression. Equally troubling is the assumption that whites cannot acquire racial literacy. Thus the mis-education and learned deficits of whites are not even problematized. Their standpoint is assumed to preclude them from achieving a complex understanding of racism. Consequently, even though most would agree that whites’ low racial literacy is a significant obstacle to reducing white supremacy, academic debates, political projects and public policy that focus on how to improve racial literacy are rare to non-existent. Based on the faulty logic of standpoint epistemologies, it is assumed that little or nothing can be done.

Conclusion

We hope this summary of the research of race and ethnicity in Latin America will inspire more concerted consideration of the lessons that the region may hold for anti-racists in the United States and other parts of the world. Interestingly this was one of the original impetuses for the study of race and ethnicity in Latin America. Immediately after the Second World War it was widely believed that Latin America had more successfully navigated race and thus offered lessons that could be adopted elsewhere. Consequently, UNESCO, in the wake of the Nazi Holocaust, sent out a team of social scientists to Brazil in search of anti-racist solutions. Ironically, this research ultimately laid the foundation for overturning the notion that Latin America, and Brazil in particular, was a racial paradise. Unfortunately, once the region’s status as a racial democracy was called into question, efforts to learn from the Latin American situation were largely abandoned. The didactic emphasis quickly reversed course.

Obviously, we believe that the abandonment of the project to learn from the study of race and ethnicity in Latin America has been a mistake. Simply because Latin America is not a racial paradise does not mean that it does not hold invaluable lessons that could help advance anti-racism in other regions. Furthermore, whereas we have dedicated this particular discussion to research in Latin America, we would encourage scholars to branch out beyond this discussion to incorporate findings from other parts of the world.
In closing, we would like to put forth an important caveat: merely because certain practices—such as race mixing, colorblindness and multiculturalism—have not been effectual in Latin America, does not mean that such remedies could not prove effective in the USA or elsewhere. We do, however, believe that these empirical realities should serve as a cautionary tale and certainly merit further consideration. More importantly, we urge the defenders of race mixing, colorblindness and liberal multiculturalism to explain and justify why the conditions in the USA or elsewhere are unique or so distinct from those of Latin America that practices and policies that have proven ineffective in dismantling racism in Latin America are apt to produce more positive outcomes in other national or regional contexts.

Notes
1. Based on the case of Cuba, Sawyer (2003) argues that class-based policies, the non-collection of race data and proclamations by the state that the race problem has been solved, does not alleviate racial inequality. Telles (2004) also takes a comparative approach to question the often-assumed link between residential segregation and racial inequality (as advocated by Massey and Denton, 1993)—in Brazil lower levels of segregation comfortably coexist with racial inequality. Finally, Wade (2004), based on the Latin American case, cautions scholars against the over-romanticization of race mixture as a cure all for racism.
2. AMEA is the Association of Multiethnic Americans.
3. There is some variation in the role that mestizaje played in various countries. For example, in the Andean region, mestizaje projects were much weaker and took longer to become official state discourses (Chambers, 2003). In countries such as Peru, mestizaje had a different and, at times, contradictory meaning than was present in Mexico (de la Cadena, 2000).
4. Important exceptions to the dominant trend of mestizaje include indigenismo, which exalted the ‘pure’ Indian (Appelbaum et al., 2003).
5. There is no direct measure of the mestizo population, although, in Mexico, it is generally understood that this population is a default category for those not classified as indigenous (Eshelman, 2005). In 2000, roughly 7 percent of the population five years or older spoke an indigenous language, the most traditional measure of indigenous status (Corona, 2001; Fernández et al., 2002). Therefore, in light of the lack of data on race, a fair estimate would put the mestizo population around 90 percent.
6. Although we believe that the case of Cuba illustrates some of the problems with colorblind policies, we also acknowledge that Cuba, in some ways, stands out from its Latin American counterparts on the issue of race. For example, Cuba was home to leaders such as José Martí and General Antonio Maceo who helped organize blacks in the fight for Cuban independence (Appelbaum et al., 2003; Sawyer, 2006). Furthermore, shortly after the Revolution, Castro developed an initiative to end racial segregation (Sawyer, 2006). Finally, in adopting progressive class-based policies, Cuba has taken steps towards reducing racial inequality in the areas of education, politics, housing and health (Sawyer, 2006).
7. There is a range of perspectives on multiculturalism. In this article we focus on an understanding of multiculturalism highlighted by social theorists and sociologists of education and, to a lesser degree, multiculturalism as conceptualized by political theorists. Furthermore, it is important to note that there are interesting debates occurring around the topic of multiculturalism outside of the Americas. For example, in the context of Britain, scholars and policy makers are grappling with complex issues such as the role of religion in a multicultural state, political agency and gender relations in relation to Muslims, the emergence of hyphenated identities, and changing notions of blackness (Modood, 2005; Modood and May, 2001).

8. Similar distinctions and debates have taken place in Britain since the issue became salient in the 1970s and 1980s with advocates for anti-racist policies critiquing traditional forms of multiculturalism for reifying cultural difference and decentralizing questions of racism (Modood, 2005; Modood and May, 2001).

9. Some have speculated that one of the reasons that this form of multiculturalism is widely accepted is because it is consistent with the ways whites or Euro Americans conceptualize culture and express ethnicity (Alba, 1990; Sleeter, 1996).

10. Whereas the meaning of multiculturalism and the means to achieve it have varied over time and across region in Latin America, we refer to multiculturalism as the general trend towards the greater recognition of diversity that occurred during the 20th century.

11. CERD/C/SR.1105 (United Nations, n.d.). This statement was made in 1991 regarding a report submitted by Mexico to the UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

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