Riley Russell and Sutton Bailey

Host Intro
For many young adults, the long process of applying to universities is all too familiar. While students in the US stress about SAT scores and writing stellar essays, college hopefuls in Brazil focus on just one exam, the vestibular. Though upper-class private schools provide tutoring and special classes early on, low-income students lack resources to properly prepare for this exam. And, complicating the matter further, there is a strong link between darker skin and lower class. While public universities have implemented quotas in an attempt to overcome these disadvantages, roots of racism in Brazilian education run deep. Sutton Bailey and Riley Russell tell the stories of two very different college experiences.

AMBI

ACT/LEO: Meu nome é Leandro Oliveira.
TRACK1/SUTTON: Leo is a Brazilian native studying international relations at the University of New Orleans. He was raised in a working class family in São Paulo, Brazil, and attended a small technical college after a lifetime of public education.

ACT/RILEY: Você pode descrever a sua pele?
Leo, could you describe your skin?


(VOICE OVER) Sure. It’s a color between black and white and Indian. I’m not very dark, but I’m also not very light. But I consider myself black.

TRACK2/SUTTON: Now meet Tiago.

ACT/TIAGO: Meu nome é Tiago Terrazas Taparelle.
TRACK3/SUTTON: Tiago is a Brazilian college student doing a semester abroad here at Tulane. He grew up in a wealthy suburb outside São Paulo, has always attended private schools, and is currently studying at one of Brazil’s top private universities.

ACT/RILEY: Você pode descrever a pele um pouco?
Could you describe your skin, Tiago?

ACT/TIAGO: Minha pele? Eu não sei como descrever minha pele. Eu sou branco. Sou bem... no Brasil estou considerado bem branquinho. As pessoas até me chamam as vezes de “fantasma” lá, que sou bem branquinho. Não estou moreno.

(VOICE OVER) My skin? I don’t know how to describe my skin. I’m white. I’m very... in Brazil I’m considered very, very white. People there even sometimes call me “ghost” because I’m so white. I’m not dark.

TRACK4/SUTTON: Tiago and Leo couldn’t have grown up more differently. Leo came from a working class family, but Tiago explains that he grew up in A class, the highest socioeconomic class in Brazil. His life was filled with privilege, top-notch education and predominantly white peer groups.
ACT/RILEY: Então ser branco é conectado com ser da classe A?
So being white is connected with being from A class?

ACT/TIAGO: Infelizmente, no Brazil sim. Você não é - claro não é uma regra - mas você
vê muitas poucas pessoas negras ou descendentes de indígenas que estão na classe A, A
mais.

(VOICE OVER) Unfortunately, in Brazil, yes. You’re not – of course it’s not a
rule – but you see very few black people or descendants of indigenous people that are A
class or A plus.

AMBI

TRACK5/SUTTON: Over the last two decades, the federal government has actively tried
to reduce racism. Federal quotas have provided a chance for lower-income students to
attend Brazil’s prestigious public universities. The government implemented laws that
saved 20% of public university admission spots for black and indigenous applicants.
However, because acceptance into public universities is based solely on one test, the
vestibular, even these quotas don’t guarantee an advantage. Professor Gwendolyn Murray
has studied the Brazilian application process and explains how crucial it is to get a good
grade on the exam.

ACT/GWEN/10:20: “It is your application to the University. There aren’t transcripts,
letters of recommendation, personal statements... you are your test.”

TRACK6/SUTTON: She says that upper-class students, who hire private tutors and take
expensive preparatory classes, have a clear advantage.

ACT/GWEN: It’s common and standard for people, high school students, to take
extracurricular test-prep courses. Well, they’re expensive. If you are an impoverished
family, your family’s barely making salario minimo, minimum wage, you’re
automatically at a disadvantage because you can’t afford to get the extra support that you
need to be college ready, to take this test.

TRACK7/SUTTON: Leo’s story is a perfect example of what Professor Murray
describes.

ACT/LEO: Eu acredito que a Universidade de São Paulo, na cidade de onde sou, é a
maior universidade de America Latina, e a mais... que tem mais prestigio. Imagino que é
a mais concorrida hoje na America Latina. Eu senti bastante chateado porque eu
realmente gostaria muito de ter estudado no USP mas eu nem cheguei para tomar este
vestibular porque eu sabia de que o conteúdo era realmente muito forte e eu teria que ter
estudado e preparado pelo menos uns dois anos para poder entrar e sim, não me senti
parte do sistema.

(VOICE OVER) I think the University of São Paulo, in the city where I’m
from, is the best university in Latin America, it’s the most... it has the most prestige. I
imagine is the most competitive today in Latin America. I felt pretty bothered because I
really would have liked a lot to have studied in USP, but I didn’t take the vestibular
because I knew the content was really very difficult, and I would have had to have studied and prepared at least two years to be able to enter, so I didn’t feel like I was part of the system.

TRACK8/SUTTON: On the other hand, Tiago’s private education more than prepared him for the vestibular.

ACT/TIAGO: Na minha escola desde o segundo ano do “high school” a gente já tinha testes preparatórias para fazer as provas específicas dos vestibulares.

(VOICE OVER) In my school from the second year of high school we already had preparatory tests to do the specific tests of the vestibulares.

TRACK9/SUTTON: Success on this exam depends mostly on good primary and secondary education. Tiago says his university is 99% white, since they are the ones who can afford private education.

ACT/TIAGO: Primeiro porque ela é uma das mais, assim... é São Paulo. Tem uma classe rica, branca, muito forte assim. Acho que é a mais forte do Brasil. E como ela é uma das universidades mais caras do Brasil só é a gente com bastante dinheiro da classe A, A mais, que consegue estudar lá. Então acho que este é um dos motivos de ter muitos brancos lá.

(VOICE OVER) It’s Sao Paulo. It has a very strong rich, white class. I think it’s the strongest in Brazil. And because it’s one of the most expensive universities in Brazil it’s only the people with enough money from the classes A, A plus, that get to study there. So I think this is one of the reasons why they have a lot of whites there.”

TRACK10/SUTTON: Tiago believes/*says* (make it stronger) his university reflects society as a whole. He says you see very few blacks or descendants of indigenous people in higher social classes. Robyn Smith, a Tulane student who studied abroad at a private university in São Paulo, called PUC, also recognized this divide.

ACT/ROBYN: I didn’t remember recognizing any black students at PUC. I’m sure they had some, but they were just really few and far between.

TRACK11/SUTTON: The connection between race and social class is troublesome for quota policy makers. In a country where the two are so closely linked, which issue should quotas address? And in a country where skin tones are so diverse, who has the right to decide which students qualify as black? Professor Gwen Murray told us that, in some schools, students applying through quotas have to submit a photo so that a committee can determine their race. This has been one of the most controversial aspects of the quota system.

ACT/GWEN: Your race, is a product of how you perceive yourself and how you are perceived by others, and affirmative action through the system of qualification based on photo, it becomes something very subjective and not personal. It’s basically someone assigning you to a category, that, well essentially you agree with it if you’re submitting
yourself to the affirmative action, but it’s putting the power in someone else’s hands to determine what you are or what you are not, which is incredibly problematic.

TRACK12/SUTTON: Despite the differences in their experiences, both Leo and Tiago agree that the quotas provide only a temporary fix for racial divides in education, and the true solution will come when the federal government improves public primary and secondary education.

ACT/TIAGO: Eu acho que as cotas é tipo... é uma solução para curto prazo, mas eu acho que, para resolver isso duma maneira certa, tem que investir na educação desde criança, desde o primário, para a população mais pobre, mais carente, porque eles não tem oportunidade de mais se educarem melhor e tudo. E vai quedar essa barreira, esse pré-conceito de que branco é o mais rico, coisa assim, é negro, pobre, violência, qualquer coisa assim.. Então acho que educação precisamente para as crianças pequenas, é o que vai fazê-lo diferente.

(VOICE OVER) I think the quotas are like... it’s a short-term solution, but I think that in order to resolve it to a certain extent you have to invest in the education starting in childhood, from primary school, for the poorest and most needy population, because they don’t have another opportunity to better educate themselves.

TRACK13/SUTTON: The preconception that white means rich and black means poor will continue to separate people like Leo and Tiago until public education improves. For WTUL, this is Riley Russell and Sutton Bailey.