**A Cutout of Color: origins of the “urban question” in sociology**

**in the works of Florestan Fernandes**

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**Abstract**

Florestan Fernandes played a fundamentally important role in the constitution of Brazilian sociology, given his contributions to a new interpretation of Brazil based on the specifics of its own history, as opposed to foreign examples. The social revolution is among his most preeminent topics, and the most innovative aspect of his work on the problem of social change is his treatment of race relations between blacks and whites. This paper is based on the hypothesis that, in his analyses on race relations in Brazil, Fernandes outlined the origins of what would later become known as the "urban question" in sociology. The “urban question” has had a strong influence on the urbanism debate in Brazil, leading to the creation of new analytical categories that changed the focus of research on cities and urban interventions. Therefore, it is vital that this question be reapproached from a critical perspective.

**Keywords**

Florestan Fernandes, “urban question” in sociology, race relations

**Introduction**

Florestan Fernandes is deemed fundamentally important to the constitution of Brazilian sociology due to his role in the construction of a new interpretation of Brazil, using explanations that were based on the specifics of the country’s own history, as opposed to foreign examples. According to Octavio Ianni, one of the leading authors of commentary on his work, “the sociology of Florestan Fernandes inaugurates a new era in the history of Brazilian sociology. Not only does it unfurl new horizons for theoretical reflection and the interpretation of social reality, it also allows us to make a critical reassessment of much of what has comprised the past and recent sociology of Brazil. (…) Based on this dialog with people here and there, the sociology of Florestan Fernandes ushers in a new interpretation of Brazil, a new way of envisaging the past and the present” (Ianni: 1996).

Also according to Ianni, “the social revolution is one of his most frequent topics. It is present in many of his writings, sometimes as a theoretical challenge and others as a working perspective” (*idem*). In the works of Fernandes, the question of the social revolution ramifies into multiple aspects, facets of the comprehensive process that is the insertion of Brazil in the competitive social order. Finally, also according to Ianni, the most innovative aspect of the sociologist's work on the problem of social change are his assessments of race relations between blacks and whites (Ianni: 2004).

The work of Fernandes on the race issue in Brazil is extensive, divided into several volumes. He began researching the topic in the 1950s alongside Roger Bastide, with whom he coauthored a number of publications (Bastide and Fernandes: 1951, 1955 and 1959). In its turn, this research developed jointly with Bastide unfolded into a series of works authored exclusively by Fernandes, on the problem of race relations in Brazil (Fernandes: 1965, 1972, 1989 and 1994).

The primordial topic of Fernandes’s work on the race problem is the adaptation of blacks and mulattos to the competitive social order in Brazil, within the context of the formation, consolidation and expansion of the social class system after the dismantlement of slave society. The main product of this research is the book *The Negro in Brazilian society* (Fernandes: 1965, English translation published in 1971), created from research focused on the city of São Paulo. In this book, Fernandes discusses why blacks and mulattos met with such difficulty when attempting to join the competitive social order by entering the salaried work market.

This work by Fernandes achieved notoriety for its excellence and originality, reversing the then-prevalent vision of the racism problem in Brazil. In one chapter of the book, Fernandes addresses the “myth of racial democracy”, through which he describes Brazilian society as refers to its black and mulatto population. This particular idea conferred immense notoriety on his work on the race question in Brazil.

In this paper, however, we will discuss a different aspect of Fernandes's 1965 publication, namely the geographic cutout proposed by the author in order to address the problem of racial integration in Brazil: the city of São Paulo.

Fernandes selected São Paulo as a geographic cutout for this research for a number of reasons, relating to the faster, stronger and more homogeneous development of the class system in this urban center when compared to the rest of Brazil. According to the author, São Paulo is the “Brazilian city in which the *bourgeois revolution* was carried out with greatest vitality, applying the mandate of *Free labor* in a *Free land*; in it, the Negro acquires real importance only at a later stage, and suffers the competitive effects of population substitution; hence, [the city] provides a study of the connections between bourgeois revolution, dismantlement of the slave system, and expulsion of the Negro from the system of relations of production” (*idem*, explanatory note).

This paper is based on the hypothesis that, by analyzing race relations in Brazil within the context of the country's insertion in the competitive social order, whose emblematic *locus* is the city of São Paulo, Fernandes outlines the origins of what would later become the “urban question” in sociology, such as it was described by his followers Paul Singer, Lúcio Kowarick, and Francisco de Oliveira. The “urban question” is understood as the problem of social transformation as a result of ongoing urbanization. In Brazil, this problem took shape most visibly as an excessive and almost exclusive concentration in the city of São Paulo. In the works of Florestan Fernandes, the urban question fits into a larger context, namely his primordial concern with social change. The “urban question”, such as it was addressed from the 1970s onward, has strongly influenced the urbanism debate in Brazil, leading to the creation of new categories of analysis that changed the focus of research on cities and urban interventions. Therefore, it is vital that this question be reapproached from a critical perspective.

**Absorption of blacks and mulattos by the social class system of Brazil**

The central argument of Florestan Fernandes’s book on the insertion of blacks in class society is that the abolition of slavery and creation of a salaried work market was a process directed by a decision of the Brazilian elite, namely the summary replacement of black slave labor with immigrant whites. Fernandes discusses two parallel and complementary behaviors that are at the heart of this process: competition between black former slaves and white immigrants for insertion in the salaried work market, in which the latter were favored because their culture already involved work in exchange for remuneration; and transformation of the work market by the elite, the state, and institutions, in a manner that favored the absorption of immigrant whites and shirked the responsibility of qualifying freed blacks for remunerated occupations and for the new social reality. “Therefore, the entire process was not intended to effectively convert the “slave” (or the “freed man”) into a “free laborer”, but rather to change the organization of work so as to permit the replacement of “Negros” by “whites”” (*idem*, p. 18).

In terms of adapting to urban work occupations, blacks were doubly disfavored: they were unprepared for specialized tasks, but viewed common ones as depreciative. “Whereas foreigners saw salaried work as a means to initiate a living, a condition from which they planned to free themselves as quickly as possible” (*idem*, p. 13), there were many activities and services that blacks and mulattos considered demeaning. Immigrants saw these same tasks simply as obligations, offered considerations or work efforts performed under a contractual bond of employment. Furthermore, blacks and mulattos were far less productive than foreign workers at the same activities (*idem*, p. 23): “the productivity of free laborers [immigrants] was superior to that of slave labor, at a proportion of more than 3:1” (*idem*, p. 33). Colonists thus needed to have “the largest possible amount of freedom”, as there was no longer any way of meeting their fieldwork requirements without resorting, *en masse*, to foreign salaried workers (*idem*, p. 23). Freed men were left with nothing but economic maladjustment, occupational regression, social imbalance (*idem*, p. 24).

In this context, immigrant whites were the greatest driving force of the transformation of Brazil's work market as a result of the end of slavery, both because of their cultural and social input and because of the expectations of the job-giving elites. “As an agent of free labor that behaved like a typical salaried worker, the colonist repelled patrimonialism, thus compelling farmers to act in accordance with new rules and a new economic mindset” (*idem*, p. 34). Blacks and mulattos remained outside the cycle of social renovation brought by the new work system: “even when they occupied a much more advantageous position than simple subsistence or urban pauperism, blacks and mulattos were not included among the human factors of the new capitalist upsurge” (*idem*, p. 35).

Hence, the effective consolidation of the new social order was brought about by immigrant white workers. Based on native and foreign worker participation data, Fernandes concludes that “under the conditions in which the competitive social order was initially formed and consolidated in the city of São Paulo, the former agent of slave labor was expelled to marginal or accessory occupations within the capitalist production system” (*idem*, p. 12).

**São Paulo: *locus* of the racial question in Brazil**

The analyses of Florestan Fernandes on the question of race relations in Brazil were based on empirical data gathered directly from the population. To implement his study, the sociologist established a territorial field of investigation, a cutout encompassing the city of São Paulo. He did not select this geographic scope at random; rather, his choice was grounded on the historical circumstances of the city: the site of social change that provided the strongest example of the process that he wished to analyze. This was due to a variety of reasons.

São Paulo is where the development of the class system was most extensive, most intense, and most uniform in Brazil. It was where the bourgeois revolution took root most completely. Therefore, São Paulo is the urban center where the social changes ensuing from the advent of the competitive social order in Brazil can be observed most vividly. This means that the consequences of abolition and of immigration were felt more strongly in the social and labor structures of São Paulo than in any other part of the country.

São Paulo also provides the clearest example of the difficulties faced by blacks when attempting assimilation into the work market. Some of the influences working against their adaptation to the new social order are particular to the historical scenario of the city. The urban expansion of São Paulo did not follow the same patterns typically shown by other Brazilian cities. Its expansion was atypical in that it was extremely fast and disconnected from the progress of the agrarian civilization. São Paulo entered the colonial exporting economy relatively late, only after the collapse of the slave system (late 19th century); up until then, the city had remained undeveloped, with no availability of services or free labor, differently from other urban centers like Rio de Janeiro, Salvador or Recife.

The growth of São Paulo can be attributed to immigration. When immigrants began flooding into Brazil in the late 19th century, the vast majority of them headed for São Paulo. Therefore, in this scenario, unlike in other Brazilian cities, blacks met with fierce competition from immigrant whites. Having come from a social experience of unspecialized slave labor, blacks were barred from exploiting the best opportunities. In the field of handicrafts, for example, blacks could have entered the free market — as indeed they did, in other Brazilian cities. In São Paulo, however, they had to compete against immigrants, and always at a disadvantage.

Moreover, São Paulo was Brazil's first specifically bourgeois urban center, and therefore it engendered a mercantile mindset that valued free labor, individual initiative, and economic liberalism. In that scenario, a black individual could fit into the role of insubordinate rebel, or of a household member or protege of a white family, under a mantle of paternalism that reaffirmed the patrimonialist backdrop of the local society; apart from these options, blacks “came forth as a dislocated and aberrant figure” in the new social order.

Finally, “the speed with which the competitive social order expanded and consolidated itself in the city of São Paulo complicated things greatly, eradicating any possibility of a gradual transition that would ease their acquisition, through experience, of the mindset and behaviors required by the new lifestyle” (*idem*, p. 14).

The final-stage dynamics of the slave system crisis originated in the rural areas of Brazil, as did the active avoidance of a reinstatement of the decadent social order. But the agrarian enterprise was not self-contained: many stages and much of the proceeds of the exporting process were handled in urban centers. Cities were converted into the “economic frontiers of agrarian expansion” (*idem*, p. 25), and it was there that society changed most drastically.

Within this panorama, blacks and mulattos were historically “denied the means to organize their lives as freedmen in accordance with the ideals or requirements of their world view” (*idem*, p. 31). Considering that “slavery deformed its agent of labor, denying blacks and mulattos the full possibility of reaping the fruits of universal free labor”, Florestan Fernandes defends that “the school of slavery not only formed, but also deformed the agent of slave labor.”

The sociologist proceeds to assess the consequences of this population's concentration in the city. An initial aspect presented by Fernandes is that women adjusted more easily to the free labor system by working as domestic servants, and became the privileged agents of labor within the black population because they were the only blacks with a means of livelihood. With regard to black men, the researcher points out several factors that made it more difficult for them to achieve insertion in the free labor system. Given the importance of the city in the dismantlement of the slave system, the urban environment held true fascination for blacks: it was there that an abolitionist public opinion first emerged. The city became a symbol and promise of freedom. Living in it would create the ideal conditions for a black individual to shed the stigma of slave or freed man... But the reality was a different story: the city broke the bond between black people and their rural past. Blacks continued to live a provincial, rustic lifestyle, a typical contradiction in periods of transition. The “advanced circles” of the dominant elite were the only stratum of society well aligned with the “cultured, civilized and modern” spirit.

Blacks thus developed a behavioral pattern of isolation, alienation and seclusion, as a means of defense against the disapproval that they suffered on account of their African-Brazilian cultural heritage. From this ensued an irrational behavior: black individuals began to value the representation of freedom by which a person has full control over him or herself, under the corollary that each individual has the free will to decide when, where and how to work, and to define dignity, refusing to accept work that is considered “demeaning” or the pre-capitalist principle that one's work efforts should be regulated in accordance with the consumption needs of the individual and his or her dependents. At this stage in history, the black population of São Paulo began to value the idea of non-insertion in the free labor market.

The blacks and mulattos interviewed by Fernandes revealed that “there was a relative delay in the creation of an independent and realistic awareness of their situation. Those that saw themselves compensated for their success, whether from working independently or under the protection of whites, felt no further obligations towards their many peers that remained in abject misery and degradation. They were constantly outraged by their subservience and passivity; and they strove, above all else, to emphasize the separation that was already taking shape between the incipient “colored elite” and the “common Negros”, making every effort to reproduce, in any way they could, the world of white aristocracy from the slavery era. Others, submerged in the underworld of the urban riffraff, awaited the “second abolition”. Their only appanage was freedom, which they did not know how to handle, although it comprised their all-absorbing concern” (*idem*, p. 58-9).

In rural areas, farmers considered blacks to be lacking in self-discipline and responsibility. It was a measurable fact that salaried immigrant labor was much more productive than black labor. In the city, blacks rejected manual labor as undignified, unacceptable work. Women learned to manage a household, but men slid into a crisis triggered by a loss of integration with the social and moral world. The results of this process were a growing dependence on women and the various hardships that ensue from believing that not working was better than accepting undignified work. Black men developed a behavior of sociability in idleness, at bars and other social venues, where they engaged in camaraderie with others in the same condition.

Florestan Fernandes also highlights the black population's inability to recognize what the situation required: instead of reviewing their condition, they blamed their former masters for every adversity that they encountered along the way. “What was truly important was the blind and exclusivist selfishness of those circles, which gave highest priority to solving the problems of cultivating their crops.” By objectifying social spoliation in a personalizing manner, blacks projected in the past both the causes and the solutions for their problems. They lost all possibility of building a clear, objective and autonomous consciousness of the present; at the same time, they denied themselves any positive consequences that this could have brought in terms of spurring the emergence of revolutionary demands. Hence, the convictions that fed the critical views of the more “realistic”, “independent” and “dissatisfied” circles of the black population were not enough to create a specific cultural horizon of “free black people”. The vast majority of the black population surrendered to a grim disenchantment and continued to see itself in terms of the expectations of whites and the interests and values of an old strategy for maintaining an “acephalous” mass of blacks, namely the strategy of allowing a select few candidates to achieve social ascension.

The sociologist makes astonishing statements on the condition of blacks within the competitive urban reality: “from this perspective, the historical-social moment in question does not only represent the start of an annihilation of Negros; it is, before and above all else, the Negro's first crucial experience with the meaning, the use, and the functions of freedom as a dimension of the cultural horizon and of the organization of the social behavior of free men. No one can deny, or even attenuate, the ruthless and brutal character of this experience” (*idem*, p. 65). “What may have looked like an end was actually a beginning.”

Therefore, when he ponders whether the city had rejected black people, Fernandes glimpsed a new answer with regard to the 1950s, different from the prevailing notion at the time: the city had rejected blacks, not for their race, but rather for their economic, social and cultural isolation, with its unspeakably dire consequences. According to the sociologist, events transpired in São Paulo with extreme celerity: not only did the social techniques and moral values of pre-capitalism collapse almost instantaneously, but also the organization of the factors of economic growth and social development destroyed any intimate and productive interaction between the capitalist present and the rustic recent past. Any positive character that could have been offered by this form of entry into the competitive order — to which blacks had full access, since their exclusion was not based on race —, was left unopened and unexploited due to a complete absence of the necessary conditioning to pursue integration with the new way of life, making the ascent of this population a despairingly and unacceptably slow process.

Blacks perceived their exclusion as a humiliating affront. On the other hand, they did not have the necessary instruments to overcome the challenge imposed by the times. “In order to purge himself of a pernicious cultural heritage and convert himself into a free man, the Negro needed to live in freedom. If he ended up using this freedom against himself, this happened only because he did not know of another way to proceed” (*idem*, p. 69).

“Therefore, a sociological analysis of the correlation between the structure of the nascent urban world and the psycho-social drivers of the recently freed Negro is greatly important for understanding not only what was, but also what would come to be the Negro's situation within the competitive social order” (*idem*, p. 69). Those were years of waiting for a refinement of adaptive skills, but also years of disillusionment, in which suffering and humiliation turned to bile. The sociologist reaches an incisive conclusion: "as a consequence, they lived inside the city but did not progress with it and by means of it" (*idem*, p. 71).

**The “urban question” in sociology**

Based on this brief overview of the book by Florestan Fernandes on the integration of blacks into São Paulo class society at the turn of the 20th century and its initial decades, it is now possible to present arguments in defense of the idea that this book contains the bases for what would later be described as the “urban question”, in the 1970s, by researchers including Paul Singer, Lúcio Kowarick, and Francisco de Oliveira. Supporting this hypothesis, we already have the fact that the three main formulators of the “urban question” in sociology were self-declared students and disciples of Fernandes, although, unlike their mentor, they primarily based their formulations on Marxist theory.

First, we shall focus on the questions selected as objects of study by these researchers, who shaped what we now call the “urban question” in sociology. Afterward, we shall wrap up by presenting the link between the topics addressed by Fernandes's followers and the works of their mentor. For a very brief overview of the research conducted by these thinkers, we will look at the works of Paul Singer and observe that their starting point was the problem of internal migrations, subsequently moving to the question of the *formation of the reserve army*, a central concept of Marxist theory and major guiding principle of the author's work. The work of Lúcio Kowarick originated from the question of urban marginality, ramifying into a category that Kowarick pinpointed as the explanatory basis of social inequality in Brazil: *urban spoliation*. In the works of Francisco de Oliveira, the regional question is approached as a thematic cutout for an analysis on unequal and combined development, a central theory in the thinking of Leon Trotsky, which enabled Oliveira to make an in-depth analysis of the *role of the state* in constructing the development model that was applied in Brazil. The concepts in *italics* are central categories in the analyses conducted by these thinkers, significantly present in the initial pages of the work by Florestan Fernandes on the situation of blacks during the process of social change in São Paulo.

Singer (1973a) was one of the first authors to approach the problem of internal migrations in Brazil as an explanatory phenomenon. The researcher examined the country's migrations from rural into urban settings and situated them within the context of industrialization, as a process of relocating the labor required for capital accumulation. According to the author, these migrations are caused by the polarization of regional inequalities, creating a mechanism of population redistribution to fulfill the interests of industrialization, under the rationale of agglomeration economies. Observed from this perspective, internal migrations become economically necessary. Singer states that these migrations play a functional role in the development of capitalism, as they contribute to the formation of the *industrial reserve army*. This phenomenon is intrinsic to the capitalist economy, comprising the most important structural obstacle between the migrant and the new economic opportunities. Finally, Singer associates this phenomenon with the urbanization process by analyzing the role of major cities in the formation of the industrial reserve army (1973b). Singer considers industrialization and urbanization as parts of a same process, namely Brazil's insertion into a capitalist economic setting.

Kowarick (1972) begins his research on the urban question by focusing on the topic of marginality. By relating it with the dynamics of capitalism, he asserts that marginality should be characterized as a form of insertion in the structures of production, and not as evidence of the system's dysfunction, such as it was predominantly interpreted at the time when he developed his work. Hence, the characterization of marginality as underconsumption, poverty, lack of social integration, and so forth, receives a secondary role in the views of Kowarick. The factors that explain it are not these, but rather the social process as a whole. Economic development generates a structure of production where marginal groups receive a peculiar and functional role.

The marginal sector represents, fundamentally, the population that is not absorbed by the sectors of production. The existence of a population surplus is part of the nature of capitalism. This surplus, the sociologist explains, has an important role in the production process: that of lowering the costs of the reproduction of labor power. This is observed both in terms of lowering the production cost of goods and services consumed by the working class and of lowering the costs of urban infrastructure, sanitation, electrical power, education, and other public services that are made available to this population. Kowarick coined the term *urban spoliation* to designate this lowering of the urban costs of reproduction of surplus labor power. Over the course of his work, the concept of urban spoliation progressively gained new connotations: starting with the “sum total of extortions motivated by the absence and shortage of access to urban services”, it begins to incorporate the topic of social exclusion and its relation to sub-citizenship, a leading topic in contemporary sociology.

Oliveira raises the same problem, under a different perspective: in his work, the “urban question” is addressed within the context of what he calls the “regional question”. In a paper on the regional problem (1977), Oliveira refutes the idea of “regional imbalances”, defending that the disparities between regions were created by the regional division of work, triggered by the process of capital accumulation. For this, he prefers to apply a concept of “unequal regional development”, by which the social conflicts between regions polarize their contradictions during the expansion of capitalism. With this proposition, the sociologist redefines the very concept of region, which is no longer characterized as a homogeneous territory for administrative or planning purposes, but rather as a zone with a particular distribution of economic activities.

Oliveira thus defines the “regional question” as the absence of a well-resolved national unit, an unresolved agrarian problem, on a par with the market and labor questions (Oliveira: 1993). In Brazil, this question configured itself as a conflict between the Northeast and Southeast of the country. According to the sociologist, the Brazilian state used public resources to support and expand primitive accumulation in the Southeast, then, at a later moment, promoted a dilapidation of labor power by failing to resolve the agrarian issue, thus giving rise to the regional question. At the core of this process, the rural production system developed in an ever more concentrating manner, expelling populations that migrated to the urban centers, especially São Paulo, consolidating the phenomenon of metropolitan agglomeration.

Hence the industrial reserve army was formed, an enormous mass of workers eradicated from agrarian areas and left without employment in the urban environment. A surplus of unemployed workers guarantees a much larger supply of labor than is needed for industrial development, leading to lower salaries. In this scenario, the state undertakes the role of providing a practicable urban life for the salaried middle class, as these are the people who pay for urban services and public betterments, and they are also the opinion-making stratum responsible for the political viability of the status quo. The full contingent of people living outside the work market is thus relegated to the margins of any public policy (Oliveira: 1988). In light of all this, the state consolidates itself as an entity oriented toward the middle class: according to Francisco de Oliveira, the Brazilian state *is* the urban middle class.

Surprisingly, every sociological category explored by the followers of Florestan Fernandes is present in his research publications that laid the bases for the formulation of the “urban question” in sociology (marked here in *italics*), dispersed throughout the sociologist's work on the adaptation of blacks and mulattos to the class system.

Already in the initial pages of the book (p. 03), Fernandes mentions the incipient formation of a reserve army while still in a rural, agrarian production environment: “Whenever production reached high levels, as reflected in the pattern of economic growth and labor organization, there were real possibilities of creating an authentic labor market: in it, former slaves had to compete with so-called “national workers” who comprised a veritable reserve army (kept apart from the activities of production, in prosperous regions, as a result of the degradation of slave labor) and, particularly, with labor imported from Europe, who were frequently more accustomed to the new work system and its economic and social implications.” Given the prior existence of a social stratum of national laborers that were kept apart from the activities of production and served as a buffer, cutting off access to the employment market, and also given that farmers were aware of the importance of that stratum, it can be assumed that freedmen, who were not prepared to face the competition with laborers imported from Europe, added to the ranks of that army.

Always referring to the social layer consisting of freed men and women, Fernandes commented on the inducement of *pauperization*, a central process in Kowarick's explanatory analysis of *urban spoliation*: “however, the real alternatives went from “caboclization” in rural areas to pauperization in the cities” (p. 29). Blacks that established themselves in the cities would be irregularly recruited for extenuating, low-paying and bitterly depreciating jobs.

Fernandes uses the concept of *spoliation* to describe not only the operational workings of the abolition process, but also the condition of freed blacks within the competitive social order: in the very first page of the book, the author portrays the abolition as “extreme and cruel spoliation” (p. 01). Regarding the “secular spoliation” of blacks, he asserts further along in the book: “not only did they depart from slavery in a materially and morally spoliated state; the immense majority of them were also denied the means to establish themselves as an independent social category or to integrate themselves quickly into the social categories that were available to them” (p. 36).

On the problem of *exclusion*, every analysis made by Fernandes on the insertion of blacks in class society converges toward this issue. *Exclusion* is the very form of that insertion, and the author makes that form explicit in some passages: “the isolation of blacks and mulattos through the economic, psycho-social and socio-cultural drivers by which they were excluded or by which they excluded themselves from the legally institutionalized order of Brazilian society; this was the manner, for aggregation to the class system was initially available to them” (p. 38). Fernandes uses the idea of exclusion as a synonym of elimination: “blacks and mulattos were eliminated from the positions that they had once occupied in pre-capitalist urban handicrafts or in the sale of small items and services, severely strengthening the tendency to confine these people to brutal, badly compensated and demeaning tasks or occupations” (p. 10).

Finally, the discussion by Florestan Fernandes on the formation of a stratum of free laborers via immigration policy was a contributing factor in Oliveira's theory on a state oriented toward the middle class, with detriment to the lower classes, a central question in his arguments on the relationship between the state and the cities in Brazil.

According to Fernandes, when they lost “their privileged importance as exclusive laborers”, blacks also lost “any interest that the dominant classes might have had in them”. Hence, “the position of Negros within the labor system and their integration to the social order are no longer a political concern”. “Former slave owners, the state and the Church were released from the responsibility of taking special measures to prepare freed Negros for the new system of life and work organization. Freed slaves were summarily and abruptly converted into masters of their own persons and of their dependents, although they had no material or moral means to accomplish that feat within the framework of a competitive economy” (pp. 02-03). “Immigrants thus emerged as *the great national hope* for leaps in progress (...). From this perspective, wherever the “immigrant” appeared, he fatally eliminated the “black” or “mulatto” candidate, because [the immigrant] was believed to be the *natural agent* of free labor” (*idem*, p. 12, italics in original text).

Hence, the theory defended by Fernandes offers the basis for the subsequent assessment by Oliveira that, already at that moment, the state was focusing on creating a stratum of free white laborers through its immigration incentive policy, and that it continued to operate in favor of that stratum by offering the infrastructure and services required for their establishment and reproduction in the city.

In the 1970s, a new sociology was born, focusing on the “urban question” and its central object of study: the lower class, characterized as a reserve army, despoiled of public services and goods, and to which nothing is offered by the state. The investigation by Florestan Fernandes on the displacement of freed blacks from the labor market after the abolition of slavery offers some clues on the origins of these formulations, engendered by the formation of a spoliated social stratum, relegated to exclusion from the new competitive social order imposed by the salaried labor system.

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