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**Race and Ethnicity and Latin America's
United Nations Millennium
Development Goals**

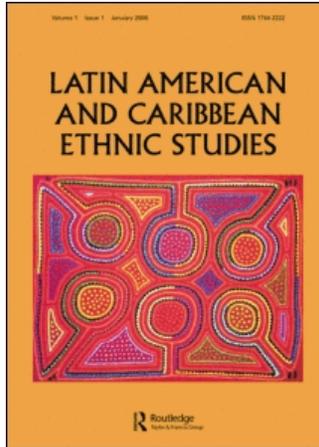
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Race and Ethnicity and Latin America's United Nations Millennium Development Goals

Edward E. Telles

Latin America's problems of underdevelopment most adversely affect the region's indigenous, black and mulatto citizens. This paper argues that Latin American governments should thus incorporate race and ethnicity in their Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which seek to reduce social exclusion in the region by 2015. However, most Latin American countries do not collect race and ethnic data or do so inappropriately and thus there is an urgent need for census and national survey systems to begin collecting such data. This paper describes the data that currently exist and proposes how to improve data collection so that equitable development can be properly monitored. This article is based on a 'concept paper' that was prepared in 2004 for the Inter-Interagency Consultation on Race and presented at the World Bank in February 2006. It was later presented at the 'International Seminar on the Construction and Use of Ethnic Variables in Public Statistics' in Mexico City in October 2006.

Keywords: Latin America; Millennium Development Goals; Afro-Latin; racism; blacks; indigenous peoples; *mestizaje*

Since the United Nations Conference on Racism in Durban in 2001, the issue of racial inequalities in Latin America has come to the fore throughout the region. All Latin American countries officially adopted the resolutions presented there, although actions in pursuit of the goals of Durban suggest that commitments to real change vary throughout the region. Largely through a process of democratization, indigenous and black movement activists in several of the region's countries have been able to begin a dialogue with their governments in addressing the persistent exclusion of indigenous, black and mixed race peoples. Some countries have made greater headway than others in these discussions and, in a few cases, real government actions have come about. Discussions about these issues and, especially, the implementation of policy actions continue to be hampered by claims that such

inequalities and the racism that produces them do not exist but rather are imports from the United States or that these problems are minor compared to the so-called 'greater problems of economic development.'¹

Largely through the United Nations, member countries have come under international pressure to pursue human rights goals and encourage sustainable development. A promising advance in this area has been the recent creation of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which set out a series of precise and measurable goals or targets to be reached by 2015. Fully 189 countries have committed themselves to achieve these goals, which include halving the proportion of persons living in poverty, universalizing primary education, reducing the child mortality rate by two-thirds, cutting back the maternal mortality rate by three-quarters and reducing by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water (United Nations Development Report, 2004). Although the targets themselves are not mandated for particular social distinctions except by gender, individual countries have opted to make them.² Although not specific about the goals themselves, the Millennium Declaration notes that 'rights' should be respected 'without distinctions based on gender, race, ethnicity or religion.' Also, the official declaration of the United Nations World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance promulgates the following:

Urges States to adopt and implement social development policies based on reliable statistical data and centered on the attainment by 2015, of the commitments to meet the basic needs of all set forth in Paragraph 36 of the Programme of the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995, with a view to closing significantly the existing gaps in living conditions faced by victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, especially regarding the illiteracy rate, universal primary education, infant mortality, under-5 child mortality, health reproductive health care for all and access to safe drinking water. (2001, item 176)

The Latin American region, although middle income by planetary standards, has the highest levels of income inequality among world regions. Thus, national wealth, while considerable, is spread especially unevenly among citizens. Since the Millennium Development goals are focused on the life conditions of the poor, Latin American countries face serious challenges. According to the World Bank (2002), the likelihood of achieving UN goals varies considerably among 24 Latin American countries and according to the particular development goal. For example, halving the poverty rate is likely for Brazil, Chile, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Jamaica but very unlikely for Bolivia, Colombia, Paraguay and Venezuela, based on recent performance. Similarly, achieving primary education is likely for half of the countries in the region and indeed some have already achieved this goal but this MDG is deemed very unlikely to be achieved for Guatemala.

While there may be little difficulty in achieving some of these goals for the general population for some countries in the region, the challenge is greater in the case of particular racial and ethnic groups. For example, the World Bank (2002) expects that Brazil is likely to achieve five of the seven MDGs but a perusal of this data for blacks

and mulattos may indicate otherwise. Similarly, Hall & Patrinos (2006) find that in the so-called Indigenous People's Decade (1994–2004), rates of poverty reduction in Mexico, Bolivia and Guatemala were slower than for non-indigenous persons while there were no ethnic differences in Ecuador and Peru, where national poverty increased. Since racial and ethnic minorities are generally further behind than the dominant group on poverty and related indicators and since goals generally measure progress towards an absolute standard rather than achieving the standard itself, progress may be similar across groups, at best, thereby not reducing, and sometimes increasing, levels of ethnic inequality. Thus, reducing the racial/ethnic gaps on the MDGs by 2015 remains a great challenge for Latin American countries.

Historical Background

Like the United States, many countries in Latin America were sites of encounters among indigenous peoples, Europeans and Africans. In broad terms, Europeans came upon American shores as early as 1492 and found various groups of indigenous peoples. Soon after, the European colonists waged wars and brought disease, resulting in the decimation of the indigenous population and either the enslavement or displacement of the indigenous survivors. As the weakened and reduced Indian population was often inadequate for their labor needs and because indigenous slavery was made illegal in 1542, Europeans would turn to Africa for slaves. Eventually, several million Africans were brought to the New World, especially to Brazil and the Caribbean but also to most of the rest of Latin America. Many of the descendants of Africans continued to be enslaved until well into the 19th century while others, as well as the conquered indigenous peoples, would continue to suffer from various repressive or exploitative labor systems.

In the 19th century, scientific racism had deemed that nonwhites were degenerate and intellectually inferior. Since many Latin American countries had large nonwhite populations, elites actively sought to escape from their apparently doomed status by whitening their populations. This included importing large numbers of European immigrants and encouraging racial mixing, expecting that white traits would dominate. Brazil, for example, assured whitening through ship subsidies and land grants to European immigrants while African and Asian immigration was prohibited. With a large African and indigenous population, Argentine elites in the 19th century strongly advocated for whitening because of the presumed superiority of the white race, a goal that they would largely achieve. Indeed, Domingo F. Sarmiento and Carlos O. Bunge saw race as the leading problem of not only their Argentina, but of all Latin America (Helg, 1990). In particular, the science of eugenics, which sought genetic improvements in humans through better breeding, emerged in the late 19th century and was embraced by the leading Latin American scientists (Stefan, 1991). Race became a dominant theme for eugenicists and the Latin American eugenics community largely pursued the avenue of 'constructive miscegenation,' contrary to the more repressive means used in other countries.

As scientific racism was becoming increasingly discredited in the early 20th century and as the world witnessed the horrors of Nazi Germany, many Latin American

countries would begin to promote their miscegenation. The glorification of miscegenation could be used as a tool for fostering national unity among their often disunited populaces and at the same time could now be used to demonstrate a moral superiority over Germany and Latin America's powerful but racially segregated neighbor to the north. Brazil and Mexico promoted national ideologies that made racial mixture the centerpiece of their new nation-building efforts. In the 1930s, Brazil began to consider itself a racial democracy based on the narrative of Gilberto Freyre (1933), which proclaimed that they had uniquely blended African, Indian and Portuguese people and cultures to create a superior meta-race of Brazilians. At about the same time in post-revolutionary Mexico, the Secretary of Education José Vasconcelos wrote and proclaimed *La Raza Cosmica*, which similarly extolled the values of racial hybridism and the production of a superior mestizo race (Knight, 1990). A new generation of Brazilians and Mexicans would eventually accept the tenants of these ideologies and also proclaim that racism did not exist in their country. Similar notions would be adopted in other nations of the region.

Miscegenation has historically been used by Latin Americans as proof that they are not racist, that racial distinctions cannot be made because of the great fluidity among categories and that nearly everyone has black or Indian blood. While historical and contemporary evidence suggests that there was often more racial mixing than the United States, this did not prevent widespread prejudice and discrimination based on skin color, language and customs. Blacks and Indians have been marginalized and relegated to the informal sector and underdeveloped regions. Despite significant miscegenation, Latin America's racial inequalities or its 'pigmentocracy'³ consistently shows up in income, education and other socioeconomic data, where such data are available. Regardless of data availability, though, the preference for white skin has become obvious for many social observers throughout the region. For example, a look at Latin American advertising and television quickly reveals the overrepresentation of light-skinned, European looking and blonde models and actors in countries like Mexico, Brazil and Venezuela.

An important difference between Brazil and Mexico, to mention only the two largest countries in the region, is that the dominant population in Mexico calls itself mestizo, while in Brazil they are considered white. This may be partly a function of the extent of miscegenation among the elite but is also largely due to the particular ideologies and classification systems that have evolved in both countries. In both countries, skin color appears to determine life chances. We know this for certain in Brazil through official statistics while this is harder to sustain in Mexico because such data are not available. Although the racial democracy ideology elevated the status of the mixed race person, this population, which comprises about 39 per cent of Brazilians, tends to have life chances that are much closer to the small (6 per cent) black population than the roughly 53 per cent that is designated as white. What makes it different from the United States is that race in Brazil is based on appearance so that the category 'white' includes many persons of some African or indigenous ancestry. In Mexico, the indigenous population comprises about 10 per cent of the population and virtually everyone else is considered mestizo, regardless of their skin color.

Data Needs on Race and the MDGs

In the few countries where such data are available, Indians, blacks and mulattos fall behind on the MDGs. However, these data have been available for only a handful of countries and rarely in the appropriate format for assessing the MDGs, although several countries have recently begun race and ethnic data collection for the first time. Based on the available data, we know that blacks and Indians throughout the region continue to disproportionately suffer from poverty and underdevelopment. Although the most egregious systems of labor exploitation have mostly ended, the available evidence consistently demonstrates that these groups continue to be more likely to live in poverty, be illiterate, die at a younger age, reside in substandard housing and bear the greatest burden of police abuse. Some Latin Americans today have begun to recognize the importance of racial discrimination in producing racial inequalities although many others, while they may recognize the apparent racial inequalities, claim that they derive from highly unequal class systems and differences in regional development rather than current racial discrimination. For most Latin American countries, though, such assertions remain speculative until appropriate data are available to test this hypothesis.

The ability of Latin American states to monitor progress toward the MDGs is generally greater for indigenous peoples than for blacks and mulattos because of greater data availability. We know about inequality on the basis of large-scale data sets for Indians in most Latin American countries, but for blacks we have only begun to establish this among a significant number of countries in the region. Until 2000, almost no Spanish speaking country in the region collected such data. Cuba has had a long tradition of collecting data for African origin persons and Costa Rica began in the 1990s. With the assistance of the World Bank, Ecuador (2001), Honduras (2001), Nicaragua (2005) and Peru (2005) have collected these data nationally for the first time and Argentina and Uruguay plan to collect race data in their next census in 2010 (Stubbs, 2006). In 2005, the Colombian Census gathered race data for the first time in a comprehensive way rather than for only those that resided in an Afro-Colombian community.⁴ Another source for racial data that include African origin populations are national household surveys in a handful of countries like Uruguay's in 1998 and Peru's in 2004 but only Belize, Brazil, Guyana and Trinidad-Tobago regularly collect this information (Florez *et al.*, 2001; Stubbs, 2006).⁵

Even where race/ethnic data have been regularly collected, providing appropriate data for measuring MDG targets is limited by the collection and format of the data. That is, data collection efforts must assure that information is sought on all of the MDG indicators. Most countries in the region have collected race and ethnic data at one time or another but the data produced often consist merely of counts of the population by race and ethnicity and at best information by race and ethnicity for only a handful of indicators at the national level. For example, poverty or income data are collected more often than information on infant mortality or access to water. Data on maternal mortality are even less likely to be collected.

Furthermore, data need to be compiled in an appropriate way for creating MDG indicators. For example, while figures on the average years of schooling or illiteracy is

often available, it is more difficult to find the MDG indicator that reveals the percentage of persons that complete primary education. Getting governments to publish such data according to race is still another issue. With rapid improvements and greater affordability of computer technology and ease in production of electronic data, countries in the region should be capable of producing individual-level data sets rather than issuing only aggregate-level published data. Individual-level data in electronic form can be analyzed locally with personal computers and statistical or spreadsheet-like software, which permits ease in formatting data to conform to the MDGs, as long as the relevant data are collected in the first place. Thus, a looming issue in reaching development goals by race or ethnicity is that adequate data become available.

Race and ethnicity in Latin America primarily involves the categories of white, indigenous, black and mixed race (*mestizo*, *mulato*, *pardo*, etc.). Depending on the country or subregion of Latin America, African or indigenous origin may prevail. Indians are the predominant race/ethnic 'minority' in Mexico, Guatemala, Bolivia while blacks and mulattos are clearly the primary group in Brazil, Cuba and Panama. Some Andean and Central American countries have significant numbers of both. Racially mixed populations in particular countries generally involve a similar predominance of either African or indigenous ancestry.

Indigenous Peoples

For indigenous peoples, such information has been more widely available for several decades. These data have been captured historically off and on since the 1850 Bolivian Census using a wide variety of indicators including language, dress and self-identification as indigenous or pertaining to one of several indigenous groups (Goyer & Domschke, 1984). Psacharopoulos & Patrinos (1994) examined data from censuses and household surveys on the indigenous population for Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru and have computed the proportion in poverty, the first MDG indicator, for scattered years when data were available. While Guatemala uses self-perception, the other countries define indigenous as one that speaks an indigenous language. There are critics who claim that there are significant numbers of indigenous persons that do not speak indigenous languages and therefore their actual population is underestimated. Nevertheless, most Latin American nations have come to a consensus that this is the most reliable indicator available. Hall & Patrinos (2006) recently edited a collection of country studies, which updated Psacharopoulos & Patrinos' (1994) analysis of indigenous vs. non-indigenous comparisons for the same set of countries, plus Ecuador.

Table 1 shows that indigenous peoples in Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru fall well behind non-Indians on the poverty index in all five countries and over the past two decades or so. While a large majority of Indigenous peoples are poor, roughly half or less of non-Indians are poor, although only less than 20 per cent of non-indigenous Mexicans were poor.⁶ For the other countries, ethnic differences are less stark mostly because the non-indigenous population is more likely to be poor than in Mexico. In the most recent period, poverty decreased more for

Table 1 Percent living in poverty, 1981–1988, 1989–1999 and 2000–2002

Country	Indigenous			Non-indigenous		
	1981–1988	1989–1999	2000–2002	1981–1988	1989–1999	2000–2002
Bolivia (1988, 1997, 2002)	64.3	74.6	73.9	48.1	57.0	52.5
Guatemala (1981, 1989, 2000)	86.6	84.2	73.7	53.9	46.9	37.6
Mexico (1990)	–	80.6	–	–	17.9	–
Peru (1981, 1994, 2002)	79.0	62.3	63.1	49.7	40.1	39.6
Ecuador (1994, 2001)	–	79.8	80.2	–	50.9	57.9

Source: Pscharopoulos and Patrinos (1996), Hall and Patrinos (2006).

Table 2 Mean years of schooling of adult males and the increase in earnings associated with an extra year of schooling by ethnic group and country, 1989–1991 and 2000–2001

Country and ethnic group	Mean years of schooling		Indigenous: non-indigenous earnings ratio		Rate of return to schooling*	
	1989–1991	2000–2002	1989–1991	2000–2002	1989–1991	2000–2002
Bolivia (1989, 2002)						
Indigenous	7.4*	6.9	0.61**	0.46	5.7	6.4
Non-indigenous	10.0**	9.9	–	–	8.6	9.4
Guatemala (1989, 2000)						
Indigenous	1.3	2.5	0.42	0.49	9.1	10.0
Non-indigenous	4.6	5.7	–	–	10.5	11.0
Mexico (1989)						
Indigenous	3.8	–	0.30	–	8.7	–
Non-indigenous	7.3	–	–	–	9.3	–
Peru (1991, 2001)						
Indigenous	5.5	5.9	0.43	0.57	–	11.7
Non-indigenous	8.1	8.1	–	–	–	12.0
Paraguay (1990)†						
Guaraní	8.2	–	0.64	–	8.2	–
Spanish	–	–	–	–	8.2	–

Source: Pscharopolous and Patrinos (1994), Hall and Patrinos (2006).

*Rates of return may not be directly comparable because of variation in control variables used in the earnings function.

**Data for urban Bolivia.

†Ethnic differences in Paraguay were made according to whether predominately Guarani or Spanish speakers.

non-indigenous persons than for the indigenous in Bolivia (1997 to 2002) but increased more for the non-indigenous than for the indigenous in Ecuador (1994–2001), although poverty was already fully 80 per cent among the indigenous. In Guatemala, percentage point declines were similar for both groups from 1994 to 2002 although the decline was proportionately greater for the non-indigenous. In Peru, poverty remained relatively stable for both groups from 1994 to 2002.

Table 2 shows similar ethnic differences on schooling, income and the relation between schooling and income for urban and rural Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, and Paraguay. Florez *et al.* (2001) calculated mean educational attainment for

indigenous and non-indigenous people, the earnings ratio of the two groups and the earnings which accrue to average members of the two groups per each additional year of education for the 1989–1991 period. In urban Bolivia, indigenous peoples had 7.4 years of schooling compared to 10.1 for the non-indigenous and that ratio appears to be similar in 2002, although ethnic differences in rural areas were starker, where Indians in 1989 had an average educational attainment of only 1.2 years compared to 4.5 for the non-indigenous (data not shown). Educational differences are found in the other countries as well. Also, the earnings ratio shown in the second column demonstrates that indigenous people earn anywhere from 30 to 66 per cent of the non-indigenous. The ethnic earnings ratio increased in Peru and Guatemala but declined in Bolivia.

Finally, the last column of Table 2 is a crude indicator of racial discrimination in earnings⁷ and shows that for people holding similar levels of education, earnings are generally lower for indigenous peoples. In other words, non-indigenous peoples earn higher wages than the indigenous because of both human capital endowments like education and because they earn more for the equivalent amount of schooling. An extreme difference in returns to schooling is in Peru in 1991, where Florez *et al.* (2001) report that Indians earn an additional 2.6 per cent of their salary for each additional year of schooling while non-Indians earn 6.2, but by 2001 there are almost no differences in that country. Similarly, there were no differences by language in Paraguay in 1990. By the 2000–2002 period, ethnic differences in returns to schooling were relatively large in Bolivia and smaller in Guatemala, but direct comparison on this measure is difficult especially since there are large differences regarding other characteristics of ethnic groups that are controlled to different degrees in the separate studies.

Indigenous peoples more often must confront dominant group attacks on their territory, language, traditions and other cultural rights than blacks and mulattos, who are often, though not always, more culturally assimilated. Although the cultural issues facing them are often quite different, the African origin and indigenous populations generally face disproportionate marginalization and racial discrimination.⁸ Blacks and Indians invariably dominate the lowest positions of Latin American societies and thus their leaders seek respect for economic and social rights like being able to enjoy long and healthy lives with a decent standard of living.

Color and the African Origin Population

Based on census counts, surveys and other estimates since 1992, at least 20 Latin American nations have African origin populations that comprise at least 10 per cent of the total population and at least 15 have populations that are 40 per cent or more of African descent (Flórez *et al.*, 2001, Table 3). About half of those countries are relatively small countries in and around the Caribbean that were colonized by the English, Dutch and French and the populations of most of these countries are relatively well off, by regional standards, with, of course, the important exception of Haiti. However, several large countries of Spanish and Portuguese colonization have significant African origin populations, particularly (in roughly descending

Table 3 Select socioeconomic indicators for the national and African origin populations in Ecuador, Honduras, and Peru, 2001–2005

	Illiteracy	Poverty	Percent of population
<i>Ecuador, 2001/2003</i>			
White	4.8	26.3	10.5
Afro (Negro & mulatto)	10.3	37.6	5.0
Mestizo indigenous	8.0	33.2	77.4
<i>Honduras, 2001/2002</i>			
Total	28.2	54.9	6.8
Garifuna	20.0	40.0	100.0
Negro Ingles	9.0	54.6	10.5
<i>Peru 2004</i>			
Total	4.0	63.0	2.8
Afro	8.7*	55.0	–
Indigenous	4.3*	45.2	–
	15.9*	70.8	–

*Refers to percent with no schooling since illiteracy information not available.

Source: Benavides *et al.* (2006), González (2006), Ponce (2006).

proportions) Cuba, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay, Honduras and Paraguay (Florez *et al.*, 2001). With the exceptions of Brazil and Cuba, none has systematically collected data on race or provided data that can be organized into statistical indicators like those that address the MDGs.

However, as noted earlier, several of these countries have begun to collect data on African origin populations and thus some initial data is available. The widespread data collection efforts of the African origin population began largely with the initiatives taken by many of these countries following the 2001 Durban Conference on Racism. Since then the World Bank has provided financial and technical assistance to these countries on drafting questions, training interviewers, developing strategies to reach rural populations and interpreting results. They have also sought to promote dialogue among national census staff and Afro-descendant civil organizations, and ‘support and encourage cross-fertilization of experiences’ across the region. This included the difficult efforts to agree on questions and response terminologies inasmuch as possible. The 2005 Colombian Census involved intensive cooperative work with not only World Bank staff but with the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (Stubbs, 2006).

Making race a regular part of census taking and inconsistency in how people identify by race, ethnicity or color are currently two major barriers to further data collection efforts. While much progress has been made in collecting race data, these efforts are far from having become institutionalized. Long term commitments are questionable at this point as the new questions and modules or the lessons learned from these experiences often are not incorporated in planning for subsequent surveys and censuses. There is a temptation to return to the old order of collecting demographic information. The Brazilian case has shown that to consolidate a system of data gathering on race, countries need not only resources and technical support,

but also political willingness and constant discussion with and encouragement from civil society (Stubbs, 2006).

Also, racial or color self-identification continues to be a problem. Self-identification is the internationally accepted standard and most acceptable method of racial and ethnic data collection even though it entails special problems in the region. Apparently, many people who are identified and treated as black or Afro are not willing to self-identify in such categories, often because identification in lighter categories is socially preferable. World Bank staff discovered that despite the quality of the questions asked, the level of technical support and the participation of Afro leaders, there was a low rate of self-identification as Afro-descendant. Although self-identification as black or Afro-descendant has been increasing throughout the region, it continues to be limited but Census staff found that it can be increased by levels of information, awareness raising, recognition and incentives for people to identify as such (Stubbs, 2006).

Since data collection efforts have only recently been completed in several countries, as of this writing, most of these data have yet to be made available. Table 3 shows poverty and literacy data for three Spanish speaking Latin American countries for which published national data are available and for which comparable statistics could be found. Specifically, I found comparable data on per cent illiterate and per cent poor for Ecuador, Honduras and Peru.⁹ Ecuador shows the expected black–white differences in which the Afro-descendant population is more likely to be poor and illiterate. However, the Peruvian data show that the Afro origin population is better off than the national population and especially the indigenous population in terms of literacy and poverty and the Honduran data show them better off in terms of literacy though poorer. In both countries, Afro populations are concentrated along the coastline. The Peru report (Benavides *et al.*, 2006) made special mention that the Pacific coast region is better off overall and comparisons by race reveal that there is little racial difference. Also, other indicators like unemployment and college attainment show Afro Peruvians to be disadvantaged although racial differences do not appear to be nearly as large as those in countries such as Brazil or Ecuador. Certainly, more fine grained analysis need to be made which can control for such differences and that can make systematic comparisons by country, region and by indicator.

The Brazilian Model

Brazil provides a model for collecting, formatting and disseminating data on race, especially with regard to its African origin population. Brazil has collected race or color data in six of its seven modern censuses, which began in 1940, and in most annual household surveys since 1976. Moreover, data have been available in electronic form for at least 25 years and the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) makes them easily available. Since 1991, the IBGE asked respondents to designate their ‘race or color’ while it used only ‘color’ in previous Censuses and it uses five terms: *branco* (white), *pardo* (brown), *preto* (black), *amarelo* (yellow or Asian), and *indigena* (indigenous).

Table 4 MDG-related indicators for white and combined black and brown populations in Brazil, 1996–1999

	White	Black/brown
Percent poor	23.0	48.0
Infant mortality (per 1,000)	37.3	62.3
Child (<5) mortality (per 1,000)	45.7	76.1
Mean years of education	6.6	4.6
Percentage with access to piped water	82.8	62.3

Source: For percent poor, Jaccoud and Beghin (2002); all other information available on www.ibge.com.br/home/estatistica/condicaodevida

Economists, sociologists and demographers have used the individual-level data produced by the IBGE to document and analyze Brazil's racial inequality over the past 25 years. Aside from demonstrating profound racial inequalities in many dimensions of Brazilian society, they have shown that such inequalities may persist despite economic growth and that they are largely due to racial discrimination (Telles, 1994, 2004). These studies have largely fueled Brazil's dramatic change from considering itself a racial democracy to now accepting the existence of racism and actually pursuing policies that seek the greater inclusion of blacks, including affirmative action.

The Brazilian data have permitted analysts to demonstrate widespread and profound racial inequalities and that racial discrimination accounts for much of the gap. Since the data are available for analysis at the individual level on CDs, they can be easily analyzed on a personal computer. For example, any variable that is collected in the Brazilian Census or National Household Survey can be tabulated according to race and ethnicity and further by regions or small areas. For those that do not have access to this technology, the IBGE makes many tables with information on race available on its website (www.ibge.gov.br). For example, Table 4 presents indicators related to MDGs and are taken from the IBGE website.

Table 4 demonstrates racial disparities on these indicators, which represent most of the development goals. The per cent of whites in poverty is less than half that of blacks and browns combined. Large gaps remain in infant and child mortality, mean years of education and the percentage of the population with access to water. Given the existence of data series with information on race since 1976, it is possible to examine progress. A study of infant mortality by race (Cunha, 1996), for example, shows rates of 76 and 96 for whites and blacks/browns in 1977 and 43 and 72 in 1987. A comparison with the above 1996 rates of 37 and 62 shows a sharp decline for both groups but especially whites between in the first decade since 1977 but a sharper decline for nonwhites in the second. Brazil's capacity for examining any of the MDGs by race and over time is unique among the major countries of the region.

The Regional Inattention to Race

Latin American analysts have commonly made two major assumptions that they use to justify their inattention to data on race, especially for the African

origin population. The first is that collecting race data is merely an epiphenomenon of class and regional inequalities and therefore it is redundant. In other words, inequalities by race exist only to the extent that they reflect the large class and territorial inequalities of Latin America. The second assumption is that race classification is so subjective in Latin America that it does not permit serious analysis of social inequalities. Some claim that there is little or no consensus on who fits into what category or even what categories should be used. While indigenous/non-indigenous distinctions are often also ambiguous, the statistical capture of color and particularly of the African origin population has been considered especially problematic. Analysis based on Brazil data shows that both assumptions are flawed.

Modern statistical analyses of individual-level data permit examinations of whether race is important independently of variables like class origin or region. That is, skeptical analysts may examine the hypothesis that race has no influence on socioeconomic variables like income to the most stringent of statistical tests. For the case of Brazil, several economists and sociologists have done just that and found that race has a significant effect on income before and after controlling for factors like class origin, region, education, gender and labor market characteristics (Silva, 1978, 1985; Lovell, 1989; Barros *et al.*, 1996; Telles & Lim, 1998). Other studies have also shown that white men are more likely to move into higher status occupations than black or brown men, when they have fathers with similar occupational origins (Hasenbalg, 1979; Telles, 2004). Yet another study takes advantage of the fact that Brazil's extensive miscegenation has resulted in a significant population of siblings that are classified into distinct color categories. That study demonstrates that white boys and girls have greater educational success than their nonwhite siblings (Telles, 2004). This study would seem to control for all relevant social and economic variables that would predict educational success, except for treatment of these children by race. That race merely reflects class is a myth.

Another myth is that racial classification is meaningless in Latin America. Extensive miscegenation is often thought to make the color categories of the census so fluid that racial distinctions become highly subjective. Color is the more common term in Brazil, as it is likely to be throughout Latin America. The Latin American concept of color captures fluid distinctions that shade into each other and the Brazil data show that there is much more ambiguity in classification than in the United States, where such distinctions are less continuous. Furthermore, skeptics argue that color classification in Latin America is often believed to follow a 'money whitens' tendency, in which the better off are considered whiter than the worse off. In this context, then, it is impossible to disentangle whether whites are better off because their whiteness has given them an advantage or whether they are white because they are better off. This creates a problem for understanding if race helps predict income, occupation or education and not the other way around. This is a uniquely Latin American issue that emerges throughout the region as ethnographers have long shown for various countries. In sum, the issue of ambiguity in classification has become a hurdle in convincing skeptics of the utility of collecting racial data in the region.

While ambiguity is clearly greater than in the United States, empirical evidence thus far shows that it does not necessarily occur in the direction of whitening. Although estimates based on race or color should not be treated as precise, just like income or disability data, they provide fairly reliable indicators. Since race is important because people categorize each other and often treat them accordingly, the practice of collecting race data through self-identification is an important issue. The reality is that most race data in Brazil are collected using the categorization of others rather than self-classification. A single household respondent classifies the other members and in practice interviewers often classify respondents themselves. Using a national survey, which collected both interviewer classification and self-classification, Telles & Lim (1998) found that 13 per cent of interviewers and respondents disagreed about who was white in Brazil.¹⁰ However, their estimates of racial inequality, after controlling for age, gender, education, region and the size of the urban area, showed that inequalities based on interviewer classification were greater than those based on self-classification. That is, both forms of classification showed that race had a substantial independent effect and, contrary to the money whitens hypothesis, self-identified race underestimates racial inequality based on the perceptions of others. Since self-identification is at least partly used for data collection in the census and surveys, estimates of racial inequality are thus likely to err on the side of underestimating racial inequality.

Another data collection issue is which categories to use. Brazilians basically rely on a tripartite distinction since whites, browns and blacks comprise more than 99 per cent of the national population.¹¹ Although many mixed race categories are used in practice, they are combined into one for the purpose of gathering data. The ambiguity of referencing particular individuals as belonging to a specific mixed race category is especially likely to be great so the use of one category would minimize this problem. More notable is the distinction that is made between browns (roughly mixed race persons) and blacks. Consistent with its national ideology, this distinction seems to be the most salient one besides the white/nonwhite distinctions that Brazilians make. However, the ambiguity between the two nonwhite categories is especially great and the status of Brazilians in them is similar, both of which lead many analysts to collapse the categories into a single nonwhite or *negro* category even though it is available for both. Given that racial mixture is clearly important in most of the region, it makes sense to continue gathering data using a mixed race category but, as the case of Brazil demonstrates, analysts may decide to collapse it with the black category when examining inequality for good reason.

Finally, it is important to note that racial data gathering continues to be problematic in even progressive circles. Collection of race data is increasingly resisted by those claiming that racial census taking and especially policies based on race may contribute to the hardening of racial or ethnic boundaries and thus lead to greater polarization on these dimensions. This is especially apparent in the Brazilian case (see Telles, 2004). Also, there are large political stakes involved in such census taking. The Colombian case is clear, where the census, facing pressure from black activists, redesigned the census question and the count of Afro-Colombians increased by several times. Despite this, many activists continue to claim that the number greatly

undercounts that population (Sánchez & García, 2006). Similarly, the indigenous movement in Ecuador contends that the official numbers grossly underestimate the true population.

Conclusion

The international community has defined Millennium Development Goals or MDGs as targets for human development over the next several years. The issue of race is particularly important in the Americas and several Latin American countries have begun to pursue, at least rhetorically, human development that is fair across racial and ethnic groups. Thus, the calculation and dissemination of MDGs by race on a regular basis is essential for Latin American countries. However, this requires greater efforts at collecting data that capture race and ethnic distinctions, particularly those for the African origin population. While the collection of race and ethnicity data in the region is not perfect, they are important for determining the quality of life of all Latin Americans.

Available evidence for the region shows that blacks and Indians are at the bottom of the social pyramid and continue to suffer from discrimination. The evidence thus far overwhelmingly shows that color distinctions are used to value persons according to such characteristics as intelligence, motivation and moral temperament. Econometric studies, where data are available, have shown that a large component of the racial or ethnic gap is explained by persistent racial discrimination. That is, race continues to be important in predicting outcomes like income, even after class, region and other labor market variables are held constant. Plenty of historical and relatively soft current data show persistent racial discrimination throughout Latin America. Hard statistical data are therefore needed, especially in those places that claim otherwise. The burden of proof that any Latin American nation does not have racial inequality or discrimination falls on their data systems to furnish the appropriate information.

Notes

- [1] This refers to much of the commentary by Latin American government officials and representatives that the author witnessed as a Ford Foundation representative and while attending United Nations and multilateral bank forums between 1997 and 2000.
- [2] At least one country in Latin America, Colombia, has sought MDGs for ethnic groups (World Bank, 2005).
- [3] A term first used by Chilean economist Alejandro Lipschutz in 1942. Lipschutz argued that throughout Latin America, privileged groups continued to justify their own position in terms of their superior physical or cultural characteristics.
- [4] As a result, the 2005 Census yielded a count of African origin peoples as 10.6 per cent of the national population compared to only 1.2 per cent in 1993. This compares to a survey of unclear methodology that counted a 26 per cent Afro-Colombian population, a number which continues to be widely cited by activists (Sánchez & García, 2006).
- [5] The widespread data collection efforts of the African origin population began largely with the initiatives taken by many of these countries following the 2001 Durban Conference on Racism. Since then the World Bank has provided financial and technical assistance to these countries on drafting questions, training interviewers, reaching rural populations and

interpreting results, promoted dialogue among the census staff and Afro-descendant civil organizations involved, and 'supported and encouraged cross-fertilization of experiences' across the region. This included the difficult efforts to agree on questions and response terminologies inasmuch as possible. The Columbian case involved particularly intensive cooperative work with not only World Bank staff but with the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (Stubbs, 2006).

- [6] Unfortunately, poverty data broken down by ethnicity are unavailable since then for Mexico in the Hall & Patrinos (2006) volume but were available only by the proportion of indigenous people that lived in the municipality.
- [7] This indicator is a crude measure of discrimination because it examines income for persons of similar levels of education, although a more refined measure would also control for region, age and other variables that also determine income.
- [8] The term race is controversial as many have noted that it is an invention rather than a biological fact and thus should not be used. Clearly, race has no basis in biology but rather is a social construct intended to create hierarchies among people based on skin color. However, ordinary people often make race or color distinctions and treat each other according to a racial hierarchy in which whites are at the top and blacks and indigenous people are at or near the bottom. Thus, sociologists and others argue that race, through racial discrimination, becomes an important basis for creating and maintaining inequalities.
- [9] Although the Costa Rica Census of 2000 collected these data, I have yet to find published data.
- [10] Fully 20 per cent disagreed on color classification overall but most of this involved disagreement in distinguishing browns from blacks.
- [11] The self-identified indigenous population in Brazil comprises only 0.2 per cent of the national population and Asians are about 0.5 per cent.

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