

# The crime of miscegenation: racial mixing in slaveholding Brazil and the threat to racial purity in post-abolition United States

*O crime da miscigenação: a mistura de raças no Brasil escravista e a ameaça à pureza racial nos Estados Unidos pós-abolição*

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## RESUMO

Este artigo discute como o exemplo brasileiro foi debatido e apropriado por políticos, cientistas e demais membros da elite branca estadunidense, que no pós-abolição estava elaborando um projeto de nação que mantinha antigas ideologias escravistas de supremacia branca e segregação racial que perduraram no país ao longo do século XX. Na América Latina era possível avaliar os efeitos negativos da mistura racial, e o Brasil tornou-se um exemplo de atraso e degeneração, reforçando a necessidade de políticas segregacionistas urgentes a serem implementadas nos Estados Unidos. A questão da mistura racial estava atrelada à produção de uma noção de identidade nacional que se sustentava nas ideias de pureza de sangue e em oposição às sociedades latino-americanas.

Palavras-chave: mistura racial; identidade nacional; Estados Unidos da América; Brasil.

## ABSTRACT

This article discusses how the Brazilian example was debated and appropriated by politicians, scientists, and other members of the white US elite, who in the post-abolition period were preparing a nation project which maintained the old slaveholding ideologies of white supremacy and racial segregation, lasting in the country until the twentieth century. In Latin America it was possible to assess the negative effects of racial mixing, while Brazil became an example of backwardness and degeneration, reinforcing the need for urgent segregationist policies in the United States. The question of racial mixing was linked to the production of a notion of national identity which was sustained by the idea of purity of blood and in opposition to Latin American societies.

Keywords: racial mixing; national identity; United States of America; Brazil.

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In 1864, still during the Civil War, the Southern newspaper *The Charleston Mercury*, a periodical from the city of Charleston, a large slaveholding center in the United States, published a report which dealt with the greatest nightmare of post-abolition US society: racial mixing, recently baptized with the name of miscegenation. The report entitled “Miscegenation in the North” had originally been published in the Yankee newspaper *The New York Times*, which circulated widely in the north of the country with the title “What point at we reaching?” The author of the text called attention to a phenomenon described as “abnormal and detestable” which was becoming common in the streets of New York, now filled with faces that were increasingly “brownish.”

The report warned the country’s citizens about the risks of a supposedly common practice among radical abolitionists, which was the habit of supporting and influencing inter-racial marriage, threatening a “grandiose and prosperous” country such as the United States. Also in accordance with the writer’s pessimistic forecasts, due to this practice, the whites of the country would cease to exist because all the white families would shortly have a black son-in-law, which would make all Americans slowly become mulattos, affected by the “unfortunate race.” “Goodbye, a long goodbye to our whiteness,” the author lamented, believing that something had to be done to “preserve the purity” of the blood.<sup>2</sup>

The theme of racial mixing was always crucial in debates about the nation, slavery, and national identity in the United States. In the period in which the above cited article was written, during the Civil War, racial mixing was seen as one of the most harmful consequences of abolition. After all, since the American Revolution in 1776, the United States had been thought of by its elites as a country formed by white men, descendants of Europeans, and who restricted the privileges of citizenship and national belonging to their own group. Blacks, as well as indigenous peoples, were not included in the idea of a white nation invented by the country’s elites (Fields, 1982). Racial mixing, thus, constituted over the years a threat to this idea, destabilizing fixed racial notions, through sometimes intermediary social places were permitted.

In general, white society, in both the north and south of the US, condemned racial mixing. In the 1840s the American School of Ethnology, a movement of scientists from the north and south of the country concerned with explaining and justifying racial differences, offered various argument which favored not only the defense of slavery, but also the creation of policies constructed on the idea of *white supremacy*. The leader of this scientific movement, Dr. Samuel Morton, used the cranium measurement method to create

a hierarchy of people in the world, but above all in the United States. Associating the weight of cranial mass and intellectual capacities, Morton concluded that blacks occupied the bottom of the scale of human evolution, while Caucasians represented the top, the vanguard of civilization (Stanton, 1960).

In the south, where being black necessarily meant being a slave, skin color was an important mark of the status of men and women in the region. Racial mixing created a dilemma in the slaveholding south: what would be the place of men and women who were so fair skinned that they could pass as white? Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, slave holders believed that the 'infusion of white blood' produced slaves who were physically and intellectually better than those who were 'pure descendants of Africans.' However, with the passing of years and the growth of the number of individuals considered mulattos, as well as the increase in the number of people who apparently were white but who lived in captivity, racial mixing came to be seen as a serious threat to the slaveholding system in the South (Tenzer, 1997, pp. 7-9).

The solution to this question came from another member of the American School of Ethnology, the Southern doctor Josiah Nott. Since the 1840s he had been defending the importance of prohibiting sexual intercourse between blacks and whites in the United States. Nott stated that racial mixing, at the time called *amalgamation*, produced an inferior individual, degenerated and dangerous. This was because the so-called mulatto would not accept his condition as slave, thereby threatening the tranquility of white society. Nott was a polygenist, like all the members of the American School, and defended that blacks and whites were distinct species. For this reason, racial mixing would also cause the degeneration of whites, who according to him were part of a superior race (Lemire, 2002, p. 4; Brito, 2014).<sup>3</sup>

Josiah Nott shared these ideas with Louis Agassiz, a Swiss scientist based in the United States since 1846. Although he was opposed to slavery, Agassiz agreed with Nott about the effects of racial mixing. He stated that this practice would produce a degenerated individual and proposed that freed Afro-Americans be released far from the northern states of the United States. Later he proposed that the free black population be sent to Brazil as a form of preventing the practice of racial mixing in an unrestrained manner in the US. Agassiz carried out a scientific mission to Brazil, which was being used as an observatory of pure and mixed races. The moment chosen for this enterprise was not accidental: 1863, during the Civil War, when the central question was the dispute over the continuation or ending of slavery in the south of the United States (Machado; Huber, 2010, pp. 30-33).

When the Southern newspaper *Charleston Mercury* republished a report from a newspaper from the adversary region, *The New York Times*, it reflected this common idea which reconciled northern and southern elites: the rejection of racial mixing. Before the war, slaveholders from the south accused Northern abolitionists of, amongst other things, defending the end of slavery so that marriages between blacks and whites would be allowed. In the *New York Times* report we can find the ‘accusation’ that white abolitionists were willing to marry blacks to prove their belief in racial equality. From this perspective, the most feared combination in unions between blacks and whites was the one in which the white woman married a black man (Lemire, 2002, pp. 84-97).

Reports about the daughters of white abolitionists marrying blacks in the north were very common in the Southern press. An example was the marriage of Sarah Judson, whose story was published in the newspaper *Memphis Daily Appeal* in 1859 and according to the author, “would turn the stomach of any white.” The bride, daughter of a “radical abolitionist,” was induced by her father to marry a black man “against the designs of nature.”<sup>4</sup>

According to the historian Martha Hodes, it was during and after the Civil War that sexual-affective relations between blacks and whites came to be less tolerated in the United States, above all in relations in which the woman belonged to the ‘white race.’ As the War approached, when slavery was more threatened, the children of white mothers and black fathers destabilized even more the slaveholding system, since the condition of the mother defined the *status* of the offspring. This was not the case of relations between white men and black women, often resulting from sexual violence and/or coercion, which fed back in to the slaveholding system, since black women produced enslaved individuals (Hodes, 1997).

The 1860s was a period of anxiety related to the theme of racial mixing, above all following the abolition of slavery in the southern states and the reelection of Lincoln, which occurred between 1863 and 1864. These facts influenced the debates about future policies in relation to the status of the freed slaves in the north and south of the United States. In addition, these debates sought to justify arguments by using the scientific theses produced by the American School of Ethnology in the 1850s. Various questions were raised in the post-abolition period: were the freed slaves to be inserted in a society with the same rights as whites? Would abolition be followed by a project of racial equality? Would abolition signify the end of racism? How to guarantee that freed slaves would continue to work, including for their former masters? How to guarantee the supremacy of whites? At the same time that these questions

were raised by slaveholders and even by moderate abolitionists, the black community was shown to be hopeful about the future. Freed slaves in the north believed in equality of rights, above all the right to vote and the end of segregated spaces (Holt, 2010).

During the 1863 electoral campaign, the Democrats (defenders of slavery) tried to associate the practice of miscegenation with the image of President Lincoln, who was a candidate for re-election for the Republican party. When Lincoln decreed the end of slavery in the Southern states in 1863, the law was ignored by slave holders in that region. This was enough for the president to be accused of leading a 'crusade' in favor of blacks and of being a supporter of marriage between blacks and whites. Lincoln had stated years before that he did not believe in racial equality, and saw the idea of inter-racial marriage as naturally repugnant (Lemire, 2002; Kaplan, 1949).

The Democrats thus used a strategy to link once and for all the image of President Lincoln to the practice of amalgamation. In the heat of the electoral campaign, two democratic journalists, David Goodman Croly and George Wakeman, used a pamphlet called "Miscegenation: the theory of racial mixing applied to the white American man and the black." The leaflet was false, and the intention of the authors, then anonymous, was to leave the impression of that it had been written by radical Republican abolitionists, supporters of Lincoln and inter-racial marriage. The text had a great repercussion in the North, where the majority of the president's voters were based, affecting public opinion terrorized by the ideas defended in the pamphlet, which promoted racial mixing as something practiced among the most advanced nations of the world. The text also pointed to people of mixed race as being the people of the future, a vision not very common in the United States, affirming that mixed races were superior and thereby opposed to the central justification of white superiority: racial purity (Lemire, 2002, p. 116; Fredrickson, 1971, pp. 171-174).

The pamphlet created the term *miscegenation*, which from then on would be used to designate mixing between people from different races. Moreover, the publication also attracted the attention of public opinion because it directly dealt with the theme of marriages between blacks and whites, a subject which caused reactions in the North of the United States whenever abolition was debated. In the 1860s racial mixing was completely condemned in the South, because at that moment the possible involvement of freed blacks and poor whites was in question, which contradicted racial rules imposed during slavery. Similarly, in the North racial miscegenation was also condemned, and the pamphlet also created negative reactions, even some abolitionists believed that

the text was pro-miscegenation. Although it was false, the “Miscegenation...” pamphlet gained veracity because it used a scientific language. Moreover, to exemplify the supposed benefits of racial mixing the authors made ample use of representations of Latin America. This was a form of making US readers also visualize their country as a ‘mixed’ society.

The use of Latin America can be perceived in the section “Superiority of the mixed races.” Here the authors stated that the mixed races were mentally, physically, and morally superior to the pure race which had not mixed, and mentioned the example of the *sambos* in South America, descendants of blacks and Indians. Once again, Brazil was cited as an example of a country where the people were miscegenated, collaborating with the consolidation of the idea of mixing in the country.

The *cafuzos* in Brazil, a mix of Indigenous peoples and blacks, are mentioned by travelers as a slim and muscular type, and with excessively long hair which is kind of curly, especially at the tips and grows perpendicular to the forehead to the length of a foot or a foot and a half. This form very beautiful hair which is the result of a mix of the curly hair of the black with the heavy and long hair of the Indian.<sup>5</sup>

Even under false pretenses, the pamphlet disseminated an image of the Brazilian as a perfect type, the beautiful result of the racial mixing in force in that society. This positive image of the so-called mulatto nourished the fantasies, or better the fears, of US society which saw in Brazil, like other Latin American countries, an anti-example of its nation project. This representation of the Brazilian type also fulfilled another role in the black abolitionist movement. The Afro-American abolitionists saw in the miscegenated Brazilian people a reference for their struggle for integration and racial equality. For them, racial mixing signified the absence of prejudice, which made the Empire an important example when they needed to convince their compatriots of both the possibility of coexistence between blacks and white in an egalitarian manner in relation to the potentials of blacks and mixed people (Brito, 2014).

Northerners and Southerners, notwithstanding the rivalry provoked by the Civil War, agreed that the freed slaves could not live in a condition of equality with the white population. The idea of racial mixing caused real repugnance among Northerners and was seen as something against natural laws, which resulted in the theme of inter-racial marriage becoming important in the 1864 election. In the same year, a series of caricatures were made to illustrate miscegenation as the result of the election of the president. Cartoons were

widely published in the anti-abolitionist press after the electoral victory of Abraham Lincoln, who would be held responsible by his opponents for promoting the mixing of races in the United States after having abolished slavery (Lemire, 2002, pp. 115-116).

One of these caricatures had as a theme a dance, the *Miscegenation Ball*, which was held in Lincoln's campaign headquarters (Figure 1). The party represented a complete inversion of order: whites and blacks, now freed, celebrated together without obeying the rules of racial decorum. Black women, with animalized characteristics and voluptuous forms, seduced white men who were attracted by their sexual instincts. In fact, the representation of black women followed what science said about them: excessive corporeality and unbridled sexuality. The cartoon sought to portray the loss of control over black female bodies and the excesses caused by abolition.

In the background of the image we can see an immense photo of President Lincoln and an immense banner which ironized the racial equality agenda of the abolitionist movement: "Universal Freedom, one Constitution, one destiny." In the upper part, on the roof of the ballroom, white observers watch the scene and, since they were not participating in it, certainly watched it with reproving eyes. In this way sectors opposed to abolition, represented by the Democratic Party, exploited the fears of US society about racial mixing.

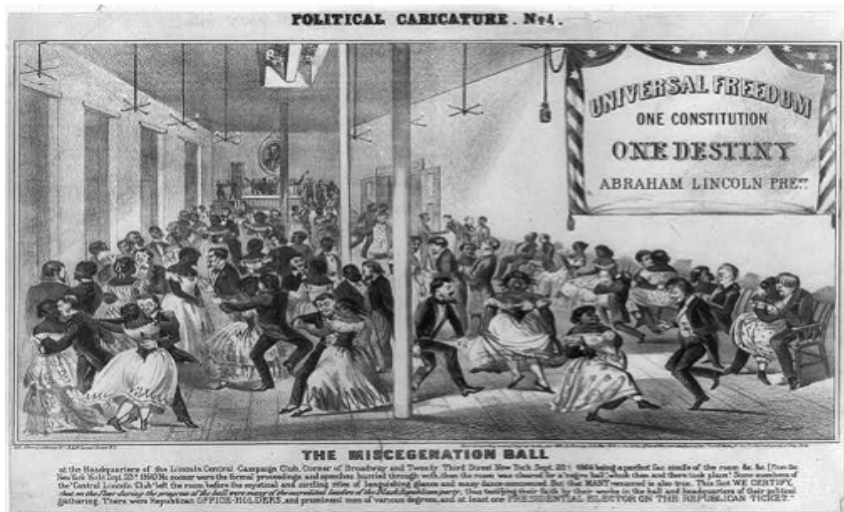


Figure 1 - *The Miscegenation Ball* – 1864.

Source: Library of Congress: Prints and Photograph Division.<sup>6</sup>

The caricature had the clear political objective of associating racial mixing with the Republican Party, of the then presidential candidate for re-election. A caption on the bottom explained the event, which had happened in “head-quarters of the Lincoln campaign.” Also according to this caption, once the formal activities were completed, the ballroom was freed for a *negro ball*. In addition, the caption stated that many members of the party left before the ball began, but those in the ballroom were all members of the Republican Party which in the caption was called the “black Republican Party” (Lemire, 2002).<sup>7</sup>

Also in 1864, the pamphlet “What amalgamation is and what we are to expect now that Mr. Lincoln is re-elected” made a similar portrayal of what was occurring in the United States following abolition and the victory of Lincoln. The cover of the pamphlet materialized the worst of the consequences of racial mixing: the fact that white women, guardians of racial purity, were violated by black men. For this, the image of the men is stripped of human characteristics and exaggerated traits in the lips, eyes, and nose, the way black people would be represented in the US media from then on (Figure 2).

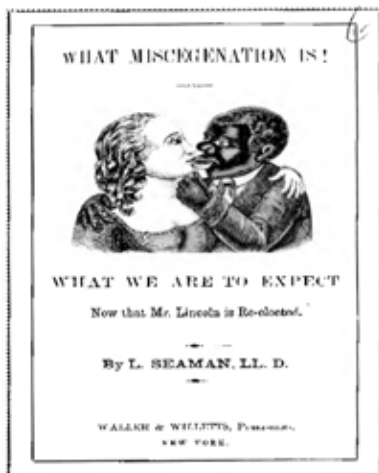


Figure 2 – Cover of the pamphlet “What amalgamation is and what we are to expect now that Mr. Lincoln is re-elected,” 1864.

The 1860s were a moment of speculation about how to maintain the old ideal of the white and masculine US nation, given the real possibility of abolition and the new condition of Afro-Americans, who demanded the right to be citizens of the country. According to Barbara Fields, since the eighteenth



century the national elites in the United States had defined an idea of a nation for the country based on the gender and race, namely the white man descendent of Europeans who was the representative of this homogenous group which formed the nation. Therefore, this 'imagined community,' according to the term created by Benedict Anderson, excluded blacks and indigenous people from the idea of the 'typical' American created by its elites. Racial purity was part of this creation and constituted the principal counterpoint in relation to the other national states in the tropics (Fields, 1982; Anderson, 2008; Painter, 2010).

What then did it signify to American elites that the United States would become a country of mulattos, where whites "would soon no longer exist" according to the pessimistic forecasts of the *Charleston Mercury* and the *New York Times*? What was the meaning of the publications of the cartoon "The miscegenation ball" and the pamphlet "What miscegenation is"? In what way was miscegenation incompatible with the project of a 'grandiose and prosperous country'? How did racial mixing go against the ideal of the nation existing among US elites even after abolition?

## THE CRIME OF MISCEGENATION IN BRAZIL

In 1860, it was again the *De Bows Review* newspaper, which had a wide circulation among the slaveholding classes of the South, which took upon itself the responsibility for providing society with an example of what could happen with a prosperous country with great potential if there did not exist laws which did not construct barriers to coexistence between blacks and whites.

Unfortunately, the Brazilian constitution considers all men equal if they are free, whether they are black men or white men. The effects of the equality of these laws do not need demonstration. This has plunged Brazil into a political revolution which has been destroying the Imperial government and its army, the majority of which is composed of blacks who will shortly dictate the terms of emancipation to the nation and the Empire will be converted into another Venezuela.<sup>8</sup>

According to J.R.H., author of the article, Brazil was a country full of natural wealth, though the growth of what he called the 'hybrid race' had condemned the country to failure. This was because the hybrid Brazilians had the privilege of being citizens, which gave them the possibility of unrestricted social ascension, even going as far as the possibility of 'leading the

government.’ Also in the opinion of this writer, Brazilians were such a mixed race that they could not progress, an idea that made a direct reference to the American School of Ethnology about the degenerative effects of racial mixing. Furthermore, he also stated that the lack of morality of the natives and the absence of local policies which regulated coexistence between blacks and whites in Brazil was the fault of English abolitionism, which had transformed Brazil “into its own Jamaica,” in other words a colony. Finally, the author made a warning about the dangers of the abolitionist movement: “the current conditions of Brazil can alert us to the dangers which we have escaped, in the middle of the fanaticism which had tormented us.”

The historian Barbara Weinstein helps us understand this Southern and slaveholding reading of Brazilian slaveholding society through the different ideas of the nation which were being formed in the two countries during the nineteenth century. According to her, the Brazilian Empire did not produce an idea of a nation which was linked to captivity, weakening the defense of slavery as it was considered a ‘necessary evil’ even among its defenders. This recognition of slavery as an evil left Brazilian slaveholders aware that slavery was something temporary and that it would have no place in a modern and republican Brazil. The large number of freed slaves, the allowing of the purchase of *alforrias* (freedom) and the breaches created by citizenship also made the Empire a complex society, where being black did not necessarily mean being a slave, notwithstanding the slavery which accompanied the African and Afro-Brazilian population.

In the South of the United States, slavery was always thought of as an institution which defined Southern society. Politicians, scientists, and intellectuals prepared a complex argument which made the slave something linked to Southern identity, especially during and after the Civil War. Theories of *white supremacy* and the purity of blood would be supported by Christianity, science, law, and the Southern economy, so that even in the post-abolition period the south continued to be identified as a region wistful of slavery, maintaining norms of racial segregation which extended until the twentieth century. While in Brazil after a certain moment slavery came to be regarded as a moral problem, in the southern states of the United States it was seen as a system of labor and social organization which guaranteed the economic success and superiority of the region in relation to the north of the country and other slaveholding nations. Among the southern states being black meant being a slave, so that when the Civil War was approaching new rules hindered the purchase of freedom. In the South of the US, even after abolition, other

practices were implemented based on racial differentiation to maintain the black community in a subaltern status (Weinstein, 2006).

Brazil, like other Latin American countries, continued to be cited for a long time as a laboratory of the worst effects of miscegenation, constituting an observatory of societies without a project for a *white man nation*. In this sense, Mexico, Cuba, Brazil, and the already mentioned Venezuela were examples worthy of observation and at the same time repugnance.<sup>9</sup> The need for racial segregation policies in the post-Civil War period intensified the debate about the effects of racial mixing and policies which aimed at preventing this practice, since abolition would not resolve the ‘racial problem’ in the country.

In 1866, in an article called “The Negro in America,” an unidentified author adopted an even more radical posture by stating that the Caucasians who had invaded and occupied Africa had “committed suicide and self-destruction by amalgamating with inferior races or worse, with the worst species of the continent.” According to the author, the Europeans in Spanish American had committed the same error.<sup>10</sup>

However, there were those who thought differently about the effects of racial mixing, which for some was a positive escape from the problem which would be created in the country in the post-abolition period. Even if this perspective had succumbed to another nation project which would be consolidated during the 1870s and 1880s, this shows us that for a certain period the defense of racial segregation was not a consensus. Since 1861 there had been those who defended that racial mixing would bring benefits to the United States. In the article “The colored creole,” an unidentified author presented American society with the positive results of racial mixing in post-abolition British colonies and even in slaveholding Brazil. According to this author, racial mixing was responsible for reducing prejudice among whites.<sup>11</sup>

The article states that there were 13 million Africans and their descendants in the Americas, who were distributed among countries such as Brazil – where there were more than four million –, followed by Cuba and Porto Rico, Central America, Haiti, French and British colonies, as well as Mexico. Half of the nine million blacks who were in the Americas, with the exception of the United States, were of biracial origin, and in countries such as Brazil, Guatemala, Grenada, Bahamas, Barbados, Jamaica and even in Haiti, the absence of racial prejudice allowed the black population to participate completely in society (*ibidem*).

According to the author of “The colored creole,” there was no other alternative for whites in the United States other than to pacifically accept the

participation of persons of mixed race in society, also as citizens. Also according to him, in Latin America and in the Caribbean, those of mixed race had shown themselves to be capable of achieving high intellectual performance and of having abilities for free labor. Opposing the thesis of the degeneration of mulattos, the author stated that individuals of a biracial origin also could serve as an intermediate class which could reduce possible racial tensions, as had occurred in Haiti.<sup>12</sup>

In 1864, the white abolitionist Theodore Tildon also came out publicly in favor of miscegenation. According to him, racial mixing was the best solution for the future of the United States in the post-abolition period, since he saw miscegenation as an intermediate stage for whitening, while society would become less prejudiced (Fredrickson, 1971, pp. 172-173).<sup>13</sup>

Even though this was not a very common opinion, a positive idea of racial mixing had some adepts in the post-abolition period who insisted on pointing to other countries as nations which benefitted from its effects. The article “The mixed human race”, for example, summarized these benefits in Martinique, in San Domingo (Haiti), and in Brazil, amongst other countries where “the mulattos are compatible with whites in a favorable form in various aspects.” Following the theories of Tildon and the French writer M. De Quatrefages, the province of São Paulo in Brazil was a place where mixing between Portuguese and Aimoré, Guaianaz, and Carijó Indians had produced a superior hybrid race, something unthinkable for polygenist scientists. The article also stated that racial mixing had made the mulattos better adapted to the local climate than to those individuals considered ‘pure.’<sup>14</sup>

The example of Brazil, where the positive aspects of amalgamation were recognized, made some individuals believe that, the integration of blacks in society through racial mixing would end the racial prejudice that existed in the United States. In the article “Emancipation in Brazil,” the writer stated that the Brazilian *melting pot*, in other words, the mixing of races, made the Latin American country a good example which would naturally lead the Empire to the end of slavery. The anonymous author stated that even though Brazilian society was recognizably stratified: at the top of the national elite were the whites, descendants of Europeans (Portuguese, French, Germans); afterwards came the white Brazilians; and finally were the mulattos of all colors - descendants of whites and Indians, Africans and Indians, free blacks, and ‘uncivilized’ and ‘domesticated’ Indians (Fredrickson, 1971, p. 131).<sup>15</sup>

After the Civil War, in the United States, the so-called ‘mulatto’ threatened progress and civilization, because they degenerated society and created

socio-racial categories which destabilized social order (Rogers, 2010, pp. 280-281; Machado; Huber, 2010, pp. 30-36). For this reason, Brazil became consolidated as a laboratory of races where Americans could find the physical, political, and moral results of racial mixing practiced in an unchecked manner. The photographs produced by the team of the scientist Louis Agassiz between 1865 and 1866 portrayed 'pure' African men and women and those classified as 'impure' or 'mixed' races. The images were an illustration of what the population of the United States could become without politics of racial segregation.

In 1868, the *New York Observer and Chronicle* published some reports about Brazil produced by Agassiz.<sup>16</sup> He stated that amalgamation was practiced more than anywhere else in the world, causing the deterioration of the country and producing a *mongrel non-descript type*,<sup>17</sup> that was physically and mentally deficient. Agassiz also said that although the country was slaveholding, the absence of racial barriers meant that freed Brazilian slaves had more liberty than those recently freed in post-abolition United States.<sup>18</sup>

Racial mixing in Brazil, according to Agassiz, was also the theme of the article called "Effects of the admixture of races," published in the *Medical News* in 1870, in which were reproduced some citations of his work in which he described the characteristic of the Brazilian population, attributing different terminologies to each racial combination. In relation to the *cafuzo*, a mix of Indians and blacks, he said that they did not have anything of the "delicateness of mulattos," and they were described as having "dark skin, long, wavy and curly hair." In relation to character, he defined them as "having a happy combination between the joyful disposition of the black and energetic bravery of the Indians."<sup>19</sup> The *mameluco* was described as a mix of Indians and whites, resulting in a "pallid, effeminate, lazy, weak..." being. After stating that the Indigenous people compromised the positive qualities of the other ancestor in mixed people in any combination, whether with whites or blacks, the article ended reaffirming the need for the maintenance of inequalities, justified by the actual limitations of blacks and those of mixed race.

Since the pre-Civil War period, before the United States adopted a rigid code of racial segregation which classified the population in a binary form, the theme of the social and legal place of those of mixed descent was widely debated. It was in the 1850s, when there was a considerable quantity of fair skinned slaves, that the so-called mulattos began to lose their intermediate status and were increasingly 'approximated' with the category of blacks. In the case of those who could be confused with whites, the possibility of *passing*, facilitated

by the imprecision of identifying anyone as black or white, revealed the breaches in the Southern racial system. According to Lawrence Tenzer, this “white slavery” weakened racialized slavery in the south and was constituted as one of the causes of the Civil War in the country (Tenzer, 1997).

According to Williamson, until the 1850s, free mulattos tried to approximate the world of the whites, which was possible in regions in the extreme south, above all those closest to the Caribbean. Between the 1850s and 1860s, the number of mulattos grew considerably, including those who were enslaved. In a decade the number of mulatto slaves rose from 66.9% to 72.3%. By 1860, 94.2% of the mulattos who lived in the South had been enslaved, and there was an accentuated wave of intolerance among the white population towards the mulattos who had been born free. In other words, once again the problem was not racial mixing in itself, but with the mixing that produced a free individual who tried to pass himself as white. To the extent that the enslaved population was becoming more fair skinned and slavery more threatened, the *one drop rule*, one drop of black blood, was becoming more applied to racially define the population (Williamson, 1980, pp. 61-73).

To show that the condition of individuals of a *mixed race* was very complex in the United States, an anonymous author identifying as mixed wrote an article to express his opinion about the social condition of this group, which he called the “unfortunate class.”<sup>20</sup> According to *Amalgamated Man*, the manner in which he identified himself, people such as him had their social condition worsened by the fact that they were victims of prejudice by people of ‘pure race,’ both black and white. Although, in his view people of a biracial origin were not prejudiced against anyone, he commented on the marginal place of ‘mulattos’ in American society. The white community did not accept them because it considered them inferior beings in every sense, and the black community did not accept them because it considered them selfish, a characteristic believed to be inherited from their white ancestry (Williamson, 1980, p. 102).

The writer questioned the data which pointed to the existence of a small quantity of people of mixed race in the United States. According to him, this idea was related to scientific theories which affirmed the limited longevity of these individuals. He stated that people of *mixed blood* composed in 1860 one quarter of the ‘colored’ population, instead of the official number which was one ninth. These numbers were compromised by the ‘interests of slavery.’ Moreover, *Amalgamated Man* stated that many individuals with dark skin were also of biracial origin and were registered as *colored*. At the same time, other individuals registered as white were actually mixed.

The Canadian poet and journalist John Reade gave his contribution to the subject in the article “The intermingling of races,” where he stated that racial mixing had already occurred in the United States, in both the South and the North, and had presented positive results in sense of forming a civilized and uniform nation.<sup>21</sup> According to him, white men were having relations with women from the Cherokee and Choctaw, who “due to their beauty and intelligence could be compared to any Southern lady.” In addition, to the “fusion of distinct blood” being highlighted as the path to civilization, he also stated that racial mixing reduced conflicts and prejudice, which was already happening among Indians and whites in the indigenous territories (McClintock, 1995, pp. 1-14; 23-24).

He also presented data which said that in Mexico and South America people of *mixed blood* composed one fifth of the population, while only 20% were composed of Europeans and three-quarters of indigenous peoples.<sup>22</sup> According to this tendency, in countries such as Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, San Salvador and Costa Rica, the majority of the population were indigenous and mixed. In South America, he stated, the *mixed races* were the most numerous part of the population and even in Brazil a significant part of the slaves and freedmen were a ‘mix’ of creoles and Indians. In fact, Reade stated that the Portuguese were constant ‘amalgamators’ who mixed with all the populations they conquered, as was the case of Brazil itself.<sup>23</sup>

## DECIPHERING THE BRAZILIAN MELTING POT

The post-abolition period in the United States was a period marked by completely distinct nation projects. During the period known as Reconstruction, between 1863 and 1877, when the black community aspired to full participation in the country’s social and political life, old racist values subsisted among the white community which insisted on maintaining the old racial hierarchies. After 1867, Reconstruction aimed at guaranteeing the employment of free labor in the south, the reincorporation of the Confederation states in the Union, as well as the right to vote of the black population and the granting of citizenship to Afro-Americans, which only happened with the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1868. The policies implemented during Reconstruction drastically changed the dynamics of life in the South, since from then on black men and women could in some way impose their conditions of labor, for example refusing to work for their former masters. Others maintained these ties, but received wages (Foner, 1990, pp. 34-35).

This autonomy was seen as an inversion of the social order, insubordination, and the breaking of the paternalist rules which guaranteed that white people could interfere and determine the choices of the black population. With this the Southern political elite saw itself as stripped of power, which generated among them a feeling even more resistant to abolition, provoking various acts of violence targeting black men and women. Former slaveholders began to understand that without slavery, which had guided social and labor relations, they would suffer a drastic loss of the sovereignty which differentiated them from the rest of the population. Therefore, segregationist policies and the valorization of white supremacy were reaffirmed in the South in the final years of Reconstruction, which according to the historian Thomas Holt, also marked a moment of reconciliation between the northern and southern regions. In addition to the restriction of the rights of the freed slaves, this signified the reaffirmation of the United States as a society whose national identity was sustained by the hegemony of the white population (Holt, 2010, pp. 158-172).

In this period in which the United States was reaffirming itself as a nation which repudiated racial mixing, Brazil continued to be seen as a nation which was organized without the existence of laws of racial segregation. Moreover, Brazil continued as an important example for perceiving the effects of miscegenation among the population.

Frank Carpenter, a writer, tells the story of an American family in Rio de Janeiro, in the novel *Round about Rio*, in which the travelers narrate their experiences in Brazil as well as their impressions about local blacks and mulattos (Carpenter, 1884). In 1881, he published these impressions in the article "Race in Brazil", in which he tried to understand the reasons for the absence of prejudice in Brazil and how racial mixing, seen as a natural practice in the country, guided various aspects of Brazilian life.

In its desire for self-development, Brazil has advanced along steps with a forced and destructive growth. The country has brought a large number of immigrants from all nations to its coast, and among them, evidentially, men have predominated. These men have to have wives and since the country does not have sufficient white women to meet the demand, they been obliged to accept women who were descendants of blacks and indigenous. As a result, the blood of the three is strongly mixed at all levels of Brazilian society, and a line of color is produced in an indistinct form. Like at daybreak when it is difficult to say where the darkness ends and the light begins. (Carpenter, 1881)



Carpenter said that he perceived that, as in the United States, the presence of the black population was also considered bad for Brazil. Even affirming that racial prejudice was an unjust and anti-republican feeling strongly enrooted in US society, Carpenter did not believe that whites and blacks should occupy the same place in society or were equal. In his view, the reason for the absence of racial prejudice in Brazil was miscegenation, which cooled tempers, but at the same time degenerated the population. Nevertheless, he stated that at least racial hierarchies were respected in army, where there was intense racial diversity. According to him, “since blacks are unquestionably an inferior race,” whites were those who occupied the upper ranks of the Armed Forces in the Empire (Carpenter, 1881).

Frank Carpenter also used art to interpret the Brazilian racial reality. One night, in the tropical scenario of the capital of the Empire, he heard the music of the opera *Aida*. This made him imagine that, possibly, the piano could be played by a mulatto pianist. The writer said that this made him reflect on the reasons for the success of this opera in Brazil, leading him to conclude that it was in the inter-racial romance between “the dark-skinned Ethiopian princess and her Egyptian lover from the North,” the white general Radamès.<sup>24</sup>

With the same theme, inter-racial love, the Brazilian *O Guarani* was also in Frank Carpenter’s opinion, a representation of national feeling about racial mixing: “a Portuguese heroine with blue eyes and golden hair, and the hero, a pure blood Indian.” The naturalness with which Brazilian society accepted relations between people of “distinct races” was, according to Carpenter, the reason for the absence of racial conflicts in the country, which at the same time prevented the progress of society (Carpenter, 1881).

Another story published in a Southern newspaper after Reconstruction also reveals this moment of reinforcing the ideas of white supremacy and racial anti-miscegenation. *The State*, a newspaper from South Carolina, published in 1892 the article *A creole beauty*, which told the story of Elizabeth Farnese, a young woman who arrived in New Orleans having come from Santiago de Cuba as a servant for a Southern family. Elizabeth was described in the articles as a woman of around 18, endowed with “enchanting eyes and shining hair.” Elizabeth’s secret was described when the author described the color of her skin: “the girl had sufficient black blood in her veins to give a [light] dark color to her very soft skin.” Elizabeth said she was a *creole*, a term which in the United States was used for someone from the West Indies or South America who had European ancestry. The same term was also used to designate “any person born close to the tropics.”<sup>25</sup>

People such as Elizabeth Farnese appeared often in the fiction of the post-abolition American South, where it was imagined that Europeans of a Latin origin (Portuguese, Spanish) had a dark or bronzed, skin different from the Anglo-Saxons. For this reason, men or women practicing *passing*, passing themselves off as white, would adopt Latin surnames.

According to Williamson, until the Civil War, there existed in the South some toleration of individuals with a dark skin but who were of Latin origin. However, especially after the war, when the obsession with racial purity increased in the region, those who until then had enjoyed an intermediary place came to be approximated with the category of blacks. Moreover, laws which prohibited inter-racial marriage were implemented in this period. In the state of Louisiana, for example, marriages between blacks and whites were forbidden until 1967 (Williamson, 1980, pp. 91-97).<sup>26</sup>

Elizabeth stated that she was a daughter of a rich coffee planter in Brazil who had gone bankrupt. Her bourgeois origin explained her good manners and her English spoken with a “light foreign accent.” Living in Southern society, being accepted in white social circles, moving among young people as “an equal,” she managed to attract the attention of a rich Englishman who asked to marry her. Elizabeth’s fairy tale began to collapse when her true identity began to be investigated by the “ambitious” mother of the bridegroom, who was suspicious of her doubtfully tanned skin (Williamson, 1980, p. 103).

Finally, it was discovered that Elizabeth was actually the daughter of “a humble couple of mulattos who for years had taken care of a church in Santiago,” Cuba. Her good education and sophisticated manners were justified by being educated in a convent, fruit of the compassion of the members of the church, pitying the poverty of the “colored family.” Having discovered Elizabeth’s origin, the preservation of the racial purity of the family of her future husband resulted in the wedding being cancelled and the scandal hushed up by the payment of a sum of money which bought the silence of Elizabeth.

Whether or not it was true, this story had an important message: only among people from the tropics with the same racial origin as Elizabeth did she have any possibility of social ascension. An example of this is the fact that one of her children became “a rich government official and influential citizen in the Republic of Brazil” (Hiraldo, 2003, pp. 51-61).

The story of the *passing* of Elizabeth Farnese reveals much about the racial policy of the United States at the end of the nineteenth century and also the imagination of Southern elites in relation to the racial dynamics of Latina America. This story was a warning to Southern families to guarantee the purity

of their lineage, by being careful about the men and women participating in their social circles who were passing themselves as whites. Furthermore, examples of racial categories such *creole*, *Spanish*, *mulatto* and *Latin* revealed an enormous racial imprecision which could have been mobilized by people such as Elizabeth, who sought to avoid the harsh segregationist policies imposed by the US binary racial system.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Throughout the post-abolition period US elites reaffirmed old ideas of racial difference, implemented a harsh system of segregation which survived until the twentieth century. More than this, the United States affirmed itself to be a country where the *one drop* rule guided racial relations, while Latin American country became their opposite. In this way, they constructed an idea of a nation based on what would make them different from the miscegenated and degenerated 'others.' Brazil, as a large slaveholding nation, had a fundamental role in this process of the creation of the 'American nation.' This was because, after the Civil War, when fears that proximity between blacks and whites would result in the 'Latinization' of the population, the defense of racial purity was reinforced based on the maintenance of old theories which condemned miscegenation.

The theme of racial mixing was central to the construction of the identity and idea of the US nation. First, because national elites reinforced the thesis of the exceptionality of the country in relation to other American societies, considered degenerated due to miscegenation. For this reason, a wide-ranging scientific, political, and religious apparatus defended these ideas during the slaveholding period. During Reconstruction, even when other perspectives about the effects of racial mixing were announced in order for this practice to be a possible path to the homogenization of the population and the resolution of the racial tensions of the country, this project ended up being defeated by the idea of racial purity defended by national elites.

When, from the 1880s onwards, the United States reinforced segregationist policies as a form of protecting its original nation project for white men, Latin American nations, including Brazil, adopted other national projects for homogenizing the population, which occurred through racial mixing as a form of making black and indigenous populations disappear. The same perspectives about the uses and effects of miscegenation were widely discussed in the US press at the end of the nineteenth century as a way of disseminating and

defending the importance of racial purity to preserve the original ideal of nation, constructed during the slaveholding period, but which had to be maintained even in a free society. At the same time that they produced an ideal about themselves, they also produced an image about an 'other' who was black, tropical, miscegenated, and also degenerated.

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### NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> Miscegenation at the North. *The Charleston Mercury*. 12 Apr. 1864. Unidentified author. The other article was published in *The New York Times*, 26 Mar. 1864, with the title "What are we coming to, and when shall we reach it?".

<sup>3</sup> NOTT, Josiah C. Caucasian and negro races. *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, 24 Apr. 1844.

<sup>4</sup> Disgusting case: a white girl elopes with a negro. *Memphis Daily Appeal*, 11 Jan. 1859.

<sup>5</sup> CROLY; WAKEMAN, 1864, pp. 8-14. The pamphlet was originally published in 1863.

<sup>6</sup> The miscegenation ball: Lincoln Campaign Headquarters. New York City, Sept. 1864. *Library of Congress: Prints and Photograph Division*. Available at: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2008661682/>; Accessed on: 19 Oct. 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Accessed on: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2008661682/>.

<sup>8</sup> Slavery in Brazil: the past and the future. *De Bows Review...*, 1860, p. 478. The original report was published in the newspaper *Charleston Mercury*. The author was identified as J.R.H.

<sup>9</sup> In relation to the fear caused by miscegenation in post-slavery United States, see: LEMIRE, 2002, pp. 120-125.

<sup>10</sup> The negro in America. *The Old Guard*, 4 Dec. 1866.

<sup>11</sup> The colored creole. *Circular*, 14 Nov. 1861.

<sup>12</sup> The colored creole..., cit.

<sup>13</sup> Amalgamation advocated. *The Daily Picayune*, 14 June 1863.

<sup>14</sup> The mixed human races. *Appleton's Journal of Literature, Science and Art*, 3 Dec. 1870.

<sup>15</sup> Emancipation in Brazil. *New York Evangelist*, 26 Oct. 1871, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Mixture of races. *The New York Observer and Chronicle*, 20 Feb. 1868. In the book *A journey in Brazil*, published in 1868, Louis Agassiz registered his conclusions about the Brazilian population and the effects of racial mixing in the country.

<sup>17</sup> According to the Webster Dictionary (1828), the term *mongrel* is defined as “of mixed breed, of different kinds, animal of mixed breed.” The word is associated with *mingle* which according to the same dictionary means ‘mixing’ and also ‘promiscuity.’ Available at: <http://www.archive.org/stream/americaandictiona01websrich#page/n7/mode/2up>; Accessed on: 7 Nov. 2013.

<sup>18</sup> *Mixture of races...*, cit.

<sup>19</sup> Effects of the mixture of races. *Medical News*, Sept. 1870.

<sup>20</sup> Amalgamation. *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, 23 Aug. 1870.

<sup>21</sup> READE, John. The intermingling of races. *The Popular Science Monthly*, 1 Jan. 1887.

<sup>22</sup> The imprecision of the percentages can be noted.

<sup>23</sup> READE, 1887, cit.

<sup>24</sup> *Aida* is an opera composed by Giuseppe Verdi and Antonio Ghislanzoni, who opened in Cairo, on 24 December 1871. The work was presented for the first time in Brazil on 30

June 1886, in the Lírico Fluminense Theater in Rio de Janeiro. General information about the opera *Aida* can be found at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aida>.

<sup>25</sup> THE NEW AMERICAN DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE. New York: World Manufacturing CO, 1882. The Webster dictionary (1882) is available at: <https://archive.org/stream/newamericandicti00newyiala#page/84/mode/2up>; Accessed on: 12 Nov. 2013.

<sup>26</sup> A creole beauty: the scion of an English family narrowly escapes miscegenation. *The State*, Columbia, Carolina do Sul, 1892.