

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



**Jorge Dominguez, ed.** *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1994. xi + 371 pp. \$62.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8153-1491-2.



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When Columbus set ashore on what was to become known as Latin America, it was, as T. Todorov noted, quite obvious who the Spaniards were and who the “Indians” were. Half a millennium after the conquest and Spanish and Portuguese colonization (not to forget similar processes in the Caribbean basin by other European powers in the ensuing Centuries), and the forced importation of African slaves, this division is no longer obvious. However this does not mean that race or classification by race has disappeared. To the contrary, as colonization progressed and races mixed, elaborate racial classification systems emerged existed together with the inherited Iberian status system. This process resulted in dozens of “casta” categories. Indeed, by 1700 in Mexico, there were over 30 categories by which a priest could identify an infant’s origin at baptism. The very complexity of such systems led to their falling out of use, but the classifying of persons by color did not.

Latin America is often assumed to be far less color conscious than, for instance, the USA. Further, Brazil is often taken as the prime example of a “racial democracy”, a position promoted by Gilberto Freyre. This position came under sharp criticism from the late Fifties as studies (such as Hasenbalg’s in the present volume) revealed that while racial prejudice is much less overt than in the USA, it is none the less powerfully present in Brazilian society, defining and limiting the lives of a great part of the population. Similar scenarios to greater or lesser de-

gree apply to the rest of Latin America. As Dominguez states in his Introduction “In nearly all racially and ethnically heterogeneous societies, there is overt national conflict among parties and social movements organized on the basis of race and ethnicity. Such conflict has been much less evident in Latin America.” (vii) Yet, whether due to ignorance or to the dictates of various “modernizing” elements in both state development programs and the academy, little serious and comprehensive work has been devoted to issues of race and ethnicity in Latin America until recent times.

This collection of essays on the issues of race and ethnicity in Mexico, Central and South America, with a concise introduction by Professor Jorge Dominguez of Harvard University’s Government Department, gathers into one volume some of the most significant journal articles on these issues. The articles have been chosen to illustrate the debate on the relationship between social class, race and ethnicity as it developed from the Fifties through to the Nineties. In so doing, Dominguez provides a valuable service to historians, political scientists and students of Latin American society. He acknowledges the dearth of studies on these issues in many Latin American nations, and offers here essays which were, and still are, significant in the relationships they draw, in specific contexts, between class, color, self-identity and the nation-building enterprises of countries in the late Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.

This volume, it should be noted, is part of a series edited by Dominguez which gathers significant articles on particular topics into a more accessible format (many were published in now long out of print or otherwise inaccessible journals), offering a quick and intense survey of both the historical development and the present status of scholarly research on each topic. Topics dealt with thus far in the series have been 1] Economic Strategies and Policies, 2] Authoritarian and Democratic Regimes, 3] The Roman Catholic Church, 4] Social Movements 5] Parties, Elections and Political Participation and 6] LA's International Relations and their domestic Consequences.

The present, the seventh volume of the series, contains the following articles, which I will list followed the date of original publication. "Race and Class in Mexico" by Woodrow Borah (1952); "On the Concept of Social Race in the Americas" by Charles Wagley (1959); "Color Prejudice in Brazil." by Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1965); "Mass Immigration and Modernization in Argentina." by Gino Germani (1966); "Race, Color, and Class in Central America and the Andes." by Julian Pitt-Rivers (1967); "Beyond Poverty: The Negro and the Mulatto in Brazil." by Florestan Fernandes (1969); "The Present Status of Afro-american Research in Latin America." by Roger Bastide (1974); "African Culture in Brazilian Art." by Abdias do Nascimento (1978); "A Comparative Study of the Assimilation of the Chinese in New York City and in Lima, Peru." by Bernard Wong (1978); "Ethnicity, Secret Societies, and Associations: The Japanese in Brazil." by Takashi Maeyama (1979); "Research in the Political Economy of Afro-Latin America." by Pierre-Michel Fontaine (1980); "Minority Oppression: Towards Analyses that Clarify and Strategies that Liberate." by William Bollinger and Daniel Manny Lund. (1982); "Brazilian Racial Democracy: Reality or Myth?" by Carlos Hasenbalg and Suellen Huntington (1982); "Race and Class in Brazil: Historical Perspectives." by Thomas E. Skidmore (1983); "Peasant Politics and the Mexican State: Indigenous Compliance in Highland Chiapas." by George E. Collier (1987); "Black Political Protest in Sao Paulo, 1888-1988 by George Reid Andrews (1988); "Challenging the Nation-State in Latin America." by Rodolfo Stavenhagen (1992) and "Rethinking Race in Brazil." by Howard Winant (1992).

Almost half of the articles are devoted to the issue of race and color in Brazil, the rest dealing with the permu-

tations of the issues in Mexico, Peru, Argentina, Central America, including comparative and materials.

Naturally this volume is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather to offer the most significant articles on the subject of race and ethnicity written in the last forty years. All the major issues are touched upon; definitions of race; the role and interconnections between race and class; the role of ethnic minorities; the relation of ethnic groups to national (majoritarian) agendas; the role of cultural associations and, in the articles by Bastide, Do Nascimento and Andrews, overdue attention to the role of Africans and their cultures in Brazilian life and politics.

Even within Brazil (which has the largest black population outside of Nigeria), the contribution of Africans is often neglected and the pervasive racial consciousness, transmuted into concerns for "boa aparencia," too often ignored. The space devoted to Brazil reflects the importance of the issues of race and color, and of course the accessibility of material for researchers. Research on these issues continues within and beyond Latin America, with recent publications by Hasenbalg, Lilia Schwarcz ("O Espetaculo Das Racas") and Klaas de Jonge (on racial stereotyping in Brazil's "Literatura de Cordel" - forthcoming). An often overlooked and definitely understudied area (somewhat addressed by the Peruvian theologian G. Gutierrez's work on *De Las Casas*) is that of the role of the Catholic Church in perpetuating racial stereotypes and attitudes.

Dominguez has done well in his selection of articles covering Mexico, Central and South America. This collection stands as an introduction for anyone seeking to grasp both the historical and the theoretical contexts of the issues surrounding race and class in Latin America. As such it informs and challenges the reader to further reflection and research. Much still needs to be done, not just in the regions covered by this volume, but in the francophone and anglophone Caribbean for instance, where research is only just beginning. This volume sets out for the researcher the issues, the fields and the methods employed in coming to grips with race and ethnicity in Latin America.

A few final comments. The volume's usefulness could be further enhanced (by the publisher no doubt) if a unified bibliography and index were provided and the series issued in (cheaper) paperback format, thus making an important collection more accessible and usable.

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