

EXPANDING PERSPECTIVES ON RACE IN BRAZIL

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- FREEDOMS GIVEN, FREEDOMS WON: AFRO-BRAZILIANS IN POST-ABOLITION SÃO PAULO AND SALVADOR.* By Kim D. Butler. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998. Pp. 285. \$52.00 cloth, \$22.00 paper.)
- O NEGRO NO RIO DE JANEIRO: RELAÇÕES RACIAIS NUMA SOCIEDADE EM MUDANÇA.* By Luiz de Aguiar Costa Pinto. Second edition. (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 1998. Pp. 307.)
- AFRO-BRAZILIAN CULTURE AND POLITICS: BAHIA, 1790s TO 1990s.* Edited by Hendrik Kraay. (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1998. Pp. 208. \$61.95 cloth, \$22.95 paper.)
- RAÇA, CIENCIA E SOCIEDADE.* Edited by Marcos Chor Maio and Ricardo Ventura Santos. (Rio de Janeiro: FIOCRUZ, 1996. Pp. 252.)
- MAKING RACE AND NATION: A COMPARISON OF THE UNITED STATES, SOUTH AFRICA, AND BRAZIL.* By Anthony W. Marx. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Pp. 390. \$29.95 cloth.)
- O ESPETACULO DAS RAÇAS: CIENTISTAS, INSTITUIÇÕES E QUESTÃO RACIAL NO BRASIL, 1870-1930.* By Lilia Moritz Schwarcz. (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1993. Pp. 287.)
- THE SPECTACLE OF THE RACES: SCIENTISTS, INSTITUTIONS, AND THE RACE QUESTION IN BRAZIL, 1870-1930.* Translated by Leland Guyer. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999. \$35.00 cloth.)
- RACISM IN A RACIAL DEMOCRACY: THE MAINTENANCE OF WHITE SUPREMACY IN BRAZIL.* By France Winddance Twine. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997. Pp. 175. \$17.00 paper.)

Scholars of race relations in Brazil have turned a critical corner in advancing understanding of the ways in which racial discrimination has been both sustained and challenged. The seven recent publications to be discussed here present methodological and theoretical approaches that challenge two longstanding assumptions: that public institutions not explicitly discriminatory are racially neutral; and that the Afro-Brazilian polity has not participated in the social struggle for racial justice. The emerging views show that the definition of racial systems is implicit in the process of nation

building, even where explicit segregation or color-specific policies are absent. What is more, by widening the definition of racial activism and looking at a broader time frame, scholars are building a growing body of evidence of Afro-Brazilians challenging the color lines that they confront.

The strength of much of the recent scholarship lies in its rejection of the definition of race as a discreet element of social organization that relates specifically to people of color. This view has been replaced by an acceptance of race as a phenomenon that radiates throughout the fabric of a society. Racial values are ever present in the tissue connecting society, culture, politics, and economy. Race and gender condition each other's social meanings. Moreover, public policy and economic opportunity affect members of a racially stratified society differentially. Efforts to assert or repress Afro-Brazilian cultural values help define the socially constructed boundaries of race. The emerging discussion of affirmative action in Brazil demonstrates a growing acceptance of the idea that once race is introduced as a differential factor in society, it remains a factor.

Because the state in Brazil seldom adopted racially explicit politics, it has largely been ignored in the scholarship about race. But by considering race as a metalanguage, as Evelyn Brooks-Higginbotham has suggested, and "calling attention to its powerful, all-encompassing effect on the representation of other social and power relations, namely, gender, class and sexuality," the question of the relative absence of explicitly racial social barriers takes second place to the broader means by which power relations are negotiated through racial values.¹ What is more, this perspective invites analysts to revisit public policies that on the surface seem to have nothing to do with race. Several scholars included here have succeeded in doing exactly that, showing the racial implications of such practices as pension structures or land laws.

Higginbotham has also provided a shorthand for describing the other approach increasingly employed by scholars of race in Brazil: "we must recognize race as providing sites of dialogic exchange and contestation" and consider the ways racial discourse is available to projects of both oppression and liberation.² Finding these "sites" takes some creativity but bears interesting fruit. Because racial objectives have seldom been established officially in Brazil, the "sites of dialogic exchange and contestation" are decentered. To break down the impression that the Afro-Brazilian polity has been inactive, one must look to local spaces where specific grievances erupt. The racialized effects of policy are felt by the Afro-Brazilian community at the local level, and thus it is at this level that the community asserts itself.

1. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 17, no. 2 (Winter 1992):251-74, 252.

2. *Ibid.*

Does the existence of institutionalized marginalization of racial minorities and the racialized reaction to such policies in Brazil mean that the history of race in Brazil mirrors that of other countries like the United States and South Africa? The answer is no. The Brazilian case remains exceptional because of the decentralization of transactions over race, which has provided the plausible denial of societal tension on which the idea of racial democracy has rested. Local tensions can be treated as the exceptions that sustain the rule. Systematic examination of these "sites" reveals the operation of a system of racial domination.

The questions asked frame the answers found, so it comes as no surprise that the broader dragnet employed by some of the scholars discussed here yields evidence that challenges readers to rethink the study of race relations. These new approaches frame the racial implications of nation building, as well as the resourceful responses of those groups that have struggled to challenge the roles they have been assigned in this project. After looking at some of the new ways of reading the state, I will consider some of the broader definitions of racial consciousness that have responded to the constraints posed by a racialized state.

The Racial State

Anthony Marx's ambitious comparative study, *Making Race and Nation: A Comparison of the United States, South Africa, and Brazil*, proposes a framework for considering the role of the state in promoting racial division and exclusion. According to Marx, the state in these countries excluded blacks to gain legitimacy among whites. Whether by direct or indirect means, the consolidation of the modern nation-state in these countries was carried out in a racial arena, and consequently, the state played a formative role in the development of racialized societies. Here lies one of the most relevant contributions of the book: the suggestion that nation building in a multiracial society is an inherently racialized process and that once race becomes a factor, it remains a factor in national politics.

Making Race and Nation is introduced as "a comparative study of interacting institutional and identity formation" (p. xi). In the South African case, the English attracted the loyalty of the Boers by withholding equal rights from the African majority. In the United States, exclusion helped regain the loyalty of southern whites in the aftermath of the Civil War. Within this framework, politics of integration and politics of separatism both worked toward black exclusion. As Marx comments, "countertendencies within white politics ironically reinforced racial domination for opposing reasons" (p. 101). In Brazil, no event like the U. S. Civil War or the Boer War divided whites, and therefore no active exclusion of nonwhites was needed to repair rifts in white society. In contrast, peaceful abolition and white unity precluded black unity and robbed Afro-Brazilians of political and

economic openings. Consequently, discrimination could be hidden “under a cloak of tolerance” (p. 79).

While Marx provides a provocative explanation for the pervasive role of the state in mediating racial hierarchies, his case study of Brazil at times lacks focus. Early on Marx asks, “If state institutions were constructed to encourage exclusive or inclusive national identities, how did these same institutions shape identities and action among blacks, and with what results?” (p. 18). Although he demonstrates that exclusion in the United States and South Africa set patterns of mobilization, Marx argues that a racial identity did not develop among Afro-Brazilians and that “racial identity must be consolidated before this identity can be turned into action” (p. 266). While white unity in Brazil has constrained the political space for black activism in ways that diverged from the U.S. and South African experiences, other authors to be considered here document diverse forms of both identity consolidation and activism among Afro-Brazilians.

The root of the difference between Marx and other authors reviewed lies in his argument that white Brazilians chose not to enact “official racial domination,” relying instead on “informal racism” to maintain domination. The absence of Jim Crow and apartheid meant that there was no issue around which Afro-Brazilians could coalesce. Curiously, Marx accepts this image of a state whose rhetoric promoted inclusion even as he discusses the politics of “whitening” and explores the consequences of state-sponsored European immigration for the Afro-Brazilian labor force. By arguing that the Brazilian state has been largely inactive and that Afro-Brazilians have been demobilized relative to their counterparts in the United States and South Africa, Marx precludes his comparison from seizing upon significant patterns of exclusion and mobilization evident in other works reviewed in this essay.

The patterns of state-sponsored exclusion were most apparent during Brazil’s First Republic (1889–1930), specifically the period in which Marx suggests that “Brazil projected an image of an inclusive nation-state and racial democracy” (p. 164). The first section of the collection *Raça, ciência e sociedade*, edited by Marcos Chor Maio and Ricardo Ventura Santos, addresses these racial politics. Essays by John Manuel Monteiro, Nisia Trindade Lima and Gilberto Hochman, Giralda Seyferth, and Jair de Souza Ramos each speak to the pattern of nation building through exclusion by the state that Marx finds in the United States and South Africa.

These scholars provide ample evidence for reconsidering Marx’s notion of a racially neutral Brazilian state. While Marx treats European immigration and employers’ preferences for white labor as examples of “informal racism,” the essays by Seyferth and Ramos characterize immigration and the politics of “whitening” as nation-building projects based on state-sponsored racial exclusion. In Brazil, the contrast between “official racial domination” and “informal racism” is a false dichotomy. White Brazilians

implemented explicitly racialist and exclusionary public policies. What is more, this dichotomy neglects a crucial component of the Brazilian system of racial domination: the ability of the state to impose subtle barriers that perpetuate the systematic marginalization of Afro-Brazilians.

While Seyferth and Ramos deal with openly racialist politics, the essay by Lima and Hochman, “*Condenado pela raça, absolvido pela medicina,*” explores the more subtle role of race in the public health and sanitation movement of the early twentieth century. This movement, which linked nation building to race in a manner compatible with Marx’s model, aimed to tame the interior of Brazil through medicine and hygiene, thus curing the perceived inferiority of its inhabitants. According to Lima and Hochman, public health officials believed, “The Brazilian was indolent, lazy and unproductive because he was sick and abandoned by political elites. Redeeming Brazil meant sanitizing it, hygienizing it, an obligatory task of the government” (p. 23).

By defining race and nation in medical and scientific terms, public health officials competed for jurisdiction over social policy, the allocation of resources, and social organization. Their rallying cry was “Brazil is a vast hospital” (p. 24), which asserted both the degeneracy of the nonwhite population and the scientific ability to cure it. This argument is also presented by Lilia Moritz Schwarcz in *O espetáculo das raças: Cientistas, instituições e questão racial no Brasil, 1870–1930* (recently translated by Leland Guyer and published in English as *The Spectacle of the Races*). It explores the role of leading nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century social institutions—historical societies, ethnographic and anthropological museums, and law and medical schools—in shaping racial discourse and competing for jurisdiction over the racial nation.

Schwarcz’s analysis of the relationship between race and medicine (the strongest section of her book) offers the argument that although both the Rio de Janeiro and Bahia medical schools dealt with questions of race, two different approaches were apparent by the turn of the century that reflected wider shifts in racial discourse. The Bahian medical school focused on sick individuals and therefore adhered to biological notions of race, and it pursued strains of legal medicine that diagnosed blacks and especially mulattos as prone to criminality and insanity. In contrast, the Rio de Janeiro medical school focused on the illness. Seeing the nonwhite population as afflicted with curable diseases, the Rio school focused on health and hygiene programs, treating the symptoms related to perceived racial inferiority.

The Schwarcz and Lima and Hochman texts draw attention to the ways in which social policies not explicitly concerned with race responded to the dominant racial discourses of their time. The creation of a federal education and health ministry in 1930 institutionalized this relationship: the decision to link health and education efforts crystallized the relationship between public policy and the increasingly accepted notion that racial in-

feriority was linked not to biology but to culture, hygiene, health, and education. What is more, the new ministry tacitly accepted the role of transforming the terms of marginalization and integration of nonwhite Brazilians into public policy.

This approach to the role of the state in adjudicating racial stratification can be seen again in the collection *Afro-Brazilian Culture and Politics: Bahia, 1790s to 1990s*, edited by Hendrik Kraay. Essays by Kraay and Mary Ann Mahony document the legal obstacles faced by Afro-Brazilians. Kraay outlines how the state redefined the military as a white institution and phased out Salvador's black militia in the decades after independence. By examining militia correspondence and legal records, Kraay presents a picture of a group of Afro-Brazilians fighting to preserve their social status, equal pay, and pensions in the face of legislation that gradually stripped them of ranks commensurate with those of the white regular officer corps.

Mahony relates the difficulties faced by Afro-Brazilian cacao planters in gaining and retaining secure access to land in Bahia's Recôncavo region. Her impressive use of legal, census, and tax records leads her to conclude that "some limited social mobility was possible, but only under very specific conditions and only in the short term" (p. 111). Land possession was hindered by merchants' aggressive use of bankruptcy courts, competition with larger (usually white) landowners, and difficulties in negotiating networks of patronage. The obstacles faced by Afro-Brazilian planters were not intended as racial barriers, but the economic structure of Recôncavo agriculture impeded black farmers' options and possibilities of ascension nonetheless.

Contradicting Marx's argument about a Brazilian state that did not work actively to marginalize Afro-Brazilians is an impressive body of recent literature documenting the often concealed obstacles to equal rights in law and social policy. The absence of segregation in Brazil signaled the presence of other barriers that reach far back into the nineteenth century, as both Kraay and Mahony demonstrate. Lima and Hochman as well as Schwarcz show in turn how the strategy of writing laws and establishing legal procedures that did not mention race but had the practical effect of marginalizing Afro-Brazilians continued in the implementing of social policies in the twentieth century.

The framework that Marx presents is more applicable to Brazil than he suggests. Nation-building projects have repeatedly been carried out by excluding Brazilians of color. The other authors under review here have completed highly original work in identifying and interpreting records that point to the state's greater role in perpetuating the institutional marginalization of Afro-Brazilians than previously shown. They present an image of the state that anthropologist Jocélio Teles dos Santos describes in *Afro-Brazilian Culture and Politics* as "the guardian of a society characterized by inequality" (p. 118).

The Racialized Society

An equally provocative analytical framework also challenges long-standing assumptions by showing that Afro-Brazilian racial identity has long been consolidated and turned into action. The contact points where racial exclusion has been established combined to form a broadly exclusionary society, but challenges to exclusion at the societal level have been frustrated by the lack of features that can be contested, such as codified segregation. Instead, contestation has emerged at the local sites where marginalization takes place, and racial consciousness is consequently shaped by the openings provided by local situations.

An impressive example in this analytical vein is Kim Butler's *Freedoms Given, Freedoms Won: Afro-Brazilians in Post-Abolition São Paulo and Salvador*, a comparative study of Afro-Brazilian community organization and mobilization in these two cities. In contrast to Marx's effort to build a model explaining systems of marginalization, Butler examines the role of African descendants in setting the parameters of freedom. Her comparative model shows the diversity of strategies adopted by Afro-Brazilians to redefine the boundaries that they have faced.

Critical to this analysis is Butler's expanded definition of political activism to include the assertion of Afro-Brazilian culture. This approach makes a great deal of sense given that Afro-Brazilian cultural activism emerged concomitantly with white Brazilian efforts to define Afro-Brazilian culture as primitive and maladaptive and to suppress its expression. Butler's expanded definition of activism draws attention to extensive actions by Afro-Brazilians to assert their own value systems in a hostile environment. As she observes, the age, race, and gender of an Afro-Brazilian woman are all liabilities in mainstream society but are valued within *candomblé*. This example points to the possibility of viewing features of Afro-Brazilian life through two lenses and lends weight to Butler's approach to Afro-Brazilian history as a part of a diasporic experience analogous to those in countries like Cuba and Jamaica.

Freedoms Given, Freedoms Won provides compelling reasons why Afro-Brazilian political activism (engendered by the Frente Negra Brasileira, social clubs, and newspapers) developed in São Paulo while cultural activism (such as *candomblé*, mutual aid societies, and Carnival *blocos*) developed in Salvador. Butler defines this difference by pointing to the "distinction between the *basis* (why) and *mode* (how) of that exclusion" (p. 60, author's emphasis). In São Paulo, "whites" discriminated against "blacks," while in Salvador, "Brazilians" discriminated against "Africans." These distinctions originated in the histories of social organization and growth in these cities and resulted in historically specific forms of activism: political activism based on assertion of "blackness" in São Paulo and the assertion of African culture in Salvador.

Butler supports her argument with an impressive array of oral histories conducted in the two cities. These interviews reveal a critical area of life that is missing from other sources and many other studies: they provide a window on the informal social networks that often made survival possible among the most marginalized groups in society. Another effective tool employed by Butler is examining social stratification, segregation, and organization through neighborhood analysis. Adding a map of São Paulo to subsequent editions would further clarify the spatial analysis of race in the city and would make *Freedoms Given, Freedoms Won* more accessible to undergraduates.

The redefinition of cultural activity as political activism is also employed in Michel Agiers's essay on candomblé in *Afro-Brazilian Culture and Politics*. Agiers views candomblé not as a cultural artifact or an African survival but as a set of political and social networks. He discusses the *terreiro* (ceremonial grounds) of a particular *mãe de santo* whose success rests on her strategies of attracting political activists to the *terreiro* and working the political system to secure registration of her home (and *terreiro*) as a historical landmark. Agiers shows the *terreiro* to be a contemporary institution that is part of the social and political space surrounding it.

Hendrik Kraay's essay on the black militia in *Afro-Brazilian Culture and Politics* projects this picture of black activism back to the eve of Brazil's independence. He shows how the militia negotiated the tension between segregation and integration within the colonial and later imperial military. Militia leaders recognized that segregation was valuable where mobility in white institutions was not possible (p. 48). Kraay finds militia members negotiating what are still complicated questions of integration and assimilation, and he underscores the importance of looking to the Brazilian Empire for clues to contemporary race relations.

The approaches of these authors to Afro-Brazilian mobilization differ considerably from that taken by France Winddance Twine in *Racism in a Racial Democracy: The Maintenance of White Supremacy in Brazil*. Twine posits the persistence of the ideal of racial democracy among poor Afro-Brazilians and explores racial value systems in an unnamed city in the interior of the state of Rio de Janeiro. She begins with an anecdote about Afro-Brazilian activist Fernando Conceição, suggesting that he developed his racial consciousness while on Fulbright-sponsored travel to the United States. This misinterpretation is based on a misleading article in the *Wall Street Journal* and misses the point that Conceição traveled to the United States specifically because he was a racial activist. Twine puts the cart before the horse by implying that racial consciousness in Brazil is inspired by experiences in the United States. The implications of the anecdote are driven home by her comment, "protests like . . . [Conceição's] continue to be highly marginal and led by the rare black Brazilian who has spent time studying abroad" (p. 2).

Contrary to Twine's assertions, few of the activists discussed by Butler or the essayists in *Afro-Brazilian Culture and Politics* seem to have traveled abroad. These sources also show that activism is neither a recent phenomenon nor restricted to a few racialized black elites. Recent scholarship demonstrates instead, according to Butler's conclusion to *Afro-Brazilian Culture and Politics*, how Afro-Brazilians "negotiated boundaries of power and prerogative in an exclusionary and discriminatory society" (p. 159).

UNESCO Revisited

Despite the persistence of some assumptions about racial exclusion that are echoed in Marx and Twine, the current scholarship on race in Brazil goes beyond pointing to discrimination to suggest ways that it has operated and been challenged. This scholarship represents a substantial refinement of the approach to race that emerged from the UNESCO studies begun a half-century ago in 1950. Asking whether Brazil lacked racial tension, the original studies pointed to an unequal society. Subsequent scholarship plumbed the depth of that inequality. Recent work has carried the field a step further by documenting the ways in which inequality has been transacted.

The analytical distance traversed in the past fifty years has inspired scholars to revisit some of the mid-twentieth-century scholarship on race relations, including works prepared for the UNESCO study. The principal examples of this rereading can be found in the edited volume *Raça, ciência e sociedade*. Antonio Sergio Guimarães analyzes the definitions of color, class, and status originally employed by Donald Pierson, Thales de Azevedo, and Marvin Harris. Maria Luca Braga assays the scholarship of Roger Bastide, stressing the diversity of his approaches. Brazilian sociologist Marcos Chor Maio presents an intellectual biography of Afro-Brazilian sociologist Guerreiro Ramos, who bridged black militancy in the Teatro Experimental Negro with work in the second Vargas administration as a member of the Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros (ISEB) and a lecturer for the Departamento de Administração do Serviço Público (DASP).

Alongside these analyses by leading theoreticians of race relations is a second edition of one of the more obscure components of the UNESCO project, Luiz de Aguiar Costa Pinto's *O negro no Rio de Janeiro: Relações raciais numa sociedade em mudança*. This timely reedition merits attention because of the richness of Costa Pinto's analysis of the Afro-Brazilian population in the city of Rio de Janeiro. His intention to trace the outlines of race relations at a transition point between rural and urban settings is captured in his subtitle. Costa Pinto portrays a city being transformed by Afro-Brazilian migration from rural areas to urban centers and racial status being renegotiated in the more fluid urban setting.

Employing a detailed analysis of census data for 1940 and 1950, Costa Pinto portrayed a city that, despite its dynamism, remained profoundly segregated according to geography, income, occupation, and education. His approach challenged the dominant ideology of racial harmony by demonstrating the structural obstacles faced by urban Afro-Brazilians. In some ways, his book resembles later work by Florestan Fernandes in its focus on racial stratification in the emerging urban areas. Yet the originality of *O negro no Rio de Janeiro* lies in the strong statistical analysis that Costa Pinto brought to the study of race.

A noteworthy element of this analysis is the focus on the relationship between race and gender. Costa Pinto revealed that much of Rio's black population had participated in the first wave of internal migration, from the 1920s to the 1940s. Most of these migrants were black women who came from Minas Gerais and the interior of the state of Rio de Janeiro. Costa Pinto depicted the extreme racial, gender, and class marginalization afflicting these women, who often lived and labored invisibly as domestic servants in the city's wealthiest neighborhoods.

Costa Pinto's statistical analyses of race in Rio presaged the work of Carlos Hasenbalg and Nelson do Valle Silva by over twenty years and broke radical new ground in the study of Brazilian race relations. Yet the most controversial element of *O negro no Rio de Janeiro* was his body of conclusions on Afro-Brazilian political activism. Costa Pinto's research led him to conclude that marginalization of Afro-Brazilians was based on the combination of economic inequality and racial discrimination, but he criticized the emergence of a racialized Afro-Brazilian elite, as embodied in the Teatro Experimental Negro (TEN), as a misdirection of energies that was out of touch with the mass of Afro-Brazilians. Following his own Marxist orientation, Costa Pinto argued that Afro-Brazilians could overcome their marginalization only through redistributive policies.

This argument drew criticism from Guerreiro Ramos, who headed the political arm of the TEN along with Abdias do Nascimento. For Ramos, the solution to Brazil's racial problems lay in integrating Afro-Brazilians into mainstream society as Afro-Brazilians. Continued identification of the colored elite with their color was a key to these ethnic politics. This debate is thoughtfully explored by Marcos Chor Maio in his essay on Guerreiro Ramos and his introduction to the second edition of *O negro no Rio de Janeiro*.

Questions explored by contemporary scholars continue to emerge from this tension between theories of racial discrimination and economic exclusion. The authors reviewed here largely share a concern for tracing the subtle lines drawn through Brazilian society to preserve race-linked social inequality while permitting the denial of racism. By drawing on ample evidence of social inequality and racial activism, scholars are increasingly illustrating the "boundaries of power and prerogative" that Butler describes.

In the works discussed here and others, the amorphousness of racial marginalization in societies that do not maintain explicit barriers is being shown to have increasingly definable features. This accomplishment is no small feat given the elasticity and endurance of Brazil's "racial democracy." Chief among these features is the decentralized nature of relations of domination and contestation. The marginalization of Afro-Brazilians has occurred through localized points of transaction, but the results are no less systematic.

In decentralizing the sites of domination, Brazil has avoided the kinds of confrontation that have taken place in other societies. But in directing scholarly attention toward these localized points, Butler, Kraay, and others are amassing a growing understanding of the processes that lead to systematic marginalization and a broader picture of the largely isolated attempts to challenge these processes. Out of this more technical view of race emerges a renewed capacity to ask larger questions about racial integration, as does Carlos Hasenbalg in the closing essay of *Raça, ciência e sociedade*. He inquires, "Is it possible that the Brazilian racial dilemma could be redefined in these terms: how to legitimate cultural diversity and at the same time insure the equal social integration of ethnic and racial groups?" (p. 245).