

Gaetano Calagna

HIS 4052 – Honors Historical Methods

Director: Dr. Victor Uribe/ Dr. Astrid Arraras

December 12, 2014

Race Relations and Politics in Venezuela during Punto Fijo, 1958-1998

Abstract

In 1998, Hugo Chávez Frías' presidential candidacy brought race to national discussion in Venezuela for first time since 1945. For long, the country's politics had abided by the myth of racial harmony and racial democracy. This approach pointed to institutional separation in the United States and Africa as examples of true racism. Latin America was largely void of such atrocities. Nonetheless, Chávez claimed the present political parties (Acción Democrática, Copei and Unión Republicana Democrática) disenfranchised the common, colored Venezuelan. He continued to assert the opposition's racism during his presidency. And his political fanbase agrees. A variety of scholars have studied the break from Punto Fijo politics to the Bolivarian Revolution. Yet, few have linked the obvious class struggle to race. Here, I seek to explain how racial identity has shaped class identity in Venezuela by closely examining the Punto Fijo era (1958-1998). The essay begins with an overview of historical race relations, moving to the period in focus. Then, I examine systematic and institutional exclusion under Punto Fijo politics. The object is to understand the merit of Chávez's racial claims since 1998. Hence, the study also sees democracy in action and the consequences of racial exclusion. The study will be accomplished through secondary research, considering the limitations brought by working abroad. In the end, this study serves as first step in analyzing the fall of what was once considered Latin America's most durable democracy.