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Daniel Azevedo Archondo April 8th, 2025

National Myths of *Mestiçagem* and *Mestizaje*: A Comparative Study on the Genesis of Early 20th Century Brazilian and Mexican Anti-Racist Miscegenation Discourse

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Abstract

National Myths of *Mestiçagem* and *Mestizaje*: A Comparative Study on the Genesis of Early 20th Century Brazilian and Mexican Anti-Racist Miscegenation Discourse
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At the beginning of the 20th century, two of Latin America's most influential intellectuals—Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre (1900-1987) and Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos (1882-1959)—published their seminal works on the mixed-race character of their home countries. *Casa-grande e senzala* (1933) and *La raza cósmica* (1925) respectively reflect the particularities of Brazilian and Mexican society and history. The convergence of these two texts around the common goal of renegotiating Latin America's place on the periphery of global history through a reimagining of the role of the *mestiz(ç)o* only eight years apart from each other reflects the shared historical past and present between Brazil and Mexico. While intellectual circles in both countries continue to study and critique the works of these two authors, the shared contradictions of *Casa-grande e senzala* and *La raza cósmica* are rarely studied in conversation with each other. While the inconsistencies between each work's exceptionalist reading of Brazilian and Mexican history with the realities of centuries of colonial racial violence are the subject of decades of analysis, the shared discursive utility of both authors' works indicate a series of parallel developments in each country in the early 20th century that make it necessary to ostensibly include the non-white elements of society into a unitary national body. This paper explores those shared historical trends that make the works of Freyre and Vasconcelos highly relevant at their moment of publication and how their ideas are used to justify real racial discrimination and violence while cloaked in a language of progress. In addition, I analyze both authors' texts to show how *Casa-grande* and *La raza cósmica* rely on a shared Eurocentric epistemology that obscures the reality of centuries of colonial violence to make their case that Brazil and Mexico are at the forefront of human civilization.

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I. Introduction to My Journey into Mestiçagem and Mestizaje

No hay odio de razas, porque no hay razas — José Martí, 1891
"There is no hatred of races, because there are no races"

On my first readthrough of Gilberto Freyre's (1900-1987) magnum opus *Casa-grande e senzala* (1933), what struck me the most—among all his exhaustive descriptions of the dietary and sexual habits of Brazilian society, the seemingly endless taxonomy of racial identities[1], and his unrelenting enthusiasm for the *mestiço*[2]—was a brief observation of 16th century Portuguese cosmetology. Freyre's description of Portuguese "women of the high classes [who] dyed their hair blonde"[3] to conform to the "[European] idealization of the blonde type,"[4] abruptly took me to recent memories of my Brazilian mother teasing her sister and aunts for their blonde dye jobs almost a century after Freyre's words (1933, 71). "In Brazil," she would tell me, "*a mulher não fica velha, fica loira*;" women don't become old, they become blonde.

In the margins of this passage from *Casa-grande e senzala* (typically translated into "The Masters and the Slaves" for English versions of the book, but which literally means "the big house and the slave quarters"), I jotted down that "nothing changes." Perhaps Freyre, like my mom, both from the city of Recife in Northeast Brazil, also had one too many family members dye their hair. Maybe he too found this seemingly banal detail of history equally as familiar to his present moment as I did. In spite of the enormous breadth of (mostly justified) critiques issued towards Freyre in the decades since 1933, *Casa-grande e senzala* is still able to prove itself as a timeless and revealing assessment of Brazilian society. Even in the parts of his analysis

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[1] *Indio*, *negro, mina*, *cabocla*, *mulata*, *mestiço*, *cabrocha*, quadroon, octoroon just to name some.
[2] Someone of mixed-race or multiracial background. *Mestizo* in Spanish. *Mestizaje* and *mestiçagem* translate to "miscegenation" in Spanish and Portuguese, respectively, although without as strong a negative connotation as the word in English.
[3] My own translation, "O certo é que, no século XVI, os embaixadores mandados pela República Veneza às Espanhas a fim de cumprimentarem o rei Felipe II, notaram que em Portugal algumas mulheres das classes altas tingiam os cabelos de 'cor loura'"
[4] My own translation, "Ódio que resultaria mais tarde em toda a Europa na idealização do tipo louro."

that were "wrong," misguided, or simply motivated by bigotry, there is still something valuable to be learned from carefully sifting through his work to extract what we can learn about Freyre's, as well as our own current, historical reality.

If the specificity of *Casa-grande e senzala* to the Brazilian context is what drew me to it in the first place, then it was the facility with which I recognized Freyre's ideas in Mexican author José Vasconcelos' (1882-1959) *La raza cósmica* (1925) that engrossed me in the link between the works of these two Latin American intellectuals. Like Freyre, Vasconcelos traces the development of the *mestizo* as a unique historical product of Latin America which represents the future ideal of humanity: *la raza cósmica*, the cosmic race. Also resembling Freyre, however, the juxtaposition of Vasconcelos' vehement exaltation of the mestizo character of Latin America with his largely homogenous and depreciative characterization of the non-European subjects of *La raza cósmica* seems at first irreconcilable.

Even so, I argue that it is actually in these comparable contradictions of *Casa-grande e senzala* and *La raza cósmica* that we can learn the most about how these narratives encode certain forms of racial domination. I contend that these shared limitations to Freyre and Vasconcelos' works are the results of their desire to renegotiate Latin America's, and thus the mestizo's, position on the periphery of world history through the same colonial discourse that designated Latin America as degenerate and outside of modernity in the first place. Individually, *Casa-grande e senzala* and *La raza cósmica* respectively reflect the particularities of Brazil and Mexico's history and discrete forms of racial domination. Put in conversation with each other, however, these texts can elucidate broader insights into (1) what produced the need for a reformulation of the national imaginary at this specific moment of Brazilian/Mexican history (2) why does it take the form of an anti-racist miscegenation discourse, and (3) how do Freyre and

Vasconcelos craft this narrative while naturalizing the racial structures of power first established during colonization and continued into independent nationhood? Far from exclusive to the Brazilian and Mexican contexts, an analysis of the fluid nature of racial discourse, and its adaptiveness across geographical and historical boundaries, should produce conclusions relevant to most societies on which racialization or colonization have left their marks. If "miscegenation discourse [...] is the point at which the ideological resources of a colonial or 'post'-colonial society that is premised upon distinguishing between colonizer and colonized are most intensely summoned," then a dissection of the points of dissonance in that discourse in Brazil and Mexico should reveal certain limits of the epistemology of coloniality (Wolfe 2001, 904).

Casa-grande e senzala and *La raza cósmica* are each one of the most studied texts in their home countries, but in-depth studies of the shared content and historical origins of these works are not common or focused on only one of them. Examination of Freyre and Vasoncelos' seminal works together, however, allows my study to incorporate the rich scholarship done on both texts written in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. This has been especially valuable as one writer's contributions on Freyre or Vasconcelos unavoidably comments on or reveals something about the other.

It is not just Freyre's observation of Portuguese women dying their hair blonde that remains relevant across the centuries, but also the systems of power that he, as well as Vasconcelos, describe and ultimately legitimize through their intellectual contributions. If *Casa-grande* and *La raza cósmica* endure to this day as quintessential representations of Brazilian and Mexican society, then it is a testament to the fact that race, as "a category that organizes exploitation," continues to structure both countries and our world as a whole (Segato 2022, 173). While the racial utopias that Freyre and Vasconcelos attempt to write into existence

in *Casa-grande e senzala* and *La raza cósmica* have not come to fruition, the deficiencies of their anti-racist projects can perhaps still point us in the right directions of liberatory imagination—or at the very least, instruct us on what pitfalls to avoid.

II. Necessity for a Mestizo Nation

La rebelión de las armas no fue seguida de la rebelión de las conciencias — José Vasconcelos, 1925
"The rebellion of arms was not followed by the rebellion of minds"

A. On the Merits of Comparison

The fact that *La raza cósmica* (1925) and *Casa-grande e senzala* (1933) both make frequent comparison to the United States, understand race as more a cultural phenomenon than one of biology, and rely on nearly interchangeable renditions of not just Latin American colonial history, but also that of the Iberian peninsula pre-1492, should rouse enough intrigue on its own. The specifics of the histories of these countries diverge greatly from each other: one colonized by Spain, the other by Portugal; one colonial economy fueled by extractive mining, the other by plantations; and one's independence gained after a decade of war against their colonizers and the other's through a continuation of monarchical rule. The similarity, then, between Freyre and Vasconcelos' works points to a pervasive and easily-mutable discourse at the core of *La raza cósmica* and *Casa-grande e senzala* which transcends national boundaries and is adaptable to a variety of contexts. The next chapter will examine how Vasoncelos and Freyre shape these underlying assumptions to the specificities of Mexico and Brazil as they tackle the same national question: the historical role and purpose of mestizaje/mestiçagem in their respective countries. This chapter, on the other hand, investigates the common historical moments and trends that Vasconcelos and Freyre respond to in *La raza cósmica* and *Casa-grande* in order to better understand why their works seem so similar.

The question of how these two canonical Latin American scholars examine hybridity within the distinctive circumstances of Mexico and Brazil and still reach parallel conclusions would be captivating enough on its own before considering that Vasconcelos and Freyre were contemporaries of each other. With only eight years separating the publication of one of their

seminal works from the other's, the considerable overlap between the arguments of the two texts becomes even more noteworthy. It is possible that Vasconcelos' work inspired Freyre's; even if that was the case, to simply conceptualize *Casa-grande e senzala* as a transplant of *La raza cósmica* into a Brazilian context would erase the nuances that Freyre has to navigate and manipulate. The fact that each text continues to significantly shape national discourse in Brazil and Mexico independently of each other should convey the value of comparatively analyzing the genesis of these narratives as distinct intellectual formations. On the other hand, to claim that the inception of these works less than a decade apart from each other was purely coincidental would obscure the notable commonalities between Brazil and Mexico at this particular moment that lead to such similar elaborations on miscegenation and national formation.

Rather, this chapter explores how the points of convergence between *Casa-grande e senzala* and *La raza cósmica* are largely the results of:

1) shared impediments to the development of a shared national identity in Brazil and Mexico because of demographic anxieties of the elite, later exacerbated by the beginning of industrialization and urbanization at the turn of the 20th century; and

2) a Eurocentric model of power and epistemology developed during Iberian colonization which survived the independence movements of the 19th century and continues to organize social relations in postcolonial nationhood.

If the "racialization of contingent human beings [...] remains mobile and continues [...] through various historical movements" (Segato 2022, 174), then it must be necessary to consider the historical trends in Brazil and Mexico that lead to the change in racial discourse which *Casa-grande* and *La raza cósmica* represent. This analysis should also partially explain why the racial formations of Freyre and Vasconcelos take the congruent shapes that they do.

In addition, a discussion of the limits of the epistemology both authors operate within will reveal a key problem of their narratives of national racial hybridity: the failure to "free ourselves [Latin Americans] from the Eurocentric mirror where our image is always, necessarily distorted (Quijano 2000a, 574). Both Freyre and Vasconcelos attempt to rescue Latin America from the peripheries of history. Instead, they conceptualize Europe (and its North American imperial successor) not as the end product of history, but as only a stepping stone to the real culmination of human civilization: Latin America—not in spite of, but because of mestizaje. Their ostensibly anti-racist projects, however, fail to come to fruition because of a Eurocentric understanding of race and history that ultimately reproduces the white supremacy that they attempt to critique.

B. Brazil and Mexico at the Turn of the 20th Century

As a highly flexible category of social organization, the capability of race to differentiate populations is inseparable from its particular historical context. So, to analyze a specific historical moment helps us understand why a new hegemonic discourse on race takes shape the way it does. While "race-making [has] no single determinant," the following pages identify some of "[race-making's] origins and consequences [which] can be specified" within Brazilian and Mexican history (Marx 1996, 205).

The turn of the 20th century brought massive disruptions to the social and political fabrics of two of Latin America's largest countries: Brazil and Mexico. The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the early stages of industrialization and urbanization begin in both nations. Necessary for these two processes in Brazil and Mexico was a mobile pool of labor which could fulfill the needs of industrial capital. In both countries, this was accomplished through immigration from Europe and Asia and, especially of consequence for narratives of mestizaje,

internal migration caused by the abolition of slavery in Brazil (1888) and the continued privatization of Indigenous communal lands under the Porfiriato regime (1876-1910) in Mexico. It is important to note that these events were not anomalies, but are instead the culmination of certain processes of national development in both countries—the gradual dismantling of Brazilian slavery beginning with the abolition of the slave trade (1850) and the Mexican liberal reforms of the mid-19th century. To better perceive the pictures of Brazil and Mexico that Freyre and Vasoncleos construct in their seminal works, we must first examine the historical moment they are responding to and why there is a need for a national racial hybridity discourse in the style of *Casa-grande* and *La raza cósmica*.

Brazil

At the end of the Brazilian empire and birth of the First Republic in 1889, a year after the abolition of slavery, Brazil was home to "the largest African-origin population in the Americas" (Fitzgerald & Cook-Martín 2014, 259). While the *Lei Áurea* (Golden Law) might have formally ended the system, the institution of slavery really began its decline in 1850 when the British blockade of the slave trade pressured the Brazilian monarchy to ultimately prohibit it. The *Lei do Ventre Livre* (Law of the Free Womb) in 1870, which granted freedom to the children of enslaved women, was also a key part of the gradual trend towards abolition. If formal slavery began its slow dismantling before 1888, its consequences persisted well beyond the Lei Áurea as well. "Since Afro-Brazilian deprivation survived the emancipation decree of 1888," (Wolfe 2001, 901), it is crucial to examine how racial exploitation outlasted slavery and what discourses arose to justify it now that "former slaves were [...] 'free' to work for pay wherever they wanted" (Fitzgerald & Cook-Martín 2014, 266).

The Lei Áurea coincided with, and was partly a consequence of, the shift in economic power from the declining Northeast sugarcane plantation zone to the Southeast's booming coffee, mining, and dairy industries. As the slave-dependent plantations of the Northeast dwindled in national relevance as other sugar-exporting territories like Cuba began to outproduce Brazil, slavery itself became less integral to Brazilian economic interests. The growing economy of the Southeast also relied on slavery to an extent, but more so on the labor of free workers. Some abolitionists even argued that "slavery would stem the flow of desirable European immigrants" and thus prevent Brazil from bettering its racial stock through a process of *branqueamento*, or whitening (Fitzgerald & Cook-Martín 2014, 266). Fears of a slave revolt in the style of Haiti also frightened elites—exacerbated by an Afro-Brazilian majority in the country and Brazil "having experienced larger slave revolts" than the United States or South Africa, for example (Marx 1996, 199).

It follows that rather than primarily rely on the labor of millions of now-emancipated Afro-Brazilians, "employers preferred European immigrants to available native workers concentrated in the northeast" due to largely racialized reasoning (Fitzgerald & Cook-Martín 2014, 266). Generally, they believed the Afro-Brazilian worker to be inferior to the European immigrant, who was already accustomed to urban work and modern life. Rather than follow an economic rationality, the state policy of branqueamento through subsidized European immigration reflected the fears of the elite of a potentially disruptive Black population. The comparative economic strength of the Southeast, however, still stimulated a general stream of internal migration from the Northeast; periodic droughts in the Northeast intensified this migratory flow.

Even though, by the beginning of the Great Depression, "Brazil had received the fourth-largest number of European immigrants in the Americas after the United States, Argentina, and Canada," the branqueamento project did not achieve the intended goals of political elites (Fitzgerald & Cook-Martín 2014, 269). Rather than create a "European-dominant population" in the style of "their main rival, Argentina," Brazil retained a high proportion of Afro-Brazilians, albeit slightly decreased after the influx of European immigrants (Fitzgerald & Cook-Martín 2014, 266). So, "elites decided to make the large population of mixed descent a selling point for its international image, [...] an exemplary racial democracy rather than a racial failure" (Fitzgerald & Cook-Martín 2014, 266). However, the elites' acceptance of Brazil's identity as a racial democracy was certainly not at odds with their previous embrace of branqueamento. Rather, as *Casa-grande e senzala* illustrates[5], the value of the myth racial democracy lies in its ability to justify past racial violence and obscure the present realities of racism.

This new wave of praise for miscegenation (and therefore selective parts of its constitutive African elements like its influence on Brazilian culture), however, did little to discontinue the idea among political or intellectual elites that non-white populations impeded national unity and modernization. On the contrary, the First Republic frequently used the discourse of racial democracy to justify discriminatory practices, notably when it came to immigration. The 1921 Law of Undesirables, for example, "prohibited the entry of immigrants who had contagious diseases, limited abilities, and/or a criminal or *politically suspect background*" (Fitzgerald & Cook-Martín 2014, 274; emphasis added). While not defined in ethnic or national terms, "its implementation by consular personnel effectively discriminated

[5] While discussions of Brazilian racial democracy are nearly inseparable from *Casa-grande e senzala*, Freyre does not actually use the term "racial democracy" in his magnum opus.

against individuals of unwanted origins, particularly in the case of blacks" from the United States (Fitzgerald & Cook-Martín 2014, 274).

When this issue was brought to the Brazilian government by activists like W. E. B. Dubois, Brazil's Foreign Ministry argued that this practice was actually necessary to prevent the spread of U.S. Black nationalism which risked the disruption of Brazil's delicate racial balance. "Confidential memos within the Brazilian government" reveal, however, "that the measure was intended to safeguard the Brazilian race, which already had 'a large Negro population'" (Fitzgerald & Cook-Martín 2014, 275). The discourse of racial democracy in this situation enables the Brazilian government to pursue its discriminatory projects of national unity while portraying itself abroad and at home as an arbiter of racial justice—unlike the segregationist United States. The effectiveness of this brand is on full display in Robert Abbot's ("editor of the influential African American daily the Chicago Defender") defense of Brazilian immigration policy in which he "extoll[s] Brazil's integration of sports, school, the army, and the navy" (Fitzgerald & Cook-Martín 2014, 276).

Under the direction of president/dictator Getúlio Vargas and Brazil's new political populist regime, the *Estado Novo* (New State), racial democracy and mestiçagem would become fundamental tenets of *brasilidade* (brazilianness). Vargas took power in a 1930 military coup against the dominant-Southeastern political alliance between elites of the states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais. He ruled over a provisional government until 1937, at which point Vargas drafted a new constitution that further centralized power in the hands of the federal government and began the authoritarian period of the Estado Novo. Since Vargas did not come into power through the ballot, one of his key concerns, especially amongst the "global economic crisis and its local impact" was the increased "possibility of labor unrest" (Fitzgerald & Cook-Martín 2014,

279). To provide outlets for this discontent in a way that maintained the interests of the state and capital, the Estado Novo's corporatist-syndicalist structure (at least in theory) mediated conflict between employers and employees. Complimentary to this form of economic nationalism was an idea of brasilidade that incorporated the Afro-Brazilian majority into a "sense of nationhood that would support the central state." Consequently this also "required making distinctions among outsiders" (Fitzgerald & Cook-Martín 2014, 279). During the Vargas years, immigration policy—commonly justified through a defense of the native Brazilian worker—remained a prominent arena for this formation of national identity.

The Estado Novo also appropriated Afro-Brazilian cultural practices and elevated them to symbols of national identity. Samba, for example, perfectly suited this project as it was a unique Brazilian cultural product with distinctively African influence. As an Afro-Brazilian musical tradition its lyrics commonly referred to the economic misery that their communities frequently encountered. This image of Brazil, however, would obstruct Vargas's nationalist aims, so samba music was frequently censored through the Estado Novo's Department of Print and Propaganda to produce the state's version of Brazilian identity and history absent of racial strife.

Mexico

If Brazil's permutation of miscegenation discourse is the result of anxieties about possible subaltern unrest, then the Mexican variant of mestizaje is an immediate response to the actual complete disruption of society by the Mexican Revolution. Just as Brazil's elites consistently perceived the country's Afro-Brazilian majority as an existential threat to national development, so too was the "Indian question" a constant concern for those at the top of Mexico's social and political hierarchy. In both countries, the new populist political regimes of the early 20th century—the Estado Novo and Mexico's post-revolution government enshrined in the 1917

Constitution—created avenues for the diffusion of discontent and pressure from below. To understand the specifics of Mexico's situation, we must first look at the issues that precipitated the decade-long revolution and how the government that rose from this violence attempted to contain future outbreaks of social strife.

Since the arrival of Spanish colonizers in Mexico in the early-16th century, Indigenous communities have been subject to continuous encroachment on their ancestral lands. The most active period of theft of Indigenous communal lands, however, was not during the three centuries of Spanish colonization, but after 1821, in post-independence Mexico. The period of *La Reforma* (the reform) from 1855-1863 saw the implementation of liberal economic reforms with the goal of accelerating capitalist development in Mexico. Crucial to this process was increased protection of and access to private property; one of the key legislations of this project was the *Ley Lerdo* (Lerdo law) of 1856. Named after the Mexican politician who drafted it, this law saw the "civil expropriation" of non-productive land to be sold off to incentivize development (Méndez 2024, 183). While the Ley Lerdo also compelled the sale of lands owned by the Catholic church not used for religious purposes, in practice, the legislation disproportionately targeted lands communally held by Indigenous peoples. These lands were then typically bought by the owners of large *haciendas* (agricultural estates) on which many recently-dispossessed rural Indigenous populations would labor. The privatization of Indigenous lands would outlive the liberal regime of the mid-19th century and continue into the authoritarian government of general Porfírio Díaz (1876-1910).

Over the course of the 19th century, wealth and power in Mexico became increasingly concentrated in the hands of the few, largely at the expense of the Indigenous people of Mexico. The widespread dispossession of Indigenous peoples across Mexico generated significant social

tensions as these individuals and entire communities became separated from the land and cultural ties that sustained them. Méndez (2024, 184) describes this process of ethnocide as the requisite actions for the proletarization and mestizofication of Mexico's population: "the formation of a class with no means of subsistence other than to 'freely' sell their ability to work in the labor markets: the mestizo class." At the turn of the 20th century, this nascent class fulfilled the labor needs of the growing cities and factories while being heavily exploited. This period saw the growth of unions attempt to collectively bargain for the rights of their workers with lackluster results given the violent repression of the pro-business Porfiriato. With this context, we can conceptualize "the popular rebellions of the Mexican Revolution—with the Zapatistas in the south and the Villistas in the north—[as] the inevitable outcome of the violent usurpation of land that became particularly severe after Independence" (Méndez 2024, 183).

For Mexico, the revolution is an extremely disruptive event—10 years of civil war (1910-1920)—that leaves a vacuum of central state authority. So, when fighting ends and a government comes into power with the Constitution of 1917, one of their main tasks is putting the nation back together. Therefore, political and intellectual elites began to champion a lot of nationalist ideas in which mestizaje played a central role. Since mestizos and Indigenous people constituted the majority of combatants during the revolution, the government that emerged from it would have to at least partly address some of their grievances. To accomplish this task, like the Estado Novo in Brazil, the post-revolution Mexican government embraced a corporatist structure that positioned the state as the arbiter between the interests of employers and employees. Also similar to Brazil, this system of accommodating class conflicts mirrored the declarations of official miscegenation discourse in which the mestizo body mediated the conflict between races as an intermediary between contentious elements. "The mestizo," argues Méndez (2024, 188),

"then becomes the national subject, not because they are a generic member of the Mexican state, but because they will come to represent the whole group of antagonistic relations between capital and labor—charged with all its contradictions and their racial specificities and specificities of gender and origin." This framing of miscegenation and national formation as the equilibrium of certain antagonisms is nearly interchangeable with how Freyre narrates the origination of Brazilian racial democracy. To define the characteristics of the national in-group, however, also required the simultaneous exclusion of constructed "others."

Like in Brazil, the creation of immigration policy frequently functioned as an opportunity to politically and discursively mold the formation of national identity. Chinese immigrants, for example, were a crucial labor pool in Mexico at the turn of the century. "Once Asian immigrants arrived," however, "a nativist backlash from peasants and workers in actual or potential labor market competition was tightly intertwined with racist ideology" (Fitzgerald & Cook-Martín 2014, 218). These common anti-Chinese bigotries would eventually culminate in ethnic pogroms committed against these communities during the Mexican Revolution (Fitzgerald & Cook-Martín 2014). In the post-revolutionary period, the increased avenues of expressing discontent from below, mediated through the paternalistic and corporatist state, meant that these sinophobic sentiments would find actualization through the state apparatus, rather than extrajudicial violence. For example, in 1926, "Mexico restricted the immigration of Asians, Jews, and Middle Easterners because these groups were unassimilable and failing to take part in the process of national mestizaje" (Fitzgerald & Cook-Martín 2014, 218). Just like Brazil in the case of Black immigrants from the United States, the use of mestizaje discourse in Mexico is not in contradiction with discriminatory practices, but is actually a fundamental "attraction of [racial]

hybridity [...] as a discursive, rhetorical and conceptual anchor in constructing a language of anti-racism" which obscures the realities of racism (Lund 2002, 21).

A study of the historical utility of anti-racist miscegenation discourse in the beginning of the 20th century helps us understand how works like *Casa-grande* and *La raza cósmica* quickly become classics of Brazilian and Mexican literature and social sciences. At the moment that Freyre and Vasoncelos write these texts, 1933 and 1925, respectively, the intellectual and political elites of Brazil and Mexico are already utilizing similar arguments and understandings of history that *Casa-grande* and *La raza cósmica* both employ. The possible value of Freyre and Vasoncelos' texts at the time of publication, then, comes from its synthesis of a variety of prominent, sometimes contradictory, contemporary discourses into one authoritative and coherent account of national formation. The similar contexts in which theories on racial hybridity come to national prominence in Brazil and Mexico, as well as the shared situations (e.g., immigration) in which elites evoke hybridity to obscure and justify real racial discrimination, reveal the ideological flexibility and utility of an anti-racist miscegenation discourse.

C. Postcolonial Malaise

If elite narratives about Brazilian and Mexican elites about racial hybridity were so valuable for its ostensible inclusion of non-white majorities into the national citizenry and its effectiveness in containing critiques of historical racial violence, then why does this strand of miscegenation discourse ultimately prove inadequate for the creation of a strong modern nation-state in Brazil or Mexico? Especially when compared with the national developments of Western Europe or the United States, Quijano (2000a, 567-568) claims that "in no Latin American country today is it possible to find a fully nationalized society, or even a genuine nation-state." He attributes this phenomenon to the lack of a "more or less democratic

participation in the distribution of the control of power" in Latin America (Quijano 2000a, 557). I argue that in *Casa-grande* and *La raza cósmica*, Freyre and Vasconcelos endeavor to designate the mestiço/mestizo as the subject allowed to participate in the democratization of society and reproduction of the nation. This attempted resignification of miscegenation fails in part, however, because of the pervasive Eurocentric model of knowledge present in *Casa-grande* and *La raza cósmica*.

For Quijano (2000a, 533), the colonization of the Americas signifies the beginning of "colonial/modern Eurocentered capitalism as a new global power." This new international model of power organizes itself along two key axes: the classification of the world's populations into distinct *races* and the articulation of all forms of labor control around the social relation of *capital*. While these foundational organizing principles of European-led global capitalism were first fastened together in the colonial experiences of the New World, the power of these twin constituent elements of the Eurocentric model of power (race and capital) outlived the colonization of not just the Americas, but of the entire world.

In order to justify Western Europe's position at the center of this developing global system of power, it was necessary "[to concentrate] all forms of the control of subjectivity, culture, and *especially knowledge* and the *production of knowledge* under its hegemony" (Quijano 2000a, 540; emphasis added). This Eurocentric epistemology is critical for its obstruction of the historical realities of colonization and exploitation. Race itself, for example, functions as "a mental construction that expresses the basic experience of colonial domination and pervades the more important dimensions of global power" (Quijano 2000a, 533). Race, therefore, became an invaluable tool in differentiating between Europeans and non-Europeans—especially in the new world historiography that a globally hegemonic

Eurocentric epistemology would develop. In addition to "a view of the differences between Europe and non-Europe as natural (racial) differences and not consequences of a history of power," the Eurocentric model of knowledge also fabricated the myth that "the history of human civilization [is] a trajectory that departed from a state of nature and culminated in Europe" (Quijano 2000a, 542). A corollary to this second myth of Eurocentrism is that modernity is solely a European phenomenon or that a non-European nation can only attain modernity through a form of Europeanization.

For those territories on the periphery of the capitalist world-system like Mexico or Brazil, Eurocentrism's monopoly on modernity remained pervasive sources of anxiety as elites in these countries pursued the formation of their own nation-states post formal independence from Europe. We plainly see the ways this model of knowledge remained hegemonic in "the foundational discourse of the 'nation' [...] that defines who belongs and who does not belong to the 'nation'" in Brazil and Mexico at the turn of the 20th century (Grosfoguel 2005, 121). In both countries, for example, anti-racist miscegenation discourse defined who was a part of the nation, while immigration policy served to exclude certain undesirable elements from entering the polity in the first place.

Casa-grande e senzala and *La raza cósmica* are not simply reproductions of the traditional Eurocentric flow of history, however. Their shared objective is to redirect the "Eurocentric evolutionist perspective of linear and unidirectional movement and changes in human history" that culminates in European/Western civilization (Quijano 2000a, 551). Rather, both Freyre and Vasconcelos attempt to dislodge Brazil and Mexico from the peripheries of history and the global economy and replace Europe (and the United States given its accession to

a global imperial power) with Latin America as the true inheritors of the mantle of modernity and civilization.

As a result of the pervasive nature of the Eurocentric model of knowledge, however, Freyre and Vasconcelos often frame their contestations of Euro and Anglo-supremacy in the same language of Eurocentrism that "often theorized [Latin America] as degenerate and outside of History in the philosophical traditions of dialectics, positivism, Aryanism, and race science" (Lund 2002, 159). Therefore, within *Casa-grande* and *La raza cósmica*, Freyre and Vasconcelos inevitability reproduce the core tenets of a Eurocentric epistemology such as the primitivism of Indigenous and Black people and the benevolent, rather than the exploitative character of European colonization. The next chapter will further explore the specific variations of Eurocentric discourse that show up throughout *Casa-grande* and *La raza cósmica*.

In analyzing the broader consequences and limiting effects of a Eurocentric epistemology on Freyre and Vasconcelos' anti-racist projects, we can better understand the difficulties of nation-state formation in Brazil and Mexico. For Quijano (2000a, 557), the nation-state requires its "member to have something real in common," that is, the democratization of the distribution of the control of power. This creates a necessary homogenizing effect on the population, even if it is only temporary and partial. This homogenization could not happen in Latin American countries like Brazil or Mexico without the process of "decolonizing social, political, and cultural relations that maintain and reproduce racial social classification" (Quijano 2000a, 568). The independence of "societies found in the colonial domination of American blacks, Indians, and mestizos could not be considered nations, much less democratic" because, after independence, "those races were denied all possible participation in decisions about social and political organization during the process of organizing the new state" (Quijano 2000a, 564-565).

Instead, a small minority of white elites, whose interests were generally antagonistic to those of the racially-marginalized, increased their influence over the now-independent territories. The lack of a decolonization of society, however, ultimately produced a paradox that Quijano (2000, 565) terms the "independent states of colonial societies." While former-colonies like Brazil and Mexico might have secured political and juridical independence from Europe, the coloniality of power continued to organize the postcolonial nation.

Decolonization was not necessary for the formation of strong nation-states in Western Europe or the United States, however, because the democratization of society did not require the homogenization or inclusion of historically-colonized races like it did in Brazil or Mexico. In the United States for example, the mass migration of Europeans across the Atlantic in the second-half of the 19th century made possible the democratization of the distribution of the control of power. Rather than incorporate internally-colonized populations into the nation-state, the United States could offer democratic participation as well as available stolen Indigenous land to these recently-arrived white immigrants. Crucially, "the coloniality of the new model of power was not cancelled, however, since American Indians and blacks could not have a place at all in the control of the resources of production, or in the institutions and mechanisms of public authority" (Quijano 2000a, 561).

It is relevant to note that the same potential limitations of a Eurocentric epistemology to the national development of Latin America were also present in the United States. The historical and demographic circumstances of the 19th century, however, meant that the United States did not have to deal with the same issues as Brazil or Mexico. In a moment of grim prescience for our present reality under a second Donald Trump presidency, Quijano (2000, 561) notes that "the colonial relations of the whites with new [non-white] immigrants [from Latin America and Asia]

introduced a new risk for the reproduction of the nation [...] as the old myth of the melting pot has been forcefully abandoned and racism tends to be newly sharpened and violent." This quote from Quijano predates the creation of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement by three years and the recent wave of extreme right-wing nativist sentiment across Europe and the U.S. by approximately two decades.

The coloniality of power is alive and well. The works of decolonial theorists like Aníbal Quijano and Rita Segato remain critical to understanding the long-lasting impact of colonization around the world. The global history of capitalism and the racial categories necessary to its maintenance helps us understand the directions that Freyre and Vasconcelos take in their narratives of national formation in *Casa-grande* and *La raza cósmica*. The following chapter engages directly with Freyre and Vasconcelos' texts in order to parse through the similar ways these authors reproduce a colonial understanding of race and history through their exceptionalist narratives about Brazil and Mexico.

III. Construction of a Mestizo Nation

Todo imperio necesita de una filosofía que lo justifique — José Vasconcelos, 1925
"Every empire needs a philosophy with which to justify it"

A. Framing *Casa-grande e senzala* and *La raza cósmica*

As Brazil and Mexico underwent massive changes in the early 20th century that altered the social and political fabric of these nations, so too did the national narratives that elites within each country used to justify their place at the top of the social hierarchy. The works of Gilberto Freyre in *Casa-grande e senzala* (1933) and José Vasconcelos in *La raza cósmica* (1925) were, as described in the previous chapter, highly reflective of this process of national myth creation. Throughout both texts, the authors reflect on the prevalence of mixed-race people in their respective countries and determine them to be a critical part of their nations' identity. The two Latin American intellectuals imagine the Western Hemisphere as the meeting point and melting pot for the Earth's supposedly distinct races. Freyre and Vasconcelos' central claims are that rather than a hindrance to national cohesion, the racially-mixed populations of Brazil and Mexico are key to their future prospects in a modernizing world.

For Vasconcelos, those distinct races are *blancos* (whites), *negros* (Blacks), *rojos* (Indigenous people), and *amarelos*[6] (Asians) that combine to form the "new" and fifth race: *la raza cósmica* (the cosmic race), the *mestizo*. While Vasconcelos' main point of reference is Mexico, he theorizes that the propagation of the cosmic race is the destiny for all of Latin America. Given his focus on the Mexican context, the bulk of *La raza cósmica* analyzes the racial dynamics between Indigenous and white influences in Mexico. Neglected in this pairing, however, is the role that Asian immigrants and enslaved Africans had in Mexican history. In his regional outlook on Latin America, Vasconcelos also engages with a long history of

[6] *Amarelo* and *rojo* translate literally to the colors "yellow" and "red," respectively.

pan-Americanist thinkers from leaders for independence like Simón Bolívar to modern essayists such as José Martí. While the Cuban nationalist Martí would describe Latin America as "*nuestra América mestiza*" (our mestizo America) in his famous essay "Nuestra América" (1891), Vasconcelos elaborates upon the historical and societal development of the mestizo and its exceptional role as the harbinger of a new epoch in human history.

On the other hand, Freyre's study is solely focused on the formation of Brazilian society as influenced by three main groups: white Portuguese colonizers, enslaved Black people originally trafficked from Africa, and, to a lesser extent, the Indigenous inhabitants of Brazil. The central object of analysis of *Casa-grande e senzala* is the sugar plantation—the main laboratory for the formation of labor and familial relationships in the Brazilian Northeast, Brazil's first plantation zone. Even though East Asian immigrant communities were rapidly growing across Latin America in cities like São Paulo during the beginning of the 20th century, their influence is neglected in *Casa-grande e senzala* as their presence was concentrated in the Southeast of Brazil. The dichotomy between the *casa-grande* (master's house) and *senzala* (slave quarters) serves as the primary analogy for the relationship between master and slave as well as the formation of white and Black racial antagonisms. In Freyre's view, however, *mestiçagem* is meant to resolve these frictions—or at the very least maintain them in equilibrium. Therefore, Freyre analyzes the plantation as the principal site of mestiçagem and how it structures the racial tensions, or supposed lack thereof, in Brazil.

These ideas challenged the previously dominant theories of U.S. and European-inspired eugenics and race science that political and intellectual elites throughout Latin America used to rationalize the subjugation of marginalized groups. Late 19th century Brazilian criminal anthropologist Raymundo Nina Rodrigues, for example, argued that Black and Indigenous

people were less responsible for their crimes because they lacked a certain degree of civilization that European descendants possessed (Salvatore 1996). He further proposed that mixed-race people inherited the worst qualities of each race which then pushed them to commit violent crimes and wallow in poverty. Freyre and Vasconcelos, however, come to the opposite conclusion as Rodrigues and argue that the offspring of an interracial pairing actually inherits the best characteristics of each race. They further claim that creation of a large mixed-race population actually betters the nation by ameliorating racial tensions. Their conclusion is that the processes of miscegenation that began in the colonial period will ultimately result in a fully blended nation where racial distinctions cease to be useful or even exist and humanity can reach its full potential.

In the midst of the dominant race-science of their day, Freyre and Vasconcelos' defense of racial hybridity were symptomatic of a paradigm shift in how race was discussed in Brazil and Mexico. As Brazilian and Mexican urbanization at the turn of the 20th century brought the supposedly distinct racial elements of each country into closer proximity, elites in both Mexico and Brazil embraced the critiques of eugenics and race science that Freyre and Vasconcelos employed in *Casa-grande e senzala* and *La raza cósmica*. Freyre and Vasconcelos' texts also served as the ideological underpinnings for the creation of a new national identity in both Brazil and Mexico that positioned both nations as flourishing modern states.

Freyre and Vasconcelos' agreement with their eugenicist contemporaries that certain humans are indeed racially distinct from each other to the point that they possess unique characteristics, however, perhaps indicates that the two authors' works did not stray far from the intellectual or sociopolitical bedrock of their predecessors. The fetishization of women of color, for example, is consistent across both texts and persistent across historical periods. However

opposed Freyre and Vasconcelos' ideas seemed at the time to the racist ideas of eugenics that preceded them, I argue that most of the content of their texts are largely a reproduction of white supremacist narratives that continued to justify the exploitation of marginalized races.

B. Miscegenation and *Atraso*

One of the key departures of Freyre and Vasconcelos' texts from previous works on race and national history in Brazil and Mexico is how they interpret the supposed *atraso* that plagues both countries. The word in Portuguese and Spanish means delay or lateness, but is also commonly used to describe the purportedly "slow" and "backward" economic, national, and cultural development of Mexico and Brazil since their independence in the early 1800s (Vasco 2015; Acevedo 2020). Even though the two Latin American colonies had very different paths to nationhood, their position on the periphery of the global economy persisted throughout much of the 19th century. While Brazil and Mexico certainly measured their nations' development against their former European colonial rulers, this frame of reference for transnational comparison shifted as the United States of America became the dominant imperial power in the Western Hemisphere.

During the 19th century, the United States seemed to be the postcolonial society to aspire towards. As another former colony of Europe, the United States was notable for breaking the mold of many new nations that arose in the wake of independence movements across the Americas. The United States rapidly expanded its national boundaries through a combination of violent occupation of Indigenous peoples' land, deals with European powers looking to offload their holdings across the Atlantic, and wars against its neighbors. Its expansion from a collection of thirteen colonies to a continent-spanning superpower inspired many Brazilian and Mexican elites to emulate what they viewed as characteristics essential to the United States' success. The

United States' imperialist growth was pivotal to its position as the hegemonic power in the Americas. While Brazil did annex territory from bordering countries such as Paraguay during the War of the Triple Alliance, the extent of the growth was minimal compared to the United States (Henderson 2016).

Meanwhile, Mexico was on the other end of the United States' expansionist ambitions. The American invasion of Mexico in 1846 resulted in the U.S. annexation of half of its southern neighbor's national territory. Despite this historic humiliation, a group of Mexican politicians shortly after the end of the conflict described the "true origin of the war" as "the insatiable ambition of the United States, favored by our weakness" (Alcaraz et al. 1850, 225). Rather than antagonize these Mexican elites, the Mexican-American War further demonstrated to them the supposed superiority of the United States and the comparative weakness of their nation.

Mexican elites after the war specifically revered the United States' "excellent elementary principles of government established while in colonial subjugation" (Alcaraz et al. 1850, 225). That is, the United States' appearance as a bastion of representative democracy that guaranteed the individual rights of man and the protection of private property. The liberalism of the United States particularly inspired Brazilian elites of the 19th century because of the long history of monarchy in Brazil (Bas 2011). The United States Civil War and subsequent abolition of slavery further produced images in Brazil of the Anglo-Americans as a beacon of progress as Brazil would not outlaw the same system until 1888 (Bas 2011).

While Brazilian and Mexican elites were quick to point to the United States' imperialist tendencies and democratic ideals as positions to emulate, their rationalizations for the United States' success also followed a Eurocentric racial logic. The popular perception of the United States was that it was much more "Europeanized" than any Latin American nation due to the

greater flow of European migrants into the country, the utter devastation of Indigenous communities and their exclusion from American society, and strict anti-Black miscegenation laws. Therefore, just as the Europeans were able to create continent-spanning empires through colonization of huge swathes of the Western Hemisphere because of some inherent qualities linked to their "whiteness," "civility," and "modernity," the United States now took up this mantle.

The continued conflation of Europeanness with modernity inspired policy changes in both Brazil and Mexico. After the abolition of slavery in Brazil, for example, the *branqueamento* (whitening) of the country through subsidized immigration from European nations became official government policy (Bento 2002). This idea, championed by eugenicists such as Nina Rodrigues, meant to dilute and eventually eliminate Black and Indigenous characteristics from the Brazilian genepool that were deemed undesirable. Similar conceptions of race and mestizaje were championed by Mexican dictator Porfírio Díaz in the late 19th century (Stern 2016).

By the beginning of the 20th century, however, Latin American intellectuals began to view the United States in a far less idealized light. The United States's resounding victory against Spanish forces in the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea in 1898 further cemented this former colony as a force to be reckoned with not just in the Western Hemisphere, but on a global scale. The Spanish-American War, however, also signaled the beginning of a century of increased U.S. intervention throughout all of Latin America. U.S. involvement took many forms, from direct military intervention to assistance to insurgent groups, as well as economic and political pressure on non-cooperative governments. Following the end of the Spanish-American war, for example, the United States annexed Puerto Rico and forced newly-independent Cuba to sign a treaty which allowed U.S. military intervention when the Americans deemed necessary as well as the

establishment of naval bases like the now infamous Guantanamo Bay currently used for immigration detention.

As the United States' actions in Latin America grew more and more overtly imperial and exploitative, early 20th century intellectuals in the region started to critically examine their neighbor to the north. In his 1904 poem "A Roosevelt" (to [Theodore] Roosevelt) Nicaraguan writer Rubén Dario expressed his disdain for the United States as the "future invader / of the naive America which has Indigenous blood."[7] Here, Dario recognizes the United States as a threat not just to one country in Latin America, but to the entire region. Importantly, Dario also points out a characteristic of Latin America which he believes makes the region unique from the United States and therefore "real" America: the continued presence and influence of Indigenous peoples. In their formative works, Freyre and Vasconcelos take this idea one step further and proudly declare that Brazil and Mexico are not white nations like the United States, but rather a nation of mestizos.

In order to redefine the previous transnational comparison between Brazil/Mexico and the United States that positioned the two Latin American nations as inferior to the U.S., Freyre and Vasconcelos utilize the language and history of mestizaje. At the time that Freyre and Vasconcelos wrote *Casa-grande e senzala* and *La raza cósmica*, the legal apartheid codified by Jim Crow laws in the southern United States was in full swing. Both authors traveled extensively throughout the United States and lived there for extended periods of time prior to the publication of the *Casa-grande* and *La raza cósmica*; these firsthand glimpses of legal segregation certainly influenced the works of Freyre and Vasconcelos (Square 2008). Freyre conducted his graduate studies at Columbia University and, while studying as an undergraduate at Baylor University in Texas, witnessed the lynching of a Black man (Lund 2002). While Vasconcelos did not attend

[7] My own translation, "eres el futuro invasor / de la América ingenua que tiene sangre indígena."

university in the United States, he attended primary school in a Texas border town and would often spend time in self-exile in the U.S. amidst the political chaos of the Mexican Revolution.

So, as the largest and most powerful country in the Western Hemisphere, the United States served as a crucial and relevant point of comparison for Freyre and Vasconcelos in their seminal works. In the preface to the first edition of *Casa-grande e senzala*, Freyre mentions an American traveler that visits Brazil and describes "the fearfully mongrel aspect of most of the population,"[8] in other words, the racially mixed nature of Brazil (1933, 31). The point, then, of Freyre as well as Vasconcelos' works is to challenge and disprove the notion that mestizaje has degenerated the Brazilian or Mexican people.

Their first steps are to trace and compare the colonial history of Spanish America and Brazil with that of the United States. Vasconcelos imagines this narrative as a constant struggle between English and Spanish influences in the New World—"*castellano y británico, o latinos y sajones*" (1925, 63). A key difference in the colonial styles of the two is that the English "committed the sin of destroying [Indigenous] races while we [Latinos] assimilated them, and this gives us new rights and hopes for a mission without precedent in History"[9] (Vasconcelos 1925, 72). Here, Vasconcelos argues that the mestizaje that the Spanish engaged in in the New World, gives the nations of Latin America a key advantage in integrating disparate racial elements rather than simply eliminating them as the British and their North American descendants have attempted.

Similarly, Freyre explains how the form of "race hatred, such as marked the history of other slave-holding areas in the Americas," like the United States, "were seldom carried to any such extreme in Brazil" (1945, xii). He attributes this success over the supposedly superior

[8] Written in English in the preface.
[9] My own translation "cometieron el pecado de destruir esas razas en tanto que nosotros las asimilamos, y esto nos da derechos nuevos y esperanzas de una misión sin precedente en la Historia."

United States to "the effects of a miscegenation that tended to dissolve such prejudices" (Freyre 1945, xii). Vasconcelos also makes references to the "inflexible line which separates the black from the white in the United States"[10] as well as the "exclusion of the Japanese and Chinese from California"[11] (Vasconcelos 1925, 75). In a break from previous idealized views of the United States, the two Latin American intellectuals critique the systemic violence carried out against marginalized groups within the imperial giant. They also argue that mestizaje and the assimilation of non-European elements into Latin American colonial society prevented the kind of prejudices present in the United States that manifested itself in codified discrimination under Jim Crow.

In pointing out the historical racism present in the United States, however, Freyre and Vasconcelos obfuscate the similarly-violent past and present of Brazil and Mexico in order to portray the two nations as "racially innocent" (Hernández 2013). A more in-depth analysis of racial structures of power within the United States would reveal more commonalities among the treatment of Black and Indigenous peoples within Latin America than the two writers would care to admit. For example, the focus on Jim Crow's construction of a Black-white binary of race ignores the pervasive colorism that favors African-descended peoples with whiter features such that "lighter skin shades are consistently accorded social and economic privileges" (Hernández 2016). Similar forms of discrimination exist in Brazil and Mexico that privilege physical and non-physical characteristics coded as European or white (Paixão 2021; Hernández 2016). Even forms of de facto segregation existed in both countries as the growth of urban centers pushed Black and Indigenous communities to the peripheries of city life like the *favelas* of Brazil. The unwillingness of Freyre and Vasconcelos to consider the similarly violent racial histories of all

[10] My own translation "la línea inflexible que separa al negro del blanco en los Estados Unidos."
[11] My own translation "la exclusión de los japoneses y chinos de California."

former colonies produces idealized images of Brazil and Mexico in order to achieve a moral high ground over the United States in lieu of economic, political, or cultural dominance.

It is not enough for these authors, however, to point out the flaws in the United States' history of racial relations because they must still account for the "real" reasons for the atraso of Brazil and Mexico. Rather than only utilize the previous eugenicist explanations, Freyre and Vasconcelos draw attention to the challenges to national development and cohesion in Latin America relative to those that the United States confronted. Both authors point to the harsh conditions of life in the tropics as a major trial over which Brazil and Mexico have had to prevail in order to take their rightful place as developed and modern nations. Freyre argues that the temperate climate of North America and Western Europe ("annual average of 56° F"[12]) is more conducive to economic progress and civilization (1933, 77). Similarly, Vasconcelos discusses the importance of "invent[ing] new mediums to combat the heat" so that "the new [cosmic] race can start to complete its destiny"[13] (1925, 79). According to Freyre and Vasconcelos, while the aforementioned complications might have hindered the early development of Brazil and Mexico, the proliferation of new technology such as refrigeration means the mestizo can finally conquer Latin America's previously untameable tropical nature.

Intellectuals influenced by eugenicist ideals of white racial superiority often blamed the mixed-racial characteristics descended from Black and Indigenous populations for the "backwardness" of Brazil and Mexico. Freyre and Vasconcelos both push back against this idea by comparing the non-racial elements that produced different outcomes in the colonial developments of Latin America and the United States. They often concede, however, that "the

[12] My own translation, "(média anual 56° F), considerada a mais favorável ao progresso econômico e à civilização à europeia."
[13] My own translation, "La nueva raza comenzará a cumplir su destino a medida que se inventan los nuevos medios de combatir el calor en lo que tiene de hostil para el hombre, pero dejándole todo su poderío benéfico para la producción de la vida."

mestizaje of factors too dissimilar takes longer to be expressed"[14] (Vasconcelos 1925, 56). As explained in the previous chapter, the Mexican and Brazilian governments of the early 20th century issued similar statements to justify their exclusion of non-white immigrants (Black Americans from Brazil and Chinese immigrants from Mexico). In the following section, I attempt to show how many of Freyre and Vasconcelos' arguments tend to resemble their eugenicist contemporaries and ultimately reaffirm white supremacy because of their Eurocentric understandings of race and culture.

C. The New Cultural-Racial Paradigm

While Freyre and Vasconcelos' optimistic narratives of mestizaje appear to contradict the conclusions of eugenicists like Nina Rodrigues, the two authors' understanding of race and colonial history inevitably reproduce and uphold white supremacist structures. One key distinction between the works of Freyre and Vasconcelos from previously-dominant theories on the racial makeup of Latin America is how they conceptualize the essential differences between races. The race-science of their day posited that there exists heritable biological differences between different races; physical anthropology's three main racial classifications of humans used to be "Negroid, Caucasoid, and Mongoloid" (Omi & Winant 2015, 109). At the turn of the 20th century, however, research in the field of anthropology led by Franz Boas (whom Freyre studied under at Columbia) challenged and disproved the relationship between negative traits, such as decreased intelligence, with certain races (Visweswaran 1998). Instead, Boas and the school of cultural anthropology that he developed focused on culture as a more meaningful criteria with which to analyze different groups of people.

[14] My own translation, "Sucede que el mestizaje de factores muy disímiles tarda mucho tiempo en plasmar."

Boas's attempts to combat the dominant race-science of his time mirrored and inspired Freyre and Vasconcelos' own strategies at dismantling the mestizaje stigma in their countries (Lund 2002, Catelli 2016). At the same time, however, the two Latin American intellectuals also fall victim to the same inherent contradictions as Boas in his elaborations on race and culture. Much of Boas's research attempted to prove that "race could be separated from racism or negative value through proper science" (Visweswaran 1998, 71). This strain of Boasian thought is reflected in the work he is well known for like his research on cranial sizes. Nevertheless, Boas and his students would also argue that "race could *not* be separated from negative value and should therefore disappear through assimilation or miscegenation, in order to dilute racial difference and evolve a common culture" (Visweswaran 1998, 71; emphasis added). In his work on the U.S. Immigration Committee between 1908 and 1910, Boas would suggest in a letter to a colleague that an "influx of white blood" could lighten an "industrially and socially inferior large black population" (Stocking 1974, 213). Boas would continue writing about the necessity of dilution of "negro blood" into the 1920s as well (Visweswaran 1998, 71).

These same contradictions are also at the core of Freyre and Vasconcelos' works. Neither author attempts a separation of race from its negative value as Boas did. Instead, they aim to separate their nations' narratives of supposed *atraso* from its most commonly-expressed form: fears of racial and national degradation through miscegenation. Additionally, instead of research in the natural sciences, Freyre and Vasconcelos' works are rooted in historical analysis and the social sciences. Freyre especially, "steeped in enthusiasm for the Boasian critique of race in anthropology, seeks to erase race. That is, his motivation is to eliminate the category of race in favor of culture" (Lund 2002, 215). Vasconcelos is similarly influenced by Boasian ideas of culture in favor of race (Catelli 2016). While both *Casa-grande* and *La raza cósmica* extensively

utilize the term ‘race’ and racial terminology to refer to different groups of people, its meaning is distanced from its biological connotations within eugenics. Rather than heritable physical characteristics serving as the primary differentiator between people, Freyre and Vasconcelos’ use of race generally refers more to historical, societal, and especially cultural differences between groups. This change in methodology is mirrored in the writing styles of the two intellectuals. Both authors, in the tradition of modern Latin American essayism, employed a “non-systematic, literary style and historical arguments” to advocate for the virtues of mestizaje in their respective countries (Cordeiro & Neri 2020, 267).

Both Freyre and Vasoncelos’ anti-racist projects, however, fail in part because they embrace Boas’s complimentary belief that race could not become a value-neutral fact and would therefore need to be eliminated through assimilation and miscegenation. While both authors discard eugenics’ biologically-defined notions of race, their linking of culture and race leads them to similar conclusions as Boas: that mestizaje is a necessary, albeit sometimes violent process as Freyre would notably point out, in order to create a modern and unified people. As Lund (2002, 184) explains, “just as the various instantiations and permutations of colonial discourse— from the Requerimiento to the civilizing mission— construct the colonial other as a racialized inner-exteriority to be simultaneously rescued and erased, incorporated and expelled, so do the various Latin Americanist theories of national or regional hybridity depend upon a simultaneous sublimation and effacement of a similarly racialized, colonial other.” In interrogating the similar ways in which Freyre and Vasconcelos reinscribe colonial hierarchies of power within their formative works, we can better understand how their theories obscure and naturalize the violence necessary to maintain said hierarchies.

D. Redemption of the Mestizo

Within Vasconcelos' cosmology in *La raza cósmica*, Patagonia is the birthplace of humanity and Latin America is home to the first great human civilization: Atlantis. The greatness of the Atlantis civilization, however, peaked millennia ago and its direct descendents, the Indigenous civilizations present at the moment of European colonization, paled in comparison as "they slept for thousands of years and did not wake up"[15] (Vasconcelos 1925, 71). In fact, Vasconcelos (1925, 80; 82). sees it as the duty "of the white [to teach] the control of the material"[16] and to pass on "the superior ideals of the whites, but not their arrogance"[17] through mestizaje. Here, Vasconcelos exhibits a paradigmatic Eurocentric view: a "temporal alteration," in which "'all non-Europeans' belonged to the past, and so it was possible to think about relations with them in an evolutionary perspective" (Quijano 2000b, 221). Even Vasconcelos' invocation of a singular Indigenous culture or people "is the product of a discursive violence that homogenizes and reifies a dynamic multiplicity of ethnocultural communities" and creates "this subjectivity called the Indian" (Lund 2002, 101). He attributes anything that is associated with modernity, civilization, and advancement with the white race, while the Native populations can only contribute "depths contained within the eye of the red man, who knew so much [...] and now seems to have forgotten everything"[18] (Vasconcelos 1925, 78). Even though Vasconcelos positions his national narrative as a celebration of Latin America's Indigenous past, his clear preference for the European influence over the region rearticulates the naturalness of a white supremacist colonial hierarchy.

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[15] My own translation, "se durmieron hace millares de años para no despertar."
[16] My own translation, "El blanco enseñó el dominio de lo material."
[17] My own translation, "aceptamos los ideales superiores del blanco, pero no su arrogancia."
[18] My own translation, "abismos contenidos en la pupila del hombre rojo, que supo tanto [...] y ahora parece que se ha olvidado de todo."

Freyre's account on race in Brazil similarly creates monolithic characters of Black, Indigenous, and Portuguese influences in Brazilian national history. Far from equal partners in this exchange, Freyre, like Vasconcelos, privileges the European contributions to the modern Brazilian nation and character, which include "the science, the skills, and [..] advanced thought"[19] (1933, 115). Freyre also credits the Portuguese colonizers for the propensity to mix with other races present in Brazil as a colony and later as an independent nation. Unlike Vasconcelos, however, Freyre does not universalize his theories on hybridity to the rest of Latin America, as his explanations for Brazil's unique mestiçagem lie within Portuguese history.

Freyre imagines Portugal as the meeting point between Africa and Europe, and attributes Portuguese tolerance for other cultures, religions, and races to the long Moorish presence and influence on the Iberian peninsula. However, because the Portuguese expelled the Moors before the Spanish did, the Islamaphoic fervor of the Spanish did not impede the Portuguese colonization of Brazil. This version of Portuguese history forms the basis of Freyre's "lusotropicalism," the idea that Portuguese colonization was preferable to other forms of European domination as the Portuguese were better equipped to and experienced with incorporating antagonistic elements into one cohesive entity. The supposed open-mindedness of the Portuguese to racial, ethnic, and religious differences made the creation of a racially-harmonious Brazil possible and the role of the Portuguese indispensable in doing so.

Vasconcelos similarly places Spanish agency and exceptionalism as the driving force behind the malleability of the cosmic race as it was "Spanish colonization that created mestizaje: this signals its character, establishes its responsibility, and defines its future"[20] (1925, 73). While Freyre and Vasconcelos might differ on which Iberian colonial power was better suited for

[19] My own translation, "com a ciência, com a técnica e com o pensamento adiantado da Europa."
[20] My own translation, "La colonización española creó mestizaje: esto señala su carácter, fija su responsabilidad y define su porvenir."

mestizaje in the New World, the convergence of their accounts around some intrinsic quality of the Portuguese or Spanish that facilitated the emergence of the mestizo is central to both narratives. Both authors use the exemplarity of the Iberian colonizers as reasons for the outsized European influence on the continent rather than the result of centuries of violent domination of non-European peoples.

The characters in Freyre and Vasconcelos' study of Latin American colonial history and its Iberian antecedents, however, are rarely solely defined by their culture, race, or nationality. Rather, examining the implicit and often subtextual references to gender and sexuality throughout both authors' texts are critical in understanding the power dynamics that they reveal and justify—most commonly as it concerns the sexual domination of women of color by European colonizers. As mestizaje describes a process of the sexual reproduction of distinct racial elements into homogenized and mixed offspring, gender and sexuality play key parts in elaborations on miscegenation. Since "[racial] hybridity theory is a discourse on the biopolitical implications of the practice and consequences of the sexual reproduction that occurs between differently constructed 'races' [...] discourses of race are inextricable from discourses of gender" (Lund 2002, 185). By paying careful attention to the ways Freyre and Vasconcelos weave and diffuse the gendered/racialized violence of the colonial order into their influential narratives of mestizaje, we can better understand the ways that systems of social control like patriarchy or white supremacy work in tandem to "simultaneously naturalize and reify a relation of colonial power as deterministically inevitable" (Lund 2002, 264).

The particular relationship between Black and Indigenous women and white European men, personified in the heroic conquistador by Freyre and Vasconcelos, serve as the archetypal pairing for miscegenation in *Casa-grande* and *La raza cósmica*. In both authors' accounts, the

necessary background for these new interracial relationships that begin to take place in the New World under Iberian colonization is the reconquista of the Iberian peninsula. The sexualized image of the Muslim woman that results from centuries of warfare against the Moorish kingdoms is critical to understand Freyre and Vasconcelos' retelling of this history. Vasconcelos notes the "aftertaste of the unhealthy muslim sensuality" present in the "melancholies of the Arab"[21] that has at least partially permeated into castilian blood (1925, 78). Freyre speaks similarly of how "the long contact with the Saracens [Muslims] would leave idealized among the Portuguese the figure of the enchanted *moura*, a delightful type of dark-skinned woman [...] enveloped in sexual mysticism"[22] (1933, 71).

Freyre is in fact quite transparent about how "the colonizers would find similar, almost identical, [idealized figures] among the nude female Indians of loose hair of Brazil"[23] (1933, 71). The Iberian representations of exoticized Muslim women initially animated the images of Indigenous women that the Portuguese used to justify their sexual violence against them, as well as those fashioned later on for Black women before these stereotypes would take on a life of their own. Freyre condenses these various impressions of Black and Brown women into a general Portuguese "sexual preference for the *mulata*" and "glorification of the *mulata*, of the *cabocla*, of the *morena*"[24] (1933, 72). In *La raza cósmica*, "*el negro*" takes on a similar quality of "avid sensual joy, inebriated of dances and unbridled lust"[25] (1925, 78).

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[21] My own translation, "Se revelan estrías judaicas que se escondieron en la sangre castellana desde los días de la cruel expulsión; melancolías del árabe, que son un dejo de la enfermiza sensualidad musulmana."
[22] My own translation, "O longo contato com os sarracenos deixara idealizada entre os portugueses a figura da moura-encantada, tipo delicioso de mulher morena e de olhos pretos, envolta em misticismo sexual."
[23]My own translation, "[...] misticismo sexual – sempre de encarnado, sempre penteando os cabelos ou banhando-se nos rios ou nas águas das fontes mal-assombradas – que os colonizadores vieram encontrar parecido, quase igual, entre as índias nuas e de cabelos soltos do Brasil."
[24] My own translation, "ditado em que se sente ao lado do convencionalismo social da superioridade da mulher branca e da inferioridade da preta, a preferência sexual pela mulata. Aliás o nosso lirismo amoroso não revela outra tendência senão a glorificação da mulata, da cabocla, da morena."
[25] My own translation, "pone el negro, ávido de dicha sensual, ebrio de danzas y desenfrenadas lujurias."

These images that Vasconcelos and Freyre craft are not novel to their works, but are instead enduring caricatures of a colonial discourse that frequently casts women of color as receptive to the sexual desires of their colonizers. This fetishization and the often collinear characterizations of Muslim, Indigenous, and Black female sexuality serve to more easily portray the sexual violence that was necessary to mestizaje as a consensual and natural process. *La raza cómica* and *Casa-grande* often obscure the realities of gendered and racialized violence through the language of Darwinian sexual selection and personal taste that both texts constantly employ.

In Vasconcelos's view of mixed race relations, the "*ley del gusto*" (law of taste) structures the preferences and desires of sexual actors (1925, 84). Rather than racial, ethnic or religious prejudices having a deterring impact on interracial relationships (like in the United States) it is "a mix of races consummate in accordance with the laws of social interest, sympathy, and beauty, [that] will lead to the formation of a race infinitely superior to any that has previously existed"[26] (1925, 88). The "gradual perfection of the species,"[27] however, requires the elimination (or at least assimilation) of the inferior elements of humanity (1925, 88).

Vasconcelos is clear in who he regards as the undesirable elements of the cosmic race when he claims that "the Indian, by way of graft onto the common race, would advance by thousands of years [...] to our era, and in some decades of *aesthetic eugenics* could disappear the negro along with those types [...] fundamentally recessive and indignant"[28] (1925, 89; emphasis added). The ultimate goal of Vasconcelos' mestizaje is the dilution of these degenerative races into one cosmic human race. The Spanish undertook this historical mandate to better the human race with "an abundance of love which permitted the Spanish to create a new race with the

[26] My own translation, "Una mezcla de razas consumada de acuerdo con las leyes de la comodidad social, la simpatía y la belleza, conducirá a la formación de un tipo infinitamente superior a todos los que han existido"
[27] My own translation, "perfección gradual de la especie."
[28] My own translation, "El indio, por medio del injerto en la raza afín, daría el salto de los millares de años que median de la Atlántida a nuestra época, y en una cuantas décadas de eugenesia estética podría desaparecer el negro junto con los tipos que el libre instinto de hermosura vaya señalando como fundamentalmente recesivos e indignos."

Indian and with the negro; bestowing the white stock through the soldier which conceived Indigenous families and the culture of the West"[29] (Vasconcelos 1925, 72). Instead of the genocidal projects of the Anglo-Saxons, Vasconcelos invokes a Boas-esque argument that the Spanish form of elimination by incorporation is comparatively kind and merciful. Through this discourse, Vasconcelos is able to reimagine centuries of dispossession and violence against the marginalized races of Latin America as a necessary and benevolent cause for the betterment of all mankind, even for the group that is dominated since they also evolve in this process.

Freyre similarly imagines miscegenation, and its requisite violence against women of color, as a necessary process for the civilization of Brazil. Like Vasconcelos, Freyre notes that the initial sexual encounters of Portuguese colonizers with the Indigenous peoples of Brazil were motivated by notions of "*gosto ou vontade*" (taste or desire) and functioned like a "true process of sexual selection"[30] (1933, 83). This first period of mestiçagem laid the foundations for the development of European civilization in Brazil because of the mestiço, due to "the pure fact of the color closer to that of the whites and for one or another trace of the moral culture or tools already acquired from their European fathers"[31] (Freyre 1933, 111). The polygamy of these conquistadores populated the region and cemented the patriarchal Portuguese figure at the center of this nascent tropical society.

The ultimate form of patriarchal authority, however, arrives later with the plantation mode of production and the enslaved people of African origins whose exploited labor fueled it. One aspect of Freyre's analysis of this dynamic that stands out is his focus on the sadism present in the Portuguese conquistador and passed on to the slave-owner, which created "unfavorable

[29] My own translation, "Comienza a advertirse este mandato de la Historia en esa abundancia de amor que permitió a los españoles crear una raza nueva con el indio y con el negro; prodigando la estirpe blanca a través del soldado que engendraba familia indígena y la cultura de Occidente."
[30] My own translation, "verdadeiro processo de seleção sexual."
[31] My own translation, "esses mestiços, quase pelo puro fato da cor mais próxima da dos brancos e por um outro traço de cultura moral ou material já adquirido dos pais europeus."

circumstances for women"[32] (1933, 113). Freyre even concedes that perhaps the "womanizing frenzy of the Portuguese was exercised against victims not always co-participants [*confraternizantes*] in the enjoyment [*gozo*]"[33] (1933, 113). In comparison with Vasconcelos' account, Freyre's—at least at first—appears to have a more realistic and sensible view of the very real violent subjugation of women of color.

Much of *Casa-grande e senzala*, however, depends upon an exceptionalist reading of the history of Portuguese colonization of Brazil, and by extension that of the modern Brazilian state. In order to incorporate the grave historical reality of colonial violence into his work about the virtues of said colonization, Freyre formulates an antagonistic compliment to the sadism of the white master/colonizer: the masochism of the Black and Indigenous woman. Through this pseudo-psychosexual analysis, Freyre is able to claim that there were indeed "cases of pure fraternization of the sadism of the white conquistador with the masochism of the Indigenous or Black woman"[34] (1933, 113). Like Freyre's previously-described notion of the Portuguese "preference for the *mulata*," this argument again tries to obscure the violence of the situation by portraying it as a reciprocal relationship.

Whether consensual or not, within the end product of this interracial encounter, the mestiço, Freyre sees the answer to an equilibrium of the many cultural and economic antagonisms of Brazilian society: "the European culture and the Indigenous. The European and the African. [...] More predominant over all the antagonisms, the most general and the most profound: the master and the slave"[35] (1933, 116). Without the mestiço, these antagonisms would

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[32] My own translation, "em circunstâncias desfavoráveis à mulher"
[33] My own translation, "O furor femeeiro do português se terá exercido sobre vítimas nem sempre confraternizantes no gozo"
[34] My own translation, "ainda que se saiba de casos de pura confraternização do sadismo do conquistador branco com o masoquismo da mulher indíigena ou da negra"
[35] My own translation, "A cultura europeia e a indígena. A europeia e a africana. [...] Mas predominando sobre todos os antagonismos, o mais geral e o mais profundo: o senhor e o escravo."

devolve into irreparable frictions and genocidal or segregationist projects like in the United States. Mestiçagem, then, and the unequal and violent relationships of power that produced it, are ultimately necessary and comparatively compassionate forms of subjugation. Lund (2002, 211) puts it well: "the racism of *Casa-grande e senzala* is the naturalization of that exploitation: not a case for democracy, but a discourse that makes colonial hierarchy and plutocracy so obvious and deterministic as to appear inevitable."

The historical process of miscegenation in Latin America is so inseparable from past and present forms of racialized and gendered violence, however, that Freyre and Vasconcelos analyze this history of domination as merely the result of competing preferences of actors in a sexual marketplace in order to maintain the integrity of their Iberian colonizers. For these two authors, it was only "natural" that after such prolonged contact with a non-Christian and non-white population (the Moors) that the Spanish and Portuguese would take darker-skinned women as their sexual partners in the New World as well. The European elements, therefore, which Freyre and Vasconcelos clearly and often mark as more valuable, would also naturally proliferate through a survival of the fittest sexual selection. Through these arguments, Freyre and Vasconcelos cloak the colonial order that depended on the sexual exploitation of women of color in a euphemistic language that suggests a degree of consent and sometimes enjoyment from the dominated group. In *Casa-grande e senzala* and *La raza cósmica*, we can clearly see how the Eurocentric model of knowledge is a foundational element for the continuation of the coloniality of power.

IV. Conclusion

El día de la Chicana

I will not be shamed again
Nor will I shame myself. — Gloria Anzaldúa, 1987

In their efforts to uplift the historical positions of their home countries from the margins of history to the forefront of humankind's development, the ultimate result of Freyre and Vasconcelos' narratives about Brazil and Mexico is a revitalization of the same colonial logic that deemed Latin America degenerate in the first place. Rather, this thesis explores how the coloniality of power (and its systems of labor control and racial subjugation) constantly reinvents and justifies itself across temporal and spatial boundaries.

The comparative study of Brazil and Mexico's history at the turn of the 20th century shows that the rise of miscegenation discourse at the same time in both countries was not an aberration, but actually a practical response to changing circumstances in each country. The conditions of postcolonial nationhood in both Brazil and Mexico required a new national myth that, at least discursively, included and celebrated the non-white elements of its populations. The true function of anti-racist miscegenation discourses like *Casa-grande* and *La raza cósmica*, however, is the justification of a colonial society—predicated on exploitation and violence along gender and racial lines—that continues to inhabit the formally independent countries of Latin America. In order to reproduce the colonial forms of domination that both state and capital relied on, narratives of national mestizaje like Freyre and Vasconcelos' operate within a distinctly Eurocentric epistemology.

The rise of global neoliberalism at the turn of the 21st century and the subsequent rise of the discourse of multiculturalism provides future research opportunities to examine how seemingly anti-racist projects further the needs of capital and the state. Though, one could argue

that, while the hidden nature of racism in narratives like mestizaje and multiculturalism do not lead to racial justice or equality, they are still preferable to an overt form of racism that openly, rather than covertly, discriminates along racial lines. Perhaps these discourses are actually a step in the right direction that could propel change that would otherwise be impossible under less-tolerant circumstances. However, the rise of contemporary far-right parties and politics across the "tolerant" and "advanced" nations of the world, which a few years prior might have openly celebrated their diversity or multiculturalism, should dispel the myth of linear progress when it comes to resolving the "race question."

While the contemporary intellectual circles of Brazil and Mexico now generally distance themselves from the conclusions of Freyre and Vasconcelos' works, the coloniality of power remains at large and continues to contort itself to the historical necessities of the moment. The continued relevance of *Casa-grande e senzala* and *La raza cósmica* to Brazil and Mexico speaks to the similar resilience of coloniality itself. If we hope to understand the apparent permanence of coloniality and uncover possible paths to liberation, we must first respond to the fundamental question that coloniality continually works to conceal: "who exploits whom in the production and reproduction of power, wealth, and privilege?" (Wolfe 2001, 905). Only when we answer this question—as I have attempted to do throughout this thesis in the case of Brazil and Mexico—can we begin to understand the material realities hidden just under the surface of categories like "race."

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