

DEBATES

Anti-racist Struggles in Latin America

Coordinated by Juliet Hooker

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Stern, Steve J.

1988 “Feudalism, Capitalism, and the World-System in the Perspective of Latin America and the Caribbean.” *American Historical Review* 93 (4): 829–872.

1998 (ed.) *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru, 1980–1995*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

1999 “The Tricks of Time: Colonial Legacies and Historical Sensibilities in Latin America,” in Adelman, *Colonial Legacies*, 135–150.

Vich, Víctor

2015 *Poéticas del duelo: Ensayos sobre arte, memoria y violencia política en el Perú*. Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos.

Weinstein, Barbara

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Black and Indigenous Lives Matter: LASA-Ford Special Grants for Research on Racism in Latin America

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During the tenth cycle of the Ford-LASA Special Projects grants, which are intended to support transregional research initiatives, LASA awarded grants to two initiatives that brought together activists and scholars involved in antiracist research and action in Latin America and the United States.

One of the awards helped fund a meeting of the research teams involved in a multiyear research project of the Red de Acción e Investigación Anti-Racista (RAIAR, the Antiracist Research and Action Network) that began in 2014. The project, entitled “When Rights Ring Hollow: Racism and Anti-Racist Horizons in the Americas,” encompassed seven cases/countries across the Americas: Brazil, Bolivia, Guatemala, Colombia, Mexico, Mapuche mobilization in Chile, and the United States. The central hypothesis of this research project was that a successful rights-based frame of black and indigenous movements for recognition, advancement, and redress—in place for at least three decades—had run its course, and that a phase of dramatic across-the-board expansion of formally recognized black and indigenous rights since the 1980s was coming to an end. This closure was particularly relevant for struggles for racial justice, because black and indigenous rights often have been conceived and deployed as the anchor of antiracist struggle. As Charles Hale, Pamela Calla, and Leith Mullings explain in their recent article on RAIAR: “When we formulated this two-part ‘end of an era’ research hypothesis in the course of 2014, we could not have fathomed the

horribly amplified confirmation that history would soon deliver, perhaps most evidently in the United States. Donald Trump’s 2016 election and the ugly racial animus that his campaign unleashed in the U.S. have parallels in each of the six other sites of struggle in our study.”¹ Two of the most innovative aspects of the research project undertaken by RAIAR—its Americas-wide comparative scope and the concerted attempt to place indigenous and Afro-descendant experiences and perspectives into a single analytical lens—have been rendered prescient by the politics of racial backlash that seems to be accompanying Latin America’s current “right turn,” notably in Brazil.

Another LASA-Ford award helped fund the international workshop “Insurgencies: Police Violence and Pedagogies of Resistance in the Americas” in New York City, which brought together activists and established and emerging scholars in the field of racialized policing practices in the Americas. The workshop sought to advance transnational collaborative research on the lived experiences of state terror and the radical pedagogies of resistance that emerge from such contexts. The scholars and activists involved in this project sought to reframe the debate about police violence and democracy. Their point of departure was the fact that the racialized aspect of this particular form of state violence remains systematically obscured. In the wake of the protests that emerged in Ferguson, Missouri, following the killing of Michael Brown, and the surge to prominence of the various organizations

involved in the Movement for Black Lives (of which Black Lives Matter is the most well-known), we know that the United States lacks federal data on the number of people killed by police, a gap that has begun to be partially filled by websites such as “The Counted.”² Meanwhile, police in Brazil have killed nearly as many people (most of them black and poor) in the past five years as U.S. police have killed during the past 30 years.³ Rather than seeing killings by the police as a symptom of democratic failure, these scholars and activists argue that police violence is part of a racialized regime of rights in which black and indigenous populations are regarded as enemies of the state, and their lives are consequently made disposable.⁴ Probing the question of scholarly and activist responses to state terror, they raise crucial questions about what justice looks like, and who can deliver it, when the law itself is deeply compromised by a racialized regime of disposability.

The essays in this dossier are drawn from both of these projects. Rigoberto Ajcalón Choy’s contribution shows how extractivist economic projects in contemporary Guatemala serve to reinforce and cement existing ethnoracial hierarchies. He also argues that the criminalization of indigenous protests that challenge the presence of mining companies and other extractivist industries in their ancestral lands demonstrates the hollowness of the multicultural rights that were enshrined after the Peace Accords and end of the armed conflict. The essay by Héctor Nahuelpán and Jaime Antimil also focuses on the dangers that neoliberal extractivist projects pose for the survival of indigenous Mapuche people in Chile, but they situate these contemporary economic projects—which also criminalize Mapuche dissent and brand Mapuches as “terrorists”—within the *longue durée* of a colonial

political project to subdue the Mapuche and take over their lands. Mariana Mora’s essay on Mexico, meanwhile, situates the massacre of the 43 students in Ayotzinapa in 2014 in light of the indigenous identity of many of the victims and their families. As an anthropologist who participated in a study of the psychosocial effects of the massacre, Mora interviewed relatives of the indigenous victims. She raises key questions about how indigenous victims of serious violations of human rights can gain justice and truth given the still-incipient nature of discussions in Mexico about the role of racism and other historical exclusions in the many forms of violence that the country is experiencing. Raquel Luciana de Souza’s essay focuses on the nexus of race, policing, and violence in Salvador, Bahia, as illustrated by the Cabula Massacre by military police in 2015, which killed at least 12 people and left 3 wounded. Her essay tackles head-on how the racialized character of policing in Salvador is obscured by the fact that most of the police officers performing statehood daily are poor and quite often black. Finally, the powerful essay coauthored by Débora Maria Silva, of the Mäes de Maio movement, and Jaime Alves describes the continued operation of a “machine of death,” that is, police killings of residents of impoverished urban communities in Brazil. In response to genocidal state violence, activists such as the Mäes de Maio are deploying what they call a “mothering politics,” which counterposes to the politics of death an “ethics of life” that gives a voice to their dead. As Nahuelpán and Antimil argue in their essay, in an observation that applies to all the essays collected here, antiracist struggles by black and indigenous peoples throughout the hemisphere are literally struggles for life: of both human beings and the planet.

Notes

- ¹ Charles R. Hale, Pamela Calla, and Leith Mullings, “Race Matters in Dangerous Times: A Network of Scholar-Activists Assesses Changing Racial Formations across the Americas and Mobilizes against Renewed Racist Backlash,” *NACLA Report on the Americas* 49, no. 1 (2017): 81–89.
- ² “The Counted: People Killed by the Police in the US,” *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2015/jun/01/the-counted-police-killings-us-database>. See also Fatal Force, *Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/policeshootings/?utm_term=.84e9efca0e30.
- ³ These statistics were compiled by the Brazilian Public Safety Forum, <http://www.forumseguranca.org.br/>.
- ⁴ See Jaime Amparo Alves, “From Necropolis to Blackpolis: Necropolitical Governance and Black Spatial Praxis in São Paulo, Brazil,” *Antipode* 46, no. 2 (2014): 323–339. ■