



**Diploma of Whiteness: Race and Social Policy in Brazil, 1917-1945.** Jerry Dávila. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003. 296 pp.

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Dávila analyzes how Brazilian educators applied modernist eugenic principles during the inter-war period to "perfect the race" by creating a culturally European, physically fit, and nationalistic Brazilian "race." Dávila describes how Brazilian elites in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil's capital, sought to extend universal elementary education to develop a model of schools as clinics where the "deficient" mix of races could be "cured" to forge a new Brazilian race (p. 3).

Dávila traces the evolution of social scientists' understanding of race in the first half of the 20th century, from race as a biological fact to a cultural and environmental condition. Gilberto Freyre's view of Brazil's racial diversity as a strength became the basis for a Brazilian version of eugenic nationalism, applied by the Brazilian state to construct the idea of a "modern" nation. Dávila outlines how modernists influenced and shaped social policies, focusing his study on the "micro-institution" of public education. Public schools in Rio de Janeiro became eugenic laboratories, applying principles of systematic industrial rationalism to education. Rio de Janeiro schools became a national showcase for the formation of a new "Brazilian man" (p. 21).

Analyzing school records, teachers' journals, letters and primary documents, Dávila examines how emerging white medical, social scientific, and intellectual elites turned their assumptions about race in Brazil into educational policies designed to promote a modern state characterized by a "whitening" sanitization process in which whiteness was equated to physical and mental fitness and African traits were in need of remediation. Public schools were employed as an instrument of social engineering to transform "black into white," a phenomenon originally documented by historian Thomas Skidmore. Through analyses of historical photographs and documents, Dávila discovers racially coded employment and teaching policies that reveal secondary education as a form of training for a narrow elite and a means of racial exclusion.

Chapters of the book review a series of social policies built upon theories of sanitation and hygiene as cures for social ills, and a means to create a new national identity. Dávila also explores struggles between progressive educators and conservative Catholic activists; the Estado Novo's appointment of military educators who continued and expanded eugenic nationalist practices in education; and the Brazilian state's ultimate failure to extend universal public education, even in the showcase state of Rio de Janeiro. Finally, Dávila touches upon the contemporary prevalence of



eugenic thought by analyzing recent media coverage in which whiteness remains the benchmark of Brazilian racial measurement.

The book has a few problems. Many of the chapters are repetitive, in the style of a doctoral dissertation that has not been adequately edited for publication. This problem may be an asset, however, as each of the chapters may stand alone as one case or set of cases illustrating the author's thesis. The book could be improved by providing more statistical data. The author often cites absolute numbers of schools, children attending school, teachers in training, and so on, but fails to provide percentages that would indicate relative proportions of children attending school at all, patterns of school attendance by racial categories, or trends in school participation by race over time. These data may not be available from official sources, and if this is the case the author might have advised us of this problem.

In a few instances, Dávila is simply not convincing. He sets out with an ambitious promise to "analyze ways in which concepts of class, gender, sexuality, nation and race influenced and reinforced each other" (p. 14), but does not successfully provide analyses of how gender or sexuality interfaced with class, nation, and race. Dávila also promises an explanation of how "these policies not only placed new obstacles in the way of social and racial integration, but left scant evidence of their effects...(therefore) limiting the ability of Afro-Brazilians to challenge their inherent inequity" (p. 4). While I fully agree with his premise, Dávila did not adequately support this argument.

On the positive side, Dávila's exhaustively researched analysis is an excellent example of the study of micro-institutions. In this case, the public school system's approach to race and class illustrates the roles played by science and public power in reinforcing the institutional marginalization of Brazil's Afro-descendant population. As Dávila notes, the study of such institutional sites may "reveal the operation of inequality more effectively than can analyses of the broader public sphere" (p. 240).

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