DILUTING THE “AFRICAN” NATION: EUROPEAN IMMIGRATION, WHITENING, AND THE CRISIS OF SLAVE EMANCIPATION

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The abolition of slavery presented the Brazilian nation with two mammoth social and economic problems: the entry of six million free blacks into society and the loss of slave labor for the plantations. National anxieties were compounded by the realization that centuries of slavery and miscegenation had now resulted in a black demographic majority. This article examines the literature proliferated by politicians and racial scientists in 19th and early 20th century Brazil that promoted the strategic dilution and eventual erasure of the Afro-Brazilians through European immigration and whitening. The Brazilian government found its justification for the whitening program in the theories of racial scientists who claimed to have scientific evidence of the inferiority of blacks. The article demonstrates how blackness and Afro-Brazilians in pre and post abolition Brazil became antithetical to modernity, national progress, and the ultimate goal to turn Brazil into a white nation.

Key Words: Brazil, Slavery, Abolition, Whitening, European Immigration

By 1880 the Brazilian white elite and slaveholders were faced with two imminent repercussions of the abolition of slavery that threatened to derail every aspect of the society and the economy: the six million free blacks about to be unleashed on society and the loss of slave labor for the plantations. Bolstered by the authority of racist science, they devised an ingenious solution that was to solve both problems simultaneously: the importation of millions of white Europeans to work on the plantations and interbreed with black women. The ultimate outcome was to be the creation of a new white Brazil cleansed of its black blood and of all memory of slavery, so that Brazil could take its place honorably among other white nations. As with the social whitening of free blacks and mulattos, blacks were again induced to become complicit in a diabolical plan to eradicate the black race from Brazil, and as throughout Brazilian
history, sex was at the center of their erasure in the guise of intimacy. The belief that it could be possible to do away with six million blacks and mulattos, such that no trace would remain of them, illustrates that white Brazilians were still in denial of the black nation they had wrought and were grasping at any means of holding onto their precarious social and economic privilege, which had been entirely dependent on slavery.

The Stain on the Homeland

“Everyone is ugly here, unbelievably ugly, like apes,” (Gaulmier 127) exclaimed French diplomat Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, sent to Brazil by Napoleon, upon arriving in Rio de Janeiro during the carnival celebrations of 1869. “The Brazilians are nothing more than the lowest kind of mulattos: a wholly half-caste population, of vitiated descent, vitiated intelligence, and fearfully ugly . . . Not a single Brazilian is of pure blood because the pattern of marriages among whites, Indians, and blacks is so widespread that the nuances of color are infinite, causing a degeneration of the most wretched kind among the lower as well as the upper classes . . . The result is deformed physiognomies which, if they are not always repugnant, are always unpleasant to look upon” (Raeders 90).

Ambassador Gobineau resided in Rio de Janeiro from April 1869 to May 1870 as head of the French diplomatic mission. He became known as one of Brazil’s most critical observers. He found the country insufferable. He thought Brazil was a backwater, hated Rio’s tropical climate, but more than anything, loathed the Brazilian people. He was particularly disgusted by the widespread miscegenation among them. He found a ready audience for his views among Brazilians who attributed the country’s underdevelopment and its tardiness in reaching modernization to its black population. Physician and biomedical scientist João Batista de Lacerda reported, “A importação, em uma vasta escala, da raça negra ao Brasil, exerceu uma influência nefasta sobre o progresso deste pais; ela retardou por muito tempo seu desenvolvimento material, e tornou difícil o emprego de suas imensas riquezas naturais. O caráter da população ressentiu-se dos defeitos e os vícios da raça inferior importada” (Lacerda 29-30).
For this many of Brazil’s politicians, writers, and intellectuals blamed the Portuguese colonizers. Whites were infuriated at Portugal for the mass importation of Africans over centuries that now left them surrounded by an overwhelming black population—a “black stain” that they needed to somehow wipe out. “No princípio da nossa colonização”, wrote Joaquim Nabuco, “Portugal descarregava no nosso território os seus criminosos, as suas mulheres erradas, as suas fezes sociais todas . . . O Brasil se apresentava então como até ontem o Congo” (Abolicionismo 170). Once again whites saw themselves as the victims of slavery and of blacks, who had corrupted their morality, language, food, and race. Nabuco continued,

Pretende um dos mais eminentes espíritos de Portugal que “a escravidão dos negros foi o duro preço da colonização da América, porque, sem ela, o Brasil não se teria tornado no que vemos”. Isso é exato, “sem ela o Brasil não se teria tornado no que vemos”; mas esse preço quem o pagou, e está pagando, não foi Portugal, fomos nós; e esse preço a todos os respeitos é duro demais, e caro demais, para o desenvolvimento inorgânico, artificial, e extenuante que tivemos. A africanização do Brasil pela escravidão é uma nódoa que a mãe pátria imprimiu na sua própria face, na sua língua, e na sua única obra nacional verdadeiramente duradoura que conseguiu fundar. (Abolicionismo 171-172)

By the late nineteenth century Afro-Brazilians (including those of mixed race) outnumbered whites by 6.7 million to 5.5 million (Skidmore 44-45). Brazil was facing the possibility of being labeled a black nation. This greatly troubled the Brazilian elite and abolitionists, adding urgency to the campaign for slave emancipation.

But how could this sudden enormous population of free blacks be integrated into Brazilian society? Slaveholders who opposed abolition pointed out that slaves were not sufficiently educated to become respectable citizens and had not learned the responsibilities of freedom. According to abolitionist Luiz Anselmo da Fonseca, “O escravo é um pouco mais do que o bruto e um pouco menos do que a criança” (590). The harmful habits that they had learned under slavery could not be easily reformed and would jeopardize the nation. With abolition whites believed that they would need to implement new laws requiring ex-slaves to work and remain at their jobs and punishing those who did not comply. Along with these laws,
Brazil would need to increase its police forces to guarantee the safety of former slaveholders and their property. Without these measures blacks would likely flee and cause anarchy. Alternatively, some believed that liberated blacks who did not work should be shipped back to Africa (Carvalho 130-134). Blacks were described frequently in the parliament speeches as a “social cancer” that needed to be wiped out. Slavery had left the population ridden with deficiencies such as indolence and immorality. Drastic measures needed to be taken to control blacks after slavery, stop their population growth, and ultimately dissolve or absorb them. The enormity of this task was decried by doctor and novelist Afrânio Peixoto who wrote in 1916, “It will take us perhaps three hundred years to change spiritually and to bleach our skin so that we become, if not white, at least disguised and lose our mestizo character . . . How many centuries will it take to cleanse this human impurity? Will we have enough albumin to refine all this trash? . . . God help us—if he is a Brazilian” (Skidmore 196).

The Rise of Scientific Racism

As the abolitionist debates intensified and the black population increased, so-called scientific theories about the inferiority of blacks and their potential for degrading the white race through miscegenation added to Brazil’s anxieties about its future. In 1855, before arriving in Brazil, Gobineau published his infamous book on the superiority of the Aryan race, Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines [Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races]. As a result of Brazil’s extensive miscegenation, Gobineau found that Brazilians were “lazy,” “indolent,” “ugly,” “degraded,” and “deformed.” He pronounced both blacks and those of mixed blood “primitively depraved,”(89) and believed that the country was fatally doomed due to racial mixing. He predicted that in less than two hundred years “degeneration” would “lead to the end of the descendants of Costa Cabral and the immigrants who followed him,” for the mixed blood would “produce offspring unable to survive” (241).

Gobineau was one of the primary proponents of the “scientific racism” that had begun to sweep Europe and the United States and was slowly creeping its way into Brazil. From the mid-nineteenth century and lasting well into the twentieth century, Brazil was inundated by the pseudoscientific racist ideas of European and U.S. thinkers like Henry Thomas Buckle, George
Gildon, Georges Vacher de Lapouge, Josiah Nott, Louis J. R. Agassiz, and Louis Couty, who established a hierarchy among the races and propounded their theory of the genetic, psychological, and cultural superiority of Europeans, the evils of miscegenation, and the inherent inferiority of mixed-race peoples, especially those of African descent.

Prior to Gobineau’s arrival, Swiss naturalist and geologist Louis Agassiz came to Brazil for a scientific expedition in 1865. His findings were equally disparaging: “Let any one who doubts the evil of this mixture of races and is inclined, from a mistaken philanthropy, to break down all barriers between them, come to Brazil. He cannot deny the deterioration ensuing from an amalgamation of races, more widespread here than in any other country in the world, and which is rapidly effacing the best qualities of the white man, the Negro, and the Indian, leaving a mongrel nondescript type, deficient in physical and mental energy” (Agassiz 293).

French biologist Louis Couty, a professor at the Polytechnic School in Rio de Janeiro, argued that Brazil’s blacks were biologically inferior and less intelligent than whites, as evidenced by the shape of their cranium and their longstanding difficulties in learning the ways of civilized people. His theories were widely espoused by slaveholders and abolitionists alike. Brazilian ideas of whiteness and racial superiority were also greatly influenced by German doctor Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, who in 1776 developed a hierarchy of the races based on cranial measurements. He concluded that Caucasians were the most racially superior, followed by Asians, blacks, and Amerindians. Scientific racism became the rationale behind Brazil’s grand scheme to whiten the country, just as white Brazilians had relied on the authority of scientists and medical doctors to initiate the social hygiene program to eradicate the diseases of blackness and homosexuality.

**Race and Labor in the New Brazil**

With the abolition of slavery looming internationally, Brazil began to debate the transition from slave labor to free labor. As slave labor was the primary driver of agricultural production, the end of slavery gave rise to concerns about a future shortage of laborers for agricultural work. A large labor force would be needed to sustain Brazil’s vast coffee, sugar, and
tobacco industries. Without a significant labor force to replace slave labor the Brazilian economy would be in peril, leading slaveholders to continue to resist abolition.

Could freed slaves keep working the plantations? Many plantation owners simply could not fathom the idea of the slave as a free worker. They argued that slaves only worked under the authority of the master and the crack of the whip, and could not be trusted as free persons. Peixoto de Brito, president of the state of Alagoas, warned of the danger of liberating blacks because they work as a “condition of enslavement rather than a universal human responsibility. With this negative attitude nurtured by the system, many slaves have equated freedom with the right to be idle” (Toplin 151).

In a series of articles published in November 1880, slave owner Luis Pereira Barreto argued against giving immediate freedom to blacks because it would be useless in their hands and would only increase their anger. He cautioned abolitionists against “dumping in the center of society a horde of semi-barbaric men, without direction, without a social goal, without savings, and what is more distressing yet, in an age that does not permit them to reconstruct their education” (Toplin 153). Likewise, the editors of the newspaper O Cruzeiro argued that when not forced to work, the black would turn to crime and vice “like a savage animal of the African deserts . . . The animal instinct in them is superior to reason” (Toplin 153). Slaveholders believed that liberating thousands of slaves would be harmful to society at large, but it would also do the slaves a great disservice as their lives as freemen would be worse than under slavery.

Convinced that free slaves would not be suitable for the nation’s workforce after their emancipation, and deeply anxious about being thought of as a nation of blacks and half-breeds, Brazilians began debating the moral, genotypical, and phenotypical characteristics of the ideal agricultural worker that the country would need after the end of slavery. Ten years before slavery ended, in 1878 an agricultural conference was held in Rio de Janeiro under the leadership of João Vieira Lins Cansanção de Sinimbú, then minister of agriculture, trade, and public works, to discuss rebuilding the agricultural economy with free labor. The conference gave rise to a forceful exchange of opinions about how to ensure the continuity of the plantations. Some of the attendees argued that former slaves could be used if work were made
obligatory to counteract their inherent laziness. A large faction maintained that that was impossible and that the new type of worker that Brazil needed was a foreigner.

Minister Sinimbú personally found the slaves “lacking the stimulus of having to maintain a civilized standard of living” and unwilling to “work hard and continuously.” He suggested importing semiservile Chinese coolie laborers to ease the transition from slavery to free labor (Dos Santos 64). This proposal led to a heated debate on the relative merits of each race. With Brazil’s “racial condition in mind,” a considerable number of delegates wished to import only Europeans on the premise that the European was superior not only to native Brazilians of either race, but also to any other non-European worker. Some insisted that full emancipation could not take place until sufficient numbers of European immigrants could be found to replace the slave workers. Though all of the planters’ principal objective was to maximize their profits, the nation’s racial composition was almost equally important. Sinimbú was not personally opposed to European immigration, but he cautioned the delegates that the intelligence and expertise of the European worker would not come cheaply. Besides, he warned, the Europeans would give up paid work at the earliest opportunity to set up their own business ventures (Dos Santos 64).

Sinimbú and many slaveholders favored Chinese laborers because they believed them to be passive, obedient, yet highly reliable and efficient workers who could be expected to work for very low wages, probably one-half those of European immigrants. They cited reports of the success of inexpensive Chinese labor in the United States, Cuba, and Peru, and argued that it could help maintain keen competition in the job market, forcing free blacks to settle for lower wages.

As the debates continued in the Senate, more and more racism and xenophobia came to the surface. The idea of allowing Chinese workers onto Brazilian soil incensed many abolitionists and those in favor of European immigration, for they argued that the Chinese would only make racial matters worse. “They are a degenerate race,” asserted Campos planter Manuel Rodrigues Peixoto. “To introduce them into Brazil would be like introducing the African slaves all over again” (Toplin 147). São Paulo planters were enraged, pointing out the indolent habits of the Chinese and the incapacitating effects of opium (Toplin 147). The possibility of the
Chinese mixing with Brazilians proved equally disconcerting. “One can imagine the physiognomic aspect, the configuration and conditions of the organs that the hybrid product of so detestable a union will offer for view and study!” declared João Menezes de Souza, a lawyer and journalist of Rio de Janeiro (Toplin 147). Joaquim Nabuco exclaimed during a parliamentary debate that the Chinese would “pervert and corrupt our race even further.” Brazil would become “mongrelized, just as it was Africanized when Salvador de Sá brought over the first African slaves” (Toplin 159). Chinese immigration would not come without “severe ethic and social consequences, even after five or six generations . . . The main effect of any plan for immigration from China would be to mongrelize and saturate the nation with yellow blood” (Toplin 159). Moreover, Nabuco claimed that the Chinese were “decadent” and “effeminate” and they would contaminate the nation with their “subservient and immoral character” and ultimately discourage Europeans from settling in Brazil (Toplin 158). “The history of the world proves,” he said, “that when the most intelligent and brilliant races are placed in contact with inferior races, the former are usually overcome by the latter” (Toplin 159). “We must raise the moral level of this country,” Nabuco said. The Chinese might be even less desirable than blacks: “The black improves himself, but the Chinaman is impossible” (159). Nabuco spoke fervently of the advantages of European laborers, who offered salvation to a hopelessly Africanized Brazil:

Compare-se com o Brasil atual da escravidão o ideal de pátria que nós, abolicionistas, sustentamos: um país onde todos sejam livres; onde, atraída pela franqueza das nossas instituições e pela liberdade do nosso regime, a imigração europeia traga, sem cessar, para os trópicos uma corrente de sangue caucasíos vivaz, enérgico e sadio, que possamos absorver sem perigo, em vez dessa onda chinesa, com que a grande propriedade aspira a viciar e corromper ainda mais a nossa raça; um país que de alguma forma trabalhe originalmente para a obra da humanidade e para o adiantamento da América do Sul. (Abolicionismo 82)

The growing consensus that Brazil needed to undertake a massive immigration program lent greater urgency to abolishing slavery. Nabuco and other advocates of European immigration argued that the maintenance of slavery would only continue to blacken the population and stood in the way of a new free, white, and modern Brazil. “Free labor and slave
labor cannot coexist, and neither can slavery and immigration,” said Nabuco (*Abolicionismo* 82; my translation). Abolitionists stated that European immigrants and even tourists would not want to come to or stay in Brazil if they had to deal with slaves. Playwrights Urbano Duarte and Artur de Azevedo wrote in 1884, “O estrangeiro que o visita, maravilhado pelos esplendores da nossa incomparável natureza, mal suspeita das amargas decepções que o esperam. E sabido que os imigrantes estrangeiros não procuram o Brasil ou não se conservam nele, por não quererem empareirar-se com os escravos. A escravidão é uma barreira insuperável à torrente imigratória” (Duarte, Azevedo 20). Other countries such as Argentina and the United States had been more successful in attracting immigrants, and many saw slavery and slaves as the primary deterrent to European immigration to Brazil.

**Strategic Miscegenation: Cleansing Brazil of Its Blackness**

Without removing blacks and blackness from the nation, Brazil would never fully realize its potential. The ruling elite, along with Gobineau and the racial scientists, sought a cure for the country’s economic and demographic peril. They found it in a plan to build a white nation.

Gobineau, despite decrying racial mixtures, proposed that some racial mixing could be done strategically. According to the “law of attraction,” he said, strategic interbreeding with superior races could potentially “purify” those of African descent by means of “natural selection,” providing a racial cleansing, whitening the Brazilian people, and thereby eliminating the innate “defects” and “vices” of the blacks and mestizos (Poliakov 218). Thus Gobineau prescribed for the Brazilian race problem a strategic alliance between Brazilians and Europeans: “If, instead of going on inbreeding [as mulattos], the Brazilian people were able to dilute even further the harmful elements of its present ethnic composition, strengthening itself through more worthy alliances with European races, the destructive movement observable in its procreation would come to an end, giving way to a contrary action. The [white] race would reestablish itself, public health would improve, its moral quality would be reformed and the happiest changes would be introduced into the social situation of this admirable country” (Poliakov 242).

Supported by scientific racism, the white Brazilian elite concluded that European
laborers, due to the presumption of their higher intelligence, work ethic, and morality, would be more socially acceptable and more productive laborers than the Chinese or free blacks. European immigration would help to “correct the extreme miscegenation begun by the Portuguese” and would “reinforce the actual supremacy of whites,” who were in danger of being “drowned by the spreading of inferior races,” wrote prominent essayist and historian Manoel de Oliveira Lima (Skidmore 72-73).

Many Brazilians believed that white immigrants would play a vital role in making Brazil into a modern nation and that white immigration would make racial mixing work in their favor. The infusion of white blood would slowly but surely dilute the black race out of existence and elevate the national character. Francisco Antônio Brandão Jr., a writer of Maranhão, celebrated the close of the slave trade because “the white race . . . being the more intelligent, will eventually triumph over the Negro black by exclusive dominance or by complete fusion, as is now happening” (Toplin 161).

Through this form of social and ethnic cleansing, officials hoped to radically alter Brazil’s racial makeup and its future possibilities. “In less than a century, in all probability, the population of Brazil will be represented, in its greater part, by individuals of the white Latin race, and within the same period, the black and the indigenous will have vanished from this part of the Americas . . . A brilliant future is reserved for Brazil, which will become the principal place in South America where the Latin race will be retempered and a soon vanish through miscegenation because of their innate inferiority. “O negro e o branco, vivendo misturados socialmente durante séculos, o sangue preto naturalmente tenderá a ser eliminado no sangue branco, ou a desaparecer, cedendo essa raça o campo a outra mais preparada para a luta da vida” said Nabuco before parliament (Nabuco, Discursos 182). Literary critic Silvio Romero, like Nabuco, also had faith that blacks would disappear and that “future victory in the life struggle among us will belong to the white man.” But in order to achieve this victory they would first have to “capitalize on the aid the other two races can furnish, especially the black race, with which it has mixed most. After blacks have rendered necessary help, the white type will continue to predominate by natural selection until it emerges pure and beautiful as in the old world . . . Two factors will greatly contribute to this process: on the one hand the abolition of the slave
trade and the continuous disappearance of the Indians, and on the other hand European immigration!” (Skidmore 36-37).

Seeking a Whiter White

Even though the majority of white Brazilians were of Portuguese ancestry, they did not look first to Portugal when it came to selecting European immigrants for the new Brazil. Many Brazilians were convinced that the country had not been colonized by the right white people. They sought to reverse that error by carefully selecting ideal white people to dilute the nation’s black population. Brazilian conceptions of whiteness stemmed from the historical ambivalence over Portuguese whiteness. The Portuguese, in the eyes of the Brazilians and other European nations such as England and France, were “not quite white,” according to Portuguese anthropologist Miguel Vale de Almeida. “Whiteness” was a broad concept that encompassed phenotypical, moral, economic, and social dimensions, as substantiated by pseudoscientific studies and theories over the centuries. Several of these studies classified Latin and Mediterranean peoples as nonwhite.

Vale de Almeida has observed that the not-quite-whiteness of the Portuguese was historically constructed in contrast to the ultrawhiteness of the British. The British and their colonization served as “ethnic mirrors” to the Portuguese, and the British looked upon the Portuguese condescendingly, always inferior to them, akin to a poor distant cousin. Many, including Brazilian sociologist and cultural theorist Gilberto Freyre, thought the Portuguese to be less than illustrious colonizers who suffered from both an inferiority complex and delusions of grandeur. According to Freyre, “There is much to be discounted in the pretensions to greatness on the part of the Portuguese. Since the end of the sixteenth century he has lived parasitically on a past whose splendor he exaggerates. Imagining that his stature is diminished or negated by foreign criticism, he has artificialized himself into a Portuguese-for-English-eyes,” but the English have been “the most perspicacious of all in portraying him [as he really is], restoring to him his precise contour and coloring” (187). Brazilians’ belief in Portuguese inferiority was widely proliferated throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Brazilian literature and cultural production. In postindependence literature, the Portuguese are
consistently depicted as ignorant, provincial, and dirty. Even today the Portuguese are the butt of deprecating jokes highlighting their reputed ignorance.

Several factors darkened the Portuguese in the eyes of Brazilians and the English. They were phenotypically darker due to racial mixing with the Moors of North Africa, and it was believed that they had a propensity for miscegenation that they practiced in all of their colonies. Whereas British colonization was a so-called “civilizing endeavor,” the Portuguese colonizers assimilated blacks by “colonizing them in bed” (Gomes 9). According to Freyre, “Independently of the lack or scarcity of women of the white race, the Portuguese always was inclined to a voluptuous contact with the exotic woman. For purposes of racial crossing, miscegenation. A tendency that appears to have been due to the greater social plasticity of the Portuguese as compared with any other colonizer” (185). The Portuguese, writes Vale de Almeida, were seen by the British as “half-breeds who generate yet more half-breeds, and proximity leads to both contact, and conflict and cruelty; we, the British, keep things separate, in their place, therefore leading to respect and social order” (8).

Thus the British, French, and Germans were not only phenotypically but also morally whiter. The governor of Pernambuco expressed a preference for Italian and German immigrants because they would help “to populate this vast land, forming a new mixture from which will emerge the New Brazilian much better than the current one” (Lima 28-29). In a pamphlet published in 1914 politician Caio de Menezes welcomed German immigration: “As an ethnic coefficient of the highest quality, the Brazilian people, more than any other, need the influence of advanced peoples in building a race, especially at this historic moment when the percentages of the African race are beginning to decline and must disappear into the whirlpool of the white race . . . . The ethnic preponderance of the foreigner can only bring marvelous results for the formation of our race” (Toplin 68).

_Brazil Opens Its Doors to White Immigrants_

The plan to import Chinese labor was eventually abandoned and the proponents of European immigration prevailed. At the end of the 1860s the Brazilian government began an aggressive immigration campaign to advance its whitening project, sending hundreds of
government officials to Europe to recruit immigrants (Balán 117-119). The government invested heavily in immigration, more than doubling its expenditures after 1872 and subsidizing transatlantic passage for European immigrants from 1851 to 1909 (Santos 182-193).

Brazilian officials actively promoted immigration at national fairs and handed out brochures and pamphlets throughout the European countryside. They invented an array of tales to entice immigrants, including that Brazil was a tropical Paris and that Brazilian culture was very French, and boasted of Brazil’s favorable climate and diamond mines.

There had been some earlier attempts in the mid-nineteenth century to attract immigrants, especially German and Swiss, with the explicit intention of countering the disproportion between blacks and whites. Those efforts had not been as successful as in other countries such as the United States and Argentina. When the Civil War broke out in the United States, Brazil saw a new opportunity to attract Europeans and increased its campaigning. However, news of European immigrant workers being exploited on Brazilian plantations reached Europe and threatened to undermine Brazil’s whitening efforts. Former white Brazilian slaveholders used to commanding black slaves simply treated the Europeans as white slaves. In a letter addressed to Viscount Abrantès, the Plenipotentiary Minister to Dom Pedro II, on June 3, 1846, the Baron of Canitz, Prussian Minister of Foreign Affairs, declared, “If Prussian subjects are provoked and encouraged to expatriate, the [Brazilian] agents will be punished, according to the decree of January 20th, 1820 which, given the circumstances, can carry a sentence up to two years in prison” (Expilly 90). Viscount Abrantès well aware of the exploitation of immigrants in Brazil responded recognizing the “existence of speculators, vagabonds and incorrigible proletarians, traffickers employing lies, immoral seducers who have nothing in sight but to get rich at the expense of immigrants, and do not hesitate to take across the sea thousands of Germans who for the most part vegetate in the most horrible misery” (Expilly 90-91).

The transition from slave labor to free labor proved difficult for many former slaveholders. They were used to exercising tyrannical rule over their slaves and attempted to do the same with the new European workers. The immigrants were indebted to the slaveholders, who paid for their transatlantic passage and provided them with housing. They saw working on the plantations as transitional and they intended to eventually purchase their own land and
start their own farms and businesses. But the plantation owners had other plans. Many Europeans reported that they were underpaid, were placed in substandard housing, and had been deceived by promises of land ownership. As a result many rebelled and left the rural plantations to start their own farms or to settle in the cities.

Many Europeans, fed up with the poor working and living conditions and loathing working alongside Afro-Brazilians due to their own racial prejudice, left plantations and started their own settlements. The Germans started a counter movement against Brazilian immigration through the Central Society of Berlin using pamphlets, brochures, books, newspapers, and conferences to condemn Brazil and discourage German citizens from immigrating. Given the proliferation of bad press among the Germans, Brazil began to focus its recruitment efforts on Italy, Spain, Belgium, and France.

The state of São Paulo was the most successful in its immigration program. The São Paulo provincial government went to great lengths to attract Europeans in the 1880s, including taxing slave owners to raise funds for recruitment, issuing government grants to private societies that promoted immigration and recruited immigrants, supplying funds for transportation for Europeans, and providing food and lodging for settlers. Consequently the state received the bulk of the immigrants. Of 55,965 Europeans who settled in Brazil in 1887, 34,306 went to São Paulo. The fertile soil, a more attractive climate, higher wages, and better employment opportunities all drew in immigrants. In the forty years following emancipation São Paulo received over two million European immigrants.

The first objective of the whitening project was to ensure the survival of the plantations, and it did partially succeed in that respect as European immigrants played an important role in easing the transition from slave labor to free labor. The southern state of São Paulo was the most successful in attracting European immigrants and the state’s agriculture flourished as a result. But São Paulo’s success in recruiting Europeans and the impact that they had on the economy were not widespread. Other states in the northeast and Rio de Janeiro, for example, were not as successful in luring immigrants and, fearing that abolition would bring on an economic crisis, in those areas slaveholders continued to fight to maintain slavery until weeks prior to emancipation.
Of the 803,000 immigrants who entered Brazil in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, 557,000 were Italians who went to São Paulo to work on the coffee plantations. The second largest group of immigrants to Brazil was the Portuguese, most of whom settled in Rio de Janeiro. The majority of the Portuguese were unmarried men who immigrated at their own expense or with the help of family members, without any financial assistance from the Brazilian government. The southern states of Paraná and Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul additionally attracted large numbers of Germans, Poles, and Russians. Though Brazil attracted a fair number of Germans, its hopes of receiving predominately Aryan types from northern Europe were not fulfilled. Ultimately the large numbers of Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese immigrants, as Thomas Skidmore has observed, ended up enhancing the “Latin character” of Brazil’s white population, leaving them not quite as white as they had initially planned (Skidmore 144).

After an almost fifty-year struggle by abolitionists, slavery was finally officially ended in 1888. At the same time, Brazil implemented several racist immigration policies in support of its whitening objective. In a decree issued on June 28, 1890, the government declared that Brazil was open to “free entry by persons healthy and able to work” and who were not subject to criminal prosecution in their own country. To this provision was added the clause, “except natives of Asia or Africa, who can be admitted only by authorization of the National Congress and in accordance with the stipulated conditions.” Moreover, “the diplomatic and consular agents of the United States of Brazil will prevent by all means at their disposal the dispatch of immigrants from those continents, immediately communicating with the federal government by telegraph when they are not able to do so” (Skidmore 137). Beggars and indigents were also denied entry.

**Conclusion**

Afro-Brazilian activist Abdias do Nascimento wrote many decades after the politics of whitening had been officially abandoned: “From the classification of Blacks as savage and inferior, to the eulogy of the virtues of mixed breeding as an attempt to eradicate the ‘black stain,’ to the simultaneous operation of transculturation, to the legal abolition of the Black
people through ‘national security’ and census prohibitions—through all these methods, Brazilian history records the genocide of the Black people” (83). For Nascimento, Brazil’s whitening project was only the continuation, if not one of myriad ways thorough which the nation sought to efface its Afro-Brazilian’s population from its past and present. Miscegenation, paradoxically, the very thing that had made the Brazilian people, became the very vehicle, through which to erase millions of the nation’s new citizens. Nascimento reminds us that even in efforts to erase, violence can still be made legible in the historical record. As Brazil sought to move into modernity and imagine a future for itself, this future, for many, could only be forged through a silencing of its pasts and an erasure of black bodies. Ultimately, dilution offered neither true inclusion, nor did it fulfill for Afro-Brazilians the promise of citizenship.

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