

Citizenship, Wealth, and Whiteness in a Costa Rican High School

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Abstract: This article addresses the democratic rhetoric taught in a Costa Rican High School and the ways in which that rhetoric clashed with school practices that revealed hierarchies based on race, ethnicity, class, and religion. This contradiction was rendered visible through student elections, the Independence Day celebration, and civic acts. Through these acts, it became apparent that white, wealthy, Catholic students were upheld as most closely matching the image of ideal citizenship projected by the nation though participants in these events pontificated about the ideals of democracy and equality. A strict enforcement of uniform use seemingly intended to homogenize the student body, but was taken to extremes and, instead, served to exacerbate class differences. Throughout the article, I rely on racial formation theory and those theories proposed by specialists in anthropology and education to note how the school taught the value placed on whiteness implicit in the school's practices.

In Costa Rica, a prevailing "foundational fiction" (Sommer, 1990)

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International Journal of Educational Policy, Research, & Practice, Volume 5, Number 4, Winter 2004-2005. ISSN 1528-3534; Copyright 2005 by Caddo Gap Press; All rights of reproduction reserved.

holds that due to small numbers of indigenous inhabitants at the time of contact, the social hierarchy that developed in other areas of Latin America failed to develop in that country. Such hierarchies, elsewhere, that pitted native peoples against conquistadors initially, and, which resulted in deeply entrenched class differences in the modern era, are widely considered absent from Costa Rican history (Monge Alfaro, 1989, p. 12; Monge Alfaro, 1960, p. 130; Abdulío Cordero in Aguilar Bulgarelli, 1977, p. 5; Rodríguez Vega, 1953, pp. 16-19, 21). Consequently, nationalist rhetoric alludes to a relatively classless, harmonious society in the colonial era. While this national myth is erroneous for many reasons, it is still widely promoted through schools. In a secondary school located in Santa Rita,¹ attended by a minority of students from Nambué, the Chorotega reservation, and a majority of students from other towns not labeled as indigenous, the national myth taught was linked to Costa Rican pride in democracy, the goal (and assertion) of equality, and to the overall assumption that Costa Rica's citizens are predominantly white and European in ancestry. In school, in a variety of contradictory ways, whiteness was tied to nationalist identity and, thus, was valued both in the classroom and outside of it. This article aims to demonstrate the homogenizing agenda of a high school that taught students nationalism, citizenship, and discipline in ways that upheld the white, wealthy, and those who practiced a dominant religion as ideal citizens, all the while espousing a rhetoric of democracy.

While lessons and civic acts upheld democracy and equality as realities of Costa Rican life, in practice, "democracy" as it was enacted in the high school was for those who could afford it, those whose religion permitted dominant national forms of observing it, and for those who matched the myth of white citizenry. In short, elections were for the white and wealthy, independence in this pacifist country was celebrated, obligatorily, through military-style marching and civic acts were geared toward those students who most closely mirrored the national rhetoric about the European, classless population. An excessive emphasis on uniform regulations seemed to mirror a focus on homogeneity. These events, often wrought with irony, were indicative of the ways in which Santa Rita High School taught students the value placed on whiteness under the guise of teaching democracy, and in which racial formation was actively taught and performed in the school setting.² Just as the projected image of sameness fails to describe the nation adequately, though, so, too, did the use of uniforms fail to erase differences with regard to race, class, and ethnicity. Through ethnographic illustrations, I intend to demonstrate the contradictions between rhetoric and practice with regard to equality and democracy in a high school context that seemingly aimed to mold all of its students in the image of the ideal Costa Rican citizen.

A few weeks prior to the end of the school year, I rode the Nambueseño students' school bus to school, as usual. As the bus approached the school, a girl seated near me read aloud the words that had been spray-painted in green capital letters on the cement wall surrounding the school: "ALCATRAS 20 MTS" [sic] approximately twenty meters from the guarded metal gates, which locked students into school. To clear up any doubt that the artist indeed was making a carceral comparison, the following segment of wall was labeled "The Rock," in English, likely inspired by the Hollywood film by this name. The girl on the bus commented, "It's true. It *is* like jail," thus demonstrating that students of this high school came to the same conclusions as Foucault regarding the similarities of prisons and schools. Other indicators also spelled out this comparison in the high school.

The doors to a select few classrooms were labeled, in white correction fluid, "Cell # 13." The metal gates to school, guarded by an individual, both kept people inside school (at times, locked in), and others outside. A few months into the school year, metal bars were placed across the serving window in the cafeteria, with a narrow opening below, with space enough to slide a plate through. Unlike the terms used in my own high school experience, what my own high school peers knew as "cutting" or "skipping" class was known as "escaping" in Santa Rita. What my classmates termed "prep periods"—school hours in which older students need not be enrolled in class but were expected to be on campus—were called "free" lessons. "Dropping out" was known as "desertion"—always in a terminology connoting a spectrum from liberty to militaristic control. Finally, select teachers at Santa Rita High School talked with fervor about their roles as disciplinarians and makers of citizens, thus displaying that uniformity, discipline, and the performance of a specific, "proper" citizenship were overt elements of the curriculum.

Michel Foucault recognizes the school (like military training camps) as "a mechanism for training," a site in which to mold docile bodies, and a homogenizing agent (Foucault, 1979, p. 172). Other anthropologists have also acknowledged the role of the school in the formation of national subjects and in the inculcation of hegemonic beliefs. Cohen, according to Banks (1996), recognizes that schools (as well as other "national channels such as the media") serve to promote nationalism (p. 154). García Canclini (1990) views the school as a "key backdrop for the staging of patrimony" (p. 154; translation mine). Rivas (1993) asserts that schools reinforce notions of the superiority of dominant culture (p. 466). Anderson (1983) acknowledges the school's integral role in the creation of imagined communities through the dissemination of dominant history.

Specialists in the study of anthropology and education have arrived

at the same conclusions. Foley (1990) notes that through schooling, students are molded “into hard-working, family-oriented, patriotic, mainstream citizens” (p. 110). Ogbu (1995), a leader in the study of anthropology and education, similarly found that schools are complicit in hegemonic projects (p. 279). In particular, national majorities “have used the public schools to define social reality” for national minorities (Ogbu, p. 279). In short, “classroom interactions are never innocent in relation to ... broader power relations” (Cummins, 1997, p. 425). Several scholars recognize the role of schooling in promoting dominant images of the nation state and in inculcating students as proper citizens (Levinson, 2001; Levinson, Foley, & Holland, 1996; Luykx, 1999; Skinner, 1996). Some sources in anthropology and education assert that a primary role of Latin American schools is citizen formation (Arnove, 1986; Levinson, 2001; López, Assáel & Neumann, 1984; Luykx, 1999). Schools are as infused with power as any other sector of society, though perhaps they have a more subtle, widespread influence.

Such imposition of “reality,” as Ogbu (1995) puts it, or indoctrination into dominant attitudes, beliefs, and identity occurs through two factors that roughly parallel Bhabha’s (1990) categories of the pedagogical and the performative (p. 297). One way in which the dominant view of reality is reproduced is as a result of the way in which schools constitute social microcosms, perpetuating the views of dominant society. This is not unlike Bhabha’s view of the performative character of the nation. The other is through direct teaching via curricula and textbooks—the pedagogical writing of the nation. Humberto Pérez, leading scholar on Costa Rican education, considers that the education system there “tries to form citizens who love their country, are conscientious about their duties and rights, with a profound sense of responsibility” (Pérez in Biesanz, Biesanz & Biesanz, 1999, p. 215). All of these opinions reflect the general understanding that the educational system is, in many ways, responsible for the “instilling of nationalist ideology” (Anderson, 1983, p. 114).

Foucault’s work is useful in demonstrating certain ways in which this inculcation is enacted. He asserts that similar processes can be observed in military training centers, schools, and prisons, alike, by which the subjects of these institutions “become something which can be made; out of a formless clay, and inapt body, the machine required can be constructed” (Foucault, 1979, p. 135). The means through which “docile bodies” are trained is discipline. Foucault explains, “at the heart of all disciplinary systems functions a small penal mechanism. It enjoys a kind of judicial privilege with its own laws, its specific offenses, its particular forms of judgment” (pp. 177-178). Likewise, Ferguson (2000), details the ways in which an elementary school in the U. S. is reflective of (and, in

the view of several teachers in that institution, preparatory of) the penal system. This article will use ethnographic evidence to argue that the school attempted to create obedient subjects that embodied Costa Rica's projected image of white citizenry.

The research presented here is based on over one thousand hours of participant observation in Santa Rita High School in 1999, as well as innumerable hours of participant observation in Nambu , the Chorotega Reservation, where I resided during this time and in my prior fieldwork. Before 1999, I conducted ethnographic research in various portions ranging from ten days to two years between 1993 and 1999. In 1999, I went back to Nambu  and conducted research in Santa Rita High School to address the mutual influences between schooling and ethnic identification (see Stocker, 2005). During that school year, I interviewed 100 percent of students from the reservation attending Santa Rita High School (who constituted 5.9 percent of the student body), and 100 percent of the administration and teaching staff of the high school. I followed 14 home room classes (composed of students from Nambu  and elsewhere, and a total of 346 students in all) for one week each, to all of their classes to observe student-to-student and student-teacher interactions in a variety of settings. I conducted interviews with representatives of each home room section for further information. I also interviewed former students from Nambu  (both those that had dropped out and those who had graduated), several Nambuese o youth that never attended high school, and prominent community members from both towns. Through these interviews and my observations, the school's creation of a particular type of citizen was most apparent. The school's attempt to create obedient subjects that embodied Costa Rica's projected image of white citizenry is perhaps best illustrated in assorted teachers' descriptions of their perceived role in the school and of students.

The Role of Teachers in Citizen Formation

In my interviews with teachers, several of them spoke of students as "docile" beings, awaiting formation. One, in overseeing students' marching practice in preparation for the Independence Day parade, noted that traveler students (as those who did not reside in Santa Rita but traveled to school each day from other towns were called) were "more docile"—more easily trained—than those from Santa Rita. Still, another noted that students in Santa Rita, less influenced by "drugs, fashions" and other "threats" than in other areas of the country, were still more easily molded than their urban counterparts who were more difficult "to dominate." Even so, though students at the high school were seen as less influenced

by foreign (especially U.S.) fashions and music—associated with precociousness and perhaps snobbery—than those in the large cities, some students proved more worrisome for particular teachers than others. In the case of students from the reservation, one teacher, perhaps in an indirect criticism of me and the English classes I provided in Nambué, noted that the presence of North Americans (anthropologists, Peace Corps workers, and a scout troop) over time had had a negative influence on students from there. She noted that students from Nambué preferred North American music and clothing to those from Costa Rica. She concluded that in having such preferences, “They want to appear that they are not what they are. In other words, they don’t accept, on many occasions, that they are an indigenous reservation.” Students from a beach town popular among North American tourists were also judged for foreign influence. Access to dollars and exposure to men with earrings and dyed hair were among the negative influences listed by select teachers. Certain teachers summed up the prevailing stereotype-ridden attitude about students from the beach town by characterizing it as exposed to surfing, prostitution, different fashions, birth control, and *gringos*—all seemingly dangerous influences. These constituted obstacles to teachers who viewed their job as encompassing not only the teaching of a given subject matter, but also the promotion of a particular national identity and image.

A self-described “pillar” of the high school informed me that the teacher’s primary role was as “formers, above all. We are molding a dough that is called ‘student.’” Indeed, various teachers listed this as a principal part of their job. When I asked teachers what their role entailed, a young Riteño teacher (as those from Santa Rita are known) noted that the teacher’s role has two branches: “the academic part and the formative part.” The latter, for this individual, involved the teaching of values, respect, and discipline. An experienced Riteño teacher explained that he liked to “always transmit to them that all human beings are ruled by norms of discipline, perseverance, and humility.” A veteran Riteña teacher declared, “outside of teaching, what I have always tried to do is to inculcate the students with manners, discipline, respect, and also responsibility, which is important.” An older Riteña teacher expressed the teachers’ job as including, “apart from the specialty one teaches, one is educating, forming the student. One cannot leave this aside. One helps in their formation, not just the academic part, let’s say, or the vocational part, but the formative part is very important. It cannot be left to one side. One must always take it into account.” She tapped the end of her pencil on the desk, for emphasis, as she added, “Yes, there is the formative, moral part, which cannot be left out.” A respected Riteña teacher told me,

“Not only the subject matter concerns me, but also personal formation interests me. [...] I am interested in the development of good professionals, good citizens.”

It was not only Riteño teachers who were concerned with this, though they were certainly in the majority of those teachers who expressly focused on citizen formation. A young traveler teacher noted that he taught discipline through sports in his class. Another young traveler teacher assured me that her role, “in addition to giving them academic formation, also [included] helping the student to learn to socialize, to share—not just to be polished in a certain subject matter, which maybe, in the future, won’t be useful.” The preceding quote is useful in demonstrating the way in which certain teachers considered it their obligation to help students negotiate the social realm. The school’s role in citizen formation was not only explained explicitly to me, but to students as well.

In an assembly celebrating the thirty-fifth anniversary of the office of the guidance counselor in Costa Rican public schools, a guidance counselor lauded her own role in “helping students to turn into productive people for themselves and for society.” Her opening comments were followed by a short speech by the Principal who announced to the assembled student body that “tomorrow, you will be faithful representatives of your county, [and] faithful representatives of Costa Rica.” These were followed by a presentation put on by select students who demonstrated, in Bakhtinian, carnivalesque fashion, what would become of students without guidance counselors (Bakhtin, 1984; see also Scott, 1990, and Luykx, 1999).

In the student presentations, students imitated strict teachers meticulously inspecting uniforms. The dramatization depicted students committing various uniform violations (shirts untucked, wearing baseball caps) and other violations (drunkenness and smoking cigarettes). Students’ and teachers’ names, in the play, were wrought with dual entendres and sexual innuendo that would have been punished had they been spoken out of this context. Jaime, a student playing the part of the Principal, and enacting one of the Principal’s favorite tropes, told students that they ought to be appreciative, given that in other countries, students have to pay to go to school. Adrián, another student actor then added, “We need the guidance counselors to make us into good citizens for the benefit of the country.”

This ritual of reversal accurately mimicked numerous official assemblies. In an assembly held for graduating elementary school students with the purpose of enticing them to attend high school, a member of the school board encouraged them to continue their studies, and, thereby, “become good Costa Ricans and good Riteños.” The language of citizenship and representation of the nation were frequently included in

assemblies, as was the idea that students ought to be more appreciative of Costa Rica's democracy, school system, pacifism, and freedom. In this regard, Santa Rita High School assemblies were true to the description offered by Biesanz et al., who observed,

Students hear that other peoples, burdened with armies, admire and envy Costa Rica. They spend many hours preparing for and celebrating historical events, and, even in primary school, for student government elections which they are told, train them for adult participation in Costa Rican democracy. (Biesanz et al., 1999, p. 215)

However, it is not only in such formal settings that nationalism and the value of citizenship and discipline were instilled in students. Students also received lessons on these topics in the classroom, outside of class, in casual conversation with their teachers, through messages posted around school, and through the civics curriculum. Through the following examples, I aim to make clear the school's goal of creating orderly, disciplined citizens.

Discipline, Order, and Civics

Early in the year, a sewing teacher explained that her class of seventh graders new to the high school were just learning to use the sewing machines and to be disciplined. An academic teacher explained to a male student, reluctant to clean the room—something he considered unfit for a boy—that “you don't just come to high school to learn math and English, but also to learn to clean and to learn discipline.” A math teacher taught her seventh grade students discipline through classroom tidiness. She asked her students to move their desks into six neat rows, explaining, “You have to learn to be orderly. You need discipline, and discipline means leaving the desks in their place.”

Part of the curriculum in religion class included teaching seventh graders that the Creator ordered humankind to work, and that in addition to that reasoning, being a hard worker was also being part of the society to which one belongs. Civic community spirit (*civismo*) was also taught as a value in this class, thus demonstrating that not only was it part of academic life, it was part of religion. An eleventh grade social studies class spent a particular class period discussing democracy. Students expressed the opinion that democracy used to be more pure, but that outside influences have altered it (thus showing how xenophobia underlay the high school context) (see Stocker, 2005). Students explained democracy by noting that democratic countries stand for peace, sovereignty, freedom of expression, and equal rights for all. On these bases, they concluded that Costa Rica was, indeed, a democratic country. As further proof,

students cited the nation's lack of a military and its history's lack of anti-democratic revolutionary movements.

The civics curriculum, of course, had much to say about citizenship. The seventh grade civics textbook listed as the goal of civic education "to know the rights and duties, which we Costa Ricans have as members of a Nation-State" (Mora Chinchilla & Trejos Trejos, 1996, p. 6; translation mine). It taught, "the concept of nationality encompasses various ideas. First, the belonging to a determined nation and later, a series of common features among the inhabitants of a country" (Mora Chinchilla & Trejos Trejos, 1996, p. 9; translation mine). The text went on to note certain "features" of Costa Rican nationality (such as pacifism, community spirit, humility and respect for foreign ideas), which define it (Mora Chinchilla & Trejos Trejos, 1996, p. 9; translation mine).

This text makes evident the link between school and citizen formation: "In our country, education is directed toward the formation of male citizens and female citizens committed to a democratic way of life. For this reason, student elections are carried out and the fundamentals of the political system that characterizes us are learned" (Mora Chinchilla & Trejos Trejos, 1996, p. 53; translation mine). The connection between national belonging and high school success was also drawn on the cover of a rulebook, which all students were required to purchase. The back cover of the book displayed numerous quotes from educators, philosophers, and the Bible, meant to inspire students. One slightly altered quote among these was written as follows:

Ask not what your country (High School) can do for you, ask what you can do for your country (High School). – J.F. Kennedy

Should the above teachings be insufficiently effective, there were signs posted throughout the campus reminding students of discipline and cleanliness. A wooden shingle hung near the administrative office declared, "CLEAN HIGH SCHOOL: GOOD DISCIPLINE," suggesting that this was a causal relationship. The blackboards in two classrooms were stenciled with the phrase, "CLEANLINESS—UNIFORM—ATTENDANCE." This shows that tied in with the general concept of discipline, and, perhaps, considered to be indicative of it, was the uniform.

Dress Code and a Uniform Citezenry

Though uniforms can be helpful in erasing markers of social class, in this particular school, they may have been taken too far. Going beyond an equalizing mechanism, they ultimately served to exacerbate financial strain for some. Above all, the uniform served as another way of

regulating the uniformity of citizens. Though uniform use does not necessarily restrict freedom, the excessive regulation of it, to the point of creating excess expense, may defeat its purpose. In this manner, once again, high school practices and policies further privileged the already privileged. As shall become apparent through the following examples, some teachers linked questions of uniform usage directly to those of citizenship and general moral fiber. When graduating sixth graders visited the high school to aid them in their decision of whether or not to attend secondary school the following academic year, they received a pamphlet, which described (optimistically) all that the school had to offer as well as uniform guidelines. These concise guidelines were as follows:

Young ladies:

- Blue knee-length skirt
- Blue pants with belt loops
- Light blue shirt with school crest appliqué
- Black shoes with shoelaces

Gentlemen:

- Blue pants
- Light blue shirt with school crest appliqué
- Black shoes with shoelaces
- Black belt

This was supposed to be sufficient for them to arrive in proper uniform on the first day of high school. Select teachers who punished students for improper uniform use in the first month of school did so on the basis of the assertion that students had guidelines for proper uniform use. However, at the staff meeting held two weeks into the school year, there was a detailed discussion of what constituted proper uniform use. These details, upon which teachers evaluated student uniform use (a component of students' conduct grades), were far more detailed than those originally outlined. The changes addressed the specific placement of hemlines, measurements of seam allowances and waistbands to the centimeter, the number and placement of pockets, approved collar style, the number and placement of darts, the preferred shape of skirts, the appropriate texture of socks, the placement of zippers, and accepted shoe style.

Teachers at the meeting noted that this description contained some problems. Some pointed out that if a skirt had the required number of darts, it would not be straight, thus violating another stipulation. A guidance counselor protested that some parents had already bought uniforms that did not follow these exact specifications. A few teachers responded, "Too bad. Who told them to go get their pants made according to another style?" Others said that any student who could afford boots could afford to go get a pair of officially approved shoes.

Several teachers had questions about the uniform. One asked for more details, “If a girl’s pants don’t have a waistband, is she absent?” “Yes,” replied the Principal. Another teacher asked about the configuration of belt loops and whether or not it was true that if a girl’s pants had two strips of fabric crossed over one another to form an X at the back of her waistband (instead of a single, straight belt loop at the back like all the others around the waistband) the wearer should be marked absent. Indeed, it was true. Similarly detailed discussions of undershirts and of apparel appropriate to vocational workshops ensued. After a debate about the use of blue jeans in outdoor, vocational classes, a vocational teacher asked if it would be acceptable to bend the rules and allow students doing outdoor labor to wear caps for sun protection and cancer prevention. This became a topic of debate and, again, the consensus was that this would pave the way for numerous uniform abuses and should not be permitted. An hour and a half was spent on the uniform discussion—approximately four or five times the amount of time spent on any other topic at the staff meeting, such as grading, testing, or special education. By far, more teachers spoke on the topic of uniforms than any other. The decisions made at this meeting regarding the official uniform were eventually printed in a rulebook. This book was finally made available to students (for a price) three months into the school year—three months after they began to be graded for proper uniform use.

However, before the guidelines were revealed in their final form to students, a committee of four teachers (all of whom were part of the clique led by the self-proclaimed pillar) met with the Principal to discuss the specifics as they would be printed. I also attended this meeting. They discussed the uniform rules one by one, at length. Apparently, several issues merited greater discussion. On the topic of uniform shoes, the Principal asked if anyone had seen the stylish high-heeled, Spice Girls-influenced tennis shoes being worn by some girls in PE class. He wondered aloud how a girl could run in those. They were not, however, outlawed in the written rules. In the first few weeks of school, I talked to a student who had not purchased tennis shoes, but whose regular uniform shoes were sturdy and would allow her to run. She was marked absent for her uniform infraction. Her classmate, clad in footwear *à la* Spice Girls—whose shoes were, technically, being marketed as tennis shoes—was not considered in violation of the rules. The entire discussion lasted nearly an hour, and the results were finally printed in the rulebook. The final rules were strict in prohibiting jewelry or caps, specifying the proper colors of hair accessories, outlawing the use of makeup, defining which hairstyles were acceptable for boys, and other sundry details.

Just as several teachers viewed citizen formation as a crucial element

of their job, so, too, did they see uniform enforcement. These teachers expounded various philosophies regarding the uniform. According to a traveler pillar, "Coming to school in complete uniform is first and foremost for a student." For another, the role of the teacher included instilling values in students, and those values included not wearing shirttails untucked, having an appropriate hair cut, and following the uniform guidelines. She specified the importance of not having back pockets in the patch style and of having the proper socks. A third considered herself strict, so far as the uniform was concerned, because "this will be of use to them as future working citizens because they will have to follow certain rules." A Riteña pillar, when I asked if she conducted frequent uniform inspections, responded, "Constantly. It's part of my personality—as an educator and as a founder." She explained that in her classes, shirts must be tucked in. She also spoke of the importance of coifed hair. "Personal presentation is part of one's personality. We are judged for our appearance." There is a certain amount of validity to her claim about being judged by appearance, as students often laughed at this teacher for the lipstick that constantly adorned her teeth.

Another teacher that resided in Santa Rita said, "For me, [the uniform] is important, for the identity of the student—within and outside of the institution." A teacher that formed part of the pillar clique told students that those who failed to tuck in their shirts would "lose out on the conduct grade and also because you don't look good. It [reflects] filth in the person." For yet another teacher, uniform use also seemed to reveal disorderly or immoral conduct in a person. In one instance, she commented that a given student was walking strangely with her shirt untucked and implied that drug use might be the root cause of both offences.

Other members of this same clique of teachers were less strict about students' uniform use. One of these noted that she did want students to have shirts tucked in or wear expensive jewelry, but she did not mark students absent for uniform infractions. Another realized that there were economic considerations in requiring such strict uniform use. She talked about students who came to school smelling like smoke as a result of their mothers washing their only uniform daily and drying it over the wood-burning stove. She summed up her perspective on the uniform by noting, "there are values that are more important than this." Another from this group of teachers said, "For me, the uniform is not so important as behavior, their way of being, and the manners that a student has." In contrast to some of her peers, this teacher did not see the uniform as either reflecting or determining the qualities she listed.

Generally speaking, the rookie traveler teachers were more aware of the potential value of uniforms in masking economic differences among

students as well as the economic constraints placed on students through “proper” uniform use. One young, traveler teacher considered that the uniform was appropriate

not only in the high school, but in the public education system. The uniform is a requirement, in an underdeveloped nation such as ours, where there is no money for the purchase of not just uniforms, but clothing. The uniform permits a lesser social division among students. I believe firmly in the uniform.... But I disagree with being so formal and demanding in the use of the uniform.

This teacher distinguished between the need for a basic uniform and extreme attitude of some teachers, leading to the inspection of undershirts. Some of his peers held similar views. Another young, traveler teacher said that at first he was strict on the uniform issue, but he soon realized he could not be. “Many, due to their economic situations, could not get shoes or the official t-shirt.” A young Riteño teacher thought that the uniform was important, but there were some details of it, “which are only meant to complicate the situation.” Another young, Riteño teacher explained, “I don’t care how you come to class [with regard to dress], I’m concerned that you do come to class to study.” He did note, however, that he asked girls to remove earrings, telling them they did not need those to be pretty. A young traveler teacher stated, with regard to her philosophy on uniforms, “I couldn’t care less. I’m someone who doesn’t care about uniforms, as long as the student comes to class and learns, that is what is fundamental. But here [uniform infractions] are a sin!”

These philosophies on uniforms seemed to reveal two distinct underlying purposes of the uniform. For many of the veteran generation, the uniform was necessary to project order and good personal presentation. Some members of this generation agreed with this, and focused on shirts being tucked in (something students could do regardless of economic situation) but recognized that it was easier for wealthier students to comply with the exact specifications, and, thus, punished students less frequently or severely for uniform violations. The rookie generation of teachers, on the other hand, viewed the purpose of uniforms as a social equalizer. Some of these recognized that the actual uniform guidelines were, at times, ineffective, if not contradictory, to this purpose.

Some noted that in spite of uniform guidelines, the poorer students were identifiable as such *due to* their uniforms. The smell of smoke, the lingering presence of perforated, threadless seams fitted to previous owners, and the faded shade of older uniforms revealed this stigmatized status of the poor. In some cases, requiring students to purchase new uniforms or alter ones made prior to the publication of the official

guidelines only exacerbated the economic situation the uniform was meant to both ease and mask. On certain occasions, uniform inspections revealed hidden indicators of wealth, which the uniform was meant to suppress. Teachers who asked students to pull down a t-shirt collar to reveal a gold chain or open a shirt to display a more expensive undershirt drew attention to the markers of wealth, which the use of uniforms was supposed to render invisible.

Various students addressed these same concerns. In one interview, I asked four students from Nambué what they thought of the uniforms. They all made faces. Following this, one explained, "it doesn't seem right. Sometimes one has [economic] needs and has to confront those in high school. Teachers don't have compassion." This student specifically pointed to the rule about proper sock color as indicative of the extremity of the uniform rules. Other students from the reservation told me that in their vocational classes (such as cow milking or horticulture), they got their uniforms dirty. This meant that they had to wash them daily (since they did not have multiple sets of the uniform) and dry them by iron, causing them to smell in such a way that revealed their ownership of only one uniform.

It was not only students from the reservation who protested the excessive enforcement of uniform requirements, however. One seventh grade student spent a day in fear when she realized that in the dark, at 3:45 a.m. when she got dressed (in order to catch the bus at 4:30, in time for a two-hour ride to school), she had put on green socks instead of blue ones. Her trepidation was caused by the fact that she had class that day with the teacher for whom uniform inspections were "part of her personality." After a class in which the guidance counselor scolded two girls for their frequent absences, I talked to them about the causes of these. The girls responded that they did not skip class or get sick much. Their absences were due to the inappropriate color of their hair ties.

Another student, while waiting for the school bus with me, lifted up her pant leg to reveal that her blue socks had a small argyle pattern on the ankle. She explained, "I could be marked absent for this." She noted that the previous week she had been marked absent once for her lack of a school crest on her sleeve, and once for wearing make-up. Her teacher had spent approximately twenty minutes (of a forty minute class) inspecting uniforms that day. On a different occasion, after watching other students also reveal small patterns on their socks and perform their practiced technique of lifting the pant leg in a particular way during inspections so as to not get caught, I asked this student about sock-related resistance strategies. Trying to determine whether or not aberrant sock use constituted resistance, I asked why she wore different colored socks,

knowing that she could be marked absent for it. She replied, "In part, because it is really stupid that they go around checking our socks." Then she noted that if a student had little money, it was also stupid that they should have to spend the little money they had on blue socks. Finally, she added that by that point in the year (eight months into the school year), teachers were checking uniforms less frequently, so she was more likely to get away with it. This student added that most students wore socks with designs on them, but implied that not all got caught equally. She commented, "I don't know why they don't treat everyone the same."

As with other situations in school, who got caught violating uniform rules was a subjective matter. Certain students from elite, Riteño families wore make-up consistently, sometimes even applying it in class, and I never saw them get rebuked for this, while the Nambueseña student noted that she did get marked absent for it. A Nambueseña was told to buy a new pair of shoes after her parents already bought her a new pair, which turned out not to be in keeping with the uniform guidelines published after her purchase. A Riteña student, daughter of the shoe merchant in town, wore identical shoes to the Nambueseña's for the duration of the school year.

Uniform inspections such as that described above were most common toward the beginning of the year, but I continued to witness them throughout the year. In his discussion of discipline and the training of docile bodies, Foucault asserts that

The meticulousness of the regulations, the fussiness of the inspections, the supervision of the smallest fragment of life and of the body will soon provide, in the context of the school, the barracks, the hospital, or the workshop, a laicized content, an economic or technical rationality for this mystical calculus of the infinitesimal and the infinite. (Foucault, 1979, p. 140)

Inspections in school were at their fussiest when it came to the uniform. In fact, it was outlined to teachers as part of their job. Late in the year, the Principal scolded teachers at a staff meeting for inspecting uniforms less frequently than at the beginning of the school year. A teacher explained, understandably, that she and her colleagues had too many tasks to do, what with trying to find an open classroom everyday, having to locate the key to that room, not to mention giving tests and educating students, without having to inspect uniforms, as well. Other teachers, however, needed no scolding to get this job done, as they, too, saw it as one of their primary responsibilities. Uniform checks could take between five and twenty minutes of classtime, depending on the thoroughness of the inspector. Combined with the time taken in locating a

room and its keys, and cleaning the room at the end of class, uniform inspections left relatively little time for schoolwork.

One male traveler teacher from the pillar clique announced to his students that, "You need to be in uniform and you know that if you're not, you're absent." He proceeded to have students stand, one by one, to inspect their uniforms. He asked some to lift their pant legs to expose their socks. One girl was caught wearing beige socks. The teacher asked her, "And your socks?!" The girl explained that she couldn't find her blue ones. The teacher scolded her, "Are you disorganized? Because that comment suggests to me that you are disorganized. Are you disorganized?" For this teacher, apparently, an orderly uniform reflected an orderly person. The teacher explained to the class the negative effects of absences on their grade in his class as well as on their conduct grade. He asked students to consider a scenario: "Imagine if you failed because of your socks." It seems a ridiculous fate, but one that could certainly occur. A Nambueseña parent talked to me about how her son was refused entrance to the school by the guard one day on account of his beige socks and his lack of a school crest on his sleeve.

The results of these uniform checks and the conduct grade taking uniform use into account were varied. Some teachers credited the conduct grade with improving uniform usage and diminishing uniform violations. Others lamented the increase in students tucking in their shirts publicly, with no apparent qualms about unzipping their pants and opening the front placket slowly, displaying underclothes, unabashed. Teachers commenting on this did so without acknowledging a direct connection between this practice and the increased strictness in uniform vigilance. Another result, though, was an increased sense of teacher power. Teachers could use uniform infractions to suspend students, and some did.

At a staff meeting in the second month of the school year, certain teachers complained about Rolando, an infamous "bad kid." Though his name was mentioned frequently in staff meetings, in this particular one, it was noted in connection with a discussion of uniforms. Teachers asserted that this student was a bad example for other students due to his uniform misuse (among other reasons), marked by the black undershirt he wore, rather than an acceptable white one. They added that he also drew devils and wrote explicit messages on the desks and walls. His graffiti, however, was not to be the root cause of his punishment. Teachers asked about uniform infraction rules and confirmed that each uniform violation constituted a "light flaw," that two "light flaws" equaled a "grave flaw," and that three "grave flaws" could result in expulsion. The Principal protested the use of the word "expulsion," replacing it, instead, with "interruption of classes." He explained that "expulsion" was not

allowed and could be contested in court. The actual punishment was more akin to that known as “suspension,” in public school systems in the United States, but often resulted in a more permanent leave.

At the staff meeting in question, teachers determined that Rolando already had two grave flaws and that with one more, he could be expelled. Two teachers agreed, on the spot, to report him individually the following day, citing his uniform as the reason for his punishment. They said that his shirt was always untucked and he wore a black undershirt, so he could be suspended on those grounds. Some teachers also used the uniform to control student involvement in certain activities. Students out of uniform were not allowed to take tests or participate in civic acts. This was evident in student elections, where the focus on citizenship formation and proper uniform use mixed in a splendid pageant of patriotism.

The Nation Writ Small: Student Elections and the Performance of Patriotism

In Costa Rica, the national trend in leadership is that prominent government officials, including numerous past presidents, have been elites descended from Spanish conquistadors (Biesanz et al., 1999, p. 78; Stone, 1978, pp. 24-25; Stone, 1990, pp. 111-112). Student elections mirrored this trend as students whose families could trace their ancestry to prominent families from Spain were central figures in the student elections. Once again, those who upheld the Costa Rican image of ideal citizenry through whiteness, wealth, and dominant religion embodied ideal citizenship. Though the high school officials estimated that traveler students constituted 80 percent of the student body while students from Santa Rita comprised the remaining 20 percent, the roll sheets reflected a different reality. In recording the place of origin of each student registered at the beginning of the 1999 school year, it became clear that 41 percent of students resided in Santa Rita while 59 percent were travelers. Evidently, the 80:20 ratio more closely reflected the proportion of poorer students to those that were from the wealthy, white, Catholic families in Santa Rita (which by no means constituted the entirety of the Riteño populace). It was a selection of students from that 20 percent that held prominent positions in the student elections.

Students held elections three months into the school year. This process involved students forming parties that ran on platforms of their making and responding to anonymous student questions. A group of school black sheep formed a party and teachers, though some discouraged this participation, could not stop it. One student commented that perhaps teachers should encourage these students to get more involved in campus

life rather than criticize their participation. Classes were cancelled to allow time for campaigning and elections. The process was announced to students who were urged, by the Principal, to appreciate the voting system, because not all students live in democracies characterized by free elections.

A social studies teacher provided information on the voting process, which was to be “secret, universal, and obligatory. The student that does not vote will be reported to all his/her teachers to take this into account in their class participation grade and attendance, because the one that does not vote will be [counted] absent.” Students needed to purchase identification cards (the price of free elections, evidently) to present at the voting tables. He reminded students that they needed to be in full uniform to vote, thus drawing attention, once again, to the link between uniform and proper citizenship performance. The results of the elections included the voting in of a Riteño-dominant party that included the daughter of the actual (regional) government representative. Past student governments included the children of teachers and prominent Riteños. It was generally expected that the president would have money, should he or she not be able to raise funds to fulfill campaign promises. Thus, social class was also relevant to ideal citizen status. An even more telling display of citizenship, however, took place around Independence Day.

It began three weeks prior to Independence Day, reached its peak on September fifteenth, and its aftermath lingered for a time following this patriotic rite. Each stage of this process also shed light on what seemed to constitute a proper citizen and how the school was involved in its formation. Three weeks before Independence Day, a memo made the rounds from class to class to announce the imminent beginning of marching practice and Civic Week in anticipation of Independence Day. The memo explained that marching practice was obligatory. Students who failed to attend these activities and perform their patriotism appropriately would have their civics grades lowered. A teacher read the memo aloud to his students and added, “So everyone has to march by force, got it?” In other words, the celebration of freedom was obligatory, and patriotism was to be graded in school. Though I found the idea of forced, dictated observance of democracy to be ironic, I heard no student criticisms of the irony. Complaints about marching, however, were widespread. In spite of the warning of a lowered civics grade, such was the frequency of students escaping marching practice, given its being the height of uncoolness, that the school administration began to threaten “deserters” with expulsion.

Throughout the weeks of practice and the Independence Day parade, itself, most students marched in squadrons in their regular school uniforms. Others, though, participated in special squads. The honors

students would lead the parade, followed by the student body, punctuated by squadrons with special talents or appearance. A boys' and girls' squadron of "cadets" wore uniforms of their own design, for this event only, and added fancier steps to their marching. A group of girls called "escorts," clad in costly outfits custom made for this event only, paraded in short skirts, blouses, ties, and ballet slippers. Similarly, the baton twirlers had to buy special boots and have short dresses and hats made especially for the parade. Finally, the band, commonly called the "espantaperros"—or dog scarer (and once referred to derogatorily as *aquella mongolada*, roughly, "that bunch of retards")—was comprised of students designated to play instruments, and who were not particularly enthusiastic about participation in this lower status squadron. They marched, wearing their regular uniform pants with a strip of masking tape down each pant leg (if not a white strip sewn on) and white dress shirts that students were assumed to own anyway. The squadrons of prestige were those that required special regalia that was, most often, quite costly. Most students got to choose to participate in a special squadron, as long as their popularity and financial situation would permit it. In contrast, the Vice Principal chose the baton twirlers on the basis of their beauty, and three of the original ten dropped out of that squadron for financial reasons. Thus, seemingly, those who could afford to do so demonstrated citizenship most enthusiastically.

One week prior to the much-anticipated parade, "Civic Week" began in school. During this week, in addition to the cancellation of afternoon classes to allow for marching practice, the first two lessons of each day were canceled to provide time for civic activities. Two Riteña teachers and one non-Riteña teacher organized the events and chose the student leaders of Civic Week. The opening ceremony began with the flag raisings, national and provincial anthems, and pledges to the flags that would take place each morning during Civic Week. Those in charge of flag raisings and pledges, thus demonstrating proper citizenship, were almost invariably white students from Santa Rita, selected by the teachers in charge. Five Riteño students (four of which were white) then presented their thoughts on particular civic values. One student presentation on solidarity included the opinion that both discrimination and militarism must be eradicated to achieve peace in the world. This, too, smacked of irony as the favorite, predominantly white students stood as examples to their classmates that morning, and because afternoon classes would, once again, be canceled for military-style marching practice.

The following morning, the same flag-raisings and pledges took place by representatives of the same race and town of origin as the previous day's participants. The speeches and flag-raisings included some of the

same students as the day before. This day, the main address was given by a white, Riteña teacher's daughter, who talked about various symbols of the nation and she spoke of the need to preserve democracy. On the third day of Civic Week, Adrián, who had participated in the previous two days' activities, led the entire ceremony for the day with much pomp and circumstance. After the anthems were sung, select teachers complained of poor student participation and behavior during that activity, and one shouted to Adrián to let students know that "the national anthem is not to be danced to." Adrián complied and then made a statement that could be interpreted as either the fruits of successful inculcation of the tropes of leadership in educational public speaking or as an ingenious ritual of reversal. Adrián urged his fellow students to sing louder, "Because in some countries, they don't have national anthems."

On the day of the parade, the primary Riteño (predominantly white) flag bearing honor students led the high school into the parade route. The male spectators behind me commented on which of the honor student girls were attractive. They followed with the same sort of analysis for the baton twirlers and the escorts as these subsequently entered the parade route. The band and the bulk of the student body passed by without much hoopla. The female cadets were the penultimate act, and second-biggest attraction. The main attraction, and last act, however, was that of the male cadets, with all their specialized steps, following commands barked out, military style, by a peer.

Some of the students who did not participate in the actual Independence Day parade were punished severely. Three students who were Jehovah's Witnesses did not march due to their religion, which prohibited such behavior. However, the school's administrators, fervently patriotic, did not accept this excuse. These students were told to march or pay the consequences. They did not march, and the penalty varied for each one, as I shall address shortly.

Religion and National Belonging

Costa Rica's official national religion is Roman Catholicism, though the constitution guarantees freedom of religion and many other religions are represented within the nation. The predominance of Catholicism in the high school mirrored its privileged position in the nation. This was evident in the existence of Catholic catechism as an item of official curriculum, in proportions of religions practiced by students, and in that both teachers and students viewed Catholicism as the norm. The Principal reported that there were no problems with religious discrimination on campus since 99 percent of the student body was Catholic. For

that different one percent, however, the school's Catholic focus may have proved trying, as several individuals viewed non-Catholic religions not only as different, but as contrary to national goals and in opposition to performances of citizenship.

One of the students who did not march in the parade was Catalina. She was suspended for a few days, but her suspension turned permanent, as she never returned to school. One Riteña teacher explained Catalina's lamentable situation as resulting from her religion. This teacher told me that Catalina's family

has a very strange religion, so I think that her problem started there. They can't go to a parade, they can't sing the national anthem, they can't participate in anything. She can't participate in a ton of things because she is of another religion. So this prevents her from being a regular student.

In this instance, the link between "regular students" (the standard against which all others are measured) and "Catholic students" is clear. Though it is not unusual that a vast majority constitute the norm, the consequences of difference seemed to be severe for the religious minority.

The fate of Ileana, the second student who did not march for religious reasons, was discussed at a monthly staff meeting. The Principal noted that Ileana's parents said that she did not have to attend civics class (a required class for all students, and taught as a component of social studies), sing the national anthem, or say pledges of allegiance (to the nation or to the province), because it went against their religious beliefs. The Principal's explanation was followed by raucous, prolonged laughter on the part of several members of the teaching faculty. As the laughter died down, one teacher declared that Ileana's father must be crazy. Some doubted that the family truly practiced a different religion and accused them of merely trying to get their daughter out of schoolwork. Ileana's aunt (a teacher) then commented that her niece's family members, indeed, were practicing Jehovah's Witnesses.

A singular Riteña teacher finally spoke on behalf of Ileana. She noted that the Costa Rican constitution guaranteed freedom of religion, so, therefore, it was permissible for Ileana not to say the pledges of allegiance or sing the national anthem. The Principal agreed, but then said that they did have to go to classes (such as civics), except for religion class, because the Ministry of Education approved exemption from religion class for non-Catholics. He added that if Ileana intended to get permission to skip other classes, she should attend a "special school." Laughter followed this comment, as well.

The Principal then noted that Ileana's cousin, Jacobo, a student with a firm (yet relatively undeserved) reputation for being a "bad kid," was

also a Jehovah's Witness. More laughter ensued and one teacher, suggesting that Jacobo was only claiming religious reasons for not marching to mask his disobedience, said, "He's a lazy boy, is what he is!" In the end, Ileana was suspended for one week. Jacobo, on the other hand, fared worse. Guidance counselors told him that he would be suspended and that he would receive a failing conduct grade. Coupled with poor grades in three other classes, this meant that he would likely fail the year. Though the counselor turned out to be bluffing, when she revealed that he would not fail conduct, Jacobo, already resigned to failing, had let his poor grades slip to failing grades in his other classes, thus sealing his fate.

In contrast to these three students, suspended due to their religious tenets standing in opposition to the prominent ideals of the school, certain other students who also refrained from marching, were not punished. One young woman, considered a good student, was pardoned. Her excuse for not participating in the parade was that the previous day, it rained and she got wet, thus provoking a potential cold. Another student with a reputation for being mischievous (as opposed to "bad" like Jacobo), and from a respected family, had no excuse. He simply was not caught. Others had equally weak excuses, perhaps even less persuasive than those reasons presumably upheld by the constitution, but were not reprimanded. One Riteño teacher at the meeting in which the fate of the Jehovah's Witnesses was decided stood up for the underdogs. He urged that students, including the one who "got wet," be treated equally to those suspended. He brought the underlying divide to the forefront when he noted, "We can't just send home the ones that are on the black list and not others, just because they are daddies' girls and mamas' boys." At least one non-Riteño teacher agreed with him, verbally. However, in the end, the girl who got rained on was left untouched, as were other students, while the Jehovah's Witnesses received an "interruption of classes."

As seen in the case of Jehovah's Witnesses in Santa Rita High School, religion, too, served to define "regular" students – and good citizens – from seemingly aberrant ones. In a subsequent class, a teacher from Santa Rita discussed another student who failed to march and noted that when he was warned he would be punished for not marching, he replied, "No, I don't believe in [marching]." The teacher laughed, heartily, as she declared, "As if it were about believing in it or not!" Thus, it was evident that in the celebration of a democracy said to rest on values such as free speech, according to Costa Rica's own constitution, there was no room for a differing opinion. Jacobo's and Ileana's punishments (including suspension and the threat of a lowered conduct grade, to the point of Jacobo's failing the school year) were also tragically ironic. These students were suspended as a result of not having marched—an action prohibited by

their religion—in a parade celebrating freedom in a country that guarantees various freedoms, including that of religion, as was pointed out in numerous civic acts celebrating the defining characteristics of Costa Rica's democracy.

These ethnographic illustrations demonstrate the ways in which one school attempted to produce a homogenized national citizenry. This is consistent with the findings of the body of literature outlined at the outset of this article with regard to schools' complicity in racial formation. The ethnographic descriptions exemplify the ways in which Santa Rita High School taught students the relative value placed on whiteness and wealth and how these were upheld as characteristics of the ideal citizen. Though school-sponsored lessons and displays of national belonging may well have served as a "backdrop" for the performance of nationalism, as García Canclini (1990, p. 154) asserts, they did not do so equally for all students at Santa Rita High School. Though Foucault's ideas provide a useful starting point for analysis, the clear impossibility for all students to fit within a narrowly defined image of Costa Rican identity (fortunately) renders the school's homogenizing agenda unattainable in any complete sense. Though this homogenizing goal is unlikely to be successful, a more inclusive curriculum acknowledging the pluralism of Costa Rican society could further prevent its monolithic application. Though teaching citizenship is not, of its own accord, a damaging plan, its exclusive, implicit definition of a Costa Rican citizen only serves to promote the existing racist, class-biased hierarchy. In this manner, the rhetoric surrounding democracy at Santa Rita High School was at direct odds with the practices that foregrounded (and sometimes exacerbated) stratification within the school. The ethnographic examples presented here are meant to provide a vivid juxtaposition of the explicitly expressed democratic ideals of the nation and the evident disparities between races, classes, and religions with regard to access to positions of privilege in the nation.

Santa Rita High School events repeatedly lauded democracy in the nation and made evident a widespread belief that this democracy pervaded the country and the school, itself. At the same time that particular school officials taught students the value of democracy and repeated a national history of equality and classless society, its specific (and often ironic) celebrations of that democracy, themselves, demonstrated something different. In spite of the strict enforcement of uniform use meant to equalize students or project an image of homogeneity, those students who were white were chosen as leaders, and those that had extra money to spend on the trappings of exemplary citizenry in the parade were prized as ideal citizens, just as those who could afford the financial strain of leadership could be elected. Finally, the rewards of democracy

were accorded to those whose religion did not deviate from the dominant norm. In short, those who were chosen to exemplify good citizenship were those whose privileged positions permitted or perpetuated predominant blindness to the class-based, racial, and religious divisions that decried the myth of democratic ideals in this Costa Rican school setting. Through a variety of means—both taught and performed—students at Santa Rita High School were turned into proper citizens or, in the event that they did not demonstrate this adequately, were punished for that failure. This training was achieved through a promotion of discipline and uniformity that was more apt to follow the letter of the law than its spirit. Through a variety of lessons, performances, and patriotic rituals, school officials professed the rhetoric of democracy with great frequency, all the while promoting and enacting a hierarchy based on race, ethnicity, class and religion.

Notes

¹ I have changed place names as well as personal names for the sake of anonymity.

² I follow Omi and Winant (1986), as well as numerous others, in considering that race is a socially constructed category. Like Daniel Yon (2000), Nadine Dolby (2001), Apple (1993), McCarthy and Crichlow (1993) and others, I take racial formation to be a process in which schooling is no innocent bystander.

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