

Culture & Society

Why I Love to Love Donna Summer

The United States, Cuba, and the Politics of Culture

Damian J. Fernandez

I will never forget that on my first visit to Cuba in 1979 one of the initial questions a Cuban asked me was if I liked Donna Summer. It was the height of disco fever—of course I liked Donna, who didn't? At the time, I did not realize that the disco queen had a role in U.S.-Cuban relations. In fact, embracing Donna Summer—or any other icon of U.S. pop culture in 1979—was not merely a matter of musical taste, but a political act as well. To the beat of Donna Summer, and through culture in general, individuals could forge bonds that governments on both sides of the Florida Straits shunned. In 1992, during another trip to the island, it became clear to me once again that culture was succeeding where governments had failed. Cuba was then experiencing its deepest economic crisis since the 1959 revolution, and, as a result, life for Cubans was very hard. Nevertheless, Madonna, another U.S. pop diva, captured the imagination and admiration of Cubans. Cuban radio and television stations played the Material Girl's material even if the U.S.-Cuban relationship—like the theoretical standing of dialectical materialism itself—was in dire straits. The power of culture to break through political walls, in the process revealing stark ironies, surprised me.

The Cubans I have met during my trips to the island have wanted to share with U.S. citizens not only musical taste but all

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things cultural, from Levis to Elvis, from the principles of capitalist economics to postmodernism. From this vantage point, Cuba's "isolation" appears more myth than reality. At least at the level of pop culture, Cubans are integrated into the global stage, if not into the global market. A significant arena of cultural commonality exists that can lay the functional foundation for further political rapprochement between Washington and Havana. Such an approach is fickle at best, however. In the cultural arena, common ground can be as easily lost as found, depending on who is in power to dictate policies and what lies below the surface of the cultural connection. In the expanding area of U.S.-Cuban cultural exchanges—a subdivision of the "people-to-people" policy inaugurated in 1992—tensions and contradictions exist that reveal the possibilities as well as the limits of cultural relations in the midst of political divorce.

U.S.-Cuban Cultural Relations in Historic Perspective.

While cultural transnationalism is part and parcel of processes at work in today's world, cultural ties between Cuba and the United States date back centuries. In the sixteenth century, Spanish expeditions to Florida sailed from Cuba. Nineteenth-century Cuban nationalism was forged as much in Havana as in Key West, Tampa, and New York. In the first half of the twentieth century, Cuban music was the rage of dance halls throughout North and South America and Europe. Just as U.S. culture sold in Cuba, Cuban culture sold in the United States and around the globe.

After the breakdown of U.S.-Cuban relations in the early 1960s and the establishment of the embargo in 1962, cultural contacts with Cuba were off limits to

common citizens. Only the daring or ardent sympathizers of the revolution traveled to Cuba. In the late 1970s, under the presidency of Jimmy Carter, the situation changed. After a group of Cuban-Americans visited the island, tens of thousands of emigrés found the doors to the island relatively open and were able to reestablish their bonds with loved ones who had stayed behind. Returning exiles brought with them more than suitcases full of goodies; they also carried cultural baggage that had a remarkable impact on Cuban society, convincing Cubans of the tremendous opportunities that U.S. society offered. This belief found its most dramatic expression in the Mariel exodus of 1980, when more than 125,000 Cubans used a brief relaxation of emigration restrictions to leave the island.

In 1992, the Torricelli Law (Cuban Democracy Act) inaugurated a two-track policy that encouraged people-to-people contacts but continued to exert economic and political pressure on the Cuban government. The law marked a normative change in U.S. policy by facilitating cultural and academic exchanges with, as well as relaxing travel restrictions to, Cuba. The United States's new logic was to take a soft stance on the Cuban people while maintaining a hard line toward Fidel Castro's government. The law was a compromise that addressed the concerns of two contending sides in the debate over Cuba policy: those who favored normalization, and those who advocated isolation. The ability to craft a *modus vivendi* in what has been a polarized issue is noteworthy, even if neither side was totally appeased. On the one hand, traditional supporters of the status quo vis-à-vis Cuba in the Cuban-American community endorsed the

Toricelli Law because Track II (the section of the legislation that established people-to-people contacts) was portrayed as a backdoor way of undermining the Castro regime—a logic that, as explained below, did not escape Cuban policymakers. On the other hand, proponents of normalization saw the law as a step in the right direction.

The Toricelli Law was a watershed since it codified what seems to be the current, if tentative, consensus on U.S. policy toward the island: relaxing the embargo piecemeal while not abandoning sanctions wholesale. The legislation also resonates with the Bush administration's current professed support for "smart sanctions"—sanctions that punish governments, not peoples. While the Toricelli Law's Track II legislation facilitated greater social fluidity between the island and the United States, the Helms-Burton Act passed in 1996 seemed to put an end to exchanges. Helms-Burton was passed in response to the Cuban military's downing of two civilian aircraft in international waters off the Cuban coast. Helms-Burton tightened the embargo on the Cuban government and expanded possible sanctions on countries, companies, and individuals who engaged with it.

The year 1996 marked a downturn in cultural engagement not only due to Washington's actions, but to Havana's as well. The Cuban government tightened control over academic and cultural travel to the United States. In an infamous speech, Raúl Castro, the Minister of the Armed Forces (and Fidel's brother), condemned what he called "fifth columnists" inside the country's cultural and educational establishment who had built relationships with foreign academics, particularly Cubanists in the United States. Raúl Castro argued that U.S.-

Cuban educational programs under Track II aimed to corrode socialist ideology and subvert the Cuban government.

Pope John Paul II's visit to Cuba in 1998 helped convince Washington of the wisdom of expanding cultural exchanges with the island. The Pope called for Cuba to open to the world, and for the world to open to Cuba. In January 1999, President Clinton announced the U.S. government's decision to facilitate cultural engagement with Cuba. The new provisions allowed for greater flexibility in securing licenses to travel and the relaxation of restrictions on remittances from Cuban-Americans to relatives on the island.

Today, two pillars sustain U.S. policy toward Cuba: facilitating people-to-people contacts while upholding the longstanding embargo. People-to-people contacts have resulted in a myriad of institutionally-organized cultural exchanges as well as hundreds of thousands of family visits which have led to personal, cultural, and affective encounters. The official exchanges cover a wide range of activities: painters who travel to exhibit their work, authors who read from their latest novels, professors who attend conferences to present papers and collaborate on research projects, and performers who stage their works.

The growth in the number of institutions that have established programs with Cuba since 1999—over 200 in the United States—and individuals who have traveled there legally—close to 200,000 from the United States, including Cuban-Americans—underscores the grassroots support in both nations for these types of linkages. It is particularly revealing that these exchanges have multiplied despite governmental obstacles. Yet this fastpace may be curtailed by fur-

ther governmentally-imposed constraints. Since last year, for example, the Cuban government has been attempting to further limit access of Cuban cultural agents, particularly scholars, to conferences and other exchange venues, particularly in the United States.

Heart, Soul, and Money. Cultural exchanges carve out a new space of commonality and encounter that is outside the traditional realm of bilateral politics. In the U.S.-Cuban case the creation of such a space has enabled both countries to normalize one dimension of their relationship, even if most other aspects remain firmly grounded in anachronistic Cold War logic.

Cultural flows are by definition a two-way affair. Cuban culture has found a market in the United States because it sells well. The U.S. entertainment industry appropriates "products"—whether they are songs, novels, or movies—from the world over and markets them successfully at home and abroad. Capitalism takes what is allegedly nationally "authentic," in this case Cuban, and internationalizes it. The *"Baza Vite Social Club"* phenomenon is a result of this process. Cuba is particularly susceptible to such cultural exports since it has had a rich cultural tradition, especially in music, both before and after the revolution of 1959.

While cultural exchanges may represent a temporary brain drain for Cuba, more importantly they are a source of foreign exchange. The music industry alone is reported to generate \$10 million a year for Cuba, while remittances from exiles are calculated at \$800 million. Moreover, cultural programs abroad also constitute a mechanism that provides flexibility to certain favored

groups within a rigid political system and a failing economy.

At the same time, the Cuban government remains aware of the inherent dangers of cultural exchanges. Artists and intellectuals, especially younger ones, form the group in Cuban society that has come closest to overtly challenging the Cuban government. Nowhere is the impact of the exchanges as dramatic as in Miami. Although, publicly, a majority of Cuban-Americans continue to support the embargo as a matter of principle, they also retain close bonds of kinship with Cubans on the island. As a consequence, Cuban cultural activity from the island is readily found in Miami—the music of *la trova*, the latest short stories of Antonio José Ponte, cutting-edge art installations, and the most gripping of documentaries.

Possibilities and Constraints.

While people-to-people engagement and the bilateral cultural activities that are subsumed under this policy have considerable benefits, the policy rests on a central contradiction and on several questionable premises. It also leads to misinterpretation of the nature of the relationship between art and politics in general, and in the Cuban case specifically.

A host of arguments have been articulated in favor of the cultural exchanges. Advocates (I among them) contend that exchanges in the arts, education, sports, and religion serve as confidence-building measures that could translate into further collaboration in key areas such as drug trafficking and immigration control, if not to full-fledged normalization. Cultural exchanges have the clear potential to become a positive force for change within Cuban political and economic life.

The experience of former totalitarian and authoritarian regimes demonstrates that cultural influences may ease a state's stranglehold on society. The covert political effects of music, art, and education can help slowly erode a dictatorship's authority. The same phenomenon is occurring in Cuba.

The policy of permitting cultural exchanges also distinguishes between peoples and governments, a logic which both Havana and Washington endorse. This soft, long-term approach is a positive step toward conflict resolution, especially in the advent of a future democratic transition in Cuba. Developing forms of cultural engagement can help in the long term by fostering the Cuban peo-

This grassroots diplomacy is expected to have a liberalizing impact in an otherwise totalitarian political system.

People-to-people contacts, and their cultural component, are expected to contribute to the development of Cuban civil society by providing greater room for autonomy from the state. While never fully articulated, this contribution is a centerpiece of the policy's logic. Current policy can assist the proto-civil society on the island in a number of ways, since it: (1) may prompt a demonstration effect by showing the benefits of alternative forms of governance; (2) has economic repercussions in terms of helping fund micro-enterprises, self-help initiatives, and the informal economy outside state

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ple's goodwill and attempting to replace mutual misperceptions with a better understanding of both societies. Some advocates regard this as a cautious process of rapprochement that could eventually lead to normal diplomatic relations.

The current policy "democratizes" U.S. policymaking in two distinct ways. On the one hand, it responds to U.S. citizens' values in terms of freedom of travel (even if severe restrictions are still in place and licenses are required) and thus echoes the domestic majority's perspective that isolating Cuba is inappropriate in the post-Cold War world. On the other hand, people-to-people contacts turn those U.S. citizens who are allowed to travel into indirect instruments of U.S. policy, as they become envoys of U.S. culture (and economic and political ideals).

control; (3) makes the task of the Cuban government's surveillance apparatus more arduous as the influx of visitors complicates procedures; (4) facilitates the channeling of assistance to human rights groups; (5) underscores the position of those within the Cuban government who support improved relations with the United States (the same individuals who are most likely to endorse a space for civil society on the island); (6) redefines the relationship between the state and society by providing greater autonomy for creative agents even if they work within state-controlled institutions; and (7) enables the rise of epistemic communities, that is, networks of individuals in the same profession who use a similar vocabulary even if they speak a different language.

The impact of cultural exchanges on civil society development is neither immediate nor automatic; rather, it is a long-term project that in considerable measure depends on the structure of opportunity for autonomous collective action in the country. Sectors of the Cuban-American community partly oppose cultural programs because they do not see the possibility of civil society formation within state-controlled arenas. Their endorsement of people-to-

on society. In Cuba though, they are also political in a literal sense, as the government makes direct decisions about who is funded or allowed to sing, play, publish, dance, or exhibit. It is therefore a pitfall to perceive Cuba as a normal country where artists are free to engage in their activities. Although the Cuban government has supported the arts, beneficiaries paid the price of accepting limits on their freedom of artistic expression. If we find that the

The seductive power of U.S. culture is a threat to Cuban authorities.

people contacts is therefore limited to support for bona-fide NGOs such as churches and dissident groups.

U.S. culture carries U.S. values, and since it is attractive it can convert others into "believers"—or so the argument goes. Capitalism's popular culture and U.S. political values are indeed quite magnetic to many throughout the world. Cuba is no exception. The seductive power of U.S. culture is a threat to Cuban authorities. They believe that capitalist culture may undermine socialist values of egalitarianism and, more importantly, erode the elite's control over political and economic life.

Pitfalls and Misperceptions.

While notions that culture builds bridges and music serves as a universal language are easily assumed, they can also be misguided and possibly counterproductive. First, they dismiss the intensely political relationship between the government, society, and the arts. The arts are always political in a broader sense, as they interpret and comment

separation of culture from politics is a necessary fiction for current U.S. policy, let us fully acknowledge this finding and all its consequences.

Second, ignoring the political dimension of Cuban culture also obscures our perception of Cuban artists' civil liberties and human rights. The people-to-people approach neglects that the Cuban government—and the U.S. government, but not based on a political litmus test of the applicants for travel licenses—decides who is allowed to travel. In practice, therefore, "people-to-people" really means "people-to-government-to-people."

Finally, the current policy may also be counterproductive because it tends to shroud traveling to Cuba in an aura of romantic prohibition. Moreover, by focusing exclusively on cultural exchanges, the old tendency of exoticizing and sexualizing Cuba—which is commonly portrayed by seductively dancing blacks or mulattos—is reinforced. This is a cliché image that edits out the less-than-gleeful aspects of Cuban social life.

How Cool is Cool? Participants in U.S.-Cuban cultural programs, including U.S. performers and celebrities, at times seem rather naive. They go with good intentions but little knowledge. As a consequence, they do not notice the serious and real restrictions of freedom in Cuban society. Contrary to what the Cuban government claims and what some readily believe, the United States and the embargo are not responsible for the constraints on civil liberties in Cuba. To praise the Cuban government for its cultural efforts, as Harry Belafonte recently did, without recognizing the pervasive limitations on the freedom of writers, artists, filmmakers, intellectuals, and most Cubans generally, is counterproductive. The same applies to those who say, or, as in Bonnie Raitt's case, sing, that Cuba is "way too cool." Cuba may be "cool," but calling a dictatorship "cool" really isn't.

A minority that engages in artistic and educational programs may be willing to accept restrictions on human rights in Cuba that it is unwilling to accept in the United States. Yet even cultural relativism has its limits. Artists traveling to Cuba should acknowledge the Cuban people's right to choose their own form of government.

A Way Out? There is a way to reconcile the tensions inherent in cultural engagement and political divorce. If the United States adopts a policy that is broader in scope and internally consistent, the logical faults of the current situation will be reduced and the benefits increased. I propose a policy with four key characteristics—it needs to be long-term, multilateral, normalizing and opportunistic.

Long-term suggests that the means and ends of the policy should look well

beyond Fidel Castro in an effort to safeguard the United States's future interests on the island. This assumes that Cuba will undergo significant political change only post-Fidel. The United States must therefore position itself in ways that will help assist the transition and safeguard its interests—promoting peace, stability, controlled migration, drug interdiction, and democracy, among others.

Multilateralism refers to a policy that engages other countries and aligns the United States with its closest allies. While this would entail the revision of Helms-Burton, it would enable the United States to more consistently draw its allies to its side in related Cuban issues, for instance, in human rights votes in the United Nations. It would also have the added benefit of defusing the U.S.-Cuba confrontation. The United States would downplay the bilateral conflict—which the Cuban government has used for its own purposes—by crafting a multilateral consensus that might increase pressure on the Cuban government.

Third, this policy would entail the normalization of bilateral diplomatic conduct. This would provide the United States with the tools to take Cuba to task for violating fundamental norms that the United States and its neighbors endorse and that the Cuban people themselves value.

Finally, an opportunistic policy would give the United States the flexibility to respond to changes on the island as soon as they occur. Under the provisions of Helms-Burton, however, the president has little room to maneuver.

People-to-people contacts and cultural exchanges with Cuba make an important contribution to normalizing the United States's relationship with the

government and the people of Cuba. These programs, coupled with travel to the island of U.S. citizens at large, and Cuban-Americans in particular, have had, and will continue to have, positive

and at times unexpected outcomes. Yet current policy imposes unnecessary limitations, and in so doing does not serve the long-term interests of the United States as well as it should.

The Politics of Samba

Bruce Gilman

Samba, which was created in its present form in the 1910s, yet whose roots reach back much farther and tie Brazil to the African continent, has played an integral part in Brazil's conceptualization as a nation. Originally despised by Brazil's elite, samba's message of racial integration was eventually used by both progressive reformers and authoritarian dictators. Despite samba's image abroad as a catalyst for racial miscegenation, its political message never took hold in Brazilian society. Today, samba continues to be as much a source of social integration as a prism of Brazil's racial fractures.

Historical Roots. It is probable that the word "samba" originated in Angola, where the Kimbundu word *samba* designated a circle dance similar in choreography to the west-African *batuque* that Bantu slaves brought to Brazil. While the exact number of blacks entering Brazil during its period of slavery is unknown, it is commonly estimated that at least eighteen million Africans were "imported" between 1538 and 1828. The primary center from which the Portuguese disseminated slaves into the Brazilian interior was Salvador, Bahia. It was the second largest city in the Portuguese Empire after Lisbon, and famous for its sensuality and decadence expressed in its beautiful colonial mansions and gold-filled churches. In Bahia, African culture took root to such an extent that today many African traditions are better preserved there than any-

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where else in the New World. Samba's rhythm is rooted in the rich musical heritage that Africans took with them in their forced migration to Brazil.

Although samba's rhythm is of African origin, its melody, harmony, form, and instrumentation are influenced by European traditions. The licentious *axé* dance, derived from the rhythm of the *bataque*, became increasingly popular in Brazil in the late eighteenth century. At the same time, the flute, guitar, and *caçapava*, which initially accompanied the *modinha*, the Brazilian way of playing the lyric song style of the Portuguese elite, would come to play an important role in samba. Brazilian poet and priest Domingo Caldas Barbosa (1740-1800), whose mother was a slave from Angola and whose father was a Portuguese businessman, broke with the tradition of the court style by substituting guitar for the harpsichord and introducing risqué lyrics in the most aristocratic salons of Lisbon. While Barbosa was indignantly criticised for his sensuous poetry, erudite Portuguese composers soon began producing their own *modinhas*. Both the *lundu* and the *modinha* crossed the boundaries between popular and elite, yet gained acceptance at the Lisbon royal court in an early instance of the fusion of African and Iberian styles.

Brazil's African-inspired musical traditions also merged with other non-Portuguese, European styles. In the mid-1840s, French traveling musical theater companies introduced the polka to Brazil. As the *lundu* fused with the polka, it turned into the *maxixe*, a Brazilianized version of the polka. The *maxixe* became the first genuinely Brazilian dance and decisively influenced the creation of samba as a specific genre, eventually finding acceptance among the elite of Rio de Janeiro.

Samba and the Politics of Racial Marginalization.

During Brazil's *belles époques*, the fashionable elite aspired to Europeanize Brazil and put an end to the African aspects of Brazilian culture. Having recently gained its independence, Brazil was searching for an identity, and it turned to the European discourse of the time for an example. Light-skinned Brazilians became ever more concerned about how they appeared in the eyes of European contemporaries, and a sense of inferiority induced them to conceal their regional customs and African influences. In stylish salons and cafés, and at literary lectures, any reference to "things native" flagged the speaker's poor taste. The *modinha* and folk varieties of religious observance were disregarded because they did not fit European values of modernity and had gone out of style. In sophisticated circles throughout Brazil, European culinary tastes were held in high esteem, and regional foods were considered gauche. The daughters of the rich played with china dolls from France that idealized the French female as the image of elegance.

Similarly, African musical traditions were marginalized at the expense of European musical styles. By the 1870s, Republican propagandists were attempting to prohibit samba on the pretext that folkloric dances shamed Brazil's national image. Instead, people of "cultivated tastes" preferred Italian opera, the form of music most representative of European elegance. Concerts given by famous European violinists were events of great social prestige. While the elite frequented dances where the waltz, polka, *schottische*, and the American quadrille were fashionable, the *maxixe* was considered a "black vulgarity."

Racial marginalization was also fostered by the growing conviction among nineteenth-century intellectuals that true Brazilian nationhood required ethnic homogeneity. Influential scientists regarded people of mixed race as indolent, undisciplined, and shortsighted. They argued that Brazil's racial composition did not exemplify cultural richness or vitality, but rather constituted a singular case of extreme miscegenation; consequently, the person of mixed race evolved into a symbol of Brazilian back-

heritage into a common Brazilian blend. Declining fortunes in the tobacco and cocoa plantations in Bahia state, the 1871 Law of the Free Womb which freed all children born to slaves, the abolition of slavery in 1888, and the proclamation of the Brazilian Republic in 1889 brought many slaves and former slaves to Rio de Janeiro. As they migrated southward they brought along cultural baggage that included a whole complex of forms, values, and social rituals expressive of an African and Afro-Brazilian way of life.

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wardness. Blacks were seen as a major factor contributing to Brazil's inferiority because they would never be able to absorb, and could only imitate, "Aryan" culture. Racial mixing thus furnished an explanation for the defects and weaknesses of Brazilian society and became a central issue in Brazil's conceptualization as a nation.

Most Brazilians believed that national homogeneity could be achieved through assimilation and miscegenation, but only if this guaranteed evolutionary superiority through a general "whitening" of the population. Thus, the most welcomed immigrants were southwestern Europeans who mixed readily with the rest of the Brazilian population; Africans were never considered among possible candidates for immigration.

Economic and political changes in the late nineteenth century undermined these attempts at slowly fusing the African

These included percussion jams and dances. In the absence of popular venues for entertainment, newcomers to Rio sought support and consolation at family parties with music, dancing, and even religious devotion.

The home of Hilaria de Almeida, "Tia Ciata," was a gathering point for the musical talent that had migrated from Northern Brazil. At Tia Ciata's parties, there was dancing in the sitting room, samba at the back of the house, and batuque in the yard. Singing melodies with popular lyrics, her guests would dance in a circle, clapping to the accompaniment of guitars, cavaquinhos, and percussion. Among the enthusiastic and talented musicians who frequented Tia Ciata's parties was a group of outstanding instrumentalists—José Barbosa da Silva, "Sinhô," João Machado Guedes, "João da Baiana," Ernesto dos Santos, "Donga," and Alfredo da Rocha

Viana Filho, "Pixinguinha." They blended all contemporary musical styles with an instinctive freedom; rather than being a mechanical aggregate of distinct musical characteristics, their work created an original and independent phenomenon that modified the cultural panorama of Brazil.

One of the collective creations that emerged out of Tia Ciata's home was a tune called "Pelo Telefone" ("On the Telephone"). Both the theme and the melody originated in the Brazilian Northeast. The song tells a story of stolen love and a telephone conversation with the chief of police, and incorporates the characteristic rhythmic divisions of *maxixe*. The telephone, an advanced means of communication, is also symbolic of modern times. While this song employed characteristics of the *maxixe*, these were fused with new elements—creating what is arguably the first samba.

On November 6, 1916, Donga registered his intellectual property rights to "Pelo Telefone" with the National Library in Rio de Janeiro as a Carnival samba. Rather than intending to attribute authorship to himself, he registered it with the intention of establishing samba as a unique genre. "Pelo Telefone" was transformed into a huge Carnival hit in 1917, was recorded by Banda de Odeon for Casa Edison, and triggered countless imitations. While it was possibly not the first samba ever recorded, "Pelo Telefone" allowed samba to acquire commercial value as a distinct genre. Despite subsequent disputes over author rights, samba eventually took its place alongside *maxixe* as a preferred style of Carnival music in Rio and eventually throughout the rest of Brazil.

In the first decade or so after the debut of "Pelo Telefone," municipal

authorities tried to crack down on samba. It was restricted to shantytowns and publicly perceived as a socially inferior type of musical expression cultivated by rascals and vagrants. The police, in their efforts to maintain public order, prohibited not only samba groups from parading downtown, but banned the actual instruments of samba as well. Samba was forced to conceal itself in *ax-dômbé* (an Afro-Brazilian religion), which was then considered slightly more acceptable. It would take the edict of a federal administration to halt the persecution of neighborhood samba groups and to officially recognize their parades.

Samba as the Model for a New Brazil.

After the federal government lent its support to samba, Brazilian folklore began to win growing acceptance beyond its traditional shantytown constituency. The increasing assertiveness among Brazil's black and mulatto populations, news of the growing appreciation of black art in Europe, and the Harlem Renaissance in the United States, all turned Brazilian folklore stylish. The upper class of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo began to cultivate a taste for the exotic, and Brazilian music was enriched by the interchange of elite and popular tastes. At the same time, the views of anthropologist Gilberto Freyre, and Getúlio Vargas, Brazil's new populist president, provided the country with fresh perspectives on racial mixing. Both Freyre and Vargas highlighted the significant contributions that blacks had made to national culture and rejected older notions that only cultural "whitening" could help Brazil evolve into a modern nation-state.

Freyre successfully challenged traditional views by arguing against the racial

pessimism and Europhile reasoning that dominated the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Instead, he promoted the idea of a Brazilian *mestizo* identity in which racial mixing was seen as a positive cultural process rather than a degenerative influence. Freyre believed that music, more than any other artistic form, was the chief expression of Brazil's national spirit. He was convinced that "the most Brazilian of arts" had the potential to break down barriers of race and class and could serve as a channel of communication for diverse groups in Brazilian society.

Vargas provided the political counterpart to Freyre's views. Ever since Brazil's coffee oligarchy had gained state power in the wake of the 1889 proclamation of the Republic, it continuously expressed its preference for European, rather than African immigration (slavery having been abolished in 1888). Only after Vargas became president in 1930 did the oli-

men Miranda's Baiana clothing was, for instance, selected as Brazil's typical costume. Given Rio de Janeiro's prominence in this composite, samba schools and carnival parades were supported by the state and quickly established themselves all over Brazil. Vargas also ordered that radio programming include popular music, and arranged for small rural towns to have public radio loudspeakers. Radio broadcasts, in turn, acquired a mass audience, and broadcasts from Rio became the most popular programs.

Samba significantly benefited from the political efforts to create a homogeneous national culture. While certain types of music suggested different racial or class origins, samba dissipated social antagonisms and helped unify a society that varied in its origins, appearance, and ways of living and thinking. Samba's triumph over the airwaves allowed it to penetrate all sectors of Brazilian society. Growing international interest in Carnaval as a

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garchy lose its grip on power. Vargas made racial mixing a semi-official doctrine. The 1934 constitution stipulated that "the entrance of immigrants into the national territory will be subject to the restrictions necessary to guarantee ethnic integration," "ethnic integration" being the official euphemism for racial mixing.

Under Vargas's authoritarian umbrella, a new model of national identity was fabricated in which distinct cultural elements were selected from the already-existing regional models and recombined to form an official national culture. Car-

cultural phenomenon also ensured that samba would play a central role in forging a new image of the Brazilian nation both at home and abroad.

From Politics to Pop Culture.

Despite samba's popularity across all sectors of Brazilian society, its message of racial integration never completely took hold. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, Brazilian elites opposed the participation of blacks in Carnaval. In response, a nucleus of black resistance developed which still remains alive today.

On the one hand, this resistance is reflected in the rich racial symbolism of certain Rio samba schools. On the other hand, Carnaval groups from Bahia like the *grêmios* Filhos de Gandhi and Badauê and the *bloco afro* Ilê Aiyê and Olodum continue to fight for the social integration of Brazil's black population, defend the civil rights of marginalized peoples, and encourage self-esteem and pride in Afro-Brazilian culture.

In recent years samba's cultural heritage and social message have been increasingly distorted by the efforts of multinational record companies to promote Brazilian music. Record companies have tried to gloss over the differences in Brazil's musical heritage and establish a uniform type of world music. In the process, the political music of the *grêmios* and *bloco afro* in Bahia has been turned into a hybrid called "axé," and the samba of Rio de Janeiro into *pagodão*. While these two styles of music are pop-

ular with listeners worldwide, some individuals use "pagodão" as a depreciative term to imply a commercialized hybrid that employs infantile and eroticized lyrics as well as simple harmonic structures and melodies.

Samba's recent global commercialization seems to parallel the selective oppression through economic channels which has plagued Brazil for more than five centuries. The most obvious consequence of Brazil's legacy of oppression and discrimination is a mistrust of any difference too strongly asserted. For this reason, last year's "500 Anos Brasil" celebration was more than a historical date. It represented a moment of reflection, applying lessons learned from past mistakes in an effort to resolve some of the fundamental problems that continue to plague Brazil today. Samba, and its ability to bridge racial differences in favor of social unity, may play a small, but nevertheless important, part in resolving these problems.