

US Foundations and Racial Reasoning in Brazil

Edward E. Telles

PIERRE BOURDIEU and Loïc Wacquant claim that 'brutal ethnocentric intrusions' by North American 'cultural imperialists' (1999: 44) have distorted scholarly and social movement ideas of race and identity in Brazil. They specifically point to the 'driving role played by the major American philanthropic and research foundations in the diffusion of US racial doxa within the Brazilian academic field at the level of both representations and practice' (1999: 46). These authors accuse US foundations of inappropriately imposing their conceptions of race on the Brazilian case by requiring grantees to implement US-style affirmative action, use dichotomous black/white categories and promote US-style black movements. They seem to make a facile assumption that because US foundations spend millions of dollars in Brazil and prioritize research on race then they must be successfully imposing standard North American conceptions of race on that country. Bourdieu and Wacquant's analysis exaggerates the power of US foundations in Brazil, fails to understand how programming decisions are made within the foundations, greatly underestimates the intellectual agency of the Brazilian academy and its black social movement, and reveals a rather dated understanding of the academic literature and public opinion on race in Brazil.

While I sympathize with a concern for the disproportionate influence of US ideas and sociological concepts overall, and, in some cases, the power of US foundations to export them, Bourdieu and Wacquant's choice of Brazilian race relations as an example of US domination greatly diminishes the strength of their argument. In particular, the Ford Foundation does not impose a US model of race in Brazil, especially not in the simplistic way that Bourdieu and Wacquant envision. Certainly, Ford and other US foundations are influential, but by no means are they the 'driving force' behind

■ *Theory, Culture & Society* 2003 (SAGE, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi), Vol. 20(4): 31–47
[0263-2764(200308)20:4;31–47;035332]

research into racism in Brazil. The existence of a black movement since the 1930s (do Nascimento, 1982) and the use of dichotomous racial categories (Fernandes, 1965) by leading academics and 'black' organizations, all pre-date the presence of US philanthropic foundations. Race has been an important issue in Brazil throughout its 500-year history and the Ford Foundation's decision to work in this area since about 1980 has been a response to pressing needs on the ground in that country. Bourdieu and Wacquant simply make erroneous assumptions based on their unfamiliarity with the subject.

Based on my experience at the Ford Foundation office in Brazil, I investigate the role of that foundation in fostering such ideas. The Ford Foundation is by far the largest funder of black movement organizations in Brazil, and is the largest private funder of race relations research, mostly through its human rights program. Other US foundations, including MacArthur, Rockefeller and Kellogg, fund research in this area but at a much lower level. As the Human Rights Program Officer for the Ford Foundation's Rio de Janeiro office from early 1997 to late 2000, and as a consultant to that foundation in 1995, I feel qualified to comment on how US foundations approach race issues in Brazil and to evaluate their impact. Since then, I have returned to my tenured academic position and thus I have no vested interest in defending the Ford Foundation. Although I would normally refrain from taking a public position that may appear a strong defense of my former institution, I find myself compelled to demystify Ford's work, given the importance that Bourdieu and Wacquant attribute to it and their gross misunderstanding of its activities and of race in Brazil more generally. In addition to my Ford experience, I draw from my academic research on Brazilian race relations for more than a decade.

The Ford Foundation and Race in Brazil: Setting the Record Straight

For the last 20 years, the Ford Foundation has elaborated its program on race in Brazil interactively with the black movement and Brazilian academics and activists. In recent years, Ford's agenda on Brazilian race issues has been driven mostly by domestic human rights concerns within Brazil, which have come to the fore as a leading civil society concern since democratization began in the late 1970s. On the other hand, Ford seeks to integrate this work into its worldwide programming because of an increasingly important and effective international human rights system and the added value gained from cross-societal exchange. Admittedly, the Ford Foundation espouses institutional principles that are often carried over into its international work, though probably not to a sufficient degree. During my consultancy for Ford in 1995, Sueli Carneiro, a leading black movement activist, articulated this position well, noting that it would be hypocritical for the Ford Foundation in Brazil to simply ignore the principles they espouse in the US (Telles, 1995).

Although the Ford Foundation has made racial justice issues central

to its US portfolio, it has mostly only considered expanding this line of programming to the 14 field offices worldwide and the 44 countries in which it works. An examination of this subject is especially timely considering the context of the UN World Conference on Racism, Xenophobia and Related Forms of Intolerance (2001), which underscored the universality of race and discrimination. Thus far, outside the USA and South Africa, the foundation's work in this area is most advanced in Brazil, where notions of race and racism resonate with much of the population. On a smaller scale, Ford has begun to fund programs on the Roma in Eastern Europe, Palestinian–Jewish relations in Israel, and indigenous peoples in the Philippines.

The Ford Foundation's hesitancy in expanding its program on race and ethnicity to non-US settings comes from careful study of the appropriateness and nature that such work would take, rather than mindlessly imposing US-centric views on other societies. Decisions to expand into such areas, as well as general funding principles, come mostly from the program officers in the local offices, in consultation with current grantees, local experts, and colleagues locally and worldwide. These individuals include natives of the regions in which they work, North Americans and others. The program officers themselves are experts in their areas of programming, generally having held academic appointments or having had long experience as civil society leaders. Ford program officers decide to fund specific grant proposals and have almost complete autonomy in designing their programs. In the roughly 400 or so program officer-initiated grants from the Brazil office during my tenure, not one was overturned by Ford executives (President and Vice-President) or directors, or by the Foundation's Board of Trustees. Ford's directors, regional office representatives and executives affect programming, mostly in the hiring of specific program officers and through long-range planning of broad programmatic themes. The Board of Trustees, which is increasingly diverse, appoints and monitors the President of the Foundation, and occasionally promotes major program shifts, but does not interfere in short- to medium-range planning or grant decisions made by programming staff.

The national and ethnic diversity of Ford personnel, including program officers and directors in the New York and field offices, would surprise Bourdieu and Wacquant. The New York office currently employs Latin Americans, Africans, Asian Indians and Middle Easterners, including highly respected scholars of these regions in high-level positions. Roughly half of field office representatives and program officers are natives of the region that they work in. Currently, for example, the Ford Brazil office is comprised of a naturalized Brazilian representative (of British origin) and two of the four program officers are Brazilian.

Thus, as the Program Officer in Human Rights, the bulk of Ford Brazil's race programming was my responsibility during nearly four years from 1997 to 2000. Contrary to Bourdieu and Wacquant's suggestion, I don't believe I was a transmitter of US racial doxa although, given the emblem on my passport, I probably could not totally avoid it. If anything, as a Latino,

like the Puerto Rican director of Ford's worldwide Human Rights Program from 1994 to 2001, I understand the limits of the US black/white paradigm and am aware of the phenotype continuum throughout Latin America. More importantly, my own academic research points out the differences between the US and Brazil regarding intermarriage, residential segregation, racial classification and inequality. Bourdieu and Wacquant even cite me to show that Brazilian levels of urban residential segregation are substantially lower than in the US (Telles, 1994). I would be the first to note how Brazil's celebration of miscegenation,¹ as opposed to the USA's legacy of racial segregation, has had profound implications for distinct patterns of interracial sociability as measured by residential segregation, intermarriage² and friendships, as well as for the development of a black middle class and anti-racist movements (Telles, 1999).

Markedly lower levels of residential segregation in Brazil do not automatically mean that there is no racism, or less racism, than in the United States, as the authors imply. After all, there is almost no residential segregation between men and women. Indeed they live in the same households. But does this mean that there is no sexism or that its virulence is less than that of racism? Sociologists in the USA have called residential segregation the lynchpin of black–white inequality in the US (Bobo, 1989; Massey and Denton, 1993; Oliver and Shapiro, 1997) but this is clearly not the case in Brazil. Racism and racial discrimination are prevalent without the same institutional supports as in the USA, including extreme residential segregation. Do Bourdieu and Wacquant imply that for Brazil to be racist this US-based assumption of residential segregation must be met? For them, Brazilian social relations among persons of different colors or race seem to require passing a US-based acid test for them to be considered racist. The fact that they use US categories to make the claim of distinction for Brazil would seem to belie their general analytic point.

White–nonwhite inequality is greater in Brazil than the USA,³ and explicit expressions of racism that occur in popular entertainment would be unthinkable today in the US. For example, even the lyrics of a recent children's song are explicitly racist. Titled 'Look at her Hair', a clown-performer named Tiririca, whose song was recorded by Sony Music Co., reveals the media's acceptance of racial insults as humorous. Recorded in a lively Afro-Brazilian rhythm known as Axé, a sample of the song's lyrics:

It looks like brillo to scrub a pan
I already sent her to take a bath
The stubborn girl won't listen
That black woman [*nega*] stinks
Can't stand the way she stinks
Smelly animal [*bicha*] smells worse than a skunk.⁴

It is not just sensitive Northamerican liberals, keen on exporting their values, who are offended by such a song. In a random household survey of the State of Rio de Janeiro in 2000, 67 percent of the population found the

lyrics 'racist' or in 'bad taste', with similar percentages for whites, browns and blacks. Thus, racism in Brazil is currently at least as insidious as in the USA on several dimensions. However, these dimensions are often ignored, while others, particularly miscegenation, are touted to demonstrate that Brazil is closer to a racial democracy than the USA.⁵ Fortunately, anti-racist activists are now beginning to challenge media and record companies and the makers and legitimizers of popular culture, thanks partly to support from Ford.

Throughout Brazilian history, race has been on the national agenda. After all, Brazil was the country that imported more slaves from Africa than any other and, in 1888, was the last to abolish slavery. Guided by the then accepted scientific view of racism throughout much of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th, Brazilian elites were obsessed by the enormous barrier to development that its large nonwhite population presented. They sought ways to circumvent this apparent straitjacket, including subsidizing European immigration and discouraging non-European immigration. Because of the tremendous influence of Gilberto Freyre (1933) beginning in the 1930s, Brazilians were able to find their salvation through the celebration of miscegenation and the ideological construction of 'racial democracy'. However, this miscegenation was and continues to be exclusionary because it was built on the racist idea of whitening, where whiteness was given the greatest value while blackness was to be avoided. Unfortunately, the whitening ideology continues to be strong, although Brazilians, like the citizens of many other countries, are beginning to recognize the deep roots of racism in their culture.

Rather than being unwitting dupes of US academic doxa, the lively and growing academic debate on race among Brazilian scholars is independently minded and set in the context of a vibrant, sophisticated and self-validating academic community. Contrary to Bourdieu and Wacquant's assertions, there is little to no reliance on publishing in English, another alleged carrier of US doxa according to these authors, and most researchers in this area do not receive US foundation funding. Aside from occasional articles, I cannot recall a single book on contemporary race relations by a Brazilian author that was published in English since Florestan Fernandes's classic was translated in 1969 (Fernandes, 1969). Although reliance on US foundations might be greater in small countries and those with few resources, Brazilian scholars engaged in the race debate consist largely of faculty and students at relatively well-funded universities. The Brazilian government, through its research agencies CNPq (National Research Council) and CAPES (Coordination for Professional Improvement in Higher Education), funds most of their research. Most of these scholars are trained in Brazil but many have advanced degrees in countries as diverse as the USA, France, Holland and Germany. Many of these researchers meet at least once each year at the ANPOCS (National Association of Graduate Research Departments in Social Sciences) meetings, which are comprised of the leading graduate social science research programs and where there

is little patience for orthodoxy or simplification, either of the North American doxic, vulgar Marxist or racial democracy kind. Although North American scholars are important contributors to this debate, they are by no means central to it. This debate is growing in Brazil as the number of black college students (self-described as such) grows and since racial inequality is becoming a central concern to many of the issues that have appeared in the increasingly important national human rights and social policy agendas. Unfortunately, Bourdieu and Wacquant make it seem as though Brazilian race relations research is only important if it appears in English, perhaps because they don't know about, or don't bother to read, the literature in Portuguese. The importance they give to Michael Hanchard's book *Orpheus and Power* (1994) is further proof of this: it has been marginal to the debate in Brazil since it was only translated into Portuguese in March 2000.

As a program officer, I developed an initiative for Ford Brazil's funding in the area of racial justice, which sought to address racism in Brazilian society through judicial, advocacy, media and research activities. The centerpiece of this initiative includes several black movement organizations in key cities that focus on combating racism through legal actions and public policy interventions. Representatives of these organizations meet regularly to discuss a unified strategy for addressing racism and recently formed a network of black movement attorneys. Their strategies include sensitizing the justice system and other government departments to racism in Brazilian society, and taking on exemplary cases with potential large-scale media and jurisprudential impact.

Besides support for these organizations, Ford's Human Rights program funded social science research activities that could reveal the mechanisms of discrimination and supplement the legal and public policy work of black movement NGOs. This included research demonstrating differences by race in hiring, criminal sentencing and police shootings, and research that examined and debated policy alternatives that could promote nonwhites and reduce racial inequality. In addition, it supported a project to examine similarities and differences in legal cultures, and anti-discriminatory law in the USA and Brazil which would serve as a basis for effective exchange between legal professionals in the two countries. The Human Rights program also sought to strengthen black leadership by supporting training activities, such as courses in public administration, election campaigning and the English language.

Moreover, this initiative sought to strengthen links between anti-racist organizations and other human rights organizations throughout Brazil and in other parts of the world. This included the funding of Brazilian organizations so that they could make use of international law and access the United Nations and Inter-American human rights systems. Relatedly, the Human Rights program has promoted cross-national exchanges between Brazilian black movement attorneys and US civil rights organizations, in the belief that the latter's long experience in anti-racist litigation may provide important lessons for their Brazilian counterparts. The exchanges thus far

have consisted of lively discussions with professional translators that, despite the cultural and legal differences that become readily apparent, enrich the knowledge and effectiveness of both sides. Finally, the Sustainable Development program initiative supports indigenous rights activities. During my tenure I supported a single research grant on discrimination and ethnicity among Japanese, Koreans and Chinese in Brazil.

Imposing Affirmative Action and the Black–White Dichotomy

Bourdieu and Wacquant claim that:

... as a condition for its aid, the Rockefeller Foundation requires that research teams meet US criteria of affirmative action, which poses insuperable problems since as we have seen the application of the black/white dichotomy in Brazilian society is, to say the least, hazardous. (1999: 46)

I was surprised to read this, based on my knowledge of the Rockefeller and other US foundations. However, the director of the Rockefeller-funded program at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro assured me that they were never required to implement any type of affirmative action program.⁶ Moreover, that was the only program dedicated to race in Brazil funded by the Rockefeller Foundation in the 1990s, but it seemed to take on special relevance for Bourdieu and Wacquant since the second author participated as a Fellow in that program. Also, these authors mistakenly credit Rockefeller with funding the Centro de Estudos Afro-Asiaticos (CEAA). For 20 years, Ford has been the primary funder of CEAA and its library has become the leading source of information regarding race in Brazil.

Although naming the Rockefeller Foundation, Bourdieu and Wacquant claim that the black–white distinction is imposed as a criterion for affirmative action. However, they seem to be referring to the ‘diversity tables’ used by the Ford Foundation. Ford Brazil requests a ‘diversity table’ and an explanation from all of its grantees in all its fields of work. This includes more than 100 grants each year, of which fewer than 20 are primarily about racial issues. The table enumerates all of its staff at different levels according to whether they are male or female, white or nonwhite, and grantees are required to explain why they do or do not reflect local gender and racial composition, and what steps they can take to better represent the Brazilian population. There is no obligation to meet certain values and, as far as I could tell, funding is not conditional on it. Rather, the diversity table is a tool for program officers to begin discussions with directors of programs about current and future race and gender representation among their staff, and the relevance of race and gender issues to their substantive concerns. While some grantees value diversity more than others, among our hundreds of grants, I do not recall a single complaint of its inappropriateness, even less its ‘hazardousness’.

Also, the diversity table uses the categories white and nonwhite, never

white and black. Ford Foundation personnel are well aware that the nonwhite term includes many color categories and that even the white/nonwhite distinction is often ambiguous. We nevertheless ask grantees to complete it to the best of their knowledge and have found that grantees tend to ask their staff to self-report their color rather than assuming it for themselves. I did not sense that grantees felt a sense of sanction for having a predominantly white or male staff as long as they were honest with the program officer and were making attempts to recruit nonwhite and female (and nonwhite female) staff.

Having said that, the white/black distinction is not as foreign as Bourdieu and Wacquant make it out to be. This distinction is constantly used by the media and by federal and local government institutions, including the Ministry of Justice's Program on Human Rights. The use of black and white is perhaps more common in the southern half of the country compared to the Northeast, where black/mulatto distinctions are more frequent (Telles, 2002). Indeed, Florestan Fernandes's (1965) classic text, funded by UNESCO, used the white/black dichotomy. Moreover, at least one recent ethnographic study shows the widespread understanding and use of the black and white distinction in the *favela* where the author did her research in Rio de Janeiro (Sheriff, 1997) and other studies show a growing preference for these terms among young cohorts (Sansone, 1996; Schwartzman, 1999; Telles, 2002).

Rather than impose a US conception of race, the important point of the table and its explanation is to ensure that grantees are aware of our concerns and, hopefully, to create a sensitivity to race and gender issues where it did not already exist. Given the widespread recognition of discrimination and inequality in Brazilian society, it seems that this was not difficult. One might ask what would happen if not for Ford's presence? Perhaps nothing, but it is difficult to know for certain given the growing general concern for inclusion, at least among progressive individuals in Brazil.

Ford's concern with diversity outside the USA has mostly been around issues of balanced gender representation while it has been hesitant to espouse its concerns for race and ethnicity outside the US for reasons I have already given. The essence of Ford's diversity policies is found in the five paragraphs of 'A Foundation Policy Restated' from the *Ford Foundation Letter* (1987: 7). The first paragraph states that:

In its work throughout the world, the Ford Foundation seeks to promote pluralism and equal opportunity and to end discrimination based on race, ethnicity or gender. This effort is shaped by the conviction that all segments of society benefit from pluralism and equal opportunity – that diversity is not merely compatible with excellence but actually promotes it.

The following paragraph asserts that this policy is to be pursued in three ways: (1) by funding activities that promote pluralism and increase opportunities for historically disadvantaged groups, (2) by seeking broad

representation on its own board and staff and (3) by encouraging diversity on the boards and staff of grantee organizations.

The third paragraph states the importance of diversity in making funding decisions. It further declares that ‘Outside the United States, diversity in gender and, *where appropriate, ethnic, racial or national origin is considered*’ (italics added). The fourth paragraph makes the case for the importance of diversity and the final paragraph neatly summarizes, albeit in an ambiguous way, Ford’s commitment to diversity in non-US settings. It states:

Efforts to achieve pluralism and equal opportunity require vigorous and sustained attention, both in the United States and in other countries. Although appropriate strategies necessarily vary according to the particular constraints and possibilities present in different societies, the Foundation is committed to working with others to promote these efforts and to ensure their success.

In a 1995 consultancy for Ford (Telles, 1995), I interviewed numerous Ford Foundation staff and a wide range of grantee directors. The 17 grantees interviewed included those both with and without race-specific programming, and those with both good and poor or mixed records on diversity. They also represented a variety of programs from each of the foundation’s program areas: governance and public policy, reproductive health and population, rural poverty and resources, education and culture, and rights and social justice. Grantee institutions included universities and both research and advocacy NGOs.

When I conducted these interviews in 1995, I was surprised that most, but not all, grantees were sensitive to issues of racial discrimination. This either reflected a change in attitudes about and understanding of racial issues compared to the presumably long-standing racial democracy ideology, or a selective population that was particularly attuned to these issues. My sense was that both factors were important. Clearly, many of the grantees were leading academics and activists in Brazil. While racial issues had been largely absent from academic and activists’ agendas during the military regime, the sudden interest in and sensitivity to racial issues among these individuals may have been due to the general exposure that the middle-class population has had to these debates in the media, ranging from debates in daily newspapers to programming on popular evening *telenovelas* (soap operas). It may also have reflected Ford’s continuing commitment to make its Brazilian grantees sensitive to racial issues.

Among most mainstream grantees, Ford’s Diversity Initiative was generally perceived as being the equivalent of quotas. The association of diversity with quotas seems to reflect a stereotypical conception of diversity from the USA that is played up in the Brazilian media. If anything, it reflected the ability of conservatives (and their foundations) to frame affirmative action or diversity in this way. The Brazilians that I interviewed

perceived that employers in the USA, under the mandate of state law, are required to have a certain statistical representation of different racial groups in all jobs. Also, this impression about affirmative action was strongly reinforced through Brazilian legislation that required 30 percent of leadership positions in labor unions and political appointments be reserved for women.

I found that the extent to which grantees accept diversity depended on their particular conception of diversity. Understood as a quota system, they were cautious, but upon explaining what diversity meant under the Ford Foundation Initiative, grantees supported the general concept. That is, when diversity was cast as a program to seek out and prepare members of minority groups for better jobs and educational opportunities, grantees were in favor of the initiative but when diversity took the form of quotas, there was opposition. Clearly, diversity or affirmative action may be broadly defined and include anything from the uncontroversial programs that help the poor and minorities write better essays in college to creating quotas for minorities in university admissions. Ford's efforts to educate its grantees about this have had little effect on the larger society. Only since about 1998 has Ford begun to fund research specifically about affirmative action policy in Brazil. Although Ford staff would have liked to do more in this area, their relatively scant resources hardly made it capable of being a driving force, especially when it is up against a status quo that is propagated by Brazil's powerful media and well-funded private and public interests.

Interestingly, a 1995 survey by Data Folha revealed public support for affirmative action. It demonstrated that opposition from the general public, even to quotas, is not as strong as Bourdieu and Wacquant would suggest or the grantees manifested (Folha de São Paulo, 1995). A national survey showed nearly half of Brazilians (48 percent) supported quotas for blacks in the university and in the workplace (Telles, 1995). This consisted of 34 percent that completely supported quotas and 14 percent that supported them in part (40 percent disagreed completely and 9 percent disagreed in part with the concept of racial quotas and 4 percent did not know). Thus, quotas have even greater support in Brazil than they do in the USA. Note that the idea of quotas was explained to respondents, so it is unlikely that they did not understand their meaning.⁷

A more recent survey in the State of Rio de Janeiro yielded similar results.⁸ Table 1 shows that 51 percent of the population believe that government has a special obligation to improve their 'life conditions', 55 percent believed that there should be quotas for blacks in the university and 57 percent believed in quotas in high-level occupations.⁹ This is hardly a rejection of affirmative action (Telles, 1995). Support for affirmative action in the form of quotas was especially strong among those with a low level of education and the poor generally, both white and nonwhite, although nonwhites were more in favor of quotas than whites at all educational levels. Opposition to quotas was especially strong among highly educated whites. Only 17 percent of university-educated whites favor governmental intervention, 4 percent favor quotas for entering the university and only 6 percent

favor quotas for good jobs. White–nonwhite differences in favor of compensatory policies or quotas are greatest among university-educated persons: 18 percent more nonwhites than whites believe the government has a special obligation to improve black life conditions and 32 percent more support quotas for blacks in the university. In the case of quotas for good jobs, the difference between whites and nonwhites is also 18 percent (Telles and Bailey, 2002).

Thus, there is strong support for affirmative action among many sectors of the Brazilian population. What makes Brazil different from the United States is the relatively small gap in such support between whites and blacks. Moreover, it suggests a widespread base of support among people of different colors. The major barrier to affirmative action, and ultimately the most important, is the opposition by the white elite.

As far as promoting affirmative action in Brazil goes, Ford funded at least four grants to examine ways to reduce racial inequality beginning in about 1998. Often referred to as ‘affirmative action’, the research sought to examine the potential of public policies to reduce racial inequality. These included empirical research that examined international models and some informal experiments in Brazil, as well as the promotion of debates and conceptual work that would yield ideas for appropriate public policies. Ford’s interest in this has been to find ways to reduce racial inequality and combat a culture of racism through appropriate public policies rather than impose US-style affirmative action. Indeed, the largest grant to the Federal

Table 1 Percentage of Persons that Agree with Antiracist Policies by Race and Educational Level, Rio de Janeiro State, 2000

		Educational level				
		Primary incomplete	Primary complete	Secondary incomplete	Secondary complete	University complete
Government has a special obligation						
Whites	68	54	37	37	17	
Nonwhites	75	60	51	39	35	
Difference	7	6	14	2	18	
Quotas–university						
Whites	78	69	38	35	4	
Nonwhites	84	78	52	39	36	
Difference	6	9	14	4	32	
Quotas–good jobs						
Whites	75	59	44	35	6	
Nonwhites	86	76	53	50	24	
Difference	11	17	9	15	18	

University of Rio de Janeiro 'allowed them to examine both government policies and civil society activities that seek to combat racial inequality' and 'establish a comprehensive program of discussion and appropriate public policy design'.¹⁰ Researchers on that grant included a wide spectrum of perspectives including those that tended to reject race-specific policies (e.g. Fry, 2000). Other grantees held a position that would support some aspects of US-style affirmative action (Guimarães, 1999), while others looked to models within Latin America (Sansone, 1998). A fourth grant specifically examined the example of affirmative action in the US and the legal basis for the implementation of similar programs in Brazil (Gomes, 2001).

However, Ford only began to fund such projects once it realized that there was substantial internal support for affirmative action. The climate on race in Brazil changed dramatically in about 1995, when the President created a task force to propose solutions for attenuating racial inequalities and declared affirmative action as a goal of his government. At about the same time, a national survey showed that the existence of racial prejudice and discrimination was almost fully recognized by the Brazilian population. Since late 2001 (after the UN Conference on Racism), the federal and several state and local governments have implemented several forms of race-specific affirmative action policies.

Ford did not fund such work until 1997, mostly because there was not a significant demand for such research. In earlier years, Ford would have also been concerned that such programs might be threatening to the local hosts, since foreign foundations are guests of local national governments. Indeed, Ford hesitated to fund race-related activities altogether for several years in the 1970s because of strong resistance by the military governments. The Ford Foundation began (carefully) funding research on race at the CEEA in 1979, as Brazil began a process of re-democratization. Two years earlier, all activities of the Inter-American Foundation in Brazil had been 'suspended' pending a review by Brazil's foreign affairs department (Itamaraty) because it funded two projects that sought to address 'the persistence of racial discrimination'.¹¹ The Brazilian government at the time was known to consider research on race and black movement activities as subversive and a threat to national security. Although we do not know for certain, since there were no public opinion surveys, public opinion seemed to accept that Brazilian society constituted a 'racial democracy' where race made little or no difference to life chances.

Afro-American Imperialists?

Finally Bourdieu and Wacquant make a particularly curious comment:

... what are we to think of those American researchers who travel to Brazil to encourage the leaders of the Movimento Negro to adopt the tactics of the Afro-American civil rights movement and to denounce the category of *pardo* (an intermediate term ...) in order to mobilize all Brazilians of African

descent on the basis of a dichotomous opposition between Afro-Brazilians and whites? (1999: 47–8)

To me, as the person primarily responsible for funding black movement organizations, this shows surprising naivety. Who are these self-proposed saviors?

However, it seems that Bourdieu and Wacquant are not pointing to any specific person but a general belief that some Afro-North Americans are eager to export their civil rights recipes and lessons, and therefore are the unwitting dupes of US imperialist thought. This would take either lots of nerve or lots of innocence. Bourdieu and Wacquant imply that, if such persons could be found, their interventions would make a difference and thus North American imperialist reason would be successful once again. During my tenure at Ford, I must admit that I once witnessed something close to what Bourdieu and Wacquant describe. In this case, a young African American student came to me raising his concerns about the strategies of the black movement in Brazil. He wanted to meet some of their leaders to teach them strategies that had worked in his (limited) Midwestern US context. He was able to talk to the director of a local black movement NGO that we funded, who cordially educated him about the inappropriateness of such strategies in the distinctive context of Brazil. I am certain that this exchange had absolutely no impact on that black movement organization. If the leaders of this organization were influenced at all, this experience should have made them even more skeptical of North American intrusiveness. However, it seems that a greater number of Afro-North American scholars and activists visit Brazil mostly seeking to learn from Brazil's own experiences, offsetting the relatively rare experiences that Bourdieu and Wacquant allude to.

Like their academic co-nationals, Brazil's black movement leaders would surprise Bourdieu and Wacquant by their independence and intelligence. Sure they are attentive to black liberation strategies in the USA, but they use the examples from these and other social movements as ideas, not recipes, for their own work. Their collective knowledge extends to liberation struggles in Africa and the Caribbean, and to human rights struggles worldwide, but they are especially informed about other social movements in Brazil, which are especially appropriate models for developing their own strategies. These black movement leaders are a heterogeneous group trained in contexts as varied as the street children's movement, Leonardo Boff's liberation theology, progressive wings of the Catholic and Protestant Churches, the Workers' Party or even in conservative parties such as the Liberal Party (PFL). Moreover, they tend to have a strong national identity and eschew foreign intrusions, including those by black Americans who do not understand their struggles.

The independent thinking of black movement leaders in the context of an important US civil rights community is exemplified by a recent exchange that I witnessed. At the December 2001 preparatory conference

for the UN World Conference for the Americas in Santiago, three black movement leaders – from Brazil, Honduras and Uruguay – rebuked the leader of a major US civil rights organization. The Brazilian reminded the North American that, in 1997, the latter had agreed to reprimand US-based Sony Records for releasing the song that I mentioned earlier in this article and publicize its actions. He apologized that he had done nothing of the kind in the intervening years, proving the more general point. The Honduran and Uruguayan followed up, noting that although the US civil rights movement and the actions of black people in the US have always been an important model for them, they were bothered by the rhetoric of Afro-diasporic brotherhood of continental proportions, and the implicit imperialism of North American blacks towards their Latin American brethren. The Latin Americans accused his and other North American civil rights organizations of failing to even recognize Latin American blacks, much less act on their behalf. They pointed out how US black civil rights organizations were silent about, or even supportive of US interventions in the region that disproportionately hurt black populations. They singled out the US embargo of Cuba, the USA's failure to send relief to the hard-hit coastal areas affected by Hurricane Mitch, the US government financing of the drug war in Colombia and the ecological disasters caused by US companies off Ecuador and in the Caribbean. Rather than reinforcing US dominance, Ford and other foundations that helped promote this particular meeting have sought to empower the alliance of Latin American black movement organizations to better represent their interests and promote effective exchange with their US counterparts about the special needs of African-origin Latin Americans. Given the importance of the USA in the region, Latin American black movement leaders are anxious to get on the agenda of powerful civil rights organizations, which they perceive as natural allies, but they insist that it be done on their own terms.

Final Remarks

If anything, the US is attractive for those interested in race in Brazil because of its comparative possibilities. It has long been the perennial referent for Brazilian and North American researchers because of some obvious similarities – like the enslavement of Africans by European colonizers – but with some distinct outcomes. Fortunately, the extent and nature of similarities and differences are informed by a variety of perspectives, which continue to be debated and interactively enrich our understandings of race in Brazil. This is increasingly occurring across languages and national borders. Although the academic debate gradually seeps into black movement thinking, the movement itself has little patience for the debate. The Ford Foundation supports the black movement in Brazil to help it respond to pressing human rights issues, including racism, racial discrimination and racial inequality. While the black movement struggles for legitimacy just as other social movements do, it faces especially large barriers

to success because it directly challenges central tenets of the Brazilian nation, including its celebration of miscegenation and racial tolerance.

I feel that Bourdieu and Wacquant's article was especially unfortunate given the importance of the first author in the Brazilian academy. Despite the lack of evidence, or even minimal understanding of Brazil shown in their article, the simple fact of Bourdieu's authorship gives it instant credibility. Eager young social scientists readily consume his ideas, which might itself be considered academic imperialism, if I am also allowed a loose interpretation of the term. I note this because of an experience related to me by a black activist-scholar who taught a course at a leading Brazilian university in the mostly white South region. Despite making inroads with her entirely white student class in convincing them about racial discrimination in Brazil, the publication of the Bourdieu and Wacquant article was to turn that around. Despite the weeks of intensive study and debate about Brazilian race relations, a guest professor in her class assigned the Bourdieu and Wacquant article to the students while noting that it was written by the 'the world's preeminent social scientist'. Some of these impressionable young students had placed an extraordinary amount of faith on the article merely because of the academic prestige of Pierre Bourdieu.

I agree that certain sources of ideas are especially seductive and poorly understood threats to social science scholarship, but I would also include those of a handful of prominent French theorists. I am left wondering why Bourdieu and Wacquant wrote an article about something they knew little about. Perhaps cynically, my guess would be that there was a political motive and they had to bet on Bourdieu's reputational capital to compensate for their exceptionally weak evidence.

Notes

1. This idea of miscegenation as a positive attribute of Brazilian identity was first articulated by Gilberto Freyre (1933). This was in contrast to previous Brazilian thought which equated miscegenation with degeneracy and was thus pessimistic about Brazil's future (Schwarcz, 1999).
2. Roughly 20 percent of whites are married to nonwhites in Brazil, while the corresponding figure is less than 1 percent in the US. However, this difference is largely, though not entirely explained by differences in the size of the nonwhite population (see Telles, 1993).
3. For example, since 1960, on average, the earnings of black and brown males have been between 40 percent and 60 percent of those of white males, with no pattern. Black and brown women earned roughly 10 percent of white males' earnings in 1960, with steady increases since then to 30 percent by 1996. For white women, these figures were 15 percent and 40 percent (Telles, 2002). Comparable ratios for the US are 60 percent to 75 percent for black men and 40 percent to 55 percent for black women for the years 1960 and 1982 (Farley, 1984).
4. Translation from the original Portuguese is my own. I have put in parenthesis two words that have may have other meanings. *Nega*, although it literally means black woman and is sometimes used pejoratively when directed at such women, is

also used as a term of endearment for any woman. *Bicha* may also mean a worm, snake, leech, an angry woman or a lesbian.

5. I seek to explain these apparent paradoxes in a forthcoming book.
6. Based on correspondence with the former director of that program, Yvonne Maggie.
7. The question was:

Given past and present discrimination against blacks, there are people who defend the idea that the only way of guaranteeing racial equality is to reserve a portion of positions in the university and in employment for the black population. Do you agree or disagree with this apportionment of slots in the universities and jobs for blacks? Completely or in part? (translation by author)

8. The 1995 national survey revealed no significant regional differences on the similar question of the previous paragraph (Folha de São Paulo, 1995).
9. This survey was funded by the Ford Foundation through a grant to the Center for the Articulation of Marginalized Populations (CEAP) and was carried out by the Survey Research Center of the Federal Fluminense University (Data-UFF).
10. Ford Foundation grant memorandum, 5 February 1998.
11. Correspondence with Bradford Smith, former program officer for the Inter-American Foundation.

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Edward E. Telles is Professor of Sociology at UCLA. He has written extensively on race relations in Brazil and the US and is a former Program Officer in Human Rights for the Ford Foundation in Rio de Janeiro.