RACE, LABOR, AND CLASS: FLORESTAN FERNANDES'S APPROACH TO THE NON-INCORPORATION OF THE BLACK POPULATION INTO THE COMPETITIVE SOCIAL ORDER

RAÇA, TRABALHO E CLASSE: A ABORDAGEM DE FLORESTAN FERNANDES SOBRE A NÃO INSERÇÃO DA POPULAÇÃO NEGRA NA ORDEM SOCIAL COMPETITIVA

RAZA, TRABAJO Y CLASE: EL ENFOQUE DE FLORESTAN FERNANDES SOBRE LA NO INSERCIÓN DE LA POBLACIÓN NEGRA EN EL ORDEN SOCIAL COMPETITIVO

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ABSTRACT: For Florestan Fernandes, Brazilian society was constituted through the subalternization of specific social groups, especially the Black population, whose social position resulted from a long historical process of silencing and domination. After the end of slavery, there was no political project aimed at effectively incorporating this population into the emerging class society, as the exclusionary logic of the old estate order was preserved in new forms. Deprived of access to schooling and the specialization required by modernization, Black people were relegated to the margins of economic and social development. This article examines Fernandes's contribution to understanding how Brazil's class structure consolidated itself in an exclusionary manner, assigning the Black population subaltern roles and producing their unequal incorporation into the competitive social order.

KEYWORDS: Florestan Fernandes. Black movement. Second abolition. Competitive social order.

RESUMO: Para Florestan Fernandes, a sociedade brasileira constituiu-se a partir da subalternização de determinados grupos sociais, especialmente da população negra, cuja posição social resultou de um longo processo histórico de silenciamento e dominação. Com o fim do regime escravista, não houve um projeto político voltado à inserção efetiva dessa população na emergente sociedade de classes, preservando-se, sob novas formas, a lógica excludente da antiga ordem estamental. Desprovidos de acesso à escolarização e à especialização exigidas pelo processo de modernização, os negros foram sistematicamente relegados do desenvolvimento econômico e social. Este artigo analisa a contribuição de Florestan Fernandes para compreender como a estrutura de classes no Brasil se consolidou de maneira excludente, destinando à população negra funções subalternas, dissociadas do trabalho livre, republicano e capitalista em formação. A partir das análises de Fernandes, busca-se evidenciar a complexidade que moldou a desigual inserção da população negra na ordem social competitiva.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Florestan Fernandes. Movimento negro. Segunda abolição. Ordem social competitiva.

RESUMEN: Para Florestan Fernandes, la sociedad brasileña se constituyó a partir de la subalternización de determinados grupos sociales, especialmente de la población negra, cuya posición resultó de un prolongado proceso histórico de silenciamiento y dominación. Tras el fin del régimen esclavista, no existió un proyecto político orientado a la inserción efectiva de esa población en la emergente sociedad de clases, manteniéndose, bajo nuevas formas, la lógica excluyente del antiguo orden estamental. Privados del acceso a la escolarización y a la especialización exigidas por la modernización, los negros fueron relegados a los márgenes del desarrollo económico y social. Este artículo analiza la contribución de Florestan Fernandes para comprender cómo la estructura de clases en Brasil se consolidó de manera excluyente, destinando a la población negra funciones subalternas y una inserción desigual en el orden social competitivo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Florestan Fernandes. Movimiento negro. Segunda abolición. Orden social competitiva.

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Introduction

Florestan Fernandes is one of the foremost Brazilian thinkers to devote himself to the social question, particularly to the suffering experienced by the Black and poor population[3]. Throughout his career—as a researcher, professor, and even as a parliamentarian—his guiding concern was to produce a social science aimed at understanding Brazilian society in all its contradictions.

His origins and process of socialization were fundamental to the sociologist he became, endowing him with a unique empathy and a singular, sensitive relationship with the groups he observed. The so-called "philosophy of the folk" (Fernandes, 1976, p. 144, our translation) was essential in enabling him, through the solidarity existing among the poor and marginalized strata of society, to integrate into these groups from an early age and to understand social ills from within. Among the many studies produced by Fernandes, those he himself regarded as most important were his investigations into the Black population. In these works, he removes the Black subject from the condition of an object of analysis and places them in the position of subject, as he developed data collection methods that involved multiple tools—such as mass observation—that allowed subjects to speak about their own realities within Brazilian society.

In this brief article, we highlight his contribution to the understanding of the foundations of the class structure in Brazil, which, rooted in colonial legacies, subjects Black men and women to a condition of subalternity from which it is difficult to escape. Among his contributions, particularly within the UNESCO Project[4], Fernandes defended the autonomy and affirmation of the Black movement, as the results of his research conducted in partnership with Roger Bastide enabled him to access the roots of the Brazilian racial dilemma and to reflect on possible changes and transformations in modern Brazilian society. One of Florestan's central

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[3] In order to avoid conceptual problems regarding the terms *people* and *population*, we adopt the notion of *population* to emphasize a set of Black men and women who underwent processes of degradation and exclusion from the competitive social order in the post-abolition period.

[4] Still under the immediate impact of the great tragedy that was the Holocaust, in the early 1950s the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) sponsored a series of studies on race relations in Brazil. Taking as its point of departure the idea of an existing racial harmony in Brazil and seeking to reflect on how this model could be replicated in areas of latent racial tension, a group of researchers—among whom Florestan Fernandes and Roger Bastide stand out—dedicated themselves to understanding racial dynamics in the country. The analysis conducted by Fernandes and Bastide ultimately fulfilled its role in reverse, as the researchers demonstrated that race relations in Brazil were structured around specific mechanisms of subordination that privileged the dominant white race, thereby exposing so-called racial harmony as nothing more than a masking of subordination, particularly of the Black population. Other researchers involved in the project reached different conclusions: the studies by René Ribeiro (Pernambuco) and Thales de Azevedo (Bahia) were highly ambiguous in this regard, while Luiz Aguiar da Costa Pinto conflated racial discrimination with class relations. In this context, we focus on the issues raised by Fernandes and Bastide, while recognizing that the UNESCO project encompassed a wide range of analyses and conclusions.

concerns was the emancipation of the Black population from the social and mental structures that maintained it in such a condition of subalternity. It became evident to Fernandes that something profoundly wrong was occurring in Brazil, which led his militant and theoretical work to run counter to the prevailing discourse of a false racial democracy.

We further contribute by highlighting elements pertinent to the process of social change present in his studies on the Black movement, which carry what may be understood as a potential for transformation for the future of the country's Black and poor population. As a fundamental theoretical issue in Fernandes's work, we address the intrinsic relationship between race and class in the interpretation of Brazilian capitalism. The contemporaneity of Fernandes is emphasized and deemed noteworthy by the authors through the discussion of the racial question in the work of one of Brazil's most important sociologists, offering contributions to reflections on contemporary Brazil.

The Structuring of Subalternity

Florestan Fernandes developed several analytical tools essential to the discussion of the foundations of social stratification in Brazil, with a focus on the historical processes through which society has evolved over the centuries. Since the colonial period, the system of domination has left deep marks on Brazilian society, particularly on Black men and women.

The historical digression undertaken here aims to highlight Fernandes's interpretation and his historical uses for understanding the social, as well as his divergences from prevailing paradigms, among which we emphasize Gilberto Freyre and the so-called racial democracy in Brazil. Returning to the foundations of the colonial system in *A sociedade escravista no Brasil* (1976), Fernandes proposes a historical reconstruction in Marxist terms, seeking the causes of the phenomenon of social stratification in Brazil as it took shape, tracing nearly four centuries of slavery and highlighting the "structural and dynamic elements" (Fernandes, 1976, p. 11, our translation) that placed the Black population in the condition it occupied at the time of his analysis. Unlike ancient slavery, the slavery that brought captives from Africa to Brazil is necessarily modern in that it reduced individuals to commodities. This characterization of the model as mercantile slavery becomes evident in Fernandes's argument, given the Marxian influence on his work. The enslaved subject thus constituted a commodity within the colonial
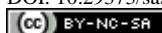
production system—a commodity that was crushed and exploited to its final limits and replaced[5] whenever deemed necessary at the discretion of the rural landowner.

> Although the master purchased the slave, what he sought was human energy—not as a mere equivalent variety of "animal energy in general," but as a form of energy that could be concentrated and intensively used through the organization of slave labor, as if the human organism were a machine (Fernandes, 1976, p. 16, our translation).

The Black population, however, was not enslaved solely by the rural landowner. A vast web of domination was engendered, placing this entire group at the base of a harsh subalternization. In the colonial system, enslaved labor was necessary, as Brazil was configured as a colony of exploitation (Fernandes, 1976). The structure of this system was financed by European countries—particularly England—passing through the Portuguese Crown to rural landowners and free men.

> The owner of the slave—and therefore the owner of his labor power and its product—was not the exclusive owner of the surplus generated by slave production, whose value, in the sectors of greatest economic significance, was necessarily realized outside and above the Colony (Fernandes, 1976, p. 20, our translation).

At the foundation of this system of domination was Black labor. Florestan points out that, beyond being treated as a commodity, Black workers constituted the driving force of the entire productive regime, having their human energy expropriated by all the agents mentioned above. Domination, in this sense, was not linear between the rural landowner and the enslaved individual; other actors must be considered in order to more productively understand the agro-export system that prevailed in colonial Brazil.

The basis of the colonial economy was therefore Black labor, without which the accumulation of wealth would not have been possible. This accumulation enabled the enrichment of the rural white elite, which gradually extended its structures of domination into urban centers. It became necessary to detach the plantation (*fazenda*) (Fernandes, 1976) from the patrimonial order, compelling landowners to develop a mentality typical of the capitalist entrepreneur, constantly attentive to productivity and to the remuneration of the factors of production (Fernandes, 2008a). This process of domination, whereby the rural elite moved into

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[5] According to Lilia Schwarcz's analysis of how damaging the slave labor process was on plantations, "the labor regime was the great villain, draining the vigor of mothers and increasing the mortality rate of the 'old'—workers aged forty or older. […] With such negative data, the image of a more benevolent form of slavery in Brazil is not confirmed, as the life expectancy of enslaved men was lower than that observed in the United States—25 to 35 years" (Schwarcz, 2015, p. 94, our translation).

urban centers, was intensified with the arrival of the Portuguese royal family in Brazil in 1808; the transfer of metropolitan structures to the colony was significant for the modernization process that would follow.

The type of labor performed by the Black population, as noted above, exploited the human strength of these men and women to the point of exhaustion (Fernandes, 2008a), especially under the plantation regime, with little rest and with entirely unhealthy living conditions imposed on the enslaved. Few Black men and women worked within the *casa-grande*, performing mainly domestic tasks. This forced labor was no less brutal or humiliating; however, it was undoubtedly less physically exhausting than daily work in the plantations.

Focusing specifically on plantation labor, as a large portion of the enslaved Black population in Brazil was employed in these activities, the men and women who occupied these positions did not possess any degree of specialization. Due to exhaustion, they could easily be replaced by new enslaved labor (Fernandes, 1976). This lack of specialization, combined with high levels of illiteracy, functioned as a key mechanism for keeping the Black population at the margins of the modern and industrial society that was already beginning to emerge in Brazil.

The disintegration of the colonial state occurred gradually in light of several historical events that cannot be fully developed here due to the limits of this article. Nevertheless, the threshold between the slave-based social order and the establishment of a competitive social[6] order in Brazil is highlighted in order to demonstrate the exclusion of the Black population from the class society that took shape. In Fernandes's analysis, it is necessary to understand

> why it was this segment of the national population that had the worst starting point for integration into the social regime that formed during the disintegration of the slaveholding and seigneurial social order and the subsequent development of capitalism in Brazil (Fernandes, 2008a, p. 21, our translation).

After abolition, according to Fernandes, the Black population was left to its own devices, with no real possibilities of entering the competitive social order. A large portion migrated to urban centers in search of work opportunities (Fernandes, 1976), often without success. Considering Fernandes's focus on the city of São Paulo, the formerly dominant figure of the landowner—now transformed into a businessman—and the European immigrant

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[6] Throughout his works, Fernandes repeatedly highlights the transition from a caste-based regime to a competitive, capitalist class system. However, this transition excluded the Black population from participation in the competitive social order that was taking shape as Brazil moved from a colonial to an urban structure. It should be made clear, nonetheless, that Fernandes understood slaveholding society as a regime structured around castes and estates.

emerged as central actors in the competitive social order and in the reconfiguration of productive relations. The Black and mulatto population, by contrast, was fated to remain outside the processes of modernization and Europeanization taking place in Brazil, which directly shaped the world of specialized labor, for which the formerly enslaved population had received no training:

> […] Brazilian society abandoned the Black population to its own fate, placing upon its shoulders the responsibility to re-educate itself and to transform itself in order to correspond to the new standards and ideals of the human being created by the advent of free labor, the republican regime, and capitalism (Fernandes, 2008a, p. 35-36, our translation).

The modern class society that emerged from historical events such as abolition, national independence, and the establishment of the republic benefited only a few, as national elites continued to reproduce behaviors and customs rooted in colonization, associated with "life ideals and habits of patrimonial domination" (Fernandes, 2008a, p. 61, our translation). As a result, urban centers became spaces of domination for a minority, particularly large businessmen.

> Even in rapidly and chaotically growing urban centers (as was the case in São Paulo), it took shape as a class society that was egalitarian only within the dominant strata and open only to those who held power or who could advantageously participate in the new tendencies toward regional concentration of income inaugurated by the coffee boom and the economic expansion of the southern region of the country (Fernandes, 2008a, p. 61, our translation).

Within the competitive social order (Fernandes, 2008a) that was established, there was simply no space for the Black population in the specialized functions demanded by modern capitalist society, especially considering that "the competitive social order discreetly closed itself to the 'Black person,' since their vertical mobility depended narrowly and directly on the personal will of the 'white person'" (Fernandes, 2008a, p. 360, our translation). In the next section, we demonstrate how post-abolition dynamics further pushed the Black population to the margins of the Brazilian labor market and how this population responded.

The World of Specialized Labor

> Black and mulatto individuals were removed from the positions they held in pre-capitalist urban craftsmanship or in small-scale trade and services, thereby strongly reinforcing the tendency to confine them to crude, poorly paid, and degrading tasks or occupations (Fernandes, 2008a, p. 41, our translation).

This statement clearly exposes what occurred to the Black population in the post-abolition period. Throughout this section, we discuss the continuity of subordinate and non-specialized labor, which prevented most of this population from participating in the industrial and modern production regime that was gradually taking shape in Brazil, once again highlighting Fernandes's analysis of the modernization process in the city of São Paulo.

The so-called myth of racial democracy was fundamental in absolving the white elite of responsibility for the slave regime and of any obligation toward the newly freed Black population. In the past, the slaveholding system was legitimized by the clergy, who defended the treatment of the Black population as property (Fernandes, 2008a). In the post-abolition period, however, it was through the legal framework—imbued with the myth of racial democracy—that the drama of the Black population in Brazil was ignored, thereby

> absolving the "white" population of any moral obligation, responsibility, or collective social solidarity in the face of the sociopathic effects of abolitionist spoliation and the progressive deterioration of the economic condition of Black and mulatto populations (Fernandes, 2008a, p. 311, our translation).

Florestan denounced the hypocrisy of the slaveholding elite and the fallacy of the myth of racial democracy at great personal cost, including accusations that he was promoting racism in Brazil. Through his analyses, it becomes possible to observe the analogous relations between other free men and the Black population, particularly with regard to the world of work. This analysis, developed in partnership with Roger Bastide, resulted in a new interpretation of the racial dilemma in Brazil, challenging the prevailing interpretation advanced by Gilberto Freyre, under whose influence the idea of racial democracy justified

> the most extreme indifference and lack of solidarity toward a sector of the population that lacked the means to confront the changes brought about by the universalization of free labor and competition (Fernandes, 2007, p. 29, our translation).

The myth in question revealed itself as a dominant ideology, allowing archaic structures of domination to persist and to function as "a factor that restrains the development of a competitive and democratic social order" (Fernandes, 2008a, p. 319, our translation), erecting
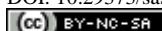
an insurmountable barrier within the world of work, according to Fernandes's analysis at the time.

The white population belonging to the national elite gained several advantages with the end of slavery, but Fernandes's principal criticism concerns the lack of responsibility assumed by members of this stratum toward the newly freed Black population. Feeling absolved of the burden of educating and preparing them for participation in the free labor market beyond the plantations, the elite allowed their exclusion to persist. According to Florestan, "Abolition meant—especially in the most dynamic areas of coffee agriculture—condemning [the Black population] to elimination from the competitive labor market or, at the very least, to the degradation of their condition as potential agents of free labor" (Fernandes, 2008a, p. 59, our translation).

Before abolition, the agro-export model depended on enslaved labor both to sustain itself and to meet the demands of the system. With the process of modernization, however, slavery became obsolete and specialized labor became necessary. Within this context, the figure of the European immigrant emerged. Cities—particularly São Paulo—came to be seen as spaces of great opportunity for free labor within the competitive social order; nevertheless, "the predominant human factor became the agent of free labor, the immigrant" (Fernandes, 2008a, p. 40, our translation). It is also necessary to emphasize that white European labor, in addition to being specialized for the industrial labor market, was part of a broader policy of whitening the Brazilian population. This policy extended beyond the sphere of labor and highlighted specific racial issues that Fernandes analyzed as inseparable from economic dynamics. In turn, Abdias do Nascimento (1978) defined the whitening policy as an instrument that reveals one of the forms of genocidal policy in his work *Genocide of the Brazilian Black Population: The Process of a Masked Racism*.

The burden of direct competition with immigrant labor was particularly severe for the Black population, which, lacking the required specialization, was not readily accepted into modern forms of employment such as factory and industrial work. Even positions requiring minimal specialization were largely inaccessible to them.

> Faced with this reality, Black and mulatto individuals were confronted with two irreversible and inescapable choices. Barred from economic and social advancement through proletarianization, they were left either to accept gradual incorporation into the growing urban working-class underclass or to withdraw painfully, seeking in disguised idleness, systematic vagrancy, or sporadic criminality ways to preserve appearances and the dignity of the "free man" (Fernandes, 2008a, p. 44, our translation).

Immigrants arrived to occupy the positions formerly held by enslaved people on plantations, but they competed on equal footing with other free men already living in the country in the search for better jobs and more dignified living conditions than those they had left behind. Therefore, they possessed attributes that ensured their entry into the competitive social order that was emerging in Brazil. Where these immigrants did not arrive, however, Black labor continued to be used, albeit often reluctantly by landowners. As Fernandes argues, "large landowners gave preference to immigrants where economic prosperity and the relative abundance of foreign labor were pronounced; in regions where this did not occur (or occurred on a smaller scale), they had to resort to the freed population" (Fernandes, 2008a, p. 54, our translation).

Lacking similar acceptance, the Black population was left to perform subordinate functions within the urban setting. Florestan notes that Black women found[7] it relatively easier to obtain employment, occupying positions such as cleaners, laundresses, and similar roles (Fernandes, 2017). In this sense, they ended up performing tasks very similar to those previously carried out by Black women in the *casa-grande*. The burden of supporting their families ultimately fell on the shoulders of Black women, as Black men were largely excluded from participation in the competitive social order.

Black men, in turn, came to occupy subalternizing roles, often being pushed toward what Fernandes characterizes as idleness, systematic vagrancy, or criminality. "In order to be free, they had to bear the option of becoming 'vagrants,' 'bohemians,' 'disorderly,' 'thieves,' and so on. The stigmatization of the Black individual, associated with the condition of slavery, acquired a new negative density" (Fernandes, 2017, p. 80, our translation). Unable to compete on equal terms with the European immigrant, who was more favorably regarded by businessmen, the Black population thus found itself in a state of social anomie[8] that had yet to be overcome.

We recognize anomie as a concept of Durkheimian origin, which refers to a transitional situation marked by the absence of social regulation during periods of social transformation.

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[7] It was easier to obtain employment in domestic service; nevertheless, such work was no less humiliating and degrading for Black women, as they performed subordinate functions in deference to the white women who employed them.

[8] In Florestan Fernandes's analysis, the very structure of the traditionalist social order is reproduced within modern class society, which is why he at times employs the term *dysnomia*. At the same time, Fernandes recognized the importance of Black cultural heritage as a factor capable of mitigating social disorganization and psychic disintegration during transitional moments, as Black individuals moved from a caste- (and estate-) based society to a class-based society. This issue is examined in *The Integration of the Black into Class Society* (2008a).
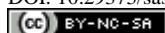
> Without decent work and adequate remuneration, the Black population was thrown into a process of anomie (social and psychic disorganization and disintegration, in Durkheim's terms), which in turn hindered access to mechanisms of social mobility such as formal education, democratic participation through voting, and fulfillment through work (Freitag, 2005, p. 235, our translation).

As the dominant white population turned its back on the Black predicament—masked by the ideology of the myth of racial democracy—a cultural dynamic took shape in Brazil that subordinated and continues to subordinate the Black population, treating this condition as natural rather than as the outcome of a complex set of structures built from the colonial period through the time of Fernandes's writings.

Fernandes argues that the Black population was not incorporated into the class society that was in formation. His defense focused on the image of the Brazilian Black population, on racial issues within the Brazilian bourgeois revolution, and, most explicitly, on race–class relations in the Brazilian context. Despite the rigor of his academic work, Fernandes never abandoned his concern with the emancipation of the Black population in its multiple dimensions.

In *The Black in the World of Whites*, the author denounces—much as he did in other writings—the Black predicament and the inability of the dominant white population to confront this issue openly, even denying the existence of racism in Brazil, where the peripheral position of Black people was framed as the result of their own failure to participate in the competitive social order. "The 'Black person' had the opportunity to be free; if he failed to become equal to the 'white person,' the problem was his—not the white person's" (Fernandes, 2007, p. 29, our translation). However, as outlined above, such participation was obstructed by the very structures that shaped Brazilian society as we know it.

Fernandes refers to this process as a false abolition, in which the freedom of the Black population existed only on paper. Rather than liberating Black men and women to live as equals within the competitive social order that emerged in Brazil, abolition merely freed slaveholders from any responsibility toward this population. The problem thus centers on Black exclusion and on the legacy of the white population, whose exemption from responsibility reveals the formation of classes in Brazil and the exclusions this process entailed (Fernandes, 2017). The false abolition denounced by Black movements and by Fernandes in his analyses would become a subject of debate in subsequent decades, particularly in discussions about overcoming Black subalternity and how this might be achieved.
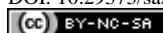
The author further emphasizes that the peripheral position of the Black population—especially in the city of São Paulo—was the result, as illustrated here, of a subordinating cultural dynamic that sought to preserve the colonial-era status quo and prevented Black men and women from achieving social mobility. Even when, through great struggle, some managed to attain a slightly less subordinate position, they did not enjoy the same social status as white men or women, underscoring the enduring nature of this population's predicament. Fernandes notes that very few succeeded in reaching what might be termed a Black middle class; however, using Weberian language, they could attain class status but never that of a status group (*Stand*)[9] (Weber, 1974).

Living in the city did not mean living in freedom, as abolition was a revolution of whites for whites and did not bring dignified living conditions to the Black population. Research contemporary to Fernandes shows that "non-whites experience a disadvantage in converting formal education into occupational positions, which may be linked to processes of racial discrimination in the labor market" (Pastore; Silva, 2000, p. 95, our translation). This finding underscores the continued relevance of Fernandes's reflections in contemporary studies on race relations in Brazil.

Only with the intensified industrialization of the 1950s did the Black population achieve minimal inclusion in the competitive social order, as labor was required for the development then underway. Even so, the roles performed by this population remained subordinate and lacked the level of specialization necessary to compete on equal terms with other free workers in the Brazilian labor market. In dialogue with these issues, Fernandes discusses the participation of various Black movements that fought for better living conditions in Brazil, many of which adopted the banner of a so-called second abolition (Fernandes, 2017). In the next section, we turn to the actions of some of these groups and to Fernandes's analysis of their political engagement.

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[9]Here we also refer to Max Weber's classic text *Class, Status, and Party* (1974). Although Weber worked with ideal types, these analytical tools help us to understand the non-incorporation of the Black population—even of those who, through great effort, reached a middle-class position—who nonetheless did not enjoy the same social status as the white population.

The Struggle for Unmasking

The Black population did not experience passively the process of subalternization imposed upon it in the Brazilian context. In this section, it is worth highlighting the role of the Brazilian Black Front (Frente Negra Brasileira – FNB), founded in the city of São Paulo in 1931. One of its main objectives was to fight for better living conditions for the Black population, constituting "a collectivity that struggles for its 'redemption' and against 'centuries-old spoliation'" (Fernandes, 2008b, p. 122, our translation). This struggle unfolded on multiple fronts, most notably in the sphere of labor, since, as previously noted, the Black population only managed to enter the competitive social order more effectively in the 1950s.

> This movement represented an attempt by the Black population to unite and organize around an institution capable of defending their rights and, ultimately, to secure a space in which sociability could be exercised. Moreover, the political context was conducive to the emergence of such organizations. After the 1930 Revolution, several institutions identifying themselves as "fronts" came into existence (Schwarcz; Gomes, 2018, p. 249, our translation).

At its peak, the FNB[10] reportedly had around 50,000 members (Schwarcz & Gomes, 2018). Its struggles ranged from access to dignified employment to issues related to housing and public safety. Other movements of a similar nature, with active participation in journalism, also fought to unmask the supposed racial democracy that did not, in fact, exist in Brazil. The unmasking of fallacious discourses regarding the situation of Black people in Brazil "generated the need to unmask certain symbols and values that served as foundations, within inclusive society, for conceiving racial reality according to the interests of 'whites' as and while the dominant race" (Fernandes, 2008b, p. 117, our translation).

These processes of unmasking also encompassed the already mentioned "second abolition," which aimed to remove from white hegemony the narrative of the liberation of enslaved Black people from the slave regime:

> […] Racial democracy would only be possible after the 'Second Abolition,' that is, after a process capable of effectively guaranteeing civil, political, and social equality for Black people, eliminating the still-existing prejudice and discrimination and providing fairer conditions of competition in the labor market (Macedo, 2005 *apud* Caldas; Silva, 2021, p. 93, our translation).

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[10] Founded in October 1931 in the city of São Paulo, the Brazilian Black Front (FNB) was one of the first organizations in the twentieth century to demand equal rights and the participation of Black people in Brazilian society. Under the leadership of Arlindo Veiga dos Santos, José Correia Leite, and others, the organization carried out a wide range of political, cultural, and educational activities for its members.

Articulating racial prejudice explicitly remained a major challenge, as it did not manifest itself overtly but rather through the absence of a system of reciprocity in relations between Black and white populations (Fernandes, 2008b). It was in the sphere of labor that this lack of reciprocity became even more evident for the Black population, which undoubtedly perceived, across all aspects of life, persistent attempts by a white elite with centuries-old traditions to maintain the status quo.

Political disputes ultimately contributed to the further marginalization of the Black population, which lived within a society mentally structured for white domination, rooted in patriarchal and slaveholding traditions. Despite the process of industrialization that Brazilian society underwent during its transition from an estate-based regime to a class-based one, no significant improvement in the quality of life of these groups was observed. Thus, the position occupied by the Black population continued to reveal the persistence of estate-based structures of subjugation.

> The "Black individual" sought to rise to the condition of a free, autonomous, and respected "race," projecting themselves into the historical process as an agent of a social revolution that had been aborted. They did not reclaim the ideology of abolitionism constructed by "whites and for whites." Instead, they developed their own myths, evaluations, and social aspirations, seeking to imbue the Second Abolition with the content of an affirmation of Black people for Black people within the established social order (Fernandes, 2008b, p. 121, our translation).

These movements aimed to overcome the social and mental barriers so deeply entrenched in history, without positioning themselves on the margins of an alternative political spectrum, but rather by seeking their own place within the competitive social order. It was an effort "to affirm themselves as a race in itself and for itself" (Fernandes, 2008b, p. 125, our translation). Fernandes also emphasized the need for state intervention in the creation of public policies aimed at integrating the Black population into the competitive social order. According to him, the entire Black and impoverished population stood at the threshold of a new era (Fernandes, 2008b), marked by possibilities for contesting the existing order. It was not only the responsibility of Black movements to fight against centuries-old subordination, but also the duty of legislative structures to guarantee these changes—a cause that Florestan Fernandes himself defended during his tenure as a congressman and that Black movements continue to pursue to this day.
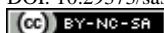
Final Considerations

The work of Florestan Fernandes, whether as a sociologist or as a political militant, was consistently oriented toward social change and toward unmasking the various fallacies embedded in Brazilian traditionalist hypocrisy. For this reason, he described his sociology as a Political and Militant Sociology. One of his central analytical concerns, as discussed in this article, was the Black condition. What stands out in Fernandes's trajectory is that he did not position himself at the forefront of these struggles, a stance reflected both in his theoretical writings and in his parliamentary activity under the banner of the Workers' Party (PT).

He also played a role in the structuring of the PT and, in an explicitly didactic manner, consistently articulated his ideas while reflecting on the social changes required in Brazilian society. He denounced the hegemonic history of the dominant classes still prevalent in Brazil and fostered debate on the ascent of subaltern classes, without distancing himself from a critical reflection on racial relations. According to Fernandes, "the remnants of the colony and of slave society would survive and fuel underdevelopment" (Fernandes, 2017, p. 81, our translation), highlighting their strong presence within peripheral capitalism.

It is therefore essential to adopt a careful perspective on the historical and cultural conditions that reproduce dynamics inherited from the colonial system. As Fernandes himself stated, this system "threw Black people into the gutter, and they had to rebuild themselves slowly and painfully" (Fernandes, 2017, p. 80, our translation). This article sought to articulate the racial question in Florestan Fernandes's work with the characterization of labor relations in Brazilian capitalism. Many of Fernandes's critics attribute to him the thesis that the mere development of the competitive social order would be sufficient to eliminate color prejudice and racial discrimination. Contrary to this interpretation, this article does not endorse such criticism, which does not withstand a more careful and comprehensive analysis of Fernandes's body of work.

Florestan also argued that it was necessary to take a clear stance against the long-standing subalternity of the Black population, not solely in class-based terms, but with the understanding that, given the complexity of Brazilian society, class and race go hand in hand and cannot be understood in isolation from one another: "class and race mutually reinforce each other and combine centrifugal forces against the existing order" (Fernandes, 2017, p. 85, our translation). Only through the banners that Florestan upheld throughout his life would it be possible to overcome the condition of subalternity embodied in the Black predicament.

Universal public education, the overcoming of cultural colonialism, and a rational understanding of social problems were among the causes he defended until the end of his life.

The idea that the development of a competitive social order could create more favorable conditions for eliminating color prejudice and racial discrimination emerged in the 1950s and 1960s as a historical possibility, provided that Black social movements were able to mobilize society toward this goal by breaking their isolation (Fernandes, 2017). Florestan Fernandes never claimed, as some of his critics suggest, that the development of such an order would eliminate racism; rather, he pointed to the possibility that racism could be overcome through the struggle of the Black movement. At the same time, he also considered the hypothesis that racism might become a structural reality of Brazilian capitalism. In his later works from the 1970s and 1980s, Fernandes concluded that this second possibility was, in fact, historically realized, thereby highlighting the intrinsic link between racism and capitalism in Brazil—a linkage that remains highly relevant and underscores the importance of Florestan Fernandes's thought in the debate advanced throughout this article.
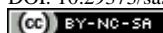
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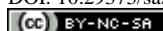
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