

THINKING BRAZIL

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A Newsletter of BRAZIL @ THE WILSON CENTER

Race and Social Inequality *Color, Class and Culture in Brazil and the US*

This summer, *Brazil @ The Wilson Center* is pleased to host three Brazilian scholars who have been selected to participate in a program sponsored by the Brazilian Ministry of Culture and the Wilson Center. Over the next few months **Katia Santos, Debora Carrari and Liv Sovik** will be researching various aspects of the influence of race and social inequality on Brazilian and American culture.

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Liv Sovik is visiting this summer from Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, where she is a professor of communications. Her project will focus on the challenge of dismantling traditional and restrictive racial ideals in the search for effective and equitable cultural policy. Katia Santos is currently at the University of Georgia where she is completing a Ph.D in Portuguese, Brazilian and African-American Literatures and Cultural studies. She is examining the racial and social barriers to education for Afro-Brazilian women. Debora Carrari, who arrived this summer with her recently completed Masters Degree in Conflict Analysis from Nova Southeastern University, is currently studying the implications of police behavior in the search for racial equality.

Look for future updates as we disseminate the preliminary results of their research in a seminar at the Wilson Center on August 12th.

Katia Santos
*Black Women and the
construction of
Knowledge: Afro-
Brazilian and African-
American Women Meet
in the Black Diaspora*

Katia's work at the Wilson Center will focus on Afro-Brazilian women and their struggle to gain access to education in spite of social and racial oppression as well



as disenfranchisement in a society that she believes is still shaped by the rules of what many in Brazil would term an era of "amiable" slavery.

Santos is also examining how literature produced by African-American scholars on issues related to black women and blacks in general, can empower Afro-Brazilians. Indeed, the black population in Brazil and the



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US encounter similar issues as both societies having been formed as African diasporas, under the institution of slavery.

Katia will utilize the experiences of African-Americans in her approach to the Brazilian context. It is her hope that this comparative approach might catalyze the Afro-Brazilian search for solutions appropriate to their circumstances. She believes that once her target audience can identify with the African-American experience they will realize how racism and sexism weigh most heavily against black women. Although the black women's movement is one of the most active social movements in Brazil today, there is still a lack of specialized literature on these issues. It is this lack of specific work that Santos believes differentiates Brazil from the US and a third world movement from a first world movement.

Debora Carrari

Implications of Police Behavior in Equality

Based on the assumption that discriminatory practices in law enforcement have a significant impact on racial equality, Debora will focus on racially biased police behavior in Brazil and United States. More specifically, she is analyzing the status of racial discrimination in both countries, as well as related public policies developed in the United States. The study will provide a comparison on police behavior in both countries, and investigate the structural mechanisms that perpetuate racial inequality through discriminatory law enforcement.

Police bias and discrimination in the administration of justice have shown to be powerful mechanisms for the perpetuation of racial inequalities. In



societies where racial prejudice and socioeconomic disparities between blacks and whites are the rule, law enforcement can be used as a form of social control, which can perpetuate racist practices and undermine political mobilization.

In this context, the comparative study of police violence against racial minorities in Brazil and United States can provide valuable information about the current status of racial inequality and the structural limitations of equality. According to Carrari, the understanding of institutional mechanisms of oppression still in place in post-slavery societies is crucial to the development of public policies that can have an impact on social disparities.

Carrari notes that police violence against blacks in Brazil is a reflection of "incomplete" citizenship and the vulnerability of Afro-Brazilians as a group, victimized by negative stereotypes and physically concentrated in low-income neighborhoods. She also feels that it also reveals the limitations of Brazilian democracy, which can end up working as a structural barrier to empowerment and political mobilization of the black population. In the United States, discriminatory practices of the police are also observed, and public policies that can protect citizens from authority abuse and racial profiling have been recently debated. These initiatives attempt to guarantee equality before the law, help to consolidate democracy, and therefore, strengthen the potential for racial equality.

Liv Sovik

Decentering Whiteness in Cultural Policy

In 1998 a new tone was set in public discourse on Brazilian identity. That year, the rap group Racionais MC's won MTV Brazil's Audience Choice award for "Diário de um Detento", a narrative of the massacre of 111 prisoners in the Carandiru jail in São Paulo, in 1992. Dr. Sovik notes that before 1998, the peripheries of large Brazilian cities were largely ignored by mainstream culture - the success of "Diário de um Detento" marked the beginning of a period in which they had become a major focus of the arts and entertainment industry. Examples of this emergence include programs on MTV dedicated



Liv Sovik

to rap music in Brazil and the United States, mainstream publications on the rap subculture and its alternative economy, a surge in the publication of book-length prison memoirs, the success of Paulo Lins's novel, *Cidade de Deus* (in print, film and television), the

recent launch of Hector Babenco's *Carandiru*, based on Draúzio Varela's best-selling *Estação Carandiru*. These are but a few examples which reflect and reinforce an abiding curiosity by audiences, throughout Brazil, in "the margins" of society.

Sovik notes that government policy has also had a direct impact on the politics of social inequality and race discrimination. This reached new heights under former President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, with the discussions of race relations in preparation for the United Nations Conference on Racism, held in Durban in 2001, and the proposal, in Rio de Janeiro in 2001, to set quotas for black students among state university entrants. According to Sovik, a practical measure that appeared to be aimed at socio-economic realities, instead flared into a broad debate on Brazilian identity. The emerging tendency for social and economic policy to include cultural dimensions has continued and intensified under the administration of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. She believes that government bodies aspire to set the tone of public discourse and to change Brazilian

political culture, setting new cultural limits for legitimate political action. The Ministry of Culture holds a key position in this new atmosphere, not because it is obligated to shape the development of a new political culture (indeed, were that to happen populism will have shown its most characteristic face), but because of its broad goals of encouraging creativity and cultural production and, thereby, fomenting a more just discourse of social cohesion and cultural identity.

Brazil has long taken pride in its diverse mixture of racial and cultural heritage, as well as conviviality. Indeed, the traditional view of race and social inequalities of *mestiçagem* or "racial mixture" is a way of diminishing racial conflicts. Dr. Sovik believes that while *mestiçagem* will always have descriptive power, internally it has, however, lost the anti-racist edge it had when it was launched. Originally it had been seen as a critique of the ideology of whitening, by which the "race problem" would be solved as the population became progressively whiter. This view *mestiçagem* has come under fire of late, mainly from the increasing strength and value ascribed to black identity, but also from the increasing divide between rich and poor (which, as Sovik notes is actually between individuals who could be characterized as "mostly" white and "mostly" black). Although she does not believe that Brazil is on the verge of adopting a bipolar race relations model like that of the United States, she has observed similarities between the countries - whiteness continues to be valued in both countries as an aesthetic ideal. The political and cultural challenge of dislodging whiteness from this ideal status is important to more democratic race relations.



Thinking Brazil Update is an electronic publication of ***Brazil @ the Wilson Center***. This project is founded on the conviction that Brazil and the U.S.-Brazilian relationship deserve to receive better attention in Washington. Brazil's population, size, and economy, as well as its unique position as a regional leader and global player fully justify this interest. In response, and in keeping with the Center's mission to bridge scholarly research and public action, ***Brazil @ the Wilson Center*** sponsors activities designed to create a "presence" for Brazil in Washington that captures the attention of the policymaking community. ***Brazil @ the Wilson Center*** is grateful for the support of the Ministry of Culture of Brazil, ADM, Cargill, ChevronTexaco, FMC, and The GE Foundation.

For more information please refer to our website at www.wilsoncenter.org/brazil or contact Alex Parlina at parliniaj@wwic.si.edu