

# Levantamos: The Center for Afro-Brazilian-American Cooperation

Monday, August 1, 2005

Issue 1

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News from Brazil

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Christen Smith

## 2005 Grant Competition Deadline August 15

[Click here for more information on Levantamos' 2005 grant competition for Brazil-based grassroots organizations.](#)

### TOP STORY

*Genocide? Police Abuse and the Black Community in Brazil*  
by *Christen A. Smith\**

[FULL STORY]

### Levantamos in Action

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*Donors and Partners Make the Year's Activities Possible*

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### News from the U.S.

*U.S. Congress Calls President and International Community to Action on Behalf of Afro-Descendants in the Americas*

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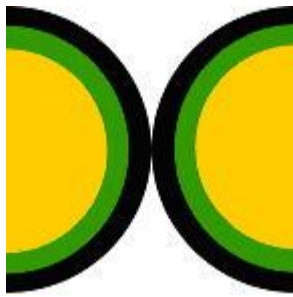
*University Formerly Opposed to Quotas Adopts New Measure*

[FULL STORY]

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## TOP STORY

### Genocide? Police Abuse and the Black Community in Brazil

On March 24, 2005, Itázio (19), Renan (22), Tamires (14), Filipe (19), Alessandro (15), and Daniela (22) were beaten, shot and then burned in the suburban community of Paripe, in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. Their bodies were found carbonized. Police investigators have blamed their deaths on drug related violence, but the families of the victims have another opinion. They claim that these young people were executed by a police death squad (*grupo de extermínio*).

According to the Organization of Pan-American Health, in 1991 homicide was the leading cause of external death in Salvador, Bahia, among young people ages 15-29. Many blame homicide, a crime that affects Afro-Brazilian youth more than any other part of the population, on drug-related activity; however, those who fight to end inequality and racism share a different opinion. While violence related to drug trafficking and everyday violence are common, many activists claim that the State is playing a role in killing Afro-Brazilian youth.

In 1997, Human Rights Watch (HRW) released a report on the shocking trend of police violence in Brazil. The report registered the following five categories of police violence: massive raids into *favelas* (shantytowns), inappropriate use of deadly force, extrajudicial executions, vendetta killings by off-duty police officers, and disappearances from official custody under circumstances that justify the presumption of police responsibility.

Those most often victimized by police abuse are those who live in the outskirts of major urban cities the periphery. Stigmatized within society as run-down, crime-ridden, hopeless areas, the periphery is a discarded space in the minds of many Brazilians. Unlike the United States, Brazil's inner cities are generally occupied by the upper class, while peripheral/suburban neighborhoods are occupied by the poor. Race and class go hand in hand in Brazil. Therefore, city neighborhoods reflect race and class distinctions.

As the majority of police violence occurs in peripheral neighborhoods, it is not surprising that young Afro-Brazilian men are the majority of the victims of police violence. Many say, however, that these young people are victims of police abuse because they are poor, and not necessarily because they are black.

It is difficult to gain a full grasp of the breadth and depth of the problem of police abuse

and race in Brazil because of a lack of statistical data on the subject. This is due in part to an overall lack of complete information on violent police crime.

Human Rights Watch notes that many cases of police violence are covered up and/ or never investigated. The police offenders often either remove corpses from the scene of the crime (taking them to the hospital for emergency care as a way of disturbing the crime scene), or mutilate the bodies of the victims (as some suspect was the case in the neighborhood of Paripe) in order to hide evidence.

Despite a general lack of information on the subject, studies like *Ironies of Citizenship: Skin Color, Police Brutality, and the Challenge to Democracy in Brazil*, by Michael J. Mitchell and Charles H. Wood, and work by the Commission of Human Rights of the Legislative Assembly in Bahia, have shown that police brutality disproportionately affects Afro-Brazilians and that the darker the person's skin, the more likely he is to be a victim of police abuse.

For activists of the Black Movement the issue is clear: police abuse is a form of genocide. Likened to the lynchings once rampant in the United States, these activists claim that police violence is a systematic assault on the black Brazilian community. In order to draw attention to the racism embedded in police violence, many are organizing to speak out on this issue.

On May 12, 2005, over 300 protestors occupied the Public Safety office at the Piedade Plaza in Salvador, Bahia, for an all night vigil protesting the genocide of black youth by police death squads. The vigil, initiated by the Unified Black Movement (MNU) and organized by various black activist organizations across the city, brought together community members, intellectuals, victims, and the families of victims to express their anger, hurt and frustration.

Out of this eventsprang the campaign *React or Die*, a movement to end the genocide of the black community by the police in Bahia. Since then, *React or Die* has held a public town meeting on race and police extermination with the Bahian government and met with the president of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Clare K. Roberts, to discuss this unsettling issue.

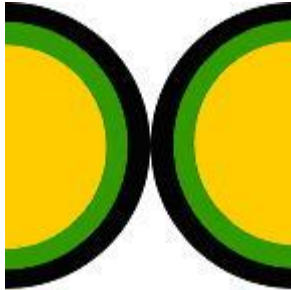
In 2005 the state of Bahia officially recognized the existence of *grupos de extermínio* (death squads). This resulted in the foundation of GRECE, the Special Group to Combat the Crime of Extermination. This taskforce investigates crimes allegedly linked to death squads in Bahia. As of July 2005, the taskforce had identified thirty-five deaths in the city of Salvador and the metropolitan region.

For the complete Human Rights Watch report *Police Brutality in Urban Brazil* access <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1997/brazil/>

For more information about *React or Die* and the campaign to end police violence against the black community in Bahia, send an email to [reactordie@yahoo.com](mailto:reactordie@yahoo.com).

\*Christen A. Smith is a doctoral candidate in Cultural and Social Anthropology at Stanford University. She has spent the last two years doing dissertation field research with black activists working in the peripheral neighborhoods of Salvador, Bahia, Brazil.

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## Levantamos in Action

We have not disappeared! Since Levantamos November Zumbi event on this side of the equator, we have been working hard on the other side to further Levantamos mission by building our network in Brazil, specifically concentrating in Bahia and the Northeast of the country. We aim to not only use U.S. dollars to build ties between the U.S. and the community of Afro-Brazilians, but to use both countries' most important resource: human resources, to fortify unions and build a bridge between the communities. Following are highlights from Levantamos' founding to the present:

February 2004, Levantamos partners with Career Gear (currently MenzFit) for its inaugural event, Mardi Gras Meets Carnival and raises funds for the organization's first grant

Grant presented in April 2004 to the Steve Biko Cultural Institute to fund Project Open Mind/Open Doors, a program developed by American Lorelei Williams, that prepares low-income Afro-Brazilian college students for leadership and careers in public service

June 2004, founder Simone Manigo Truell joins Levantamos as organization's full time Executive Director. Organization opens an office in Salvador, Bahia

June 2004, first Women's Collective event held in Washington, D.C

July 2004, Women's Collective event in Salvador, Bahia brings together Afro-Brazilian and American women

November 2004, the first annual Zumbi dos Palmares: A Celebration of Afro-Brazilian Culture takes place in Washington, D.C. Levantamos brings four Afro-Brazilians (chef and restaurateur Dona Ana Celia, capoeira professors Bomba and Chico, and award winning hip hop artist MC Aori) to Washington to lead the festivities and information sessions

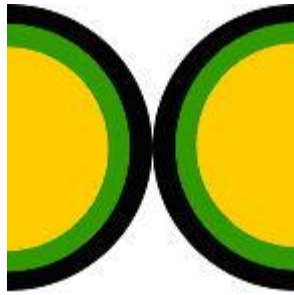
January 2005, Levantamos facilitates exchange in Salvador, Bahia, between Morehouse alums and three Bahian students who applied for and received full scholarships to study at Morehouse College, the United States' largest, private liberal arts college for African-American men

February 2005, Levantamos launches Avocet Travel's Awakening Minds scholarship, a donor-directed initiative, and awards the first scholarship to Bahian Luciana Cruz Brito

April 2005, Levantamos works with the Corredor da Liberdade (Liberdade Cultural Corridor) to introduce the initiative and promote it to U.S. travel companies and tourists

July 2005, Levantamos partners with several communities and organizations in Bahia to publicize its second annual grant competition

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## Donors and Partners Make the Year's Activities Possible

### Our Donors

#### Benefactors

Tanya Callaway  
Jennifer Johnson  
Marcio Schwinden  
Samuel Truell

#### Patron

Michael Catoe

#### Supporters

Horace Blackman  
Melissa Peterson Blackman  
Jonathan Branch  
Avery L. Brown  
Tasha Cooper  
Julie Johnson  
Marion Manigo-Truell  
Diane Pinderhughes  
James Stark  
Tim Stelzig  
Bettye Walters

### Our Partners (Zumbi 2004)

## Abalou Capoeira



## Internat I Capoeira Angola Found.



eliminating racism  
empowering women  
**ywca**  
national capital area

## Special thanks to

Roberta McLeod, Director Armour J. Blackburn University Center and Intramurals, Recreation and Club Sports (Howard University)

Dr. Barbara Williams, Howard University Dean of Special Student Services

Tony Carr, WPFW radio

Our Partners (Mardi Gras Meets Carnaval 2004)

**AshMoyubba** Folkloric Ensemble

[MenzFit](#)

Quilombo do Queimado

## Our Volunteers

Luciana Cruz Brito

Mavis Gragg  
Tendai Jordan  
Malakhia Joyner  
Lauren Montgomery  
Okezi Otovo  
Ebony Prouse  
Ava Volandes  
Bettye Walters  
Nicole Young

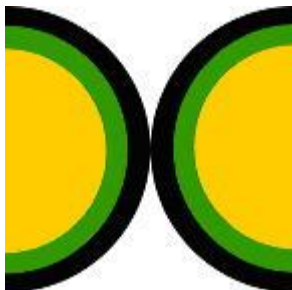
**Intern**  
Cassidy Fludd

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## News from the U.S.

### U.S. Congress Calls President and International Community to Action on Behalf of Afro-Descendants in the Americas

July 18, 2005, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.Con.Res. 175 acknowledging African descendants of the transatlantic slave trade in all of the Americas with an emphasis on descendants in Latin America and the Caribbean. The House recognized the injustices suffered by these African descendants, and recommended that the United States and the international community work to improve the situation of Afro-descendant communities in Latin America and the Caribbean. Specifically, the bill encouraged the community to promote research that focuses on identifying and eradicating racial disparities in economic, political, and social spheres; to promote programs that focus on Afro-descendant communities; to provide technical support and training to Afro-descendant advocacy groups that work to uphold basic human rights in the region; and, to promote the creation of an international working group that focuses on problems of communities of Afro-descendants in the Americas.

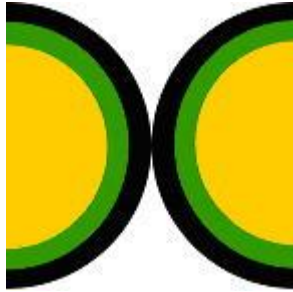
New York Representative Charles B. Rangle introduced the bill on June 8, 2005. The bill, which was co-sponsored by 45 other members of the House, was received in the Senate on July 20 and referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

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## News from Brazil

### Research Reveals Blacks in Brazil Face Higher Unemployment

Recent research on unemployment completed by the Indersyndicate Department of Statistics and Socio-Economic Studies (DIEESE - Departamento Intersindical de Estatística e Estudos Sócio-Econômicos, [www.dieese.org.br](http://www.dieese.org.br)), a Brazilian NGO, reveals that in Brazil there exist large disparities in employment based on the race of the worker. For instance, in 2004, of the Black population in Salvador, Bahia, 26.4% were unemployed whereas only 18.1% of non-Blacks were unemployed. Salvador da Bahia is the capital of Bahia, a state in the Northeast of Brazil that is said to be the cradle of Afro-Brazilian culture. Of its 3 million inhabitants, 86.5% are Black of an active age, that is, age ten and older.

The news was not any better when looking at the statistics for employed Blacks: Blacks earned a median monthly salary of R\$575, whereas the median salary for non-Blacks was nearly double that of Blacks R\$1,148 monthly. For most of 2004, the minimum monthly salary in Brazil enforced by the government (similar to the U.S. minimum wage) was R\$260.

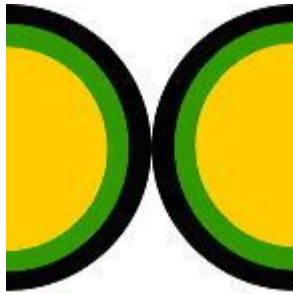
In the south of Brazil in Sao Paulo, said to be the second most populous city in the world, the active population of Blacks was 37.1% in 2004. Of that number 23.1% were unemployed. This compares with 16.8% unemployment for non-Blacks.

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## University Formerly Opposed to Quotas Adopts New Measure

The University of São Paulo in 2006 will have the first masters degree program in Brazil with quotas for Blacks, indigenous people, the poor and those with physical disabilities. Ten of the thirty available spaces will be reserved for these students that traditionally have been the victims of discrimination. The masters program concentrates on human rights with a focus on social exclusion. The University of São Paulo's decision to adopt quotas for the masters program marks a departure for the University, which formerly was against such quotas that currently exist in several public universities throughout Brazil. According to Professor Fábio Konder Comparato, University administrators unanimously agreed to adopt quotas for the human rights masters program because of its focus on social exclusion.

- As reported in the July 27, 2005 edition of journal *A Tarde* ([www.atarde.com.br](http://www.atarde.com.br))

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