

**Reconfigurations of Racism, Racial Politics/Policies,  
& New Scenarios of Power after 2001**

**A Preliminary Research Agenda**

**Proposed by  
The Center for Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino Studies (CLACLS)  
and  
the W. E. B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies  
at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst**

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**Project Overview**

Since the late 1990s Latin America has emerged as a primary region in global constellations of racial politics and race-specific policies. The rise of Black organizations and movements across the region was met by the elaboration for the first time of state policies explicitly designed for Afro-descendant and Indigenous populations. In the same period there was a significant increase in the attention given to Afro-Latin Americans by intergovernmental organizations such as the U.N., the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, philanthropic institutions such as the Ford Foundation, and U.S. organizations with international reach such as the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Congressional Black Caucus. Today, there are government offices and programs addressing questions of racial discrimination and inequality in several Latin American countries, at the same time that there are growing networks of Black groups organized at local, national, and hemispheric levels.

Nevertheless, social indicators reveal that the majority of the Afro-descendant citizens of the region still suffer from serious social inequalities and persistent political and economic disenfranchisement. Poor policy design and erratic implementation, ambivalent state commitment and scarce government funding may help explain the failure to implement most of the recommendations found in the Durban Platform of Action to date. But we maintain that an organized political, cultural and discursive backlash that asserts the irrelevance, and even

inexistence, of race and racism is also responsible for the paucity of progress on racial equality and affirmative action policies throughout the Americas.

In light of this scenario, we, UMass' Center for Latin American, Caribbean and Latino Studies and the W. E. B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies, in collaboration with former Brazilian Racial Equality Minister, Matilde Ribeiro, have been organizing an action-research consortium to assess the status of racial inequality, the current state of racial politics, and the efficacy (or lack thereof) of racial policies pertaining to Blacks in the Latin American region and, comparatively, in the Americas as a whole. To pursue these general research and policy objectives, we are joining efforts with several intellectuals in Latin America and the United States, some of whom are primarily based in social movements and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and others who are university-based, to develop a collaborative research project that will focus on the general theme of *Black Cultures and Racial Politics in the Americas* (see Current Collaborators and Consortium Participants below).

Our inter-institutional, inter-American consortium will be launched formally at an international seminar on *Reconfigurations of Racism, Racial Politics/Policies, and New Scenarios of Power since 2001*, to be held at UMass-Amherst in early December of 2008, for which we are presently requesting funding. That seminar will promote an unprecedented dialogue between Black movement leaders, rights advocates, and specialists in Black politics and policies, which will form the bases for an applied research agenda aimed at identifying enduring obstacles to overcoming racism in the Américas.

### **Project Background and Proposed International Seminar**

Over the last few years we have organized a number of collaborative events including a two-panel session for the 2007 Latin American Studies Association meetings in Montreal in September of 2007, and an international seminar on "Race, Ethnicity, and Racism: Interrogating Categories and Drawing Implications for Public Policy," held in Bogotá, Colombia this past March, and co-organized by UMass' CLACS/Afro-American Studies, GEAC-Universidad Nacional de Colombia, and the Observatorio de Discriminación Racial/Universidad de los Andes-PCN. Our next step is to organize a seminar meeting in early December 2008, with the three goals of 1) discussing more effective rights advocacy strategies that might be useful to activists and policy-makers as they prepare for the Durban Review Conference, to be held in Geneva in April 2009; 2) defining and planning a longer-term research agenda, and; 3) consolidating our activist-scholar research consortium.

We already have devised a collaborative methodology for the December 2008 seminar and have a general sense of the focus for the action and policy-oriented research agenda we hope will emerge from that meeting. A designated sub-group of scholars and activists, with the assistance of a UMass graduate student researcher, will write a background paper analyzing the root causes and key dynamics that help account for the new configurations of racial inequality and discrimination since 2001, an important date marked both by the attacks on the U.S. on 9/11 and by the U.N. Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa. This document, which would be available to seminar participants by mid-November 2008, would serve as a template to develop a fully-fleshed analytical framework on the causes and mechanisms of racial inequality in the Americas, a comparative analysis that would concentrate on Latin America while drawing lessons from the long history of racial politics and policies in the United States. The need of a comparative approach is evident when addressing issues such as Affirmative Action that have been more recently the subject of heated public and scholarly debate in countries like Brazil and Colombia, but that have a much longer history in the U.S.

The analytical framework emerging from the seminar would help devise a research agenda that would relate the structural problems of Afrodescendant communities to an assessment of the efforts from both organizations of civil society and governmental institutions to address problems of racial inequality and discrimination. We therefore propose to investigate both Black social movements and ethnic organizations as well as state ethno-racial policies. Our main purpose will be to identify the achievements and limitations of the racial politics and policies of both state and civil society and to analyze the reasons behind persistent racial inequalities, while analyzing why and how certain policies work better than others.

A key anticipated product of our seminar would be to develop a general assessment and some recommendations for policy change which we would disseminate widely among concerned activist, policy, and scholarly circles, through a variety of electronic and other media. The participation of several Black movement and policy advocacy networks in our Consortium will greatly aid our dissemination efforts and we thus hope our research results would support the efforts of rights advocates involved in the Durban Review process and beyond.

At a planning meeting with activist-intellectuals and Black movement leaders held in Brasília in June of 2008, during the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Durban Review Conference, we identified five priority themes that represent the main areas of interest and need expressed by both organizations of civil society and policy makers. These will be the focus of our inaugural seminar and will shape a longer-term empirical research that will clearly translate into social-ethnic policy-making, and include: 1) access to land and ecological integrity; 2) education (ethnic and in general); 3) political, cultural, and human rights; 4) economic democracy and sustainable development; 5) media and cultural representations.

An ambitious and comprehensive agenda is proposed here and a unique and exceptionally well-qualified group of participants have been identified and have expressed serious interest joining with us in this undertaking. We are proposing nothing short of a rigorous effort to address the problem of race and racism in the Americas at a hemispheric level of activist scholarship at its best. At our seminar-meeting in December we will focus more precisely on what will be the main angle of our research in the short- to medium-term. With the assistance of a graduate RA, the background paper, seminar presentations, and proceedings will be quickly summarized into a formal final research report assessing the current status of racial politics and policies in Latin America. This document will be of immediate utility to both organizations of Afrodescendent movements, as well as policy advocates and public officials. The seminar would also launch a longer term collaborative project that seeks to identify and measure the diverse forms and expressions of racism (structural, institutional, and everyday) in different Latin American countries and compare them to each other and to the United States. From this database, scholars, grassroots advocates of social change, policy-makers, will have a better basis from which to address a problem as old as the start of the Columbian exchange by reaching across national borders and seeing how race and racism reconfigures itself in various transnational manifestations.

### **Current Collaborators and Potential Consortium Participants**

The Black Cultures and Racial Politics Consortium is presently composed of a number of institutions and individuals in the U.S. and Latin America. The institutions include a partnership between CLACLS and the Department of Afro-American Studies of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, the Institute for Race Studies of the University of California at Los Angeles, the Afro-Latino Graduate Student Project based at the University of California at Berkeley, the Global Afro-Latino and Caribbean Initiative (GALCI) based in New York City, the Grupo de Estudios Afro-Colombianos-GEAC of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia-sede Bogotá, the Observatorio de Discriminación Racial of the Universidad de los Andes and Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN) in Colombia, the Centro de Estudios Contemporâneos of the Universidad de Brasília, and the Instituto da Mulher Negra (GELEDES) in São Paulo, Brazil. In the U.S. we have also been collaborating with Tufuku Zuberi, a professor of sociology and Africana Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, and with Arturo Escobar, a professor of anthropology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Several outstanding Black rights advocates are committed to the project and will be attending our inaugural seminar, including: Epsy Campbell from Costa Rica (Vice-President of ONECA, chair of the Black Parliament in Latin America, and leader of the Red de Mujeres Afro-Latinoamericanas, Caribeñas, y de la Diaspora), Humberto Brown (U.S.-based Panamanian

rights advocate), and Suely Carneiro (prominent Black feminist activist and scholar), Matilde Ribeiro (consultant to UNIFEM in Race and Gender and former Minister of Racial Equality of Brazil), and João Carlos Nogueira from Brasil (founder of the Núcleo de Estudos do Negro, a leading research NGO, and former chief advisor to Minister Ribeiro). We have also been in contact with other Black intellectuals-leaders of the region such as José Chala from Ecuador (President of Corporacion de Desarrollo Afro-Ecuatoriano-CODAIE) and Jesús García from Venezuela (Red de Organizaciones Afro-Venezolanas), who we also hope to involve in the project in the near future.

We expect the Consortium to bolster the work of the newly constituted university *Initiative on Immigration, Race and Inequality*, which brings together scholars from a range of disciplines, colleges and schools at UMass-Amherst. Our proposed seminar would figure as one of the core 2008-2009 activities of the Interdisciplinary Research Cluster that grows out of this Initiative.

### **Proposed Seminar Participants**

The seminar will promote a structured dialogue between Afro-Latino movement leaders and academics specializing in comparative racial politics and policies. We will rely heavily on local experts from the Five Colleges, as well as U.S. colleagues interested in consolidating our Consortium. The list of invitees includes:

Sonia E. Alvarez, UMass-Amherst  
 John Anton, Ecuador  
 Maria Inês Barbosa, UNIFEM, Brasil  
 John Bracey, UMass-Amherst  
 Humberto Brown, GALCI  
 Epsy Campbell, Black Latin American Parliament, Costa Rica  
 Nirva Camacho, Red de Organizaciones Afro-Venezolanas, Venezuela  
 Suely Carneiro, Geledés, Brazil  
 Arturo Escobar, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill  
 Libia Grueso, PCN, Colombia  
 Michael Hanchard,  
 Joseph Jordan, UNC-Chapel Hill  
 Agustín Laó-Montes, UMass-Amherst  
 Marta Moreno-Vega, GALC  
 Kim Morrison, UMass-Amherst  
 Dorothy Mosby, Mount Holyoke College  
 Claudia Mosquera, Colombia  
 Jose Antônio Nogueira, NEN, Brazil  
 Tianna Paschel, UC-Berkeley (presently in Colombia)  
 Seth Racusen, Anna Maria College

Matilde Ribeiro, former Minister of Racial Equality, Brazil  
Romero Rodriguez, Mundo Afro, Uruguay  
Mark Sawyer, UCLA  
Amílcar Shabbaz, UMass-Amherst  
Ed Telles, Princeton University  
Tufuku Zuberi, University of Pennsylvania

**Institutions and University Units Approached for Funding for December Seminar**

The Inter-American Foundation  
The Five College Lecture Fund  
Five College Luso-Brazilian Studies  
Five College Latin American Studies  
The Office of the Provost, UMass-Amherst  
The Office of the Graduate Dean, UMass-Amherst  
The College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, UMass-Amherst  
The Political Science, Sociology, Anthropology, History, Communications, Afro-American Studies Departments and various research institutes at UMass and the Five Colleges