

Creating Dreams, Fighting For Rights
A Study With Centro de Cultura Negra do Maranhão, Brazil

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“Nobody is born hating another person for the color of their skin, for their origin or even for their religion. To hate, people need to learn and, if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love.”

-Nelson Mandela

Abstract:

The history of race in Brazil is a long and complicated one which has resulted in a contemporary racial climate fraught with hidden racism and the systematic oppression of the entire black population. Because of this complex history, black movements in Brazil have struggled to gain political power and unified support from the black population. Today, the black movement is made up of many independent organizations, working in their own way to fight racism and inequality within Brazil. This research project looks at the work of one such organization of the Brazilian black movement, the Centro de Cultura Negra in São Luis, Maranhão. I focus on the work of this organization in relation to young people, both in São Luis and in quilombo communities in Maranhão, and look to understand how CCN organizes and educates this new generation of the black movement. The introductory chapter briefly introduces the topic and I then move to explain my motivations for research and the importance of this research. Next I outline the location of my research, including a breakdown of the organizational structure of CCN, and move from this to a background history of racism and the black movement in Brazil. Following this background, I address the current issues of educational inequality in Brazil, how this affects the black population in particular, and the work that CCN does to combat this inequality. I then comment some on the lack of cultural valorization and racial identification within the Brazilian black community and how CCN works to inspire these values within young people. Finally, I outline some the personal and political dreams of the students of CCN and conclude that the real work of CCN is in giving these young people the confidence and self-esteem

that allows them to dream, and that will allow them in the future to be a vital part of the black movement in Brazil.

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“When we (black students) were in a place where we had to choose someone, we only chose those who were whiter... This is prejudice.”
-Fernanda, quilombola teenager¹

Introduction:

Driving down one of the main roads of São Luis, the capital of the state of Maranhão in Brazil, one passes innumerable gas stations, supermarkets, and schools. The majority of these schools have a billboard or some other form of advertisement in front to entice enrollment in their programs. The largest of these signs belongs to *Colegio Adventista*, a large private Christian high school. The billboard covers the entire front of the school and pictures five smiling students, each shown with their name, their status as university students, and a thought bubble filled with their career goals. At the bottom of the billboard, the school brags of its “more than 85% approval in the vestibular (pre-college entrance exam)”. Every single one of the kids on the poster is white. Signs like this line the streets of São Luis, encouraging young adults to excel in school, to go to college, to have a successful life. But the vast majority of the signs are filled with white images. In São Luis, a city whose population is 85% black, the contrast between the faces on these signs and the faces in the streets is a stark one. Racism, racial inequalities, prejudices, and discrimination are all alive and well in Brazil. The Brazilian black population is by far the most disadvantaged in the country, with the lowest mortality rates, graduation rates, health access, income levels, and access to basic public services. The youth of this population suffer the most from this inequality, facing futures without jobs or incomes as well as being frequent victims of emotionally and physically violent acts of racism. Beyond these external struggles, these young people are also raised in a society so filled with racism that these ideas are frequently internalized, leading to extremely low self esteem and very little racial and

¹ *PQRN: Em Revista*, pg. 52.

cultural pride. The Centro de Cultura Negra (center for black culture- CCN) in São Luis, Maranhão, is a black cultural organization that strives to reverse these trends. Although CCN is a cultural organization with members of all ages, its focus is on working with the youth of São Luis and Maranhão. Through programs such as Sonho dos Erês (dream of the children) and Projeto Quilombo e Resistência Negro (project quilombo and black resistance- PQRN), CCN focuses its efforts on recreating a sense of racial pride and identity within this population while giving these young people hope for the future and the skills necessary to fight for their rights.

Personal and Professional Motivations:

My main goal for this research project was to have an experience that would allow me to better understand the current state of the black movement in Brazil, especially as it pertains to young people. I was interested in working with an organization such as CCN which is a part of the larger Brazilian black movement. I wanted to observe and participate in the programs of this organization in order to understand what this particular group has chosen to do to address the many obstacles facing the youth of the black population in Brazil. Originally, my project was going to be focused on researching the methods of CCN in recruiting youth members to the organization. However, upon arrival in São Luis, it soon became clear that my previous understanding of the organization had been somewhat mistaken. I had thought of it more as a political and social group that had a clear determination of who was a member and who was not and which was more focused on forming a politically powerful base than it was on education. Getting to know CCN, I have come to realize that this is not at all the case. Although there is a base of adult members who are part of the organization as a cultural and political base of support, the majority of the work with young people is in a more personal vein. Instead of spending time trying to recruit

youth to serve as members, CCN works with kids who truly need the help; kids who are living on the street or have drug problems or are in gangs or are facing some of the innumerable problems within this poor, mostly black population. Because of this focus, the interaction between CCN and its young members is much different than I had imagined and not conducive to my original research question. Therefore, I chose to change my topic slightly, trying instead to understand how CCN works with the young, black population of Maranhão in general to overcome some of the social obstacles they face on a daily basis.

On a personal level, this project is important to me because it has allowed me to understand on a very small scale the great work being done in Brazil through organizations of the black movement. I think it is important for someone involved in the racial struggle in the United States to understand these struggles in other places, because racial problems exist everywhere. Clearly the issues are not identical from country to country and community to community but the basic struggles for racial equality are working towards the same goals. What I hoped of this project was that it would give me a different perspective on the black movement and allow me to see both the positive and negative aspects of the work being done by the black movement in Brazil. Through this I hoped to understand more fully the global struggles within the African diaspora and to take this growth of knowledge back to the United States and apply it there. I believe that through this project I have gained a much wider perspective on the struggle for racial equality, in that observing the differences and similarities between these countries has allowed me to reflect on the situation in the United States and learn a great deal about conditions in Brazil. There are of course limitations to this project, the biggest one being time. For this reason, I understand that this is not a paper about the black movement in Brazil or the black movement in São

Luis, but rather is about the experiences of a few members of CCN and the stories they told and the things I saw within this small part of the Brazilian black movement.

On a professional level, this work has a great deal to do with my formal university education which is focused around African and Afro-American Studies. I feel that far too often, especially in the United States, the struggle for racial equality is seen as one which is unique to the United States. The rest of the African diaspora is often ignored or excluded from these debates and struggles, as if racism is only a problem in North America. I hoped this project would remind me on a firsthand level that this is not the case, that people all over the world are struggling with racism that is perhaps worse than it is in the United States. One goal for this research was to be able to bring back to communities in the United States more personal accounts of the activism and great work going on in other parts of the world that should be recognized by the black movement in the United States. My hope is that at some point these global movements will be able to come together to fully tackle the issues of racism over the world. On a smaller scale, however, I wanted to use this project to produce a greater awareness on my university's campus about the existence of these other movements and the potential within them to truly attack problems of racism.

Importance of Research:

Racism in Brazil is deadly because of its invisibility. Brazil has a racial history very different than that of the United States, in that discrimination and segregation were never legally implemented by the Brazilian government. Instead, the racism that has been a huge part of Brazilian society since the time of slavery has been invisible and ignored, explained away by myths of Brazil as a “racial democracy”, a unique country where racial mixture was the rule and this miscegenation was the proof of a racially accepting culture that avoided the racism that existed all over the rest of the world.

Even today, Brazil is seen by many as a racial utopia where races are mixed and racism does not exist. This denial has allowed centuries of racial oppression and inequality to go unnoticed by much of the world. However, if one enters any community in Brazil with one's eyes open, racism becomes immediately apparent. It is important for Brazil and for the rest of the world that this invisible racism be researched and be exposed to the rest of the world as a first step towards fighting for equality.

This research project is obviously a very small one done over a very short period of time with a huge number of limitations including this time limit and a language barrier. Despite this, I think it is important for American students to experience the powerful fight for equality currently going on in Brazil, and to bring the stories of this fight and these warriors back to the United States. This research project is less about coming to some unique conclusion or discovering something new, and more about having a personal experience working with people dedicated to improving the racial situation in Brazil and taking this experience back to people involved in a similar fight in the United States. I think that the success of all these movements in the end will depend on the ability of people to come together. It will depend on the ability of people of different races within countries to come together in this common fight, the ability of movements from different countries to come together in the global fight for the rights of the African diaspora, and the ability of the world to come together to erase racism. For this reason, research of this sort is important as it has the capacity to start this cooperation, at least on a small scale. The stories and histories and personalities discovered in this research have the potential to personalize the power currently available in the Brazilian black movement, a movement which is frequently seen as weak or disorganized. The responsibility for spreading this knowledge mainly lies with me, as such a small-scale research project is bound to have a smaller influence.

However, I still feel research of this type has great potential to create personal connections which can link movements in the future.

I also feel strongly that research of the black movement in Brazil needs to branch out of the historically popular research areas. Nearly all of the research of this type that exists is based in Salvador, Bahia, which is the city in Brazil with the highest concentration of black people and the most famous occurrences of racism and racial division. If research is not based in Salvador it is usually focused on São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, as the two biggest cities in Brazil. While much interesting information has been and can be gleaned from these cities and they do all in fact have very different racial situations, this research leaves a huge portion of the country unexplored. The state of Maranhão has the third-highest percentage of black population in Brazil, but very little research has been done here. Even spending just three weeks here, it has become quite clear to me that São Luis has a very active movement fighting for racial equality, improved education, access to public services, and many other important issues. Before uniting black movements across the world, it is important that black movements within countries such as Brazil unite. Because of the sheer size of the country there is a great deal of disconnect between the various states and cities. The Northeast in particular is often seen as less cultured and less educated, and is therefore ignored a great deal of the time.

The existence of organizations such as CCN make it clear that great work is going on in all parts of the country, not just the ones that are internationally known. I hope that in the future more research will be done in areas such as Maranhão because there is valuable information to be taken from the fights going on here. Perhaps in some small way little research projects such as this one will inspire other research to be done here to understand in a more full and inclusive way the realities of racism and the racial

movement in Brazil.

Location of Research:

São Luis is the capital of the state of Maranhão, located in the Northeast of Brazil. It is a city of around 1 million people, located on an island slightly off the mainland of Brazil. 85% of this population is black, meaning they identify as either “pardo” or “preto” on the national census. In 2004, São Luis’ “index of development” figure was .778, marking it as one of the more underdeveloped parts of Brazil.

Although São Luis is a sizable city, it is noticeably undeveloped, with very few skyscrapers and a very small city center. The great majority of the city is poor, and nearly all the streets are lined with ditches filled with sewage water, as public services are noticeably lacking throughout the city.²

Although most of my research took place within the city of São Luis, I also had the chance to twice visit Jacarei dos Preto, a quilombo community located about two hours inland from São Luis. Jacarei dos Preto is one of the quilombos with which CCN works, although they have only been involved there since September of 2007. The community is made up of 60 families, all of whom identify as “negro afrodescendente”. The community contains one school which has two classrooms, and the students of the community are divided up into three classes. There is no hospital in the community, although there is one about a ten-minute drive away. Drinking water comes from the local river, which is also where people bathe and wash their clothes. Houses are generally made of wooden structures covered in hardened mud, most without doors or windows. Although they lack many things, almost every family in the community owns a television, a factor which I will touch on a bit later. The base form of survival within the community is living off the fish and seafood that comes from the nearby river. The

² *Prefeitura: São Luis.*

community in many ways is still a traditional, rural community, run mostly by the women, and with the elders retaining a large amount of respect because of their age and wisdom.³

The Centro de Cultura Negro do Maranhão is a cultural organization whose headquarters are in São Luis, although it does work throughout the state of Maranhão. CCN puts a great deal of its focus on young people, in 2007 working with a total of 225 youth, this being made up of 105 children and 120 adolescents. CCN also currently has 197 adult members, or “militants”, although a great deal more participate in CCN’s activities, especially during Carnival when there are usually over 10,000 people involved in Akomabu, the Carnival block produced by CCN.⁴

CCN was founded in 1979 by a group of individuals who wanted to create an institution in São Luis that would work to promote political and cultural consciousness to rescue the cultural and ethnic identity and the self-esteem of the black population in this area, to promote organization in the search for true citizenship, and to combat all forms of intolerance caused by racism through promoting the rights of the black population in Maranhão.⁵ CCN was the first organization of the black movement to exist in São Luis, and still retains an important role in the community as a base of support. CCN works in five main regions of Maranhão, including the metropolitan area of São Luis, but also branches out into more rural areas to work with rural black communities. Its primary foci are education, young people, and health.⁶

In terms of organization, CCN has divided its work into three main categories: culture and afro-brasilian identity, formation and participation, and public policy and human rights. My research was focused on two of these specific projects run by CCN,

³ WJ, pp 15-16 and 53-54.

⁴ Interview with Mauricio Paixão, Dec. 3, WJ pg. 58.

⁵ *Sistema de Gestão*.

⁶ Interview with Mauricio Paixão, Nov. 26, WJ pg. 42.

Sonho dos Erês and Projeto Quilombo e Resistência Negra. Sonho dos Erês is a part of the culture and afro-brasilian identity focus, and Projeto Quilombo e Resistência Negra is part of the public policy and human rights focus.⁷

PQRN was formed in 1995 as a way to increase CCN's work in rural black communities in developing educational and political-cultural actions to contribute to the strengthening of racial identity in these areas. One main focus within this program is to work on supporting and enforcing Law 10.639 which mandates the inclusion of African history and culture in all schools in Brazil.⁸ CCN was the first organization in Brazil to work with quilombos in this way.⁹ The state of Maranhão contains 642 quilombo communities, by far the most of any state in Brazil, and they are all facing huge obstacles in terms of education, health, public services, infrastructure, and cultural identity. The average illiteracy rate in quilombos is 80%. There are also huge problems within these communities with young people leaving the quilombos to find work or to finish school, and afterwards either never coming back or returning having lost the culture of the community. PQRN works a great deal with these issues, supporting a relevant education system and developing cultural appreciation within the youth of these populations. Quilombo communities in Brazil are also struggling to acquire land rights from the government, although the Constitution of 1988 was supposed to guarantee them these land rights. In 2005, of the 2,228 Brazilian communities considered to be quilombos, only 70 had received titles to their land from the government.¹⁰

Sonho dos Erês was formed in 1995 with the goal of working with adolescents who are in some sort of precarious living situation, whether they be living in the streets,

⁷ *Sistema de Gestão.*

⁸ *Sistema de Gestão.*

⁹ Interview with Socorro Guterres, Nov. 13, WJ pg. 5.

¹⁰ *PQRN: Em Revista.*

involved in drugs or gangs, sexually or physically abused, living on extremely low incomes, or have had problems with the law. Each year Sonho dos Erês takes 90 students between the ages of 15 and 21 and works with them on learning about their histories, citizenship, ethnic-cultural identity, self-esteem, sexuality and many other issues. The goals of the program are to raise self-esteem and cultural identification, increase autonomy, develop working skills and attitudes, and increase the political-social inclusion of these young people. The project is divided into three workshops, each for 30 students. These workshops teach graffiti art, t-shirt design and printing, and instrument construction and performance. Each of these workshops has classes three times a week, either in the morning or the afternoon so as to work around the school schedules of the students.¹¹ Within these classes, the students learn the skills necessary to produce the goods, as well as having discussions and lectures about race, culture, and many other relevant issues. After producing these works of art, t-shirts, and instruments, the goods are taken to CCN's gallery in the commercial center of town and sold, with 95% of the profits being returned to the students at the end of the year. The other 5% is given back to CCN to help pay for supplies. The reasoning behind this is that it is another way of valorizing the work and skills of these students, a concrete way of showing them that they do have the potential to successfully work and have an income and a better life. The profits are added up at the end of the year and then divided evenly among all the students who were involved. The sum is never very large, last year it was around R\$1000, but it is mainly used as a reaffirmation of the hard work and new skills of these students.¹² More than anything else, Sonho dos Erês becomes a support system for these young people, giving them a space to explore issues that are normally not addressed and to receive support from teachers as well as psychologists who are not

¹¹ *Projeto "O Sonho dos Erês"*

¹² Interview with Mauricio Paixão, Nov. 26, WJ pg. 42-43.

available to them anywhere else. The leaders of this program become integral parts of these kids' lives, becoming involved with family situations as well as any problems which may come up within schools.¹³

Although CCN has members of all ages, the majority of their concrete social work is done with young people, whether they are from rural quilombo communities or from the urban neighborhoods of São Luis. CCN was formed around the belief in the strength of young people to change and to begin to obtain critical thinking skills and political consciousness. This remains the goal of CCN today, to strengthen this youthful protagonism within black communities in Maranhão. The majority of these youth are of African descent, but the organization does not limit itself to working only within this ethnicity. This choice has been made because CCN believes that the fight of the black movement is not just a fight of the black population, it is a fight of blacks and non-blacks with the same desires.¹⁴ In addition to this, there is also the belief that in order to fix the problem of racism, it is necessary not just to work with the oppressed but also with the oppressors. Racism exists in both the minds of blacks and non-blacks, especially in a place like Brazil where racism has been so internalized by the black population. For this reason it is necessary to work with both black and non-black students in order to change ideas of race within all their minds in an effort to create a united fight against racism.¹⁵ As a white woman, I experienced this racial openness throughout all my time at CCN, always feeling like my presence was appreciated and accepted just as much as any other person.

CCN as an organization does a great deal of collaborating with other social organizations as well as governmental entities. *Sonho dos Erês*, for example, gets a good number of their kids through work with Rede Amiga da Crianca (Network of

¹³ Interview with Domingas Cantanhede and Railson Rodrigues, Nov. 13, WJ pg. 5.

¹⁴ Interview with Mauricio Paixão, Nov. 26, WJ pg. 43.

¹⁵ Interview with Socorro Guterres, Nov. 27, WJ pg. 47-48.

friends of children) and Movimento Nacional de Meninos e Meninas de Rua (National Movement of Street Children), two other social organizations focused on helping children in poor conditions. CCN also collaborates with the movimento organizado hip-hop (hip hop movement) and rede religiosidade afro (afro-religious network), as well as the secretary for education and SEPPIR, secretary for the promotion of racial equality. This collaboration provides a place to meet kids in need of help as well as a way to access services which CCN may not be able to provide.¹⁶

Funding is a huge issue for any NGO, and CCN is no exception to this rule. For this reason, the leaders of CCN are forced to spend a good deal of time applying for sources of funding from different grants and organizations. Some of the money comes from the government, and the rest from corporations, the vast majority of these being international. Last year, 80% of CCN's funding came from international corporations such as Petrobras and Oxfam as well as Christian groups such as Christian Aid. Because of this, CCN is working to increase its funding from local corporations and government, although they would prefer to rely more on corporations since they see themselves as a political group and therefore should not be receiving too much from the government.¹⁷ Each project is funded by different specific entities, with Sonho dos Erês getting most of its money from Petrobras and PQRN receiving money from Christian Aid and UNICEF, among others.¹⁸

Analysis of Findings:

Racism in Brazil has a very long and complex history, all of which has come together to produce today's current situation. I will outline a very brief summary of this history in the hopes of explaining more clearly why and how things are the way they are for today's black population in Brazil. Slavery in Brazil started in the 1500s and was

¹⁶ *Sistema de Gestão.*

¹⁷ Interview with Mauricio Paixão, Nov, 26, WJ pg. 43.

¹⁸ *Sistema de Gestão.*

not abolished until 1888, the latest abolition of any country. Following legal abolition, Brazil began state-sponsored European and Japanese immigration in an attempt to “whiten” the population, lowering even further the number of jobs available to freed slaves.¹⁹ Although the Brazilian government did such racist things as this, there was never legal segregation or racial separation in Brazil. Partly because of this, and partly because of the history of racial miscegenation which had taken place between the Portuguese, indigenous population, and African slaves in the early years of Brazil, in the 1930s Gilberto Freyre made public his idea of Brazil as a “racial democracy”. This theory of Brazil as a country without race, a land of complete racial mixing and equality, where everyone was simply ‘Brazilian’ and nothing else, has worked for decades to mask problems of racism.²⁰ Despite clear statistical and social evidence of racial inequalities and racist issues in Brazil, the first president to acknowledge these problems was President Cardoso in 1995.²¹

Today, the evidence of racism can be seen in almost any statistic regarding the state of living of the Brazilian people. In 1999, 52% of the black population did not have adequate household sanitation, while only 28% of the whites were in this situation. 26% of blacks had no running water, but only 8% of whites were without it.²² The life expectancy of Euro-Brazilians is 73.99 years, while it is only 67.87 years for Afro-Brazilians.²³ On average, white Brazilians earn 57% more than blacks. Only 15 of the 513 members of Congress and 3 of the 81 Senators are black, and 98.5% of the judges are white.²⁴ This is all taking place in a country with the largest number of Afro-descendants outside of Africa. Perhaps the most telling statistics, however, are more

¹⁹ Nascimento and Nascimento.

²⁰ Guimares.

²¹ Nascimento and Nascimento.

²² Htun.

²³ Carvalho.

²⁴ Lloyd.

personal ones. In 2003, a survey revealed that 96% of Brazilians claimed to not have racial preconceptions, but 74%, when questioned further, answered with racist responses.²⁵ Most stunningly, in a questionnaire, 48% of black respondents agreed to the statement “good blacks have white souls”.²⁶

This history of race as an unspoken, internalized, often invisible, issue has contributed in great part to today’s situation of racism in Brazil. Because so much of the country’s recent history has been based on the myth of racial democracy, today a large portion of the country still believes that racism does not exist, despite the clear statistical evidence to the contrary. This invisible racism is palpable to a large portion of the population and invades every part of their lives. Speaking to the students of Sonho dos Erês as well as to the leaders of CCN, racism is something from which they suffer at every minute of every day. Racism in Maranhão was described to me as “extremely cruel” and “subtle”. Socorro Guterres, a teacher for CCN, described racism in Brazil as having both subtle and brutal parts. She spoke of how youth in particular suffered greatly under this racism, being exposed to both the subtle violence of everyday racism as well as being the first targets for brutal violence from groups such as the police. She stated that black people in Brazil knew where they were not supposed to go, knew that they were not welcome in the cinemas, the big malls, the nice stores, the restaurants. She said that in her own life, as a successful black woman, she is constantly facing racism as she drives down the street or goes into stores and people immediately think she does not belong there. When people come to her apartment door to sell things, they frequently assume she is a domestic worker and ask for the owner of the house.²⁷

Speaking to the kids of Sonho dos Erês, the stories were much the same.

Discussion mostly focused on treatment in public places, with reports of being watched

²⁵ Lage.

²⁶ Gund.

²⁷ Interview with Socorro Guterres, Nov. 26, WJ pg. 47.

more closely in stores and on the streets, being treated differently in restaurants and generally being considered threatening. Milson Santos, teacher of the percussion class for Sonho dos Erês, spoke about the common perception of all black people as thieves, saying “If they see me running, it must be because I stole something”.²⁸ This unspoken, subtle, and extremely naturalized racism is a violent force which tears through the lives of these kids and leads, in many situations, to a low self-esteem and a severe lack of racial pride and identity. These are some of the issues which CCN tries to address within this community.

This lack of public knowledge and discussion about race is due in some part to the struggles of the black movement in Brazil. Although various strong black movements have developed in the past century in Brazil, they have encountered huge obstacles throughout periods of political dictatorships. Large-scale Afro-Brazilian organizations started with the Frente Negra Brasileira, working through the 1930s. This effort was ended in 1937 when the Vargas dictatorship banned all political groups.²⁹ Throughout the 1960s antipoverty programs in response to the U.S. Civil Rights Movement were formed and then banned by the military dictatorship. The next big black organization, Movimento Negro Unificado, was not formed until 1978, and became the most significant racial organization of the time, inspiring the rise of many other black identity groups, including, presumably, CCN. A big step forward in Brazil’s racial history was taken in 1988 when a new constitution was written that included laws criminalizing racism, giving land to some quilombo communities, and mandating racial inclusiveness in history classes (Law 10.639).³⁰ Also in the 1980s, the black movement took a big step forward by claiming November 20th as their declared Black National Consciousness Day. This date is the anniversary of the death in 1695 of

²⁸ Group interview with Sonho dos Erês, Nov. 20, WJ pg. 25-27.

²⁹ Winant.

³⁰ Nascimento and Nascimento.

Zumbi, leader of Palmares, the largest quilombo in Brazil. This act of self-definition was a profound way of declaring a history and identity.³¹

Today, thanks to a more active political dialogue, race has become a much more talked-about subject and progress has been made in some areas such as the development of some educational quotas. The black movement has been strengthened, but it still faces a great deal of obstacles, both from inside and out. Within the black movement, there is internal conflict around many issues, including the question of quotas. Some people within the movement make arguments that black people “by nature” do not like to study, and that because of this, fighting for quotas is a pointless fight.³² In addition to this, the black movement struggles with opposition from the outside, including large numbers of people who deny the existence of racism and use this to oppose social programs such as quotas and education in schools.

One of the black movement’s biggest issues is in helping the Brazilian population to finally identify with their race. Because of Brazil’s history of racial mixing and the government’s support of the racial democracy theory, not only are there many different words available to describe race, but all of these words are in general considered to have a more positive connotation than “negro”. Brazil has a history of providing many racial options on the census, and the population in general has tended to choose a race which is slightly whiter than their own, in an attempt to gain some sort of social status from this label. This phenomenon has created a system in which even people of African descent are able to contribute to the system of stigmatizing the fact of being black, and specifically being “negro”, because everyone except for the darkest has the option of “whitening” themselves slightly and going up a category.³³ The black movement continues to struggle with this, as it is hard to rally people together around

³¹ Winant.

³² Interview with Mauricio Paixão, Dec 3, WJ pg. 58.

³³ Telles.

their race when they are ashamed to identify as this race. I will come back to this issue a little later to discuss CCN's approach towards this problem.

CCN as an organization is a part of the Brazilian black movement. Because the black movement is made up of all these smaller, individual groups, there is a huge variety of opinions and approaches, some of which cause conflict and some of which do not. Some of these groups focus more on cultural appreciation, others on education, and still others on political mobilization, but they all work for the same objective: "to combat racism in Brazil and to fight for the guarantee of rights of the black population in Brazil". While these groups work individually most of the time, they come together for the larger fights, issues such as land rights for quilombo communities, rights of Afro-Brazilian religions, and education, specifically the implementation of Law 10.639.³⁴ This is the current strength of the black movement in Brazil, to be able to unite these diverse organizations to work in these few, extremely important issues.

Education is one of the largest focal points of CCN and the Brazilian black movement in general. Problems within the Brazilian educational system stretch from pre-school through university, with inequalities existing the entire way. The black population in Brazil is the least-educated portion of the population, with black students on average only attending school for an average of 4.6 years, while white students are there for 6.6 years. Even after the implementation of quotas in some Brazilian universities, black students make up only 5% of the college population, and this in a country which is 47% black.³⁵ The inequalities within the educational system are both structural and psychological. Structurally, public schools in general, and particularly those located in poor, mostly black neighborhoods, are not equipped with the same amount of supplies and learning materials as are the more expensive, exclusive private

³⁴ Interview with Socorro Guterres, Nov. 26, WJ pg. 46-47.

³⁵ Lloyd.

schools. This basic issue of access to learning materials creates a baseline inequality that exists from the beginning of schooling and has a lasting affect. On a more psychological level, the school system in Brazil is still oriented strongly towards promoting a white, European version of history. There are very few images of black people within the education system, whether one is looking in history books or on posters or even in story books. An example of this is the prevalence of posters promoting educational success that are aimed solely at the white portion of the population and give no support or inspiration to the black students. There has historically been very little valorization of any type of African culture or history in Brazilian schools, and this continues to be a struggle today.³⁶

In recent years, the government has started to implement a few plans which aim to get rid of some of this inequality, although much is left to be done. In 1988 the Brazilian constitution was rewritten and now includes Law 10.639 which mandates the inclusion of African culture and history in all Brazilian schools. This is definitely a step forward, but the country is still struggling to enforce this law, and many schools continue to write out this portion of history and this part of the country.³⁷ More recently, since 2000 the Brazilian government and some universities have started to promote and require racial quotas in their hiring or acceptance practices. These quotas have caused a great deal of protest as well as support, and have become a divisive issue throughout the country and even within the black movement.³⁸

For those in favor of quotas, they are generally seen as a good step, an indispensable step at this point, but not nearly enough. For one thing, even since the implementation of quotas, the percentage of black Brazilian university students has gone up from 2% to only 5%. Another problem is the issue of poor primary schooling

³⁶ Interview with Mauricio Paixão, Nov. 16, WJ pg. 13

³⁷ Nascimento and Nascimento.

³⁸ Htun.

and the effect that this has on the black population's education levels. Even with quotas, it is ludicrous to think that a poor black student, who has attended poorly supplied public schools, is going to compete on a college level with someone who has gone to a private school their entire life and has had access to any supplies they ever wanted. As well as this basic economic issue, the lack of valorization of Afro-Brazilian culture has a huge effect on the effectiveness of education. For a child to never see a face that looks like them or anyone that represents their culture or race within the educational system, the chances of that child being inspired to return every day and work towards more years of schooling is a very small one. Quotas exist in the end because of this inequality of access to a quality education. The great majority of students in private schools are white, and the majority of those in public schools are black. Drastic restructuring within the public school system is necessary in order to even start to have educational equality between races and classes in Brazil.³⁹

The problem of education within urban settings is pretty dismal, but things get even worse in rural areas. Maranhão has a huge number of quilombo communities and all these communities struggle an enormous amount with educational problems. First of all, there is again the question of basic supplies and structures necessary to have a functioning school. During a visit to Jacarei dos Preto, a quilombo community two hours outside of São Luis, dreams for a better school included requests of a functioning bathroom, adequate school supplies and reading materials, and running water. The school within this community has only two rooms. For this reason the students are split into three classes and two attend school in the morning and one in the afternoon, each class with one teacher working with a variety of ages.⁴⁰ These basic structural

³⁹ Interview with Socorro Guterres, Nov. 27, WJ pg. 46.

⁴⁰ Work Journal, pg. 54.

problems are already creating a huge obstacle to the success of students in this community.

Beyond economic issues, quilombo communities in general struggle a great deal with the substance of what is taught in schools. There is a frequent tension between the traditional urban structure of school in which students attend school everyday, all year, and the traditions of rural communities in which older children are expected to help out their families by farming and taking care of the younger children, jobs which frequently conflict with attending school regularly. In addition to this, it is perhaps even harder for quilombo children who have grown up with this very strong sense of pride in their race and their history to be suddenly approached with this curriculum full of white people and a history written by Europeans, the very people who enslaved their ancestors. This confusion between what the books say and what the elders have been saying is a very stressful situation for a child and causes a great deal of tension, usually resulting in either dropping out of school or rejecting the community's culture.⁴¹

Within the specific community of Jacarei dos Preto, the educational system is a complete mess. In a community discussion around issues of education and schooling, many shocking things were revealed that exposed the dire need for educational reform. One of the three teachers was at this meeting, and she stated that the other female teacher was open about the fact that she did not enjoy teaching, and did not hide this from the students. The other teacher was apparently even worse. He reportedly has a tradition, that if a student forgets a pencil, he would throw a pencil in the air and, while the student is scrambling to get it, the rest of the class is expected and encouraged to rush in and beat up the student. He once told his class that what happens in school should not be discussed outside of school. These are just a few of the examples of the

⁴¹ *PQRN: Promovendo Mundancas*

huge problems within this school which have somehow gone unnoticed by the government. The issue of recruiting and training professors to work in these communities is a complex one. Even more than other teachers, those who work in quilombos need to understand the specific situations of these children, the specificities of their culture and community and values, and they need to find a way to incorporate these in school in order to encourage attendance and learning.⁴²

When speaking about education, it is important to think about what exactly the word means. Many times people assume that education is the same everywhere, that all communities can learn from the same books and the same exercises and the same teachers. But, as can be seen from communities like quilombos, this is not at all the case. In a general sense, education can happen in or out of school, in both formal and informal settings. Especially within small, traditional, rural communities such as quilombos, a huge part of a person's education is through informal interactions outside of school. Education of working skills happens in the fields with your parents or grandparents as they teach you how to farm and when to harvest and when to plant. Education of history is passed orally from the elders to the younger generations, a history of their people and their ancestors which is very different from the history written in any book. Education of culture is found in church and community events. According to Socorro Guterres, education is any form of "conhecimento", or gaining knowledge. Because of this, it is important to recognize these out-of-school experiences as forms of learning as well, and not to discount their educational value. This is a concept which must be understood by the teachers in these communities in order to effectively lead these students through school.⁴³

⁴² Work Journal, pg. 54.

⁴³ Work Journal, pg. 53-54.

Through the project of PQRN, CCN is working in many of these quilombo communities, including Jacarei dos Preto, to help resolve these issues of education and culture. After this community discussion, the leaders of CCN planned to set up meetings with the Secretary of Education as well as SEPPIR in order to resolve the more bureaucratic issues within the school system. On a more personal level, the plan is to increase visits to the community to include ones to the school while classes are in session. PQRN is an important and valuable tool working on these issues, especially in helping to train professors on issues of cultural sensitivity and historical values.⁴⁴

In a more urban setting, CCN works with educational issues through the program of Sonho dos Erês in an effort to supplement whatever education these students may be receiving from their public schools. The approach by CCN to this problem is to incorporate education in with the workshops which teach manual skills. Within these workshops, there are regular discussions and lectures which give the students a place to explore and learn about a huge variety of life issues, including black culture, racism, sexuality, and business management. Although this education is not taking place in a formal classroom setting, it is just as valuable as and probably more pertinent to these students than what they get out of public school. Again utilizing the idea that education is not just about books, CCN uses these lectures to educate about issues that are normally ignored by the school system, but that are issues that have a huge impact on daily life and on the futures of these kids.⁴⁵ There is a big effort made to make this education more appealing than traditional school is, in an attempt to make the students actually want to learn, something which is a new concept for a great deal of them. For this reason, Sonho dos Erês sets up activities such as trivia contests in which the students are asked questions about, for example, the history of quilombo communities.

⁴⁴ Work Journal, pg. 54.

⁴⁵ Interview with Graciane Santos, Nov. 19, WJ pg. 21.

In this way, the students actually learn a good deal of history, but it is done in a way that is fun and attractive to this age group.⁴⁶

One of the most important things which CCN does with its students is to help them understand just how important education is. Talking to the students, it became quite clear that a great majority of them have a good sense of the importance of education, both in and out of school. Speaking to Marcelo, a 19-year old in Sonho dos Erês, he explained that in his mind, the problems and inequalities in Brazil are due to a “lack of information and good jobs”. He expressed over and over his desire to continue studying, to complete school, in order to have a life different than his parents’. He is currently working with children in São Luis and talked about how little these kids learned from school and how little they really know. He reiterated that this problem of lack of knowledge and education is the exact same reason that his family does not have money to buy clothes.⁴⁷ During a group interview with Sonho dos Erês, Domingas Cantanhede, one of the administrators of Sonho dos Erês, spoke about the role of education in helping to recognize rights and violations of these rights. Through learning about one’s own culture and racial identity, one learns to recognize the more subtle forms of racism one encounters everyday and, through this recognition, can start to fight the racism.⁴⁸

CCN also puts a big emphasis, both within São Luis and in the rural areas surrounding it, on teaching youth about their political rights, as another form of necessary education. CCN has a program which is a branch of Sonho dos Erês called “Esporte e Cidadania” which works with young people on this very question of political rights and what it means to be a citizen of Brazil. Through programs such as this, CCN

⁴⁶ Work Journal, pg. 36.

⁴⁷ Interview with Marcelo, Nov. 21, WJ pg. 31.

⁴⁸ Group Interview, Nov. 20, WJ pg. 26.

works to get young people involved in the political system, as only through this involvement can the fight for equality and freedom progress.⁴⁹

One of the big struggles of the black population in Brazil lies in creating a sense of value in black culture, since this valorization is missing throughout the rest of the society. This is usually done through the promotion of certain types of music or dance. CCN uses the Carnival group Akomabu and the dance group Abanja to create appreciation for traditionally African music and dance, giving this population a sense of pride in their history and ancestral culture. Religion is also a powerful tool of unification and a way of creating cultural appreciation. Within CCN, although the members represent many different religions, there is a common appreciation for Afro-Brazilian religions such as candomble. The grounds of CCN contain two shrines to the two orixas of the organization, and these are kept constantly lit and full of food for the orixas.⁵⁰ Akomabu even incorporates this religious appreciation into its celebrations, having as the theme of the Carnival block a couple of years ago “Afro-Brazilian religions”.⁵¹

Cultural valorization is a particularly big issue within quilombo communities, which have traditionally had such strong cultural pride and values. With recent changes in society, specifically the universal presence of television, this culture is starting to erode. Visiting Jacarei dos Preto, the elders of the community claimed that this allure of television and the unrealistic but attractive ways of life shown on novellas was removing the youth from the traditions and culture of the community. They spoke of the lack of interest within this young generation of participating in traditional dances and celebrations, being more interested in watching this foreign culture on television.⁵²

⁴⁹ Work Journal, pg. 40.

⁵⁰ Work Journal, pg. 1.

⁵¹ Interview with Fatima Sousa, Nov. 15, WJ pg. 9.

⁵² Work Journal, pg. 53.

PQRN works on this problem within the quilombo communities, trying to encourage participation in traditional dances such as Tambor de Crioula. In addition to this, CCN is working to bring to these communities other forms of black culture, such as capoeira, which are new to these communities but are other ways of showing pride in Afro-Brazilian culture.⁵³

Along with a lack of cultural pride, the Afro-Brazilian population as a whole suffers a great deal from a lack of racial pride. This problem is a direct result of Brazil's racial history, and specifically has been affected greatly by the issues of labels and census choices. Unlike the United States, where the country created a strict racial dichotomy with rules defining who was black and who was white, Brazil has historically provided a great deal of possible monikers to describe one's race. This variety of options combined with the extreme racism in Brazil's society to create a situation where people wanted to be called as light a word as possible, so people would "whiten" themselves and choose a color slightly lighter than their skin.⁵⁴ Today, although there are fewer labels available, the census still provides choices of "pardo" and "preto", and "moreno" and "afrobrasileiro" are commonly used in everyday language. Each of these labels is often used as an attempt to avoid the name "negro", which many people still see as a socially harmful name, a direct signal of being black, which is also a direct signal of a socially lower position. The black movement in Brazil has struggled a great deal with this question of language, as it was formed using the word "negro" but today many of its members still are reluctant to be labeled this way.⁵⁵

This issue of what label one uses is only a symbolic way to see the deep-seated racial shame that so much of the black population in Brazil has acquired. Growing up in a society designed for and run by white people, black children are constantly

⁵³ Work Journal, pg. 15.

⁵⁴ Telles.

⁵⁵ Interview with Socorro Guterres, Nov. 27, WJ pg. 45.

surrounded by negative images of black people, constantly told that white is beautiful and black is bad. Much of this racism is internalized and turned into self-hatred and denial of one's race.⁵⁶ This is one of the problems which CCN tries the hardest to address and eliminate, not only with young people but also with their adult members, because this is a problem that is crippling the black community and greatly reducing its potential to fight for equality and full rights.

In many ways, this fight to combat racial self-hatred is the real mission of CCN. Working with the kids of Sonho dos Erês, the goals are to construct within this population a positive self-esteem, to show them through education and workshops that there exists another image of their race than the negative one they have grown up with. "This is the work that CCN does with kids, this deconstruction of negative ideas and a construction of new values, new ideas about being black in Brazil."⁵⁷ As well as working with kids, CCN provides a space in which adults can explore and discover new things about their race, and get past their own internalized hatred to embrace their race.⁵⁸ Nearly everyone I talked to at CCN self-identified as "negro", a very powerful statement in a country like Brazil. The woman I lived with during my time in São Luis, Fatima Sousa, was a good example of a black woman who had complete pride in her race and her role as a "negra". Whenever anyone mistakenly called her a "morena", she would not hesitate to correct them with the correct term.⁵⁹ This racial pride is unusual in Brazil but exists within CCN thanks in large part to their many activities aimed to inspire this kind of pride and joy in being black.

One of the most interesting interviews I had was with a 20-year old student of Sonho dos Erês named Dieundes. On his official documents, Dieundes is listed as

⁵⁶ Group Interview, Nov. 20, WJ pg. 26.

⁵⁷ Interview with Socorro Guterres, Nov. 27, WJ pg. 46.

⁵⁸ Interview with Mauricio Paixão, Nov. 26, WJ pg. 42.

⁵⁹ Work Journal, pg. 9.

“branco-amarelo” or white-yellow. However, after telling me this, Dieundes proceeded to explain that although this was the label he had been given as a child, he rejected it because it has a connotation of a certain social class to which he does not belong. Dieundes is a member of the dance group Abanja from CCN, and one night was performing with the group in the Centro of São Luis. A stranger came up to him and asked him what was going on, so Dieundes proceeded to explain Abanja and CCN in general. Following the explanation, the stranger turned to Dieundes and told him he should not be a part of this group, because it was for black people and he was not black. After telling this story, Dieundes expressed his frustration with this, as no person should be told what to do because of their race. He explained that he in fact identifies as black, no matter what society as a whole tells him he is or tells him about what it means to be black.⁶⁰ The fact that CCN is able to inspire this kind of racial pride in someone who has the easy option of identifying as “white” is a credit to how intently they are working on this issue.

Talking to the students of Sonho dos Erês, the consensus across the board was that they identified as “negro”. Students expressed contempt towards those who use terms like “moreno”, as they interpret this as a sign of being ashamed of being black or “negro”.⁶¹ They also spoke of their transformation from a childhood of racial shame to their current racial pride, a transformation that took place in general at CCN. People spoke of coming to recognize that they were no different because of their skin color, that “I cry the same as everyone else cries”.⁶² This process is an extremely difficult and lengthy one, and it is one of the most important things that CCN is doing within this young black population.

⁶⁰ Interview with Dieundes, Nov. 21, WJ pg. 32.

⁶¹ Group Interview, Nov. 20, WJ pg. 26.

⁶² Interview with Marcelo, Nov. 21, WJ pg. 30.

CCN works through both Sonho dos Erês and PQRN to help inspire political participation and activism throughout these youth populations. This is a hugely important process, as it is a way of giving this invisible population a voice and a way to fight for a better future. Talking to the students of Sonho dos Erês, I was struck by the fact that these young people had concrete desires for change within the government, concrete criticisms that they were ready to articulate about their country. This type of self-assertion demonstrates a level of self-esteem and sense of self-worth that is unusual within the black population in Brazil, a population that has been internally and externally oppressed by decades of racism. When asked what he would tell the government if he had the chance, Dieundes responded that Brazil needs more laws about racism. He spoke of the current law which criminalizes racism, but explained that it is ineffective and commonly ignored.⁶³ Rafael, a 19-year old student, wanted to tell the government to have “mais amor” (more love) for the Brazilian people and specifically for the poor.⁶⁴ Marcelo, age 19, spoke of improving situations for women as well as improving education and producing more jobs.⁶⁵ Sonho dos Erês works to develop within these students the critical thinking skills and self-esteem that are necessary to critique the government. Not only does this improve the lives of these students, but it helps create a more politically active base for the future of the black movement in Brazil.

From as basic a place as its name, Sonho dos Erês is a program about developing and fulfilling dreams. Before fulfilling a dream, a child has to develop the ability to have dreams, to have goals in life, to feel like they deserve a better life. Much of the work of Sonho dos Erês is in this vein, working to raise self-esteem and cultural values which come together to create in students an awareness of their potential and a feeling

⁶³ Interview with Dieundes, Nov. 21, WJ pg. 32.

⁶⁴ Interview with Rafael, Nov. 21, WJ pg. 33.

⁶⁵ Interview with Marcelo, Nov. 21, WJ pg. 31.

that they deserve to reach whatever goal they set. Many of the students spoke about how before joining CCN they were living troubled lives, drinking all the time⁶⁶ or living on the street, and how they really had no goals in life.⁶⁷ However, after spending time working with CCN, these students all had concrete, ambitious dreams they were working for every day. These dreams frequently involved education, being the first person in their family to finish school, or going to college to get a better job. Marcelo had no end to his dreams, his list including doing a study abroad program to the United States, doing a research project there about the black upper-middle class' ability to blend into white society, going to school to be a social worker, and working with quilombo communities in the interior of Maranhão.⁶⁸ Dieundes spoke of continuing his work with CCN, helping educate the community about racism and discrimination, and being “um lutador contra racismo” (a fighter against racism).⁶⁹ To me, these dreams are what CCN is all about. CCN as an organization has created a safe space for kids growing up in impossible situations, a place where they can come to explore themselves and their lives and come to love themselves despite the negative images with which they are bombarded every day.

Methodology of Research:

My research was conducted over three weeks spent working at CCN in São Luis, Maranhão. It took three main forms: reading of secondary sources, observations, and interviews. CCN has many publications detailing the structure and goals of the organization, which allowed me to understand in a very concrete way how the group is organized and how it functions. As well, each separate project has its own reading materials. The leaders of Sonho dos Erês provided me with pamphlets telling the

⁶⁶ Group Interview, Nov. 21, WJ pg. 33.

⁶⁷ Interview with Dieundes, Nov. 21, WJ pg. 32.

⁶⁸ Interview with Marcelo, Nov. 21, WJ pg. 31.

⁶⁹ Interview with Dieundes, Nov. 21, WJ pg. 32.

history of the project and the development of its various programs. In addition, Sonho dos Erês has produced several short magazines which include personal accounts from current and former students which detail the personal impact CCN has had on the lives of these people. These gave me another way to gather firsthand accounts, although in a somewhat less personal way. PQRN also has many publications which are generally more formal than those of Sonho dos Erês and give very detailed explanations of the history and projects of this work in the quilombo communities.

During this research period I spent all of my time either at CCN or with members of CCN. While in São Luis, I lived with Fátima Sousa, a longtime member of CCN and one of the leaders of PQRN and Akomabu, CCN's carnival block group. Because of this, everything in my day-to-day life related to my research and I used these constant observations to learn a lot about CCN and its work. Through living with Fátima, I was able to understand more fully what the lives of these workers are like and to see in person how deeply the staff of CCN is invested in their jobs and in the goals of racial equality and pride. Besides my daily work at CCN, we also attended a good number of social functions at the organization, mostly consisting of African dance and music performances. These events allowed me to see the more social function of CCN and its role as a social base for many of these students and adults. Related to my work with PQRN, we were able to make two visits to one of the quilombo communities which is involved in this program, and these firsthand experiences allowed me to understand much more fully the struggles and realities of these communities. In addition to these, I attended a good number of presentations outside of CCN, including street parades by Akomabu, dance performances, and a performance by members of Akomabu at a national convention of lawyers and judges. This allowed me not only to see the projects of CCN in action, but also to get a better idea of how CCN raises its

visibility in the community and through this attracts new members. These observations all added a great deal to my research and allowed me to understand in much greater detail the functions of CCN and its various forms of work within a variety of communities.

The base of my formal research was a series of interviews, both formal and informal. Being at CCN every day, I spoke a lot to the various leaders of Sonho dos Erês (Graciane Santos, Domingas Cantanhede, Ligia Santos and Railson Rodrigues) and through these more informal conversations was able to obtain a great deal of information about the organization. Along with this, living with Fátima allowed for many such informal conversations which relayed a lot of information about CCN and its projects. I also conducted formal interviews with four students of Sonho dos Erês (Marcelo, Dieundes, Daniel and Rafael), Milson Santos (former student and current teacher of Sonho dos Erês), Socorro Guterres (coordinator of identity work and educator of PQRN), and Mauricio Paixao (one of the three coordinators of CCN). Along with these individual interviews, I, along with Ariel Sloan, the other student researching at CCN, had two lengthy discussions with large groups of students from Sonho dos Erês. Each of these talks were with about 20 teenage students from the Sonho dos Erês programs and allowed us to get a wider variety of answers to our questions while also providing an opportunity for these students to ask us questions and learn a little something from us.

Definition of Terms:

Centro de Cultura Negra – “center for black culture” (CCN)

Sonho dos Erês – “dream of the children”

Projeto Quilombo e Resistência Negra – “project quilombo and black resistance”
(PQRN)

vestibular -- mandatory pre-college entrance exam which must be passed in order to enroll in university.

racial democracy -- an idea first coined by anthropologist Gilberto Freyre in his 1933 book, *Casa-Grande e Senzala*, to describe Brazil as a country whose population was a production of racial mixing between the Europeans, indigenous population, and African slaves. The suggestion was that this historical miscegenation had created a race which was uniquely “Brazilian” and it was used as evidence that Brazil was a country without racism. The myth of racial democracy lasted for years, with the government using it as a truth until very recently. This deception has helped to excuse and hide years of racial inequality and to convince many Brazilians that they were truly living in a race-free country.

index of development (índice de desenvolvimento) – a statistic used to compare countries based on levels of education, wealth, literacy, health, life expectancy, and other points of reference. The scale of measurement runs from 0 to 1, with 1 being the most developed and 0 the least.

Tambor de Crioula – a traditional Afro-Brazilian dance which is most prevalent in the state of Maranhão. The dance is traditionally made up of women in long skirts dancing in a circle while men play long drums and sing.

Conclusion:

The Centro de Cultura Negra in São Luis, Maranhão is a vital, vibrant organization doing extremely important work in and out of São Luis. Through my research with Sonho dos Erês and Projeto Quilombo e Resistência Negra, I was able to observe some of this work and understand more fully the goals of this organization. As an institution, CCN serves as a community center, a support group, an educational institution, a mental health clinic, a workout center, and a family. Through PQRN,

members of CCN are able to work with some of the many quilombo communities in Maranhão on many issues including cultural appreciation, education, health, and political activism. Sonho dos Erês does equally important work in educating and supporting a group of teenagers who live in some of the most difficult social conditions in Brazil. Each and every project of CCN, whether it works with children or adults, in quilombos or urban settings, develops within its participants a cultural appreciation and racial identification that is unusual and extremely important for the black population of Brazil.

“My soul is black, that’s not a negative thing.”
-Milson Santos, 19

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Marcelo, 19, student of Sonho dos Erês, t-shirt making class.

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Railson Rodrigues, psychologist for Sonho dos Erês, CCN.

Socorro Guterres, coordinator of identity projects for CCN and educator for PQRN.

Indications for Further Research:

I plan to continue my exploration of black identity in the context of the United States, especially as it pertains to young people. I hope to find in the United States a cultural and educational organization similar to CCN and continue this work surrounding racism and racial identity.

ISP Appendix:

1. I do not believe that I could have done this project in the United States. This project was about a particular organization, which of course does not exist in the United States. As well, the problems of racism and racial pride in Brazil are problems that are unique to this country and are in no way the same issues that the black population in the United States faces. For this reason, I believe that black cultural organizations in the United States would have a much different approach to helping black youth.

2. If I had done this project in the United States, that is studying how a black cultural organization works with black youth, I believe the results would have been drastically different. The characters of the black populations in Brazil and the United States are very different, and they have developed to value and retain different things. In particular, in Brazil and especially in CCN I have seen a huge stress on African culture, African religion, African music, African dancing, all of which has pretty much

disappeared in the United States. As well, doing this research in the United States would be much different because the black population in the United States does not suffer nearly as much from a lack of identity and racial pride. Since this is a big part of CCN's work, the results in a United States organization would have been much different.

3. The process of doing the ISP was a very new experience to me, as I had never done any type of interviewing or primary research before. Usually my learning is done through secondary sources, so this was very different for me, and very difficult at times. But overall I felt that it was a very good experience and that I learned a lot from it.

4. I would say this paper is probably about 65% primary data or observations and 35% secondary sources.

5. I tried to analyze the observations and interviews I had, and to group them into bigger topics which would help to explain the work CCN does with young people. There was definitely a lot of information that I was not able to include because it didn't quite fit into any of the main topics.

6. I do not feel like the drop-offs had any effect on my ISP, I feel like they were more effective in getting to know the city of Fortaleza, and since my ISP was in a different city, this knowledge had very little effect on my project. The field exercises were more helpful in that they made me a bit more comfortable with talking to strangers in Portuguese, which helped some in my interviews for the ISP.

7. The main thing I got out of the FSS was the huge stress on ethics and being aware of ethical situations during research.

8. My ISP went pretty smoothly overall. I felt that my biggest struggle was making sure that my project was separate from Ariel Sloan's, but overall I felt like things progressed pretty easily, thanks to a great deal of support from CCN.

9. My research in itself was done within the time limit. I did have a hard time with the time limit, however, when it came to personal relationships and becoming attached to the organization. I felt like I finished all the interviews and formal research that I needed to do, but I also think that more time there would have been extremely helpful and would have allowed me to understand more fully the organization as a whole.

10. My topic did change, because upon arrival at CCN I soon discovered that my original topic was not applicable. However, I was able to change it only slightly and find two projects to work with more closely which lent themselves nicely to this new topic.

11. Most of my research was found and completed thanks to people at CCN. Since I was focusing my research on this organization, it was pretty easy to complete all my interviews by staying within the organization. From a suggestion from Bill Calhoun, program advisor for SIT, we also contacted Professor Carlos Benedito and were able to talk to him some about our research. All the publications were provided by the staff of CCN.

12. My methodology included formal and informal interviews, observations, and reading. I chose these methods because I felt like they would provide the most complete way of understanding CCN, as I got the official explanation, people's interpretations, and the actual actions of these people.

13. My advisor, Socorro Guterres, was quite helpful, although we only had a few official meetings. Because I was at CCN every day and had easy access to everyone who worked there, there was less of a need for an advisor who would oversee everything I was doing. Therefore, while Socorro was very helpful and a joy to work with, I got just as much support from the rest of the leaders of CCN as I did from her. A

lot of what I got from Socorro was stories about her own life and her own experiences within CCN, stories which were vital to my research.

14. Most of my interviews, even if they were shorter or less in-depth than others, revealed some sort of information which I was able to use in my research. Even the ones that were not directly referenced in this paper provided me with background data and information that was helpful. Although I have quite a few events and visits within my field journal which are never referred to in the paper, I would not call them in the least bit useless, as I feel that they all helped me to understand the culture and broader situation of this community.

15. This ISP allowed me, for a month, to be a part of a vibrant cultural organization that participated in all sorts of activities and traditions which I otherwise would never had experienced. Being a part of these dances and parades and religious ceremonies helped me understand more fully the culture and traditions of the black population in the Northeast of Brazil.

16. Mostly due to the openness of CCN and its members, the ISP period was the time in which I have felt the most at-home and comfortable in Brazil. This was a surprise to me as I was expecting to have some difficulties due to my race, but these fears were never realized. I felt more integrated into CCN than I have in any other space in Brazil.

17. This ISP really showed me the incredible potential which lies within the Brazilian black movement to work for concrete improvements in their country. It was amazing to work with and observe such dedicated, intelligent, and thoughtful people who are so in tune with the struggles of the black population and who understand exactly what needs to be done to improve things. More than anything, I was inspired by this project. I spent most of my time in São Luis being in awe of the workers and

members of CCN and amazed by the work which they have done and are doing. The fact that this fairly young organization in one of the poorer cities in Brazil could have come so far and done so much work on this incredibly important problem should be an inspiration to all black organizations and all organization working for equality and freedom all over the world.

18. If I were talking to a future student interested in this project, I would tell them to take advantage of the amazing opportunities which the people of this organization will provide. As well, I would tell them to be sure not to discount Maranhão just because it is usually left out of race research in Brazil. The black movement in São Luis is strong and vibrant and doing extremely important work that needs to be discussed throughout the rest of the world.

19. I would do this project over again in an instant. The one thing I would change would be to ask for more time there. This was one of the best experiences of my life and I hope to maintain the relationships I made during this time and return to CCN very soon.