ceptions exist, however, conditioned by the economic opportunities and the institutional framework of the different host countries.

Card and Raphael have rendered a significant service to the academic and policy communities by putting together this collection. Because of the quality and diversity of its contributions, it is a book worth reading and worth using as a reference point. Already, significant changes in the size and direction of immigrant flows are taking place in both the United States and Europe. The findings reported in this volume can usefully serve as benchmarks to assess the direction and significance of these new trends.


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In this ambitious edited volume, Edward E. Telles and his colleagues (the Project on Race and Ethnicity in Latin America, or PERLA) attempt to provide a comparative analysis of ethnoracial identification, classification, and inequality across Latin America. Such an immense undertaking is a critically important one and should be commended. The centerpiece of their effort is the new data they generated to study ethnoracial dynamics throughout Latin America. Notably, this international and multidisciplinary team managed to construct and conduct a series of nationally representative surveys in Mexico, Colombia, Peru, and Brazil that cover a wide array of key topics of interest to researchers of ethnoracial inequality and politics; they even generated cross-national data on skin color rated by interviewers—an impressive achievement. Bringing these new data to bear on long-standing quandaries regarding the relationship between skin color and ethnoracial identification, classification, political attitudes, and inequality across Latin America makes this book an important read for specialists and nonspecialists of Latin America alike. Their central finding is that despite historical and contemporary differences in the logic of ethnoracial identification, categorization, and classification across Latin America, skin color is a key factor of social stratification in all of the countries they examine.

Each chapter begins by providing a very necessary historical treatment of the role of “race” in the formation of each country’s nation and the logic of ethnoracial categorization and classification in each country (among all of the chapters, the history of official statistics in Peru was a real standout...
[pp. 142–48]). The cross-national survey also enables the rare opportunity to compare within Latin America and rigorously challenge the assumption that Latin America is monolithic. This aim is built into the structure of the book, with each chapter simultaneously serving as a stand-alone analysis of each country and, by covering similar themes and hypotheses (along with similar figures), an individual component of a larger comparative analysis (p. 35).

While states in Latin America appear to be paying increased attention to collecting ethnoracial statistics and there appears to be both widespread recognition of ethnoracial discrimination and support for ameliorating ethnoracial inequality (two other key findings of Pigmentocracies), there is still a profound lack of clarity over fundamental questions such as “Who is black or indigenous [or white] and how much ethnoracial inequality is there?” (p. 218). Pigmentocracies tackles these important questions head-on. The researchers report widespread disagreement between interviewers and respondents about which ethnoracial categories respondents belong to. This was especially the case in Colombia, Mexico, and Peru, where “almost a third of the respondents who considered themselves white were classified as mestizos by the interviewers and almost half of the respondents who self-identified as indigenous were classified as mestizos” (p. 153). With respect to this form of ambiguity, Brazil actually appears as an outlier. The researchers report relatively high levels of agreement regarding who is white, brown, or black in Brazil between interviewers and respondents (significantly higher levels than have been reported in prior research).

The researchers also found great variation in the estimated size of ethnoracial populations depending upon how questions regarding group membership were worded and the categories made available to respondents. The estimated size of the indigenous population in Mexico, for example, nearly doubled with wording changes to the self-identification questions (p. 52). In Brazil, estimates of the “Afrodescendant” population ranged by a factor of 10 times, from only 5.6% based on self-identification as black (preto) to nearly 60% based on interviewers’ classification of respondents as black or brown (pardo; p. 190). Disagreement over classification and self-identification, in addition to ambiguity over the “true” sizes of various ethnoracial populations, prove difficult obstacles to estimating ethnoracial inequality and designing policies to address said inequalities (they also complicate political mobilization around such issues).

By comparison, skin color tended to be a much more consistent and stronger predictor of inequality throughout Latin America than membership in official, ethnoracial categories. Across Latin America, “light-skinned people, regardless of their identity, had higher levels of education and higher occupational status than their darker counterparts” (p. 226). Consequently, while it may seem counterintuitive that in Mexico, for example,
self-identified whites have lower socioeconomic status than mestizos, it remains the case that the lighter skinned one is in Mexico the better one’s socioeconomic status. Also, while it is true that the indigenous across Latin America tend to have lighter skin, yet worse outcomes than Afrodescendants, the strong correlation between skin color and socioeconomic status in Latin America remains untouched by this exception.

While skin color has been widely held to be central to ethnoracial dynamics throughout Latin America, (quantitative) research has, ironically, proceeded without actual data on skin color. In fact, as Michael Banton (2012) hints in a symposium in Ethnic and Racial Studies, this is even true of Telles’ award-winning book Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil. In it, Telles states that “the Brazilian notion of color is equivalent to race” (Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 218); yet, in the 2012 symposium in Ethnic and Racial Studies (in a reply to Banton), he argues that “race” and “color” “overlap.” The findings of Pigmentocracies, however, strongly suggest that this changing and evolving position may not have gone far enough: ethnoracial categories obscure significant color inequalities (p. 226), and this suggests that race and color should be treated as analytically distinct by researchers. Whether race and color overlap in folk practice is a different matter than whether or not they are analytically distinct with respect to the estimation of ethnoracial inequality. An opportunity was lost to further elaborate the relationship between race and color. A sustained discussion of the thorny issue of comparing similarly named ethnoracial categories across national boundaries would have been very useful as well.

Nevertheless, Pigmentocracies is clearly a very important contribution. It is hard to imagine that future research on ethnoracial dynamics in Latin America (and perhaps beyond) will not, in some way, be in conversation with this significant and remarkable work—especially as scholarly interest in skin color continues its resurgence.


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Our understanding of the Vietnam War has made remarkable progress in the past two decades. The end of the Cold War and the related changes in Vietnam’s domestic politics and foreign relations made it possible in 1975, for the first time since the end of one of the most formative conflicts of the