Recent Approaches in English to Brazilian Racial Ideologies: Ambiguity, Research Methods, and Semiotic Ideologies. *A Review Essay*

JOHN F. COLLINS

Queens College and the CUNY Graduate Center

Race in another America: The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil, by Edward Telles (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 324 pp.

Laughter Out of Place: Race, Class, Violence, and Sexuality in a Rio Shanty-town, by Donna Goldstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 379 pp.

Dreaming Equality: Color, Race, and Racism in Urban Brazil, by Robin Sheriff (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 264 pp.

Blackness without Ethnicity: Constructing Race in Brazil, by Livio Sansone (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 248 pp.

Social scientists usually agree that it is difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of the United States without invoking race. The same is often assumed of the Americas' second most populous nation, Brazil, albeit for different reasons. Throughout much of the twentieth century, debates about Brazil's apparent racial exceptionalism turned on claims about an ostensibly ambiguous black-white color line and assertions that its racial ideologies are somehow more mutable, more multifaceted, and hence less riven by descent-based and legally-sanctioned distinctions than North American variants. In fact, the twentieth-century construction of the Brazilian nation has drawn in critical ways on such idealized, often contradictory, engagements with racial mixtures that supposedly gird a hybrid brownness known as "racial democracy."

This seductive yet problematic story of a nation made modern through miscegenation has been popularized by a number of influential thinkers, most notably Gilberto Freyre, a Franz Boas-trained public intellectual and scion of a planter family. Freyre, as part of an elite response to European and North American denigrations of Brazil's mixed-race populace, argued famously in his

997

1933 book, *Masters and the Slaves*, that Brazil would develop free of prejudice due to its origins in the imagined intimacy of the plantation. This thesis is based in part on the claim that Muslim occupation of the Iberian Peninsula predisposed Brazil's planters to engage in, and recognize the offspring of, liaisons with non-white and enslaved women. Despite vociferous contestation by Brazil's Black Movement (MNU) and important sectors of the state and academic community today, this gendered and troublingly effective celebration of the allegedly redemptive effects of mixture is much more than an elite formulation. The idea of a predisposition to harmonious fusion remains salient in the lives of millions of Brazilians of every class and phenotype. At the same time, there is a growing sense in Brazil today that racial discrimination exists yet often goes unrecognized. This state of affairs is often attributed to naturalized filters co-constructed by elites, state institutions, and working class citizens. Given this unsettled moment characterized by, on one hand, analysts and activists who consider Brazil a racially divided nation made misleadingly whole by ideologies of shared brownness and, on the other, those who continue to celebrate racial mutability and the lack of clear ethnic boundaries, it is essential to explore ideas about ambiguity.

The books reviewed here deepen and trouble the assertion that certain ideological formations may obscure, or even render impossible, a recognition of discrimination and hence an ability to unite along racial lines. They do so in relation to notions of ambiguity. Nonetheless, the authors' treatments of categorical uncertainties are different from those developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s by researchers who sought to undermine what they concluded were false assertions about the lack of a clear color line. Instead, the authors are united in their interest in both the pernicious effects and the seductive enticements of racial democracy, an influential formation that "pulses at the center of Brazil and its unique history" (Sheriff 2001: 220). How it pulses, with what effects, and when or if it will be overshadowed, are areas of substantial concern today.

RECENT NORTH AMERICAN TREATMENTS OF AMBIGUITIES AND IDEOLOGIES IN BRAZIL

In *Race in another America*, sociologist and former director of the Ford Foundation's Rio de Janeiro office, Edward Telles, sets out to explain how it is that, in spite of Brazil's apparently mutable and competing classificatory systems, social mobility and well-being are strongly affected by color. His regionally specific statistical analyses of the relationships between race and capitalism, intermarriage, residential segregation, and "the [ostensibly] nondiscriminatory mechanism of class" (2004: 139) present valuable evidence on belonging and exclusion. He complements this examination with historical and policy analysis. The result is a readable and detailed overview of modern Brazilian attempts to come to terms with racial thought. Telles describes "'vertical relations'

... [that] capture the dimension of economic exclusion" alongside "the more neutral concept of 'horizontal race relations' to refer to miscegenation, or more precisely, levels of sociability, which can then be used to analyze cross-national differences" (2005: 12). This separation of structures from social bonds and affective life reveals much about how racial ideologies allow for, and may even stimulate, discrimination. It permits an exploration of whether "the extent and nature of discrimination at each of these levels ... may have separate logics" even as one "cannot ... assume that discrimination at one level implies equal discrimination at all levels" (ibid.). Since each axis derives in part from a previous juncture in Brazilian racial politics, Telles has transformed chapters on earlier moments in race relations into a historicized heuristic. He does so without separating elite, nation-based ideology from a subaltern racial consciousness. Nor does he code popular approaches as more vital and truthful than their erudite counterpart.

Telles' schema accounts for regional differences and anthropologists' and sociologists' often divergent conclusions. He looks first at mid-twentieth-century ethnographic work undertaken mostly in more African-influenced and rural areas of the northeast. Such studies emphasized fluidity, intermarriage, shared residence, and, hence, ambiguity. Yet via the vertical axis Telles also incorporates the next wave of more contentiously economic investigations. Here researchers demonstrated, often quantitatively, that one's race might lead to substantial life hindrances. This ability to take into account previous scholarship alongside new data demonstrates much about the coexistence of inclusive and exclusionary ideologies. It also shows how methodological orientations may alter conclusions. Axes used to illustrate how people live alongside or marry one another, even as darker skinned individuals are excluded from employment and education, also imply that ambiguities of domination arise because of the intersections of separable planes of social life. Yet by bifurcating the social and the political/economic in explaining ambiguities, Telles runs the risk of suggesting that discrimination is an isolable form of marginalization that crosscuts ideologies of belonging. As a result, it may appear that exclusion and inclusion meet only at specific points.

Telles is too sophisticated to reify the vertical and the horizontal. He continually recognizes their imbrication, asserting for instance that racial hierarchy within interracial marriages, "often endures. Although explicit racism is submerged in such relations, it is able to raise its ugly head at any time" (2004: 231). But how does racism reappear in such affective relationships? How useful are axes for mapping this? Does it really do so "at any time," or are emergences patterned? Is discrimination's re-emergence a function of disappointments in a workplace conceived of as separate from family, and thus placed along a vertical axis, or is it a result of more complex contradictions expressed in the intimacy of (horizontally-classified) marriage, one of the world's oldest economic institutions?

Telles' model might gain even more power through a consideration of "vertical" and "horizontal" as qualitatively distinct yet continually overlapping (rather than crossing) realms. Such a perspective, for which a vocabulary may not yet exist, requires a greater recognition of interweaving, rather than intersection. It begs the question of whether insights that arise from this approach may be preserved in a more interlaced perspective that nonetheless avoids reproducing "vague notions that are therefore of limited analytical value" (2004: 12). Telles largely discounts the importance of ethnography in favor of allegedly more "secure" empirical and hence statistical, methods. It would be helpful to see all the authors discussed here work to combine, or at least consider the effects of, statistical, historical, and ethnographic methods in ways that strengthen each perspective. This might do more justice than Telles' axes, since by categorically separating realms that overlap in multiple ways Telles has both clarified and simplified. Such elucidations are productive, but they also flatten the extent to which human struggle tends to alter its own contexts.

Donna Goldstein examines the ambiguities of oppression by looking at the double-edged struggles and choices of working class women in a neighborhood typically referred to as a *favela* (a "shantytown" or "squatter settlement") by middle class Brazilians. *Laughter Out of Place* is, however, less an analytic consideration of race per se than a sensitive community study that casts famil- ial, neighborhood, regional, and national politics against backdrops of race, gender, and class. One reason Goldstein's monograph is so valuable to under- standing racism is that it focuses on the lives of women who survive through domestic service. It is a book about wage labor and intimacy across race and class divides, across cityscapes and community ideologies, all of which are critical aspects of Brazil's enduring myth of racial democracy. *Laughter Out of Place* takes up the challenge of understanding the sharp divisions and soft alliances that create the ambiguities Telles works so hard to separate into hori- zontal and vertical dimensions.

Humor, "an indirect dialogue, sometimes critical, often ambivalent, always (at least partially) hidden" (2004: 2), and sexuality are critical to "power relations and how they are experienced by the poor" (2004: 5). They crosscut and reveal affinities among women excluded from public dialogues and "almost wholly devoted to surviving" (2004: 15). Goldstein concentrates on "laughter out of place," introduced around divergences in taste between the bourgeoisie and their non-white servants who, employers argue, laugh at inap- propriate moments while viewing the same soap operas. Rather than presenting this as a collision of worldviews, Goldstein explores how a common text may be interpreted in different ways by people who find themselves united in unequal intimacy. Such divergences around shared signs may both empower and disempower those for whom "inappropriate" behavior becomes a source of solidarity, a means of surviving racism, sexism, and poverty, and thus a

source of shifting yet enduring boundaries between black and white, middle class and miserable, *favela* and *asfalto*.

In her discussion of "color-blind erotic democracies," Goldstein examines how working class women seek to feed their families and improve their life chances through sexual relationships with older, middle class, and generally lighter-skinned men known as *coroa*s. Goldstein does not argue that this strategy is somehow rational. Rather, by focusing on desire, she analyzes how poor women valorize themselves through their ability to attract and symbolically dominate wealthier men who provide these women with food and money for their families.

The ties that bind *coroa*s and women from poor neighborhoods reveal much about racism and its denial in Brazil. They provide "gendered evidence of the reasoning behind Afro-Brazilian women's reluctance to interpret … interactions as racist. Interpretations of racism within these contexts would necessarily preclude … seduction, and … that would endanger … mobility" (2004: 124). This is an important point. If one emphasizes economic benefit, rather than the workings of desire, in *coroa*/working class relations, it would appear that the affective relationships Telles classifies as "horizontal" play a role in public, "vertical" relations for people for whom racialized exclusions are sharpest. This entanglement of the economic and sentimental is consistent with Goldstein's interrogation of "colorblind erotic democracy," in which relationships that are both intimate and exploitative structure behavior. In fact, women "fantasize and tease one another about seducing … *coroa*s … they racialize their own bodies, approximating … images of the hot, sexual mulata that form … racial democracy. Sexual discourses … are … appropriated and reproduced by the women" (2004: 133). Whereas Telles incorporates earlier works by arraying them on intersecting axes, Goldstein addresses these studies' confusion of lived and descriptive categories by revealing how women's practices, and how they conceptualize these practices, rehearse nationalist thought in ways that reproduce subjugation while making survival, and even enjoyment, possible.

The book's final, and most dizzyingly "out of place," chapter is also its most powerful. "What's so Funny about Rape," is difficult to interpret in terms of contemporary theory. Without giving away too much about one of ethnography's most disquieting moments, suffice it to say that Goldstein recounts the travails of two sisters who situate their own sexual assault within a humorous reconstruction of events that draws on patriarchal logics similar to those against which Goldstein writes. The event as recalled is not presented as false consciousness. Rather, the sisters share laughter, perhaps ruefully, about a violence that freed them, paradoxically and only for a time, from ideas of feminine honor partially reproduced by women themselves. Located at the end of a book about how love, desire, social mobility, and arguments for equality may draw on shared narratives that generate exclusion, this chapter demonstrates how

"women are not merely passive victims of the structures and discourses of domination . . .. While they do enact and reproduce these structures . . . these women also . . . often strenuously and creatively resist them" (2004: 273).

Even as Goldstein considers idioms that promise relief but reinscribe oppression, her ethnography, like Telles' sociology, opens up significant aporia. Near the close of *Laughter out of Place*, Goldstein asks, "What is to be done?" (2004: 273). Unlike Telles, who offers policy suggestions, Goldstein concludes with a faith in the still-unrealized prospects of the left-leaning presidency of Luis Ignácio da Silva ("Lula"). Both authors anchor race in a discussion of political and economic shifts. Yet the abstractions basic to Telles' approach are more conducive to the invention of ameliorative programs. Goldstein's refusal to simplify, by contrast, pushes the reader to imagine a world beyond existing schema. And this promise of new conceptual modalities, though difficult to realize, may encourage struggle where initial glances reveal little hope.

Visions of justice are also basic to Robin Sheriff's *Dreaming Equality*, researched in Rio at about the same time as *Laughter out of Place*. Yet these visions are not entirely redemptive. Sheriff is concerned with the overlapping effects of domination and resistance in "Morro do Sangue Bom." This moniker, translated as "Hill of the Good Blood," is metonymic of her argument about race. In referencing "good blood," Sheriff employs Rio slang for someone trustworthy, known, and of one's community. This imagery of good and bad blood brings up a pressing issue related to the color line.

Unlike anthropologists from the UNESCO (Fernandes 1965; Harris 1956; 1964; Wagley 1952) and post-UNESCO generations (Harris and Kottak 1963; Kottak 1992; Sanjek 1971), Sheriff argues that racial categories are substantially bipolar, or divided between black and white. She represents these as much more like North American variants, claiming that people in Morro do Sangue Bom, while not demonstrating a strong theory of descent as a source of identity, do posit a continuity of blackness around experience. Her argument is based on connections that speak to shared being. According to Sheriff, birth into a class of people understood as black due to discrimination produces a naturalized belonging comparable to, but not the same as, North American treatments of genetic affiliation. At the center of this claim is an analysis of "ambiguity" that both recalls and departs from arguments made by Telles and Goldstein.

Sheriff's treatment of ambiguity is influenced by linguistic approaches that undermine a positivist reliance on the transparency and fixity of taxonomies: "To assume . . . that [color] . . . terms function simply as static categories in a system of 'racial classification' . . . is to miss not only the many other linguistic functions that these terms serve but also the ways in which people . . . construct their own sense of identity" (2000: 30). She argues that there are three contexts or forms through which racial categories become real. These are not idioms that "belong" to particular groups. They are registers created as Brazilians traverse

the borders of personhood, politics, and belonging. The first, or the "*discourse on race*," is elusive and the source of Sheriff's unconventional argument that, "people in the Morro do Sangue Bom . . . conceptualize racial being as . . . bipolar" (2000: 30). Yet these normally repressed arenas contrast with a second, "*descriptive discourse*" in "which what is . . . described is not . . . race but rather a necessarily imprecise perception of *cor*, or color." (2000: 34). Sheriff's third conceptualization is based on a "euphemistic, etiquette-driven manner of speaking" or "*pragmatic discourse*" (2000: 31). Here people do not employ words to refer to a stable object. Instead, they manipulate "language itself rather than . . . membership in a taxonomical category" (2000: 34). Language for language's or politeness' sake, as opposed to language as a referential medium, thus entails a playful masking of opinions about selves.

Sheriff concerns herself with forms that are apparent, on or near the surface of social life, and those hidden in the depths of collective consciousness. Only at certain moments of stress, rupture, and, less frequently, of intense solidarity, do people speak about the bipolar racial system which exists "below" the ideal of cordial relations. This approach to the pragmatics of speaking leads to a fascinating explanation of ambiguities surrounding categorization. For Sheriff, the fluidity supposedly basic to racial calculations is not due to the absence of logics, clear separations between groups, or conceptions of solidarity. Rather, it is a function of politeness, of a hesitancy to fix particular people as representatives of a group. The ongoing modification of racial categories within social conventions tied to the rhetorical production of truth means that groupings take on different valences according to the register with which they are associated. Ambiguities are not inherent to categories and hence evidence of a lack of racial thinking. They are empirical demonstrations of the pragmatic, sometimes confusing use of race and language so as to avoid impropriety. People are conscious of this veiling of ontological status and shared taxonomies even if they are not always free to comment on its effects—when "someone calls Susana *morena* [brown], she inevitably hears the echo of *preta* [black woman] ringing silently but somehow palpably" (2000: 53–54).

Sheriff's model relies on the assumption that the ethnographer may uncover that which others miss or leave unvoiced. There is a certain hubris in this road to submerged identity categories that conform so closely to the black/white distinctions in earnings and schooling documented statistically by Telles. Sheriff's conclusions are based on rich ethnography. They say much about how people employ ambiguity as they face an ideological field that both oppresses and empowers. Yet however compelling and appropriate Sheriff's methods might be, her argument that Afro-descendent residents of Rio, or *cariocas*, demonstrate a bipolar racial consciousness is stronger than claims made in previous research. Insofar as she is updating fieldwork conducted twenty to forty years earlier, oftentimes in quite different regions, Sheriff's argument would benefit from a more nuanced recognition of regional and historical variability. In fact, as

Telles makes clear, younger, wealthier, and better educated Brazilians are more likely than previous generations to self-identify as black. In other words, racial categories exist in motion, varying in time and space, both within and beyond Morro do Sangue Bom and the nearby middle class areas of Rio that are the focus of Sheriff's analysis.

A more nuanced engagement with historical processes might also alter Sheriff's assertion that MNU activists exert little influence on the Morro. Although residents may not be familiar with MNU policies, and are perhaps more preoccupied with economic survival, Sheriff's fieldwork hints at connections between MNU messages and the identities she poses as relatively enduring "internalized paradigms" that need not "proceed from an exposure to coherent public discourse" (2000: 116). While MNU rhetoric is not dominant today, there are moments when these messages seem to have been picked up, if only partially, by "people in Morro do Sangue Bom [who] insist that 'if you don't pass for white, you are black'" (2000: 10). This phrasing, quoted in quite similar ways elsewhere in the book, recalls a 1990 government campaign, supported by the Ford Foundation and the MNU, to encourage Afro-descendents to mark the "black" census box and not let their race "pass for white" or "go blank" (*passar em branco*) (Nobles 2000). This observation should not be interpreted as a critique of Sheriff's skillful ethnography. Rather, it is a warning about the importance of situating conclusions in the flow of history. Powerful counter-discourses of the type that Sheriff suggests exist silently in Morro do Sangue Bom might be approached as historically variable structures, not enduring yet normally latent ones. The comparisons that would help us understand how they function must also be historicized.

Yet Sheriff does historicize silence, and her analysis proves the need for more research on the performative and racialized production of pasts, presents, and futures. Sheriff engages history as a forward-looking process, and this generates insights: "In Morro do Sangue Bom, insistent claims to inherent equality refer to universal human values, but they are articulated from within a distinctly Brazilian idiom" (2000: 220). This hopeful reading of racial democracy as more than a false ideology is a fantasy of equality seized from the nation-state by impoverished *carioca*s and underscored by Sheriff's skillful ethnography. It is an argument about the way the world should be, but is not. Hence, celebration of hybridity and silence about polarized racial categories may be more than an absence and a presence. Rather, the two coexist, each very differently, as interpretations of the workings of race in Brazil. Silence is a way of resisting racism. It is a reluctance to fix human essences, a practice of categorization that exists, but in the view of Sheriff's interlocutors, should not. Silence is not just an effect of racial democracy, but its correlate. This is a fresh insight. It should be developed further in the study of other locations and times. In fact, Sheriff's recognition of silence as a value related to working class treatments of identity and difference provides important openings for

research strategies that might answer questions raised by Livio Sansone's challenging book, *Blackness without Ethnicity*.

Sansone, an Italian anthropologist educated in Holland and Britain and living in Brazil, has produced a study quite different from those of his North American peers. It is a multi-sited ethnography based on long-term, politically involved research in Rio de Janeiro, Bahia, and Amsterdam. Sansone focuses less on interactions in particular sites or on the sociological data that so interest Telles. Instead, he favors a broad discussion informed by decades of ethnography and influential teaching in Brazil. He argues that ethnicity, which he seems to define as the sense of corporate unity that prevails among groups tied together by shared cultural traits and political programs, is lacking among black Brazilians: "Beside forgetting that blackness is a contingent rather than an inherent political factor . . . those who believe in a direct link between phenotype and ethnicity seem to imply that melanin itself carries the imperative of black political organization" (2003: 180).

Sansone's questioning of the exportation of ethno-racial sensibilities that may overshadow how ethnicity is actually lived draws on Butler (1998), Gilroy (2001), and Bourdieu and Wacquant (1999; cf. French 2000; Hanchard 2003). His Black Atlantic approach mitigates North American ideas within a frame woven from Rio, a site of Afro-Brazilian modernity; Salvador, a site of Afro-Brazilian tradition; and Amsterdam, a metropole in which attention to postcolonial migrants has not led to their empowerment. The discussion, and especially the comparison between Amsterdam and Salvador, is loaded with detail and brilliant deliberations on everyday practices. Yet it would gain much from a clearer exposition of where, beyond an escape from northern hegemony, this work leads.

Sansone never defines ethnicity precisely. He configures black youth in Rio, Salvador, and Amsterdam as special groups, or "subcultures" (2003: 11), that fit into the nation, and the Atlantic, in different ways. Sansone follows, ethnographically, as life is led (and collective consciousness is developed) in a Brazil where color is not the "be all and end all" of identity. His analyses of how Afro-Brazilians seek social mobility in the absence of the corporate structures available in the United States are quite convincing. A central question remains, however, given Sheriff's identification of bipolar conceptions of race, Goldstein's shared idioms, and Telles' axial analysis of fraternity and discrimination: Is there ethnicity in Brazil?

If Sheriff is correct about a normally unvoiced black solidarity, then it would seem that Sansone has overstated his case, at least in Rio. Yet Sansone supports his argument well. Many Afro-descendent Bahians do fail to self-identify as black or to conceptualize collective politics in ethno-racial terms. Sansone argues this is due to the influence of class-consciousness and national, as opposed to "minority," imaginaries. Yet even as this weak ethnicity thesis is supported, it engages in assumptions very much like those Sheriff challenges.

While other identifications—by neighborhood, class, or religion—may be more salient than blackness, social relations are also laced with significations akin to Sheriff's "silences" that make presences felt without objectifying those qualities. In fact, this tendency is an important mark of Brazilianness. While Sansone deserves applause for resisting North American understandings, one might argue also that such northern *ways* of being racialized should not serve as baselines. If people interpret being and the signs of a supposed onto-logical state in distinct ways, why not develop approaches to ethnicity that take into account the specificity of such perceptions? For this reason, it is important to understand better how Sansone approaches the relations he calls ethnicity.

Recent North American academic thought stresses that race is a metalan-guage that shows how "the question of explicitly racial social barriers takes second place to the broader means by which power relations are negotiated through racial values" (Davila 2000: 189; Higginbotham 1992). Seemingly in relation to similar rethinkings of ethnicity, both Sheriff and Goldstein focus on how discourses that appear to be separate from race are often in fact about race. This approach, which may or may not demonstrate a North American conjuring of race where it does not exist, derives its convincing power from what Goldstein calls the "euphemization of power relations" (2003: 89), a form of dissimulation that Sansone treats as "racial cordiality" (2003: 45). Such cordiality underscores the importance of Sheriff's concen-tration on non-referential communication. Taken in conjunction with Sansone's multisited ethnography, this recognition of the power of dissimulating the prac-tice of taxonomization, even as one racializes the world, begins to make clearer some of the ambiguities of racial politics.

It appears, given the data on racial identification and discrimination mustered by Telles, the hints of an enduring and quite separate black consciousness in Morro do Sangue Bom, and the extent to which dark women from Felicidade Eterna insert themselves into contemporary structures of feeling akin to Freyre's mythic origins of racial democracy, that there exist highly developed senses of ethnic and racial boundaries in Brazil today. Nonetheless, Sansone is correct in arguing that there are few instances of public, bipolar corporate identi-fication. He also emphasizes, admirably, how racialization may change according to age, education, and one's movement through the city. Yet it is not entirely clear how, or whether, this results in decreased solidarity, ethnicity, political commit-ment, or recognition of racism. What is apparent is that there has been a rise in Afro-Brazilian organization in recent decades. It would also appear that the move in studies of Brazil to demonstrate that race relations are in fact not fluid (and hence much closer to those in the United States than claimed previously) has lost some momentum. In other words, researchers now seek to examine racism not simply by fixing categories formerly celebrated by researchers and laypeople alike as fluid. Instead, they have begun to demonstrate how race may be a powerful force even if only intermittently apparent.

Is Brazil, then, really characterized by *Blackness without Ethnicity*? The answer depends on how one defines ethnicity, and race, as well as Brazil and nations in general (Hanchard 2003; Matory 2005). Again, a number of North Americans and Brazilians have sought to impose definitions akin to the northern variant, and there has been substantial slippage between concepts of ethnicity and race. Still others have argued against the imposition of North American ideologies even as they imagine this to be possible without doing away with an Afro-Brazilian racial solidarity that recalls Sansone's amorphously defined "ethnicity" (Bairros 1996; Ferreira da Silva 1998; Gomes da Cunha 1998). This group may even include Sansone, at least partially, who writes, "using the United States as a model . . . is not necessarily the best way to . . . [conduct] comparative studies of race relations. Yet to problematize . . . is not to propose a move back to . . . Gilberto Freyre" (2003: 187).

CONCLUSIONS

Given the shape taken by modern Brazil, how might one develop new approaches to racial challenges without mimicking Gilberto Freyre? The studies just discussed provide openings. All explore race's labile qualities. They work within a relativistic social science that is cautious about peeling back ideology from a substrate of truth. Most of all, they recognize the extent to which critique rarely escapes contamination. As I have emphasized, the painstaking analysis of signification's distinct semiotic footings attempted by Sheriff does much to situate race within debates about the production of truth in the social world.

It is race's relation to truth—in fact, some analysts have argued that chameleon-like racial idioms are fundamentally productive of truths (Stoler 1997)—that may provide new analytic paths. Despite, or perhaps in anticipation of Sansone's complication of ethnicity, Brazil's most dearly held and affectively inscribed truths have revolved around race, or its negation, for at least a century. These relations, so essential to producing illusions of clarity and masks of ambiguity, have drawn on various types of evidence. Hygiene, urban space, kinship, sexual proclivities, and childcare have all been mustered as contexts in which a group's character and "proper" role in society can be linked to its "essential" human characteristics and interior qualities. By contexts, I mean arenas that are deemed worthy of regulation by social institutions and that constitute universes in and from which interpretations of human characteristics are formulated. Such scrutiny tends to alter its own contexts over time. In the process, observations may become authoritative means of producing sanctioned declarations about how individuals and groups are configured as natural entities in circumscribed worlds.

From such a perspective the importance of Sheriff's method should become more apparent. By examining competing semiotic or linguistic ideologies within which claims about the relationship between visible signs and invisible

referents are developed, a researcher may begin to reveal the operations that, for example, make ontologies appear variably fixed or fluid. In broad strokes, this would correspond to the commonsensical difference between supposedly bipolar North American racial values and ostensibly fluid Brazilian practices. Thus, how one appears to observers who evaluate surface signs has done much to define one's racialization in Brazil as well as the United States.

Once it becomes clearer that the ties that bind signs to their objects—in this case the supposedly obvious phenotypical characteristics that Sansone argues do not necessarily connect people to referents like "ethnicity"—are not always arbitrary, but can become fixed through the actions of people and institutions, then this process may be understood as an essential part of perceptions of race. By tracking how collectivities and institutions influence such operations, one might understand too how racial practices shift and gain a foothold, as Sansone might claim, or a powerful role, as Sheriff, Goldstein, or Telles argue, in making the world comprehensible. In this light, the distinctions between the projects discussed here might be treated as different yet contiguous spaces on a continuum. Such a scale would not be organized so much upon race as upon the way evidentiary paradigms and theories of signification allow for apperception of the world. Race is one shortcut into this process of linking evidence and drawing conclusions within an ideological field. This analytical space might be called "everyday life" at certain levels and "theory" at others. Like simplifications that make the world more understandable even as they elide its dissonance, race is convincing, useful, and truth-producing. Yet such truths are not final truths.

Variable and often competing schema do much to structure the perceptual and analytical shortcuts dubbed race or ethnicity today. The books discussed in this essay push for a consideration of ambiguities about race and ethnicity as lived categories around the exploration of the bonds between apparently separate practices or spheres of social life. From such a perspective, examination of the specific nature of the relations between signs and their objects may do much to explain what racial practices accomplish, and hence what they are. This approach involves moving away from attempts to fix the meanings of race and ethnicity and toward a recognition of the importance of the semiotic arrangements that gird them and the practices that piggyback on them.

Such a project involves a greater engagement with history, signification, and the production of context. This conclusion may seem overly abstract and far removed from the struggles of neighborhoods like "Felicidade Eterna." But how is it that happiness might be understood as extending into an implicitly eternal future? Why does happiness in Goldstein's title, like "whitening" in Brazilian nationalist thought, make sense to North American readers and publishers as registering a relationship to such futures? Why does blackness in many instances point to the nation and to pasts that have made that collectivity

distinctively Brazilian? The answers, even if they seem to lie on the tip of one's tongue or, conversely, appear completely unavailable at this moment, may lie in the mechanisms through which evidence and conclusions based on that evidence are aligned. We now know that cordiality has much to do with this attunement. But what else besides politeness motivates the irruption and interpretation of racial meanings in Brazil, and elsewhere, today?

REFERENCES

Bairros, Luiza. 1996. Orfeu e Poder: Uma Perspectiva Afro-Americana Sobre a Política Racial No Brasil. *Afro-Ásia* 17: 173–86.

Bourdieu, Pierre and Loïc Wacquant. 1999. On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason. *Theory, Culture and Society* 16, 1: 41–58.

Butler, Kim. 1998. *Freedoms Given, Freedoms Won: Afro-Brazilians in Post-Abolition Salvador and São Paulo*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Davila, Jerry. 2000. Expanding Perspectives on Race in Brazil. *Latin American Research Review* 35, 3: 188–98.

Fernandes, Florestan. 1965. *A integração do negro na sociedade de classes*. São Paulo: Dominus.

Ferreira da Silva, Denise. 1998. Facts of Blackness: Brazil is Not (Quite) the United States . . . and Racial Politics in Brazil? *Social Identities* 4, 2: 201–34

French, John D. 2000. The Missteps of Anti-Imperial Reason. *Theory, Culture and Society* 17, 1: 107–28.

Gilroy, Paul. 2001. *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Gomes da Cunha, Olivia. 1998. Black Movements and Identity Politics in Brazil. In, Sonia Alvarez, Evelyn Danigno, and Arturo Escobar, eds., *Politics of Culture/Culture of Politics*. Boulder, Westview Press, 220–251.

Hanchard, Michael. 2003. Acts of Misrecognition: Transnational Black Politics, Anti-Imperialism and the Ethnocentrism of Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant. *Theory, Culture and Society* 20, 4: 5–29.

Harris, Marvin. 1956. *Town and Country in Brazil*. New York: Columbia University Press.
———. 1964. *Patterns of Race in the Americas*. New York: Walker.

Harris, Marvin and Conrad Kottak. 1963. The Structural Significance of Brazilian Racial Categories. *Sociologia* 25: 203–9.

Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. 1992. African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race. *Signs* 17, 2: 251–74.

Kottak, Conrad. 1992. Emics and Etics of Racial Classification in Brazil: Based on a Recent National Survey. Paper Presented at American Anthropological Association 91st Annual Meeting, San Francisco, 4 Dec.

Matory, J. Lorand. 2005. *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Nobles, Melissa. 2000. *Shades of Citizenship: Race and the Census in Modern Politics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Sanjek, Roger. 1971. Brazilian Racial Terms: Some Aspects of Meaning and Learning. *American Anthropologist* 73, 5: 1126–43.

Stoler, Ann. 1997. Histories of Racisms and Their Regimes of Truth. *Political Power and Social Theory* 11: 183–255.

Wagley, Charles. 1952. Introduction. In, Charles Wagley, ed., *Race and Class in Rural Brazil*. Paris: UNESCO.