# GREAT EXPECTATIONS:
## The Ambiguity of Social Whitening in Colombia

Mara Viveros Vigoya

The Occasional Papers of the School of Social Science are versions of talks given at the School's weekly Thursday Seminar. At these seminars, Members present work-in-progress and then take questions. There is often lively conversation and debate, some of which will be included with the papers. We have chosen papers we thought would be of interest to a broad audience. Our aim is to capture some part of the cross-disciplinary conversations that are the mark of the School's programs. While Members are drawn from specific disciplines of the social sciences—anthropology, economics, sociology and political science—as well as history, philosophy, literature and law, the School encourages new approaches that arise from exposure to different forms of interpretation. The papers in this series differ widely in their topics, methods, and disciplines. Yet they concur in a broadly humanistic attempt to understand how, and under what conditions, the concepts that order experience in different cultures and societies are produced, and how they change.

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# GREAT EXPECTATIONS:
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## Introduction

In this talk, I will examine the process of social ascent experienced by a small stratum of the black Colombian population residing in Bogota and the phenomena known as whiteness and whitening. This analysis is based on two studies I have done on the rise and participation of the black middle classes in Colombian national life.

An obvious first question is: Why study the black middle class in Colombia? In addition to adding to the corpus of information on social mobility and political participation, this topic requires three methodological moves, which are critical to my field.

1. The focus on the middle class destabilizes the normalized relationship between race (commonly understood as blackness) and poverty.
2. The focus on the middle class reminds us that race—to paraphrase Frantz Fanon[1]— is a relationship. It is impossible to study blackness in isolation; we must also account for the history of the construction of whiteness, which has specific contours in Colombia and South America, in general.
3. Social mobility for black people can be linked to the acceptance or the resistance of the demand for social whitening.

One of our interviewees, Leandro, a 33-year-old electrical engineer who has made exceptionally rapid upward mobility, makes this very point:

> I think it is important to adapt to the environment in which you are moving, and adapting is neutralizing. Ethnicity should not be seen much; because I notice that the treatment you receive is different if one day you show up in an African shirt. And I don't like it..., consciously or unconsciously, I don't want to stand out as different...I wanted to dress like they do on television, with television as the standard.

His words sum up pretty well the core of what I will present today: the ambiguities raised by the upward social mobility for a black man in a context that highly values whiteness.

I use the word "whiteness" to express the ideologized concept related to the status of privilege associated with the white group, as a race. "Whiteness" is a disproportionate valuation of what is white, not just in terms of physical appearance, but also in social and cultural behaviors. This is a global phenomenon, but it has distinctive expressions in different social and geopolitical contexts. In the case of scholarship on Latin Americans, there are few reflections on this.

"Whitening" is defined as the search to escape from what is "black" in order to ensure for oneself a better form of social existence in a context that values what is white as a synonym for progress, civilization, and beauty.

This quest is undertaken in two ways, first, through *mestizaje* (miscegenation or "race-mixing") in an intergenerational process, and second, through the integration into non-black social networks. While the former is evident in physical appearance, I am more interested in the latter, because it reveals social dynamics.

In what I call social whitening, different forces interact: the ideological, the social, and the personal. The ideological dimension of social whitening is constructed in relation to a national identity that privileges what is white, or whatever approximates it, and restricts the social and symbolic space occupied by Indigenous populations and descendants of Africans. The social dimension alludes to the dynamics that act "to dilute and disperse that which is black, and black culture."[2] And the personal dimension includes daily practices of social groups and individuals identified as not white in their attempt to adapt to "white" values.

During the 1990s, the definition of national identity was modified in the Colombian Constitution (as in other Latin American countries) to recognize the country as "multicultural" and "pluri-ethnic." In this context, the 1991 Constitution mandated, through Transitory Article 55, the adoption of Law 70 or the Law of Black Communities, that established special rights to land, mandatory incorporation of Afro-Colombian history in the educational curriculum, two special seats in the House of Representatives for Black Communities, opening up space for their political participation.[3] Nevertheless, history has shown that the potential of these measures for change was strongly restricted by economic and political factors and by the persistence of an armed conflict that disproportionally impacted black and indigenous populations and reproduced the old social exclusions.

It is in this context that I will examine the process lived by both male and female subjects in Bogota, as they integrated into social environments in which they were minorities. And I will analyze the relationship between social ascent, whiteness, and whitening with two objectives: to show, first, that in the current context of multiculturalist policies, there does not necessarily exist a contradiction between ascent and having a black identity; and second that, even so, the political, economic, and cultural determinants do not produce a black identity that succeeds in defying the racist character of the Colombian social system. I will conclude by exploring some forms of resistance to white cultural domination and some micro-agencies that seek to reverse these long-term tendencies.

**History of Whitening in Colombia**

In the Latin American colonial context, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the certification of blood purity—which required the documentation of ancestry without religious blemish of being Jews or Muslims—was gradually transformed into the need to prove that one did not have any ancestry that was black, mulatto, sambo, or quadroon (1/4 black

or indigenous). At the same time, the same colonial dynamic that created these categories, known as *castas*, permitted processes of social ascent through whitening, making it possible for "Indians" and "Blacks" to surpass the limits imposed by their condition through a process of mixing across generations.[4]

We must not forget, nevertheless, that whiteness was also a matter of reputation, since a person could be white if he or she was considered to be so publicly. Official documents show that "color easily turned into an instrument of power, applicable under colonial law in order to achieve certain ends."[5] Color was defined according to situation; it was not a simple matter of the perception of the color of one's skin. Moreover, the "habitus[6] of whiteness" was associated with traits of distinction and practices of concentrating economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital in the dominant classes that were prolonged in the new Republic, despite the egalitarian and integrationist rhetoric that supported this project. By means of habitus, elites sought to reinforce the boundaries of racial identities and the meaning of whiteness and white racial privilege that were being undermined by the upward mobility of nonwhites.

During the Republican period that began in the early nineteenth century, whitening took on a new meaning, as an ideology in relation to national identity supported in an imaginary hierarchy that justified the dominance of the "Whites." This logic of differentiated classification in groups considered endowed (or not) by nature with certain attributes, was in contradiction with the new model of citizenship that aimed to legitimize Republican political power. Nevertheless, once the legal distinctions were eliminated, these categories became more fluid; *mestizaje* began to be valued as a characteristic of a new nation **and** a source of status that could vindicate by being a natural attribute or a result of a personal project, which was not just accepted, but, rather, desired. Moreover, whitening persisted as a promise of inclusion in the community of citizens, not just by exercising the right to vote or marrying someone "whiter," but rather by participating in different political and public spaces or by adapting to the values of respectability and honor of the groups constructed as white.

Only at the end of the twentieth century did the Indigenous and Black movements succeed in questioning the model of the mestiza nation and make known the multiculturalism of Colombia, defined as a "*pluriétnica* and *multicultural*" nation, as the Constitution of 1991 proclaims. However, due to the changes that multiculturalism brought, racial categories did not disappear; they were gradually replaced by denominations that made reference to ethnicity and culture—such as Afro-Colombian or Afro-Caribbean—in order to legitimize and normalize modern practices of racism, as was done in the rest of Latin America. The idea also persisted that the problems of racism and social inequalities are fundamentally problems of class, without considering the connections that exist between race and class, or giving any importance to race as a relevant category to explain these inequalities.[7]

As we can see from these maps, (Figs. 1 and 2) the proportional representation of black populations in Latin America has tended to decline in the past two centuries. This is due to various causes: material circumstances (higher death rates, lower life expectancy),
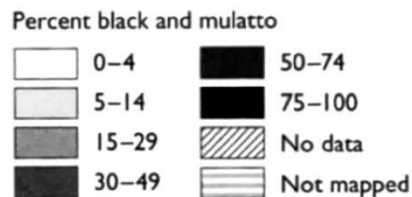
MAP 1. Afro-Latin America, 1800. Credit for all maps: William Nelson.

Figure 1



MAP 3. Afro-Latin America, 2000.

Figure 2

**Percent black and mulatto**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 0–4 | | 50–74 |
| | 5–14 | | 75–100 |
| | 15–29 | | No data |
| | 30–49 | | Not mapped |

Source: G. R. Andrews, *Afro-Latin America, 1800-2000*
(Oxford University Press, 2004)

European immigration, but also cultural representation of "blackness;" in Latin America economic success and upward mobility can whiten black people, even if whiteness is subject to social and historical forces. During the long period in which the ideology of *mestizaje* prevailed in Colombia, between 1886 and the 1991 Constitution, black individuals were excluded from the fundamentals of national identity, but included socially as common citizens, although they were not perceived as the most representative of Colombian identity.

This process meant they remained trapped between two trends: that of whitening and that of a national homogeneity, which contained them rhetorically but ignored the racial and ethnic discriminations of which they were an object. Although a new regulatory framework has been consolidated, and public officials have begun to adopt multicultural politics, the results of the last census in 2005 show that in the greater part of the counties of Pacific regions, the effect of the impact of the programs focused on the Afro-Colombian black populations—those that have the poorest quality of life—has been minimal, and that

the index of unmet basic needs has risen in relation to the indicators of the census of 1993. Moreover, in these last 20 years the ties that have united the processes of multiculturalism to neoliberal politics have been consolidated and the collective rights granted as compensatory measures to "disadvantaged" cultural groups have become an integral part of the neoliberal ideology.[8]

While neoliberal multiculturalism undertakes, in the new millennium, the functions that the discourse of *mestizaje* did from the nineteenth century until the end of the twentieth, some authors have raised the idea that "the Colombian State has oriented itself to a greater recognition of difference, without abandoning the ambivalent change between modernist projects of homogenization and the postmodernist projects of differentiation."[9] In any case, from different perspectives, different authors agree that multiculturalism has not managed to reduce the racialized effects of neoliberal politics on these social groups and populations, **and** it has also contributed to reproducing their marginality.

In addition, the rights to land and education that were granted to black communities in 1993 by Law 70 were established on the basis of their characteristics as an ethnic group, defined as inhabitants of specific territories (rural zones and along the Pacific Coast) and as bearers of a cultural identity worthy of being protected and valued. In practice, this has meant that the affirmative action established by this law can only be applied to those who fall under the definition of *comunidades negras* (black communities). Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that the changes brought by Law 70 have paved the way for the surge of new black communities in unexpected places that were based on more flexible definitions of belonging. Equally, it is worth pointing out that in the period after the World Conference against Racism in 2001, the use of the category "race" was re-introduced and legitimized in discussions about social justice in relation to Afro-descendants.[10]

Since the second half of the nineteenth century, a process of social differentiation of the black population has emerged, resulting in a gradual and restricted social mobility of the mulatto elite. In the nineteenth century in Cartagena, there was already a social ascent of a few black figures with university degrees, mostly mulatto men who became successful physicians and lawyers. During the course of the twentieth century, through the accumulation of economic capital in rural areas and mining, and in large measure thanks to increased access to higher education, a "black middle class" was constituted in various regions of the country. This class was able to establish a social, political, and economic space despite the persistence of racial prejudice and discrimination. The presence of this black group, which has managed to ascend socially in Colombia since the nineteenth century, raises questions about whitening from two perspectives: that which includes, for the black individual and his family, the promise of social ascent, and that which implies shedding any black traits that could be linked with the idea of their inferiority.

In the next section, we will see how the new era of multiculturalism may have introduced new ways in which upward mobility affects black identities.

## Whiteness and Social Whitening: A Colombian Case Study

In the racialized and hierarchical geographic distribution of populations in Colombia, the social ascent of black people presupposes their departure from the places where they are concentrated such as the Pacific and Caribbean coasts, and their migrating to the large interior cities like Bogotá or Medellin, whether to broaden their level of education or to improve their work and economic situation.

In the case of those individuals interviewed in the framework of my research study "'Race,' gender and social ascent: the experience of the Black middle classes in Colombia," of the thirty interviewees in Bogotá, thirteen are from the Pacific region, ten from the Andes region, and seven from the Caribbean. Identified through social networks, these individuals were initially contacts of the members of the research team. The male and female subjects identified themselves as "black" people, "brown" people and, in smaller proportion, as "Afro-Colombians," "Afro-descendants," or "mulattoes." These denominations give us an account of the changes and possibilities that the diffusion of multicultural discourse brought about regarding terms of ethnic identity such as "Afro-Colombians" and "Afro-descendants," and at the same time, the persistence of categories like "brown women," "mulatto women," and "black women," that respond to the process of *mestizajé*.

Their ages range between 25 and 60 years, and out of the 15 men, 14 are under 46 years old, while out of the 15 women, only ten are in this age range. All have studied at the university level, have available income that permits certain material comfort, and live a "modern" lifestyle, which means a place of work is central in their lives. In relation to occupations and professions, the women comprise a more diversified group than the men, although there is a tendency to group in the service sector. Among the men, there is a greater number in engineering, the natural sciences, and social sciences, and none work in the service industry. Among the interviewees, only two women and one man have liberal professions, an environment historically relevant for the social ascent of people of Afro-Colombian descent. While a significant number of them work in education, no one is an entrepreneur.[11]

Living and working in Bogotá was, for a long time, an indicator of ascent on the scale of regional wealth in Colombia. In recent years, the growth of the black population in the capital city has been connected to the displacement due to violence or socioeconomic vulnerability, but this was not the case for our interviewees. For them, living in Bogotá has signified gradually integrating into "white" networks. In their places of residence, scattered across middle-class neighborhoods, black ethnic networks are practically non-existent. This documents their integration into the middle-class circuits of Bogotá, separate from their ethno-racial and social groups of origin.

In all cases, the migration and the new experiences in the capital, where economic, political, and cultural power are concentrated, have exposed them to a series of relationships and influences that have had the effect of whitening them socially and culturally. This has occurred without their having experienced the specific desire to do so, but also without their

having been able to avoid it. Familiarization with the codes of the white world is produced in a social context in which racial hierarchies remain in effect.  These manifest themselves in the event of a later conflict. The interviewees revealed that whiteness is an ambivalent achievement.

The thirty interviewees in Bogota made reference to feeling "strange," "different," of having been "the black man" or "the black woman" where they lived, studied, worked, even where they enjoyed entertainment. Many say "they are noticed" and "remembered more easily" than others, and are rare and visible in the positions they occupy. Some of the women say that above all, those who are older than 40 lost contact with their regions of origin, which are described by them, male and female, as places of  "happiness," "good people," or "innocent," while at the same time signifying "stagnation," places "where nothing happens" and, in some cases, places where they encounter "envy" and "slander."

Others want to do something for "their people," but they don't know how and feel they only have time for their work. Powerful structural ties exist between what is not black and socio-racial mobility, and these minimize the potential solidarities between upwardly mobile black citizens and their black community.

In our sample, there were strong differences in marriage patterns by sex.  Of the ten men who have spouses, only two of the spouses are described by them as "black" and three as "brown;" the rest have spouses who are "white" or "mestiza."  Of the fifteen women, four have "black" husbands, one does not give information, and ten are single. This would mean that the men who have achieved upward social mobility tend to be in interracial marriages, while for the women, upward social mobility translates into a greater difficulty in finding intimate company, inside or outside their ethno-racial community.  Lucía, a 45-year-old unmarried teacher, tells us:

> What I feel is that (I'm not going to say it's all of them) our black men were looking for white women, and our white men were not looking for black women. No one was interested in us, at least not here in Bogotá. And that's hard.

Of women without partners, all agreed that in the social environment in which they found themselves "at marrying age," there was not much of a chance of finding someone in the same social circumstance. They do not express the desire to unite themselves to white men, but the difficulty of building any romantic relationships.

Said Ana, 50 years old:

> While he was dreaming about going off to live in Chocó, I was dreaming about going to live on the outside, so we had no common point. He wanted a wife waiting for him at home, to attend to him, with the fireplace lit, and whatever else. I was dreaming about being successful in my career. So, we didn't have anything in common.

**Upward Mobility and Black Identity**

What can be said about the relationship between the experience of social mobility that our interviewees have had and the possibilities of affirming a black identity?

Due to the restricted and individualized possibilities of upward social mobility of the black population in general, the existence of this small upper middle class segment of the population fails to erode the overall correlation between being poor and being black. According to data from the Census of 2005, the living conditions of black people have tended to worsen with the general economic crisis of recent years. The greatest mobility can be identified in the generation of the fathers and mothers of our interviewees and the slope of ascent tends to diminish between the generation of the parents and our interviewees. Likewise, regardless of their motivations, social ascent has meant for them, male and female, living in a world of whites in which black men and women end up generally dependent upon a social and cultural white matrix that reproduces the hierarchies of the prevailing socio-racial order.

Furthermore, their perception of racial discrimination is ambivalent; even if almost everyone recognizes it as a fact in Colombian society, few are willing to talk about it in the first person. Their answers tend to minimize or relativize it (they say, "Well yes, you feel some pressure in certain environments," "I have never felt it directly"); they refer to it in an informal way or they explain it in general terms ("it's a part of the same dynamic of racism in the country and Colombian society"). Only those who work academically or professionally with the ethno-racial topic recognize in an explicit way, "the need to perform actions of positive discrimination" in order to counteract "racial inequalities and equate social opportunities."

However, there is not necessarily a contradiction between ascent and having a black identity. The multicultural discourse that praises diversity and encourages individual difference as an intrinsic quality, authorizes a number of ways to express relationship with black identity. Many of these were already present under the ideology of *mestizaje*, but did not have the political legitimacy that this discourse has conferred on them. For instance,

- one can feel "racial pride" without claiming to have an "Afro-culture;"
- one can claim an "Afro-identity," be it from the "scholarly" understanding of black culture, from multiculturalism (which values that which is ethnic), or from personal convictions;
- one can avoid identifying oneself as black as a way of affirming "an existence that does not revolve around race"; or
- one can use a regional definition (like Caribbean) for the feeling of belonging, or in order to avoid negative stereotypes and attenuate the place of radical otherness.

The ways our interviewees relate to black identity can be grouped into three large sets defined by generation.

(1) The first is comprised of those who lived their youth at the height of the *mestizaje* ideology, in the 1950s, and sought to differentiate themselves from any communitarian black

position. Some of them refer to a white ancestor in order to show that they just are as mixed as the rest of Colombians.

(2) The second group are those approximately 40 years old and who were alive at the time of the change of government parameters on difference in the 1990s. These underline the contribution of black culture to the national culture, above all in musical and gastronomical terms, but few dare to question the political fundamentals of hierarchical ordering of cultural forms.

(3) Those who are younger than 35 comprise the third set, who describe themselves in contrast to the generation of their parents. Some engage in an ethnic discourse that defends a greater consciousness of their cultural specificities; others define themselves as heirs of the achievements of the past generation; and still others express their desire to anchor their sense of belonging in attributes other than ethno-racial ones.

Together, these contrasts and apparent contradictions provide an account of the ambiguities that the discourse of multiculturalism generates with its openings and closures, its changes and inertias. Nevertheless, due to the diversity of our interviewees' positions on identity, we can show that these continue to be bound discursively not just by the new emphasis on Afro-Colombian ethnicity and racial discrimination, but rather by the persistent and naturalized valuation of what is white. The social hierarchy of the country is established not only from below, but also from the top.

**Adapting and Resisting the Demands of Whiteness**

Many of the interviewees have another element in common: their adaptation to the cultural forms of a predominantly white context like that of the middle classes in Bogotá. This adaptation requires diverse practices that include continuous work on physical appearance and dress, a manner of speaking devoid of any regional accent, and courteous manners that cause them to be described as "refined" black women or black men. In the women, smooth hair prevails and they justify needing it because of the demands of work. Diana, a 30-year-old from Cartagena, wears her hair in what could be considered an ethnic style because she is a fashion model. In her case, the important thing is to be noticed and to stand out, and so she plays with her physical appearance, starting with her hair, showcasing a variety of hairstyles for job security.

Some of our female interviewees whiten their skin with make-up, which allows them to pass from being "black" into the ambiguous category of *morenas* (brunettes), even if they have dark skin. For the women who work as state officials, wearing tailored suits and neutral colors, classic shoes, and discreet jewelry prevails. Of the fifteen men interviewed, all have short hair; some use gel to tame their hair; and two men have completely shaven heads. They wear, according to their position, full suits, or light colored shirts and pants of neutral color; their manners are the manners of "gentlemen" and their tone of voice is measured, in order to be, as one of our interviewees says, "at the height of that recognition they've acquired." In general, the men avoid attire that carries ethnic connotation for reasons that Leandro, our

first mentioned interviewee, rising on one of the fastest paths of social ascent expressed clearly.

Others are, in contrast, trying to keep their distance from the cultural ways and practices that sometimes cause them to be perceived as a part of the undesirable category: "stuck up blacks." Mario—a 37-year-old civil engineer, native of Santa Marta, a city on the Atlantic coast, public official, resident of Bogota for eighteen years—expresses this in the following way:

> I am still from the 'hood. There are some things that aren't easy for me because I am accustomed to other things, but in essence, you keep talking a certain language, with certain gestures, certain little things and tricks. For me, it's not hard to understand the language and the people of the neighborhood because that's me... If there's one thing I know for sure, it's that I was born there and [...] the dialogue with my friends from there has to be in that language. It isn't going to be the same as what I could have with the people from here, a specialized monkey language, because they're going to say that I'm some crazy from-shit snob, ¡like what the... man, what!

But, those who opt for informal clothes feel that one should assume the cost of doing so, like Mariano—38 years old, resident of Bogotá for the past five years, historian, public official, and university professor:

> You have to work twice as hard—that is, to affirm, I dress this way, but don't think I don't have anything in my head. If I am here, I ought to have something to say. But you should know that they are always putting you to the test [...] There is always a tendency to not believe in what you are doing because of your physical appearance, and that comes not just from the white or mestiza population but also from the Afro-population—and sometimes with much more force.

For all of the interviewees, male and female, it is evident that they have had to do more than their white colleagues to obtain the same recognition. They do not always explain that extra effort in terms of racial inequalities, but rather social ones, as Ana summarizes very well:

> We understood clearly that our inheritance was education, because there was no inheritance at home. So we were aware that we would have to become professionals to achieve something in life, because we could not permit ourselves the luxury of being lazy.

There are no explicit references to race, rather the economic deprivations that obligated one to put all hope in education as a vector of social mobility.  Nevertheless, in Colombia the

only ones who have the right to just be people, without having to prove it, are those who embody the norm of whiteness.

Many would like to escape the traps of pigmentocracy just as they would like to escape ethnic identity and in different ways, they show their desire to "universalize themselves" and to want "more than to fight for things for the Afro-community," "to receive treatment that is equal to that of the rest of the Colombian population," "to be one of the crowd," to "forget that they are black women and men;" nevertheless, the social reality makes sure to remind them of these things, as in the case described below.

Leandro, the engineer mentioned at the beginning of this paper, is aware that his identity discourse "is different from that of other people who claim a specific ethnic belonging," because he feels, "how cool it would be if life were only one color." Nevertheless, this yearning for a monochrome world without hierarchies—"post-racial," we might say— collides with the reality of the racial hierarchies that compels him to avoid indicating on his resumé where his identification card was from or his place of birth on the Pacific Coast, "in order to not mark himself" during his employment search. His behavior expresses his awareness of the prerogatives of whiteness as the unique, racially unmarked position, and as that place of comfortable enunciation, privileged and unnamed, from where one frequently has the illusion of observing without being observed.

**Conclusion**

In this talk I have addressed the theme of whiteness and social whitening as socio-cultural norms and dynamics that, independent of their will, affect black populations who migrate to capital cities, and even more, the small percentage of this population who ascend the social scale. The processes described show continuities and breaks among the most local and micro-social levels and the structural dimensions of racial systems. And although few spaces escape the influence of socio-racial hierarchies, or do not serve them, there always exist agencies in micro-social spaces that express the shifts and realignments that our interviewees make of the racial authority of whiteness in Colombia.

Without a doubt, in 1991, state multiculturalism opened a political space for the black communities and for the emergence of an ethnic identity that is less diffuse than formerly. Nevertheless, the definition of black populations as an ethnic group produced an indigenization of blackness that left out urban populations, initially ignored the problems of racial discrimination, and obligated the black people to represent themselves as culturally different in order to obtain recognition. This restricted definition of blackness did not fit the middle-class urban black sectors that we have described in this talk, whose identity searches have expanded and who would like to affirm their place as actors in the system without having to renounce their blackness, but who also want that blackness not to limit their social and economic possibilities.

Multicultural discourse has propitiated a favorable atmosphere for the affirmation of diversity, detaching it from racial inequalities. Nevertheless, although we tend to evade the

theme of race, lately greater attention has been paid to racism and the fight against racial discrimination, as some publications and social or state initiatives attest. At the same time, the demands of the Afro-Colombian movement related to populations that are vulnerable to being victimized (such as those considered to be at risk of displacement), continue to be privileged and the compliance with other demands that are more tied to economic redistribution is being postponed.

The results of this research indicate that the flexibility of the system that welcomes successful black people continues to be conditional and that without group support, it is very difficult to pursue achievements over time and to generate bonds of solidarity with the black community. Social mobility—all the more so in the context of the neoliberal environment—does not seem possible to achieve, unless in the terms of a development model that promotes individual enterprise and discourages the possibility of creating a collective path for social advancement.

Similarly, one can affirm that the continued existence of negative representations about black people as a social group is very tied to the difficulty of clarifying the privileges and the hyper-valuing of what is white.

With all this, the space that has been opened in which to think and to denounce racism allows us to hope that it may be possible to generate political mobilization for claims that don't revolve around a singular and rigid definition of blackness. At the same time, the potential of the new middle class "blacks" to interpellate the privileges of whiteness and to construct a critical mass of professionals, capable of defying the risk of becoming only a new group of power, remains in question.

## ENDNOTES

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5. Hering, Max, op. cit. 144.
6. In the sense that Pierre Bourdieu uses the term "habitus" in Bourdieu, Pierre. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.* London, Routledge.
7. See F. Urrea, C. Viáfara & M. Viveros. "From Whitened Miscegenation to Triethnic Multiculturalism: Race and Ethnicity in Colombia," Edward Telles and the Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA), *Pigmentocracies: Ethnicity, Race, and Color in Latin America.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014: pp. 81-125.
8. Hale, Charles. (2005) "Neoliberal Multiculturalism: The Remaking of Cultural Rights and Racial Dominance in Central America." *PoLAR. Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 28 (1): 10-28.
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11. It is important to point out that these interviews are not meant to be representative of a group, but to represent the process of whitening as they experienced it. My research focus is not on typicality, but on experience of a process.