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Kevin Xiong

Macalester College, kxiong3@macalester.edu

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CREATING “S”ITIZENSHIP, DENYING CITIZENSHIP: A Hmong Man’s Journey Through High School

Kevin Xiong

I was motivated to write this paper to understand why some have to sit for citizenship and others don't. As an active student at Patrick Henry High School (PHHS), I was accepted as a citizen of PHHS and did not have to be sent to the Citizenship Room. Throughout my four years in high school, I was consistently on the honor roll, played on the varsity tennis team, was in the National Honors Society, and served as the Vice President and President of the service club. As a high achieving Asian student involved in all of these activities, I was placed under the Model Minority Myth. The Model Minority Myth proclaims the idea that through hard work Asian people can overcome any obstacles. This is often used in a way to make comparisons between Asians and other marginalized racial groups, especially Blacks. This is troubling as the makeup of PHHS is predominantly split between Asian and Black students. Where most Asian students are held to a pedestal and accepted as citizens in the school, many Black students are criminalized and forced to regain their citizenship through sitting in the Citizenship Room.

Being an Asian student and upholding these ideals of Citizenship, many teachers and staff spoke on my behalf. When my name did not get called for the honor roll, my teachers questioned why that was and gave me permission to go to the honor roll ceremony. When I was late to school, I was never interrogated, but was rather given an excuse. In high school, I took college classes at the University of Minnesota and had to bus back for the last class period at my high school. One day I did not have my class at the university so I decided to stay home until my class at my high school. Not really wanting to go to that class either, I purposely went to school late. When I arrived the school security asked why I was late, but before I could mutter an excuse he said, “oh traffic must be bad today, huh?” I just nodded and took my pass to class. It was one in

the afternoon, and I did not drive to school; his response didn't make sense. I consistently saw other students being questioned about their tardiness and escorted to class, but I did not need to answer any questions. I wrote this paper as a critique of the use of citizenship and patriotism in schools and how they perpetuate stereotypes of students. My positionality as a compliant Asian student was my excuse to get me out of trouble.

Most existing scholarships on patriotism and citizenship in education has assessed how education has become a segue to teach students “what it means to be human, including particular subjectivities and identities such as... the democratic citizen” (Biesta). Patriotism has not been as extensively studied as citizenship, but scholars have discussed the attitudes of students towards national pride and the politics of including patriotism into education. Least examined is how patriotism and citizenship affects a student's academic standing and classroom environments. Most have only discussed the positives of citizenship education. My research comes in to challenge these ideas of patriotism and citizenship positivities and show how students are negatively affected by these ideals.

Historical Context

One of the reasons why I chose PHHS is because it is named after the “ideal” patriot and citizen, Patrick Henry who famously gave his “Give Me Liberty Or Give Me Death” speech in 1775. After his speech, Patrick Henry gained popularity and was labelled as a patriot for standing up for what he believed. Therefore, PHHS's mascot is a patriot. Patriotic traits are played out through the IB program at PHHS.

The International Baccalaureate Program (IB) plays a huge role in how citizenship and

Creating "S"itizenship, Denying Citizenship

Kevin Xiong

education is executed at PHHS. According to the PHHS website, the mission of the IB program "aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect." The IB mission is what the high school strives for. As students walk risk-takers, knowledgeable, principled, open-minded, caring, balanced, and reflective (IBO). When asked about the different meanings of "citizen" and "citizenship," a teacher at Patrick Henry stated, "some of the meaning also comes from the fact that we are a committed and long-standing IB World School and value the IB Learner Profile attributes." Students recognized for their citizenship often also display one or more of the traits from the IB learner profile. In classes, teachers are often encouraged to evaluate students on those attributes. Has the student been a risk-taker in the class? How has the student demonstrate open-mindedness? Since PHHS has been an IB World School since 1987 (IBO), the program's values have been deeply integrated into the curriculum.

PHHS's location and student demographic is important to take into consideration. PHHS is located in North Minneapolis. In 2013, Minneapolis's population was about 60% White and 40% people of color -- 18% Black, 11% Hispanic, 6% Asian, 3% mixed race, 2% Native American, and less than 1% other (OneMinneapolis 2013). Although Minneapolis as a whole has a White demographic majority, North Minneapolis does not. According to the Minnesota Compass, only 11% of the North Minneapolis population was White in 2013; 53% were Black, 22% Asian, 4% mixed race, and 10% Hispanic (MN Compass 2013). According to the Minneapolis Public School's website, PHHS has the second least amount of White students. In 2015, PHHS had about 48% Black, 34% Asian, 9% Hispanic, 2% Native American, and only 7% White students. This is especially important to keep in mind later, when I discuss the school-to-prison pipeline at PHHS.

The idea of patriotism and citizenship at PHHS has changed over time. Patriotism began

the hallways of the school, attributes of the IB learner profile are displayed on banners and signs. The IB learner profile is a "broad range of human capacities and responsibilities that go beyond academic success" that consist of: inquirers, thinkers, communicators,

with Patrick Henry who spoke up for his freedom and believed in the power of his nation. Once PHHS adopted the views of the IB program and became an IB World School, the idea of patriotism has come to align with aspects of the IB learner profile. PHHS embodies these different organizations and views within their definitions of patriotism and citizenship.

Citizenship

Throughout PHHS there is a big usage of the word "citizen" and "citizenship" with different meanings for different instances. On the school's website, phrases such as "upstanding citizens" and "productive citizenship" are commonly used to describe their students. In response to the murder of Jamar Clark, students asked to lead a student forum.

Our students shared their experiences, empowering words, and encouraged each other as members of the PHamily to continue to be upstanding citizens. Our scholars are amazing thought leaders and trailblazers (henry.mpls.k12.mn.us).

This first definition of 'upstanding citizenship' is to stand up for what they believed and lead the path for others to follow. The students at PHHS demonstrated their citizenship by advocating and taking control of what they want: a student-led forum. The school's activities page states:

Many of Patrick Henry clubs and activities are "student-run" – empowering students to make a difference in their immediate school community as well as develop the leadership skills necessary for productive citizenship (henry.mpls.k12.mn.us).

Here, 'productive citizenship' refers to someone who possess the necessary leadership to make a

Creating "S"itizenship, Denying Citizenship

Kevin Xiong

difference and act independently. PHHS, in this instance, is challenging and teaching students to "act responsibly, reason effectively, and contribute to a changing society" (henry.mpls.k12.mn.us).

Another usage of citizenship at PHHS is the Citizenship Room. The Citizenship Room is located at the basement of the school building with dim lighting, a one-way mirror, and seats lined up is the Citizenship Room. Rows of seats are faced towards the staff's desk at the front of the room. The citizenship room also known as the cit [sit] room, is where students with misbehavior are sent to sit and to think, although not explicitly stated, on their citizenship. This form of citizenship aligns with what the National Association of Secondary School Principals agree with. In brief, it is a place for students who are 'disruptive' and does not fall under the ideal traits of citizenship.

The American Citizenship Award was to recognize students who would otherwise go unnoticed due to "disruptive students command[ing] attention" (NASSP). Both the Citizenship Room and Citizenship Award are in place to reduce the amount of disruptions in the classroom, but one rewards, while the other punishes. According to the NASSP,

We all want students who are always prepared in class, have their homework finished on time, and volunteer whenever volunteers are needed. We want students who are ready to help others, always play fair, and treat everyone with respect; students who exemplify the desirable behaviors we all want to encourage.

This creates guidelines to how the "ideal" student should behave within an educational setting: always do what is "desirable" to the authority. The 'authority' in the school setting would be the teachers and staff at the school.

Patriotism

I argue that patriotism separates those who do not align or fit into the model of 'us' in a "us

versus them" divide. Students who embody the ideal citizenship create a national identity of 'us' while students who do not fulfill their citizenship are referred to as 'them'. In Michael J. Bader's chapter, "The Psychology of Patriotism," he describes a patriotic symbol as a nation which "represent[s] the fulfillment of our longings for connectedness and safety. In this sense, the nation is a metaphor for a family" (Bader). Since PHHS often refers to itself as PFamily (Patrick Henry family), students who do not exemplify the ideal traits of citizenship are often segregated. This personal displacement affects academics and self-perception.

The Citizenship Room drives segregation. Students are taken out of their classes to be put in the an enclosed room to reflect and takes on a look similar to the school-to-prison pipeline: the concept that pushes students out of school and into the prison system. Although students are still within the school, the removal of students into the Citizenship Room is similar to the prison system in terms of the space and goal. Both have the mindset that isolation will allow for self-reflection on their actions. Patriotism creates a sense of wanting to belong to the family. The school refers to itself as family; students want to belong and connect with their peers. If a student is constantly isolated for not being able to fit into the norms, they would, as Bader suggest, "make do with whatever they can find to satisfy these needs" (Bader 41). This need to fit in and be a part of the larger group can sometimes be seen as a student 'acting out' by teachers. Students may speak out of turn or do something to gain the attention of their peers. Teachers oftentimes send the student to the Citizenship Room without the understanding that it further isolates the student and perpetuate the school-to-prison pipeline.

Contrary to isolating unpatriotic students, PHHS also has a system to honor those who have shown exceptional patriotism called "Power Patriot of the Week." The Power Patriot of the Week is one of the highest awards given to a student. The point of this award is to recognize students, staff, parents and community

Creating "S"itizenship, Denying Citizenship

Kevin Xiong

supporters who strive to model some or all of the characteristics of the International Baccalaureate Program.

"S"itizenship to Prison

The act of having citizenship and patriotism perpetuates the school-to-prison pipeline. Heitzeg defines the school-to-prison pipeline as "the tracking of students out of educational institutions into the criminal justice systems." Students are affected indirectly when they are suspended and are kicked out of school and onto the streets. In Minneapolis Public Schools, 1 out of 5 African American males are suspended versus 1 out of 29 White (mpls.k12.mn.us). Reflecting back on the demographics of PHHS, about 90 percent of their student body are students of color with 53 percent Black students. Students who are sent to the Citizenship Room for disciplinary actions are most likely students of color, especially Black students.

The Citizenship Room becomes an easy escape for teachers to take when they do not want to deal with students who are misbehaving in the classroom. Students are sent to a dim-lighted room with rows of desks facing the security staff and have a one way mirror. Students who are considered a disruption are sent to sit and reflect on their behavior. This room uncomfortably represent an interrogation room. With a one way mirror that staff on the other side can view through, it is as if the disruptive students who are sent there are prisoner having to reflect on their misconduct and prove their innocence. This is not the case for all teachers; one teacher states

I have not often used the "Citizenship Room" in part because it effectively removes me (the teacher) from the process of reflection that I am asking the student to do for having done something that I (the teacher) has determined to need removal of said student from the classroom

in response to her thoughts on the citizenship room. Some teachers are not willing to address

and work with the student's behavior and leave them up to others to deal with them.

Conclusion

Race plays a huge role in the formation of citizenship and patriotism at PHHS. The perpetuation of racial stereotypes allowed me to turn blind on those whose experience included the Citizenship Room. This created a divide between a 'them' (those who were sent to the Citizenship Room) and 'us' (those who were not sent to the Citizenship Room). My nostalgia for high school comes from a happy place for I was given and held up to the ideals of citizenship and patriotism. Where some of my peers had to sit to regain their entrance as citizens of PHHS, I was able to get a free pass. The combination of both citizenship and patriotism have created a new philosophy of education with implications that may not necessarily reinforce the positivity that it hoped to for. The school intends to create an inclusive environment, but how does it do that when it forces the isolation of students who are labeled as "disruptive" and outside the norms of their definition of citizenship and patriotism? This approach perpetuates and steer students into paths that society has pre-labeled for them.

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