



## Revisiting the controversy over race, eugenics and Physical Education in the work of Fernando de Azevedo: a new view on miscegenation and its role in building a nation<sup>1</sup>

Revisitando a controvérsia sobre raça, eugenia e Educação Física na obra de Fernando de Azevedo: uma nova visão sobre miscigenação e seu papel na construção de uma nação

Revisitando la controversia sobre raza, eugenesia y Cultura Física en la obra de Fernando de Azevedo: una nueva visión sobre el mestizaje y su rol en la construcción de una nación

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### Abstract

Within the controversial reading on the relationship between Fernando de Azevedo, eugenics, and the institutionalization of Physical Education, this article revisits and analyzes whether his ideas are associated with a eugenic and racist nation project, seeking to understand the relationship between the myth of social regeneration through Physical Education, school education and sanitary hygiene. Thus, I used a bibliographic review to investigate how the theme race is approached mainly in the works *On Physical Education* (first edition of 1920 and third edition of 1964) and *A Cultura Brasileira* (1960), written by Fernando de Azevedo in different times and contradictory political contexts that are situated in phases that denote clashes, approximations, and distances between intellectuals linked to the social and scientific thoughts in the First Brazilian Republic (1889-1930).

**Keywords:** Education. Physical Education. Eugenics.

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## Resumo

Dentro da leitura polêmica sobre a relação entre Fernando de Azevedo, a eugenia, raça, miscigenação e a institucionalização da Educação Física, este artigo revisita e analisa se suas ideias são, de fato, associadas a um projeto eugênico e racista de nação, buscando compreender as relações entre o mito da regeneração social por meio da Educação Física, da educação escolar e da higiene sanitária. Para isso, foi utilizada a revisão bibliográfica, investigando-se como o tema raça é abordado principalmente nas obras *Da Educação Física (primeira edição de 1920 e terceira edição de 1964)* e *A cultura brasileira (1943; 1960)*, escritas por Fernando de Azevedo em tempos distintos e contextos políticos contraditórios que estão situados em fases que denotam embates, aproximações e distanciamentos entre os intelectuais ligados ao pensamento social e científico na Primeira República (1889-1930).

**Palavras-chave:** Educação. Educação Física. Eugenia.

## Resumen

Dentro de la controvertida lectura sobre la relación entre Fernando de Azevedo, la raza, el mestizaje, la eugenesia y la institucionalización de la Educación Física, este artículo revisita y analiza si sus ideas están, de hecho, asociadas a un proyecto de nación eugenésica y racista, buscando comprender el Relación entre el mito de la regeneración social a través de la Educación Física, la educación escolar y la higiene sanitaria. Así, utilicé una revisión bibliográfica para investigar cómo se aborda la carrera temática principalmente en las obras *Sobre educación física (primera edición de 1920 y tercera edición de 1964)* y *A cultura Brasileira (1943; 1960)*, escritas por Fernando de Azevedo en diferentes tiempos y contextos políticos contradictorios que se sitúan en fases que denotan enfrentamientos, aproximaciones y distancias entre intelectuales vinculados al pensamiento social y científico en la Primera República Brasileña (1889-1930).

**Palabras claves:** Educación. Cultura Física. Eugenesia.

## Introduction

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that Fernando de Azevedo (1894-1974) was an artificer, throughout his intellectual work, of the construction of a theory related to *cultural evolution* and education as the means to effect a *social change* in Brazil. In addition to the term eugenics, attributed to him by some authors as a form of accusation, Azevedo's work proves to be relevant in the process of institutionalization of Physical Education, Sociology, and Brazilian education, with the issue of race and eugenics being secondary themes to the author in the process of his intellectual maturity. I used a bibliographic review to investigate how the theme race is approached mainly in the works *Da Educação Física* ("On Physical Education", first edition of 1920 and third edition of 1964) and *A cultura brasileira* ("The Brazilian Culture", 1943; 1960), written by Fernando de Azevedo in different times and contradictory political contexts that are situated in phases that denote clashes, approximations, and distances between intellectuals linked to the social and scientific thoughts in the First Brazilian Republic (1889-1930).

To a certain extent, it was the pseudoscience called eugenics that enabled the immersion of the sociologist and reformer Fernando de Azevedo in the intellectual environment in the first three decades of the 20th century, when eugenics was "the science" that seduced many Brazilian intellectuals concerned with interpreting Brazil. This path also led him to discover Sociology, a movement that led him to the sociological ideas of David Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), one of the most important sociologists – and also an anthropologist, political scientist, social psychologist, and philosopher –, a pioneer of the sociological positivist current. It was Durkheim who formally made sociology a positive science and who, alongside Karl Marx and Max Weber, is commonly cited as the main architect of modern social science and the father of sociology. His ideas decisively influenced Fernando de Azevedo, leading him to become a prominent supporter and defender of the ideas of Durkheimian positivism, social theories linked to evolutionism, and one of the most important sociologists linked to Brazilian education, as will be shown below.

## First steps

Born in São Gonçalo do Sapucaí (MG), in 1894, the boy Fernando de Azevedo nurtured the desire to become a priest, which led him to join, in 1903, the Jesuit gymnasium of Colégio Anchieta, in Nova Friburgo, in the state of Rio de Janeiro. At the boarding school for boys, run by Jesuit priests, in addition to his compulsory studies, Azevedo also excelled in fencing, at a time when his poor health and the difficult financial situation of his family became a threat to his school life, as he reports in his memoirs in the book *História de minha vida* (1971), quoted by Penna (2010, p.27). At the same institution, he finished high school and then continued his studies for another five years at the seminary of the same order, only in the city of Campanha, Minas Gerais. His taste for intellectual activity and education began to emerge at that time, as highlighted by Penna, remembering that "he learned classical languages, Greek and Latin literature" (PENNA, 2010, p.15). He also learned poetry and rhetoric until he abandoned the idea of being a priest and, in 1914, decided to renounce the religious life. Later, after a crisis of conscience, he discovered his "true vocation": teaching.

His involvement with social issues, education, and science led him to approach the so-called "sciences of racial improvement", eugenics, a pseudoscience that seduced several other intellectuals in the early 20th century. This path inevitably led Fernando de Azevedo to meet the Eugenics Society of São Paulo. Stepan (2005, p. 55) recalls that, in the first decades of the 1900s, "[t]o Brazilian elites, eugenics was a symbol of modernity, a scientific tool capable of putting Brazil on the path of progress and of the so dreamed of 'concert of nations'".

Thus, in the same year that he finished Law School at Faculdade do Largo de São Francisco, in São Paulo (SP), among bacteriologists, microbiologists, doctors, psychiatrists, literati, professors, and intellectuals, Fernando de Azevedo, then 24 years old, became one of 140 personalities linked to the sciences of the time and who became the first members of the São Paulo Eugenics Society, founded on January 15, 1918, in the noble hall of the Santa Casa de Misericórdia, as Gualtiere (2018) recalls. and Kern (2016). Arnaldo Vieira de Carvalho (1867-1920), then director of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery of São Paulo, was elected president of the same institution founded six years earlier, in 1912, which in the following years would become one of the most prestigious medical schools in the country.

At the Eugenics Society, Fernando de Azevedo would become a well-known figure among the outstanding figures who worked in the *intelligentsia*<sup>2</sup> of Brazil. Then, Azevedo was one of the greatest enthusiasts and supporters of the inclusion of physical education in the compulsory curriculum of schools in the 1920s/30s. Castro (1994, p. 217) recalls his lecture “The secret of the marathon” at the Eugenics Society, in 1919. Physical Education was the first discipline to which he dedicated systematic studies, materialized in the work *A poetry of the body* produced in 1915 and which, in 1920, would be named *On Physical Education: what it is, what it has been and what it should be* after being edited to be published in book form.

The first edition of *The poetry of the body* was organized into three parts. The first part is a systematic study of issues surrounding physical exercise, gymnastics, and sports; the second part highlights schools and methods focused on Physical Education practices; and the third is related to the importance of the problem of Physical Education in Brazil, presenting proposals to help to overcome such problems and, at the same time, pointing out ways to solve them. In this work, Azevedo dedicates a chapter to address the issue of *racial-ethnic regeneration*, in which he outlines evolutionary ideas that bring him closer to eugenic theories. In the third revised edition of the work, published in 1960, this chapter was replaced by a new one, called *National Organization and Physical Education*, in which Azevedo already demonstrates that he is seeking a certain distance from the polemical concepts of eugenics and the “regeneration of the race”, which can be defined as a phase that held the search for the differentiation of the central theses of Galtonian eugenics and the affirmation of an evolutionary vision influenced by the ideas of neo-Lamarckism.

The *neo-Lamarckism* is the unfolding of theses attributed to the French zoologist Jean Baptiste de Lamarck (1744-1829) responsible for the elaboration of the first *evolutionary theory* with a biological/scientific bias, pointing to the transformation of the conditions of life imposed by the environment and by the uses and disuses as important in this perspective. This idea existed since antiquity and Lamarck was the first to present it in a scientifically grounded way, adding an important element to it: the idea that there were species that existed and became extinct, if not abruptly, but transmuted to the point of becoming new species. Stepan (2004, p. 345) recalls that “the neo-Lamarckian foundations of the eugenics vision of Kehl and many of his Brazilian colleagues were often disguised by their constant reference to Galton, as the father of eugenics, and to Mendel, and by the absence of direct references to Lamarck”.

Eugenics was not a historical event specific to Anglo-Saxon countries, but a movement of ideas that developed in different parts of the world, adapting to different national contexts. In 1869, with the publication of the work *Hereditary Genius*<sup>3</sup> written by the English scientist Francis

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<sup>2</sup> "The emergence of the intelligentsia marks the last phase of the growth of social consciousness. The intelligentsia was the last group to adopt the sociological point of view, as their position in the social division of labor does not give them direct access to any vital and active segment of society. The reclusive cabinet and book dependence only allow a view derived from the social process. It is not by chance that this group ignored the social character of change for so long. And those who were finally sensitive to the social pulse of their time found the way to a sociological appreciation of their position blocked by the proletariat" (MANNHEIM, 2001, p.77-78).

<sup>3</sup> Hereditary genius, in free translation by the authors.

Galton (1822-1911), eugenics gained a more robust theory. The work spoke of a supposed “genetic inheritance of intelligence”, a theme that made possible the organization of eugenicist theories that claimed, at the same time, genetic biology as its legitimizing argument and theoretical status, as Nancy Stepan (2005, p.30) recalls. *Hereditary Genius* is considered the seminal text of eugenics. Galton in his work deals with two forms of eugenics: a positive one, which would consist of procreation “between able people”, through the control of marriages, with the support of tax incentives and childbirth aids; and negative eugenics, which defended the non-procreation of those he called “unfit”, in this case, those considered mentally ill, prostitutes, alcoholics, and miserable people. The objective was to “prevent the spread of its ‘hereditary stain’, as Carvalho recalls (2017, p.10). Until the turn of the 19th century, Galton's ideas spread around the world. At this time, they began to take root in the United States, where its supporters tended to be middle-class, white, and “well-educated”.

In Brazil, it was Renato Ferraz Kehl (1889-1974) who in 1917 “organized a meeting of physicians to discuss the new eugenics science of *sir* Francis Galton” and to expose what “prenuptial exams and the proposed of reviewing the marriage legislation that allowed consanguineous marriages (to which most doctors were opposed, some based on eugenics)” (STEPAN, 2004, p.339).

Eugenics supporters sought a foundation in racial theories constituted in the 19th century, a period that gave rise to the so-called *scientific racism*. The white Europeans were representatives, in this logic, of a “biological superiority”. Blacks and yellows, on the other hand, were considered inferior in this hierarchy. Miscegenation was frowned upon by eugenicists. For them, miscegenation would be responsible for irreversible damage to the “offspring”. Soon, the eugenics movement became a *nationalist* campaign against Blacks and miscegenation, and also questioned the place of immigrants in society. In this context, miscegenation was highlighted in debates about Brazilian society.

### **Azevedo's first public office happened after his ascension in the Eugenics Society**

At the end of the 1920s, Azevedo's performance as an intellectual led him to the appointment and subsequent acceptance of the position of director-general of Public Instruction in Rio de Janeiro, then the country's federal capital. It was during this period that he had the opportunity to put into practice his ideas and ideals about not only Physical Education but *Educação Nova*, a movement that would become the most important action for reforms in education in Brazil under the banner of *Escolanovismo*, with which Azevedo became involved and engaged intensely in the 1920s/30s, projecting his performance and national recognition. The movement's landmark was the publication of *Manifesto dos Pioneiros da Educação Nova* (1932), which publicized the reforming ideals of education, also encouraging the grouping of various intellectuals linked to education and science, and which, in simultaneously, the intellectuals who had sympathies for the ideals of eugenics.

His experience as a public manager spurred the preparation and publication of the book *New paths and new ends* (1932). In it, Azevedo presented, in addition to his reformist experiences as director of public education in Rio de Janeiro, an outline of his conceptions about the importance of public education and the tasks that needed to be fulfilled to make it accessible to the masses, covering detailed analyzes ranging from the educational reforms implemented until then, such as the Sampaio Dória Reform<sup>4</sup>, in São Paulo, in addition to others that took place in

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<sup>4</sup> As Dermeval Saviani reports in the book *História das Ideias Pedagógicas no Brasil* (SAVIANI, 2013, p. 175) “The trigger for changes was the Sampaio Dória Reform, in São Paulo, in 1920, named after the then director general of the State Public Instruction, Antonio de Sampaio Dória (1883-1964). Concerned with the fact that half of the population aged 7 to 12 is out of school and with a low budget, he proposed an initial stage of two years (equivalent to the beginning of the current Elementary School), free and compulsory”.

locations outside of Rio de Janeiro. His criticisms and contributions ranged from architecture and school hygiene to the physical hygiene of students and teacher training. The work also emphasizes its hygienist and sanitary influences described in the concerns with a clean and airy environment aimed at producing health in schools. In the book, he still points to the social space as the *purpose* of his philosophical conceptions about the social role of the school:

[and] I speak on behalf of these stunted and anemic children, almost ragged, who fill a large number of public schools, very close to the bustle and splendor of the great centers of the city, and bring, in apathetic sadness, in the deep circles under their eyes and the look without shine, if not in scoliosis, and in all kinds of stigmata, the mark of the social environment in which they languish, and all the signs of a congenital weakness aggravated by hereditary defects and the dearth of unhealthy environments, and offered as easy preys to environmental contamination. (AZEVEDO, 1958, p.50).

If initially, Physical Education appears as the main vector of his ideas, the author expands the scope of his analysis to the integrality of education, seeking to differentiate what would be a escolanovista practice concerning the old methods used in Brazilian education that had as a mark the strong presence of the Catholic Church in its formulations, since the arrival of the Jesuits, as Saviani recalls (2013, p.58). Azevedo also harshly criticized the precarious conditions for teaching. He denounced the situation of classrooms that were intended for the popular masses, which he defined as "mere spaces of beaten earth or sheds adapted for educational use with the support of crates and wooden stumps in the form of seats for students" (AZEVEDO, 1958, p. 51).

By making an emphatic defense of compulsory, secular, and free education for the majority of the people, he condemned the elitism of education and defended its extension to the popular masses. At the same time, he promoted sanitary hygiene, a speech that was close to medical and eugenic ideas, pointing out that "popular education, to be "the most powerful of economic forces", as Rui Barbosa rightly qualified it, must begin for the hygienic protection and physical training of the school population" (AZEVEDO, 1958, p.50).

At the same time that he pointed to the issue of health as a key issue for the educational organization, he brought in his speech the arguments about the dilemmas of "race", a favorite subject of the most engaged eugenicists, but which, in Azevedo's approach, already demonstrates a certain precaution in not prioritizing or defining race as a criterion of superiority or inferiority in the social composition of Brazilian civilization. When talking about frail, sickly-looking children, he criticized the agglomeration of children in tiny classrooms, where everything conspired against health, arguing that "[it is] certainly necessary to make pedagogical gymnastics mandatory in all schools in the District, which must always find enough space in schools, where it is taught with scientific criteria, in systematized courses" (AZEVEDO, 1958, p.33).

The notes mentioned above were included by Azevedo in the annals of the Eugenics Society of São Paulo, which he helped to write. Gualtiere (2018) recalls one of these passages, reporting that:

[t]hus, at the end of the 1910s and beginning of the 1920s, taking as a reference the Annaes de Eugenia (1919), a publication of the Eugenics Society of São Paulo, in which Fernando de Azevedo was 1st secretary, we found that, despite the specificities found among the authors, the conception that eugenics, or the science of the improvement of the

species by human selection, should have among its goals, the elimination of the factors that caused the degeneration of the species (GUALTIERE, 2018, p.484) is widely present.

“Race degeneration” is one of the mottos that eugenicists at the time described as one of the fundamental goals to be attacked so that the development of Brazilian society could fully take place. These conceptions will be the target, in the following years, of contradictions and divergences among the “modernists”, in which Fernando de Azevedo himself will be found.

Only eleven years after the foundation of the Eugenics Society, the I Brazilian Congress of Eugenics was convened, held from July 1 to 6, 1929, in Rio de Janeiro. The person responsible for presiding over the congress was Edgard Roquette Pinto<sup>5</sup> (1884-1954), an intellectual who was notable not for his eugenics, but for being considered the father of broadcasting in Brazil and for the creation of Rádio Sociedade in Rio de Janeiro. He also played an important role in the *escolanovista* movement as a signatory of the *Manifest of the Pioneers of Educação Nova*. He considered radio “an important machine for educating our people”, as highlighted by Azevedo (1964, p.234). The presence of Roquette Pinto demonstrates the variety of areas of activity of the members who came to compose the Eugenics Society of São Paulo, which reinforces the perception that intellectuals adhered to the ideas of eugenics as the expression of “science” at the beginning of the 20th century.

The same period in which eugenic ideals seduced the country's intellectuals was also marked by the population increase in Brazilian in the metropolises after the Proclamation of the Republic in 1889, followed by the triggering of a process of industrialization and growth of urban services and commerce, mainly in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The concentration of people in large numbers, living in unsanitary housing, stimulated an increase in poverty and favored the concentration of dirt in the cities providing a perfect combination for the proliferation of diseases and violence. At the same time, the interior of the country, the so-called “sertão” remained isolated. Amid the wave of eugenic ideas, the sanitary movement was born and gained strength, which aimed to solve sanitary and public health problems in urban centers and the countryside of Brazil. The sanitary movement would provoke a certain division among the supporters of eugenics ideas: some wanted to sanitize the country and those who wanted to “improve the race”. From this contradiction, a positive vision will emerge on the formation of the “Brazilian race” marked by miscegenation, a trend to which Azevedo will demonstrate adherence in his following works, seeking to formulate analyzes based on the social sciences and Durkheim's sociological method, at the same time that he tries to act in the formulation of public policies, mainly for education and culture as strategies for overcoming modernist challenges.

### **Eugenics and nationalism meet**

The historian Eric Hobsbawm (1917-2012) in the work *Nations and nationalism since 1780: program, myth, and reality* (1990), describes that national sentiment was spread across Europe from the French revolutionary movement and the Napoleonic wars at the end of the 18th century. XVIII century. Such events spread French Enlightenment ideas to the interior of Europe, promoting the rise of nationalist sentiment either for good acceptance or as a response from their opponents. The author shows that “the characterization of a nation occurs based on criteria

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<sup>5</sup> The broadcasting that began in Brazil in 1919 with the first station, Rádio Clube de Pernambuco, and gained momentum in 1923 with Rádio Sociedade do Rio de Janeiro, founded, with purely cultural purposes, by Roquette Pinto, - the pioneer of radio culture in the country-, and Henrique Morize, and later transferred to the federal government, only developed, in reality, and surprisingly, after the 1930 revolution and, above all, that of São Paulo in 1932, when radio played a prominent role in the propaganda of the revolution. (AZEVEDO, 1964, p. 418)

that are usually clear: language, ethnicity, common territory, culture, etc. However, such criteria are ambiguous, changeable and opaque and serve nothing more than for propagandistic and pragmatic purposes" (HOBSBAWM, 1990, p.15).

The author recalls that national movements, in the second half of the 19th century, began to highlight ethnic elements as part of the insertion of ethnolinguistic elements that would mark the nationalism of this period: "[in] the second half of the 19th century, ethnic nationalism received huge reinforcements; in practical terms through the increasing and massive geographic migration; in theory, through the transformation of "race" into a central concept of the social sciences of the 19th century" (HOBSBAWM, 1990, p. 123). As a reason for the triumph of the principle of nationality, the author points to the "collapse of large multinational empires in Central and Eastern Europe and the Russian Revolution", episodes that redefined the European map, transforming the continent into a territory with defined states. (HOBSBAWM, 1990, p.149). Hobsbawm (1990) concludes that, both in the objective definition and in the subjective definition of a nation, both would not be sufficient for a group of people to self-determine it. The objective explanation, which uses simple characterization criteria, despite being able to define it *a priori*, does not match the variety of nations in the real world. On the other hand, the subjective explanation, according to which, to be a nation, it is enough to consider oneself as such, is very vague, making a full definition impossible, and therefore neither of the two definitions are fully satisfactory.

In Brazil, nationalism can be described as a complex process. Contrary to what happened in Europe, the model that inspired the Brazilian process did not develop in a historical period marked by a transition from an agrarian to an industrial society, as Carone (1978), Carvalho (1987), and Fausto (1995) recall. Oliveira (1990, p. 145) recalls that "[t]he First World War brought the national question to the agenda, transforming the previous meaning of nationalism. The natural feeling of love for the country, based on territorial grandeur and the qualities of the races that formed the Brazilian man, was no longer sufficient", as Hobsbawm (1990) had already identified on the transformation of old nationalism in Europe. The "new nationalism" involved, in addition to the search for a new identity, the reinforcement of thinking that denied the biological models that supported racist thinking, recalls Oliveira (1990, p.148). The author also points out that "[t]he nationalism, as a banner to guide intellectuals concerned with building a project of national salvation, had to deal with the economic question linked to industrialization and with its companion, the worker question" (OLIVEIRA, 1990, p.148). It is this context that will sharpen the contradictions about the ideals of eugenics, as a nationalist project, and its inability to respond to the challenges posed.

Several authors (CARONE, 1978; CARVALHO, 2008; FAUSTO, 2001; GORENDER, 1998; IANNI, 2004; OLIVEIRA, 1990 and LESSA, 2008)) identify many peculiarities and specificities in the nationalism that was formed in Brazil. Lessa (2008) recalls that

[the] National State is the one that condenses, explains, and formats the Brazilian nationality, not being, in this particular, originality. The specific trait is not to deal with the people. From these angles, the Brazilian experience provides a pedagogical example, since almost a century has passed between the institutionalization of the National State and the delineation of the nation as territory and people. (LESSA, 2008, p.238)



The slave mode of production as a heritage may have been the main element to outline the unique parameters of Brazilian nationalism, which saw in the people a disposable element for the construction of national identity, idealizing the possibility of a genetically manipulated nation to meet a projection of a people different from the objective reality in which they were formed, through the miscegenation between cultures and ethnicities. From this exclusionary thought, sympathy and acceptance of the biologizing ideas of Galtonian eugenics about "race" and nationality will spring.

Eugenics is a term that comes from Greek and means well-born. Eugenics emerged to validate the policy of hierarchical segregation between human groups. The idea was disseminated by Francis Galton, the person responsible for creating the term, in 1883. He imagined that Charles Darwin's (1809-1882) concept of natural selection, which, by the way, was his cousin, also applied to human beings. Stepan (2005, p. 30) recalls that eugenics was divided by Galton into

positive eugenics, which seeks to improve the human race through individual selection through suitable marriages to produce genetically "better" individuals; and "negative eugenics", which preaches that the improvement of the race can only happen by eliminating genetically "inferior" individuals or preventing them from reproducing. (STEPAN, 2005, p. 30).

With positive eugenics proving almost impractical as a form of social control, most eugenicists around the world were sympathetic to the adoption of negative eugenics. Humanity saw the effects of the adoption of negative eugenics in Nazi Germany, which mixed eugenics with authoritarian nationalism and preached the elimination of "inferiors" (STEPAN, 2005, p.30).

In Brazil, nationalism and eugenics met and mixed at the beginning of the 20th century. As Oliveira (1990, p.13) points out, "nationalism is a category that privileges a totality and, consequently, does not emphasize internal differences, nor does it work with what distinguishes men in the social space". In the first decades of the 20th century, many intellectuals engaged in political life and social struggles, reproducing, reinforcing, and or resignifying the theses around nationalism, many of them were part of the eugenics movement.

It is in this context that the reforming intellectual Fernando de Azevedo joins and gradually stands out, having education and cultural transmission as the main objects in his discourse on the construction of the nation and the cultural identity of the country. At the same time, contradictions surfaced, rescuing Oliveira's (1990, p.13) warning that "[t]rying to grasp the mentality of generations of intellectuals in the face of the dilemmas of Brazil and the world in the period that comprises the First Republic It means understanding the complexity and ambiguity of Brazilian social thought of that period."

By revisiting the history and controversial ideas contained in eugenics theories, such as the thesis of "racial regeneration" in Brazil, it opens up the possibility of, more than a simple encounter with the Brazilian social thought, also accessing the dilemmas that surrounded the idea of Brazilian identity and race. When analyzing the role played by some intellectuals of this period as interpreters of these themes, some contradictions emerge. Fernando de Azevedo was one of the intellectuals who assumed the role of interpreter of Brazil in the First Republic, which later led the author to be analyzed by some researchers as an emphatic defender of eugenics racism, giving this theme an even greater centrality than Azevedo's work, leaving aside his important role as a member of the group of intellectuals *reformers of education* and the New

School movement, as emphasized in the works of Soares (2012) and Vechia and Lorenz (2009). This movement reveals, at the same time, the fact that eugenics was not constituted exclusively as a racist movement but was also guided by concerns and interventions in broader social policies, such as education and health, which requires a breadth in eugenics studies.

It is clear that Azevedo, like other Brazilian intellectuals, dealt with the themes that concomitantly composed the agenda of the eugenics movement, with emphasis on themes related to education, culture, and the formation of the "nation" and "nationality", during the period comprising the First Republic (1889-1930). It is undeniable that the theme "national identity" was a significant subject for the social sciences of that period. Azevedo, as a social scientist, could not fail to address the same script that mobilized social thought. In this context, health, education, and culture are objects present in the discourse that seeks to define, at the same time, a national project for the construction of *national identity*. The race theme was part of the social sciences script in the country at the turn of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Resende recalls that for

Fernando de Azevedo to reflect the social change as a result not only of changes in the field of materiality but also of values and mentality. The process of renewal of Brazilian social organization was based on the development of industry, science, knowledge, education, the ideals of freedom, etc. (RESENDE, 2004/2005, p.180).

The issue of race and nationality, therefore, occupied a prominent place in the national theoretical agenda, and, inevitably, there was an encounter with the theses of the then pseudoscience called eugenics.

Nationalism, on the other hand, also had some aspects. One of them sprang from authoritarian positivist thinking. Fausto (2001, p. 38) recalls that "a common trait among authoritarian nationalists was the role they attributed to the so-called racial issue". As Stepan recalls (2005, p. 29) "eugenics was a concept created in England in 1883 that spread in several countries at the beginning of the 20th century".

Especially in the United States and Germany, eugenics gained strength and diffusion. Despite the false scientific appearance around the term race, the eugenics movement was essentially political and social and was anchored in a biological approach as a theoretical model to explain social issues and dilemmas, emphasizing the strategies of exclusion of the so-called, "unwanted elements" of society to genetically "improve" the population. In Brazil, the unwanted also gained the status of "dangerous classes", as highlighted by Chalhoub (1996, p. 9), reinforcing the most radical eugenics campaign that it was necessary to "breed" people with good genetic characteristics.

Authors such as Gomes, Wegner, and Souza (2017) highlighted the place that biological theories occupied in social thought and how, in this scenario, the issue of race gained prominence, based on genetic research on corn seeds, especially in the USA, and that, by their results, sought to associate and give scientific status to racist theories. This demonstrates how "[im]portant was the influence of social and cultural studies, which intended eugenic and racial discourses, based on biological determinism" (GOMES; WEGNER; SOUZA, 2017, p. 3).

Seemingly harmless, the discourse of improving the human species has had perverse consequences throughout history, like Gomes, Wegner, and Souza (2017) recall. In the United States, the theory significantly influenced social relations in American history and culture from the 19th century onwards. Eugenics lent arguments for the creation of laws prohibiting miscegenation, criminalizing interracial marriages, and going as far as the compulsory sterilization of Latino, Black and Indigenous women. Wegner (2017, p.81) recalls that, in Brazil, "eugenics is established by allying itself with sanitation", being taken

up by doctors, scientists, journalists, and intellectuals. The defense of sanitation through hygienist practices provided the thesis of the "improvement of the race". Eugenics trends defended a series of social practices to "improve" the Brazilian nation, including the extension of Physical Education to the entire population as a way of improving the physical conditions of the popular masses.

On the concept of race, Kern (2016, p.33) states that the term appears in modernity “[with] different meanings, this word has been used since the Middle Ages, already indicating its use to demarcate the boundaries between 'us and the others'”. The author also recalls that

[in] the realm of natural history, therefore, the race would be a doubly artificial concept: first, because it did not arise from the original divine will, but from the subsequent human action on Earth; secondly, because race is just one more among the classificatory categories of his taxonomy of living beings, admittedly created arbitrarily by the author of the representation — in this case, the naturalist (KERN, 2016, p.35).

### **Fernando de Azevedo and eugenics**

As a political project, Brazilian eugenicists sought to intervene and influence the elaboration of State policies in the First Republic, with emphasis on sanitary medicine and education. Schwarcz (2000, p. 142) recalls that “eugenics officially came to the country in 1914, at the School of Medicine of Rio de Janeiro, with a thesis supervised by Miguel Couto, who published several books on education and public health in the country”. Another aspect highlighted by Stepan (2004) is that eugenics in Brazil differed from its similar version in Europe and the USA, by a theoretical strand based on a *neo-Lamarckist* interpretation, that is, “Neo-Lamarckism prevailed, particularly, in medical circles. The continued confidence of physicians of these decades in scientifically refined Lamarckian ideas does not reflect stupidity or ignorance, but the apparent impossibility of treating certain problems of human pathology” (STEPAN, 2004, p.347). In this context, evolutionist theories gain space.

The question of heredity, for example, was at the center of the theories developed by Galton, with the control of genetic and biological inheritance being the center and the means to obtain answers to social problems. Heredity would be, therefore, the main responsible for the national formation, be it good or bad. Stepan (2004, p.346) states that "The novelties of Lamarckism at the beginning of the 20th century were the challenge presented by Mendelian genetics and the association of heredity with the new goal of human improvement". The author also recalls that eugenics in Brazil, like the social sciences, was greatly influenced by French thought and, consequently, by French eugenicists/evolutionists.

Fernando de Azevedo, in addition to being an adept of Durkheim's French thought, was significantly influenced by other thinkers in French sociology who contributed deeply to his theoretical perspectives. Notably, they were *evolutionary theorists* and that led, to a large extent, to the methodological interpretations in Azevedo's thinking about the social changes desired for Brazil. One of them was Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), considered by many to be one of the most influential liberal theorists of the 19th century. He was also one of the founders of modern sociology, a pioneer in the *theory of evolution*, and an important philosopher whose works caught the attention of Fernando de Azevedo, who is quoted by him at various times including the work *On Physical Education*. Resende (2004/2005, p.173) recalls that "[al]though, to a lesser extent, a direct influence of Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) is detectable in the first part of the work *A cultura brasileira*". In the work *Da Educação Física*, Spencer appears in both editions, from 1920 and 1960, respectively, as a bibliographic reference in chapters that mention eugenics, notably under the title *Regeneração ethnico-social pela*

*educação physica* published in 1st edition and changed the title in the 3rd edition to *Organização Nacional da Educação Física*. From this perspective, Resende (2004/2005) draws attention to the fact that

[the] theory of Spencer, which, strictly speaking, influenced Durkheim and Fernando de Azevedo, among countless other social thinkers of the 20th century, is based on the assumption that the evolution of societies takes place because of a broad process of differentiation that it is continuously established between individuals and social institutions (RESENDE., 2004/2005, p.178).

In *Da Educação Física* (1920 and 1960) as described by Piletti (1994, p.84), the bibliography used by Azevedo shows that of the 87 works cited, 65 were French and 12 German, only one in Portuguese and the others in English. The French influence on Azevedo's references to Physical Education is evident, for example, when he quotes Georges Demeny (1850-1917). His attempt to incorporate French ideas on Physical Education appears strongly in his criticism of the English method, which, according to him, was based exclusively on games and sports, without valuing gymnastics. The author emphasizes that

[th]us, an education in which the intensive practice of physical exercises is simultaneous with the application of a plethoric program cannot serve as a paradigm for us, or in which, due to an exaggerated preparation of athletic preparation, as in English education, it is relegated to the background the organization of teaching, not arid and formalistic, but oriented to form the student's spirit, arm him for life and prepare him for the career he has chosen, through a more solid than varied culture, more technical than decorative (AZEVEDO, 1920, 1960, p.27).

Stepan (2004, p.347) recalls that "[by] cultural tradition, Brazilian scientists learned their science from France" and that "[t]he case of eugenics was no exception, as it became clear when, in its first meeting, the Eugenics Society of São Paulo took the French eugenics society as a model of organization, reproducing its statutes word for word". The author also recalls that the reading of Galtonian principles about genetic inheritance was little absorbed among Brazilian eugenicists, especially Renato Kehl, which, for the author, "reflected the fact that few Brazilian physicians had studied genetics in the school of medicine or were then involved in genetic research" (STEPAN, 2004a, p.347).

This predilection for the French points to an approach to eugenics ideas that differ, in part, from the medical view, which prevailed among intellectuals linked to sanitary medicine in the Eugenics Society. Azevedo saw in education the means to improve "the Brazilian race", thus producing a "robust and healthy" society. The author stated that "[o]nce education introduced the country's habits, the practice of this physical culture, sustained over a long series of generations, would cleanse our people of morbid diatheses, strengthening and enriching them, progressively through the incessant creation of robust individuals" (AZEVEDO, 1960, p. 216), which denotes his evolutionary vision on the development of future generations through the practice of a scientific Physical Education focused on the production of health and "robustness". On this idea, Soares (2012, p.125) states that "Fernando de Azevedo, like Rui Barbosa, in specific circumstances, believed that it was possible to make progress and development in the country viable through strict health control and a broad campaign for the education of the people, a campaign that resulted in the New School movement".

From these statements, it is possible to point out that Azevedo did not start from conceptions that included genetic purification of *Galtonian* matrices for the constitution of a healthy people. He affirms that [...] the generations of tomorrow, refined by the system, by Physical Education - refiner of the race and collaborator of progress - would thus imprint on those who succeeded them, and submitted to the same treatment, the stamp of their character, so that they could, within the limits of the hereditary biological patrimony, to further improve Human nature [...] (AZEVEDO, 1960, p.216).

It is clear that the author establishes, as pointed out by Soares (2012), a close relationship between Physical Education and Medicine, but it is not a matter of proposing genetic manipulations but the introduction of physical culture in education as a mechanism for “improvement of the race” by the *evolution* and adaptation.

In the two works by Azevedo analyzed here, - *Da Educação Física* (1920 and 1960) and in *A cultura brasileira* (1964) -, the term race appears many times as a synonym for the Brazilian people. The book *A Cultura Brasileira* was organized into three volumes, and the work divided into three parts, and in them the meaning and use of the term "race" is very evident, as in the first part, when the author analyzes the formation of Brazil and the people, under the title *The country and the race*, stating that

[c]ertainly, if it is not possible to determine precisely the elements from whose mixture the Brazilian people resulted in each of the regions, and to discern, in this population, all the ethnic differences, one can already distinguish in the Brazilian, a Mediterranean, of mixed blood, in the variety of its subtypes, - a unique national type that imprinted its characters, vigorously marked by the primitive groupings, founded on material kinship and developed by the long cohabitation of the same territory, by the language community and by the common beliefs that followed and characterized our civilization (AZEVEDO, 1964, p. 35).

He closes the chapter dedicated to the formation of Brazil by saying that "the beam of Western civilization to which Brazilians will lend a new and intense light is that of the atmosphere of their civilization" (AZEVEDO, 1964, p. 35), which demonstrates that the idea of race contained in their interpretations refer to the formation of national identity from the material conditions in which the formation of the Brazilian population was amalgamated.

Faced with this finding, it is possible to raise the hypothesis, in the case of Fernando de Azevedo, that his reading of eugenics may have been a way of adapting his view of the heredity borrowed from the French neo-Lamarckists/evolutionists, associating the approach to the context of the time when eugenics was synonymous with the science of physical and social health, and which would collaborate for the development of a national civilizing project. By stating “[that] this people is an amalgamation of several races, themselves crossed and re-crossed, like the Portuguese who became, through their genetic activity, mobility and adaptability to the tropical climate, the nucleus of national formation” (AZEVEDO, 1964). , p.33), he demonstrates two understandings: i) that the meeting of ethnicities “[...] that, by this incessant fusion, the country constituted, in Mendes Correia’s expression, one of the largest fields of ethnic and social assimilation, there is no shadow of a doubt” (AZEVEDO, 1964, p.33), thus denoting evolutionism as cause and effect, and ii) that natural causes did not explain the country's social differences.

In refuting the racist theses defended by Oliveira Viana<sup>6</sup> (1883-1951), based on theories developed by Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, for example, Azevedo distances himself from hierarchical eugenics racism and demonstrates this by saying that

[in] the work of conquest and discovery, Oliveira Viana thinks he took the lead in emigrating to the new world, the dollic-blond man (homo Europeans, by Lapouge) preponderant in the aristocratic class and essentially migratory, while the brachycephalic and of small stature (*homo alpinus*, by Linnaeus) who formed the base of the middle and popular classes, would have flowed later, in copious streams of settlers, especially after the discovery of the mines. The hypothesis, however, does not have sufficient base documentation to support it, nor has it been confirmed by further studies and research (AZEVEDO, 1964, p. 30).

Therefore, unlike Oliveira Viana, who did not hide his sympathy for European immigration, especially that of the Germans, as a way of "improving the Brazilian race", immigration found in Brazil a form of culture and a population that was already consolidated, having in the Black, the Indigenous and in the Portuguese its base formed: "Thus, when in the 19th century, shortly before the abolition of slavery, the immigration movement of Mediterranean and German origin (Portuguese, Italian, Spanish, German and others) began to intensify the national nucleus" (AZEVEDO, 1964, p.32).

Among intellectuals, Sousa (2013, p. 4) recalls that "there was a current that saw the miscegenation that took place in Brazil as responsible for the problems in national development". The reason would be a favorable genetic predisposition in certain peoples for progress, which was not the case in Brazil, since the characteristics inherited by the Brazilian people due to miscegenation made them incapable of achieving a development similar to those of European and North American nations. . "Thus, the social differences of inferior nations vis-a-vis European nations were explained. Race became a notion discussed in works that predicted a cloudy future for Brazil" (SOUSA, 2013, p.4).

In the case of Azevedo, he clearly shows that he prefers to follow the line proposed by Gilberto Freyre (1900-1987) when analyzing the Brazilian formation. He expresses an understanding that recognizes miscegenation as a positive event, this phenomenon being the synthesis of national identity. In *A Cultura Brasileira*, he states that

[If], as can be seen, the Brazilian origins are determined in the mixture of the three races or the progressive assimilation, in the first centuries, of the Red and Black races, by the European White race, in a large blood transfusion, the issues related to different ethnic types, Portuguese and Blacks, who were channeled to Brazil, their respective anthropological characters, the geographical distribution of Blacks and Indians and the proportions in which crossings with white colonizers took place (AZEVEDO, 1964, p. 29) are still to be fully clarified.

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<sup>6</sup> The prosperity of the South would be the result of the German contingents and other foreign ethnic groups, who gave impetus to life in those regions. The slow progress of the extreme North would be linked to the fact that there was no presence of those ethnic-cultural stocks there, being Northeastern operations, which he considered, in certain aspects, without the requirements for operations of such high civilizing significance. (VIANNA, 1938)

Further on, the author states that

[to] this fact, of great importance for the national formation, of having the number of foreigners remained relatively small in relation to the primitive nucleus, it is necessary to add, to understand the Brazilian phenomenon, the mobility of the population, whose movement, acting as an instrument of assimilation, contributed to the interpenetration and assimilation of different races and cultures (AZEVEDO, 1964, p.31).

In his work, the author seeks to transit between biology, sociology, history, psychology and anthropology to identify the formation of "races" in Brazil. In some passages, it is still noticeable to find some contradictions of the author, as already warned by Candido (1994). This becomes clear in the way he used the method of ethnographic tradition<sup>7</sup> of physical anthropology of the early 20th century to adopt a stratigraphic perspective and, at the same time, lamented the impossibility of hierarchizing the cultures of African peoples brought as slaves to Brazil. The absence of documentation would be the main cause of this impossibility. Relying on the studies of Raimundo Nina Rodrigues (1862-1906), to whom he praises for his anthropological studies on race, and Gilberto Freyre, to whom he devotes greater relevance to sociological studies, he states that they

[i]n dealing with the African trade, they have already demonstrated the variety of "nations" and areas of culture from which Black slaves were transported, ranging from elements collected from the most savage tribes of the Kaffirs to Sudanese Blacks, of advanced culture, predominant in the Bahian formation. (AZEVEDO, 1964, p. 32).

Fernando de Azevedo was an organic<sup>8</sup> part of the intellectual *field* who, in the context of the First Republic, had eugenics as a science reference, a thesis that ran through the first half of the twentieth century. During this period, science played an instrumental role in the construction of concepts adopted in the structures of the Brazilian State, in addition to being the background for the interpretation of major national problems, including education and Physical Education, as stated by Castellani Filho (1988), Soares (2012), Ghiraldelli Júnior (2003), Schwarcz (2000), Santana and Santos (2016), Góis Junior (2009), Kern (2016) and Gualtieri (2018).

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<sup>7</sup> According to Clifford Geertz, all or virtually all the theoretical trends that tried to locate a man in the set of his customs adopted a tactic of relating biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors among themselves, which he called the stratigraphic conception. Stratigraphy would understand man as the superposition of these indisputable factors, incomplete and irreducible layers. Cultural factors, in this concept of hierarchical stratification, do not mix with the other factors, assuming a relationship of independence, creating the image of a man who, although rational, would be naked concerning his customs (GEERTZ, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Intellectuals of an organic type, when developing, are faced with those of a "traditional" type, inherited from previous social-historical formations: clerics, philosophers, jurists, writers, among others. These traditional intellectuals have a strong sense of continuity through time and see themselves as independent from the struggling social classes. In a way, the latter try to capture these traditional intellectuals in the process of the struggle for hegemony. In the case of the working class, for Gramsci, the struggle would be in the sense of affirming a new intellectual, no longer removed from the productive world or drenched in abstract rhetoric, but capable of being, simultaneously, specialist and political. In other words, capable of exercising a leading role in the new historical bloc (GRAMSCI, 1989).

Many of these authors rely on the work *Da Educação Física*, which had its first edition written in 1915, and was later revised and republished in book form in 1920 and 1960, to point out the use of the term “improvement of the race” as the eugenicist thesis who would thus have the centrality in Azevedo's thinking about gymnastics and Physical Education and which would be, consequently, the main theoretical statute in the Azevedo conception in the formation of the area of Physical Education. Soares’ (2012) criticism, for example, falls on what he defines as “the bases for the elaboration of a biological and medical conception of Physical Education, having, therefore, as an object of work, a biological body devoid of historicity” (SOARES, 2012, p.127).

Regarding this aspect described by Soares, it is necessary, however, to make some considerations about the social sciences in the historical time in which Azevedo writes his work. Like Physical Education, Sociology was also seeking its place and scientific status in Brazil. In this sense, it is worth remembering that Sociology would only be included as a school subject in the 1930s, a period that coincides with the schooling, institutionalization, and professionalization of both areas in the Brazilian context.

The search for theoretical answers about the formation of Brazil reveals in Azevedo an intellectual who tries to escape racialist and naturalist explanations that speak of climate and race. Candido (1994) quoted by Resende (2004/2005, p. 174) states that “[f]rom the first pages of the text *A cultura brasileira*, he engaged in an obstinate struggle with Durkheim's writings to formulate a path that allowed to get rid of explanations based on race and physical environment”. It is evident between a work of youth - *Da Educação Física* - and another that can be classified as intellectual maturity, such as - *Brazilian culture* -, that he “[was] questioning the need to formulate an interpretation of the country that would refute the theses of a natural condemnation of non-progress, of non-evolution” (RESENDE, 2004/2005, p.174).

In his work, Azevedo shows sensitive concerns about the living conditions of the poor population, formed mostly by Blacks and Mestizos, and he strives to formulate theses on how to extend access to school to the popular masses. For the author, the democratization of access to public, free and secular education was the way to combat social inequalities already so latent in cities swelled by precarious agglomerations, which served as housing in the early twentieth century; the inequalities were concentrated in the mass of proletarians that was being formed, composed of Blacks, Mestizos, and poor Whites. For Azevedo, education would be the means to improve “the Brazilian race” in a constant process that would allow the “evolution” of living conditions and reduce the distance between the education of the elites and that offered to the popular masses.

In a passage in the work *Da Educação Física* with the subtitle *O problema da higiene social pela Educação Física* (“*The problem of social hygiene through Physical Education*”), Azevedo recalls the exclusion of the working masses and their children from sports brought from Europe in the first decades of the 20th century, stating that, “[t]he workers – poor boys and girls are, in general, a minority in sports societies. There is no need to talk about Physical Education at school for boys or girls, to which the difficulties of their families or premature initiation into work leave schools closed” (AZEVEDO, 1960b, p. 206). The author's conception of social hygiene is different from the tradition that sees the physical elimination of the poor, which would therefore be a problem for the police, expressed by the famous idea contained in the phrase recalled by Chalhoub (1996, p. 57) that “The social question is a police issue”, the



famous slogan is attributed to Washington Luís<sup>9</sup> (1869-1957) a president deposed in 1930 and who ended the so-called "Old Republic". In another passage, Azevedo, when expressing his conception of Physical Education, associates it with the defense and democratization of access to education for all, defending that "Physical Education is not intended only for the rich class, which degenerates through inaction, sedentary and due to its extravagant and disaggregated life, it is also intended for the poor class, which is depressed and enervated by excessive work, lack of a healthy environment and adequate food" (AZEVEDO, 1960, p. 207).

Gualtieri (2018, p.484) recalls that there was a speech that pointed out that "[the] problem of national education will only be on the way to being solved on the day when we have an enlightened and conscious 'elite', capable of understanding its importance and to undertake its solution. Preparing an 'elite' is, therefore, the first step to take" (Boletim da Associação Brasileira de Educação - ABE, July 1927, apud BRASILIANA 4)" (GUALTIERE, 2018, p. 485). These concerns are reflected in the notes made in the documents written by the then members of the eugenics society, as Gualtiere (2018) points out, which also reinforces that the eugenics project extended to broad sectors and areas of society.

Azevedo, besides being a writer, was a researcher concerned with national issues above all. In addition to dozens of articles and books, he did not refrain from writing documents related to studies on Brazil, as was the case of *A cultura brasileira*, commissioned by the government of Getúlio Vargas (1882-1954) as an introductory text to the demographic census in 1940, organized by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). Added to the list of his writings was the writing of minutes and manifests, as was the case of *Manifesto dos Pioneiros da Educação Nova* (1932), signed by 26 other educators and intellectuals, with the title *Educational reconstruction in Brazil: to the people and government*. The manifesto was circulated nationwide to offer guidelines for an education policy that should be reformulated. He also wrote a column on literary criticism for the newspaper O Estado de São Paulo.

Contrary to the negative view of miscegenation, Azevedo believed that in human history it was miscegenation that led to the emergence of great *civilizations* and that contributed to the progress and prosperity of their "races". Therefore, if Brazilian civilization emerged

[i]t was thanks to this breeding, a biological process of natural selection, facilitated in part by the displacement of populations and the absence of racial prejudice, that in Brazil the races, White, African and Amerindian, were merged, and the Brazilian people were formed, resulting from various ethnic, Indigenous and foreign elements, assimilated by the White (AZEVEDO, 1964, p. 33).

The author follows with a vision that transits between optimistic positivism and a certain naive idealism when citing a supposed "absence of prejudices" when he seeks to value the miscegenation characteristic of the formation of Brazil and cites authors who extol miscegenation as responsible for the success of some civilizations: "[b]ut, on the one hand, it is no less certain that "all the peoples who march ahead of civilization, as Jean Finot reminds us, have the richest blood in heterogeneous elements" (AZEVEDO, 1964, p.33). By the way, citing the French sociologist Jean Finot (1856-1922), author of the book *Le Préjugé des*

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<sup>9</sup> President deposed on October 24, 1930, twenty-one days before the end of his term as president of the republic, by a military coup led by General Tasso Fragoso, who transferred power, on November 3, to the political-military forces commanded by Getúlio Vargas, in the so-called Revolution of 1930. He was the creator of the first intelligence service in Brazil in 1928.

*raças*<sup>10</sup> (1906), one of the few French theorists who was against race theory in the period, Azevedo demonstrates an increasingly clear theoretical distance from racist theorists.

In *A Cultura Brasileira*, he demonstrates very firm positions around a vision of race that seeks to put aside the negative racist view of miscegenation, a movement present in the works of other intellectuals who adhered to the ideas of eugenics. Góis Junior (2009, p. 09) sees Azevedo moving away from negative theses about race, remembering that “[t]here, racial determinists become the target of a well-crafted critique by Brazilian intellectuals such as Gilberto Freyre and Fernando de Azevedo, modernist intellectuals who became followers of an anti-racist tradition, inaugurated by Alberto Torres”. The author, when making a more attentive reading of the approach to the race theme in Azevedo's work, realizes that he is tracing a path opposite to racism and that, in the search to deviate from the analyzes proposed by the most fervent racists, he points out another perspective in the theses on "improvement of the race”, which sees in economic and social factors the causes of the moral weakening of the Brazilian people. Góis Junior (2009, p.10) highlights Azevedo's role as an intellectual concerned with national issues. A modernist writer, he published a vast work in which he analyzed Brazilian society as a whole, for example, in *A cultura Brasileira*. Azevedo was also a militant, who even actively participated in the discussions and Congresses of Eugenics and Hygiene (PAGNI, 1994), was one of the responsible and most engaged educators in the New School movement. Azevedo also had outstanding performances as a public manager at the head of education secretariats in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, always seeking to overcome social inequalities in education and never in affirming the superiority of races or denying the miscegenation that took place in Brazil.

### Final considerations

By using the eugenics term in the form of an accusation against Fernando de Azevedo and, at the same time, not analyzing his work inserted in the historical context in which eugenics was considered a “science”, many authors have reduced the analysis of eugenics exclusively as a political movement and not as a movement that, in the 19th and 20th centuries, had the *status* of science and that had the support of many thinkers. From the work *Da Educação Física* and the proceedings of the I Congress of Eugenics, many authors have extracted from Azevedo's thought something anachronistic and stagnant, from the 1920s. It is crucial to note that Azevedo's works, in their temporal evolution, opt for a theoretical path that re-establishes a positive understanding of race, miscegenation, and education.

There is an inflection in Azevedo's work that sees eugenics racism as a contradictory form to the characteristics that Brazilian civilization acquired from the meeting of the three basic ethnicities - Indians, Portuguese, and Blacks -, which is revealed by its approach to the theses defended by Gilberto Freyre. This becomes even more evident when Azevedo criticizes the thinking of Oliveira Viana, an author deeply identified with theories about race. As highlighted by Gualtiere (2018, p. 482), “[the] eugenics movement gained strength in the first decades of the 20th century and [...] it was not something unitary, but a complex population of ideas, professionals, and institutions that changed in the contexts in which it developed. Therefore, it is necessary to bring a new perspective for studies on the relationship between Physical Education and theses related to eugenics. Superficial studies need to give way to deeper and more attentive approaches to its future in Brazil. The term eugenics has been adopted much more as a form of accusation, to the detriment of an analysis of the paths taken by the

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<sup>10</sup> In free translation Race Prejudice

social and health sciences, in the configuration of the theoretical statute that also allowed and influenced the institutionalization of Physical Education in Brazil.

The works of Fernando de Azevedo are, in this line, full of data and references to the formation of the Brazilian people, including the theme of race, showing that the author disagrees with racialist theories, while there are more prominent references to the studies of Gilberto Freyre, to whom Azevedo devotes extreme deference, evident especially in the book *A Cultura Brasileira: A Transmissão da Cultura*.

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