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What a delightful surprise to open my mailbox and see Macys touting a celebration of Brazil. The merchandise colors are vibrant oranges, yellows, and shocking turquoise. However, as I looked at the models chosen to represent Brazil, it was clear that Macys had missed the boat. Brazil is a multi-racial country. Everyone knows that its people represent a human rainbow, and in fact, after World War II, American scholars often pointed to Brazil as the racial ideal. Thus was born what anthropologist Dr. France Winddance Twine has critiqued as the myth of Brazil as a “racial democracy.”

What Twine shares in her seminal book, Racism in a Racial Democracy: The Maintenance of White Supremacy in Brazil,” is that behind the scenes, Brazilians who looked phenotypically Black have a vastly different life than those who are light-skinned or position themselves as white Brazilians. According to the description of the book at Rutgers University Press website, “…In Racism in a Racial Democracy, France Winddance Twine asks why Brazilians, particularly Afro-Brazilians, continue to have faith in Brazil's "racial democracy" in the face of pervasive racism in all spheres of Brazilian life. Through a detailed ethnography, Twine provides a cultural analysis of the everyday discursive and material practices that sustain and naturalize white supremacy.”

As a Latin American country, Brazil, like many of its geographical cousins, does not keep track of “race” in its census. However, walking around Brazil’s second largest city, Rio de Janeiro—where most tourists end up, a glance at who constitutes the most underserved will reveal that the vast majority of Brazil’s economically impoverished and undereducated, 51 percent of the total population, have African ancestry. In the United States, according to its racial system, they would be categorized as “Black” or “Afro-American” because of our historic “one-drop” rule (one drop of Black blood makes you Black).

Brazil was the site of the largest slave trade in the 1800s. As a result, over half of Brazil’s 194,

946,470 people are believed to have some direct link to African ancestors. That is roughly 97 million people who would be considered “Black” by our standards. In fact, outside of the continent of Africa, Brazil has the largest number of African-descended people.

And, the origins of what most of us (and Macys) draw upon to celebrate as Brazil’s vibrant culture of music, African religion, dance, and carnival can be traced directly to African origins—samba, capoeira, Orisha worship, etc. Yet, Black and mixed race Brazilians are underrepresented in every category of development: education, economics, employment, etc.

Ironically, Brazil has taken a page from the United States and instituted sweeping Affirmative Action laws. During my visit to Rio after attending the 2006 Caribbean Studies Conference in Bahia, Brazil, where most Brazilians of African descent are concentrated, I met with some of Brazil’s advocates of racial inclusion. They discussed the fact that the Affirmative Action laws were coming under attack by students who believed that they were entitled to entrance into the University by virtue of their white skin, and who resented the “quotas” that Brazil had instituted in order achieve a more balanced representation of all Brazilians. These few Black Brazilian students, who gravitated towards the legal staff working on defending Brazil’s Affirmative Action policies, were breaking barriers in ways similar to the first students to desegregate white schools in the South. And, they encountered much of the same hostile

resistance. Accompanying me was an attorney who shared with the group some history of the strategies lawyers in the U.S. had used to defend Affirmative Action policies. We left Brazil, both hoping that the defense of Affirmative Action as an attempt to achieve racial parity in education would have better success than it had in the United States.

So given Brazil's history as a majority Black and mixed race country, how is it that Macys managed to miss the boat and represent only the white side of Brazil? I suggest that in the future Macys employ an anthropologist (such as myself) to analyze their marketing strategies, and truly and fairly "celebrate the beauty and culture of Brazil" in all its rich diversity.

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