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# **Character or caricature: representations of blackness in Dominican social science textbooks**

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This article sets out to examine the question: how do social science textbooks used in the Dominican public schools portray national identity and ethnicity to its students? This article examines how the popular contemporary Dominican perspective on ‘blackness’ plays a fundamental role in the current Dominican social science public school curriculum. The article begins with an historical overview of race and ethnicity in the Dominican Republic and insight into how the relationship between the Dominican Republic and Haiti has shaped both countries’ concept of race, culture and ethnic identity in very different ways. The theoretical paradigm of the project is guided by constructivism and by and critical race theory. The methodological process of data collection and analysis is also outlined. Data sources include: interviews, participant observation, personal experience field notes and document collection. Various illustrations and activities from social science textbooks used in Grades 2, 3 and 5 are the basis for the results section. The results of this investigation are presented in three themes regarding the Dominican perspective of ‘blackness’ and how it is portrayed as a part of national identity and ethnicity. These themes are: (1) blackness represents less desirable social status; (2) blackness can be prevented through generational ‘blancamiento’ (whitening); and (3) blackness is represented by negative and exaggerated stereotypes.

## **Introduction**

Struggles over land, money and power are certainly a common source of disquiet and conflict in many regions of the world. However, with regard to the Dominican Republic and Haiti, the conflicts are also tinged with an underlying conflict arising from each country’s fundamentally polarized concept of ethnic and racial identity. The larger project from which this article is taken, sets out to examine the question: how do social science textbooks used in the Dominican public schools portray

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national identity and ethnicity to its students? In this article, I examine how the popular contemporary Dominican perspective on ‘blackness’ plays a fundamental role in the current Dominican social science public school curriculum.

### **Race and ethnicity in the Dominican Republic**

The Caribbean island of Hispaniola is shared by Haiti and the Dominican Republic. This small piece of island territory has the enormous task of maintaining two very different concepts of race, ethnicity and national identity within its borders—in Haiti, an acknowledgment and acceptance of its African heritage and in the Dominican Republic, a desire to deny or erase it.

The manner in which Haiti and the Dominican Republic perceive their African heritage is largely a result of the relationship that the two former colonies had with their European colonizers. Just prior to the French Revolution in 1789, the western portion of the island, which was held by France, had a significantly larger black population than did the Spanish-held eastern end of the island. The white, Spanish-speaking inhabitants of Santo Domingo long feared the idea of a militarily dominant, more densely populated, French-speaking black presence to their west. Their fear was not without some basis, however. At three points in time, Haiti occupied the Dominican Republic. The Dominican Republic now celebrates its Independence Day on 27 February to commemorate its third and final independence from Haiti in 1844. The fact that the Dominican Republic celebrates its freedom from Haiti rather than from Spain is a significant point. Independence Day in the Dominican Republic literally and symbolically expresses the country’s desire to embrace its European legacy and to reject its connection to an African past, a past that is very similar to that of Haiti.

One of the key means by which the Dominican Republic has chosen to distance itself from its African heritage is through the intentional process of ‘blancamiento’, or ‘whitening’. By encouraging European immigration to the Dominican Republic during the Second World War and by ordering the massacre of nearly 30,000 people of dark skin living along the Dominican-Haitian border in October 1937, dictator Rafael Trujillo left no doubt that ‘blancamiento’ was of primary importance in the Dominican Republic during his 30-year reign. Trujillo and his supporters coined the term ‘dominicanization’ to describe their efforts to clearly mark the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, meaning to underscore the difference between a black Haiti and a white Dominican Republic.

The reality, however, is that no clear racial and ethnic lines exist in the Dominican Republic. Categories are determined by physical appearance; you are what you look like. Thus, in a nuclear family it is very possible to have an ‘indio claro’ (light Indian) mother, an ‘indio oscuro’ (dark Indian) father and children who could be categorized as ‘moreno,’ (medium-brown complexion), ‘jabao,’ (yellowish-complexion with African features) ‘negro lavado’ (literally, a washed black person) and ‘blanco jipato’ (fair complexion with African features). Again, one can see that ethnic and racial distinctions are drawn along lines of physical appearance. This extraordinarily subjective means of determining racial and ethnic categories provide Dominicans

with the flexibility to downplay, or even disregard, their African heritage. The word 'indio', the Spanish word for 'Indian', has become a euphemism for 'black' or 'of African descent' in Dominican society. In the Dominican Republic, the category 'black' is reserved for reference to Haitians and Africans, not for Dominicans of even the darkest skin color. Thus, one can readily see that the ambiguous nature of race and ethnicity in the Dominican Republic allows someone of African physical appearance to consider himself or herself 'not black'. Attempts to obscure, or even deny, one's African heritage are easily accomplished in a society that employs dozens upon dozens of racial categories, all intended to circumvent the term 'black'. Instead, a person could self-identify as one of the many other terms used in the Dominican Republic, often 'indio'.

Just like many other Latin Americans, Dominicans have been grappling with ethnicity issues throughout their history. In the Dominican Republic, the central issue has been how to reconcile the dominant presence of an African-descended population with a nationally held Eurocentric ethnic ideology. One manner in which the Dominican Republic, and Latin America as a whole, has tried to reconcile these two opposite situations is by collecting inexact census information. A recent census taken in the Dominican Republic lists that anywhere from 10% to 90% of its total population could be considered 'Afro-Latin American' (Minority Rights Group, 1995). This vague percentage is due in large part to the incredibly flexible categories. For example, education, wealth and fame are all factors that serve to 'lighten' one's ethnic categorization (Mörner, 1967). Also, the definition of 'Afro' can be rather narrow, especially in the Dominican Republic. For example, many Dominicans would limit the definition of 'Afro' to Haitian nationals living in the Dominican Republic and not include a Dominican whose parents or grandparents are of Haitian origin (Minority Rights Group, 1995).

*Américas: an anthology* (Rosenberg *et al.*, 1992) succinctly states what is at the heart of race and ethnicity issues in the Dominican Republic—the Dominican Republic's relationship with Haiti.

The 22-year Haitian occupation left a significant impression on Dominican culture. With deep anti-Haitian sentiments still alive, the Dominican elite tended to emphasize its whiteness and European ties, as opposed to the blackness and African ties associated with Haiti. This white Hispanic ideology, which sharply contrasted with the visible reality of a large mulatto and black majority among the Dominican population, reached its peak under the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo, who ruled between 1930 and 1961. (p. 143)

The Dominican Republic has defined its own national identity as being the polar opposite of what Dominicans perceive to be Haitian or of African descent. Within these parameters, Dominicans are what the Haitians are not. In a segment of the *Américas* video episode 'Mirrors of the heart', Dominicans explain how national identity and ethnicity are conceptualized in their country. One interviewee, Carlos Pérez, reveals that even the darkest complexioned Dominicans do not consider themselves black; they would never use the term 'negro', the Spanish word for 'black', to describe themselves. Instead, dark complexioned Dominicans refer to themselves as 'indios'. 'Mirrors of the heart' also provides evidence that the practice of 'blancamiento'

(‘whitening’) is alive and well in modern Dominican society. In one scene, Pérez and his mother openly discuss his potential marriage partners. Although Pérez’s mother readily admits that her son is an adult and is free to marry whomever he chooses, she quickly acknowledges her desire to have a white daughter-in-law and blonde grandchildren. She offers rather matter of fact reasoning for this preference by saying ‘Hay que pensar en el futuro’, meaning ‘One has to think about the future’.

This anti-black sentiment is not the only force that has shaped the perception of ethnicity in the Dominican Republic. A central argument in Torres-Saillant’s ‘The tribulations of blackness: stages in Dominican racial identity’ is that Dominicans have not been solely responsible for the creation of their own ethnic identity. Torres-Saillant (1998) states in the article that Dominicans have ‘had to negotiate the racial paradigms of their North American and European overseers’ (p. 127). Historically, Dominicans have had to reconcile their fluid and nebulous concept of race with the concretely binary system of race based principally on ‘blackness’ and ‘whiteness’ that is prevalent in the US. Torres-Saillant underscores two incidents between the US and the Dominican Republic to illustrate this point. In one instance, the 2 September 1854 issue of the *New York Evening Post* ‘highlighted the blackness of Dominicans to spark antipathy against them in public opinion sectors of the United States’ (p. 129). The *New York Evening Post* drew attention to the black population in an attempt to undermine Secretary of State William Marcy’s plan to have the US officially recognize the Dominican Republic (p. 129).

Paradoxically, the US has also significantly downplayed the size of the black population in the Dominican Republic. Torres-Saillant (1998) notes that shortly after the *New York Evening Post* article was published:

... a writer seeking the opposite result undertook to underestimate the black element of the Dominican population—representing the Dominican people as—‘made up of Spaniards, Spanish Creoles and some Africans and people of color’. (p. 129)

Torres-Saillant’s two examples evidence the notion that the Dominican Republic’s desire to devalue or ignore its African ancestry is supported by other western countries. Both the Dominican Republic and the US would rather perceive the Dominican Republic as ‘white’ rather than ‘black’.

Alan Cambeira’s 1997 book *Quisqueya la bella: the Dominican Republic in historical and cultural perspective* is a deeply personal and patriotic interpretation of the country’s past, present and future. The book’s ambivalent tone toward the Dominican Republic’s handling of ethnic and racial issues can be seen as representative of many in the Dominican Republic today. Cambeira does sharply criticize overt, violent acts toward Haitians and Dominicans of very dark skin complexion; however, he does not criticize the underlying denial and disdain for ‘blackness’ and ‘African-ness’ in the Dominican Republic that actually fuel those violent acts. In a section titled ‘The parsley test’ (p. 182), Cambeira recalls how in 1937 Dominican soldiers, acting under direct orders from Trujillo, killed an estimated 30,000 Haitians and Dominicans living in the border zone between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Soldiers presented ‘suspects’ with a sprig of parsley and then asked the person ‘What is this?’

If the person pronounced the word *perejil*, the Spanish word for ‘parsley’, with a Haitian Creole accent, as in *pewejil*, then the person was killed immediately.

The macabre and sinister operación perejil (the parsley test) was considered the one foolproof method of uncovering who actually was or was not Haitian among the Black population. (p. 182)

Cambeira clearly condemns this type of racially motivated violence, but he fails to acknowledge the imprint that such outright hatred and fear has left on contemporary Dominican society. This lack of acknowledgment is observed in the comment:

... there has been a noticeable absence of calculated acts of violence and brutality targeting *dominicanos* of African and/or Haitian origins. (p. 222)

In *La isla al revés: Haití y el destino dominicano* (*The inside out island: Haiti and the Dominican destiny*) author and five-time Dominican president Joaquín Balaguer skillfully plays upon the long standing fear, hatred and ignorance that characterizes the sentiment of many Dominican citizens toward Haitians, their neighbors on the western third of Hispaniola. Balaguer (1995) firmly asserts that neighboring Haiti is at the crux of all ill to be found in the Dominican Republic. He accuses Haitians, especially those living in the Dominican Republic, of spreading disease and single-handedly destroying the Dominican soul and moral and ethnic values.

The intent behind *La isla al revés: Haití y el destino dominicano* (1995) cannot be mistaken for much more than politically motivated and racist propaganda aimed to fan the already smolderingly tense relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. In reference to Balaguer’s book, Michele Wucker (1999) writes:

The book is openly racist, warning that the ‘vegetation-like increase of the African race’ was a dire threat to Dominican culture and values. ... Balaguer’s book summarizes the official Dominican discourse that for many years shaped how citizens were supposed to think about race and Haiti: ‘The black man, abandoned to his instincts and without the brake that a relatively high living standard in any country places on reproduction, multiplies with a speed almost like that of plant species. .... Santo Domingo has been able and is required to serve as the seat of the race that is spiritually the most chosen and physically the most homogeneous in the Americas. (p. 53)

Within Latin America, the situation of the Dominican Republic is not unusual in that European physical appearance and culture are placed at the top of its pyramid-shaped ethnic paradigm. However, the context in which the Dominican Republic has forged its ethnic pyramid is exceptional in that it shares the same geographic space, the island of Hispaniola, with a Haitian population that represents the antithesis of its own ethnic make up. Although this argument is not accurate, it certainly carries tremendous social, cultural and educational weight in the Dominican Republic, as will be explored in the results section of this article.

### **Theoretical paradigm**

In the 1995 book *Lies my teacher told me: everything your American history teacher got wrong*, author and sociology professor James W. Loewen asks and responds to a

question that reflects the complicated intersection of identity formation, cultural transmission and textbook content:

Why are textbooks so bad? Nationalism is one of the culprits. Textbooks are often muddled by conflicting desires to promote inquiry and to indoctrinate blind patriotism. (p. 3)

Loewen sharply criticizes the blatant omissions, the propagandized rhetoric and the outright errors that he finds in 12 widely adopted American history textbooks. However, the US is not the only setting where accurate content comes into conflict with blind patriotism. Most recently, US military officials appointed former Iraqi exile Fuad Hussein to the new Iraqi Ministry of Education; he was given the challenge to revise the politically charged school curriculum that former Baathist leader Saddam Hussein installed in 1973. In a 2003 article in the *Christian Science Monitor* by Christina Asquith, Fuad Hussein says, 'We considered anything anti-American to be propaganda and we took it out. In some cases, we had to remove entire chapters' (p. 11).

Similarly, in 2001 Japan found itself lodged in a battle over textbook content with South Korea and China. South Korean president Kim Dae-Jung expressed his country's anger over what many South Koreans saw as a sanitized version of Japan's 35-year occupation of the Korean peninsula. China joined South Korea's demand for significant changes to the Japanese textbooks, specifically over what China characterized as a downplayed entry about the 1937 Nanjing Massacre. China asserted that the Japanese military slaughtered nearly 300,000 Chinese citizens, a number several times higher than what the Japanese textbook cites.

Through these examples, one can see that although the context may vary, the effort to balance culture, history, identity and political influence with education remains a constant task. The path that this project follows is one that places the subjects' perspective center-stage and allows the investigation to shape and reshape itself in order to better reflect the subjects' personal understanding of the topic being examined. As a qualitative research methodology, constructivism closely echoes this same perspective-centered foundation. Constructivism is not driven by hypothesis-testing or the attempt to replicate results found in previous experiments, but rather seeks to highlight the subjects' way of understanding the world around them. On the issue, Schwandt (1998) writes:

Constructivists are deeply committed to the contrary view that what we take to be objective knowledge and truth is the result of perspective. Knowledge and truth are created, not discovered by mind. They emphasize the pluralistic and plastic character of reality—pluralistic in the sense that reality is expressible in a variety of symbol and language systems; plastic in the sense that reality is stretched and shaped to fit purposeful acts of intentional human agents. ... Constructivists are anti-essentialists. They assume that what we take to be self-evident kinds (e.g., man, woman, truth, self) are actually the product of complicated discursive practices.

The situation-specific nature of constructivism makes it a very appropriate choice as the theoretical framework of this project. In Schwandt's words (1998):

The world of lived reality and situation-specific meanings that constitute the general object of investigation is thought to be constructed by social actors. That is, particular actors, in

particular places, at particular times, fashion meaning out of events and phenomena through prolonged, complex processes of social interaction involving history, language and action.

This investigation approaches Dominicans as social actors who have long constructed their perspectives of ethnicity, race and culture based upon their negative attitude toward the neighboring Haitian population. The impact of information, or misinformation, about ethnic and racial ideologies is discussed in several books in the area of education. In *Race is ... race isn't: critical race theory and qualitative studies in education*, Daria Roithmayr (1999) writes:

... in short, the classroom—where knowledge is constructed, organized, produced, and distributed—is a central site of social and racial power. (p. 5)

Pai and Adler (2001) assert that the essence of the educational process itself is fundamentally similar in all societies:

Every culture attempts to perpetuate itself through deliberate transmission of what is considered the most worthwhile knowledge, beliefs, skills, behaviors and attitudes. This deliberate transmission of culture is called education. (p. 40)

Education has certain 'tools of the trade' which aid in accomplishing curricular goals. 'One of the prime emphases has been on that most common "pedagogic device", the textbook' (Apple, 1999, p. 169). In *Power, meaning and identity* (1999), Apple lays the foundation for understanding the importance of textbook analysis in educational issues of race and ethnicity:

First, textbooks and other curriculum material provide levers to pry loose the complex connections among economy, politics (especially the state), and culture. ... Further, they are the results of hegemonic and counterhegemonic relations and social movements involving multiple power relations. (p. 171)

Although Apple (1999) writes this in reference to the US, his words are equally applicable to the Dominican context. The newest textbooks adopted in the Dominican social science curriculum seem to reflect a stereotyped devaluation of the African-descended population in the Dominican Republic. Although an attempt is made to include that population in the texts, the portrayal is often based on culturally held stereotypes about the severely maligned Haitian population, who many Dominicans perceive as a 'too close for comfort' representation of 'blackness'.

## **Methodology**

In this study, credibility was established through prolonged engagement, triangulation and member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Over a three month period in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, I worked closely with a self-defined Afro-Dominican who was very knowledgeable, as well as active, in matters of race and ethnicity in the Dominican Republic. This person regularly discussed, evaluated and guided my progress through the data collection process.



## Data collection

Various data collection methods were also used to ‘cross check’ the information being gathered. For example, much of the data I collected from interviews, participant observations and personal experience field notes reflected an anti-African bias in the Dominican Republic. The information taken from these data sources were used to ‘double check’ the data collected in the social science textbooks.

Document collection was the most fruitful data source for this study. Specifically, social science textbooks for Grades 2, 3 and 5 were collected, and so were curricular guidelines established by the national office of education (Secretaría del Estado de la Educación.) Other documents were examined and they provided background reading, as well as popular culture insights that were useful for this study. Those documents include: newspaper clippings from *Listín Diario* and *La Última Hora*, articles from the magazine *Oh*, and brochures and the newsletter *Cimarrona*, which is published by the Dominican grassroots anti-racism organization ‘Identidad’. Document collection was carried out throughout the time spent in the Dominican Republic.

## Coding the data

I coded the data collected from interviews, participant observations, personal experience field notes and documents in a two-step process—open coding and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the first step of open coding, I identified similarities and differences among the abstract concepts, or categories, present in the various primary data sources (that is, the textbooks and curricular guidelines.) Examples of categories that I established during this open coding step included: skin complexion, hair texture, age, job-seeking, desire to change beliefs, resignation (meaning, to change beliefs would be impossible so why try?), personal experience with Haitians, and opinion about ethnic backgrounds.

I began to uncover the paradigm, or organizational scheme, that emerged from the data during the next step of axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The axial coding relationships showed that the textbooks mirror the anti-Haitian bias that was noted in the personal observation field notes, participant observations and interviews. It ensued that the Dominican ethnic reality that was brought to light through these data sources was also seen in the social science textbooks.

## Results

*Theme 1: blackness represents less desirable social status (see Figures 1 and 2)*

The text used in Grade 2 has 10 illustrations of a variety of occupations (p. 54 of the textbook). Occupations include: a shoe repairman, a teacher, a construction worker, a butcher, a welder, a hair stylist, a shoe saleswoman, a baker and a police officer. Only one illustration featured on this page does not explicitly portray an occupation. This non-occupational drawing is of a very fair-complexioned male with blonde hair who is dressed in a shirt, a tie and a black graduation cap and gown. He is holding a

— Observa los dibujos:



- ¿Cuáles de estos oficios se mencionaron en la canción?
- ¿Qué tipo de trabajo realiza tu papá?
- ¿Qué tipo de trabajo realiza tu mamá?
- ¿Qué tipo de trabajo realizan los demás miembros de tu familia?
- Escoge un viajador. Pregúntale acerca de su trabajo.

Figure 1. Occupations. Permission granted by the Secretaría del Estado de la Educación

briefcase. The shoe saleswoman and the hair stylist are all very fair-complexioned women. In contrast, those having the darkest skin complexion are the construction worker, the welder, the shoe repairman, the butcher and the police officer.

Observa y comenta los siguientes dibujos.

- ¿Qué hace cada persona?
- ¿Qué documento personal debe presentar cada una?



Figure 2. Cashing a check. Permission granted by the Secretaría del Estado de la Educación

In these illustrations, fairer complexioned Dominicans are represented as members of a more highly educated workforce than Dominicans of a darker complexion. Although the workers of darker complexion are, in fact, portrayed as productive members of the Dominican workforce, their occupations are relegated to being ‘blue

collar' in nature, often manual labor. The construction worker and the welder are examples of this depiction. This correlation between complexion and employment opportunities reinforces the impression that a more European physical appearance is to be associated with education and 'white collar' employment, while a more African physical appearance is to be associated with vocational training and 'blue collar' labor.

Also, concepts of female beauty are represented in the illustrations of the shoe saleswoman and the hair stylist. The fair complexion and straight hair of both women represent a commonly understood standard of female beauty in the Dominican Republic, a standard that emphasizes a more European appearance and de-emphasizes traits that could be considered more African in appearance. The depictions of the shoe saleswoman and the hair stylist extend the Dominican standard of beauty beyond mere aesthetic preference and into the realm of work and employment opportunities.

This theme is also expressed in an example from the Grade 3 textbook. Three illustrations on page 141 of the textbook are part of a discussion on personal documents, for example, school identification cards, birth certificates, and 'cédulas' (national identification cards that have passport-sized photographs). The illustration at the bottom of page 141 shows five people (three women and two men) standing behind a roped-off area waiting to cash a check.

The first woman is very fair-complexioned and is dressed in a business suit, a scarf, high-heeled shoes and is carrying a purse. The second and third women are both of much darker skin complexion than the first, the business woman. The second woman is drawn with her hair in curlers. The third woman has a kerchief on her head; she has her hand raised, extended from her chest, raising some ambiguities about what she is there to do—possibly to panhandle.

Much like the 'Occupations' illustration in the Grade 2 textbook, this illustration attaches beauty to a more European physical type, a fairer complexion. Also, employment opportunities could to be attached to the first woman and not to the other two. The former, who typifies 'buena apariencia', can more easily be associated with success and employment than can the latter. These data indicate that employment advertisements that require that female applicants have 'buena apariencia'—literally 'good appearance'—seek to employ only those female applicants of more European appearance. This same sentiment is demonstrated in the illustration of the saleswoman and hair stylist.

This preference was also evidenced through a wide range of comments made by Dominicans in interviews and in personal experience field notes. For example, a 22-year-old Dominican male who gave an informal interview noted that young Dominicans like to date someone who has a lighter skin color than themselves. He stated that if all other characteristics were equal between two dating possibilities, a Dominican would likely choose the person of lighter skin color because it is considered more attractive. Although he did say that skin color is not the sole factor in partner selection, he was quick to point out the fair skin and straight hair are very high priorities for both men and women when choosing a mate.

My Dominican family-based living situation was a frequent source of raw data collection. For example, I was told by a Dominican woman in her mid-50s that 'I

would be so pretty if I would straighten my hair'. I was invited on several occasions to accompany the mother of my host family to the beauty salon. The host mother had indicated to me that straightening my hair '... would be very easy. It would look so nice'. Although I politely declined all offers to have my hair straightened (a hair stylist at a mall in Santo Domingo offered to straighten my hair at a discounted price), the host mother's pleadings persisted throughout the duration of the home stay. The exaggerated sense that straightened hair is 'pretty' and curly or natural hair is 'unattractive' is one manifestation of the European ideal of beauty and preference for physical appearance, which is also reflected in the social science textbooks.

*Theme 2: blackness can be prevented through generational 'blancamiento' ('whitening') (see Figure 3)*

Unit four of the Grade 2 textbook focuses on modes of communication and transportation. The second activity of the unit asks students to observe the actions of the people in the illustration shown on the page (p. 73 of the textbook). Six people are in the illustration. A middle-aged man is shown handling a 'for sale' sign; two girls and one boy are seated on a rug speaking with one another; another boy is seated on a couch, and is smiling as he speaks with someone on the telephone; last, a woman is seated at a table while she writes a letter. The room has a television. The boy seated on the couch is presumably watching television; this is not clear in the illustration because only a back view of the television is shown.

It is important to note that the middle-aged man is very European in physical appearance, very fair complexioned. The woman is much more darkly complexioned than the man. She is drawn with a large rear end and thick lips. Of the four children portrayed, three faces are shown. All three visible faces are very fair complexioned, just as the middle-aged man. The girl whose face is not seen in the illustration has blonde hair and her upper arms match the fair complexion of the other children and middle-aged man.

As mentioned, the topic of unit four is modes of communication and transportation. Given the variety of communication tools represented in the illustration (letter writing, television, telephone, face-to-face conversation and outdoor signs), the first question presented for students to answer seems particularly out of place. The question is '¿Qué forma el grupo de personas del dibujo?' ('What group do the people in the picture form?') Although a variety of answers may be possible, the most obvious response to this question is 'a family'.

Two key issues in the analysis of this illustration are: what is the significance of having students acknowledge the people in the picture as members of a single family? What does the depiction of the family, specifically the mother and four children, say about Dominican identity?

In response to the first question, the textbook encourages students to acknowledge that multiethnic households are a common familial make up in the Dominican Republic. One can interpret that although this familial make up may, in fact, be very commonplace in the Dominican Republic, it seems particularly out of

**Observa lo que hacen las personas del dibujo.**



**Comenta con tus compañeros o compañeras:**

- ¿Qué forma el grupo de personas del dibujo?
- ¿Qué hace cada persona del dibujo?

Figure 3. Family gathering. Permission granted by the Secretaría del Estado de la Educación

place to have students concentrate on that in the unit covering communication and transportation. On the surface, the illustration seems to portray a multiethnic

Dominican national identity and encourages Grade 2 students to easily associate Dominican national identity with multi-ethnicity. However, a deeper look at the physical appearance of all members of this family might yield a different interpretation.

The illustration's portrayal of the mother and her children are essential to addressing the second question 'What does the depiction of the family, specifically the mother and children, say about Dominican identity?' As previously mentioned, the textbook's illustration on page 73 emphasizes the multiethnic nature of Dominican identity. However, if the people in the illustration are to be seen as members of the same nuclear family (mother, father and four children), then the children are not drawn to outwardly show any physical resemblance to their mother, who is drawn to have more stereotypically African physical traits. Only the more European physical traits of the father are carried into the next generation by the children.

This illustration appears to suggest a portrayal of 'blancamiento' ('whitening') and 'mejorando la raza' ('improving the race') as they are typically manifested in the Dominican Republic and throughout Latin America. The illustration depicts in picture form the desire to lighten the complexion of the Dominican population through interethnic marriage. More African physical traits will, through the process of 'blancamiento', no longer be a visible component of Dominican national identity and ethnicity.

The images in this Grade 2 lesson echo the comments made by the Pérez mother in the 'Mirrors of the heart' video episode. She expressed the notion that each generation should strive to create fairer complexioned future generations through careful mate selection. Further evidence of 'blancamiento' was also gathered in other data sources used for this project. A variety of personal experience field notes record how many Dominicans 'calibrated' my own skin complexion to be 'india oscura' ('dark Indian'), and which fairer complexioned physical types would be a 'good choice' for me. One field note entry documents a comment to me that such a good choice would 'make my mother very happy'.

*Theme 3: blackness is represented by negative and exaggerated stereotypes (see Figures 4, 5, 6 and 7)*

The illustrations on pages 152, 153 and 154 of the Grade 3 textbook are part of a lesson on Dominican identity. The section is titled 'Somos dominicanos' ('We are Dominicans'). Page 152 has a picture of a male Taíno Indian. He is shown from head to waist. His face, arms and torso are covered in red and white paint. He is wearing a medallion around his neck. The top of page 153 has two more illustrations: a male and female identified as 'blanco' and 'blanca', the Spanish word for 'white'. They are labeled as Spanish. To the right, is another illustration of a male and female identified as 'negro' and 'negra', the Spanish word for 'black'. Similarly, they are marked as African. The skin of the Spanish/'white' male and female could be considered a brownish-orange. The skin complexion of the African/

### 3. Somos dominicanos.

Conversa con el grupo y el profesor o profesora acerca de:

- Por qué eres dominicano.
- En qué te pareces físicamente a tus padres y a tus hermanos y hermanas.
- En qué te pareces a tus compañeros y compañeras de curso.

**Selecciona dos compañeros o compañeras. Haz en tu cuaderno una lista con sus características físicas. Es decir, descríbelas físicamente**

- Di en qué se parecen.
- Explica en qué son diferentes

Observa el taíno de la ilustración.



—Comenta en qué se parecen los compañeros que describiste a los taínos.

—Di si tú te pareces a los taínos.

—Comenta sobre alguna persona que conoces que se parezca a los taínos.

**Haz una lista con las características físicas que tienen en común los compañeros y compañeras del curso. Coméntala con el profesor o profesora y los compañeros y compañeras.**

Figure 4. Taíno. Permission granted by the Secretaría del Estado de la Educación

'black' male and female is very dark purple. The only means by which their features are discernable is by a light blue outline along the eyebrows, nose, lips and neck.

The illustration on page 154 is a chart that describes in picture form how the indigenous, Spanish and African populations intermarried and had offspring; thus, giving rise to 'mestizo' and 'mulato' populations.



Comenta con el profesor o profesora y los compañeros:



**BLANCO      BLANCA**  
**(ESPAÑOLES)**



**NEGRA      NEGRO**  
**(AFRICANOS)**

¿A cuáles de estas personas te pareces tú, a los españoles o a los africanos?

- ¿A cuáles se parecen tus compañeros y compañeras?
- De tus familiares, ¿quiénes se parecen a los españoles y quiénes se parecen a los africanos?



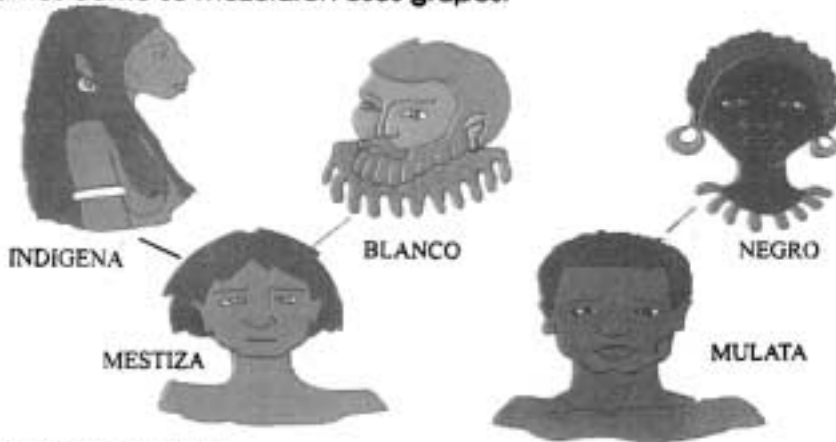
*Ya sabemos que los primeros habitantes de nuestra isla fueron los taínos.  
Después llegaron los españoles y más tarde los africanos.*

*Estos tres grupos (españoles, africanos y taínos) comenzaron a mezclarse. Es decir, se casaron unos con otros y tuvieron hijos.*

Figure 5. Spaniards and Africans. Permission granted by the Secretaría del Estado de la Educación

In the top row of the chart, three people are labeled ‘indígena’ (‘indigenous’), ‘blanco’, and ‘negra’. The ‘indígena’ is drawn from her head to mid-torso. The profiled illustration shows her naked breasts. To her immediate right is the drawing of the Spaniard, labeled ‘blanco’. He is drawn with red hair, blue eyes and an aquiline nose. The third illustration is of the ‘negra’. She is drawn similarly to the person

**Veamos cómo se mezclaron esos grupos.**



**Comenta en grupo:**

- ¿Cómo se llamaban los hijos de una indígena con un hombre blanco?
- ¿Cómo se llamaban los hijos de una negra con un hombre blanco?
- Describe físicamente los mestizos y los mulatos.

*Los taínos de nuestra isla se fueron muriendo. Esto se debió al mal trato que le daban los españoles y a los trabajos tan fuertes que tenían que hacer.*

Lee y aprende.



**¿Cuáles grupos quedaron entonces en nuestra isla?**

**¿A qué grupo se puede decir que pertenecemos los dominicanos de hoy? ¿Por qué?**

*Como los taínos murieron pronto y su raza desapareció de nuestra isla, sólo quedaron los blancos españoles y los negros africanos. Por eso decimos que la mayor parte de los dominicanos somos mulatos, es decir, la mezcla de blancos y negros. Pero no debemos olvidar que todavía poseemos muchas características de la cultura de los taínos.*

Lee y aprende.



Figure 6. Mestizaje ('mixture'). Permission granted by the Secretaría del Estado de la Educación

# Los indígenas de El Caribe



Figure 7. Casabito. Permission granted by the Secretaría del Estado de la Educación

labeled as African on page 153. Her skin is a very dark purple. Her lips are drawn very full and her nose is extraordinarily flat and wide.

The second row of the chart explains the term ‘mezizaje’ (‘biological mixture’) in picture form. A ‘mestiza’ is shown to be the offspring of an ‘indígena’ and a ‘blanco’. A ‘mulata’ is shown to be the offspring of a ‘blanco’ and a ‘negra’.

These illustrations contribute to the understanding of ethnicity in the Dominican Republic—an understanding that revolves around negative stereotypes about populations of indigenous and African descent. The ‘indígenas’, also referred to more specifically as ‘taínos’ at times in the lesson, are depicted nearly, if not completely, nude and frequently in body paint. The pictures on pages 147 and 148 of the textbook illustrate this. The depictions of ‘africanos’ are extremely caricature-like, drawn with purple skin, wide, flat noses and very full lips.

A reasonable observer can easily conclude that the illustrations presented here do not really offer the young students a fair means by which they could include an African component into their concept of Dominican identity. This is particularly critical to understanding textbooks’ transmission of national identity and ethnicity because this lesson is specifically intended to help students form their concept of what it means to be a Dominican. Can students readily associate themselves with a population that is purple? Certainly not. Therefore, the illustrations of ‘indígena’, ‘mestiza’, ‘mulato’ and ‘blanco’ are much more likely categories with which students will associate themselves; thus, diminishing or possibly excluding the African element—the element of ‘blackness’.

Another example is taken from the Grade 5 textbook. Here, a page from a children’s magazine insert, *Al Compás*, in the Dominican daily paper *Listín Diario*, is reproduced on page 62 of the textbook. The six-frame cartoon takes its name from the title character Casabito, who is the Taíno Indian child in the cartoon who shares information with the audience of young readers.

In the issue of *Casabito* reproduced in lesson eight, Casabito is speaking with another character, María Moñito, about ‘palabras tainas’ (Taíno words). Casabito is drawn wearing only a loincloth, reminiscent in style to the Taínos depicted in the Grade 3 textbook. María Moñito is a young girl with dark brown skin. She is drawn in stereotypical ‘pickaninny’ fashion, made popular by American vaudeville and minstrel performance of the early-1900s. María Moñito is drawn with large, round eyes, red, puckered lips and her hair styled in five knots tied with red ribbons atop her head. She has one curl resting high on her wide, round forehead. This characterization of María Moñito is another reflection of ‘blackness’ being represented in exaggerated, stereotypical fashion in the social science textbooks.

Negative and exaggerated stereotyping of ‘blackness’ proved to be a prevalent theme in much of the other data collected for this study, not just in the social science textbooks. A black female student from the US, who was studying abroad for the year in Santo Domingo, recounted in an interview that her host mother insisted that she remove her ‘trenzas’ (‘braids’) because such a hairstyle, along with her very dark skin, made her look ‘as if she were one of those dirty Haitians’. Participant observations

also recorded pejorative joke-telling with Dominicans of dark skin color or Haitians as the unfortunate target of exaggerated and blatant negative stereotyping.

## Conclusion

Textbooks are used as a form of ethnic propaganda in the social science curriculum of the Dominican Republic. Three major themes emerge from the textbooks' illustrated representations of blackness as they perpetuate the commonly held anti-black racial and cultural ethos of the Dominican Republic:

1. Blackness represents less desirable social status.
2. Blackness can be prevented through generational 'blancamiento' ('whitening').
3. Blackness is represented by negative and exaggerated stereotypes.

These themes are not only found in textbooks, but also in a range of other data sources. These sources include interviews with Dominicans, and non-Dominicans who live in the Dominican Republic and have first-hand experience in negotiating the Dominican concept of ethnicity and color; personal experience field notes and participant observations that I collected while living and conducting research in the Dominican Republic; and a wide variety of popular media outlets such as newspapers, magazines, and television and radio broadcasts.

The possible impact of these themes on students extends far beyond the classroom setting. The negative representations of blackness found in the textbooks lend false credibility to similarly negative popular Dominican perceptions of blackness, in which students are likely already well-versed prior to even beginning school. The extreme caricatures in the textbook images either dehumanize blackness altogether, or position blackness at the very bottom of the social, economic and aesthetic ladders.

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