

Interview with George Reid Andrews

Fabiane Popinigis*

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GEORGE REID ANDREWS is Distinguished Professor Emeritus in the Department of History at the University of Pittsburgh and a member of CLAS (Centre for Latin American Studies) at the same institution. Andrews is an outstanding scholar in the development of the field of historical studies of the African diaspora and race relations in Latin America, and is recognised as one of those responsible for the creation of the field of Afro-Latin American history. Since the 1980s, he has published several influential books with original and innovative research, both on individual countries (Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay) and on impressive overviews of the region. In his first book, *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires, 1800-1900* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), the author addressed the alleged disappearance of the Afro-descendant population in Buenos Aires by examining the black presence in the process of Argentine independence, their organisation and associative culture in 19th-century Buenos Aires, using various sources such as memoirs, reports, censuses and the black press. In the next book, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo, Brazil (1888-1988)* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), Andrews covers the period from the abolition of slavery to the commemoration of its centenary, examining the ways in which national workers entered the labour market and discussing the impact of racism on this process, as well as the forms of organisation of black workers. The author would return to the specificity of a South American country in *Blackness in the White Nation: A History of Afro-Uruguay* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010), which looks at the centrality of Afro-descendants in shaping the country's popular culture through their musical forms. The book was a landmark in the history of Afro-descendants in Uruguay, and inspired much subsequent work.

In *Afro-Latin America, 1800-2000* (Oxford University Press, 2004), Andrews extended his research to the entire region, defining Afro-Latin America as the group of nations under

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the rule of Portugal and Spain between 1500 and 1800, whose populations were 5-10 percent or more of African ancestry and that shared the experience of slavery and plantation agriculture. The book examines “how Latin American societies used ideas about race to reserve wealth and power for members defined as ‘white’ and to deny those goods to members defined as ‘black’ and ‘brown’”. Research and debates on the process of invisibility of the African presence in Latin America are then updated In *Afro-Latin America: Black Lives, 1600-2000* (Harvard University Press, 2016), where Andrews argues that Africans and their descendants were central actors in the creation of those societies. From this question, he also examines the ways in which the narrative of invisibility was contradicted throughout the twentieth century by organised movements of black workers and intellectuals, and by more recent research by historians.

With the aim of presenting a state-of-the-art historiography of Afro-Latin America, the book *Afro-Latin American Studies: An Introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), co-edited with Alejandro de la Fuente, brings together recognised researchers in the field to address diverse and wide-ranging aspects of culture, politics and society. Importantly, the book is published in Portuguese and Spanish and is available online for free download, broadening and democratising access for the interested public. More recently, Andrews co-authored with Paulina Laura Alberto and Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof *Voices of the Race: Black Newspapers in Latin America, 1870-1960* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), a collection of newspapers from the black press in Brazil, Argentina, Cuba and Uruguay. The newspapers of the black press have been fundamental sources for his own work and for the development of research in the field of Afro-Latin American history.

Throughout his career and impressive achievements (in addition to his books, Andrews is the author of dozens of articles published in English, Portuguese and Spanish), Andrew has been in constant dialogue with black movements and their local members. A committed intellectual, throughout his academic career the author has built a legacy of research on race and class inequalities for comparative studies between Latin American societies and the United States, as well as the forms of organisation and struggles for rights of black communities in these countries and their achievements.

Andrews has pioneered research in societies where the black presence has been made invisible, or where their inclusion as workers in the labour market has been treated as an inadequacy due to the legacy of slavery. His work as a whole is an unequivocal and inspiring contribution to the struggle against racism and for social justice, to what he himself described as an attempt to restore black people to their rightful place in the history of their respective countries since the end of slavery, in the construction of national identities and, above all, in the post-abolition period. Professor George Reid Andrews's work is therefore an essential reference for new generations of scholars interested in a committed history of the African diaspora in Latin America based on rigorous empirical research.

This interview was kindly granted during my stay at CLAS at the University of Pittsburgh in the second semester of 2024, when I had the pleasure and honour of attending some of Professor Andrews's classes in his Latin American Readings course for graduate students

Fabiane Popinigis: You are a pioneering historian in studying race and racism in Latin American countries where black people have been virtually absent or considered irrelevant in history, as in the case of Argentina (1980), your first book, and Uruguay, in a much later study (2010). In your first book, *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires*, you wrote that your aim was to re-inscribe the country's Black population into Argentine history. What made you interested in social and racial inequalities in Latin America?

George Reid Andrews: I'm not sure what led me to this interest, but I would start by placing myself in the historical moment. I was an undergraduate in the years 1968-72, and that was a time of great social ferment and social movements in the US: the civil rights movement and the anti-Vietnam War movement, which were connected in various ways. So that was the environment when I was in college.

In 1972 I entered graduate school at the University of Wisconsin, which was a major centre of anti-war activism. One of the buildings on campus was blown up in protest against the [Vietnam] war, and one person was killed. These movements were very much in the air, and I was reading about Latin American history. Socio-economic inequality is a central aspect of that history, but the way I got into the issue of race was actually a bit of a coincidence: I was in a bank waiting room with my wife. She was getting ready to start graduate school, and she went to the bank to open an account. The bank was in a predominantly black neighbourhood in Chicago, and the magazines in the waiting room were issues of *Ebony* magazine, you know *Ebony*? It was an important African American magazine in the United States for many years, and in one of those issues in the waiting room I found an article called "Argentina: Land of the Vanishing Blacks".¹ I was looking for a topic for my dissertation at the time, and I had already heard about this historical question, that the black population was an important part of Argentina's population in 1800, but by 1900 that population no longer existed. What had happened? And as part of my graduate training, I had taken a course in demography on how to analyze censuses. So, I thought I could use the Argentine censuses to follow this process of disappearance and see how the black population in Argentina had supposedly vanished. And that's how I got into the general area of Afro-Latin American studies, with the aim of writing a dissertation.

¹ THOMPSON, Era Bell. Argentina: Land of the Vanishing Blacks. *Ebony*, p. 74-85, October 1973.

However, when I did the research, I discovered that the censuses showed that the black population continued to exist until the censuses stopped collecting data on race, which was in the mid-1800s. At that point you could no longer use censuses to study the black population, but I continued to find a lot of evidence of the existence of this community, particularly from an active black press, and also in photographs from newspapers and magazines of the time. So the project took an unexpected turn. I had thought I was going to write about the process of disappearance, but instead I ended up writing about how this population maintained itself in the midst of a society that denied its existence. And it denied that existence successfully, because so many European immigrants had arrived that the black population had indeed become a very small percentage of the total population. And that's the story I ended up telling.

When I came back to the United States and presented these findings, audiences were very interested and kept asking larger questions about the history of black people in other Latin American countries, particularly Brazil. And I thought, well, clearly there is an interest in black history in Latin America. I'm going to keep working in this area.

Fabiane Popinigis: You did your research in Argentina in 1975 and stayed until the end of 1976. It was a difficult period in the country, months before the dictatorship began in March 1976. How was the experience of living and doing research at that time of great political violence?

George Reid Andrews: My wife and I were very young when we arrived in Buenos Aires, I was 24 and she was 23. It was the first time we had lived outside the United States and we didn't know much about the world, we didn't know a huge amount about Latin America apart from what I had read in books. As we travelled down to Argentina, we stopped in several countries along the way, came via the Pacific coast and stopped in Santiago to visit graduate-school friends who lived there. Chile was under military rule at the time and we were shocked. People there told us how difficult things were and it was very easy to perceive how heavy and repressive the atmosphere was. It was also winter and Santiago gets very cloudy and gray in winter. It was a very gloomy situation in every way. So when we got on the plane to go to Buenos Aires, we were quite anxious about what we would find there. And Buenos Aires felt similar in some ways, but it was still under formally democratic rule. Isabel Perón had succeeded to the presidency after Juan Perón's death in 1974, and her government was closely allied to the Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance, the AAA.² State terrorism was very

² The Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance was a far-right organization that attacked and murdered political opponents during the Peronist government of 1973-76. It was responsible for the murder of hundreds of people. "Victims were generally detained in their homes or in the street, the operatives shouting 'Federal Police.' They surrounded the victim, covered their heads with a hood, and pushed them into vans marked Ministry of the Interior or R. 2 Sec. Inteligencia." ROSTICA, Julieta. Apuntes sobre 'la triple A.' Argentina (1973-1976). *Desafíos*, 23-2, p. 21-51, 2011.

much in effect, people were disappearing and so on. In addition to the guerrilla and trade union movements, the repression was especially targeting university students and faculty, who were the people we were in contact with, and it was an atmosphere unlike anything we had ever experienced. It was a powerful combination of fear and dread, but also a very frenetic one, because people were extremely anxious and very emotionally expressive about their anxiety. And they were anxious not just about politics but also about the economy, because inflation was running at around 250 per cent in 1975 and 700 per cent in 1976. This created a climate of great uncertainty, fear and tension.

In March 1976 Isabel Perón was deposed, the military took over the government and at that point all the gloves came off, the repression became absolutely open. Ford Falcons were driving around without license plates, with men holding machine guns outside the doors.³ The repression was very visible and palpable on the streets and we really didn't know exactly how to behave. When the coup happened, some Argentine friends left the country because they knew they were in great danger and went to Spain or other countries. For us, it was an eye-opening experience, the experience of seeing what it was like to live under a fascist government, something we knew about in the abstract but had never seen up close.

Fabiane Popinigis: You mentioned that when you spoke to Argentinians about your research, they were very surprised, because they held the perception that the African presence in the country's history was insignificant. How do you view the current historiography concerning Africans and their descendants in Argentina and Uruguay, especially considering that your work remains a fundamental reference in these countries?

George Reid Andrews: It's hugely exciting to see all the recent research. It never occurred to me at the time that this could happen, it never crossed my mind. And I have to say, again, going back to 1975 and 1976, that it's true that most of the people that I talked with were incredulous that anyone would have given me money to go do research on a topic that didn't exist. They said, what are you going to spend the year doing? There's nothing to study! But a few months after arriving, I met two historians who were working on the black community: Ricardo Rodríguez Molas and Marta Goldberg.⁴ I also met some historians at the National Archives, Eduardo Saguier, Juan Carlos Garavaglia, and Samuel Amaral, who worked with colonial and 19th-century documents, and they knew that people of African ancestry kept

³ The Ford Falcon was a model of automobile manufactured in Argentina from 1963 through the 1990s. It was considered to be a sturdy and reliable vehicle and sold very well. Owing to its widespread use under the dictatorship in acts of violence, kidnapping, and disappearances of civilians, the car, especially when painted a military shade of olive-green, is strongly associated in the memory of those years with state terrorism. REATI, Fernando. El Ford Falcon: um ícono del terror. **Revista de Estudos Hispânicos**, 43, 2009.

⁴ MOLAS, Ricardo Rodríguez. La música y danza de los negros en el Buenos Aires de los siglos XVIII y XIX. Buenos Aires: Clio, 1957. Idem, Negros libres rioplatenses. **Revista de Humanidades**, n. 1, p. 99-126, September 1961. GOLDBERG, Marta. La población negra y mulata de la ciudad de Buenos Aires, 1810-1840, **Desarrollo Económico**, n. 16, p. 75-99, April-June 1976.

appearing in these documents.⁵ So they encouraged me, helped me a lot, and pointed out sources for me to look at.

Now, 50 years later, it's amazing how much research is being done! It's really inspiring to see so many great things being published. I'm thinking, for example, of Maria de Lourdes Ghidoli's book, *Estereotipos en negro*.⁶ This is a really spectacular book, about two things: firstly, how black people were portrayed in 19th-century art in Argentina, and how the message of invisibility was cultivated; and secondly, about how Afro-Argentine artists tried to respond to and contest the process of disappearance. This book will be published in English translation in the next few years so that North American audiences can read it. Also Paulina Alberto's book, *Black Legend*, which is so important.⁷ The collective volume she did with Eduardo Elena and other authors, *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina*.⁸ And Lea Geler's book, *Andares negros, caminos blancos*.⁹ Alejandro Frigerio, Florencia Guzmán, Magdalena Candiotti – I can't go any further because I don't want to leave anyone out!¹⁰ I've just received a new book by Ezequiel Adamovsky, on the history of carnival, which makes a super-interesting argument about how blackness was really the core of the 19th-century Carnival in Buenos Aires, until the *comparsas candomberas* were banned in 1894.¹¹ But that didn't mean the disappearance of candombe, which continued to inform Argentine popular culture into the 20th century. So a lot of fascinating work is coming out, and it's hugely gratifying to see.

Fabiane Popinigis: Let's move on to Brazil. In your book *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo*, you say that you and your wife spent a month in Brazil after living in Argentina, and that it was during this trip that you became interested in studying the history of race relations in Brazil. This is understandable, since Brazil received 40% of the people from the African continent in the Americas through the Atlantic traffic, and it is the country with the second-largest black population in the world. But why São Paulo? And what are the similarities and particularities

5 SAGUIER, Eduardo. **Mercado inmobiliario y estructura social**. El Río de la Plata en el siglo XVIII. Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1993. GARAVAGLIA, Juan Carlos. **Construir el estado e inventar la nación**: El Río de la Plata, siglos XVIII y XIX. Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2007. AMARAL, Samuel. **The Rise of Capitalism on the Pampas**: The Estancias of Buenos Aires, 1785-1870. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

6 GHIDOLI, María de Lourdes. **Estereotipos en negro**. Representaciones y autorrepresentaciones visuales de afroporteños en el siglo XIX. Rosario: Prohistoria Ediciones, 2016.

7 ALBERTO, Paulina. **Black Legend**: The Many Lives of Raúl Grigera and the Power of Racial Storytelling in Argentina. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022.

8 ALBERTO, Paulina; ELENA, Eduardo (ed.). **Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina**. New York, Cambridge University Press: 2016.

9 GELER, Lea. **Andares negros, caminos blancos**: Afroporteños, estado y Nación Argentina a fines del siglo XIX. Rosario: Prohistoria Ediciones, 2010.

10 FRIGERIO, Alejandro. **Cultura negra en el Cono Sur**: Representaciones en conflicto. [S. l.], Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Económicas de la Universidad Católica Argentina, 2000. GUZMÁN, Florencia. **Los claroscuros del mestizaje**. Negros, indios y castas en la Catamarca colonial. Córdoba: Encuentro Grupo Editor, 2010. CANDIOTTI, Magdalena. **Una historia de la emancipación negra**. Esclavitud y abolición en la Argentina. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2021. GUZMÁN, Florencia; GELER, Lea; FRIGERIO, Alejandro (ed.). **Cartografías afrolatinoamericanas**. Perspectivas situadas desde Argentina. Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2016.

11 ADAMOVSKY, Ezequiel. **La fiesta de los negros**: Una historia del antiguo carnaval de Buenos Aires y su legado en la cultura popular. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2024.

with other regions of Latin America where black people have been invisibilised to the point of disappearing from historical narratives?

George Reid Andrews: It's true, after leaving Argentina we travelled through Brazil for a month. We went down the Pacific coast to go to Argentina, and then we came back up the Atlantic coast to go home, at the end of the year, in December 1976. Of course, I knew that Brazil was the heart of black history in Latin America, everybody knows that, and I thought that if I was going to continue in this field, I would need to go back to Brazil to do research. Then, with the success of the book on Argentina, I realised that it would make sense to do that.

In the meantime, I had been reading... because, you know, it's always good to read outside your field and broaden the themes you try to pay attention to. There were several books that came out in the US in the early 1980s comparing racial segregation and race relations in the US and South Africa.¹² The question they posed was: how did these countries arrive at their systems of legalised segregation and what led them to it? Because those systems are pretty unusual in world history. To answer that question, the authors of these books looked closely at the class relations that were driving segregation. They asked, for example, what was the role of white workers? Did they tend to be in favour of or against segregation in each of the two countries? What was the role of the white middle class? What was the role of the industrial elites, the financial elites and the commercial elites? And so on and so forth. I found these books so interesting that I wrote an article about them, which had nothing to do with Brazil.¹³ I was reading them as examples of different ways of doing comparative history and that's when I started to formulate the idea of doing research on São Paulo.

Brazil is a famous case of a society in which legalised, codified racial segregation never materialised. So I wondered if I could take those same questions and those same methods of analysis and apply them to Brazil to explain why that country didn't develop segregation. At the same time, I would dialogue with another important question in Brazilian historiography: were race relations – as they were called at the time – in the 20th century driven primarily by inheritances of slavery or were they created by new conditions caused by industrialisation, modernisation and economic development? Florestan Fernandes had argued that Brazil received a heavy inheritance of social and racial inequality from slavery, but that as Brazil modernised and transformed itself into a more capitalist, more industrialised, more urbanised society, that inheritance would gradually be overcome and

¹² CELL, John W. **The Highest Stage of White Supremacy:** The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982. FREDRICKSON, George M. **White Supremacy:** A Comparative Study in American and South African History. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981. GREENBERG, Stanley B. **Race and State in Capitalist Development:** Comparative Perspectives. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.

¹³ ANDREWS, George Reid. Comparing the Comparers: White Supremacy in the United States and South Africa. **Journal of Social History**, 20, 3, p. 585-599, 1987.

Brazil would eventually be able to fully integrate its black population into class society, as did not happen in South Africa and the USA.

So I thought, okay, is this happening? Fernandes wrote in the middle of the 20th century, in the 50s and 60s; now, in the 80s and 90s, were we seeing that process of racial integration? I knew, both from the demands of the black movement and from the empirical research carried out in those years, that no, that Brazil had major problems with racial inequality. Well, if racial integration wasn't taking place, was it for reasons analogous to the processes that drove segregation in South Africa and the United States? Was something similar happening in Brazil? Were white workers fighting for racial privilege like they did in the US and South Africa? Were white middle classes safeguarding their racial positions? What was the role of employers in trying to maintain racial difference and inequality or, alternatively, trying to overcome it? To investigate this, I felt I had to do the research in São Paulo, the region of Brazil where industrialisation, modernisation and urbanisation had gone the furthest, and which was also an important centre of slavery. To apply the method, it seemed that São Paulo was the right place to do it. That's why I went there.

Fabiane Popinigis: When you arrived in Brazil in 1984, the country was experiencing a climate of optimism due to the process of political opening, the struggle for amnesty, the wave of strikes and the effervescence of social movements, which would lead to the end of the dictatorship and the founding of new political parties, such as the Workers' Party. How was this reflected in the academic world? What was the field of Latin American studies like when you arrived, if there was such a field? Tell us a little about how you were received by your colleagues in Brazil.

George Reid Andrews: When I arrived in Brazil, the field of Latin American Studies did not yet exist, at least as I experienced it. However, most of the scholars that I met were very interested in what was going on, not only in Latin America, but, of course, in the United States, Europe and the whole world. Also when I arrived, all those movements you mentioned were very important, as well as a very active black movement, which had really started to coalesce in the second half of the 70s. And those researchers interested in labor history, which was a very developed field of study in São Paulo at the time and even more so today. Scholars interested in social history, scholars interested in the development of capitalism, etc. Those historians of labour and capitalism hadn't paid much attention to the role of race in these processes, but all of them, everyone I spoke to, immediately agreed that the question of race was important, especially in relation to the history of labour.

Emília Viotti da Costa wrote an article at that time that had a big impact on me. The article was a kind of state of the art on what was happening in the field of Brazilian labour history.¹⁴ In that text she argued that an important topic that was still awaiting serious

¹⁴ COSTA, Emilia Viotti da. Brazilian Workers Rediscovered. **International Labor and Working-Class History**,

research was the role of race in the working class and in labour movements. Since race is fundamental in all aspects of Brazilian society, it had to be fundamental in labour history too. I arrived in São Paulo at that time, proposing to look precisely at how race manifested itself in labour and class relations, and almost everyone I met said, yeah, cool, go do that. It was more or less the opposite of what had happened in Argentina.

When I arrived in São Paulo, I had an affiliation with CEDEC, the Centre for the Study of Contemporary Culture, which had been founded a few years earlier and was an important centre for labor studies, labour history and trade union movements. Boris Fausto was there. He had just written his book *Trabalho urbano e conflito social*.¹⁵ Lúcio Kowarick¹⁶ was there, José Álvaro Moisés,¹⁷ various people were there. I also got in touch with John French, who had written a book on the Brazilian ABC,¹⁸ and he put me in touch with Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, who was at Unicamp at the time. He had just organised that collection with Michael Hall, *A classe operária no Brasil*.¹⁹

Paulo Sérgio helped me get into the archives of Eletropaulo, formerly the São Paulo Tramway, Light and Power Company, to work with the company's employee files. I also met Yara Khoury, from PUC-SP, and she helped me get into the archive of the Jafet textile factory. In both archives, I made a census of the records to try to understand the experiences of black and white workers when they entered into the firm. How often were they hired? How long did they stay? What kind of jobs did they do? What kind of salaries were they paid? That's the kind of information I was looking for in those documents.

Another person who helped me enormously was anthropologist Miriam Nicolau Ferrara.²⁰ In the course of her own research, she had interviewed José Correia Leite, Raul Amaral, Francisco Lucrécio, and other figures from black activism in the first half of the century, and had assembled a large collection of black newspapers. It was her personal archive, which is now at the University of São Paulo.²¹ But at that time the collection was at her house and Miriam very generously invited me to go there to work with the newspapers. This was indispensable for my research, because newspapers are a very concentrated source on black thought, and on how the black community functioned during the first half of the 20th century.

n. 22, p. 28-38, Fall 1982.

15 FAUSTO, Boris. **Trabalho urbano e conflito social (1890-1920)**. São Paulo: Difel, 1976.

16 KOWARICK, Lúcio. **Trabalho e vadiagem: a origem do trabalho livre no Brasil**. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1987.

17 A political scientist who had published books on the Strike of the 300,000 and on the new union movement. MOISÉS, José Álvaro. **Greve de massa e crise política** (estudo da greve dos 300 mil em São Paulo, 1953-1954). São Paulo: Polis, 1978. MOISÉS, José Álvaro. **Lições de liberdade e de opressão: o novo sindicalismo e a política**. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1982.

18 FRENCH, John. **The Brazilian workers ABC: Class Conflict and Alliances in Modern São Paulo**. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992.

19 HALL, Michael M.; PINHEIRO, Paulo Sérgio (ed.). **A classe operária no Brasil: documentos (1889-1930)**. São Paulo: Alfa-Ômega, 1979.

20 FERRARA, Miriam Nicolau. **A imprensa negra paulista (1915-1963)**. São Paulo: FFLCH-USP, 1983.

21 <http://biton.uspnet.usp.br/impresnanegra/>.

Other people also helped me. In Rio I met Carlos Hasenbalg, with whom I had a very fraternal relationship.²² The staff at IBGE (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística) headquarters also helped me a lot, doing some special tabulations. I also had a very rich relationship with a number of black activists. I met Hamilton Cardoso and his wife, Dulce Pereira, who later became president of the Palmares Foundation, and I talked to sociologist Clóvis Moura several times.²³ I also accompanied the Council for the Participation and Development of the Black Community in the state of São Paulo, a commission with representatives from all the state secretariats. I remember Hélio Santos, Ivair Augusto Alves dos Santos, Nelson Arruda, Maria Aparecida Bento, and others.

So almost everywhere I went, the reception was very positive. But unfortunately my ability to interact with local academic circles was somewhat limited, because I spent every day immersed in the archives of the two companies (Jafet and São Paulo Light). The files were so demanding to work with, because I was taking statistical samples, and it took me months to do this work, filling out the computer cards we used in those days, filling out the sheets, codifying and tabulating all the variables that I was trying to study. It's only one chapter in the book, and yet it represented probably six of the twelve months I spent in São Paulo.

Anyway, because of that I was so buried in the archive that I probably didn't engage with the local intellectual community as much as I could and should have done. I made more contact with Brazilian researchers in 1988, when I returned to finish the research, but also to take part in the events of the centenary of the abolition of slavery. Because that was the perfect ending for the book: how was Brazilian society looking back at what had happened in 1888 and in the 100 years since? It was an incredibly rich month (of May), because all the universities were sponsoring symposiums, seminars, events, lectures and so on. I met many people, including the new generation of labour historians and historians of slavery that were just getting their PhD's and starting their professional careers, such as Silvia Lara, Sidney Chalhoub, João Reis, Leila Algranti, Célia Azevedo, Maria Helena Machado. And again, the reception was very positive. They were interested in hearing what I was finding.

Fabiane Popinigis: Your visit to Brazil on the centenary of Abolition in 1988 became a chapter in your book. You argued that, while part of black militancy considered abolition to have been 'a lie and a farce', because black people continued to suffer from poverty and racism, the academic events organised to mark the anniversary were very much related to the past of slavery and Abolition, but dealt little or not at all with racial inequalities in the 20th century.²⁴

²² An Argentine sociologist well-known for his work on race in Brazil. See HASENBALG, Carlos. **Discriminação e desigualdades raciais no Brasil**. Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1979. He was also the director of the Centro de Estudos Afro-Asiáticos from 1986 to 1996 and editor of the journal *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos*.

²³ A sociologist and historian known for his work on Afro-Brazilian history. MOURA, Clóvis. **Rebeliões da senzala: quilombos, insurreições, guerrilhas**. São Paulo: Edições Zumbi, 1959. Idem, **O negro: de bom escravo a mau cidadão?** Rio de Janeiro: Conquista, 1977. Idem, **Sociologia do negro brasileiro**. São Paulo: Ática, 1988.

²⁴ "Not all the celebrants of May 13 shared this interest in the contemporary situation. A number of governmental agencies, both in SaoPaulo and at the national level, chose to focus their activities exclusively on slavery. In Sao

George Reid Andrews: Well, that was the field at the time, very much focused on slavery. That was one reason why people gave me such a positive response. They said, it's so good that you're researching the 20th century! We're working with slavery, it's very important, but there's more to the story than just slavery. Especially if we want to explain why things look the way they do today.

Fabiane Popinigis: This is also why *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo* is a pioneering book, since you focused your research on the impact of racism and race relations among black workers after abolition. The intersection between race and class, from a historical perspective, is a topic that is currently very close to the hearts of the *Mundos do Trabalho* magazine audience. That's why it would be interesting if you could talk a little more about the relevance of this connection, since these dimensions don't always appear connected or are taken into account together.

George Reid Andrews: Yes, that's true. You know, for a long time the approach to labour history in Brazil was very structural, a class-based approach that didn't take much account of race and gender. And going back to Emília Viotti da Costa's article, she said (in 1982) that the role of race in the working class was a priority issue that we needed to research. So maybe it was also because of the effervescence of the labour movement at that time and the participation of large numbers of black workers alongside white workers in that movement that some people were seeing the necessity to start thinking about race in relation to the working class, in relation to class formation and in relation to labor organisations as well. Like, for example, the racial composition of trade unions. And even more important than the racial composition of unions, what was the composition of the leadership of those movements? Again, the people I spoke to who were interested in labour studies agreed that researching the racial dimensions of labour movements was important, that this was work that we needed to do.

After writing the book on Brazil, I continued to visit the country during the 1990s, and I went to various conferences, all hugely interesting. But the conferences focused mainly on contemporary racial issues, affirmative action issues, public policies, what the government should be doing, and so on. And then I lost touch with the field of labour history.

In the early 2000s, when I went to do research in Uruguay,²⁵ I tried to stay in touch with what was going on in Brazilian studies, but not very successfully. It's really hard, when you change your focus from country to country, to maintain your command of what's going on in

Paulo, for example, the State Archive commemorated the date with the public exhibit "Sources on the History of Slavery in Sao Paulo," and the University of Sao Paulo hosted the International Congress on Slavery, with hundreds of scholars from Brazil, the United States, Europe, and other Latin American countries. Such observances served the worthy purpose of reminding Brazilians of the three hundred-year experience of slavery in their country, and the profound ways in which that experience has shaped Brazilian society and civilization. Yet this focus on slavery often tended to divert attention from the contemporary scene." Andrews, *Blacks and Whites*, 222.

²⁵ ANDREWS, George Reid. *Blackness in the White Nation: A History of Afro-Uruguay*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. Idem, *Negros en la nación blanca: Historia de los afro-uruguayos, 1830-2010*. Montevideo: Librería Linardi y Risso, 2011.

each of them. So I have the general sense that the need to incorporate race into the study of class, and vice versa, is widely recognised today by most people working in these fields. I can't cite the specific evidence to show that this is actually happening, but my hypothesis is that it is.

Fabiane Popinigis: In *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo*, you mention that you were interested in a 'history from below', which dealt with ordinary people and the dominated as people who 'always participate in the process of [historical] creation, and not just as helpless victims'. Above all, you were interested in seeking to understand how their actions and their struggles could have important consequences for the political systems in which they were embedded. What were the main references in your training to formulate this understanding and to develop research questions and methodologies of study? And what were the main historiographical debates circulating at the time in this regard?

George Reid Andrews: I always feel ill-prepared to answer this question. My graduate training, three years at the University of Wisconsin, was for the most part limited to what North American academics were producing about Latin America at the time. We read a lot of 19th- and 20th-century history, colonial history, books that had been published in the previous 5-10 years. None of these books was very theoretically adventurous, they were much more empirical investigations. I still have some of those books on my shelves here, and none of that prepared me to think to think in terms of innovative methodologies or ways to do things.

My encounter with history 'from below' happened in dialogue with other books that attempted to do this for the United States, especially in the field of black history. I think of Ira Berlin's book on free black people in the American South, Leon Litwack's book on free blacks in the northern states, Herbert Gutman's book on the black family.²⁶ These books and others like them were all serious efforts to get at what was going on among these populations that had not been seriously investigated, and how they were acting to make their own history.

When I arrived in Brazil, as I mentioned, Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro and Michael Hall had just produced that collection of documents about the working class, which seemed to me to be oriented along exactly the same lines: dialogues among workers talking about themselves, and elites and state authorities talking about workers and how they needed to be regulated and controlled, and so on. These were serious efforts to understand what was going on in parts of society that historically hadn't been written about extensively.

But what really opened my eyes were the black newspapers, in which I found, in a very concentrated form, the members of that community – a community that was very hard to

²⁶ BERLIN, Ira. **Slaves without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South**. New York: Pantheon Books, 1974. LITWACK, Leon. **The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961. LITWACK, Leon. **Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery**. New York: Albert A. Knopf, 1979. GUTMAN, Herbert G. **The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925**. New York: Pantheon Books, 1976.

get hold of, empirically, in historical research. And they were writing about themselves, about how they were living, what they were doing, what they were thinking about, what were the big problems they were facing. When you find a source like that, you 'listen' very carefully to what's being said and try to communicate that to the reader. That's the method I use.

Another way of researching history from below was through workers' employment records. This is a very difficult source to work with because those records are so fragmented and dry. You have to read them against the grain, because they were created to provide information to the employer and also to the social security system. So they're really quite dry, they don't give a sense of the person at all, they only start to make sense in the aggregate. That's why I tried to use them by aggregating them in databases and analysing them statistically. The records also contain photographs, some of them quite eloquent, but I couldn't think of what to do with them. They also contain people's names, and I wrote those down, but I couldn't find a way to use them in the research.

All this is to say that, apart from the statistical methodologies, I was never trained to do what I did, I kind of figured it out along the way. But I knew that the important thing was to try to 'listen' to what people were saying at the time, and certainly to try to be alert to how they were acting, both as individuals and collectively.

Fabiane Popinigis: You recently published the 2018 book *Afro-Latin American Studies*, co-edited with Alejandro de la Fuente²⁷, in which you wrote a chapter called 'Inequality: Race, Class, Gender', adding gender to the essential categories in the construction and reproduction of inequalities and reflecting on the concept of intersectionality. Here you recover and update elements that you had already included in your previous work, such as the place of black women in the labour market, and deepen these questions with a focus on gender, starting with persistent wage inequality. Why did you decide to make this category more explicit and also point to it as an important element to guide future research in the field of Afro-Latin American Studies?

George Reid Andrews: When I wrote the book *Afro-Latin America*, published in 2004,²⁸ research on gender and women in black populations was starting to develop, but not to the extent that would allow me to discuss those issues in depth in that book. By 2018, the literature on women and gender had become quite strong, and therefore demanded to be included in the article as a distinct and specific dimension of inequality, connected to the other dimensions of class and race.

²⁷ DE LA FUENTE, Alejandro; ANDREWS, George Reid (ed.). **Afro-Latin American Studies: An Introduction**. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018. **Estudios afrolatinoamericanos: Una introducción**. Buenos Aires: Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (Clacso), 2018. **Estudos afro-latino-americanos: uma introdução**. Buenos Aires: Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (Clacso), 2018.

²⁸ ANDREWS, George Reid. **Afro-Latin America, 1800-2000**. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004; **América Afro-Latina, 1800-2000**. São Carlos: Editora da Universidade Federal de São Carlos, 2007; **Afro-Latinoamérica, 1800-2000** Madrid: Iberoamericana; Frankfurt: Vervuert, 2007.

In the research on São Paulo, I had certainly noticed gender issues when I was reading the black newspapers, but I didn't venture far enough back then. And also, going back to my initial research questions, they focused on class and not gender. But by 2018, there was so much discussion about gender and its connections to race that I had to include it. Black Brazilian feminists have been very important in promoting these discussions, such as Beatriz Nascimento, Lélia González, Sueli Carneiro, among others.

There is also the literature that has developed in sociology on precisely the question you bring up, the wage gap, which is one major way of measuring racial inequality. Wage differentials not just between blacks and whites, for example, which was my focus in the São Paulo book, but wage differentials among white men, black men, white women and black women. And there we come back to the black feminists who theorised the phenomenon of the triple discrimination: discrimination based on gender, based on race, and based on poverty. For sure this theorising has been completely confirmed by empirical data, which shows that racial discrimination is one thing that exists, gender discrimination is another thing that exists, and when you put them together, the group that suffers both of those discriminations, which are black women, are the most seriously discriminated not just in terms of wage inequality but in all areas of social and economic life.

Another reason to include gender was the formation of black women's organisations within the black movement. Not only in Brazil, but in several Latin American countries, black women felt the need to create their own forms of activism, specifically aimed at addressing their particular needs. Those organisations were not so much at the centre of the scene when I was in Brazil in the 1980s, but they have become increasingly present and have had more impact on society as we enter the new century in the early 2000s and 2010s. Those organisations too make a very compelling case for why we have to take gender seriously when we analyse these various forms of inequality.

Fabiane Popinigis: In this same article you discussed the importance of public policies based on social class indicators to reduce inequalities in Latin America. Do you think these class-based initiatives were and are effective in reducing racial inequalities? Do they also help to fight racism or are they different things?

George Reid Andrews: For me, racism and racial inequality are not the same thing, they are different phenomena. Racism consists of ideas and ideologies about the supposed existence of races: what racial groups are, what their inherent qualities are, how their members behave, etc. In recent years, many people have used the concept of racism to refer to what I would call racial inequality: a situation in which the goods of society – education, employment, income, health – are distributed unequally between racial groups. For example, when black people receive on average X years of education and white people receive on average X + 4 or 5 years

of education. And here, in this area of specific and measurable inequalities between whites and blacks, I believe that class-based public policies can have great impacts on reducing racial inequality. For example, the Bolsa Família programme, which pays poor families to keep their children in school. As the vast majority of those poor children are black, when the government implemented this policy, the racial differentials in primary school enrollment, and to a lesser extent secondary school enrollment too, immediately fell. Increases in the minimum wage in the 1990s and 2000s had equally dramatic impacts on reducing economic inequalities between white and black families.²⁹

So I'm a big fan of this kind of policy. However, you asked whether these policies can affect racism. If we define racism as the ideas that people have about race and therefore about other people based on race, here we have evidence to suggest that these policies to reduce inequality don't necessarily reduce the incidence and prevalence of racist ideas and behaviors. And Cuba is a good case in point, where public policies in the 1960s and 1970s greatly reduced racial inequalities in employment, education, health and other aspects of life. But during that same period, racist ideas and racial prejudices remained more or less intact, and then resurfaced during the Special Period of the 1990s, as de la Fuente and others have shown.³⁰ So, for me, the first step is to try to reduce measurable inequalities as much as possible, and class-based policies can make enormous progress in this direction.

Fabiane Popinigis: To conclude, as we're talking a few days after the US elections in which Donald Trump was elected, could you comment on this, thinking about the history of other elections? The United States has never had a woman president, and in this case, the Democratic candidate was a self-proclaimed black daughter of immigrants. The issue of immigration, especially from Latin America, was crucial in the race and has become more radical since the last US election in 2020. In addition, both race and class issues have moved to the right. How do you interpret this shift?

George Reid Andrews: For the country's progressive sectors, it's a moment of deep disappointment. While Donald Trump exceeded his 2020 vote by 2.6 million votes (74.2 million in 2020, 76.8 million in 2024), Kamala Harris received 7.0 million votes less than the vote Joe Biden received in 2020 (82.3 million in 2020, 74.3 million in 2024). The coalitions that supported Biden in 2020 did not re-emerge to support Harris, or at least not at sufficient levels to ensure her victory.

²⁹ ANDREWS, George Reid. Racial Inequality in Brazil and the United States, 1990-2010. *Journal of Social History*, 47, 4, p. 829-854, 2014; Desigualdade racial no Brasil e nos Estados Unidos, 1990-2010. *Afro-Ásia*, n. 51, p. 141-74, 2015.

³⁰ DE LA FUENTE, Alejandro. *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001. The Special Period refers to the economic crisis of the 1990s, when the USSR ceased to exist, depriving Cuba of the massive subsidies that it had received during the 1970s and 1980s.

One notable aspect of the election is that, compared to the other industrialised countries, the Biden administration's pro-programmes have produced by far the strongest economic recovery, and by far the fastest growth. But the electorate apparently didn't feel the effects of these programmes, and a large number of voters stayed at home on election day.

Did racism and/or misogyny play a role in Harris' defeat? I have no doubt that these attitudes contributed to the result, but I don't think they can explain an abstention of 7 million votes. Harris suffered the effects of having presided over the country together with Biden during the Covid period. All over the world, governments that were in power during this period of deep crisis and unease have been rejected at the ballot box.

We are now entering a period of great danger and risk. Trump's aim is to govern in an authoritarian and unrestrained manner, and he has all the conditions to achieve this. The Democratic Party does not control either chamber of Congress, the Supreme Court is firmly aligned with him and the Republican Party even more so. I always try to be optimistic in my assessments, but this moment doesn't leave much room for optimism.

In that sense, it's much more pleasant to talk about the past than the present, and I sincerely appreciate this opportunity to talk with you and with the readers of *Revista Mundos do Trabalho*.

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