

Brazil Has a Great Debt to Blacks

Contributed by Demetrio Valentini
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Zumbi of Palmares, was the hero of black resistance, the martyr for the dignity of African descendents in Brazil. Blacks are the ones who carry the weight of the biggest perversity perpetrated by Western civilization, the spoilage of the African continent and the subjugation of the African populations to slave labor, be it in Africa itself or in other countries through the slave trade.

We know that Brazil was the last country in the world to abolish slavery officially. It is not strange that we continue to feel its consequences, through the weight of prejudices against the black race, though discrimination which continues to persist, and through situations of social inferiority, which is introduced in the structure of Brazilian society and which will only disappear after very long process of undoing.

Thereby comes the importance of the force of conscious-raising that symbolically has taken the form in the emblematic figure of Zumbi of Palmares. He symbolizes the awakening of consciousness, first among black populations, but also among all Brazilian people.

We have a great social and cultural debt to people of African descent. They brought with them to Brazil a great contribution, represented not only by their work, but above all through their culture and simply by their presence, which deserves our admiration, our care, and our solidarity.

Brazil needs to wake up to a special mission that we have in the world to give testimony to the peaceful and harmonious existence possible among different peoples and cultures. In solidarity with the black population in our country, we express our gratitude for their invaluable contributions to our history and our mission.

Brazil also has a Guarani Indian hero called Sepe Tiaraju. He died while confronting the Spanish and Portuguese troops who were uniting to divide up the Guarani territory in accord with the interests of these two powers, simply disregarding the will and organization of indigenous populations.

The memory of Sepe Tiaraju is carefully kept by the Guaranis in the territories east of the Uruguay River. He is honored so much that he was canonized popularly as Saint Sepe, a name also given to one of the municipalities of Rio Grande.

These heroes are the flag bearers, whose relevance still remains. The best way to honor their memories is to continue to take up the causes for which they gave their lives.

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Quick Facts Regarding Race and Poverty in Brazil

- * 43% of blacks are below the poverty line.
- * 20% of whites are below the poverty line.
- * Of this 43% of blacks below the poverty line, 19% live in misery (earning less than US\$ 40 per month).
- * Of this 20% of whites below the poverty line, 7% live in misery.
- * Of the richest 10% in the country, 22.3% are black.
- * 16.8% of the black population is illiterate.
- * 7.1% of the white population is illiterate.
- * 4.6% of the black population complete 12 years of school.
- * 15.2% of the white population complete 12 years of school.

Source: Retrato das Desigualdades - Gênero e Raça, UN's Development Fund for Women