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Black Protest and  
Public Policies in Brazil**

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# Racial Inequalities, Black Protest and Public Policies in Brazil

Antonio Sérgio Alfredo Guimarães

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I begin by providing a brief overview of the evolution of racial inequalities and Black poverty in Brazil. There is a steady and increasing pattern of inequality between non-whites (blacks and pardos) and whites in every aspect of social life (income, occupation, education, health, housing, etc.). The data show that the increase in wealth and quality of life that occurred in the last decades was almost completely concentrated in the white population. The emergence of a black middle class did not contradict the fact of rampant inequality between ethno-racial groups. On the contrary, the tiny black middle class that has emerged provides support for an organized black movement in the country.

I then discuss the question of how a country that is believed to have exceptionally few race issues generates contradictory public reactions even today towards the implementation of affirmative action policies, which could break the structural inertia of inequality. In the next section, I present the Movimento Negro Unificado (Unified Black Movement) agenda in the 1980s and 1990s. I explain (a) the main areas of racial unrest (everyday racial discrimination, prejudice expressed in books, mass media, educational system, lack of political representation); and (b) the political strategy of the Black movement, its alliance with the *esquerda* and the progressive parties, and the gains that accrued to it under the 1988 Constitutional Charter.

Subsequently, I analyze the main state responses to the Black movement's agenda. I analyze the official responses to black mobilization and as attempts to integrate black protest into the political system. I conclude the paper by providing a brief appraisal of current federal programs, which can affect the black population and reduce inequalities (Agenda 2000-2001; *Avança Brasil*; *Alvorada*, *PLANFOR*).

Given the increase in inequalities among ethno-racial groups, despite state efforts to tackle them, I will conclude by trying to answer the question: "what is wrong with Brazil's anti-racist programs?"

## **Black poverty and how the racial issue is handled in Brazil**

Black poverty is a fact of life in Brazil. Usually, we read statistical reports on poverty and racial inequalities in Brazil, and accept poverty as natural. Reviewing some of the numbers may help us think about the causes in a more precise manner. Below, the data that unequivocally shows that poverty affects blacks more than whites is presented.

**Table 1: Selected Socioeconomic Characteristics by Color – Men**

Socio-Economic Characteristic	COLOR		
	White	Black	Pardo
<b>Years of Schooling</b>	<b>6,25</b>	<b>3,81</b>	<b>3,96</b>
<b>Age of first employment</b>	<b>12,66</b>	<b>12,20</b>	<b>12,01</b>
<b>Per capita family income</b>	<b>376,57</b>	<b>166,87</b>	<b>163,61</b>
<b>Size of family</b>	<b>3,70</b>	<b>4,05</b>	<b>4,18</b>
<b>Urban residence (%)</b>	<b>83,17</b>	<b>77,79</b>	<b>73,19</b>
<b>Father's schooling</b>	<b>2,96</b>	<b>1,33</b>	<b>1,57</b>
<b>Father's occupational status</b>	<b>8,66</b>	<b>5,58</b>	<b>6,04</b>

Source: PNAD 96 – quoted from Silva (2000)

Also, there are large status and income differences in favor of the whites that are due to the employment area (in rural areas income is nearly 50% lower), which is expressed in the difference between occupational stratum 1 and 2. Other differences, like manual and non-manual labor, are shown in the difference between occupational stratum 3 and 4. Both these facts demonstrate the great importance, in our social hierarchy, of education (minimum schooling) and of urban residence. But, in all occupational stratum, or status groups, the black income is, on the average, almost half of that of the white (49%).

**Table 2: Income Averages by Occupational Stratum and Color**

Occupational stratum	Color			Total
	White	Preto	Pardo	
<b>1</b>	<b>315,96</b>	<b>158,12</b>	<b>182,06</b>	<b>239,46</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>577,88</b>	<b>311,75</b>	<b>350,09</b>	<b>173,17</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>644,88</b>	<b>464,99</b>	<b>458,49</b>	<b>567,48</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>1.246,94</b>	<b>717,05</b>	<b>775,80</b>	<b>1.100,78</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>1.877,23</b>	<b>987,32</b>	<b>1.039,20</b>	<b>1.678,49</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>2.919,93</b>	<b>1.805,16</b>	<b>1.940,11</b>	<b>2.772,62</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>949,66</b>	<b>403,24</b>	<b>432,81</b>	<b>734,18</b>

Source: Silva (2000).

A third point is that, aside from color, gender is a discriminating factor in terms of income, and therefore, poverty. Table 3 shows that white men and women have average earnings more than black men and women. Black women earn the least.

**Table 3: Average Earnings by Gender and Race\***

<b>White men</b>	6
	.3
<b>White women</b>	
	3.6
<b>Black men</b>	2
	.9
<b>Black women</b>	1
	.7

\*Expressed in multiples of the monthly minimum wage (at this writing, about US\$75.00).

Source: IBGE, 1994. Apud: Nascimento and Nascimento (2000)

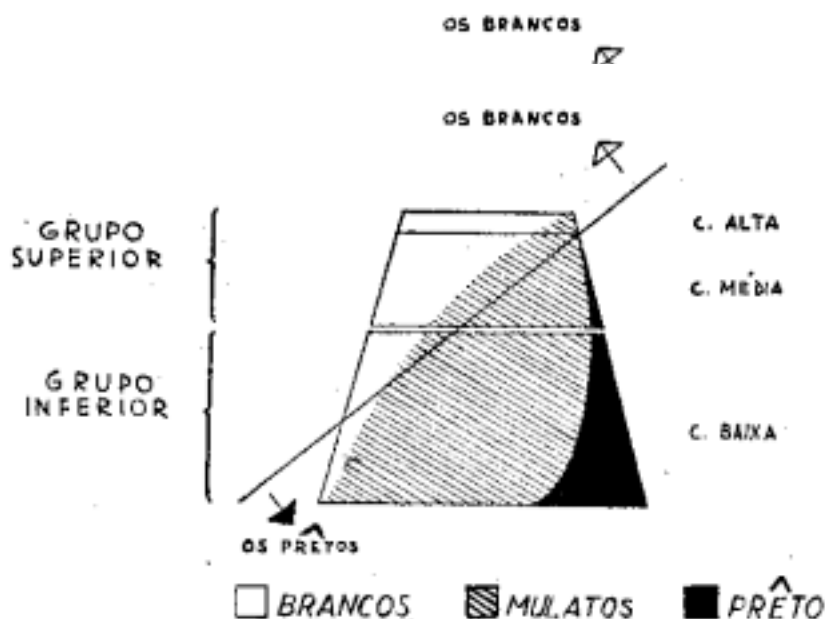
This third point can also be demonstrated by examining the participation and unemployment rates by gender and race. As Table 4 shows, black women are more numerous in the working population than white women, but they are also more prone to unemployment. Black men are part of the working population in the same proportion as white men, but their unemployment rates are higher.

**Table 4: Participation and Unemployment Rates by Gender and Race, São Paulo Metropolitan Area 1998**

<b>Rates</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Black (pretos and pardos)</b>	<b>Non-Black</b>
<b>Participation</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>73,3</b>	<b>73,3</b>	<b>73,4</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>50,9</b>	<b>53,8</b>	<b>49,5</b>
<b>Unemployment</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>18,3</b>	<b>22,7</b>	<b>16,1</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>21,2</b>	<b>25,0</b>	<b>19,2</b>

Source: INSPIR/DIEESE (1999)

And finally, the number of blacks in absolute poverty is almost double that of whites.



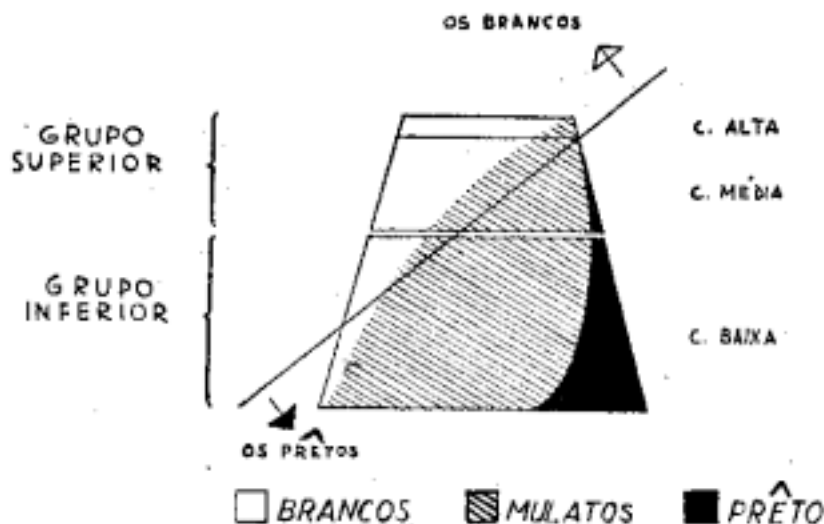
### AS CAUSAS DA POBREZA NEGRA

Seen from a historical view point (for example, between 1960 and 1996), the inequalities between the blacks and the whites have not diminished much in Brazil, and indicators such as university schooling have grown. The two graphs from Telles (1999) included in the annex show this. And according to this author:

“The findings demonstrate that in Brazil industrialization has no clear or singular effect on racial inequality. Cross-sectional data suggest that industrialization reduces overall racial inequality among men although longitudinal data shows no effect on men but possibly positive effects for nonwhite women. However, both cross-sectional and longitudinal data suggest that industrialization and development increase racial inequality at the top of the social structure particularly because of the effects of education. Although the expansion of higher education in the 1970s may have led to unprecedented mobility for some nonwhites, higher education has mostly benefited the almost entirely white, middle, and upper-middle classes.”

Therefore, statistically, it is well established that poverty affects blacks more than whites in Brazil. More than that, it's also demonstrated in sociological literature, since the 1950s, that in Brazilian ideology, imagery and speech, black and poor are considered equivalent, as also white and rich. Anthropologist Thales de Azevedo (1966), for instance, in a text dating back to 1955, studies racial hierarchy in Bahia, Brazil, and concludes that the steepest differences occur between whites and blacks. These steep differences are equally referred to colloquially as rich and poor. Comparing social structures in Bahia and in the south of the United States, based on a diagram suggested by Lloyd Warner which visualizes the racial/social class system, Thales expresses the Brazilian social structure as follows:

Table 9: Percent of "Miserable Poverty" by Region and Color, 1998			
State/Region	Color		
	White	Preto	Pardo
Rio de Janeiro (Southeast)	6.0	12.7	13.8
São Paulo (Southeast)	4.0	12.3	8.7



Source: (Azevedo 1966: 39).

There is, therefore, in Brazil, be it in people's minds, in demography or sociology, in economy or anthropology, between those who govern and those who are governed, a consensus that the poor are black and the rich are white.

### Poverty as being natural

What are the causes of black poverty? The explanation widely accepted by the government and by the people is that the discrepancy between whites and blacks is the result of slavery in the past. As it is inherited from the past, it is considered then as something that would disappear in time. This explanation, although it contains some truth, hides some big problems. Firstly, it frees the present generations of responsibility in the continuing inequality. Secondly, it offers a convenient excuse for preserving the inequality (how can you reverse in 5 years the product of 5 centuries? has been the most used phrase by the many republican governments, including the current one). Thirdly, it suggests that many governments have, gradually, tried to correct the discrepancies (sometimes, this argument is more than suggested, it's explicit among economists: the economy must grow so that the social problems can solve themselves naturally).

Against this conservative explanation of poverty, through the years (at least since 1930 in an organized manner), the black leadership has taken a stand. For them, the cause of black poverty is the lack of opportunities, the racial prejudice and discrimination. Up until a short while ago leading to 1988 review of the constitution, the arguments of the black leadership were peremptorily rejected: there was no discrimination, no racial prejudice, and black poverty was purely poverty. This is how "racial democracy" is defined, and it explains black poverty as a product of the past, class prejudice and discrimination, meaning the discrimination of the poor. Nowadays, an important change can be noted: both the government and public opinion recognize the existence of racial discrimination<sup>1</sup>. But, it's my opinion that class discrimination is still considered legitimate, which in the end, for blacks, comes down to the same thing.

It is important to state the legitimacy that has been acquired in Brazil of class discrimination and prejudice against the poor. Black militants say, in great part, that this legitimacy comes exactly

<sup>1</sup> On the governmental side, the Fernando Henrique Cardoso administration publicly recognized, on several different occasions, that there is racism in Brazil. On the public side, a Datafolha research from 1995 indicated that 89% of Brazilians also believe that whites are prejudiced against blacks, and 58% think that the fact that the black's living conditions are worse than the white's is due to the discrimination of whites against blacks and prejudice. Datafolha (1995)

from the fact that the poor are black. I think these militants are right. First, there is what Hasenbal & Silva call a “cumulative disadvantage cycle”, which affects blacks. In other words, statistics show that not only the black’s starting point is at a disadvantage (heritage from the past), but that in every step of social, educational, and market competition, new discriminations are added, which cause a rise in disadvantages. In other words, the statistics show that the disadvantages of blacks are not only due to the past, but are heightened in the present through discrimination.

Secondly, and maybe most importantly, is how this discrimination presents itself. You could not state, in Brazil, as has been done in the United States or in South Africa, that the racial factor is a reason for explicit or directly detectable discrimination. On the contrary, in Brazil, the racial issue is usually diluted in a series of ascribed personal attributes. Using as an example access to employment, 45% of Brazilian blacks, according to Datafolha (1995), consider the main problem blacks experience: in the job market, esthetic and behavioral values translate as “good appearance”. This notion is the largest single factor responsible for discrimination against blacks and the poor<sup>2</sup>. Aside from “good appearance”, young university students looking for jobs also have to worry about their university’s good name. The market prefers the free public universities, in which competition for admission is great, than private universities<sup>3</sup>. The problem consists in the fact that the quality of the free public grade school has deteriorated so that any student who wishes to enter a free university must be able to pay for a private grade school. Not only do the young poor kids have no access to that, but also many of the wealthy blacks that don’t go to elite schools, must pay for their university education. So, the market and the government discriminate against blacks twice: first, the market offers more qualifications to students from private schools, and second, the government rewards students from the public universities better.

Furthermore, the market for less qualified jobs -- the ones the black and the poor have enough schooling to aspire towards -- is fragmented by areas, in large cities like São Paulo. The first question that candidates are asked when applying for a job is in what area of the city they live in, and how many buses or trains they will have to take to get to work. That diminishes the chances of blacks and poor people of getting a job. On one hand, the poor districts are stigmatized by violence, poor esthetics and dishonesty<sup>4</sup>; on the other hand, the richer districts are the ones that offer the best jobs.

There is still a more perverse kind of discrimination that cannot be ignored: gender. Poverty, lack of opportunity, salary inequality and discrimination affect women much more than men. In the last few years, women’s rights and equality between the sexes in the work place have improved the position of women in the job market. But, looking at statistics based on race, it is clear that these benefits affect only white women. In other words, female emancipation is restricted to the middle and upper classes, not benefiting poor women, who are usually black. The data show that, for instance, even as white women have expanded their participation in the PEA and in the job market, including

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