



## Education for ethnic-racial relations in Brazil - struggles and guarantees of rights

*Education for ethnic-racial relations in Brazil – struggles and guarantees of rights*

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**ABSTRACT:** This article discusses the relevance of education for ethnic-racial relations in Brazil, highlighting the historical role of the Unified Black Movement (MNU) in the inclusion of African History and Afro-Brazilian Culture. Brazilian identity in school curricula, as provided for in Law 10.639/2003. The article analyzes the context of structural racism and cultural whitening as obstacles to the valorization of Black identity, arguing that education is a central tool in addressing these historical inequalities. The systematic exclusion of Black history and culture from school curriculum has, for centuries, contributed to the maintenance of a racist social structure, where the Black population is marginalized and their contributions are made invisible. The MNU's work was decisive in building collective awareness of the need for anti-racist education, and the enactment of Law 10.639/2003 represents an important legal milestone in this process. However, the challenges to its implementation are numerous, including poor teacher training, a lack of adequate teaching materials, and institutional resistance to curricular change. The analysis indicates that the law's implementation depends on a political and pedagogical commitment to valuing ethnic-racial diversity and overcoming inequalities. Thus, schools must be spaces for social transformation, capable of promoting the recognition of Black identities, combating racism, and contributing to the construction of a more just, equitable, and pluralistic society. The valorization of Afro-Brazilian cultures

-Brazilians and Africans, therefore, is not only a legal requirement, but an ethical and educational imperative.

**Keywords:** Racism. Ethnic-Racial Relations. Anti-Racist Education.

**ABSTRACT:** This article discusses the relevance of education for ethnic-racial relations in Brazil, highlighting the historical role of the Unified Black Movement (MNU) in the inclusion of African History and Afro-Brazilian Culture in school curricula, as established by Law 10.639/2003. It analyzes the context of structural racism and cultural whitening as obstacles to valuing Black identity, arguing that education is a central tool in confronting these historical inequalities. The systematic exclusion of Black history and culture from school content contributed, for centuries, to the maintenance of a racist social structure, where the Black population is marginalized and its contributions are rendered invisible. The actions of the MNU were decisive in building-in collective awareness about the need for anti-racist education, and the enactment of Law 10.639/2003 represents an important legal milestone in this process. However, there are countless challenges to its implementation, from the precarious training of teachers to the absence of adequate teaching materials and in-stitutional resistance to curricular change. The analysis points out that the effectiveness of the law depends on political and pedagogical commitment to valuing ethnic-racial diversity and overcoming inequalities. Thus, schools must become spaces for social transformation, capable of promoting the recognition of Black identi-ties, combating racism, and contributing to the construction of a fairer, more equitable, and plural society. The appreciation of Afro-Brazilian and African cultures, therefore, is not just a legal requirement, but an ethical and educational imperative.

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This study seeks to discuss the importance of education for the promotion of ethnic-racial relations in Brazil, as well as the role of the Unified Black Movement in the fight for anti-racist education, considering the implications of structural racism and cultural whitening in educational processes.

The construction of Brazilian society is deeply marked by historical processes of colonization, slavery, and racial exclusion. Despite the country having one of the largest Black populations outside of Africa, official narratives, especially those transmitted in schools, have long reproduced a Eurocentric perspective that renders invisible the contributions of African and Afro-Brazilian peoples. Given this reality, education on ethnic-racial relations emerges as an essential strategy for confronting structural racism and cultural whitewashing.

In this context, the role of the Unified Black Movement (MNU) stands out. Since its creation in 1978, it has been fighting for an education that values Black history and culture. The enactment of Law 10.639/2003 is a milestone in this social mobilization, making the teaching of African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture mandatory in schools. However, the implementation of this law faces resistance linked to the structural racism and cultural whitewashing still prevalent in the educational environment.

Brazil's history is marked by centuries of slavery and racial inequality, the effects of which persist to this day in various spheres of society, especially in education. Despite the ethnic and racial diversity of the Brazilian population, school curricula were long guided by a Eurocentric perspective that obscured the African and Afro-Brazilian contributions to the country's formation. The struggle of the Unified Black Movement was fundamental to the achievement of public policies that valued Black identity. Given this, it is urgent to reflect on the challenges

and advances of this policy, considering education.  
as an instrument of social transformation and combating racism.

## 2. EDUCATION FOR ETHNIC-RACIAL RELATIONS

Education on Ethnic-Racial Relations in Brazil aims to ensure rights and achievements, and eliminate prejudice present in various social institutions, both public and private. Discussing racism or prejudice based on race or skin color means analyzing the presence of this factor in all social spaces. Eradicating the effects of 300 years of slavery in Brazil is a complex and time-consuming challenge. However, it is necessary to implement public policies aimed at raising social awareness, conduct campaigns, and integrate this issue into all spheres.

For decades, attempts have been made to raise awareness about prejudice, but it has been observed that these strategies and attempts have been non-corresponding approaches, perhaps because it is an international issue that transcends borders not only of territory, but of all organizations. It would be simple to eradicate something that could be ingrained in some social class or institution, but it is observed that it is something present in all segments, from the simplest to the most complex. Silva (2021) discusses this aspect by analyzing the devaluation of discussions on the topic of racism:

"For much of our history, discussions about racism as a theoretical object of study were devalued and ignored by academic researchers. This is because access to higher education was made difficult for marginalized groups in our society, the education of Black and Indigenous youth was precarious, and there was no representation of their identities in school curricula." (SILVA, 2021, p. 21)

2

We can still reflect a little on the reactions to those who are victims of prejudice, when the  
When racism is perpetrated against Black people in socially vulnerable situations, the repercussions are not the same when it involves someone belonging to a higher social class or holding a prominent position, as is the case with soccer players. Racism or prejudice must be a struggle that serves everyone across social classes, organizations, and institutions, from the rich to the poor.



## 2.1. Education for Ethnic-Racial Relations in Brazil

In Brazil, strategies to end racism began in a structured way through Law 10.639/2003, an affirmative action measure, sanctioned by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, on January 9, 2003. Obviously, this law is the result of various slave movements in their most diverse manifestations, whether on the streets or through other means of communication. In fact, media spaces for this purpose have always been unavailable.

The law is understood as affirmative action that was configured as a demand of the black movement in Brazil, which, over the decades, assumed education as a priority on its agenda (PINOTTI, 2017).

This law culminated in the inclusion of the topic in the school curriculum through the National Curricular Guidelines, guiding the teaching of African history and Afro-Brazilian culture in history curricula. This was undoubtedly a significant step forward, a victory resulting from much struggle. However, the content delivery has become vague. It seems to feel like merely following an institutional protocol with vague accounts of slavery and African religion.

But despite everything, statistics show that there are still many social, political and economic disadvantages for black people, as Lima (2021) states:

"Data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), published in the newspaper Folha de S. Paulo, on May 25, 2017, show that 76% of Black people in Brazil are among the poorest 10% of the country's population, although they make up 53.6% of this same population. They also report that, with the arrival of the economic crisis in the country, the income received by white people in all formal jobs had an average positive variation of 0.8%, between 2015 and the first quarter of 2017; among mixed-race people, it fell by an average of 2.8%, and among Black people, it fell by 1.6%. In a survey also published in the Folha de S. Paulo newspaper on February 24, 2018, released by the National Household Sample Survey (PNAD Contínua), from the IBGE, the unemployment rate among Black people at the end of 2017 was 14.5%; among mixed-race people, 13.6% and among white people, 9.5%". (LIMA, 2021, p. 10)

Education is expected to be more comprehensive and comprehensive, addressing the continent's origins, culture, struggles, achievements, and riches, rather than merely focusing on the poverty that has been perpetuated for years, claiming Africa is the poorest continent in the world. Reflecting on what Africa is and studying its origins allows Black students to boost their self-esteem and foster a pursuit of greater knowledge.

Education needs to make Black students feel a sense of belonging to their history, proud of their origins, not just remembering an enslaved people, but rather citizens who have conquered dignified spaces and a place in all classes and places. However, in their research, Marinho and Martins (2017) show that some schools still neglect these topics: "We must point out the denunciation of a school that remains silent on racial

issues and fails to embrace and discuss the differences between Black and white people, pointing to an education that, even with laws, programs, and projects to protect and redress the injustices committed against the Black population, is far from constituting a center that seeks to combat racial discrimination, intolerance, and symbolic violence experienced daily by children and adolescents within the school system." (MARINHO, MARTINS, 2017)

With the aim of ensuring the presence of the Black population in the country's educational institutions, Law 11.645/08 was created in 2010. In addition to incorporating Indigenous culture into the school curriculum, it introduced a quota system for Black people in universities and other institutions. This regulation raised several questions, but the main objective, beyond racial equality, was to guarantee the occupation of spaces previously



occupied by whites only, thus avoiding educational segregation, the laws instituted seek to ensure the transformation of black people in Brazil through education.

Currently in Brazil, this theme is being implemented through the National Policy on Equity, Education for Ethnic-Racial Relations and Quilombola School Education-PNEERQ, established by ordinance no. 470, of May 14, 2024, perhaps by mere coincidence, or not, again in a left-wing government and of the same president who in 2023 sanctioned Law 10.639/2003, which includes the same theme in the history curriculum, President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva.

The objectives of PNEERQ are:

“Art. 3

I - Structure a system of targets and monitoring to ensure the implementation of art. 26-A of the Law No. 9,394 of 1996; II

- To train education professionals for management and teaching for ERER and EEQ; III - To contribute to overcoming racist practices in Brazilian education; IV - To encourage the

development of institutional capacities for implementing ERER and EEQ policies in federal entities; V -

To recognize anti-racist institutional

advances; VI - To contribute to overcoming ethnic-racial

inequalities in Brazilian education; VII - To ensure the right to quality education for all children, young people, and adults; and

VIII - Consolidate the EEQ modality”

The strategy of bringing to society a topic that has been discussed for decades without much success through a national policy is undoubtedly a considerable advance, as it not only seeks to report facts about slavery, but also aims to create a sense of belonging by creating the responsibility to fight for equality, eradicating nuances of racism or prejudice.

The PNEERQ is a call from society to an international cause, but one that must begin with education, the only space that fosters dialogue, respect for differences, and fosters healthy discussion for everyone. This policy involves not only educators and students, but also federal entities, cooperating to eradicate racism, prejudice, and any other form of racial and social inequality. The more than 5,571 municipalities now have the opportunity, together with the states, to discuss how to solve a decades-old problem.

### 3. THE STRUGGLE OF THE UNIFIED BLACK MOVEMENT (MNU)

Founded in a context of military dictatorship and political repression, the Unified Black Movement established itself as a significant force in denouncing racism and demanding rights. From the outset, its main agenda included criticizing the way Black people were treated in textbooks and at school.

4

The Unified Black Movement (MNU) was influenced by North American Black organizations, African independence movements, and workers' mobilizations against the Brazilian military dictatorship. It was also influenced by the ideas of intellectuals such as Abdias do Nascimento and Lélia Gonzalez, who challenged the stereotypical view of Black people as passive. During the 1970s and 1980s, the MNU established itself as the main reference point for the Black movement in the country, although it maintained ties with sectors of the bourgeoisie and the Workers' Party (PT), as Custódio (2017) points out. Its presence was also notable among social movements and unions. The MNU played a decisive role.

in the affirmation of black identity in Brazil, and their demands, after a long process of struggle, were partially accepted by public policies. These analyses are reinforced by Custódio (2017), who states directly:

The MNU took as its inspiration some Black organizations from the United States, which were part of the Civil Rights Movement, as well as the liberation movements of African countries, especially Portuguese-speaking countries such as Mozambique and Angola. In Brazil, MNU members were influenced by the experiences of workers' strikes against the dictatorship and by Brazilian intellectuals who demystified the idea of the peaceful Black person. Among the most cited are Abdias do Nascimento and Lélia Gonzalez. These influences and political activity allowed the MNU to stand out in the Brazilian political scene in the late 1970s and 1980s as the main organization of the Brazilian Black movement. However, it did not break with the trust of the São Paulo bourgeoisie, nor did it provide an independent path for Black people in Brazil. It expressed its positions within sectors of the social movements, but also within sectors of the labor movement and within the Workers' Party (PT), which was a great class conciliator and attenuator of national tensions. In this way, we can understand the role of the Movement Unified Black for the composition of the identity of the Brazilian black between the 70s and 90s, its relationship with the scenario of strikes and demonstrations against the Military Dictatorship and how the issues raised by the black people were incorporated, very partially, into public policies in the following years, which despite being important were only achieved through years of struggle by the Brazilian black movement". (CUSTÓDIO, 2017)

The MNU denounced the silencing of African history, the devaluation of Afro-Brazilian culture, and the absence of positive Black references in educational settings. This activism was crucial in pressuring the Brazilian state to recognize the need for an educational policy focused on ethnic-racial relations.

The author De Cássia Rodrigues (2023) states that being a militant in the black movement means fighting against racism and its manifestations through complaints, manifestos, public notes, marches, public acts, decrees, laws, decree-laws, resolutions, ordinances, literary or theoretical productions, etc. in an autonomous and independent way, that is, unlinked, without connection to political parties, churches, trade unions and unions, to the State.

#### 4. STRUCTURAL RACISM AND CULTURAL WHITENING

The difficulty in applying Law 10.639/2003 is directly related to structural racism, which organizes social institutions—including schools—to maintain privileges for the white population and marginalize Black people. Furthermore, cultural whitening, a historical process that values European practices and knowledge over Afro-descendant traditions, is still common in the Brazilian school curriculum. These symbolic mechanisms of exclusion serve to maintain a racial hierarchy that naturalizes inequalities and renders invisible the contribution of Black people to nation-building.

According to Lacerda (2021), "racism and social vulnerability are currently a sad reality faced by the black population in Brazil, and we believe that such consequences were, in part, the result of the construction and consolidation of ideologies and symbols that exalted white supremacy in the country".

#### CONCLUSION

Education on ethnic-racial relations is a fundamental step in confronting racism in Brazil. The work of the Unified Black Movement and the passage of Law 10.639/2003 represent significant progress.

important in the fight for the valorization of black identity and the transformation of school curricula.

However, these advances still clash with institutional practices marked by structural racism and cultural whitewashing. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen public teacher training policies, expand access to appropriate teaching materials, and foster a school culture committed to racial equity. Only with anti-racist education will it be possible to build a more just, pluralistic, and democratic society.

The consolidation of anti-racist education also requires recognizing African and Afro-Brazilian epistemologies as legitimate sources of knowledge. Valuing the history, culture, and contributions of Black people is fundamental to breaking with the Eurocentric logic that still dominates schools. Furthermore, it is necessary to invest in assessment processes that consider the ethnic-racial diversity of students, promoting inclusion at all levels of education. The active participation of the school community, social movements, and families is essential to sustain these transformations.

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