# AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND BRAZIL'S RACIAL DEMOCRACY

## *When Myth Eclipses Reality*

This work focuses on the mitigated success in redressing racial discrimination and inequality in Brazil, 'the most unequal country in the world.' Identifying a disconnect between evidence of discrimination and popular discourse, this paper looks at Brazil's colonial past before providing an in-depth examination of post-abolition concepts of mestizaje and racial democracy. Engineered and promoted by Brazilian elites anxious to limit Black uprisings, such notions discredited the possibility for racism to exist in the country by emphasizing biological and cultural mixing and by framing inequality as class based. After providing an overview of Brazilian racial inequality and Black resistance through time, I highlight the pervasive influence of elite discourse on lagging Black consciousness and mobilization. Elaborating on challenges to Afro-Brazilian mobilization, this work identifies the strength of the Brazilian state as well as its currently fragmented party system–where Black people are 'captured'–as significant hindrances to effective political mobilization by the Black movement. Offering an overview of contemporary Brazilian politics, this work also notes the detrimental effects of the Jair Bolsonaro regime on social welfare programs and affirmative action policies in Brazil.

*Written by Florence Harvey-Hudon*
*Edited by Evdokia Konstantopoulos*
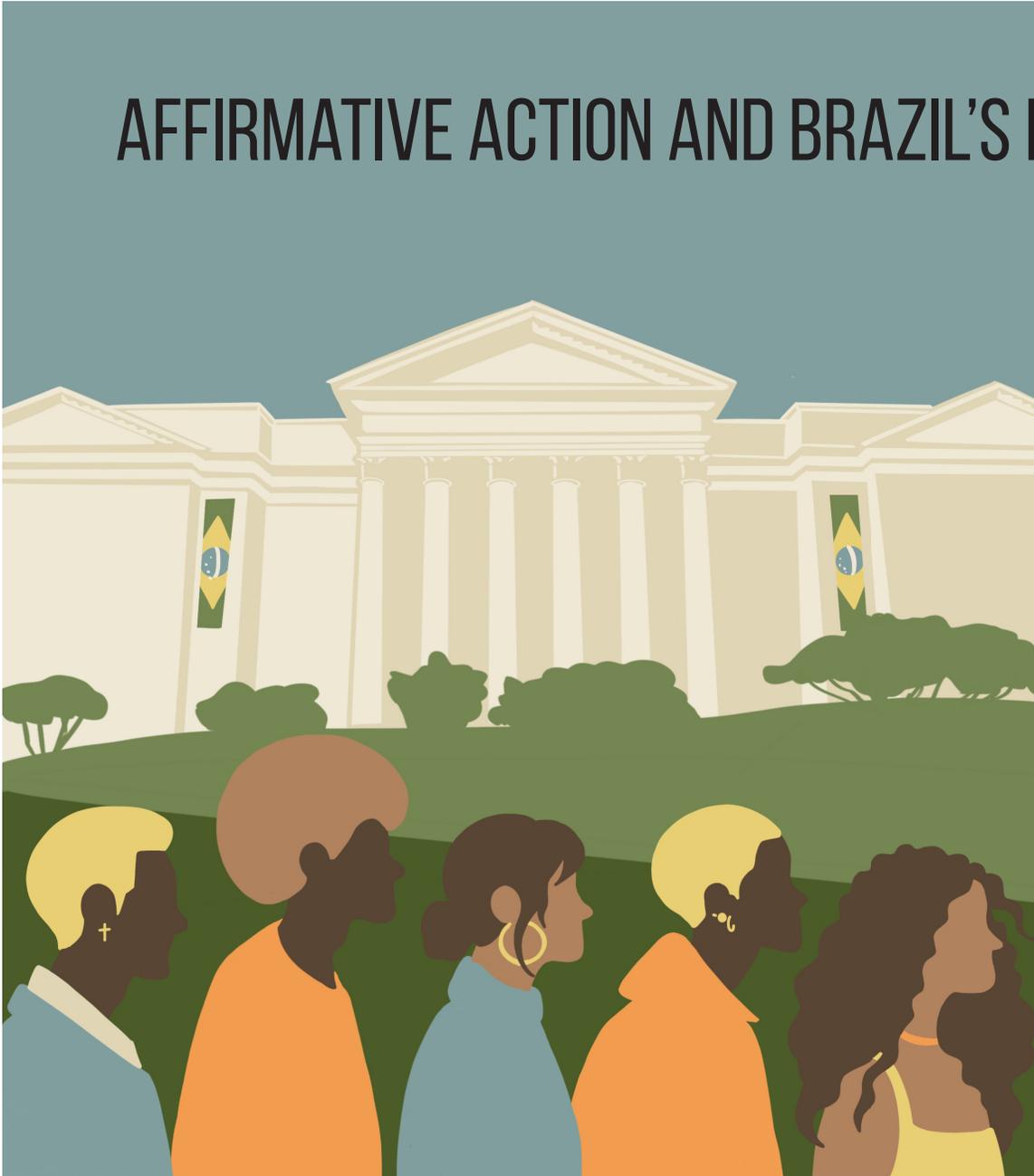
Widely recognized as 'the most unequal country in the world,' much attention has been directed towards inequality reduction in Brazil since the 1990s. While most of the state's efforts have materialized in the celebrated *Bolsa Família* conditional cash-transfer program and in a law which pegs the minimum wage to GDP growth, affirmative action policies, most prominently in public institutions of higher education, have also been implemented.[1] Despite significant evidence that the Lula administration's social welfare programs and affirmative action policies had succeeded in reducing inequalities since the 2000s, Jair Bolsonaro's incumbency has been marked by revocation and contraction, as the new president claimed: "This cannot continue to exist, it is all victimization. Poor black, poor woman, poor gay, poor person from the Northeast. Everything is victimization in Brazil. We will end that."[2] Echoing the sentiments of "those with more education, more money and who are whiter," Bolsonaro bolsters the complaints of opponents who argue that affirmative action is unnecessary, may disadvantage non-targeted groups and is "distinctly un-Brazilian."[3] As a whole, Bolsonaro's comments uncover the widely accepted rhetoric of Brazilian racial democracy wherein all racial groups coexist as equals and in which pervasive racial discrimination in the job market and political sphere is framed as class-related.[4] Accordingly, this work highlights the continued influence of the Brazilian myth of racial democracy as central in repudiating affirmative action policies and discouraging racial mobilization. Supplementing a survey of Brazilian race discourse with a review of *mestizaje* effects as well as an examination of the Brazilian state and party system, this work illuminates strong state capacity and a fragmented party system as considerable challenges to effective political mobilization by the Black movement. Altogether, this work identifies numerous factors behind mitigated success in redressing racial discrimination and inequality in contemporary Brazil.

## Historical Context

Firstly, Anthony Marx examines historical facts of Brazil's colonial era in *Making Race and Nation*. Surveying previous literature on the subject, Marx promptly clarifies that despite the apparent disconnect between the country's history of large-scale slavery and a later absence of legal segregation, 'rosy explanations' need to be discarded.[5] Tannenbaum and Freyre claim that Portuguese colonialism was characterized by "a more humanitarian form of slavery" influenced by Catholic doctrines of natural equality as well as colonial racial tolerance resulting from Portugal's proximity and contact with Africa (as well as its domination by the Moors). Revising these claims, Marx highlights the extensiveness and brutal nature of Brazil's colonial era.[6] Discrediting claims that high levels of manumission and miscegenation during the period could demonstrate the colonizer's mercy and "cultural predilection," he emphasizes that Brazilian slaveholders imported new slaves cheaply and in large numbers because they were unable to keep them alive and that colonial settlements largely consisted of "outnumbered and disproportionately male Portuguese."[7] As for the role of the Church, Marx reminds that the Catholic Church owned slaves before underlining the harmful impact of the Church's doctrines of natural equality, which "reinforced status distinctions by race, with Africans at the bottom of the formally inclusive hierarchy."[8] As such, despite allegations that the Portuguese pursued policies of incorporation more than imposition, Marx argues that the longevity of direct, centralized imperial efforts effectively enforced slavery, imposed a 'color bar,' and established discrimination against Black people.[9] When abolition was finally instated, the Brazilian ruling class opted to "maintain their long-established social order of white privilege without enforcing racial domination," as they feared dissent from the large Black population.[10] Absence of legal segregation post-abolition, however, did not imply racial democracy according to Marx, who rather posits the myth helped maintain the structure of white privilege and non-white subordination while avoiding "the constitution of race into a principle of collective identity and political action."[11] Supported by a belief in *mulatto* – referring to people of mixed Black African and white European ancestry – social mobility, the myth of racial democracy diluted potential conflict and disguised racial boundaries, allowing for racial inequality to be "explained as reflecting unavoidable but fluid class distinctions" by Brazilian elites.[12] Altogether, the absence of a firmly established official race order "provided no explicit target of state policy against which racial identity could be consolidated," thereby yielding limited identity formation among Black people, who, lacking self-consciousness as a unified group, could not "collectivity interpret and act upon their situation."[13]

## Race Consciousness

Examining the initial conviction that "there [was] little or no racial discrimination but rather great fluidity among races," Edward Telles suggests that the evidence of harmonious horizontal relations – as seen through intermarriage – led some thinkers to predict that "integration would lead to eventual assimilation," whereas others believed the evident racial inequality and discrimination in vertical – hierarchical – relations discredited the plausibility of racial democracy.[14] As Telles summarizes, sociability among the races as presented through the idea of *mestizaje* – "referring to both biological and cultural mixture" – did not signal racial harmony for thinkers such as Abdias do Nascimento, but rather acted as an "ideology for legitimizing racial discrimination."[15] As Telles notes, the concept of *mestizaje* was promoted by Brazilian elites and anthropologist Gilberto Freyre during the 20th century, as race science was progressively discredited.[16] Widely contradicting evidence that social hierarchies based on race, color and language had been established – and had persisted – since the colonial era, *mestizaje* narratives presented Brazilian "national subjects as meta-races that fused white, indigenous, and black blood or culture."[17] Departing from 19th and 20th century concern over non-white 'liabilities' and whitening strategies (through which they hoped to increase the share of whites in the country), elites engaged in a reframing – or denial, as Marx puts it – of Brazil's racist history.[18] Disguising a long belief in white biological supremacy dating back to colonization and slavery, elites declared that "mestizos or mixed-race persons would [thereupon] be considered the ideal or prototypical citizens" as ethno-racial distinctions would suddenly disappear from official and popular discourses.[19] As outlined by Telles, concepts of *mestizaje* and racial democracy were endorsed in Brazil despite criticism by intellectuals "that they erased race and ethnicity from the consciousness of the general population (...) [and that] mestizaje implied a cultural or statistical genocide of black and indigenous peoples."[20] Adopted by many who would usually be identified as indigenous, Black or *mulatto*, the *mestizo* identity gained popularity, according to Telles, because it promised "more fluid and presumably superior social relations." [21] Limited in its concrete effects, however, Telles found that "skin color cut through the cover of mestizaje and revealed an unambiguous pigmentocracy" in Brazil, whereby skin color predicted ethnoracial inequality and was linked to reported discrimination.[22]

## Black Mobilization

Despite considerable hindrances, numerous instances of Black mobilization mark Brazil's history, notwithstanding mitigated results in collective identity formation. From large slave revolts to Nascimento's *quilombismo* – "a concept that operates bonds of combative solidarity with the African peoples of the diaspora and the continent" – formal and informal resistance surfaced throughout the centuries.[23] Post-abolition, many racial movements began in the "black, urban emergent middle class," as the sub-

group's access to education, resources and international influences is believed to have contributed to its awakening and organization.[24] Founded in 1931, the *Frente Negra Brasileira* was the first major post-abolition Black movement in Brazil.[25] Mostly reaching Black elites, the movement remained highly patriotic and embraced racial democracy, advocating for its fuller elaboration.[26] Focusing on assertion of Black culture after the Vargas dictatorship, the group's efforts to encourage negritude remained fruitless, as "Afro-Brazilian culture was constantly folded into a Brazilian culture celebrating tolerance consistent with the ideology of racial democracy".[27] Breaking with the Frente Negra's emphasis on culture, subsequent 1970s *Movimiento Negro Unificado* (MNU) undertook a more militant approach, disillusioned that modest mobilization would amount to concrete results.[28] Centered on Black self-esteem and solidarity, the MNU similarly gained limited traction in Brazil, as its focus on ideology failed to gain popularity in the favelas (shantytowns).[29] Notable for its more concrete approach, a 1991 campaign by Black activists to encourage Afro-Brazilian self-identification as Black in the upcoming census emphasized the need to "consolidate a racially defined pressure group."[30] Promoting ethnic pride through the *negro* category, activists sought to diminish racial ambiguity, destigmatize blackness and resist 'whitening' in a country where official and unofficial hierarchies "have inhibited the formation of a collective Black identity around which African Brazilians may mobilize in response to shared discrimination and exclusion."[31] Gaining some momentum among younger cohorts, the *negro* category is slowly replacing the brown category in self-identification contexts, although street-level usage remains low.[32] Such results, while promising, may remain fruitless if they are not instrumentalized by Black activists into state efforts to reduce racial inequality.

**Black Consciousness in Brazil**

As previously discussed, 20th-century racial thinking was characterized by widespread adherence to state-promoted *mestizaje* ideology in Brazil. Concretely reflected in the increasingly growing share of Brazil's population which self-identified as 'mixed' or 'brown' (officially the *pardo* category since the 1940 census) from the 1950 census to the 1991 census, notions of *mestizaje* are believed to have prompted more complex, ambiguous, and fluid racial classification in Brazil.[33] Resulting in decreasing self-identification of the population as 'Black,' the internalization of *mestizaje* is visible through official systems of classification (as used in censuses) as well as in popular systems, which employ additional terms such as *moreno* and, to a lesser extent, *negro*.[34] Classification along a continuum, moreover, makes categories more elusive, as notions of "who is black, mixed, or white in Brazil may change greatly within [the country] depending on the classifier, the situation, or the region."[35] *Côr*–a term more commonly used than race–thereby becomes relational; influenced more by informal discourses about physical characteristics–"including skin color, hair type, nose shape, and lip shape"–than by ancestry.[36] Besides physical traits, markers such as education and class also seem to influence racial identification, as people who self-identify as white are more socially advantaged than self-identified non-whites and as a "tendency for race-color identity to shift toward white among wealthier and better-educated non-white individuals" can be identified, showing that money and education 'whiten.'[37] Still holding symbolic value, whiteness and blackness therefore remain commonly associated with status in Brazil, resulting in the practice of whitening the racial classification of children as well as the consideration of whiteness as "a valued property in the marriage market for both whites and non-whites, allowing the former to maintain high status for their children and permitting the latter higher status for themselves."[38]

Camouflaged by the celebrated myths of "color-blind sexuality" and of "erotic democracy," the symbolism associated with blackness and whiteness, however, does manifest itself in horizontal relations, or those of equal standing, in Brazil.[39] As duly pointed by Donna Goldstein in her ethnography *Laughter out of Place,* blackness and 'African characteristics'– e.g., "kinky hair and flat noses"– remain associated with slavery or contemporary 'servitude', and are therefore considered ugly, whereas white characteristics belong to a higher category of beauty.[40] Such claims, however, are often challenged by Brazilians who point out that "the primary icon of 'hot' sexuality in Brazil is the mulata."[41] Forgetting the origin of the *mulata,* who was "appropriated solely as a sexual object" and "exalted as an erotic Other" since colonial times, those who defend the positive image of the *mulata* ignore the power imbalance through which a "pornographic gaze of white males upon Black female bodies" was established.[42] In popular discourse, such omittance also transpires in the Black Cinderella fantasy, a narrative in which a "poor, clever and seductive dark-skinned woman" carries out a *golpe de baú* (treasure chest coup) and gains upward social mobility by seducing a *coroa* (an older, rich and usually white man).[43] Undeniably intertwining notions of gender, class and race, the cross-class and cross-color Black Cinderella story is vehemently defended as 'logically not racist' by those who fail to note that "Black female sexuality is valorized and considered erotic because it is suspended in a web of power relations that make it available in a particular way."[44] Altogether, the Black Cinderella fantasy demonstrates how the elite-promoted 'color-blind erotic democracy' is internalized by low-income women while simultaneously 'proving' that despite racialized notions of beauty, interracial sexuality 'discards' the possibility of racism.[45] Nonetheless, evident patterns of erotic calculation within the fantasy are neither democratic, egalitarian nor idiosyncratic. Rather, notions of a color-blind erotic democracy help "mask and normalize everyday racism and internalized racism in Brazil."[46]
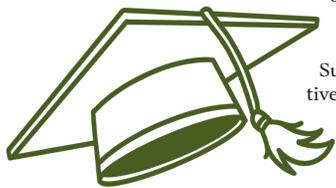
**Limits to Afro-Brazilian Identification**

Often compared to the United States and South Africa, Brazil stands out as a nation with surprisingly low levels of race-based mobilization. As previously noted, the absence of an official racial order in Brazil "provided no explicit target of state policy against which racial identity could be consolidated."[47] Similarly, the uncodified nature of Brazil's racism resulted in "the lack of a Brazilian race-based civil rights movement" and, as such, racism was not challenged directly in courts.[48] Nonetheless, structures of racism are widely recognized by segments of the poor Afro-Brazilian urban population, even though such recognition does not automatically translate into enthusiastic support for the Black consciousness movement.[49] If racial discrimination is perceived and often alluded to in 'hidden transcript'– more muted, informal forms of protest such as humour, namely–why is it silenced and isolated from the political sphere?[50]

On the one hand, we may identify *mestizaje* and notions of racial democracy as highly diminishing the salience of race as a basis for mobilization in Brazil. *Mestizaje*, as Madrid highlights, blurs ethnic boundaries and reduces ethnic polarization throughout Latin America.[51] The ambiguity of racial classifications resulting from *mestizaje,* as such, results in "multiple, fluid, and ambiguous ethnic identities" to which Brazilian natives only weakly identify.[52] This is crucial, as multiplicity of identities may reduce the prominence of a single identity and "defuse social and political conflict."[53] Considering that identity formation is a prerequisite for mobilization, this deficiency of a self-conscious group which can collectively interpret its condition precludes possibilities for meaningful mobilization.[54] Concretely, *mestizaje* also renders the Black category more porous, leading to a desire to 'escape' from it.[55] Strikingly, popular notions of "the *mulatto* escape hatch" and myths of a Black Cinderella indicate a widespread understanding that there are–however slim–possibilities for upward social mobility for low-income Black people in Brazil.[56] According to Goldstein and Telles, such opportunities often result in the avoidance of self-identification as Black, as the racial classification is often associat-

ed with negative characteristics–dirty work, ugliness, and servitude–and fewer chances of succeeding in life.[57] Such negative connotations therefore encourage the prevalence of the *mulatto* category over an Afro-Brazilian identity, implying an ability to escape into a more positively valued category.[58] This process significantly hinders the possibility of Black solidarity, as many "Afro-Brazilians are wary of taking pride in and declaring their blackness."[59] As such, leaders of the Black movement appear out of touch with the majority of the population, since "only highly politicized people can speak openly about their race without feeling the shame attached to blackness."[60] Internalized racial ideology, as such, translates into "harmony and avoidance of racial confrontation" in Brazil.[61]

On the other hand, racial identity is often understated to the benefit of class identity, which Brazilians often relate more strongly to.[62] This is most noteworthy considering that notwithstanding the economic legacy of slavery, poverty and residential segregation are conceptualized as class problems rather than race problems, indicating that Brazilian elites have successfully reframed racial inequality as "reflecting unavoidable but fluid class distinctions."[63] Consistent with the claim that "racial differences [are] fluid and conditioned by class" evidence that some–though not many–Afro-Brazilians are able to succeed encourages accommodation.[64] Realignment along class distinctions, as such, could also reflect an underemphasizing of race by Afro-Brazilians in order to retain hope.[65]

### Affirmative Action and its Detractors
### Current Affirmative Action Policies

Despite considerable challenges to mobilization, the implementation of affirmative action policies in Brazil (while sometimes described as 'top-down') tangibly showcases that mobilization and pressure tactics from Brazil's Black movement have proven successful.[66] Making use of race and ethnic social science data available since the multicultural turn, the Black movement argued that race and ethnicity were associated with societal inequalities, thereby justifying a need for racially based affirmative action policies.[67] Originally condemned as unconstitutional, racial quotas were officially permitted in a unanimous ruling by the Brazilian Supreme Court in April 2012. Allowing affirmative action policies to take a person's race into account, the Court cited Article 3 of the constitution, which states, "the Federal Republic of Brazil fundamentally seeks to create a free, just, and undivided society; eradicate poverty and marginalization; reduce social and regional inequalities."[68] While "the idea of affirmative action or policies specifically designed for blacks and mulattos [sounded] quite odd and out of place in the Brazilian context," discrimination and white privilege could no longer be ignored in the country, leading to the establishment of class-based and race-based quotas in federal institutes of higher education.[69] Considering that *pardos* (Browns) and *pretos* (Blacks) have suffered severe disadvantages in the sphere of education in Brazil, access to the higher education system through affirmative action "allows entry into a place of former middle and upper-class privilege mainly occupied by whites."[70] In the long run, such policies can also be expected to reduce inequalities in the labor market, for which IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) data illustrates disproportionately lower revenues for *pretos* and *pardos*, disproportionate portions of *pretos* and *pardos* employed in the informal sector as well as disproportionate shares of executive and management positions occupied by *brancos* (whites).[71]

### Limits

An undeniable achievement for the Black movement, the Supreme Court decision to allow racial quotas has nonetheless failed to materialize significantly in spheres outside of education. Crucially, the labor market remains largely impervious to affirmative action, with only a few enterprises voluntarily adopting measures.[72] As for the political sphere, a recent gain in ensuring that Black candidates get a fair share of airtime and public funding remains largely isolated.[73] Despite some openness to affirmative actions demonstrated by Brazilian institutions, policies problematically rely on self-identification data rather than systemic measures.[74] Attempting to address this challenge, Federal Senator Benedita da Silva (from the *Partido dos Trabalhadores,* or PT) suggested in 1998 that color identification be included on identification cards, employment, educational, hospital and police registries, as the measure would allow the state to accurately assess the color composition of the country.[75] According to da Silva, the policy would not only enable conclusive evaluations on the distributions of public goods and penalties to be undertaken, it could also bring more consciousness of the society's plurality.[76] Harshly criticized as "counterproductive, unnecessary, and dangerous", da Silva's initiative was never implemented, leaving problems of unpredictability in self-identification and inaccuracy in distribution evaluations largely unresolved.[77] As a result, claims that a shift in racial discourse, especially if geared towards affirmative actions, may lead to a 'blackening' of the Brazilian population cannot be statistically tested, allowing for alarmist warnings by the very small, but powerful, opponents of such policies to gain traction.[78] As a whole, affirmative action policies in Brazil remain largely insufficient in adequately addressing racial inequalities, and a majority of policies discussed in the mid-1990s–"social programs targeted at black neighborhoods, job training programs, preparatory courses for university entrance exams, and support for black-owned businesses"–have yet to be implemented.[79] Whether substantial energies will be directed towards the reduction of racial inequalities, as Nobles declares, will be determined by politics, not social scientific thought.[80]

### Support and Opposition

In terms of support, we must note that despite evidence from 2010 Latin American Public Opinion Project surveys on university quotas that "nearly half of Brazilians strongly agree that reserving university spots for Black people and *mulattos* is fair, and more than two-thirds are at least somewhat favorable to this statement," one in every six Brazilians strongly disagreed, indicating that they believed university quotas for Afro-Brazilians are very far from fair.[81] Unsurprisingly, those who voiced disapprobation were generally from the more educated, richer and whiter segments of the Brazilian population, signaling that a small, yet powerful minority strongly opposes affirmative action in Brazil.[82] Sharing this opinion, many Brazilian scholars have argued that "U.S.-style affirmative action will produce negative consequences for Brazilian society," which should not dismiss racial democracy as a mere myth.[83] Considering that said myth "provides an ideal of racial egalitarianism," many hold that affirmative action policies politicize race in ways that are distinctly un-Brazilian.[84] As a whole, detractors insist that racial quota policies unfairly disadvantage non-targeted groups, and that "class-based policies would be sufficient and effective in combating racial inequalities, since in Brazil most poor people are black and brown."[85] Partially supporting such claims, Brazilian economist Monica de Bolle posits much of Brazil's success at reducing inequality in the 2000s was related to the conditional cash-transfer *Bolsa Família* program as well as an increase in the minimum wage.[86] Nonetheless, a considerable reliance on external economic forces (namely, the commodity boom) rendered these reductions highly volatile, with data showing that inequalities have been rising since 2015.[87]

With current President Jair Bolsonaro in power, such trends are unlikely to reverse, as the incumbent has actively attacked welfare programs and affirmative action policies. Frequently proposing to abolish racial quotas, bills presented by the Social Liberal

Party (Bolsonaro's party) also aim to abolish 2012 legislation which reserves half of places in federal universities to students from public high schools.[88] Similarly attacking social, cultural and labor programs, Bolsonaro's presidency has discarded the *Partido dos Trabalhadores*' platform of radical change and insistence on lessening social injustice, rather promising to "clean up politics, shrink the state and crack down on crime."[89] Materialized in cuts to the *Bolsa Família* program, Bolsonaro's shrinking policies undermine years of PT efforts and directly affect millions of Brazil's poorest, who had begun to foresee a better future for themselves.[90] Sadly, the Bolsonaro administration's threats to affirmative action policies and social welfare reflect a *déjà vu* in a country believed to have historically been "indifferent to poor people mainly because they are mostly black or brown," whilst the arguments voiced by affirmative action critics match the aforementioned pervasiveness of racial democracy notions and the salience of class identities in Brazil.[91]

### A Centralized State

Far from indicating absence of resistance, the continued domination of Afro-Brazilians by the Brazilian elite signals unity and effectiveness. As Marx highlights, Brazil's unique experience of royal presence – with Dom João IV's exile in the country in 1808 and command by Portuguese heirs until 1889 – helped preserve a remarkable degree of Brazilian unity and stability, as "Brazilian nationalism shifted from anti-Portuguese to embracing a localized monarchy."[92] Besides symbolic influence, Portuguese-descendent emperors also ensured the persistence of an established order, and the transition to a republic was marked by "a prefabricated central state" already in place.[93] Intra-white unity, furthermore, benefited from the Portuguese colonial tradition of "a strong crown and weak private sector," providing a strong base with which elites could install a corporatist order.[94] Benefiting from strong state capacity, elites used educational and cultural campaigns to promote "racial democracy spectacles of *samba, futebol* and *carnival*" which would showcase Brazil's unique history and unity.[95] With remarkably low state investment in education, Afro-Brazilians were ill-equipped to question state-promoted ideology and achieve upward social mobility, further displaying strategies of opportunity hoarding.[96]

Also instrumentalized in the implementation of the rule of law, strong Brazilian state capacity, paired with "cracking down on crime" rhetoric, has resulted in extreme violence– during the 1964-1985 dictatorship and beyond–in a country now described as a violent democracy.[97] Perceived as a form of governance, state violence has been disproportionately directed towards Afro-Brazilians, who represent 76.2 percent of police victims according to the 2018 Brazilian Yearbook of Public Security.[98] Such 'necropolitics' directed at this population segment are unlikely to be resolved under Bolsonarism, as the President openly defends "ultra-hard-line views on fighting crime" and 90.4% of the population reports being very concerned by crime.[99] Since "fear of violence and sensation of insecurity leads to public support for draconian public policies," racial inequality in Brazil will most likely continue to be reflected in lethal violence and public security policies marked by police impunity.[100] Such violent climate, understandably, also discourages mobilization by Afro-Brazilians, as defying the authorities or exhibiting dissent may prove deadly.

### Brazil's Party System

From a political standpoint, an astonishing deficiency of explicit racial politics in Brazil proves both striking and detrimental to the Black movement's efforts. Indeed, Brazilian politics have been marked, for decades, by an avoidance of race by the majority of elected candidates –with the notable exception of aforementioned Benedita da Silva.[101] Partially due to a reduction of ethnic polarization resulting from *mestizaje*, avoidance of race in Brazilian politics is also encouraged by the country's strong presidential tradition and weak party system.[102] In a system where tremendous resources are at the disposition of the President while parties are divided, highly decentralized and fragile, the Brazilian population typically votes for individuals, not parties.[103] Encouraged by the open list system, this phenomenon undermines the potential formation of a Black movement party with significant clout.[104] Since ethnic parties tend to succeed in party systems with competitive rules for intra party advancement, the highly fragmented Brazilian system–where thirty distinct parties are currently represented in Congress–impedes the chance that a Black movement party could "stake out unclaimed policy territory, exploit untapped social cleavages, or embrace important demands of the electorate that [other] parties have failed to address."[105] As a result, racial politics are absorbed by class-based politics, since a large segment of Afro-Brazilians belongs to poorer segments of the population. Obstructed by the Workers' Party (PT) claims that "there is no color to socialism," racial politics are suffocated in Brazil's party system, despite overwhelming support by Afro-Brazilians for the PT in recent years.[106] Considering the current weakness of Afro-Brazilian group unity, avoidance of race in Brazilian politics seems unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.

### Political Capture

As a whole, evidence from Brazil shows parallels to Paul Frymer's description of political capture in the United States, whereby a political party captures specific minority interests while facing little to no efforts by the primary opposition party, which does not attempt to attract the minority's votes.[107] Despite evidence from 2010 that there are no significant differences in support for affirmative action between leftists and rightists in Brazil, conflicting evidence from 2011 showed a higher percentage of social assistance recipients which stated they would cast a hypothetical vote for the incumbent (Lula, with the PT) than non-recipients.[108] Since Lula's terms, analysts have claimed policies such as the *Bolsa Família* allowed the PT to broaden its electoral clientele to low-income and poorly educated Brazilians.[109] Since the disadvantaged in Brazil, including Afro-Brazilians, are believed to vote for "those who they believe will improve their chances of being productive members of the society, raising their children, and leading a better life," Afro-Brazilians are, arguably, captured by the PT, as the Social Liberal Party (the PT's adversary in the 2018 presidential election) rather economically leans to the right.[110] As such, despite assertions that the Brazilian electorate does not identify with any party but rather votes for individuals–due to the open list system–evidence from the 2018 presidential elections shows clear trends in Black (and poor) support for PT candidate Haddad, while rich white Brazilians showed overwhelming support for Bolsonaro.[111] Considering unwavering support from *lulistas* (Lula supporters) despite the former president's convictions, we may hypothesize Haddad's strong support by poor Black people–despite a platform which did not focus on racial issues – to signal a growing loyalty to the PT within a traditionally volatile party system.[112] Such a trend, if continued, would signal the capture of Black people by the PT, and could explain the very limited gains in affirmative action policies in the past years, as the interests of the captured group are neglected by its own party.[113]

### Conclusion

As a whole, this work has provided a thorough examination of previous literature on Brazilian inequality before highlighting the pervasive influence of *mestizaje* and racial thinking–with a focus on racial democracy–on Brazilian attitudes towards race. Elaborating on challenges to Afro-Brazilian mobilization, this work identifies the strength of the Brazilian state as well as its currently fragmented party system–where Black people are 'captured'–as significant hindrances to concrete gains in activist efforts to reduce racial inequality in Brazil. Offering an overview of contemporary Brazilian politics, this work notes the detrimen-

tal effects of the Jair Bolsonaro regime on both social welfare programs and affirmative action policies in Brazil. Bringing forth the legacies of racial thinking, this work identifies the elite-engineered myth of racial democracy as a significant factor limiting inequality reduction, despite popular outcries for improvements since the 1990s.

## Endnotes

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