Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

STANLEY R. BAILEY (2009) Legacies of Race: Identities, Attitudes, and Politics in Brazil. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 304 p., index.

In Legacies of Race, Stanley Bailey has analyzed racial attitudes of the general population of Brazil with somewhat surprising results. He calls into question the arguments of social scientists who claim that belief in racial democracy blinds people to prejudice. Using three large-sample public opinion surveys from 1995, 2000, and 2002, Bailey tests to what extent prevailing racial theories hold when race is not clearly defined. Bailey affirms that robust racial boundaries are absent in Brazil, yet also suggests that the de jure dichotomous classification adopted by race-target policies may well encourage the formation of cohesive racial groups.

Bailey's main goal was to examine the effect of the myth of racial democracy, first popularized by Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre in the 1930s. Freyre argued that the racial mixing typical of Portuguese colonization undermined the formation of robust racial boundaries in Brazilian society – that Brazil has, therefore, not experienced the strong racial separatism characteristic of United States history. Bailey says that for decades members of the economic, political, military and intellectual elite have boasted about racial democracy among Brazilians (110). Quoting the anthropologist Robin Sheriff, Bailey emphasizes that the myth of racial democracy summons "the collectively-held notion of the moral force of a shared heritage, a common family, a unified nation. Racism is repugnant. It is immoral. It is, above all, un-Brazilian" (6).

Throughout the twentieth century, Bailey explains, negro activists – that is, brown or black people of African descent in Brazil – and racialist social scientists deemed the myth to be an ideology of domination. According to their perspective, the ideal of racial democracy propagated by the Brazilian elite has fostered a denial of racial discrimination and confounded people's perception of racial inequality. Bailey challenges this argument in his exploration of the common understanding of race among average Brazilians.

Bailey's inspection of the data reveals that both white and non-white Brazilians are aware of the existence of prejudice. Public opinion, he shows, recognizes that structural disadvantages – not individual differences – explain the precarious socioeconomic condition of non-white Brazilians. Bailey also shows that a great part of the population supports negro initiatives. According to his findings, approval of quota systems for blacks and browns is much higher among white Brazilians than among white Americans. Of white Brazilians, 46.3% support university quotas; 48% support employment quotas. Of white Americans, only 29.7% and 15.4% support such initiatives.

Given these results, Bailey argues that the racial democracy myth does not mask the realities of racism but, rather, serves as an ideological support for policies that threaten the status quo – what he calls a "hierarchy-attenuating" or "delegitimizing myth." Bailey suggests that racial democracy may reflect "a deep-seated desire for a society that is not segmented along racial lines and that is essentially equal for all people" (167).

Another important topic broached in Legacies of Race is racial ambiguity in Brazilian society. As Bailey shows, Brazilian attitudinal stances and cultural practices do not vary appreciably among racial categories. He argues that racial sorting in Brazil is not a relatively straightforward process as it tends to be in the United States, where racial groups are more clearly divided into "black" and "white." The evidence leads him to conclude that the Brazilian context is best framed as "antiracialist." Antiracialism, according to Bailey, rejects the notion that discrete racial groups necessarily determine social interaction. In antiracialist societies, nation- and class-based affiliations are more powerful predictors of attitudinal stances than colour (23).

One of the book's major strengths lies in Bailey's discussion of the applicability of dominant racial theories to contexts other than the United States. Most literature on race, he emphasizes, is based on American racial dynamics and thus dominant perspectives are too group-oriented – that is, they assume racial groups possess a great sense of cohesion and solidarity among individual members. The problem, Bailey argues, is that dominant perspectives have been applied to social contexts that do not share the American racial experience. Dominant stances fail to provide an appropriate account of Brazilian racial relations, which may be better understood from an antiracialist perspective.

Bailey suggests, though, that prevailing theories may be applicable to the Brazilian context in the future. Affirmative action policies have resulted in the adoption of dichotomous categories to classify Brazilians as negro (that is, black and brown) or white. From Bailey's perspective, the institutionalization of a dichotomous racial classification may well encourage the formation of racial groups with a greater sense of cohesion – that is, a shift toward racialism. Racial attitudes in Brazil are apparently in transition (224).

If fault is to be found with Legacies of Race, it is that Bailey fails to account for regional variation. Carlos Hasenbalg (Discriminação e desigualdades raciais no Brasil, 1979) points out that Brazilian race dynamics are not necessarily uniform. Moreover, although Bailey acknowledges the importance of class over race in determining the social conditions of Brazilians, he gives insufficient attention to it. That said, the work is a "breakthrough contribution" to the debate about racial attitudes in Brazil, as Paul Sniderman justly states in his endorsement of the volume. Legacies of Race provides an insightful discussion about the concept of "racial group" and its relevance to the study of social interaction. For this reason, it may interest anyone studying racial attitudes.

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