

Possibilities in the struggle for the teaching of black history in the national curriculum base era in Brazil and the United States: Law 10.639/03 and National History Standards¹

Possibilidades na luta pelo ensino de histórias negras na era das bases nacionais curriculares no Brasil e nos Estados Unidos: a Lei 10.639/03 e os National History Standards

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ABSTRACT

Initiatives to implement national curricular bases have spread across the globalized world, with the intention of implementing models of content and skills that prepare students to respond to classificatory and standardized tests. In contrast with these homogenization policies, social movements, such as the transnational black movement, have struggled to break with the Eurocentrism and the racism that have historically structured such standards of education both in Brazil and in the USA, investing in more democratic and inclusive curricular proposals. In this article, we strive to think of history teaching from a transnational perspective, putting into dialogue experiences of the Federal Law 10.639 of 2003 (BRASIL, 2003), in Brazil and the National

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History Standards of the 1990s in the United States, in the struggle for the acknowledgement of the role of black people and the diversity of their trajectories in school curricula.

Keywords: History teaching. Curriculum. Black History. Law 10.639/03. National History Standards.

RESUMO

Iniciativas de implantação de bases curriculares nacionais têm se espalhado no mundo globalizado com o intento de efetivar modelos de conteúdos e habilidades que preparem os estudantes para responder a testes classificatórios e padronizados. Contrastando com essas políticas de homogeneização, movimentos sociais, como o movimento negro em âmbito transnacional, têm lutado para romper com o eurocentrismo e o racismo que historicamente têm estruturado tais padrões presentes na educação tanto no Brasil quanto nos EUA, investindo em propostas curriculares mais democráticas e inclusivas. Neste artigo, buscamos pensar o ensino de história em perspectiva transnacional, colocando em diálogo as experiências da Lei Federal 10.639 de 2003 (BRASIL, 2003), no Brasil, e dos *National History Standards* [Padrões Nacionais de História], da década de 1990, nos Estados Unidos, na luta pelo reconhecimento do protagonismo dos negros e a diversidade das suas trajetórias nos currículos escolares.

Palavras-chave: Ensino de História. Currículo. História Negra. Lei Federal 10.639/03. *National History Standards*.

The history of black populations, marked by pain and violence, but also by creativity and resistance strategies, is an essential part of Americas' history. The Atlantic slave trade, which developed in the Modern Age, beginning in the sixteenth century, structured the social and economic relationships in countries where it was practiced (MATTOS, 2003). Several historians have demonstrated through their research that wherever slavery was practiced, it was resisted, and in a number of ways (REIS; GOMES, 1996). According to Pereira (2012), since slavery was a structuring factor in American societies in the Modern Age and since it was resisted wherever it was found, we can therefore suppose that these struggles against slavery were structuring factors in the social formation of these countries. There are diverse examples of studies conducted in the fields of history and education that have contributed in recent years to a better understanding of the black population agency in the historical formation of Brazilian and American society (LOVE, 2019; VIANA, 2016; PEREIRA, 2019). In the post-abolition

period, the American continent continued to be marked by anti-racist struggles, to such an extent that the legacy of the struggles of black populations in African diaspora affects all people. When talking about the history of this continent in the last 500 years, it is not possible to do it so completely without including the history of black populations.

However, when examining the history curricula of the two countries with the largest black populations, Brazil and the United States, we have noticed that historical narratives based on Eurocentrism and underlying racism continue to be reproduced in their school curricula, as in their monuments and museums, marginalizing and excluding the black population. In this article, we seek to put into dialogue the attempts at reforming the traditional curricula in Brazil and the USA and including, in national curricula directives, historical narratives that address the notion of black people as protagonists and the diversity of their experiences. For this purpose, we will discuss some of the impacts and possibilities stemming from Law 10.639 of 2003 (BRASIL, 2003), which made compulsory the teaching of African and African-Brazilian history and cultures in every school in Brazil. We will also discuss proposals such as the National History Standards in the United States, understanding the place of the racial component in the preparation of school curricula in countries characterized by colonialism and racism.

Race, curriculum and coloniality

Race, conceived of as a political and social construction used to justify and attempt to naturalize the inferiority of phenotypical and cultural traits of colonized, non-white peoples, has historically been a structuring element for educational policies and curriculum directives in countries with a colonial past. This curricular conception has implied the subordination of numerous cultures and ethnic groups in favor of a white and western European standard of knowledge, consolidating a process of forgetting and silencing other forms of thinking and epistemology.

Amidst the fear of racial violence in the nineteenth century and of revolutionary disorder during most of the twentieth century (SMITH, 2010), both the Brazilian and American elites have sought in the doctrines of scientific racism, social Darwinism and, in its most extreme form, the racial supremacy of whites, models for maintaining political, financial and social stability. In the United States, Mendelian eugenics of the immutability of genetic characteristics

and of the dissociation between hereditary units was established, while in Brazil, neo-Lamarckism was adopted, which argued that genetic deficiencies could be overcome in a single generation (TELLES, 2003).

In practice, the United States have implemented a “line of color”, policed by the state: segregationist laws regulated marriage and sexual relations, as well as separation in public spaces. The one-drop rule, which stated that the existence of a single non-white ancestor excluded an individual from the category of whites, made no room for people of mixed race and left no doubt as to which group an individual belonged. The Brazilian government, on the other hand, after the failed whitening policy in the early decades of the twentieth century, invested in a nationalization campaign, especially in the beginning of the nineteen thirties, whose goal was to culturally integrate white, black and indigenous people under the banner of “Brazilianness”, based on the idea that the country was constituted by a “race of people of mixed origins”, upon whom moral, political and social attitude characteristics endowed with positivity were bestowed.

The appreciation of mixed races in Brazil, seen as a counterpoint to the racial segregation in the United States, for a long time, in the academic literature and in terms of common sense, was viewed as a striking difference between the race relations developed in the two countries. The forms of articulation by the black movements were also different. Andrews (1985), for instance, pointed out aspects that hindered the mobilization of African-Brazilians in the anti-racist struggle, such as the lack of segregationist legislation in Brazil, which would make racial discrimination more subtle and harder to detect, and the substantially more relaxed nature of the Brazilian racial hierarchy, which worked to undermine African-Brazilian political mobilization in many ways. However, we understand that education, especially public education, provided in both countries, could be seen as bearing many similarities, a fundamental factor when it comes to thinking of race relations in both Brazil and the United States (PEREIRA, 2019).

If, in eugenic terms, the racial theories adopted in the United States and Brazil sound radically different, in both cases, these theories were systematized in the school curricula and the historical narratives included therein. This was done aiming to delineate a profile of the nation in which blacks were defined and treated as a group of lower status and whose racist stereotypes were strengthened in order to create consistent barriers against their integration into society. In the discipline of history, America had become a space for the continuing domination of European white men and their western culture. In this context, blacks and indigenous people were presented as mere appendages in the process of perfecting white hegemony.

This curricular concept was predominant in several countries in the American continent, including Brazil and the United States, which experienced what Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist (2003) referred to as the paradox of the settler societies. In these societies, even after the end of the colonial empires, Eurocentrism continued to shape what came to be recognized as formal knowledge, and the white and/or European continued to be seen as the standard, the norm. On the other hand, the other groups were to play the role of the Other, constituting what Quijano (2005) referred to as “coloniality”.

In the education system, coloniality has been expressed in the predominance of whites in positions of power, the lack of narratives with blacks and indigenous people as protagonists and the devaluing and exoticization of their cultures. This perpetuates the false idea that “it is white men who made history; discovered other lands; shaped the histories of science, the arts, and humanities; and made the important contributions to the world” (HICKLING-HUDSON; AHLQUIST, 2003, p. 85).

New curricular concepts have challenged the coloniality of knowledge in curricula, such as post-colonial thinking, which names and challenges the legacies of colonialism and its continuation through neo-colonial practices and investigates the underlying assumptions of discourses on Eurocentrism, including “whiteness”, and explores approaches to construct alternatives to colonialist discourse (HICKLING-HUDSON; AHLQUIST, 2003). Moreover, post-colonial studies focus on processes of hybridism and translation and are compelled to perceive the whole phenomenon of colonization as a negotiation with the Other. As pointed out by Lopes (2013, p. 15, our translation):

The colonizer, when dominating the colonized, needs to admit the possibility of negotiating meanings: I cannot colonize those whom I completely destroy. There are always relations of otherness mediated by power that constitute the negotiations that serve as the catalyst for constructing the identities of colonizer and colonized. Although these negotiations on their own are not capable of instituting democracy or of eliminating power, they are also not a pure cultural saturation of the colonized.

Thus, the curriculum is configured as a connector between diverse epistemic places, an arena in which the various local cultures therein and the hegemonic global cultures co-exist, negotiate and struggle (MACEDO, 2006). Thinking of the curriculum from this perspective allows us to visualize

the struggles of the historically subordinated people and the epistemes that are invisible and have been made inferior, and thus disassemble the colonial discourse, essentialisms and polarities.

History is power. Telling history is an exercise of power. This is why the struggle to recover the histories of black people from their point of view rather than from within the prism of the colonizer has been a constant demand of black movements in the African diaspora. Throughout the last century, it has been possible to identify African-Brazilian and African-American initiatives that have denounced the inadequacy of curricula and their different mechanisms of subversion. Knowing that in this process the negotiation of belonging is always a contingent translation and a transfer of meanings, we will focus on the anti-racist strategies in education and, more specifically, in history curricula in the sense of including subordinated and marginalized narratives.

Teaching black histories: a transnational struggle

Definitively, “Black lives matter”. This sentence has circulated in the African diaspora in different ways for centuries, as the black population has fought for its humanity and equality, even during the times of colonialism and slavery. Since 2012, with the creation of the Black Lives Matter movement, it has been projected around the world on social media. This projection, made possible due to the existence of a historical struggle against racism, gained strength recently, beginning on 25 May 2020, through the video that quickly went viral online depicting the murder of George Floyd, a black man killed by a white policeman in the city of Minneapolis in the USA. The policeman used his knee to pin down Floyd’s neck for over eight minutes, even though he heard the man begging for his life. Thousands of people took to the streets in the ensuing months to protest against racism in several cities around the world. This fight against racism, which has crossed national borders and has been understood as a transnational political struggle, is momentous in societies like Brazil and the United States. The racism that enables the dehumanization of black people and, consequently, events like the murder of George Floyd has also historically structured the inequalities that exist in Brazil and many other countries. For a long time, in both Brazil and the United States, militants from the black movement have understood that if black lives do not matter in the curricula and teaching of history in schools, it will be even more difficult to fight racism in societies as a whole. Therefore, the transnational black movement in

the field of education and specifically in the teaching of history, so that black lives also matter in curricula, has been a striking and fundamental characteristic for decades in both Brazil and the USA (PEREIRA, 2019).

Racist principles were so deeply rooted in American societies that, even in societies that are as socioeconomically different as Brazil and the United States, the curricula today remain similar with regard to how they treat Afro-descendant populations. Consequently, in both countries we have identified textbooks and teaching practices that treated blacks as inferior beings whose historical experiences have been marginalized or made totally invisible. Nevertheless, since the mid-nineteenth century, when colonized curricula began to be structured, many advances have been made concerning the history that is taught about blacks. Racist discourses no longer go unnoticed and without being rejected by students and teachers at all levels of schooling.

The valuing of education was mobilized by the black movement in Brazil to rise socially and surpass inferior stereotyping, as pointed out by Gomes (2012b, p. 735, our translation):

It is understood by the black movement as a right gradually won by those who fight for democracy, as an additional possibility for social ascension, betting on the production of knowledge that values dialogue between different social subjects and their cultures and as a space for the formation of citizens who stand against each and every form of discrimination.

Faced with an education system that has disqualified and excluded them, African-Brazilian militants and intellectuals created institutions to educate the black population, began to subvert Eurocentric curricula and demand from the state the study of the history of the African continent, the struggle of black people in Brazil, black Brazilian culture and the culture of blacks in the formation of Brazilian national society. One of the most subversive experiments was undertaken by the Brazilian Black Front in the 1930s, which established a school attended by thousands of black students with the motto “Gather, Educate and Guide”. This subversive experiment would lead to a new debate on the education of black people in Brazil by introducing an alternative narrative of the history of Brazilian blacks in order to combat the colonialist discourse of official history (GONÇALVES; SILVA, 2000).

The agenda of the black movement intensified in the sphere of education in 1978, with the greater political openness towards the end of the military regime. According to Santos (2005), at this time, their demands concentrated

on debates about racism, black culture, education, labor, black women and international politics. There was also a growing concern over reformulating school curricula with a view to valuing the role of black people in the history of Brazil, with the proposed introduction of the teaching of African history and languages. These demands grew in keeping with the process of reintroducing democracy in Brazil. In 1982, in their Action Program, the United Black Movement defended the demystification of Brazilian racial democracy and the struggle to introduce the history of Africa and black people in Brazil into school curricula (DOMINGUES, 2007).

On the eve of the promulgation of the Constitution of 1988, sixty-three groups from the black movement gathered at the national Black Convention) for the Constitution to pressure the Constitutional Assembly to guarantee by law a ban on publicity that showed prejudice towards religion, race, class or color in books, newspapers and magazines, and an educational process that respected all aspects of Brazilian culture (SANTOS, 2005). As a result of these pressures, the new constitution initiated a progressive acceptance of the demands of the black movement, enabling policies of reparations for the slavery of Africans in Brazil through the granting of collective land deeds to traditional black communities recognized as “remnants of quilombos” and the official recognition of immaterial heritage related to the legacy of enslaved populations.

The Federal Constitution of 1988 (BRASIL, 1988) addressed the right to education and the teaching of history based on valuing diversity and fighting racism and racial discrimination. In 1995, during the Zumbi dos Palmares March against racism, for citizenship and life, once again the black movements reinforced these guidelines by delivering to President Fernando Henrique Cardoso their Program for overcoming racism and social inequality. In response to these protests, in the 1990s, several laws were sanctioned, at the state and municipal levels, aiming to not using school textbooks that spread prejudice. These laws also instituted the inclusion, in school subjects, of spaces in the curriculum for the histories of black people in Brazil and the history of the African continent. Santos (2005), when providing examples, points to the Organic Laws of the Municipalities of Salvador, Belo Horizonte, Teresina, Rio de Janeiro and Porto Alegre, which were altered to include the history of black people in school curricula. In the United States, the second half of the twentieth century was also characterized by the growing struggle for racial equality. We will not delve deeply here into the complex nature of the civil rights movements, black power or black nationalism, as we will focus on the field of education, where one of the most profound changes was desegregation in schools. In its decision on the case of *Brown vs. Board of Education*, in May 1954, the US Supreme Court had ruled that segregation in public schools based solely on race

was unconstitutional and denied black children equal opportunities in education. In practice, Love (2019) showed that blacks were kept in economic and racial isolation as whites moved to the suburbs and ensured that black children could never attend the same schools as their children.

Around thirty-eight thousand African-American teachers and principals lost their jobs due to the closure of black schools and the fact that white parents did not want them teaching their children. However, if between 1955 and 1970, while fighting to destroy the segregationist structure, the civil rights movement did not succeed in totally transforming race relations in the USA, it at least helped African-Americans to gain more power at the local level. Consequently, many school councils, curricular committees and history departments in high schools began to include more African Americans and even whites who rejected the ideology of white supremacy (LOEWEN, 1995).

The first changes in this respect could be seen in the approaches used in textbooks. Although they did not break totally from the white supremacy view, this view became less explicit. If in the first half of the twentieth century slavery was included in books as something positive and cast in a positive light, according to Loewen (1995), after the 1960s, textbooks dedicated more space to the subject of slavery and began to address it as the main cause of the civil war. They also characterized the brutality of this system and its impact on African-American lives. The Reconstruction era was also revised² to include discussions on the integration and exclusion of African Americans in the economic and political system.

Law 10.639/03 and the National History Standards: transnational struggles for the emergence of black histories

The passage from the twentieth to the twenty-first century was characterized by an advance in international debates on racial issues and education. These debates began with the 1st Conference on Black Culture in the Americas in 1977 in Colombia, which demanded the rewriting of black history and the diffusion and participation of blacks in building America at all levels of schooling.

² The Reconstruction era (1865-1877) is the name given to the period following the American Civil War (1861-1865), when the victors, the North, directed their efforts towards the abolition of slavery, the disbanding of the Confederate States of America, the reconstruction of the country and the Constitution of the United States.

The debates continued up to the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, in Durban, which would become a benchmark for curricular decisions in the 2000s. We must highlight that the Rapporteur General of the World Conference against Racism was Edna Roland, a militant in the Brazilian black movement, nominated for this role by the Brazilian government (ALBERTI; PEREIRA, 2007). The participation of the Brazilian black movement at the conference in Durban, especially the attendance of black women, such as Edna Roland herself, was fundamental in achieving the results at the international level against racism in recent decades. Since the mid-twentieth century, the struggles for national freedom in Africa, especially with the end of the Apartheid system and with the democratic election of Nelson Mandela in South Africa in 1994 have strengthened the anti-racist struggle in the African diaspora. Consequently, the demands of the black movements in the Americas for the repositioning of Africans and their descendants in the writing of history have also gained traction.

Approved by the United Nations (UN) in 1997, the Durban Conference was preceded by four regional conferences in Europe, America, Africa and Asia that discussed racism and racial discrimination in order to formulate plans to eradicate them. Attended by representatives from 173 countries, the conference attracted attention to the subject of reparations policies for Africa and Afro-descendants due to the Atlantic slave trade and its outcomes. In its program to achieve the eradication of all forms of prejudice, the states were urged to promote “the full and accurate inclusion of the history and contribution of Africans and people of African descent in the education curriculum” and textbook and curriculum reviews and amendments “so as to eliminate any elements that might promote racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance or reinforce negative stereotypes, and to include material that refutes such stereotypes” (DECLARAÇÃO E PROGRAMA DE AÇÃO, 2001, p. 73-74, our translation).

The debates in Durban resonated in the American continent and influenced the creation of the Special Rapporteurship on the Rights of Persons of African Descent and Racial Discrimination, in 2005, and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which gave rise to the work group known as the “Inter-American Convention against Racism and All forms of Discrimination and Intolerance”, whose priority for the Americas was the preparation and implementation of teaching content and materials that combat prejudice (VIANA, 2016, p. 80). In Brazil and the United States, this movement oriented a series of mobilizations to promote changes in the curriculum at the local and national levels throughout the 2000s.

Brazil, as a signatory of the Durban Plan of Action, internationally recognized the existence of racism in our country and committed itself to take measures to overcome it. Because of this commitment and bowing to the pressures and political articulations of the black movement, the government created the *Secretaria de Políticas de Promoção da Igualdade Racial* (SEPPIR) [Secretariat for Policies for the Promotion of Racial Equality] in 2003 and, in 2004, the *Secretaria da Educação Continuada, Alfabetização e Diversidade* (SECAD) [Secretariat for Ongoing Education, Literacy and Diversity], within the Ministry of Education. According to former minister of the SEPPIR, Nilma Lino Gomes (2012), the historical demand for articulation between the right to education and diversity arising from social movements and, particularly, from the black movement, gained force in the organizational structure of the Ministry of Education. The possibility of a major curriculum change arose through the implementation of Law 10.639 of 2003 (BRASIL, 2003), which modified Article 26 of the *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação* [Law of Directives and Bases of Education], making the teaching of the history and culture of Africa and African descendants compulsory:

Article 1, Law 9.394, of 20 December 1996 comes into force with the addition of the following articles 26-A, 79-A and 79-B: “Art. 26-A. In elementary and high school education institutions, both official and private, the teaching of African-Brazilian history and culture is compulsory. § 1 The content of the program to which this article refers shall include the study of the history of Africa and Africans, the struggle of black people in Brazil, Brazilian black culture and blacks in the formation of national society, depicting the contribution of black people in the social, economic and political fields pertinent to the history of Brazil. § 2º The content referring to the African-Brazilian history and culture is to be taught within the entire school curriculum, especially in the fields of Artistic Education and Brazilian Literature and History [...]” (BRASIL, 2003, our translation).

In accordance with the *Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação das Relações Étnico-Raciais e para o Ensino de História e Cultura Afro-Brasileira* [National Curricular Directives for the Education of Ethnic and Race Relations and for the Teaching of African-Brazilian History and Culture], the past of the descendants of African people needed to be told in other ways. The history of Africans and their descendants would no longer be restricted to the subject of slavery and told from the viewpoint of tutelage or submission. The new

legislation encourages the divulging and study of the effective participation of black people in the history of Brazil in a number of fields, including economics, politics, culture and science. Law 10.639/03 (BRASIL, 2003), which is a direct result of the political actions of the Brazilian black movement³, in constant dialogue with processes occurring at the international level, such as those mentioned above, regulates the entire basic education system and different school disciplines. It also seeks to overcome the Eurocentric viewpoint and promote the democratization of teaching by demanding changes in how blacks are represented. It questions positions of power and problematizes the relationship between rights and privileges, paving the way for the decolonization of curricula in basic and higher education.

More than introducing a new curricular component, the law in question legitimizes the approach of themes linked to African and African-Brazilian history and culture, proposing alternative and emancipatory narratives that oppose the historically dominant Eurocentric perspective. The legislation paved the way for the construction of an anti-racist education system and an epistemological and curricular breakthrough, given that the inclusion of the historical and cultural African and African-Brazilian experience would shed light on the persistence of colonialism and racism. It would also establish contextual histories, articulated in a network, enabling a broader worldview (GOMES, 2012a, 2012b).

The transformational potential of Law 10.639/03 (BRASIL, 2003), however, does not mean that there was no opposition to how this bill was sanctioned. The fact that no goals were set and no agency was made responsible for guaranteeing the implementation of the law was the object of considerable criticism, given that putting it into practice in the classroom ended up falling to teachers, depending on their interest and willingness to engage. Not requiring the reformulation of course programs, especially in teacher qualification and training to prepare teachers to give classes on African-Brazilian history and culture was considered by many people as a contradiction that would make it impossible to achieve the goals of the law (SANTOS, 2005). Even today, over seventeen years after the promulgation of the law, there are teachers who claim that they do not have the necessary training to meet the demands of a less Eurocentric education system, although advances have been made in the availability of ongoing training and the production of textbooks and teaching materials in this respect.

3 Regarding the process of struggles of the black movement and the drafting of the bill of law that was passed in the National Congress and sanctioned by the President of the Republic as Law 10.639/03 (BRASIL, 2003), see: Pereira (2017).

The news of the formulation of the *Base Nacional Comum Curricular* (BNCC) [National Common Curriculum Base] was monitored with particular interest by the groups and individuals committed to the implementation of Law 10.639/03 (BRASIL, 2003). There were high expectations that the version that was passed would ensure the more effective inclusion of African and African-Brazilian history in school curricula. Nevertheless, there was also the fear that the approved BNCC would have the opposite effect. Although the document could not annul Law 10.639/03 (BRASIL, 2003), depending on the curricular planning that it presented, it could create obstacles in practice regarding the implementation of the law, since the production of textbooks and teacher training, factors that directly impact the reality of the classroom, were based on the BNCC. For these reasons, there was an intense clash over the contents that would make up the BNCC and several versions were drafted before a final decision was reached, as we will see.

The struggle to redeem the histories of black populations and include them in school curricula has historically mobilized the black movement in the USA, as demonstrated in reports and articles published by the black press throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Pereira (2019, p. 131), when analyzing the archives of the *Chicago Defender* and *New York Amsterdam News*, found that the drive for the teaching of black history was viewed as a strategy to raise the self-esteem of African Americans, confirm their humanity and encourage them to face the racist oppression that they experienced in American society.

The author cites, as an example, an article⁴ published in the *Chicago Defender* on 9th December 1939, in which the writer John W. Tate Jr argued that only through knowledge of their own history could black people free themselves from inferiority complexes, accusing black politicians and teachers of propagating Eurocentric curricula, even in black schools. This argument by Tate Jr could serve as an example of the anxiety of the black movement in the diaspora that recognized in the teaching of history a powerful tool against racism: “Study Negro history – let this be the motto of the present-day Negro! And let him study scientifically by studying the biographies of his great men” (TATE JR, 1939 *apud* PEREIRA, 2019, p. 133).

Following racial integration in schools in the mid-twentieth century, the black movement in the United States concentrated on demanding the integration of black history into the histories to be taught to the entire population in terms of equality. This should be done without hierarchies influenced by racism, as

4 “Race Must Learn More Of Its History Says Scribe Who Puts Blame On Present School Plan”, published on 9 December 1939 in the *Chicago Defender*.

African-American history would be fundamental to achieve an understanding of national history. In the ensuing decades, these efforts were intensified, inspiring bills of law that sought to modify curricular directives and guarantee the teaching of black history in schools through initiatives such as that of African-American politician William Boyland. In the 1980s, he proposed to the New York State Senate the inclusion of Black History in the curriculum of public schools, claiming that without it “the history of the United States is not taught correctly” (BOYLAND, 1983 *apud* PEREIRA, 2019, p. 138).

An opportunity to integrate historical African-American narratives into the national curriculum was formalized in the United States through a proposal to change the curriculum in the 1990s, known as National History Standards (NHS), which we believe could dialogue with Law 10.639/03 (BRASIL, 2003) in Brazil, both in its relationship with its potential for transformation and the controversies it spawned. The NHS were the result of the National Goals for Education, adopted in 1989 by state governments, approved in 1992 by President George Bush in the context of launching the national curriculum program America 2000.

America 2000 sought to implement in every community of the country national goals of competence in learning, in addition to tests to assess their progress up to the end of the millennium. The six goals set by the federal government were: school readiness, with every child starting school ready to learn; school completion, with the rate of high school graduation exceeding 90%; student proficiency in English, mathematics, sciences, history and geography; the USA topping the world ranking in mathematics and the sciences; promotion of adult literacy to compete in a global economy; and freeing schools from drugs and violence⁵.

Achieving the third goal, which included the teaching of history, required curriculum reform, as it involved preparation for responsible citizenship, which was considered necessary and productive for the inclusion of students in the modern economy. Seeking to maximize their democratic nature, the drafting of the NHS involved elementary and high school teachers and historians in a task force to create the standards, as well as submitting drafts to a national forum made up of 31 national organizations that had contributed to the creation of the norms and reviewing the second-last draft (NASH, 1997). The project was coordinated by the National Center for History in the Schools at the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA), and involved dozens of national organizations with links to the teaching of history.

⁵ See more in: George Bush (1991).

After 32 months of work, in November 1994, the board of the NHS published 3 volumes, ranging from kindergarten to the 12th grade: *National Standards for United States History: Exploring the American Experience* (5th-12th grade); *National Standards for World History: Exploring Paths to the Present* (5th-12th grade); and *National Standards for grades K-4* (from kindergarten to 4th grade): *Expanding Children's World in Time and Space*. The NHS were not legally enforceable and did not mean direct federal interference in local education councils. According to Nash, Crabtree and Dunn (2000, p. 275), the use of the directives was voluntary and they were designed to “set forth the most essential understanding that American youngsters should master by the end of the fourth, eighth and twelfth grades”.

Bearing in mind that one of the National Education Goals was for students to have knowledge of the diverse cultural heritage of the United States and world community by the year 2000, the NHS proposed a more inclusive and multicultural approach than had been seen in most local curricula and textbooks:

We must aim, rather for a history curriculum that embraces yet goes beyond the admirable goal of representing a diverse variety of groups and cultures. Such a curriculum would aim not merely to determine which groups or civilization to include and how much time in the school year to award to each. Rather, it would identify the most important developments, processes, and transformations that we would like students to understand, formulate the historical questions we most want them to address, work out the humanistic and social scientific vocabulary we want them to be able to use, and create stimulating lessons that lead them to explore the broader landscapes in which groups, societies, and peoples interact. If pursued honestly, such an approach would produce unequivocally inclusive history (NASH; CRABTREE; DUNN, 2000, p. 275).

In the curriculum proposed by the NHS, less space was given to Europe, and more content on the history of Africa, Asia and Latin America was incorporated. An effort was also made to include histories of women, African Americans, religious minorities, native Americans (indigenous people), Latinos, Asian Americans and the working class, without shying away from exposing conflicts, power relations and exploitation. Beyond the mere inclusion of content on black history, Nash, Crabtree and Dunn (2000) reports the concern over the quality of the approach in that it would not be restricted to illustrious black people and commemorative dates but should also include the study of African-American life and culture. The 10 phases on the History of the United States,

for instance, beginning in the seventeenth century, included content on slavery, racism, the struggle for civil rights, the end of the racial segregation policy in schools and affirmative action policies in the country.

By bringing to the curriculum and thus to textbooks and explanations in the classroom the conflicts and power relations, i.e., domination, oppression and resistance, both the NHS and Law 10.639/03 (BRASIL, 2003) included key elements to begin the decolonization process. As argued by Gomes (2012b, p. 105), when the intention is to begin a dialogue between different cultures and the subjects that produce them, it is necessary to address the conflicts between historical experiences and different worldviews. Knowledge about the construction of the discourses that hierarchize cultural differences between human groups across race can destabilize the dominant epistemological models and produce in students and teachers “a posture of non-conformity that is necessary to take a hard look at the dominated or emerging models through which it is possible to learn a new type of relationship between knowledge and, therefore, between people and social groups” (GOMES, 2012a, p. 105, our translation).

The smaller space reserved for the history of Europe, the triumphs of western civilization, the historical acts of illustrious white men and the great events of political history provoked a wave of criticism of the NHS, which were widely publicized on television and in the newspapers at the time they were launched. Accused of being excessively multicultural and politically correct, the NHS, according to critics, were playing down the Western and promoting a form of anti-American history because learning about tense themes in American history, like the Ku Klux Klan and McCarthyism, could have a negative impact on national pride and embarrass students.

The possibility of adopting a historical perspective in school curricula that was not centered on the white European paradigm was considered unacceptable. To the neoliberals and neoconservatives, it was a distorted directive, to the extent that, in 1995, the United States Senate voted to condemn the NHS by 99 votes to 1, beginning a battle between center-left politicians and the extreme right over the NHS and the adoption of standards in all disciplines.

Meanwhile, in Brazil, the possibility of breaking away from the Eurocentric tradition in education has been the result of protests by black social movements demanding the implementation of laws and government interventions on a lower scale. In the United States, the traditional autonomy of states and even districts in education alone would result in resistance to any federal interference in the curricula. In this respect, it is important to highlight that the reach of the NHS was limited in the national reality, especially when compared with the developments resulting from Law 10.639/03 (BRASIL, 2003) in Brazil.

The discussion proposed by the NHS did not take place in many states and, in some states, they were completely rejected, so that most in American schools the curriculum remained Eurocentric.

The advance of neoliberalism in the 1990s contributed even more to growing mistrust in the NHS and endorsed the protests of the critics on the extreme right who demanded less federal involvement in education. Those responsible for drafting the NHS, Nash, Crabtree and Dunn (2000, p. 18), however, claimed years later that despite this tense atmosphere, every American state, with the exception of Iowa, were open to developing academic standards for their public schools and the educators who analyzed the NHS directives considered them intelligent, wide-ranging and useful. In this respect, we understand that they were reflected in later curricular policies in the USA.

National education policies created since the 2000s, such as No Child Left Behind⁶ (NCLB), in 2001, and the Common Core State Standards Initiative⁷, in 2010, according to Love (2019) and Lewis-McCoy (2016), hampered the integration of the history of black people in the United States and the diaspora in school curricula. In these proposals, the success of school came to be measured by the annual score in reading, mathematics and sciences, and educators have been held responsible for academic results and punished by cuts in funding for schools if the results are negative. Pressured to guarantee a good performance in the standardized tests, and striving to optimize their students' learning, many teachers have opted not to address subjects that are not included in these tests. This marginalizes content regarding Africans and their descendants. Furthermore, due to the Common Core, many states have decided to use textbooks that meet the standards, but do not represent black populations in a critical and integrated way in the main historical narrative.

6 The federal program No Child Left Behind was launched in 2001 by President George W. Bush, passed by Congress in that year and promulgated as a federal law in 2002. According to the program, every state was obliged to participate in the NAEP examination (*National Assessment of Educational Progress*) and present an annual variation of students' grades, with a schedule establishing when and how all students would achieve the goal of 100% proficiency by 2014. Schools that did not achieve these goals would be labeled as "in need of improvement" and face a series of onerous sanctions.

7 The **Common Core State Standards for mathematics and the English language were launched on 2 June 2010**, during the Barack Obama administration. They were formulated by the National Governors' Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, which, in an attempt to avoid controversies like those in which the NHS became involved, left the decision on whether to adopt them in the hands of the state education departments. On the other hand, the states were encouraged to adopt the standards of the Race to the Top fund, a competitive subsidy of the Department of Education worth \$4.35 billion. In this case, the states compete for scholarships in evaluations of the efficiency of teachers, principals and students based on the common standards. 45 states plus the District of Columbia complied with this policy.

In recent years, Brazil has specialized in adopting student performance assessments at all levels of learning, with examinations on a large scale, such as the *Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica* (SAEB) [Basic Education Evaluation System], *Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio* (ENEM) [National High School Examination]) and the *Exame Nacional de Desempenho de Estudantes* (ENADE) [National Student Performance Examination]. The next step will be the implementation of a *Base Nacional Comum Curricular* (BNCC) [National Common Curriculum Base]. The construction of the BNCC in Brazil, especially with regard to the field of history, was a recent and difficult process, with many upsides and downsides concerning the incorporation of historical agencies of black and indigenous populations into the curricula. The first version was drafted by a committee of specialists in history teaching, including university professors and teachers of basic education recommended by the *Undime União Nacional dos Dirigentes Municipais de Educação* (Undime) [National Union of Municipal Education Managers] and *Conselho Nacional dos Secretários de Estado de Educação* (Consed) [National Council of State Education Secretaries], as well as university professors invited by the *Ministério da Educação* (MEC) [Ministry of Education]. This committee presented its first version of the BNCC for public debate in 2015. The political advances in terms of democratization of education in Brazil and the curricular documents created as a result of historical struggles of the black movement, such as Law 10.639/03 (BRASIL, 2003) and the *Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação das Relações Étnico-Raciais e para o Ensino de História e Cultura Afro-Brasileira* (BRASIL, 2004) [National Curricular Directives for the Teaching of Ethnic and Race Relations and the Teaching of African-Brazilian History and Culture], created a potential for drafting a first version of the BNCC. In this document, the perspective of breaking away from Eurocentrism in history teaching and, consequently, more room on the curricula for the agency of black and indigenous peoples in the history of Brazil were made clear. A good example of an advance enabled by Law 10.639/03 (BRASIL, 2003) in the first version of the BNCC, in the Curricular Component of History, was the sequence of research procedures recommended for the first year of high school, in the part dedicated to the so-called “Amerindian, African and African-Brazilian worlds”:

(CHHI1MOA013) – Value the role of Amerindians, Africans and African Brazilian and immigrants in different events of Brazilian history.

(CHHI1MOA014) – Interpret the black and quilombola movements in contemporary Brazil, establishing relationships between these movements

and the historical trajectories of these populations from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century (BRASIL, 2015 *apud* BRAZÃO, 2017, p. 8, our translation).

This first version was completely abandoned, since the Minister of Education himself, who formed the committee responsible for drafting the document, did not agree with the result of the committee's work, as shown in reports published in the press at the time⁸. Even the public debate held on this first version ended up being ignored and the second version, presented in 2016, was completely different from the first, restoring the Eurocentric aspect traditionally found in history curricula in Brazil since the nineteenth century (SILVA; MEIRELES, 2017). The removal of the innovations and advances presented in the first version of the BNCC, in 2015, was similar to what occurred in the USA regarding the NHS in the 1990s.

From 2017 to 2018, the Ministry of Education approved the BNCC for elementary education and high schools, which were drafted by a new committee of teachers recommended by the Ministry of Education that was completely different from the committee that worked on the first version in 2015. According to the content of its website, the BNCC “must provide guidelines for curricula of the teaching systems and networks of the states, as well as teaching proposals for all public and private schools providing pre-school education, elementary education and high school education all over Brazil” (BRASIL, 2018, our translation). Although the BNCC for history, approved by the MEC, incorporated aspects of what is advocated by Law 10.639/03 (BRASIL, 2003), which we recognize as an advance in the democratization of history teaching in Brazil, the curricular document currently in force continues to be characterized by Eurocentrism. An example can be found in the Curricular Component of History for the eighth grade, when addressing the “Thematic Unit” dedicated to the “processes of independence in the Americas”. When indicating the “Objects of Knowledge”, although this includes “The Saint-Domingue slave revolt and its multiple meanings and developments: the case of Haiti”, it emphasizes in the following item “The tutelage of the indigenous population, the slavery of blacks and the tutelage of former slaves” and the following “skills”:

8 For a good example, see: Moreno (2015).

(EF08HI14) Discuss the notion of tutelage of the indigenous groups and the participation of black people in Brazilian society from the end of the colonial period, identifying aspects that remained unchanged in the form of prejudice, stereotypes and violence against indigenous and black populations in Brazil and the Americas (BRASIL, 2018, p. 425, our translation).

It seems to us that, although “black participation” is compulsory owing to Law 10.639/03 (BRASIL, 2003) and is mentioned in the BNCC, there is a heavier emphasis on slavery, tutelage and violence in the curriculum document, as shown in the cited example, rather than agency, the production of diverse struggles and forms of resistance on the part of the black population in the historical process of the formation of Brazilian society. We understand that the work that will be done based on this BNCC, whether it potentiates knowledge in relation to the historical role of the black population or remains focused on “tutelage” or slavery will depend on each individual teacher. The fact we highlight in this article has to do with the possibilities created for the democratization of history teaching through the existence of Law 10.639/03 (BRASIL, 2003), a result of the struggles of the black movement in Brazil.

It is not a matter of holding teachers responsible for compliance with the law, but rather a matter of recognizing their role in selecting curricula. The textbook publishing market and teacher training courses at Brazilian universities had already been impacted by efforts to comply with legislation in our country in the last two decades, presenting resources and possibilities for training and the later actions of male and female teachers. The road to a satisfactory offer of teaching materials and teacher training courses that comply with Law 10.639/03 (BRASIL, 2003) remains a long one, but progress must be made even with the current BNCC. In the absence of materials aligned with such curricular perspectives, teachers are capable of subverting and innovating, adapting the production of historical knowledge to the reality in which they operate. Mandatory content alone does not guarantee new approaches. It falls to teachers to articulate contributions from the theory of history, historiography, the curricular field and the teaching of history, mastering them and, in so doing, breaking with racist stereotypes.

In this movement surrounding the construction of the BNCC, both the creators and the critics of the base relied, among other things, on the results of the Common Core Standards and NCLB in the United States to defend their positions. The implementation of national curricular bases, followed by equally standardized tests and assessments that classify, reward and punish educational

institutions, has been presented as the solution to the problems in education by the “neoliberal” initiative in the world. This initiative is represented either by politicians, big business conglomerates in the field of education or private foundations⁹. Proposals are generally based on the expectation that curriculum standards would guarantee the improvement of student and teacher performance, progressively eliminating gaps and inequalities in education.

It is not the objective of this article to evaluate the real results of such projects, but rather to signal that the adoption of curricular standards forces teachers to choose between what would be a “story of truth/really important”, which is the one legitimized by tradition and tested in external assessments, and “minority contributions/extra information”, and thus dispensable, which almost always correspond to narratives of subordinate groups that continue to fight for the recognition of their historical roles. This kind of choice, guided by the racial theories that historically supported the construction of curricular guidelines, only reinforces Eurocentrism and racism in curricula, both in Brazil and in the USA. In other words, when it comes to standards, it is necessary to remember that in countries that were colonized in the Modern Age, the standard in general is white, western, patriarchal and heteronormative.

Promoting the dialogue between the NHS and Law 10.639/03 (BRASIL, 2003), in turn, helps us to demonstrate the transnational nature of the movement of black militants and education professionals in the struggle for the decolonization process of history curricula in the African diaspora and facing reactions from the more conservative sectors of society.

Final Considerations

According to Pereira (2019) and Lewis-McCoy (2016) regarding African-Brazilian and African-American histories, respectively, the introduction of disciplinary content from a perspective that opposes hegemony has historically occurred in a timely manner, largely due to the engagement of teachers in the anti-racist struggle. There are people who are politically committed to opposing racism and seek to address issues that affect their students and their communities and thus reimagine and rewrite curricula to provide examples and strategies of resistance (LOVE, 2019). We understand that the classroom is a space for

⁹ Regarding the fundamental role of private foundations in the establishment of the BNCC in Brazil, see the article by Rebecca Tarlau and Kathryn Moeller (2020).

negotiation of narratives and, even with the strictest Eurocentric curricula, teachers from all over the African diaspora have demonstrated through their teaching that every class can also be a class on the histories of black populations.

Directives proposed by Law 10.639/03, in Brazil, and by the NHS, in the USA, in recent decades have opened up new possibilities in the struggle for the teaching of black histories. However, as explained above, regarding the fight for education and the review of the histories told about black people, it is important to highlight that both of these curriculum policies were the result of protests and interventions by black militants, teachers and historians who, in their work and/or political and social struggles, sought loopholes to construct historical narratives against hegemony through the perspectives and experiences of black populations. Perhaps the clearest example in this respect is Professor Doctor Petronilha Beatriz Gonçalves e Silva, the first black Brazilian woman to earn a doctorate in Education and the first black person to become a member of the National Education Council (CNE), recommended by the Brazilian black movement in 2002. Professor Petronilha was the rapporteur responsible for drafting the *Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação das Relações Étnico-Raciais* [National Curricular Directives for the Teaching of Ethnic and Race Relations], published in 2004, a year after the promulgation of Law 10.639/03 (BRASIL, 2003).

Agents of the anti-racist struggle, white and black people who work in the field of education, create spaces for negotiation in curricular documents such as the BNCC and the Common Core State Standards in a dialectic that does not accept cultural hegemonies and use the “culture of the anti-racist struggle” (PEREIRA; LIMA, 2019), produced by the actions of the transnational black movement to construct visions of community and a version of historical memory that subvert the minority positions that were attributed to them by the colonial system (BHABHA, 1998).

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