Book Review

Gillam, Reighan. *Visualizing Black Lives: Ownership and Control in Afro-Brazilian Media.* U of Illinois P, 2022.

Though interest in Afro-Brazilian cultural production continues to rise, discussions of how Black Brazilians are represented in media still often revolve around images produced by the most influential commercial players in the audiovisual industry: the networks, prominent film studios and distributors, and, increasingly, streaming platforms. Reighan Gillam's *Visualizing Black Lives: Ownership and Control in Afro-Brazilian Media* recenters this analysis by focusing on how contemporary Afro-Brazilian cultural producers claim the power to represent themselves, their experiences, and their concerns. The author is an associate professor in the Department of Latin American, Latino, and Caribbean Studies at Dartmouth College. In addition to *Visualizing Blackness*, Gillam has written numerous articles on race, media, and visual culture in Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America.

Visualizing Black Lives is divided into four chapters accompanied by an introduction and brief conclusion. After the introduction situates the book within studies of racism and Blackness in Brazil, chapter 1 presents the history of Black Brazilian activism and media production, demonstrating the deep roots of Afro-Brazilian efforts to contest the hegemonic discourse of Brazilian racial democracy and to create space for representations of Afro-Brazilian life grounded in the experiences and interests of Afro-Brazilians. Drawing an important contrast to hard-won gains in the area of education policy, including affirmative action quotas for university admissions and curricular requirements for the teaching of Afro-Brazilian history, Gillam notes that significant Black influence over mass media representations of race and Blackness was not achieved concurrently. The difficulty of influencing patterns of representation within the mainstream thus establishes the continuing necessity of independent Afro-Brazilian media production.

The second chapter turns to TV da Gente, the first network founded to increase and improve representations of Afro-Brazilians. As Gillam shows, TV da Gente drew inspiration from Black-oriented television programming in the United States

while attracting capital from Angola. Gillam argues that the network's Black producers and hosts held a measure of creative control they had not enjoyed in their previous industry experience. In particular, for Gillam, by representing Afro-Brazilian professionals as both middle-class and Black, the hosts and programming of the network contested the familiar myth that in Brazil, "money whitens."

Chapter 3 discusses the use of irony by Black media producers in exposing and attacking racism, presenting as case studies Thiago Vaz's "Saci Urbano" murals, the YouTube series *Tá bom pra você* produced by Kenia Dias, Érico Brás, and their children, and the satirical cartoons of Maurício Pestana. Examples drawn from each of these projects illustrate how they confront their audiences with the brutality of police violence against Afro-Brazilians, the quotidian microaggressions and abuses suffered by Black people in Brazil, and the insufficiency of considering racism only as a trait of individuals. As Gillam shows, these ironic visual media reveal the absurdity of denying the existence of racism as a structural force with pervasive social consequences.

The final chapter analyzes three short films to show how Afro-Brazilian directors have cultivated an antiracist gaze among spectators: *A formação do olhar* (Jefferson Santos, 2013), *Cores e botas* (Juliana Vicente, 2010), and *Jennifer* (Renato Candido, 2011). Santos's documentary explores how film can and should be used in classroom instruction, while the two narrative shorts employ the gaze of children and adolescents to focus attention on how one learns to see the world. The three films place visual media at the center of a process that includes learning not only to see the signifiers of race and the social hierarchies of racism, but also to see beauty, value, and possibility in Blackness.

The book's contribution is significant and twofold. First, the author demonstrates that despite the persistence of anti-Black representations and superficial portrayals of racism within commercial media in Brazil, Afro-Brazilians are not and have never been passive objects of this reifying gaze, but instead have employed varied visual media to construct their own self-representations and deconstruct pernicious myths. Second, the book reveals several particularly important dimensions of this cultural production, namely the assertion of Afro-Brazilian belonging within the commercial media-sphere, the critique of racism undertaken from Black perspectives, and the pedagogical use of visual media to model and develop an antiracist gaze, particularly among Black spectators. The book thus demonstrates why analysis of visual media representing

Blackness in Brazil must center the production of Black Brazilians and, simultaneously, why studies of Black Brazilian cultural production must attend to the variety of visual media employed by Afro-Brazilian producers.

Though *Visualizing Black Lives* is very well argued and highly interesting throughout, it does have some limitations. Although the first chapter discusses the historical links between Black political movements and media production, the book includes little discussion of the construction of racial discourses and identities in Brazil. This need not concern specialist readers but may pose a challenge for audiences less familiar with the history of race in Brazil and for whom the book is otherwise very well suited. In addition, some important concepts could be more fully theorized. For instance, the book focuses on the importance of what the author refers to as ownership and control of the means of media production, yet these concepts are not fully defined in relation to one another and the argument does not emphasize the economic relations underlying media production. This is notable for instance in the chapter on TV da Gente, which discusses the greater creative freedom enjoyed by the network's hosts and producers relative to their previous industry experiences, but does not assess how the work of these employees was shaped by the commercial priorities of the network's founder and investors. Finally, the discussion of Black filmmakers in chapter 4 could have mentioned Adélia Sampaio, widely considered the first Black woman to direct a feature-length film in Brazil. While Sampaio's *Amor maldito* (1984) might not obviously represent an antiracist project of the kind that *Visualizing Black Lives* prioritizes, the filmmaker's significance should not be overlooked, especially as her work and experience are reclaimed by new generations of Afro-Brazilian media producers.

However, these concerns are minor and largely indicate areas for continued study and debate while reflecting the book's great relevance to scholars and students from the intersecting fields of anthropology, Black studies, Brazilian cultural studies, and media studies. The book is very well written and clearly argued, making it an attractive option for use in a variety of undergraduate courses. Above all, *Visualizing Black Lives* is a timely and compelling study that calls much-needed attention to the Afro-Brazilian media producers enacting what Gillam aptly terms antiracist visual politics.

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[1] The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the United States Air Force Academy, the Air Force, the Department of Defense,