Afrodescendants, Identity, and the Struggle for Development in the Americas

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Afro-Descendants, Identity, and the Struggle for Development in the Americas

Edited by Bernd Reiter and Kimberly Eison Simmons
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From April 28 to April 30, 2010, the Institute for the Study of Latin America and the Caribbean (ISLAC) of the University of South Florida hosted an international conference entitled “Reexamining the Black Atlantic: Afro-Descendants Still at the Bottom?” The question was rhetorical, but the aim of asking it was not. As the organizer of the conference, I had long wanted to bring together scholars, activists, and funding-agency representatives committed to, and engaged in, the problems of Afro-descendant communities spread over the Americas. As an activist-turned-scholar, who had lived and worked in the Colombian Pacific (Chocó) and then in Salvador, Brazil, I was keenly aware of the many changes that had affected black communities in the Americas since I lived there (1989–90 in Colombia; mid to late ’90s in Salvador), and I was equally aware that a new generation of scholars was producing new readings and interpretations about the situation of those diverse communities. From working first with the Catholic Church and later with local and international NGOs, I also knew that scholars were not the only ones knowledgeable about Afro-descendant communities in the region, which is why I decided to also invite local activists and funding-agency representatives to this conference. The conference thus was a “dream-come-true” for me—made possible by the unconditional support of the new director of our Institute, Dr. Rachel May. Under her leadership, ISLAC will continue to coordinate and support research and activism aimed at Afro-descendant communities in the Americas. The conference would also not have been possible without the active
support and encouragement we received from the Inter-American Foundation, in particular Linda Borst-Kolko, vice president of operations, who not only facilitated the attendance of some activists, but also, through her own participation, ensured the participation of other funding-agency representatives engaged in these issues. I am indeed very grateful to Linda and the Inter-American Foundation for their participation in my conference and their unwavering support of Afro-Latin communities in different parts of the Americas.

The conference was a great success and allowed for many encounters and reencounters. Old and new faces met and interchanged their ideas and experiences, and as on so many other occasions, decided to "keep in touch" and continue working on this topic. At a final plenary session, entitled "Lessons Learned and Elaboration of an Action Plan," the participants not only decided to publish the papers presented at the conference, but also to find a way to make them available to a broader audience, especially to the very communities for which this knowledge would be helpful: Afro-descendants in the Americas. To achieve this goal, we hope to create and publish a Spanish translation of this book. Furthermore, we decided to continue our effort to bring together scholars, activists, and funding-agency representatives interested in Afro-descendants in hopes that well-informed funding decisions can be facilitated; that academic work can be grounded in real-life experience; and that local activism has a chance to put their daily work into a broader perspective. Finally, we decided to produce a "mapping" that brings together the different needs of local communities, expressed by activists and described by scholars, with the resources already available at universities and funding agencies in an effort to facilitate future action. We will continue our efforts to bring together activists, scholars, and funding-agency representatives to facilitate the circulation of knowledge, to add a real-life dimension to academic work, and to improve the livelihoods of Afro-descendants in the Americas. The University of South Florida Institute for the Study of Latin America and the Caribbean (ISLAC) was put in charge of coordinating this effort toward continuity.

Of crucial importance to the success—and continuity—of this project was Kimberly Eisen Simmons, coeditor of this book, and book series editor of the African Diaspora Research Project Series of the Michigan State University Press. Kimberly facilitated contact with Julie Loehr, acquisitions editor of MSU Press, without whom this book would not have become a reality.

The original description of the conference read as follows:

Slavery has forever changed the face of the Americas and racism is a persistent problem, as well as a common element that unites the destinies of historically excluded groups across the different geographical and political unities that together form the Americas. Over the last decade, most countries of the western hemisphere have not only recognized the continuing importance of colonial legacies and racism, some of them have also designed social policies that take explicit account of the far-reaching effects of racism.

This recognition has produced a full-scale revision of national projects and official versions of imagining and presenting the nation to its own citizens and to the rest of the world. Countries that only ten years ago officially declared that racism did not affect them are now enacting affirmative-action policies.

In Brazil, for example, the myth of "racial democracy" has been steadily dismantled over the last few years, and over the past five years, the Brazilian state has enacted several federal affirmative-action policies to actively address the deep inequalities characterizing this country. In the United States, to the contrary, the voices against such policies are growing stronger, and affirmative action might be on the verge of ending.

Comparing the Americas through the lenses of racism and exclusion has already produced very fruitful insights into the shortcomings of American and Caribbean democracies, and into the continuing importance of colonial legacies in the region. Regional comparison also adds significantly to our understanding of persistent poverty and provides insights into the effectiveness of different measures of targeted poverty reduction. In particular, inter-American dialogue among historically excluded groups promises to allow lessons learned in one country to inform affected groups in others.

**AIM OF THE CONFERENCE**

This international conference aimed at analyzing and comparing the causes and effects of racism in the Americas. Instead of stopping at this merely academic level, we also invited local activists and development practitioners, such as private foundations and international aid agencies, to join this discussion, in order to add a concrete policy component.

By facilitating a dialogue between scholars and development practitioners, we not only seek to stimulate an important dialogue that is grounded in real-life experience, but also produce valuable policy suggestions.

This conference therefore actively embraced and promoted the University of South Florida's combination of research with real-life problem-solving agency. This international and cross-disciplinary conference facilitated cooperation among different USF
scholars and research units, namely ISLAC, International Affairs, Africana Studies, and the Patel Center.

Specific Questions That Were Addressed in the Conference

Among the questions addressed in this conference were:

- What is the importance of international organizations in the dissemination of racial consciousness across national borders?
- Can the lessons learned in one country be readily applied in another?
- Is the application of North American racial categories to the analysis and crafting of social policies in countries like Brazil part of “imperialist reason” (Bourdieu, 1999), or of the inter-American dialogue among historically excluded groups and the agencies that support them?
- At what stage are group-conscious public policies across the Americas?
- What positive and negative results have they produced so far?
- Is there a change in “racial consciousness” connected to these policies?

Expected Outcomes

- The articles presented in this conference will be gathered, edited, and published.
- We will create a network of scholars, institutes, agencies, and local communities interested in analyzing and addressing the pressing problems of Afro-Latinos.
- We will elaborate an action plan that involves scholars, local activists, and funding agencies.
- We will share and disseminate policy-relevant information about racism and its effects among scholars, practitioners, and funding agencies.
- A lasting working relation between ISLAC, the Patel Center, the Institute on Black Life, and the Department of Africana Studies will be initiated.

Not all questions have been successfully addressed, and we might not achieve all of the outlined outcomes. However, the book gives evidence of an ever-growing and expanding awareness of each other: communities of scholars, activists, and funders.

Some participants were unable to contribute to this volume, due to their busy schedules as activists and scholars. Their contributions were nevertheless important and shall not be forgotten. Thank you! Participants whose presentation and work are not included are: Hon. George Martinez, activist and hip-hop ambassador; Todd A. Cox, deputy director and program officer for Advancing Racial Justice and Minority Rights at the Ford Foundation; Isnel Pierreval, youth ambassador, Haiti; Lorelei Williams, consultant; and Susan Greenbaum, professor, Department of Anthropology, USF.

My final thanks go to Dr. Faye V. Harrison for her gracious keynote address and thoughtful contribution to this book.
Global Africa, the geographically and socio-culturally diverse peoples of Africa and its Diaspora, is linked through complex networks of social relationships and processes. Whether examined at the level of the household, neighborhood, village, city, province, state, or region, the experiences of these dispersed peoples are multilayered, interactively varied, and complex, and yet constituted of and mediated within a global and unequal social ordering system.

—Ruth Simms Hamilton, Routes of Passage

SITUATING DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF UNEQUAL SOCIAL ORDERING SYSTEMS

Development remains an elusive ideal. There is no agreement as to what development truly means and how generalizable some of its claims are. The most insightful approach on development comes from Amartya Sen (1999), who argues that development cannot be reduced to economic growth, because economic growth is only a means to an end—and that end is “living the kind of life one has reason to value” (10). To Sen, freedom constitutes the core of development—the freedom to act, to participate, to work, to have a voice, to be recognized and respected by one's peers and community members, to pursue one's education, to participate in markets, and
Introduction

at the most basic level, the freedom to live. This freedom depends crucially on one’s capabilities—that is, one’s potential to act, or one’s agency. Most people of this world encounter barriers that restrict and limit their agency—while few people dispose of excessive agency, which intrudes on the lives of others.

This collection of papers focuses on one crucial factor limiting the agency of a particular group of people—namely, racism—and how it impacts the capabilities of people of African descent in the Americas. Racism, the way it is treated here by the scholars, activists, and funding-agency representatives contributing to this volume, is a structural phenomenon that works dialectically: by limiting the agency of some, it bestows extra-capabilities on others, thus providing them with unearned privileges and advantages—even with a sense of normalcy (Reiter 2009).

Racism has transformed black and indigenous people in the Americas into “others” and minorities—even in such countries and regions where they constitute numerical majorities. Racism has, at the same time, brought all those together that suffer under the same racial regime, thus forging a shared sense of destiny and a solidarity that reaches beyond national borders—in what Paul Gilroy (1993) has so famously termed “the Black Atlantic.” It has allowed for the emergence of diasporic networks and connections of thought and action, where different people and groups in different countries are able to relate to each other’s experiences and problems, offering insight and advice, and developing concerted action.

This sharing of experience and insight is what motivates this volume. It is based on the understanding that no knowledge is absolute and objective, but instead limited and situated. Furthermore, the contributors to this book acknowledge that scholarly approaches to understanding reality are limited, whereas other approaches, determined by different positonalities, have valuable contributions to make as well. While academic inquiry has the potential to be more reliable, nonacademic knowledge production is broader and more intuitive because it is not limited to the confinements of scientific methodology. Taken together, they can complement each other and jointly complete the jigsaw puzzle that constitutes the understanding of human reality.

The main goal that all the authors assembled here share is to facilitate a fruitful interchange of the different knowledges of scholars, activists, and funding-agency representatives, so that development can be rethought and reconstituted based on the informed input of the different specialists. After all, development has remained elusive to the populations this book is concerned with—African descendants. This is in part, so we argue, because not enough of those who design and execute development programs and strategies pay attention to the specific needs and problems of the Black Diaspora. Diaspora communities face specific problems and barriers in their quest for agency—and just as all knowledge is situated and limited, so all development strategies have to be specific, contextualized, and situated, if any success is truly desired.

However, even though the specific situations of African descendants in the Americas need further explanation, we do not have to start from zero. Especially, some of the broader context in which development is discussed is beyond much dispute, and some lessons must be accepted from the past—be that the past of a collapsing USSR, which demonstrated the lack of viability and undesirability of “real socialism,” or the more recent past that showed us the impossibility and undesirability of “free” markets. This is what we all know, even if some of us do not want to admit it: Markets can provide great opportunities for people. However, it provides many more opportunities for those who enter markets with greater assets, be it people, groups (firms), or countries. Catching up is hard to do and might be altogether impossible under market conditions.

We also know that markets do not emerge and develop spontaneously—states have always helped their own markets and made them possible. The same is true for individuals, groups, and firms. Without support from their states and governments, they have a diminished chance to enter and survive highly competitive markets, even more so when assets have already been distributed and are highly concentrated (Bowles and Gintis 1999). To enter markets with a true chance of success, as well as to establish the foundations for agency, historically excluded groups rely on their governments.

Furthermore, it is clear by now that firms and individuals cannot gain easy access to markets if the necessary conditions are not in place—such as access to information, capital, infrastructure, and an environment of law, order, and peace. Most black communities in the Americas—from Canada to Argentina—know these limitations, pitfalls, and limits all too well. They have remained at the bottom of social, political, and economic hierarchies despite their multigenerational efforts to move up. They have struggled long and hard, and they continue to believe and invest in education and different strategies aimed at securing a better life for their children. They have done the hardest, most menial jobs even after slavery ended—and although their life situations have improved together with those of the broader societies, their efforts have not made them equal.

At this point, we also know that politics matter. One of the strongest cases for how politics matter comes from Kerala, India, where the local government was able to change the social reality of Keralans—lifting their literacy, health, and thus life standards up to levels equal, sometimes even superior, to those of rich Western countries, despite the prevailing scarcity of resources and the below-average levels of income of Keralans (Heller 2000). Development is after all not simply a matter of economics—and all those who have tried to convince us of this dogma were either simply wrong or ill-intentioned. We have also learned that gender matters, and focusing development
aid on women can make a difference, because women around the world tend to make
many of the decisions that impact the lives of families and communities—and they are
oftentimes the ones carrying out those policies aimed at improving families, neighbor-
hoods, and overall lifestyles (Seligson and Passé-Smith 2008).

And although politics matter, we are now also well aware that government alone
cannot bring about development if the people are not actively involved in the process of
democratic governance. During the 1990s, development policies thus started focusing
on strengthening civil society, based on the insight that successful development may
result from strong civic organizing able to pressure governments and hold people
accountable. Authors such as Judith Tendler (1997) went further and argued that
successful development results when central states cooperate with local states and
local civil society—creating a tripartite “state-civil synergy.” Beyond the specifics of
how much government and how much civil society is needed to achieve development,
it is now clear that states and civil societies both have important roles to play in
development. Great attention thus needs to be paid to both state capacities and civil-
society activism, measured through such complex indicators as social capital and
civic-mindedness.

However, some questions and issues have not been sufficiently addressed, let
alone resolved, especially with respect to people throughout the African Diaspora.
The age-old discussion about the relationship between states and markets rages on—despite all the evidence that has long demonstrated that markets do not come about by themselves, that states can do much to further development, and that the
real question thus is what smart government action is and what it would look like.
Our analysis needs to go beyond the simple dichotomy of states versus markets and
instead focus on what governments can do to help markets work more efficiently and
more equitably. Hence, in our discussions about Afro-descendants, political economy
retains an important space, and we have to ask how government action reaches differ-
ent people who are differently positioned throughout society.

Again, Amartya Sen’s work in Development as Freedom (1999) as well as Muham-
mad Yunus’s (2009) work on microfinance offer important insights. Both these
approaches share a focus on the importance of free agency. If people have the freedom
to act, they will do so in their own benefit and thus achieve development for them-
selves and their communities. However, both these approaches are still somewhat
undertheorized—especially the one offered by Yunus. Even though they point to the
importance of agency, they do not offer a comprehensive framework that allows us to
see and examine why and how agency works or can work, and under what conditions
and limitations.” However, in all of this, it is clear that governments play important
roles in “making markets work.” Access to markets, in turn, is what most people on
this planet want, as poverty is still the number one issue plaguing Afro-descendants
and other historically marginalized groups. Economic welfare thus remains a central
theme for the poor and excluded, and as such it is the theme of several contributions
assembled here.

We also know now that investing in education is a crucial ingredient for achieving
development. The history of South Korea has been analyzed to prove this point, and
such agencies as the World Bank have learned this lesson some years back, thanks to
the studies undertaken by World Bank economists such as George Psacharopoulos
(1973). Education and development are tightly and causally related, where education is
a necessary but not sufficient condition for development. Great attention thus needs to
be paid to education and educational policies—leading some of the authors assembled
here to focus entirely on education.

Despite all the shortcomings in understanding development, the history of
development and developmental aid has taught us one undeniable fact: “The solu-
tions to the world’s problems have to be highly contextualized,” in the words of Hans
Rosling (2006).” There are no ready-made, one-size-fits-all, general solutions to the
different, and very specific, problems people face in different parts of the world. This
is especially the case in African diasporic contexts. Development discourse needs to
become more grounded and situated—that is, more aware of local circumstances, the
specific political forces at work, and the specific historical, cultural, and social factors
that determine and limit the agency of different people and groups. Only if we are
aware and understand exactly what limits people’s agency, and thus what restricts
their capabilities to live the kind of life they want to live—only then will we be able
to support their own efforts towards a better life. If, on the other hand, rich countries
and the organizations they control continue to ignore the circumstances and the voice
of those they attempt to assist, then this assistance will continue to achieve very little
and run the risk of undermining people’s efforts towards emancipation by reproducing
dependencies and lack of freedom.

This need to ground and situate development discourse and practice certainly
poses great challenges—especially if such goals as the Millennium Development Goals
are kept in mind, goals that aim to achieve a world without poverty and hunger by 2015.
However, this same need also provides great opportunities for all those whose job it
is to provide grounded and situated accounts and explanations about the lifeworlds of
different peoples, namely, social scientists. Social scientists produce a myriad
of extremely detailed accounts of the specific situations and problems of different
groups suffering from a lack of access and development. Some social scientists are
also specialists in the knowledge of local people and groups—groups whose voices
by themselves have no chance to be heard, let alone respected and considered. Social
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scientists thus can be allies of, and transmitters for, all those whose voices are so readily discounted: the poor, the illiterate, the minorities, the marginalized, and the stigmatized.

Such diverse scholars as Karl Popper (2002), Donna Haraway (1988), and Sandra Harding (1993) have argued that truly reliable knowledge about "how reality really is" or "how things really are" might be entirely out of our reach. The best we seem to be able to do is to develop theoretical models that permit us to make inferences about reality that allow us to see and explain causal connections that we have previously overlooked, or simply not recognized as patterned and thus relevant. Relevant and engaged social science thus needs to be self-critical and own limits and, at the same time, seek ways to insert its findings into those spheres that are instrumental in the formulation and application of policies targeting the poor and the excluded. Such an attitude requires first and foremost recognition of findings produced in different academic disciplines, as well as recognition of the validity of knowledge held and produced outside of academia.

THE CONTINUED IMPORTANCE OF RACISM

Accordingly, development must be discussed not merely at the macro level, by analyzing the state and its different strategies. If anything, Sen alerts us that development needs to start and end with concrete people. Transferred to the rest of the social sciences, this means providing situated analyses of different people and groups in specific places, dealing with specific historical conditions. Racism and sexism are concrete mechanisms limiting agency, and it is thus imperative to include an analysis of these mechanisms of exclusion in the development debate, and thus insert the voice of social scientists and local activists into the discussion currently dominated by bankers and economists.

People who have been stigmatized and marginalized for centuries face two types of obstacles: first, they are forced to compete in market systems from extremely skewed starting positions; that is, they have to compete with individuals and firms that have accumulated assets and carved out competitive advantages for themselves for centuries (Brown et al. 2005). As mentioned above, markets work best for those who can enter them with assets—and competitive advantages easily translate into even greater asset differences between those who started competing way ahead and those who started from zero, as Fred Hirsch (1976) has long ago demonstrated. To use a metaphor: no matter how fast you can run, you will never catch up with the guy who started running years before you. The second main obstacle historically excluded and racialized people face is the effect that racism has had on them. Persistent racism is in effect able to diminish the performance of those who are targeted, as many studies in education and psychology have shown (Ogbu and Davis 2003; Ogbu 2008).

Recognizing the importance of racism as an extremely relevant factor limiting agency and diminishing the chances to succeed and "catch up" with those who not only do not face discrimination but actually benefit from it is thus central to the broader task of situating and grounding development and developmental discourse—especially in those parts of the world colonized by Europeans.

POSTCOLONIAL CONDITIONS

As a result of these insights, we are once again forced to ask an old question: What is development? And how can it be achieved? The social sciences have sought to give answers to these questions at least since the 1960s, when most of Africa achieved independence and colonialism was slowly coming to an end. The new world that emerged after colonialism was one deeply structured by five hundred years of European domination—a domination that had set the framework not only for what the world would look like, but also how the solutions to the world's problems had to be presented. After colonialism thus came postcolonialism, that is, a world where the former colonizers still held all the power and controlled all the knowledge—at least the kind of knowledge the West had defined as worth our while.

Hence, the rich part of the world, after having become rich by exploiting the poor part of the world, now set out to define what needed to be done in the poor countries. During colonial times, they had trained locals, thus creating a new, local elite who soon would become the beacons and the spokespersons of this new movement towards "development." The poor countries, so was the verdict, had to "catch up." Western science produced exactly the kind of justifications needed to advance this project—a project that brought, now we know, more markets for Western firms, more debt to already impoverished countries, and in the end, more Western control over poor countries. Western developmental doctrine accomplished foremost one thing: it helped the West. In academia, this project was termed "modernization," and modernization theory emerged in different disciplines as a broader paradigm that had at its core the belief that development equaled modernity, where modernity simply meant to become Western.

To make matters worse, the available macro-approaches, focusing on state roles,
modernization, or international structures of dependency, did not provide us with enough analytical tools to effectively understand the life situation of diverse peoples and countries facing very specific problems—let alone the very specific needs and problems of different groups within any given country. Although the usage of such terms as “Third World” has slowly faded, much analysis still seems to adhere to a First World/Third World mindset and, worse, analytical framework when thinking about poverty, ineffective government, corruption, lack of infrastructure, inequality, democracy, and quality of life.

The truth is that some marginalized groups face typical “Third World” problems in their “First World” countries, while most Third World countries have elites and upper-middle classes living at very high standards—comparable, and oftentimes superior, to those of First World elites, because they can rely on an abundance of cheap labor. In such countries, the privileged few count on a mass of poor people willing to take over almost all of the unpleasant daily tasks that middle classes in rich countries have to handle themselves (such as babysitting, carrying bags, cleaning, washing, and cooking). The structuring of most societies and the forging of those social hierarchies that determine who works as a maid and who is an employer are reflections of very ingrained colonial legacies. Colonial legacies need to be acknowledged and actively addressed if any real improvement towards equitable development is a true goal—and this cannot be achieved with reference to simple First World/Third World dualisms.

Education provides a good example. Situations like those in Baltimore, where 76 percent of African American males do not finish high school, do not live up to the idea of a First World country—especially if we consider the much higher educational requirements in the United States as compared to most South American or African countries, where achieving eleven years of formal education provides a graduate with much better chances in the job market than in the United States. This becomes even clearer when considering that most poor countries of the western hemisphere offer at least basic healthcare and education services to their populations, whereas in the richest country on the planet, the United States, 30 million Americans are not able to go to the doctor or hospital when they get sick, for lack of money. Amartya Sen (1999, 23) pointed out that African American males have a lower life expectancy than the average Bangladeshi—even though they have a much higher average income. Our discussions about development need to become more sophisticated, less biased, and more embracing of knowledge produced by non-economists, as the analytical frameworks of orthodox economists tend to be too abstract to capture the real-life problems affecting actual people and communities.

Individuals and communities—their life chances and capabilities—need to be moved to center stage of any discourse on development. This automatically implies a firm commitment to democracy—not because democracy is the most efficient means to achieve the ends of economic growth and modernization. It is not. Instead, democracy is the end—or formulated differently, the means and the ends need to overlap for “development” to retain any true meaning. The analysis assembled here points beyond instrumental approaches on how to best and most quickly achieve growth. In doing so, it reflects the historical learning that too many times aggregated economic growth has not improved the life situations of the historically excluded.

Lofty discourses—produced mostly by economists and political scientists working at American elite universities—about world systems, globalization, neoliberalism, dependency, modernization, state roles, and the importance of well-functioning bureaucracies have proven of little help for analyzing why some countries, and some groups within countries, continue to face poverty and exclusion. For a whole school of American scholars, development has remained a question of modernization, where countries need to first undergo a process of industrialization and produce the social forces able to press for political participation and democracy later. Even faced with all of the shortcomings of this model that have since become apparent in those countries that have actually undergone such a trajectory, these scholars have remained celebratory about the achievements of “the West.” They also neglect to analyze the difficulties the West has imposed on the rest of the world, ruling out an easy “catching up.” The bias of some analysts becomes obvious in such figures as the late Samuel Huntington, who expressed reservations about too much participation of the people, thus voicing what can only be interpreted as a deep-seated bias against the poor. Scholars like Huntington took their belief in the moderating power of the middle classes from Seymour Martin Lipset, perhaps the godfather of modernization theory. This entire school of thought was brilliantly proven wrong by Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi, who in 1997 published “Modernization: Theory and Facts,” proving that industrialization and capitalism did not lead to democracy. But even if they did, modernization theory does not explain if industrialization is the only way to go, or even the most desirable path to follow, or how industrialization can be achieved—let alone how freedom from hunger, disease, illiteracy, exploitation, inadequate housing, inadequate education, and lack of political participation could be achieved by all those deprived of true development.

Latin American writers and thinkers such as Andre Gunder Frank, Raul Prebisch, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso developed a countertheory against modernization during the 1970s. These authors explained that the lack of development of a country was caused by the development of other, richer countries, as they controlled international markets, organizations, and institutions that reproduced poverty for the majority and wealth for the few. However, the application of dependency theory, and
its offspring, world system theory fares no better when it comes to providing guidelines for all those suffering—especially as it became clear that revolution does not offer a promising way out of poverty. If knowledge is power, we should not be surprised that the powerful seek to defend their exclusive access to the domain of knowledge—limiting it to powerful organizations or to fancy and highly unpractical theories, legitimized by degrees given to them by club-like elite universities.

Such treatments, although intellectually interesting, leave us with very little, and they seem to help the academic careers of their authors more than all those in need of reliable analytical frameworks that would help them to understand the forces that hold them back, so they can devise strategies to overcome them. We have learned that well-functioning states and state apparatuses are important for achieving economic development; but the fact is that most states do not function well—not in poor countries and not even in rich ones. Political scandals, corruption, nepotism, the abuse of state power, and political representatives interested in anything but the common good and the welfare of the citizens they represent, have led to widespread disenchantment with politics—in poor and rich countries alike. In the United States the military-industrial complex and the power of huge media conglomerates have long taken over genuine political will, formation and deliberation and replaced them with a theater of politics, where internally incoherent platforms are packaged and sold only to allow political elites to stay in power by catering to the biggest lobbyists and all those in fear of nonwhites and foreigners (think of the notorious proposition to cut back government, while at the same time arguing for more military spending and more government interference in private lives—at least when unborn life is at stake).

To overcome such legacies, we are faced with the task of liberating ourselves from the patterns—political, economic, but also intellectual—that have long dominated the discourse and the practice of development. We need to reassess the value and importance of modernization, without risking the pitfall of romanticizing poverty. As proposed earlier, Amartya Sen's thinking about capabilities provides a starting point. For Sen, the ultimate goal of development must be the enlargement of the range of opportunities and concrete possibilities a person has to live the kind of life he or she deems worth living. This includes the freedom to participate in public life and to be considered a full member of a community, and to be able to participate in the public sphere without shame (Sen 1999). To achieve such a goal, social scientists, funding-agency representatives, local activists, and traditional knowledge-bearers need to communicate and respect each other's knowledge and wisdom. Elitism and exclusivity have to be attacked and overcome, as elites have never proven to advance anybody's agenda but their own. Racism has to be recognized, analyzed, and addressed effectively by making it a mainstream concern and an integral part of any serious analysis of social reality—not the exclusive domain of disenchanted minorities who, so goes the stereotype, complain too much. This also implies that the understanding of all those affected by injustice, exploitation, stigmatization, and racism has to be recognized and valued for what it truly is: expert knowledge.

Such a utopian agenda will of course not be achieved quickly, nor could it. However, something far less ambitious can be achieved, namely, taking concrete, even if small, steps in the right direction. Whenever bankers listen to social scientists; when academics communicate with activists; when academic work is done not just by elite universities but diverse sources—then we come one step closer to a more democratic reality and a less divided world. The works assembled here were put together in just this hope, namely, to facilitate the dissemination and cross-fertilization of different types of knowledge, produced by different types of stakeholders and participants in reproducing development discourse as it applies to the specific situation of people of African descent in the Americas.

**Chapter Overview**

Part 1, "The Black Atlantic Reexamined," brings together two essays. The first, written by cultural anthropologist Faye V. Harrison, entitled "Building Black Diaspora Networks and Meshworks for Knowledge, Justice, Peace, and Human Rights," addresses the part that transnational networks play in Afro-descendants' struggles for subsistence security, food sovereignty, sustainable environments, security and, holistically understood, human rights, which encompass civil/political rights along with economic, social, and cultural rights. UN conferences and NGO forums, as well as world social forums, have been building Black Diaspora networks and meshworks for knowledge, justice, peace, and human rights, and legal instruments of the international human-rights regime into intelligible norms and strategies for mobilization. Under the best-case scenarios, once these transnationally negotiated norms and plans of action are taken home to local and regional struggles, they undergo reinterpretation and, ultimately, an indigenization that resonates with the everyday practical consciousness and cultural logics of particular places and situations. Short of this outcome, the transnational exchange or circulation of information does not necessarily result in the production of politically enabling knowledge, free from the baggage of differential power that is mapped across the North/South axis. Consequently, across the dense field of Black Atlantic meshworks, all networks and network participants are not equal. Nonetheless, the more relatively privileged are not necessarily the more
knowledgeable when it comes to solving problems, resolving conflicts, and imagining and putting into practice the most humane outcomes. Subaltern knowledge, enhanced through local and translocal activism, is, therefore, integral to decolonizing neoliberal globalization.

The second essay, jointly written by historian Darién J. Davis, sociologist Tianna S. Paschel, and Inter-American Bank representative Judith A. Morrison, is entitled "Pan-Afro-Latin Americanism Revisited: Legacies and Lessons for Transnational Alliances in the New Millennium." It provides an overview and an interpretation of the different collaborations and interchanges among black communities of the western hemisphere. The authors also analyze the changing patterns of black organizing and their varying impact on states and governments, and they consider the importance and impact of international organizations for the development, change, and dissemination of black consciousness and transnational collaboration. The authors, all of whom have themselves played key roles in the processes they describe and analyze, conclude that "While Afro-Latin Americans will continue to face economic, political, and cultural challenges in a region plagued by inequalities, they have made progress over the past several decades. We argue that this is in part because they have constructed Pan-African alliances and transnational collaborations that have played a significant role in raising global awareness and influencing national policies."

Part 2, "Double-Consciousness and Black Identity—Globalized," unites the largest number of essays. This is in part due to the salience and problematic potential of black communities having to negotiate their identity vis-à-vis their own nation-state and other black communities of the African Diaspora to which they are more and more exposed. In her chapter, historian Lauren Derby challenges the view that anti-Haitianism is an ahistorical constant in Dominican history, contending that one must historicize its emergence as well as distinguish between popular and official discourses. She argues that anti-Haitianism is a form of racialized nationalism that emerged with plantation agriculture at the turn of the twentieth century as U.S. sugar firms imported Haitian labor resulting in a new subproletariat, rather than during the Haitian occupation of 1822, and that recent popular violence against Haitians is partly a result of the 2003 Dominican bank crisis, when rural employment plummeted over 50 percent and wage levels sank to the lowest in the Caribbean. Thus the current wave of Haitian-Dominican tension may represent popular scapegoating as Dominican salaries plummeted and jobs evaporated, as well as intrastate factionalism within the reigning Dominican Liberation Party due to the unstable coalition that brought Leonel Fernández to power.

Cultural anthropologist Kimberly Eison Simmons draws on the experiences of students who participated in the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) Program in Spanish Language and Caribbean Studies, in Santiago, Dominican Republic, from 2000 to 2004, to situate the seemingly conflicting racial projects of the Dominican Republic and the United States. She discusses how, for African Americans and Dominicans, the question of race is actually very similar when it becomes a question of color, as blackness and mixedness are situated processes that encompass ideas of ancestry as well as phenotypic expression in both countries. She argues that racial discourses, and the politics surrounding race and color, for Dominicans in the United States and African Americans in the Dominican Republic, are very similar because of historical colorization—which she defines as intragroup racial and color-naming practices. She suggests that growing interaction between African Americans and Afro-Dominicans, and a growing understanding of race and the racial systems in both the United States and the Dominican Republic contribute to how identities are being reconstructed. Particularly, African Americans in the Dominican Republic and Dominicans in the United States encounter a racial dilemma—how one is racially defined within a new national context as categories are often based on the state's own definitions, series of laws, and informal ways of classifying people based on skin color.

In "Negotiating Blackness within the Multicultural State in Latin America: Creole Politics and Identity in Nicaragua," political scientist Juliet Hooker focuses her attention on a population often overlooked and forgotten, namely, Creoles living on the Caribbean coast of the country. The chapter explores the ways that Latin American Afro-descendants are remaking and reimagining their collective identities in the context of official multicultural policies that now recognize their existence and have endowed them with a certain measure of collective rights, through the lens of the contemporary mobilization of Afroc-descendant Creoles from Nicaragua's Atlantic coast. The author traces changes in the ways English-speaking Creoles imagine and represent their identity within a Nicaraguan nation that has been portrayed as overwhelmingly mestizo or Indo-Hispanic, focusing in particular on the contemporary emphasis on a strong "black" racial group identity among many younger Creoles, one that is imagined in terms of transnational connections to the African Diaspora, including to an African past and Afro-Caribbean ancestry. Finally, Hooker analyzes the shifting conceptions of Creole identity in light of the connections between the current emphasis on blackness and changes to Nicaragua's model of multiculturalism that begin to recognize the existence of racial hierarchy, and to implement specific policies to combat racism and racial discrimination. In particular, she focuses on the impact of multicultural policies on the self-making strategies of Nicaraguan Creoles, and on the forms of activism that have emerged from current imaginings of Creole collective identity, and their effect, in turn, on the multicultural state.

Political scientist Leonardo Reales Jiménez shifts our attention to another
often-forgotten group of Afro-descendants in the Americas, namely Afro-Colom-
bi ans. He demonstrates how racial discrimination and social exclusion are complex structur al problems that have affected the Afro-Colombian population for decades.
Afro-Colombians experience the highest level of poverty, which is demonstrated by their extremely limited access to education, healthcare, and employment. In fact, most regions with Afro-Colombian presence endure the worst socioeconomic conditions, and the main victims of the armed conflict are Afro-Colombians. Racial discrimination and exclusionary practices, and other human-rights violations against people of African descent, have been committed by both state and nonstate actors. They are prohibited by the constitution and human-rights treaties ratified by the Colombian state. However, their noxious effects on the Afro-Colombian communities have not been extensively explored. This chapter thus describes the consequences of racist practices on Afro-Colombians, and the challenges of their struggle for human rights in the framework of armed conflict. The text represents one of the few works of its kind that explains the main aspects of the dramatic human-rights situation of Afro-Colombians throughout the nation's contemporary history.

Political scientist and criminologist Seth Racusen discusses what he calls "The Grammar of Color Identity in Brazil." In this chapter, which relies on a survey conducted by the Federal Fluminense University of Rio de Janeiro in 2002 (Pesquisa Nacional Brasileira, PESB), he finds that Brazilians use a "ranking grammar and a deracialization grammar," that is, a rather complex way of negotiating social hierarchies that makes reference to ethnic markers. To Racusen, Brazil thus is a thoroughly racialized society, which further debunks the myth of a raceless Brazil or Latin America. He also pondered the impact of these rather complex ways of self-identification on such public policies as affirmative action, as being to some degree of African descent does not and should not, according to Racusen, qualify one for affirmative action.

Racusen's essay leads to the next section of this book, Part 3: "Racism in 'Raceless' Societies and the State: The Difficulties of Addressing What Ought Not Exist."

Latin Americanist and economist Paula Lezama tackles the important problem of how to go beyond the mere comparison of incomes and life circumstances in order to assess—and quantify—the true life conditions of racialized groups and thus quantify the importance of racism. After developing a theoretical model that promises to achieve this goal, she applies her framework to the situation of Afro-Colombians. This chapter, then, analyzes welfare conditions of Afro-Colombians vis-à-vis non-Afro-Colombians, using Amartya Sen's Capability Approach as the theoretical framework, and the latent variable modeling as the empirical method. Applying Multiple Indicators Multiple Causes (MIMIC) models, Lezama is able to provide findings on two latent constructs: "knowledge" and "being adequately sheltered." She finds that after controlling statistically by a set of relevant exogenous "causes" of each capability dimension, ethnic background has a consistently negative influence. Therefore, the capability set, or the freedom an Afro-descendant enjoys in achieving the life he/she wants in terms of "knowledge" and "shelter" is consistently lower in relation to non-Afro-descendants. This evidence points toward the proposition that Afro-Colombian deprived conditions are due to pervasive patterns of racial discrimination, and not just to low income levels or lower educational attainment as official discourse and academic dialogue have argued.

In "Racism in a Racialized Democracy and Support for Affirmative Action Policy in Salvador and São Paulo, Brazil," political scientist Gladys Mitchell-Walthour brings our attention back to the country with the largest black population in the Americas: Brazil. Mitchell-Walthour shows how affirmative-action policies were implemented in universities in Brazil beginning in 2001 yet remain a controversial topic for Brazilians. Much of the debate about affirmative action stems from scholars and activists. The opinions of potential beneficiaries are largely ignored in social-science literature on political opinion and racial attitudes. She finds that in a select sample of Afro-Brazilians from Salvador and São Paulo, age, income, city, and opinion about the major problem of blacks are all statistically significant variables for predicting support for affirmative action. As age decreases and income increases, the likelihood that a respondent will support affirmative-action policies for blacks and browns in employment and university admission increases. Respondents from São Paulo and those who admit that the major problem of blacks (negros) is racism or discrimination are more likely to support affirmative action than respondents from Salvador and respondents that blame the major problem of blacks on other social factors.

The final chapter in this section is coauthored by economist and Dominican activist Altagracia Balcazar Molina and Dorotea Wilson, former mayor of Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua—one of the major cities on the Atlantic Coast—and a former member of the Nicaraguan parliament and the government of the Autonomous Region. Both authors participated in the conference that gave origin to this book as representatives of the Network of Afro-Latin-American and Afro-Caribbean Women—one of the largest and most influential networks of African-descendant women in the western hemisphere. In their paper, they provide data on the situation of black women in this region, and they point to their own activism as a way to address and one day overcome this situation. They focus on the Dominican Republic to demonstrate the profound and long-lasting effects of racism, arguing that "it was possible to establish the alleged superiority only through the use of force by the groups that unilaterally built a hierarchical social structure based on discriminatory criteria, such as poverty, ethnic-racial differences, sex, sexual orientation, and age, among others."
Part 4. "Migration, Diasporas, and the Importance of Local Knowledge," engages frontally with the theme elaborated above, namely, the need to produce and consider situated knowledge in order to be able to better understand the lifeworlds of poor and historically excluded groups. The chapters assembled under this section also highlight the importance of considering and respecting the knowledge of those who are true experts in their own lifeworlds: locals. Ecological and visual anthropologist Amanda D. Concha-Holmes highlights marginalized epistemologies in the academy by re-framing Afro-Cuban ecological knowledge. She shows how African knowledges have often been understood within an evolutionary hierarchical model denoting inferiority (and even criminality) in conceptualization and practice. Currently, African-derived religions are identified as folklore—consumed by tourists, but not necessarily offering critical knowledge to the academy (e.g., religious studies, anthropology, or conservation). Yet, the global flow of people, ideas, and practices that is glossed as African Diaspora deserves improved attention. Concha-Holmes outlines some of the historical movements of Africans to the Caribbean, specifically Cuba, and delineates how scholarship and legislation have altered through time to create distinct images of Afro-Cubans. Specifically, by translating Osain, the Yoruba deity of healing herbs and the sacred forest, she hopes to expand the understanding of Yoruba Diaspora ecological knowledge.

In "Neoliberal Dilemmas: Diaspora, Displacement, and Development in Buenos Aires," cultural anthropologist Judith M. Anderson brings our attention to a country that has gone through great efforts to "whiten" its population—Argentina. Indeed, Anderson argues that the prevailing belief among scholars and the general public is that the anti-black racism that has come to characterize U.S. race relations does not exist in Latin America and the Caribbean. Furthermore, it is believed that ideologies about blackness are exclusively imported from outside the region. These ideas, combined with the mythology that Argentina does not have its own native black population, have created the presumption among Argentines that anti-black racism does not exist in their country. Anderson, however, shows that Argentina has a long history of discrimination towards several ethnic and racial minorities: Afro-Argentines in particular have been favored targets of many prejudiced policies and practices. Accompanying this violence are many hidden histories of resistance that are slowly being recovered, as well as a visible mobilization around black identities. These struggles for visibility against the backdrop of anti-black racism have led to coalition building among some members of black communities, and have especially strengthened a sense of black identity among foreigners. But this has not been a unified effort; many have chosen instead to retreat from public spaces rather than confront the trauma of discrimination. Recent immigration from Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean has led to the heightening of multiple black identities in Argentina. The popular vision of U.S. racial politics there is one in which blacks are extremely subordinated. However, blacks residing in Argentina recognize that they too have a racialized inferior status in the nation. This occurs to the extent that dominant society dismisses racism as an invention of the imagination of black people rather than a lived reality. The everyday experiences of black residents in Argentina serve as examples of the variety of ways that anti-black racism persists even in so called "racial democracies."

The final chapter in the section, as well as of this book, is written by sociologist Mamyrah Douqé-Prosper and entitled "Pluralizing Race." Douqé-Prosper focuses on a case study of Miami, Florida, to demonstrate how Haitians in the United States have developed their racial identity according to their social and economic positioning in the homeland and the host country. By analyzing the discourse and practice of the civic organization Take Back the Land, she shows how the racial identification process of Haitians is mitigated by factors such as color of skin, class, gender, and immigration status. The author discusses the importance of situating knowledge, of ensuring reflexivity in academic research, of problematizing representation in activist work, of pluralizing race, and of applying an intersectional understanding to the study of oppression.

Finally, in the conclusion, the editors seek to bring the findings presented in the different chapters together and present some of the combining and overarching themes—and learnings—that can be drawn from the individual chapters.

NOTES

1. In fairness, we should add that Sen has recently sought to address this shortcoming in another book on the subject, namely, The Idea of Justice (Belknap Press, 2009).
2. Hans Rosling said this in his talk "Debunking Third-World Myths with the Best Data You've Ever Seen," available online at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JU6vSjrAdLc.
3. The case of the Japanese Burakumin is interesting in this regard: although ethnically the same as dominant Japanese, they perform consistently worse in standardized tests and assessments of intelligence; see, for example, Neisser 1986, 29.

REFERENCES

Introduction


PART 1

The Black Atlantic Reexamined