

THE HUMAN TRADITION IN **MODERN BRAZIL**

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José Sérgio Leite Lopes, "Class, Ethnicity, and Color in the Making of Brazilian Football," *Daedalus* 129:2 (2000): 239–70; idem, "Football and the Working Class in Brazil: Colour and Class in the Making of National Identity," Working Paper, Manchester International Centre for Labour Studies, University of Manchester, no. 15 (May 1996); and Alex Bellos, *Futebol: The Brazilian Way of Life* (North Pomfret, VT: Bloomsbury, 2002).

Norma Fraga

Race, Class, Education, and the Estado Novo

JERRY DÁVILA

The music and sports industries began to offer a small number of talented but mostly poorly educated nonwhites such as Geraldo Pereira and Domingos da Guia new possibilities for social mobility and celebrity in the 1930s. Studies by social scientists, however, have shown that level of education is the variable that best predicts future income. Of course, income is only one way of measuring relative success (a subjective concept, especially for poorly paid academics) within a given social system. In any case, unlike a career, a reputation, physical vigor, or belongings, education is a possession that cannot be easily lost or taken away. A good education tends to lend more stability to an individual's position as well as the patina of polish and respectability often associated with superior social and class status. On average, a better-educated person is more able to deal with the adversities and injustices that nature, society, or fate presents them over the course of a lifetime. In the ideal, public educational systems should serve as gateways to achievement and social mobility for all citizens. But in practice, educational institutions often act as barriers to maintain the status quo.

Jerry Dávila's recounting of Norma Fraga's life as a student of African descent during Brazil's Estado Novo (1937–1945) reveals how the public education system worked to the disadvantage of most nonwhites. New standards for teacher certification and higher pay led to both a "whitening" and a feminization of the teacher corps in Rio's growing network of elementary schools during the Vargas years. The system also tended to reflect stubborn ideas of racial hierarchy among an overwhelmingly white teacher population. Thus, white students were more likely to be tracked for achievement and promotion, while black and brown students were more likely to be held to low standards or held back altogether. Most of the architects of the system and the curriculum itself preserved stereotypes of primitive, inferior African culture and assumed that the need to "whiten" those of African descent through education was a matter of national salvation. These practices flew in the face of the nationalist rhetoric of racial democracy that most leaders of the Estado Novo embraced. As Professor Dávila shows, Dona Norma was one of the few persons of color who managed to overcome barriers that kept most nonwhites out of the higher educational

institutions and the profession of teaching. Her relatively privileged background and intelligence overcame the social disadvantages of her race. Her biography gives renewed life to the tired cliché of the exception that proved the rule, and it shows how a disproportionately small, but significant, non-white urban middle class emerged despite the many prejudices common to Brazil's institutions.

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On September 4, 1942, some 40,000 public school students assembled in Rio de Janeiro's largest soccer stadium to pay homage to the "Brazilian Race." Under the direction of the country's most famous classical composer, Heitor Villa-Lobos, the students performed "folkloric" African and indigenous songs and sang nationalist hymns to celebrate the Estado Novo dictatorship. They were honoring the dictator, President Getúlio Vargas, and the spirit of Pan-Americanism. Brazil had just entered World War II on the side of the Allies and would soon send soldiers to Europe to fight under the command of U.S. generals. Ironically, this gathering of tens of thousands of students—described as a special "Race" that was "Brazilian"—sang nationalist anthems and celebrated the Allied cause by imitating the public assemblies of fascist Europe. The Estado Novo regime that mobilized these students had been imposed five years earlier as a dictatorship colored by fascistic influences, but this government was never as heavy-handed or supported by well-organized grassroots fascist parties commanded by a national leader such as Adolf Hitler or Benito Mussolini.

One of the 40,000 voices at the stadium on that day belonged to Norma Fraga, a fourteen-year-old student at the nation's most prestigious high school, the federally run Colégio Pedro II. She stood at a historic crossroads for Brazil. Her singing bridged the Allied military cause with the fascist political culture that it fought. What was it like for her? Did she respond to the fascism of the event, the nationalism of the moment, or the world at war? None of the above: "for us at that time, we did not have the slightest notion of what it all was, it was something for the youth to enjoy. There must have been some who detested it, because

it was more or less mandatory, and there were always those who would not go, but I went to all of them, because I love big public events . . . it was fascist, it was a fascist regime, but we all loved it."

Norma Fraga's experience was typical in many ways. When she was nine years old, her family moved from the countryside to the federal capital, Rio de Janeiro, at a time when urban populations in Brazil swelled. She attended the public schools that had been transformed and expanded by Anísio Teixeira, a progressive reformer and Rio's director of public education before he was purged from Vargas's government in a 1935 anti-Communist crackdown. Like many young urban women increasingly contemplating professional careers, Fraga dreamed of being a teacher, and indeed would teach history for most of her life. Yet there are also ways in which her story is unique. Standing in the stadium in 1942, she wore the khaki uniform of the Colégio Pedro II, one of the most exclusive schools in Brazil at the time and indeed one of the country's few public secondary schools. She would join the 4 percent of her generation that completed their secondary education. Indeed, according to census data, only 17 percent completed the third grade. What was most exceptional about her experience, however, is that Norma Fraga was a woman of color.

While the 1940 census declared nearly half of Brazil's population to be black, indigenous, or racially mixed, and while Brazilian elites professed that their country was a racial democracy free of tensions and intolerance, it was unusual for a student of color to reach the rarified halls of the Colégio Pedro II, let alone any other secondary school. Of her class of over 500, there was only one other student of color, Fraga recalls, and that pupil was the daughter of one of the school's administrative staff. It was highly uncommon for a young woman like her to be in high school and much more probable that she would work as a domestic servant, the source of employment for one-third of black women in Rio over age twelve at the time. Two-thirds of Brazilians of color in her generation were illiterate. Norma was born in the countryside, the youngest of twelve children. The odds that she would escape the almost invisible barriers that systematically marginalized Brazilians of color were high. The odds that she would reach the Colégio, and indeed complete a university education, were astronomically high.

Norma Fraga was an unusual woman in an unusual time. Her experience is evocative of the barriers faced by Brazilians of color like herself, and of the very rare opportunities that made it possible to overcome them. It is a story of belonging and of being able to belong. Interviews conducted between 1999 and 2001 with Norma Fraga, and with other students who studied at the Colégio Pedro II alongside her, make it pos-

sible to see her experience not only as an exception but also as a means of understanding the growing complexity of urban life in a country that struggled with its identity, especially in terms of its racial heterogeneity and mixture. The awkward transition from semi-fascist dictatorship to signatory of the United Nations charter, the slow process of industrialization, the quick process of urbanization, the image of racial democracy—lying like a veneer over centuries of slavery and racial injustice—all framed the world in which Norma Fraga grew up.

As Norma's experience shows, there is more than one way to read the patterns of politics and political participation during the Estado Novo. Some white students of the Colégio Pedro II became political activists who first pressed for Brazil's entry into World War II, then for an end to the Estado Novo dictatorship. A few even became members of Brazil's Communist Party. Norma did not take part in these movements. To the contrary, she relished the choreographed moments of nationalist celebration of the Estado Novo regime. Still, her presence at these events, especially as a student of the prestigious Colégio Pedro II, defied the expectations of white educators who, like others of Brazil's mostly white social elite, did not believe that Afro-Brazilians were well adapted or suited to succeed in a modern industrializing society. Norma's presence was in itself a political act: she lived through momentous years in Brazil's history; and, throughout them, she carved out a role as an equal participant.

Norma Fraga was more than a witness to those "Day of the Race" festivities of September 1942. An avid participant who loved to sing, she also enjoyed the great crowds. She attended the rally with her entire eighth-grade class, and indeed with the rest of the students in her school. Along with tens of thousands of other public school children from around the city, she sang songs that had been practiced in class year in and year out. The "Day of the Race" assembly, like many other such gatherings over the course of the year, was a moment in which the regular students in nationalist choral song would be put on display. On this day, or any other, she might sing a short hymn composed by Villa-Lobos that illustrated the musical and cultural march toward whiteness which the composer, like other educators, envisioned as the destiny of the "Brazilian Race." In the hymn, "Rejoicing of a Race," Villa-Lobos composed two choruses, one identified as African, the other as *mestiço*. The African chorus, simple and unsophisticated, was three syllables, continuously repeated: "A - - iu - - ê/ A - - - - iu - ê." The *mestiço* chorus was more complex, but still repetitive: "Chumba Tuma á - ê - ma, Chumba Tuma á - ê - ma/ Chumba Tuma á - ê - ma, Chumba Tuma á - ê - ma/ Can-ja can-jê - rê tu-ba! Can-ja can-jê - rê tu-ba!" Reflecting Villa-Lobos's views on whitening, lyrics became increasingly complex as the cultural voice

transitioned from an African toward a European one, but the African chorus remained primitive in its simplistic repetition.

More complex songs such as "Little Soldiers" reflected the nationalism promoted by the Vargas regime: "We are little soldiers/ Strong in the struggle to find/ The conquests and destiny/ That we offer to our fatherland/ March, little soldier/ Content and happy/ Be guided on your journey/ By your love of the Nation." Another common theme was the cult of personality around Getúlio Vargas. Students sang "Viva Brazil! Save Getúlio Vargas!/ Brazil places its faith/ Its hope and its certainty/ In the future upon the Chief of the Nation."

Norma sang these words, her voice swelled by tens of thousands of others, as generals, ministers, foreign dignitaries—and at times Vargas himself—looked on proudly at the disciplined, nationalist, and Europeanized "Race" that was being forged. While some educators actually believed this race would be physically whitened, most agreed that it could at least become culturally and behaviorally European, and therefore functionally if not physically white. Although educators poured great efforts into the building of such a consciousness, for a student of color such as Norma, none of this really made any sense: "it was a 'Brazilian Race' in quotation marks, you know, because what Brazilian race is there? What does that mean? But that is what they called it . . . but we prepared all those patriotic hymns, and it was that whole pretty thing of the public schools all there and parading, the 'Chief of the Nation,' Getúlio Vargas [would attend], and they called it Day of the Race, which is a totally erroneous expression because there was no race in that, but they called it Day of the Race." The idea of the "Race" had no resonance, she recalled. "It all came out of the heads of the ideologues of the Estado Novo, with their fascist model, which we can criticize today, but at the time I thought it was great to go to the events, to dress in the [school] uniform and parade." Although she identified herself as black, Norma saw no contradiction in her participation in these movements.

These student gatherings took place several times each year, celebrating the Race, Brazilian independence, the proclamation of the Estado Novo, or even the visit of dignitaries from the United States. They were a major logistical operation: for months the school system planned and choreographed special transportation on buses and trolleys for children to gather from around the city. Meeting places, bag lunches, and medical supervision were all carefully arranged. Students rehearsed yearround in their schools. The authorities intended these assemblies to dramatize a united, nationalist support of the regime, confidence in the nation, and adulation for the "Chief of the Nation," Getúlio Vargas. Their complex logistics and fluid, choreographed performances evoked the image of a vigorous government capable of coordinating the nation's energies.

The assemblies conveyed an image of order and progress, but at a price—the regime curtailed democracy, restricted civil liberties, and disbanded political parties in favor of an authoritarian administration that envisioned Brazil as an organism whose constituent parts could be coordinated by an all-powerful central government. Writing from exile, Anísio Teixeira, the reformer who had introduced the choral song program when he directed the school system in the early 1930s, condemned the Estado Novo as “a corrupted and most degrading fascism which is giving life to our most objectionable potential.” He continued: “Ours is a phase of putrefaction. And our Government is the result of this putrefaction.” Teixeira, who admired the United States, used these strong words to condemn the Estado Novo system of government, which applied a “corporatist” model of social organization developed by Benito Mussolini in Italy and adopted by fascist Spain and Portugal (and to an extent this model was even visible in some aspects of U.S. New Deal policies). Under this system, groups such as workers and industrialists, farmers, intellectuals, and students were seen as distinct corporate entities whose interests would be managed and balanced by the regime. By coordinating the nation’s energies, the Estado Novo would project Brazil into the modern age. The assembly of the students acting as a single group and—despite their different ethnic and racial backgrounds—as a single “Race” symbolized the orderly and united society that the Estado Novo architects envisioned. Students would yield their individualism and gain membership in a corporate group that defined them as the future of the nation.

While the idea of a “Brazilian Race” held no special significance for her, Fraga still participated in its elements. Beyond the choral displays, the process of building the “Race”—of carrying out the social engineering that would make Brazil culturally, if not physically, white—was pursued extensively in school programs. Just as there was an irony to fascist assemblies that celebrated the Allied war effort, there was an irony to students of color singing about a “Brazilian Race” that did not quite exist but that, if it did, would be white. It is this irony that Norma negotiated through her education and that highlights the tension between color and status in Brazil. While Brazil is a country that instituted few explicit barriers to the integration and ascension of people of color, subtle obstacles and discrete reminders of the superiority of whiteness dotted the social and institutional landscape. Indirect barriers, ostensibly meritocratic policies, and values that belittled people of color together resulted in the systematic marginalization of those of African descent. Significantly, this system did not totally foreclose social mobility. It permitted the integration of some privileged individuals. In these cases, status became more

important than color in determining social place. Norma’s relationship with those symbols of status placed her among that privileged group.



The Fraga family moved to Rio de Janeiro in 1937 after Norma’s father died. He had been a landowner and political boss in the interior of Espírito Santo. It was uncharacteristic but not inconceivable for a rural landowner in Brazil to be nonwhite. A landowner typically needed extensive networks of patronage and credit, resources available to few former slaves. It is not surprising, then, that her father would have been both a landowner and a bulwark of the ruling Republican Party in the years before Vargas came to power. Economic and political power were close cousins in the countryside, and Norma’s father’s situation allowed him to send his children to study in the federal capital, where they even attended medical and law schools. Although this experience was uncommon for most Brazilians of African ancestry, we should remember that some families of color had a lineage of freedom that by the twentieth century might stretch over many generations. These families, like that of engineer and abolitionist André Rebouças or President Nilo Peçanha—exceptions whose families experienced prodigious social mobility—would be heralded as examples of racial equality in Brazil, despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

In the decades before Vargas came to power, being a political boss meant delivering the votes to guarantee an election, regardless of the methods. Norma’s older brothers would return home at election time with their wrists sore from fraudulently signing names to ballots. Since Norma’s mother was staunchly opposed to these practices, she became an ardent *getulista* (supporter of Vargas) in 1937 when the Estado Novo closed the political system, suspended elections, and dissolved the political parties, temporarily ending the corrupt electoral politics that her late husband had encouraged. Since two of her children studied in Rio, Norma’s mother resolved to move the family there, and she supported them by running a downtown boardinghouse.

When the family arrived in the capital, nine-year-old Norma enrolled in a public school near her home in the city center, the most economically, racially, and ethnically diverse part of Rio. Although one of her teachers was black, and although she also aspired to be a teacher, she recognized the fact that this profession was increasingly limited to white women. Many Brazilian men and women of color had taught in public schools at the beginning of the century. Most lacked formal training,

and their numbers declined as the school system expanded and the government imposed more exclusive selection, testing, and training criteria for teachers. Most new ones were graduates of the Institute of Education, the city's teachers college, which admitted a small number of aspiring candidates and did so only at the beginning of their high-school years.

Admissions committees selected candidates on the basis of their health, appearance, psychological exams, and intelligence tests. The tough selection criteria, based on such vague factors as temperament and appearance, made it easy to exclude nonwhite candidates without explicitly using "race" as a reason. These criteria especially handicapped candidates who came from poorer backgrounds and who in the past had been educated and prepared for teaching by religious charities and orphanages. Although the Institute offered one of the only public secondary educations in the city (along with the Colégio where Norma studied), its admissions criteria were so strict that candidates commonly took a year-long preparatory course for the exams. Since the preparatory courses were private and expensive, they were one more way in which admissions were restricted to well-heeled, generally white candidates. The increased professionalization of the teacher corps, in the guise of tighter admissions standards to the Institute, the restriction that only women could become teachers, and other measures had the cumulative effect of limiting the number of nonwhites who could apply.

These criteria of professionalization were part of a broader reform under way in elementary education. By the time she enrolled in school, public education had been massively reorganized. Education reformers expanded institutions that had once been the province of the privileged in order to reach the masses. The reasons for this transformation had to do with the educational policymakers' preoccupation with race and the creation of an industrial work force. Many feared that the mostly poor and nonwhite population were degenerate, but they believed that the school system could redeem them and thereby save the nation. Consequently, the curriculum, extracurricular activities such as choral assemblies, teacher training, and the process of placing and advancing students were all redrawn with a racialized agenda. Formal barriers were not erected, but the nature of education reform and expansion meant that the newly included groups experienced few opportunities for meaningful advancement.

It was in this context that the "Day of the Race" celebrating the doctrine of a "Brazilian Race" became a centerpiece of the public education offered by the Estado Novo regime. Everyone could belong, regardless of color. Schools would build the "Brazilian Race" by addressing degeneracy. Indeed, for the reformers of the nation's public school system—men such as Minister of Education Gustavo Capanema—the "Bra-

zilian Race" was a work in progress: the country's different ethnicities and races would dilute over time into a healthier and more fit, culturally European, and potentially white Brazilian people. Special attention to maternity, infancy, and youth would gradually transform the nation's diverse phenotypes. Public education would Europeanize the culture. The choral performances of the "Day of the Race" were an allegory of this work in progress. Students would sing "folkloric" African and indigenous music that symbolized a primitive ethnic past. They would hail the accomplishments of the regime, praise Brazil's bright destiny, and laud the qualities of its leader, Getúlio Vargas, who, like the overwhelming majority of public figures, was a white man.

In the rarified atmosphere of the halls of government ministers, Brazil's racial mixture was the topic of serious discussion and planning. Could Brazil become a white country? What did it mean to be a white country? How could Brazil get there? By the 1930s, the consensus was that Brazil could become "functionally" white by training its citizens in the appropriate cultural, moral, hygienic, health, and civic values. Minister Capanema chose to celebrate this historic accomplishment by commissioning a statue of the "Brazilian Man" to be placed outside the Ministry of Education. In 1938, as the statue neared completion, Capanema visited the studio where it was being made and was appalled by a racially mixed, physically unfit figure. This image was not the robust and racially fit "Brazilian Man" that would be the model for his ministry's labors. Capanema fired the sculptor and started over again with a list of precise measurements provided by doctors and anthropologists that defined an Aryan and athletic figure.

While policymakers squabbled over the appearance of the "Brazilian Man" statue, Norma went on with the business of being an elementary school student. Big blocs of her school day were given over to the curriculum of whitening and fighting degeneracy. Her physical education classes were specifically tailored from imported French eugenic standards to increase the health and vitality of the "Race." Her choral songs and the whole civic calendar she followed were tied to a Europeanized and nationalist identity. As a girl, she took regular courses in a discipline called puericulture, which attended to issues of pre- and postnatal child care. For the government agents of the "Brazilian Race," childbirth was a crucial intersection on the road away from degeneracy, and proper maternity care was a commensurately important feature of social policy.

Despite her inclusion in the Colégio Pedro II's student body, Norma's educational experiences reveal frequently hostile attitudes toward Afro-Brazilians such as herself. There was no explicit racism in the school that Norma attended, but there were numerous implicit barriers that very few Brazilians of color were able to negotiate. School system programs

that Norma took part in were created by educators who had a deep-seated belief in the "degeneracy" of Afro-Brazilians. Most did not believe Afro-Brazilians to be biologically inferior, but they equated blackness with poor health, poor hygiene, a pre-logical culture, psychological maladjustment, and an inability to work productively. The programs they created—such as Villa-Lobos's nationalist musical program, the textbook vision of Afro-Brazilians, and slavery as folkloric vestiges of a bygone Brazil, and the Health Brigade—all reflected the belief that Afro-Brazilians were at the margins of the national experience, becoming members of the mainstream only as they embraced new "scientific" norms of comportment. While the school system sought to remedy perceived deficiencies, its policies reflected and reproduced a belief in the accumulated inferiority of Brazilians of color.

Returning to Villa-Lobos's choral performances, we can see the ways in which the vision of a disciplined, nationalist and modern Brazil was rife with racial implications. Villa-Lobos saw his musical program as an instrument for the European acculturation of nonwhite students, and for the preservation of social discipline in schools where children from different races increasingly studied together. The presumably white students imagined by Villa-Lobos learned not only "the good teachings of their professors, but sometimes, certain habits and customs from rebellious children, generally influenced by environment or heredity, even though the school should be a temple for developing the soul, cultivating a love of beauty . . . focusing on the qualities and virtues that human progress depends upon."

Villa-Lobos counterposed whiteness—defined in his words by progress, beauty, and virtue—to blackness, which embodied rebelliousness, bad habits, and problems of heredity. His musical program was an educational, disciplinary, and nationalistic allegory of the journey away from blackness, through mixture, into whiteness. One of the traits that Villa-Lobos believed had to be left aside was the "obstinate" and "unconscious" rhythms performed during Carnival, whose sambas were composed by Afro-Brazilians such as Geraldo Pereira (see Chapter 8). Villa-Lobos bemoaned the fact that this enthusiasm was not projected into the singing of the national anthem. But he believed that the transition from street rhythms to forcefully sung civic hymns could be achieved through the "constant exercise of marches and martial songs," which not only sharpened the musical capacity of the population but also awakened "a greater civic interest for things patriotic." Writing of the "race now being created," Villa-Lobos explained: "This is a task of preparing the child mentality to, little by little, reform the collective mentality of future generations." He endeavored to create a new national aesthetic that, among other things, was hostile to Afro-Brazilian culture. He did not try

to erase Brazil's African and indigenous cultural expressions. To the contrary, Villa-Lobos gained fame specifically by celebrating Brazilian folklore and weaving African and indigenous elements into his classical compositions. But the structure he brought to musical education assumed the vantage point of a white man looking upon African and indigenous cultures as folk artifacts, vestiges of Brazil's past that needed to be recognized and included but subordinated to its modernistic future.

The condescending vision of Afro-Brazilians typically held by educators was visible in the texts they wrote and the commemorations they planned. Their vision was present as well, though less visible, in school practices which, though based on principles of science and merit, were nonetheless steeped by educators with the sense that Afro-Brazilians were ill adapted to modern, urban, and industrial society. Consequently, schools tracked students based on their perceived state of health, level of intelligence, and degree of psychological adjustment. A review of school records reveals that these were racially coded and subjective criteria that, school reports show, routinely tracked wealthy and white children into advanced classes and poor and nonwhite children into remedial classes. In some cases, teachers presumed that children in the remedial classes were not even capable of learning to read or write and held them back, year after year, until these students abandoned school altogether.

Norma avoided this trap. Probably because her family was not poor, her teachers perceived her to be a more promising student. Indeed, her background was unusual but not unique in the sense that hers was one of the few families of color—out of the thousands that migrated year in and year out to the major cities—that came to Rio with property, income, and education. Her class status counterbalanced her racial status and was probably one of the reasons she merited the attentions of her teachers. Her family also had the means to keep her in school, while many other children left to work to support their families. But alongside her favorable economic situation, she benefitted from the absence of explicit barriers and the fact that her teachers apparently did not dismiss her because of her color. Instead, her teachers made her a model for other students to follow. Anyone could be a member of the "Brazilian Race," but in the opinion of educators, few students of color matched up to expectations.

One of the ways in which Norma did meet—and indeed helped to set—standards was in her enthusiastic participation in the elements of building the "Brazilian Race," from the Villa-Lobos concerts to her school's Health Brigade. Each school had a Health Brigade composed of older students, who were responsible for instructing and overseeing the basics of hygiene that were a centerpiece of school eugenic (race improvement) programs. With her armband bearing a Maltese cross, Norma was one of the junior managers of the school programs that addressed

problems that educators associated with poverty and degeneracy. Norma was responsible for ensuring that her classmates had brushed their teeth; she checked them for lice and assessed the cleanliness of their uniforms: "I demanded the most from my classmates." The Health Brigade, like other activities that helped to build the "Brazilian Race," was a progressive attempt to remedy the perceived inferiority of poor and nonwhite Brazilians, but it was also a program that reinforced stereotypes. In a similar fashion, policies for placing and advancing students as well as for selecting and training teachers were ostensibly meritocratic procedures that also suffered from assumptions about race and class. These policies relied on norms of medical and psychological fitness and dress, speech, and comportment as well as special training and preparation available only to more prosperous Brazilians.

Through her social class and her participation in school activities, Norma fit into a social category of whiteness, the color of her skin becoming one aspect among others ascribed equal or greater social weight by her peers. Consequently, although fewer than half of the students who entered the first grade finished elementary school, Norma did. And although the city offered almost no public high-school programs that bridged the elementary school to the secondary system, Norma gained admission into the Colégio Pedro II, the most prestigious high school in Brazil. Norma's mother aspired for her to study at the Institute of Education because its graduates had their careers as teachers for the city virtually guaranteed. During the Estado Novo, teaching was a relatively well-paid job and was widely seen as a gender-appropriate profession for a young woman. The Institute was a gateway to a respectable middle-class career for women, and its graduates often married military officers and cadets who also studied and worked in Rio. Still, Norma dreamed of attending the Colégio Pedro II. It was located near her home, and she saw the students coming and going and admired their khaki military-style uniforms.

In the mid-1900s uniforms conveyed a sense of privilege. A blue skirt and white blouse unmistakably meant being a normal school student at the Institute of Education. Students at the Colégio Pedro II complained bitterly when a school in Niterói, a city across the bay from Rio de Janeiro, adopted uniforms similar to their own. These adolescents recognized that in a society in which very few individuals held most of the social, political, and economic privileges, status came from being part of recognized public institutions. The uniform conveyed that sense of status for students as it did for police or members of the military. The uniform was all the more important for a young woman such as Norma who, because of her color, would be presumed to be poor and probably a

domestic servant. The uniform was a guarantee that despite the stereotypes held about Afro-Brazilians, she was part of the system. While the corporatist Vargas regime foreclosed democratic political participation, it defined paths for symbolic citizenship that Norma followed, which offered some protections from common racism.

At the Colégio Pedro II, Norma gained a rare opportunity to earn a public secondary school education. Admission was highly competitive since the school was the only federal institution providing secondary education. Five Brazilian presidents had graduated from the Colégio. Its curriculum was the national model for secondary education, and students who attended the Colégio were all but guaranteed admission to a university. Norma, for instance, enrolled in the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro after graduation. Her teachers were commonly the leaders of their fields, writing textbooks that would be adopted for use in public schools nationally.

In this rarified environment, the question of race was in some ways hardly visible. Norma recalled only one classmate of color and no teachers of color. But the question of race was present in other ways. The Colégio Pedro II's history curriculum presented a picture of Brazilian development that emphasized the achievements of whites while reinforcing stereotypes about Brazilians of color. One of the leading history texts of the period, written by a professor at the Colégio Pedro II, exemplified the ways that Afro-Brazilians were depicted. In a section on African influences in *Epítome da história brasileira* (Epitome of Brazilian History), author Jonathas Serrano first cited the *mãe preta*, or black wet nurse, and added that other African contributions to Brazilian culture included "superstition, love for music and dance, a certain 'creole negligence,' heroic resignation in the face of misery, a fatalistic and light-hearted attitude in regard to work—these are some of the more or less favorable qualities we have inherited from the blacks." Students reading this book also learned that slavery in Brazil was less harsh than elsewhere since the mostly white masters were fond of their slaves, and that the black "re-tempered" the white race that came to America. The historic race being created undeniably profited greatly from African blood.

Serrano agreed with other leading educators such as Minister of Education Capanema that the "Race" being created would be white. Following the convention established in the 1930s and expressed by Gilberto Freyre, among others, Serrano recognized an African influence in the formation of modern Brazil. But he saw this influence as being anthropological and historic. It was an encounter that took place in the past, between primitive peoples and their European masters. In Serrano's textbook as in the visions of other educators, right up to Minister of

Education Capanema, Afro-Brazilians were an artifact of Brazil's past, not partners in its present and even less participants in its future. Was Serrano's vision racist? Within his context, Serrano would have seen himself as a well-meaning progressive who championed a vision of Brazilian history that acknowledged an African presence. He also interpreted Afro-Brazilian culture through the most modern, technical, and scientific lenses available to him: anthropology and Freudian psychoanalysis. In his mind, there could be no room for racism in beliefs so firmly grounded in science—beliefs that showed a presumed trajectory of assimilation for the Afro-Brazilian population.

The racial values woven into educational practices in the years during which Norma studied constantly reinforced an impression that Afro-Brazilians were largely unfit for modern society and would gradually disappear from the social landscape. This assumption was based on the belief not that people of African descent were inherently or biologically inferior, but that the conditions under which they had historically lived had left them in a state of physical, cultural, and social atrophy. Naturally, this complex of beliefs allowed room for exceptions. Social class, education, occupation, or celebrity status could outweigh race. Once Norma entered the Colégio Pedro II, she became part of an educational and educated elite. A tiny minority of Brazilians finished high school in these years, and a miniscule portion of these gained their degree from an institution as rigorous and prestigious as the Colégio. Entering the Colégio also opened the doors to further study. Upon graduation, she completed university studies in history and embarked on a career as a high-school teacher.

Norma's experience reveals one of the particularities of race relations in Brazil. The nation's society is characterized by gapping disparities in the social status of white, racially mixed, and black citizens. Still, this gap has seldom been reinforced by outright racial segregation or exclusion. Instead, widespread but subtle barriers to social mobility operate. Leading educators of the Vargas era created educational policies that are one example of the values and practices that perpetuated the social exclusion of Afro-Brazilians. A principal feature of this subtle system of racial exclusion was its elasticity: exclusion was not absolute. Some exceptional individuals, such as Norma, were occasionally able to succeed in institutions like Rio's public schools. The combination of ostensibly scientific, meritocratic, and technical educational policies with the presence of individual exceptions to the pattern of exclusion helped to develop the impression that Brazil was a racial democracy. This perception drew attention away from the ways educators wove racial values into the school system, and the ways the school system made it harder for Afro-Brazilians to enjoy its rewards.

Norma defied the odds through her participation in the system's practices. The Health Brigade, the Villa-Lobos performances, and the uniforms of the Colégio Pedro II were elements of a symbolic citizenship made all the more significant by the dictatorship's foreclosure of the instruments of active citizenship, such as the right to vote or to form political parties. What is more, her role in these activities made her part of the "Brazilian Race" despite her color. Advocates imagined the "Brazilian Race" to be white, but this whiteness was to be achieved through participation, and Norma participated. Being part of the system neutralized many of the negative connotations associated with being a person of color in Brazil. Norma's status was conveyed by her school uniform rather than by the color of her skin. Even though the system made it hard for Norma to ever wear the uniform, once she had it, the system worked to defend her privileged status.

During the 1940s students at the Colégio were increasingly drawn into political activism in support of the war. This involvement in national political debates was nothing new for students who had long seen themselves as part of a vanguard. Norma did not participate in these movements. This does not mean that she was politically inactive. To the contrary, Norma's politics were the politics of defying the odds and the social expectations that would place her in the uniform of a maid rather than in the uniform of the Colégio. Through her accumulated educational opportunities, she began a career as a high-school history teacher. At the end of this career, as she made time in her comfortable apartment in a middle-class Rio de Janeiro neighborhood for the interviews that are the basis of this story, Norma's recollections revealed the creative ways in which she shed the subtle racial expectations and obstacles placed against her and made herself counted. Who is to say which political struggle was more heroic? They were also the politics of presence and participation. By defying the odds, Norma was a self-identified black member of the "Brazilian Race."

SOURCES

This essay is based upon interviews with Norma Fraga, Wilson Choeri, and Aloysio Barbosa conducted between 1999 and 2000. Their remarkable personal stories show us what it was like to go to school during the Estado Novo, and they also reveal ways in which individuals could, and did, defy the social expectations of this time. In a period of repressive political demobilization, Choeri and Barbosa became political activists. At a time when the school system was far more likely to judge a student of color than to educate him, Fraga gained one of the finest educations available in Brazil. Yet in

order to fully appreciate the extraordinary nature of Norma's experience, one has to do more than look at the statistical improbability of her education. One has to look at the ways in which the institutions she took part in understood the meaning of her color, and how that meaning turned into everyday practices.

This essay relies, then, upon an array of fragmentary sources from the Vargas-era Rio de Janeiro school system. In most cases, individual educators or participants in educational programs kept the best-preserved records. Heitor Villa-Lobos's decade of coordinating the school system's Musical Education Service can be studied through the archive located within his Rio de Janeiro home, which has become a museum. Although Jonathas Serrano's textbooks were so widely used that they can still readily be found in used bookstores, his papers can be found at the Brazilian National Archive and contain an especially rich set of documents pertaining to his membership in a federal commission that evaluated other historians' textbooks for content and accuracy. The papers of educators Gustavo Capanema, Anísio Teixeira, and Manoel Bergstrom Lourenço Filho, who respectively served as minister of education, directed the Rio school system, and developed the psychological testing and tracking systems, are preserved at the Getúlio Vargas Foundation's Centro de Pesquisa de Documentação Histórica. The Colégio Pedro II and the Institute of Education are the only two public educational institutions in Rio that conserved a record of their own historical development. Both schools maintained impressive collections of materials pertaining to their operations in the first half of the twentieth century. A more detailed analysis of these sources, especially in regard to the patterns of racial exclusion in schools, can be found in Jerry Dávila's *Diploma of Whiteness: Race and Social Policy in Brazil, 1917–1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

SUGGESTED READINGS

For further reading on the exclusion of Afro-Brazilians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Eduardo Silva, *Prince of the People: The Life and Times of a Brazilian Free Man of Colour* (New York: Verso Books, 1993); George Reid Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo, 1888–1988* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); Hendrik Kraay, ed., *Afro-Brazilian Culture in Bahia, 1790s to 1990s* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1998); Pierre Michel Fontaine, ed., *Race, Class, and Power in Brazil* (Los Angeles: CAAS, 1985); and Rebecca Reichmann, *Race in Contemporary Brazil* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999). Thomas Skidmore's *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974) explores the concept of whitening. Kim Butler's *Freedoms Given, Freedoms Won: Afro-Brazilians in Post-Abolition São Paulo and Salvador* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998) offers an analysis of Afro-

Brazilian struggles for political and cultural integration. For the Afro-Brazilian experience in a comparative perspective, see Leo Spitzer, *Lives in Between: The Experience of Marginality in a Century of Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).