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The Brazilian-Americans: Demography and Identity of An Emerging Latino Minority

Darién J. Davis
MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

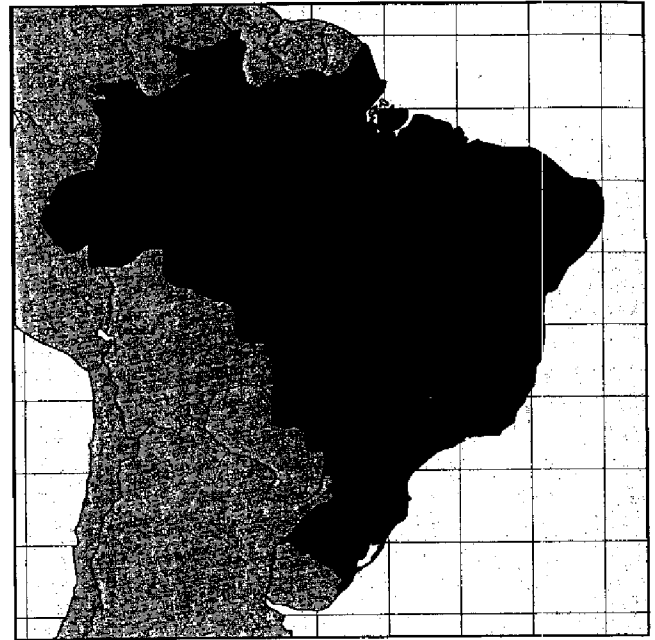
INTRODUCTION

According to almost every population growth indicator, Latinos represent the largest growing minority group in the United States. It is projected that in the first half of the next century, Latinos will become the largest minority group in U.S. society. However, Latinos are not a homogenous group. The national, racial, and political differences which often distinguish Latino groups from one another are also indicators of the community's cultural heterogeneity. With the exception of Puerto Ricans and a portion of the Mexican population, most Latinos arrived in the United States through immigration. The *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service* (1991) indicates that between 1981 and 1990, Latinos accounted for almost 50 percent of the total number of immigrants. (Mexicans accounted for 23 percent, while other Latin Americans for 25 percent). Of those other Latin Americans, Brazilians represent the group with the smallest per capita immigration to the United States although their numbers are increasing. New York Mayor Rudolph Guliani's designation of the two blocks of 46th Street in Manhattan, New York City that run from 5th to 7th Avenue as "Little Brazil," is indicative of their growing influence.

Despite their growing importance, there has been little scholarship dedicated to Brazilians in the United States or *Brazucas*, as they are often called, although many short articles have appeared in both the Brazilian and the American press.¹ Few published books focus exclusively on the Brazilian-American experience. Jose Victor Bicalho, *Yes, En Sou Brazuca* (1989) and Maxine Margolis' *Little Brazil: An Ethnography of Brazilian Immigrants in New York* (1994), represent two important beginnings. Margolis' work provides an in-depth assessment of the Brazilian community in New York while providing insights into the challenges Brazilians face in their newly adopted country. Frank Goza has joined Margolis in unmasking the U.S. Bureau of the Census' inadequacy in properly counting Brazilians in the United States.²

This essay provides a brief historical assessment of the Brazilian-American community in the United States while attempting to answer two broad questions: How do Brazilian-Americans define themselves, and what is the relationship of Brazilians to other U.S. minorities, particularly other Latino groups? In order to understand the answers to these questions it is important to understand Brazilian construction of identity in Brazil and examine how that construction informs Brazilian-American identity in the United States.

While Brazilian migration to and settlement in the United States show remarkable similarities with the "push" and "pull" patterns of other Latin American immigrants, they represent a



curious case study. Brazil is the largest country in Latin America with a population of more than 185 million but it has one of the smallest official per capita immigration to the United States. While Brazilian immigration increased during the military dictatorship of the 1960s, the number of Brazilians in the United States pales in comparison to the numbers reported from the Central American republics. Finally, most Brazilian immigrants to the United States prior to the 1980s tended to come from the upper or middle class. The failing Brazilian economy and the difficulties in acquiring visas were major obstacles to Brazilian travel to the United States. Even a one-way ticket required substantial economic investment.

Since the 1980s, however, Brazilian immigrants, like other Latin American immigrants, have become more diverse, coming from all classes and races. Within the Brazilian community, there are many professionals who work in the business and service sectors, but there are also many undocumented immigrants who work in a variety of occupations. Once in the United States, Brazilians have tended to concentrate in one of four regions: the East Coast (particularly New York and New Jersey), New England (particularly around Boston), Florida, and California. These are regions where Spanish-speaking Latin Americans have also settled.³ In parts of New York, California, and Florida, where both the Brazilian and Spanish-speaking populations are quite high, Brazilians must carefully navigate their position and cultural identity among other Latin Americans. In order to understand the relationship of Brazilians to other Latino immigrants, it is important to examine their patterns historically.

HISTORICAL PROFILE

Creating demographic profiles is not an exact science. Determining the number of immigrants to a particular region may, in theory, seem an easier task, particularly in the United States where the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) publishes immigration statistics quarterly and yearly. However, INS immigration statistics only provide information about those individuals when they officially migrate or change their legal status.⁴ There is very little data on the return rate, exit, or death of immigrants. More complete information is found in census reports taken every ten years. While these reports provide us with general trends and detailed information on the characteristics of the U.S. population, they are limited by the mechanism through which the data is gathered, and by the language used. The Bureau of the Census' use of the category "Hispanic Origin," for example, only came into operation in the 1970s to compile data for "The Ancestry of the U.S. Population." During the 1990s, many Brazilians were directed to choose the "Hispanic Origin" category even though the Bureau's official definition of Hispanic refers to people who claim ancestry from a Spanish-speaking country. At the same time the Bureau also relies on the person completing the questionnaire to use his/her own judgment (i.e. self definitions) in areas of race or ethnic identity.⁵ Maxine Margolis' analysis of tourist visas issued to Brazilians from 1984-1992 showed a dramatic increase, and indicated that many Brazilians who traveled on tourist visas actually stayed in the United States for other purposes. Furthermore, it is impossible for the Census to provide data on undocumented immigrants who, in some cases, represent a large percentage of residents of any given city.

Unfortunately, this lack of information has contributed to stereotypes and misinformation about Brazilians-Americans. Brazilian-Americans, to be sure, have always been under-represented in every U.S. Census, and it was not until recently that data began to be collected about Brazilian workers, permanent residents, undocumented immigrants, and students. Brazilians who arrived in the first decades of this century were itinerant residents predominantly from the upper class, traveling for leisure, or in some cases, to study in one of the prestigious academic institutions in the United States. Others Brazilians, particularly musicians, travelled to the United States with Carmen Miranda in the 1930s and 1940s and during the bossa nova craze of the 1960s.

The truth is that Brazilians have been a relatively small immigrant group prior to the 1960s. According to the 1980 Census, of the total number of Brazilians present in the United States, 6076 or fewer than 12 percent arrived before 1950. Census reports from the 1920s and 1930s provide very little information on Brazilians, but they did record information on the mother tongue of individual residents. In 1920, 1,419 residents from South America, presumably Brazilian, declared Portuguese as their mother tongue. In 1930, that figure rose to 2,795, most of them residing on the east coast.⁶

In the 1930 Census, all data about Brazilians are included under the label "South America" or "South and Central America." Their inclusion with Spanish-speaking Latin

American groups may seem warranted from a historical perspective, but overlooked important language and cultural traits. Even today, many Americans believe that Brazilians are Spanish speakers. In several surveys of U.S. college students conducted between 1992-1994, almost fifty percent responded that Brazilians speak Spanish.⁷ These statistics reflect the general ambivalence, if not ignorance, about Brazilian culture. Unfortunately, like other Latino groups, Brazilians rarely find themselves in the mainstream U.S. media except for sensationalist coverage, whether it is a report about government corruption or environmental disaster in Brazil, or carnival, or World Cup soccer.

The 1950s was the first decade that the INS began collecting data explicitly for Brazilians entering the country, but there was no dramatic change in the type or number of immigrants until the 1960s, a decade that brought unprecedented political and cultural change to the United States and to Brazil. U.S. immigration law, in particular, radically changed the process through which immigrants from the Americas would enter the country. The 1965 Immigration Act which abolished the previous national origins quotas, established a 170,000 hemispheric and 20,000 country ceiling, as well as a seven-category system which gave preference to relatives of U.S. residents and made it easier for Brazilians to bring their families to this country. While these changes benefitted Latin American immigrants in general, a few Brazilians benefitted given their low numbers relative to other Latin American groups.⁸

Economic and political events in Brazil during the 1960s and early 1970s contributed to the steady increase in Brazilian immigration to the United States. The 1964 military coup was responsible for widespread censorship and human rights violations. Many Brazilians were considered *personas non grata* by the state, particularly after the more brutal internal coup of 1968. Not surprisingly, this was also the era when countless numbers of Brazilians headed for Europe, other parts of Latin America, and the United States. Thus within a decade, the almost 30,000 individuals who claimed Brazilian ancestry in the 1960 U.S. Census, would increase exponentially. Along with this new wave of immigrants, came a new musical style, "the bossa nova" which would also make its way to the United States and make the Brazilian presence more visible. Musicians such as Antonio Carlos Jobim, João Gilberto, and others moved to the United States to pursue opportunities that, as Claus Schreiner puts it, were "too good to turn down."⁹

Between 1960 and 1969, approximately 31 percent of the current Brazilian-American population came to the United States. Since then, the characteristics of this population have changed. More women began to travel North, along with members of the lower and middle classes. While the racial and ethnic differences among Brazilians are difficult to ascertain, heightened tensions between blacks and whites in the United States, coupled with the popular ideology of "racial democracy," which espouses a purported lack of racial discrimination in Brazil, affected Brazilian immigrants.

Popular musician, Jorge Ben Jour, for example, who originally traveled to the United States to perform with musician Sergio Mendes, eventually returned to Brazil because of the racial animosity that he felt in Los Angeles.¹⁰ However, Black activist Abdias do Nascimento, who traveled to the East Coast as a playwright and educator, provides a different perspective. Nascimento was able to achieve in the United States what was positively unimaginable for a black man in Brazil.¹¹ Thus the experience of Brazilians in the United States began to rapidly diversify. The changing climate at many American universities, which began to encourage diversity, benefitted Brazilians such as Nascimento, while the society at large still held on to many of its prejudices.

The 1960s was a crucial decade for Brazilians in the United States for many reasons, but particularly for establishing a distinct community.¹² During this period, Brazilian-American businesses also began making serious economic commitments. The Banco do Brasil opened a New York branch in April 1969, the same year that saw the creation of the Brazilian-American Chamber of Commerce, an official forum which would promote trade and investment opportunities between Brazil and the United States.¹³

By 1978, the rate of Brazilian immigration to the United States had declined, coinciding with a new political era in Brazilian history called *abertura*, or political opening, which signaled a weak but definite turn towards democracy. That year approximately 1,923 Brazilians were admitted into the United States, a decline of 33 percent from the 1965 figure of 2,869.¹⁴ The next year that figure dropped to 1,450.¹⁵ At the same time, immigration push factors slowly began to shift, particularly in the wake of the 1979 oil crisis and as the military government's fiscal mismanagement plunged the economy into stagnation. Henceforth economic concerns became the principle motivating force behind the new Brazilian exodus. The "American Dream," continued to attract entertainers, academics, and other professionals. This is confirmed by the fact that the largest percentage of Brazilian immigrants during this period were adults between the ages of 20-29 who were about to or had recently entered the labor force. These figures remain particularly low, however, if one compares the same figure for smaller countries like Cuba and the Dominican Republic. Of the total 1,923 legal immigrants who entered the United States in 1978, 20 percent were white collar workers including professionals, managers, administrators, and persons in the service industries. Only 3 percent were classified as domestic workers or laborers.¹⁶ By the early 1980s the percentage of professionals among Brazilian migrants had diminished and many more Brazilians did not declare a major occupation to immigration authorities.¹⁷ The 1980 U.S. Census provided more information about Brazilians than ever before. Still, the official number of 40,919 foreign-born Brazilians was considerably less than the conservative estimate of 50,640 reported by *The Brazilians*.¹⁸

Economic conditions did not improve in Brazil by the time the new democratically elected President Fernando Collor de Mello came to power in 1989 and Brazilians had already begun to establish roots in their newly adopted homes. Three years earlier, the INS had established a mechanism (known as the Immigration Reform and Control Act or IRCA) through which foreigners residing in the United States illegally could apply for permanent residence. However, Brazilians did not benefit from this new law

in any significant way. According to immigration statistics for the year 1988, for example, only 2,699 Brazilians had migrated to the United States, mostly professionals and administrators. Many more, distrustful of the INS, remained uncounted.¹⁹

According to *The Brazilians'* survey, based on the 1980 census, there were approximately 50,640 persons of Brazilian ancestry in the United States, 70 percent of whom were between the prime working age of 16-64. In contrast to the Spanish-speaking Latin American groups, an overwhelming majority of Brazilians in the United States (87 percent) were born in Brazil.²⁰ Of the total U.S. Brazilian population, only 14,450 became naturalized citizens and 26,469 retained their Brazilian citizenship. These figures help us better understand the Brazilian community's sense of identity and participation in the political arena.

By the time of the 1990 census, the official Brazilian population had reached over 94,000 which, as Margolis points out, still represents a significant undercount. Margolis also provides anecdotal information which suggests that this low figure was due to the lack of a clearly defined category for Brazilians in U.S. census forms, as well as a general disinterest among Brazilians to participate in the census report.²¹ Although there was no specific census category where Brazilians could clearly identify themselves, many Brazilians did register under the category "Hispanic."²²

While areas such as New York, New Jersey, Boston, Los Angeles, and Miami continue to attract more Brazilians, other cities such as Washington, D.C, New Orleans, San Francisco, and Orlando have also seen a rise in their Brazilian residents. A recent *Veja* reports hailed Florida as a new "Brazilian frontier," with more than 200,000 Brazilians (300 percent more than the U.S. census' national estimate). Florida's new Brazilian residents are as diverse ethnically and economically as other Latino groups throughout the country.²³ It is clear that despite the undercounting, a healthy community exists with its own sense of identity, and independent of official demographic reports.

BRAZILIAN-AMERICAN CONSCIOUSNESS AND MINORITY STATUS

Benedict Anderson has already shown that a nation's means of communication play a significant role in establishing links among individuals who share certain national experiences.²⁴ Minority communities within nation-states may also forge a sense of community through modern forms of communication. Local newspapers, television and radio programs, stores and business groups, social and employment centers, and churches continue to serve this purpose within the Brazilian-American community. At the same time, Brazilian-Americans have maintained strong contacts with Brazil and many continue to receive news from Brazilian dailies, while new media such as the internet introduced new ways of promoting a sense of community.

The Brazilian print media in the United States is much more developed than radio or television and it is strongest in metropolitan areas such as New York, Miami, and Boston.

While Brazilians do not rely exclusively on one particular media to receive information about community events or activities, they rely frequently on local papers and communications among friends.²⁵ The top printed newspapers include

The Brasilians, Made in USA, The Brazilian Times, Brazil Update, Brazilian in Review, The Brazilian Voice, and Jornal dos Sports. Many, however, consult newspapers/magazines published in Brazil just as often as their major sources of information about their country and about Brazilians in the United States. Among those most frequently cited are *O Estado do São Paulo, Globo,* and *Veja.* More than 90 percent of Brazilians maintain strong ties with relatives, businesses, and a host of other institutions in Brazil which allow them to receive a constant flow of information directly from their country.

Intimate contact with relatives and friends in the home country is common among Latin American and Caribbean immigrants. It is also indicative of the immigrants' desire to retain a piece of their homeland. Perhaps it is for this reason that many Brazilians are reluctant to renounce their Brazilian citizenship. According to the 1980 Census Report, 73 percent of the Brazilians in the United States maintained their Brazilian citizenship, while only 37 percent were naturalized U.S. citizens. Yet marriage patterns indicate that Brazilians have created strong familial ties in the United States, establishing connections that would make a return to Brazil seem unlikely. A majority of Brazilian-American men and women tend to get married (57 percent-64 percent). On the other hand, 45 percent of Brazilian men married Brazilian women, fortifying Brazilian roots on foreign soil, and increasing the possibility of passing on the Brazilian heritage and language to their children.²⁶

To understand the social relations within the Brazilian community in the United States and among Brazilians and other minority groups, it is necessary that we understand how Brazilians construct their sense of social identity in Brazil. How is it different from that of the United States? What adjustments must Brazilians make in order to place themselves within the context of American multiculturalism and forge a new American identity?²⁷ Ethnically, Brazilians define themselves as "white," "black," "moreno/a," "mulato/a," and a host of other labels, many of which do not have adequate translations into English. Furthermore, these identities are closely related to class. Once Brazilians enter U.S. boundaries, however, their "Brazilianness" comes into play within a wider context of other nationalities and ethnicities.²⁸

Ethnic politics in the United States is by no means a simple matter. As in every categorization process, ethnic categories and official government documents such as census reports do not adequately explain the various cultural nuances and differences within national or ethnic groups. Moreover, the United States maintains an ethnic classification scheme which combines the traditional black-white dichotomy with regional categories such as "Asian," "Hispanic/Latino," and "Native American." While grossly inaccurate on many fronts, these labels attempt to group people of similar backgrounds (ethnic, national, and regional) into homogenous categories for a myriad of economic, social, and political purposes.

Immigrants striving to hold on to their cultural identity often resist adopting these arbitrary categories. Although government-imposed categories may provide a civil identity, the government has no jurisdiction over cultural identities in or outside the United States. Minority groups around the world have lobbied to gain control of the labels that the state uses to describe them. This is particularly evident in the struggles of African Americans to

change their official categories from "Colored" to "Negro" to "Black" to "Afro-American" to "African-American;" or the Roma's struggle to prohibit the Romanian government from referring to them as "gypsies."²⁹ Brazilian-Americans show both rage and ambivalence towards American ethnic labels to which they are often obliged to conform. When asked to describe their ethnic group, 78 percent of Brazilian-Americans responded "Brazilian;" only 14 percent responded "white."³⁰ That a large percentage of Brazilian-Americans continue to hold on to their cultural identity is not an indication of lack of integration into U.S. society, but rather a reflection of how deeply Brazilians feel about their national identity, and an inability to come to grips with U.S. labels and racial categories.

Brazilian-American identity, like identities all over the world, is shaped by local politics, and socioeconomic trends. Demography also plays an important role in how Brazilians perceive themselves and how they relate to other ethnic groups. In areas where there is a relatively large Brazilian population such as Miami, New York, and Los Angeles, Brazilians are more likely to hold on to their cultural traits, although in many cases Brazilians take pains to avoid being associated with the "Brazilian community"—an association that they feel may limit their social mobility or integration. As in the case of many other immigrant groups, Brazilians must also try to survive in two worlds, the American and the Brazilian, which may not necessarily be reconcilable. Brazilians who leave their country seeking a better life have learned that the so-called "American Dream" might always remain elusive.

It is important to bear in mind that, historically, those Brazilians who were likely to travel to the United States came mostly from upper and middle classes, where few "blacks" are represented. Immigrants are mostly white, mulatto or mestizo, but many biological mulattos and mixed Brazilians also consider themselves white. Thus when forced to choose among white, black, or Hispanic categories, a majority of Brazilians choose "white," some choose "Hispanic/Latino," and few choose "black." Brazilians view these categories not merely as racial ones, but also as class categories. Thus they are often reluctant to be officially categorized under what the larger society might perceive as a disadvantageous position. At the same time, when given the opportunity to choose "Other," Brazilians overwhelmingly write in "Brazilian."

As with many national groups, persons of diverse backgrounds come together during celebrations and crises. Brazilian celebrations, such as Independence Day (September 7) and carnival, provide mechanisms through which individuals can maintain contact with a Brazilian identity. During the last half decade, Brazilian musicians from Caetano Veloso, Jorge Ben Jour, and Gilberto Gil to Daniela Mercury have performed in the United States to sold-out audiences comprised mostly of Brazilians. Brazilian-American Chamber of Commerce events have achieved similar successes. (Most Brazilians, however, do not participate in broader Latin American celebrations such as the Calle Ocho celebrations in Miami, Three Kings Day (January 6th) or the Puerto Rican Parades).

Critical events also bring Brazilians together. The brutal slaying of the Brazilian jogger Maria Isabel Pinto Monteiro Alves in Central Park in September 1995 provided Brazilians in New York with a moment of reflection about their lives in the United

States. Business owners such as João de Mattos, the publisher of *The Brazilians*, responded with shock. Many Brazilians interviewed by reporter Felicia R. Lee took the attack on the Brazilian woman personally. Mr. Mendes, for example, who has lived in the United States for twelve years, responded: "This is the first time that this has happened to us." Tania Maria Ramos, owner of the Brazilian store, Coisa Nossa, on 46th Street expressed this sense of community well: "No one knows her. But when they said a Brazilian, I said, 'Oh my God!' I couldn't take this thing out of my mind."³¹ Ramos went on to distance Brazilian-Americans from violence: "... the Brazilians are happy people, they don't like to fight. We like to party. We like to do things in a happy way." As is evident, many of the perceptions that North Americans have of Brazilians, many Brazilians also have of themselves. They are nonetheless stereotypes. While tragedy and celebration may bring Brazilian-Americans together, recently they have also shown an emerging political consciousness. The well-organized parades in various U.S. cities in support of the impeachment of President Collor in 1992 and the inauguration of "Little Brazil" in Manhattan are only two examples.

Interestingly, many Brazilians believe that Americans are obsessed with racial categories and that they face far fewer social constraints in Brazil. This belief comes mostly from white or mixed Brazilians who have grown up in a tradition that continues to promote the notion of a Brazilian racial democracy and an image of a society free of racial discrimination. Even though the myth of racial democracy has long been debunked, most Brazilians are simply uncomfortable with scrutinizing their racial heritage or ethnic background, particularly in a public forum. While individuals of mixed African and European heritage in the United States are automatically considered black, in Brazil there is a pyramid of racial categories based not only on heritage, but on physical characteristics, region, education, economic standing, and other variables germane to the Brazilian *weltanschauung*. Indeed, those who define themselves as "white" in Brazil may be suspect if they choose this categorization in the United States. Dark blacks (*pretos* or *crioulos*) are the only group who may not experience a type of ethnic identity crisis when they cross national boundaries. For the majority of Brazilians, however, having to define themselves by the different and limited U.S. ethnic categories proves to be a major dilemma.

In the United States these arbitrary labels may serve political and economic purposes, but most immigrants come to understand these official categories very slowly. When asked to choose an ethnic label, ("Latino," "Black," "White," "Hispanic"), 38 percent responded Latino, 9 percent Black, 37 percent White, 6 percent Hispanic, and 9 percent chose none.³²

Official categories aside, discrimination and prejudice, unfortunately, have been a constant part of the minority experience in the United States. African Americans and Latinos have joined forces on numerous occasions to combat an array of governmental and private practices which unfairly discriminate against their communities. But the type of discrimination that immigrants face may differ considerably from that experienced by U.S. citizens. Since the majority of Brazilians in the United States are not native born, they presumably share some of the negative immigrant experiences along with Latinos. This is only partly true, however. When Brazilians were asked whether they

had experienced prejudice or discrimination in the United States, only about 40 percent replied yes, indicating that prejudice is not central to the majority of Brazilians immigrants.

The fact that there is a large and diverse U.S. Latino population also adds another dimension to the Brazilian-American experience. Within the Spanish-speaking Latino community there is much debate over whether "Hispanic" or "Latino" should be used to refer to their community. While books such as *Everything You Know About Latino History* emphatically claim that Brazilian-Americans are not Hispanic, other sources and books on Hispanics often include Brazilian entertainers.³³ In addition, U.S. census takers report that Brazilians may be included under the Hispanic category, even though technically, the category refers to individuals who claim ancestry from Spanish-speaking countries.³⁴

Discussions in Brazil about the role of Brazilians within the larger Latino community has engendered as much debate as the popular discussions within the United States. One Brazilian informer, a university teacher from São Paulo, stressed the importance of considering the close historical connection between Spain and Portugal from 1580-1640 during the unification of the Iberian crowns. Indeed, Portugal's history is intimately related to that of Spain's. This connection led Brazilian writer Gilberto Freyre to unequivocally claim that "Brazilians are a Hispanic people. The culture is Hispanic." Avoiding what he called "a rigid criteria of separation," Freyre forged a pan-Hispanic identity for Brazilians as descendants of the Portuguese, who like other groups from the Iberian peninsula (Galicians, Catalans) were not necessarily subjugated to the Spanish or Castilian condition.³⁵

However, most Brazilian-Americans understate Brazil's Hispanic connection. Brazilians in Brazil know much more about culture and politics in the United States and Europe than they know about their Spanish-speaking neighbors, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay. Spanish is not a required language in the high-school or university curriculum, but English is. While MERCOSUR, the regional economic integration initiative led by Brazil and Argentina, signalled a new regional cooperation, there is no indication that this initiative will lead to a deepening of cultural and linguistic understanding. Brazil's leadership in MERCOSUR, on the other hand, has served to reinforce its sense of confidence as a distinct Latin American nation capable of pursuing its own course of development independent of NAFTA.

In a random survey placed on the Internet in 1994 and again in 1995, Brazilians both in the United States and in Brazil were asked which term, "Latino" or "Hispanic," they preferred and why. While almost 20 percent chose neither and a majority responded "Latino," almost 30 percent responded that "Hispanic" and "Latino" referred to the same group.³⁶ Some Brazilians, particularly recent arrivals and first generation middle class immigrants, tend to avoid either term. The term "Latino," is often associated with economic deprivation, poverty, and minority status. Brazilians wanting to avoid prejudice place themselves in a category which they perceive as "free from prejudice." At the same time, Brazilians believe that social discrimination is much more acute in the United States than in Brazil. Therefore, it is no surprise that many Brazilians do not want to be identified as Latinos, as there is a fear of identifying with a minority group who they perceive as facing discrimination.³⁷

Similar to other Latinos, Brazilians, nonetheless, list two factors that contribute to discrimination: "their dark skin"³⁸ and their accents. Brazilians such as Laís Gillette and Lourdes Torres offer testimonies of discrimination in the work place, although others such as Beti Rozen link this prejudice to being linked with Latinos, "who do not have a very good image in this country."³⁹ Language, on the other hand, is a major source of confusion. While good English skills are a necessary requirement for career advancement, lack of knowledge of English was never mentioned as a major problem among most of the Brazilians surveyed.⁴⁰ In fact, almost 55 percent of Brazilians do not speak Portuguese outside the home or familiar surroundings. For many, losing their accents was a priority, as José Roberto Carvalho reported to *Veja* journalists: "They discriminate against Latinos, especially if you speak with an accent."⁴¹ Problems which arise within the United States stem mainly from ignorance and misunderstanding on the part of Americans, particularly since accents are not necessarily a measure of language proficiency.⁴²

Brazilians are often offended when Americans believe that they speak Spanish. A large percentage do, however, understand and/or speak Spanish, particularly in areas with a large Spanish-speaking population. In her introductions to Gal Costa and Daniela Mercury, who performed at Lincoln Center this past summer, Judith King, a Brazilian-American radio announcer, welcomed the audience in Spanish and Portuguese acknowledging the appeal of Brazilian culture to Latinos in general. In some areas, like Miami, a rich new *Portañhol* has developed as a buffer between the Brazilian and the Cuban community. In addition many English-speakers often approach Brazilians, speaking what *Veja* journalists term *Portuingslês*, a mixture of Portuguese and English.⁴³ Still, many Brazilian-Americans, like King, have become proficient in Spanish.

Some Brazilians indicate that they often feel a closer proximity to the Portuguese community in the United States than to other Spanish-speaking Latino groups because of the language. This is particularly true in areas such as Newark, New Jersey where Portuguese immigrants began arriving in the 1920s and 1930s and where Brazilians have also begun to settle. The community boasts a Portuguese language newspaper, *Luso-Americano*, and Portuguese can be heard in many of the neighborhoods. But according to Edilberto Luciano Mendes, editor of *The Brazilians*, the Portuguese and Brazilian communities do not have much in common.⁴⁴ Historically, Portuguese immigrants were connected to the whaling industry and have been concentrated in southern New England, San Francisco, and Hawaii. As with the descendants of other nineteenth-century European immigrants, the Portuguese are well integrated into the American mainstream, and many do not speak Portuguese. The majority of the Portuguese-language newspapers along with enterprises such as Luso-Brazilian Books, which markets Portuguese-language texts, cater exclusively to the Brazilian community.

The Brazilian community is already well established, albeit only in three major pockets: in the east and west coasts, and in Florida. Its cultural and economic contributions have had an impact on North-South relations as Brazilians in the United States grapple with problems of economic security and national identity. Questions such as "Am I Brazilian?," "Am I American?," "Am I Latino even though I don't speak Spanish?" are being asked with

increasing frequency, particularly as a Brazilian-American second generation continues to grow. Unfortunately, federal, state, and local governments provide us with very little information on Brazilians, though local community groups such as the Brazilian-American Chamber of Commerce, lobby groups, and Brazilian public figures continue to promote community awareness.

A cultural production reflective of the Brazilian-American experience is still at an early stage. At least three novels have been published in the last five years which attempt to provide visions of this experience. Among them is Luiz Alberto Scotto's *46th Street: O caminho americano* which relates cultural dilemmas with class and race overtones of Helena, Carlos, and Antônio, three very different Brazilians, living in the United States. Helena, like many Brazilians who travel north, was a professional in Brazil and becomes a waitress in New York. Carlos and Antônio incarnate two other Brazilian personalities: the graduate student who decides to stay on and the undocumented immigrant.⁴⁵ Brazilian-American literary and cultural competitions have further nurtured the community's sense of identity. One of the winning entries in the 1995 literary competition sponsored by *The Brazilians* aptly sums up the challenge of this new Latino community; a challenge that is echoed in Latino immigrant communities all over the United States:

Oh, sorrow that vacillates between "who I am" and "where I am"

Empty my mind and transform me into a river of longing...

And together, we will laugh so much, oh so much

That we will cry from homesickness with tears, so lost and lonely,

Tears that resemble us

*Because we are Brazilians without Brazil*⁴⁶

Today, Brazilian-Americans, like other Latino groups are a diverse community which represents many ethnicities. While many Brazilians may be undocumented and others may be undercounted in the national census, Brazilian-Americans have begun to leave their mark on many cities on the east and west coasts. The Brazilian-American Chamber of Commerce lists an impressive membership of companies who have contributed to both the U.S. and Brazilian economies. As a rule, Brazilians in the United States remain unsure about their "minority status," particularly given the national framework from which they come. While a majority of Brazilians may accept the label "Latino," (rather than "Hispanic"), an overwhelming number consider Brazilians unique and unlike any other immigrant group from Latin America.

The 1960s were undoubtedly an important decade in which Brazilians changed their status as itinerant residents and began to establish important social, economic, and cultural roots in the United States. A mere thirty-five years have passed and the Brazilian population (documented and undocumented) is now a force with which the United States must reckon. As Brazilians come face to face with a new way of life, they must necessarily transform the way they operate in the world. For many, this transformation has been extremely difficult, questioning the very core of their native identity. The decision to deny a "Latino identity" is a personal one and relates largely to how individual

Brazilians experience life in the United States, and the identity that they choose to construct vis-à-vis the cultural mainstream.

The U.S. government employs a restrictive identification category in all its official documents. Until very recently, groups such as Mexicans and Puerto Ricans were forced to construct their identities based on an archaic bipolar construction of ethnicity in which Native Americans were ignored and citizens were classified officially as "black or white." Regional terms such as "Hispanic" and "Asian" have recently diversified previous categories, but most Brazilians still fall within the "other" category. U.S. government labels have an official power, as they often determine the categories and language that will be used in academia and by public and private institutions around the country. Since "whiteness" in the United States and Brazil is often synonymous with privilege, those who can choose to be

classified as "white," will do so! The relationship between official categories and national identity will also transform itself over the next few decades, as official government agencies attempt to properly account for the Brazilian population and as Brazilians establish closer links with other minority groups. The growth of the Brazilian population in the United States will further diversify the country's Latino identity. This population growth has helped create distinct Brazilian enclaves in many areas, particularly in New York, Boston, and Miami. As their political and social consciousness grows they will find increasing opportunities to interact with their Spanish-speaking counterparts. But many more studies need to be conducted before we can fully understand the contributions and challenges of this community to American life. ■

NOTES

- ¹ Since 1990 articles on Brazilians in the U.S. have appeared frequently in the Brazilian press. Examples include, "Cresce o Numero de Brasileiros que No Querem Mas Ser Brasileiros," *Folha de So Paulo* March 18, 1990, C1; "Estudo Mostra Como Vivem 90 Mil Brasileiros em Boston," *Folha de So Paulo* June 19, 1990, C5; "Lana 'Go-Go' em Newark, Quería Falar Ingles," *Folha de So Paulo* June 10, 1991, D3; Dea Januzzi, "Terra do Tio Sam, Um Sonho Clandestino Que Pode Virar Pesadelo," *O Estado de Minas* June 17, 1990, 16, several articles have appeared in *Veja*, Brazil's most popular weekly magazine. In the U.S., articles over the same period include: Thomas Kamm, "Brazil's Swelling Wave of Emigration Reflects Gloom about Nation's Future," *Wall Street Journal*, October 1, 1991, 16; Richard Miller, "Money Tree Image Lures Poor Brazilians to U.S.," *Cape Cod Times* July 28, 1991, 1 and 8; Derek Reveron, "A Little Piece of Brazil Grows in Miami," *Miami Herald*, May 6, 1991, 14, in addition to articles which have appeared in Brazilian community newspapers.
- ² Margolis, Maxine L. "Brazilians and the 1990 U.S. Census: Immigrants, Ethnicity, and the Under-Count." *Human Organization* 54, 1, (1995): 52-59. Frank Goza's work "Brazilian Immigration to North America," *International Migration Review* 28, 1(1994): 136-152. See also by Margolis "A New Ingredient in the Melting Pot: Brazilians in New York City," *City and Society* 3,2 (1989): 179-187; "From Mistress to Servant: Downward Mobility among Brazilians in New York City," *Urban Anthropology* 19,3 (1990): 215-231; "Women in International Migration: The Case of Brazilians in New York City" Conference Paper no. 66, Columbia University, New York University Consortium for Latin American and Caribbean Studies. 1992; "Transnationalism and Popular Culture: The Case of Brazilian Immigrants in the U.S.," *Journal of Popular Culture* 29, 1(1994): 29-33.
- ³ Statistical data indicate that in 1990 the geographic distribution of the Latino population was as follows: California, 29 percent; Texas, 23 percent; New York 10 percent; Florida and New Mexico, approximately 5 percent each.
- ⁴ Frank Goza's work "Brazilian Immigration to North America," *International Migration Review* 28,1, (1994): 136-152.
- ⁵ In completing the questionnaire for the 1990 Census with regards to race, approximately fifteen categories are defined, including a category called "other." There is an implied understanding of these categories (white, black, Indian, etc...), but there is also a large group of individuals who do not feel that these racial terms represent them. Hence over the decades national origin terms have been added to the census to account for groups such as Filipino, Vietnamese, Samoan, etc. Since there is no category for "Brazilians," they may choose any one of the categories, all three if they are racially mixed, and/or "Hispanic." See Margolis, Maxine L. "Brazilians and the 1990 U.S. Census: Immigrants, Ethnicity, and the Under-Count," 52-59.
- ⁶ Bureau of the Census, Social and Economic Statistics Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, Table 6, "Mother Tongue of Foreign-Born White Population by Country of Birth" *15th Census of the US 1930 Population, Vol. 2- General Report*. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, 1933). See also Table 7, p. 350. Franklin Goza and Patricia Simonek, "Who are the Brazilian Americans? A Profile of Brazilians and Persons of Brazilian Ancestry in the U.S.," *The Brasilians* (June 1992): p. 1 and 6.
- ⁷ For over ten years I have given short quizzes to my students in language, Latin American Studies, and history courses at the University of Notre Dame, Tulane University, and Middlebury College. I have also conducted random surveys of the American population on Fifth Avenue in New York in June 1994, and September 1995. Results on both occasions showed that 55-62 percent of a little over 100 interviewees responded that Brazilians speak Spanish.
- ⁸ U.S. Department of Justice, *INS Fact Book* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1994), 53.
- ⁹ Claus Schreiner, *Música Brasileira: A History of Popular Music and the People of Brazil*. (New York & London: Marion Boyars, 1993), 144-149. See also Ruy Castro, *Chega de Saudade: A História e as Histórias da Bossa Nova*. (São Paulo: Editora Schwartz, 1990), 320-323.
- ¹⁰ Ruy Castro, p. 385.
- ¹¹ Pedro Celso Uchôa and Jovelino Ramos, *Brasil 1964/199? Memórias do Exílio: 1: De Muitos Caminhos* (SP: Editora Arcadia, 1976), 23-52.
- ¹² "Who are the Brazilian-Americans?" *The Brasilians*, 6.
- ¹³ Brazilian-American Chamber of Commerce, *1996 Business Review/Directory* (New York, 1996, p. 7. "Frank Graza, Banco do Brasil, New York City, interviewed by author, 6 September 1995, Banco do Brasil, New York City.
- ¹⁴ U.S. Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, "Immigrants Admitted By Country or Region," *1978 Statistical Yearbook of Immigration and Naturalization Service* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1979), 17, Table 8.
- ¹⁵ U.S. Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, "Immigrants Admitted By Country or Region," *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1979), 2, Table 1A.

- ¹⁶ U.S. Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service "Immigrants Admitted By Country or Region of Birth and Major Occupation," *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*. (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1978), 17, Table 8.
- ¹⁷ U.S. Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, "Immigrants Admitted By Country or Region of Birth and Major Occupation Group Fiscal Year 1985," *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1985), Table 6.1.
- ¹⁸ Franklin Goza and Patricia Simonek, 1 and 6.
- ¹⁹ Bureau of the Census, Social and Economic Statistics Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, "Immigrants Admitted By Country or Region of Birth and Major Occupation," *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1988), 17 Table 8.
- ²⁰ "Who are the Brazilian-Americans?" *The Brasilians*, 6.
- ²¹ Maxine Margolis, *Little Brazil: An Ethnography of Brazilian Immigrants in New York City*, 252-257.
- ²² Margolis, 252-257.
- ²³ João Sorima Neto and Ernesto Bernades, "A Miami do Brasil," *Veja* 29,29 (1996): 50-65.
- ²⁴ See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London & New York: Verso, 1983).
- ²⁵ Of the sample population, a little more than 35 percent listed newspapers as their primary form of receiving news, followed by 24 percent who reported communication with personal friends, while 20 percent relied on magazines, and less than 10 percent on the Internet.
- ²⁶ "Who are the Brazilian Americans? A Profile of Brazilians and Persons of Brazilian Ancestry in the U.S.," *The Brasilians* (June 1992): p. 1 and 6.
- ²⁷ I have argued elsewhere that in educational circles and especially in the classroom educators must be careful not to use politically correct language that may have a place in the U.S. to refer or speak of experiences outside of the country, particularly in regards to race issues in Latin America and the Caribbean. See Davis, "Multiculturalism or Multi-Cultural Imperialism? An Investigation into the Language of Multiculturalism," *World Leaders* 38, 6 (1995): 23-37.
- ²⁸ It is important to reiterate that U.S. official categories of race or ethnicity are not, anthropologically speaking, racial categories. The U.S. employs categories that relate to heritage (Hispanic); region (Asian); ethnicity (African-American), etc.
- ²⁹ Martin Emerson, "What's in a Name?," *The Outsider* 43 (1995): 2.
- ³⁰ This survey was originally sent out via the Internet in the Spring of 1995. Thirty individuals responded. In the summer of 1995 an undetermined number of surveys were mailed via U.S. Postal Service to random individuals of Brazilian ancestry in California, Boston, New York, Washington D.C., and Miami (155 respondents). A subsequent survey was sent out to 25 individuals in the Fall of 1995. Information in this paper comes from a total of 210 respondents. I am indebted to Sagheer Bin Faiz for his help with the tabulations and statistical calculations of the data.
- ³¹ Felicia R. Lee, "Slaying Shocks Usually Upbeat Brazilians," *The New York Times*, September 21, 1995, B1 and B3.
- ³² Survey (Summer 1995)
- ³³ Himilce Novas, (New York: Penguin Books, 1994). See also George Hadley-Garcia, *Hispanic Hollywood: The Latins in Motion Pictures* (Citadel Press Books, 1990).
- ³⁴ I received this information from the Washington D.C. Office of the Census in September 1996. For a clear appraisal of the original intention of the Hispanic category, see Michael R. Lavin, *Understanding the Census: A Guide for Marketers, Planners, Grant Writers, and Other Data Users* (Kenmore, NY: Epoch, 1996), 136.
- ³⁵ Gilberto Freyre, *O Brasileiro Entre Outros Hispânicos* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria José Olympio, 1975), xxxi-xxxiii.
- ³⁶ Information about the individuals surveyed on the Internet was difficult to tabulate, although they were mostly affiliated with academic institutions, and thus were probably either from middle class backgrounds and/or educated with a minimum of an undergraduate degree. Many were clearly graduate students or professors. Other surveys and questionnaires indicate that Brazilians do consider themselves Latino but not Hispanic. Perhaps this result stems from a higher level of consciousness or understanding of ethnic labeling in the U.S.
- ³⁷ A similar phenomenon occurs with African and West Indian immigrants, particularly those with middle class consciousness, who do not want to be associated with the negative connotations of blackness or minority status and prefer a foreign identity despite their residence in the U.S.
- ³⁸ Specific complaints include phrases like "sendo morena" (having dark hair as well as dark-complexion).
- ³⁹ "O American Dream Brasileiro," *Momento* 2,11, 5-9.
- ⁴⁰ This was true for the surveys conducted by mail. Anecdotal evidence suggests, however, that there are some problems, particularly with "accents." A 1996 *Veja* special report on "Learning English in Brazil" claims that the majority of schools are ill-prepared to meet the growing demand to teach English. According to language specialist Rajendra Rangi Singh, only 15 percent of the schools in Brazil were classified as "good." The extent to which English preparation in Brazil assists in the immigrant's rate of integration cannot be determined from the results of this study. See Valéria França "Do you speak?," *Veja* 29,33 (1996): 62-64.
- ⁴¹ João Sorima Net e Ernesto Bernades, "A Miami do Brasil," *Veja* 29,29 (1996): 55.
- ⁴² These findings do not necessarily differ from those of Frank Goza, "Brazilian Immigration to North America," *International Migration Review* 28,1 (1994): 136-152. Goza reports that 22 percent of Brazilians surveyed in the U.S. reported discrimination was due to an inability to communicate adequately in English. In this author's estimation, this percentage is extremely small.
- ⁴³ João Sorima Net e Ernesto Bernades, "A Miami do Brasil," *Veja* 29,29 (1996): 50-65.
- ⁴⁴ "Celebrating the Portuguese Communities in America: A Cartographic Perspective," Exhibit at the Library of Congress, Washington D.C., June 10-November 29, 1997. Edilberto Luciano Mendes, interview by author, July 23, 1997, New York.
- ⁴⁵ (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1993). Another novel recently translated into English, which treats the lives of Brazilians living in New York during the 1960s, is *Stella Manhattan* by Silvano Santiago (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994).
- ⁴⁶ Paulo Caldeira, "Nós os brasileiros SEM BRASIL," *The Brasilians* (May 1996), 7. Translations are my own.