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Mirrored Repressions: Students and Inmates in a Colonial Landscape

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Abstract

This article both relies on and challenges an Althusserian theoretical framework to demonstrate how schools have never solely been ideological state apparatuses (ISAs), but rather--- they have operated as repressive state apparatuses (RSAs) by design for the intentional colonization of marginalized populations and they continue to operate in this fashion. A brief historical timeline of New Mexico's educational system's development post-colonization is presented to situate and unfold this argument. Then, photographs of one southern New Mexico high school are juxtaposed with photographs of one southern New Mexico prison to invite the reader to consider, aesthetically, the resemblance in a way that pushes us to consider the RSA nature of schools. Additionally, school rules and prison rules get compared to further develop the thesis that this particular school (that serves a majority of Mexican-American youth in southern New Mexico) looks more like an RSA than an ISA. The conclusion is that schools were designed for children and youth, namely Mexican-Americans in this case, but this assessment can be widely applied to marginalized students of all races to varying extents in the U.S., to be part of the colonial project as obedient subjects and if they are "defiant," the school mechanism is prepared to repress and punish—activities Althusser assigns to RSAs. Ergo, schools are performing the precise function they were intended to since the beginning of colonization in southern New Mexico—which is to train students to obey hierarchies and if they do not, they are punished in various ways.



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*“Why haven't you **learned** anything?!”*

*Man that school shit is a joke.
The same people who control the school system control
the prison system, and the whole social system...”
-Dead Prez in They Schools*

Relying on a cursory glance at the two pictures below, can you tell which is the prison and which is the school? What are key differences? Omitting verbal cues and familiar acronyms, what are the iconic similarities in structure? What are some implications of the similarities in physical iconographic attributes? Should two distinct institutions with distinct imperatives—a prison and a school—be so similar in their superficial facility and function?

An apt symbolic introduction to this article, we are greeted with two entrances. Figure 1 opens into a correctional facility in a southern New Mexico city. Figure 2 is a gated entrance to a high school in the same city in southern New Mexico. Each serves the function of permitting and prohibiting entry to the institution within its fences and gates. In fact, the entrance to the correctional facility is structurally less prohibitive, with the school gate being more obtrusive and secure. These are familiar barriers that stop traffic for the purpose of scrutinizing and screening all bodies attempting entry into the institution. The axiom in operation is that all bodies are initially suspicious. We see specific pathways that bodies must travel in order to enter and alternate pathways for those exiting, and attendant electronic arms that forcibly bar or allow for either entry or exit. We see abundant signage that assert the authority of the institution while declaring control as to what can or cannot come into the facility.



Figure 1. A correctional facility in a southern New Mexico city



Figure 2. A gated entrance to a high school in the same city in southern New Mexico

In this case study, a southern New Mexico high school is compared to southern New Mexico State prison. For the sake of this analysis, two institutions were chosen that most would consider quite distinct in approaches and goals—the prison, a repressive state apparatus (RSA), and the other—a school, an ideological state apparatus (ISA) in order to examine whether our assertion, that schools that service racially marginalized youth are RSAs rather than strictly ISAs, is valid. Both institutions in this study are located within southernmost Doña Ana county in New Mexico and are within 20 miles of the other. Our comparison focuses exclusively on two qualities of these facilities; one area of investigation is the rules and regulations of each institution, and the other consideration centers on the organization and presentation of the physical plant.

This is a determinedly interdisciplinary approach. Our suppositions stem directly from ongoing dynamic exchanges shaped by our distinct, individual disciplinary lenses and our shared commitment to social justice and freedom. One of us is an Ethnic Studies scholar whose work, here, is situated in a cultural geography modality. Another is a Critical Pedagogue, whose work has centered around the ways in which youth of color are punished and criminalized within and without the school system. And the third is a Criminal Justice scholar specializing in the history of punishment in the United States. It is this marriage of discourses, the collaboration of our varied orientations, that fuels the boldness of the inquest.

The Anti-Crisis Assertion and Schools as RSAs

The foundational understanding on which this article rests is that we are *not* amidst a crisis in education for Mexican-American and other poor youth of color. We center our analysis on the plight of Mexican-American students, in particular, in the Southwest because that is the group struggling disproportionately in most societal outlets in our region. Meanwhile, we think our observations can be applied more broadly to other marginalized youth faring poorly in U.S. public schools. What we hope to launch with this piece is a widespread agreement that poor, brown youth are not in *crisis* and that, rather, they are precisely in the place that the colonial

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project has designed them as a group to be in the long trajectory of United Statesian oppression of their communities. To claim this educational moment is a crisis is to ignore the historical ways in which poor brown folk have long been positioned to labor for corporations, to passively accept the hegemonic order, and to struggle never-endingly toward liberty. A real crisis, from the nation state's vantage point, would be the rupture of this colonial strategy and if in fact this ever occurred, our education system might start to resemble what Democracy has promised us all along, and most certainly would look radically different from the education system we have now.

Further, we borrow from theorist Louis Althusser's premise that details the ways nation states and those in power use "ideology" to oppress people. Althusser, building on Antonio Gramsci's powerful concept of cultural hegemony, contended that there are Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) that initially work to punish bodies at the outset of a colonial project and then continue to do so in order to maintain a societal order that favors the nation state. RSAs include the military, police force, prisons, and in earlier colonial time—tools such as swords, cannons, and other weapons. In the 1970s, Althusser introduced the concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) as institutions that work to psychically coerce minds (of the subaltern classes) to submit, obey, and do the bidding of the nation state, for example, through labor. ISAs include the school, religious institutions, the family, media, and other sites where *ideas* are introduced and enforced to create social control. In brief, RSAs control and order bodies through *violence* in the first instance, while ISAs control and order bodies through *ideology* in the first instance.

Public discourse views schools as benign, and often benevolent, ideological apparatuses—not as being repressive or violent. Our claim is that they have always been RSAs, when coupled with the colonization and marginalization of communities of color, and therefore: always already violent in nature. Our major claim is that the general public views schools as benign ISAs and they have slipped with little detection over the past few decades that schools are also RSAs and that, while they still function as ideological bases where our youth become trained into serving the nation state and punished into assimilation, they have begun to overtly repress students via violence. While both RSAs and ISAs operate via the tools of violence and ideology, we notice by looking locally and nationally that it is becoming increasingly normative for youth's bodies to be criminalized and under corporal control while at school. Schools are and *have always been* RSAs for poor youth of color. Considering the nation state's ongoing colonial project, we have joined our three disciplines—Education, Criminal Justice, and Ethnic Studies—to begin understanding what positing schools as RSA means in our uniquely rural, Borderlands, colonial-continuum landscape. New Mexico is unique in the dialogic exchange about: rurality, the colonial project, and the Borderlands. It is a largely rural state that reached 'majority-minority' status in 2010 when the Mexican-American population surpassed Whites.

By comparing the newest high school in our area to a longstanding prison to explore the interstices of two institutions thought of, generally, as not of the same imperative. Crudely expressed, the school is a 'safe place,' while prisons are to house 'criminals.' Schools are typically open and colorful, while prisons are gray and bleak. Later in this piece we compare two institutional facets and offer photographs to visually contextualize the argument we make. The comparison points are: Rules and Aesthetics/Structure.

National Discourse

There are three main crisis discourses happening at the level of the U.S. Department of Education. One is that our schools are not as competitive as those in similarly developed nations, particularly European nations such as Finland. The second is that the U.S. is facing a graduation crisis, sometimes calling itself a “dropout nation.” The third concern is that the U.S. math and science curricula must be more globally competitive, and this is why we see increased and sometimes exclusive funding being funneled toward STEM programs. In order to deal with these crises, President Barack Obama on July 18, 2011, called on the business community and key figures from the public sector to help in transforming the U.S. educational system in order for it to be more competitive. This article locates its analysis within the second crisis, that of the “dropout nation” since New Mexico faces a higher-than-national drop out rate.

In 1997, as the national educational crisis discourse grew more prominent, Collin Powell founded America’s Promise Alliance, a foundation with 400 national partners that included the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In 2009 the foundation began to publish *Grad Nation*, a report that highlighted state’s graduation rates. The report also listed the best places for youth to reside. According to this national review, in 2013, New Mexico suffered the third lowest graduation rate, just above Mississippi and Nevada. The report listed the best town for youth in New Mexico was Los Alamos. What the report failed to contextualize was that Los Alamos is an anomaly in New Mexico and does not represent the average demographics of New Mexico since it is home to a national science lab and boasts intellectual and income rates far higher than the average in the U.S. The report features zero analysis about why youth disproportionately drop out in New Mexico, and offers no context for which towns are considered desirable in a given landscape.

In response to the drop out nation crisis discourse, critical educators such as Noguera, 1995; Kupchick, 2010; Fuentes, 2011; Nolan 2011 have alluded, contrastedly, to a criminalization crisis that pushes poor people of color out of schools— especially African-American youth. While our anti-crisis argument aligns with the push-out assertion, we make a case that schooling is not in crisis and is rather, a well-designed instrument of the colonial project and is doing exactly what it was intended to do to poor communities of color. In clear words, there is no crisis. Further, to claim crisis is to deny the colonial project’s impetus and ongoing work. Researchers above diagnose the activity correctly, that schools are punitive to youth and they have to be in order to make the body of color docile.

Noguera (1995) writes that since the inception of schools, they were agents of control. Schools were aesthetically modeled after asylums. In this aspect, we can see that schools from their beginnings have not only been ISAs, but also RSAs since they were constructed to train the body for routine and obedience to authority. Corporal punishment was an integral part of schooling system in the U.S. for centuries. New Mexico, for example, only recently banned corporal punishment in 2011. Lewis and Solórzano (2006) write that schools are not only training docile bodies but also criminalizing those docile bodies.

As Nolan (2011) notes, students are actively participating in creating themselves as criminal bodies. This analysis is important to understand the function of the ISA. This is possible because the pedagogy we see in schools is pedagogy of oppression. Freire (1970) argues that people learn to act and be like the oppressor, they are actively assimilating into the identities

prescribed to them. Freire reminds us that the oppressors use violence to subdue the population, and that therefore schools are oppressive institutions that use violence and tyranny in order for youth to ideologically view themselves as criminals who are unworthy except when they get good grades or are praised by teachers as a validation of their assimilated behavior. The praised students are the ones who will move up the ladder of higher education while those punished with bad grades will be the discarded as not deserving of a higher education or to be part of society.

Freire, one of the most radical and well-known pedagogists advocates for decolonization as route toward reaching autonomy. Similarly, Ivan Illich's (1971) anti-institutional stance is a critique of compulsory education and a call for a liberatory learning practice. These critical approaches identify the school system as an ill agent of the nation state from which nobody can realize freedom and, instead people are trained toward dependency and serving Capitalism's desires. In a longer analysis, New Mexico would be squarely situated within this U.S. Capitalist manifestation as one of the poorest, most starving states within the nation—by most accounts. Education, while *not in crisis* as it applies to Mexican-Americans and poor youth of color in the state, is one of the largest areas of concern the state faces.

Locale Introduction

In 2012, the 100-year anniversary marking New Mexico's statehood, a widely touted, state-of-the-art high school was built in the southernmost bordertown where we live and work. Even before the district broke ground, the public discourse surrounding the school was abundant and contentious. It was to be the first new high school built in 20 years and cost over one hundred million dollars to construct. It sits atop the city, looking down from the base of the Organ Mountains. The site is symbolically and literally situated at the intersection of a historically and contemporarily segregated small city of a little under 100,000 residents. The school's location is also contentious, by virtue of landing in one of a few wealthy sections of town—where a numerical majority of the residents are White. Residents of the community wanted the school to be exclusively theirs and others wanted their children to be eligible to attend a new school amidst a county and a region of relatively dilapidated schools. People living in the vicinity of this school are largely emigrant academics, retirees seeking a sunny retreat from the Midwest or the East, and folks who cashed out in the housing boom and found themselves able to afford a sprawling home at the base of the majestic mountains. The city we describe is largely Mexican-American, having early roots that linked it to Mexico. In recent years, there has been an influx of White retirees who understand that their "retirement dollars go a long way in Las Cruces," as a popular website gleefully reports (bestboomertowns.com). The school sits just on the outskirts of this ever-expanding housing project—what some call the new Scottsdale, Arizona. Thus, from its inception the school had a rocky start. In many ways, the tension is symptomatic of our town's residual colonial and racialized landscape, a story often dismissed in favor of the state's romanticized 'Land of Enchantment' narrative.

When the school was finished and unveiled, many of the townspeople remarked about its aesthetic. The gray, industrial, concrete, gated, angular style stands out in a panorama of mostly sand-colored, rounded-edges, and partially adobe-influenced buildings. Once the fencing, gates, lampposts, and other lighting devices were added, one could not help but see that the campus resembled a modern-day prison.

As we sat witnessing that moment of ongoing celebration—both the centennial and the new school—we have borne the reign of one of the more punitive, anti-education, anti-immigrant, anti-Civil Rights governors (a Republican, Hispanic woman) in the state’s history. As she prepares to exit the Governor’s office, the state remains one of the poorest in the U.S., with a dismal track record in student success, graduation rates, and high unemployment rates. This most recent legislative session saw deep gouges to funding in K-higher education.

Schools’ Promise

Schools have been touted, throughout the 19th and 20th centuries in particular, as the institutions that would serve as the great equalizers in the Democratic U.S. Education is widely considered the most effective route by which people from all backgrounds can eventually succeed and ‘become President!’ The liberal argument that school is a Democratic gift that will lift people and communities up is well known in the national discourse and serves to obscure the lived realities of systematic and routine oppression faced by the majority of United Statesians.

Most recent critical pedagogy/education literature identifies schools as punitive, and places that are non-neutral in their treatment of poor youth. And they are being described as particularly dangerous places for children of color. However, by most critical accounts, schools are still being posited as ISAs. Freire (1970) and Macedo (2006) state that the most imminent educational concern lies in the inculcation and indoctrination of our children by mainstream, assimilationist ideas that purport to elevate those who are compliant—what Althusser calls the work of ISAs. Certainly in dialogue with these assertions, but also taking a step further, we posit that schools are enterprises rooted in the colonial project and we can see this today more clearly with the use of public monies to deny students schooling through charter schools and their proliferation. Schools now, in our estimation, resemble Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) more than ever before. And, they were always RSAs by design.

Methodology

To explore this theoretical premise, we employ a single case study that compares a local high school to a local prison. Regardless of one’s political or ideological thinking about the prison, there is little room for debate on the following; the penitentiary is unequivocally an RSA. According to Althusser, there are two key features that mark an RSA as such: 1) physically ordered/controlled/manipulated bodies and 2) the use of violence in the first instance. Prisons are designed specifically to direct, catalog, regulate, manage, and ‘correct’ bodies. Likewise they routinely, and by design, rely on the threat or use of violence to do so. Punishment itself, and prison is its penultimate harshest form in the U. S., is commonly defined by those who study it as ‘coerced suffering’ or ‘imposed hard treatment’ (Alexander, 2010). When incarcerated, one’s body is literally seized by the nation state that is in turn authorized to deal with that body as it sees fit. That which that nation state does in the name of punishment would in fact be illegal, and considered a violent crime against a person, in any other context.

A Historical Hypothesis

As we reviewed the literature and observationally wondered about the true state of schools, we simultaneously saw many ‘crisis of Latinos in education’ conferences, initiatives, and meetings being marketed and advertised across the nation. We realized through this process

that schools for youth of color have always been both ISAs and RSAs . Evidence of schools ramping up an openly RSA agenda includes zero tolerance policies that sprang up in the 1990s, police patrolling campuses, border patrol in some places like our region, suspension, expulsion on the rise, even increased arrests at the school site (Meiners, 2011). Evidence of schools being ISAs are the different discourses propagated through out the nation. For instance, Betsy DeVos, U.S. Secretary of Education, speaks of “school choice” as code for more charter schools; she is careful not to speak of denying students an education. Nevertheless, if we do a case study on charter schools in DeVos’s home state Michigan, specifically Detroit, Michigan, we see that students were being denied access to a quality public education. In Detroit, Michigan, charter schools opened and closed leaving students without a school and making them travel long distances to get to the next school (Binelli, M (09-15-2017). This is but one example of how describing schools for poor youth of color at the national level is nuanced—and we can point to a lack of *crisis* as we trace the punitive nature of education—along both ISA and RSA strands.

To seek answers, one can historically trace public discourse about punishment and the ‘public good,’ looking specifically at large policy shifts and social movements. What stood out glaringly was the famous shift from LBJ’s ‘War on Poverty’ to the Goldwater-credited ‘War on Crime.’ Debate about the 1960s Civil Rights Movement often includes criticism or lament about the movement’s efficacy and legacy—especially as we find ourselves in a more racist, anti-feminist, economically recessed time fifty years later. As we thought and talked about the current state of our nation, the answer to our question about how schools are linked to punishment crystallized. The 1960s constellation of social movements was so powerful that it almost fully supplanted ISAs with the introduction and, indeed, insistence upon new paradigmatic approaches and ideological frameworks from which to understand each other across positionalities. The discrete but linked-through-notions-of-freedom peoples’ movements had at their core a demand that White/Eurocentric, male, power-wielding State institutions be dismantled and that space be carved out, by any means necessary, for the voices and activities of all peoples in the U.S. The movements challenged colonialism, racism, sexism, and the different authorities that insisted upon maintaining the status quo. High school youth walked out of classrooms to demand, among other things, teachers who looked like them and taught from the same epistemic locations! Campesinos united for basic human rights and tolerable working conditions and convinced 17 million U.S. residents to boycott grapes! Universities opened Ethnic Studies programs, and women began to be hired in positions previously unattainable, among other shifts. We may argue that the transformations were not enough, or have not been maintained, but the simple and key fact that ISAs were *effectively* challenged and shaken remains.

These slow changes were not without heavy sacrifice. People went on hunger strikes, people were hosed down in the streets, spit on, beaten, dragged, attacked by dogs, killed. This television decade allowed viewers at home to see the brutality of the U.S. RSA as it abused bodies seeking democracy and equality—ideas written into the preamble of our nation’s constitution and, indeed, the social fiber of our national psyche. Viewing people being dehumanized drew empathy and sympathy and contributed to the national shift, however small or large one might imagine, in how we thought about race. The ‘War on Poverty’ was about reexamining national culpability and reordering the country’s priorities to work toward the creation of opportunities for poor folks, people of color, to gain employment and to enhance their education levels.

We are citizens of the richest and most fortunate nation in the history of the world...[W]e have never lost sight of our goal: an America in which every citizen shares all the opportunities of his society, in which every man has a chance to advance his welfare to the limit of his capacities. We have come a long way toward this goal. We still have a long way to go. (Lyndon B. Johnson, January 8, 1964)

Johnson (1964) goes on to directly name ‘racial injustice’ as one of the factors that determines how people become trapped in a life of poverty. Historians debate the efficacy of the programs instigated by the War on Poverty, but it is clear that the rhetoric and intent marked a clear departure from the overtly racist practices of the pre-Civil Rights era.

In the 1970s/80s, the ‘War on Crime’ was ushered in to the detriment of gains made by the War on Poverty, Affirmative Action, and other associated Civil Rights legislation. In Barry Goldwater’s 1964 acceptance speech as the Republican candidate for President he aggressively associated Civil Rights with domestic disorder and asserted danger on our streets from the menacing specter of an urban criminal of color. Johnson won the election and in 1965, picking up on the currency of law and order, congress passed the Law Enforcement Assistance Act. (Friedman, 1993) In effect the seed for governance through crime began here though it wasn’t until 1968 that, for the first time, the United States populace identified crime as a key national problem. (Chambliss; 2001) Nixon tightly seized the political gold that law and order tropes proved to be. Such tropes included ‘tough on crime,’ ‘individual responsibility,’ and ‘nothing works.’ No other presidential candidate since has dared to abandon those. By the mid 1970s the war on crime was in full swing and by the 1980s Ronald Reagan ushered in a corresponding hard line War on Drugs. The tools of domestic warfare were harsh criminal laws, strict law and media enforcement, and severe punishment. These strategies were positioned, and accepted, as the principal means to generate public safety and an era of mass incarceration unlike the world has ever seen took root. These initiatives specifically targeted young men of color who in 1995 came to be identified by Princeton professor John DiIulio as *superpredators* (Tonry, 1995; Chambliss). Poor people, in particular, single mothers of color and their children were also caught up in the penal web (Bosworth & Flavin, 2007).

When hegemony is threatened, punishment shores up. Because the heartstrings of otherwise oblivious U.S. residents had been tugged, harsh measures were taken to revert back to the previous landscape. Fleeting sympathies were thus supplanted by a bigotry and fear that resembled the pre-Civil Rights era. It was no longer enough that bodies were brown, black, female, or poor. Before the 1960s, only the demarcations of ‘Other’ were needed to despise those classes. In the 1980s, because of that shift, those bodies needed a second mark—that of criminality. In order to accomplish this, institutions that previously operated as ISAs became increasingly castigatory over the decades to eventually resemble what they do now—RSAs of the purported ‘colonial past.’ In the schools, we are arguing as others have, youth are being punished and being taught to submit rather than being taught the love of learning. Today’s schools are weapons of domestic warfare against youth, immigrants, communities of color, and the poor. These targets align with the country’s obsessed and frenzied feeling of danger that has been deliberately constructed over the past few decades.

The oft-repeated phrase that ‘the children are our future’ has been used in education advocacy rhetoric. Our sense, and what we hope to spark dialogue about, is that precisely

because the children are our future and precisely *because* an increasing majority of those children are brown, the public schools are purposefully being designed in the colonial formula of assimilation = success. And, because assimilation has never worked (and, indeed, was never meant to work), today's schools are operating not only as ISAs but, more than ever before—RSAs—that will ensure punishment for youth of color.

Rules and Regulations

Althusser asks, “What do children learn at school?” He agrees that students are instructed in reading, writing, and mathematics; but, he adds, “children at school also learn the ‘rules’ of good behavior.” (Althusser, 132) He claims that students are agents in the Capitalist division of labor and they are instructed according to the job each pupil is “destined for.” The “rules of morality, civic and professional conscience” are actually, Althusser interprets, “the rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labor and ultimately, the rules of the order established by class domination.” Thus, they learn to either labor, or to manage laborers. In the case of our assertion, the mostly poor, brown youth who inhabit our local schools are those being instructed in the obedience necessary for wage labor—to produce profit for others. Althusser writes that “the school... teaches ‘know-how’, but in forms which ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology* or the mastery of its ‘practice’.” (Althusser, 133) To approach a kind of test by which to evaluate our comparison between prison and school, a general review of the ‘rules’ at both institutions became necessary. In fact, using Althusser’s idea of the ‘ruling ideology’ of the State, we work to understand the ‘rules’ we discovered as part of the body control mechanism of the nation state.

It is the intermediation of the ruling ideology that ensures a (sometimes teeth-gritting) ‘harmony’ between the repressive State apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatuses...(Althusser, 150)

The *Family and Student Handbook 2012-2013* from the high school in our study and the *2012 Inmate Handbook* from the prison in our study were juxtaposed and reviewed for this section. While it is abundantly clear that less physical autonomy exists for prisoners as compared to students, much of the language and structuring of the handbooks supports our premise that schools have become RSAs. Before we share photographs of the two institutions that illustrate the similarity in their physical structure, it is important to highlight pieces of the official handbooks, which are contractual agreements, made with both student and inmate as they operate as subjects within their given institution.

In the section on ‘School Discipline,’ the school handbook states the following: “School disciplinary action will focus on management of inappropriate students behaviors and appropriate consequences.” (p. 10) Like with most terms outlined by ISAs, there is no need to define what is ‘appropriate’ and what is ‘inappropriate.’ These are either well-ingrained by the twin-ISA, the school-family, by the time young people begin attending school or else they become learned by discipline and the enforcement of authority over the students. They are assumptions embedded in the ruling ideology—and according to World Systems Theory, they are norms associated with Whiteness, male positionality, Christian hegemony, and the owning class (Alexander 2010). This is important to iterate within the context of our majority-Mexican American, poor community. Once a person becomes an inmate, there is certainly a deeper punitively associated with these ‘appropriate’ and ‘inappropriate’ categorized behaviors. We

reviewed two sections: *Visitation* and *Dress Code* that was troublingly similar in each handbook, to compare the language and punitively associated with certain behaviors and ‘rights’ for students and inmates. While we focus on visitation and dress code only, there are dozens of additional parallels that can be observed in the handbooks including: rights, property, search and seizure, access to certain parts of campus, identification requirements, among others.

Visitation

Both the prison and the school provide a section in their respective handbooks about ‘Visitors.’ The framework of Visitation marks certain bodies as within the institution’s clutches, as distinct from those on the outside. Each handbook includes language that describes visitors as potential ‘disruptions’ or as ‘interference’ to the institutional process. The school handbook encourages visitors to come see their students as long as they do not ‘interfere with the educational process’ p. 15). Additionally, visitors to the school must proceed first to the school’s main office before stepping on school grounds. As can be expected, visitors to the prison must perform much more than a visit to the main office. In fact, visitors are subject to a high-level of scrutiny that includes searching their person, their vehicle, and even changing the diaper of an infant in the presence of a correctional officer. (p. 1 Inmate Visitation)

In order to visit or to remove the student from school, much paperwork must be generated and exchanged. The language used to couch this detailed bureaucracy is “for the safety and protection of your child...” Custody is a term used frequently throughout each handbook—referring to the custodial rights of parents in the case of the school and custodial rights of the State in the case of the prison. ‘Authority’ is also an oft-used word throughout both guides—asserting to subjects that they are not self-governing within the confines/parameters of the institutions they inhabit. Who is the custodian, the authority? More importantly, they tell us who is *not* in charge. Language positions prisoners and students as docile subjects of unnamed authority. These Visitation sections delineate the passage of bodies from one authority to the next—a practice in administration of repression and one that is unique to RSAs.

Dress Code

Althusser asserts that the administration of laws, while not itself a physically violent act, is also a form of repression and thus exists within the scaffolding of the RSA. Self-presentation and expression are autonomous acts. To prohibit one’s choice about their attire is to inflict mortification of the self. In relation to autonomy over the body, most institutions have a dress code. Codes are enforceable rules and regulations, and thus, become an important piece in the dialog about how bodies are controlled. RSAs list the things you can and cannot wear, and the ‘infraction’ (another term used in both handbooks) of these codes result in various levels of punishment.

“The student dress policy is an essential aspect of creating a school environment that is safe, conducive to learning, and free from unnecessary disruption.” (P. 6) Again, the code instructs that “students shall adhere to a standard of dress and appearance that is appropriate,” with the assumption being that the school district maintains all power as a State agent in determining the parameters of appropriateness. In bold lettering at the end of the “Student Dress Code” section, it states, “Contact the school’s principal for more specific information about types of dress that are not allowed.” (P. 6) The code, then, is about obedience and limitation. The code

does not offer a list of what is appropriate dress, but instead shallowly offers what is ‘not allowed.’ In this way, the Othered youth, become hyper-visible in their presumed poor choices of clothing, while the backdrop of normative, appropriate clothing remains at the discretion of the ruling class who create the ideology that then gets shaped into ‘rules and regulations.’

The prison dress code is much more extensive and provides lengthy lists of prohibited attire. Appropriate and inappropriate items are in this instance much more utilitarian and obviously in-line with the purpose of the prison. Clothing with pockets is not allowed, certain jewelry is limited, long-sleeve shirts are prohibited and ‘gang-affiliated’ clothing is also off limits. In the descriptions about what is prohibited, the prisoner handbook is clear about why certain items are appropriate, or not, within the confines of the prison. The student handbook similarly prohibits ‘gang or gang-like’ attire or behavior, but does not as clearly explicate the reasons for this mandate. All of this ties back to the ordering and controlling of bodies within an institution and shows how policies and procedures are quite similar in an institution deemed ISA (school) and in an institution deemed RSA (prison). Because the rules look similar and overlap according to their infractions being punishable, we claim that blurred space as further evidence that schools are bleeding into the RSA category. Because the autonomy of a student’s presentation of the self authorizes institutional violence—expulsion from the school grounds—we see this as a clear practice of an RSA.

Physical Plant Comparison

RSAs are marked by their distinctive treatment of bodies. Such institutions impose and intrude on corporeal integrity through a multitude of means including violence. Bodies caught up in an RSA are not physically free. The apparatus dictates their movement, expression, and legitimacy while imposing punishment if they deviate from institutional order. The comparative images below demonstrate powerful, if disturbing, similarities between the structural expression of the prison and the newest high school in our region. The correctional facility was completed in 1983 and the school in 2012. With almost thirty years between their constructions architectural fashion cannot be what accounts for why they look so similar. It is evident in these photos that the like design elements of these institutions is not inadvertent and in each case is primarily dictated by the determination to control, arrange, direct, contain, transform, and conceal bodies. The pictures also capture the force and violence embedded in many of the design strategies. The intended logistical operations of these institutions, in particular those associated with repression are effectively communicated by their shared architectural landscapes. Each pair of photos is accompanied by a short commentary highlighting parallels and authoritarian elements.

Decorated Driveway

In Figures 3 and 4, we see decorous landscaping (or is it an attempt at décor) leading to the institution. The deliberate plantings do little to temper the absolute authority made clear with bars, gates, locks, and guards.



Figure 3. Prison

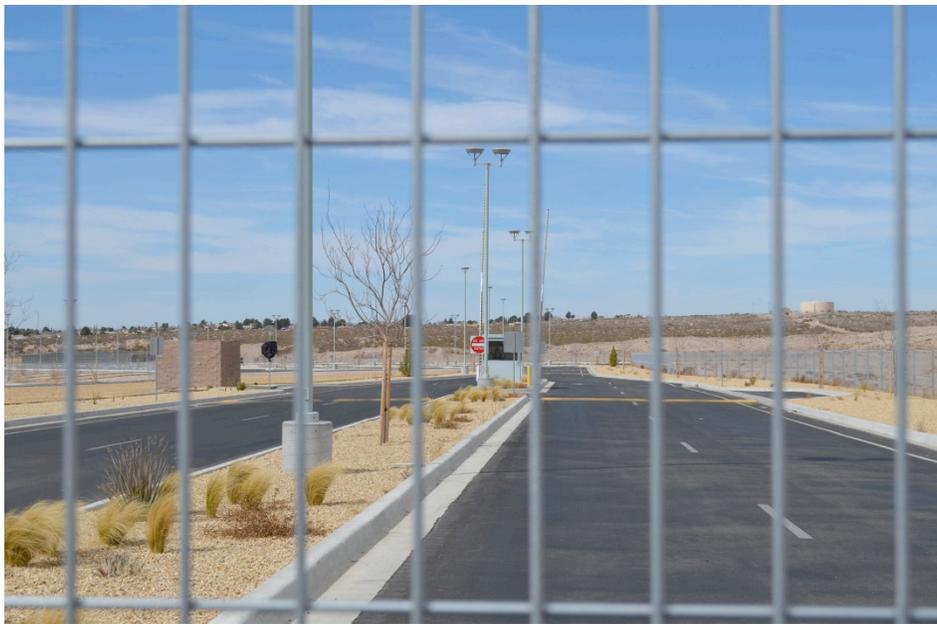


Figure 4. School

Outsiders

In Figures 5, 6, and 7, we see each institution designates who is an internee and who is an outsider. All those not ‘housed’ there are ‘visitors’ and it is up to the institution if they come in and where they can or cannot go. This limits witness and fosters institutional isolation. These are segregated facilities. The arrows control the flow and motion of bodies.



Figure 5. Prison



Figure 6. School



Figure 7. School

Bounded Compound

In Figures 8 and 9, we see each institution has a pronounced visible boundary marked by miles of assertive metal fencing. The locked steel enclosures maintain a corporeal compound that separates, confines, and isolates these institutions from the communities in which they exist. Questions we must ask ourselves as we take a look at these pictures are-What message do these bounded compounds send to those on the outside about the bodies who are on the inside. What identities are available to those on the outside as a result of these bodies on the inside who are marked as dangerous?

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Figure 8. Prison



Figure 9. School

Smack in the Middle of Nowhere

In Figures 10, 11 and 12, we see vast expanses of land surrounding these facilities. The scale communicates their remoteness and seclusion. These are not porous institutions. Segregation reinforces authority and repression.



Figure 10. Prison

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Figure 11. Prison



Figure 12. School

Conclusion

The punitive relationship between schools and prisons has been previously noted, it is called the ‘school to prison pipeline.’ In the education literature schools are identified as pit-stops or sites along a pipeline toward incarcerations; in the criminal justice discourse schools are but one social institution in a constellation of many that have adopted (almost exclusively) the strategy of governance through crime. In the Ethnic Studies tradition, schools are seen as sites of assimilation and simultaneous ‘Othering’ for the purpose of keeping poor communities of color subaltern within the World Systems Theory global order. What is distinct here is the demonstration, using a single case study comparing a prison and a school to one another, that schools themselves are RSAs.

We arrive at this assertion following the primary claim that education is *not in crisis* for poor communities of color that remain in the trajectory of a long, ongoing colonial project that is specific to the United States. These two premises: that education is not in crisis and that schools are RSAs rather than ISAs form a markedly different allegation than is typically mounted and it has distinct corollaries.

In the 1960s & 1970s popular ideology and activism asserted significant claims against the status quo (against well-established ISAs that included the schools). And for a brief moment education reform incorporated ideas of racial equality, liberation, and student voice. These claims were so powerful, and backed by television imagery, that they became at least cursorily embraced by a wide swath of people living in the U.S. Because of the efficacy of swaying the empathetic pendulum toward care and desire for true equality, the State and conservative ideologues began to crack down on people of color who were the perceived benefactors of Civil Rights legislation and things like Affirmative Action. Though the Civil Rights era and its attendant policies were relatively short-lived and ultimately effected little structural change (in part because the push back was so powerful), that moment has somehow come to shape the dominant narrative about schools and effectively erased the more accurate history/origins of the intention/directive of these institutions. We challenge the habitually asserted notion that schools, as a national socio-political institution, could/would/did enact or allow for the liberal democratic notion that these institutions could level the distance between social classes, destabilize racism and promote equality, interrupt notions of who is to be valued, cultivate voice and foster individual power, or alter ISAs in any substantive way. We say that given their deeply-buried roots in the colonial project, schools (and their relationship to sites of power, the government, and the State in general) will structurally never be sites that shatter ISAs. This is all the more evident by how seamlessly they are RSAs.

Our central point, deeply troubling and perhaps shocking, is that schools are doing exactly what they were initially designed to do. As part of the colonizing effort, schools were created to: separate children from their parents’ and ancestors’ ways of life, form docile/laboring bodies dependent on institutions as consumers, sort out ‘good’ from ‘bad’ bodies, assist young people in the process of self-colonization and loathing, indoctrinate young people as to their place in the normative expectations of U.S. society. This is not to say that education, the building of knowledge or the dismantling of ignorance, has not or cannot seed revolution or change lives and lift people from states of ignorance or despair. We write here about the *institution* of schools, about U.S. education structures not the process or experience of learning. Our contention is that

schools were designed and erected as part of the colonial project and this mission remains underway.

Our analysis is important for several reasons. Schools are distinct from other social institutions as there is a pervasive entrenched narrative that they are inherently good; that they are sites of fortification not repression. We claim that the progressive liberal idea of education is a fairly recent one, never realized, and in denial of the institution's *original* intent. Most scholars, from a variety of disciplines, noting the criminalization of today's educational landscape, assert this progressive notion of educational structures suggesting that today's schools are a deviation from the righteous path these institutions travel upon. We do not. We call for a renaming of the State-sponsored school as a site of colonization for our youth. In the tradition of Paolo Freire, Donaldo Macedo, Howard Zinn, Pedro Noguera, and others, we ask those invested in our communities and our youth, how do we truly cultivate autonomous thinkers in a way that does not simply uphold the nation state's increasing demands?

This is a modest preliminary inquiry. The comparison bears more exploration, perhaps juxtaposing more institutional dimensions as well as examining other institutions besides schools that are not traditionally considered RSAs. The theory too, invites more scrutiny. However, we are of the mind that schools have always been RSAs that shift and develop according to our national discourse and geo-political times.

Note

The authors contributed equally to this article. All photographs are by Dana Greene.

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