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The lessons of slavery:

Discourses of slavery, *mestizaje*, and *blanqueamiento* in an elementary school in Puerto Rico

ABSTRACT

On the basis of ethnographic research conducted in an elementary public school in Puerto Rico, we maintain in this article that subduing and narrowing the history of slavery is instrumental in the reproduction of national ideologies of *mestizaje* in Afro-Latin America. We explore how school texts and practices silence, trivialize, and simplify the history of slavery and conclude that these maneuvers distance blackness from Puerto Rican identity and silence racism while upholding racial democracy and *blanqueamiento* as a social value. [*slavery, racism in education, Puerto Rico, blanqueamiento, mestizaje, blackness, public history*]

Shortly after 2:00 p.m. on an average school day, one of us (Isar) walked into the small air-conditioned social worker's office at the Luisa Rodríguez Elementary School in Cayey, Puerto Rico.¹ A young, uniform-clad teenage girl sat at the desk, talking in flirtatious tones on the school's phone. Isar greeted the social worker as she stood next to her commandeered desk, and they began to discuss an upcoming conference about the history of slavery in Cayey. "There were slaves in Cayey?" the social worker asked, "Really!?" Before Isar could answer, she heard the young girl telling her phone interlocutor in a high-pitched voice: "I am not *prieta!*" (*prieta* is a popular synonym for *black*) "I am not *prieta!*" The social worker turned to Isar and said, "You see? That is related to what you study." The girl looked up to ask what they were talking about. Isar explained she was conducting a study about racism in schools. "I am not racist," she said, "but this guy is calling me *prieta* and I am not *prieta!*"

These two events—a young girl's rejection of a black identity and a school official's unawareness of the history of slavery in her community—might seem apparently unrelated. However, this article maintains that the silencing of slavery and the distancing of individuals from blackness are, in fact, key interdependent manifestations of the ideology of race mixture (*mestizaje*) in Afro-Latin America.

Researchers of national ideologies of *mestizaje* in Latin America and the Caribbean have underscored how notions of race mixture operate within very specific structures of power that often exclude blacks, deny racism, and invalidate demands for social justice against discrimination

(cf. Burdick 1992; Hale 1999; Helg 1995; Price 1999; Whitten and Torres 1998; Wright 1990). Scholars have pointed out, for example, that the celebration of racial mixture through an ideology of *mestizaje* serves to distance Afro-Latinos from blackness through the process of *blanqueamiento*, or “whitening.” They have also highlighted the ways in which the idea of *mestizaje* is mobilized as evidence for national ideologies of racial democracy that claim that because the majority of the population is mixed, “race” and racism are almost nonexistent in these societies (cf. Betances 1972; Hanchard 1994; Sawyer 2006; Telles 2004; Wade 1997). This article contributes to this literature by arguing that one important, albeit underexplored, area of inquiry for understanding the social reproduction of such national ideologies in Afro-Latin America is the “containment” or “taming” of the history of slavery. Specifically, we maintain that national ideologies of *mestizaje* in Latin America, and particularly in the Hispanic Caribbean, are sustained by dominant politics of public representation that silence, trivialize, and simplify the history of slavery and its contemporary effects.

Slavery is a thorny, problematic topic for nation-building projects. Although ideas of slavery, “race,” modernity, colonialism, capitalism, and nationalism are historically and conceptually bound (see Anibal Quijano in Santiago-Valles 2003:218), Western narratives about the past produce their legitimacy precisely by silencing those connections (Trouillot 1995). National discourses of *mestizaje* in Afro-Latin America are no exception. Thus, we argue that one important mechanism through which discourses of *mestizaje* deny legitimacy to experiences of racism and to the affirmation of black identities is by silencing the historical connections between slavery and contemporary racial disparities.

Depending on how the history of this period is told, slavery can destabilize nationalist representations that celebrate mixture and the so-called whitening of the nation from various standpoints. To evoke slavery is to recognize that one racial segment of the population used “race” to exploit and dehumanize another sector of the population for more than 300 years in the Americas. Racial mixture did take place during this time, but mostly through violent means, such as rape, which provide little motive for celebrating *mestizaje*. Furthermore, the history—not just of men and women in bondage but also of the large and vibrant communities that were formed by free people of color during the slave period—challenges nationalist renditions of history that belittle the impact of African heritage in Puerto Rico and elsewhere. Finally, an awareness of the socioeconomic legacies of the system of slavery on contemporary society can serve to challenge “colorblind” arguments that characterize black people’s failures in the socioeconomic order as the result of a lack of individual achievement, and not as the product of historical–structural inequalities. Understanding the history of slavery, its long-term economic and ideological repercus-

sions, elucidates the roots of contemporary racial inequalities and related racial identities. Addressing the ideological effects of slavery can thus challenge nationalist premises of celebrated mixture, desired *blanqueamiento*, and declared colorblindness by bringing to the fore the tensions, cracks, and dissonances of nations that are not as harmonious, whitened, or democratic as discourses of *mestizaje* would suggest.

Understanding how slavery challenges discourses of nationhood is particularly significant within the context of the Caribbean, a region that received almost half of all enslaved Africans imported into the Americas during the slave trade. Scholars of various generations have recognized the importance of the institution of slavery, and of its economic and ideological effects, for understanding race, racism, and the troublesome development of national projects in different parts of this deeply colonized region (see Giovannetti 2006; Hoetink 1967; Klein 1967; Mintz 1989; Safa 1987; Scarano 1992; Tannenbaum 1947; Williams 1957).² Our approach to slavery takes a somewhat different turn as we seek to unravel not how slavery explains contemporary racial hierarchies in the Caribbean and Afro-Latin America but, rather, how dominant representations of slavery and of the enslaved reproduce the national ideologies underpinning those hierarchies (Goldberg 2002).

A similar line of inquiry has been undertaken by recent scholarship on “the politics of public history,” which has focused on the construction of historical narratives through museum exhibits, heritage sites, commemorative festivities, new history texts, and public monuments (García-Canclini 1989; Handler and Gable 1997; Patullo 1996; Price and Price 1994, 2001; Sutton in press; Thomas 1999; Trouillot 1995). Such research in the Hispanic Caribbean is scarce, but Puerto Rican historian Jorge L. Giovannetti has recently launched a poignant call for historians and social scientists to actively engage with public education projects about slavery (beyond the ivory tower) “that would assist in unveiling and unmasking the racial past of the region with the explicit purpose of crafting a better future for all” (Giovannetti 2006:30).

In this article, we turn to schools and schooling practices in Puerto Rico as fertile ground for exploring state-sponsored representations of slavery and the implications of such representations for early socialization processes into nationalist ideology of race mixture, and *blanqueamiento*. Sociologist Edward Telles argues that schools may be the most important site for examining how racial inequalities are produced (Telles 2004:156; see also Lewis 2006).³ However, as Ethan Johnson has demonstrated, there has been little research conducted on the relationship between racial inequality and education for blacks within the context of Latin America (Johnson 2007).⁴ In his own work, Johnson investigates the ways in which students negotiate discourses of national identity and whitening in Ecuador, focusing on issues of exclusion (i.e., the exclusion of black people and their

contributions from the history of Ecuador) and student rejections of a black identity. However, in places such as the Hispanic Caribbean and Brazil, official representations of the nation employ diverse practices and modes of representation that center on both the inclusion and exclusion of black communities (Telles 2004:6). Our study therefore explores the ways in which the racial hierarchies embedded in national ideologies of race mixture are reproduced within schools by simultaneously silencing and celebrating African heritage.

School lessons about slavery are fertile sites from which to investigate dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in Puerto Rico. Slavery cannot be completely silenced from public school lessons because it serves as the foundation for one of the island's "three roots" of cultural nationalism. However, the lessons of slavery often conjure up underlying anxieties about "race" and racism in everyday life. As we show, the anxieties raised by the lessons of slavery, and the social fissures that this history reveals, are nonetheless quickly managed through strategies of redress that seek to domesticate and conform reality to "comfortable" hegemonic beliefs of national harmony and mixture. In Puerto Rico, such hegemonic beliefs interpret racial mixture and the blending of the three founding groups (the indigenous Taíno, the Spaniard, and the African) as indices of Puerto Rican society's lack of racism. A focus on the ways in which the history of slavery is represented in schools thus allows us to examine both how slavery troubles this narrative of national harmony and how people and institutions attempt to evade and contain the troublesome topic of race, while never managing to suppress it completely.

We focus our research on the third grade because, according to islandwide curricular guidelines, it is at this level that children learn the official story about colonization, slavery, and Puerto Rico's African heritage for the first time. Our methodology consisted of discourse analysis of social studies textbooks, including *Somos Puerto Rico: El País, la Patria* (La Biblioteca 2002), which is the official textbook approved by the Department of Education of Puerto Rico and that is used for third grade social studies classes at all Puerto Rican public schools. We also examined the textbook *Puerto Rico es Nuestro País* (Vizcarrondo 1992), which was the official text until 2002 and that some teachers still use to prepare their lessons.⁵ We also conducted participant-observation in classrooms during social studies lessons and conducted interviews with the teachers about their lessons and pedagogical practices. The teachers involved in our study were active partners in the construction of our methodological design, inasmuch as they suggested exercises, designed class dynamics, and coordinated extracurricular activities with our project in mind.

This study forms part of a larger ethnographic project that aims to document racism and xenophobia at the elementary school level to propose educational strategies to

tackle these problems. To this end, some of the questions we ask in this article are: How is slavery constructed in the curricular unit about African heritage? How do teachers teach the history of slavery to children? How do children interpret this historical information? And to what extent do the lessons they learn about slavery contribute to ameliorate the problem of racism in school?

Dominant discourses of mixture and blanqueamiento

State-sponsored educational discourses reproduce, and often justify, dominant ideas about social relations and power differences within a given society (Bourdieu and Passeron 2000). It is therefore necessary to understand how this study's particular school site "fits" into dominant discourses about "race" in Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rican culture and Puerto Rican people are often represented as the product of the mixture between Taíno Natives, Spaniards, and Africans. This mixture, however, implies blanqueamiento, or the notion that Puerto Ricans have whitened and "evolved" by shedding most of their African "blood" (for other analyses of blanqueamiento, see Burdick 1992; de la Fuente 2001; Guerra 1998; Skidmore 1974; Stephan 1991; Stutzman 1981; Wade 1997). Historically, ideologies of blanqueamiento have been used by colonial and national elites to promote the migration of Europeans to whiten the population (as carried out in Puerto Rico during the early 19th century). Such ideas emerged from a colonial paradigm that made Europe (and whiteness) the hegemonic cultural and racial referent for "civilized nations" and constructed Africa, the Americas, and the Orient as zones to be tamed and civilized.⁶

At a personal, more contemporary level, blanqueamiento relates to individual strategies of marrying lighter-skinned individuals to gain social status and supposedly dilute, through mixture, the "African blood" of the next generation. As documented by previous research on race and racism in Puerto Rico, blackness is socially marked on the island as inferior, ugly, dirty, unintelligent, backward, reduced to a primitive hypersexuality (particularly in the case of black women), equated with disorder, superstition, servitude, danger, and heavily criminalized (cf. Alegría and Ríos 2005; Cardona 1997; Díaz Quiñonez 1985; Findlay 1999; Franco and Ortíz 2004; Giusti Cordero 1996; Godreau 2002a, 2002b, 2003; Guerra 1998; Rivera 2003; Rivero 2005; Santiago-Valles 1995; Santos-Febres 1993; Torres 1998; Zenón-Cruz 1975). In addition, the use of a very complex and ambiguous racial nomenclature, similar to that documented in other Latin American and Caribbean countries, reflects personal efforts of Puerto Ricans to distance themselves from blackness by negotiating various degrees of whiteness (Duany 2002; Godreau 2000; Vargas-Ramos 2005).

Representations of the three “ethnic roots” of Puerto Rican culture serve to reinforce ideologies of blanqueamiento by simplifying the legacies of each cultural group and placing these within a social hierarchy. Within this model, Hispanic heritage takes precedence as government agencies and dominant cultural discourses construct traits such as the Spanish language, Catholicism, and Hispanic cultural traditions as the core of Puerto Rican values. Indigenous influences come second in order, for although Taínos were practically exterminated by Spanish colonizers, the Taínos are often romanticized as noble warriors whose spirits guard over the island’s natural resources (Haslip-Viera 1999). Finally, the African heritage, commonly designated as the “third root,” comes last and is relegated to the realm of music, rhythm, mysticism, and eroticism.⁷

When celebrated, representations of African heritage come in the form of festivals, carnivals, folk art, or state-sponsored kiosks where foods, instruments, masks, and other commodities associated with black culture are presented or sold. Such authentic cultural products of blackness are often located in specific so-called isolated communities, where black people and their traditions are said to have “survived” modernity and its by-product: blanqueamiento. In Puerto Rico, this maneuver of whitening operates by locating blackness only in certain coastal towns or communities (i.e., the town of Loíza or the community of San Antón in Ponce), indirectly identifying the rest of Puerto Rico as non-black (Godreau 2002a).

Cayey, our field site, is one of those places constructed as “nonblack” and consequently, as “typical” within Puerto Rico’s racial geography. Cayey is a semirural town of approximately 47,000 people located in the interior highlands of Puerto Rico, about 30 miles from the capital of San Juan. Dominant and government-sponsored views in Puerto Rico often associate towns like Cayey with the image of the *jíbaro*, the light-skinned peasant of the highlands, that is often mobilized as a symbol of national authenticity and whiteness. This whitened view of the island’s interior belies the reality of a population that never developed independently from African influences but, instead, integrated cultural and biological African influences from the earliest period of Spanish colonization in the process of becoming Puerto Rican (Kinsbruner 1996; Mintz 1989). In fact, Puerto Ricans classified as “free blacks” and “mulattoes” composed about 40 percent of the island’s total population throughout the 19th century (Figueroa 2005:50).

The majority of this large black and mulatto population was free rather than enslaved. In fact, Puerto Rico’s slave population never surpassed 12 percent. Traditional interpretations have cited the relatively small slave population as evidence of slavery’s minor role in Puerto Rico’s economic development and of the island’s status as “nonblack.” However, revisionist scholars have begun to question this reductionist view of slavery, pointing to the key role played by

sugar-producing districts that developed large sugar complexes similar to those found in the slave colonies of the English or French Caribbean. Cayey’s enslaved population did not compare to these large districts, but it was still among the top 15 slaveholding municipalities of Puerto Rico in 1828 and in 1865 (Figueroa 2005:54). Historian Fernando Picó, for example, points to the prevalence and stability of a slave population in Cayey that was reported to be 19.6 percent in 1812 and 21 percent in 1821, quite striking figures if compared to the islandwide percentage of 12 percent (Picó 2007:37). These communities settled in Cayey for many decades and formed families through informal unions and marriages with other slaves and free people of color (Picó 2007).

Although scholarly sources point to the importance of vibrant black communities in Puerto Rico and Cayey—both free and enslaved—African ancestry is strategically erased from Puerto Rico’s social memory. In the census of 2000, for example, only 8 percent of the general population identified themselves as black, whereas 80 percent identified themselves as “white.” Results are even more striking for Cayey, where only 3.9 percent of residents identified themselves as “black” whereas an overwhelming majority of 88.2 percent identified themselves as “white” (U.S. Department of Commerce 2000). Challenging such ideologies of blanqueamiento becomes problematic in the context of Puerto Rico’s ambiguous position as a commonwealth territory of the United States.⁸ Intellectuals have argued, for example, that “to accentuate the racial fissures in the formation of Puerto Rican nationality . . . in the long run, only benefits U.S. colonialism” (Carrión 1993:9). In this context, the United States is constructed as an “opposite Other,” a foil against which many Puerto Ricans vehemently defend a sense of different national identity and ethnic homogeneity (Dávila 1997; Duany 2002; Morris 1995). Lines of distinctiveness are thus often drawn between a racially mixed, supposedly harmonious “Puerto Rico” and a deeply segregated United States (Rivero 2005).

Addressing Puerto Rico’s history of slavery can threaten and disrupt this national narrative of homogeneity and harmony by sparking dialogue about racism, discrimination, and black people’s resistance. However, public schools cannot simply eliminate slavery from the local curriculum. As sites of cultural reproduction for dominant discourses of mestizaje, public schools are forced to find ways of managing black history—through a combination of both inclusion and exclusion—to be consistent with dominant discourses of racial mixture. The question then becomes how to place this past of social schism and racial inequality within a narrative of national unity, harmonious mixture, and racial democracy.

We believe the answer lies in institutional practices that attempt to contain the subject of slavery by silencing, trivializing, and simplifying its historical repercussions. Each of

these maneuvers will be discussed in detail in the next sections, but we define them briefly as follows: By *maneuvers of silence*, we are referring to those strategies that lead to the erasure and overall absence of information about slavery. These maneuvers have the overall effect of constructing black history and culture as foreign, irrelevant, and clearly distinguishable from what is considered Puerto Rican. By *maneuvers of trivialization*, we mean discourses that downplay black resistance to slavery and the systemic, global dimension of racism during slavery. These maneuvers represent slavery as a local phenomenon and blacks as the passive victims of white actors' good or bad will. By *maneuvers of simplification*, we mean discourses that reduce, essentialize, and equate blackness to slavery and to a set of narrowly defined features that are seen as unattractive, primitive, and overly folkloric. Maneuvers of simplification construct blackness as a pure category that is equivalent to slave status, thus locating it outside the realm of the present-day "modern" and racially mixed Puerto Rico. We contend that these maneuvers have the combined overall effect of distancing blackness from Puerto Rican identity and silencing racism while upholding racial mixture and blanqueamiento as a social value. As a result, they serve to domesticate and constrain the lessons of slavery in ways that preserve and reproduce the dominant ideals of national unity and homogeneity espoused by ideologies of mestizaje.

Although we explore each maneuver separately in the next sections, our theorizing assumes that they are interdependent and support one another. Hence, representations that trivialize the impact of slavery work in tandem with existing silences in the curricula, while representations that simplify this historical period are often enabled by renditions that trivialize black agency and vice versa. However, discussing each strategy separately allows us to better illustrate and abridge the different kinds of effects (and contestations) they produce when people employ them in the same situation. Finally, we must point out that these three strategies prevailed in the government-sponsored textbooks we examined but figured only intermittently in schooling practices. As such, we theorize them as strategies of representation that are not completely stable or hegemonic. Rather, we argue that they operate as mechanisms of redress produced by the State (a neocolonial state in the case of Puerto Rico) and its schooling institutions to respond to the destabilizing effects that the lessons of slavery have on national ideologies of mestizaje and racial democracy.⁹

Maneuvers of silence

As social thinker and writer Teun Van Dijk suggested, discourse analysis can provide a powerful tool for understanding racism. He promotes a methodological approach that examines various types of texts and forms of talk to make inferences about the social cognition that majority or elite

group members make about "minority" groups (Van Dijk 1993:94). However, a heightened attention to the structure of text and talk in discourse analysis runs the risk of assuming that that which is not spoken of, or written about, is of little consequence in social life (Sheriff 2000). Yet, silence, particularly in the study of race and racism, is a key element of discourse and can be studied as both a consequence and an index of the unequal distribution of power and knowledge in a particular society (Trouillot 1995). Trouillot, in fact, argues that history can be understood as a particular "bundle of silences" that can tell us not only what is valued in history by the dominant groups that produce and authenticate those narratives but also how history works to legitimize those same power differences in the present (Trouillot 1995:27).

The curricular silences we discuss in this section serve to legitimate the idea that slavery and African heritage played a minor role in Puerto Rico's development and that being "black," therefore, is not representative of Puerto Rican identity. Such ideas can be traced to the classic works of national ideologues in Puerto Rico and elsewhere in Latin America who argued that, unlike the Protestant English colonies in the Americas, slavery was milder, less important, and more "benevolent" in the Spanish colonies, giving way to more tolerant race relations and interracial mixture (i.e., blanqueamiento; cf. Freyre 1975; Tannembaum 1947; for the same argument in Puerto Rico, see Barbosa 1937; Blanco 1942; Díaz-Soler 1981). Recent generations of historians in Puerto Rico and elsewhere have successfully challenged this historiography, thus revealing the fallacy of benign slavery in Ibero-America (Baralt 1981; Figueroa 2005; González and Vega 1990; Helg 1995; Knight 1970; Martínez-Allier 1989; Scarano 1992; Scott 1985).

Contemporary textbooks in Puerto Rican public elementary schools do not contain explicit references to slavery as a benevolent institution. However, the idea that slavery was unimportant or inconsequential is still conveyed in a number of ways through silences and key omissions. For example, in both the present and previously employed textbook, the unit on "Mis raíces" (My Roots) dedicates one chapter to each of the three "heritage groups" of Puerto Rican nationalism. However, although each of the three "roots" is addressed, the chapter on Puerto Rico's African heritage is shorter than the other two "roots" (Taínos and Spaniards) in the social studies textbooks used.¹⁰

Another structural element in the most recent textbook that marginalizes the topic is that information about slavery or Puerto Rico's African heritage can only be found after covering almost half of the textbook. Slavery, in fact, is not discussed in any of the previous units of the social studies textbook but only mentioned briefly in a paragraph that discusses the great deeds of illustrated men and women, such as abolitionists (La Biblioteca 2002:6). Slavery is not even discussed in the unit entitled "We Are Caribbean People," a

striking absence considering that the impact of slavery has been a key criterion used by Caribbeanists in defining the region as a sociological unit of analysis (Mintz 1971). Instead, this Caribbean unit refers to common elements such as geographic location, fauna, flora, and shared cultural traditions, such as the predominance of drums in particular musical genres, common foods, and festivities. A case in point is a reference to the carnival and to the “*superstitious beliefs that come to us from a strong African ethnic presence*” (La Biblioteca 2002:91, emphasis added). The only time the word *slavery* appears in this unit about the Caribbean is in reference to the non-Hispanic Caribbean. This Caribbean is moreover represented as racially different from Puerto Rico. Haiti, Aruba, Curacao, and Bonaire, for instance, are mentioned to encourage students to “not reject anyone because their skin color is different from *ours*” (La Biblioteca 2002:93, emphasis added).¹¹ Implicit in this plea for inter-Caribbean tolerance is not only a message about good racial manners but also the idea that the color referred to as “ours” is nonblack.

Silences surrounding blackness and the impact of slavery in Puerto Rico extend beyond textbooks and into the world of general history books, children’s books, and complementary educational material (booklets, pamphlets, educational coloring books, illustrations, etc.). Third grade teachers at Luisa Rodríguez Elementary School, for example, complained that they had a hard time finding illustrations or additional school materials about this topic to complement their lessons. Indeed, we found that none of the principal school supply stores and drug stores that carried educational materials in Cayey had booklets about slavery or about Puerto Rico’s African heritage. Information about Taínos, however, was found in six of the nine stores visited in Cayey.¹² Similar silencing processes take place with national monuments, school plays, tourist sites, and other places third grade children visit in their school field trips, which tend to have little if any information about the slave past.

Although beyond the scope of this article, teacher training constitutes another site for researching how the silencing of the history of slavery takes place. Puerto Rico’s Department of Education officially recognized the lack of adequate training available for teachers on Puerto Rico’s African heritage when it sponsored a series of workshops in 2000, 2002, and 2003 to address this need (Rivera Marrero 2002). The program coordinator stated that the workshop was necessary because many schoolteachers did not know enough about the influence of Africa on Puerto Rican society to teach it.

None of the third grade teachers at the Luisa Rodríguez Elementary School were able to attend these government workshops. In fact, when we approached them for this project they confessed to us that in their 14 years of teaching at the school, they had never taught the unit on African heritage to their students. The most striking form of silencing we found was therefore not in the textbooks’ marginal treat-

ment of the subject but, rather, in the fact that the unit was not taught at all. Teachers explained that the reason they never covered the material was because they did not have enough time to get to the unit on African heritage, which begins almost halfway through the textbook. Nevertheless, after meeting with the teachers on three occasions to express our interest in researching this school site and in collaborating with them, all three teachers unanimously decided to skip some of the initial sections of the textbook to get to the unit in question: “The Third Inherited Root: The African.”¹³

Breaking the silence: Third graders’ opinions about the “black race”

In spite of the previously mentioned structural silences present in the textbook and in teacher training, third grade teachers made an extra effort to complement their first teaching of this unit with poems, plays, and classroom exercises that they obtained from sources such as the local teacher’s union. As we demonstrate, these individual efforts served to subvert some of the aforementioned omissions in the official government textbooks.

One of the teachers in our study, whom we refer to as Marta, spent considerable class time talking to her third graders about the slave trade and the enslaved (about the work they did, how they were brought from Africa, etc.), thus making up for the subordinate treatment of the subject in the textbook. Fewer pages, in this case, did not mean less classroom time for the unit. Her vivid stories also complemented some of the book’s illustrations about the use of the whip, the shackled hands of the enslaved, and the burning marks of the *carimbo* (branding iron), making the students shriek and crouch in their chairs. In the context of this unit, Marta mentioned some of the cultural and physical characteristics of enslaved Africans in positive terms, pointing out, for example, that having dark skin protects you from the sun, and that people with dark skin often looked younger.

With our research project in mind, Marta asked her students to make a drawing and write a paragraph about their thoughts regarding *la raza negra* (the black race). Marta, a light-skinned woman with blue eyes and dyed-blond hair, asked her students: “What are your opinions about the black race? How would you react today if a black student came into the classroom? How would you treat this student?” Students wrote a variety of responses—14 in total—in answer to her question. Most students (13) said they would treat black people well: “If I had a black friend, I would not tease him,” wrote one boy. “I know I should not reject blacks because they suffered a lot. I also should not call them names because that makes people feel bad,” wrote another girl.

The exercise gave students the opportunity to express their thoughts in written form without having to refer to the textbook’s content. The assignment, nevertheless, reproduced dominant aspects of racial discourses about Puerto

Rican identity found in the textbook, namely the notion that Puerto Ricans are not “black.” Marta’s question, “How would you treat a black student that came to the classroom?” seemed to suggest that there were no children who could be identified as black already there. Just like the textbook representation of people from Haiti and the English Caribbean as having a color “different from our own” (i.e., not black), Marta considered the students in her classroom as not black. According to her, they were either white or *trigueños*. This term is sometimes used as a euphemism for black, but Marta, like other Puerto Ricans, also used *trigueño* to indicate that a person’s color is lighter than black (Godreau 2000). According to Marta’s criteria, a person was black only if he or she had a very dark skin color combined with certain phenotypic features (wide nose, lips, curly hair, etc.), a profile typically construed in Puerto Rico as describing a “true black” person (Vargas-Ramos 2005).

Marta’s third graders in turn shared this premise for, although responses varied, all students, except one, established a distinct line between a hypothetical black student or a group of black people (i.e., *los negros*) and a nonblack me or us. One girl, for example, wrote, “I would treat *them* well, because *they* are like *us*.” Others established a direct correlation between being black and being a slave or an African: “I would treat the Africans well,” said a boy. “Africans live in Africa. *They* also help *us*,” wrote another girl. The only girl who did not establish such strict lines of distinctions identified herself as *trigueñita*. The diminutive *ita* is often used to soften the negative impact of this identity to communicate resignation, rather than pride or mere neutrality, toward blackness. “I have a friend that is *negrita*,” she wrote. “Her name is Cristina, I do not treat her badly, I really love her. I also have a cousin who is very *trigueña*. I am also *trigueñita*. *Still* my family loves me. They would never reject me” (emphasis added). Her use of the word *still* suggests she considers *trigueñita* to be a characteristic that is usually rejected, but is not in her case.

A second idea implicit in many of these students’ writing was the understanding that violence and rejection of black people only happened during slavery. Thus, when asked to comment on the hypothetical case of a new black student arriving in their class (who could be rejected because of color), nine out of 14 children wrote that they would not reject the student and complemented their answers by writing about the abusive mistreatment of Spaniards toward the enslaved. “Blacks suffered more than the Indians, but Spaniards were the worst because blacks had to have their freedom,” wrote a girl. “They did not come by their own will. If they ran away, they were mistreated and were whipped,” said a boy. “I would say they were very happy until the Spaniards arrived. And the thing that I liked the least was when Spaniards lashed them with the whip,” said a girl. In this way children equated the experience of racial violence with “slave suffering,” connecting the assignment to what they had learned previously

in the unit about African heritage. All of their references to racism were thus located in the past. In fact, although all students expressed they would not reject a black boy or girl because of their color, none gave counterexamples of racial discrimination in contemporary Puerto Rico.

A third idea present in these children’s paragraphs was that, because of *mestizaje*, one was not supposed to reject a black person. As one boy said about “the black race,” “I would not reject it because *we* have the race.” Another girl wrote, “I know that I can’t say that I don’t like the Indian, Spaniard, or black person because I know I have something from those three races.” Six students wrote about being a mix of the three races, stating for example that “Blacks are our third race, and even if we have skin like Spanish or Indian, we have black things.” Five mentioned they had family members, friends, or neighbors who were black and two said they would like to marry someone black or have a black baby. This acknowledgment of mixture, however, was not enough to claim blackness as part of the “we.” Overall, the children represented blackness as something that was different from “us” and racism as something that only happened during slavery. *Mestizaje*, in that sense, appeared in these children’s narratives as a “polite” discourse; a double-faced sign that stood for racial fraternity on one side, and for non-blackness on the other. Furthermore, slavery, although not an explicit part of the assignment, prevailed in many of these children’s narratives as an ideological device that displaced blackness and racism to the past. As a result, although the class exercise broke the silence of slavery, it nevertheless reinforced national discourses of racial harmony and homogeneity by rendering both blackness and racism as foreign to contemporary Puerto Rican society.

Such displacement of blackness and racism to “the past of slavery” or to “somewhere else” is different from previously discussed silencing effects produced by the textbook’s marginal treatment of slavery. Classroom dynamics did not silence the topic of slavery (as the textbook unit about the Caribbean does) and the teacher did not avoid or dedicate less time to this unit as the textbook does. Yet these two kinds of effects (the silencing of slavery and the displacement of racial discrimination to the past) are not disassociated from each other for they ultimately end up silencing racism as a relevant topic for Puerto Rican society.

“They call me burnt pork chop”

Although the initial class essays seemed to easily reproduce dominant discourses of racial harmony, some of the incongruous premises contained in this triple-faced discourse of racial mixture, racial distancing, and silencing about contemporary racism emerged several days later in Marta’s classroom when it became evident that some of the students had been identified as “black” and rejected by other classmates and by members of their families. On that day Marta

asked them to stand up and read their short essays out loud to the class. She arranged the chairs in a circle, creating a more intimate atmosphere. Students took turns standing in the middle of the circle and reading their paragraphs. With surprising confidence and ease, Marta probed and asked her students to elaborate: "You say you would treat this black student well. . . . Do you think that this is how everybody treats black children in school? Do you think that there are boys or girls in this school who are black? Do they get teased in school because of their color?" Some students had a hard time answering. One kid, who the first author identified as "black," did not finish the assignment and just stood there looking at the cement floor in silence, unable to answer until he was finally allowed to sit down. The teacher was surprised for he was usually very diligent with his work. Others took turns reading and answering Marta's questions, as she continued: "You said you would like to have a black baby. Does that mean you would marry a black woman? Remember that you are going to have to kiss her, hug her?" "Ugh!" exclaimed two boys. Slowly, one of the boys began to open up. "Well, Missi, I like *trigueñas* or whites, not blacks." A boy sitting across him told him, teasingly, "I know who your girlfriend is, it's Daisha!" The other answered angrily, "It's not Daisha! It's Daniela and *she* is white!"

Other students followed: "Missi, missi, my mother is white and I turned out like her," said a girl. "Missi, my grandfather is always calling me *prieto*, and I don't like it!" said a boy. (*Prieto*, as noted, is a popular synonym for black.) Soon, five boys were talking about how they teased others or about how some of them were being teased by other children in school because of their black features. They talked about getting into fights when others called them names like "black coffee," "black faggot," "Coca-cola," or "black African." The boy who had been previously silent raised his hand and said, "Missi, missi, they are always calling me burnt pork chop." After that comment, he continued to participate vividly in the discussion. We wondered if the reason why he had initially remained silent was because the question posed: "How would you treat a black student?" implied that he was not there.

Marta said, "Think about how bad this name calling feels. Do you remember what happened last year?" She reminded them of a black girl with whom no one wanted to play. She looked at the first author and explained, "They said she had lice, but I checked her head and she didn't." The girl, who had been the target of the children's rejection, no longer attended the school. Marta asked her students, "Do you remember what happened?" Some of the girls nodded. Then, quickly, they told the teacher they had changed their ways and had accepted the girl afterward. Marta said they were like a family, that she was like their mother, and they were like brothers and sisters. Such teasing, she said, should not take place among them. "We are all the same."

As an experienced and skillful teacher, Marta was able to create a space in her classroom that allowed students to challenge silences about racism. And even when the premise of the assignment assumed that children like the boy called "burnt pork chop" had to come from somewhere else, students came forward and revealed their own prejudices, fears, and shame in ways that occasionally put them within, not outside, the realm of blackness. The exercise also placed racism not in the past but in a contemporary time frame in ways that challenge previous classroom dynamics that displaced blackness and racism to "the past of slavery" or to "somewhere else." That this discussion about racism took place in the context of a classroom lesson about slavery is no coincidence. Rather, it is an indication of the potential that challenging silences about this historical period can have for stimulating dialogue about present-day racial hierarchies in schools and elsewhere.

As we can see, the possibility of empowering children to confront, or at least talk about, racism depends a lot on teachers, their skills and determination to challenge institutional silences, and their willingness to listen to students' "impolite" commentaries. In the context of this research study, Marta created a space for her students to talk about racism and their trust in her allowed them to do so openly. However, once the space is created, teachers have few resources from which to draw to help guide their students through the very difficult terrain of confronting their prejudices and the contemporary ideological effects of slavery. None of the official textbooks mentions or explains the connections between slavery and racism. Racism is, in fact, not mentioned at all in any of the three chapters that comprise the unit about Puerto Rico's colonial history. Instead, representations of slavery go from subjugation to liberation, from humiliating to festive vistas of black people dancing and playing drums, providing children with few clues as to what the enslaved did in between, or of what their descendants have done since.

Maneuvers of trivialization

If institutional maneuvers of silence in the textbook marginalize the topic of slavery, displace racism to the past, and support the construction of "black" as something different from "Puerto Rican," maneuvers of trivialization load that distant "black" identity with passive, disempowering connotations. More specifically, maneuvers of trivialization downplay the systemic violence of slavery and racism while failing to acknowledge black resistance to it.

Commenting on how the Haitian Revolution has been silenced from Western historiography, Trouillot calls attention to historical tropes that minimize the role of the enslaved in his or her liberation by attributing the success of their organizing to other outside "forces," thus denying historical agency to the rebelling slaves (Trouillot 1995:103).

This silencing, argues Trouillot, stems from Western historiography's refusal to recognize colonialism, racism, and slavery as key processes in the formation of what is called "the West" (Trouillot 1995:98).

Similar discourses of trivialization abound in what became a commonsense understanding of slavery in Puerto Rico from the 1930s until the 1970s. José Celso Barbosa (1937), Tomás Blanco (1942), and Luis Díaz-Soler (1981) were only the most notable among a number of intellectuals who categorized slavery and slave resistance as inconsequential. Within this framework, the enslaved was represented as docile and obedient, thus making the possibility of their resistance "unthinkable" (Trouillot 1995). According to these early authors, the so-called soft brand of slavery that existed in Puerto Rico facilitated racial integration and blanqueamiento at both the social and biological levels, thereby eliminating racism as a social problem in the island afterward (see also Tannenbaum 1947). These discourses of benevolent slavery thus went hand in hand with notions of racial democracy and the representation of a deracialized harmonious present.

In the 1970s, a new generation of historians began to produce new historical work that addressed slave rebellions, maroon communities (blacks who escaped enslavement), complaints lodged by the enslaved against their owners, and the importance of the black population on the island during the 16th and 18th centuries (see Baralt 1981; González 1990; González and Vega 1990; Sued-Badillo and López-Cantos 1986, among others). Despite these important contributions, trivialized interpretations of slavery, which downplay both its horrors and its moments of resistance, continue to permeate contemporary representations of Puerto Rican history. For example, a preliminary study of 29 newspaper articles published from 1995 to 2005 in the local newspaper *El Nuevo Día* to commemorate the abolition of slavery, showed that of the seven articles that offered historical information about slavery, only two talked about slave resistance. One author went so far as to state that blacks were treated better during slavery than after its abolition (Arrieta 2000:22).

These official discourses of slavery, which minimize the mistreatment of slaves and obscure the importance of slave resistance, serve to further reinforce national ideologies of racial harmony by trivializing the very roots of contemporary racism. As we show below, these discourses permeated school discourses of slavery, often working in tandem with previously discussed tactics of silencing and displacement.

Slavery as a valid system that was not practiced correctly

Textbooks used in social studies classes in the third grade underplay the horrors of slavery as an institution in ways that are perhaps more subtle than the newspaper representation discussed above, but quite pervasive nevertheless. One way trivialization takes place is by silencing the systemic racist

principles behind the colonial enterprise, focusing instead on the inhuman deeds of powerful white actors. This individualization of systemic violence reduces the horror of slavery to an issue of isolated misbehaviors, thus placing the blame for the injustices of slavery not on the capitalist system of which it was an integral part but on a handful of unruly individuals who strayed from the humanistic guiding principles of the West.

This form of individualization is evident in the textbook, *Puerto Rico es Nuestro País*, which states:

Slavery was a legal institution that was regulated by the government and by laws that were likely to guarantee the humanitarian treatment of slaves and that looked after their wellbeing, health, and other aspects. All of this sounds reasonable and even pretty, but in practice, the reality was different. Only some of the *hacienda* owners were understanding and humanitarian. In general, they were cruel, with no sense of Christian charity and left the management of slaves to unscrupulous overseers. [Vizcarrondo 1992:103, translation by authors]¹⁴

As we can see, the text finds fault—not in the institution of slavery itself—but in the cruel attitude of individual slave owners who did not practice the humanitarian principles recognized by the government. By stating that "in practice, the reality was different," the text reveals such individual acts of cruelty as a "hidden truth," provided as an act of candor by the text in ways that further support its individualizing rendition about the horrors of slavery.

The current textbook *Somos Puerto Rico* reproduces this same trivialization in the chapter about the Spanish heritage when discussing the exploitation of the indigenous population:

Spain's monarchs authorized the Island's governor to distribute land and Indians to the Spanish settlers. The Indians were forced to work the land. In exchange, settlers gave them food and clothing. They also had to teach them the Christian faith and the Spanish language. The settlers did not meet the mandate of the monarchs. They mistreated the Indians, forcing them to work in excess and separating them from their families and *yucayeques*. [La Biblioteca 2002:123, translation by authors]¹⁵

Once again, slavery is criticized because it was not practiced correctly. By focusing on the cruelty of settlers, textbooks aggrandize the role that was played by the hacendados, on the one hand, and trivialize the systemic ideological foundations of a transatlantic, global system that stripped black people of their agency, on the other hand. In this sense, the ontological principle of European (white) superiority is not really questioned, only its proper use and effect (Trouillot 1995:81).

Another way in which the textbook aggrandizes the deeds of white men is by highlighting the role of

abolitionists through illustrations and text content that provides concrete examples of their heroic deeds, such as buying black children to grant them their freedom. The fact that this was a common practice among slaves and *libertos* who manumitted family members is not mentioned. Furthermore, abolitionists are described as *puertorriqueños* (Puerto Ricans) and referred to by their names in the text, not through foreign labels like *criollos*, or descendants of Spaniards, thus endowing their agency with a national appeal (La Biblioteca 2002:138). Black people depicted in the unit about African heritage, however, are nameless and referred to in the text as “esclavos africanos” (African slaves), “seres humanos” (human beings), or “negros,” never as “puertorriqueños.” References to slaves who were born on the island are absent, as if slaves (and blacks) always came directly from Africa.

Teaching trivialization

One day before class, Marta told me—half-jokingly—that she worried that none of the students wanted to be Spaniards. “They hate them!” she said, smiling nervously. During the lesson, Marta asked her students, “If you had been born during that time, how would you have felt? What would you have done? Would you prefer to have been born a slave, or would you prefer to have been a Spaniard?” Most students said they would prefer to be African, not Spaniards. A dark-skinned boy said he would rather be an abolitionist. She pursued the issue further. “If you had been born a slave what would you have done?” One of the boys said, “Oh, I would run away. I would get a pistol and, *bang!* grab a boat, and leave to go to Spain!” The choice of Spain might seem surprising, but in a previous lesson Marta had told students that the Spanish crown was unaware of the injustices being committed on the island against the enslaved and that was why abolitionists had to travel to let them know that they had to change the system on the island.

Making students take the position of the enslaved, Marta then reminded them of the risks involved if they were caught: “Remember you could be hung or tortured. What would you do? Would you risk it or stay?” “I would stay,” answered one girl. Marta continued: “Imagine now that you are a slave owner. How would you treat the people that work for you?” “I would treat them well,” answered another girl. “I would give them food; I would lend them money if they needed it.”

Marta’s comments about the Spanish Crown not being aware of the atrocities committed against the enslaved on the island, and the girl’s representation of herself as a benevolent slave owner, seem to reproduce the textbook’s trivialized representation of slavery as a local, individualized phenomena, and the message that the problem with slavery had more to do with how it was practiced than with the institution itself.

Classroom dynamics, however, are not merely determined by the textbook. The class continued, and Marta took

the initiative to include a play about a slave woman and her struggle for freedom in the lesson plan for that day. The play was not part of the official curricula but one that she had found on her own. Using theater as a pedagogical strategy, Marta asked her students to enact the story of “Doña Toña.” Toña sold fritters and had saved enough money to buy her freedom. She told her owner of her wish to do so, but he was unwilling to let her go. Doña Toña confronted him in front of a judge who made the hacendado grant Toña her freedom. The play ended with Toña reuniting with her brother (a *cimarrón*, or runaway slave), who had run away and was hiding in the mountains or, in this case, underneath a classroom desk. Students loved the play and were eager to play the parts, especially that of the judge.

Marta’s initiative is important because through this play children were able to hear a story about black resistance to slavery. The play also showed a woman as a protagonist, establishing links of solidarity with other people of different status: the judge and her maroon brother. Certain elements of the play seemed to reproduce some of the discourses found in the textbook about the system of slavery, particularly by constructing the problem of freedom as a battle with individual hacendados standing in opposition to a benevolent system of law and justice. However, the play also managed to complicate these representations by introducing other figures of resistance, such as the rebellious *cimarrón*, and by foregrounding the role of the enslaved (over and above that of abolitionists) in the struggle for freedom. As we show in the next section, such representations of black resistance against slavery are seldom found in the textbook, which fails to represent resistance as a collective struggle or as women’s initiative.

Downplaying resistance

Recent scholarship suggests that when it comes to elementary school textbooks, the number and quality of illustrations plays a crucial role in the transmission of information (Cruz 1999; Wilhelm 1995). The unit about African heritage, however, contains no images of black resistance during slavery in either of the two social studies textbooks used by the teachers. Even though one paragraph of the social studies textbook mentions the importance of individual and collective struggle against slavery, stating that “the importance of rebellions lies in that black slaves’ struggle to obtain their own freedom,”¹⁶ the illustration that appears above the paragraph features a white man whipping an almost naked slave, lying on the ground (La Biblioteca 2002:138).

The few images of black affirmation one finds are, without exception, individual representations of ex-slaves celebrating after emancipation. Moreover, the unit contains no illustrations of enslaved blacks coming together as collective agents, involved in strategic meetings or other forms

of collective activity. The only time the enslaved are represented in groups they are placed in either submissive positions (chained, taking a beating, etc.) or engaged in banal celebration (playing music, dancing, etc.). The chapter dedicated to the Taíno, however, features illustrations of collective resistance to colonization and exploitation. Images of Taíno resistance also appear in the chapter on Spanish heritage. One illustration, for example, shows a group of Taínos attacking Spaniards with burning sticks (Vizcarrondo 1992:80). Although Taínos and Spaniards are represented as coherent collective agents, Africans are represented as unconscious subjects, thus reaffirming the idea of their unproblematic absorption into the Puerto Rican racial triad.

Finally, images of the enslaved are overwhelmingly masculine, a feature that once again contrasts with the Taíno unit, in which pages are populated with images of women working in groups and planting crops. Enslaved women, in contrast, are seldom shown. When represented, they are relegated to supporting or passive roles, carrying young children, alone, never fighting or working.

Drawing resistance

When third graders at Luisa Rodríguez Elementary School were asked to make a drawing about “Puerto Rican history” for a school contest, their representations mirrored some of the maneuvers of trivialization described above. For example, although 69 percent of the children drew different versions of the racial triad in harmony, only one student drew a picture depicting active resistance to colonialism. Not surprisingly, the protagonist was a Native Taíno, who was throwing an arrow at a bleeding Spaniard. As far as representations of African heritage, none of the drawings showed active resistance against slavery or confrontation. Drawings about slavery overwhelmingly showed subjugation. Nevertheless, three children made drawings that suggested liberation. Following the model set by the textbook, these children drew black people with broken chains, thus emphasizing individual (rather than collective) moments of liberation, while Spaniards appeared, or their presence was suggested, in nonconfrontational terms.

Lisa Mitchell (2006) has argued that in analyzing children’s drawings, one must take into account not only the content of an image but also the circumstances of its production, circulation, and consumption. Drawing is not an inherently child-centered activity, she argues, “but one in which relationships of power, authority and difference need to be acknowledged and integrated into the analysis” (Mitchell 2006:70). In the context of this drawing activity, organized according to a teacher’s instruction and for a school-organized contest, the prevailing use of the three “roots” in harmonious synthesis may say more about children’s negotiations with discourses of racial harmony and *mestizaje* than about their

own concern with the “difference” of the African or indigenous root. This harmonious discourse of mixture was reinforced even more by the fact that two of the three drawings selected as winners in the school contest depicted emblematic images of the three races harmoniously placed next to one another.

Yet, as we have already shown, school practice is also a product of teachers who have a certain degree of autonomy to act and transform school curricula. After the contest took place, three teachers who were critical of the choice made by the school judges gave small “prizes” (toys) to two students who did not receive an official prize. One of the teacher’s prizes went to a boy who drew three slaves on top of a mountain with broken chains, raising their arms, and overlooking the passage of three ships below. In a similar move, the third grade teachers we worked with decided to include scenes alluding to Puerto Rico’s African heritage in the performances they staged for “Puerto Rican Week.” They were the only ones to do so. All of the other teachers dressed their students as *jibaros* (the “off-white” peasant symbol of national identity). Furthermore, four months later, the librarian, to honor the celebration of the abolition of slavery, made a bookmark for the school community that read in Spanish, “Let us not forget the suffering of black people in our history so that it can help us liberate ourselves from the racial prejudices that still exist today.” The bookmark displayed a scene of subjugation and suffering, similar to those found in the textbook. However, its message did what the textbook failed to do: it linked the systemic and racial violence of slavery to contemporary racism, encouraging its readers to remember, not evade or trivialize, its historical repercussions.

Through these individual efforts teachers, librarians, and students are able to question the trivializing discourses found in official textbooks and illustrations. By emphasizing images of black resistance and pointing to contemporary struggles with racism they are able to challenge dominant discourses of national harmony that foster a sanitized, trivialized, and (as we discuss below) simplified view of the past (see Figures 1–3).

Maneuvers of simplification

Unlike the maneuvers of silencing or trivialization that were occasionally challenged through teachers’ individual efforts and pedagogical practices, we found that maneuvers of simplification were the hardest to counteract and the most pervasively reproduced within the school. Maneuvers of simplification construct a homogenous stereotypical rendition of black people in which they all share the same innate characteristics. Black people are thus represented as phenotypically homogenous and are all confined to the same social category, thus instilling the idea that black people all look alike, and were all slaves. We found such representations in

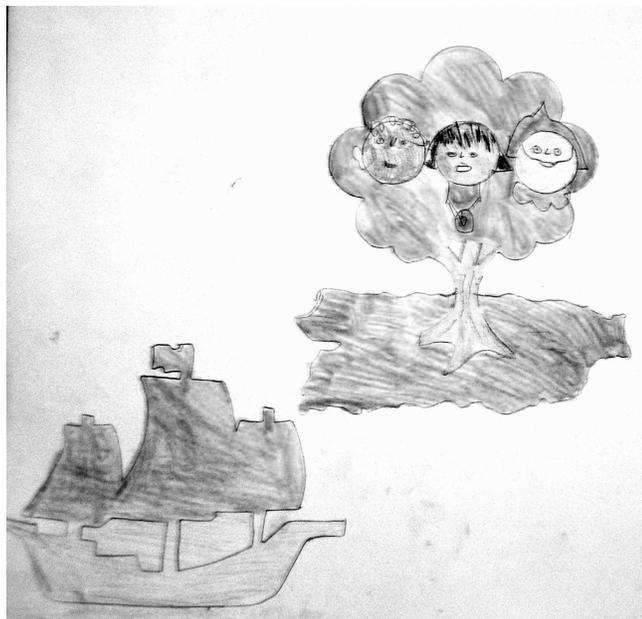


Figure 1. Drawing by a third-grade boy. Sixty-nine percent of all third graders drew different versions of this racial triad for the Puerto Rican Week school contest.

all three of the third grade classrooms visited. However, our ethnography focuses on one particular classroom.

Black = African = slave

Ana is a light-skinned teacher whose calm and patient disposition with students is indicative of her vast teaching experience. Close to a third of her students had “special education” needs, difficult situations at home (lack of resources, domestic violence, illness, etc.), and she often talked about the difficulties of capturing their attention and improving their academic achievement. On the day we observed her class, she began the session with a review of the previous material. She talked to her students about *los negros* (the blacks), where they came from, how they came, and what it meant to be a slave. “What is a slave? Are you slaves?” A boy answered, “I am a slave because my dad is always telling me to get him water or a soda downstairs.” After explaining the difference between fetching a soda for your parent and being a slave, Ana proceeded to ask her third graders if they knew why slaves had been brought to the island. “Because Spaniards were lazy,” said a boy. “Because there were no more Indians, Spaniards killed their families,” said another. “And what do you think of Spaniards?” Ana asked. “They were bad,” said a boy. “They were bullies,” said another. “I am Spaniard, and I am not bad!” said a girl who had been previously identified as “Spanish looking” during the discussion of that unit.

Third graders had a very clear idea that it was the enslaved Africans who did all the hard work while the Spaniards gave the orders. This difference in power was racialized to

the extent that it made “black” interchangeable with “slave.” However, it was not racialized with regard to the slaveholders, who were seldom referred to as “white” nor was the term *white* equated with *colonizer*. The difference became evident, for example, when Ana asked her students to complete the following equation, ___ + ___ + ___ = Puertorriqueño, with the corresponding words *Indios*, *Espanoles*, and *Negros*. This use of *negro* as an ethnic-caste category that sometimes stands for “African” and sometimes stands for “slave” is quite common in social studies textbooks at all educational levels (Ortiz-Garcia 2006; Picó and Alegría 1989:22).

The reduction of blackness to slave and foreign (African) status disregards a significant large sector of free blacks who lived and were born on the island during the slave period. In fact, the number of free blacks in Puerto Rico always exceeded the number of slaves on the island, and until the 1820s nonwhites composed 50 percent of the total free population (Mintz 1989:87). However, the educational material we examined failed to mention the role of *libertos*, black artisans, *pardos*, mulattos, or of free blacks before, during, or after the slavery period.

To disregard the impact of this heterogeneous, large sector of people of color in Puerto Rico denies agency to those enslaved men and women who managed to buy their freedom, or otherwise escape the grip of slavery, before abolition and who strove to find alternative sources of livelihood within an institutionalized racist society. In that sense, collapsing the category of black into the category of slave is not merely a maneuver of simplification but also one of trivialization and silencing of the multilayer positions of Africans and their descendants during the slave period. The equation of black = slave also reduces enslavement to Africans, thus denying the enslavement of the Taínos. Furthermore, omitting the impact of free blacks reduces the category of blackness to that of enslavement, indirectly identifying anyone who is free and not a slave (i.e., a contemporary Puerto Rican) as “nonblack.” Just as with the social construction of “mixed” as nonblack, the equation of blackness with slave status also dissociates blackness from a “modern,” contemporary Puerto Rican identity.

Jack Alexander (1977) and Daniel Segal (1993) describe a similar collapsing of legal status (slave) with color-race (black) in identity formation processes among Jamaicans and Trinidadians. In both cases, however, ancestral races and their equivalent class positions (slaves = blacks, masters = whites, etc.) were traced to contemporary social groupings in the new nation that are considered mixed. Mixing could be traced until all racial elements were accounted for (Segal 1993:85). According to Alexander, in Jamaica, “Every time a person perceives himself or someone else in terms of race, he commits himself to a view that sees the present as the result of a long process of mixture in which the two elements [black and white] are always kept track of because they have never really joined together” (Alexander 1977:432–433).



Figure 2. Drawing by a third-grade boy illustrating a Taíno Native throwing an arrow and wounding a Spaniard.



Figure 3. Drawing by a third-grade boy illustrating a Spaniard whipping an enslaved African.

The situation is different in the Hispanic Caribbean, where collapsing slave and black serves as a means to disassociate oneself from a black identity, not to trace a personal genealogy. Writing about the Dominican Republic, Silvio Torres-Saillant (2000) characterizes this black-slave slippage as a constitutive part of what he calls “deracialized consciousness.” He argues that Dominicans “step outside the sphere of blackness” by equating “black” with slaves and with neighboring Haiti. According to Torres-Saillant, this collapse of color with class-legal status was facilitated by the decay of the plantation economy in colonial times and by the rapid growth of a population of free blacks that grew to become a majority and who sought to distinguish themselves from slaves (Torres-Saillant 2000:1094). The split black versus Dominican hyper-racializes the position of slave (and Haitian) at the same time that it deracializes Dominican identity as not black.

In Puerto Rico, as in the Dominican Republic, uses of the word *negro* to mean *slave* can also be traced to 19th-century practices that distinguished between a large free population who called themselves “mulattos,” or “pardos,” and the less numerous slave population who were “racialized” as “black” by both whites and free people of color. Similar displacements of “blackness” to mean an inferior status can be found in contemporary Puerto Rican dynamics that racialize Dominicans as “the blacks” in xenophobic discourses across the island, relating blackness to illegal migration, disadvantaged socioeconomic status, foreign accent, and racial features (Duany et al. 1995; López-Carrasquillo 1999; Martínez-San Miguel 1998). Thus, while Haitians are exploited, persecuted, and construed as “the blacks” in the Dominican Republic, Dominicans are discriminated and construed as “the blacks” in Puerto Rico (see Duany 2006).

This distancing mechanism became evident in Ana’s classroom with a student who had recently arrived from the Dominican Republic. Following a Puerto Rican nomenclature, Marcos could be described as a light-skinned *trigueño*. During a lesson about the Caribbean in which Ana mentioned Haiti, Marcos told Ana, “Those blacks are really bad, missi! Those *prietos* steal children and they eat them!” Marcos’s response echoes the Dominican Republic’s dominant national discourse of anti-Haitianism and rejection of blackness, a discourse Sheridan Wigginton argues is also reinforced in elementary school textbooks used in the Dominican Republic as early as second grade (2005). In Puerto Rico, Marcos’s teacher, Ana, said she tried to make him see that he was also part negro, but he refused, stating he was white. His classmates reacted to his comments with laughter, and Ana explained that it was “because . . . he speaks strangely, with an accent, you know.” Later that same afternoon, some of the students drew a boy with black crayon smeared over his body and face, labeled it with Marco’s name, and put it on his desk. He was very upset when he came back from recess and saw it. His displacement of blackness to Haitians was, apparently, not successful in the context of Cayey, Puerto Rico, and his classmates’ racist xenophobia ended up racializing him as “black” despite his light-skinned color.

All blacks look the same

A second way in which blackness is distanced and marked as an alien identity in school via its simplification is through the reduction of blackness to a unique, homogenous “physical type.” The most recent textbook, for example, lists the characteristics of “African slaves” as follows: “Dark skin and eyes; curly, thick and dark hair, wide nose and lips, protuberant cheekbones, high stature, lean features.” It then adds, “Slaves also liked music, dance and the narration of anecdotes/stories” (La Biblioteca 2002:137, translation by authors).¹⁷ The previous text, *Puerto Rico es Nuestro País*, lists similar characteristics, adding that enslaved Africans were



Figure 4. Drawing by a third-grade boy. Ten out of 14 students used black crayon instead of brown or other intermediary shades to depict black people.

“strong, hard-working and could endure long work shifts” (Vizcarrondo 1992:102, translated by authors).¹⁸

Such renditions construct “black slaves” as “fit for exploitation,” reinforcing previously described maneuvers of trivialization. Moreover, this excerpt reproduces widely accepted ideas about blacks being inherently rhythmic and prone to telling “stories.” As far as the phenotypic representations, the list provided not only disregards the physical heterogeneity of African populations that were brought to the Americas, and Puerto Rico in particular, but also renders “black” as a “pure” racial category. Black people, the text implies, have physical attributes that manifest themselves in a fixed and uniform pattern. This rendition of the “black slave” as a “fixed,” homogenous-looking type concurrently renders blackness as exotic in a place where racial mixture and phenotypic heterogeneity are understood as the norm.

The effects of such essentialized representations became evident, for example, when Marta asked her students to draw a picture about “the black race” and ten out of 14 students used black crayon (instead of brown or other intermediary shades) to depict black people. Similarly, Ana used black construction paper (not brown or beige) for a class exercise in which she asked students to cut the silhouette of a slave. Textbook illustrations of black people as slaves also reproduce this typification. They are never depicted with green or light-brown eyes, wavy hair, or in a light skin tone. In these ways, blackness is pushed to the extreme slot of the racial continuum—outside the margins of the “mixed” Puerto Rican identity. (See Figure 4.)

This distancing of blackness through simplification prevails in both textbooks, but it is most evident in the 1992 version. In contrast, the most recent text (2002) makes an apparent effort to link the aforementioned characteristics of black slaves to children’s contemporary sense of identity,

encouraging children to search for their African roots. It asks children—after listing the slave’s physical characteristics—to pick a student that “looks most like an African.” In contrast, the 1992 version only asks a similar question (Do you know people who are native from Puerto Rico who physically look like ___?); however, this question only appears in the unit about Taínos and Spaniards, not in the unit about Africans, a revealing omission.

Classroom simplifications: Looking for the African within

Considering previously mentioned discourses of blanqueamiento and maneuvers that victimize the slave subject, how might children react to the revisionist invitation included in the new 2002 textbook to look for an African classmate? Ana invited us to her classroom on the day her class would be discussing this exercise. She asked her students to take turns in reading each of the physical characteristics of African slaves out loud. “Which of these characteristics do we see among us?” she asked. Some students pointed at others, laughing. “Mónica’s nose, Taisha’s color.” “Ajá,” replied Ana. She continued with an endearing look of scrutiny as she searched for other characteristics among her third graders. Students lowered their heads; two covered them with their arms or jackets. The teacher then pointed toward the first author.¹⁹ “And she? What characteristic does she have?” A girl said, “Her hair.” “Ajá,” said Ana approvingly. “And Nanette also has similar hair, right? Now, stand up Noeli. Show us how you dance. How did you dance at the rehearsals last week? Show us! Very good!” Ana said, while the girl danced a little. “That swing in the hips, we inherited from blacks, and even though you (referring to the girl) are light skin, you have that in your blood.”

Like other teachers, Ana’s probing meant to encourage her students to locate themselves—or at least part of themselves—within the sphere of blackness. By breaking up the “phenotypic kit” of blackness presented in the book into “parts,” she hoped her students could identify something as belonging to a black identity. However, her strategy reproduced the same stereotypical rendition of blacks as rhythmic “types,” and left the children with few other positive, attractive references with which to identify. In fact, her strategy ended up essentializing all Puerto Rican cultural “roots.”

Ana asked her students: “Do you consider it is bad to have one of these characteristics?” “No,” said a student. “Why?” asked Ana. “Because we all have them,” said another. “Not me!!” said Marcos (the Dominican student) emphatically and laughter followed. “Missi, missi!” one boy pointed toward him. “Marcos’s *bembes!*” (a derogatory name for big lips). “Yours!” answered Marcos. Ana asked Marcos, “Where do you place yourself, Marcos? In which one of the three races?” “With Spaniards,” he answered.

Other children gave a variety of answers, most of which combined *Indio* with one of the other two roots. None of

the children said just African. A couple of other children said Spaniards. “But, how come?” probed Ana. “Didn’t you say they were lazy?” A girl said that she is both Indian and Spaniard. Ana asked her, “And your hair . . . where does *that* come from?” The girl smiled with some embarrassment, lowered her head, and covered it playfully with her jacket for a little while.

As we can see, Ana’s efforts to break up the idea of a homogenized and phenotypically stable black race failed to remove the stigma that is often associated with these characteristics. Writing about her experiences growing up black in Puerto Rico, Carmen Luz Valcárcel points to the ways in which the phenotypic traits associated with blackness were undervalued in her school to the point where, as she states, “black girls were never considered pretty. I learned to evaluate myself psychologically with white models as they were considered more attractive” (1994:286). Valcárcel describes a deep, almost obsessive preoccupation among Puerto Ricans with hair texture, color, and nose and lip morphological characteristics that could be identified as “black” (see also Franco and Ortiz 2004; Godreau 2002b). She recalls how these feelings, in turn, were exacerbated by the school lessons she received in elementary school about slavery:

The history of black slavery was taught from a white supremacist view, sympathizing with the colonizer and the slave owner. . . . We never learned about the slave women who participated in the Maroon communities of runaway slaves in the Caribbean (Terborg-Penn 1986). It was psychologically painful to learn about black slavery from this perspective. Thus at school, too, I came to wonder if there was something wrong with my being black and with my feelings about the injustice of slavery. I was embarrassed by the derogatory sneers of my classmates. [Valcárcel 1994:289]

As Valcárcel narrates, the images of slavery and blackness that are produced at the elementary school level do not encourage individual identification with blackness; instead, they further reinscribe dominant discourses of disassociation. In particular, as she suggests, the way in which slavery is taught in elementary schools instills the idea that there is “something wrong” with being black and with dwelling on the injustices of slavery. As we discuss below, these feelings are further reinscribed through the exaltation of folkloric black traditions that simplify and constrain the role and contributions of blacks to the Puerto Rican nation.

All blacks dance and sing

Given the sense of shame and disassociation that references to African heritage can provoke among Puerto Ricans, what positive references to blackness might one find in the lessons of slavery? The official textbooks provide no contemporary role models, no heroes, no beauty queens, or

famous public figures of visible African heritage with which children could identify. The only elements of positive black affirmation found in the official textbooks came near the end of the chapter on African heritage. After the discussion of slavery, the chapter addresses the folkloric contributions of black people in the areas of music, dance, and other forms of spontaneous creativity. These cultural “spontaneous” elements are often celebrated, by activists and state officials alike, as the positive contributions of the “African root.”

However, within the context of schooling practices that reward intelligence, skill, and discipline, the celebration of folkloric expressions of blackness fails to put African contributions to the Puerto Rican nation on equal footing with the other parts of the Puerto Rican racial and cultural triad. This is because dancing and music virtuosity are understood as blood-driven attributes, not as contributions that require work or intellectual ability. Thus, while the chapter on the Spanish heritage describes Spaniards as people who “were agile in their thinking, ambitious for power and riches, brave and skillful with arms” (La Biblioteca 2002:123), African slaves are described as people who “liked music, dance, and the narration of stories.” Only one of the eight African contributions to Puerto Rican culture listed in the textbook mentions “work,” and none of the items can be attributed to skill or political or intellectual ability. African contributions are instead relegated to what is defined as “superstitious beliefs” (not religion or spirituality) and leisure activities that are associated with feelings and innate tendencies that supposedly emanate from the African blood present in the blending of the “races.” Labor, and especially skilled labor, are muted in this chapter, amidst text passages that emphasize the cruel treatment enslaved Africans received, on the one hand, and their creative artistic musical talents, on the other hand. In the ten pages dedicated to the unit on slavery, only five scattered sentences provide information about the actual work that slaves performed, and there is not a single illustration that represents it. However, folkloric, musical activities are illustrated by five out of the 11 illustrations of black people that appear in this chapter. Three of the remaining six illustrations present enslaved Africans in degrading situations, and two show them as passive “racial types.”

Finally, black agency is simplified in the textbook by limiting black social interactions to the realm of same-same relationships. Text and images of black people (slave or free), for example, only appear in the chapter about African heritage; blacks are completely absent from the two previous chapters about Taínos or Spaniards. Chapters about the Taíno and the Spaniards, on the other hand, talk about the interrelationship among them (La Biblioteca 2002; Vizcarrondo 1992). This “ghettoized” approach to the topic of African heritage disallows representations of black people (enslaved and free) as part of a social network that involved

Taínos, Spaniards, criollos, and mulattos of different socioeconomic statuses during the colonial period, thus flattening out the experience of black people during slavery and robbing it of its complexity.

Conclusion

Schools are sites of social reproduction as well as contestation. They are social spaces where children learn, often for the first time, the official story about their country and, thus, the national ideologies that should inform their identities. In Puerto Rico, as in other islands of the Hispanic Caribbean, national ideology is built on notions of *mestizaje* that portray *blanqueamiento* and racial harmony as national social values. We argue that silencing, trivializing, and simplifying the history of slavery are fundamental maneuvers for the maintenance of the ideology of *blanqueamiento* and its public denial of racism in schools. The history of slavery not only brings to the fore the cracks and tensions of contemporary racist societies but can also grant historical legitimacy to racial identities that run counter to the discourses of racial harmony and democracy. In this way, the history of slavery troubles nation-building discourses in the Hispanic Caribbean and elsewhere in Afro-Latin America.

Although in this day and age it would be unthinkable to completely erase slavery from Puerto Rican history books, writing and teaching about slavery continue to be problematic, creating deep-seated dissonance among many. The maneuvers of silence, trivialization, and simplification we documented reveal the ways in which people attempt to manage the conflict and contradictions posed by the lessons of slavery in schools. Our ethnographic work at Luisa Rodríguez Elementary in Puerto Rico showed us how elementary teachers and students produce and reproduce common racial anxieties, bringing to the fore tensions and contradictions in a national discourse that professes racial equality but continues to value whiteness over blackness. The eight and nine year olds we observed maneuvered those tensions in sophisticated and complex ways. On the one hand, they are keenly aware of the racial hierarchies prevalent in Puerto Rico, the low status assigned to blackness, and the hurtful power of racial epithets. On the other hand, they also practice a “polite” discourse that holds that people should not be rejected because of their color, and they recognize the high value adults place on *mestizaje*, not just as “accurate” history but also as a “well-mannered” interpretation of Puerto Rican identity. The foundations of such “racial politeness,” however, did not seem to have a strong hold at this age, at least not enough to thwart spontaneous classroom comments that occasionally revealed students’ antiblack racism and preferences toward *blanqueamiento*.

We have argued that dominant discourses and lessons about slavery play an important role in the reproduction of these nationalist ideals. Through silencing, trivializing, or simplifying the historical effects of slavery, third grade children in Puerto Rico learn that they are part of the Caribbean but of a “different color” and that they are a mixture of races in which some elements of the mix are more important than others. The children we observed also learned that Spaniards (although lazy and cruel) had power, and that Taínos had agency, while slaves (at least according to textbook illustrations) had none. They learned that blackness is equal to “slave” and that slaves (or blacks) were all people who danced, looked the same, and who were treated unfairly in the distant past. Finally, students learn that although slaves were black then, “Puerto Ricans” are mixed now (and, thus, not black). As long as school practices continue to teach slavery in ways that represent blackness as an atypical 19th-century victimized and essentialized identity, Puerto Rican children are not likely to raise their heads from underneath their jackets to embrace their African heritage, let alone challenge racial oppression. Transforming the lessons of slavery into something else—such as a reminder of Puerto Rico’s rich, multilayered, complex, and resilient heritage—will depend on school decision makers (from the community level to the administration) becoming increasingly aware of the relation between notions of *blanqueamiento*, public renditions of history, daily school practices, racial identity, and present-day racism. The practices we observed at Luisa Rodríguez Elementary indicate that this is not a linear, easy, or rapid process, but one that is possible, nevertheless.

The most telling counternarrative action we observed was the teaching of the unit on African heritage for the first time in that school in 14 years. In the process, children learned, for example, to problematize identification with the colonizer and slave owner who they characterized as lazy and abusive. They also learned that even though slaves were victims, some adults with authority in the school valued images and stories that depicted black liberation. Similarly, they learned that some teachers were interested and willing to listen to their experience with race and racism at home and in the school, even when they assumed students were “not black.” In addition, we saw the use of theater to enact and challenge dominant historical discourse; the use of drawing and arts and crafts as vehicles for expressing racial views and opinions about slavery and blackness; and essay writing and oral presentations as vehicles that helped students see linkages between slavery and present-day racism. These and other activities we documented evidence that the maneuvers that silence, trivialize, and simplify slavery are not completely hegemonic and can be challenged by school staff in ways that weaken, not reproduce, *blanqueamiento*.

When Ana concluded her teaching of the unit “Third Root: The African,” she asked her students to volunteer in reading out loud the eight contributions the textbook mentioned as African. When the last student finished reading the last contribution, Ana added: “And there are also many many more that the book does not mention, right? (she asked, looking at one of the researchers) And that is partly why she (the researcher) is visiting us today.” Ana did not, or could not, mention any additional contributions, but our mere presence in the school suggested to her that there is more to be said about the legacy of slavery and of Africa in Puerto Rican history and culture. Our challenge is to turn that intuitive supposition into a fertile space for collaboration between teachers and academics that can better guide Puerto Rican children in their daily encounters with racial discrimination in the classroom and elsewhere.

Notes

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1. School name is a pseudonym.
2. Most countries of the Caribbean region remained colonies of European powers until the 1960s.
3. Telles’s work (2004) calls attention to the underrepresentation of black teachers and students in higher education as one of the most evident indicators of racial discrimination in Brazil.
4. Although research on racism and education in Puerto Rico is scarce, some exceptions are Isabel Picó and Idsa Alegría 1989, Wilfredo Miranda 1993, Ada Verdejo-Carrión 1998, and Angel Ortiz-García 2006. Relevant newspaper articles are Tatiana Pérez-Rivera 2006 and Sandra Rodríguez-Cotto 2003.
5. Official textbooks are chosen by the Department of Education with the input of a group of selected teachers who read and analyze different textbooks and present their recommendations to the Secretary of Education. One teacher at Luisa Rodríguez Elementary School said she actually preferred the previous textbook because it had more illustrations than the 2002 version.

6. This Eurocentric paradigm not only informed colonial authorities but was also incorporated and refashioned by intellectuals and national elites in Puerto Rico (Ferraó 1993; Guerra 1998) and other parts of Latin America.

7. One indicator of this racial hierarchy in official representations of the nation is that, although more than a dozen museums have been established since the 1970s to showcase Spanish and indigenous traditions across the island (Duany 2002:49), it was not until the late 1990s that the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture opened the *Museo de Nuestra Raíz Africana* (Museum of Our African Heritage) and its exhibits on slavery and Afro-Puerto Rican culture in Old San Juan. Furthermore, slavery and the African legacy are completely silenced or merely mentioned as a footnote in other historic sites across the island (Giovannetti 2006; Godreau 1999). At the museum of the Castillo Serrallés in Ponce, for example, schoolchildren learn about the rum-making empire of the Serrallés family (owners of the Don Q. Rum emporium), their sugar hacienda, and their cosmopolitan European lifestyle. Yet neither the film documentary nor the exhibits of the museum mention slavery or feature any black workers. The silence is striking considering how slavery played a key role in the development of Ponce's sugar industry and that Ponce was among the top three sugar producing districts of the island during the late 19th century (Scarano 1992). The museum also erased blackness by turning what used to be service quarters (occupied by approximately seven black or mulatto men and women) into the museum office and tourist shop.

8. Puerto Rico was a colony of Spain from 1492 until 1898, when Spain ceded the island to the United States as a result of its loss in the Spanish-American War. Puerto Ricans have been U.S. citizens since 1917 but with limited representation and rights.

9. Our use of the term *maneuver* is based on Antonio Gramsci's theorization of the concept. He defined *war of maneuver* as a rather unsteady strategy pertinent to the realm of politics (Gramsci 1971:233). Similarly, our use of *maneuver* hopes to convey this sense of malleability and instability when it comes to textbook discourses that silence, trivialize, and simplify African heritage. More than strategies of representation that produce permanent effects, maneuvers are forms of representation that are employed at specific moments by teachers to support particular claims and used in combination with other pedagogical strategies that can subvert or complicate an initial position.

10. The older textbook *Puerto Rico es Nuestro País* (Vizcarrondo 1992) dedicates 19 pages to the Taíno, 26 pages to the Spaniards, and 10 to the African, in that order. The most recent social studies textbook *Somos Puerto Rico* (La Biblioteca 2002) dedicates 16 pages to the Taínos, 12 pages to the Spaniards, and 12 pages to the African.

11. Translation completed by the authors. The original text reads as follows: "no debemos rechazar a nadie porque tenga el color de la piel diferente al nuestro."

12. It is worth noting that although we found some educational material about slavery in similar stores in the capital city of San Juan, we found no complementary materials about Puerto Rico's Spanish heritage in San Juan or in any other school supply store. European heritage, in this sense, stands as the "norm" against the other two more "ethnic roots" for which booklets, manuals, or educational coloring books have been produced.

13. When our research team first approached the school to discuss this research project, some of the teachers suggested we visit another school. The principal also expressed concern about teachers feeling they would be evaluated by us. A few months later, however, that principal left the school and teachers assumed greater autonomy over school affairs. One of the third grade teachers, whom we

call Marta, was a leader of the group and was particularly eager to collaborate with us. She had an MA degree and had conducted research herself in a school setting. Her husband, she said, identified as black and was also very interested in the project. Another teacher, who had a black sister and a Spanish husband, recognized the impact of "race" in her family dynamics and was very supportive of the project. A third factor that could have influenced the teachers' decision to participate was our willingness to collaborate with them in school activities, particularly in the school's upcoming celebration of "Puerto Rican Week" by providing resources and inviting professors who were musicians and experts in theater and dance to take part in the celebration.

14. The original text reads as follows:

La esclavitud, como institución legal, estaba reglamentada por el gobierno. Las leyes tendían a garantizar un trato humanitario a los esclavos. Ofrecían seguridades respecto a su bienestar, salud y otros aspectos. Todo esto en teoría parecía razonable y hasta bonito, pero en la práctica la realidad era otra. Sólo algunos de los dueños de las haciendas eran comprensivos y humanitarios. En general, éstos eran crueles, sin sentido de caridad cristiana y dejaban el manejo de los esclavos de mayores inescrupulosos.

15. The original text reads as follows:

Los Reyes de España autorizaron al gobernador de la isla a repartir tierras e indios a los colonos españoles. Los indios fueron obligados a trabajar la tierra. A cambio, los colonos les proveerían alimento y ropa. También debían enseñarles la fe cristiana y el idioma español. Los colonos no cumplieron con el mandato de los Reyes. Se dedicaron a maltratar a los indios, obligándolos a trabajar en exceso y separándolos de sus familias y yucayeques.

16. Translation completed by the authors. The original reads as follows: "La importancia de las rebeliones está en que los negros esclavizados lucharon por obtener su propia libertad."

17. The original reads as follows: "piel y ojos oscuros; cabello rizado, grueso y oscuro; nariz ancha; labios gruesos; pómulos salientes; estatura alta; complexión delgada. A los esclavos también les gustaba la música, el baile y la narración de historietas."

18. The original reads as follows: "Fuertes, trabajadores y resistían largas jornadas de trabajo."

19. The first three authors and researchers in this study have physical characteristics that are at times construed as "black" in different contexts. Although not unquestionably or consistently recognized, some of us also claim a black Puerto Rican identity.

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