



Comparative American Studies

An International Journal

Copyright © 2004 SAGE Publications (London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi) www.sagepublications.com Vol 2(1): 61–73
[1477-5700(200403):2:1;61–73;041288]
DOI: 10.1177/1477570004041288

The enduring function of caste: colonial and modern Haiti, Jamaica, and Brazil

The economy of race, the social organization of caste, and the formulation of racial societies

Tekla Ali Johnson

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, USA

Abstract Modern day social hierarchies in Jamaica, Brazil and, to a degree, Haiti find their roots in the colonial context, where planters stratified laborers in order to maximize control. During slavery planters found artificial ways of influencing African identity, dividing enslaved Africans by their occupations and by skin color. These distinctions created divisions among workers and color proved a singularly powerful and enduring symbol of social and economic mobility. The American propensity for creating racial classifications for Africans and further divisions for ‘mixed-race’ offspring traditionally served economic interests. Their perpetuation into the present may signal the continued utility of dividing Africans into subgroups as a means of maintaining control of racial politics in the Americas.

Keywords African women ● bi-racial ● color-conscious ● plantation life ● race and gender ● slave societies

In an article published in the NAACP’s *Crisis* Magazine in 1914, W.E.B. Du Bois argued that legal restrictions did not bar Brazil’s eight million Africans and ‘mulattos’ from progressing in society, in contrast to the system of segregation in the United States. ‘All these elements (African, European, Indian) are fusing into one light “mulatto” race’, he argued.¹ Du Bois, however, did not explain why black people in Brazil, like those in North America, remained disproportionately poor following their emancipation from slavery. Or why other African Americans like Ollie Stewart,

a writer who traveled throughout Brazil in 1940, did find a color-line. Restaurant owners refused to serve Stewart, and 11 white and 'light' hotel clerks claimed to have 'no vacancies' before he finally found lodging. In Brazil, Stewart argues, it is the 'light-skinned colored man . . . not the white, who perpetuates caste privilege' (Hellwig, 1992: 91, 97).

This article argues that modern day social hierarchies in Jamaica, in Brazil and, to a degree, in Haiti have their roots in the colonial context where planters stratified laborers in order to maximize their control. While the North American planter class employed the same general strategies for management of African workers as did planters in Brazil and Jamaica, there were differences in each hemisphere's slave regimes, since climatic conditions brought unique pressures to bear on separate agricultural societies, and differences in the enslaved population's demographics created contours in the caste systems of each racial society. Yet, in both hemispheres, white planters found ways of influencing Creole identity, dividing enslaved Africans according to their free, slave, or trustee status. African captives were also separated by their occupations and by skin color. While all of these distinctions combined to create divisions among workers, color proved the most useful and enduring as a symbol of social and economic position – a fact which sheds light on the debate over whether racism gave rise to slavery or whether racist ideologies fulfilled various psychological and practical needs of slavery.

What follows is an examination of caste's meaning in the economic and political systems of three colonial societies – Jamaica, Brazil, and Haiti – and how they connected with and were similar to racial patterns of slaveholding in the United States. In the Caribbean and Latin America, caste systems were loose enough to provide mobility between the groups directly above and below one, but functioned to keep most dark-skinned Africans from entering middling or elite society (Hellwig, 1992: 100).

E. Franklin Frazier argues that Brazil by the mid-20th century was a country of 'mixed-bloods', most of whom identified with the whites (Hellwig, 1992: 131, 133). Indeed, the social creation of 'mulattos' in Brazil and Jamaica allowed planters to dominate non-white majorities and served to cement slave societies. It was, in fact, these mixed-race people upon whom much of the workings of domination depended. Although they occasionally operated with fellow Africans as resisters, 'mulattos' more frequently helped whites sustain slavery and the oppression of blacks.

Historical circumstances, combined with economic opportunities, account for the different perspectives on race adopted by Americans and Brazilians. The United States had a caste system which excluded all non-whites, while Brazil's social system disparaged only the dark-skinned man and woman. Generally, in Brazil, only a person who has no white ancestry is considered black (Degler, 1971: xiii; Hellwig, 1992: 135). Where many North American Caucasians saw two races – black and white – Brazilians made racial categories for color gradations at each

point on the spectrum from African to European. In Brazil, for example, Pretos are dark, Cabo Verdes are slightly lighter, and Mulatto Claros are lighter still (Hellwig, 1992: 102–3).

Du Bois, however, was correct in that by the early 20th century no legal segregation of the races existed in Brazil, nor did statutes forbidding miscegenation survive into the 20th century. In addition, mixed unions between whites and 'mulattos' were accepted in Brazil and in Jamaica throughout most of the slavery era. Paradoxically, the demographics of all three nations (Jamaica, Brazil, and Haiti) were overwhelmingly African, so that African culture and history intertwined with, if not predominated in, each country. Still, throughout the 20th century, mixed-race people, rather than dark-skinned blacks, dominated Brazilian popular literature and art. Brazil's racial discrimination and color-conscious stratification is, therefore, complex and not immediately obvious – to the extent that modern Brazilians even boast of their 'racial democracy'. However, racism exists within the very structure of Brazilian society, and to dark-skinned travelers, Brazil's three zones of differing race relations are clear. Sao Paulo State, Rio de Janeiro and surrounding communities, and states in the south all differ in their treatment of African people. Generally, the further south one travels the greater the racial prejudice. However clear cut, geographical caste structures are not simple nor one dimensional. Social categories in Brazil are not based upon color alone but on a combination of color and class. A 'white' person is generally defined as any wealthy person, including rich blacks, fairly well-off 'mulattos', and a person of any income level who looks white. Thus, the social designation of blackness in Brazil is derived both from a consideration of appearance and economic status. A 'black', then, is any average-income or poor dark-skinned person. Degler argues that 'the simplest way to conceive of this complex social system is that marrying a darker-skinned person, unless he or she is extremely wealthy, results in a lowering of one's social class (see Degler, 1992: 5, 8, 15, 18, 96, 99, 104–5, 115).

It is tempting to conclude that the bases for racial disparities in the formerly English, French, and Portuguese colonies are economic and relate only to the perpetuation of a class of unskilled laborers, but this explanation does not account for the greater difficulty that dark-skinned blacks have in breaking out of the lower economic and social group today. Neither does it explain why the standards of beauty in Brazil and Jamaica are white or light, considering the Africanness of the population base, nor why mixed-raced people acquire better education and jobs.

Systematic reinforcement of psycho-social structures established during slavery must be factored into any analysis of Jamaica, Brazil, and Haiti, for economic explanations alone do not explain the continuance of racism, and the pervasive operation of color castes. In reality, the reproduction of Brazil's class structure, at its core, revolves around issues of sexuality and family formation. European visitors to Brazil in the late 18th century reported the 'sexual fire' of enslaved females, where both the

black and 'mulatto' women 'tempted' white men (Freyre, 1946: 424). Hind-sight, argues Gilberto Freyre, makes it clear that enslavement equaled sexual accessibility, and that white men forced many enslaved women into a form of prostitution, where cycles of sexual relations were a necessary component of survival (p. 425). An imbalance in the male-female sex ratios, and an overall preponderance of males on plantations along with black-white power differentials, resulted in white men's frequent use of African women as a sexual 'outlet' (p. 426). Enslaved black men, meanwhile, often longed for the companionship of wives and lovers, while observing white planters and overseers placing young African females in domestic occupations separated from the African community. Indulging themselves, white planters at times 'created harems of young girls' (pp. 426, 428). Sexual activity between planters and overseers and African domestic workers occurred throughout slave systems in the West Indies and Latin America. Enslaved women domestics learned Portuguese, French or English, henceforth serving as interpreters between the dominant class and the enslaved population (Cardoso, 1975: 74).

Women and young girls were raped by white men with impunity. Managers of West Indian estates were so infamous for their sexual aggression toward enslaved Africans that they ceased to hide their behaviors, and a typical estate ledger listed the births of 'mixed' offspring at around 7% annually between 1816 and 1838 (Berlin and Morgan, 1993: 79–81; see also Ward, 1988: 171).

The few West Indian female slave narratives that exist attest to the pressures on enslaved women, and especially upon domestic servants. These documents belie the notion that house slaves had a life of ease (Paquet, 1992: 133, 136). Children resulting from the frequent sexual assaults and from concubinage were listed as colored or brown and were often further categorized into 'quadroon . . . mestee' and other groupings (see Craton, 1997: 219; see also Ward, 1988: 183). Despite their often violent conceptions, any one of these offspring had a chance at being treated better than un-mixed African captives, whom whites, according to contemporaries, attempted to treat like 'draft animals' (Ward, 1988: 173). Color became (to borrow Carl Degler's term) as important as an 'escape route' from slavery for Africans as it was as a controlling and organizing mechanism for whites (Degler, 1971). After the 18th century, the skin tones of incoming Africans were recorded in slave registers. With the exception of the United States, the distinction between blacks and 'coloreds' was almost universal throughout the Africa diaspora in the Americas (Ward, 1988: 18–19). In some locations even greater interest was taken in melanin levels. An 1815 slave registration ledger from St Lucia lists 34 shades of black captives from 'Negre' through 'Rouge' to 'Meive Blanche' (Higman, 1984: 154, 527). Patterns of color-coded affiliations established during slavery have persisted in Brazilian cities, especially in high-income areas. Inferior education and discrimination over job opportunities due to racial prejudice has created cycles of

poverty among black Brazilians, whose absence in the middle class is pervasive. Specifically, Brazil's and Jamaica's school systems directed dark-skinned Africans towards service and labor jobs.

This is not to say that, in this apparently segregated world, some poor whites did not still reside on the borders of black communities. Their location there, among or alongside blacks, would seem to defy racism's creation of segregated and impoverished communities of black people. It should be recalled, however, that just as poor whites may sometimes be found in close proximity to low-income African neighborhoods today, so, too, did landless whites work alongside blacks under the early slave regimes. Following the otherwise dominant historical pattern, however, most Brazilian whites today are 'more segregated' from blacks than they are from 'mulattos'. More revealing is the tendency of mixed-race people, especially in the present-day, to separate themselves from other Africans, presumably encouraged by an ideology that stresses whitening (Telles, 1992: 194–5).

Winthrop Jordan finds a correlation between the acceptance of miscegenation and the emergence of a majority black population. In the American mainland colonies, whites at first hid their sexual liaisons and private abuse of black women, partially by refusing to acknowledge their mixed offspring. However, in contrast to the 'mulatto' population of the United States, which stayed below 6% annually, the mixed-race population in Bahia, Brazil, reached 40% in 1850 (Jordan, 1962: 183, 195). These Brazilian and West Indian 'mulattos' began developing their own social mores, which often mirrored the values of whites. The most notable shift in their attitudes was their general acceptance of slavery. Surprisingly, in Brazil, mixed-race freedmen who owned slaves were no more likely to free their human property than were whites. By contrast, as was the case, for example, in Bridgetown, dark-skinned blacks were much more likely to manumit their captives. Socially, mixed-race Creoles in the British West Indies formed a middle group 'separated from, and superior to, the black peasantry' and more likely to make it into the professional class (Ward, 1998: 196, 200; see also Schwartz, 1982: 83; Higman, 1984: 385; Pitman, 1926: 637).

Clearly present-day systems of racial classification originated under slavery. Racial categories evolved in plantation communities as a means of stratifying workers. Encouragement of inter-group prejudice helped to ensure the subordination of Africans so that whites' investments, as well as their lives, might be safe. Yet, even before relying upon race for purposes of stratification, planters separated African laborers on the basis of the geographical location of their original purchase, and soon developed categories for enslaved blacks according to occupation. In the late 16th and early 17th centuries Europeans' 'slave' ledgers recorded the national and local identities of Africans arriving in the West Indies and Latin America as Eboes, Congos, or Coromantins (for example). These created elaborate typologies, assigning work habits and abilities

according to each enslaved person's imagined ethnic tendencies. Planters sought out Mandingoes and Foulahs for domestic service, many of whom were literate in Arabic. At Saint Dominique, skilled sugar production was dominated by Kongos and Fulbes, who were usually assigned to the boilers. Twenty-five percent of Yoruba and Igbo men also worked at boiling kettles (Thompson, 1997: 160–61).

As enslaved populations became increasingly creolized, however, slavers shifted to color-coded hierarchies. The separation of the mixed population from other Africans began with white men who left portions of their estates to mixed offspring, or (in rare instances) who raised their 'mulatto' offspring along with their white children. Once they reached adulthood mixed offspring were at times given special privileges and supervisory roles on the plantation. While this case should not be overstated, since the majority of these light-colored African children were assigned to the fields along with their mothers, some were not, with a few being sent to Europe to be educated and others becoming blacksmiths, masons and other skilled laborers on Brazilian and West Indian plantations (Berlin and Morgan, 1993: 86; McD Beckles, 1999: 178; Thompson, 1997: 147–9).

Booms and busts in the Brazilian economy as well as a decreasing white population created demands for miners, shopkeepers, cooks, and other working-class people who would service the wealthy. Their positions as middlemen required some mobility and therefore, in the eyes of whites, some trustworthiness. In the United States, landless white families provided plantations with food and other supplies. In Brazil, Jamaica, and Haiti, by contrast, large numbers of poor whites did not exist and 'mulattos' were assigned plantation support roles such as overseer, domestic worker, and in some cases as members of militias. Degler referred to this practice as the "'mulatto" escape hatch', because the role played by light-skinned Africans throughout the West Indies and Brazil allowed a select group of men and women to perform physically lighter work, while at the same time requiring these individuals to monitor fellow blacks. To 'escape', in this context, literally meant having the ability, because of skin color, to 'avoid the backbreaking labor of field-work'. Over time this 'escape' came to include better access to skilled jobs, education, material well-being, and status (Degler, 1971: 44–5, 182).

While most free mixed-race people suffered continuous racial harassment by whites, they were also accepted into guilds as journeymen and in other positions which darker Africans were denied. By the 19th century, Jamaica had created a multi-tiered economic-and-caste structure, so that mixed-race people with wealth began to join the middling professional class. As a result of their differing 'class' or occupational levels, many socially advantaged 'mixed' people came to view themselves as superior to other blacks. They hesitated to use their skills and social and political power (relative to field workers) to help their communities organize and develop. In Brazil, throughout the 20th century, greater

opportunities existed for light-skinned people – clearly a carry-over from the colonial period. During the past 100 years it has become commonplace for middle-class ‘mulattos’ in Brazil and Jamaica to disdain and even show contempt for fellow Africans, even while barriers to success still acted upon all people of African descent (Degler, 1971: 182–3; Engerman and Genovese, 1975: 352–4).

Reinforcing their views of blacks as degenerative and themselves as superior, light-skinned blacks frequently sought to associate with white power and privilege. Unlike the racial shifting that occurred in the United States, where the lightest-skinned Africans often sought to ‘pass’ into white society, West Indian ‘coloreds’ retained their non-white status but separated themselves from their mothers’ people. In colonial contexts outside of the United States, intermarriage was not acceptable to whites, but having a ‘mulatto’ mistress was. Whites in the United States outnumbered enslaved Africans by at least twenty to one in all periods. This probably accounts for their society’s higher retention of English culture and mores, and explains the pretense that as Christians they did not have sexual encounters outside of marriage, while their more overtly racist beliefs prohibited (or at least sought to prohibit) their sexual attraction to and sexual encounters with blacks. One repercussion of black women’s social-sexual status under slavery may be observed in the frequency with which educated African Brazilian males today marry white wives, and encouraged their offspring to marry light-skinned or white people. Slavery’s vestiges are everywhere in post-colonial societies like Brazil, in spite of national rhetoric about social and political equality. One scholar pointed out that Brazil’s professed lack of racism is less convincing when birth attendants’ first priority there is to determine whether the baby will belong to the white, the mixed, or the black group (see Degler, 1971: 187, 190, 192–3; Thompson, 1997: 180).

Such a concern was important because of the frequency of the birth of ‘mixed’ children. In Tobago, for example, from 1819–22, half of the children born to Creole women were ‘mixed,’ and a majority of the remainder were fathered by mixed freedmen, a pattern which would appear in many West Indian and Latin American societies. In retrospect it becomes clear that, as the proportion of Africans with white ancestry increased over time in the Caribbean’s and Brazil’s slave and post-colonial societies, so did their identification with each other as a privileged group, while their alienation from other Africans intensified. Racial legacies from slavery have persisted up to the present, then, partially because of the pervasive idealization of whiteness – as associated with privilege and status – and partially due to the continuance of economic oppression which, Winthrop Jordan has observed, were mutually reinforcing. In political and social discourse this internalization of white supremacy, or at least white advantage, meant that social problems were often ascribed to blacks. Belief in the ‘disadvantage of African origin’ often entered the personal realm, leading mixed-race people to associate only with others

possessing an 'acceptable' amount of melanin. The stigma attached to being black in Jamaica and Brazil, along with the potential social and economic rewards for 'mixing' with lighter Africans and whites, has created obstacles to racial solidarity and resistance to white political dominance. This too is a lingering effect of slavery (see Degler, 1971: 157, 359; see also Harrison, 1995: 55–6 and Higman, 1984: 157).

On balance, it is clear that the European colonizers' use of race as a new twist in the strategy of divide and rule succeeded, at least temporarily, since for the past three centuries promotions of color consciousness, among both blacks and whites, have enabled whites to control all colonial societies (Degler, 1991: 71–2, 84). As the system of slavery became more entrenched, however, perpetuation of 'mulattos' as a social group was reinforced by the intentional selection by blacks and 'coloreds' of light-skinned mates. Vincent B. Thompson, a historian of the diaspora in the early post-colonial period, wrote that 'The greatest achievement of a Black or coloured man . . . was to marry a white woman' (1997: 181). Consciously or subconsciously, many free Africans living in racist societies sought (and seek) to improve their children's life chances by moving them, by virtue of their heredity, away from their African heritage. These offspring in turn formed distinct social and economic groups and utilized a variety of strategies to propel themselves toward economic ease and away from enslavement and/or oppression (McD Beckles, 1999: 179–81, 187).

In truth, it was the rapid death of whites in the Caribbean, combined with the shrinking of available lands, which led to the retreat of white laborers to the United States mainland, and which created the economic, political, and social 'vacuum' into which 'mulattos' were pushed, and willingly stepped. At a very early date, then, in the 17th century, according to Leonard Broom (1954: 117), 'The preconditions for the differentiation of the Black and colored populations . . . in South Africa, Brazil, and the United States' were formed. In Jamaica, the almost complete absence of working-class whites gave the 'colored' caste members even greater opportunities, which they, in turn, frequently used to distance themselves further from other blacks. 'Lightness, valued as a promise of higher status, became valued for itself . . . ' (Broom, 1954: 117; Dunn, 1972: 16, 77).

Only in the late 20th and early 21st centuries has the ideology of whiteness been widely critiqued by working people in the West Indies and Brazil. At the same time, unfortunately, little common ground has been found for organizing based on race, culture, or economic condition because many mixed-raced people staff public middle-class jobs; seemingly testifying against racial exclusion. Rebecca Reichmann argues that racism is hard to pinpoint in Brazil and, yet, rabid racial oppression has persisted against the darkest-skinned people there. Occasionally these black urban Brazilians have come together to demand improvements in housing, sewerage, or water services, but their networks have tended to be single issue projects with no overall plan to confront and resist

discrimination based on skin color. African communities' limited success at organizing, due to the confusion about the source of the economic and political disparity, is strengthened because of the 'anti-racism' pretenses of the government. The visual imagery of non-whites in positions of authority combined with the government's propaganda about equality, in spite of oppressive conditions, helps to maintain the historical disunity between blacks and 'mulattos' (Reichmann, 1992: 157).

Hauntingly, the socio-economic inequalities and stereotypes about blacks that were formulated under slavery persist. The life chances of blacks in Brazil are the lowest of any group. Hindrances to political organizing remain systemic. Early Afro-Brazilian organizations, such as the Frente Negra [Brasileira, 1931], which demanded better living conditions for Africans and encouraged cultural pride, also failed to address the systemic origins of inequalities. Later, when the Negritude Literary Movement called for a resurgence of interest in African ancestry and history through the arts, these powerful writings circulated primarily among intellectuals, while failing to reach the masses of impoverished blacks (Reichmann, 1992: 157–9).

By the 1980s, African Brazilians' struggles for equality had taken on increasingly pan-African, as opposed to assimilationist, forms. Lately, cultural organizations have performed leadership roles in creating political awareness and cultural identity for black Brazilians. Specifically, carnival groups have challenged police authority as well as promoting African cultural identity. For example, the Bloc Afro is a 'blacks only' carnival parade focused on African people to the exclusion of whites and all others. The traditional dress and 'black only' aspects of the carnival movement were reflected in the United States during the mid-1990s where a 'For Us By Us' cultural/commercial clothing line grew popular with black urban youth. Political and cultural leadership in the late 1980s and 1990s intertwined carnival tradition with the cultural re-creation movement throughout the diaspora. For instance, many Afro-Brazilians increasingly exhibited their embrace of Africanness by dressing in traditional African style clothing, adopting an African name, and by making greater attempts at organizing along cultural if not racial lines. The biggest hurdle to current mobilization efforts in Brazil for those discriminated against because of their ethnic heredity is the lack of a 'discourse' on the role of racism in the recreation of economic and social relations formed under slavery. Efforts to illuminate the workings of racism in Brazilian society are made more difficult by the tendency of the government and business communities to 'absorb the symbols of resistance movements into national and commercial art' (Reichmann, 1992: 161–4).

Despite their complex existence dating from colonial times to the present, it may be argued that the majority of offspring from Africans who 'mixed' with Europeans did not join the white racial group. The best evidence for this is that 'mulattos' were discriminated against on the basis of their African heredity, like other blacks. However, throughout the

West Indies, Latin America, and Brazil, a large number of 'mulattos' consider themselves part of a separate caste from blacks. The historical impetus for their current position is not an honorable one. That the children of enslaved mothers are notched into colonial records as mediators for the slavers, 'responsible for searching other slaves' quarters and for whipping slaves found with weapons', provides solid evidence of the 'mulatto's' role as an upholder of the slave regime (Barash, 1990: 409). Carol Barash suggests that lighter-skinned domestic servants had an ambiguous status which made them potentially dangerous both to fellow laborers and to the functioning of the slaver's household. 'Coloreds' in the house found out valuable information that they could pass on to their black comrades in the fields, or use to enhance their own survival (p. 414). Helping to oppress a segment of society in order to promote oneself has a well-rehearsed place in human history. In the colonial era, as well as the present, adopting racial exclusion toward one's family was the easier path, the one that the majority of light-colored Africans trod.

Over 20 years ago, Chancellor Williams described what he called 'the mulatto problem' in ancient Egypt. Williams examined the adoption of mixed-race Egyptians onto the fringes of the ruling classes when black Egypt was overtaken by Arab and later European invaders. These African-Arabs were given privileges, along with responsibility for controlling the population, eventually embracing their middleman status and joining in the economic system which pushed their darker relatives southward (Williams, 1976: 76).

Since the first to be called Egyptian exclusively [as opposed to Ethiopian] were half-African and half-Asian, their general hostility to their mother's race was a social phenomenon that should not be passed over lightly. . . . Its nature is essentially opportunist, a quest for security, recognition and advancement by identifying with and becoming a part of the new power elite. . . . (Williams, 1976: 76)

So, too, free mulattos in the West Indies were frequently privileged under the law, and we have observed that the 'mixed' population of Brazil joined in discriminating against their darker-skinned brothers and sisters. In the United States, while all people with visible African heritage were 'black' until the 1970s (notwithstanding the limited application of 'mulatto' and related labels assigned to female entertainers in some southern US cities), those with sufficiently light skin could and sometimes did 'become' white by passing (Frazier, 1957: 690). More recently, in the United States a debate over adding a category to the National Census for 'bi-racial' individuals raged. Although, on the surface, the new category seemed fair, by taking (for the first time in North America) both parents' heritage into account, many African Americans were suspicious. They countered that a category for 'mixed' blacks could substantially reduce their political clout, since population was frequently used as a guideline in federal program expenditures, and more significantly, for black political power

bases obtained through the re-drawing of voting districts in the 1970s and 1980s.

This recent idea of creating a new ethnic category for the census indicated that the United States' 'multi-racial' population had grown, either numerically or in terms of social acceptability, to the extent that many white families had, or finally had acknowledged, racially mixed relatives. Chancellor Williams' historical and sociological paradigm of inter-ethnic regimes' strategic use of 'mulattos' as a buffer caste matches up well with the arrangement of a highly color-conscious reality in Brazil and the Caribbean for the past two hundred years. This 'acculturation' process was slowed by geo-climatic conditions in North America, conditions which allowed Euro-Americans to live in white-majority communities throughout most of the country, resulting in rigid white/black racial policies. In Haiti, Jamaica, and Brazil, however, whites depended upon mixed-race individuals to help maintain their regime, and this necessitated some power and status sharing (Schwartz, 1982: 3, 18, 25, 81).² North American blacks have, like Brazilians and West Indians, been subjected to the idealization of lightness in their schools and in the media as a result of whites' over-weaning self-admiration, in addition to systematic efforts during slavery aimed at denigrating the African people's homeland – efforts stemming from planters' unending attempts at gaining psychological power over their workers. Fortunately, the idea of a 'mulatto' classification has been hindered by African American working people in the United States. Black and brown men and women point to Euro-American duplicity, recalling that at one time if one-sixteenth of an individual's ancestry was African then that person was considered black, and recalling the 'one-drop [of "black blood"]' rule. It has largely been these everyday African Americans, ranging across the color prism, who reject being divided and stratified yet again by whites and whose insistence upon group unity forestalled the creation of legal categories for 'half-castes' in the United States up to now.

Notes

- 1 DuBois is quoted in David J. Hellwig (1992: 31–2). The terms 'mulatto' and 'colored' are socially constructed images, which refer to non-existing racial groups and are, like the idea of human 'races', scientifically invalid. In the Brazilian context, however, they refer to creolized Africans who have a white parent or grandparent. I use them in this article in order to locate the origin of these constructs and to explain interactions between artificially separated groups of Africans with oppressive institutions and with each other.
- 2 Schwartz discusses Carl Degler's contribution to the field through his book, *Neither Black nor White* (Degler, 1971).

References

- Barash, Carol (1990) 'The Character of Difference: The Creole Woman as Cultural Mediator in Narratives about Jamaica', *Eighteenth-Century Studies: The Politics of Difference* 3(4): 406–24.
- Berlin, Ira and Morgan, Philip D. (1993) *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas*. Charlottesville, VA: Virginia University Press.
- British Parliamentary Papers West Indian Colonies: Sessions 1825–29; Civil and Criminal Justice* (1971) Shannon: Irish University Press.
- Broom, Leonard (1954) 'The Social Differentiation of Jamaica', *American Sociological Review* 19(2): 115–25.
- Cardoso, Geraldo (1975) *Negro Slavery in the Sugar Plantations of Veracruz and Pernambuco 1550–1680: A Comparative Study*. Diss. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Craton, Michael (1997) *Empire Enslavement and Freedom in the Caribbean*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers.
- Degler, Carl (1971) *Neither Black nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States*. New York: Macmillan.
- Dunn, Richard (1972) *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Engerman, Stanley L. and Genovese, Eugene D. (1975) *Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere: Quantitative Studies*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Frazier, E. Franklin (1957) *The Negro in the United States*. New York: Macmillan.
- Freyre, Gilberto (1946) *The Masters and the Slaves*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Goveia, E.V. (1970) *The West Indian Slave Laws of the 18th Century*. Barbados: Caribbean University Press.
- Harrison, Faye V. (1995) 'The Persistent Power of "Race" in the Cultural and Political Economy of Racism', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24: ??–??.
- Hellwig, David J. (1992) *African-American Reflections on Brazil's Racial Paradise*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Higman, B.W. (1984) *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean: 1807–1834*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Ingersoll, Thomas, N. (1991) 'Free Blacks in a Slave Society: New Orleans, 1718–1812', *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 48(2): 173–200.
- Jordan, Winthrop D. (1962) 'American Chiaroscuro: The Status and Definition of "Mulattos" in the British Colonies', *William and Mary Quarterly* Third Series, 19(2): 183–200.
- McD, Hilary Beckles (1999) *Centering Woman: Gender Discourses in Caribbean Slave Society*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers.
- Meredith, John A. (1988) 'Plantation Slave Mortality in Trinidad', *Population Studies* 42(2): 161–82.
- Paquet, Sandra Pouchet (1992) 'The Heartbeat of a West Indian Slave: The History of Mary Prince', *African American Review* 26(1) [Women Writers Issue]: 131–46.
- Pitman, Frank Wesley (1926) 'The Breeding and Vitality of Eighteenth Century Slaves in the British West Indies', *Journal of Negro History* 11(4): 629–49.
- Porter, Dorothy B. (1952) 'The Negro in the Brazilian Abolition Movement', *Journal of Negro History* 37(1): 54–80.

- Reichmann, Rebecca (1992) *Race in Contemporary Brazil: From Indifference to Inequality*. University Park, PA: Temple University Press.
- Schwartz, Stuart B. (1982) 'Patterns of Slaveholding in the Americas: New Evidence from Brazil', *The American Historical Review* 87(1): 55–86.
- Telles, Edward (1992) 'Residential Segregation by Skin Color in Brazil', *American Sociological Review* 57(2): 194–5.
- Thompson, Vincent Bakpetu (1997) *The Making of the African Diaspora in the Americas: 1441–1900*. New York: Longman.
- Ward, J.R. (1988) *British West Indian Slavery: The Process of Amelioration. 1750–1834*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Williams, Chancellor (1976) *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.* Chicago, IL: Third World Press.
- William-Myers, A. (1996) 'Slavery, Rebellion, and Revolution in the Americas: A Historiographical Scenario on the Theses of Genovese and Others', *Journal of Black Studies* 26(4): 381–400.

Tekla Ali Johnson is a PhD candidate at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Ali Johnson's primary research interests include Africana/African American history and the history of resistance. She has recently co-authored 'Frederick Douglass and Nebraska', with John R. Wunder (*Nebraska History*, 2004). Address: University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Department of History, 612 Oldfather Hall, Lincoln, NE 68588, USA.