



## Pigmentocracies: ethnicity, race, and color in Latin America

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To cite this article: David L. Brunisma (2016) Pigmentocracies: ethnicity, race, and color in Latin America, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 39:3, 492-494, DOI: [10.1080/01419870.2015.1095308](https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1095308)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1095308>



Published online: 14 Oct 2015.



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have been given a more global context. Nonetheless, this is a valuable and interesting collection of essays, adding to the important task of articulating black experience and the contestation of difference in global churches of interest to a wide audience.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1095318>

**Pigmentocracies: ethnicity, race, and color in Latin America**, by Edward Telles and the Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA), Chapel Hill, NC, University of North Carolina Press, 2014, 320pp., \$29.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-4696-1783-1

In the inaugural issue of *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2015) in laying out what he saw as the most necessary theoretical developments in the sociology of race and ethnicity wrote:

... racial theory should have been rooted in the experiences of the first peoples who experienced racialization, but that was not the case ... Even when Latin American and Caribbean writers have written about race, they have relied mostly on American or European theorizations. We would be in a better explanatory position today to understand not only race in the world system, but even developments in the United States and Europe, if we were to go back and ... 'begin at the beginning'. [r]ooting our racial theory on the historical experiences of the oldest racial regimes in the world. (79)

Those oldest racial regimes are located in present-day Caribbean and Latin American countries. For over five years, the 12 scholars who make up the Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA) have been working on the conceptualization, pilot studies, and, ultimately, groundbreaking data collection effort to comparatively 'illuminate how race and ethnicity play out in Latin America' (31). Edward Telles, eminent sociologist of race and ethnicity at Princeton University in the USA, has coordinated this amazing effort, resulting in *Pigmentocracies: Ethnicity, Race, and Color in Latin America*. This book begins to fill major gaps in the empirical, and, given time, ultimately, the theoretical development so necessary to understand inequalities and experiences of race and racialization. Equally important, this study introduces researchers in Europe and the USA to a set of scholars and scholarships that have not typically made it into the theoretical and empirical canon of studies of race and ethnicity (e.g. Mexico's Regina Martínez Casas, Columbia's Óscar Almario, Peru's Juan Carlos Callirgos, and Brazil's Graziella Moraes Silva, to name just a few). PERLA, formed in 2008 and concluding data collection by 2013, has given us the first cross-national, representative surveys of race and ethnicity in Latin America – the sheer scale of the project is breathtaking.

Interdisciplinary, analytically taught, and methodologically significant, *Pigmentocracies* comes to us at just the moment when we need it in the study of race and ethnicity – much will come from its publication.

Starting with the widespread assumption, both within and without Latin America, that race and ethnicity play little to no role in individual lives in communities across various Latin American contexts, Telles and colleagues structure their book by focusing on a key set of questions, answerable with the amazing PERLA data: What factors are involved in the formation of ethnoracial identities? What is the degree of ethnoracial inequality? To what degree do individuals witness and experience various forms of ethnoracial discrimination? What is the structure of social relations across ethnoracial boundaries? These questions are investigated in a 'comparative sociology of the contemporary situation ... that is embedded within a particular historical and political context' (3) in the four focal countries: Mexico, Colombia, Peru, and Brazil. The introduction (like the entire book) is destined to become an important piece of scholarship tying together, as it does, the crucial race-making histories of the region and the important development of ideologies and concomitant structures of whiteness, followed by those of *mestizaje*, and most recently articulating with those of *multiculturalismo* followed like a script of nation-building in all four of the focal countries in this study. These political and ideological contours also have mapped onto the political economies of censuses within and across these Latin American countries making it difficult for the most basic of questions to be answered (e.g. how many 'indigenous' people are there in Peru?) – until now. Brazil, one of the most studied Latin American countries with regard to racialization, importantly, takes a back seat on the path Telles and colleagues need to traverse with the PERLA data, learning so much along the way about Mexico, Colombia, and Peru, each with their own critical similarities and differences, putting what we think we know about Brazil into comparative conversation with these other national findings. What we learn, among so many others, is that history, the nature of colonization, nation-building, and, methodology matter – but I will let you have the pleasure of reading these analyses for yourself – I know you will enjoy the ride.

If it is not yet obvious, I was thoroughly engrossed in *Pigmentocracies* and its major set of findings across contexts. One fundamental (and controversial) innovation in the PERLA dataset is the use of a common colour palette and a related colour rating by the interviewer – leading to the consistent finding that, across these four contexts, colour is a more significant indicator of ethnoracial inequalities and experiences of discrimination than racial identification or identity – deeply challenging the myopic self-identification approach to collecting ethnic and racial data. Throughout, the approach to measuring race and ethnicity, and racial and ethnic inequalities is complicated very effectively in this volume by the fundamental role of operationalization and question formation – leading, in all cases to different answers to these basic questions. At the core one this study's central contributions is the importance of measurement in understanding race, racial identity, racialization, and racial inequalities.

*Pigmentocracies* is a very important book showing the wealth of collaborative scholarship. The empirical riches are strong, as are the theoretical fruits of them.

What results is a rich tapestry of evidence of the cultural, social, political, and economic structure of pigmentocracies in the contemporary moment. Given the historical grounding in the interdisciplinary scholarship investigating race, racial identity, racial ideology, and racial inequalities in these four countries, we begin to see how such pigmentocracies are forged, maintained, ideologically articulated, and the prospects for change – all crucial for developing racial theory from ‘the beginning’. In these analyses of states that have long been in denial of the degree of ethnoracial inequalities within their borders – we emerge from this analysis of innovative and much-needed comparative data and the practical policy implications that such empirical results offer, beyond pure ideology. As Telles and the PERLA team found ‘... skin color cut through the cover of *mestizaje* and revealed an unambiguous pigmentocracy in the four countries examined’ (13). Like the veil of Latina American ideologies of *mestizaje* and *multiculturalismo*, societies currently mired in colourblindness and post-racial socio-cultural rhetoric, studying colour and its social structures, makes the deep and long-standing structure of white supremacy – pigmentocracy – visible. We have a lot of work to do. The first thing I do as I finish this review is add *Pigmentocracies: Ethnicity, Race, and Color in Latin America* to my graduate seminar in race as well as place it on our department’s race reading list.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1095308>

**Behind the white picket fence: power and privilege in a multiethnic neighborhood**, by Sarah Mayorga-Gallo, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2014, 193 pp., \$29.95 (paperback), ISBN 9781469618630

It is a curious experience, reviewing a book that so closely resembles one’s own. In 2012, I published *Racial Ambivalence in Diverse Communities: Whiteness and the Power of Colorblind Ideologies* (Lexington Books), which, like Sarah Mayorga-Gallo’s *Behind the White Picket Fence: Power and Privilege in a Multiethnic Neighborhood*, details the creation of a white habitus inside of a racially diverse neighborhood, preserving the racial privilege of whites inside of an ostensibly diverse space. In both Mayorga-Gallo’s book and my own, this happens by whites commodifying diversity, consuming it as something that adds pleasure to their lives, and supporting their own identity work as tolerant and interesting people. They do this while severely policing the actions of the people of color who are their neighbors and, often unintentionally, limiting ability of those same neighbors to similarly protect their own resources. Both books are also critical of the limitations in available diversity discourses. Our analyses of differing economic power and racial privilege in these communities, which take place alongside well-intentioned