

BOOK REVIEW ESSAYS

## Multiculturalism, Afro-Descendant Activism, and Ethnoracial Law and Policy in Latin America

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This essay reviews the following works:

**Seams of Empire: Race and Radicalism in Puerto Rico and the United States.** By Carlos Alamo-Pastrana. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2016. Pp. xvi + 213. \$79.95 hardcover. ISBN: 9780813062563.

**Civil Rights and Beyond: African American and Latino/a Activism in the Twentieth-Century United States.** Edited by Brian D. Behnken. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016. Pp. 270. \$27.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780820349176.

**Afro-Politics and Civil Society in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil.** By Kwame Dixon. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2016. Pp. xiii + 174. \$74.95 hardcover. ISBN: 9780813062617.

**Black Autonomy: Race, Gender, and Afro-Nicaraguan Activism.** By Jennifer Goett. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017. Pp. ix + 222. \$26.00 paperback. ISBN: 9781503600546.

**The Politics of Blackness: Racial Identity and Political Behavior in Contemporary Brazil.** By Gladys L. Mitchell-Walthour. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. xvi + 266. \$34.99 paperback. ISBN: 9781316637043.

**The Geographies of Social Movements: Afro-Colombian Mobilization and the Aquatic Space.** By Ulrich Oslender. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016. Pp. xiii + 290. \$25.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780822361220.

**Becoming Black Political Subjects: Movements and Ethno-Racial Rights in Colombia and Brazil.** By Tianna S. Paschel. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016. Pp. ix + 311. \$26.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780691169385.

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Five of these seven books are directly focused on the socioeconomic and political realities Afro-descendants have experienced over the past several decades. They shed light on Afro-descendants' politico-legal activism for the recognition, promotion, and defense of their rights in one or more specific Latin American national contexts. These five authors share more or less obviously the premise that the combination of local and national indigenous and Afro-descendant political activism with international influences from the global North and multilateral organizations<sup>1</sup> brought about a "multicultural turn" in the Latin American region beginning in the late 1980s. Each of these five books' arguments should be approached keeping the Latin American multicultural turn as a prominent background.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Michel Fontaine, "International Organizations and the Human Rights of Afro-Latin Americans: The Case of UNESCO," in *Black Social Movements in Latin America: From Monocultural Mestizaje to Multiculturalism*, edited by J. M. Rahier (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 35–51.

<sup>2</sup> Juliet Hooker, "Indigenous Inclusion/Black Exclusion: Race, Ethnicity and Multicultural Citizenship in Latin America," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 37, no. 2 (2005): 285–310.

This essay moves farther north geographically with the last two books—authored by Carlos Alamo-Pastrana and edited by Brian D. Behnken—which deal with Puerto Rico and, in the United States, anti-black and anti-Latino racism, civil rights, and the dynamic relationships between African American and Latino/a activism. The inclusion by the *LARR* review editor of these two books in this corpus of publications under review here brought some heterogeneity into the mix that allows me to nonetheless emphasize two things: first, because of its colonial relationship with the United States, Puerto Rico (along with, for different reasons, Cuba and the Dominican Republic) did not experience the multicultural turn as the rest of the Latin American region has been experiencing it; and second, there exist different historically constituted racial regimes of white supremacy in the United States and Latin America.

## The Latin American Multicultural Turn and the New Latin American Constitutionalism

When looking at the region as a whole, we must begin by acknowledging that this multicultural turn unfolded originally in different national contexts at dissimilar paces and rarely at exactly the same time. With it, indigenous individuals and organizations have become inevitable and in some cases relatively successful political players on national and international scenes. The same has also been the case for some Afro-descendant individuals and organizations across the region, even if more visibly in some national contexts than in others.

With the multicultural turn, official Latin American narrations of the nation changed notably in a movement from ideological “monocultural *mestizaje*” (“racial democracy” in Brazil) and “erasure” of ethnoracial differences in national populations to multiculturalism and state constitutional “embracing” of ethnoracial differences in a logic of state corporatism/co-optation and ethnonormativity that always racializes indigenous people differently than Afro-descendants (notwithstanding their separate self-identifications). With the “turn” came not only the recognition of ethnoracial collective rights for indigenous people—and in some specific cases for Afro-descendants, too—and anti-discrimination law, but also novel ways for the powerful to reproduce the ethnoracial status quo<sup>3</sup> and its anti-black racism under the cover of a national narrative of multiculturalist ideology. One should keep these processes in mind while reading the first five books under review here.

Latin Americanist legal scholars write about the wave of constitutional reforms and adoption of new constitutions that accompanied the turn as the “new Latin American constitutionalism.”<sup>4</sup> The new Latin American constitutions usually recognize ethnic and racial diversity in their national populations in one of their first articles. This recognition has been a novelty when considering the previous Latin American constitutions, which never mentioned any national populations’ ethnoracial diversity, often assuming the existence of a national white-mestizo “we” that erases ethnoracial differences. These new constitutions have had a symbolic and ideological dimension in that they are inscribed in a desired democratic rupture with the immediate societal and constitutional past mired in republican universalism.<sup>5</sup> They are imbued with the hope that their application in all identified aspects of life will contribute to bringing about justice and happiness. They are innovative and their scope is vast, as is the number of their articles when compared to previous constitutions. Their most striking characteristic is certainly the extended catalogues of rights they recognize for identified vulnerable groups (women, children and youth, the physically impaired, the elderly, etc.) and historically marginalized minorities (indigenous groups and communities of Afro-descendants, mostly), including protection against discrimination. A number of special laws making constitutional articles and principles operational have also been passed along with or following the adoption of constitutional reforms or new constitutions. The multicultural turn, or to be more precise the new Latin American constitutionalism, has brought about specific legal instruments: those that have as their objective to recognize and protect identity-based collective rights (for indigenous people and also sometimes for Afro-descendants and others), and those instruments that define hate crimes and provide sentences and remedies in instances of racial and other discrimination.

The books by Tianna Paschel (Colombia and Brazil), Kwame Dixon (Salvador da Bahia, Brazil), Ulrich Oslender (Colombia), Jennifer Goett (Nicaragua), and Gladys L. Mitchell-Walthour (Brazil) all deal with

<sup>3</sup> Carmen Martínez Novo and Pavel Shlossberg, “Introduction: Lasting and Resurgent Racism after Recognition in Latin America,” *Cultural Studies* 32, no. 3 (2018): 349–363.

<sup>4</sup> C. M. Herrera, ed., *Le constitutionalisme latino-américain aujourd’hui: Entre renouveau juridique et essor démocratique* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Detlef Nolte and Almut Schilling-Vacaflor, eds., *New Constitutionalism in Latin America: Promises and Practices* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012).

Afro-descendant cultural politics and politico-legal activism in one particular national context of Latin American multiculturalism. Paschel is the exception as she compares the Brazilian context to the Colombian one, while also at times making generalizing claims to be taken as valid for the entire region.

Paschel's book explores the adoption processes of ethnoracial law and policies in Brazil and Colombia in the past few decades, and their impacts on black social movements. It is ambitious, detailed, and well researched and documented, which is probably why it has collected so many well-deserved awards.<sup>6</sup> The evidence Paschel uses to support her claims is generally diverse and encompasses participant observation, consultation of archives, and numerous interviews with many of the actors involved in the movements for ethnoracial rights under scrutiny in both Brazil and Colombia. Paschel's work reveals how Brazilian and Colombian black movements passed from a space of marginalization and even "invisibility" to a space of official recognition through their activism and their strategic taking advantage of the international community's growing interest in ethnoracial matters. She explores the consequences of those changes on the black movements themselves, while also considering the fragility of the newly acquired rights in current times of extreme rightist politics in both Colombia and Brazil.

I find one important aspect of her analytical core problematic: Paschel's categorical dichotomization of what she calls two "political field alignments," which she conceptualizes as each being the product of a particular combination of the field of domestic politics with the "global ethnoracial field." These two political field alignments would have occurred, she argues, at two different time periods and fashioned two mutually exclusive politico-legal discourses of "ethnoracial collective rights," on one side, and "racial equality law," on the other, which correspond to the two categories of legal instruments brought by Latin America's new constitutionalism discussed above. Indeed, she separates these two sets of political discourses and legal instruments, calling "multicultural" only those that deal with ethnoracially based collective rights, while labeling those that are supposed to remedy ethnoracial discrimination "racial equality laws." In doing so, she distances herself from the many Latin Americanist scholars who identify the intents of these two "political field alignments"—to use Paschel's terminology—as falling within the scope of Latin American multiculturalism. When considering the Latin American region as a whole and moving beyond the particularities of this or that specific national context (Brazil or Colombia, for example), we can undeniably see in virtually all relevant constitutional reforms or adoption of new constitutions—including the Brazilian and Colombian cases—articles prohibiting racial and other discriminations prominently placed alongside articles recognizing ethnoracially based collective rights. Legal scholars consider the recognition of "ethnoracial collective rights" and the adoption of "legal protection against racial and other discriminations" as two aspects of the new Latin American constitutionalism, two different threads of a single multiculturalist project to reorganize society. Both sets of preoccupations and instruments have characterized Latin American multiculturalism since the very beginning in the late 1980s to the early 1990s.

There is without a doubt intellectual value to Paschel's distinction between what she also calls the "multicultural alignment"—mostly associated with ethnoracially based collective rights for Afro-descendant communities in rural areas (the *quilombos* in Brazil and the "black communities" of the Pacific coast in Colombia)—and the "racial equality law alignment," more often associated with urban individuals and communities that include the growing black middle classes in the region. The dichotomization she argues for has the benefit of laying emphasis on the two different logics behind each set of political demands and accommodations: the right to be different (multicultural collective rights) versus the right to be treated as anyone else, with equity (anti-discrimination law). However, I am not convinced by her insistence in proposing these two "political field alignments" as definitely antithetical and as belonging to different "time periods"—as if both of their logics could not be found at work at the same time in one particular national context. Indeed, when using her work in Brazil and Colombia to generalize about the entire region, Paschel suggests that these two alignments have been unfolding in the 1980s and 1990s for ethnoracial collective rights, and in the 2000s for racial equality laws (mostly following the 2001 UN World Conference against Racism). This periodization, which she proposes to be valid across the Latin American region, is certainly Paschel's most contentious and fragile point. As previously discussed, the so-called Latin American multicultural turn has taken place at different times and paces in the different countries of the region.

<sup>6</sup> The book was the co-winner of the 2017 Herbert Jacob Book Award of the Law and Society Association; winner of the 2017 Gordon Hirabayashi Book Award of the Human Rights Section of the American Sociological Association; winner of the 2017 Society for the Study of Social Problems Global Division Book Award; and co-winner of the 2017 Barrington Moore Book Award of the Comparative and Historical Sociology Section of the American Sociological Association.

While Brazil and Colombia—the two countries Paschel focuses on—were among the first to engage in the turn (see the 1988 Brazilian and the 1991 Colombian constitutions), other countries had not engaged in it before the 2000s, while others, for a number of different reasons, remained untouched by it (Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Cuba). To take just a few examples: it was only in June 2019 that the constitution of the Federal United States of Mexico was reformed to include—for the very first time—the recognition of the existence of Afro-Mexican peoples and communities.<sup>7</sup> In Ecuador, although the first constitution to adopt a multiculturalist orientation was passed in 1998 with separate articles acknowledging the possibility of collective rights for Afro-descendants and adopting an anti-discrimination stance, the 2008 constitution adopted during Rafael Correa's administration (2007–2017) reemphasized the same on both fronts. Bolivia approved a new constitution in 2009, which for the first time named Afro-Bolivians as part of the nation, granting them, “in all that applies” (article 32), the same collective rights and protections as indigenous peoples and protecting them against discrimination. The International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169, a legal instrument of importance for Afro-descendants to defend their collective rights to territory, particularly in Central America, was only ratified after the year 2000 by Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. Paschel's periodization too enthusiastically applies a rather rigid time frame to the entire Latin American region.

In a section titled “Multicultural Constitutionalism” (7), Paschel directly contradicts her affirmation that racial equality laws and policies only emerged in the 2000s when she notes that with the advent of “multiculturalism” many Latin American states “also passed affirmative action policies, in the areas of education and even in political life” (8). Later on in the book, when she discusses the work of the Brazilian National Constituent Assembly on ethnoracial rights, which preceded the adoption of the first multicultural constitution in the region in 1988, Paschel acknowledges how heated the discussions about affirmative action policies were (92–95) and that many propositions came from different black organizations. Of these, “only two ... were ultimately included in Brazil's 1988 constitution: racism was criminalized, and *quilombos* were guaranteed territorial rights” (90). This, I think, contributes to acknowledging the intertwined duality of “multicultural constitutionalism” and “racial equality law” found in Latin American multiculturalism since the very beginning of the turn. Indeed, when taking the entire region into consideration, one cannot but appreciate how entangled these two political fields have been, even if each might eventually have dominated the political conversation/debate at different time periods in given national contexts, without ever erasing the other.

In contrast to Paschel's comparative work, political scientist Kwame Dixon focuses exclusively on the Brazilian city of Salvador, in Bahia State. This more limited scope contrasts with Paschel's ambitious project to deal with both rural and urban Afro-descendant social movements in Brazil and Colombia (and in the region in general). At first, I found Dixon's complete silence about the multicultural turn (or alignment) in Brazil surprising. He writes as if the turn and the adoption of ethnoracial law and policies had never happened and had no relevance for the understanding of urban Afro-descendant social movements in Salvador. He is not preoccupied with placing the processes he discusses within regional dynamics. His book illustrates the difference between the political struggles of rural and urban Afro-descendant communities and individuals. While rural movements seek collective rights (usually over land or territory), urban movements are more interested in obtaining equal treatment and eventually reparation for a long history of racial discrimination.

This is a short book (156 pages plus references and notes). Many will find it useful for undergraduate courses that have a section on Afro-Brazil. It would be very practical as a required reading in study abroad programs that bring students to Salvador da Bahia (which Dixon had done before writing this book). The book synthesizes the great complexity of the history of what has been called “the Brazilian black movement” with a special focus on the most visible location of blackness in that country: Salvador and the state of Bahia. It depicts the political and social landscape of blackness in Salvador and examines the impact of the rise of the Movimento Negro Unificado contra a Discriminação Racial (the Unified Black Movement against Racial Discrimination) out of Rio de Janeiro. It then moves to uncover the famous *blocos afros'* anti-racist cultural politics through a discussion of the differences between Ilê Aiyê and Olodum. Dixon briefly considers how greatly slavery has marked that city's contemporary scenery, before engaging in a discussion of the adoption of affirmative action policies in higher education in Brazil and black electoral politics in Salvador since the 1970s. The ethnoracial cultural politics of Olodum and Ilê Aiyê as described by Dixon point to what in fact

<sup>7</sup> Cámara de Diputados, “La Cámara de Diputados reconoce a los pueblos y comunidades afromexicanas,” *Boletín* no. 1888, June 28, 2019, <http://www5.diputados.gob.mx/index.php/esl/Comunicacion/Boletines/2019/Junio/28/1888-La-Camara-de-Diputados-reconoce-a-los-pueblos-y-comunidades-afromexicanas>.

is a blurry line and not a clear-cut separation between the strictly ethnoracial and the anti-discrimination concerns discussed by Paschel.

The book by geographer Ulrich Oslender, my departmental colleague, continues along those lines and brings us back to Colombia and its Pacific Lowlands area, which is—demographically speaking—South America's second “black region” after Northeastern Brazil. Oslender's point of departure is the conceptualization of “black communities” in the 1991 multiculturalist constitution, and particularly in its Artículo Transitorio (AT) 55, which led to the subsequent adoption of the famous Law 70 on August 27, 1993. AT 55 and Law 70 brought about what Eduardo Restrepo has called the “ethnicization of blackness” in Colombia,<sup>8</sup> because they recognize rural black communities of the Pacific coast as the legal territorial authority in a manner usually associated in Latin America with indigenous people (*lo étnico* is associated with indigeneity, while *lo racial* is linked to blackness). At the time, black communities located elsewhere in the country, outside the Pacific Lowlands, did not benefit from Law 70's recognition of Afro-descendants' collective rights.

As Oslender emphasizes in the book's prologue, Law 70 had the effect of considerably incentivizing black political mobilization on the Pacific coast: “By 1994 over 350 organizations of black communities were registered with the Office for Black Community Affairs. As one of the most strongly articulated directions at coordinating these efforts on the regional and national level, the Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN) (Process of Black Communities) emerged as a network of more than 120 local organizations and a national organizational dynamic with its base in the Pacific port city of Buenaventura” (3). The PCN coordinated an “ethnic-territorial” movement based on five principles: the reaffirmation of identity and the right to be black; the right to territory and a space for being; autonomy as the right to the exercise of identity; the construction of an autonomous perspective for the future; and a declaration of solidarity with Afro-descendants everywhere.

In this book, Oslender's concern is to approach the Pacific Lowlands' social movement that began developing in the 1990s as the vocalization “of the notions of territory, development, and society from an Afro-Colombian perspective, and the articulation of their rights, aspirations, and dreams based on and developed through the perspective of daily life and traditional practices of black communities on the Pacific Coast” (4). To do so, he intends to take distance from traditional social movement research and to decipher the spatial logic behind the PCN's conceptualization of an Afro-Colombian right to territory. Inspired by the work of other geographers, he wants to reveal the Pacific coast's Afro-Colombian “environmental imaginaries”—with the objective of calling for the respect they deserve—which contest the very concrete “imperialism of the imaginary” imposed on Afro-Colombians more or less violently by national and transnational capitalist and state enterprises (palm oil production, gold extraction, paramilitaries). His approach is fundamentally ethnographic in that instead of beginning with the social movement's organizational structures, as “traditional” social movement research would have it, he starts with the “situated physical, social, and cultural contexts of everyday life as framing the subjectivities of ordinary people, which subsequently become articulated as social movement discourse” (4). After treating the readers to a detailed theoretical discussion of the concepts of “place” and “space” that makes reference to the work of eminent geographers, he anchors—with fine attention to detail—the worldview and cultural politics of Afro-Colombian communities and the political activism of their social movement within the “aquatic space of the Pacific Coast.” As a sociocultural anthropologist, I greatly enjoyed Oslender's place- or space-oriented approach, even though I wonder if he could have gone further into the microphysics of the great many actual places that make the Colombian Pacific Lowlands instead of generalizing one system supposed to be valid in the entire area. In a way that announces the next book to be discussed, Oslender also underscores how much the violence generated by the state, the paramilitary, and the narco-guerillas has ignored and foiled legal protections provided by multiculturalism to empty vast, collectively owned areas of their inhabitants—conveniently for the moving in of palm oil and mining companies.

Jennifer Goett, a sociocultural anthropologist, brings us northward to Nicaragua. Of the seven books commented on in this essay, hers is the only one to systematically incorporate gender in the core of her analytical work. She identifies her research approach as activist (in the tradition of Ted Gordon and Charlie Hale at the University of Texas at Austin) and feminist ethnography. The book emerged out of Goett's fieldwork on Nicaragua's Atlantic coast between 1998 and 2013, and particularly in the area in and around Monkey Point with Miskito Coast Creole people, the descendants of nineteenth-century West Indian migrants. Her book examines the impacts on the everyday life of working-class Creole people of the prolonged violence from the mestizo state, mestizo soldiers, mestizo colonists, and national and international capitalist intensification. It

<sup>8</sup> Eduardo Restrepo, “Ethnicization of Blackness in Colombia,” *Cultural Studies* 18, no. 5 (2004): 698–753.

points to the failure of multicultural reforms to guarantee to Creoles their most elementary livelihood and security. Indeed, as she engaged in participant observation, making herself available to help the work of local organizations, she witnessed in the late 1990s and early 2000s the alliances between Creole community leaders and their indigenous Rama neighbors to build up a movement for autonomous rights with the support of nongovernmental organizations and human rights advocates. That activism was successful as it led to the creation of a large section of the Atlantic coast as the Rama-Kriol Territory. She carefully threads the history of multicultural reforms that ensued and their impacts on the Atlantic coast, embedding this history in the country's political trajectory from the Somoza regime to the Sandinista revolution, the Sandinistas' electoral loss, and their return to power.

Goett's argument recalls Oslender's in that, like him, she is concerned with the multiple ways Creoles' social experiences—which she calls “vernacular”—influence the design of their activists' political strategies and actions. Indeed, she ethnographically uncovers how porous the boundaries between Creole everyday life and organized politics are, and reveals how much “vernacular practices” and subjective experiences inform communities' collective political actions against the state and capital. At the same time, she scrutinizes how the power of the state and capital inserts itself in Creole subjective experiences, leaving concrete and lasting “relational effects.” She shows that this dialectic may not be correctly grappled with without considering embodied social difference, which feminist activist ethnography is well placed to do, thanks to its awareness of socially differentiated politics: “Racism and patriarchy have deadly consequences for community people, yet women and men have distinct experiences of racial violence that are conditioned by their sexually differentiated bodies and gendered subject positions. They also respond to violence and subordination in different ways, drawing on gendered practices to fashion complex racial selves and assert autonomy over their lives and social domains” (4).

Goett's knowledge of local history and politics from the perspectives of Creole actors is fabulously rich and denotes the seriousness of her activist-ethnographic dedication. Her reflexive discussion of her relation to the field and of her ethnographic strategies and experiences provide an excellent entry point into the complex sociocultural, economic, and political situations she elucidates. This is certainly one of the best ethnographies I have had the opportunity to read in a long time. Goett is able to explain convincingly how Creole vernacular practices, gendered subjectivities, and black diasporic identification combine in the Creole community's fight against systematic oppression in a violent context. Her work unveils how collective ownership of territory can facilitate egalitarian change or deepen inequality, because “it can serve as a strategic asset that emboldens and radicalizes black autonomy and as a governance strategy that may facilitate the expansion of state and capitalist power. The tension between these two effects is likely to shape the contours of future struggle in the region” (26).

Gladys L. Mitchell-Walthour is a political scientist. The ambition of her book is to use an “intersectional approach” to examine the impact that race has on Afro-Brazilian political behaviors and on how black and brown Brazilians reproduce a race-based perspective on municipal, state, and national politics in the cities of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Salvador. She discusses how, thirty years after the adoption of the first ethnoracial legal instruments (either for collective rights or against discrimination), race continues to be central to black and brown people's perceptions of and engagements in politics. The data she uses as evidence to support her claims are mostly quantitative, from surveys that either she conducted herself or were led by others (notably the 2010 Latin American Public Opinion Project or LAPOP). She also consulted newspapers and secondary sources and at times engages in analyses of popular culture. However, one could lament Mitchell-Walthour's dealing with racial and/or color identification processes exclusively through the analysis of answers to questionnaires. Indeed, the unidimensionality of the questions and responses to a questionnaire cannot but elude the complexity of the always multidimensional and situation-specific realities of identification processes. We, with our multiple identities or identifications, do identify intersectionally and differently in different situations, with different people, at different times. This reveals both the limitations of surveys to deal with such issues as identification processes and the absolute necessity of instead approaching those with respect for their always peculiar circumstances. Ethnographic research—of which this book is deprived—is a must to properly deal with racial identification, racial group attachment, and Afro-descendants' perceptions of racial discrimination. Regarding the use of ethnographic methods, Mitchell-Walthour's book is at the other end of the spectrum when compared to the other books discussed in this essay so far.

Unfortunately, at Cambridge University Press (which published her book), Mitchell-Walthour did not benefit from the services of an active and engaged copy editor. The quality of her prose and its sometimes complete lack of precision, her many run-on sentences and overt simplifications create many obstacles for the reader to overcome if he or she is to reach Mitchell-Walthour's thinking.

In the book's conclusion, she writes about the Bolsa Família, a social program inaugurated during the Lula presidency and continued during the presidency of his successor, Dilma Rousseff, in these confusing words: "While Afro-Brazilians do not overwhelmingly support the Workers Party, the party to which Rousseff belongs, the majority of Afro-Brazilians were affiliated with the Workers Party. It is likely that a high number of *Bolsa* recipients supported her due to her political party. This is similar to the idea that some Americans believed African Americans only voted for President Barack Obama because he is African American rather than the fact that African Americans are overwhelmingly Democrats and thus vote for politicians who are affiliated with the Democratic Party" (217). The book makes a number of other references to more or less recent events in Brazilian political life. For the very first time in my thirty-year-long professional career as an academic, I do not recommend the adoption of a book. Other books might better serve the reader interested in contemporary Afro-descendant politics in Brazil.<sup>9</sup>

The book by Carlos Alamo-Pastrana brings us to Puerto Rico and its long history of conflicted relationship with the United States. Its silent premise is that indeed Puerto Rico has remained embedded in the pre-multiculturalist ideological context of what I call "monocultural mestizaje" or "racial democracy," which also characterized the rest of the Latin American region until the end of the 1980s or early 1990s. The book's project consists in examining written materials from the period 1940–1972 that the author considers have been left out or neglected by relevant scholarship: exchanges between cultural and political actors in the United States and Puerto Rico that draw "on ideas about race and empire to make sense of local conditions and accomplish diverse sociopolitical objectives" (4). These correspond to the three decades during which Puerto Rico's commonwealth colonial status was established (in 1952).

The texts in focus in the book were written by African American journalists and political activists who visited the island and wrote hoping to find in Puerto Rico's land and economic reforms a source of inspiration to empower African Americans in the US South. Although they were mostly African Americans, the visitors also included white American progressive writers who published reflections about Puerto Rico's colonial and racial politics and commented on black labor and poverty in both the United States and Puerto Rico. Often, such writings were inspired by what the visitors saw as the island's "racial democracy" and imagined the establishment of a new racial order in the US South that would be built around class-based solidarity, bringing together poor white and black laborers. Some also idealized the island "as a space where American progressives could comfortably settle without having to be burdened by the cultural and political baggage of U.S. race relations" (15). Alamo-Pastrana ends the book with a chapter on the strong political connections between the Puerto Rican Left and Pan-Africanism's internationalism through a discussion of one of the Puerto Rican leaders of the struggle for independence, Ana Livia Cordero, who was a medical doctor and the wife of African American author Julian Mayfield. Instead of conceptualizing the racial regimes of the United States and Puerto Rico as fundamentally different and opposed, Alamo-Pastrana uses the concept of "racial imbrication" not only to decrypt the structured connections between them (white supremacy) but also to expose how African American, white American, and Puerto Rican writers and activists looked to other national spaces to reinterpret the working of race and racism in their local and national contexts.

The collection edited by Brian Behnken, with its twelve contributions, renews Alamo-Pastrana's discussion with the intention to both widen it to an examination of African American and Latino/a (not only Puerto Rican) relations and activism, and to limit it geographically to the United States. The essays examine what Behnken conceives as "the dynamic relationships and activist moments shared by African Americans and Latino/as in the United States from the 1940s to the present day" (2). The collection is not limited to the civil rights era or to the exclusive relations between African Americans and Mexican Americans in the Southwest, as essays focus on interactions between Cuban exiles and Miami's black freedom struggle (by Chanelle Nyree Rose), the internationalization of civil rights involving Afro-Cubans, African Americans, and global apartheid (by Mark Malisa), the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party and the Young Lords Organization in Chicago (by Jakobi Williams), African American–Puerto Rican radicalism in New Jersey (by Laurie Lahey), the US civil rights and Latin American social movements in the "Nuevo South" (North Carolina) (by Hannah Gill), and others.

As explained by Behnken in the introduction, the collection's orientation is to consider African American–Latino/a relations in all their complexity, avoiding the established and simplistic paths of considering these

<sup>9</sup> See Christen A. Smith, *Afro-Paradise: Blackness, Violence, and Performance in Brazil*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016); John F. Collins, *Revolt of the Saints: Memory and Redemption in the Twilight of Brazilian Racial Democracy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015). See also Peter Wade, "Racism and Race Mixture in Latin America," *Latin American Research Review* 52, no. 3 (2017): 477–485, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.25222/larr.124>; Mark Becker, "Politicized Identities and Social Movements," *Latin American Research Review* 53, no. 1 (2018): 202–210, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.25222/larr.225>.

relations exclusively in terms of either conflict or cooperation: “It has become something of a cliché, for example, to think that a common experience of oppression has somehow given these groups a natural affinity and an innate sense of cooperation” (5). In any case, he adds, “conflict does not mean combat, and tension does not mean hostility” (6). This is a collection of historical essays that investigate the past in order to make better sense of the present state of affairs of what Behnken calls “the black and brown relations in the U.S.” Too bad that these two racial/color categories are not problematized at all in the introduction. Indeed, contemporary African diaspora studies envisage the category of blackness in the United States and elsewhere as being shared by different groups of individuals, which include African Americans, of course, but also Haitian Americans, Afro-Cuban Americans, Jamaican Americans, Nigerian Americans, Ghanaian Americans, Congolese Americans, and so on. The same goes for the category of brownness, in which a number of publications have included Chinese Americans, Indian Americans, Pakistani Americans, and so on. This raises the questions: considering this unavoidable diversity of black and brown people in the United States, what are the particularities of African American–Latino/a relations? Why is it important to attempt to single them out in one volume?

### Author Information

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