

BEYOND Racism

EMBRACING AN
INTERDEPENDENT
FUTURE

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STATEMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL WORKING AND ADVISORY GROUP

All human beings are the same beneath the skin. There are no “inferior” or “superior” races or race-based differences in intelligence, character or worth among the world’s peoples. We are all part of the same human family.

Racism is the denial of our shared humanity, a violation of the human rights to which all people are entitled. It is a moral blight, source of festering injustice and serious economic problem.

Wherever racism is found, it is a divisive force. It deprives societies of unity and the cooperation of all of their people in pursuit of the common good. It wastes talent, productivity and lives and contributes to human suffering. It fuels inequality and disparities in power, encouraging abuse and exploitation of vulnerable groups and individuals. It undermines democratic governance, retards economic development, and sets conflict in motion as groups or individuals struggle either to preserve or resist an unfair status quo.

In the future, the world will be even “smaller” than it is today. The lives and well-being of diverse peoples and nations will be increasingly intertwined in a global web of economic, social and political interdependence. If we are to have any measure of peace and prosperity, we will all have to adjust to living and sharing with and learning from people who may not resemble ourselves. Thus we all have a vested interest in developing rules, policies, understandings and values that can protect and affirm everyone’s birthright to be free from racism, sexism and other such practices.

We began the Initiative’s work with the awareness that for all of their differences, the nations from which we hail – Brazil, South Africa and the United States – throughout their histories have been shaped and deeply affected by “race,” racism, sexism and other forms of prejudice. In each, from the beginning, people of European descent and appearance dominated and enslaved people of African descent and their progeny. They relegated their fellow human beings to the status of “property.” By law (in the United States and South Africa) or practice (in all three countries), Whites resisted sharing equal rights and opportunities with Blacks. White wealth and advantages accumulated for hundreds of years through exploitation of cheap Black labor, while Black disadvantages deepened. White racism provided a ready excuse for repressive violence and a convenient basis for segmented compassion.

As a consequence of these practices, the three nations are now home to more than 125 million people of African descent or appearance, a disproportionately large number of whom are mired in poverty and lack the skills needed to thrive or compete in the technology-driven workplace and global economy that are coming into being. In Brazil, a society with a complex array of color-based group identities, close to half of the population (“Blacks” and “Browns”) have a degree of African descent or appearance, and the majority of these “non-Whites” are poor. In South Africa, which is less than 15 percent White, virtually all of the poor are “Black” or “Coloured.” In the United States, African Americans are 13 percent of the population but fully 33 percent of the poor.

Our nations are now at a critical turning point. Buffeted by domestic and international trends and developments, they face the present and future challenge of finding ways to undo the legacy of cumulative disadvantage affecting people of African descent so diligently constructed and maintained in the past. These trends and developments present new problems. But they

also can present new opportunities for these democracies to point the way to a post-racist era of progressive human relations.

The challenge of the new era will be to help individuals, institutions, societies and the world move beyond racism by systematically uprooting the attitudes, practices and policies that promote and sustain inequality. Those nations that continue to provide benefits for Whites at the expense of Blacks, women and other vulnerable groups, fail to nurture the talents of all of their people and tolerate or even encourage deep cultural and “racial” divisions, will undermine their competitive edge with other nations and lose credibility with their own people.

It will take a substantial and sustained investment of time, energy and resources by people in Brazil, South Africa, the United States and the international community to bring about these changes. But the simple truth is that our nations and world cannot afford the soaring costs and negative consequences of prejudice.

In the course of our inquiry, we have met many remarkable people and glimpsed their reality. We have learned that, despite their conflicts and diversity, people are more alike than different. We all wish to have decent places to live, open opportunities to learn, help from others when we need it, satisfying and productive work, a measure of good health, the ways and means to care for our loved ones, a sense of protective and equal justice, and peace. These can be attainable goals if we resolve to put the angels of our better natures to work as architects of a more egalitarian, global society.

To some people the aspiration to move beyond racism may seem naïve. But without an abiding vision of where we wish to be in the future, a plan to get there, and a commitment to find our way, we will surely fail to make progress. We cannot succeed in moving beyond racism if we do not try.

One of our members, Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, once described the value of a comparative lens for the study of racism and inequality with these words: “It is as if we are in a great, mirrored ballroom. We see ourselves and we see others. There is the shock of recognition. We are them, and they are us.”

We can learn a lot by gazing into the mirror, listening and learning and thinking about our diverse efforts to overcome racism. We can plan and work together to change what we do not like if we move with resolve and high purpose.

We do not pretend to have the capacity or wisdom to quiet the world’s ancient hatreds nor to reconstruct the world’s prevailing attitudes and institutions. But through study of Brazil, South Africa and the United States and sharing some of what we have learned, this work seeks to make a contribution toward a world where prosperity, justice and good will are primary terms for human liberation – and real engines for social and economic progress. The poet William Butler Yeats once wrote, “From our birthday, until we die, is but the winking of an eye.” Let us use our time well and for good.

Peter D. Bell
Ana Maria Braslleiro
Lynn Huntley
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Franklin A. Thomas
Thomas Uhlman

January 2000

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

"...Racism is an invention, an utter and total fabrication that grew up as a justification for the military and legalistic takeover of the land, labor, water and resources of one people by another people....The shared justification for racism in all three of our countries and continents accounts for the similarities among us....Structures of inequality may be maintained in different ways. In South Africa, racism was maintained using a culturally masculine style: with clear rules, distance, military authority and the like. In Brazil, it was maintained by what might be called a feminine style: that is, by perpetuating the myth that we are one family, that everything is fine, and accusing those who point out racism of 'dividing the family,' just as women are accused when we point out injustice inside the patriarchal family. In the United States, it was done both ways: North and South, the clarity of southern racism versus the subtler diffusion of northern racism."

Gloria Steinem

"The end of apartheid does not mean the end of racism. It is but the beginning of a new struggle in a new terrain....William Makgoba recently referred to this terrain as the "new racism." What are the contours of the new racism? The first is the intrusion of privately held racial attitudes into the gray domain of interpersonal relations and semi-public conduct beyond the reach of the constitution or law. A second contour...is formal and informal racial discrimination....A third contour is evident in the attitudes toward affirmative or corrective action of those advantaged by White supremacy....A fourth contour of the new racism may be discerned in attitudes toward Black political empowerment...."

Wilnot James

"The eternal discussions around the myth of racial democracy and about the benefits of the specificity of Brazilian racism must be overcome by urgent and concrete public policies to improve the condition of Afro descendants immediately....It is time to endeavor, in civil society and in government, to promote dramatic social change. That is the best way to go beyond racism."

Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro

"First and foremost, combating racism is a moral imperative. Beyond that, however, stand substantial economic gains that will be available to everyone in countries that are successful in removing race-related barriers that now exist. Our work has shown that the pie can truly expand for all as the economic inefficiencies propping up the legacies of racism are removed."

Thomas Uhlman

"Racial discrimination assumed different forms in Brazil, South Africa and the United States, but the outcome was strikingly similar....Those who suffered racial oppression were not only robbed of their political rights to participate in the democratic processes of their own countries, but the disadvantage emanating from racial discrimination was all encompassing. It was political, social and economic."

Khehla Shubane

"...Anti-racist struggles do not end with the appropriate constitutional and legal victories. Anti-racist vigilance is a continual need. Anti-racist strategies have to be conceptualized anew in order to give substance to the form of a non-racial democracy and ensure that new forms of racism do not take root in more sophisticated and complex incarnations but which nevertheless have the same effect of exclusion or subordination."

Ratnamala Singh

"...The deepest diabolic damage caused by racism results in its victims' dehumanization--in racism's historical undermining of Black peoples' capacity to resist co-optation and the degradation of their own good values. Racism's vilest fruits are a lack of hope and a void of trust and faith in ourselves."

Edna Roland

"Racism takes a toll on all of us, victims as well as others. Racially discriminatory attitudes and behavior are deeply embedded within our institutions and individual psyches. Often we are unaware of the existence of race-based assumptions and the subtle and powerful influences they exert upon us. As some have rightly observed, through our policies as nations, and most especially through our individual actions and attitudes, we end up making race every day."

Franklin A. Thomas

"...I never cease to be appalled by the capacity of people to deny the basic dignity and worth of fellow human beings....At the same time, I am inspired every day by people...who reach out to others (regardless of their apparent differences), respect their dignity, support their potential, and affirm the oneness and equality of all human beings....(T)he survival of our ever-shrinking world will eventually depend on the willingness of all people to respect, if not love, one another."

Peter D. Bell

"Being a woman, a Black woman or a White woman, makes a big difference in how we experience racism and prejudice....Racism perpetuates itself through the control of women's minds and bodies."

Ana Maria Brasileiro

"We must continue to struggle against racism, sexism and other linked forms of oppression, not only because it is the right thing to do, although it is. Nor do we struggle only when victory seems to be at hand, although we always hope to prevail. We continue to struggle because to give in and give up is to ensure that all is lost and to betray what we stand for. Ultimately, we struggle in order to affirm our values and who we are."

Lynn Huntley

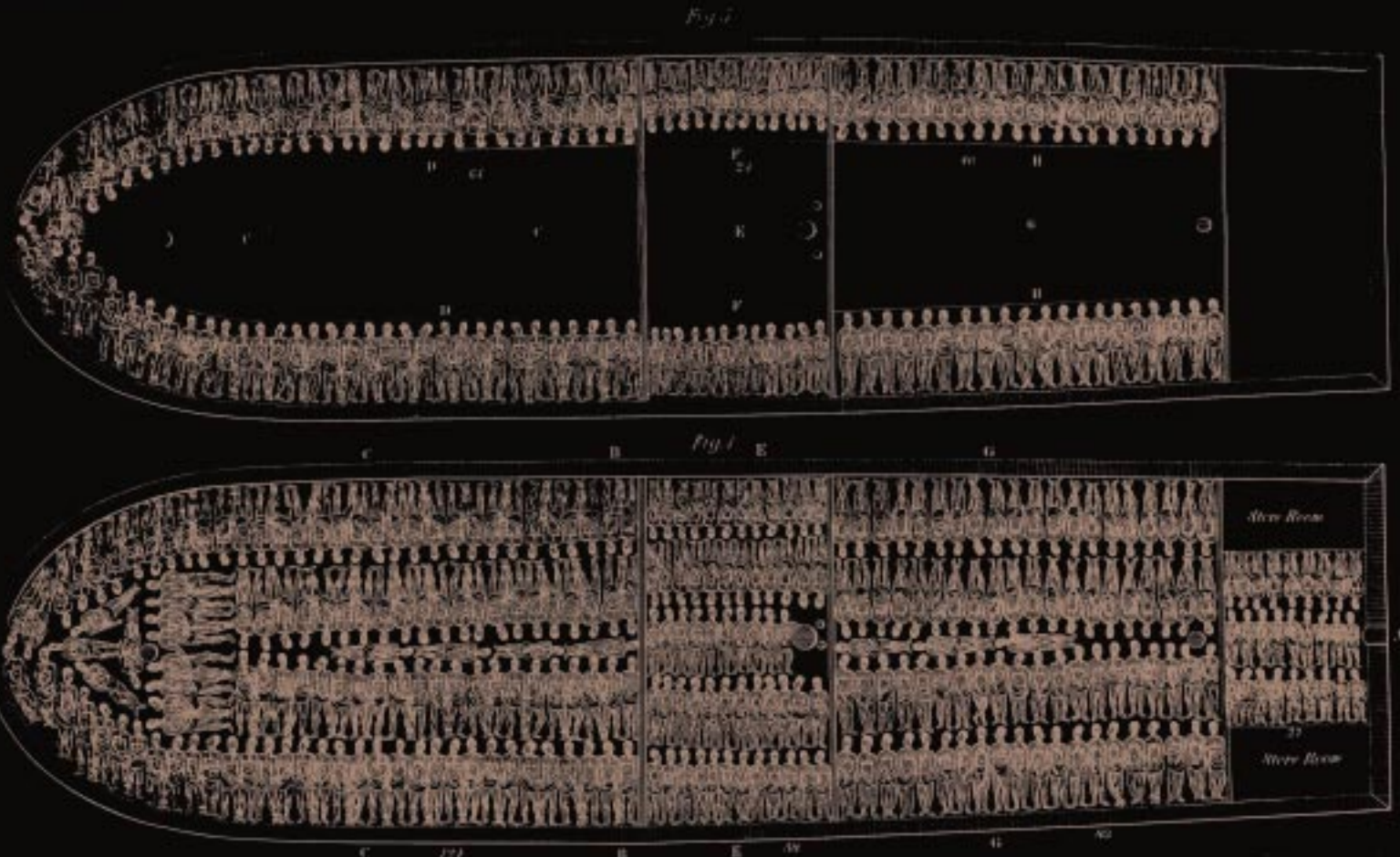
I. *Introduction*

The moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice.

~ MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

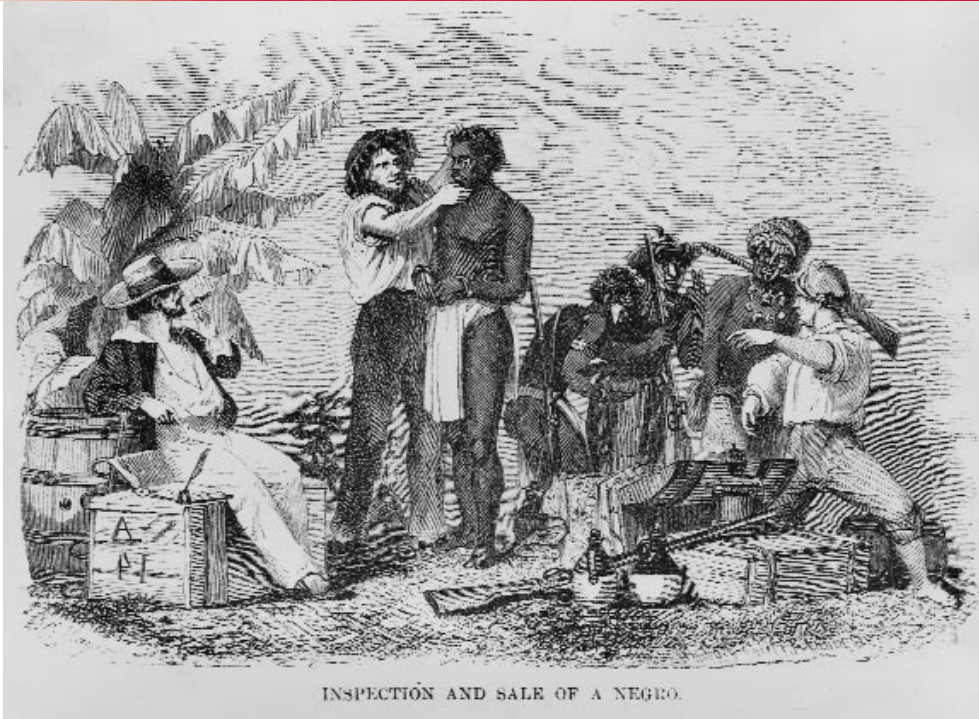
And here we are, at the center of the arc. . . Everything now, we must assume, is in our hands; we have no right to assume otherwise. If we, and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others, do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and... change the history of the world.

~ JAMES BALDWIN



At the beginning of the 20th century, British and Afrikaner forces were engaged in a high-stakes war for colonial domination of the southern region of Africa, most of which is today the nation of South Africa. Black Africans in this territory lacked adequate arms to defend themselves and quickly became pawns in the White power struggle.

Across the Atlantic Ocean, Brazil, the first permanent colony to enslave Africans (in 1538) and the last to abolish slavery (in 1888), made no provision to care for its vast population of poor, uneducated former slaves and their progeny. Seeking a national identity aligned with Portugal, its colonial master, and the rest of Europe, the Brazilian government and ruling elite nurtured a color-coded, class-based society, where Whites monopolized positions of power. Both Africans and indigenous Indians were uniformly poor and voiceless.



INSPECTION AND SALE OF A NEGRO.

Far to the north, in the United States, the Supreme Court coined the phrase, "separate but equal" in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the 1896 ruling that ushered in an era of legally sanctioned racial segregation and discrimination. Afterward, legal discrimination was confined primarily to the Southern states, but the custom of White privilege reigned virtually everywhere in the country for the better part of the 20th century.

In all three countries, most men believed that all women were subordinate. Women were excluded from voting, many kinds of work for pay and most positions of leadership. For women, whether White or Black, "anatomy" was deemed to ordain "destiny."

The legacy of racism and sexism in all three nations dates back to each country's origins: Colonialism and monarchy ruled Brazil for almost four centuries— from the time seafaring explorers in the early 1500s claimed it for the Portuguese crown. Brazil was the largest and most enduring slaveholding society in the Western Hemisphere, enslaving far more Africans than the United States. During the first four centuries of its existence, enslaved African women and men made up a substantial majority of Brazil's population.

Unintended consequences arose in Brazil. The constant importation of Africans kept a vibrant African culture in play and kindled revolts by the enslaved, most memorably in the late 1500s, when the Republic of Palmares, a community of Africans escaping slavery, grew to more than 30,000 before being overwhelmed by military force in 1695.

Another long-term, social consequence of the huge African population was pervasive, sexual subordination of vulnerable, enslaved African women by dominant White males. White Brazilians, eager to increase their numbers, encouraged miscegenation as a way of "whitening" the population. The country remained majority Black even after slavery was abolished, but the government later banned Black immigration and vigorously promoted and subsidized White European immigration as replacement labor.

Despite appearances of fusion, an ever-widening gulf separated darker and poorer citizens of late 19th-century Brazil from lighter skinned and richer ones. Segregation was never imposed by law, but an intricate weave of social customs and class distinctions draped the descendants of enslaved Africans in tattered threads of perpetual disadvantage.

Brazilian women of African descent, doubly burdened by color and gender, occupied the lowest levels of the paid workforce, largely as domestic servants. White women were more socially and economically privileged than their Black counterparts, but were expected to stay home and have children in keeping with the mores of the time. Both were valued as means of production— Black women for their labor and the children they could produce to serve as slaves and White women for the "racially pure" children they could produce.

South Africa's strategic location on the sea route to the Orient drew Dutch settlers in the mid-1600s and then the British— both to the decided disadvantage of the Black Africans, who suffered grievously from European diseases, land seizures and forced labor. Europeans also instituted slavery, although most of the enslaved were drawn from other parts of Africa or East Asia. The practice neither lasted as long, nor was it as generalized in South Africa as it was in Brazil.

When local White settlers who called themselves Afrikaners and the British learned of the land's rich deposits of diamonds and gold in the latter half of the 19th century, they fought the bloody Boer War for control of the wealth. The Black majority found little, if any, hope of fair treatment from either side. By 1910, when the Union of South Africa was admitted into the British Commonwealth, the English and Afrikaner peoples formed a cross-ethnic, White minority coalition of convenience. While differing on other matters, they agreed on policies and laws that restricted the rights of Black Africans in virtually all areas of public life and used brute force and violence to carry out those policies.

This laid the foundation for the coming era of apartheid. A hierarchy of power and privilege was created in which White men occupied the upper echelons, and White women, afforded fewer rights and privileges, were still economically advantaged over all Black Africans. Like their Brazilian counterparts, Black women were denied equality because of race and gender and were generally viewed and treated as subordinates to Black men, as well.

The American Revolution of 1776, "a people's rebellion," overthrew British colonialism in the United States. But that inspiring triumph hardly obscures White racist practices before and after the war: the systematic annihilation of the indigenous Indian population and the use of African slavery, beginning 150 years before the Revolutionary War and continuing for 80 years. After President Abraham Lincoln freed enslaved Africans and permitted their entry into the Union Army, the Civil War between Southern Whites and the rest of the nation ended with the South's defeat in 1865.

The federal government then spent a dozen years in a largely futile program to "reconstruct" the South. Afterward, Whites in the North and South returned to a policy of states' rights and White supremacy. By the century's end, when the U.S. Supreme Court had chiseled the "separate but equal" myth into the law, the old institution of slavery was effectively replaced by different forms of racism: Ku

Klux Klan terrorism, lynching, unbridled White power, state-imposed violence and legalized segregation.

Similar to those in Brazil and South Africa, White American women enjoyed economic advantages over Blacks of both genders but occupied positions subordinate to White men. White women in the United States gained the right to vote in 1920 but did not enter the paid workforce in large numbers until after World War II. Due to economic necessity, Black women worked throughout in much higher numbers in low-wage and low-skill jobs. They were effectively denied the right to vote in the South until the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 became the law of the land.

These are but a few brief glimpses of the historic origins of racism and its frequent companions, sexism and inequality, in Brazil, South Africa and the United States. They illuminate how three nations, located on separate continents, evolved and developed distinct manifestations of racial and gender-based discrimination.

As the 20th century ends, the United States, with a current population of more than 276 million, bears the burden and the glory of its status as the world's richest and most powerful nation and carries still the legacy of a house divided over race. Brazil, with an estimated 166 million people spread over a land mass larger than the contiguous United States, is one of the world's 10 largest economies— but also one of its most unequal societies in terms of the distribution of income and wealth. South Africa's 41 million citizens live under a modern democratic constitution in southern Africa's most highly developed nation, yet Blacks face daunting inequalities left over from the apartheid era.

In spite of their histories— perhaps, at times, because of them— the three nations featured in this report have made some powerful strides toward movement beyond racism in recent years. In 1988, Brazil's long period of military rule and oligarchy gave way to a new democratic government. President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Brazil's freely elected leader, has acknowledged the role of racism and discrimination in maintaining Black disadvantage and White privilege and the need for corrective action. Now, as the new century begins, a vanguard of Brazilian activists has at long last broken the silence that sustained the myth of "racial democracy" in the country, beginning a national debate on these critical issues.

In 1994, in the first inclusive and free elections in their history, South Africans elected Nelson Mandela as their president. Just three years earlier, the African National Congress

leader had been released after 27 years of confinement as a political prisoner. In 1999, Thabo Mbeki was chosen as President Mandela's successor in free elections. After almost half a century of mind-numbing racism under the all-White apartheid regime, South Africa has become a democratic republic based on the principles of non-racism and non-sexism, constitutional government and protection of human rights. Many members of the national Parliament are female, including its speaker. But the legacy of racism, sexism and inequality continue to consign most Black South Africans to desperate poverty and most women to less than equal rights and opportunities.

Beginning in the 1950s, African Americans and their allies spearheaded the movement that toppled legalized segregation and discrimination. The movement established legal and judicial principles of equity that helped clear the way for Blacks, women of all "races" and others to make impressive political, social and economic gains. Today, America has a larger Black middle class and more Black officials than ever before. Black women have narrowed the gap in earnings with White women and achieved levels of higher education greater than those attained by Black men.

These and other momentous changes constitute some of the 20th century's greatest, transcendent and continuing human rights stories. Racism, sexism and other such divisive "isms" are losing their grip in most nations of the world. Emerging is a hard-won consensus, a deeply felt conviction, that notions of racial or male superiority are destructive myths best left in the 20th century's wastebasket. Most people no longer accept White supremacy, a ruling assumption at the beginning of this century, as we move into the next. As the century ends, however, people of African descent are still subject to de facto discrimination, and a disproportionately large number are mired in deep poverty.

Brazil, South Africa and the United States have hardly begun to move beyond racism and sexism to a new plateau of equity, but their achievements provide encouragement and hope for the next millennium. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu has observed, it is impossible "once the desire for freedom and self determination is awakened in a

people, for it to be quenched or satisfied with anything less than freedom and self-determination."

Today, in Brazil, South Africa and the United States, the prevailing goals of government have begun to shift from primarily serving the interests of Whites to trying to develop the means for all women and men to build better lives. Basic principles of gender and racial equality are now part of domestic and international law, policy and commerce, endorsed by most governments and people in words, if not always in deeds. A growing number of institutions and efforts foster peaceful relations among nations and between governments and their peoples.



The challenge of the new epoch will be to move individuals, institutions and societies beyond racism and sexism in practice as much as in belief by uprooting institutional arrangements, attitudes, and policies that promote and sustain inequality. The contours of dramatic, transnational developments affecting future efforts are already visible: globalization, migration and demographic shifts, human rights, women's global leadership, democratization, and the yearning for peace and reconciliation. These pose new challenges, opportunities and imperatives and heighten our interdependence.

The challenges are many and not to be understated. Old patterns of hierarchy and racism die hard. Times of rapid and dislocating change, when old norms give way and uncertainty is palpable, can bring out negative feelings, fears, and an "impulse to insularity." Shifting sands can be treacherous. This should tell us all that now is not the time to take anything for granted.

In each country, the story of race relations is still being written. The picture is fluid and dynamic. The words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. are apt:

Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. Even a superficial look at history reveals that no social advance rolls in on the wheels of inevitability... This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.



IN THEIR OWN VOICES

Brazilians

Rubem César Fernandes

Rubem César Fernandes is coordinator of the Viva Rio Movement, a comprehensive initiative for the civic and social revitalization of Rio de Janeiro, once the capital and largest city of Brazil and always its brightest beacon, but beset in recent years by a succession of calamities. Rubem, a native of the city, returned in 1973 after eleven years in exile:

I left in the mid-1960s, as so many people did, to escape from the dictatorship. The joke back then was that Brazil had a two-party system: Yes and Yes Sir. The regime was too restrictive for a lot of us, and resistance was dangerous, so we left. Exile was a great adventure, really— I was in my early twenties, when life itself is an adventure. I went first to Poland, and then elsewhere in Europe, and finally to the United States. In 1973, soon after I finished work on my doctorate at Columbia University, my father was shot by an intruder at his home here in Rio, and I came to see about him— and I've been here ever since.

He was a doctor, and my grandfather had been a Presbyterian minister, and I came home and taught at the university. As you can see, our roots were deep in Rio's professional class— which, of course, means middle or upper class, privileged. Returning as I was from exile on the political left, I had mixed feelings about coming home.

And for Rio, too, it was the best and worst of times. We had lost the national capital to Brasilia in the 1960s, and that brought financial hardships and diminished status. Then São Paulo overtook us in population. On the brighter side, the transition from dictatorship to democracy began in the mid-seventies and moved slowly forward, and we got a new federal constitution in 1988. But the decade of the eighties was very tough for Rio, primarily because of a huge increase in drug traffic. Things just seemed to spin out of control— crime and violence, racism, poverty, police corruption, the kidnapping and killing of street children. It was a shame— this beautiful place, these wonderful people, and all of us were going down. Viva Rio was born from that sober realization.

I think the time is right for all these things to be happening now— the coming of democracy, the revival of Rio, the challenges to racial and



economic discrimination. We are seriously trying to cope with civil rights and civil liberties at the grassroots level for the first time in our history. The union movement and the rights of workers go back to the 1930s, but until now we have never focused explicitly on race or gender or economic class issues.

Now race is finally on the table– but it's still hard to get people engaged. Afro-Brazilian culture is strong and pervasive, and Whites freely participate in it– in the religion, the music, the food. There is no fixed meaning of color; even within the same family there are differences. I always thought of myself and my family as White– until my father went to New York and was identified as colored or Latino. Brazil's racism is very subtle, even intimate; we share virtually everything– except social status and mobility.

The challenges for us now are clear and connected: to uplift the favelas and end their isolation from the rest of the city, to raise the visibility and the status of Blacks and women and all poor people, and to reduce the huge gap between the “haves” and the “have nots.” We have to do these things together. It's one thing to pursue separate social or cultural or religious interests– many are attracted to that– but politically and economically, we're all in the same boat, sink or swim. Democracy is not divisible.

Personally, I think we're making real progress, and I'm encouraged. Rio is being revitalized, born again. Brazil as a whole is on the upswing, too. The authoritarian impulse is still strong, but democracy is infectious; people like freedom– and having tasted it, they won't be willing to give it up. This is a very pivotal time in our history.

Zézé Motta

Zézé Motta was catapulted to fame in 1976 when she starred in the title role of *Xica*, a Brazilian movie drama about the exploits of a heroic slave woman. As one of few Black actresses to attain stardom in Brazil, Zézé has stood out as exceptional proof of how closed the nation's acting profession has been to citizens of African origin. Now, at the pinnacle of her career, Zézé Motta is determined to make the path easier for young Black actors and actresses whose opportunities are limited by racial discrimination:

When I first discovered that we have this problem in Brazil, this racial discrimination, my initial reaction was sadness. I cried a lot. But then I soon realized that crying was not the solution. I had to do something to change the situation.

I had come to Rio with my family from Campos, a small city in the interior, when I was just three years old. Throughout my childhood, I didn't see a lot of discrimination because I was not around many White people. It was not until the mid-1960s, when I was trying to become an actress, that I realized how serious the problem was.

Once, I recall, a commercial I had acted in was rejected by the client because, he said, viewers wouldn't accept advice from a Black woman. They paid me, but they refused to air the commercial. The assumption was that Blacks should only be allowed to appear on the screen as maids, servants– and, in fact, those were the only roles we could get, and directors typically behaved as if they were doing us a favor when they hired us.

But then I was lucky enough to be chosen to play *Xica*, and that changed everything for me. Looking back, I can separate my life into two chapters: before and after *Xica*. The movie was a big hit, not only all over Brazil but throughout Latin America and beyond.

Now I have made over 20 films, and I'm on TV, the stage, in commercials– and I sing, too. I have visibility, and so it's harder for those who control things to say “no” to me. But there are still very few Black actors and actresses in this country, and their roles are limited, and their pay is less than that of Whites. So I have become active in trying to call attention to them and to increase their number and their opportunities.

We have compiled a roster of over 300 Black actors and actresses all over Brazil, and we are forming a professional group, like an actors guild, to support their advancement. Also, this year I'm living out a dream with the creation of a theater workshop. We have gone into three of the favelas, where poor people are concentrated– where everyone is “Black,” even the Whites– and we have chosen 50 adolescents to spend six months in an intensive training program



that we hope will lead directly to acting jobs. This is only a start, but we can build on it, so I'm very excited about this. My hope for our future is in this rising generation.

There is so much to be done. The myth of racial democracy makes it very hard to fight the subtle and sophisticated racism that is so common here. I'll give you a couple of examples. A few years ago, I had a screen romance with a White actor in a telenovela— a television series — and the negative reaction among White Brazilians was widespread and extreme.

And here's another: We have a national law now that makes open discrimination a crime. For example, it's no longer permissible to publish "help wanted" ads for Whites only. So now there are codes. Look in the paper and you'll see this phrase: "Must have good appearance." That's generally understood to mean, "No Blacks need apply." Such exclusions are common— in housing, employment, education, and even public accommodations.

Afro-Brazilians have been held back in so many ways for so long that it's hard to build a movement here. We need to work on our self-esteem, especially

among the young. And we have to make alliances with others who are willing to support our cause.

A true racial democracy would be a wonderful thing for Brazil. It would assure the elevation of all cultures in our society, and not the obliteration of any. That's the ideal I want to work for. There are deep divisions here now, obviously, but I'm an optimistic person, so I have hope for the future.

Dulce Pereira

Dulce Pereira was born in the interior of São Paulo state, in a rich agricultural and coffee-growing region sometimes called, "the Brazilian California." Both of her grandfathers once owned farms there but lost their land, in part because of racial discrimination: they were Black men with small holdings, hemmed in by powerful Whites who owned large estates. Dulce, the eldest of four children, saw and felt the painful adjustment her parents had to make as a result of these losses, and came away with a powerful sensitivity to discrimination and injustice:



My mother went to work as a maid, and from the age of ten I often worked with her to help the family. But she and my father had visions of our future, and they saw to it that we kept up in school and stayed connected to the world. We had Japanese and Arab neighbors, and in our Catholic Church there was a progressive priest who inspired me. So in spite of the problems associated with being Black and poor and a girl, I did rather well.

At 16, I passed the American Friends Service examination for its overseas exchange program, and in the fall of 1972 I went to live for a year with a White family in South Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It was a wonderful experience, the turning point of my life. Our social and political interests were very compatible. They had lost a daughter to leukemia, and in some small way I moved into that empty space, and we bonded, they and I. So I have two families now.

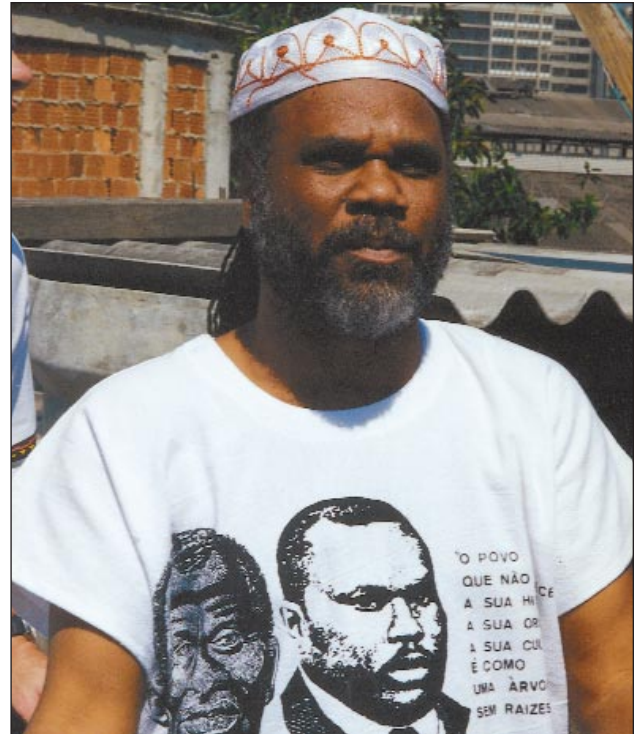
After I returned to São Paulo, I moved to Brasília and enrolled in the communications program at the state university there. Later, back at São Paulo University, I did graduate work in broadcasting— and all the while, I remained active in race and gender issues and in the Labor Party. For the past ten years, I have been the director of a public affairs interview program on television.

I'm president of the Palmares Foundation in the Brazilian Ministry of Culture. [Palmares was the name of a maroon society in the interior of northeast Brazil in the late seventeenth century.] In the new democratic administration of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, this foundation is the first government response to racism, an acknowledgment that Brazil must come to terms with its history as a racist society. It's an encouraging start, but we have a very long way to go.

Throughout Brazilian history, the African and Indian cultures have been characterized as inferior, while a small minority of European males was guaranteed access to land and wealth. This social pyramid, defined by race and gender, has given us one of the most inequitable societies in the world. To correct that, we have to concentrate on lifting up those in greatest need— and most of them happen to be Black.

Ivanir dos Santos

Ivanir dos Santos was born in a Rio brothel in 1956, and lived there until he was five. Then, in the chaos of a police roundup of prostitutes, he was forcibly separated from his mother and taken away to a government-operated institution for children. He never saw her again. But being



Black and poor was not enough to defeat Ivanir. Now, as executive director of CEAP, a non-governmental community development and advocacy organization on behalf of poor and marginalized Brazilians, he uses the story of his own survival to inspire large numbers of today's slum-dwellers:

I was classified as an orphan, even though I knew that both my mother and my father were alive. He was an auto mechanic who came regularly to see my mother and me. But they took me away from her, and I was given a number— 76— and kept in various detention centers until I was a teenager. Finally, when I was about 14, I went back to the old street corner where I had lived, and some of the prostitutes recognized me. I learned from them that my mother had committed suicide in despair over losing me.

Somehow, in spite of my circumstances, I managed to get through high school and find a job as a graphic artist's assistant. Art, music, and theater were the things I liked best, but I was also very interested in organizing young people like me, people labeled as "problems"— abandoned and neglected children and young adults. I was in my 20's by then, and as I became more socially and politically aware, I gradually realized how much race has to do with these issues. Institutionalized White youths are called children, and the government's intent is to give them assistance— but Black youths in state custody are called minors, and the general prescriptions for them are control and



punishment. Society sees them as delinquents, as untouchables, but I see them as the future, as barefoot, ragged, hungry, abused citizens. When I came to that awareness, I knew I had a calling, a mission in life.

For the past 20 years, I have tried in every way I could to be an activist in the fight against racism and poverty. I qualified by examination for admission to Notre Dame College in Rio, and earned a degree

there. I have continued to work in graphic arts and the theater. As a member of the Labor Party, I have run for office several times—most recently in 1996, when I got more than a half-million votes and finished a close third in the race for vice mayor of Rio.

My first responsibility, though, is to the children of the favelas; they are the primary focus of CEAP. Brazilian society has excluded them; they deserve respect, not

scorn, and a fair chance to improve their circumstances in life. I have the gift of my experience, my survival, to pass on to the children of the streets. What I have learned, what I have tried to be, is not so much an example to them as an inspiration. Not “be like me,” but “fight to rise above this, and then find ways to help those coming along after you.”

You see the poor everywhere in Brazil. But the ones you see are not the problem. They are just the tip of the iceberg, a mere sample of the huge underlying crisis that makes a farce of our so-called racial democracy. If the true problem ever comes on the street in full force, this society will fall apart. It is clearly in the best interest of all Brazilians to eradicate inequality and discrimination and injustice now, before a terrible calamity comes to pass.

Zuenir Ventura

Zuenir Ventura has lived all of his life in the state of Rio de Janeiro, being born into a village working-class family in 1931 and moving to metropolitan Rio to stay when he entered college. Today he is one of the city's best-known journalists, a columnist for the newspaper *Jornal do Brasil*. For most of his career he has written about popular culture, but he attracted wide public notice in 1994 with a book (*Divided City*) about life inside one of Rio's most notorious slums, Vigário Geral, where 21 people had been killed in a disastrous police drug assault the previous year. His own humble origin gives Zuenir a clear perspective on the close connections between Rio's affluent minority and its legions of beleaguered poor:



My father was a house painter. He and my mother had 11 children, but only four of us survived beyond childhood, and I remember how hard they struggled to make life better for us than it had been for them. I got a degree from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and thought I might become a teacher, but ended up instead with a job in the archives of a local newspaper. One day I was asked to write something, and that's how I became a journalist.

Rio is like New York— a huge city where people come from everywhere and are transformed. What happens here eventually happens all over Brazil. So the crisis of the favelas, the screaming social inequities and violence, must be taken seriously by everyone. These social problems are so great in Brazil, it's irresponsible and foolhardy to ignore them, to be unconcerned.

It's estimated that there are about 600 favelas in Rio, and that at least one-fifth of our 10 million people live in them. Vigário Geral is not small, but by no means the largest, with about 20,000. I started going there a month after the massacre. As outsiders, we have racial and social prejudices, and we're scared of violence, but I tried to shed all of that and be completely open, with no preconceived ideas, so that I could see it with the fresh eye of the chronicler. To my great surprise, I found no deep desire for vengeance there— a lot of grief, a lot of pain and suffering, but also an impulse of survival and even a predisposition toward happiness. I found neighborliness, fraternity, solidarity, a spirit of sharing, and an appreciation of small blessings.

For most people who read my book, this was a revelation. We just don't know. We live near the favelas, next door to them, but they're unknown to us. They've been all around us for a hundred years, but only recently has society's awareness of this social tragedy grown, and only now are we making an effort to change. We heard their music, we saw what a view they had from the hilltops, and we were lulled into complacency. But now we hear the gunshots, and the violence has spread all over the city, and we are forced to realize that this segregation won't work— no security system, no gates and bunkers will protect us. There is no solution except to raise the standard of living in the favelas and integrate them fully into the life of the city.

Consciousness is the first step toward that solution. When enough people are aware and realize what's at stake, there will be a nonpartisan, non-ideological movement for change that will force the city and state to act. If we are to survive, the divided city has to end.

This is in part a racial problem, but it's more complex than that; it's really social and economic apartheid we're talking about. True, the poor in general are Black, but their exclusion is based more on economics than race. You truly can't tell who's Black or White any more, unless a person has very obvious African features and color. I myself am White, I suppose, but like most people, I don't find it easy to talk about this. I learned about racial stereotypes from my mother, who was very light-skinned. When I was a teenager, a Black person came to our house and said, “I'm your cousin,” and my mother greeted him as her nephew. What's the lesson in this? Our language is ripe with euphemisms and circumlocutions to avoid it, and we have been somewhat self-delusive and hypocritical. Now, militant politics is forcing us to say what we are. What am I? I'm a Brazilian.

Vera Soares

Vera Soares came out of the University of São Paulo in the late 1960s as an ardent feminist, deeply committed to the struggle against gender bias, but less aware of the extent to which race and class discrimination permeated Brazilian society. Now a teacher and administrator at the university, she is still an activist for women's rights— but with a broader understanding of the central place of Black and poor women in the movement for social reform:



When I was a student back during the dictatorship, I agreed with the leftist argument that the class struggle was also about gender and race. But race and even class issues were somewhat abstract to us then, because there were so few Black or truly poor students among us. There were many women, though, and for us the gender issue was very concrete; in fact, it was what gave rise to our activism in the first place. All we could see then, incredibly, was gender, not race.

It took twelve or fifteen years— all the way into the late 1980's— for us to finally realize that the feminist movement could never be complete without Black participation. I personally have learned a lot from the Black

women I've met. I've learned that if we want the women's movement to be powerful, we have to be united across racial lines. Thanks to those women, I don't have any hang-ups about integration versus separate development. Both are necessary. Blacks have to come together to know their history and find their identity and develop pride, but that shouldn't in any way make them less committed to feminism or democracy.

I don't think it's realistic or practical to pursue political change in Brazil through an all-female or all-Black party. We can't be rigidly separate; social and cultural and political movements have to be flexible and interlocking. Then we can all work together to make the national and state governments serve everyone— male and female, rich and poor, White and Black.

Racial identity is a very difficult and complex issue in Brazil. We have to acknowledge that racial discrimination exists here and make every effort to close the tremendous gap between rich and poor. These two issues are closely intertwined. This country is rich in resources, but so many of its people are poor, and most of them are of African or Indian origin. Also, power is still largely concentrated in the hands of an elite few White males. If we are to make any real progress against these tremendous problems, then we must develop alliances among women, Blacks, and the poor.



Benedita da Silva

Benedita da Silva, a lifelong resident of the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, is also one of the most prominent women in contemporary Brazil. She was a co-founder in the late 1970s of the Workers Party [popularly called PT]; she was elected to the Rio City Council in 1982 and to the Federal Chamber of Deputies [lower house] in 1986; she narrowly lost a runoff election for mayor of Rio in 1992; and she won a seat in the Federal Senate in 1994— becoming only the third Black member of that 81-seat assembly. In 1998, she was elected Deputy Governor of Rio de Janeiro. A tall, forceful, striking figure with a resonant voice, Deputy Governor Benedita has staked out a place for herself at the center of public life as a champion of three under-represented constituencies— Afro-Brazilians, poor people, and women:

I have lived here in Chapéu Mangueira virtually all of my life; I was born right over that hill [she points], just a couple of miles from here. I designed and built this house myself; it took me over ten years. I could have built it somewhere else, had I wanted to, but I chose to put it here. This is my home community, these are my people. It's just a simple house on a hill, but a real house, not a shanty, modest but comfortable, and big enough to accommodate visitors. I have lots of visitors—just about everyone but the Pope, so far.

Like the vast majority of Afro-Brazilians, I grew up in poverty, the next-to-last of 15 children— and, as it turned out, the only one to go to college. My mother was a laundress, my father a laborer. They were illiterate. Not ignorant, just illiterate. They struggled heroically to make life better for us, but nothing ever came easy; poverty and racial discrimination always held them back. Thanks to them, I got a healthy exposure to three important areas of my life— education, religion, and work— and they also gave me the motivation, the confidence, and the courage to fight hard for those at the bottom.

So my life conditions eventually took me into politics, and, though I have not always been victorious at the polls, I have managed to reach a level of visibility that allows me to be an effective voice for my constituents. It's very natural for me to be visible— I'm big, I'm Black, I'm loud. And because the Black majority in Brazil has always been so invisible— in government, in business, in the universities, on TV— it's especially important now, when we are in transition from dictatorship to democracy, for there to be people like me out there ringing the bell for racial justice.

Racism and the denial of human rights have always been problems in Brazil, but the government and civil society have ignored this, even denied it. We are



beginning to hear new expressions of concern from the government about these issues, but not much has actually happened yet. We have to go beyond words and symbols to substance and action. The Black citizens of this country want— we demand— inclusion in Brazilian society at every level. We have much to give to our nation and much to get from it.

I've been to South Africa. I've seen what Nelson Mandela has done for the Black majority there, and for the cause of democracy. We Afro-Brazilians are where they were when Mandela came out of prison: facing the necessity to create and develop new leadership. I think we are at the beginning of something very important, something historic.