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Brazil and Racism: Examining the Unified Black Movement, 1970-2000

Max Laine

HST 499: Senior Seminar
Primary Reader: Dr. Patricia Goldsworthy-Bishop
Secondary Reader: Dr. David Doellinger

In June 1996, as part of the United Nations Human Rights Council, a special report by Michael Glélé-Ahanhanzo articulated contemporary forms of racism, xenophobia, and related racial intolerance that existed in Brazil. Contrary to his report many Brazilian government officials saw the country as a place in which “Racism doesn’t exist... Brazil is a multiracial country and a multiracial democracy; it is not like the United States or South Africa... [Brazil] has no history of racial hatred.”¹ In contrast Glélé-Ahanhanzo quoted Brazilian professor Cristovam Buarque who said that Brazil in reality was a state in which “apartanêcao sociais” (social apartheid) was alive and well,² applying heavily to the experience of Afro-Brazilians.³ Many activists who Glélé-Ahanhanzo interviewed noted that they felt racism and racial discrimination had become so ingrained into Brazilians that it was simply a part of life.⁴ However, what the document failed to mention was a group sought this change and were successful at it. The Unified Black Movement (MNU), led by both Abdias do Nascimento and Beatriz Nascimento, challenged the social apartheid implemented by both Brazilian government and society. The efforts of the Unified Black Movement lead to an increase in Black Consciousness, mobilization, and greater political activity in Brazil that can be still seen to this day. Examined through the ideals of the MNU which sought the elimination of both segregation and racism, the materials produced by the MNU such as their newspaper and comics which worked to raise awareness about Zumbi and Black history, and the actions taken by the MNU to

¹ Michael Glélé-Ahanhanzo, “Implementation of the Program of Action for The Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination” (United Nations, 1996), 9.

² Michael Glélé-Ahanhanzo, “Implementation of the Program of Action for The Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination” (United Nations, 1996), 10.

³ In the document other races are mentioned (Indian and mixed) but for sake of the paper the focus will be on Afro-Brazilians.

⁴ Michael Glélé-Ahanhanzo, “Implementation of the Program of Action for The Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination” (United Nations, 1996), 10.

help secure legislative equality. It's important to understand what social apartheid is and how it affects Afro-Brazilians.

Social apartheid isn't a uniquely Brazilian issue, but what makes social apartheid so unique to Brazil is how much it's become ingrained within society. Apartheid is the legal segregation imposed upon a group of people based upon their racial or ethnic identity. The term, apartheid, came from South Africa in which policies were enacted to segregate nonwhites from whites. Yet, in Brazil apartheid doesn't come from laws. Instead, it comes from de facto segregation, meaning that while segregation was illegal, social institutions and society itself still imposed segregation and racist ideas upon Afro-Brazilians. This created a paradox in Brazil where racism existed but was actively ignored. The reality is racism exists in many aspects of everyday life in Brazil but hides itself behind different terminology than that of the United States and South Africa. In both countries one's race is mainly built upon their genetics, while skin color partially can play a role. Often genetics is the defining way in which individuals will view themselves and others. In Brazil on the other hand, if a person has dark skin, they are black or will use their skin color to not identify as Black (which is explained later in the paper). One's racial identity applies to one's skin color and not their ethnic background.⁵ Thus for this paper the term "Black" and "Afro-Brazilian" are interchangeable. Mainly because the term Afro-Brazilian has been a term used more recently to unite mixed individuals with the Black population, which can be seen later in the paper with how the Unified Black Movement defined what it meant to be Black.

⁵ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil, 1978-2002* (North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2015), 33.

Social apartheid is a part of everyday life, which is the experience of many Afro-Brazilians. Historian Carl Degler uses the story of a mixed army officer who attempted to get a haircut at a local barbershop in Sao Paulo (in the book the story doesn't explain when it took place). In context of his book *Neither Black nor White*, Degler uses the story to showcase the feet dragging towards racial equality. Mainly how the story showcases that Brazilians were simultaneously both for and against racial discrimination. However, I argue that the story highlights the reality of social apartheid within Brazil. The story showcases how society had created segregation, even after segregation had been outlawed in 1951. The story goes that a white barber refused the dark-skinned army officer because his place didn't generally cater to people of color, because the officer was a stranger out of town he didn't know about this rule. Resulting in the army officer, who was outraged with the barber, making a scene that attracted onlookers who quickly formed a crowd. Who after learning about what the barber had done, busted into the shop, and prepared to deliver a beating to the barber. The barber (who feared the beating) quickly asserted that he himself wasn't discriminatory, but instead asserted that his customers (who were White) refused to get their haircut with a negro, and instead forced the barber to institute the discriminatory practice.⁶

The army officer's story showcases the reality of both racism and social apartheid in Brazil, in two ways. First the officer himself was discriminated against not because he was Black as the barber claims, but instead because his skin was Black. As noted, the man himself identified as a mixed individual and not a Black man. This is significant because the reason for his discrimination had to do in part with his racial background, but more importantly it had to do with his skin color. The army officer was perceived not as a mixed individual, but instead as a

⁶ Carl Degler, *Neither Black nor White* (New York, Macmillan Company, 1971), 139.

Black man, resulting in his discrimination. The key factor for racism in Brazil is mainly what an individual's skin color looks like, and while racial identity plays a minor factor, skin color plays a bigger role and has led to many Blacks in Brazil seeking to identify themselves as mixed and not Black for this very reason.⁷

Second, the barber's reaction towards the crowd's accusation of racial discrimination highlights the reality of social apartheid, mainly how the barber refused the army officer and how they shifted the blame from himself to his costumers. Legally, segregation was outlawed by the Brazilian law, which occurred in 1951 with the passing of the Afonso Arionos anti-discrimination law.⁸ Yet many social institutions and society itself created unwritten rules about where Afro-Brazilians could (or couldn't be) served or even allowed to enter certain locations, such as bars, schools, and hotels. In other words, segregation was apparent and alive, but without the signs that highlighted such practices. Ironically however, many places (and people) didn't want to admit their racism and instead tried to find other ways of shifting the blame. No one wanted to be seen as being racist, but racism existed all the same. As stated before, the paradox of racism in Brazil resulted from a society that was both proud and ashamed of the multi-racial aspect of its society. But to understand how the origins social apartheid was formed it's important to examine Afro-Brazilian history before the 1970s.

From Slavery to Freedom

The origins of racism and social apartheid in Brazil go all the way back to when the first slaves were brought to Brazil. While there's no pinpoint year in which people agree when the

⁷ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil: 1978-2002*,

⁸ Kimberly F. Jones-de Oliveira, "The Politics of Culture or the Culture of Politics: Afro-Brazilian Mobilization, 1920-1968," *Journal of Third World Studies* 20, no. 1, (Spring 2003), 116.

first African slaves arrived in Brazil. Between 1571-1575, 388 African slaves had been transported to Brazil. This number would increase about 9,000 times more, and by 1860 the number would be 3,521,065.⁹ More slaves were transported from Africa to Brazil than any other country in the America's,¹⁰ in comparison, the United States only had an estimated 344,415 slaves arrived by 1860.¹¹ The reason that so many slaves were brought to Brazil had to do with the distance between Africa and Brazil. Angola and Brazil are separated by less than 3,500 miles, in comparison the United States is almost 5,000 miles away. While it may not seem like a lot, slaves didn't have to travel as far from Africa to Brazil, making them cheaper and more readily replaceable than their American counterparts. The population increase also played a major role upon Brazil itself, by 1775 Brazil's population was an estimated 58% African/mixed.¹² The Portuguese were unique in how and why they colonized as they did. Unlike the English who sought to form a colony and the Spanish who saw it as an opportunity to convert natives (these weren't the only reasons but could be argued they were the primary reasons for colonization), the Portuguese saw Brazil only as a way to generate money. However, early attempts towards controlling these slaves resulted in three forms of resistance: non-confrontational through the sabotaging of work, armed revolts, and running away to the Amazon to form their own communities. For the sake of the paper, focus will be placed primarily on those who ran away to form their own communities.

⁹ "Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade – Database," Slave Voyage, (accessed June 2nd, 2022), <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database#tables>.

¹⁰ It's important to note that if one looked at regions the Caribbean had more slaves, but for the sake of this paper (and the point being made) the focus will solely be upon single countries not regions.

¹¹ "Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade – Database," Slave Voyage, (accessed June 2nd, 2022), <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database#tables>.

¹² Justin Bucciferro, "A Forced Hand: Natives, Africans, and the Population of Brazil, 1545-1850," *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Economic History* 31, no. 2,

When slaves ran away from their captors into the jungles of the Amazon, many formed their own groups called *quilombos*. Communities which were founded by runaway slaves, often bringing their cultural identity with themselves to these communities.¹³ The most famous of the quilombos was Palmares, on the eastern coast of Brazil, which at one time had been home to an estimated 30,000 runaway African slaves. Led by Zumbi the tribe survived for a couple years before in 1692 it came under attack by Portuguese soldiers, resulting in a 43-day siege that ended with the death of Zumbi.¹⁴ The character and mythos that surrounds Zumbi wouldn't become a part of national importance until the 1970s, but it would be unthinkable to not mention Zumbi and the quilombos located in Palmarous. But for now, Zumbi and Palmarous were a part of a long list that existed of other quilombos who came into conflict with the White Portuguese slave owners. While the quilombos were a viable solution to escaping slavery, many slaves didn't seek this option, either because escape was difficult, or it was much easier to survive under the rule of their Portuguese masters than to try and find a community. Which led to a form of mixing that took place between the masters and slaves, one which was forced concubinage, a system in which masters used their power to rape enslaved women. Leading Brazil down a more multicultural path that became unique in nature compared to other colonies of South and North America.

Many enslaved women were used as forced concubines by their slave master, this created a new racial group that still is a part of Brazil today: The Mulatto.¹⁵ A mix between the European masters and enslaved African women, they began to form a new social group that in a sense would become the middle class of colonial Brazil (similar in nature to the poor Europeans which

¹³ David, Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil: 1978-2002*, 24

¹⁴ David, Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil: 1978-2002*, 24

¹⁵ Mulatto is a term used not just in Brazil but is a common phrase used throughout Latin America.

came to the United States). The term Mulatto is a dated term that is commonly no longer used in academic papers, however in Brazil the term survived up until the 21st century, which for the sake of the paper Mixed will be used instead of Mulatto. Mixed individuals existed in a racial purgatory, resulting in them socially being above the Black slaves, but not high enough that they were equal to the White elite. Thus, they created a new social class within Brazil, they became what today could be called the middle class. Because of this, many escaped the binds of slavery because their racial background wasn't African along with being well versed in the Portuguese language and practices, their status was thus automatically freed.¹⁶ Their freedom came from being both mixed racially and understanding the Portuguese language along with the culture helped plant (and later cemented) Brazilian racial identity for the 20th century. But for now, these are the key features that help separate someone between being an African and a mixed individual. The once profitable business of slavery (especially the slave trade) soon became a massive worldwide issue that forced change in how slavery existed as an institution, not just globally, but within Brazil as well.

By the beginning of the 1800s, many Western countries began to either outlaw slavery or began ways to control the slave trade to only parts of their country, such as the Southern part of the United States. Slavery in Brazil took no such stance, in fact the Slave Trade in Brazil ended because of outside pressure from Great Britain not from within. Slavery for Brazil wasn't seen as immoral or being only dedicated to a region of the country. Instead, slavery existed all over, with only certain regions of Brazil relying on slavery more than others.¹⁷ Because of this, slavery itself as an institution lasted longer than anywhere else in the western hemisphere. In fact the

¹⁶ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil: 1978-2002*, 25.

¹⁷ Carl Degler, *Neither Black nor White*, 100.

slave trade itself lasted until the 1850s. Despite how important the slave trade was for Brazil, efforts were made towards the abolition of slavery by those who had formally been enslaved and some of the White elite, mainly due in part that in Europe slavery had been seen as a dark stain. So, a small minority of the White elite followed the Europeans, not because they saw it as a moral battle (though for some this may have been the case) instead this was done to emulate the European counterparts. Abolition was a slow process that instead of leading to bloodshed, led to a process in which slaves were slowly emancipated by their owners (based upon contracts made between the enslaved party and the owner). It could be argued that abolition wasn't a movement, but instead a slow process that allowed for the freedom of enslaved Africans that still benefited the White elite.

Abolition as a movement in Brazil occurred by slaves buying their freedom, mainly from money they had saved during their time as a slave.¹⁸ Abolition itself had yet to occur (this wouldn't happen until 1888). After freeing themselves, many former slaves began to fight for the freedom of the Africans who were still enslaved. Starting in the mid-1800s, a movement that was former slaves themselves seeking the ending of slavery within Brazil.¹⁹ Resulting in the first and largest Afro-Brazilian movement that Brazil had ever seen. Helped by the few White elite, on May 13th, 1888, Brazilian Princess Isabella signed into legal affect the Golden law, which ended slavery in Brazil and resulted in the emancipation of Afro-Brazilians from the bonds of slavery. On paper this sounds like a well-deserved victory. And it would have been, if it weren't for the fact that when the law itself had been signed, only 5% of the entire Black population was still enslaved.²⁰ To give context, the Afro-Brazilian population in 1850 (thirty-eight years before

¹⁸ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil: 1978-2002*, 28.

¹⁹ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil: 1978-2002*, 28.

²⁰ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil: 1978-2002*, 28.

abolition) was 3,522,949.²¹ As stated earlier, abolition wasn't a sudden moment which resulted in the freedom of the large masses, instead it had been a slow process which resulted in the eventual freedom of African slaves by 1888.²² Even worse, because slavery hadn't been ended in a huge event, many slaves were simply left on the streets once they gained their freedom. In fact, the Rio de Janeiro's Favela's, which is slum housing in which the houses were built on vacant land, has its roots here, due to slaves not being able to own land or simply didn't have enough money to own land in the first place.

The dumping of slaves after their freedom was granted wasn't by accident, many of the White elites saw Africans as a negative part of the country, which political scientist David Covin describes being an "... Embarrassment, a ball and chain around the neck of the nation, preventing it from achieving the heights reached by members of the community of European States."²³ They saw African-Brazilians as this embarrassing part that existed in Brazil, one which they wanted to erase in order to see themselves in the same light as their European counterparts. What they hoped would happen to the freed Afro-Brazilians who had been dumped on the street was simple, without the support of their old masters, would die out because there was a belief amongst the white elite that the Afro-Brazilians couldn't live without the support of their masters. However, it quickly became apparent that this "dying out" period wouldn't happen. Many Brazilian intellectuals (most of which were part of the White elite) turned towards social Darwinism to try and find a way to eliminate the non-White aspect of Brazil.

Whitening and Racial Democracy

²¹ Justin Bucciferro, "A Forced Hand: Natives, Africans, and the Population of Brazil, 1545-1850," *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Economic History* 31, no. 2, 314.

²² David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil: 1978-2002*, 27-28.

²³ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil: 1978-2002*, 28-29.

After emancipation in 1888, Brazil intellectuals began to examine the racial make-up of the country. Brazil, like many other Latin American countries was and still is a racially mixed society. For many of the intellectuals, this was unacceptable, due in part to their guided belief in scientific racism, the idea that science proved that the White race was the most superior of all the races. Yet how could Brazilian intellectuals (and the government) claim this superiority it felt it deserved, while living in a society that already was heavily influenced by both Native and African culture, along with the racial make-up of the country? Simple: through a process they called *branqueamento* or Whitening.²⁴

Whitening in short is a process in which through the immigration of Europeans and the destruction of Black communities with low reproduction rates through poor or lack of access to education, healthcare, and jobs, Brazil's population would whiten as the "minority groups" of Brazil slowly died out.²⁵ For the intellectuals of Brazil the idea of whitening wasn't something that was new. In fact, the idea has roots in the 1860s, 20 years before abolition.²⁶ However, pushed by the White elite who wanted and favored Europeans over the recently freed Afro-Brazilian population, the Brazilian government began to implement whitening policies, in which they provided incentives to Europeans to migrate over to Brazil. Thus, by bringing many of these Europeans over they both took over parts of the economy through their new jobs, but also influenced Brazilian culture, mainly by bringing their cultures with them. Yet, unlike the past where, to be considered Brazilian one had to understand Portuguese culture and the language, now one simply needed to be White to be considered Brazilian. The goal of this process was

²⁴ Kimberly F. Jones-de Oliveira, "The Politics of Culture or the Culture of Politics: Afro-Brazilian Mobilization, 1920-1968," 104.

²⁵ Kimberly F. Jones-de Oliveira, "The Politics of Culture or the Culture of Politics: Afro-Brazilian Mobilization, 1920-1968," 104.

²⁶ Kimberly F. Jones-de Oliveira, "The Politics of Culture or the Culture of Politics: Afro-Brazilian Mobilization, 1920-1968," 104.

simple: the Brazilian white elite hoped to help dilute (or to an extent, erase) the non-White parts of Brazil by bringing in a larger white population, which would eventually drown out the non-White aspects of Brazil culture and society.²⁷ The process of Whitening wasn't just contained to legislation towards immigration policies, lasting until the early 1930s. In fact, some aspects of Whitening were done through societal means as well but were strengthened by governmental policies or ideas. The life of slaves after abolition in affect was the first steps of social apartheid that occurred within Brazil.

Unlike the United States where abolition led to reconstruction and attempts at trying to integrate African slaves into American society through programs, Brazilian abolition focused solely on ending slavery, without plans to integrate any of the slave population into society. Thus, historian Kimberly F. Jones-de Oliveira perfectly summarized the connection between the process of Whitening through immigration and abolition without integration as leading to "... the marginalization of blacks within Brazilian society."²⁸ As a result, many Afro-Brazilians were left to fend for themselves on the street. Homeless, broke, jobless, and having little to no education, many Blacks were in a vulnerable state, a state which society wanted. Both did not see the non-white elements of the country as factors which made them unique from other countries. Instead, society saw the Afro-Brazilian and the Indigenous populations as a hindering element that held back Brazil from becoming the country it sought to become: a European-esque country. Pushing many Afro-Brazilians to use what historian Carl Degler called the "mulatto escape hatch,"²⁹ Meaning that by identifying as Mixed, an individual could rise out of their racial category to

²⁷ Kimberly F. Jones-de Oliveira, "The Politics of Culture or the Culture of Politics: Afro-Brazilian Mobilization, 1920-1968," 104.

²⁸ Kimberly F. Jones-de Oliveira, "The Politics of Culture or the Culture of Politics: Afro-Brazilian Mobilization, 1920-1968," 105.

²⁹ Carl Degler, *Neither Black nor White*, 219.

achieve a much more improved quality of life. The idea hasn't dissipated with time evident when examining the 1976 Brazilian census.

Whitening as a practice encouraged individuals to try and distance themselves from calling themselves Afro-Brazilian, resulting in many individuals adopting different names for their racial identity. This hasn't dissipated with time; the 1976 Brazil census is evident of this. Instead of providing racial categories for individuals to identify as, the census asked what their skin color was. This resulted in 134 different "colors" that individuals identified as; individuals described themselves not in racial terms but what their skin color *appeared* to be. Individuals described themselves as "Café" (coffee), "Morena-Roxa" (purplish tan), "Quase-Negra" (almost Black), and "Jambo" (like a fruit, the deep-red color of a blood orange) just to name a few.³⁰ While individuals may not have seen themselves exactly as the color they identified as, it reflects more so the idea that an individual would rather identify with "Quase-Negra" or "Morena-Roxa" than simply calling themselves Black. This highlights how Whitening changed the way in which individuals were willing to not just their skin color, but their own racial identity. The Unified Black Movement, as part of their goals, would go on to challenge this notion as part of their movement (which is discussed later in the paper). However, Whitening led to many different responses, the most influential coming from sociologist and historian Gilberto Freyre.

In 1933, Sociologist and Historian Gilberto Freyre published his magnum opus *The Master and The Slave*. The book changed the way race was understood within Brazil, mainly by examining why Brazil had become, as Freyre would later call it, a Racial Democracy.³¹ Brazil

³⁰ Barbara Weinstein, "What Does the 1976 Census Say about How Brazilians Thought about Race?," The Choices Program (Brown University. , March 15, 2018), <https://www.choices.edu/video/what-does-the-1976-census-say-about-how-brazilians-thought-about-race/>, 00:05.

³¹ While Freyre's book *The Masters and The Slave* doesn't outright use the term Racial Democracy. Many of the key points of what makes Brazil a Racial Democracy are highlighted and defined within the book.

through miscegenation of the three main races: Indian, African, and Portuguese led to the creation of the modern Brazilian, with the appearance of a Portuguese, the body strength and resiliency of the African slave, and the ability to survive in the harsh conditions of Brazil's weather and environment from the Indian population.³² This also resulted in a multicultural society which had many different cultural aspects within Brazil that instead of being eliminated (as the goal of Whitening attempted) should be celebrated as being pure Brazilian.³³ Freyre states this is what helped create a mixed race society, which because of its mixing had overcome the same issues of racism and segregation that existed globally. In short, this is what a Racial Democracy is. Freyre's book comes to this conclusion by examining both colonial records and habits of the Portuguese, the environment and how it affected all three of the main races of Brazil, the available food, and how syphilis (a sexually transmitted disease) showcased the mixing of races.³⁴

Many parts of Freyre's book at the time of publication helped spread and fed into the white social memory of Brazil. Evident when talking about slavery, Freyre discussed that slaves were well fed to quell the slave population from rebelling, while also claiming that slaves were better taken care of in Brazil than in the United States.³⁵ This is in complete contradiction to the reality of slavery in Brazil. Especially as discussed earlier, slaves were treated even worse and weren't even taken care of because of they were a commodity, not a human being. Other parts of Freyre's book, however, reflect prejudice ideals. The "perfect" Brazilian, according to Freyre, was one who *looked* White while having the genetic makeup of an African and Indigenous

³² Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters, and The Slave*, 1933, 45.

³³ Ibid,

³⁴ Ibid, 1-80.

³⁵ Ibid,

person within themselves. From Freyre's definition, the perfect Brazilian fit the Eurocentric ideals of Social Darwinism. The idea that the perfect person was someone who was White contradicts even the fundamentals of what being a both a Racial Democracy and mixed society means. His analysis also stated that Africans were strong individuals who were physically stronger, which is why they were good as slaves. Reflecting the idea that Afro-Brazilians were chosen because racially they were physically stronger than the white slave owners. Reinforcing the idea that Afro-Brazilians were chosen for slavery because of their genetic make-up. Yet this didn't matter, for many Brazilians the book was a comforting need that fed nationalism during a turbulent time.

The 1930s was a time of change in Brazil, when *The Masters and the Slave* had been published two governmental changes had already taken place, with more instability to follow which wouldn't end until 1945. The book was what Brazilians wanted to hear: that Brazil was a society in which it had somehow beaten racism and segregation. Yet the reality was it only reinforced social apartheid. The *Master and the Slave* was used as a nationalistic tool which praised Brazil for ending racism within the country, and that those who argued that Brazil wasn't a Racial Democracy was being "anti-Brazilian." What Freyre's book did was strengthen the current social apartheid which existed in Brazil. Attempts at equality were met with resistance, and yet attempts were made towards change, resulting in the two groups who tried to challenge social apartheid: Black Brazil Front (FNB) and The Experimental Black Theater (TEN).

Attempts at Mobilization

Because of Racial Democracy and its ideals of equality, it was an insurmountable task to try and challenge social apartheid. As noted by historian Kimberly F. Jones-Oliveira, that

“Within this environment of ‘racial equality’ it was very difficult for Afro-Brazilians to develop a positive image of their African heritage, let alone begin to mobilize a mass movement protesting racial discrimination.”³⁶ How could a group claim their identity and call for equality when a society told them they were equal, while their actions reflected the main ideals of both Whitening and social apartheid? This is the challenge that faced early attempts at mobilization. Between the 1930s and the 1950s two mobilization efforts took place. First, in 1931 the Brazilian Black Front (FNB) was founded. Secondly, in 1944, The Black Experimental Theater (TEN) was founded. It’s important to understand both movements and their attempts at bringing to light ongoing prejudice and racism towards Afro-Brazilians, because many of their failures were learned from to help ultimately lead the Unified Black Movement to success.

In September 1931, the Brazilian Black Front (FNB) was founded. Making it the first Black conscious movement and the first Black movement in Brazil since abolition in 1888.³⁷ The FNB sought to combat the current economic issues and instability facing the Black community, Whitening had eliminated jobs which had been available to Blacks, which were now being taken by the increasing number of European immigrants.³⁸ In order to fight against this the FNB sought to increase the confidence that Afro-Brazilians had lost in order to feel they could compete against Whitening which had led to the loss of job opportunity, while also standing up to discriminatory practices by invading public spaces.³⁹ With early success, the movement began

³⁶ Kimberly F. Jones-de Oliveira, “The Politics of Culture or the Culture of Politics: Afro-Brazilian Mobilization, 1920-1968,” 106.

³⁷ Kimberly F. Jones-de Oliveira, “The Politics of Culture or the Culture of Politics: Afro-Brazilian Mobilization, 1920-1968,” 109.

³⁸ Kimberly F. Jones-de Oliveira, “The Politics of Culture or the Culture of Politics: Afro-Brazilian Mobilization, 1920-1968,” 109.

³⁹ Kimberly F. Jones-de Oliveira, “The Politics of Culture or the Culture of Politics: Afro-Brazilian Mobilization, 1920-1968,” 109.

to expand by turning itself into a political party, however, this would soon come to haunt the Brazilian Black Front as it would lead to their downfall.

In 1930, Getulio Vargas rose to power through a military overthrow of the previous Brazilian government. Brazil was then thrown into the most chaotic time in their history as multiple government changes and armed rebellion occurred during this time. Cemented when in 1937 a coup transformed Vargas's rule to a military dictatorship. Vargas then used his new power to outlaw all political parties. The resulting fallout of political parties being outlawed in Brazil forced the FNB to change its name to the Black Brazilian Union, the group would only survive a year later, folding due to the increased political pressure, in May of 1938 on the fiftieth anniversary of abolition.⁴⁰ The FNB had been an attempt at an organization, however, poor timing led to the downfall as soon the key points made about the unity of Blacks had been squashed by Vargas's government. Mainly in how it had been able to recruit said Blacks through workers' rights that alleviated some of the issues the FNB had tried to argue.⁴¹ However, it wouldn't take long for another Afro-Brazilian organization to rise and attempt to try and break through to the masses like the Brazilian Black Front attempted to do.

In October of 1944, Abdias do Nascimento founded The Black Experimental Theater (*Teatro Experimental do Negro* or TEN). The group sought to strengthen African identity and culture through the theater group after the exclusion of Blacks from theater all together. Inspired after watching a play in Lima, where the lead (who is supposed to be an African character) was instead played by a White man in Black face, anger by this Nascimento decided to form his own

⁴⁰ Kimberly F. Jones-de Oliveira, "The Politics of Culture or the Culture of Politics: Afro-Brazilian Mobilization, 1920-1968," 110.

⁴¹ Kimberly F. Jones-de Oliveira, "The Politics of Culture or the Culture of Politics: Afro-Brazilian Mobilization, 1920-1968," 111.

theater group in response.⁴² The goal of TEN was simple, to use theater as a form of expression of African culture but also a location in which members of the community could express issues of racism within their daily lives.⁴³

However, by the 1950s TEN began to run into problems of censorship due to their controversial discussions to use Black actors as main roles, instead of Black faced individuals. By censoring many of the plays TEN tried to perform limited the scope of African Heritage it could try and celebrate with Blacks themselves. But what became the death rattle was a change in government in 1964. After attempts at democratization in the 1960s, the Brazilian military overthrew the president, resulting in a new military dictatorship. The new government wouldn't stand for groups who sought to challenge Brazil's government, resulting in organizations to fold and its leaders to flee Brazil for fear of being harmed. TEN faced the same fate, and in 1968 Abdias do Nascimento fled from Brazil resulting in the folding of The Black Experimental Theater. It appears any attempts to try and mobilize would be impossible going forward. The two attempts made seemed to prove to some that Brazil was a place that wouldn't rid itself of the shackles of racial discrimination.

The founding of The Unified Black Movement

Before 1978, a change in how race was being viewed in Brazil began to take place. What changed was the way in which people understood Brazil's Racial Democracy and ongoing social apartheid. Historians and social scientists were more willing to scrutinize racism within Brazil than others had in the past. Influenced by the Civil Rights movement, historian Carl Degler with

⁴² Kimberly F. Jones-de Oliveira, "The Politics of Culture or the Culture of Politics: Afro-Brazilian Mobilization, 1920-1968," 112.

⁴³ Kimberly F. Jones-de Oliveira, "The Politics of Culture or the Culture of Politics: Afro-Brazilian Mobilization, 1920-1968," 113.

his book *Neither Black nor White*, helped open the door for and helped lead this change in thought. Published in 1971, the book challenged racism in Brazil mainly through the experiences of Afro-Brazilians within Brazil.⁴⁴ This is a key part of the change in the way other historians (and social scientists) would write about racism in Brazil to this day. Other historians and social scientists before Carl Degler (such as Gilberto Freyre) examined racism, prejudice, and discrimination from a top-down perspective of Brazil. Examining its history from this lens created a blind spot, as stated earlier, racism and segregation in Brazil takes the primary form of social apartheid. Meaning that society itself implements discrimination and racist ideas upon groups of people instead of through an institution. Since Brazil from the outside looking in appeared to be a racial paradise due to how racial hegemony had been able to occur. But, by examining from the experiences of individual Afro-Brazilians, historians and other social scientists can see past the blind spot and are able to see the reality of racism and social apartheid in Brazil. This being that racism and social apartheid didn't just exist, it thrived. Degler's book changed how historians (and other social scientists) approached race in Brazil. It's important to note however that within Brazil a national conversation had yet to occur, unlike what was happening internationally. Because a military dictatorship existed since 1964, it meant ideas that questioned the government couldn't openly be expressed within public places. However, the conversation about Afro-Brazilians place within Brazilian society continued after the folding of the TEN in 1968. In fact, what helped the conversation continue were cultural and social groups such as those involved with Carnival.

⁴⁴ Carl Degler, *Neither Black nor White*.

The Ilê Aiyê (nicknamed the “Black Carnival”) was founded in 1974 by Antonio Carlos de Santos.⁴⁵ A Carnival block, which celebrated Afro-Brazilian culture within Carnival, and was made up of only Afro-Brazilians excluding non-Blacks from participating as members. An important detail, mainly because many of the elite Carnival blocks had excluded Afro-Brazilians from participation and favored whites. Santos sought to flip traditions of racism by excluding a group which normally hadn’t been excluded before: whites.⁴⁶ Ilê Aiyê was an important Afro-Brazilian group mainly because it acted as a place where the conversation about racism and segregation could continue after the end of TEN. In fact, the director of Ilê Aiyê in 1988, Paulo Bonfim made it clear in the article “Speak Creole” published in *Nêgo* (the Unified Black Movements newspaper) stating “We all know that, in my mind at least, it didn’t start in 1974 with Ile Aiye. Because if that were the case I wouldn’t have been on the Ile in ’74.”⁴⁷ What Bonfim’s quote highlights is that while the Unified Black Movement wasn’t the reason Ile Aiye was able to start, instead it was the reason it brought people together and the Unified Black Movement was the reason both the conversation about race and an organization like Ilê Aiyê was able to continue for as long as it has (it is still active to this day). Ilê Aiyê and other organizations like it helped push momentum throughout the late 1960s into early 1978. But they weren’t the spark which caused the MNU to be founded. That would take place during the summer of 1978. However, before understanding the steps taken it’s important to understand how the Unified Black Movement has been written about after it folded in 2002.

⁴⁵ Michael Aster, “Brazil Struggle with Racism Carnival,” *Lakeland Ledger* (Lakeland, FL), Feb. 6, 2000. https://books.google.com/books?id=Kp8sAAAAIBAJ&pg=PA2&dq=AfroBrazilian+and+racism&article_id=6496,2485991&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj46afd3e72AhVqHzQIHU67CnQQ6AF6BAGJEAI#v=onepage&q&f=false.

⁴⁶ Michael Aster, “Brazil Struggle with Racism Carnival,” *Lakeland Ledger* (Lakeland, FL), Feb. 6, 2000. https://books.google.com/books?id=Kp8sAAAAIBAJ&pg=PA2&dq=Afro-Brazilian+and+racism&article_id=6496,2485991&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj46afd3e72AhVqHzQIHU67CnQQ6AF6BAGJEAI#v=onepage&q&f=false.

⁴⁷ Paulo Bonfim, “Speak Creole,” *Nêgo* (Bahia, Brazil), April 1988.

When researching the Unified Black Movement, very little historical analysis (in English) exists focusing on the Unified Black Movement, most social scientists and historians included the group but nothing existed just examining the movement. In fact, from hours of looking for people who have written about the MNU one name came up: David Covin. The political scientist has been the only individual who has written an in-depth analysis about the Unified Black Movement (that's been published in English) in his book *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil, 1978-2002*. Published in 2006, David Covin explains in his book that the Unified Black Movement had held itself to a standard of perfection (an impossible task), because of this the organization had been seen as a failure by contemporary social scientists examining Black rights movements in Brazil. However, unlike said contemporary social scientists, David Covin argues that what the MNU had accomplished, especially with the pressures it faced, was an incredible task that should be celebrated not deemed a failure as others had argued.⁴⁸ I would expand upon his initial analysis by arguing that there had been success, just not the kind which can be easily measured. When the book was written in 2006, it had only been four years after the group had folded. Covin couldn't fully see the affects that the MNU had upon Brazilian society. Even twenty years after the folding of the MNU, I argue that were just now seeing what the MNU had accomplished. The Unified Black Movement didn't end racism or social apartheid in Brazil, but it now made race a part of the national conversation, a conversation which prior to the MNU had only happened amongst small groups or individuals. Building off David Covin's argument, the MNU had succeed, but not in a traditional sense of ending practices, the Unified Black Movement had unlocked and opened the door for a national conversation about Afro-Brazilians to occur (including but not limited to Black consciousness, mobilization, and political activity).

⁴⁸ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil, 1978-2002*, 187-188.

A conversation which hadn't been seen in Brazil before or since by a Black group within Brazil itself. To understand how the Unified Black Movement got to this point it's important to examine the foundational years of the MNU between May of 1978 to December of 1979.

In May of 1978, Robson Silveira da Luz had been arrested for allegedly stealing fruit from a fruit stand, the Sao Paulo police held him and pushed for a confession from Robson (this included torture methods) resulting in his death. This act pushed the Black community to act, as they became outraged that a man who was arrested for allegedly committing a crime had been given a death sentence. In fact, anger from his death didn't dissipate with time, which is evident from an opinion piece published ten years after his death and the founding of the MNU in June of 1978. The opinion piece titled "MNU- 10 Years Later!" describes that Robson Silveira da Luz had been "arrested and savagely tortured to death in a Sao Paulo police station."⁴⁹ The words "savagely tortured to death" reflect how many within the Afro-Brazilian community interpreted the event, the savage killing of a Black man whose life had been taken by a police force who had been used to wielding such power over Afro-Brazilians. Then in June, four Afro-Brazilian boys had been kicked off a volleyball team by the owner of the gymnasium. Because the owner of the gym feared their inclusion on the volleyball team would inspire not just other Black volleyball players to join but encourage other Blacks to join the gym as well, thus he felt kicking them off was the only option.⁵⁰ Both events angered many Afro-Brazilians, those within already pre-existing groups knew the time was right for action to take place.

The two events ignited a call for mobilization, which finally occurred in June as members from different Black movement groups got together to organize a plan of action, resulting in the

⁴⁹ "MNU – 10 Years Later!" *Nego*, no. 14, 1988, 2.

⁵⁰ Michael Astor, "Freedom Movement launches in Brazil." *Baltimore Afro-American News*, October 3, 1978, 5.

founding of the United Movement Against Racial Discrimination (MUCDR in Portuguese) on June 18th of 1978. A decision was made during the meeting that a demonstration would take place in two weeks, quickly an effort was made and members organized on July 7th, 1978 at the steps of the Municipal Theater in Sao Paulo.⁵¹ The demonstration itself attracted 2,000-3000 Afro-Brazilians.⁵² The protest itself was an important monument for many Afro-Brazilians, mainly because it validated the oppressed feelings of racism and discrimination which had been taboo to discuss because of Brazil's ideals of Racial Democracy, making it clear that Brazil was a country that was incapable of having racism or prejudice. Evident by founding member Lelia Gonzalez, stating "The Letter indeed was a revelation. 'We are in the streets today in a campaign of denunciation. A campaign against racial discrimination, against police oppression, against unemployment, underemployment, and marginalization. We are in the streets to denounce the devastating conditions in the Black community.'"⁵³ For many, if the protest had just taken place and no further actions by the MUCDR had been taken, it would have been deemed a success. It was the first time since abolition that such a large Afro-Brazilian group had mobilized to protest for Black civil rights. However, MUCDR sought to seize the energy that had come from the event and focus it on making real change.

The first ever meeting took place on July 23rd, during the meeting, an outline of the organization and structure of MUCDR was created. However, it quickly became apparent the MUCDR would be too liberal for some of the more conservative groups, many groups within the organization sought more extreme changes than the conservative groups were willing to tackle. The liberal groups within the MUCDR wanted to expand Black women's and gay rights,

⁵¹ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil, 1978-2002*, 62-63.

⁵² Brazilian officials claim 2000, while those who organized the protest say the number was 3,000.

⁵³ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil, 1978-2002*, 64.

dismantling of the current economic system which favored practices of whitening, workers' rights, increasing understanding of Black consciousness (understanding of Black history, identity, culture, etc.), and governmental changes which would help increase both participation, protection, and involvement of Black politicians within the government itself. The Liberal groups within MUCDR didn't want to just challenge Racial Democracy, but also whitening and Social Apartheid. Because of this, they lost support from many conservative groups who left to continue what they had previously done. Unfazed, MUCDR continued its task and agreed to continue the conversation on September 9th for a two-day meeting. Before the meeting had ended a change had been decided after the word Negro was proposed by the Rio members to be added to the MUCDR.⁵⁴ The group was no longer the United Movement Against Racial Discrimination, instead the members changed the name to the United Black Movement Against Racial Discrimination (MNUCDR).⁵⁵ After the agreed upon change, the group once again dispersed and prepared to meet again on September 9th.

The second meeting occurred on September 9th and went until the 11th. During the meeting the founding documents were revised, resulting in heated debate amongst members. The debate was so heated that entire groups walked out in protest, however, they returned the following day and were able to create the action program and the approval letters.⁵⁶ One of the important things about the meeting was the decision to have the MNUCDR try to seek a position on the national election. If this didn't succeed then the group sought to find a party which would then help push their ideas instead.⁵⁷ Even with the set back of members walking out and the

⁵⁴ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil, 1978-2002*, 65.

⁵⁵ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil, 1978-2002*, 65.

⁵⁶ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil, 1978-2002*, 65.

⁵⁷ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil, 1978-2002*, 65.

heated debates occurring, the MNUCDR still pushed forward and agreed to a third meeting to take place before the end of the year. November 4th.

Members dispersed again both to recruit new members and try to come up with what issue the MNUCDR would tackle first. However, the group was under heavy political pressure from the government. The Brazilian government saw the MNUCDR as “subversive” due to its position against Racial Democracy. Pressure from the government was quickly put upon the movement, as Paulo Bonfim (the director of *Ile Ayiê* in 1988) recalled “At the time we started to make the Black group [MNUCDR], we were very afraid. A lot of fear because it was at a time that we were under political pressure. Much greater police pressure than we suffer now... When it was time to leave, not everyone could leave at once.”⁵⁸ The Brazilian government saw the MNUCDR as a subversive group which sought to undermine the government. The group was being tested early on, but the real test and attempt at shutting the MNUCDR down would come about during the third assembly.

On November 4th, 1978, the MNUCDR was set to meet at the headquarters of the Bahia Public Employee Association. Located in Salvador (the capital of Bahia and where the office was located), preparations had been made through local groups for the third assembly to take place. However, when the MNUCDR arrived, the president of the meeting association barred the MNUCDR from being able to organize. Due to a violation of the Afonso Arinos Law, because the organization was “discriminatory”. The reality was the law as stated earlier was a legal excuse to break up the meeting, as evidenced by the national police who mobilized to prevent the meeting. Frantically, leaders of the MNUCDR called out to other places to see if they could host the members. An alternative location was found and the members as one group moved to the

⁵⁸ Paulo Bonfim, “Speak Creole,” *Nêgo*, April 1988, 7.

new location (the Villa Velha theater, which had been more open to presenting on racial themes and ideas based upon Afro-Brazilians). However, pressure from the police forced the public theater to declare that the group had violated the Afonso Arinos Law. The group frantically put out another call to find a place that would host the meeting. All the while police presence grew both outside the theater and in the neighborhood surrounding the theater. Quickly the MNUCDR was able to find an alternative location where the Afonso Arinos Law couldn't be used due to the location being private: the German-Brazil Cultural Institute. The Group walked several tense blocks as a group to the new location, where they were able to get settled, the third assembly could now start.⁵⁹ The chaos of the event reflected the government's willingness to prevent mobilization to occur. As stated earlier in the paper Brazil was (and still is) a country where most of the population is Afro-Brazilian, thus mobilization against a white government was a major threat to the stability of the military dictatorship. Using police force as they had was an attempt to try and scare the group into having a violent reaction. However, MNUCDR was made up of members who already had experience in mobilization (both as a Black movement and in general with other groups), thus they were able to keep their heads and start the needed third assembly. The event exemplifies how important social apartheid was not just to society, but the government as well. Maintaining the status quo allowed for the military dictatorship to remain in power.

The third assembly of MNUCDR accomplished three important tasks, which included defining details of the action program, deciding that September would be when they met again to prepare for the Congress of Black cultures in the Americas, and adopting the resolution to make November 20th Black consciousness day (the day was chosen because that's when Zumbi had committed suicide).⁶⁰ Changing Black consciousness day was incredibly important, as it was one

⁵⁹ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil*, 76.

⁶⁰ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil*, 76.

of the main drivers of change the MNUCDR sought to implement. The date change was due to many Afro-Brazilians seeing abolition not as a day in which Slavery had been ended, instead they saw the day as a transformation of Afro-Brazilians from being owned to being dominated by Whites. Emancipation hadn't solved the anything for Afro-Brazilians, merely, it evolved into many of the current issues that Afro-Brazilians faced.⁶¹ Abolition was a needed thing to happen for Afro-Brazilians, however, it also marked a change where Afro-Brazilians may not have been owned, they were still the bottom of the social ladder, this is elaborated upon later in the paper. While the MNUCDR meeting in September of 1979 while important for the organization, it wasn't as important as the changes that took place in December of 1979.

The First National Congress of the MNUCDR took place in December 1979 with a focus to discuss efforts towards mobilization campaigns against police brutality and against prejudiced job hiring practices. Also, on the agenda was women's rights including but not limited to, the elimination of whitening through marriage and child baring amongst Afro-Brazilians not Whites, education, birth control, and how these issues related to the MNUCDR.⁶² But the biggest point would be brought up in relation to the action program, more specifically, the name MNUCDR. Many members of the MNUCDR felt that CDR (Portuguese translation of "against racial discrimination") portion of MNUCDR was being redundant.⁶³ Therefore a name change was agreed upon, MNUCDR was trimmed down to MNU. The Unified Black Movement was officially born.

To better understand the MNU and what it had achieved, it's important to examine the three areas in which they had achieved success. Increasing Black Consciousness, mobilization

⁶¹ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil*, 29, 77.

⁶² David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil*, 77.

⁶³ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil*, 78.

efforts, and political activity (both within congress and as citizens). To better understand this, it's important to examine the MNU through the members themselves, published materials such as posters and newspaper articles in *Nêgo* (in 1989 it was renamed to *MNU Journal*), and the political changes that took place.

Black Consciousness and The Unified Black Movement.

Before understanding how the Unified Black Movement expanded Black Consciousness in Brazil, it's important to understand how Black Consciousness along with both mobilization and political activities will be examined in the rest of the paper. Traditionally one could examine the three issues as they occurred on a timeline. However, the reality is that it would seem as though not much change had occurred. In fact, a common complaint when examining the MNU (and other Afro-Brazilian mobilization groups of the late 20th century) is that not much changed for Afro-Brazilians in Brazil. Sweeping changes didn't occur throughout Brazil like the MNU had sought out to do, however, I agree with David Covin's assessment of the Unified Black Movement "It is times that as critics, as scholars, as human beings, we applied another standard. By following the MNU, by recognizing and assessing what its members accomplished, and under what circumstances, we may find our way to it."⁶⁴ Covin in the quote expresses how as humans we have this ability to set the bar so high, we tend to see social groups as failures for not achieving their goals. The MNU wanted to eliminate every and all forms of racism, prejudice, and social apartheid towards Afro-Brazilians, along with ending police violence, employment differences, and educational gaps within Brazil as a whole. Under this lens, the MNU was a complete and utter failure. However, the reality is even trying to open the national conversation

⁶⁴ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil*, 196.

about racism, prejudice, and social apartheid was already a monumental ordeal for the MNU to overcome. The Unified Black Movement had success, just not on the scale it had wanted to achieve. But to examine the achievements it did make it's important to examine them as themes, not as actual dates on a timeline. Doing so will allow for a greater picture to form of how much success really had occurred. David Covin partially takes this approach in his book *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil, 1978-2002*. However, Covin approaches the topic as a political scientist. His approach generally focuses more so on the structure of the group and how this affected the movement. While this works for the book, it doesn't allow for a deeper analysis of what the Unified Black Movement had achieved and how it had achieved said goals. Since it focuses on mainly on how the movement worked, not what it had achieved. All of which goes back to the fact that the Unified Black Movement Increased Black Consciousness for all of Brazil, more than any other group had previously, and still affects Brazil to this day.

What is Black Consciousness, and how does it relate to the Unified Black Movement?

Black Consciousness was an ideology created in 1969 by South African activist Steve Biko.⁶⁵ As an ideology Black Consciousness sought to improve the Black communities through greater self-worth than they previously had, which would lead to more confidence and eventual action as the ideology would bring about "consciousness" to many Blacks. Creating the motivation for action against racism and segregation to occur.⁶⁶ The general concept of Black Consciousness had been around in Brazil as the reader might recall from the FNB in the 1930s. However, unlike the

⁶⁵ Leslie Anne Hadfield, "Steve Biko and The Black Consciousness Movement," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia* (February 27, 2017), <https://oxfordre.com/africanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277734-e-83#notes>.

⁶⁶ Leslie Anne Hadfield, "Steve Biko and The Black Consciousness Movement," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia* (February 27, 2017), <https://oxfordre.com/africanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277734-e-83#notes>.

1930s, Black Consciousness was more extreme (in comparison) to what had been in Brazil before. The FNB sought to allow for greater action within the current system of how Brazil was operating under social apartheid. They didn't seek to flip the entire system, instead they simply thought a more positive racial identity will lead to Afro-Brazilians to get more jobs. Of course, in the system of social apartheid it's already rigged that Afro-Brazilians aren't equal, thus, the Unified Black Movement used Black Consciousness to completely change the system by outraging through this consciousness moment Afro-Brazilians into action. Unlike South Africa, Brazil didn't have the same institutional segregation which had been going on to help fuel the movement. Instead, Black Consciousness itself sought to also educate the public about both Afro-Brazilian history and culture. This is first evident in a documentary directed by Raquel Gerber in 1989 titled *Ori*. The film mainly explores Afro-Brazilian History and culture, along with how social apartheid and racism still affected many Afro-Brazilians. Supporting these ideas, the film uses footage from meetings of MNU members to highlight such practices. Using *Ori*, a better sense of Black Consciousness can be formed as a basis to understand why it was needed in the first place for Afro-Brazilians.

The film *Ori*, at almost the eight-minute mark, a forum is occurring about Afro-Brazilians and the struggles they face.⁶⁷ The forum itself opens an opportunity to see into and understand how Black Conscious was used by the Unified Black Movement to bring awareness about the ongoing issues of racism and segregation. The meeting itself discusses culture and how Afro-Brazilian culture is as much Brazilian as the European is being Brazilian as well, while also acknowledging that now is the time for the conversation to take place due to other countries having the same conversation about whether Black culture is a part of a countries overall

⁶⁷ *Ori*, Raquel Gerber, (2012), 7:58. <https://www.cultureunplugged.com/documentary/watch-online/play/54524/--r-->.

culture.⁶⁸ As the forum went along, a shift occurs in the conversation which focuses more on Black Consciousness and the confidence issue that Afro-Brazilians face due to the negative association. Highlighted by Marcelo Orlando Ribeiro, stating that “Black people must tell Black people. Black people must tell White people, the traditional families that teach their children that Black people are [not] only drivers, car washers, and cooks. High society must stop thinking that Black people are only good at Carnival, football, drinking, and fighting.”⁶⁹ Ribeiro’s quote reflects Black Consciousness at its core, that Afro-Brazilians are more than just more than just the lowest part of Brazilian society. Instead, they had the ability to achieve more than what society had dictated for them as the MNU later would make clear in their publications. Even these lower jobs were a step up for many from the traditional jobs of Afro-Brazilians, expressing that Afro-Brazilians were more than good at physical activities, they could do more and be greater than the basic benchmark that had been set by the White’s (and even Blacks of Brazil). Supported by an emphatic short speech given by Eduardo de Oliveira e Oliveira, a member of both the Black and the gay rights movement occurring in Brazil, Oliveira emphatically states:

We have a right to this institution since it is within the university, the university should educate more Black people, so that, like Beatriz [Nascimento], who has been to university, they can go anywhere and teach people. Without qualifications, I wouldn’t be able to do this. I’d just be a Black man. Today after 12 years of work, they ask me in because Mr. Oliveira has a degree. I won’t put on airs or turn White, but I use it to assert myself and help others do the same.⁷⁰

Oliveira’s quote reflected an attitude within the Unified Black Movement, this idea of Afro-Brazilians helping other Afro-Brazilians to achieve Black Consciousness through education. The

⁶⁸ *Ori*, Raquel Gerber, (2012), 7:58 to 9:23. <https://www.cultureunplugged.com/documentary/watch-online/play/54524/--r-->.

⁶⁹ *Ori*, Raquel Gerber, (2012), 9:32 to 10:02. <https://www.cultureunplugged.com/documentary/watch-online/play/54524/--r-->

⁷⁰ *Ori*, Raquel Gerber, (2012), 10:02 to 10:43. <https://www.cultureunplugged.com/documentary/watch-online/play/54524/--r-->

idea of education, especially from Afro-Brazilians, was a key point of both the Unified Black Movement and Black Consciousness. As many within the movement understood that the White narrative of their history, psychology, and other aspects of their lives had been influenced heavily by whitening and social apartheid. Thus, the MNU understood that Black Consciousness was as an important tool in educating Afro-Brazilians in making the needed change to achieve equality that previously hadn't been used before.

Achieving Black Consciousness was what the MNU saw as part of the battle against social apartheid and racism in Brazil. The Unified Black Movement and its members realized the importance this confidence gained from Black Consciousness played, especially when society itself held Afro-Brazilians in such a low light. Yet how did members recruit Afro-Brazilians to the cause if they didn't identify as Black? Especially for those individuals who Whitened themselves using the term mixed. Using Black Consciousness, the group changed the way in Black identity could be used within Brazil. Specifically, in how individuals could identify themselves. As stated earlier, the term mixed applied to individuals who had other genetics that allowed them to pass as mixed. For example, someone could have curly hair, but their skin was lighter in complexion. Therefore, someone could identify as mixed with curly hair. Meaning they address themselves as having African genetics, but that they were still genetically a majority White. It didn't matter if the individual took a DNA test and came back as 90% Black, if they could "pass" as partially White, they could identify as mixed. Yet the MNU flipped this thinking on its head, mainly by applying the same logic but in reverse. In other words, someone was Black if their appearance had a key identifier as being Black.⁷¹ Using our example, the individual whose hair was curly due to their African genetics, could call themselves as Black instead. By

⁷¹ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil, 1978-2002*, 78-79.

having this identification, the MNU got around the limiting nature that previous organizations had before. As David Covin summarized the general message being: “We are not the same skin color, we do not have the same facial features, we do not have the same hair color or texture. But if you look at us, you can tell we all had ancestors from Africa who were enslaved in this country.”⁷² Therefore if you had identifiable features which could be African in nature (skin color, hair color or texture, and facial features) then you were Afro-Brazilian, this was essential for the Unified Black Movement. Unlike Brazilian society at the time, the MNU celebrated African features, working with the ideology of Black Consciousness that being Black wasn’t a curse. Instead, it was an ideology which could unite different groups of Afro-Brazilians for the common issue of Black equality within Brazil. The ideas of Black Consciousness didn’t dissipate with time either, even during the ten-year anniversary in 1988, Black Consciousness still permeated in the air of the Unified Black Movement evident by their published newspaper *Nêgo*.

The newspaper itself had roots before the Unified Black Movement was founded. In 1976, the group met in Salvador with one of the future leaders of the MNU Leila González. *Nêgo* continued to meet until 1978, during which it morphed into the Salvador branch of the MNU. By 1981 the namesake was soon given for the published newspaper of the Unified Black Movement.⁷³ The newspaper itself was published irregularly but by 1983 going forward *Nêgo* was able to publish regularly, and by 1987, the newspaper became the official newspaper of the MNU.⁷⁴ By 1989, the name of *Nêgo* was changed to the *MNU Journal*, mainly to reflect a more national newspaper name than the original which was based in Bahia. However, by the 1990s, the newspaper was feeling the economic shocks of hyper-inflation which affected Brazil.

⁷² David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil, 1978-2002*, 79.

⁷³ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil, 1978-2002*, 88.

⁷⁴ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil, 1978-2002*, 88.

Because the newspapers members were made up of a population who economically were at the bottom of the scale. The newspaper itself went through periods of inconsistency due to the financial constraints hurting the country.⁷⁵ Even so, *Nêgo* was important for the movement, it was one of the few local (and only national) newspaper which reflected only Black voices. An important detail because all the national newspapers in Brazil primarily came from White voices, because of this, *Nêgo* became a place in which Afro-Brazilians could express themselves.⁷⁶ An important detail of *Nêgo*, because it allowed the MNU to express its own ideas while also involving a community often ignored both within academic journals and even the national newspapers of Brazil. To better understand the impact *Nêgo* had on Black Consciousness, examining one of the newspapers will help provide that answer, specifically from *Nêgo* no. 14 published in 1988.

1988 was an important year for Brazil, that year marked the centennial of the abolition of slavery in 1888. Many within Brazil celebrated the ending of slavery on March 13th (the day in which abolition was signed). However, for the Unified Black Movement, 1988 was the ten-year anniversary of when the organization was founded in 1978, the group stood in opposition to the celebration of abolition. Due in part to the social memory of abolition within Brazil. Many White and some mixed Brazilians celebrated but for different reasons, they were happy slavery had been ended. However, in the eyes of Whites (and in some mixed individuals) abolition wasn't the ending of and celebration of those who fought against slavery, abolition was a day in which Afro-Brazilians had been given their freedom as a gift. Completely downplaying the actions taken to end slavery by Afro-Brazilians, by saying their freedom had been given as a gift, the White slave owners (and Brazil's social memory of abolition) had made it clear that it was their

⁷⁵ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil, 1978-2002*, 89.

⁷⁶ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil, 1978-2002*, 88.

kindness that they had been given their freedom. In essence, African slaves hadn't earned their freedom, it had been given as a gift by their owners. This is the social memory of abolition, a memory in which the MNU sought to challenge using their newspaper.



(Figure 1)⁷⁷

⁷⁷ "A Long History," *Nêgo*, no. 14, April, 1988, 8.

Nêgo no. 14, published in April of 1988, was used to address the social memory of slavery and of abolition through the political comic titled “A Long History.” The comic (Figure 1) shows an Afro-Brazilian listening to a lecture being given by professors about slaves and the conditions they were under. However, the lecture ‘s reflects the social memory of slavery in Brazil, made even clear when the character responds to the comment that slavery was a favor to Blacks, by saying “In Brazil, Black slaves had better treatment than in other colonies because they enjoyed better conditions.”⁷⁸ In response to this comment, the Afro-Brazilian decides that he is done hearing this and plans to meet with a friend of his. The friend (representative of the MNU), the Afro-Brazilian (named Aboilio) then asks the man (whose name in the comic is Coloroco) if he heard the claim that Africans enjoyed being enslaved outraging him in the process. Coloroco, then calms his friend by saying he is experiencing is Black Consciousness which he says is a moment when “We realize that there are two versions of history. The one of Whites and oppressors who today celebrate abolition as given to the Blacks. And the other which is the history of a people who were humiliated and fought against the subhuman conditions that were imposed upon them.”⁷⁹ After saying this, Abilio asks Coloroco if the history of Blacks is passive. Coloroco then tells the history of different forms of resistance, those being suicide, running away and forming Quilombos (runaway slave communities), and armed revolts taken against the White slave owners. The stories Coloroco summarizes showcases how African slaves weren’t content with their conditions as abolition has been portrayed by the “White dominant class.”⁸⁰ Abilio asks about Black attempts at mobilization since abolition, with Coloroco saying there have been two: in the 1920s with Black mobilization as a whole and in 1978 with the

⁷⁸ “A Long History,” *Nêgo*, no. 14, April, 1988, 8.

⁷⁹ “A Long History,” *Nêgo*, no. 14, April, 1988, 8.

⁸⁰ “A Long History,” *Nêgo*, no. 14, April, 1988, 8.

MNU.⁸¹ The story which Coloroco is an important one, especially since this idea of abolition being a day in which White (and some mixed individuals) Brazilians celebrate it as a day in which the enslaved Africans were given freedom. But to fully understand what the comic is showcasing more than the story it tells on the surface, there needs to be an understanding of comics as a medium, which allows for greater analysis of “A Long History.”

“A Long History” was published in 1988, a year before Brazil’s military dictatorship folded and became a democratic country. Before this change, from 1964 until 1989, Brazil was under a military dictatorship in which freedom of speech became heavily restricted. So how did members of movements get around this while being able to keep their lives and still express their ideas? Simple, by using comics as a medium to express ideas without fear of retaliation from the government. Comics allowed said political thought to be expressed under a pseudonym that allowed the artist (and at times writer) to allow anonymity and still express their ideas.⁸² Analyzing comics is ever important during this time in Brazilian history to understand what the Unified Black Movement had wanted to achieve. In context of the it being an article in *Nêgo* no. 14, it acts as a break that transitions the paper into a discussion about the social memory of abolition and slavery in Brazil. After the comic, the articles in *Nêgo* no. 14 explored the “need to demystify the idea of a ‘benevolent Brazilian slavery,’”⁸³ the political comic highlights two things: that Black Conscious is the realization of racial social memory and why educating Brazilians the reality of both slavery and abolition will demystify the event and open their eyes to the reality that Afro-Brazilians faced in 1988. The medium of a comic also allows for the

⁸¹ “A Long History,” *Nêgo*, no. 14, April, 1988, 8.

⁸² Teresa Cristina Schneider Marques, “The opposition to the Brazilian dictatorship abroad through cartoons and caricatures (1964-1979),” *Historia Unisinos* 19, no. 2, (September-December 2015), 360. <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/5798/579866787009.pdf>.

⁸³ “Enough Racism,” *Nêgo*, no. 14, April, 1988, 9.

Unified Black Movement to connect with its audience. Starting in box 5 (the one showing the village) and ending in box 8 (with Coloroco looking ahead) in figure 1, the story transitions to an oral telling of the history of different forms of resistance that African slaves took. The comic presents itself as an oral history not just to the character Abilio, but to the audience as well. Evident when in panel 8, Coloroco is looking directly at the audience. Oral history (an African tradition) is no longer being told simply to a character, but to the audience directly, in a way which opens the conversation about Black Consciousness to the audience (this audience being both returning and new members). The comic is no longer discussing the issue of “benevolent Brazilian slavery” and need of Black Consciousness through the understanding of history between the two characters, but instead is now including the audience in said discussion. As a medium, the political comic allows Unified Black Movement members to engage in this discussion Black Consciousness, while also acting as a transitional piece meant to prepare members for the next four pages dedicated to the discussion of slavery, abolition, and the need to demystify it. Additionally, the comic even deals with Marxist attitudes when Coloroco responds to Abilio’s question of whether the history of Blacks is so passive (as the professors tell it in the comic), Coloroco says, “This is the history of the state of the bourgeoisie. It was never true and evidence of this is registered by the runaway slaves who formed various Quilombos.”⁸⁴ His quote reflects an ability of the Unified Black Movement which created the space needed for different unique voices to occur, which leads into the next part of the Unified Black Movement.

Mobilization efforts of the Unified Black Movement.

⁸⁴ “A Long History,” *Nego*, no. 14, 1988, 8.

Mobilization was an important aspect of the Unified Black Movement, evident when examining *Nêgo* no. 14 in the section titled “It happened.” Instances of mobilization are recorded, such as a story in which the Unified Black Women’s Group (an offshoot of the MNU) had mobilized a march after the debate titled “the situation of Black Women in Society.”⁸⁵ Such story indicates that through Black Consciousness, individuals who previously hadn’t had the space for mobilization now had the needed space to organize and execute a march when needed. Before further examining mobilization that the Unified Black Movement achieved, it’s important to note that for this paper mobilization includes both marches and events put on by the Unified Black Movement. However, it cannot be understated the role that Black Consciousness played in mobilization. Understanding how Black Consciousness helps connect individuals is key to understanding how mobilization spaces were created.

As stated earlier, the most influential aspect of the Unified Black Movement, due in part to how it brought individuals together who often might not have worked together. Black Consciousness acted as a connecting tissue for mobilization, as different groups understood they all shared a common aspect that affected their identity: being Black. Highlighting both marches and events showcases how the Unified Black Movement opened the door for the conversation of racism, prejudice, and segregation to occur. Understanding this it’s important to examine the most successful mobilization effort the Unified Black Movement participated in, the march for Black Consciousness Day.

As stated earlier, during the third assembly, it had been agreed that a campaign needed to be launched which sought to create November 20th as Black Consciousness Day. An important step had been taken by the Unified Black Movement to demand this change. The Unified Black

⁸⁵ “It Happened,” *Nêgo*, no. 14, 1988, 5.

Movement wasn't just challenging the traditional narrative of slavery and abolition in Brazil, but was also taking control of their own narrative, something that Afro-Brazilians hadn't been able to accomplish. Further evident when examining the article titled "Enough Racism," published in 1988 (the centennial of abolition) the MNU elaborates on why the celebration of abolition is needed for whites (called the ruling class in the paper) and what it represents for Black people in Brazil. Saying:

The 'centennial of abolition' is important for the ruling classes because it was from 1888 onwards that the capitalist system asserted itself as predominant in the country's economics. For the black, the situation is little different from that of 100 years ago. We are still the mainstay of the system: we provide cheap labor, we do jobs considered the most 'dirty,' we have the lowest salaries, we live on the outskirts of cities, our children hardly have the opportunity to attend schools and roam the streets with the denomination of "abandoned minors," we constitute one of the segments with the least political representation. In short, we continue to build a society to whose benefits we are not entitled.⁸⁶

The quote argues that after abolition, capitalism simply evolved, an important aspect for whites in Brazil, and for Blacks representative of how things hadn't changed. In relation to the centennial of abolition, this showcased how even 100 years later things hadn't changed for Afro-Brazilians. Thus, taking control and changing days wasn't just a minor symbolic victory for Afro-Brazilians, instead it would be the first time in which Black people in Brazil were no longer the bottom of social hierarchy. It would be a day in which it celebrated who they were, however, the event hadn't become a national event that the Unified Black Movement wanted, triggering mobilization efforts. The feelings felt by the Unified Black Movement towards May 13th (day abolition occurred), resulted in a counter protest that began in 1979, then on November 20th (the day Zumbi died) a march would occur calling for the day to be nationally recognized as Black Consciousness Day.

⁸⁶ "Enough Racism," *Nego*, no. 14, (Bahia: Brazil, 1988), 11.

A significant part of mobilization is consistency; a lack of consistent mobilization could lead to a movement collapsing, especially under a government which sought to eliminate free speech. The Unified Black Movement not only was consistent, one of the lasting legacies that often is ignored of the MNU is the marches that take place yearly on November 20th. Such marches didn't end when the MNU folded in the early 2000s, instead they continued, evident by AP News footage of such marches occurring in 2021.⁸⁷ While the Unified Black Movement didn't invent the mobilization efforts to make this change (it had started in Pernambuco where Palmares was located),⁸⁸ they incorporated it as part of the national mobilization effort. Such incorporation was a significant part of the Unified Black Movement, due in part to how the group operated as both an organization and a movement. I would argue this fluidity of being both an organization and movement. Understanding this allows for a better understanding of how such space was created for mobilization to occur.

As an organization the Unified Black Movement was unique in how it operated as both a movement and an organization. Traditionally there are two types of civil rights groups: a singular organization or a movement. Said singular organization was made up of members who believe in only one single way in which ideas can be executed, often with a singular leader in charge of the group. An example of this would be the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) who was led by Martin Luther King Jr. While a movement is based upon a basic principle but disconnected with different organizations involved but no command leadership, mainly their decentralized. Think Black Lives Matter who operate without a single leader or leadership often acting on their own, in a decentralized way. The Unified Black Movement was unique in that it had both qualities. It had centralized leaders,

⁸⁷ "Brazil Black Awareness," *Nego*, no. 14, (Bahia: Brazil, 1988), 3.

⁸⁸ "History," *Nego*, no. 14, 1988, 3.

but there was fluidity which allowed said leaders to leave the MNU without it falling apart. Groups within the Unified Black Movement could act upon their own, but still worked together for larger events (such as November 20th). Because of this, it created space in which mobilization was encouraged both on a larger national scale and on a smaller local scale in Brazil. An important aspect of the Unified Black Movement because without its groups could mobilize on their own, but weren't able to achieve the same national attention, this is how the Unified Black Movement was able to bring the needed space for mobilization. Such mobilization efforts led to another positive effect, it allowed for individuals to express themselves. Leading to the next important task the Unified Black Movement sought, political activity.

Political Activity and The Unified Black Movement.

Before the Unified Black Movement, very few Afro-Brazilians had access to political representation and the expression that came with it. In fact, the supposed "Racial Democracy" wasn't so racially representative in politics. It's important to note that while Black politicians have been a part of the Brazilian government before the Unified Black Movement, they weren't there to represent Afro-Brazilians, they were in reality reinforcing the norm which was whites using their political power to rule over Afro-Brazilians.⁸⁹ In fact before 1983, only two Black politicians had been in office with the goals of furthering Afro-Brazilian rights, even then by 1983 they were long out of office.⁹⁰ However with the rise of Black mobilization groups in the 1970s (especially the Unified Black Movement) an increase in Black politicians can be examined as well, this is no coincidence. The MNU with the

⁸⁹ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil: 1978-2002*, 125.

⁹⁰ Ollie Johnson III, "Racial Representation and Brazilian Politics: Black Members of the National Congress, 1983-1999," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 40, no. 4, (Winter 1998): 102.

space created through mobilization and Black Consciousness created a platform for individuals to launch themselves into government, what also helped is that by 1985 Brazil was in a stage of democratization. However, this only played a small role in opening political involvement of Afro-Brazilians, in fact many involved with the Unified Black Movement became a part of government. Such as Abdias do Nascimento (who became the first Black deputy and senator who waged a consistent campaign for Afro-Brazilian rights within the National Congress), Benadita de Silva (first Black woman to serve as a federal deputy), Luiz Alberto, Paulo Paim, and Celso Pitta (becoming the first Black Mayor of Sao Paulo, one of the most populated cities in the world).⁹¹ These political leaders had their start within the Unified Black Movement, and the space it gave for Afro-Brazilians to express themselves was the needed space for them to have influence within the government itself. A question that needs to be asked is, how did their involvement in the Unified Black Movement lead to greater political activity for the rest of the population? To understand this, it's important to see what they had campaigned and gotten signed into law, starting first by examining additions made to the 1988 constitution.

The process of Brazilian democratization could arguably be traced to 1982, in which the military government finally allowed for multiple parties for the first time since 1964 and opened the door for change to occur.⁹² In 1983, led by Abdias do Nascimento, five Afro-Brazilians were elected congress under the recently created *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers Party or PT for short) the party itself helped elect most Afro-Brazilians into

⁹¹ Ollie Johnson III, "Racial Representation and Brazilian Politics: Black Members of the National Congress, 1983-1999," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 40, no. 4, (Winter 1998): 97.

⁹² Ollie Johnson III, "Racial Representation and Brazilian Politics: Black Members of the National Congress, 1983-1999," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 40, no. 4, (Winter 1998): 108.

congress.⁹³ With their newly elected positions, the elected Afro-Brazilians led by Abdias do Nascimento, began a campaign of the many different issues which Afro-Brazilians faced within Brazil (police violence, healthcare access, food stability, employment opportunities, etc.).⁹⁴ In 1988 opportunity came for the elected Afro-Brazilians, as 1988 marked the year in which new changes would occur to the constitution. Due to the military dictatorship falling apart, this allowed for new laws to be in place that would help protect Afro-Brazilians. Two important changes occurred with the constitution which allowed for Afro-Brazilians to have greater political rights and have a voice within the government of Brazil.

Originally in the 1964 constitution, being able to vote required individuals to have to be literate, this acted similarly to the laws in the United States that were meant to prevent African Americans from being able to vote. Which can be seen when examining the 1980 illiteracy rate of Afro Brazilians at an estimated 2.3%,⁹⁵ to give context in 1980 Brazil's population was 119,011,000, with an estimated 44.8% of the population being Afro-Brazilian.⁹⁶ 5,331,692,800 is the total population of Afro-Brazilians in Brazil, that an estimated 44% of Afro-Brazilians in the 1980s are illiterate. Afro-Brazilians in congress knew change was needed to include the entire Afro-Brazilian population into having a political voice. Leading to the 1988 Constitution eliminating the need for an individual to be literate to vote. A huge victory for Afro-Brazilians who now had a greater political voice than they previously had ever. Using this momentum further protection was added in the

⁹³ Ollie Johnson III, "Racial Representation and Brazilian Politics: Black Members of the National Congress, 1983-1999," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 40, no. 4, (Winter 1998): 107.

⁹⁴ Ollie Johnson III, "Racial Representation and Brazilian Politics: Black Members of the National Congress, 1983-1999," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 40, no. 4, (Winter 1998): 108-109.

⁹⁵ Justin Bucciferro, "Racial Inequality in Brazil from Independence to the Present," in *Has Latin American Inequality Changed Direction? looking over the long run*, ed. Luis Bertola and Jeffery Williamson, (Springer Cham, 2017), 186. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-44621-9>.

⁹⁶ Remember the Unified Black Movement saw both mixed and Black people as being Afro-Brazilian so for this essay that's how the numbers are counted.

constitution itself with it officially declaring that racism is illegal and against the constitution under Article 5, Section 42.⁹⁷ What this did was strengthen already existing anti-racism and segregation laws, such as the 1951 Afonso Arinos Law, making it now an offense where jail time was required. All these new laws led to a massive change in legal protecting that previously hadn't existed for Afro-Brazilians. Even before this change Afro-Brazilian participation within the government as elected officials increased, in 1988 Afro-Brazilian politicians doubled in size and made-up 3 percent of the entire Brazilian government.⁹⁸ While this group wasn't equal in size to the Afro-Brazilian population to have true representation that was needed within congress. It was an important start, especially considering how little representation existed before 1983, and has only grown with time. Even more important however is how Afro-Brazilians have used this newfound political voice to act against social apartheid in Brazil. Which can be examined through two cases of discrimination, one which takes place in June of 1978 and the other in February 2000.

In June of 1978, an article titled "Many Blacks Shut Out of Brazil's Racial 'Paradise'" by David Vidal outlines the experience of an Afro-Brazilian woman in trying to apply for a job. Berta Santos (a pseudonym used to protect her identity) an Afro-Brazilian, applies for a job as a bilingual secretary for a major company in Rio de Janeiro, she has the needed skills, she herself is an English speaker and once worked in an African embassy for a week. She calls the hiring agency to help apply for the job opening. However, she receives a call later said hiring agency which tell her that they were very sorry, but the company she applied for

⁹⁷ Ollie Johnson III, "Racial Representation and Brazilian Politics: Black Members of the National Congress, 1983-1999," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 40, no. 4, (Winter 1998): 110.

⁹⁸ Ollie Johnson III, "Racial Representation and Brazilian Politics: Black Members of the National Congress, 1983-1999," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 40, no. 4, (Winter 1998): 109.

didn't hire Blacks.⁹⁹ In complete opposite is the article "Brazil Struggles with Carnival Racism" by Michael Astor, outlines another woman's experience with racism but with a completely different reaction. Venusemar Andrade (her real name) 25, sent in an application to the Barca bloco,¹⁰⁰ however, when she handed in her application, she was openly laughed at being told "are you crazy? Blacks didn't get into this bloco. Are you trying to dirty the bloco?"¹⁰¹ She then proceeded to press criminal charges against the group, citing the 1988 constitution, her actions led to other also suing. The attention brought with it led to an investigation by the Bahia civil rights office, forcing the bloco to change its policy and must give a reason as to why someone wasn't hired.¹⁰² The two stories showcase the change in political power that Afro-Brazilians had before and after the Unified Black Movement. In the first story, Santos wanted to tell her story but feared of the consequences it brought about it, having to use a pseudonym to hide her identity and remain as vague as possible. Along with all that, after she had been denied there was little if anything she could do to challenge such hiring practices, it was simply a part of life. In comparison, Andrade was able to not only challenge but help bring an investigation and change in hiring practice to the bloco. All the while not having to hide her identity, she was able to use her political power to help bring

⁹⁹ David Vidal, "Many Blacks Shut Out of Brazil's Racial 'Paradise,'" *New York Times*, June 5, 1978, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1978/06/05/110857460.html?pageNumber=10> (Accessed June 2, 2022).

¹⁰⁰ Bloco translates to block in Portuguese, which is a name for groups which perform on the streets during carnival.

¹⁰¹ Michael Astor "Brazil Struggles with Carnival Racism," *Lakeland Ledger*, February 6, 2000, https://books.google.com/books?id=Kp8sAAAAIBAJ&pg=PA2&dq=Afro-Brazilian+civil&article_id=6496,2485991&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjGqY-j0Lf1AhUKJzQIHUF6BdAQ6AF6BAGIEAI#v=onepage&q=Afro-Brazilian%20civil&f=false (accessed June 2, 2022).

¹⁰² Michael Astor "Brazil Struggles with Carnival Racism," *Lakeland Ledger*, February 6, 2000, https://books.google.com/books?id=Kp8sAAAAIBAJ&pg=PA2&dq=Afro-Brazilian+civil&article_id=6496,2485991&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjGqY-j0Lf1AhUKJzQIHUF6BdAQ6AF6BAGIEAI#v=onepage&q=Afro-Brazilian%20civil&f=false (accessed June 2, 2022).

change to a bloco which previously was able to get away with such practices. The stories showcase how in the Unified Black Movement was able to influence the political sphere of Brazil and make positive changes for Afro-Brazilians, in a sense, giving them political power, they never had before and using said power to challenge social apartheid in Brazil, this is the Influential power of the Unified Black Movement. Yet the narrative that followed the Unified Black Movement tells a different story.

The Unified Black Movement and Brazil: twenty years later.

As stated earlier in the paper, many social scientists (and members of the Unified Black Movement) felt as though the MNU had achieved very little. Claiming the Unified Black Movement hadn't achieved the goals of ending police brutality, unequal hiring and employment practices, unequal housing opportunity, lack of educational access, and much more. While I don't disagree with the idea that the movement failed to bring about major sweeping changes like what was seen with the ending of Jim Crow laws in the United States and Apartheid in South Africa. However, what the Unified Black Movement had accomplished was more than impressive considering what conditions existed in Brazil before the movement came about. Then examining Brazil today creates a much clear picture of the success the Unified Black Movement was able to increase Black Consciousness, mobilization, and political activity today in Brazil. But to understand the changes seen it's important to examine it by the three areas, starting first with Black Consciousness.

In Brazil today a greater focus has been put on Black identity, an easy way of seeing this is examining the census. In 2010, Brazil became the first country in the world where a minority group had a greater population than a majority group. The white population of

Brazil for the first time since Whitening practices in the 1890s, dropped below 50%, sitting at 48% of the entire Brazilian population.¹⁰³ While the Afro-Brazilian population (including the mixed population) made up about 51% of the population.¹⁰⁴ The number has increased with time, evident by the 2016 census in which the Afro-Brazilian population has increased to 56%, while the white population of Brazil has decreased by the same percent, going from 48% to 43%.¹⁰⁵ What's occurred now in Brazil is individuals are more willing to racially identify as Afro-Brazilian than they had in the past. Evident not just from the census, but from individual stories as well.¹⁰⁶ The Unified Black Movement opened the door for individuals to both identify as Afro-Brazilian while having a positive racial identity. Because Black Consciousness has increased, it's also led to further Afro-Brazilian mobilization, more so in the past twenty-two years than what occurred during the Unified Black Movements time.

The issue of police brutality sparked the mobilization effort of the Unified Black Movement back in 1978, while the MNU was unable to end police brutality, their efforts to mobilize haven't disappeared with time. In fact, mobilization efforts have become both faster and at times easier to occur within Brazil now than they had in the past. Evident with the killing of Marielle Franco, a Black, gay, feminist politician who died when two police

¹⁰³ Mariano Castillo, "Minorities now officially a majority in Brazil," *CNN*, June 16, 2011, <http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/americas/06/16/brazil.race/index.html> (accessed June 2, 2022).

¹⁰⁴ Mariano Castillo, "Minorities now officially a majority in Brazil," *CNN*, June 16, 2011, <http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/americas/06/16/brazil.race/index.html> (accessed June 2, 2022).

¹⁰⁵ Terrence McCoy and Heloísa Traiano, "He grew up White. Now he identifies as Black. Brazil grapples with racial reidentification," *The Washington Post*, November 15, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/brazil-racial-identity-black-white/2020/11/15/2b7d41d2-21cb-11eb-8672-c281c7a2c96e_story.html (accessed June 2, 2022).

¹⁰⁶ Terrence McCoy and Heloísa Traiano, "He grew up White. Now he identifies as Black. Brazil grapples with racial reidentification," *The Washington Post*, November 15, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/brazil-racial-identity-black-white/2020/11/15/2b7d41d2-21cb-11eb-8672-c281c7a2c96e_story.html (accessed June 2, 2022).

officers shot her to death in 2018.¹⁰⁷ The event itself triggered mass protests within Brazil, while the event is interesting itself to analyze. It showcases the ability for mobilization to occur at such speeds that previously hadn't been feasible. Once more the protests of the event didn't end a couple weeks later, instead it continued after into 2019. Ironically the event and the way people were protesting it felt the same energy as when Robson Silveira da Luz had died in 1978. Furthermore, the mobilization efforts from the Unified Black Movement and the space needed for Black Consciousness to occur and increase overall led to greater political activity both participation and laws in place for Afro-Brazilians.

Such changes can be examined in the increase of Black voices within the Brazilian government itself. Evident when examining the fall and winter of 2020, an election year for Brazil. At the national level the number of Afro-Brazilian politicians made up 4% of Brazil's congress was made up of Afro-Brazilians,¹⁰⁸ up only a percent from what it was back in 1988. Yet, the local level paints a much bigger picture of the current change happening reflective of the MNU. In November of 2020, the municipal elections saw for the first-time majority candidates running for mayor or council seats, with 40% of said candidates winning in their respective elections.¹⁰⁹ This shows that participation within Brazilian government is

¹⁰⁷ Enesto Londono, "A Year After Her Killing, Marielle Franco Has Become a Rallying Cry in a Polarized Brazil," *The New York Times*, March 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/14/world/americas/marielle-year-death.html> (accessed June 2, 2022).

¹⁰⁷ Luciana Magalhaes and Samantha Pearson, "Wave of Black Politicians Takes Office in Brazil," *Wall Street Journal*, January 1, 2021, <https://www.proquest.com/wallstreetjournal/docview/2474484172/C88A76225C24642PQ/1?accountid=8134> (accessed June 2, 2022).

¹⁰⁷ Luciana Magalhaes and Samantha Pearson, "Wave of Black Politicians Takes Office in Brazil," *Wall Street Journal*, January 1, 2021, <https://www.proquest.com/wallstreetjournal/docview/2474484172/C88A76225C24642PQ/1?accountid=8134> (accessed June 2, 2022).

no longer being a place for whites, instead Afro-Brazilians now are participating more than they did in the past. Using the space by the Unified Black Movement, Afro-Brazilians are now able to be a part of spaces they otherwise would never have been in before. The Brazilian government itself began to implement more and more policies aligned with Affirmative action for Afro-Brazilians since 2000. Afro-Brazilian political activity can be where it is today due to the efforts of the Unified Black Movement who created the needed space for such activities to occur.

The Unified Black Movement challenged the social apartheid which exists in Brazil, and while social apartheid didn't end. The MNU provided the needed space to both challenge social apartheid and increased Black Consciousness, mobilization efforts, and political activity which can still be seen in Brazil that can be seen to this day. Furthermore, greater research (especially in English) about the Unified Black Movement needs to occur to fully understand the affects the MNU had upon Brazil. Such research needs to happen because the Unified Black Movement had changed so much for Afro-Brazilian and had found a way of often including the ignored voices of both women and the LGBTQ+, something which the United States has only recently began to do. In the end the Unified Black Movement wasn't the first Black Movement in Brazil, nor the last. But in fact, was the most important one to occur which brought with it national change and allowed Afro-Brazilians to control their own destiny, it was a movement led by Afro-Brazilians for Afro-Brazilians.

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