

BEYOND *Racism*

EMBRACING AN
INTERDEPENDENT
FUTURE

*A*n old motto says, "Out of many people, one people."

Like the motto, the weaving theme for this publication is made up of different threads and colors, interlacing to create a single pattern of beauty and completeness. It shows that our destinies are inextricably bound.

In the weave, every thread makes a contribution. That intimates that all races bring to the world's stage a vast treasury of distinct ideas, cultural nuances, and social insights that— if creatively woven together— will create a better, brighter and more benevolent world. Alone, the threads aren't as striking.

But stitched together, bound by a common goal, the pieces form a great patchwork of unity.



*O*VERVIEW REPORT

AIMS AND AUSPICES

The Comparative Human Relations Initiative is an examination of power relations between people deemed to be "White" or "Black" by virtue of perceived "race" or "appearance" in Brazil, South Africa and the United States. It is an exploration of how racism – the use of superficial characteristics to confer privileges on some people and disadvantage others – operates and is maintained and ways to overcome its consequences.

The focus on Blacks and Whites is not meant to reify "race" nor disregard the experiences of other groups who also suffer from forms of prejudice and discrimination in these countries. To the contrary, the Initiative's work underscores the linkages among all forms of prejudice. There is value in a detailed examination of each piece of the complex puzzle of human relations in these countries, if we are to understand the whole.

Ultimately, the solution to racism, sexism and other linked and interacting forms of inequality will be found in broad, multifaceted movements – "new majorities" – to secure the fundamental human rights of all people. The Initiative's overarching aim is to contribute to diverse efforts to develop fairer societies in which race, gender, ethnicity, color and other superficial markers of identity are not used to allocate societal goods, benefits, rights and opportunities.

Brazil, South Africa and the United States were selected for comparison because each has a large and disproportionately poor population of persons of African descent or appearance and a history of legal and/or informal denial of equal enjoyment of rights and privileges to such persons. While these countries are at different phases of development and each has exceptional characteristics, all are increasingly affected by common trends and transnational developments that are reshaping dynamics of inter-group relations and forcing redefinition of identities, priorities and interests. These trends are creating new levels of global interdependence and imperatives for stepped up efforts to move beyond racism.

Begun in 1995, the Initiative is a project of the Southern Education Foundation of Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A., a non-profit organization, in collaboration with the Institute for Democracy in South Africa, the Office of the Dean of the Humanities Faculty of the University of Cape Town, and an informal coalition of groups and individuals in Brazil. The Initiative involved several hundred scholars, activists, governmental officials and private sector representatives in meetings in Atlanta (April, 1997), Rio de Janeiro (September, 1997) and Cape Town (March, 1998).

This is an Overview of the Full Report of the Initiative's International Working and Advisory Group, whose members have guided and participated in this effort since its inception.



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