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Multiracial Identities in the United States: Towards the Brazilian or South African Paths?

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Abstract: Multiracial identities in Brazil, South Africa, and the United States all formed within White supremacist, White racist, and anti-Black social orders. Brazil and South Africa historically acknowledged multiracials in ternary racial orders with a structurally intermediate status somewhat higher than that of other nonWhites, particularly Blacks, but significantly lower than that of Whites. In contrast, in the United States, multiracial identities have historically been prohibited due to hypodescent and the monoracial imperative, which categorize multiracials according to their most subaltern racial background and necessitate single-racial identification. In the 1980s and 1990s, a U.S. multiracial movement challenged these norms. This article compares the multiracial phenomenon in the United States with historical formations in Brazil and South Africa using data from published literature, censuses, written correspondence with activists, and observations of public behavior in the United States. The objective is to theorize whether and to what extent U.S. multiracial identities function in ways similar to the historical formations of Brazil and South Africa, particularly with regards to questions of collective identity, anti-Blackness, and White adjacency.

Keywords: multiracial; mixed race; miscegenation; Brazil-Race relations; South Africa-Race relations; United States-Race relations; White supremacy; White racism; anti-Blackness



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1. Introduction: White Supremacy, White Racism, and the Multiracial Middle

White supremacy supports the belief in the superiority of values, customs, and artifacts associated with Whiteness and derivative of Europe and Europeans (Frederickson 1981). White racism is the systemic and structural expression of attitudes and behavior derived from White supremacy implemented through public policy and other social processes that grant and seek to maintain White privilege and White dominance over racially-defined “minorities,” including multiracials. It is embedded in the structure and institutions of society as the product of centuries of systematic exclusion and exploitation.

European colonial attitudes toward miscegenation, as well as the social differentiation of multiracials from Whites and other nonWhites, were primarily motivated by self-interest grounded in White supremacy and White racism (Bender 1978; Marx 1998; Frederickson 1981). Less influenced by the varying national and cultural origins of the colonizing Europeans, they were based more on the interplay of two demographic factors in the colonial territories: the ratio of European men to women and the proportion of Whites to nonWhites.

In Brazil and in South Africa, Whites were a minority and were mostly single males. Bender (1978), Frederickson (1981), Marx (1998), and Keegan (1997) argue that there was considerable interracial intimacy between White men and women of color in these two places due to a shortage of White women. Most of these relationships involved coercion rather than mutual consent, including rape or fleeting extramarital relations and extended concubinage. Interracial intimacy involving marriage was taboo but less so through concubinage, notwithstanding the social stigma.

Yet in Brazil, despite legal barriers to interracial marriage in the colonial period and strong social prejudice during and after the colonial era (Daniel 2006), the interracial family was legitimized. South Africa also saw relatively frequent intermarriages, although

there were some legal sanctions and social stigma.¹ [Frederickson \(1981\)](#) and [Marx \(1998\)](#) point out that severe prohibitions against intermarriage, as well as interracial intimacy, more generally, were not implemented there until apartheid in the mid-twentieth century. The resulting miscegenation in both Brazil and South Africa gave rise to sizeable multiracial populations.

Particularly in Brazil, the shortage of Whites meant multiracials often filled roles in the political economy as artisans and skilled labor, as well as in the state's security apparatus. Shared European ancestry and culture with multiracials there factored into the White minority's calculations to maintain White domination. Whites implemented a ternary racial order granting multiracials an intermediate status and privileges somewhat above that of other nonWhites, especially Blacks, although significantly below that of Whites. This contributed as much to multiracials' own circumscribed status as to the superordinate position of Whites ([Daniel 2006](#)).

In Anglo-America, a more balanced ratio between European men and women was achieved early in the colonial period. Many Europeans arrived as families, reproduced European patterns of conjugal life, and rapidly became a majority. Interracial intimacy between White men and women of color was highly stigmatized. Interracial marriage, particularly between Blacks and Whites, became illegal early in the colonial period.² Sufficient numbers of Whites meant multiracials were not as necessary in the artisanal and skilled trades or the state's security apparatus. It also meant that Whites did not need to rely on multiracials in upholding White domination by granting them greater privileges than Blacks.

Instead of allying with mulattoes in order to control the Black minority, Whites in the United States endeavored to maintain domination by enforcing hypodescent and the monoracial imperative to safeguard White racial subjectivity and maintain White supremacy. They began enforcing hypodescent and the monoracial imperative during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as part of antimiscegenation legislation. Consequently, the children of interracial relationships were categorized according to their most subaltern background and with monoracial (single-racial) identification. The result was a binary racial order with no intermediate or middle status. One was either White or non-White or, more specifically, White or Black, given their popular extremes in the binary framework.

[F. J. Davis \(1991\)](#) argues that hypodescent applied most stringently to first-generation offspring of interracial unions, particularly to African-descent individuals ([Jordan 2014](#)), whether first-generation or later, who experience the most restrictive rule of hypodescent: the one-drop rule, which designates as Black anyone with African ancestry ([M. Harris 1964](#)).³ Unique to the United States, this ensured all future descendants would be designated and self-identified as solely Black. The "dual minority" offspring of Blacks and other groups of color are also subject to the one-drop rule and monoracial formations ([Forbes 1988](#); [Loewen 1971](#)).

The place in the U.S. racial hierarchy of those with partial Latinx, Asian American, or Native American ancestry ([Spickard 1989](#); [Wilson 1992](#)) is less clearly defined, as it is for non-Black dual minorities, such as South Asian/Mexican and Filipino/Mexican Americans ([Leonard 1992](#); [Guevarra 2012](#)). Yet hypodescent still tends to push them toward the more subaltern racial background, although that varies situationally. Still, in all instances, monoracial norms have historically disallowed the articulation and recognition of multiracial identities.

Because of this, multiracials suffer discriminatory attitudes and practices informed by "monoracism" ([Johnston and Nadal 2010](#), p. 125). Monoracist structures produce unearned benefits for Whites, as well as for monoracial groups of color, even as the latter suffer structural oppression ([Nadal et al. 2011](#)). While monoracials of color do not experience anything near the advantages of Whites, their cultural, social, economic, political outlets, and resources may make it difficult for them to recognize their own biases ([Daniel 2021](#)) and "monoracial privilege" ([Nadal et al. 2011](#), p. 43). This can perpetuate discrimination

against multiracials, whose identities are officially unrecognized, questioned, and erased (Johnston and Nadal 2010).

Monoraciality qua hypodescent has perpetuated macroaggressions involving state agencies, public policy, and institutional practices that ignore or erase multiracials. It has also sustained mesoaggressions vis-à-vis organizations, the workplace, community, and schools, ranging from being unable to fill out a form reflecting one's identity to the absence of material on multiracials in mass media and school curricula (Pew Research Center 2015). Johnston and Nadal argue that multiracials have also sustained microaggressions in the sphere of interpersonal relations (Johnston and Nadal 2010). These involve brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults and question the legitimacy of identity while negating it through erasure, bullying, etc. Multiracial identities or experiences might be seen as psychologically "abnormal" or individuals may be said to have issues because they are mixed (J. C. Harris 2019; Johnston and Nadal 2010). Multiracials are also often accused of trying to deny their "actual" and appropriate—i.e., monoracial—category membership to avoid the racial stigma associated with the less prestigious background of color (Nadal et al. 2011; Johnston and Nadal 2010).⁴

This should not imply that the U.S. binary racial order based on hypodescent and the monoracial imperative is somehow less egalitarian than the Brazilian and South African ternary racial orders. Despite their different trajectories, these racial orders shared a history of colonialism, patriarchy, slavery, and miscegenation (Marx 1998). They were also deeply informed by White elite efforts to build national unity. Racial formation in each nation was therefore a central organizing principle to nation making and nationalism originating in and shaped by Eurocentrism, and therefore by White racism and White supremacy, with the state constructing and enforcing the institutional boundaries of race.

Moreover, in all three places, Blacks have historically been the largest subaltern group and race relations have been characterized by anti-Blackness. While U.S. law has been preoccupied with race in general, Blackness has a unique place there due to hypodescent. Given the eradication of formal expressions of racism in the United States, including the removal of the last antimiscegenation legislation in the 1960s, hypodescent and monoraciality thus provide an excellent opportunity to compare U.S. multiracials of partial African descent in the post-civil rights era⁵ with historical multiracials in Brazil and South Africa. Multiracial identities have only recently been allowed in the United States, while in Brazil and South Africa they have existed since the colonial era. It therefore bears asking whether and to what extent multiracial identities in the U.S. post-civil rights era function in ways similar to or different from historical Brazilian and South African formations.

2. Materials and Methods

This article draws from and further develops Frederickson's comparison of South Africa and the United States (Frederickson 1981), and Marx's comparison of Brazil, South Africa, and the United States (Marx 1998), neither of whom discusses post-civil rights multiracial identities or the multiracial movement in the U.S. This movement antedates Frederickson's work. But it was at its height in terms of the census debate in the late 1990s when Marx published his book.

The analysis also draws from and expands on Daniel's comparative historical examinations of Brazil and the United States (Daniel 2006), as well as Brazil, South Africa, and the United States (Daniel 2002). The goal is to determine whether and to what extent multiracial identities function in similar ways within the context of White supremacy and White racism with regards to anti-Blackness and White adjacency. Another objective is to determine whether U.S. multiracial identities serve as the basis of a group identity, as has historically been the case in South Africa, or as individual identities that are tenuous, porous, multiple, overlapping, and resistant to the concept of the "racial group," as has historically been the case in Brazil.

Data derive from published literature, censuses, written correspondence with activists and observations of public behavior between 1988 and 2021 of individuals in the United States at educational and support group meetings, courses at the University of California, Los Angeles and University of California, Santa Barbara, conferences, webinars, and festivals devoted the subject of multiracial identities.

3. Discussion

3.1. *The U.S. Path: The Binary Racial Order*

3.1.1. The Anglo-American Racial Order from Colony to Republic

The European colonizers in Anglo-America were less successful in coercing Native Americans into forced labor and enslavement compared to the densely populated Indigenous agricultural societies in Peru and Mexico. Still, Indigenous people throughout the Americas were decimated by war, enslavement, and Old World diseases to which they had no immunity.⁶ During the seventeenth century, Britain introduced European indentured servitude to meet its agricultural labor needs. This was typically a temporary contractual arrangement with the price of passage from Europe advanced in exchange for five to eight years of voluntary labor. Throughout the early colonial period, the Anglo-American colonies were overwhelmingly composed of White yeomanry, indentures, and former indentures, as well as wage earners.

There were few African slaves although slavery gradually became established in the 1650s and 1660s. In the mid-eighteenth century, the importation of enslaved Africans expanded as the numbers of European indentures were reduced, in part, because the former was a cheaper labor source (Williamson 1980). Yet the legal distinction between individuals held in servitude and those who were free was more precise than that between the voluntary labor of European indentures and the involuntary labor of African slaves. Indeed, European indentures and African slaves worked under similarly harsh conditions.

Also, interracial intimacy was not yet legally prohibited, despite strong prejudice (Daniel 2006). Osuji (2019) points out, however, that Black/White interracial intimacy, particularly intermarriage, has been the most heavily policed in Anglo-America beginning with European indenture and African slavery (also Murray 1997). Beginning in the 1660s, Virginia passed antimiscegenation legislation to deter interracial unions between indentured European women and enslaved African men. Fines or penalties included banishment, whippings, and additional servitude for the women, whose children would also be held as indentures (F. J. Davis 1991). Between the 1660s and 1680s, the laws were unevenly enforced. Many mulattoes were enslaved during this period but some could rely on their European ancestry or apparent Whiteness to gain or maintain freedom for themselves and their families (Wilkinson 2019).

To further the racial divide, and maintain White supremacy, elite Whites increasingly impelled indentures and former indentures to identify with their Whiteness. White labor was promised “a public and psychological wage” (Du Bois [1935] 1998, p. 700) affirming its racial superiority to subaltern Blacks, even if socioeconomic rewards did not materialize. To help solidify this racial divide, Southern—and some Northern—colonies criminalized interracial unions. Whites also formally defined mulatto offspring as Black. This conveniently exempted White men from the legal obligation of inheritance and other benefits.

White men also forbade White women’s casual, common-law or legal unions with Black men. Such unions threatened the sanctity of White womanhood and integrity of the White family, which were pivotal to preserving White racial “purity” and privilege, demographic dominance, and the intergenerational transmission of wealth, power and prestige (F. J. Davis 1991). Legally prohibiting interracial marriages maintained the White patriarchy’s economic and political power (Nash 2014). Still, public attitudes tolerated sexual assault and concubinage involving White men and women of African descent, which did not threaten the racial order. These relations became the source of most subsequent mulatto offspring, who were designated as Black in keeping with the rule of hypodescent (Nash 2014; Spickard 1989).

Throughout antebellum Anglo-America, most mulattoes and Blacks were slaves. Yet the division between house slaves and field slaves frequently reflected stratification based on skin color and other phenotypical features. House slaves were often lighter-skinned and more European in appearance. While most mulattoes worked in the field along with Blacks, house slaves were more likely to be mulattoes (Keith and Herring 1991). Mulattoes were also disproportionately represented among the free throughout the North and South. Some amassed fortunes and sided with the confederacy during the Civil war, particularly in Louisiana (Rankin 1977–1978) and South Carolina (Koger 1985), where some owned slaves. Reece (2018) also found that mulattoes displayed higher occupational statuses relative to Blacks in places where slavery was more prominent and where free mulattoes were literate. He argues that this suggests that colorism, or the intraracial hierarchy among African-descent Americans established during slavery, was more likely to be reproduced where slavery was more significant, and where free mulattoes parlayed their literacy into better economic statuses after emancipation. Skin color stratification thus originated, at least partially, in attitudes and practices that developed during slavery.

Most free mulattoes and Blacks lived in precarious economic circumstances, if not in grinding poverty, and all existed in an ill-defined penumbra between servitude and freedom. However, their status in the antebellum Lower South—the lower Mississippi Valley, the Gulf Coast, and South Carolina—differed from the North and Upper South—North Carolina and in the states northward and westward (Bodenhorn 2002). In the Lower South, with its Latin influence (French and Spanish), free mulattoes and Blacks, particularly the former, experienced a status similar to, though less elevated than, multiracials in Latin America. For example, they were not extended a White racial identity to the same extent as light-skinned mulattoes in Brazil and in some other parts of Latin America. Moreover, there were fewer free mulattoes and Blacks in the Lower South compared to places such as Brazil (Bender 1978; Frederickson 1981; Williamson 1980).

Yet the Latin North American ternary racial order in the Lower South allowed mulattoes (and free people of color generally) in Charleston, Savannah, and Gulf ports such as Natchez, Mobile, Pensacola, and New Orleans to achieve some education, accumulate some property, and experience markedly elevated lives. Consequently, free people of color in the Lower South not only achieved a relatively favorable status but also the most secure position of such people anywhere in North America, despite the generally oppressive conditions (Berlin 1974; Rankin 1977–1978).

Regional variations notwithstanding, European Americans had little inclination to recognize legal distinctions among individuals of African descent, although informal social differentiations based on skin tone may have been present (Bodenhorn 2002). In 1785, following the American Revolution, Virginia defined as Black anyone with one Black parent or grandparent. States in the Upper South adopted the Virginia rule. North Carolina pushed legal Blackness into the third generation for marriages involving Whites (Berlin 1974). In Georgia, individuals enjoying the rights and privileges of Whites could be taken to court if their ancestry was doubted. Those with more than one eighth Black ancestry were deemed “Free Coloreds.” Despite fine legal distinctions, Whites generally considered as Black anyone with African ancestry, no matter how remote. Over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the one-drop rule gained currency as the “commonsense” definition of Blackness (Berlin 1974; F. J. Davis 1991).

Blacks and mulattoes were counted in each census from 1850 to 1920 (except 1880 and 1900). In 1890, census enumerators distinguished between Blacks, mulattoes, quadroons, and octoroons. “Black” described individuals with three-fourths or more African ancestry, “mulatto” those with three-eighths to five-eighths, “quadroon” those with one-fourth, and “octoroon” those with one-eighth or less. In practice, however, the words describing varying degrees of African ancestry had little significance beyond the creation of a hierarchy among African-descent Americans (F. J. Davis 1991; Williamson 1980).

The preoccupation with degrees of African ancestry in the 1890 census reflected White paranoia about invisible Blackness or “cryptomelanism” (Mathews 1974, p. 318). It was

thought that multiracials crossing the racial divide and “contaminating” the European American population meant that “mongrelization” (F. J. Davis 1991, p. 13) would lead to the decline of Anglo-American civilization. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such race suicide fears became part of a broader White supremacist mindset that helped sustain legal and informal barriers to racial equality in most aspects of social life. These regulations reached extreme proportions with the institutionalization of Jim Crow segregation.

3.1.2. The Rise of Jim Crow Segregation to the Post-Civil Rights Era

The 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision legally sanctioned Jim Crow segregation and unequal treatment of African-descent people and other communities of color in most aspects of social life (F. J. Davis 1991). The state upheld Southern strategies depriving anyone defined as “Black” of citizenship and the right to vote, as well as the segregation of public facilities, schools, and housing. In the North, theaters, restaurants, hotels, housing, and schools were already segregated in practice (Daniel 2006). After 1920, the census ceased to differentiate between Blacks and mulattoes. They were regarded, and gradually came to regard themselves, as Blacks in keeping with the one-drop rule (Williamson 1980). By the early twentieth century, that rule became the legal and commonsense definition of Blackness throughout the United States, where state after state enacted legislation to void interracial marriages.

The “possessive investment” in Whiteness among European Americans (Lipsitz 1998, p. 2), was critical to maintaining White supremacy, White racism, White racial privilege, and structural oppression against people of color, despite increasing repudiation beginning in the 1960s. Especially for Blacks, but also for other groups of color, an unintended consequence of hypodescent and the monoracial imperative has been to forge and legitimate their own monoracial group identities. Many individuals of color thus do not question these devices. Others take a more political stance based on the belief that hypodescent and the monoracial imperative are necessary for maintaining solidarity and community in the struggle against White supremacy and racism (R. S. Jones 1994). They therefore rearticulate rather than reproduce them based on equality instead of hierarchy (Omi and Winant 1994, p. 99). Still, racial designations and singular categories of experience are naturalized, if only unwittingly, as mutually exclusive.

The dismantling of Jim Crow segregation, the implementation of civil rights legislation, and the removal of the last antimiscegenation laws in 1967 led to more fluid social relations and an increase in interracial marriages and multiracial offspring. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, many Black/White couples in particular began to counter racial norms by socializing their children to embrace multiracial identities. In the 1980s and 1990s, they formed grassroots organizations to address their marginalization, erasure, and pathologization (DaCosta 2007; Daniel 2001, 2021; Williams 2008, 2017).⁷ The movement’s efforts were most visible in seeking to change the collection of official data on race and ethnicity, particularly on the census, making it possible for multiracial-identified individuals to be enumerated. That objective was accomplished beginning with the 2000 census.⁸

Studies indicate that post-civil rights multiracial identities include these “first-generation” offspring of parents socially designated and self-identifying as monoracial (Daniel 2001; Wardle 1987). They also encompass “multigenerational” individuals with two biracial-identified or one biracial-identified and one monoracial-identified parents and with parents or ancestors socially designated as monoracial despite their multiple racial backgrounds (Daniel 2001). Multiracial identities are also influenced by phenotype, family, peers, and society more generally. These multiple points of reference may change over a lifetime, and differ depending on the backgrounds and identity options available (Brunsma et al. 2013; Hall 1992; Korgen 1998; Lee and Bean 2010; Townsend et al. 2012; Pauker et al. 2018; Poston 1990; Root 1990; Sims 2016; Wallace 2001; Wijeyesinghe 2012). Despite the range of ancestries and orientations, research indicates that multiracial identities in the United States manifest between the boundaries of monoracial groups. They thus share liminality as part of their

formation (Anzaldúa 1987; DaCosta 2007; Daniel 2021; Field 1996; Renn 2004; Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002; Wallace 2001; Wilton et al. 2013).

Asian American-White individuals are more likely than Black-White or Latinx-White individuals to identify as multiracial. Asian American-White or Latinx-White multiracials and their offspring also have greater flexibility to identify as Asian American or Latinx, as well as White or multiracial (Jiménez 2004; King-O’Riain 2006; Lee and Bean 2010). Multiracials with a more European American appearance are also more able to achieve monoracial White identification (Bonilla-Silva 2017; Daniel 2021; Mass 1992), and may lean toward Whiteness in terms of marriage partners and progeny identification (Hoskins 2011; Lee and Bean 2010; Miyawaki 2016; Pew Research Center 2015).

Multiracials with African ancestry, however, more frequently view themselves as Black. This is attributable to the continued impact of the one-drop rule that enforces rigid racial categories and boundaries through external imposition and self-ascription (Bratter 2007; Daniel 2001; Hoskins 2011; Khanna 2010; Lee and Bean 2010; Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002; Roth 2005; Strmic-Pawl 2016). Whiteness is also not necessarily an option for “dual-minority” multiracials, whose physical appearance typically marks them as non-White no matter how they identify (Hoskins 2011; Romo 2011).

3.2. *The Brazilian Path: The Ternary Racial Order*

3.2.1. The Brazilian Racial Order

Much as in Anglo-America, the Portuguese colonizers of Brazil were comparatively unsuccessful in coercing the less densely populated Indigenous Americans into forced labor and enslavement. Indigenous people were similarly decimated by war, enslavement, and Old World diseases to which they were not immune. Consequently, colonists increasingly imported African slaves (although as late as the 1580s, Indigenous people still made up two-thirds of the slave labor force).⁹ After 1600, the transition to African labor was complete in most regions (Daniel 2006).

Unlike the United States, Brazil has experienced widespread miscegenation and cultural blending. There was extensive miscegenation between White men and women of African descent, as had been the case with Native American women. Whether through violence, coercion, or consent, Portuguese civil and ecclesiastical authorities condemned it. Yet official reprimands failed to have the desired effect (Furtado 2008; Nazzari 1996). Authorities thus turned a blind eye to interracial intimacy. In practice, many common-law marriages involved White males and women of color. Seventeenth-century Portuguese law recognized these as one of “virtually every kind of union” approved to increase the population (Pierson 1967, p. 113). They resulted in a substantial increase in multiracials (*pardos* in official contexts; *mulatos* or *mestiços* in everyday parlance), who were often given manumission (Daniel 2006). While many mulattoes remained enslaved, as elsewhere in the Americas, they were also disproportionately represented among the free (Berlin 1974; Russell-Wood 1982). Consequently, multiracials had greater potential for vertical social mobility long before the official abolition of African slavery in 1888.

Given the insufficient numbers of Whites, multiracials worked in the artisanal and skilled trades, helped manage colonial settlements, and secure territorial borders. They also served in the civilian militia as part of the state’s security apparatus, which included fighting off slave uprisings, as well as catching and returning fugitive slaves (Daniel 2006). Indeed, due to shared European ancestry and culture, Whites viewed multiracials as natural allies in upholding White domination. To gain their loyalty, Whites developed a ternary racial order recognizing Whites (*brancos*) multiracial (*pardos*), and Blacks (*pretos*) granting multiracials an intermediate status higher than other nonWhites, particularly Blacks, but lower than Whites. Some multiracials were nevertheless able to take advantage of the “mulatto escape hatch” (Degler 1971, p. 110). This informal social device allowed select individuals token vertical mobility and the rank of situational “Whiteness” due to talent, culture, or education.¹⁰ While some multiracials did protest social injustices,

including against Blacks, many pressed instead for improvements in their own social status (Burdick 1992a, 1992b; Cohen and Greene 1972; Klein 1972, 1986; Russell-Wood 1972).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Brazilian state encouraged European immigration to replace (and displace) African Brazilians in the labor force, particularly in southern Brazil. Preferential hiring of European immigrants meant African Brazilians, collectively speaking, were concentrated in the most underpaid and intermittent types of employment in the secondary labor force as manual laborers, servants, and domestics. In the informal economy, they also worked, for instance, as street vendors (Acerbi 2017) and sex workers (Pimenta et al. 2011). They were impoverished, often indigent, and unemployed (Daniel 2006). Still, some multiracials were granted token integration into the primary labor force composed of skilled worker trades, the petty bourgeoisie, and the intelligentsia (Burdick 1992b).

3.2.2. From Whitening to Racial Democracy

Brazilian racial designations have been based primarily on appearance, in combination with culture, and class, rather than on ancestry (Daniel and Hernández 2020; Degler 1971; Nogueira [1954] 1985). Racial features and stigma associated with African ancestry have long encompassed everyday discursive and material endeavors in Brazil, which sustain and naturalize White Supremacy (Twine 1997; Hordge-Freeman 2015). While in the United States, multiracials with African ancestry who appeared White were designated as Black due to the one-drop rule, in Brazil, the escape hatch in its broadest sense has allowed millions of White-appearing multiracials to self-identify and be socially designated as White, with all of the privileges of Whiteness (Daniel 2006).¹¹ This has coopted into silence many possible voices in the antiracist struggle.

While the more expansive conceptualization of Whiteness in Brazil was unacceptable in the United States, in Brazil as in the United States, many nineteenth-century intellectuals were similarly alarmed that genetic and cultural hybridity would undermine Brazil's ability to join modern "civilized" nations (Skidmore 1974; Stepan 1991). This apprehension was confirmed by the 1890 census. Brazil's population was composed of 6,302,198 *brancos*, 4,638,795 *pardos*, 2,097,426 *pretos*, and 1,295,796 *caboclos* (Indigenous people and their descendants). Multiracials totaled 41 percent, Blacks 15 percent, Whites 44 percent, and caboclos 32 percent. African Brazilians totaled 56 percent and outnumbered Whites (Diretoria Geral de Estatística 1898).

By the early twentieth century, the Brazilian elite had developed a logic different from but as racist and White supremacist as that of the United States by adopting neo-Lamarckianism. This contended that individuals adapted and perfected genetic traits during their lifetime and transmitted these improvements to future generations (Dávila 2003; Loveman 2014; Stepan 1991). The "cure" for miscegenation and cultural blending was Whitening (*branqueamento*) through cultural and racial Europeanization (Nascimento 1979; Schwarcz 1999; Skidmore 1974). The state therefore not only actively promoted European immigration, it restricted that of Blacks (Cottrol 2013; Fitzgerald and Cook-Martín 2014; Goldberg 2002; Hernández 2013).¹² Informal racist policies and practices would serve to eradicate the domestic "Black peril" through poverty, malnutrition, disease, and infant mortality (Daniel 2006).

In the early 20th century, Brazilian elites reevaluated miscegenation and cultural bending through the positive ideology of *mestiçagem*. Mid-twentieth-century thinkers, such as the anthropologist Gilberto Freyre (1900–1987), argued that multiracials invigorated Brazil, and characterized Brazilians as a "metarace" beyond racial specificity due to the egalitarian integration, or the reciprocal *transracial/transcultural* blend, of Europeans, Africans, and Indigenous people (Freyre 1963a, 1963b, 1970). The ideology of *mestiçagem* helped undermine scientific racism and biological determinism. Yet it simply replaced "hybrid degeneracy" with "hybrid vigor," touting miscegenation as "browning" while implicitly euphemizing Whitening, Europeanization, and White supremacy. Given social scientific legitimacy and institutionalizing Brazil's image as a racial democracy without legal barriers to racial equality,

mestiçagem became a cornerstone of state policy (Daniel and Hernández 2020) and central to national identity (D. Davis 1999; Hernández 2013; Loveman 2014).

In the 1950s, Brazilian and foreign social scientists commissioned by UNESCO to research Brazil's "successful" "racial democracy" instead found racial discrimination, with darker-skinned individuals disproportionately at the bottom of society (Wood and Carvalho 1988). This made the promotion of racial democracy ideology even more crucial during Brazil's military dictatorships from 1964 to 1985. By 1969, University of São Paulo academics measuring racial inequality were branded subversives, given compulsory retirement, imprisoned, and exiled. Racial mobilization was deemed racist and a threat to national security. Activists risked detention, incarceration, and torture. No racial data were collected in the 1970 census because officials argued that racial categories were ambiguous and virtually meaningless. The true motivation, of course, was to promote the belief that race was insignificant in shaping social stratification (Hasenbalg et al. 1989; Lovell-Webster 1987).

3.3. *The South African Path: The Ternary Racial Order*

3.3.1. The South African Racial Order

In 1652, Cape Town, South Africa, was established to provide fresh food and water for ships traveling between Holland and the Dutch East Indies, particularly Indonesia. The Dutch East Indies Company released some employees to become free burghers or fully enfranchised citizens to work as farmers. This relieved the Company of the need to produce food for passing fleets. Still, the shortage of White agricultural labor prompted the importation of slaves, primarily from India, Ceylon, Indonesia, Madagascar, and Mozambique. Indians also came as indentures in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Boeseken 1977; Keegan 1997; Worden 2010).

The Dutch also sought to induce indigenous African Khoisan (Khoi and San) as a labor force. The pastoral Khoi resisted the sedentary, let alone the captive, lifestyle. The hunting-gathering San mounted even more formidable resistance (Besten 2009; Ross 1999). Similar to the Americas, indigenous South Africans were decimated by Old World diseases to which they had no immunity. Europeans also dislocated and dispossessed them by expanding settlements, destroying their lifestyles through cultural suppression, including through open warfare and massacre, as well as enforced labor incorporation. Eventually, the Indigenous people were forced to work as servants or laborers on White farms due to their loss of grazing land (Ross 1999; Worden 2010).

Farms and slaveholdings at the Cape were much smaller than in the Americas. By the end of slavery in 1838, there were 38,000 slaves (Frederickson 1981; Ross 1983). They were historically largely involved in wine and wheat production and cattle farming, as well as domestic and urban labor of every imaginable capacity (Ross 1983; Elphick and Shell 1988). Cape Town gradually transformed into a true settler colony stretching hundreds of kilometers into the northern and eastern interior (Groenewald 2010).

The original colonists were mostly single men from the social margins of various European nations, although they were largely Dutch. Consequently, there were no legal prohibitions against interracial marriage or interracial intimacy more generally (Elphick and Shell 1988; Keegan 1997; Maylam 2016). As in Brazil, European males formed sexual liaisons and marriages with non-White women, particularly with Asian and multiracial ones due to their phenotypical proximity to Whiteness (Frederickson 1981; Keegan 1997).

Frederickson indicates that by the late eighteenth century, miscegenation was common between Afrikaner farmers, trekkers, and Khoi concubines in rural and frontier areas. This resulted in a multiracial population frequently referred to as *Bastaards* (Frederickson 1981).¹³ In the nineteenth century, other multiracials largely descended from Khoi, Europeans, and escaped slaves (known as Griquas) emigrated from the Cape colony and established semi-independent polities or states in the frontier region of central South Africa. They eventually became part of the Boer Republics of the Orange Free State and Transvaal (Frederickson 1981; Keegan 1997; Lewis 1987; Van Den Berghe 1960; Venter 1974).

Both Bastards and Griquas were also variously incorporated into the colonial regime. In the eighteenth century, Bastards were conscripted into commando units of the colonial security apparatus to respond to insurgent Khoisan. In the early nineteenth century, the Griqua frequently enlisted in commando service too. Although the Griqua were a harbor for runaway slaves, from which many descended, they were also willing to return escaped slaves to gain the approval of colonial authorities. Ultimately, by the end of the nineteenth century, the Griqua met their demise as they were dispossessed and lost their independence due, in part, to increasing White encroachment on their territory (Frederickson 1981; Ross 1983; Venter 1974).

As in other slave societies, South Africa developed a population of free people of color, most of them former slaves and their descendants, commonly referred to as “Free Blacks” (Elphick and Shell 1988). The widest definition included “all free persons wholly or partially of African (but not Khoikhoi) or Asian descent” (Elphick and Shell 1988, p. 239). Yet manumission in the Cape colony was relatively rare, certainly compared to Brazil. It was largely urban and concentrated within Cape Town (Elphick and Shell 1988; Groenewald 2010; Ross 1999). Many Free Blacks were Muslims, mostly Indian and Indonesian, and to a lesser extent, Madagascan and East African.

Free Blacks in South Africa were therefore not predominantly mulattoes, as were Free Coloreds in Brazil and the United States. But as in Brazil and even in the United States, they performed interstitial roles in the economy as artisans and members of the skilled trades. Early on, they were legally equal to free burghers and could own land and do business just as the colonists. Still, the Company and, more importantly, the burghers, did not always view them as equals, at least in the eighteenth century (Elphick and Shell 1988; Keegan 1997; Worden 2010). Nor were the small minority of Free Blacks who owned slaves and land particularly prosperous (Groenewald 2010; Worden 2010).

In late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Cape society, a White upper class of company officials and prosperous wine and grain farmers were at the top of the social hierarchy. An intermediate group was composed mostly of Europeans but also included some Free Blacks. The bottom stratum included non-White chattel slaves and Khoi servants. The latter were nominally free, but fell into a type of serfdom because of their landlessness (Worden 2010). The social distinction between Europeans and Free Blacks was clear. But the permeable White-non-White boundary made it possible for some multiracials to be fully accepted as White and others designated as non-White (Frederickson 1981; Maylam 2016; Worden 2010).

In 1795, Britain invaded, bringing British families and formally annexing the Cape. It soon passed the Slave Trade Act (1807), prohibiting the trade throughout the entire British Empire. Slavery itself was abolished in the Cape Colony in 1834, although most former slaves were indentured to their previous owners in an apprenticeship system that did not cease until 1840. By 1853, a complex, if largely informal, racial hierarchy was established, with physical appearance a significant factor (Goldin 1987; Maylam 2016; Watson 2012). Yet class allegiances and, to some extent, religious affiliation (i.e., Christian vs. Muslim) also mattered. Racial ideologies had also not crystallized around the distinction between Bantu-speakers and other nonWhites. The critical distinction was between the minority of missionary-educated Blacks and the masses of Bantu-speaking Blacks. The latter were mainly confined to the eastern frontier. Blacks who resided in the Western Cape were small in number (674), and many were educated and eligible to vote. This facilitated their inclusion into the category of the 14,000 people in the Western Cape defined as “Coloured” (Goldin 1987).

3.3.2. The Shifting Racial Order

The second half of the nineteenth century was marked by Afrikaner-British political rivalry. This boiled over into the Boer War (1899–1902), which ended with British victory. In 1910, the Cape Colony, renamed the Cape Province, united with Natal, Transvaal, and the Orange Free State to form the Union of South Africa under British rule. In 1931, South

Africa became a sovereign state. In 1961, it became the Republic of South Africa. The British and Afrikaners maintained an uneasy power sharing for most of the first half of the twentieth century. After conquest and the economic incorporation of Bantu Blacks in the late nineteenth century, Afrikaner and British Whites considered the most relevant social division to be between themselves and Blacks. They could have followed the U.S. binary racial order, consigning all multiracials to an undifferentiated “Black” category. Another option would have been a ternary racial order similar to Brazil (Frederickson 1981; Keegan 1997; Marx 1998).

Marx (1998) points out, however, that multiracials in South Africa had long been able to advance socially, “passing” as Whites rather than becoming a third category, as in Brazil. There was tacit awareness and no public condemnation of passing. There was also no legal divide between Whites and multiracials as was the case with mulattoes in the United States. Individuals who appeared White were not required to verify their racial ancestries. Light-skinned multiracials in South Africa were admitted to White schools. While many passed into an emerging Afrikaner working class (Goldin 1987), those with some wealth or education, who also approximated a rather liberal notion of European physical appearance, became prominent in the Afrikaner middle class (Frederickson 1981; Goldin 1987; Keegan 1997; Western 1996).

This siphoned off many who might have provided multiracial leadership in sharp contrast with the United States, where the mulatto elite was consigned to the subaltern status of Blacks, identified as such, and provided much of the African American leadership. As in the United States and Brazil, multiracials in South Africa were deemed biological and psychological “degenerates” (Adhikari 2005, p. 90). But they were also regarded as above Black Africans. Consequently, South African social Darwinists believed that European ancestry among multiracials gave them the potential to lead non-Europeans, particularly Blacks, and insisted that alliances be prevented (Goldin 1987).

Despite the initial absence of a ternary racial order, Marx (1998) indicates that a distinct “Coloured” identity gradually developed among multiracials. “Coloured” originally referred to all non-Europeans, including multiracials (Goldin 1987), who were classified in 1891 as “Mixed and Other Coloured” (Christopher 2002), one of five Coloured sub-categories (Office of the Census 1892). By the 1911 census, “Mixed and Other Coloured” was distinguished from Blacks (Bantu) as well as from Whites, much as *pardos* were in Brazil. They numbered more than 600,000 and composed approximately 9 percent of the population (Office of the Census 1913).

Reconstituting Coloureds as multiracials separate from Whites and other nonWhites intertwined with objectives of the White-dominated state, but also reflected allegiances among Coloureds (Adhikari 2005; Goldin 1987). In 1902, the small Cape Town Coloured petty bourgeoisie founded the African Peoples Organization (APO) in response to increasing discrimination that included the elimination of Black Africans, Coloureds, and Indians from the political process of forming the Union of South Africa in 1910 (Adhikari 2005). Coloured manual laborers in the docks, quarries, and municipal services had also become vulnerable to cheaper African laborers. They experienced massive unemployment due to a series of economic depressions beginning in the 1860s (Goldin 1987). The APO and other Coloured organizations viewed these curtailments as harbingers of worse things to come.

A Coloured identity thus became the site of resistance to further disenfranchisement, impoverishment, and urban segregation. Denied assimilation into the White community, Coloureds sought a higher status than Bantu Blacks (Adhikari 2005; Goldin 1987; Lewis 1987; Van der Ross 1986), adopting the rhetoric of social Darwinism by arguing that “respectable Coloured men” should not be classed with the “barbarous native” (Goldin 1987, p. 25). As Africans endured increased residential segregation and other controls, the advantages of being Coloured were more acutely felt (Lewis 1987).

3.3.3. The Rise of Racial Apartheid

The delicate balance between the two White factions in South Africa drastically changed when the Afrikaner National Party (NP) consolidated its power with a political victory in 1948. The National Party victory in 1948 was secured with a slim majority of five seats. In 1936, Black voters had been disenfranchised. The NP saw the 50,000 multiracial Coloureds eligible to vote as a serious threat to the survival of the government as their vote was considered decisive in seven constituencies. In 1956, Coloureds were also disenfranchised, while Indians were disenfranchised in 1896 and never had any subsequent parliamentary representation. Consequently, the electorate became exclusively White (Goldin 1987).

Under Afrikaner rule, the state institutionalized racial apartheid grounded in White supremacy and White racism touching all aspects of social life (Frederickson 1981). South African scientific and popular racial thought formed around two major nodes: first, Calvinist beliefs informed Afrikaner notions of their special destiny as a chosen people and, therefore, the divine sanction of apartheid and White supremacy; second, British notions of social Darwinism and eugenics became popular among English- and Afrikaans-speaking ideologues (Du Toit 1983; Rich 1983).

Posel (2001) and Rich (1990) argue that White supremacy in South Africa did not primarily originate in racial science. Biologically essentialist notions of race were not inconsequential in the construction of apartheid. Indeed, in many ways apartheid borrowed from the myths of racial science. Yet up to World War II, Afrikaner nationalist intellectuals increasingly focused on culture (Posel 2001). The post-war discrediting of Nazi Germany made scientific racism even more unacceptable and by 1948, cultural differences had become central to apartheid doctrine (Rich 1990). Similar to Brazil, racial classification was not simply based on genealogy. Phenotype and social habits were deciding factors (Posel 2001).

This racial common sense informed the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act 1949 and the Immorality Amendment Act 1950, which, respectively, outlawed interracial intimacy through marriage or informal liaisons, while the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act 1953 enforced segregation in all public premises, vehicles, and services. Racial group definitions derived from the Population Registration Act 1950, “the linchpin of apartheid” (Welsh 2009, p. 54). The population was classified as Black, White, and Coloured (multiracial).¹⁴ Indians were initially classified as a subgroup of Coloured, and were later regarded as one of four separate racial groups. A White was someone generally accepted as White in appearance (Lewis 1987; Posel 2001), with “habits, education, and speech and deportment and demeanor” taken into consideration (Posel 2001, p. 56). A Black was someone accepted as a member of an African aboriginal race or tribe. A Coloured was neither Black nor White, and thus essentially defined in terms of what they were not (Posel 2001).

Clearly, hypodescent was not a main feature of White supremacy in South Africa (Maylam 2016). Frederickson (1981) argues that this was because many South African Whites knew or strongly suspected they had non-White progenitors who had passed as White. Inquiring too closely into ancestry would have been imprudent. Much like in Brazil, Afrikaners therefore avoided unambiguous ancestry rules to determine who was Coloured or White (Goldin 1987), with various tests assisting authorities in classifying individuals with unclear racial designations. “The pencil test,” for instance, consisted of sliding a pencil through a person’s hair. If the pencil fell to the floor, the person was “White.” If the pencil stuck, the person was “Coloured.” Blacks could be reclassified as Coloured if the pencil fell to the floor. If it stuck, the individual remained Black (Posel 2001).

In some cases, members of the same family were classified differently, and thus forced to live apart. Residential segregation, sanctioned by the Group Areas Act 1966, was instrumental in furthering these practices. It profoundly affected Coloureds, with thousands removed from residential areas they had occupied for generations (Western 1996). Still, unlike Africans, Coloureds were not subject to the system of pass books containing fingerprints, a photo, and information on access to non-Black areas (Goldin 1987; Western 1996). Nor were they deported to homelands established by the Bantu Authorities Act 1951. These

were independent states to which each African was assigned citizenship and political rights according to the record of origin. Blacks had no citizenship in South Africa, and no right to involvement in the nation's political structure. Still, Black labor was needed in traditionally White areas. Blacks were thus housed in separate communities called townships adjacent to White cities (Frederickson 1981; Marx 1998).

De facto Coloured townships also developed. Seeking to make the Western Cape a Coloured "homeland,"¹⁵ the state made it a "labor preference" area for Coloured workers (Goldin 1987, p. 173), which virtually excluded Africans (Western 1996). Still, Afrikaners equivocated vis-à-vis Coloureds. Goldin (1987) maintains Coloureds threatened the delicate construct of Afrikaners as a chosen people because they shared Afrikaner ancestry and Afrikaans as their mother tongue. Also, unlike in the U.S., Whites in South Africa were in the minority and had good reason to fear a rebellious Black majority.¹⁶ Coloureds thus factored into the state's calculations for maintaining domination, with proposals to grant them something close to White status. Ultimately, the state gave them a status considerably lower than that of Whites but somewhat higher than that of Blacks. Their townships and schools were somewhat less deprived and squalid than Black ones. Goldin (1987) and Marx (1998) maintain that many Coloureds viewed Blacks as inferior, while Blacks branded Coloureds as sellouts.

4. Conclusion: Toward the Brazilian or South African Paths?

4.1. Multiracial Collective Subjectivity

Multiracial identities in Brazil, South Africa, and the United States have formed in racial orders characterized by White supremacy, White racism, and anti-Blackness. Unlike the United States, Brazil and South Africa acknowledged multiracials in ternary orders with a structurally intermediate racial status. But in South Africa and the United States, racial lines have been characterized by thick (comprehensive) individual and collective subjective racial identification (or groupness) with hard centers (less diffuse), with group identities central to organizing the principles of Jim Crow segregation and apartheid, and continued salience in the post-civil rights and post-apartheid eras (Adhikari 2009; Chace 2017; Dalmage 2018; Erasmus 2001; Lewis 1987; Van der Ross 1986; Whitehead 2020). In contrast to South Africa and the United States, collective racial subjectivity in Brazil has historically been ambiguous, with relatively thin boundaries and soft centers, and with all racial boundaries resistant to the concept of a "racial group" (Bailey 2009; Daniel and Hernández 2020; Telles 2006).¹⁷

Few surveys have included questions regarding multiracial group identity in the United States. Yet a Pew Research report (2015) and Davenport et al. (2021) provide some insight into multiracials' identities, attitudes, politics, etc. Davenport et al., which draws from a national opinion survey that sampled more than 1200 multiracial adults, focuses largely on White-Asian and White-Black multiracials. The Pew report draws from data on individuals from many different backgrounds based on an online survey of a nationally representative sample of 1555 multiracials ages 18 and older. For comparative purposes, an additional 1495 adults from the general public were surveyed.

The Pew report indicates that only 34 percent of all multiracials think they have a great deal in common with others of the same racial background. Only 17 percent think they have a lot in common with multiracials whose racial background is different. This does not mean that there is no sense of multiracial group identity. Some basic ingredients supporting a sense of groupness have recently emerged in social spaces. These include websites, social media, student groups and college courses, support and educational organizations, socials, festivals, and conferences (Daniel 2001, 2006, 2021; Daniel et al. 2014; Jackson 2010; J. A. Jones 2011).¹⁸ Still, current data indicate multiracial identities in the United States function more as individual designators, as in Brazil, and less as group designators, as in South Africa (Daniel 2001, 2021; Johnston-Guerrero and Ford 2015; Newman and Daniel 2015; Spickard 2015; Thornton 1992). U.S. multiracial group identities thus navigate between the Brazilian and South African paths (Davenport et al. 2021; Pew Research Center 2015).

Accordingly, U.S. multiracial collective subjectivity is currently thin and soft. In the future, boundaries could thicken and centers could harden if identities gain sufficient force to organize social and cultural life around a sense of groupness (Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Daniel 2001, 2021). Yet there may always be an intrinsic permeability to any sense of groupness among multiracials in the U.S. In part, this is because multiracial identities have always suffered constraints—such as hypodescent—prohibiting their development. They are also composed of myriad backgrounds and experiences, which are themselves multidimensional. Moreover, the data from both Pew and Davenport et al. suggest multiracials of similar backgrounds unevenly identify with a broader multiracial collective subjectivity. Subgroup differences may impede the development of the sense of linked fate and shared experience that unites many Blacks and other monoracials of color.

4.2. Multiracial Identities, White Adjacency, and the “Critical” Difference

Multiracial identities in Brazil and South Africa have been variously complicit with Whites’ strategy of maintaining their domination through a divide and rule strategy premised on anti-Blackness and the pursuit of White adjacency in the context of social inequities (Dupree-Wilson 2021). This has often been pointed to in terms of the dangers of multiracial identities in the United States (Daniel 2002, 2006; Elam 2011; Sexton 2008; J. M. Spencer 1997; R. Spencer 1999; Warren and Sue 2011).¹⁹ Some U.S. multiracials may indeed display anti-Blackness and seek White adjacency because, like all racial identities, multiracial ones continue to function under racist social structures. In the post-civil rights era, these social structures provide greater opportunities for social mobility through selective inclusion of individuals of color who more closely approximate European Americans in terms of physical appearance as well as assumed behavioral and attitudinal characteristics (Allen et al. 2000; Bonilla-Silva 2017; Daniel 2006; Hagiwara et al. 2012; Garay et al. 2022; Hughes and Hertel 1990; Keith and Herring 1991; Lanuza et al. 2021; Monk 2014; Rondilla and Spickard 2007; Viglione and DeFina 2011; Taylor 2016; Wade et al. 2004; Weaver 2015).

This selective inclusion could become all the more important to Whites given the increasing decline in the numbers of European Americans in the U.S. population²⁰ and the concomitant growth in the numbers of people of color. It would serve to create an alliance with new “insiders” to counter their demographic deficit, as has historically been the case in Brazil and South Africa. These social dynamics also indicate a shift from maintaining racial rule primarily through White domination and exclusion—although the latter is not absent—to the increasing juxtaposition with White hegemony, that is, selective inclusion (Gramsci 1971). This fosters the illusion of power sharing while also allowing European Americans to maintain structural control.

Yet even taking into consideration the growth of White hegemony, post-civil rights multiracial identities in the United States do not have the same premises as historical formations in South Africa and Brazil. Moreover, they also differ considerably from the historical identities of African descent multiracials in the United States itself who historically responded to hypodescent and monoraciality by seeking to secure White adjacency through, for instance, “passing”. Both opportunism and an underground tactic of resistance, passing typically occurred when individuals of a more European American phenotype and cultural orientation made a covert break with the Black community, either temporarily or permanently, in order to enjoy the privileges of the White community. Precautions had to be taken against exposure, and permanent passing often exacted a considerable price by forcing an individual to leave family and friends behind without a word (Daniel 2001).

The “great age of passing” occurred between 1880 and 1925, undoubtedly in response to Jim Crow legislation (F. J. Davis 1991; Williamson 1980). Because of the need for spatial mobility and anonymity, permanent passing was more common among men than among women, and occurred more frequently in the urban North (particularly during the first great migration of 1900–1925) than in the rural South. Because passing was clandestine, it is not possible to pinpoint its origins or to know how common it was. Some sociologists have estimated that annually ten to twenty-five thousand people passed; others put the numbers

above a hundred thousand ([Williamson 1980](#)). But calculations made in 1946 estimated that only 2500–2700 individuals crossed over annually. These calculations tracked several decades of census data showing an increase in the European American population and a decline in the Black one that could not be accounted for by immigration and births, or emigration and deaths. These modest figures are probably the most accurate ([Daniel 2001](#)).

Individuals unwilling or unable to pass often distanced themselves from the Black masses by forming elite groups known as “blue-vein societies” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These sought to reproduce normative European American cultural and phenotypical norms to gain entry as equals in the larger society. They also shaped and perpetuated a pernicious colorism among African-descent Americans by giving preferential treatment to individuals who more closely resembled European Americans in terms of consciousness, behavior, and phenotype ([Daniel 2001](#)). Similar patterns of White adjacency have been apparent among communities commonly referred to as “triracial isolates” by social scientists, if not by the communities themselves. These emerged in the nineteenth century when some multiracials formed separate enclaves either on the fringes of villages and towns or in isolated rural enclaves particularly in the Southeastern United States. Known to have European, Native American, and African ancestry, historically, most affirmed only their Native American and European American ancestries.

Some groups, such as the Lumbee of North Carolina, have fought for federal recognition as Native Americans. In 1956, the Lumbee succeeded in gaining official recognition as nontreaty Native Americans. This excluded them from federal benefits. Yet it placed them squarely on the indigenous side of the racial divide. Indeed, the primary identity of the Lumbee is that of Native Americans, not multiracials. In November 2, 2021, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Lumbee Recognition Act (H.R.2758), with Senate approval pending. This would grant the Lumbee federal recognition with all of the benefits equivalent to that of treaty Native Americans (e.g., the Cherokee, the Comanche, and the Choctaw) that qualify for federal subsidies.²¹ Yet their claims to indigenous status have been met with reluctance, if not resistance from many of those groups ([Blu 1980](#), pp. 77–90; [Borowich 1996](#), pp. 60–65, 74–83; [Lowrey 2010](#); [McKie 2022](#); [U.S. Senate 2021](#)).

Other groups, such as the Melungeons of Appalachian Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia, have recently begun to affirm their African, along with their Native American and European, ancestry. Since the mid-twentieth century, many individuals have migrated to cities. Along with increased intermarriage (generally with European Americans), this has led to the extinction of many communities and the loss of collective identity.

Finally, after the U.S. annexation of Louisiana and the Gulf ports of Mobile, Natchez, and Pensacola in the early nineteenth century and the subsequent implementation of the one-drop rule, many multiracial “Creoles of color” fought to maintain the privileges they enjoyed under the ternary racial orders of French and Spanish rule when their social status was somewhat superior to that of Blacks. Others passed for White or joined Blacks in challenging the onslaught of segregationist policies in the Jim Crow era.

Indeed, in the 1960s, younger Creoles felt the heightened pride and consciousness that affected all individuals of African descent. Many began to realize, like others before them, that it was advantageous to ally with Blacks, at least politically, in the fight for civil rights, where unity among all individuals of African descent was essential ([Domínguez 1986](#); [Dubois and Melançon 2000](#)). At the same time, many Creoles, in a manner similar to some of the triracial isolates, have sought to affirm identities in a manner that embraces their multiraciality but eschews the previous anti-Blackness and desire of White adjacency ([Berry 1963](#); [Daniel 2002, 2006](#)). Still, they primarily identify as Creole or Melungeon, etc., and only secondarily, if at all, as multiracial, notwithstanding these changes ([Daniel 2002, 2006](#)).

At a fundamental level, U.S. multiracial identity formations, both historically and currently, are simply reflective of individuals who embrace more than one racial background. Consequently, they are inherently “critical” of the monoracial imperative, as well as of hypodescent. They indicate strategic choices individuals make to contest the mutually exclusive nature of traditional and normative racial boundaries, but do not dismiss mono-

racial forms of identification in and of themselves as illegitimate. They rather, question the external ascription of monoracial identifications as the norm against which all other forms of identification are deemed unacceptable.

Yet earlier formations were largely grounded in anti-Blackness and hyperdescent privileging White ancestry over Black. They interrogated and resisted normative racial categories and perhaps subverted their mutually exclusive and dichotomous boundaries. They rarely aimed to dismantle the hierarchy as they were less a reaction to the forced denial of European ancestry than they were a reaction to the denial of the privileges that accrued to European ancestry and appearance. In contrast, post-civil rights multiracial identities do not privilege any ancestry. Indeed, they resist the pursuit of White adjacency. These identities take the further step of challenging White racism, White supremacy, anti-Blackness, and inequitable power relations. While they are not immune to the larger U.S. racial ecology and are not inherently the solution to racism and racial inequality (Daniel 2001; Mahtani 2014; Warren and Sue 2011), they also do not seek to further the larger racial ecology.

Studies indicate that many present-day individuals who identify as multiracial display this criticality by informally challenging and speaking out against everyday racism and racist power dynamics, and are also formally engaged in antiracist work (Buggs 2017; Daniel 2001, 2021; Jackson 2010; Renn 2004; Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002; Wallace 2001; Wijeyesinghe 2012). Their “multiracial knowledge” (Johnston-Guerrero and Wijeyesinghe 2021, p. 46) is also a template for a social praxis that critiques racial essentialism and hierarchy, while arguing for more inclusive collective subjectivities. More broadly, multiracial knowledge fosters social justice through “betwixt and between” conceptual stances that revolve around a “both/neither” as opposed to an “either/or” axis. These can help avoid defensive-aggressive polarizations between inclusion and exclusion, which may be counterproductive in terms of collaborating on other concerns (Daniel 2021; Jolivet 2011; Williams et al. 1996).

The need for these efforts is increasingly urgent. The achievement of historic civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s may have eradicated the most egregious forms of legalized racial inequality and exclusion, but White racism, White supremacy, and anti-Blackness, however much attenuated, still underpin the U.S. racial order. They result in grossly inequitable access to education, employment, health care, transportation, and housing, etc. These outcomes are not merely the byproducts of benign neglect. They purposefully assign people of different racial groups to differential and inequitable social spaces that advantage Whites and disadvantage people of color (Lipsitz 2011).

Challenging these inequities necessitates attention to power relations and exploitation, which the implied conviviality of multiraciality can obscure. Indeed, some celebratory popular images perpetuate the notion that interracial marriage will lead to a more tolerant society (Childs 2005, 2009; Rodríguez-García et al. 2016). There have also been imaginings that multiracials are automatically imbued with temperamental qualities ideally suited to solve racism and racial inequality (Daniel et al. 2014). Even if well-intentioned, this naïve egalitarianism can easily fall prey to what Bonilla-Silva refers to as “colorblind racism” (Bonilla-Silva 2017, p. 56). This assimilationist erasure of racial (and cultural) distinctions under the guise of transcending difference through more egalitarian forms of integration masks subtle forms of selective and inequitable inclusion or inequalitarian integration. Romantic ideas about multiraciality also divert public attention and state policy from tackling continuing racial inequities and patterns of exclusion. If the post-civil rights era provides an opportunity to conceptualize multiraciality as egalitarian, its potentially problematic agency must also be critically scrutinized and interrogated so as not to repeat the historical formations of Brazil and South Africa and even of the United States.

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Notes

- ¹ For example, in South Africa, a 1685 law prohibited marriage between White men and slave women, but legal unions between White men and free women of color continued to take place ([Van Den Berghe 1960](#)).
- ² [Murray \(1997\)](#) and [Osuji \(2019\)](#) found that antimiscegenation statutes also targeted other groups. For example, a few restricted intermarriages with Native Americans. Yet such legal prohibitions were not uniform. In places without formal restrictions, legal allowances often contradicted social practice. Moreover, permeable racial boundaries did not overcome a longstanding history of racial tension and genocide. By the nineteenth century, anti-miscegenation statutes would include Asian Americans but not Mexican Americans, who were legally White ([Maillard 2007](#); [Murray 1997](#)).
- ³ [M. Harris \(1964\)](#) coined the term “hypodescent” referring the one-drop rule, which designates as Black anyone with “one-drop of African blood.” In principle, hypodescent is applicable to degrees of ancestry less restrictive than the one-drop rule in terms of blackness as well as to all mixed-race combinations.
- ⁴ [Hernández \(2018\)](#) argues that these and other discriminatory practices do not indicate that multiracials are legally disadvantaged claiming discrimination within current U.S. civil rights laws.
- ⁵ The post-civil rights era broadly defined is the time period since the official dismantling of Jim Crow segregation beginning with *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which desegregated public schools, the Civil Rights Act (1964), the Voting Rights Act (1965), and the Fair Housing Act (1968), which gained federal oversight and enforcement of voter registration and electoral practices in states or areas with a history of discriminatory practices, and ended discrimination in renting or buying housing. This legislation also included *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), which eliminated the remaining statutes against racial intermarriage, as well as the removal of legal restrictions on immigration through the Hart-Celler Act (1965).
- ⁶ Native Americans residing in the Anglo-American colonies of the Southeast were enslaved through warfare and purchase by European colonists throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. They shared the common experience of enslavement with Africans although the latter would eventually outnumber them ([Gallay 2002, 2009](#)). In addition to working together in the fields, Africans and Native Americans lived together in communal living quarters, ultimately formed interracial unions, and had multiracial offspring ([Nash 2014](#)).
- ⁷ Personal correspondence with Carlos Fernández, president of AMEA (Association of Multi Ethnic Americans), 10 November 1989; Susan Graham, Executive Director of Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally) and Carlos Fernández, 22 October 1992, 11 November 1992, 18 November 1992; Susan Graham, 5 June 1996; Ramona Douglass, Vice President of AMEA, 21 February 1997, 11 July 1997, 26, 27, 30 September, and 1 October 1997; Ramona Douglass with Greg Mayeda, president of Hapa Issues Forum, 16 June 1997. Observations of public behavior at Third Multiracial Leadership Summit, 7 June 1997 and between 1988 and 2021 of individuals in attendance at support and educational group meetings, conferences, webinars, and festivals devoted the subject of multiracial identities.
- ⁸ At its height in the late 1990s, the multiracial movement included 30 grassroots organizations with approximately 3500 active participants. Despite its comparatively small size, the movement brought about measurable changes in U.S. racial formation ([Williams 2017](#)). The 2000 census indicated that multiracials (“two or more races”) totaled 7 million or 2.4 percent of the population ([U.S. Census Bureau 2001](#)). On the 2010 census they were 9 million or 2.9 percent of the population. The 2020 census data indicate multiracials total 33.8 million people or 10 percent of the population ([U.S. Census Bureau 2021](#)). Yet Pew research data ([Pew Research Center 2015](#)) indicate many individuals acknowledge their multiracial backgrounds on forms without identifying as multiracial. Consequently, a more detailed study of census data is needed to determine how to interpret them.
- ⁹ Consequently, there was an increase in the numbers of multiracials of African and Indigenous or European, African, and Indigenous descent ([Daniel 2006](#)).
- ¹⁰ [Hasenbalg \(1985\)](#) and [Silva \(1985\)](#) refuted Degler’s concept of the mulatto escape hatch noting that the racial divide, in terms of overall socioeconomic stratification, is primarily between Whites and African Brazilians and only secondarily between pardos and pretos. Yet [Goldoni \(1999\)](#) found differences between pardos and pretos to be statistically significant. While they are very similar in terms of socioeconomic status and share more with each other than with Whites, their social locations are not exactly the same. Hasenbalg and Silva also misinterpreted Degler’s underlying thesis. Degler does not imply that multiracials, collectively speaking, are exactly intermediate to Whites and Blacks and significantly better off than Blacks or gain access to the prestigious ranks of Whites by virtue of their multiraciality. Rather, the mulatto escape hatch informally awarded a few “visibly” or socially designated and exceptional multiracials the rank of situational Whiteness in accordance to their approximation to White norms.
- ¹¹ [Mitchell \(2020\)](#) argues that the Brazilian and U.S. racial orders are intrinsically the same. However, this broader meaning of the escape hatch has not historically been normative in the United States. This is an intrinsic and significant difference.
- ¹² Census data indicate multiracials declined from 41.4 to 21.2 percent between 1890 and 1940. Whites had grown from 44 to 63.5 percent during the same period. This was attributable more to the massive European immigration than an increase in miscegenation or racial self-recoding of multiracials as Whites ([Nobles 2000](#); [Skidmore 1974](#)).
- ¹³ Bastaard, the Dutch word for “bastard”. stigmatized them as the progeny of “illicit” relationships. They embraced the term proudly as a form of self-ascription through reclamation.

- 14 This legislation included six subcategories of those classified as Coloured. Individuals who did not fit into any of those categories were labeled “Other Coloured”.
- 15 Approximately 90 percent of Coloureds reside within the western third of South Africa, over two-thirds in the Western Cape, and 40 percent in the greater Cape Town area (Adhikari 2006).
- 16 In 1951, the national population included 8,560,083 Blacks, 2,641,689 Whites, and 1,103,016 Coloureds (South Africa 1951).
- 17 The Black movement in Brazil has heightened awareness of and mobilized opposition against racial discrimination, resulting in the increased prominence of Black consciousness (Osuji 2019) and growth in a sense of linked fate and shared group experience among many African descent Brazilians.
- 18 Observations of public behavior between 1988 and 2021.
- 19 An examination of changes in Brazil and South Africa surrounding questions of multiraciality beginning in the late 1970s is beyond the scope of this paper. Still, is it worth mentioning that activists have sought to heighten awareness of and mobilize opposition against racial discrimination. In Brazil, this helped discredit the racial democracy ideology (Osuji 2019). In South Africa, it helped dismantle apartheid. Black consciousness-raising in both countries has sought to undermine the divide-and-rule dynamics informing multiracial and Black identities in ternary racial orders by collapsing these differences and moving toward binary racial logics similar to the U.S. This has been most apparent in the debate surrounding affirmative action, which has variously sought to erase multiracials from the statistical landscape as well as the national imaginary. Some Brazilian and South African multiracials have also sought to maintain their identities but in an egalitarian manner that diverges from the previous variants based on White adjacency and anti-Blackness (See Daniel and Hernández 2020; Pirtle 2020).
- 20 The White (non-Hispanic) population has declined from 79.4 percent in 1980 to 57.8 percent in 2020 (Frey 2021).
- 21 During the period from 1778–1871, the U.S. Federal government signed some 370 treaties with Native Americans many of them long-unfulfilled, broken, amended, or nullified. Many of these treaties have guaranteed education, health care, housing, and other services to Native American communities. They also variously agreed to manage and protect Native Americans’ resources, such as lands and timber.

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