

Colonial Legacies and Comparative Racial Identification in the Americas¹

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What accounts for variation in racial identification in the Americas? An influential first generation of race scholarship attributed contemporary racial schemas to the cultural legacies of different colonizers, whereas a second generation has emphasized varying national ideologies like *mestizaje*. Seeking to adjudicate between these perspectives, the author theorizes the process linking colonial legacies to national racial ideologies and, in turn, contemporary patterns of racial identification. He tests this theory using data from 27 countries and 25 states in Brazil. He finds that colonial demography, not colonizer cultural legacies, best accounts for contemporary racial schemas. As such, he concludes that the importance of colonizer identity to racial formation has been overstated and that national racial ideologies are best understood as the endogenous product of differences in colonial European settlement. By bridging comparative-historical sociology and comparative race and ethnicity, this article helps resolve the discordant arguments of two influential generations of race scholarship.

INTRODUCTION

Understandings of race across the Americas exhibit remarkable range from bipolar systems of racial classification to systems with multiple intermediate categories (Wade 2014). Some countries are characterized by *racial binaries*

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in which almost everyone, regardless of skin color, identifies as white or black. Others are defined by *racial spectrums* in which, except for the very lightest or darkest people, almost everyone identifies as mixed race. The boundaries of whiteness and blackness—the criteria delimiting membership in these categories—thus differ in terms of how inclusive or exclusive they are by skin color (Barth 1969; Telles 2014). Likewise, improvements in socioeconomic status can have very different effects on racial identification in different contexts. In some countries, wealth and education can whiten one's race, whereas in others it can darken (Telles and Paschel 2014). So, racial schemas, or the set of internalized rules that govern what racial categories mean and how they should be applied (Roth 2012), vary along at least two important dimensions: first, the relationship between skin color and racial identification and, second, the relationship between individual changes in socioeconomic status and racial identification.

But why do racial schemas differ so significantly across the Americas? An influential first generation of scholarship—motivated by differing understandings of race in Brazil and the United States—placed great importance on the cultural legacies of different colonizers. It was long held that because “miscegenation” rates were high and mixed race individuals had greater status in Iberian colonies such as Brazil, the normativity of racial mixture persisted in countries colonized by Spain and Portugal in the postindependence era (Freyre 1946; Tannenbaum 1947; Harris 1970; Degler 1971; Hoetink 1973; Horowitz 1973). However, a more recent generation of scholarship has downplayed the notion that colonial legacies predetermined contemporary racial schemas. Scholars have instead attributed understandings of race to divergent postcolonial projects across the Americas that emphasized, for example, racial mixture (*mestizaje*) or whiteness as essential features of national personhood (Sue and Golash-Boza 2009; Wade 2010; Telles and Flores 2013; Loveman 2014; Telles 2014; Telles and Paschel 2014).

Because recent scholarship has examined the construction of race in the postcolonial period without ruling out the claims of the earlier generation of scholarship, we are presented with a number of puzzles. Do colonial legacies matter for contemporary racial schemas, or do they not? If they do matter, how do they matter? Colonial history is far from deterministic, yet, at the same time, elites in the postcolonial period were not presented with blank slates with which to forge new nations. In order to bridge these two generations of scholarship and better understand how different racial schemas developed across the Americas, we need to both test whether colonizer identity

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actually matters for racial identification and probe how colonial legacies endogenously shaped different postcolonial national racial ideologies.

To do so, this article draws on a number of disparate literatures to theorize the comparative historical sequence connecting colonization to contemporary racial schemas and then tests this theory using the best available quantitative data. The first generation of race scholarship connected racial formation across the colonial and postcolonial eras through the cultural legacies of different colonizers. In contrast, I contend that colonial demography path dependently shaped the racial ideologies—whiteness or *mestizaje*—adopted by national elites. I theorize that in areas where European-descent populations were relatively small and there was a socially significant mixed race population during the colonial era, postindependence elites sought to better secure social order by promoting a revisionist ideology of racial mixture. Because people in nations defined by ideologies of *mestizaje* have highlighted their mixedness in the postcolonial era, the boundaries of mixed race categories have expanded such that individuals who would identify as white or black in other countries based on their skin color instead today identify as racially mixed. In other words, such states tend to be characterized by a racial spectrum and socioeconomic *mestizoization* today. As colonial demography path dependently shaped the racial ideologies of different countries, I expect that racial binaries and socioeconomic whitening characterize countries today predominated by European settlers during the colonial era.

Recent improvements in survey data coverage make it newly possible to test competing explanations for variation in racial schemas across almost all countries in the Americas. Using data from over 130,000 respondents across 27 countries, I find relatively little support for the claims of the first generation of race scholarship. There is no evidence that otherwise phenotypically similar individuals are more likely to embrace racially mixed identities relative to whiteness in former Iberian colonies. Instead, consistent with my argument, racial binaries and socioeconomic whitening tend to characterize countries predominated by European settlers in the colonial era regardless of whether they were colonized by Iberian or non-Iberian powers. Finally, I corroborate my cross-national findings through a subnational analysis connecting colonial demography to the different regional racial schemas in contemporary Brazil.

This article thereby addresses and reconciles the discordant findings of two influential generations of scholarship on race and ethnicity. I provide evidence disconfirming systematic differences in understandings of race across former Iberian and non-Iberian colonies in the manner theorized by the first generation of scholarship. But colonial legacies nonetheless do matter for contemporary racial schemas. The patterning of contemporary racial binaries and socioeconomic whitening in the Americas can be traced in no small part back to colonial demography insofar as the predominance of European

settlers shaped the postcolonial racial ideologies adopted by different nations. As such, I argue that elite racial ideologies, the central explanatory factor for contemporary racial schemas in the second generation of scholarship, are best understood as the endogenous product of differences in colonial European settlement. By bringing a comparative-historical perspective into the study of race and ethnicity, this article provides a more comprehensive account of how the legacies of the colonial era shaped racial formation in the Americas. Colonial demography, not colonizer culture, is the foundation of different racial schemas across the Americas today.

TWO GENERATIONS OF RACE SCHOLARSHIP IN THE AMERICAS

Cross-national comparison of racial identity in the Americas has a long intellectual heritage. The standard base for scholarly comparison has been between the United States and Brazil. Motivated by the apparently more fluid and multidimensional nature of race in Brazil, a generation of scholars in the mid-20th century emphasized different colonial experiences as the source of difference in understandings of race.

Perhaps most notably, Freyre (1946) proposed the theory of luso-tropicalism. Freyre hypothesized the existence of a particularly Portuguese capacity to accept and embrace racial difference and argued that Portuguese colonization was characterized by greater racial mixing between colonizer and colonized. Freyre then attributed contemporary Brazilian racial democracy to the cultural legacies of Portuguese colonizers.

While luso-tropicalism clearly rests on a number of problematic assumptions including the myth of Brazilian racial democracy or the idea that Portuguese colonization was any less coercive than other forms of colonization (e.g., Nobles 2000; Bergad 2007), the idea that the incidence of interracial mixing during the colonial era shaped contemporary understandings of race in the Americas remained influential for some time.² Although they disagreed over whether higher levels of mixing in Iberian colonies were due to different cultural, legal, and religious traditions (e.g., Freyre 1946; Tannenbaum 1947; Degler 1971; Hoetink 1973) or to more imbalanced sex ratios of the colonizers (Horowitz 1973), there was consensus among this first generation of modern scholarship that differences in racial boundaries between Iberian colonies and northern European colonies were due to different levels of interracial mixing. The broadly shared assumption was that, because of the existence of a privileged mulatto or mestizo group, skin color cut across colonial class divisions, which, in turn, enabled more normative notions of racial mixture to persist in former Iberian colonies (Harris 1970; Degler 1971; Hoetink 1973).

² Numerous critiques of Brazilian racial democracy have been eloquently articulated by activists and scholars (e.g., Nascimento 1950; Fernandes 1969; Ortiz 1985; Telles 2004).

The assumption of persistence across the colonial and postcolonial eras is, however, not entirely supported by the historical record. We cannot ignore the historical juncture that followed colonial independence and the end of slavery, which was a period of rapid change in understandings of race in the Americas (Marx 1998; Gullickson 2010). More recent scholarship has tended to trace contemporary patterns of racial identification to the ideological projects of *criollo* elites across the Americas in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Postindependence leaders in Latin America responded to racialized notions of personhood in the late 19th century by seeking to construct ethnoracially unique and homogeneous nations (Wimmer 2002; Loveman 2014; Telles 2014). Yet, not all nations were constructed alike. In some countries, officials depicted the nation as homogeneously white, while in other countries the prototypical national character was predicted to be an off-white *mestizo* type (Wade 2010; Loveman 2014). Countries whose elites adopted an ideology of national whiteness such as Argentina or the United States moreover tend to be the most white identified today, whereas identification as *mestizo* tends to be greatest in countries such as Mexico, Brazil, or Peru whose elites adopted ideologies of *mestizaje* while minimizing the significance of African and indigenous heritage (Sue and Golash-Boza 2009; Telles and Flores 2013). Contemporary patterns of racial identification have in this way been compellingly attributed by scholars to divergent national projects across the Americas.

Yet, the ideologies of national elites alone remain incomplete as a comparative explanation for racial boundaries in the Americas. Specifically, we need to understand why elites in some countries came to adopt ideologies of racial mixing while others adopted ideologies of whitening. On this question, there is relatively little consensus. For Marx (1998), intrawhite conflict in the postcolonial era explains the development of a racial binary in the United States; for Stamatov (2017), Protestant classificatory culture explains the development of racial binaries in countries in the Americas colonized by Britain or the Netherlands; and for Loveman (2014), colonial legacies are less important relative to the agency of elites and international norms. Each author downplays the importance of colonial demography in structuring contemporary understandings of race.

A central challenge for the comparative race literature going forward is to disentangle and adjudicate between different explanations for variation in racial identification (Davenport 2020). One means of doing so, adopted in this article, is by testing whether contemporary racial schemas in the Americas vary today in a manner consistent with particular explanations across the full set of country cases.³ For example, in order to judge the importance of colonial

³ This means moving beyond testing theories based on a singular Brazil/United States comparison. As Loveman (1999) points out, the importance of intrawhite divisions for racial binaries as theorized by Marx (1998) fades away once you incorporate more cases such as Mexico.

cultural legacies, we can test whether patterns of racial identification differ systematically across former Iberian and non-Iberian colonies. Likewise, to judge the importance of colonial demography, we can test whether racial schemas today systematically vary according to colonial European predominance.

It is worth bearing in mind that to test particular structural explanations for racial formation is not to deny the importance of contingency or agency. It remains true that “neither colonial legacies nor the brute facts of ethnic demography predetermined the racialist constructions of nationhood that crystallized in postcolonial Latin America” (Loveman 2014, p. xiv). Yet, equally it is not coincidental that homogeneously white conceptions of nationhood came to dominate countries such as Canada, the United States, Chile, or Argentina. While colonial legacies are far from all determinative, I draw on the comparative-historical tradition to understand how colonial demography path dependently shaped different racial projects in the Americas.⁴

THEORY

To understand the historical sequence that I contend connects colonial demography to contemporary racial schemas (fig. 1), it is necessary to first understand the origins of colonial demographic variation. Different racial social systems developed throughout the Americas over the colonial period as European settlement was shaped by precolonial environmental and social conditions. Mass European settlement during the colonial era was a phenomenon of the 18th and 19th centuries and tended to be directed toward areas of the Americas suitable for pastoralism and cereal crops (Eltis 1983). Given the seasonality of wheat production, wheat cultivation was most profitably undertaken by owner-occupiers who could hire temporary labor. European settlement to wheat-suitable areas of the Americas thus tended to be characterized by whole-family resettlement onto frontier and small-scale farms (Adelman 1994). Given that indigenous populations had relatively little value as a stationary agricultural labor force and were the main competitors for land, they were coercively excluded from the colonial state. Only areas of the Americas suitable for wheat production like the Southern Cone and the United States tended to have close to a majority share of settlers at independence (Engerman and Sokoloff 1997).⁵

⁴ The method of this article, while employing quantitative analysis, follows the comparative-historical method that is defined by the systematic comparison of historical sequences rather than qualitative case study analysis per se (Lange 2012; Falleti and Mahoney 2015; Mahoney and Thelen 2015).

⁵ I do not mean to imply that these areas had no substantial nonwhite populations in the late colonial period. For instance, Chile’s partial 1813 census enumerated the white population at 74%, Argentina (only Buenos Aires enumerated) was 73% white in 1822, and

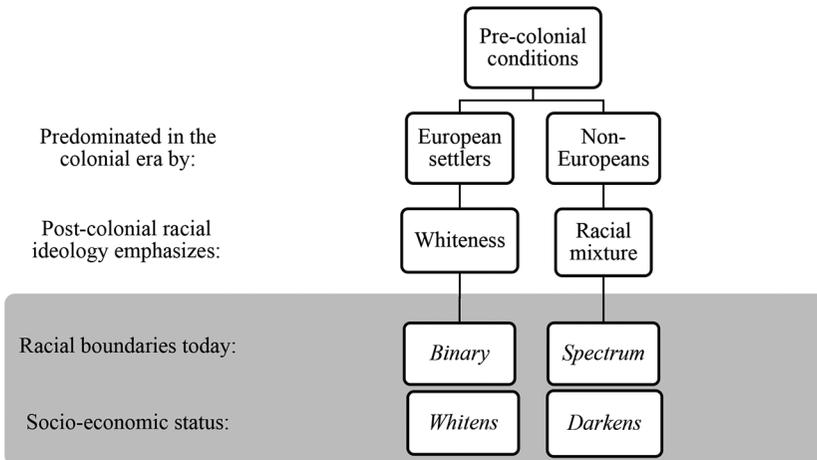


FIG. 1.—Development of contemporary racial schemas across different countries in the Americas.

Elsewhere in the Americas, colonies tended to be predominated by non-Europeans. In settings with dense precolonial populations like Peru, Paraguay, or Mexico, large blocs of land, mineral resources, and indigenous labor were granted to early settlers (Haring 1957). These settlers extracted labor from the indigenous population and remained relatively few in number because of restrictive immigration policies (Eltis 1983; Altman and Horn 1991). Reflecting subsequently high rates of interracial mixing, by the mid-18th century a large and important social stratum of mestizos had emerged to occupy an intermediate place in the political and economic hierarchy (Quijano 2000; Wimmer 2002; Telles 2014). In areas with low precolonial population densities but that were nevertheless suitable for sugarcane such as Jamaica or Hispaniola, colonial labor systems were based on chattel slavery (Smith 1965; Dunn 1972; Engerman, Haber, and Sokoloff 2000). In the absence of a large captive indigenous labor force, colonists turned to the importation of slaves from sub-Saharan Africa to work on sugarcane plantations (Engerman 1982). In sugarcane-suitable areas, African-descent populations overwhelmingly dominated demographically, manumission rates were relatively high, and mulattos occupied a privileged intermediate position in the racial hierarchy by the late colonial era (Knight 1990; Engerman and Higman 1997).

Uruguay was 64% white in 1860. It was only in the late 19th century after waves of European immigration and racial passing that these countries as a whole became overwhelmingly white. On racial passing and the disappearance of Argentina and Uruguay's formerly large black communities, see Andrews (1980, 2010).

Colonial demographic composition in turn shaped postcolonial racial ideologies of states in a path-dependent reactive sequence (Mahoney 2000). The nation-states of the Americas that emerged from colonial wars of independence in the 18th and 19th centuries were founded on lofty principles of popular sovereignty (Wimmer 2002). Given that legitimate political authority was vested in the people, a key dilemma facing postindependence leaders lay in defining precisely who “the people” of the nation were (Loveman 2014). In a broad sense, areas that were predominated by European settlers at independence tended to define full membership in the nation-state based on whiteness. Given that indigenous populations still presented a threat to European settlers insofar as they possessed legitimate claims to land, indigenous populations in areas such as the United States, Uruguay, Argentina, Costa Rica, and Chile were denied a place in the homogeneously white nation-state (Frederickson 1982; Otero 2006; Loveman 2009).

Yet, areas that were predominated by non-Europeans tended to adopt a view of the prototypical national member as racially mixed or nonwhite. This is for a number of reasons that vary by case. First, although American-born white elites (*criollos*) in areas such as Colombia, Mexico, or Ecuador may have had an interest in preserving the colonial privileges of whiteness, they were nevertheless obliged to introduce more inclusive racial ideologies in the process of mobilizing nonwhites during revolutionary struggles (Roitman 2008; Telles 2014). Second, in areas where Europeans were a small minority such as Cuba or Guatemala, *criollo* elites sought to better secure social order against the threat of revolution by broadening out the racially normative population to mixed race individuals. In such cases, intercourse between European and non-Europeans and revisionist historical narratives of postracialism were actively promoted by the postcolonial state to forestall successful nonwhite political mobilization.⁶ Finally, in areas where European-descent populations were relatively scarce at independence, mixed race individuals often already occupied large landholdings and important positions of power. In such cases, ideologies that represented racially mixed persons as the prototypical members of the new nation-state reflected the membership of elite colonial networks (Wimmer 2013).

These two divergent postcolonial trajectories are responsible for contemporary variation in racial schemas across the Americas. Adapting Telles and Paschel (2014), racial schemas across the Americas today differ principally according to (i) the relationship between skin color and racial identification and (ii) the relationship between individual changes in socioeconomic status and racial identification. With respect to variation on the first dimension, we can distinguish between countries defined by *racial binaries* (i.e., inclusive conceptions

⁶ For example, as Cuban founding father Jose Antonio Saco put it, “Miscegenation is needed to neutralize, to a certain degree, the terrible influence of the three million Negroes surrounding us, millions that keep on multiplying, and that may swallow us up in the not too distant future” (Saco 1958, p. 201; as quoted in Martinez-Echazabal 1998, p. 28).

of whiteness and blackness by skin color) and countries defined by *racial spectrums* (i.e., inclusive conceptions of racial mixture by skin color).

In countries characterized by a national ideology privileging whiteness such as the United States, Chile, or Argentina, not only is the population phenotypically lighter on average but whiteness as a racial category has also become particularly inclusive by skin color (Telles and Flores 2013). The boundaries of whiteness have expanded in such areas because phenotypically darker persons or persons not historically considered white have had an interest in performing whiteness in order to secure sociolegal status (Ignatiev 1995; Fox and Guglielmo 2012). For example, after New Mexico was ceded to the United States in 1848, high-status beached Mexican citizens began to perform their “Spanish-ness” to gain rights and status in the United States (Nieto-Phillips 2004). Over time, this has led to a whitening of New Mexico, as the boundaries of whiteness have expanded to encompass a phenotypically broader set of individuals relative to Mexico (Mora 2011).

In a general sense, because racially liminal persons in states where whiteness is normative have sought to reclassify themselves and their children as white, the boundaries of whiteness in such states are the most inclusive by skin color today.⁷ This process of national whitening has been driven in part by high-status mixed race individuals who have successfully reclassified themselves as white. So, socioeconomic whitening has historically been most prevalent as a phenomenon in nations where whiteness is normative.⁸

On the other hand, countries characterized by national ideologies of racial mixture such as Peru, Mexico, or Paraguay have a racial spectrum today in which the boundaries of racially mixed categories such as *mestizo*, *pardo*, *moreno*, and *creole* are inclusive of people with a wide range of skin tones. For example, in Brazil the mixed race category of *pardo* is a catchall category that can be used to refer to all but the very lightest and darkest individuals (Telles 2002). The phenotypic inclusiveness of a normative mixed race category in such countries has correspondingly meant that the boundaries of blackness

⁷ The racial binary in settings such as Chile, Uruguay, or Argentina has historically been white/indigenous rather than white/black. This article does not theorize the phenotypic boundaries of indigeneity as indigeneity is associated with language and rural residence (Wagley 1965; Wade 2010; Telles 2014). Nevertheless, the theoretical mechanisms that have expanded notions of whiteness are comparable in settings where whiteness is defined in opposition to blackness or indigeneity.

⁸ Socioeconomic whitening has long been an object of study in Brazil (e.g., Harris 1956; Nobles 2000; Telles 2002; Schwartzman 2007) but has been only recently begun to receive more scholarly attention in countries such as the United States where individual reclassification has historically been treated as the exception to the rule (Davenport 2020). For example, using linked census records, Saperstein and Gullickson (2013) and Nix and Qian (2015) both find significant racial fluidity in early 20th-century America and that improvements in socioeconomic status were associated with reclassification as white, and Davenport (2016) has found that affluence still significantly whiten identification among biracial American college students today.

are less inclusive in such areas. This is because in countries lacking a white/nonwhite racial binary, high-status phenotypically dark individuals have historically disassociated themselves from the pejorative identity of black and have instead identified as mixed race.⁹ For example, blackness in countries that have adopted ideologies of *mestizaje* such as Colombia has historically been invisible (Paschel 2016), and in Mexico it tends to be applied only to individuals on the very darkest end of the phenotypic spectrum (Sue 2013). In other words, the boundaries of blackness tend to be less inclusive by skin color in countries characterized by an normative mixed race category. This process of national mestizoization has been driven largely by high-status dark individuals who have successfully reclassified themselves as racially mixed. As such, rather than whitening, individual improvements in socioeconomic status have historically been associated with mestizoization in nations where racial mixture is normative.

Given that colonial demography path dependently shaped the racial ideologies adopted by postindependence criollo elites and, in turn, contemporary racial schemas, the observable implications of this theory are that

HYPOTHESIS 1.—The boundaries of whiteness are more inclusive by skin color in countries in the Americas predominated by European settlers in the colonial era.

HYPOTHESIS 2.—The boundaries of blackness are more inclusive by skin color in countries in the Americas predominated by European settlers in the colonial era.

HYPOTHESIS 3.—Socioeconomic status tends to whiten individual race in countries predominated by European settlers in the colonial era and mestizoize elsewhere.

DATA

I test these hypotheses with data on individual racial identification, interviewer-rated skin color, and European colonial settlement across 27 countries in the Americas.¹⁰ My data on racial identification come from the 2012–16 General Social Survey (GSS) rounds in the United States (Smith et al. 2018) and the

⁹ For example, in Brazil improvements in socioeconomic status more robustly predict reclassification from black to normative intermediate categories such as *moreno* or *pardo* than to white (Telles 2002; Loveman 2009); in Peru moving to an urban area is more closely associated with a change in identification from indigenous to *mestizo* rather than to white (de la Cadena 1991, 2000); and in Mexico and Peru more educated individuals are actually more likely to identify as *mestizo* than white (Telles 2014; Paredes 2018).

¹⁰ These countries are Argentina, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, the United States, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Some descriptive statistics on each country are provided in table A1.

2010–14 AmericasBarometer (AB) survey rounds in Latin America.¹¹ In these nationally representative surveys, my primary outcome of interest is individual ethnoracial identification. Individuals were asked in the AB survey, “Do you consider yourself white, mestizo, indigenous, black, mulatto, or of another race?” and in the GSS survey, “What is your race? Indicate one or more races that you consider yourself to be.”¹² Using these responses, I created a measure of whether an individual identified as white, mixed race, black, or other.¹³

To get a sense of the variation in the relationship between skin color and racial identification that exists across countries today, I also compiled information on individual skin color. For all countries with the exception of Canada, the sample contains information on the interviewer-rated skin color of the survey respondents.¹⁴ Interviewers measured respondent skin color after concluding their interview, using similar 10-point (GSS) or 11-point (AB) skin color scales (Telles 2014).

The enumerators do use a common color palette that should reduce bias, but it is likely that different enumerators nonetheless rated individual skin color systematically differently (Hill 2002), and so the measure is not entirely “objective.”¹⁵ Nonetheless, the magnitude of bias introduced by interviewer heterogeneity may be quite small. In a recent study comparing regressions between skin color and education with those that correct for interviewer variance in skin color measurement, Cernat, Sakshaug, and Castillo (2019) find little substantive change in results—they thus conclude that “concerns regarding the impact of interviewer-induced bias in substantive analyses involving skin color were not strongly supported . . . which is reassuring for the growing number of researchers interested in studying the influence of

¹¹ The AB survey is by the Latin American Public Opinion Project, <http://www.LapopSurveys.org>.

¹² Following Bailey, Saperstein, and Penner (2014), I code those in the GSS who identify with one or more categories in the United States as mixed race. The results are similar when using the white/black/other coding by GSS. In the AB survey, I coded an individual who identified as mestizo, mulatto, creole, or moreno as mixed race. Pardo was not an option in the survey.

¹³ Approximately 90% of the respondents identified with one of these three categories. In Guatemala, the option to identify as white was not given, which reflects the absence of white on the Guatemalan census. This is consistent with the theory of this article, as Guatemalan elites have historically sought to reduce the salience of racial difference and emphasize the normativity of a mixed race category (*ladino*). The results are robust to the inclusion or exclusion of Guatemala.

¹⁴ Given the historically prototypical nature of whiteness in Canada that is theoretically consistent with the predictions of this article, its inclusion in the sample would have likely strengthened the results.

¹⁵ See Dixon and Telles (2017) for an excellent review of skin color measurement.

skin color on social inequalities” (p. 790). Encouraged by the fact that interviewer bias, although present, is unlikely to be large enough to alter any substantive conclusions, I cautiously use the AB and GSS data as the best available cross-national measures that we have at present on individual skin color.

For my independent variable of interest, I compiled different proxies for the demographic proportion of European settlers during the colonial era for each country. Drawing on colonial census data on the number of whites, supplemented where available with estimates from secondary sources, Easterly and Levine (2016) created a data set on the proportion of each country’s population that was European during the colonial era. The principal measurement challenge is to decide which year is the valid point to use the proportion of settlers as an explanatory variable for future sociopolitical developments. To take into account the fact that colonization occurred at very different times in different parts of the Americas, Easterly and Levine provide two different measures. The first is the proportion of European settlers who existed in each country approximately a century after initial European contact.¹⁶ And the second is the average share of European settlers in each country between 1500 and 1800, which is available for a smaller number of countries.¹⁷

I also compiled measures of wheat suitability, sugarcane suitability, and precolonial population density at the national level. As discussed in the theory section, these three factors primarily shaped the demographic predominance of European settlers during the colonial era and so are useful indirect proxies for the relative size of the European settler population. The measure of precolonial population density was obtained from Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson (2002), who compiled estimates of the log population density of modern nation-states in the Americas in 1500. The indexes of rain-fed

¹⁶ As Uruguay was a buffer zone in the colonial period and lacked a census, I interpolated the share of Europeans from the earliest Uruguayan census in 1860, which enumerated the white population at 64.1% (Andrews 2010, p. 7).

¹⁷ I am cognizant that measures of colonial European predominance based on census data are imperfect. Historical estimates of “Europeans” rely on official classification as white, criollo, or peninsular in determining the population that is of pure European descent. This means, for instance, that the children and grandchildren of European settlers in Spanish colonies would still be counted as European in the data but only if they are regarded as largely pure Spanish descent according to the colonial *casta* system. This introduces the potential for bias, as the criteria for classification as white were not uniform across different colonies and the settler population is likely inflated in areas with few Europeans where mixed race elites could purchase reclassification as white. But Twinam (2015) has shown that purchasing whiteness (*gracias al sacar*) was actually very rare in the Spanish Empire, as petitions for reclassification provoked much resistance from settler elites keen to protect the racial-class order. Thus, while measures of colonial European populations based on census data are imperfect, they are still suggestive and will be cautiously used in this article.

wheat and sugarcane suitability were compiled using data from the Global Agricultural-Ecological Zones project at the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization.¹⁸ Wheat suitability has by far the strongest correlation with colonial European predominance ($r \sim .69$ relative to $-.38$ for precolonial population density and $-.08$ for sugarcane suitability) and so greatest attention will be paid to this proxy. Our confidence in the predictive importance of colonial demography is improved to the extent that the results are supported by these very different measures of European demographic predominance.¹⁹

Only having cross-sectional data from a single decade is a limitation of the article. Understandings of race are dynamic and have changed significantly over the past few decades. But we can nonetheless get analytical leverage by using contemporary data on racial identification. The first generation of race scholarship advanced theories such as luso-tropicalism to explain variation in racial schemas in a time-invariant way. And, although national racial ideologies have changed somewhat in recent decades, we should expect the legacies of different national racial ideologies over the 20th century to persist over time into the early 21st century (indeed, Telles and Paschel [2014] do find this). So, although the time coverage of these data is limited, we can still use contemporary data to test competing theories of racial formation, as theories that rely on colonial legacies are fundamentally designed to explain persistence over the *longue durée*.

Specification

The baseline multinomial logistic regression simultaneously fits four equations of the form

$$\ln\left(\frac{P_{\text{race}_i}}{P_{\text{mixedrace}_i}}\right) = \alpha + \sigma_j + \beta\text{ColDem}_e + \mu_i,$$

where P_{race_i} is the probability that an individual i identifies as white, black, or other, respectively, relative to $P_{\text{mixedrace}_i}$ (i.e., the probability that an

¹⁸ These data are available from the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, Laxenburg, at <http://webarchive.iiasa.ac.at/Research/LUC/GAEZ/index.htm>. I used these data to create an index of suitability for rain-fed wheat and sugarcane with mixed inputs, standardized relative to the total area of a country. The reference climate years for the data are 1960–90. The world’s climate was admittedly slightly warmer over the reference years relative to the colonial period. But the facts that climate change is a slow-moving process and that we are using rain-fed rather than modernized, irrigation-based indexes of suitability mean that these data still have much value as proxies for historical agricultural production (Fouka and Schläpfer 2020).

¹⁹ The results are similar when proxying the size of the colonial European population through mean latitude or the share of European ancestry in the overall genetic admixture of a country today. Available on request.

individual identifies as mixed race). The predictors of interest are ColDem and μ —the proportion of a country k that was European during the colonial era and the colonizer fixed effects for each colonizer l (Dutch/British/French/Spanish/Portuguese)—and σ are the skin color fixed effects.

By including skin color fixed effects in all specifications, I maximally control for the effect of skin color on individual racial identification. To be sure, race is also shaped by other visible factors such as hair type or bodily shape, but, unfortunately, data on such characteristics are not available. Although this is a limitation of the analysis, skin color is the most important phenotypic dimension shaping race (Telles and Paschel 2014), reflected in the fact that the term “color” is often synonymously used with the term “race” in Latin America. By holding constant individual skin color, I can best isolate how contextual factors like colonial demography shape the racial identities of otherwise phenotypically similar, although not identical, individuals today. Finally, to account for the fact that the effect of colonial demography on racial identification is at the country level, standard errors are clustered at that level.

Baseline Results: Cross-National Variation in Racial Binaries

Table 1 reports the results of the baseline model predicting identification as white and black relative to mixed race. The results show that there is little support for long-theorized differences in racial identification across former Iberian and non-Iberian or Protestant and Catholic colonies (e.g., Freyre 1946; Tannenbaum 1947; Harris 1956; Degler 1971; Stamatov 2017). The coefficients on different colonizers in table 1 reveal that people are no more likely to identify as white relative to mixed race in countries colonized by Britain or the Netherlands (compared to the Spanish baseline). Quite the opposite. Otherwise phenotypically similar individuals are much more likely to identify as white relative to mixed race in the former Iberian and French colonies of the Americas. In other words, whereas the boundaries of blackness are more inclusive in former Protestant colonies (cols. 2 and 4)—consistent with the notion that Iberian culture normalizes racial mixture and intermediate racial categorization—the boundaries of whiteness are actually much less inclusive in former Protestant colonies (cols. 1 and 3).

This may be surprising, but the conventional wisdom linking Iberian culture to the embrace of racial mixture may itself be based on a scholarly bias toward large countries of the Americas such as Mexico or Brazil. When comparing different countries in the data, the boundaries of whiteness are actually most inclusive by skin color in four countries: Uruguay, Argentina, Costa Rica, and Chile.²⁰ These are all former Spanish colonies whose elites have legally and culturally privileged possession of whiteness throughout

²⁰ Figure available on request.

TABLE 1
COLONIAL LEGACIES AND RACIAL BINARIES ACROSS THE AMERICAS

	MODEL 1		MODEL 2	
	White (1)	Black (2)	White (3)	Black (4)
Proportion European (colonial era) . . .	4.11*** (.90)	4.29*** (1.10)		
Proportion European (1500–1800) . . .			4.05*** (1.51)	4.34*** (1.01)
French colony . . . . .	.97*** (.27)	7.89*** (.25)	.82*** (.31)	8.02*** (.26)
British colony	−1.81*** (.43)	2.85*** (.65)	−1.62** (.72)	3.41*** (.33)
Dutch colony	−2.50*** (.22)	3.05*** (.25)	−2.45*** (.29)	3.13*** (.25)
Portuguese colony . . . . .	.48** (.23)	1.33*** (.23)	.51* (.27)	1.29*** (.22)
Observations	131,866		118,367	
Skin color fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cluster SE	✓	✓	✓	✓

NOTE.—Multinomial logistic regression with racial identification as the dependent variable (baseline is mixed race). Skin color measured on a 10-point scale, and SEs (in parentheses) are clustered at the country level. Spanish colony is the reference category. Results for identification as other not reported.

- * $P < .01$.
- ** $P < .05$.
- *** $P < .10$.

the postcolonial era (Townsend-Bell 2014; Alberto and Elena 2016). Moreover, it is worth noting that national elites in the former Dutch and British colonies of Suriname, Guyana, Belize, and Jamaica have historically embraced multiracialism or racial mixture. So, when broadening our analytical lens to the whole of the Americas, the evidence is generally inconsistent with the importance of Iberian or Catholic cultural legacies. But, if not colonizer culture, what accounts for variation in racial schemas across countries?

The results provide confirmatory evidence for the importance of colonial demography and hypothesis 1. Otherwise phenotypically similar individuals are significantly more likely to identify as white relative to mixed race in countries that had a greater proportion of Europeans in the colonial era (table 1, cols. 1 and 3).

To be sure, and as figure 2 makes clear, skin color matters a great deal in predicting individual racial identification; the likelihood an individual will identify as white relative to mixed race declines substantially and near monotonically with skin color. Nevertheless, colonial demography also matters a great deal in predicting identification as white across all reported skin colors. Even among individuals with “very light” skin color, the probability

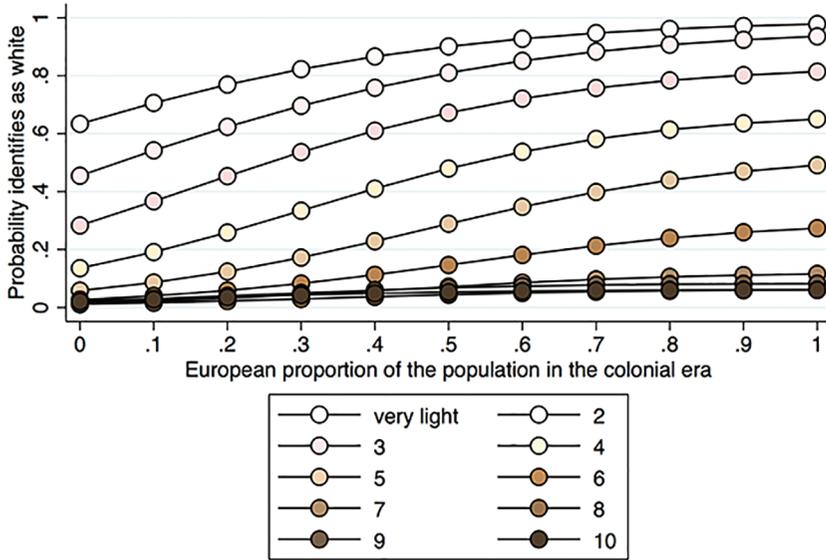


FIG. 2.—Predicted probability of identifying as white across individuals with the same skin color by the proportion of the country that was European during the colonial era.

that an individual will identify as white increases substantially in magnitude as one moves from a country predominated by non-Europeans in the colonial era to one predominated by European settlers (fig. 2). As the corollary, identification as mixed race increases substantially among individuals of all skin colors when one moves from a country predominated by European settlers during the colonial era to a country where the proportion of settlers was relatively small. Hence, the boundaries of whiteness tend to be particularly inclusive by skin color and mixed race identities less inclusive in settings of substantial colonial European settlement.

Consistent with hypothesis 2, blackness also tends to be more inclusive by skin color in countries predominated by European settlers during the colonial era (table 1, cols. 2 and 4). As figure 3 represents, almost all of the darkest-skinned respondents are predicted to identify as black in countries predominated by European settlers during the colonial era, whereas more than half are predicted to identify as white, mulatto, creole, and mestizo in countries populated by non-Europeans during the colonial era. This is consistent with the idea that, while white/nonwhite racial binaries developed in settings of greater European settlement and only phenotypically liminal persons could potentially reclassify themselves, a broader range of racial identities is currently available to Afro-descent populations elsewhere in the Americas.

The alternative proxies for colonial European predominance also support hypothesis 1 and, to a lesser extent, hypothesis 2 (table 2). Otherwise

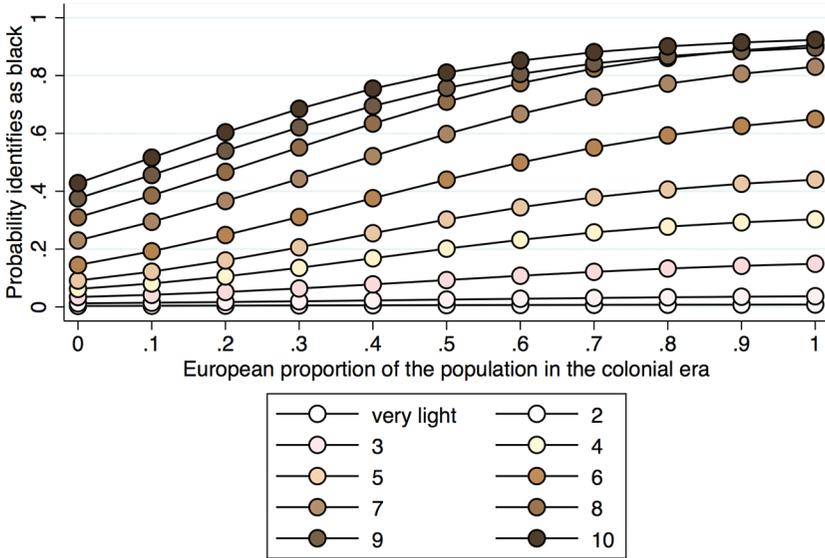


FIG. 3.—Predicted probability of identifying as black across individuals with the same skin color by the proportion of the country that was European during the colonial era.

phenotypically similar individuals are significantly more likely to identify as white relative to mixed race in countries more suitable for wheat production, less suitable for sugarcane production, and that had lower precolonial population densities such as the United States or Argentina. The boundaries of blackness are similarly more inclusive by skin color in countries more suitable for wheat production, although the effects of sugarcane suitability and precolonial population density lack statistical significance. As discussed in the data section, wheat suitability has by far the strongest correlation with colonial European predominance, so this absence of statistical significance in the other proxies may partly reflect measurement error. In sum, the results generally support my theoretical predictions: racial binaries, understood as inclusive conceptions of whiteness and blackness by skin color, tend to characterize countries today predominated by European settlers during the colonial period.

Status-Driven Racial Fluidity

I now test hypothesis 3—whether socioeconomic status whitens or darkens individual racial identification depending on colonial demography. Socioeconomic whitening occurs when improvements in socioeconomic status whitens individual race. Although we lack panel data in AB so we cannot track racial change in the same respondents over time, I follow Telles and

TABLE 2
ALTERNATIVE PROXIES FOR COLONIAL DEMOGRAPHY PREDICT RACIAL BINARIES TODAY

	MODEL 1		MODEL 2	
	White	Black	White	Black
Wheat suitability index	3.44*** (.55)	1.74* (.99)		
Sugarcane suitability index	-6.35*** (2.26)	1.67 (2.56)		
Log population density (1500)			-.75*** (.12)	.09 (.29)
French colony . . . . .	.96*** (.27)	7.59*** (.33)	1.61*** (.28)	7.28*** (.24)
British colony	-.25 (.41)	4.16*** (.60)	-1.23*** (.43)	3.11*** (.71)
Dutch colony	-1.47*** (.48)	2.52*** (.45)	-3.97*** (.18)	2.89*** (.56)
Portuguese colony . . . . .	.73*** (.24)	1.08*** (.27)	-1.21*** (.22)	1.32* (.71)
Observations	116,317		131,866	
Colonizer fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Skin color fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cluster SE	✓	✓	✓	✓

NOTE.—Multinomial logistic regression with racial identification as the dependent variable (baseline is mixed race). Skin color measured on a 10-point scale, and SEs (in parentheses) are clustered at the country level. Spanish colony is the reference category. Results for identification as other not reported.

- * $P < .05$.
- ** $P < .01$.
- *** $P < .001$.

Paschel (2014) by proxying the extent of socioeconomic whitening through the extent to which socioeconomic status predicts white identification among otherwise phenotypically similar people in the same country. Telles and Paschel examined the direction of status-driven racial fluidity separately by country. To instead test whether socioeconomic whitening varies systematically by colonial demography, I pooled the data across countries and ran multinomial logistic regressions predicting individual racial identification including (i) skin color and country fixed effects and (ii) an interaction between individual socioeconomic status and colonial demography. I measure individual socioeconomic status using individual years of education, but the results are the same when instead using household income.

Consistent with hypothesis 3, socioeconomic status whitens but only in countries with a relatively high proportion of Europeans during the colonial era like the United States or Uruguay (table 3). This is also true if we proxy colonial European predominance through wheat suitability or precolonial population density. The magnitudes of these effects are admittedly not

TABLE 3
SOCIOECONOMIC WHITENING DIFFERS BY COLONIAL DEMOGRAPHY ACROSS THE AMERICAS

	IDENTIFICATION AS WHITE				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Education	-.03*** (.01)	-.03*** (.01)	-.02*** (.01)	-.01 (.02)	-.02** (.01)
Education × proportion European (colonial era) . . . . .	.12*** (.02)				
Education × proportion European (1500–1800) . . . . .		.09*** (.02)			
Education × wheat suitability . . . . .			.09*** (.02)		
Education × sugarcane suitability				-.05 (.10)	
Education × population density (1500)					-.01** (.005)
Observations	130,917	117,439	115,616	115,616	130,917
Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Skin color fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cluster SE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

NOTE.—Multinomial logistic regression with racial identification as the dependent variable (baseline is mixed race). Skin color measured on a 10-point scale, and SEs (in parentheses) are clustered at the country level. Spanish colony is the reference category. Results for identification as black and other not reported.

- * $P < .05$.
- ** $P < .01$.
- *** $P < .001$.

large. The difference that an additional 15 years of education, all else held constant, makes to the probability a person will identify as white is only some 10 percentage points between countries with relatively high or low proportion of Europeans during the colonial era. But, because the main effect of education on racial identity is quite small, the effect of colonial demography is sufficient to alter the direction of status-driven racial fluidity (fig. 4). In other words, socioeconomic whitening today is entirely limited to countries predominated by European settlers during the colonial era. Improvements in education instead *mestizoize* countries predominated by non-Europeans during the colonial era like Mexico or Peru where ideologies of mestizaje have tended to be adopted by the state.²¹

²¹ This can be seen in fig. 4 and table 3 because the baseline is mixed race identification and the coefficients on education are negative (so improvements in education predict racial mestizoization rather than whitening in countries with a small proportion of Europeans during the colonial era).

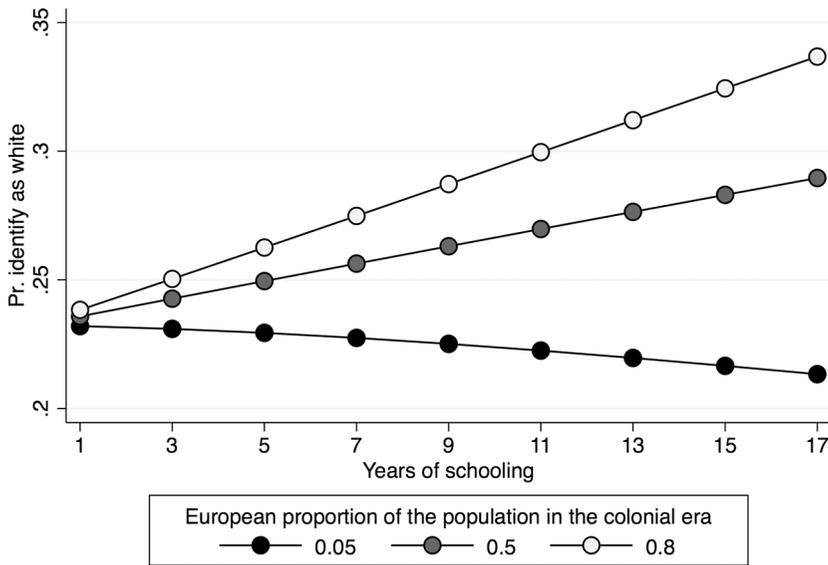


FIG. 4.—Marginal effect of education on identification as white by the proportion of the country that was European during the colonial era. Derived from a multinomial logistic model including respondent skin color and country fixed effects.

Thus, while it is now well established that the direction of status-driven racial fluidity is far from uniform across the Americas (e.g., Telles and Flores 2013; Telles and Paschel 2014; Paredes 2018), these results provide the first systematic evidence from across the Americas accounting for when socioeconomic status whitens or darkens individual race. At least for racial self-identification, higher socioeconomic status whitens only in countries predominated by European settlers during the colonial era. Elsewhere, where ideologies of racial mixture tended to be adopted by postindependence elites, socioeconomic status today tends to mestizoize individual race.

A limitation of the analysis so far is that I have implicitly treated countries as internally homogeneous. This is, of course, far from the case. I will now address this limitation by demonstrating how colonial demography shaped contemporary racial schemas in different regions of Brazil. I focus on Brazil for two reasons. First, Brazil's racial dynamics have long been central to the study of race in Latin America. Although I cannot offer a thorough review of this vast literature, by addressing a canonical case I can demonstrate the value of my theory for making sense of an important touchstone in the broader race literature.²² Second, Brazil is highly decentralized and is therefore particularly well suited to testing the theory of this article at the subnational level.

²² Please see Telles (2004, 2014) and Bailey (2009) for excellent surveys of the historiography.

Brazil's Regional Racial Schemas

Conceptions of whiteness, blackness, and racial mixture vary across Brazil (Telles 2004; Loveman, Muniz, and Bailey 2012; Monk 2016). Just as certain nation-states in the Americas have been historically defined by a racial binaries and others by the normativity of racial mixture, Brazil's regions differ substantially in terms of their racial schemas. Scholars have primarily distinguished between a racial schema in the Brazilian South and Southeast defined by a white/black binary and a system in its North and Northeast historically defined by the normativity of racial mixture (Nogueira 1985; Guimarães 1999). Drawing on the data from AB, we can indeed see that Brazil's South is marked by a binary with inclusive conceptions of both whiteness and blackness by skin color, whereas the Northeast is characterized by a racial spectrum and an encompassing racially mixed (*moreno*) category (fig. 5).²³ The overwhelming whiteness of Brazil's South according to the census is thus due not only to the generally lighter skin color of its people but also, in large part, to the particularly broad conception of whiteness that exists there today.²⁴

What accounts for these different regional racial schemas? My theory would predict that different understandings of race within Brazil today can be traced back to colonial demography insofar as European settler predominance shaped the racial ideologies of elites during the postcolonial era. We can test whether multinomial regressions indeed bear out the predictive importance of colonial demography for contemporary racial identification in Brazil. I draw on racial composition data from Brazil's first two national censuses in 1890 and 1872 to compile the best available proxies for the relative predominance of European settlers in each of Brazil's states during the late imperial era.²⁵ I triangulate these census data with measures of

²³ In popular usage, there can be significant overlap between the black and *moreno* categories (Golash-Boza 2010), but this AB question elicits which of the two categories the respondents feel better captures their identity and is thus an appropriate measure of the relative salience of blackness compared to the more ambiguous *moreno*.

²⁴ In the 2010 census, the percentage identifying as white varied ranged from 80% in the South to less than 30% in the Northeast. It is perhaps worth noting, as Wade (2014) does, that European ancestry does not nearly account for the full extent of variation in racial identification across Brazil—the proportion of Europeans in the overall genetic admixture ranges only from 60.6% in the Northeast to 77.7% in the South (Pena et al. 2011).

²⁵ To be sure, it is problematic to simply equate the size of the European settler population in each state with the percentage of whites. Notions of whiteness differed across Brazil and were historically particularly inclusive in the Northeast over this period (Harris 1956). Nonetheless, to the extent that much of the white population in the North and Northeast during the late 1800s was, as Guimarães (1999) puts it, less *branco fino* than *branco da terra* (i.e., of less “pure” European heritage), historical census data underestimate the relative predominance of European settlers in the Brazilian South. This compression in variation biases against, rather than toward, finding any relationship between European settler predominance and contemporary racial schemas.

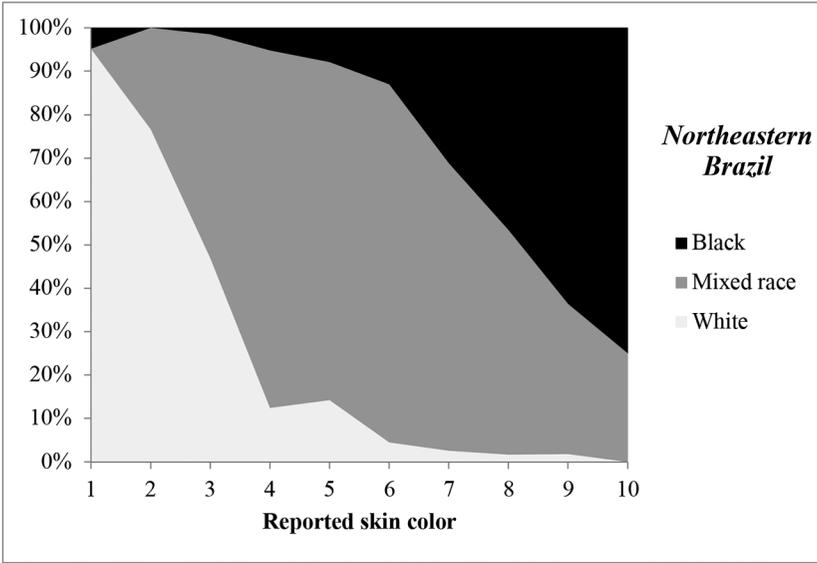
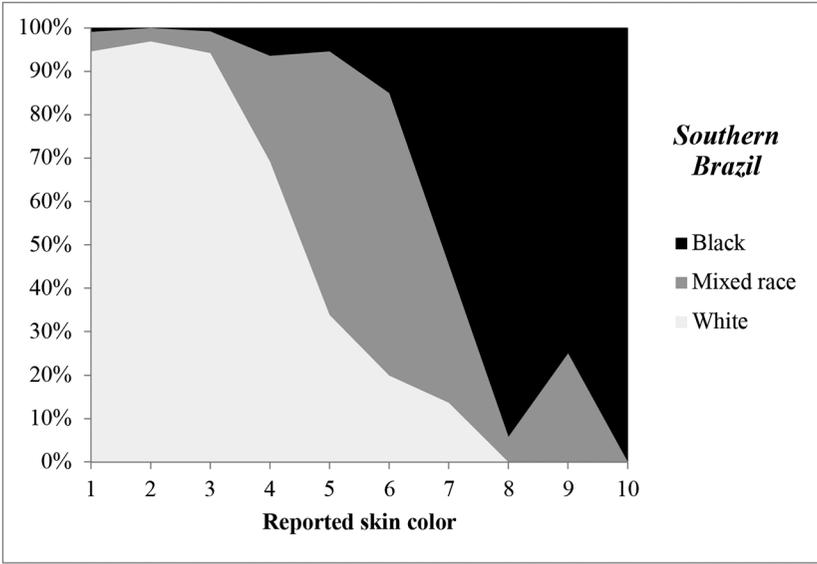


FIG. 5.—Proportion of Brazilians in the South and Northeast identifying as white, black, or mixed race in the 2010–14 AmericasBarometer survey rounds by the 10-point skin color palette (1 = very light).

TABLE 4
COLONIAL DEMOGRAPHY PREDICTS RACIAL BINARIES WITHIN BRAZIL

	MODEL 1		MODEL 2		MODEL 3	
	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black
Proportion white (1890)	4.49***	2.24***				
	(.75)	(.59)				
Proportion white (1872)			4.10***	2.23***		
			(.71)	(.51)		
Wheat suitability					6.75***	3.48***
					(.78)	(.87)
Sugarcane suitability					-.75	-.20
					(.58)	(.58)
Skin color fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cluster SE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

NOTE.—Multinomial logistic regression with racial identification as the dependent variable (baseline is mixed race). Skin color measured on a 10-point scale, and SEs (in parentheses) are clustered at the state level. *N* = 5,414.

- * *P* < .01.
- ** *P* < .05.
- *** *P* < .10.

wheat and sugarcane suitability by state taken from the Global Agricultural-Ecological Zones project as more indirect proxies for colonial European predominance. I then use the same survey data from AB to examine how Brazilian state demography during the late imperial era predicts the racial identification of individuals with the otherwise same skin color today.

Consistent with my theory, the boundaries of whiteness and blackness are both much more inclusive today in states of Brazil predominated by settlers during the imperial era or that are more suitable for wheat production (table 4). These effect sizes are substantial and similar in magnitude to the cross-national results. The odds that an otherwise phenotypically similar person identifies as black or white in a state with a standard deviation higher proportion of settlers during the late imperial era (or approximately 20 percentage points) are 2 and 10 times higher, respectively, today.

Likewise, socioeconomic status can whiten or darken one’s race in Brazil today depending on historical settler predominance (table 5). The magnitude of the interaction between education and colonial demography is admittedly not very large, but it is sufficient to reverse the main effect of education (fig. 6). In other words, education whitens Brazilians today but only in states predominated by European settlers during the late colonial era. Elsewhere in Brazil, higher socioeconomic status tends to darken one’s race today. Thus, consistent with hypotheses 1–3, racial binaries and socioeconomic whitening characterize areas of Brazil predominated by European settlers during the colonial era.

TABLE 5
SOCIOECONOMIC WHITENING DIFFERS BY COLONIAL DEMOGRAPHY WITHIN BRAZIL

	IDENTIFICATION AS WHITE			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Education	-.12** (.05)	-.12** (.05)	-.03 (.02)	-.002 (.04)
Education × proportion white (1890) . . . . .	.22*** (.08)			
Education × proportion white (1872) . . . . .		.21*** (.08)		
Education × wheat suitability . . . . .			.14 (.11)	
Education × sugarcane suitability				-.02 (.08)
State fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Skin color fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cluster SE	✓	✓	✓	✓

NOTE.—Multinomial logistic regression with racial identification as the dependent variable (baseline is mixed race). Skin color measured on a 10-point scale, and SEs (in parentheses) are clustered at the state level. Results for identification as black and other not reported. *N* = 5,364.

- * *P* < .05.
- ** *P* < .01.
- *** *P* < .001.

The Colonial Origins of Racial Schemas in Brazil

How did colonial demography shape contemporary racial schemas in Brazil? Much like the rest of the Americas, Brazil was marked by differences in colonial settler predominance that reflected underlying environmental conditions. Even before mass immigration to the South from Europe began in the late 19th century, settlers predominated in the wheat-suitable areas of southern Brazil. Yet, in the sugarcane-suitable Northeast, European settlers during the colonial era were a relatively small minority relative to either the mixed race or slave communities.

These demographic differences were to prove consequential for the different regional racial ideologies that emerged in Brazil over the 20th century. As Eakin (2017) details, there were two competing racial visions in early 20th-century Brazil that each located racial mixture as central to *Brasiliidade* (Brazilianness). Critically, however, the envisioned outcomes of racial mixture were very different. For elites in São Paulo and the South, *mestiçagem* was viewed as a means to progressively whiten Brazil. Modern, industrialized São Paulo was associated with whiteness and Europeaness, and so mass immigration from Europe was viewed as key to progressively eliminating any lingering African and indigenous influence on the new Brazilian nation (Weinstein 2015).

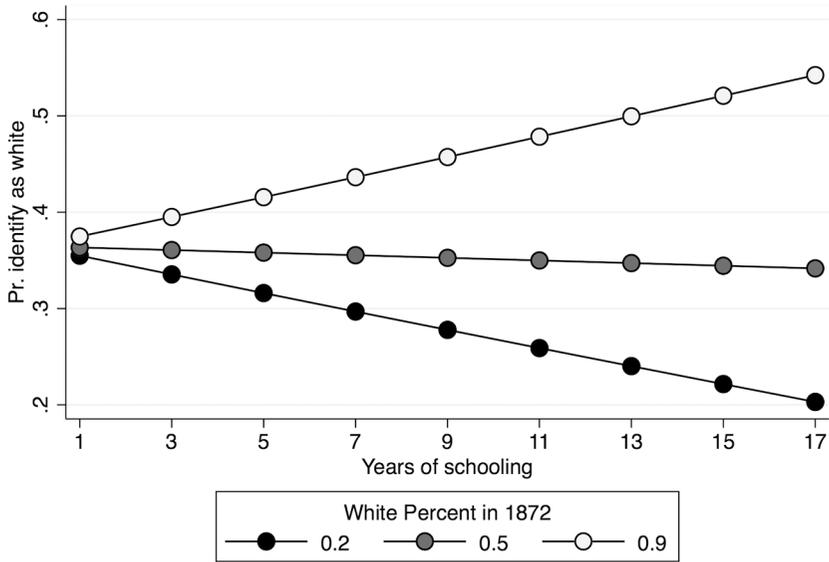


FIG. 6.—Marginal effect of education on identification as white by the proportion of a state that was white in Brazil in 1872. Derived from a multinomial logistic model including respondent skin color and state fixed effects.

This vision, dominant for some time, was ultimately displaced in the interwar period. The 1930s were a period of great change in Brazilian national identity as politicians and intellectuals began to embrace a new ideology that instead gave racially mixed, northeastern Brazilians pride of place in the national character (Skidmore 1974). For Gilberto Freyre, Jorge Amado, and the new midcentury generation of Brazilian leaders, the mixed race *nordestino*—rather than the white Paulista—represented the essential Brazilian character and ideal of racial democracy.

Yet, notions of racial democracy and representations of *moreno* identity were embraced unevenly across postcolonial Brazil. As Blake (2011, p. 224) summarizes, “Differing racial demographics between the Northeast and South led northeastern intellectuals and ruling elites to adopt a more pragmatic approach to race than that of their southern counterparts. . . . If the majority of *nordestinos*, especially the working classes and the poor, were Afro-Brazilian, then there was little to be gained, either economically or politically, in making race an issue.” Yet, just as elites in the Brazilian Northeast embraced notions of racial democracy and sought to reduce the salience of racial difference, Paulistas and southerners continued to privilege whiteness as a source of regional exceptionalism (Oliven 1996; Weinstein 2015). Indeed, in the 1950s, Freyre publicly criticized intellectuals from São Paulo for their “un-Brazilian” and “quasi-American” attitudes toward race (Weinstein 2015,

p. 340). The emphasis placed by Paulistas on their whiteness and accordingly on policing a white/nonwhite racial boundary created an oppressive climate for Afro-descendants who found themselves openly subject to racial discrimination (Guimarães 1999).²⁶

The different racial ideologies that took hold across Brazil are, in turn, responsible for regional variation in racial schemas today. Identification as *moreno* in contemporary Brazil reflects not just one's racial background but also the embrace of racial mixture (Sheriff 2001; Sansone 2003). So, identification as *moreno* relative to black or white is particularly popular among mixed race Brazilians in the Northeast and North, where commitment to the ideal of racial democracy has historically been strongest (Bailey and Telles 2006; Mitchell-Walthour and Darity 2014). In the South and Southeast where whiteness has historically been prized, however, upwardly mobile persons have historically downplayed any mixed heritage with a view to reclassifying themselves and their children as white. Accordingly, higher socioeconomic status tends to whiten racial identification in the Brazilian South and Southeast while darkening individual race in the North and Northeast (Schwartzman 2007).²⁷ And longitudinal surveys show that mixed race Brazilians have tended to change their race to black or white in the Brazilian South (Muniz and Bastos 2017). This process of racial reclassification progressively led to a whitening and blackening of the Brazilian South and Southeast, as the boundaries of whiteness and blackness there expanded to encompass a phenotypically broader set of individuals relative to the rest of the country. Yet, the process of racial reclassification led to a *mestiçagization* of the Brazilian North and Northeast, as the boundaries of *moreno* expanded to encompass all but the very lightest and darkest individuals.

In sum, the evidence from Brazil mirrors my cross-national findings and helps to illustrate my overarching argument. Racial binaries and socioeconomic whitening both characterize areas today that were predominated by Europeans during the colonial era, where whiteness rather than racial mixture has been prized during the postcolonial era. More generally, the existence of substantial regional variation in understandings of race across Brazil today underscores the fact that, contrary to the expectations of the first generation

²⁶ These regional differences in racial attitudes were subsequently captured in the touchstone UNESCO project of the 1950s, which found substantial social and economic distance separating whites and blacks in Brazil's southern cities whereas explicit racial prejudice was more muted in the Northeast (Maio 2001).

²⁷ Consistent with the changing political associations of blackness, Bailey and Telles (2006) and Marteleto (2012) find that more educated Afro-descendent Brazilians increasingly identify as black rather than *moreno*. Likewise, Telles and Paschel (2014) find that in Brazil today socioeconomic status tends to darken or whiten depending on whether you are at the *pardo* white line or *pardo* black line.

of race scholarship, there is no singular luso-tropical or Iberian legacy that led Brazilians to embrace particular racial ideals. Rather than colonizer culture, colonial demography path dependently shaped contemporary racial schemas both within Brazil and across the Americas as a whole.

CONCLUSION

Why do understandings of race differ so substantially across the Americas today? An influential first generation of race scholarship attributed contemporary racial schemas to the cultural legacies of different colonizers, whereas a second generation has stressed the different postcolonial racial ideologies adopted by elites. Seeking to reconcile these discordant arguments, this article has theorized how colonial legacies path dependently shaped contemporary understandings of race through the racial ideologies adopted by national elites. Using survey data from over 130,000 individuals across 27 countries and 25 states of Brazil, I have demonstrated that the incidence of racial binaries and the direction of status-driven racial fluidity can be traced back to colonial demography. Racial binaries and socioeconomic whitening characterize areas predominated by European settlers during the colonial era, where nations and regions have been constructed as white. Elsewhere in the Americas, where racial mixture has been prized during the postcolonial era, the boundaries of mixed race categories have expanded to encompass all but the very lightest and darkest individuals and socioeconomic status tends to mestizoize individual race today. I moreover found little evidence in favor of the importance of Iberian or Catholic cultural legacies. Otherwise similar individuals are actually much more likely to identify as white relative to racially mixed in former Iberian and French colonies.

The contributions of this article are twofold. First, I have demonstrated that patterns of racial identification across the Americas today are inconsistent with the cultural claims made by the first generation. But I have shown that colonial legacies nonetheless are important. The incidence of racial binaries and socioeconomic whitening across the Americas can be systematically predicted by colonial demography insofar as European settler predominance led national elites to adopt national ideologies privileging racial mixture or whiteness. As such, the second core contribution of this article is that it indicates that elite racial ideologies, the central explanatory factor for racial schemas in the second generation of race scholarship, are best understood as the endogenous product of differences in colonial European settlement. Colonial demography, not colonizer culture, shaped contemporary racial schemas across the Americas.

The natural extension of this article is to see whether similar patterns hold for racial categorization as opposed to self-identification. Interviewers appear to be, if anything, more attuned to contextual factors when assigning

individual race. For instance, socioeconomic whitening is greater in Brazil when race is ascribed by the interviewer rather than by the interviewee (Bastos et al. 2008; Bailey, Loveman, and Muniz 2013) and interviewer whitening is particularly prevalent in southern areas where whiteness is normative (Telles 2002, p. 433). So it is likely that similar patterns with respect to colonial demography, racial binaries, and socioeconomic whitening would be found for external categorization, although this remains an open question for future scholarship. More broadly, the findings of this article underscore the necessity when studying racial stratification of measuring race through phenotype rather than self-identification. Racial stratification as recorded by self-identification will always be higher in states defined by a racial binary and socioeconomic whitening, even if the underlying relationship between individual skin color and socioeconomic outcomes remains the same. Given that racial categories mean different things in different places, categorical inequality may poorly capture variation in underlying racial stratification (Bailey et al. 2014; Saperstein, Kizer, and Penner 2016). So, building on recent advances in the study of color stratification (e.g., Bailey et al. 2014; Telles 2014; Monk 2015, 2016; Dixon and Telles 2017; Kizer 2017), scholars interested in racial inequality in both the United States and Latin America would be well advised to attend to inequality as measured by skin color rather than necessarily of racial categories.

Beyond the study of racial stratification, there is much promise for work that builds on this article by uncovering the historical origins of other subnational racial schemas. For instance, Bolivians in the department of Santa Cruz have often articulated their demand for political autonomy and secession from the rest of Bolivia in racial terms, highlighting the region's higher standard of living and whiteness relative to the Andean west (Lowrey 2006). Claims to whiteness, however, must be treated as historically contingent, given that the whiteness of *crucenos*, much like the whiteness of southern Brazilians, cannot simply be reduced to relative differences in phenotype or European heritage. Rather, whiteness is also the product of ideological work in which regional elites for political reasons have defined *crucenos* as racially distinct relative to the rest of Bolivia. Beyond Bolivia, regions in countries such as Colombia and Panama are very much racially stereotyped, and such stereotypes, in turn, likely powerfully shape racial ascription. Given rapidly increasing data availability, and building on recent work on the contextual predictors of race (e.g., Weinstein 2015; Davenport 2016; Liebler and Zacher 2016; Bratter and O'Connell 2017; Pickett, Saperstein, and Penner 2019), a particularly promising route for future research is to unpack the nation and uncover the historical origins of regional racial schemas.

Admittedly, a renewed focus on long-run historical origins may appear undesirable to more idiographically minded scholars. Comparative-historical theories that rely on path dependency such as the one in this article often have

an overly deterministic flavor. Yet, macrotheoretical reasoning remains essential to advancing our understanding of race and ethnicity, as it is only by identifying commonalities and trends that we can accurately discern puzzling outliers and thereby direct future research (Loveman 2009). In this sense, I have shown that colonial European predominance is generally associated with racial binaries today across different countries and regions of Brazil. But this pattern is not a deterministic law. Anomalous cases that are not accounted for by my framework are, for example, Panama, Costa Rica, and Jamaica. These anomalies in turn point to promising directions where our understanding of comparative racial formation might be improved.

With respect to Panama, the anomalously inclusive notion of whiteness there today points to the need for further research on how the United States shaped racial formation across the Americas. The influence of the United States has been used to compellingly explain the whitening of Puerto Rico over the early 20th century (Loveman and Muniz 2007). Yet, the export of white supremacy from the United States during Jim Crow was far from limited to Puerto Rico. The United States wrested Panama from Colombia in 1903, and Panamanian elites, seeking to raise the sociolegal status of their population in the eyes of U.S. officials, constructed a national identity built around Spanish heritage and the denigration of black Antilleans (Zien 2017). Likewise, Dominican elites under U.S. occupation in the early 20th century sought to raise the sociolegal status of Dominicans by denigrating black Haitians (Mayes 2014). Yet, researchers have not put these countries in conversation to explain their subsequent changes in racial composition.

The history of Costa Rica, however, points to the perhaps underappreciated role of international conflict in shaping contemporary racial composition. Costa Rica—a country that has long considered itself a white outpost in Central America—is an anomaly because it is characterized by relatively little colonial European settlement and a particularly inclusive conception of whiteness today. Costa Rican identity has been primarily forged in opposition to “dark,” indigenous Nicaragua with whom it has long had testy relations. To differentiate Costa Rica from Nicaragua, its elites have portrayed Costa Rica as an exclusively European country with no significant indigenous heritage (Gudmundson 1984). Such racial revisionism is not limited to Costa Rica. For example, after the Cuban Revolution, Cuba’s leaders constructed a narrative of racial democracy in order to contrast Cuba with the United States (Loveman 2014). Yet, perhaps because of disciplinary boundaries, scholars of race rarely attend systematically to international conflict. A particularly promising area of future research is thus into how international rivalries have shaped racial identities across the Americas.

Finally, the Jamaican case suggests there is great scope for further research into how national racial projects have been subverted from below through activism. Consistent with my theory, Jamaica’s elites during the

immediate postindependence era in the 1950s and 1960s sought to minimize the salience of race and construct a homogeneously mixed race nation. Yet, Jamaica is empirically an outlier because it is characterized by a racial binary and particularly inclusive notion of blackness today.²⁸ Brazil has experienced a similar racial trajectory. Reflecting the consolidation of the narrative of racial democracy, over the second half of the 20th century millions of Brazilians switched out of the black and white categories into the racially mixed *pardo* category (Carvalho, Wood, and Andrade 2004). But since the 1990s, there has been a resurgence of black identification in Brazil (Miranda 2015), particularly in the Northeast, driven by factors including affirmative action and a transnational black activism (Bailey 2008; Francis-Tan and Tannuri-Pianto 2015; Paschel 2016). These cases illustrate that elite efforts to construct homogeneously mixed race nations over the 20th century were far from necessarily successful.

As ideologies emphasizing racial mixture are displaced and countries like Brazil and Jamaica become progressively defined by racial binaries, the predictive importance of colonial demography for contemporary racial schemas will likely attenuate over time.²⁹ Testing this conjecture is beyond the scope of this article, which has focused on accounting for cross-sectional differences in racial schemas today. But I am aware that variation in racial schemas across the Americas developed during the 20th century and likely peaked before when the survey data for this article were collected. So, if and when longitudinal data become available, I encourage researchers to attend to the rise and fall of different national racial projects over the 20th century.

The findings and theory of this article should therefore be read not as the final word but rather as a call for more work that integrates the fields of comparative-historical sociology and comparative race and ethnicity.³⁰ By theorizing the causes of general trends in racial identification, comparative-historical research can help test competing theories of racial formation and

²⁸ For instance, whereas in 1960, 75% of Jamaicans identified as black and 15% as Afro-European, in 1990 only 7% identified as mixed race and 90% identified as black.

²⁹ The relationship between education and racial mestizoization has likely similarly weakened in recent decades, as in countries like Mexico more educated individuals are increasingly self-identifying as indigenous and black (e.g., Villarreal 2014; Villarreal and Bailey 2020).

³⁰ In the ethnicity and race literature, most studies tend to examine macrolevel processes (or how power relations shape the racial order) in isolation from microlevel processes—the factors that determine how a person identifies in a particular way, at a particular point in time (Saperstein, Penner, and Light 2013; Emirbayer and Desmond 2015). Yet, in the comparative-historical literature, the relatively few works that analyze race and identity tend to focus on differences in citizenship law (Brubaker 1990), legal exclusion (Stinchcombe 1995; Marx 1998), or census categories (Nobles 2000; Loveman 2014) rather than ethnoracial identification.

illuminate new puzzles or explanatory variables—such as international rivalries, internal secessionist conflicts, or the changing sociopolitical influence of the United States—for future race scholarship to explore. I have shown in this article that racial schemas across the Americas today remain highly patterned because of the demographic, and not cultural, legacies of the colonial era. But there remains great scope for more work that can refine our understanding of the long-run construction of racial and ethnic difference.

APPENDIX

TABLE A1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR EACH COUNTRY IN THE SAMPLE

Country	Colonizer	Independence	% White	% Mixed	% Black
Argentina	Spain	1818	67	29	1
Bahamas	Great Britain	1964	3	5	92
Barbados	Great Britain	1961	1	6	93
Belize	Great Britain	1964	1	75	1
Bolivia	Spain	1825	6	77	<1
Brazil	Portugal	1825	35	47	12
Chile	Spain	1826	59	36	1
Colombia	Spain	1821	30	56	7
Costa Rica	Spain	1821	54	40	3
Dominican Republic	Spain	1844	12	73	14
Ecuador	Spain	1822	9	84	3
El Salvador	Spain	1821	23	62	4
Guatemala	Spain	1821	<1	56	<1
Guyana	Great Britain	1966	<1	24	30
Haiti	France	1804	1	<1	99
Honduras	Spain	1821	29	62	4
Jamaica	Great Britain	1944	<1	10	88
Mexico	Spain	1821	19	70	1
Nicaragua	Spain	1821	21	67	5
Panama	Spain	1903	33	47	12
Paraguay	Spain	1811	36	55	3
Peru	Spain	1821	11	78	2
Suriname	Netherlands	1954	<1	18	27
Trinidad and Tobago	Great Britain	1956	2	26	47
United States	Great Britain	1776	74	7	16
Uruguay	Spain	1828	72	23	3
Venezuela	Spain	1821	33	61	4

NOTE.—Racial composition data come from the GSS and AB survey data described in the article.

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