

# Brazilian Activist Addresses Educational Inequality Through ‘Tinder Of Books’ Campaign

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*Winnie Bueno (courtesy of the author).*

Brazil is one of the **most unequal** countries in the world, and this inequality manifests not only in the purchasing power of the population, but also in the ethnic composition among its different classes. Data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) for 2016 **shows** that more than half of the Brazilian population, 54 percent, is Black or mixed race. **However**, among the poorest 10 percent of the Brazilian population, 78.5 percent are Black (a classification that includes Black and mixed race people), against 20.8% white. Among the 10 percent richest Brazilians, 72.9 percent are white and 24.8 percent are Black.

The situation of Brazil’s nonwhite population has improved over the years, with the increase of Blacks among the upper classes and thanks to the quota policy in universities, the number of Black students **enrolled** in undergrad courses went from 2.2 percent in 2000 to 9.3 percent in 2017. However, exclusion is still a sad and persistent reality in Brazil. Even for those who manage to enroll in a university, accessing books is difficult — as is paying for transportation and balancing studies with a job.

Blacks continue to have the **lowest wages** as shown by a **study** from the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA). Data on white incomes revealed they were, on

average, R\$ 767.84 (roughly \$185 dollars) higher than the Black population in 2017 — and faced more obstacles to accessing the best schools and receiving an overall quality education.

These inequalities produce greater difficulty for the Black population to access culture and consume cultural goods, which led activist Winnie Bueno to try to make a difference.

In November of last year, Bueno, a PhD student in Sociology at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), came up with the **#TinderdosLivros** campaign ('Tinder of Books'). According to Bueno, it began after “a **provocation** from me on Twitter challenging white people who claim to be antiracist to buy books that a Black person needed.” “Racism prevents Black people from having access to books,” she explains to *The North Star*, “sometimes it’s hard to get R\$50 (\$12) out of the budget to buy a book, because Black people have bigger emergencies.”

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Books in Brazil are expensive and few public libraries are available outside big cities or in remote neighborhoods. Books by Black national and international theorists such as Angela Davis, Muniz Sodré, bell hooks and Abdias do Nascimento, are difficult to find even in schools and public libraries.

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These factors force the interested party to have to buy them — or to ask for help. Facing such reality, Bueno “started to connect Black people who need a book with other people who are willing to donate.” With her campaign she realized that a lot of white people were willing to buy books for a stranger.

She said on the first tweet of the campaign that “do you know what would be cool on Black conscience day? You, the privileged white man who calls yourself anti-racist, buy a book that a Black activist needs and send it to him.”

Bueno’s challenge started a wave of requests for books and donations. She says she doesn’t know how many people have benefited, but she imagines she has already helped deliver “more than 600 books.”

The process is simple. According to Bueno, “the person who needs a book sends in my Twitter or Instagram mailbox the name of the book he wants, the full address of the place where the book has to be delivered, and the full name of who will receive it. The person who wants to donate sends me a message saying that he wants to be a donor, I

print the order data, send it to the person who wants to donate, the person buys the book requested and sends it to the house of the person who requested it.”

And there’s only rule is the ‘Tinder of Books’ campaign: “*recipients are Black people.*”

On Twitter, **many** of those who **received** books have posted pictures of the books **with thanks** and personal **messages**, sometimes about the **difficulties** the recipients had to overcome to study. In 2018, only 40.3 percent of Blacks and mixed-race people in Brazil had completed high school, therefore such a project can help those with limited educational opportunities.

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In the absence of public policies, it is up to activists such as Bueno and those who have donated books to promote—even if only to a limited extent—the democratization of knowledge.

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But why the ‘Tinder of Books’? Bueno explains that it’s “a nickname that I invented just for the sake of connecting people through one thing in common, which in this case is a book — difficult times demand more than activism, they demand activist creativity.” On Twitter, she **wrote** that the project exists “because I believe that education is a powerful weapon against oppression, and books should be shared with as many people as possible.”

“This project means many things, it means sharing affection, it means empathy, it means the possibility to access knowledge autonomously, it means things that words can’t handle,” she adds.

‘Tinder of Books’ (#TinderdosLivros) may seem like a small campaign with a limited reach, but in a country as unequal as Brazil, the campaign proved to be a great success and capable of changing people’s lives one tweet at a time.

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### **About the Author**

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