TAKING EXCEPTION: NARRATIVES OF RACIAL EQUALITY IN BRAZIL, MEXICO, AND CUBA

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The Americas, as a geographical location both invented and "discovered', have symbolically represented the image of the New World in the imagination of the West. Diverse peoples of indigenous, African, Asian and European origin have populated this region since its inception, and in many respects, have come to define it. Once invented, lowly and adventurous members of the Old World migrated there and claimed it as their own. With the development of centralized governments, civic institutions and metropolitan culture in many American nations by the late nineteenth century, national intellectuals, statesmen, and civic leaders argued that there was something "exceptional" to the historical trajectory of its nations, nations that did not have origins in European feudalism, with cultures that were in the process of becoming nationally distinct from each other, and from the Europe its elites and working classes left behind.

Many intellectuals both inside and outside the region referred to this part of the New World as a site of promise well into the 20th century, without monarchies and other "parasitic classes" to impede national development. In many parts of Latin and South America, ideologies (mythologies, in fact) of exceptionalism developed which were not unlike the mythology of "American" exceptionalism along the axis of class relations in the United States. The mythologies of exceptionalism found south

of the United States, however, pertained to racial antagonism and difference. Intellectuals of Brazil, Mexico, Cuba and other nation-states believed their countries to be distinctive not so much in terms of absent class tensions (the obvious, constant state repression of labor politics would render such claims ludicrous) but in terms of racial harmony and cultural congruence, a sort of cultural/structural functionalism.

This form of exceptionalism will be the focus of this essay, as a means of addressing its theoretical and political implications in the histories of Brazil, Mexico and Cuba. Surprisingly absent from debates and literatures on race and ethnicity in the Americas is a recognition of the similarities to be found via cross-national analysis of ideologies of race and racial difference. I am concerned here with narratives of racial exeptionalism articulated in social thought. This limits my investigation to three prominent thinkers- Jose Marti, Gilberto Freyre and Jose Vasconcelos. For the sake of brevity and space, I can not explore discourses of racial exceptionalism as articulated in institutions, state policy and party platforms, even though these are clearly necessary spheres for investigation.

What I hope to do in this essay is chart a theoretical and comparative terrain for examining those spheres by highlighting the influence of Enlightenment views of reason upon both liberal nationalism and racial difference in the multi-racial polities of Brazil, Mexico and Cuba. In the period of liberal reform which

swept Latin America (Davis, 1961) the French Revolution--both its events and thinkers--greatly informed would-be architects of national identity. Faith in institutions, constitutions and liberal rhetoric was based upon the presumption that fully formed citizens would follow the development of civil society. Yet in neglecting to recognize and problematize the Eurocentric cast of Enlightenment "universals," Latin American intellectuals reproduced the fundamental paradox of the Enlightenment- the development of racialist and culturally chauvinist explanations of human distinctiveness alongside claims of universal egalitarianism.

With versions of a racially exceptionalist discourse prevalent as well in many other countries like Venezuela, (Wright, 1990), Argentina (Andrews, 1980), Paraguay, and the Dominican Republic, I will attempt to lend theoretical coherence to disparate historical circumstances of racial difference, while at the same time deconstructing the notion of racial exceptionalism as an objective explanation of racial interactions in these places. It is my belief that only through comparative analysis of racial politics that seemingly peculiar dynamics of racial strife and conflict found elsewhere will present similarities as well as dissimilarities.

Much like its more class-based counterpart in the United States, racially exceptionalist discourses bear little resemblance to the realities of racially-based inequalities in the region. Yet as belief systems grounded in "common sense" and

not "objective" understandings of racial politics and inequality, both academic scholarship and popular culture in these polities have been influenced by the mythologies of exceptionalism, and thus must be considered as constitutive elements of social reality.

In short, exceptionalist credos have persisted and thrived in various societies despite evidence to the contrary--segregation, race-related violence and stereotypes. In this regard, ideologies of racial exceptionalism should not be viewed as falsifications of social realities but as intensifications of both elite and popular suspensions of racial and cultural heterogeneity. They are replete with the prejudices, biases and predeterminations about the location and role of various racial and ethnic groups. Ironically, they are also full of the novelty and ingenuity of ideas spawned in emergent nation-states, or national entities that have undergone significant ruptures--revolution in Mexico, for example. Before proceeding to a discussion of particular narratives of racial exceptionalism, however, we must first define what it is.

Narratives of Exceptionalism: Paradoxes of Race and Class

The idea of exceptionalism is usually associated with the emergence of republican institutions, popular classes and liberal democratic practices in the United States. Louis Hartz is noted for the idea's development as an explication of the distinct political and cultural features of the United States, in contrast

to the monarchial and feudal underpinnings of western European nation-states. In The Liberal Tradition in America, Hartz (1955) defines "natural liberalism"[1] as something which is

> 'born equal,' as Tocqueville said. And this being the case, it lacks also a tradition of reaction: lacking Robsepierre it lacks Miastre, lacking Sydney it lacks Charles II. Its liberalism is what Santayana called, referring to American democracy a 'natural' phenomenon.[2]

Hartz contrasts the French revolution to contrast it with the absence of revolutionary tradition in nonfeudal society such as the United States. The absence of revolutionary tradition, coupled non-feudal social relations and institutions, helps to produce a society of unfettered norms and values, ready to fully embrace the meaning of liberalism. In normative terms, Hartz further suggests a societal tabula rasa that is the direct result of a society's inhabitants being born "equal":

> ... if we study the American liberal language in terms of intensity and emphasis, ...we begin to see a pattern emerging that smacks distinctly of the New World. It has a quiet, matter of fact quality, it does not understand the meaning of sovereign power, the bourgeois class position is scarcely present, the sense of the past is altered, and there is about it all, as compared with the European pattern, a vast and almost charming innocence of mind.[3]

This innocence of mind is presumably the result of New World liberal egalitarianism in both its spatial and sociological dimensions. Yet as I will attempt to uncover through my

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[1]Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1955, p.5

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., p. 7.

investigation of racial exceptionalism, the logic does not necessarily follow that the relative absence of bourgeois, sovereign recognition in both the United States and America automatically meant the absence of social inequality. We shall see, however, both liberal and Marxist theorists held this logic in their writings on the New World, with negative implications for those who were neither of the New World nor the Old one.

Implicit in Hartz' exceptionalist logic is that what makes the U.S. exceptional is not the evolution of class or other tensions in ways that are peculiar to the U.S., but the absence of an historical replica of class/labor conflicts in Europe. Commentators outside of the U.S. also thought this to be true, and an advantage for U.S. political culture. The Italian Antonio Gramsci commented on this as well in the "American and Fordism" section of The Prison Notebooks, in describing the socio-economic conditions peculiar to the U.S.:

> This condition could be called a "rational demographic composition" and consists in the fact that there do not exist numerous classes with no essential function in the world of production, in other words classes which are purely parasitic. European "tradition," European "civilization," is, conversely, characterized precisely by the existence of such classes, created by the "richness" and "complexity" of past history. This past history has left behind a heap of passive sedimentations.... One could even say that the more historic a nation the more numerous and burdensome are these sedimentations of idle and useless masses living on "their ancestral patrimony," pensioners of economic history.[4]

[4]Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks. New York: International Publishers, p. 281.

For Gramsci the absence of nobility in the United States exemplified relatively unfettered conditions for the development of liberal democratic institutions and political culture in the United States. Like Hartz, Gramsci assumed that under more meritocratic circumstances, a society could function more rationally, less on kinship, clientelism and other patronage systems. Fundamentally, both Hartz and Gramsci assumed that the principal line of cleavage in a given polity, the basic social manifestation of inequity between two or more groups, was class.

Both Hartz and Gramsci concur on this point, though their vantage points are distinct; the United States represented a distinctly novel example of nation-state development because it successfully followed the liberal traditions of the Enlightenment to their logical conclusion on foreign soil. Its future would be rational, according to plan. The nation's idiosyncracies (slavery, class wars in West Virginia and Kentucky, its nouveau riche) did not affect the nation's progress, but were isolated exceptions that would prove liberal rule. The presence of central government, representative authorities and institutions overrode these caveats to exceptionalism.

Thus institutions, and not the people, ideas and biases that inhabited them, were the distinctive feature of U.S. exceptionalism. Simply lay the structural foundation for a republic, and the process of democracy will follow. Europe became the point of reference for determining whether the U.S. mode of governance was exceptional or not. Since the main

protagonists of feudal conflict--the "parasitic" classes--did not exist in the exact form in the New World, similarities between Western European and American nation-states were too minimal to warrant comparison. For what would make a particular social order exceptional, in the final analysis, were its incomparable features, if one follows the argument. Without a feudal order, its norms and cosmology, the New World represented a tabula rasa, the "innocence of mind" that Hartz refers to. Yet does the innocence of mind, the absence of historic tradition, encompass ideas, norms, and values as well as institutions? We shall see below.

Racial Exceptionalism: The Presence of Difference

The recognition and activation of racial difference in the New World has greatly undermined the potential of social orders flourishing without respect to title or genealogy. Indeed the robustness of European racialisms in the Americas have forced scholars to expand such sociological categories to include race and ethnicity as markers of social standing. Perhaps the United States is the most glaring example, as republican institutions co-existed with legislated, national disenfranchisement of white women until 1920, and blacks until 1965. Moreover, the existence of legal apartheid in the United States after the abolition of slavery became the paradoxical barometer of the chasm between the rhetoric of liberal democracy and its arbitrary application.

Responding to the contradiction between rhetoric and deed, many Latin American intellectuals of the 19th century felt that the U.S. was not the model of liberal democracy to emulate. Their northern neighbor's inability to resolve its problems of racial politics suggested an incomplete project of liberal democracy. Thus, Europe remained the exemplar of progress and reason. The United States, while envied for its own industrial revolution, was disparaged for its racial animus.

The United States was disparaged for another reason, which further complicated the triangular relationship of Europe, the U.S. and Latin America. By the early 20th century, the United States had gone from strength to strength, from fledgling nation-state to hemispheric and finally, world power, amidst the decline of European empires and the turbulence of Latin American political and social history. Against this backdrop, the intensity of racial hatred and conflict in the United States appeared to many as an Achilles heel that made the country's proclamations of liberal democracy suspect.

Thus, the task for similarly constituted liberal nationalist projects in Latin America was to challenge both racialism and feudalism and insure that neither flourished. If such an arduous task could be accomplished, then Latin America could actualize the principals of the Enlightenment <u>and</u> achieve racial harmony, something that the United States had been unable to do.

This task then, was not only dear to Latin American liberal intellectuals but a source of national pride, a facet of Latin

American social reality that could be closer to the liberal ideal than its counterpart within the empire to the north. In assuming this two-tiered task, however, new contradictions emerged, as nationalist intellectuals based their strategies of racial/national unification upon concepts and assumptions of innate racial difference between peoples that were ambiguous at best, and racialist at their worst. In doing so, they formulated ideologies of racial exceptionalism that shared a basic assumption with the ideology of U.S. exceptionalism; a particular form of social conflict can only be defined in relation to the form it assumed when it first appeared as an historical phenomena.

In other words, the absence of European feudalism in the United States means the absence of "parasitic" classes, those whose relative prosperity is based upon the labor of others. Similarly, the absence of race relations situations in Latin America that mirrored U.S. apartheid meant the absence of racialism in the region. In substituting the absolute for the relative, prospects for comparative assessment, explorations into manifestations of racial inequality were neglected, on the grounds that race relations in Latin America were unlike those of the United States. In doing so, several of the most notable anti-racist Latin American intellectuals of the 19th century infused values and beliefs into their narratives of democracy that were intrinsically racist. The consequences of this infusion was not only the reproduction of racist ideologies, but

the postponement of any serious examination of racist discourse in nationalist struggles within the region over the course of the 20th century.

Brazil

Students of comparative racial politics and Brazilian history have long known about the peculiar ideological construction of "racial democracy" that has been deeply embedded in Brazilian popular culture and social science discourse over the course of the 20th century. What has not been catalogued is the persistence of a racially exceptionalist credo even after the myth of racial democracy has subsided. My conceptualization of racial exceptionalism reflects an attempt to explain the subtle ideological shift from the common sense belief that Brazil is a country without racial antagonisms to a qualified recognition of racial prejudice, discrimination and subordination as a feature of Brazilian life, while maintaining the belief that relative to other multi-racial polities--namely the United States--Brazil is indeed a more racially and culturally accommodating society. Racial exceptionalism, as a broader ideological construct of slave-holding and Republican elites, has outlived racial democracy as an ideological form.

The theme which unifies the ideology of racial democracy and the broader cultural rationale of racial exceptionalism is the comparison, in absolute, rather than in relative terms, of slave societies and the racial interactions which grew from them. Instead of treating differences in slave systems as a matter of

distinguishing between the degree, not the mode, of dominance of one slave-holding class as opposed to another, Brazilian slaveholders who advocated the continuance of slavery posed the issue of Brazilian racial slavery in the absolute;" if our form of slavery is not as bad as the others, it is therefore not bad at all."

Gilberto Freyre was greatly influenced by this mythology of Brazilian race relations which forcefully emerged during the years of the First Republic (1889-1930). At the time of Freyre's writing of Casa Grande e Senzala, Brazilian elites were enthralled by the Modernist expression in literature, film and architecture first generated in Europe. Like their upper-class counterparts in Argentina who longed for legitimation from their counterparts in Europe, the aesthetic innovations of Modernism reproduced in South America provided a link for many elites who were alienated by the realities of their existence in the New World.

Freyre's response to Modernism was to turn away from its cosmopolitan, universalizing tendencies in favor of Brazilian regional traditions, and the syncretic consequences of the encounters between whites, Angolan slaves, and indigenous "tribes." He also, however, rejected the eugenicist explanations of Nina Rodrigues and sought instead a cultural trajectory for the possible evolution of a Brazilian society consisting of indigenous, African-born and white European peoples. Freyre took the "facts of Brazilian social life" namely, the shortage of

white women and the controlled abundance of African-born ones, and reconstituted them in a scenario which suggested that the slavemaster's "big house" was the theater for a racially egalitarian polity unknown to the New World:

> The scarcity of white women created zones of fraternization between conquerors and conquered, between masters and slaves. While these relations between white men and colored women did not cease to be those of "superiors" with inferiors," and in the majority of cases those of disillusioned and sadistic gentleman with passive slave girls, they were mitigated by the need that was felt by many colonists of founding a family.... A widely practiced miscegenation here tended to modify the enormous social distance that otherwise would have been preserved between big house and slave hut. What a latifundiary monoculture based upon slavery accomplished in the way of creating an aristocracy by dividing Brazilian society into two extremes of gentry and slaves, with a thin and insignificant remnant of free men sandwiched in between, was in good part offset by the social effects of miscegenation... the indian woman... or the negro woman and later the mulatto, the quadroon and the octoroon becoming domestics, concubines and even the lawful wives of the white masters, exerted a powerful influence for social democracy in Brazil.[5]

If anywhere, these "zones of fraternization" were charted in the realm of eros, specifically in the desires of white, male slaveowners. Black, or dark-skinned males, as well as white females are absent from this scenario. Absent too, is any possibility that so-called fraternal zones were spaces of brutal intimacy, where relations between landowner and servant were structured by a relative freedom of choice for the landowner, and the relative absence of choice for the female servant. Servant,

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[5]Gilberto Freyre, The Masters and the Slaves, English edition. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1933.

in this vein, has a double connotation, related to a laboring as well as a sexual function.[6]

Yet Freyre pushes his selective miscegenation even further, by connecting it by the passages' end to the rise of social democracy in Brazil. This gives the notion of a "trickle down effect" in economic and philosophical liberalism a novel resonance, for this is precisely what Freyre is suggesting by the passage's end; sexual union between white males and non-white females had a socializing effect for the composition of families, the inheritance of estates, the very redistribution of land, property and capital in Brazil. Where blacks and other people would normally have been excluded from such interaction and sharing with white owners in other slave societies, in Brazil they were *integrated* into the domestic economy, indeed a vital component of the pattern of human relations on the colonial estate.

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[6]The term brutal intimacy is taken from Michael Jimenez's discussion of the relations between Columbian peasant women and landowners, in which peasant women were often central figures in a triangular relationship of labor, capital and land. It was not uncommon for men to offer their daughters to landowners in exchange for property and other forms of security, or for women to willingly enter into relationships with administrators for long-term material favors (property, title, tax leniency). Jimenez sees peasant women in this dimension of brutal intimacy as wielders of sexual capital. This form of capital represent a transcript which distinguishes them from male peasants. Possible hidden transcripts of "passive slave girls" is unexplored by Freyre for he is concerned with intimacy (and a very limited notion of intimacy at that) not struggle or brutality. See Michael F. Jimenez, "Class, Gender, and Peasant Resistance in Central Columbia, 1900-1930," in Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance. New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1989, edited by Forrest Colburn, pp.122-150.

Brazil would not be weakened by its racial plurality, Freyre's Luso-Tropicalism suggested, but strengthened by it. As Emilia Viotti da Costa has observed, advocates of Luso-Tropicalism "discarded two of the European racist theories main assumptions; the innateness of racial differences and the degeneracy of mixed bloods."[7] A new, mulatto race of people would be formed by the conjunction of African and European descendants, combining the best attributes of both to create an intellectually sophisticated but sensualized race of people, neither black nor white but brown and Brazilian.

All the while, however, there was an implicit acceptance of the terms of the debate set by Brazilian eugenicists and Positivists. Freyre's cataloging of the various racial mixtures in Brazil, the mulatto in particular, has more phenotypical than social implications. *Mulattoes, caboc1oes, cafusas, zambos* and other racial phenotypes appear as individual offspring, not as members of groups interacting with other groups.

This too, however, fits within the scheme of racial exceptionalism. Without the analysis of group exchanges, there can be no claims made for group inequalities. Discrimination against a dark-skinned woman on the basis of her color, for example, can only be conceived of at the level of the individual or isolated phenomena. Conversely, the social ascension of a handful of blacks, mulattoes and pardos to positions of high

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[7]Emilia Viotti da Costa, <u>The Brazilian Empire: Myths and Realities</u>. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985, p. 239.

social status is viewed by adherents to the doctrine of racial exceptionalism as confirmation of Brazilian racial democracy. Even an astute historian of racial slavery like Eugene Genovese has accepted this thesis to a large extent, as evidenced in his comparative analysis of slave societies in the New World.

From the first position to the second there is a transposition of logic; when racism appears it is treated as an aberration which does not undermine the broader social premise. The logic is transposed when considering instances of social mobility; the elevation in status of a few individuals bodes well for racial democracy as a whole.

Cuba

Jose Marti remains one of the few explicitly anti-racist intellectuals advocating liberal nationalism during and after the period of liberal reforms in Latin America. His vision of an independent Cuba encompassed respect for individual and collective rights, not merely in terms of liberal citizenship, (suffrage, the right to express dissenting views), but for egalitarian treatment of racially defined and subordinated groups.

Examples of his concern for racial inequality, and his vision of a race-neutral liberal democracy can be found in his newspaper articles and in his polemical writings.[8] For Marti, black Cubans like Antonio Maceo proved their commitment to the

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[8]One such example is his La Question Racial (La Habana, 1959). Also see Our America (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977) edited by Philip S. Foner.

national liberation struggle, and deserved all the rights and privileges of their white counterparts in an independent Cuba. The wars of independence 1868-1878, and the interaction between white and Afro-Cuban exiles in New York created a national bond between black and white independientistas, and abolished the taint of slavery upon social relations thereafter. Writing in Patria, the expatriate newspaper Marti founded in New York, Marti articulated a perspective which was a recurrent theme in all of his writings on the race question in Cuba:

> ...the revolution was a mother, a saint, she who knocked the whip out of the slaveowner's hand, thrust the Cuban Negro into life, rescued the Cuban Negro from an ignominious existence and took him into her arms. The Cuban Revolution did this! Abolishing slavery, a measure that has spared Cuba the blood and hatred of which it is still a victim because the republic of the North has not basically eliminated these things, is the purest and most transcendental fact of the Cuban revolution. Made by slaveowners, the revolution declared slaves free. Every slave of those days, now free, and all their children, are sons and daughters of the Cuban revolution.[9]

Here, the seed of racial exceptionalism is planted. In contrast to the United States, Cuba has eliminated the racial hatred that was an outgrowth of slavery. The revolution provided a shared sense of patria among all Cubans. Rather than determine a person's worth on the divisive, non-objective basis of color, Marti argued that "merit, the manifest and continuous evidence of culture, and the constant process of trade will eventually unite

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[9]From Patria (New York), January 5, 1894, in Our America; Writings on Latin America and the Struggle for Cuban Independence, edited by Philip Foner, (New York: Monthly Review Press), p. 316.

all men. There is a plentiful supply of greatness in Cuba, in Negros and white men alike."[10]

Individual merit, culture and trade, Marti's cornerstones of racial equality, are Benthamite notions of individual and collective good. Several scholars of Cuban nationalism and history have noted the liberal, non-Marxist elements in Marti's thought, so there is no need to delve into the origins of Marti's thinking here. What is relevant here is the nexus of liberal and racial equality within Marti's vision, and its implications for Cuban race relations.

For many Enlightenment-inspired intellectuals of the late 19th and early 20th century, culture and education were key variables for the advancement and elevation of national and regional civilization (Davis, 1961). Marti, in this and other respects, was simply an intellectual of his time. Like those of his time, however, cultural sophistication meant the adaptation of Enlightenment ideals, which were invariably European ideals. The "manifest and continuous evidence of culture" which Marti identifies as a feature of a "new" independent Cuba is in fact based upon Old World, specifically bourgeois norms. Again, this implicit assumption of Marti's is no different from Sarmiento's, Mariategui's, or a host of others during this epoch. Yet, the assumption would assume a new wrinkle in an independent Cuba, where a large portion of the population consisted of people of African descent and where, unlike many other countries of Spanish

[10] Ibid., p. 314.

speaking Latin America, African influences were unmistakable and to a certain extent, celebrated. The question of Afro-Cuban contributions to Cuban culture would remain even after the "third" Cuban revolution of 1959.

In addition, Marti would not tolerate racism in any form, whether generated by white or black Cubans:

> The white man, who because of his race considers himself to be superior to the Negro, admits the idea of racial difference and provokes the Negro racist to take a similar stand. The Negro who proclaims his race, even if it may be his mistaken way of proclaiming the spiritual identity of all races, is justifying and provoking the white racist.[11]

As commendable as Marti's anti-racist position is, especially in 1893, it has several problematic features. Are white and black racists one and the same simply because both makes claims of superiority and inferiority on the basis of race? Should black Cubans who suggested that they were morally superior to those who enslaved them be considered racist on those grounds? If they should be, as Marti argues here and elsewhere, then he is contradicting the very Enlightenment basis of abolitionist discourse. If British, French, U.S., even Latin American abolitionists argued that slavery was a morally bankrupt institution upheld by morally bankrupt societies, why couldn't slaves and former slaves make the same argument?

By equating arguments of superiority with racism itself, Marti reduces racism and racialism to a discursive practice, neglecting its non-discursive features like violence,

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[11]Ibid., p. 312.

psychological and emotional terror which whites often unleashed upon Afro-Cubans while blacks, because of their relative powerlessness, could not. In short, Marti's anti-racist stance de-historicizes the power dynamics in which white and black "racists" are engaged, in that there is no consideration of the pre-history between the two, the circumstances and conditions which lead to charges and counter-charges of racism, other than slavery. Moreover, slavery is not treated as a legacy with its own cultural and ideological justifications, but a mere act which disappears with abolition.

This can be evidenced in another passage on the race question, where Marti declares that "there will never be a racial war in Cuba. The republic cannot move backward, and ever since that memorable day when the negro won his redemption in Cuba... the republic has not said one word about Negroes or white men."[12]

The Oriente race war of 1912 would disprove this claim fifteen years later. Clearly, Marti never claimed to be a soothsayer, and can not be criticized for not foreseeing events which occurred after his death. Yet the racial tensions which led to the outbreak of racial violence in 1912 did not emerge overnight. Recent investigation into the events of 1912 suggest that the massacre of blacks in Oriente triggered racial violence against blacks throughout the country (Helg, 1942). The incident then, was not an isolated phenomena but simply the most

[12]Ibid, p. 314.

unambiguous manifestation of the deeply-rooted prejudices and anxieties surrounding the black presence in Cuba and their struggle for civil rights in a country ruled by white criollos. The effects of prejudice were either neglected or unseen by Marti, whose preoccupation with national liberation and unity overshadowed other social concerns. Yet such a vision of national unity, resting upon a precarious base of unexamined racial tension, was limited from the outset, bound by its own presumptions to ignore the subtle effects of racial difference that could not be attributed to slavery.

Mexico

Like Marti, Jose Vasconcelos viewed the United States with both grudging admiration and contempt; admiration for its industry and institutions, contempt because of its disdain for Latin America and its peoples. In La Raza Cosmica, Vasconcelos characterizes the first decades of the 20th century in Latin America as "a conflict of Latinism against Anglo-Saxonism; a conflict of institutions, aims and ideals."[13] On this point, Vasconcelos argued in La Raza Cosmica that the United States was an appendage of the Anglo-Saxon race, an example of racial continuity that Latin American countries would do well to follow. In speaking of the political emancipation of the United States from Britain he wrote:

> Emancipation, instead of debilitating the great race, made it branch off, multiply, and spread all powerful,

[13]Jose Vasconcelos, La Raza Cosmica, bilingual edition (Los Angeles: California State University, 1979), p. 8.

> over the whole world.... Since then, what is not conquered by the English of the Isles, is taken over and kept by the English of the new continent.[14]

The above passage contains two core themes which undergird Vasconcelos' vision of a "cosmic race" in Latin America; a) the designation of the Anglo-Saxon as the great race; b) as the intellectual component of Vasconcelos' so-called fifth (cosmic) race, it would be the socio-eugenic "engine of growth" for other races in Latin America; " The civilization developed and organized in our times by the whites has set the moral and material basis for the union of all men into a fifth universal race, the fruit of all the previous ones and amelioration of everything past."[15]

This great race, however, would fuse with other races in Latin America, namely indigenous groups, to produce the fifth civilization. In Vasconcelos' philosophy of history, no single race has ever reproduced itself *by itself*, that is to say, races that have not adapted to mestizaje have died off (1979;14). According to Vasconcelos, this was the distinctive dimension of Latin America which the Anglo-Saxon race never entertained:

> ...what no one even thought of doing on the Anglo-Saxon area of the continent was done on the Latin side. In the north, the contrary thesis continued to prevail: The confessed or tacit intention of cleaning the earth of Indians, Mongolians, or Blacks, for the greater glory and fortune of the Whites... If it were

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[14]Ibid., p. 12

[15]Ibid., p. 7.

> necessary to adduce proof, it would be sufficient to observe the increasing and spontaneous mixing which operates among all peoples in all of the Latin continent; in contrast with the inflexible line that separates Blacks from the Whites in the United States, and the laws, each time more rigorous, for the exclusion of the Japanese and Chinese from California.[16]

Given Mexico's own history of immigration policies excluding Chinese immigration, an indigenismo which did not include the indigenous (Knight, 1990), and Vasconcelos' veritable pruning of blacks from his fifth civilization, the former minister of education painted an idyllic picture of Mexico which did not square with practices of racial prejudice, oppression and exclusion in the country.

Yet Vasconcelos's declaration, even more so than Marti, is a synopsis of racial exceptionalism in post-revolutionary Mexico. Like Marti, Vasconcelos juxtaposes the United States against Mexico and Latin America in general to make racial mixing in the region appear more benign. Like Freyre, Vasconcelos confuses racial mixture at a biological level with racial interactions as a sociological phenomena and suggests that because the former has occurred without conflict (by itself a rebuttable presumption) the latter exists as well. Though some have branded La Raza Cosmica a utopic fantasy, it is one, like Gilberto Freyre's Luso-Tropicalism, grounded in the positivistic and nationalistic discourse of his epoch. Again like Freyre, the presumption of non-conflictual interracial unions does not address the unequal

[16] Ibid., p. 17.

access to members of the opposite race and sex according to racial difference, in other words, the likelihood of a former black male slave having sexual relations and subsequent offspring with a white female, herself a criolla daughter of Spanish heritage (1979;15). Such sexual unions are implicitly orchestrated by gender and racial politics.

Vasconcelos argues that the sexual advantage of the cosmic race was the ability of its members to choose their partners without reference to racial markers, but in accordance with " the mysterious eugenics of aesthetic taste,"[17] arguing further that "Where enlightened passion rules, no correctives are necessary. The very ugly will not procreate, they will have no desire to procreate."[18] Yet what informs, indeed structures enlightened passion? Who determines that which is beautiful from that which is not? Like Marti, what Vasconcelos assumes to be self-evident (aesthetics) is precisely what requires explanation. What is implicitly contained in Vasconcelos' aesthetics, an aesthetics putatively divorced from politics, are the preferences for certain norms, values and ideals over others, namely, the influences of the Anglo-Saxon, with its own parameters of the good, rather than those of the African, the Indian, or the Chinese.

In the introduction to the Bilingual edition, Didier T. Jaen writes that La Raza Cosmica is "not simply a racist theory, but

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[17]Vasconcelos, p. 28

[18]Ibid., p. 28.

a theory of the future development of human consciousness."[19] Yet "racist theory" is never solely about race, and indeed is about "the future development of human consciousness," insofar as nearly all theorizations of race concern themselves with questions of human progress and development. Furthermore, as Vasconcelos, Marti and Freyre's writings have displayed, ruminations of race and racial difference are inextricably linked to national identity and development. Jaen's comments seem to deny the possibility that social theory can be racist and concerned with human development at the same time. As Knight (1990) persuasively argues, Vasconcelos and other Mexican intellectuals of his generation like Antonio Caso and Gonzalo Aguirre Beltran never quite rid themselves of the Positivist influences bequeathed by the previous generation. In the end, their substitution of environmental and cultural factors to explain racial differences only altered the manner in which their racist arguments were cast. It did not alter the fact that their views on racial difference and mixture were racist, and in this respect, not fundamentally distinct from the socio-biological and positivist explanations they sought to refute.

Conclusion

I have attempted to chart a theoretical terrain upon which to conceptualize the phenomena of "racial exceptionalism," the Latin American cousin of U.S. exceptionalism. Both versions of exceptionalist discourse consider the New World, in relation to

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[19]Didier T. Jaen, Introduction, p. XXXi.

Europe, a "blank slate" for social interaction and engineering, devoid of the sociological fetters of feudalism and racialism, respectively.

With Europe and the United States treated as distinct vantage points upon the continuum of nation-state development, Latin American social theorists such as Jose Marti, Gilberto Freyre and Jose Vasconcelos theorize a third path between European feudalism and U.S. racial segregation in an attempt to produce societies founded upon laws and cultural practices of racially and class-based egalitarianism. Yet in doing so, they never sought to interrogate the racialist basis of their views of progress, culture, aesthetics and "tradition," views which themselves merely accentuated the racialist strains within much of Enlightenment thought.

An example of this lack of interrogation which all three share was the presumption that because Cuba, Brazil and Mexico did not have legally codified racial segregation and inequality like the United States, it did not bear the burdens of racial difference. What this presumption ignored was that the United States had socio-cultural and juridical codes of racial difference. In fact, formal, institutionalized segregation and inequality was the superstructural manifestation of power disjunctures arising from racial difference. Thus, cultural and social forms of racial difference produced formal segregation, and not the other way around.

The third absent recognition in the theorizing of Marti, Freyre and Vasconcelos, was the degree to which nation building and state formation in Europe during the 17th century was informed by racial differences. As noted by Benedict Anderson (1989), nationalism and national development is an inclusive and exclusionary process at the same time. From the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492 to the renewed expulsion and killing of Romani gypsies in Eastern Europe in 1992, nationalism and racialism have been conjoined. One of the functions of a state apparatus in multi-ethnic and multi-racial polities is to regulate and normalize such differences. Its efforts can be found in immigration policies, popular culture and foreign policy, in addition to domestic law. In this sense, the histories of racial difference in Cuba, Brazil and Mexico are no different.

As part of a racial politics perspective, one can expect the dynamics of racial politics to be distinct from one multi-racial polity to the next, while still finding overarching similarities to warrant a comparative method. Peculiarities of nation, state and region constitute the differences in racial politics between non-whites in the case of Brazil, "whites" and "blacks" in the United States, and Hispanic, indigenous, Chinese and African-derived peoples in Mexico, without necessarily denying the similarities of enslavement, forced exile and hyphenated identities.

This mode of racial politics analysis parallels the logic of Sean Wilentz' argument against the notion of American (U.S.) exceptionalism (see "Against Exceptionalism: Class Conflict in the American Labor Movement, 1790-1920; International Labor and Working Class History, vol. 26, 1984, pp.1-24), specifically, that the absence of the precise, literal form of Western European class conflict in the United States does not mean that class structuration and antagonisms do not exist there, but that they instead assumed distinct cultural and material forms.

There is much work to be done on racial politics and difference in Latin America. Further investigations require modes of analysis that encounter sameness and difference simultaneously, with no obligation to choose one over the other. Only then can we begin to successfully historicize and theorize about the conjunction of racial and national identity, a conjunction that is paradoxical, contradictory, and never one-dimensional. As I have argued, race is never simply about "race," but much, much more.

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