KU ScholarWorks | The University of Kansas Central American Theses and Dissertations Collection

http://kuscholarworks.ku.edu

Seventh Grade Students' Perceptions of Nicaraguan Immigrants in Costa Rica

by Karen Bonkiewicz

Professor in Charge
Brent Metz

Committee Members
Charles L. Stansifer
Lorraine M. Bayard De Volo

KU LIBRARIES
The University of Kansas

The University of Kansas has long historical connections with Central America and the many Central Americans who have earned graduate degrees at KU. This work is part of the Central American Theses and Dissertations collection in KU ScholarWorks and is being made freely available with permission of the author through the efforts of Professor Emeritus Charles Stansifer of the History department and the staff of the Scholarly Communications program at the University of Kansas Libraries' Center for Digital Scholarship.

Seventh Grade Students' Perceptions of Nicaraguan Immigrants in Costa Rica

By

Karen Bonkiewicz

Submitted to the Department of
Latin American Studies and the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
May 2006

_____
Brent Metz, Ph.D. (chair)

_____
Dr. Charles L. Stansifer, Ph.D.

_____
Lorraine M. Bayard De Volo, Ph.D.

Date Defended: April 21, 2006

Copyright 2006
Karen Bonkiewicz

The Thesis Committee for Karen Bonkiewicz certifies
that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

Seventh Grade Students' Perceptions of Nicaraguan Immigrants in Costa Rica

_____
Dr. Brent Metz, Ph.D. (chair)

_____
Dr. Charles L. Stansifer, Ph.D.

_____
Lorraine M. Bayard De Volo, Ph.D.

May 1, 2006

ABSTRACT

Karen Bonkiewicz, M.A. Latin American Studies
May 2006
University of Kansas

Costa Rica has experienced large migrations from Nicaragua in the past two decades due primarily to Nicaragua's weak economy and volatile government. Costa Rica offers immigrants a stable economy and political situation. One consequence of these migrations is strong negative perceptions held by Costa Ricans about Nicaraguans. How and from where did the negative perceptions originate? What feeds and encourages these negative perceptions? Why do negative perceptions continue to persist? In order to answer these questions and assess the validity of the negative perceptions, this thesis analyzes essays written by seventh-graders regarding their opinions of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica. The overall student response was negative, which matches the discourse used by the adult population. In some instances, there was reasonable, objective evidence for the validity of the negative perceptions. However, in most cases, the students tended to over-generalize and exaggerate negative perceptions in response to their fear of the "other."

Acknowledgments

There are several people who made this research project possible and to whom I owe my profound thanks. First, my parents and brothers were a constant source of encouragement and support. Were it not for their many phone calls, emails, and prayers this project would not have reached fruition.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the high school counselors and teachers in Costa Rica who allowed me into their schools and classrooms to conduct my research. I am appreciative of their time, energy, and willingness to share themselves and their students with me. The students' cooperation and participation were invaluable and my interactions and experiences with them were truly enjoyable. I am also indebted to Adrian Vargas Coto from the Department of Statistics of the Ministry of Education. Often I was working to meet certain deadlines and his immediate responses proved to be crucial in completing this project.

I must also express my gratitude and appreciation to my Costa Rican host family, Lidieth Araya Pérez and José Rocha Bonilla. They edited the countless letters I wrote to principals and teachers as well as the surveys and essays I conducted with students. Over many cups of coffee and suppers, we shared animated conversations about my project and they answered a myriad of questions that surfaced throughout my research.

Dr. Christine Jensen, my writing professor, was an invaluable resource. Her expertise in helping me clarify and organize my writing, plus editing chapter after chapter, was essential in completing my thesis.

Lastly, I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Brent Metz, Dr. Charles L. Stansifer, and Dr. Lorraine M. Bayard De Volo. Their analysis was paramount in the completion of my thesis. I am especially grateful to Dr. Stansifer and Dr. Metz for their extended time and direction throughout the writing process. A special note of thanks to Dr.

Stansifer as it was his stimulating Central American History course that first introduced me to this fascinating region and thus led to this research project.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction…… 7

Costa Rica's National Identity…… 8
Review of Literature – National Identity…… 12
Research Methodology……..... 18
Organization of Research……... 22

Chapter 2
Political, Economic, and Social Histories of Costa Rica and Nicaragua 24

Spanish Colonial Era…….. 24
Independence Years 1820s – Early 1900s…….. 28
Early 1900s to late 1930s…… 34
1940s to 1970s…… 35
The 1980s…… 40
The 1990s to Present……... 42

Chapter 3 Migration……. 44

Push factors……. 44
Pull factors…….. 47
Numbers…….. 51

Chapter 4 Students' Essays and Data……. 73

Research Setting and Demographics……... 73
Analysis of Essays……... 78
Students' Perceptions by Themes: Are the Perceptions Valid?..... 87

Chapter 5 Conclusions……. 111

Bibliography…… 120

Appendices…….. 123

Chapter 1

Introduction

In the last decade much research and literature has been dedicated to analyzing the effects of the rising influx of Nicaraguan migration to Costa Rica.[1] The Nicaraguan migration is easily compared to the Latino population immigrating to the United States in search of jobs, education, social services, and an overall better quality of life. For those same reasons Nicaraguans migrate to Costa Rica. In both migration cases – Latinos to the U.S. and Nicaraguans to Costa Rica – it is vital to the economic, political, and social futures of each country to identify problems and benefits resulting from the migration and, through study, offer potential solutions to these issues.

In everyday life encounters, a strong current of negative perceptions exists among Costa Ricans about Nicaraguan immigrants that, at times, leads to verbal and physical conflict and abuse. One manner in which to foster good working relationships is to address these perceptions and analyze their validity. Ultimately it is by unveiling misconceptions and explaining cultural differences (that inherently exist between any two groups of differing origins) that one can begin to bridge the gap between them. This is especially important when they occupy the same physical, social, and political space. To this end, this thesis will examine the perceptions held by Costa Ricans of Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica and seek to explain why such beliefs continue to permeate Costa Rican daily life. How and from

[1] Carlos Sandoval's book *Otros Amenazantes* (2002); multiple collective investigations by Abelardo Morales and Carlos Castro (1999, 2002); and Vilma Contreras Ramírez's book *Educación sin fronteras* and her work in International Organization for Migrations (IOM) (2004). For complete citation, see Bibliography.

where did the negative perceptions evolve? What feeds and encourages these negative perceptions? Why do negative perceptions continue to persist?

This paper first posits that the vastly different political, economic, and social histories of Costa Rica and Nicaragua have fostered different national character traits, and in the process, shaped and formed contrasting national identities. This paper then suggests that the negative perceptions that Costa Ricans possess and display toward Nicaraguan immigrants is a direct result of these widely differing national identities formed by past and present political, economic, and social factors. Next, the paper recounts the migration history as well as elucidates the push and pull factors that influence Nicaraguans to migrate. This paper then presents and analyzes the essays written by students in four urban high schools in San José, Costa Rica on the theme, "Nicaraguans in Costa Rica."

What *is* Costa Rica's National Identity?

What are the values that Costa Ricans hold? From where do Ticos derive their sense of national pride?[2] What national characteristics distinguish them from their Central American neighbors? Costa Rican President Oscar Arias Sánchez identified Costa Rican values in a speech made to the U.S. Congress in 1987. He said, "[The United States] and Costa Rica share the most notable values won by mankind since the dawn of history: democracy, freedom, respect for human life, and the struggle for justice and peace."[3] The authors of *The Ticos* echo Arias in their evaluation of Costa Rica's national identity.

> "Ticos of all classes, political parties, and regions share a sense of national identity. They believe they have a unique way of life and a distinctive national character . . . They feel set apart from (and superior to) their Central American neighbors . . . their most cherished values [are] democracy, peace, the family, and education . . . The values of

[2] Ticos is what Costa Ricans call themselves.
[3] Speech to the United States Congress, September 22, 1987. Arias Sánchez, Oscar. "Let's Give Peace a Chance," in *The Costa Rican Reader*. Edelman, Marc and Joanne Kenen, eds. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989: 369.

> liberty, dignity, and equality include insistence that Costa Rica, though small, is a sovereign nation with the right to make its own decisions."[4]

The following paragraphs highlight Costa Rica's national traits as identified by the above quotes from Arias and the Biesanzes.

Peace. Costa Ricans, in comparison to other Central American states, have enjoyed a long history of peace. "Costa Ricans have long considered their country a peaceful haven in a violent world. They speak of their Nicaraguan neighbors as prone to violence and boast that even today their president can mingle freely with a crowd."[5] In the same speech to the U.S. Congress President Arias noted Costa Rica's absence of an army. He said, "[M]y country maintains no military establishment whatsoever; your nation has found it necessary to maintain a powerful military force . . . Let us combat war with peace. Let us combat totalitarianism with the power of democracy."[6]

Democracy, freedom, and individuality. These three traits are embraced and celebrated by the Costa Rican people. In his speech, Arias boasted, "Costa Rica is a proud example of a free people practicing the principles of democracy . . . We love democracy."[7] In defining the importance of freedom, Arias quoted educator Joaquín García Monge, "People, who rise up as one to defend their most cherished freedoms, are possessed by the only true sacred passion."[8] From the president down to the high school students who participated in my research, all demonstrate that democracy and freedom are closely held values – as is

---

[4] Biesanz, Mavis Hiltunen, Richard Biesanz, and Karen Zubris Biesanz. *The Ticos*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publications, Inc., 1999: 6.
[5] *Ibid*, 1.
[6] Arías Sánchez, 369, 374.
[7] Arias, 370.
[8] Arias, 369.

independence. One columnist writes, "The Tico is such an individualist that he plays soccer only by a miracle."[9]

Education. In comparison to all of Latin America, Costa Rica's public education system ranks among the best. John Booth writes about education in the early 20th century, "Education became a virtual civil religion, embraced by rulers and citizens alike."[10] He continues describing the present attitude Costa Ricans possess about education, "Citizens demand education services from the government. Rural communities want neighborhood schools even though tiny rural schools may deliver inferior education."[11] The Biesanzes connect education to the well-being of the democratic system, "Costa Ricans see formal education not only as a means of achieving material progress but also as a condition of democracy."[12]

Homogenous. Costa Ricans view themselves as homogenous both culturally and physically. Most are mestizos – a mix of European heritage and Native American ancestry. Jeffrey Gould explains that the term "mestizo" was constructed and employed by the (Nicaraguan elite) to shift attention away from indigenous heritage. According to Gould, "[m]estizaje[13] refers both to the outcome of an individual and collective shift away from strong self-identification with indigenous culture."[14] Costa Ricans, however, take it a step further in distinguishing themselves among their more indigenous-influenced Central American neighbors. Rarely, if ever, do they call themselves mestizos. Instead Costa Ricans

---

[9] Abelardo, Bonilla, "Abel and Cain en el ser histórico de la nación costarricense," in Luis Ferrero, ed., *Ensayistas costarricenses* (San José: Lehmann, 1971), p. 281.
[10] Booth, John A. *Costa Rica: Quest for Democracy*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998: 94.
[11] *Ibid*.
[12] Biesanz, 7.
[13] According to Gould, "'mestizaje' refers to the process through which the category is created." Gould, Jeffrey L., Charles R. Hale, and Carol A. Smith. "Memories of Mestizaje: Cultural Politics in Central America since 1920," unpublished manuscript, 1994. Cited from Gould, Jeffrey L. *To Die This Way*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998: 10.
[14] *Ibid*.

refer to themselves as white, especially in regard to the rest of Central America. As one Costa Rican student wrote in his essay, "People know us for our light skin color."[15]

Despite Costa Ricans' claim that they live and participate in a democratic, free, egalitarian, independent, and educated nation, they do not always extend those same rights to Nicaraguans. Why? There exists a fear that not only will Nicaraguans darken Costa Ricans' light skin color, but that they will disrupt and alter the mostly homogenous Costa Rican culture. For this reason, they express quite negative opinions about the Nicaraguans who come to live in Costa Rica. A documentary was recently produced in San José, Costa Rica about the Nicaraguan migration to Costa Rica, "*NICA/ragüse*." The frankness with which interviewed Costa Ricans expressed their negative sentiments is a reflection of the conversational rhetoric that occurs daily. Interviewees said, "There are a ton of Nicaraguans here," "They make us crowded here," "They kill their kids," "They assassinate their women," "They cross our border like they [Mexicans] cross the U.S. border," "They are violent by nature," "They are violent people," and "They take away Ticos' jobs."[16] These perceptions are not new. Author Stephen Kinzer related what a Costa Rican said in a 1985 interview, "'We consider ourselves somewhat cultured here,' said an engineering student who reflected widely held opinion. 'The Nicaraguans are thick-headed Indians.'"[17]

Are such beliefs founded in and supported by facts? Where did these negative perceptions originate? Why are such negative perceptions so pervasive in Costa Rica?

---

[15] The Biesanzes posit that in the absence of differences – both culturally and physically, which often lead to conflicts – the homogeneity has allowed Costa Rica to develop a stable political atmosphere (5).

[16] "*NICA/ragüense*." Dir. Julia Green Fleming. San José, Costa Rica: Collagemedia Productions, 2005.

[17] Kinzer, Stephen, "In Fearful Costa Rica, the *Yanquis* Are Welcome," in *The Costa Rican Reader*. Edelman, Marc and Joanne Kenen, eds. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989: 304

Review of Literature – National Identity

In order 1) to understand the negative perceptions held by Costa Ricans of Nicaraguan immigrants as outlined in the previous paragraph and 2) to answer the above questions, one must go back in time in search of the roots of these perceptions. Three particular time frames in the history of the Americas elucidate the origins and subsequent proliferation of such perceptions: Colonial Period, Formation of the State, and Neoliberalism. Finally, the contribution of this thesis to the present works will conclude the Review of Literature.

Colonial Period – Spanish arrival in 1500s to Central American Independence 1820s

Spanish hegemony over political, economic, and social life left little room for individual state development. Costa Rica, however, was farther isolated geographically than Nicaragua from the Viceroyalty of New Spain and the Captaincy General in Guatemala City. Out of necessity, the residents of Costa Rica made most decisions and thus developed a greater sense of independence earlier than Nicaragua. Another difference between Nicaragua and Costa Rica was Costa Rica's smaller indigenous population. Due to this fact, fewer Spaniards settled in Costa Rica. Instead, the Spaniards focused on the more heavily indigenous populated Nicaragua so as to convert them to Catholicism and exploit their labor. This once again provided the people of Costa Rica more liberty to make decisions. These key factors – geographic isolation and fewer indigenous people in Costa Rica than Nicaragua – were the initial beginnings of shaping Costa Rica's and Nicaragua's national identities. As chapter two demonstrates, Costa Rica will eventually see themselves as democratically and racially superior to the dictatorial Nicaraguan government with a nation of dark skinned people.

Formation of the State – 1820s-1920s

After Central America gained independence from Spain in 1821, the ruling class in each particular region began to develop strategies to build loyalties to each individual state. They believed that loyalty, whether genuine or forced, would reinforce states' sovereignty, promote progress, and later provide the means to advance their ideological ideas over neighboring states. The process of "nationalizing" a country, or in other words, creating a nation with a particular identity, came to be known as the period of state formation.

There are several theories as to how a country's identity and image are created. First of all, *what* creates identity? The creation of an outsider or enemy can be the force that compels a nation's people to rally, unite, and ignore individual differences within the country. When such a threat is felt, there is a tendency to make one's country appear superior to all others. "Social theory," says Michael Hechter, "has approached nationalism as . . . [the] production of beliefs that one's own country is the best, and the invocation of national unity to override internal differences."[18] In this sense, it is necessary to make distinctions between groups of people, between "us" and "them."

Who creates identity? According to Hechter, nationalism is created "through projects by which elites attempt to mobilize mass support."[19] This is to say, the elite ruling class possesses the governmental and monetary powers to shape and form the country's image. At the end of the nineteenth century in Costa Rica, there was a push among the elites toward creating a democratic government. Among them existed a unique group of Costa Rican education advocates who simultaneously held government positions that allowed them to funnel government monies and support into education. Mauro Fernández, a most vocal

---

[18] Ritzer, George, ed. *Encyclopedia of Social Theory Vol. II*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005: 519.
[19] Ritzer 519.

education advocate and affectionately called by Costa Ricans, "the father of education," enjoyed tremendous success because 1) he held the position of *Secretaria de Hacienda, Comercio, e Instrucción Pública*[20] and 2) he had the unconditional support of President Bernando Soto.[21] His education reforms paired with his democratic political ideology helped to shape the national identity of Costa Rica.[22]

Construction of identity (and national solidarity) was re-emphasized again after World War II. Like Hechter, theorists of nation-building Eric Gellner and Benedict Anderson agree that identity is created. Eric Gellner writes, "Nationalism is not the awakening to nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist."[23] Benedict Anderson argues that the identity of the nation is imagined, rather than a genuine representation of the people that occupy the land within the country's borders. Anderson writes,

> I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. Communities are distinguished . . . by the style in which they are imagined.[24]

Anderson posits that the image that persons of a particular nation hold of their country and of themselves (as well as outsiders) is but an imagined identity constructed and influenced by various factors such as schools, government propaganda, family oral histories, and perhaps most influential in the 19th century, the media. For example, the advent of newspapers heightened individuals' awareness of the lives of people in other regions of the

---

[20] Secretary of Treasury, Commerce, and Public (School) Instruction
[21] Rodríguez Vega, Eugenio. Cinco educadores en la historia. San José, Costa Rica: U Estatal a Distancia, 2001.
[22] Other key education advocates between the 1880s and 1940s were: lawyer Julián Volio Llorente; Minister of Public Education Roberto Brenes Mesén; creator and editor of the liberal and progressive magazine, *Repertorio Americano*, Joaquín García Monge; and professor Omar Dengo who was an avid political activist.
[23] Gellner, Ernest. *Thought and Change*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1964: 169. Cited from: Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities*. New York: Verson, 1991: 6.
[24] Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. New York: Verson, 1991: 6.

country and made one feel suddenly united to perfect strangers. Anderson describes the proliferation of newspapers:

> What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned? At the same time, the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed in his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbors, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life . . . fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality.[25]

Today, the media has multiple outlets to relay "facts." From newspapers to radio, from television to internet, and from satellites to cell phones, the media finds endless possibilities to pass news that occurs in one part of the country to another part almost instantaneously.

Another question that is asked about nation building is *why*? Why create an identity for a country? Weber and Durkheim have "seen nation building as a crucial component of developing an effective modern society, one capable of political stability and economic development."[26] In the late 1800s, ideas from the Enlightenment period in Europe trickled across the ocean to Central and South America. One key concept of a "modern society" was the idea of progress. In order to have progress, a nation needed cohesion (solidarity) which would generate political stability. Political stability, theoretically, would lead to economic development resulting in the overall well-being of a nation.

Anderson, Weber, and Durkheim speak of nation building as a collective effort. Pablo Vila concurs and goes on to posit another dimension to the theories of the construction of nations. He agrees that a particular identity (composed collectively) exists. Then Vila adds that, in addition to the propaganda by the elite and the media, each person further propagates identity through the narratives one tells oneself about himself or herself and the narratives one tells oneself about others. Vila writes:

---

[25] Anderson, 35.
[26] Ritzer, George, ed. *Encyclopedia of Social Theory Vol. II*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005: 519.

> "I start my work from the theoretical premise that each set of individual and group identities is [1] constructed within a culturally specific system of classification and [2] with the help of narratives about oneself and "other.'"[27]

Why do individuals recount such narratives? They do so in order to create a sense of unity and a distinction between "us" and "them." Some individuals fear the "other," or that which is unknown. Additionally by telling these narratives, one has the potential to create a sense of superiority over another. All these reasons help one to feel safe and good about oneself.

In summary, the construction of nation can be thought as 1) a means by which the ruling class fosters solidarity, mobilizes the masses for economic and political progress, stability and development, and distinguishes "us" from them"; and 2) the propagation of the narratives individuals tell about themselves and others based on what they chose to believe from outside sources (media, elite propaganda, etc.)

Neoliberalism 1980s through 1990s

One of the major consequences of neoliberal policies and capitalism is the movement of persons across international borders.[28] Transnational migration necessarily brings large numbers of multiple cultures into more frequent contact with each other. The greater number of ethnic groups, migrating to and living in the same physical space as the native people, changes the cultural landscape of a country that previously experienced lower migration inundations. This in turn has the potential to affect the national character of a country. Roger Rouse states in regards to national identity,

> "Migration has always had the potential to challenge established spatial images. It highlights the social nature of space as something created and reproduced through collective human agency and, in doing so, reminds us that within the limits imposed by power, existing spatial arrangements are always susceptible to change."[29]

---

[27] Vila, Pablo. *Ehtnography at the Border*. Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota Press, 2003: 114.
[28] An in-depth description of the effects of neoliberal politics is discussed in chapter two.
[29] Rouse, Roger. "The Social Space of Postmodernism." Chapter from *The Anthropology of Globalization: A Reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2002: 163.

When an individual migrates to a new country, one is used to thinking in terms of the immigrant adapting and assimilating. Vila, however, argues that immigrants take their culture with them and form a third culture, which is a mix of both. This new formation threatens the receiving country's ability to promote solidarity, political ideologies, and desired collective images.

Colonial Period, Formation of the State, and Neoliberalism

Costa Rica had unique experiences in the colonial period in relation to Nicaragua as well as to the rest of Central America, which led to an identity unique from its neighbors. Charles Stansifer highlights the national characteristics of Costa Rica and Nicaragua in terms of democracy in his historical analysis of both countries.[30] John A. Booth likewise discusses Costa Rica's principal characteristics, putting forth an analysis of the national identity of Costa Rica.[31]

For the past twenty or thirty years Costa Rica has been receiving hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguan both migrants and immigrants each year. Such migration impacts health, poverty, crime, education, and jobs. Changes brought by the Nicaraguan immigrants affect the Costa Rican national identity. To many, the Nicaraguans are seen as "threatening others" to the values and way of life in Costa Rica.[32]

---

[30] Stansifer, Charles. "Elections and Democracy in Central America: The Cases of Costa Rica and Nicaragua." Chapter from Philip Kelly (ed). *Assessing Democracy in Latin America*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998.

[31] Booth, John A. *Costa Rica: Quest for Democracy*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998. Both Stansifer and Booth's descriptions of Costa Rica's national identity are discussed in detail in chapter two.

[32] Sandoval García, Carlos. *Otros amenazantes*. San Jose, CR: Editorial de la U de Costa Rica, 2002: 155.

Contribution of thesis

This thesis uses the above literature to help explain why Costa Ricans possess negative perceptions of (and exhibit discriminatory behavior toward) Nicaraguans living in Costa Rica. Next, it presents a unique look into these perceptions through the eyes of students in the context of high school classrooms. Observations of students and essays written by them are the principal tools in elucidating Costa Ricans' negative stereotypes and perceptions. Lastly, this thesis attempts to deconstruct perceptions that are false or exaggerated.

Research Methodology

As part of my master's program, I studied at the University of Costa Rica in San José, Costa Rica from July 2004 to July 2005. I enrolled in graduate classes there while at the same time conducting research. The first semester I took a history class on world migrations and chose to study the Nicaraguan migration to Costa Rica and its impact on elementary education. To complete the necessary research I contacted the Ministry of Education. There I established several connections with both administrators and teachers. I visited elementary schools that had high concentrations of Nicaraguan children and quickly learned the challenges facing teachers and immigrant students as well as Costa Rican-born students. The first semester paved the way for me to conduct research during my second semester.

My objective was to gain an understanding of the perceptions held by Costa Rican students of Nicaraguan immigrants. Likewise, I wanted to compare their opinions and beliefs to those of Nicaraguan students. To this end, I asked the same questions about national identity and attitudes toward Nicaraguans to the Nicaraguan students (and students from other countries) present in the classroom.

In February of 2005 I contacted Adrian Vargas Coto, with whom I had worked the previous semester in the Department of Statistics in the Ministry of Education. He provided me with a racial profile of every single elementary school, high school, night school and schools for special needs in Costa Rica. I decided to focus my study on urban high schools in San José.[33]

From the demographic information that Vargas Coto provided, I made a list of ten high schools with large percentages of Nicaraguans in relation to the schools' total population. I proceeded to call principals, write letters, and send faxes to each one explaining my research goals and seeking their permission to conduct the research in their schools. Based on responses, I chose two coed high schools, and one all girls' and one all boys' school.

Upon receiving permission, the principals directed me to the *Orientadores*. They serve in the same capacity as counselors in the United States' public school system. They advise and register students, act as intermediaries between parents and teachers, provide seminars on teen issues (i.e. pregnancy, self-esteem, and study skills, etc.) In the beginning I hoped to have a sampling of classes across the seventh through twelfth grades with at least five Nicaraguan students present in each class. However, despite the large population of Nicaraguan students in each of the schools, only the seventh grade sections and a few eighth grade sections had five or more Nicaraguans in each class. According to the counselors, a high percentage of Nicaraguan students drop out by the ninth and tenth grades. Thus, I elected to work with only seventh grade classes.

In addition to choosing one grade level, I hoped to minimize other potentially confounding variables by selecting only math and Spanish (the equivalent of U.S. seventh

[33] High schools in Costa Rica include grades seven through twelve.

graders taking an English class) classes. All seventh graders in Costa Rica are taught the same core curriculum – there are no advanced or elective classes in regards to math or Spanish. This way I could observe the same lessons being taught to different groups in different high schools, and gauge and compare their reaction and interaction in a more objective manner. With the exception of one high school, I observed the same class section in both their Spanish and math classes. In the case of one high school, I observed the same class in Spanish and math, plus one additional Spanish class, due to the recommendation of the counselor. In all, I worked with nine professors – five Spanish teachers and four math teachers.

The next step was to establish a schedule with teachers. Due to time constraints, I was limited to visiting each class once a week for an 80-minute period. However, this proved to be more than enough time to get to know students and teachers for two reasons: 1) I had an entire semester[34] and; 2) I actually saw the same group of students for 160 minutes each week – 80 minutes of Spanish and 80 minutes of math.

In meeting with students in March, I provided them a general explanation for my observations in their classroom. I told them I was a high school teacher from the United States and that the goal of my research was to compare U.S. high schools with those of Costa Rica. The first few weeks the research method was mostly observatory. As the students and I became more comfortable with each other, I employed a more participatory research method. For the next month and a half we became better acquainted as I spent time with them before school and in-between classes (a period of between 10 and 20 minutes). It was during this informal time that I casually inquired about the life of a typical student in seventh grade in San José, Costa Rica.

---

[34] An academic school year in Costa Rica begins in mid-February and ends in late November or early December. There is a three-week semester break in July.

In mid-April I asked students to complete a general survey that provided me with biographical information. Participation was voluntary and I told students that all information I collected would be seen by me alone. I also explained that if I used any of the information they provided in my thesis, I would remove names and all citations would be anonymous. I also requested teachers to fill out a biographical survey.[35]

A few weeks later, I gave students a second survey with topics ranging from safety in school, respect for students and teachers, to racism. I wrote questions based on my own teaching experience in the United States and what I thought pertinent to high school age students. The questions on the survey covered several aspects of high school life. The second survey was completed anonymously.

The surveys provided good general information, but I still wished to delve deeper into perceptions and beliefs of Nicaraguan immigrants held by the students. It was during this time that I became acquainted with University of Costa Rica Sociology professor Carlos Sandoval García, a nationally and internationally recognized expert in Nicaraguan migration to Costa Rica and author of *Otros amenazantes* (The Threatening Others). He recommended that I duplicate a part of his study in my four high schools to assess the perceptions on a more intimate level. In *Otros amenazantes*, Sandoval administered two essays in several high schools and cited students' responses in his book. Thus in mid-May I replicated Sandoval's study and asked the seventh-graders to write about the following themes.

In the first one titled, "*Costa Rica como Nación*" (Costa Rica as a Nation), I instructed students to write those characteristics that distinguish Costa Rica from all other countries in the world. From this essay I hoped to gain an understanding of what Costa Rica

[35] The content of the questions for the teachers was modeled from the following doctoral dissertation: Berryman, James L. "Case Studies of Interaction between Teachers and Students in Selected Nebraska School Districts with a High Percentage of Mexican-American Students." Lincoln, NE: May 1983.

meant to them, or in other words, their definition of the national identity of Costa Rica. In introducing the second essay, "*Los nicaragüenses in Costa Rica*" (Nicaraguans in Costa Rica), I explained that a part of high schools in Costa Rica that I had observed, dealt with the immigration of Nicaraguans. I told them I wanted their thoughts on the issue. I reminded them that only I would be reading their writing.

It is from the second set of essays that I gathered the most in-depth and poignant opinions about Nicaraguans living in Costa Rica. My classroom observations paired with the essays provide a colorful slice of reality of the racial relations that exist between Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans today in Costa Rica. As one might hypothesize, the Costa Rican viewpoint contrasted sharply with that of a Nicaraguan immigrant student. These perceptions are elucidated and expanded upon in chapter four.

It should be noted that Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans, as well as students of other nationalities, took both surveys and wrote both essays. It should also be noted that while the second survey and both essays were done anonymously, several students chose to write their names. Teachers did not write essays. The first survey and essay instructions for *Los nicaragüenses en Costa Rica* can be found in the Appendix Section in both the original Spanish form and an English translation.[36]

Organization of Research

Chapter **two** examines and compares the political, economic, and social histories of Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Through a historical analysis at the national level, one observes the development of particular traits that, over time, have become part of Costa Rica's and Nicaragua's national identities. Many times these traits contrast sharply.

[36] I did not include the second survey or the first essay because no material was taken or used from them in this thesis.

Chapter **three** elucidates the push and pull factors of migration. Statistical data is presented to further develop a more complete understanding of the political and economic stability and instability experienced in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, respectively, that leads to forced migrations. The difficulty of estimating the number of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica at any one time is discussed, followed by a section profiling the "typical" Nicaraguan immigrant. Lastly, maps depicting Nicaraguan populations in Costa Rica are presented to construct a visual comprehension of Nicaraguan communities and settlement patterns.

Chapter **four** first analyzes the essays written by seventh grade students about *Los nicaragüenses en Costa Rica* – Nicaraguans in Costa Rica. Second, contents of the essays are compared to available statistical data as an objective means of supporting or disproving the validity of the seventh grade students' statements. Of the statements where no statistical data can confirm or refute students' comments, a discussion follows that seeks to explain possible reasons for the negative perceptions.

Chapter **five** presents the conclusions of the research. It answers the question, "Why do these negative perceptions continue to persist?" Likewise, it describes the potential for additional studies of Nicaraguan migration and perceptions stemming from the paper.

Chapter 2

Political, Economic, and Social Histories of Costa Rica and Nicaragua

What political, economic, and social factors have prompted millions of Nicaraguans to leave their homeland and cross the border into Costa Rica? These answers can be traced back to Spanish colonial times, followed by the Independence period, the era of liberalism, and ending in the present decades of the 1990s and 2000s.

Spanish Colonial Era

Nicaragua

Despite their present differences, both Nicaragua and Costa Rica had similar beginnings in the colonial era. In his article titled, "Elections and Democracy in Central America: The Cases of Costa Rica and Nicaragua," Charles L. Stansifer highlights the shared characteristics of the two countries in the colonial era. Both were provinces of the Captaincy General of Guatemala and seen as isolated colonial posts. Stansifer states that they were at the tail end of the political administration. Any time news, laws, or information was sent from Spain, it first passed through Mexico City, then Guatemala City and finally arrived in León, Nicaragua and Cartago, Costa Rica. It could take months or even years before either country received the message.[37] Neither possessed riches nor mineral wealth to attract Spanish settlers to colonize its already scarcely populated lands. During the colonial period, Nicaragua's population was around 175,000 and Costa Rica's was about 60,000.[38] Also, because of "the absence of large numbers of sedentary Indians, especially Costa Rica, [this]

---

[37] Kelly, Philip, editor. Assessing Democracy in Latin America. Chapter 9, "Elections and Democracy in Central America: The Cases of Costa Rica and Nicaragua." Boulder, CO: Westview P., 1998: 119.
[38] Ibid.

limited the development of landed estates."[39] Lastly, neither Nicaragua nor Costa Rica's physical geography offered Spain the potential of a transisthmian crossing.

As the colonial era progressed, marked differences began appearing. Stansifer and John A. Booth note that Nicaragua possessed a larger indigenous population than Costa Rica; this had several rippling effects.[40] First, the Spanish landowners took advantage of the Indian labor and formed encomiendas and haciendas that exploited the indigenous workers.[41] Booth posits that it was thus in the colonial era that "a new class structure developed, marked by extreme inequality between the wealthy [Spanish] landowners and the poorer, lower-status mestizos and the abused Indians."[42] At the same time, cacao and indigo were successfully introduced as cash crops due to the forced Indian labor. In contrast, Costa Rica passed through the entire colonial period without a single cash crop; it remained a very poor country until the introduction of coffee in the 1800s.

In order to insure the continued economic success of the encomiendas and haciendas, the Spanish needed to suppress the frequent resistance put up by the Indians, especially the Indians on the Atlantic coast allied with the British. Thus, the second effect of the large indigenous populace was the installation of military forces to subdue indigenous uprising. According to Booth, "[U]pper-class culture rationalized violent coercion of the poor to preserve the economic order."[43] In contrast Costa Rica Indians had no such European (non-Spanish) ally that threatened Spanish imperialism.[44]

---

[39] Ibid.
[40] Stansifer, 120.
[41] Immense tracks of land used for farming owned by Spaniards or Creoles and used indigenous or mestizo labor.
[42] Booth, John A. Costa Rica: Quest for Democracy. Boulder, CO: Westview P, 1998: 19.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Nicaragua and Costa Rica's attributes are cited from Stansifer's article on page 120.

A third consequence of the strong Indian presence in Nicaragua was the arrival of Catholic clergy.[45] Spanish officials saw Nicaragua not only as having the potential to grow economically, but as virgin ground to convert thousands of Indians to the Catholic religion. Thus, they built a large cathedral in León and placed the bishopric there as well. Once more, Costa Rica, in addition to being isolated politically, was also isolated more so from the religious conversions by the Spanish clergy.

Two final corollaries emerged in the colonial era that shaped Nicaragua's course in history. First, the Spaniards established a university in León in 1811, which contributed to its feelings of cultural superiority over Costa Rica. Second, the proximity to Guatemala and El Salvador and their need for meat encouraged a cattle industry to emerge in Nicaragua.[46]

Costa Rica

Costa Rica, in comparison to Nicaragua, marched through the colonial period mostly unnoticed and ignored. The little recognition or administrative, academic, military, religious, or intellectual aid trickled first down from the Captaincy General in Guatemala City through León and finally to the Central Valley. Costa Ricans thus were left to tend to and fend for themselves.

Why did Costa Rica receive so little attention and colonization? First, it lacked a dependable labor force as there were few large groups of Indians to coerce into working. Second, Costa Rica held no promise of mineral wealth or precious metals. Third, as stated above, Costa Rica possessed no cash crop during the colonial time period. Although cacao and indigo did grow on the Caribbean coast, the mountainous terrain made it either impossible, or hugely expensive, to transport crops to ports. Plus, growers on the coast were

[45] Stansifer 120.
[46] Stansifer 120.

susceptible to raids by pirates. Fourth, raising cattle, as was done in Nicaragua, was also equally unfeasible due to distance and transportation costs.[47]

Given such characteristics, what did the social classes look like in this time period compared to Nicaragua? Booth summed up the characteristics of Costa Rica,

> Costa Rica, in contrast [to Nicaragua] had much less wealth in exportable resources, fewer Indians to exploit, and was geographically isolated. It thus failed to develop the same rapacious elite culture as its northern neighbors and remained somewhat more socially homogenous than the northern colonies.[48]

Though desperately poor in the colonial period, this later worked in favor of Costa Rica. The absence of a dependable labor force to produce cash crops "helped to prevent the establishment of the hacienda [or encomienda] economy."[49] While Costa Rica was not completely void of social classes upon entering the Independence period, its social stratifications were much less pronounced than in Nicaragua.

With neither wealth to protect nor Indians to suppress or convert, the Spanish crown saw little need for military or clerical presence in Costa Rica. Thus, through the colonial period, while most Latin American countries were under strict Spanish rule, Costa Rica enjoyed a certain amount of autonomy.

Nicaragua and Costa Rica

As the colonial period neared the end, Nicaragua, economically, found itself to possess a fair amount of wealth due in large part to the Indian workers' cultivation of cacao and indigo crops and the cattle industry. However, only a small upper-class of Spaniards and creoles enjoyed the economic success. Economic gains created profound class divisions. Stansifer explains, "[c]acao and indigo plantations and cattle ranches with their Indian workers meant that the two-class system common to most regions in Spain's American

---

[47] Stansifer, 120.
[48] Booth, 1998, 19.
[49] Stansifer, 121.

empire was entrenched in Nicaragua in the colonial period."[50] Lastly, the Catholic Church enjoyed a role of immense power and voice in Spanish politics, hacienda economies, and class divisions.

In the twilight hours of the colonial period, Costa Ricans were still very poor. In the absence of Indians and of large landowners, land was divided into small parcels among many families and used for subsistence farming. Politically, Costa Rica, because of its physical isolation, experienced autonomy in making decisions that affected their everyday lives. Thus, when Central America gained independence from Spain, Costa Rica transitioned into a ruling position more easily than the other Central American countries that had been under Spanish rule for 300 years and had little experience with creating and enforcing laws. Socially, as Booth explains, Costa Rica's class make-up was of a more homogenous group. Void of large controlling hacienda or encomienda landowners, Costa Rica had less pronounced class divisions. Additionally, the few Indians that survived the disease and slavery in the Colonial Period, inter-married and "eventually assimilated into the emergent mestizo population."[51] Finally, without a bishop present in Costa Rica and fewer Indians to convert, the Catholic Church was weaker than in Nicaragua.[52]

Independence Years 1820s – Early 1900s

The political, economic, and social differences intensified even further when the colonies gained independence in the 1820s.[53] As newly freed countries, leaders from Central America rallied to form a new confederation that would assemble the five countries together under one government. Costa Rica's isolated position allowed it to remain outside of the political struggle and continued to enjoy its autonomy. Nicaragua, however, closer in

[50] Stansifer, 121.
[51] Booth, 1998, 34
[52] Stansifer 121.
[53] Stansifer, 121.

proximity to Guatemala City, separated into two groups: the conservatives of Granada and the liberals of León. Nicaraguan conservatives and liberals possessed dissimilar ideas about the future political direction of Nicaragua. The political schism was fueled by two rival family groups who went at great lengths to inculcate their political ideologies and agendas throughout Nicaragua. The division took its toll economically and socially and sent Nicaragua plummeting into economic hardship and social unrest. Costa Rica, on the other hand,

> entered independence with fewer large estates, a smaller oligarchy, a weaker clerical establishment, and a more equitable distribution of land than Nicaragua. These circumstances allowed Costa Rica to ease into national independence without the political strife and caudillismo that plagued its neighbors.[54]

In 1838 both countries withdrew from the Confederation and once more, continued down very different paths.

Coffee and the Economy

By the 1850s primary exports, indigo and cochineal, became unprofitable with the modern production of dye; thus all of Central America sought to diversify its exports, resulting in the introduction of coffee. Cultivation first began in Costa Rica in the early 1800s, which was producing 50,000 pounds annually by 1834.[55] "Costa Ricans were [also] the first to increase their production as completion of the Panama Railway in 1855 facilitated transportation of their coffee to growing European markets."[56] Nicaragua had been closely observing the economy of Costa Rica, and impressed by their production, it too started coffee farms. However, they were never able to match Costa Rica's production. Below is a chart that provides statistical data on the rapid growth rate of coffee produced between the years 1885 and 1914.

---

[54] Stansifer, 124.
[55] Woodward, 150.
[56] Brockett, Charles. *Land, Power and Poverty: Agrarian Transformation and Political Conflict in Central America*. Boulder, CO: Westview P, 1990: 21.

Table 1 – The Coffee Boom in Costa Rica and Nicaragua: Coffee production in millions of pounds[57]

Period	Costa Rica	Nicaragua
1885-90	24.5	9.3
1890-95	26.9	12.6
1895-99	31.1	9.0
1900-04	45.7	18.5
1905-09	31.1	19.9
1910-14	30.9	18.1

The mid-1800s coffee boom marked a dramatic shift in Costa Rica's economic success. Although coffee brought money to Nicaragua, its economy suffered from the loss of the cacao, indigo, and cochineal markets. The tables began to turn as Costa Rica's economy improved exponentially as Nicaragua's economic stability floundered and then plunged into economic strife in the late 1800s.

Political Environments – Liberalism, Positivism, Dictators, and Democracy

It was during this time also that liberalism, and later positivism, became prevalent in political thought and practice. Positivism was a philosophy based on stages of political and intellectual development. It emphasized order and progress over freedom and democracy and justified using authoritarian rule to achieve such goals. Early liberals, among them many educators, believed positivism was the answer to Latin America's economic woes.

Positivism was promoted by presidents Tomás Guardia of Costa Rica (1870-1882) and José Santos Zelaya of Nicaragua (1893-1909).[58] As a whole, the two presidents

> stood for restrictions of clerical power and privilege; abolition of slavery; abolition of burdensome taxes on commerce; more egalitarian political and judicial institutions and public education; and economic development, especially road, port and immigration projects.[59]

[57] Brockett, 22, Data from Edelberto Torres Rivas. *Interpretación del desarrollo centroamericano.* San José: EDUCA, 1971: 283-287

[58] Zelaya actually studied in France at the height of positivism influence.

[59] Woodward, 151.

Likewise, to stimulate economic growth both leaders supported inter-regional as well as international trade, and thus began to invest money in transportation, particularly in railroads.[60]

In addition to dictators and the bitter partisan politics of Granada and León, Nicaraguan daily life was saturated with clergy and military. The Conservatives and the Liberals made the transition from Catholic-indoctrinated schools to publicly funded schools a power battle. Conversely, because of the few clergy in Costa Rica, it was easier to establish the Liberal Laws of 1884 that "established free, compulsory secular education, expelled the Jesuit order, limited religious processions [and] permitted work on holy days."[61] As mentioned previously, in the absence of a large indigenous population, Costa Rica had few clergy present. Thus, the expulsion of religious orders did not create near as many conflicts as it did in Nicaragua. The following "equation" aided the advanced development of social programs and education in Costa Rica as compared to Nicaragua: small indigenous populations in Costa Rica as compared to Nicaragua meant few clergy in colonial times through the late 19th century, which in turn meant less opposition to the secularization of schools and implementation of reforms in Costa Rica in the 1870s and 1880s.

The strength of the armed forces in Nicaragua intimidated the people from political participation. Booth writes,

> This heavy military involvement in economic and political life retarded the development of civil political institutions and spawned both military rule and considerable violence. Except for Costa Rica, Central American nations spent most of the period from 1838-1945 under either civilian or military dictatorships.[62]

---

[60] In the case of Costa Rica, Guardia's leadership, albeit a dictatorship, provided the social skeleton framework for that which Costa Rica's future democratic government would continue to focus: social well-being, (free) public education, and transportation.
[61] Ameringer, Charles D. *Democracy in Costa Rica*. New York City: Praeger Publications, 1982. 19.
[62] Booth, 19-20.

Without a strong military force, Costa Rica avoided the bloodshed and riots that erupted on a regular basis in the 1800s in Nicaragua. Nicaragua, however, at the end of the 19th century, was riddled with economic strife, political instability, and deep social and class divisions.

The economic, political, and social situation in Costa Rica contrasted sharply with Nicaragua. In contrast to the Zelaya dictatorship, the election of 1889 in Costa Rica "is generally considered the first genuinely free election in Central American history."[63] This is often noted by scholars as the birth of democracy in Costa Rica, although it would not be until 1949 when all persons received voting rights. Economically, Costa Rica's small coffee fincas continued to thrive. Socially, while elite coffee owners were present, the overwhelming percentage of Costa Ricans were considered middle class and enjoyed modest living conditions.

The Coffee Economy and Positivist Political Philosophy's Effect on Social Classes

From coffee production in Costa Rica emerged a strong middle class, which did not take place in Nicaragua, nor in the rest of Central America. There were three explanations for this difference: 1) smallholder fincas versus the concentration of property in the hands of a few elites, 2) shortage of labor versus indigenous labor, and 3) technology. In Nicaragua a small elite class possessed the majority of lands, which were cultivated by Indians and mestizos, and lacked innovative farming technology. Thus, the two-class (rich, ruling elites and poor Indians) system became further ingrained in Nicaraguan society.

A smallholder society, "Costa Rica was populated in relatively large proportions by independent small farms, and it was they who initiated the coffee boom."[64] The lands were

[63] Stansifer, 125.
[64] Brockett 26, Quotes from Edelberto Torres Rivas. *Interpretation del desarrollo centroamericano.* San José, EDUCA, 1971: 283-287.

not confined to a small elite class; rather, farms were operated by families. The homogeneity of Costa Rica's population aided the rise of a middle class with few sharp class distinctions.

Shortage of labor did not allow Costa Rica to produce large amounts of coffee quickly. There were no Indians whose labor could be exploited, and thus the government relied on small, independent coffee farms operated by families for production. In fact, during harvest time, relatively high wages were offered in order to attract help.[65] Thus, the absence of conflict over labor shortages proved advantageous to nation building in Costa Rica, whereas the class stratification deepened yet further in Nicaragua between the elites and the Indians.

According to Charles Brockett, the third difference in coffee production in Costa Rica versus Nicaragua, was technology. Costa Rica made up partially for its lack of labor by importing a "newly invented processing machine that allowed the rapid expansion of production."[66] Technology, supported by the government, gave proof to liberals that modernization was indeed needed and the means of achieving it was by educating. Ralph Woodward supports this claim as well: "Coffee production in Costa Rica permitted the state to modernize somewhat more rapidly than other Central American states."[67] Coffee production was an economic factor that provided the impetus for the development of education, which leads to yet another distinction between Costa Rica and Nicaragua.

Liberals in Costa Rica believed that modernization depended on the education of the masses. The coffee profits provided the economic means to open and maintain schools. Additionally, the absence of a strong military force or the need to fund it allowed the liberal leaders to funnel more government monies into education. While Nicaragua's elite believed

---

[65] Brockett 27.
[66] Brockett 27.
[67] Woodward, 150.

education was only for the upper-class and not for the working indigenous labor force, Costa Rica passed a law making school mandatory for all children in 1884. Costa Rican youth still today enjoy the fruits of labor by the early fathers of education. Education advocates Julián Volio Llorente, Mauro Fernández, Roberto Brenes Mesén, Joaquín García Monge, and Omar Dengo were five individuals who radically influenced, developed, and implemented a series of education programs in Costa Rica from the elementary level to the university level from 1866-1945.[68] Because of these highly-educated, charismatic, and dedicated individuals, education and democracy came to be identified as valued characteristics of Costa Rica's national identity. Table 2 below provides a quick glance at one example of the disparity in education in Costa Rica and Nicaragua as evidenced by the literacy rate.

Table 2[69]
Percentage of literacy in Costa Rica (1927 & 1950) and Nicaragua (1920 & 1950)

Country	Census from 1920 & 1927	Census from 1950
Costa Rica	65.7%	78.8%
Nicaragua	40.5%	37.4%

Early 1900s to late1930s

With the exception of the 1917 coup by the Tinoco regime, Costa Rica managed to escape dictatorial rule in the early decades of the twentieth century. Likewise, because it had little mineral or metal wealth to offer, nor was it a military threat, Costa Rica experienced little intervention by the United States. Nicaragua, in contrast, experienced multiple interventions by the U.S. military between 1909 and 1932. Once more, Costa Ricans enjoyed their political autonomy.

[68] See Eugenio Rodríquez Vega. *Educadores en la historia*. San José, CR: EUNED, 2001, 10.
[69] Molina, Iván and Steven Palmer. *Educando a Costa Rica: Alfebetización popular, formación docente y género (1880-1950)*. San José, CR: Editorial Porvenir, S.A., 2000, 44. Cited from Oficial, Censo general de 1920. Oficial de población de Costa Rica 11 de mayo de 1927, p. 40 and 44-51.

The economic woes in Nicaragua created by the political divisions and subsequent social unrest of the Independence era carried on into the twentieth century. These woes were heightened by the intervention of the U.S. government and military in the ousting of Zelaya in 1909. When the Marines pulled out of Nicaragua in 1931-32, they left three lasting legacies: "U.S. economic domination; a guerrilla war; and the development of Nicaragua's National Guard."[70] The development of the National Guard led to the suppression of the Sandinista revolutionaries who protested U.S. presence and sought political and economic independence. In 1934, Anastasia Somoza García, commander of the National Guard, ordered the assassination of Sandino. In 1936 Somoza forced President Sacasa to resign and in 1937 became President.[71] Nicaragua was about to enter into one of the longest, most harsh and oppressive regimes the Nicaraguan people had ever experienced.

1940s to 1970s

Costa Rica

As mentioned previously, Costa Rica enjoyed frequent and fair elections beginning in 1889 and continuing through the 1940s. Democracy appeared to be taking root in Costa Rica at a time when the Dictators' Club of the 1930s was norm of the era. Then, in 1948, a five-month civil war in Costa Rica broke out over a disputed election. Rafael Calderón Guardia, who was a social reformer aligned with the Communist Party, lost in a landslide vote to Otilio Ulate. Unwilling to accept defeat, he and his supporters declared a fraudulent election, which sent the country into civil war. It ended quickly when José Figueres – an advocate for middle and lower class rights and a democratic government – and his supporters defeated Calderón

[70] Thiesson, Heather K. "Nicaragua," in Tenenbaum, Barbara A., ed. *Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1996: Vol. IV, 185.
[71] *Ibid*.

and the army.[72] Stansifer comments on the brief war, "This much studied event is now generally understood to have been not a social upheaval of the category of the Mexican or Cuban Revolutions but an anticommunist, middle-class movement in favor of political democracy."[73]

By decree, Figueres ruled for nineteen months before turning power over to Ulate. The return of power to the fairly-elected Ulate was a tremendous act of faith in the democratic system by Figueres. Ulate was not of Figueres' political party, yet he gave up power to Ulate in the name of establishing a democratic government. Democracy was further solidified when in the 1953 election Figueres won and the presidency was transferred to him. In the 1959 elections, power once more changed hands from Figueres' National Liberation junta to Mario Echandi from the Union Nacional, an opponent of the NL.

> The consistently transparent fairness of the election system established in 1949 thus became the basis of a great change in Costa Rican politics after the civil war – the emergence of the democratic elite settlement. In this arrangement a majority of political and economic elites developed confidence in and commitment to a constitutional, democratic political game.[74] . . . This commitment has defined a regime that has now persisted for five decades, making it by far the oldest and most stable of Latin American democracies.[75]

In addition to the peaceful transfer of power, Figueres and his supporters created a new Constitution that incurred the following changes: The Supreme Electoral Tribunal was introduced to ensure clean elections, and it still effectively functions today. Next, females now had the right to vote, which substantially broadened Costa Rica's democracy. Lastly, the abolition of the army meant that force could not be used to instill ideologies. This perhaps has been the greatest factor that has assured peace to Costa Rica in the next five decades.

---

[72] For a more complete understanding of the Costa Rica's brief civil war, see John Patrick Bell's *Crisis in Costa Rica: The 1948 Revolution*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1971.
[73] Stansifer 126.
[74] Stansifer 126.
[75] Stansifer. Quoted from Peeler, *Latin American Democracies*, pp. 100-110; Mario Carvajal Herrera, *Actitudes políticas de costarricense* (San José: Editorial Costa rica, 1978), 137-157.

> 'Having no army has several payoffs for democracy: It greatly enhances the authority of civil government by eliminating an institution that in Costa Rica and elsewhere has repeatedly disrupted constitutional rule and undermined democracy.'[76] Denied the tempting power of a standing military, public officials and other power contenders must negotiate among themselves on a relatively equal footing. Finally, having no army reduces dramatically the opportunities for Costa Rican rulers to abuse citizens' rights or systematically disregard citizens' wishes.[77]

Education was discussed earlier in this paper as a means used by the ruling class in the mid-1880s to achieve progress and moderation. The new elite of the 1950s likewise embraced education as a means to make citizens of the masses. While Costa Rica boasted of a large middle-class, it is still important to realize that it was ultimately the elite who made decisions and created laws. Figueres was a loquacious advocator of all human rights and possessed the support of the middle class. He, along with other intellectuals, was able to convince the elite that education was absolutely necessary for the democratic future of Costa Rica. As presidential power was transferred from one political party to the next, elite confidence in the system grew. "Widespread elite agreement with democratic rules of the game appears to be critical to the consolidation and survival of constitutional democracy."[78] As this chapter nears the end of the historical overview of Costa Rica, one observes that Costa Ricans today still enjoy democracy and education because of the crucial turning point in 1948 when Figueres (among others) successfully convinced the elite class that democracy could and would work for Costa Rica if they invested heavily in education.

Nicaragua

While its southern neighbors moved closer to a democratic society, Nicaragua slid farther and farther away from democracy into tyrannical rule. In the name of economic betterment and progress, the Somoza regime (came into power in 1936 and) squashed all

---

[76] Booth 57. Quoted from Fernando Volio Jiménez, *El militarismo en Costa Rica y otros ensayos* (San José, CR: Libro Libre, 1985), pp. 13-85; Orlando Salazar Mora, *El apogeo de la República Liberal en Costa Rica*, 1870-1914 (San José: Editorial Universidad de Costa Rica, 1990) 271-283.
[77] Booth 57.
[78] Booth 147.

opposition forces. By doing so, Anastasio Somoza and his sons argued that it ensured economic stability.

> Somoza consolidated the state and its administrative, social, and judicial branches in a single person. Through the National Guard, he controlled the military, police and judges; the rewarding of business licenses; the arms, tobacco, prostitution, and liquor trades; the national health services; broadcasting; the collection of taxes; and the leading financial institutions.[79]

Why did the United States endorse such an obvious oppressive dictatorship? Somoza was a strong defender of U.S. interests. United States businesses "gained economic and financial concessions under his rule."[80] While the Somoza family benefited tremendously financially from its relationship with the U.S., few profits ever trickled down to the general population. Somoza not only silenced the political opposition, he also ignored the social well-being of his people.

Unlike the United States, Costa Rica did not support Somoza, and José Figueres felt that Somoza was a threat to Costa Rica's democracy. In fact, Figueres provided assistance to the Caribbean Legion (a group comprised of exiled revolutionaries) to train and plan an attack on Nicaragua in order to oust Somoza.[81] The plan failed and instead of Figueres attacking Nicaragua, Somoza struck first by invading Costa Rica with a small army in December of 1948. The attack was short-lived, but nevertheless increased tensions between Nicaragua and Costa Rica and deepened the political divide between the countries

When Somoza was assassinated almost ten years later in 1956, his eldest son, Luis Somoza Debayle, assumed the presidency and his younger son, Anastasio

---

[79] Thiessen, 185.
[80] *Ibid*.
[81] Ameringer, Charles D. *Don Pepe*: A Political Biography of José Figueres of Costa Rica. Alburquerque: NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1978: 76.

"Tachito" Somoza Debayle, assumed leadership of the National Guard.[82] Under the brothers' rule, the gap in distribution of resources widened and the wealth remained in the Somoza family. More and more outbursts occurred among the peasant class denouncing Somoza's leadership and calling for reforms. Luis Somoza dealt with the opposition as his father before him had – he crushed their demonstrations.

A heart attack killed Luis Somoza in 1961 and Tachito Somoza filled the presidential vacancy. His reign proved to be still more harsh and repressive. During this time a small group of peasants were clandestinely forming opposition parties, namely, the Sandinistas. The name was taken from the revolutionary leader of the 1920s and 30s to represent their fight for equal distribution of wealth, land, and resources. In the late 1960s and early 70s several attempts were made to overthrow Somoza; each ended in violence and the execution of the leaders.[83] The multiple opposition groups had yet to unify or gain enough popular support to depose Tachito.

In 1972 a massive earthquake destroyed Managua. The international monies that poured in for relief services were pocketed by Tachito. "His wealth increased while the Nicaraguan population became one of the poorest in Central America."[84] Such actions enraged opposition groups and their unification began to take shape. Social and economic order broke down, crime increased, and opposition grew in the middle- and upper-classes. The assassination of Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, founder of the opposition Democratic Liberation Union in January of 1978, provided further impetus for the revolutionary groups to unite and forge ahead with their demonstrations and public outcries. The Sandinista Front for the National Liberation

---

[82] Thiessen, 186.
[83] *Ibid.*
[84] *Ibid*.

(FSLN) became the principal grass roots support that organized the resistance manifestations. Tachito responded with more executions and bombings of insurgents. Finally in the spring of 1979, "after terrible violence in which an estimated 50,000 Nicaraguans died," Tachito fled to the United States and then to Paraguay.[85] On July 19, 1979 the Sandinistas assumed control of the government.

The 1980s

Nicaragua

Politically, the Somoza liberal government was quickly being replaced by a socialist system. The United States government initially approved the new leadership, but later expressed "some concern over its leftward drift . . . [and] when Ronald Reagan took office in January of 1981, U.S. policy turned decidedly hostile."[86] Taking it a step further, the Reagan administration and the CIA began clandestinely supporting anti-Sandinistas (the contras) near the Nicaraguan-Honduras border in the form of military training and weapons. The Reagan administration increased tension with the Soviet Union during the Cold War and feared that because the Sandinistas accepted aid from communist Russia, then the Americas could potentially be infiltrated with communist ideology.

In addition to military support to the contras, Reagan successfully blocked financial assistance from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to Nicaragua.[87] In 1985 "Reagan inaugurated a total embargo on trade with Nicaragua that continued until March 1990."[88] The steep cost of fighting the CIA-backed contra

---

[85] *Ibid*. In Paraguay Argentine radicals murdered Somoza. Woodward, 277.
[86] Woodward 279.
[87] Woodward 282.
[88] Thiessen, 187.

war and the spiraling inflation further weakened an already feeble Nicaraguan economy.

The people suffered generations of poverty under the Somoza regime and now suffered even worse conditions due to the U.S. embargo. In addition to economic dire straits, tens of thousands of family members, friends, and neighbors were killed in the contra war. The Nicaraguan people were drowning in profound political, economic, and social instability.

Costa Rica

Costa Rica experienced in the 1980s an inundation of neoliberal politics. Such recommendations originated principally from the United States, International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank. It was believed that privatizing governmental services such as telephone, electricity, and water would result in competition and capitalism and ultimately stimulate the Costa Rican economy. Instead, monopolies formed and the prices of these services were driven upward, making it hard for Costa Ricans to pay for such basic necessities. Large North American-styled malls were built (such as Mall San Pedro in San Pedro, San José) in hopes of attracting international stores and products. This resulted in many small store owners unable to compete with the lower prices and thus went under. The middle-class that emerged in the liberal era in the late 1880s grew smaller, producing more gaping differences between the upper- and lower-classes in the 1980s.

Politically, Costa Rica's democracy was still fully intact. The large and multiple peaceful manifestations that took place then and take place today were and are a tribute to Costa Rica's democratic system and its use of freedom of speech.

Again, the absence of an army and its potential to intimidate further secured Costa Ricans' right to demonstrate.

Costa Ricans observed its northern neighbor with great interest and concern as the contra war heated up and political and social unrest intensified. Within this time period several international governments, such as Mexico, offered to step in and act as arbiter between the Sandinistas and the contras. Because of United States resistance several attempts at peace failed. That is, until Costa Rican President Oscar Arias' proposal for peace was accepted, among other factors, and ended the Sandinista and contra war.[89] For his intervention and peaceful solutions he won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1987. This re-solidified Costa Ricans' nationally held belief that their government was democratic and peaceful in their dealings with conflict.

The 1990s to Present

The road to a democratic system in Nicaragua continues to be bumpy. Regular elections have taken place since the 1990 election of Violeta Barrios. Political parties, such as the FSLN, continue to seek support for their varying political ideologies. In the mid-90s many Nicaraguans who had fled their homeland either in the Somoza or the Sandinista years repatriated in hopes that peace would reign. However, Hurricane Mitch in 1998 forced tens of thousands to emigrate once again from Nicaragua in search of work, food, housing, and overall better living conditions.

Costa Rica has been the recipient of such migration, which has caused additional strain on the already overloaded social services such as health care and education. The neoliberal politics of the 1980s have left Costa Rica in debt to the

[89] Woodward, 283.

World Bank and other international lenders and governments.[90] While it continues to enjoy the highest GDP in Central America, it, too, has suffered poverty as the gap between the classes widens.

For the past fifteen years both countries have experienced globalization unparalleled in any other time period. The strongest mark of globalization is the expected ratification of the TLC – Tratado Libre de Comercio – with the United States. Big businesses in all three countries profit while the poor get poorer and the middle-class numbers drop. Nicaragua has already signed the Treaty and Costa Rica is just months away from doing the same, despite widespread opposition.

Now that the histories have been examined, I turn the direction of this paper to migration. There have been and continue to be particular moments and events in history that instigate large amounts of Nicaraguans to migrate to Costa Rica. These are described and then supported statistically with several tables that indicate numbers, years, and percentages of Nicaraguan migration.

[90] *Ibid*, 230-233.

Chapter 3

Migration

The previous chapter provided a historical review of the political, social, and economic histories of Costa Rica and Nicaragua. One major consequence of these histories is the massive Nicaraguan migrations to Costa Rica. Thus, the next step in understanding the perceptions held by Costa Ricans toward Nicaraguan immigrants is to highlight key migration periods and their impetuses, followed by series of tables that specify the number of Nicaraguan people entering Costa Rica, and concluding with a profile of a typical Nicaraguan immigrant.

G. Flores Gamboa described both politically recognized refugees and "undocumented people" as "persons who have been obliged to abandon their homes or habitual economic activities due to threats to their lives, security, or liberty by the generalized violence or prevailing conflict and who have been obliged to cross a national border in the process."[91] In addition to this accepted definition, the severe economic conditions in one country possess an enormous weight in the decision to migrate to another country of economic stability. The political, social, and economic push factors in Nicaragua combined with the pull factors in Costa Rica have been the motivating forces for literally millions of migrating Nicaraguans the past thirty years.

Push Factors

The severe and oppressive reign of the Somoza regime began in 1936 and lasted until the Sandinista Revolution in 1979. The longevity and brutality of the Somozas caused many to flee the harsh and often violent political conditions in search of security and peace –

[91] Wiley, James. "Undocumented Aliens and Recognized Refugees: The Right to Work in Costa Rica." *Immigration Migration Review*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Summer, 1995), 426.

particularly in the 1970s. Authors Hamilton and Chinchilla summed up the political and economic situation and subsequent migration in this way, "The combined efforts of political crisis, war and the economic crisis aggravated by political conditions . . . transformed a normal migration flow into massive displacement and exodus."[92]

The Somozas, in addition to being infamous for funneling government monies into their own personal bank accounts, gave huge amounts of government monetary funds to the army. The table below paints a numerical picture of the importance the Costa Rican and Nicaraguan governments placed on the well-being of its people in the late 1970s. The table compares the government expenditures of Costa Rica and Nicaragua on defense and social services in 1978 and 1976, respectively. Note that the ratio of human services to defense is 21:1 in Costa Rica and 3:1 in Nicaragua.

Table 3 - Comparative Data on Central Government Expenditures (% of budget)[93]

Country	**Costa Rica**	**Nicaragua**
Year	1978	1976
Defense	2.7	12.8
Education	24.5	16.9
Health	3.6	4.1
Social Security/welfare	28.3	19.9
Total % on ed., health & soc. security/welfare (2+3+4)	56.3	40.9
Ratio of human services to defense (5:1)	21:1	3:1

After the Sandinistas successfully ousted Somoza, "nearly all the estimated two hundred thousand Nicaraguans who had fled between April 1978 and 1979 returned to Nicaragua,"[94] only to find their country in a state of economic ruin. The economic situation did not improve under the Sandinistas and many found themselves emigrating once again in

[92] Hamilton and Chinchilla, 96.
[93] Booth, John A. and Thomas W. Walker. Understanding Central America. Boulder, CO: Westview P, 1998: 157. Quoted from Wilkie, James W. and David Lorey, eds. 1981. *Statistical Abstract of Latin America*, Vol. 21. Los Angeles: U of California Latin America Center Publications. Infopress Centroamericana. 1984. *Central American Report* (Guatemala). January 20.
[94] Hamilton and Chinchilla, 97.

search of a sustainable income. Likewise, there was much migration on the part of former Somoza supporters. President Reagan's controversial fight against the leftist Sandinistas worsened conditions economically and politically, causing yet more people to flee. It has been argued that the "U.S. financing of the Contra war was directly and indirectly responsible for population dislocations and economic crisis in Nicaragua and the flow of refugees and migrants into neighboring countries."[95] The Sandinistas were forced to divide energy and resources to fight the contras while the economic and political situation deteriorated further still. Later, financial aid promised by the Reagan administration to the contras upon the ousting of the Sandinistas never materialized. In the post-Sandinista era U.S. aid to Nicaragua fell to the same level it had been in 1979.

It has also been posited that the neo-liberal politics and structural adjustments of the 1980s and 1990s increased national debt in all the Central American countries. The United States' involvement as a major player of capitalism and structural adjustments, prolonged and intensified political and economic conflicts.[96] The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) loaned Latin American countries millions of dollars to aid the floundering economies. However, the World Bank and IMF gave the loans on very specific terms. For example, in order to receive the money, Central American governments had to cut social service expenditures, downsize the government staff, and privatize utilities and other government-operated industries. The loss of the government-sponsored social service programs made the poor even poorer. Those who once owned small businesses were forced to close because they could not compete with the capitalism-driven World Bank and IMF's plans to privatize in the hopes of stimulating competition. Small business, unable to match the low prices of the corporations, suddenly found themselves in harsh economic conditions.

---

[95] Ibid, 105.
[96] Ibid, 106.

At the same time, transnational companies began arriving as globalization increased in the 1990s. All these factors combined, forced many people to make the decision to migrate as their countries of origins could not offer them any way in which to earn a sustainable income.

In 1990 the Sandinistas were defeated in a transparent election. The victory was celebrated prematurely as the economic and political situations were still on very shaky ground. Nicaraguan migrations continued through the 1990s in search of a better quality of life. By this time, strong migration patterns had been established between Nicaragua and Costa Rica. The number of emigrations exploded after Hurricane Mitch tore through Nicaragua in 1998. The hurricane devastated the country, heightening the political and economic instability already rampant.

The central push factors in Nicaragua were and continue to be: political violence, political instability, economic crisis due in part to the effects of structural adjustments, severe shortage of jobs, little or no social services such as health care and poor quality education, lack of government services such as welfare and/or food programs, and natural disasters.

Pull Factors

As shown in the previous chapter, Costa Rica's political history has been quite different from Nicaragua. Few dictators, little or no oppressive regimes lasting decades, and a major shift toward democracy after the 1948 civil war have made Costa Rica a relatively peaceful and secure place to live. A professor in Costa Rica related the following anecdote that underscores the differences in political stability between the two neighboring countries:

Born in Nicaragua, this professor grew up in the Somoza years. His family's home happened to be on a road that the Somozas passed regularly in a caravan of black cars. His mother, secretly active with the Sandinistas, forced him and his brothers to move away from the windows and hide each time Somoza passed. Thus, as a young child he developed a great

fear of the Nicaraguan government. In 1976, when he was 13 years old, his mother, fearing for her life as well as her children's, took him and two of his brothers and fled to San José Costa Rica. In his first week in Costa Rica, they were in downtown San José when his mother spotted Costa Rican President Daniel Oduber Quirós in the crowd and proceeded to take her young sons to meet him. This professor described his awe and amazement that a president of a country could walk peacefully and safely down the street without an entourage of escorts and security guards enveloping him. This experience left an indelible impression on him. This story provides a very real, poignant example of the vast political and social discrepancies between Nicaragua and Costa Rica during the Somoza years. According to James Wiley, this border was not only a political border, but a "political frontier [that] was transformed into an ideological frontier as well."[97]

In addition to political stability, Costa Rica offered and continues to offer a higher standard of living. The standard of living is often measured by a nation's GDP, the percentage of those living below the poverty line, life expectancy, infant mortality, and literacy rate. Based on 2004 statistics, Costa Rica's GDP was US$ 9,600 versus Nicaragua's US$ 2,300. Eighteen percent of Costa Ricans live below the poverty line compared to a staggering 50% in Nicaragua. Statistics from 2005 show life expectancy in Costa Rica to be 76.84 years; in Nicaragua's it is 70.33 years. Infant mortality in Costa Rica for July 2005 was 9.95 deaths/1,000 live births while Nicaragua's was 29.11 deaths/1,000 live births for the same year. Literacy is defined as those aged 15 and older who can read and write. The literacy rate in 2003 for Costa Rica was 96%; in Nicaragua it was 67.5%.[98] Costa Rica exceeds Nicaragua in each and every category.

---

[97] Wiley, James, 426.
[98] http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/cs.html, http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/nu html (15 November 2005).

Job availability is the next major pull factor. Hall wrote, "Costa Rica's small population made it a new importer of labor since the advent of export agriculture in the 1840s; Nicaragua was the greatest source of that labor."[99] In addition to job opportunities, jobs of the same nature pay more on the Costa Rican side. For example, CEPAL reported that in 2000, the average farming salary per month was US$ 201.33 in Costa Rica and a mere US$ 59.09 in Nicaragua.[100]

Job opportunities and better pay paired with a lack of manpower and resources encourage one to cross the Nicaraguan-Costa Rican border fairly easily. Wiley wrote, "The nation's periphery remained sparsely populated, including the northern frontier, whose remote location and difficult terrain contribute to its being a porous political boundary. Illegal entry was relatively easy since Costa Rica lacked the resources to effectively control the frontier."[101] The border today continues to be permeable due to limited resources and rugged terrain.

Such fluidity between the borders allows many workers to come and go according to seasonal labor needs. Authors Hamilton and Stoltz Chinchilla explain that Nicaraguan migrations are, "cyclical, temporary, or permanent."[102] Thousands come during harvest seasons to work in the fields, harvesting coffee, bananas, melons, and sugar cane[103] and then return to Nicaragua in the off-season. More permanent migrants work for construction businesses, and in security job positions, and many women work in the domestic industry, serving as maids, nannies, and cooks.[104]

---

[99] Wiley, 426.
[100] CEPAL. www.eclac.cl/search/todossitio.asp, 71.
[101] Wiley, 426.
[102] Hamilton and Chinchilla, 75.
[103] CEPAL, 59.
[104] Sandoval García, Carlos. Otros amenazantes. San José, Costa Rica: U de Costa Rica, 2003: 287.

Another pull factor is the availability of social services, for example, health care. Despite their illegal status, Nicaraguan immigrants are eligible for primary health care provided by the Ministry of Health, which does not request documentation of those soliciting the services.[105] Many adult Costa Ricans speak of the Nicaraguan women who cross the border to have their babies in a Costa Rican hospital and then return to Nicaragua after the birth. Another government service is education. Schooling is provided to all students regardless of migratory status up to the age of twenty-one.

Proximity[106] and the ability to create migratory chains easily and quickly through family members are still more pull factors that attract Nicaraguans to Costa Rica. The proximity allows for seasonal, yearly, or bi-yearly return trips home. Likewise, such propinquity facilitates the formation of migratory chains. A few family members immigrate, and later other family members follow once the first ones have found jobs and secured housing. Bach calls this flow "transnational social networks."[107] Such social networks provide and pass on vital information necessary for the move and transition into a new place and culture.

While the above factors to not account for all the reasons that prompt people to migrate, they do encompass the major impetuses. In summary, the principal pull factors of Costa Rica are: political stability and peace, higher standards of living, job possibilities, proximity and fluidity of the border, social services such as health care and education, and migratory chains.

---

[105] Wiley, 427.
[106] CEPAL, 58.
[107] Hamilton and Chinchilla, 77.

Numbers

From politicians to human rights groups to the International Organization of Migrant Workers, all try to estimate the number of Nicaraguans living in Costa Rica. The statistics obtained from the *Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería* (Department of Migration and Foreigners) present only those Nicaraguans who entered (or left) legally through the Department. The percentage of the thousands of *indocumentados* who migrate to Costa Rica seasonally or cyclically, temporary or permanent, is an educated guess at best.

According to a Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL)[108] report, the 2000 National Census reported that 7.8% of the population in Costa Rica was immigrant; and 5.9% of this figure was Nicaraguan (born in Nicaragua but living in Costa Rica). This means that 76.4% of the total immigration population was Nicaraguan. This number of Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica is the highest in the last 50 years; in 1950 it was 4.2% and in 1984, 3.7%.[109] Carlos Sandoval García, author of *Otros amenazantes* (2002) , sociology professor at the University of Costa Rica, and an expert on Nicaraguan migration issues, estimates in 2002 that in all – documented and undocumented – there were about 300,000 Nicaraguans living in Costa Rica at any one time.[110] If we take this figure and divide it by the 2000 total Census population figure of 3,810,179, 7.9% of Costa Rica's total population was Nicaraguan circa 2002. Presently (2006), Sandoval maintains that this percent fluctuates between 7% and 8%. Vilma Contreras Ramírez, Director of the Education Programs for International Organization for Migrations (IOM) in San José, estimates that at

[108] Economic Commission for Latin America
[109] CEPAL, 66
[110] Sandoval García, 266.

any one time – legal or illegal – around 400,000 Nicaraguans are in Costa Rica.[111] This is the equivalent to 10% of the Costa Rican total population.

The following pages provide tables of migration beginning in the 1970s. It should be noted that the Costa Rican government did not maintain statistical data on migratory movements until the Department of Migration was created in 1988. This curious fact – the lack of government recognition – reflects the national attitude of Costa Rica toward the Nicaraguan migration in the 1970s and 1980s. Everyone understood that Nicaraguans were in Costa Rica legally and illegally, but it wasn't until 1990 when thousands repatriated (after the Sandinistas were defeated) that Costa Ricans publicly acknowledged their presence or lack of presence, because the Costa Rican economy suffered large financial losses due to the Nicaraguans no longer supplying the labor force needed in the agriculture sector.

The first set of data comes from the National Institute of Costa Rican Statistics. Table 4 demonstrates the number of Nicaraguans present in Costa Rica in periods of five-year increments. This table also indicates an urban or rural habitation according to gender.

Table 4 – Number of Nicaraguans present in Costa Rica 1970-1990[112]

Year	**Total**			**Urban**			**Rural**		
	Both	Male	Female	Both	Male	Female	Both	Male	Fe-male
Before 1970	9,946	5,438	4,508	5,331	2,579	2,752	4,615	2,859	1,756
1970 – 1974	4,872	2,459	2,413	2,640	1,181	1,459	2,232	1,278	954
1975 - 1979	7,550	3,480	4,070	4,684	1,957	2,727	2,866	1,523	1,343
1980 - 1984	13,375	7,116	6,259	7,854	3,885	3,969	5,521	3,231	2,290
1985 – 1989	16,255	8,915	7,340	8,907	4,526	4,381	7,348	4,389	2,959
TOTAL	51,998	27,408	24,590	29,416	14,128	15,288	22,582	13,280	9,302

[111] Contreras Ramírez 35.
[112] www.inec.go.cr. November 28, 2005.

One observes that in nearly every case more men settled in rural areas than women; inversely, more women than men settled in urban areas. Men worked in agricultural jobs and women tended to find jobs in cities as domestic workers, a trend that continues today. Also noticeable is the doubling of migration to Costa Rica between the time periods 1974-1979 and 1980-1984. This can be attributed to the political instability (which in this case, also signified economic instability) as the control of the government transferred from the Somozas to the Sandinistas in what would be the beginning of their ten-year reign.

The next table shows the entrances and exits of Nicaraguans as well as the other Central American countries plus Colombia, as it also is a primary feeder to Costa Rica. By comparing Nicaraguan migration to the migrations of neighboring Central American countries, it becomes apparent that Nicaragua has been and continues to be the principal feeder country to Costa Rica. The data for the following four tables is compiled from the statistical information collected by the Costa Rican Department of Migration.

Table 5 – Principal Migratory Movements 1989-1992[113]

Country	1989 Enter	1989 Exit	1990 Enter	1990 Exit	1991 Enter	1991 Exit	1992 Enter	1992 Exit
Colombia	10,091	9,909	9,796	9,527	10,969	10,716	14,661	13,674
El Salvador	8,994	8,824	8,953	8,655	11,980	12,104	16,288	16,524
Guatemala	15,111	15,172	12,678	12,415	16,110	15,689	18,854	18,383
Honduras	10,202	10,096	8,548	8,255	10,859	10,245	13,321	12,498
Nicaragua	**40,178**	**40,646**	**46,627**	**53,132**	**77,428**	**81,800**	**78,875**	**72,718**
Panama	63,208	56,672	55,337	52,066	53,746	48,406	62,076	56,773

It is noted that when the Sandinistas lost power in 1990 there was negative net migration as thousands repatriated to Nicaragua. While 46,627 entered, 53,132 exited; that is to say that 6,505 additional Nicaraguans left Costa Rica. The same occurred in 1991, with a negative

[113] Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería.

net migration of 4,372. However, from 1992 to the present, there has been positive net migration.

Table 6 – Principal Migratory Movements 1993-1996[114]

Country	1993 Enter	1993 Exit	1994 Enter	1994 Exit	1995 Enter	1995 Exit	1996 Enter	1996 Exit
Colombia	16,207	15,814	17,862	17,524	17,044	16,778	19,273	18,401
El Salvador	18,897	18,275	21,819	20,678	22,398	22,574	24,170	22,686
Guatemala	22,546	23,008	21,453	20,922	23,611	24,121	23,549	22,663
Honduras	13,260	12,430	14,664	13,773	15,710	15,743	14,943	17,309
Nicaragua	**82,553**	**69,082**	**98,126**	**76,947**	**100,705**	**81,805**	**125,541**	**85,048**
Panama	58,331	51,603	54,954	47,196	54,170	47,388	49,420	43,909

What is notable about the above years is the steady increase of Nicaraguans entering and *staying*. It reflects the growing economic disparity in Nicaragua, resulting in more and more people migrating across the border. Also significant is that from 1989 to 1993, the number of Nicaraguan immigrants doubled. As compared to the other countries, the numbers of Nicaraguans climbed while other immigrating populations declined. In 1990 Nicaraguan immigrants outnumbered the Panamanians, the former emigrating leader to Costa Rica. Since then, as the following tables indicate, no other Latin American country has surpassed Nicaragua.

Table 7 – Principal Migratory Movements 1997-2000[115]

Country	1997 Enter	1997 Exit	1998 Enter	1998 Exit	1999 Enter	1999 Exit	2000 Enter	2000 Exit
Colombia	19,429	18,670	22,418	21,312	26,685	23,854	39,592	33,936
El Salvador	23,069	29,924	25,006	23,451	28,742	27,358	30,997	29,431
Guatemala	24,942	24,727	30,933	30,218	32,695	30,788	32,348	31,211
Honduras	17,309	16,151	19,579	18,210	26,177	24,972	24,211	22,445
Nicaragua	**99,088**	**76,606**	**158,331**	**99,088**	**154,184**	**117,141**	**136,905**	**109,740**
Panama	47,131	43,953	48,531	43,206	52,866	47,920	54,639	48,768

After Hurricane Mitch struck in 1998, Costa Rica granted humanitarian amnesty to more than 300,000 Central Americans, the majority being Nicaraguans.[116] Since 1999 more

[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.

than 100,000 Nicaraguans have been migrating to Costa Rica yearly – and this is only the percent of legal Nicaraguans, reported by the Costa Rican Department of Migration.

Table 8 – Principal Migratory Movements 2001-2004[117]

Country	2001 Enter	2001 Exit	2002 Enter	2002 Exit	2003 Enter	2003 Exit	2004 Enter	2004 Exit
Colombia	47,966	40,593	35,863	33,799	27,332	27,657	27,572	28,106
El Salvador	35,570	33,193	34,699	31,964	33,832	30,868	41,446	36,928
Guatemala	32,283	31,031	33,719	32,404	35,355	32,349	41,037	39,897
Honduras	27,751	26,137	25,244	23,822	24,158	22,025	29,566	26,410
Nicaragua	**171,358**	**132,631**	**186,015**	**138,039**	**163,522**	**126,209**	**215,164**	**187,146**
Panama	55,993	47,215	62,920	50,425	59,613	50,689	66,056	60,396

Since the Costa Rican government began taking statistics in 1989, the number of Nicaraguans immigrating to Costa Rica has quadrupled. Between the years 1995 and 2000, a total of 774,754 entered and 470,662 exited, leaving a positive net migration gain of 304,092. From the years 2001 and 2004, a total of 736,059 entered and 584,025 exited, leaving a positive net migration gain of 152,034. While positive net migration has diminished in the last five years, it does not negate the fact that hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans are making the choice to migrate to Costa Rica.

Profile of Nicaraguan Immigrants: Who are they?

According to an article by CEPAL, the majority of immigrants are between the ages of 20 and 39 years of age.[118] This age bracket forms both the chief group of the labor force and the group of women in child-bearing years. The next largest group is those between the ages of 40 and 49, also a principal group that contributes to the labor force. Tables 7 and 8 below portray migratory movement in 2002 and 2003 according to age.

---

[116] Contreras Ramírez, Vilma. *Educación sin fronteras: Una exitosa experiencia para la atención a la diversidad sociocultural*. San Jose, CR: OIM, MEP, CR-USA, 2004: 33.
[117] Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería.
[118] CEPAL, 66.

Table 9[119]
Number of Nicaraguans Entering & Leaving Costa Rica according to age – 2002*

Age	Entering	Exiting	Net Balance
0-9	6,066	3,920	1,636
10-14	3,674	2,569	1,105
15-17	3,740	2,377	1,363
18-19	7,626	3,965	3,661
20-24	**28,476**	**18,056**	**10,420**
25-29	**27,308**	**19,785**	**7,523**
30-39	**46,554**	**36,236**	**10,318**
40-49	**33,076**	**26,291**	**6,785**
50-59	17,702	14,813	2,889
60-64	4,468	3,839	810
65 & older	7,273	6,009	1,264
Total	**186,144**	**137,860**	**48,284**

*Does not include water entry, thus accounting for the discrepancy in the statistics between Tables 6 and 7.

Table 10[120]
Number of Nicaraguans Entering & Leaving Costa Rica according to age – 2003*

Age	Entering	Exiting	Net Balance
0-9	4,852	3,216	1,636
10-14	2,916	2,392	524
15-17	2,489	1,806	683
18-19	5,233	2,951	2,282
20-24	**24,466**	**15,895**	**8,571**
25-29	**23,824**	**18,140**	**5,684**
30-39	**41,039**	**33,515**	**7,524**
40-49	**30,650**	**25,210**	**5,440**
50-59	16,474	13,689	2,776
60-64	4,286	3,432	854
65 & older	6,605	5,261	1,344
Total	**162,834**	**125,516**	**37,318**

*Does not include water entry, thus accounting for the discrepancy in the statistics between Tables 6 and 8.

In CEPAL's article on the panorama of migration in Costa Rica, it stated that both men and women between the ages of 20 and 39 migrate to Costa Rica at a fairly even rate. CEPAL contrasted that to Salvadorian migrants where women constitute the majority (20-39

[119] Source: Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería, Departamento de Planificación.
[120] Source: Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería, Departamento de Planificación.

years of age); and from Panama, where men make up the majority, immigrating principally between the ages of 20 and 39 years of age.[121]

According to CEPAL, in the mid-1980s the average number of years of formal education was four years for Central American immigrants in Costa Rica. In a more recent investigation (1999), researchers Morales and Castro relate the following statistics on the education levels of Nicaraguan immigrants.

- 8.7% do not have any formal education
- 25.9% have some elementary education
- 20.5% have completed elementary school
- 25.5% have some secondary education
- 11.8% have completed secondary education
- .07% have some university education
- 4.4% have a university degree[122]

This group primarily worked in agriculture, industry, and domestic service.[123] Table 11 below shows the numbers and percentages of highly qualified workers employed in Costa Rica from other Central America countries in 1984. Nicaragua ranked last among its Central American counterparts.

[121] CEPAL, 60.
[122] Morales, Abelardo and Carlos Castro. *Inmigración laboral nicaragüense en Costa Rica. FLACSO* – Fundación Friedrich Ebert – Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos – Defensoría de los Habitantes, 1999.
[123] CEPAL, 70.

Table 11[124]
Participation of Highly Qualified Workers from Central America working in Costa Rica - 1984

Country of Origin	Highly Qualified Workers*	% of the PEA**
Guatemala	251	51.4%
Honduras	158	26.5%
Panama	335	19.1%
El Salvador	527	17.2
Nicaragua	1,599	8.8%

*Highly Qualified Workers corresponds to the following groups: professionals, technicians and managers
** Población Económicamente Activa – Population Economically Active

In its 2000 report, CEPAL stated that little had changed in regards to job type in the late 1990s; manual labor and low-skilled jobs remained the primary employment options. Sandoval concurred in his research for his book published in 2002. Of the immigrant population economically active in 2000 (includes all Central American immigrants in Costa Rica) 36.9% worked the agriculture sector, 22.0% service oriented jobs, and 12.6% in industry. Gender differences occurred in the following areas: men composed 46.6% of the farming sector, 12.5% of industry, and 12.4% of services. Women made up 56.2% of services (includes domestic workers), 16.6% commercial, and 13.0% of industry.[125]

While the above statistics include all Central American immigrants in Costa Rica, it is worth remembering and repeating that the 2000 Census reported that of all immigrants (Central American or otherwise) 76.4% were Nicaraguans. Thus, one can make an educated guess that the above job descriptors accurately reflect the Nicaraguan work force in Costa Rica.

In summary, though all Nicaraguan immigrants possess their own unique history and characteristics, one can make general assumptions based on the data given here. A Nicaraguan immigrant is likely to be between the ages of 10 and 39 and is as likely to be

[124] CEPAL, 68.
[125] Statistics in this paragraph came from CEPAL, 67.

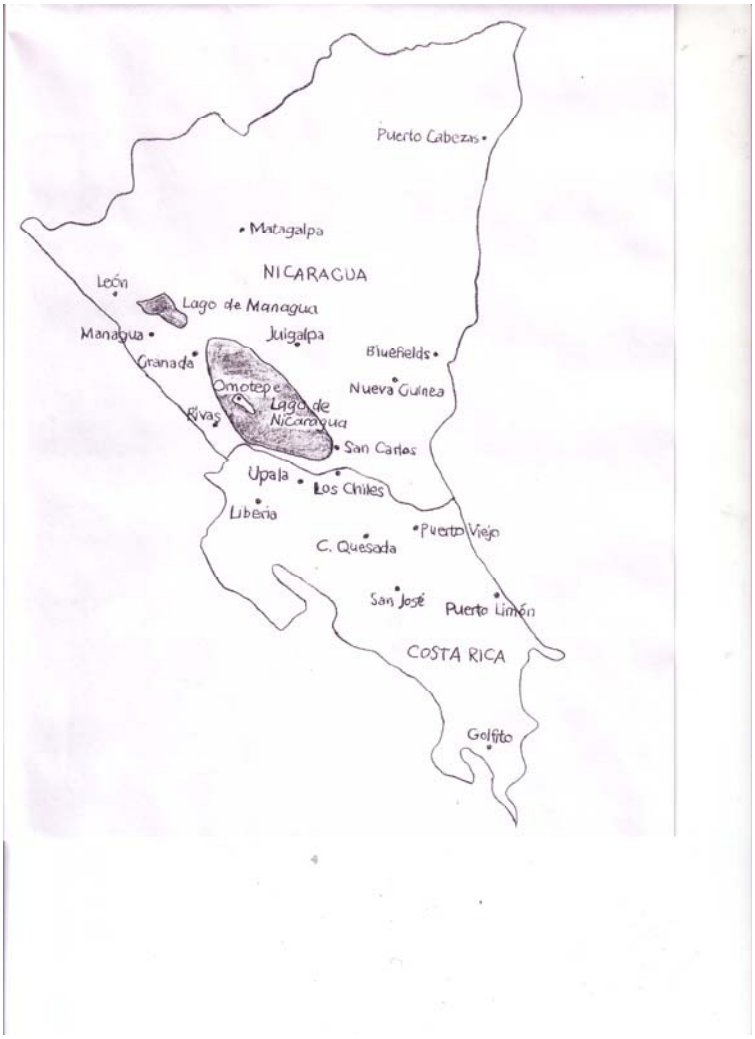
male as female. He or she will most likely work in agriculture, industry (construction), domestic sector, or public service sector and have a minimal amount of formal education. I can attest to the education characteristic through my observations in elementary, middle and high schools in 2004-2005. A large percentage of the Nicaraguan children were old for their grade, were repeating grades, or during the course of my year-long observations, simply dropped out.

From Departamentos in Nicaragua to Provincias in Costa Rica

All current literature on Nicaraguan migration to Costa Rica recognizes that migration chains exist and are paramount for transition and subsequent survival. The Costa Rican government possesses no official records or data on the origin of Nicaraguans, more specifically, the *Departamentos* from which they are coming, and to which *Provincias* in Costa Rica they are establishing themselves. Via personal interviews and email correspondence, I also discovered that the Department of Migration does not record or track such information either and thus such disaggregated statistics do not exist in government records. However, research conducted by the *Consejería en Proyectos para Refugiados Latinoamericanos*[126] cites various originating cities in Nicaragua and settlement cities in Costa Rica. The map below highlights them.

[126] Advice Council on Projects for Refugee Latin Americans.

Map 1 – Originating Cities in Nicaragua and Receiving Cities in Costa Rica



The authors provide explanations for migration for the following cities. The impetus for migration from the western cities of Managua, Granada, and Rivas occurs because the region is entrenched in socio-economic problems. The lack of jobs and impoverished economic conditions motivate migration. San Carlos residents and those living near the Costa Rican-Nicaraguan border and around the San Juan River, likewise, experience harsh economic problems. The closeness of the border lures many Nicaraguans to leave and enter

Costa Rica in search of better economic situations. The researchers posit that Nicaraguans in and around the northern city of Puerto Cabezas make the long journey to Costa Rica due to the fact that domestic cotton cultivation has diminished in recent years. Out of economic necessity, they, too, migrate.[127]

The researchers also explain the reasons for settlement in particular areas of Costa Rica. Northern parts of the Atlantic zone used to belong to Nicaragua. For this reason, there is already a strong Nicaraguan presence there. Familial connections make the creation of migration chains easier. The central plains, characterized by coffee production, require many manual laborers. Such a need is filled by mostly Nicaraguan workers. In the Northern zone, the principle economic activity is the planting and gathering of fruits and the production of grains. Lastly, the metropolitan area of San José offers Nicaraguan men construction jobs and security guard positions. San José offers Nicaraguan women work as domestic help and jobs in the service sector.[128]

Another source that provides information about Nicaraguan settlement in Costa Rica is the 2000 Census. The 2000 Census recorded the number of immigrants living in Costa Rica according to province. Map 2 shows that the percentages in San José, Limón, and Alajuela possess the highest percent of Nicaraguan immigrants. Due to its distance from Nicaragua, the immigrants from Limón are more likely to be from Colombia and Panama. Map 6 presents further support for this claim.

Map 3 divides the immigrants into percentages according to urban or rural dwelling. It is logical to state that San José, situated in the Central Valley, would have a greater percent

---

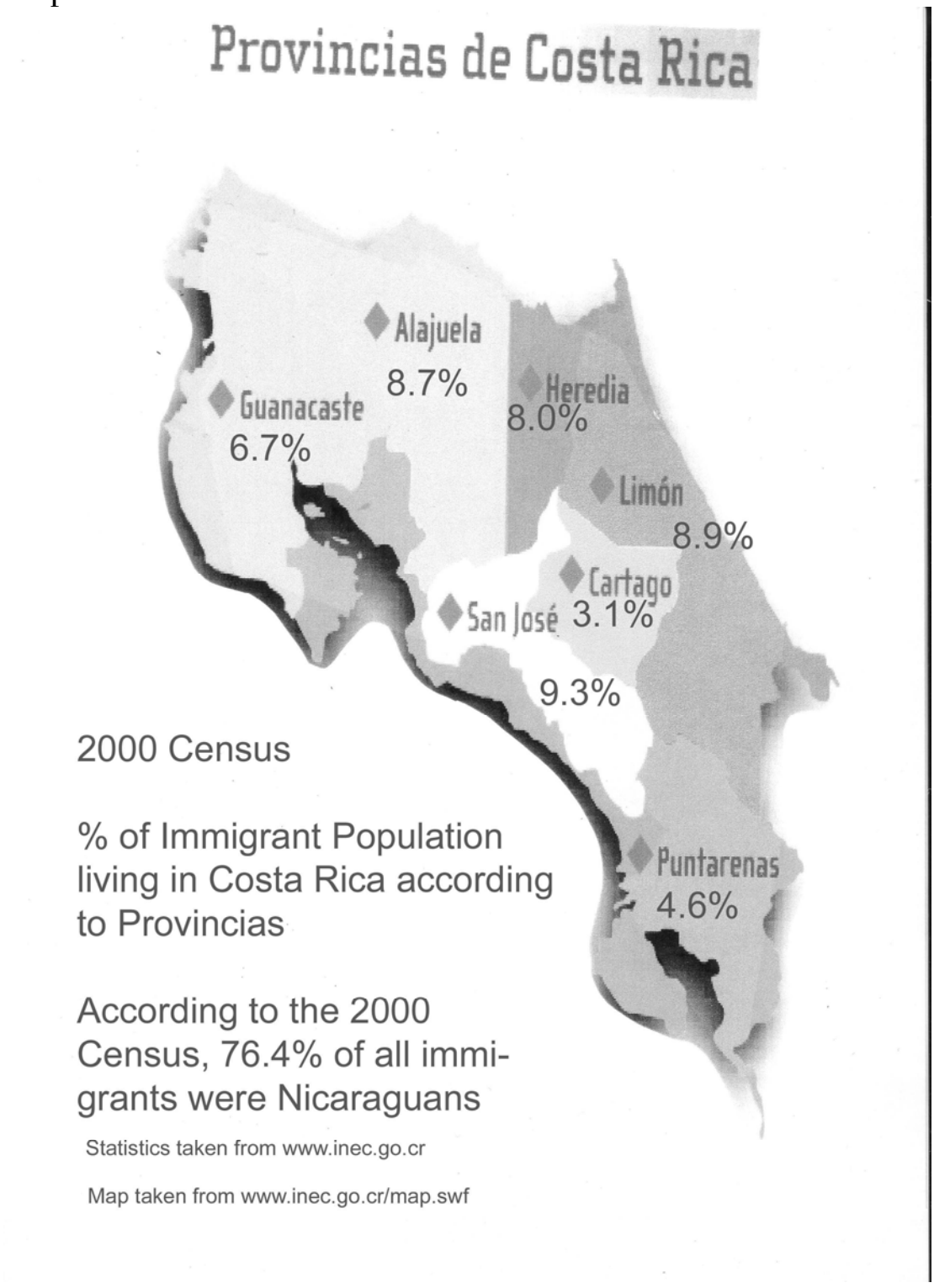
[127] *Los nicaragüenses en Costa Rica: Enfoque de una problemática*. San José, Costa Rica: Consejería en Proyectos para Refugiados Latinoamericanos, 1996, 6.
[128] *Ibid*, 5.

of immigrants in urban settings versus Heredia and Alajuela where the percentages of rural dwellings are greater.

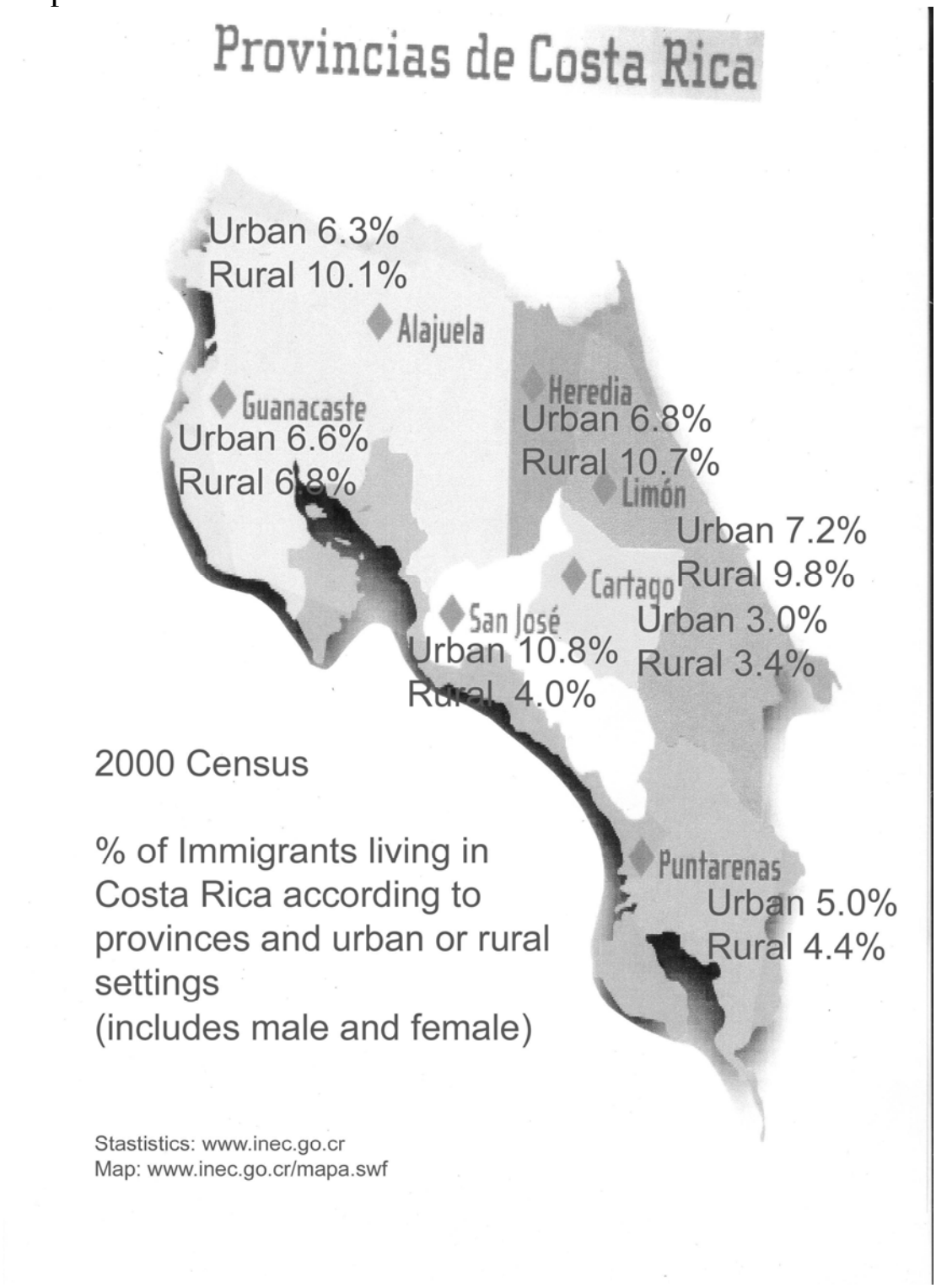
Map 4 indicates the gender divisions in urban settings. With the exception of Puntarenas, each province has a higher percentage of women in urban areas than rural.

Map 5 indicates gender divisions in rural settings. In each province there are a higher percentage of men than women in rural settings.

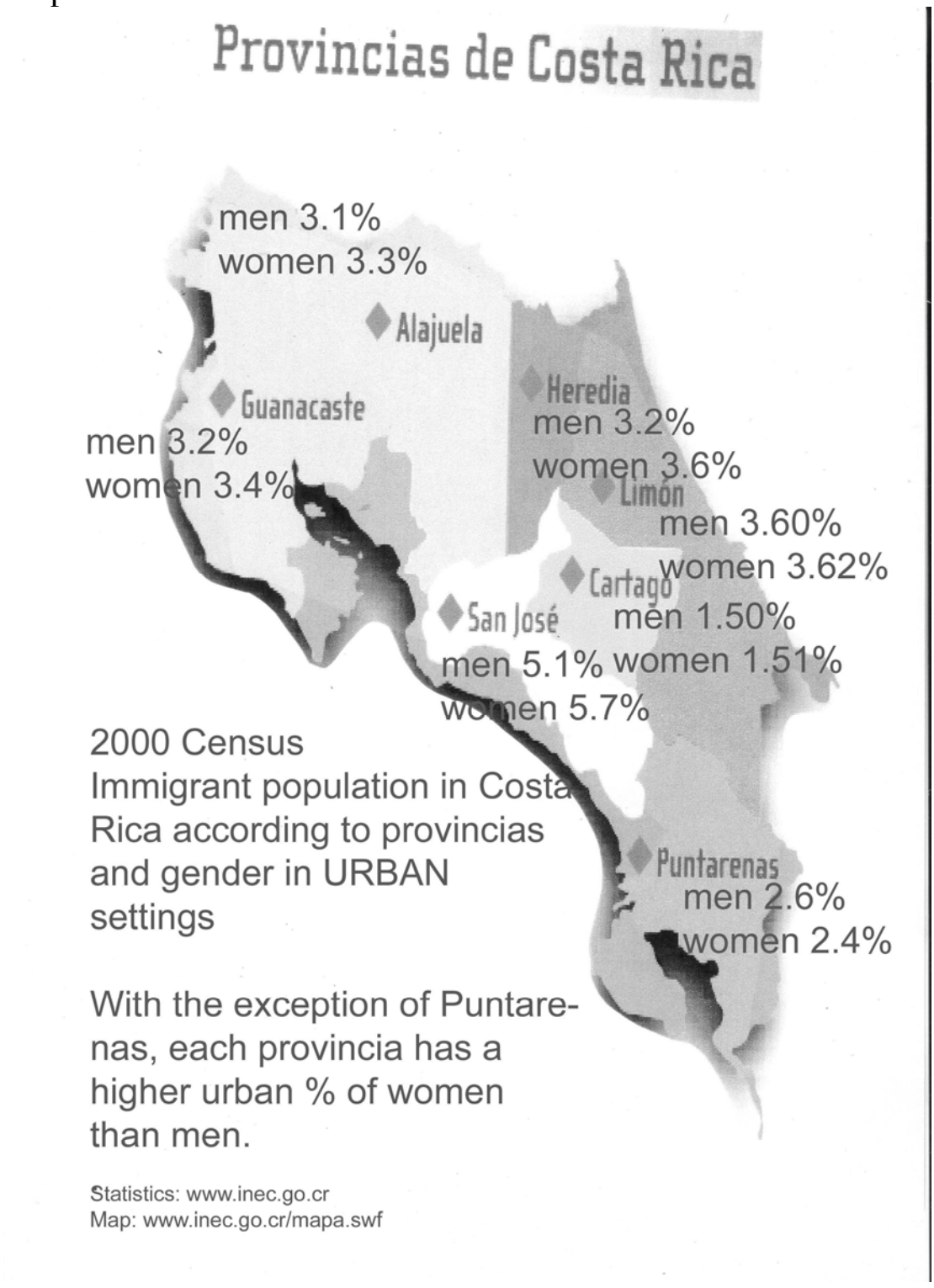
Map 2


Provincias de Costa Rica
Alajuela
8.7%
Guanacaste
6.7%
Heredia
8.0%
Limón
8.9%
Cartago
San José 3.1%
9.3%
Puntarenas
4.6%
2000 Census
% of Immigrant Population living in Costa Rica according to Provincias
According to the 2000 Census, 76.4% of all immigrants were Nicaraguans
Statistics taken from www.inec.go.cr
Map taken from www.inec.go.cr/map.swf

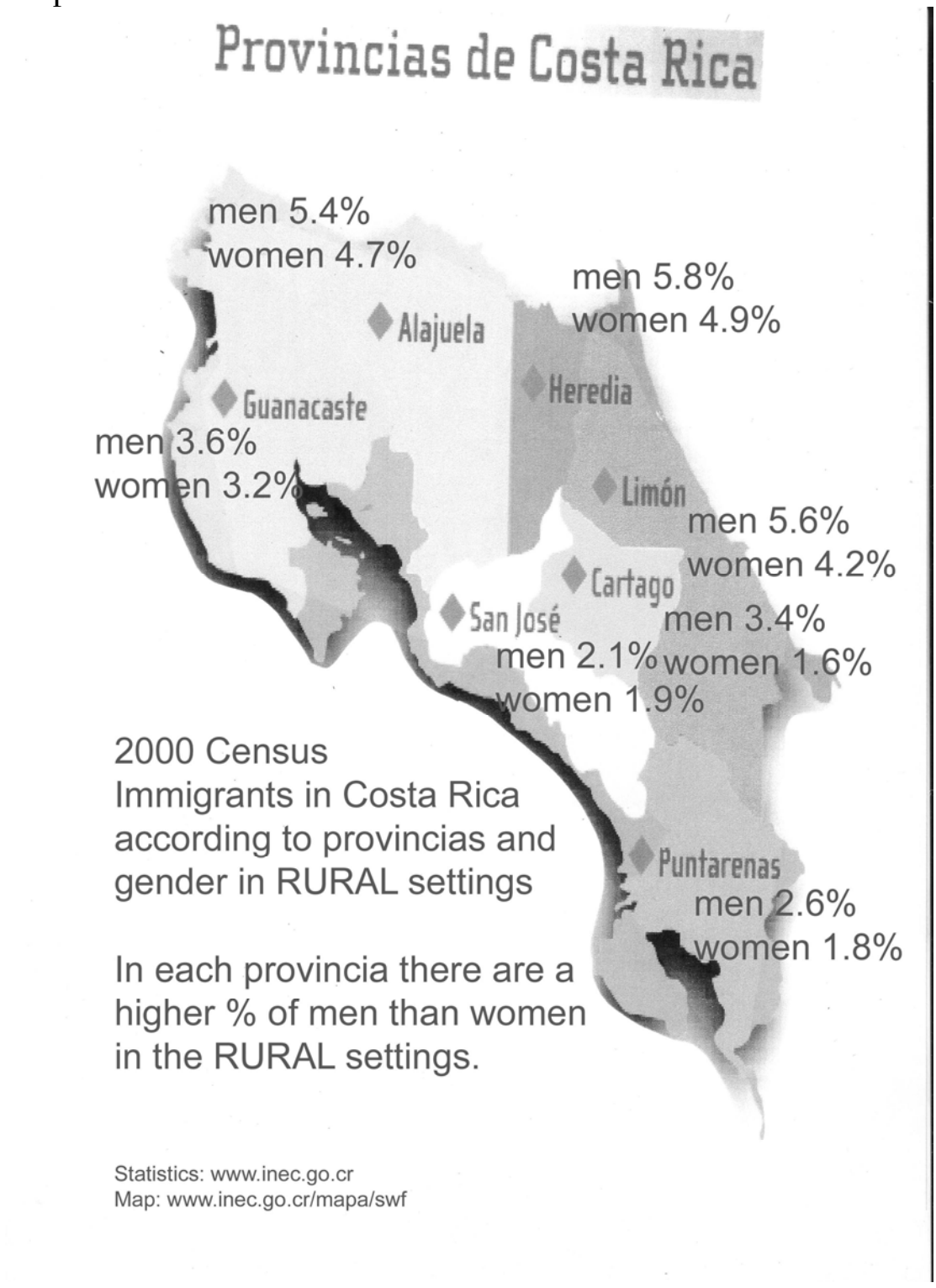
Map 3


Provincias de Costa Rica
Urban 6.3%
Rural 10.1%
Alajuela
Guanacaste
Urban 6.6%
Rural 6.8%
Heredia
Urban 6.8%
Rural 10.7%
Limón
Urban 7.2%
Rural 9.8%
Cartago
Urban 3.0%
Rural 3.4%
San José
Urban 10.8%
Rural 4.0%
Puntarenas
Urban 5.0%
Rural 4.4%
2000 Census
% of Immigrants living in Costa Rica according to provinces and urban or rural settings
(includes male and female)
Stastistics: www.inec.go.cr
Map: www.inec.go.cr/mapa.swf

Map 4


Provincias de Costa Rica
men 3.1%
women 3.3%
Alajuela
Heredia
men 3.2%
women 3.6%
Guanacaste
men 3.2%
women 3.4%
Limón
men 3.60%
women 3.62%
Cartago
men 1.50%
women 1.51%
San José
men 5.1%
women 5.7%
2000 Census
Immigrant population in Costa Rica according to provincias and gender in URBAN settings
Puntarenas
men 2.6%
women 2.4%
With the exception of Puntarenas, each provincia has a higher urban % of women than men.
Statistics: www.inec.go.cr
Map: www.inec.go.cr/mapa.swf

Map 5


Provincias de Costa Rica
men 5.4%
women 4.7%
Alajuela
men 5.8%
women 4.9%
Heredia
Guanacaste
men 3.6%
women 3.2%
Limón
men 5.6%
women 4.2%
Cartago
San José
men 3.4%
men 2.1%
women 1.6%
women 1.9%
2000 Census
Immigrants in Costa Rica
according to provincias and
gender in RURAL settings
Puntarenas
men 2.6%
women 1.8%
In each provincia there are a
higher % of men than women
in the RURAL settings.
Statistics: www.inec.go.cr
Map: www.inec.go.cr/mapa/swf

A third source that indicates Nicaraguan settlement in Costa Rica comes from the Ministry of Education, which provides the percentage of Nicaraguan children attending schools in each of Costa Rica's school districts. The next set of maps is the 20 national school districts and indicates the percentage of Nicaraguan students in each district. These maps further create a more complete visual representation of the geographic relocation of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica. If Sandoval's earlier estimate of 7.9% of the Costa Rican total population (at any one time, legal or illegal, since Hurricane Mitch) is Nicaraguan, and that the principal migrating group is between the ages of 10 and 39[129], then one should expect a similar percentage of their children in the schools. On a national scale, this is not the case. For the academic year 2004, of the 962,352 students[130] enrolled in Costa Rica schools, 36,042 are Nicaraguan, which is 3.7% of the total population. However, when broken down into the 20 school districts, the picture changes dramatically. For example, Coto, the southern most district, has such a diminutive number of Nicaraguans – 95 out of 38,217 students – that its percentage is .002%. On the other hand, San Carlos, a northern district that borders the San Juan River (the Costa Rica/Nicaraguan border), boasts of 9.8%; 4,514 out of 46,277 are Nicaraguans. If these numbers are disaggregated further by grade level, percentages are yet higher in the first two Ciclos.[131] I and II Ciclos include grades 1-6, ages 5-13 and contain the highest percentages. Once again San Carlos possesses the highest with 13.4% of Nicaraguan children in I and II Ciclos. Santa Cruz, a northern Pacific district, has 7.5%, and San José, the capital and hub of industry and service job opportunities, boasts a 7.3% Nicaraguan

---

[129] CEPAL, 66. Different sources cite slightly different age brackets. The Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería state the principal migrating group is between 20 and 39.

[130] This figure includes public, private, and semi-private schools. The figure all represents all levels – pre-school, elementary, night elementary school, (grades 1-6) both academic and technical high, day and night high schools (grades 7-12) and special education.

[131] *"Ciclo"* is the Spanish term for "Cycle." In Costa Rica this term refers to a particular group of grades.

population in its I and II Ciclos.[132] Below are maps indicating Nicaraguan student population as compared to total populations and percentages.

Map 6 indicates that while only 3.9% of the total student population is Nicaraguan, in the north and central regions the percentages are much higher.[133] The highest percentages of Nicaraguan students are present in San Carlos and Upala with 9.8% and 6.1%, respectively.

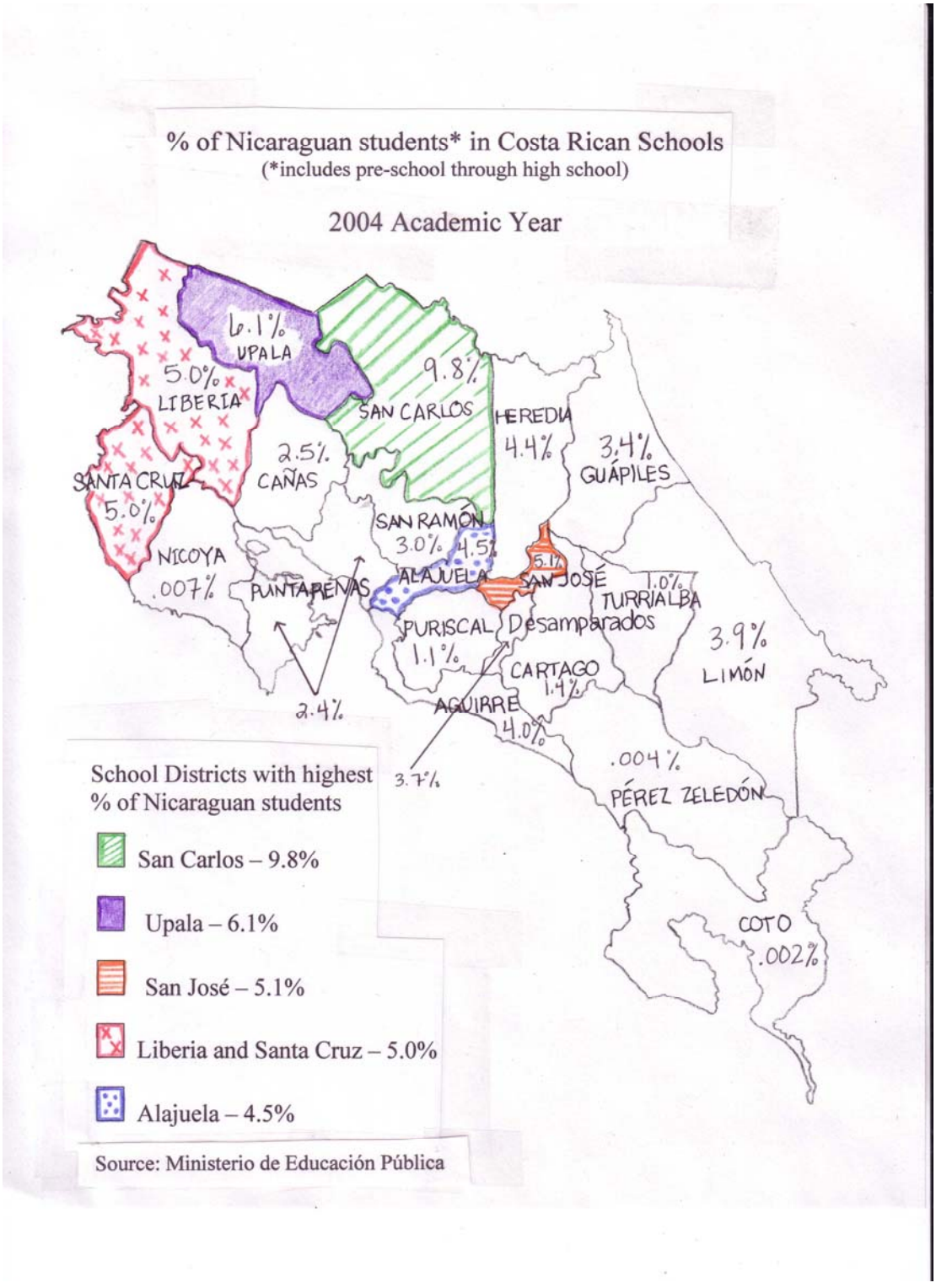
The total Nicaraguan student population statistics are disaggregated in Map 7 into I and II Ciclos. The percentage in San Carlos for I and II Ciclos, 13.4%, is double the national percentage of Nicaraguans living in Costa Rica. In fact, seven provinces boast of percentages higher than the national average of 5.9% as reported by the 2000 Census. These figures can be explained by the proximity of the northern provinces to Nicaragua; in the case of San José, the jobs available in the urban Central Valley (such as construction, security guards, and domestic workers) attract large numbers.

Map 8 demonstrates III and IV Cycles. III Cycle includes grades seven through nine, and IV Cycle includes grades ten through twelve. The interesting observation with this map is the steep drop in percentages of Nicaraguan students. As reported by CEPAL, Sandoval, and from personal observations, this drop is a reflection of the number of Nicaraguan students who drop out of school to work.

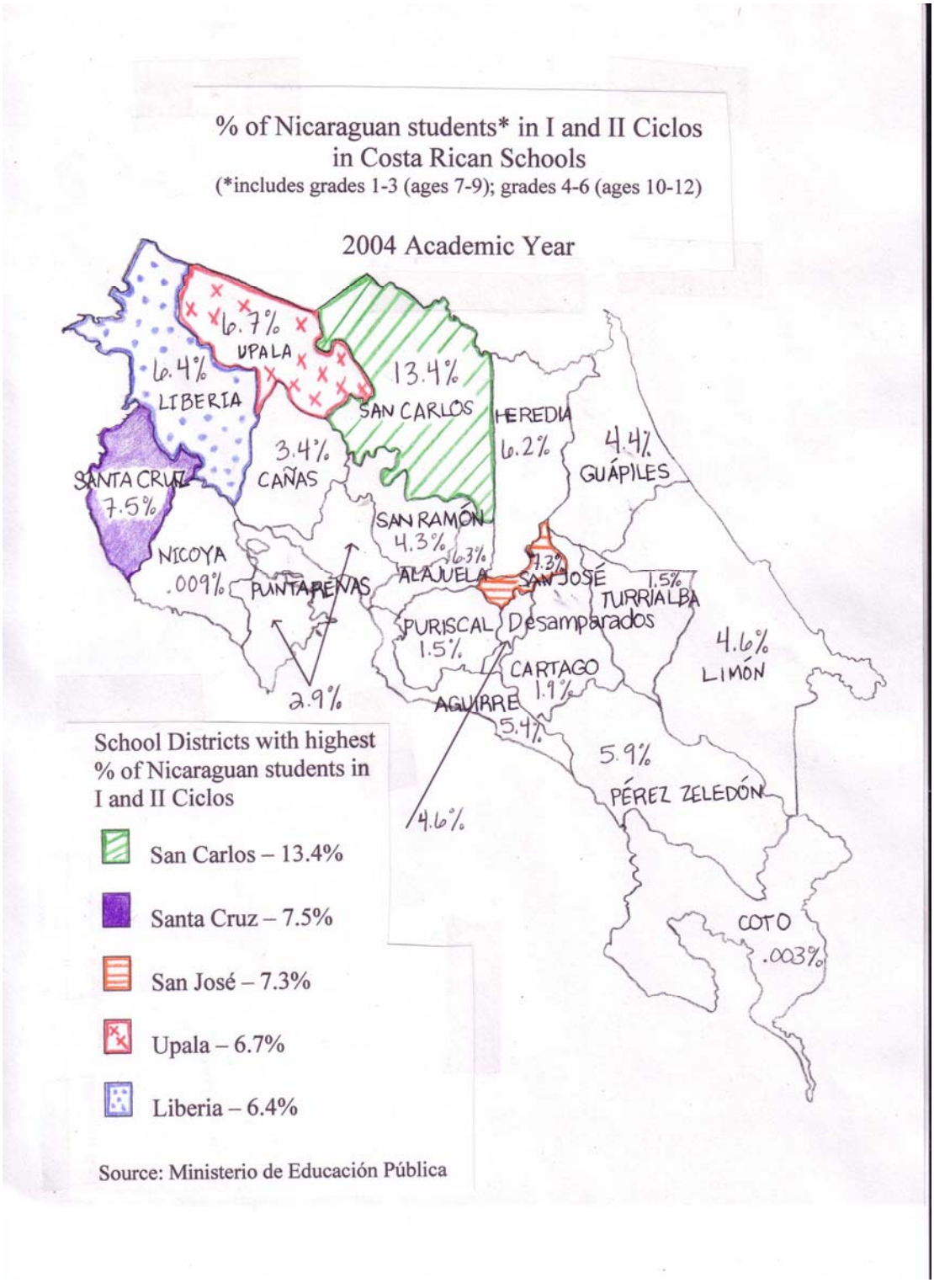
---

[132] All student population numbers were obtained directly from the *Ministerio de Educación (MEP)*, Minister of Education of Costa Rica.

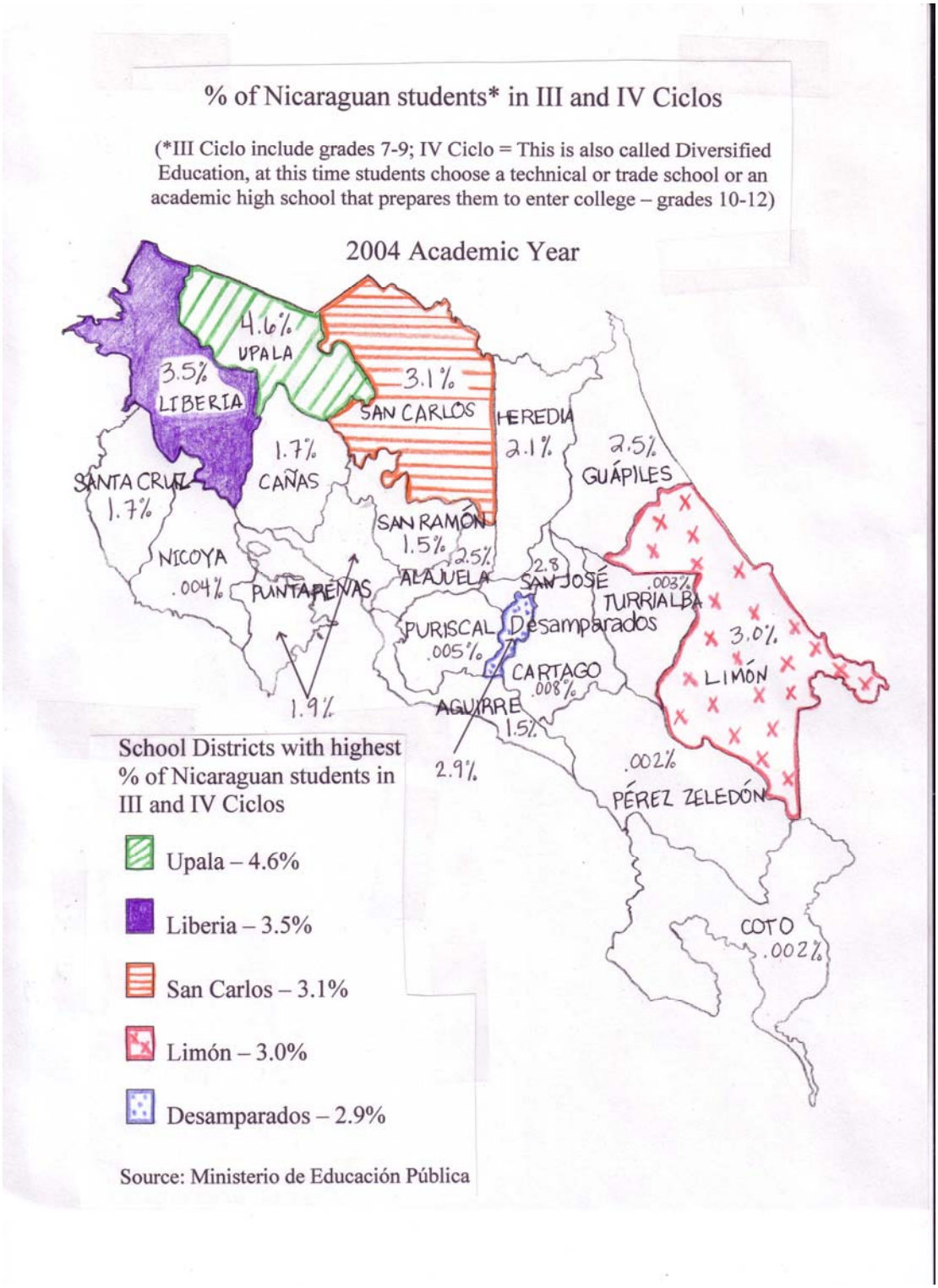
[133] As mentioned earlier, one can reasonably state that, while Limón statistically ranks number two for the province with most immigrants, the majority of these immigrants are most likely from Colombia and Panama.


% of Nicaraguan students* in Costa Rican Schools
(*includes pre-school through high school)
2004 Academic Year
6.1%
UPALA
5.0%
LIBERIA
9.8%
SAN CARLOS
HEREDIA
4.4%
3.4%
GUÁPILES
2.5%
CAÑAS
SANTA CRUZ
5.0%
SAN RAMÓN
3.0%
4.5%
ALAJUELA
5.1%
SAN JOSÉ
1.0%
TURRIALBA
NICOYA
.007%
PUNTARENAS
PURISCAL
1.1%
Desamparados
3.9%
LIMÓN
CARTAGO
1.4%
2.4%
AGUIRRE
4.0%
3.7%
.004%
PÉREZ ZELEDÓN
COTO
.002%
School Districts with highest
% of Nicaraguan students
San Carlos – 9.8%
Upala – 6.1%
San José – 5.1%
Liberia and Santa Cruz – 5.0%
Alajuela – 4.5%
Source: Ministerio de Educación Pública

Map 6


% of Nicaraguan students* in I and II Ciclos
in Costa Rican Schools
(*includes grades 1-3 (ages 7-9); grades 4-6 (ages 10-12)
2004 Academic Year
6.7%
UPALA
6.4%
LIBERIA
13.4%
SAN CARLOS
HEREDIA
6.2%
4.4%
GUÁPILES
3.4%
CAÑAS
SANTA CRUZ
7.5%
SAN RAMÓN
4.3%
NICOYA
.009%
PUNTARENAS
ALAJUELA
1.3%
SAN JOSÉ
1.5%
TURRIALBA
Desamparados
PURISCAL
1.5%
4.6%
LIMÓN
CARTAGO
1.9%
2.9%
AGUIRRE
5.4%
5.9%
PÉREZ ZELEDÓN
4.6%
COTO
.003%
School Districts with highest
% of Nicaraguan students in
I and II Ciclos
San Carlos – 13.4%
Santa Cruz – 7.5%
San José – 7.3%
Upala – 6.7%
Liberia – 6.4%
Source: Ministerio de Educación Pública

Map 7


% of Nicaraguan students* in III and IV Ciclos
(*III Ciclo include grades 7-9; IV Ciclo = This is also called Diversified Education, at this time students choose a technical or trade school or an academic high school that prepares them to enter college – grades 10-12)
2004 Academic Year
4.6% UPALA
3.5% LIBERIA
3.1% SAN CARLOS
HEREDIA 2.1%
2.5% GUÁPILES
1.7% CAÑAS
SANTA CRUZ 1.7%
SAN RAMÓN 1.5%
2.5% ALAJUELA
2.8 SAN JOSÉ
.003% TURRIALBA
NICOYA .004%
PUNTARENAS
PURISCAL .005%
Desamparados
3.0% LIMÓN
CARTAGO .008%
1.9%
AGUIRRE 1.5%
2.9%
.002% PÉREZ ZELEDÓN
COTO .002%
School Districts with highest % of Nicaraguan students in III and IV Ciclos
Upala – 4.6%
Liberia – 3.5%
San Carlos – 3.1%
Limón – 3.0%
Desamparados – 2.9%
Source: Ministerio de Educación Pública

Map 8

Summary of chapter

There exists multiple push and pull factors that influence Nicaraguans to immigrate to Costa Rica. The volatile and often violent political situation in Nicaragua's past and present is one such factor. The unstable, weak Nicaraguan economy resulting in lack of job opportunities is another. Costa Ricans, on the other hand, enjoy fairly stable political and economic conditions. The quality of life, as measured by life expectancy, infant mortality, literacy, GPD, and those below the poverty line, is better. Additionally, Costa Rica offers Nicaraguans many jobs in agriculture, construction, and domestic work. Natural disasters, namely Hurricane Mitch, have pounded Nicaragua, resulting in tremendous economic losses. Due to these factors, hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans have and continue to immigrate to Costa Rica in search of a better life.

Chapter 4

Students' Essays and Data

Chapter two analyzed the histories of Costa Rica and Nicaragua in order to elucidate the origins of the stereotypes and perceptions presently held by Costa Ricans of Nicaraguan immigrants. Chapter three examined the push and pull factors of Nicaraguan migration to Costa Rica and outlined the common characteristics of a typical Nicaraguan immigrant. Lastly, a series of tables provided statistical data on the number of Nicaraguans entering and leaving the country to show the movement of Nicaraguan migration.

The first component of chapter four analyzes essays written by seventh graders about *Los nicaragüenses en Costa Rica* – Nicaraguans in Costa Rica. The second component examines available statistical data as an objective method of proving or disproving the validity of the seventh graders' statements. For the statements where no statistical data could confirm or refute students' opinions, a discussion follows that seeks to explain possible reasons for the negative perceptions.

Research Setting and Demographics

Schools with high concentrations of Nicaraguans are typically located in poor and/or immigrant neighborhoods. Originating from severe economic situations in Nicaragua, they find themselves in neighborhoods that perhaps offer a better quality of life, but nevertheless are poor, dirty, and oftentimes unsafe. This was the case in the two coed high schools.

The all-girls' and all-boys' schools were located in downtown San José. Students attend these schools for two reasons: 1) location, which explains the attendance of poor students from the downtown and surrounding areas; 2) family tradition, as many of the teachers at the all-girls' school had been students themselves there. Thus, both single-sex

schools pulled coteries of varying social classes together, and both had significant populations of Nicaraguan students.

The following tables present the demographics of students for the 2005 academic school year.[134] (Teacher demographics can be found in Appendix K.) Of the four high schools in which I conducted the research, two were coed – Liceo Roberto Fermín and Liceo Pérez; the third was an all-girls' school – Colegio de Santa María; and the fourth was an all-boys' school – Liceo de San José. All names have been changed to protect the privacy of the teachers and students.

Table 12 displays the ethnic make-up of each school. In observing the data below, it is helpful to remember that of the total population in Costa Rica, 7.9% are Nicaraguan. For the 2005 academic year, of the total population of Liceo Roberto Fermín, 11.3% were Nicaraguan and 87.2% were Costa Rican. Of the total population in Liceo Pérez, 8.4% were Nicaraguan and 91.1% were Costa Rican. In Colegio de Santa María, 4.0% were Nicaraguan and 95% were Costa Rican. In Liceo de San Jose, 4.8% were Nicaraguan and 93.5% were Costa Rican. The categories labeled "other females" and "other males" consisted of students from other countries besides Costa Rica and Nicaragua. The most common "others" were from Colombia and Panama. The total population of all four schools combined was 5,680 students. Of that total, 91.6% were Costa Rican, 7.2% were Nicaraguan, and 1.2% fell under the "other" category.

[134] The academic school year in Costa Rica begins in February and end in late November or early December.

Table 12 – Student Population According to Nationality – Academic Year 2005

Name of School*; Percents; Total Females and Males	CR females	CR males	Nic females	Nic. males	Other females	Other males	Total Student Population
Liceo Roberto F.	642	615	70	93	8	13	1,441
Percent	44.6%	42.7%	4.9%	6.5%	.006%	.009%	
Total F & M		**1,257**		**163**		**21**	**1,441**
Percent		**87.2%**		**11.3%**		**1.5%**	
Liceo Pérez	643	609	40	76	2	3	1,373
Percent	46.8%	44.4%	2.9%	5.5%	.001%	.002%	
Total F & M		**1,252**		**116**		**5**	**1,373**
Percent		**91.1%**		**8.4%**		**.003%**	
C. de Santa M.	1,130	N/A	48	N/A	16	N/A	1,194
Percent	**95%**	**N/A**	**4.0%**	**N/A**	**1.0%**	**N/A**	
L. de San José	N/A	1,563	N/A	81	NA	28	1,672
Percent	**N/A**	**93.5%**	**N/A**	**4.8%**	**N/A**	**1.7%**	

Totals	2,415	2,787	158	250	26	44	5,680
Percent	42.5%	49.1%	2.8%	4.4%	.005%	.008%	
Total F & M		5,202		408		70	5,680
Percent		91.6%		7.2%		1.2%	100%

*Names of Schools have been changed to protect the privacy of the teachers and students.

Table 13 further breaks down the ethnic make-up of each individual class. The table below identifies the student population that participated in the research. Liceo Pérez (LP), Section 7-12, had the highest percentage of Nicaraguan students with 27.6%, followed by Liceo Roberto Fermín (LRF), Section 7-3, and Liceo de San José (LSJ), Section 7-3, with 18.2% and 15.4%, respectively. Colegio de Santa María (CSM), Section 7-6, had the smallest percentage of Nicaraguans with 12.1%. In all, 238 students participated in the research study. Of those, 39 students were Nicaraguan, or in other words, 16.4% were Nicaraguan. This figure is more than double the national figure of 7.9%.

Table 13 – Survey Population Broken Down by Individual Classes According to Nationality – Academic Year 2005

Name of School	Section	Subject	# of CR	# of Nic.	# of other	Total # of students	% of Nic students in classroom
Liceo Roberto Fermín (mixed gender)	7-3	SPAN	27	6	0	33	18.2%
Liceo Roberto Fermín (mixed gender)	7-9	MATH & SPAN	28	4*	0	32	12.5%
Liceo Pérez (mixed gender)	7-8	SPAN	26	4*	0	30	13.3%
Liceo Pérez (mixed gender)	7-12	MATH	21	8	0	29	27.6%
Colegio de Santa María (All girls)	7-5	MATH	26	6	1	33	18.2%
Colegio de Santa María (All girls)	7-6	SPAN	28	4*	1	33	12.1%
Liceo de San José (All boys)	7-3	SPAN	22	4	0	26	15.4%
Liceo de San José (All boys)	7-13	MATH	19	3	1	23	13.0%
Totals			196	39	3	238	16.4%

*One Nicaraguan dropped out of school before the surveys and essays were initiated.
** SPAN = Spanish

Table 14 continues to break the figures down further. Of the 239 students who participated in the study, 100 were female Costa Ricans; 97 were male Costa Ricans; 25 were female Nicaraguans; 14 were male Nicaraguans; 2 were female "others," and 1 was male "other." Of the 82.4% total Costa Ricans, 41.8% were female and 40.6% were male. Of the 16.4% total Nicaraguans present, 10.5% were female and 5.9% were male.

Table 14 – Survey Population Broken Down by Individual Classes According to Nationality, Gender – Academic Year 2005

Name of school and section	# of Female CR	# of Male CR	# of Female Nic.	# of Male Nic.	# of Other female	# of Other male	Total # of Stu.
LRF – 7-3	13	14	4	2	0	0	33
LRF – 7-9	12	16	2	2	0	0	32
LP – 7-8	11	15	2	2	0	0	30
LP – 7-12	10	11	7	1	0	0	29
CSM 7-5	26	0	6	0	1	0	33
CSM 7-6	28	0	4	0	1	0	33
LSJ 7-3	0	22	0	4	0		26
LSJ 7-13	0	19	0	3	0	1	23

Totals	100	97	25	14	2	1	239

Percentages	41.8%	40.6%	10.5%	5.9%	1.2% (fem. & male)	100%

Table 15 demonstrates the nationality of the participating students' parents. Of the participating students, 82.4% were Costa Rican. However, only 68.2% of those students had two Costa Rican parents. While 82.4% of the students were Costa Rican, 31.8% of the students had parents of mixed nationalities. In other words, over a third of the Costa Rican students had an immigrating parent that was not of Costa Rican dissent. Does this fact influence how students perceive Nicaraguans? The answer is discussed in the analysis of the students' essays. Table 15 also portrays the nationality of the Nicaraguan students' parents. Of the participating students, 16.4% of students parents were Nicaraguan and 14.2% of them had two Nicaraguan parents. Additionally, the percentage of all participating students with one parent from Nicaragua was 8.4%. The percentage of all participating students with one parent from Costa Rica and the other parent from a country besides Costa Rica or Nicaragua was 6.7%.

Table 15 – Nationality of Parents of Students – Academic Year 2005

Name of school and section	# of stu. with both parents from CR	# of stu. with both parents from Nic.	# of stu. with at least one parent from Nic. (other parent is either CR or is not reported)	# of stu. with one parent from CR and other parent from other country (not Nic.) or not reported	# of stu. with both parents from other countries (not Nic.)	Un-reported
LRF 7-3	25	3	3	0	0	2
LRF 7-9	22	3	3	3	0	1
LP 7-8	23	3	2	2	0	0
LP 7-12	15	9	3*	2	0	0
CSM. 7-5	20	6	4	2	1	0
CSM. 7-6	23	3	3	3	1	0
LSJ 7-3	18	4	1	3	0	0
LSJ 7-13	17	3	1	1	1	0
Totals	163	34	20	16	3	3
Percentages out of 239 students	68.2%	14.2%	8.4%	6.7%	0.0%	0.0%

*One of the three students has one parent from Nicaragua, the other from Honduras.

Analysis of Essays

The students' essays provided the means for systematically collecting opinions and answering the principal question of this thesis: What are the perceptions of young Costa Ricans, specifically seventh graders, of Nicaraguan immigrants? The analysis and objective comparison of their responses to available statistical data seeks to answer another thesis question: What is the validity of these stereotypes?

The topic of the essay was "*Los nicaragüenses en Costa Rica*," "The Nicaraguans in Costa Rica." Students were instructed to express their opinion about the Nicaraguan population living in Costa Rica. (See Appendix E for specific "Instructions.") The students' responses fell on a continuum ranging from one extreme to the other. The span of responses

ranged from, "I hate Nicaraguans and I think they should go back to their own country," to "There are some good ones and some bad ones," to "I like them; they don't bother me."

Group overall perceptions

To objectively measure the students' overall attitudes and feelings toward the Nicaraguan immigrants, I categorized the entire essay of each individual student as "Overall positive," "Overall negative," "Equal," "Indifferent," "No opinion," or "Writing illegible." For example, if the student had more positive comments than negative, I labeled it "Overall positive." If the student had more negative comments than positive, I categorized it "Overall negative." If the student had an equal number of positive and negative comments, I labeled it "Equal." A few students wrote, "I don't care," or "It doesn't concern me," I categorized their essays as "Indifferent." A few other students wrote, "I don't have an opinion," or "I chose not to respond." I put them in the "No opinion" category. Lastly, some students' penmanship was not legible and thus these essays earned the label "Writing illegible." Below is a table of the categories and sample pieces of writing.[135]

Table 16 – Examples of Statements from Students' Essays

Overall positive	Female: "They are people that come to our country in search of jobs, in search of economic help, to help their families in the economic situation. On the contrary Costa Rica as a country of peace should help the Nicaraguans, also I would like that everyone thought the same, since they are human begins just as we are."
Overall negative	Male: "I don't have anything against the Nicaraguans . . . but what they do here in Costa Rica is destroy it, kill, rape, bring drugs, kill their spouses or abandon their wives."
Equal	Female: "I think that the majority of Nicaraguans are good…but the bad thing is they take all the Costa Rican jobs and then Costa Ricans don't have jobs.
Indifferent	Female: "I'm not one to judge and anyway in reality I don't care at all."
No opinion	Female: "I don't want to give my opinion."

[135] Students wrote the essays in Spanish. All of the translations are mine. To preserve the integrity of the students' writing, I did not do any editing – be it grammar, sentence structure, or otherwise.

Table 17 provides the compiled results. Of the 238 participating students, 198 (83%) students were present on the day the essays were administered. The essays were voluntary and anonymously written. It should also be noted that all students of all nationalities wrote essays. For the categories “Overall positive,” Overall negative,” and “Equal,” the numbers are broken down according to nationality. An explanation for this appears below the table. Of the 198 essays written 79 (39.9%) were “Overall negative,” 61 (30.8%) were “Overall positive,” 41 (20.7%) were “Equal,” 9 (4.5%) were “Writing illegible,” 6 (0.03%) were “No opinion,” and 2 (0.01%) were “Indifferent.”

Table 17 – Distribution of Students Essays in Attitude Categories

School & Class	Overall positive	Overall negative	Equal	Indifferent	No opinion	Writing Illegible	TOTAL
LRF SPAN 7-3	CR – 6 NIC – 2 = 8	CR – 10 NIC – 1 = 11	5	0	0	3	27
LRF MATH 7-9	CR – 2 NIC – 1 = 3	20 (all CR)	CR– 2 NIC-2 = 4	0	2	1	30
LP SPAN 7-8	CR – 2 NIC – 2 = 4	8	5	1	0	1	19
LP MATH 7-12	CR – 5 NIC – 3 = 8	4	2	1	0	0	15
CSM MATH 7-5	CR – 7 NIC – 4 COL – 1 = 12	9	7	0	1	0	29
CSM SPAN 7-6	CR – 7 NIC – 2 = 9	12	6	0	1	0	28
LSJ SPAN 7-3	CR – 8 NIC – 3 = 11	7	6	0	1	2	27
LSJ MATH 7-13	CR – 3 NIC – 2 COL – 1 = 6	8	6	0	1	2	23
TOTAL	CR – 40 NIC– 19 COL – 2 = 61	CR – 78 NIC – 1 = 79	CR – 39 NIC – 2 =41	2	6	9	198
Percentages	30.8%	39.9%	20.7%	0.01%	0.03%	4.5%	

The overall feelings and perceptions become even clearer when various categories are further disaggregated. For example, of the 61 “Overall positive” essays, 19 (31.1%) were written by Nicaraguan students and two (3.3%) were written by Colombian students. This is

to say, of the 198 essays, only 42 (21.2%) of those essays were written by Costa Ricans and were "Overall positive."

Those Nicaraguans who had recently migrated to Costa Rica had a more complete understanding of the conditions in Nicaragua and the push factors that motivated such migrations. Those who were born in Nicaragua but had immigrated to Costa Rica as small children, likewise, had more empathy toward the economic and social struggles of those Nicaraguans living in Costa Rica and consequently viewed the migrations positively. The one "Overall negative" essay written by a Nicaraguan student was surprising as both he and his parents are Nicaraguan. He wrote, "Well, some of the Nicaraguans are good, others bad. It's that Nicaraguans don't know how to respect other people. Nicaraguans also speak funny. Here in Costa Rica the Nicaraguans come to do bad things."

The second surprising finding was that four Costa Rican students with mixed Latin parentage wrote "Overall negative" essays. For example, a female student whose mother was from El Salvador and whose father was from Bolivia wrote, "I think that it's better that the Nicaraguans go to their own country the only thing that Nicaraguans do is bad things like killing, robbing, and above all I don't like at all how they talk and smell." My initial conjecture was that a student with a parent from another country would display more understanding toward the Nicaraguan migration plight than those with two Costa Rican parents. However, there may be differences in attitudes depending on the reason the parent immigrated to Costa Rica. For example, if the parent did not immigrate out of economic need, then the student might be less apt to understand the Nicaraguans' motives for migrating. The essays of these students with mixed Latin parentage also highlight the political and social hierarchies that exist among the Central American countries.

The third surprising find was an essay written by a female student from China. Both her parents were Chinese and together they had been in Costa Rica just over two years. She expressed the same negative feelings toward Nicaraguans as her fellow Costa Rican peers despite having very limited Spanish skills. She wrote,

> I don't like that the Nicaraguans live in Costa Rica. Mostly I like Costa Rica, but sometimes I hate it (but only a little) because there are so many Nicaraguans. The Nicaraguans here steal, rob, do whatever they like outside their own country. Robbing, kidnapping, raping, all this stuff they do. Nicaraguans are on the black list. If they are poor, why are they everywhere and not looking for a job?

There exists doubt about from where she acquired such a strong negative feeling against Nicaraguan immigrants as her Spanish was quite limited. In fact, she wrote her essay in Mandarin and later I had it translated. Regardless of the sources from which she gained her perspective on Nicaraguan immigrants (parents, classmates, television), her response nevertheless shows that negative perceptions are not limited to only Costa Ricans.

The two Nicaraguan students whose essays I categorized as "Equal" acknowledged that some Nicaraguans come to Costa Rica to do harm, but most come for economic gain. They also expressed anger that the Nicaraguans who do cause harm reflect badly back on all Nicaraguans. One of the two female Nicaraguan students wrote,

> The Nicaraguans come to Costa Rica to look for a new life because as my parents always tell me that in Nicaragua there aren't any jobs but the Nicaraguans that don't come to look for a new life and cause harm makes it bad for the rest of us with the Costa Ricans.

In summary, the above information relates that the overall sentiment that Costa Rican students express toward Nicaraguans living in Costa Rica is more negative than positive. The Nicaraguan students possessed an overall positive attitude to Nicaraguans living in Costa Rica. The statements in the Nicaraguans' essays demonstrated that they understood the economic hardship in Nicaragua that prompts so many to cross the border. Lastly, the negative perceptions are not limited to Costa Rican students. It appears that foreigners of

Latin American ancestry as well as Asian descent may adopt from their Costa Rican peers the same negative perception.

Individual Perceptions

To demonstrate the complexity of the essays, I examined each sentence within the essays, extracted the stereotype or belief, and then categorized each one. Many single-sentences had multiple ideas and perceptions. Thus, the multiple perceptions in a single sentence were sorted into categories. From the earlier analysis of the essays, I had identified several recurring categories: "Nicaraguans destroy country/do harm to Costa Rica," "Nicaraguans come to kill," "Students think Nicaraguans should be in their own country/don't understand why they are in Costa Rica," Nicaraguans bring crime/create problems," "Name-calling by Costa Ricans to Nicaraguans," "Nicaraguans rob," "Nicaraguans assault," "Nicaraguans take Costa Rican jobs," "Nicaraguans rape," "Nicaraguans speak poorly/funny accent," "Nicaraguans bring drugs to Costa Rica/do drugs," "Nicaraguans kill their spouses," "Nicaraguan men treat women badly," "Nicaraguans abuse and / or rape children," Nicaraguans stink," "Nicaraguans negatively affect Costa Rica's economy," "Costa Ricans have paternalistic attitude toward Nicaraguans," "Ticos are losing their culture due to Nicaraguan immigration," "Ticos lose light color of skin because Nicaraguans darken it," "Positive remarks made by students about Nicaraguans," and "Students who gave reasons for Nicaraguan migration to Costa Rica."

In this analysis, I assigned each sentence (or multiple ideas within a sentence) to one of the aforementioned categories. I read the essays an additional two times to ensure consistent categorizing of sentences. Of the 198 essays, a total of 449 remarks were tallied. Of the 449 remarks 315 (70.2%) were "Overall negative," 117 (26.1%) were "Overall

positive," 9 (2.0%) were "Writing illegible," 6 (1.3%) were "Chose not to respond," and 2 (0.004%) were "Indifferent."

Below is an example of how sentences, and the multiple ideas within them, were coded. "NIC" refers to Nicaragua or Nicaraguan(s) and "CR" refers to Costa Rica or Costa Rican(s) depending on the context.

> "(a) Nicaraguans are good people, but the majority comes (b) to kill and (c) rob. They (d) treat women poorly and they (e) bring harm to Costa Rica."

- Remark (a) – 1 tally for "number of positive remarks made by students about NIC"
- Remark (b) – 1 tally for "NIC come to CR to kill / kill ticos"
- Remark (c) – 1 tally for "NIC rob"
- Remark (d) – 1 tally for "NIC men treat women (CR & NIC) badly"
- Remark (e) – 1 tally for "NIC – destroy country, do harm to Costa Rica"

If a student named the same topic twice, I counted (coded) it only once. For example, in one essay a student wrote that Nicaraguans are "stupid" and "sons-of-bitches." I only marked one tally for "number of times students called NIC names and or cursed NIC." Or, for example, if they mentioned two reasons why Nicaraguans migrate to Costa Rica, I only counted the two comments as one idea, marking one tally for "number of students who gave reasons why NIC come to CR."

Below, Table 18 lists each category as well as the number of times the remark was tallied in students' essays. Categories appear in descending order according to the number of times a remark was written. The first number appearing in each individual box is the number of tallies. The percents in each box are the following:

- "% of Total" refers to the number of tallies marked divided by the total number of responses. For example, in (1), 53 tallies were marked. 53 was then divided by the total number of tallies coded (449) = 11.8%
- "% of Neg." refers to the number of tallies marked divided by the total number of negative responses. For example, in (1), 53 tallies were marked. 53 was then divided by the total negative number of tallies coded (315) = 16.8%.
- "% of Pos." refers to the number of tallies marked divided by the total number of positive responses.

The numbers are rounded to the nearest tenth. The extremely small numbers are rounded to the nearest hundredth.

Table 18 – Individual statements made about Nicaraguan immigrants & the number of times the statement appeared in students' essays – **Negative Remarks**

1. NIC – destroy country, do harm to CR = 53 11.8% of total 16.8% of negative	2. NIC – come to CR to kill / kill Ticos = 41 9.1% of total 13.0% of negative	3. # of stu. who think NIC should be in their own country / don't understand why NIC in CR = 39 8.7% of total 12.4% of negative
4a. NIC – bring crime, create problems = 26 5.8% of total 8.3% of negative	4b. # of times stu. called NIC name = 26 5.8% of total 8.3% of negative	5a. NIC – rob = 23 5.1% of total 7.3% of negative
5b. NIC – assault = 23 5.1% of total 7.3% of negative	6. NIC – take CR jobs = 20 4.5% of total 6.3% of negative	7. NIC – come to rape = 10 2.2% of total 3.2% of total
8. NIC – speak poorly / funny accent = 9 2.0% of total 2.9% of negative	9a. NIC – bring drugs to CR / do drugs = 8 1.8% of total 2.5 of negative	9b. NIC – kill their spouses = 8 1.8% of total 2.5 of negative
10a. NIC – men treat women (CR & NIC) badly = 6 1.3% of total 1.9% of negative	10b. NIC – abuse and or rape children = 6 1.3% of total 1.9% of total	11a. NIC – stink = 4 .009% of total .01% of negative
11b. NIC – negatively affect CR economy, make CR poorer = 4 .009% of total .01% of negative	12a. CR – paternalistic attitude = 3 .007% of total .01% of negative	12b. Ticos are losing their culture due to NIC migration = 3 .007% of total .01% of negative

Table 18 – **Negative Remarks** continued

12c. Ticos lose light color of skin because NIC darken it = =3 .007% of total .01% of negative

Table 19 shows the results of the positive comments made by students. Comments in #13 and #14 were written by both Costa Ricans and Nicaraguan students.

Table 19 – Individual statements made about Nicaraguan immigrants & the number of times the statement appeared in students' essays – **Positive Remarks**

13. # of positive remarks made by students about NIC = 66 14.7% of total 56.4% of positive	14. # of students who gave reasons for why NIC come to CR = 51 11.4% of total 43.6 of positive

Students' Perceptions by Themes: Are the Perceptions Valid?

The prior section answered the thesis question: What are the perceptions of seventh graders in Costa Rica of Nicaraguan immigrants? This section will seek to answer the thesis question: What is the validity of each perception or stereotype? While it is statistically impossible to provide objective data to prove or disprove such statements as, "Nicaraguans speak funny," or "We Ticos are losing our culture with all the Nicaraguans here," it is possible to expose exaggerated stereotypes such as, "All Nicaraguans kill," or "Nicaraguans take all Costa Ricans' jobs." Clearly, some categories had very few remarks. Therefore, for my in-depth analysis I collapsed the categories into five themes: "Destroy Country," "Crime," "Jobs," *Fuera Nicas*[136]/Reasons for coming to Costa Rica," and "Culture."

Four of the five themes reflect the most common negative perceptions among Costa Rican youth about Nicaraguans. The exception is the fourth which reflects both the negative

[136] Translation: Get out Nicas.

and the positive perceptions. "*Fuera Nicas,*" a negative theme, is paired with one of the two positive categories, "Number of students who gave reason for why Nicaraguans come to Costa Rica." The paired categories represent the extremes of students' opinion and thus are best examined and analyzed side by side.

In each thematic section below, I first provide several examples of students' essays. Second, a discussion follows about the identified perceptions. When possible, statistical data is presented to support or question the validity of the written remarks. Finally, there is a discussion and examination of the positive comments.

Destroy Country

This first theme, "Nicaraguans destroy our country and do harm to Costa Rica," was the single most repeated remark in students' essays, with 53 students making this claim.

> The reason that Ticos treat them bad, because they come to do harm to Costa Rica a peaceful and hard-working country. (Costa Rican female)
>
> …What they do is destroy Costa Rica.
>
> …the only thing that they come to do is harm Costa Rica.
>
> They don't come to do good here, they come to do harm here.

However, these remarks are general statements and do not give examples of how Nicaraguans destroy Costa Rica. Without further elaboration by students, it is difficult to hypothesize the exact nature or validity of this recurring comment.

Crime

According to the essays, there is an assumption or agreement that all or most Nicaraguans kill, bring crime, assault, do drugs, rob, and treat women badly. Students equated criminality with being Nicaraguan. If one is Nicaraguan, he or she will most likely commit some kind of crime in Costa Rica. Some students even provided statistics about Nicaraguan criminality.

> I don't accept them…the great majority 95.9% of the murders rapes, drug problems, liquor, armed robbery are Nicaraguans. They are like rats from the sewer that one tries to return to their land and they return this seems to me a nightmare . . . they are like lobsters that seize Costa Rica destroy us and afterwards surely they go to Panama and then to Venezuela until they kill America. (CR male)
>
> They are sons-of-bitches who only come to kill people, damn nicas. (CR male)
>
> The Nicaraguans come only to C.R to rob, kill, and do harm to this country. (CR male)
>
> Normally when there is a death or assault they always say it's a Nicaraguan . . . for that reason hardly anyone wants them here. (CR female)
>
> They come to Costa Rica to kill and assault they are bastards that come to bother Costa Rica. (CR male)
>
> They assault each day more or less 10 people. (CR male)

Stereotypes often have some basis in fact but to varying degrees. Thus, to what extent are the students' beliefs and perceptions real or valid?

According to the statistics from the *Departamento de Investigación y Estadísticas*[137], of the prison population of the last ten years, the percentage of Nicaraguans in Costa Rican prisons is lower than the percent of Nicaraguans living in Costa Rica. The percent of Nicaraguans living in Costa Rica was estimated earlier in this paper to be between 7% and 8% of Costa Rica's total population. Between the years 1993 and 2003, the Nicaraguan incarcerated population was at its lowest in 1993 with 2.6% and highest in 1998 at 5.2% (out of total incarcerated persons.)

[137] Department of Investigation and Statistics

Table –20 Prison population according to nationality 1993 - 2003[138]

Year	# of Foreigners in CR prisons	# of Nicaraguans in CR prisons	Total Prison Population in Costa Rica	% of Costa Rican prisoners who are foreign	% of Costa Rican prisoners who are Nicaraguan
1993	248	91	3,532	7%	2.6%
1994	331	141	3,698	9%	3.8%
1995	390	173	4,200	9%	4.1%
1996	475	219	5,454	9%	4.0%
1997	564	225	5,848	10%	3.8%
1998	816	386	7,410	11%	5.2%
1999	914	464	9,375	10%	4.9%
2000	728	400	9,876	7%	4.1%
2001	1,124	544	11,683	10%	4.7%
2002	1,053	412	12,367	9%	3.3%
2003	988	452	12,624	8%	3.6%

According to these statistics fewer Nicaraguans than Costa Ricans on average commit crimes.

The next table shows statistics that were obtained from a publication by the *Departamento de Planificación Sección de Estadística*[139]. These statistics also demonstrate the number of people sentenced to prison in 2003. However, there is a disagreement in the number of people sentenced to prison according to nationality. The former statistic shows that 3.6% of the prison population were Nicaraguan while the latter (below) shows 7.0% were Nicaraguan. Despite the discrepancy in the percentages of Nicaraguans entering the Costa Rican prison system, the percentage of Nicaraguans in Costa Rican prisons is still within the range of 7% and 8% of Costa Rican's total population being Nicaraguan.

Table 21 – Nationality of people sentenced to prison in 2003[140]

Country	**Total**	**Female**	**% of females**	**Male**	**% of males**
Costa Rica	3,186	303	82.6%	2883	88.4%
Nicaragua	254	29	7.9%	225	6.9%
Others	187	35	9.5%	152	4.7%

[138] Source: Departamento de Investigación y Estadísticas, INC
[139] Department of Planning and Statistics
[140] Costa Rica Poder Judicial. Departamento de Planificación Sección de Estadística. Anuario de Estadísticas Judiciales. 2003. San José, Costa Rica. Cuadro N. 113, pg. 623. 2004.

Table 22 (whose statistics were obtained from yet a third source) demonstrates that 8% of the total Costa Rican prison population sentenced in 2004 was Nicaraguan, particularly Nicaraguan males. The number continues to increase and just tops out at the national average range of 7% and 8% of total Nicaraguans living in Costa Rica.

Table 22 – Nationality of people sentenced to prison in 2004[141]

Country	Total	Female	%	Male	%
Costa Rica	4,451	246	83%	4205	84.7%
Nicaragua	420	23	8%	397	8.0%
Others	390	28	9%	362	7.3%

Previous tables showed that the percentage of Nicaraguans in the prison population was below the national average. However, the available data from the years 2003 and 2004 show that Nicaraguans sentenced to prison in each year are on par with the national average of 7%-8% of the total population in Costa Rica. It also demonstrates that the percentage of Nicaraguans in Costa Rican prisons is on the rise.

Of all criminal activity, murder was the crime that appeared as the most frequently recurring theme in the students' essays. Forty-one students wrote that Nicaraguans come to kill, kill Costa Ricans, kill each other or some other variation of Nicaraguans murdering others. First, who is committing the murders? Six hundred seventy-four murders were committed in Costa Rica between the years 1998-2000. The table below shows the nationality of the convicted murderers.

[141]Sistema de Información de Administración Penitenciaria (SIAP), Departamento de Investigación y Estadísticas

Table 23 – The Nationality of Convicted Murderers in Costa Rica 1998-2000[142]

Nationality	1998	1999	2000
Costa Rica	156	193	184
Nicaragua	35	34	48
Others	7	5	12
TOTAL	**198**	**232**	**244**

- In 1998, 78.8% of convicted murderers were Costa Rican; 17.7% were Nicaraguan; 3.5% were others.
- In 1999, 83.2% of convicted murderers were Costa Rican; 14.7% were Nicaraguan; 2.1% were others.
- In 2000, 75.4% of convicted murderers were Costa Rican; 19.7% were Nicaraguan; 4.9% were others.

The percent of those Nicaraguans convicted of murder between the years 1998-2000 is double the proportion of the population of 7.8%. In 2000, one in every five convicted murderers was Nicaraguan. Another striking figure is that in comparison to the total number of foreigners committing murders, Nicaraguans represent 80% of the total. Such data provide some support to students' claim that Nicaraguans kill. There is a disproportionally large percent of convicted murderers of Nicaraguan nationality as compared to convicted murderers of Costa Rican nationality or of foreign origin.

In his research, Sandoval presents similar findings. However, Sandoval states, "The majority of Nicaraguans who committed homicides, whose nationality was reported by the newspapers, were male and lived in rural zones of extreme poverty."[143] He argues that while the percent of Nicaraguan murderers is high, poverty and lack of job opportunities were greater indicators of criminality than nationality. I present additional data that support this claim on page 89.

The aforementioned paragraphs discussed the nationality of the convicted murderers. The following paragraphs highlight the nationality of the homicide victims. What is the

[142]Sección de Estadísticas, Departamento de Planificación
[143] Sandoval, 280.

nationality of the homicide victims? Are Nicaraguans more likely to be victims of a homicide?

Table 24 – Nationality of victims of homicides 2001-3003[144]

Total	2001	%	2002	%	2003	%
Total	262	100%	258	100%	300	100%
Costa Rican	212	80.5%	190	72.5%	234	78.0%
Nicaraguan	37	14.4%	55	21.3%	43	14.4%
Others	13	5.1%	13	6.2%	23	7.6%

The distribution of nationality of victims indicates that Nicaraguans, when compared to the national average of 7.8%, are disproportionally higher. Nicaraguan victims represent between 14% and 20% of total homicide victims. According to the statistics, a significant number of Nicaraguans are killed by persons of Nicaraguan origin. In the essays, Costa Rican students claimed that Nicaraguans come from a violent nation that fights instead of talking through problems and conflicts as Costa Ricans peacefully do. A statement many students made was that Nicaraguans often kill each other out of rage, jealousy, or anger. During 2001, 11 out of 30 (30%) Nicaraguans were killed by other Nicaraguans. The number in 2002 rose to 22 out of 55 (40%), but in 2003 fell to 9 out of 43 (21%).[145]

What motivates Nicaraguans to kill? One female Costa Rican student wrote, "The majority kill their families here in Costa Rica because of jealously or for things that don't make sense." Below is a table that lists the motives for the murders.

[144] Sección de Estadísticas, Departamento de Planificación
[145] Source: Sección de Estadísticas, Departamento de Planificación

Table 25 – Number of people of Nicaraguan origin killed by another Nicaraguan in Costa Rica according to motive or cause: 2001-2003[146]

Reason for murder	2001	2002	2003	TOTAL
Crime of Passion	0	1	1	2
Personal Problem	3	6	2	11
Land dispute	0	3	0	3
Dispute, fight	5	6	2	13
Robbery or assault	2	2	0	4
Revenge	1	1	0	2
Domestic abuse	0	1	0	1
Domestic violence	0	2	2	4
Self-defense	0	0	1	1
Drug problem	0	0	1	1
TOTAL	**11**	**22**	**9**	**42**

In descending order, the motive given for one Nicaraguan killing another Nicaraguan for the years 2001-2003 was a dispute or fight (13), a crime of passion (11), and tied for third, robbery or assault and domestic violence (4). These data provide some support for students' perceptions that Nicaraguans kill each other out of anger or jealousy instead of discussing the conflict. However, such perceptions tend to become exaggerated and/or accepted truth. For example, though Nicaraguans represent a disproportionally high percentage of convicted murderers and homicide victims, this statistic is converted from "some" to "all Nicaraguans kill."

Based on the statistics in the aforementioned tables, are Nicaraguans more prone to violence? Or are Nicaraguans in extreme poverty situations with few or no job possibilities actually more prone to be involved in criminal activity, as posited by Sandoval's research? Sandoval's claim that poverty and lack of jobs are greater indicators of criminality than nationality is supported further when the types of jobs and professions of the convicted murderers are examined. The table below indicates the job or profession of the convicted murderers for the year 2000.

[146] Source: Sección de Estadísticas, Departamento de Planificación

Table 26 – Job or Profession of Convicted Murderers in 2000[147]

Job or Profession	TOTAL	Male	Female
Agent of Judicial Investigative Police	4	4	0
Already in jail	5	5	0
Auto Mechanic	2	2	0
Brick mason	1	1	0
Businessperson	3	3	0
Cabinetmaker	1	1	0
Car Washer	2	2	0
Chauffeur	4	4	0
Crew worker on boat	1	1	0
Delinquent	14	14	0
Domestic worker	4	0	4
Drug related activities	14	14	0
Farmer	24	23	1
Gardener	1	1	0
Hit man	2	2	0
Merchant in the formal & informal sectors	15	14	1
Painter	1	1	0
Photographer	1	1	0
Police Officer	8	8	0
Professor	1	1	0
Prostitute	5	0	5
Retired person	4	4	0
Security guard	16	16	0
Store Salesperson	6	5	1
Student	4	4	0
Taxi driver	7	7	0
Unemployed	59	58	1
Unskilled construction worker	5	5	0
Unskilled farm laborer	20	20	0
Unskilled industrial worker	3	3	0
Information ignored	7	7	0
TOTAL	244	231	13

According to the statistics gathered by the Costa Rican judicial courts, six jobs or professions were most common among male convicted murderers:[148]

- 59 unemployed = 24%
- 24 farmers = 10%

[147] www.poder-judicial.go.cr Cite viewed June 2005.
[148] *Ibid.*

- 20 unskilled agriculture workers = 8.2%
- 16 security guards = 6.5%
- 15 commercial vendors = 6%

Of the 13 female convicted murderers, the two most common jobs or professions were prostitution and domestic work: 5 or 38% and 4 or 30.8% respectively.[149]

The fact that the largest "occupation" of the convicted murderers in the year 2000 was "unemployment" at the time of the homicides suggests that poverty might be a strong indicator of the potential to commit a murder and/or other crime. The other professions listed are likewise low paying jobs that do not offer financial stability or security to the men and women and/or their families. Unskilled farm laborers, security guards, vendors, construction and industrial workers, and taxi drivers all earn low wages in their respective job.

Another indicator of poverty or lack of material and financial means to support oneself is level of education. The statistics in Table 27 highlight a striking tendency of convicted murderers to possess a very low level of schooling. This table indicates the level of education of the population sentenced to jail in 2004.

Table 27 – The level of education of the sentenced-to-jail population of 2004[150]

Level of Education	**Number**	**%**
No education	203	3.9%
Some amount of elementary education completed	864	16.4%
Completed elementary	1,113	21.2%
Some amount of secondary completed	773	14.7%
Completed secondary	179	3.4%
Technical/Vocational school	1	0.0%
Community College/Trade School	1	0.0%
Some university education	65	1.2%
University degree	59	1.1%
Not reported	2,003	38.1%
TOTAL	5,261	100.0%

[149] *Ibid*.
[150] Sistema de Información de Administración Penitenciaria (SIAP), Departamento de Investigación y Estadística

Of those reported levels of education:

- Those with some elementary education, those who completed elementary school, and those who completed some secondary school had the highest crime rates. These three groups comprise 52.3% of the crimes committed – over half.
- Those who had some completed secondary versus those who completed secondary school dropped from 14.7% to 3.4%.
- Those who completed secondary school and/or had gone on for further training in a vocational field or at a university comprised 5.7% of the crimes committed.

This information once again seems to demonstrate that nationality alone does not predispose one to commit a crime. In addition to poverty, a lack of education is a major factor in criminality. As discussed in chapter three, the typical Nicaraguan migrating to Costa Rica has an average of four years of formal schooling. If a Nicaraguan child attends school in Costa Rica, s/he is likely to be three grade levels behind her or his Costa Rican peers. Likewise, as explained by the counselors in all four Costa Rican high schools participating in this study, Nicaraguan students drop out in great numbers after eighth grade to work due to their families' economic hardships. Thus, the problem returns to the lack of economic means, which leads to the inability to attend school due to work responsibilities, which in turn leads to the greater potential for Nicaraguans to be involved in criminal activity.

To summarize the *Crime* section, those who commit crimes are most likely to be male, possess little formal schooling, and live in dire economic straits. Nationality is not likely to be the determining factor in predicting criminal activity. More studies are needed that

examine criminal behavior and low socio-economic levels for both Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans in order to prove or disprove this conjecture.

Jobs

Twenty students commented that Nicaraguans take Costa Rican jobs. Here is a sampling from their essays.

> . . . many times instead of giving the job to a tico they give it to a nica. (CR male)
>
> There are fewer jobs for the Costa Ricans. (CR female)
>
> I don't like that the Nicaraguans live in Costa Rica because there are too many Nicaraguans and many ticos don't have jobs because the Nicas already having them. (CR male)

The twenty students, however, did not mention the types of jobs the Nicaraguans are taking. Whether they are repeating the rhetoric they hear in daily conversations, on the news, and/or from friends, or whether their parents or someone they know has lost a job to a Nicaraguan is unknown.

There were a few students whose views matched some of the available data regarding Nicaraguans and jobs.

> The Nicaraguans generally take the jobs the Costa Ricans don't want to do like construction, picking coffee, agriculture. The Nicaraguans are persons just like us the only distinction is the nationality. That's no reason to discriminate. (CR female)
>
> . . . the work they do is the work some people here do not want to do, like construction, carpentry, agriculture among others. (CR male)

Sources indicate that Nicaraguans fill the following labor sectors: in the rural zones Nicaraguans take agriculture jobs especially in banana production, the collection of coffee and sugar cane, and the production and harvesting of fruits; in urban zones, Nicaraguans fill jobs in the construction industry, private security guards, domestic service sector, and the

production of goods for exportation.[151] As the students indicated above, many believe these are jobs Costa Ricans consider beneath them. Costa Rica has traditionally been an agriculture-based economy. So when did the negative change in attitude toward manual labor occur?

Sandoval explains that Costa Rica experienced a transition from an economy based in agriculture to an economy based in service-oriented activities in the last 30 years. He says, "New generations, whose parents traditionally worked in agriculture or construction jobs, found jobs in the service sector or the public sector, which has also expanded during this time period."[152] The economically active population employed in agriculture and construction declined from 55% to 20.4% between 1950 and 1997.[153] Inversely, the number of jobs in the service sector grew from 47.6% in 1987 to 56.2% in 1997. Meanwhile, the incorporation of women in the labor force rose from 19.5% in 1973 to 33.5% in 1997.[154] Thus, there has been an expansion of the service economy without a sharp decline in the agriculture and construction industries because Nicaraguan immigrants fill these voids. Likewise, the Nicaraguan presence allows growers and industries to enjoy high profits without investing heavily in innovative technology. There is little need to improve current technology when the Nicaraguan migrants fill the labor shortage for extremely low wages.[155]

The transition of the Costa Rican economy was due in part to 1) tourism beginning in the 1980s and 2) globalization in the 1990s. First, tourism, "promoted by the United Nations as a strategy to participate in the global economy since the 1960s . . . was adopted by

---

[151] Molina (1999); Castro and Morales (2002); Consejería en Proyectos para Refugiados Latinoamericanos (1996); Sandoval (2002). For complete citations see bibliography.
[152] Sandoval 286-7.
[153] PNUD (Programa de Naciones para el Desarrollo). (1998) Estado de la Nación en desarrollo humano sostenible. San José.
[154] Sandoval 287. Cited from Molina, Iván (1999). "Costarricense, por dicha." Cultura e identidad nacional en Costa Rica (1950-1999). Documento presentado en la Conferencia Costa Rica: Democracia, Ambiente y Paz, University of Kansas.
[155] Sandoval 287.

Caribbean governments at different times as a way to diversify their economies, to overcome economic crises that threatened to cripple the small nation-states, and to acquire foreign exchange."[156] While agriculture was and is still an important component of Costa Rica's economy, tourism (especially eco-tourism) has created new jobs that Costa Ricans are choosing over traditional agricultural or construction jobs, leaving a labor shortage. Second, in regards to globalization, Vilma Contreras Ramírez posits,

> The insertion of Costa Ricans in the world of globalization has generated such a large quantity of jobs that they are not able to be filled exclusively by the national work force. For that reason the welcome of Nicaraguans … is an important economic factor for the economic activity in Costa Rica. They satisfy the production of goods and services directed at the international market.[157]

Both the addition of service jobs that leave gaps in the traditional sectors and the new jobs resulting from globalization draw unemployed Nicaraguans to Costa Rica. Contreras goes on to explain, "Many work in the construction business, do domestic work, and agriculture. They are occupying jobs that Costa Ricans consider beneath them as more and more are moving toward the dynamic sectors of the economy."[158]

The jobs described above that Nicaraguans fill are often repetitive tasks that require few skills. Castro and Morales state, "[I]n general, the type of work available for immigrants is characterized by unskilled labor, activities that demand long work days, poor pay, and intense physical effort."[159] Unfortunately, because there are Nicaraguans in dire economic straits ready to fill these positions, growers and industries pay them low wages. The owners

---

[156] Kempadoo, Kamala. Sun, Sex, and Gold. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC., 1999: 20. Cited from Crick, Malcolm. "Representations of International Tourism in the Social Sciences: Sun, Sex, Sights, Savings, and Servility." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 18 (1989): 307-344. Walvin, James. "Selling the Sun: Tourism and Material Consumption." *Revista/Review Interamericana* 22.1-1 (summer 1992): 208-225.
[157] Contreras Ramírez, 32.
[158] Contreras Ramírez, 32.
[159] Castro, Carlos and Abelardo Morales. *Inmigración laboral nicaragüense en Costa Rica. FLACSO* – Fundación Friedrich Ebert – Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos – Defensoría de los Habitantes, 1999.

themselves earn high profits while they pay lower wages to a Nicaraguan than to a Costa Rican. Thus, Nicaraguan laborers are often more attractive as employees.

Construction is another industry that employs a significant number of Nicaraguans, especially unskilled construction workers. The instability of the sector, characterized by growth spurts followed by static periods, necessitates workers for short time periods. Costa Ricans, unwilling to work in such unstable conditions, opt out in favor of a dependable job that guarantees regular pay periods. Thus, once again, Nicaraguans in economic crises must take such unpredictable and erratic jobs.[160]

A study completed by ASTRADOMES found that around 20% of all domestic laborers in Costa Rica are Nicaraguans.[161] This is yet another job many Costa Ricans refuse to take. The domestic workers are required to work between 12-14 hours a day and often are required to be on call 24 hours a day.[162] Most Costa Rican women will not work under such conditions, but the Nicaraguan women do so out of necessity. Like the construction and agriculture industries, many employers can get away with paying domestic workers below average salaries.

No one knows for certain the numbers of Nicaraguans in each of the above sectors.[163] However, in one of their many collective studies, Morales and Castro (1999) collected statistics on the types of jobs Nicaraguans occupy. They report that, of the male Nicaraguan immigrants, the top three categories of employment are 36.1% in construction and artisan production, 31.5% in agriculture, and 15% in the service industry. Of the total number of

---

[160] Sandoval 287.
[161] ASTRADOMES (Asociación de Trabajadores Domésticas de Costa Rica) (1997). *Situación del oficio doméstico: estudio por muestra, Costa Rica*. San José, ASTRADOMES-Confederación Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Trabajadores del Hogar (CONALCTRAHO).
[162] Consejería en Proyectos para Refugiados Latinoamericanos. *Los nicaragüenses en Costa Rica: Enfoque de una problemática*. San José: 1996, 18.
[163] Consejería en Proyectos para Refugiados Latinoamericanos 15.

female Nicaraguan immigrants, 31.9% work in service industry jobs and 51.1% work in personal services such as domestic labor.[164]

So do Nicaraguans take Costa Rican jobs? In one study, the researchers state, "With respect to the displacement of Costa Rican manual laborers, this does not appear to be true because the sectors where Nicaraguans work are exactly the productive sectors that have become unattractive to the Costa Rican worker."[165] While this statement may be correct for the middle-class up to the upper-class, it may not necessarily be true for Costa Ricans of the lowest socioeconomic groups. They might indeed be competing with Nicaraguans for unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. This appears to be the case for the students' parents in the four high schools based on the students who self-reported their parents' occupations.

As mentioned earlier, the two coed schools were located in very poor neighborhoods with several Nicaraguan immigrants. The parents – both Costa Rican and Nicaraguan – of these students held jobs that were unskilled labor to semi-skilled labor and jobs that required little formal education or vocational training. Some examples of jobs parents held were bus driver, construction worker, grocery store checker, security guard, restaurant worker, salesperson, domestic worker, and machine operator. Nearly all of their jobs fell in the lower- to low-middle-class categories. Not one parent from either Liceo Pérez or Liceo Roberto Fermín held a professional job.

The all girls' school and all boys' school, possessing a mixture of socioeconomic ranges, had 12 parents – 11 Costa Ricans and one Spaniard – with professional jobs such as architect, engineer, accountant, bar/restaurant owner, lawyer and judge. (One of the two lawyers was a female Costa Rican married to the male judge who was from Spain.) The two

---

[164] Morales, Abelardo and Carlos Castro. *Inmigración laboral nicaragüense en Costa Rica. FLACSO* – Fundación Friedrich Ebert – Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos – Defensoría de los Habitantes, 1999.

[165] Consejería en Proyectos para Refugiados Latinoamericanos 18.

female Costa Ricans listed as "Students" were both married to engineers. However, Colegio Santa María and Liceo San José possessed large populations of lower- to low-middle-class students as well.

All four schools had similar numbers of parents with middle-class jobs such as government worker, assistant in surgery, electrician, mechanic, and project administrator. A table listing the occupations of the students' parents can be found in Appendix G-J .

The compiled occupation statistics indicate that all four schools had the greatest number of students in the lower- or low-middle class categories – *regardless* of nationality. Sixty-five percent of Costa Rican male parents had jobs that fell in the lower- to low-middle class range. Nearly seventy-four percent of Nicaraguan male parents had lower- to low-middle class jobs. Of the students' mothers, 81% Costa Rican female parents and 100% of Nicaraguan female parents held low- to lower-middle-class jobs. (See Appendix for tables.) While the Nicaraguan parents represented greater poverty, more than 65% of all four schools' student body populations were in the lowest end of the socioeconomic range.

In summary, most Nicaraguans are taking jobs that middle- to upper-class Costa Ricans refuse. Costa Ricans of lower-classes, however, might indeed be competing for jobs with the Nicaraguans. The students from lower-class families, both Costa Rican and Nicaraguan, have parents that are working in similar jobs. According to the viewpoint of the students in this study, students might indeed be justified in saying that Nicaraguans take Costa Rican jobs – jobs their parents might wish to occupy.

Fuera Nicas – Get out Nicas / Reasons for coming to Costa Rica

The negative comments of "students who think Nicaraguans should be in their own country" and "students who do not know why the Nicaraguans are in Costa Rica" are compared with "students who gave reasons for why Nicaraguans come to Costa Rica." The

paired categories represent the extremes of students' opinion and thus are best examined and analyzed side by side. The fact that 39 Costa Rican students had no idea why Nicaraguans were in Costa Rica is surprising, because the grave economic problems in Nicaragua are regular themes in both daily conversations and in the media. On the other hand, the fact that 51 students understood the economic reasons for migration is encouraging, for those students could empathize with the Nicaraguan migration plight. Ultimately this leads to better, more positive interaction between them and Nicaraguans.

The negative comments from the essays appear below. Like the *Crime* section, some students gave actual percentages of the number of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica according to their beliefs.

> Well my opinion is that the Nicaraguans that live in my neighborhood I can't stand I don't like them I don't understand why they come here if they have their own country, here they do whatever they want, rob, kill, assault, etc. (CR female)
>
> . . . already half of the country is Nicaraguan. (CR female)
>
> . . . in the country there are more nicas then ticos. (CR female)
>
> I can't even leave to go to the corner because one only sees Nicaraguans. It would seem that this country was Nicaragua and not Costa Rica. (CR female)
>
> . . . what's happening now is that it should be called Costa Nica because they're all coming here. (CR female)
>
> Practically 13% of the country is Nicaraguan, there are too many. (CR male)
>
> . . . I prefer that they stay in their country and us in ours. (CR female)
>
> Would it be that everyone is going to change countries the ticos there and the nicas here? (CR female)

Throughout the students' essays there tended to be an exaggeration of the number of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica. As stated in chapter three, Sandoval predicts that at any one time, between 7% and 8% of the total Costa Rican population – legal and illegal – is Nicaraguan. One student puts the Nicaraguan population at 13% while another places it at 80% (see quote

on page 100). Vilma Contreras puts the figure a little higher than Sandoval at 10%; this percentage is still nowhere near the hugely exaggerated 80% as one student quoted.

What may influence students' exaggerated perceptions are the large populations of Nicaraguans present in the participating high schools, especially at the seventh grade level. In the eight seventh-grade classrooms that participated, the percent of Nicaraguans in these classes ranged from 12.1% to 27.6%. Additionally, students' parents might be competing for jobs, community resources, and physical space such as housing. Such factors might unconsciously bias Costa Rican students' perception into thinking that their neighborhoods are overflowing with Nicaraguans. Furthermore, the two coed high schools were located in very poor neighborhoods, where many immigrating Nicaraguans settle. Thus, to those Costa Rican students, it may indeed appear that Costa Rica is populated with Nicaraguans.

The first essay below shows the unconcealed hatred one Costa Rican male feels. The second one demonstrates the fear that many possess about the large Nicaraguan migrations.

> The nicas are damn people that come to mess up the country, they should make a damn island and a piece of land so that they live there all the sons-of-bitches. (CR male)

> I think that the Nicaraguans only come to Costa Rica to look for problems look how Costa Rica is full of Nicaraguans we already have an over-population if one passes by the streets of Costa Rica of 1,000 persons you see and observe 800 persons that are Nicaraguan and one doesn't feel good between so many Nicaraguans one feels scared about them because they are problematic. (CR male)

Both show a lack of understanding about the financial struggle Nicaraguans face first in their own country and then in Costa Rica.

The next group of essays consists of positive comments made by Costa Rican and Nicaraguan students as well as one Colombian student. These students gave reasons explaining why Nicaraguans migrate to Costa Rica.

> The Nicaraguans are hard-working people in the majority, it seems good to me that they come to C.R. in search of a better future and we shouldn't discriminate because that pleases no one. (CR male)

> It's okay because equally like me and my parents, we are Colombians and many more people come to Costa Rica to look for a better work option and a better future for them and their families. (Colombian male)

> They are people that come to our country in search of jobs, in search of economic help, to help their families in the economic situation. On the contrary instead of judging them one has to see the economic situation and not speak bad of them on the contrary Costa Rica as a country of peace could help them, the Nicaraguans, also on the one hand I would like that everyone thought the same, since they are human beings equally as we are. (CR female)

The majority of students (of all nationalities) who gave motives for migration listed economic factors as the number one reason. They seemed to comprehend the severity of the economic problem in Nicaragua and even expressed a benevolent attitude toward the Nicaraguans. The next essay, written by a Costa Rican female with Nicaraguan parents, demonstrates a depth of understanding for the human condition and struggle.

> Well, for me, it doesn't matter to me the nationality because we're all equal. we cry, laugh, feel, etc. the only thing that interests me is how a person is if they are good the only thing that one tells me is their feelings it doesn't matter to me their nationality nor their physical [appearance]. (CR female with Nicaraguan parents)

The following two excerpts were authored by Nicaraguans. The first one intensely understands the economic crisis in Nicaragua, and he is acutely aware that many Costa Ricans do not grasp the seriousness of the situation. The second one is indignant that many Costa Ricans lump all Nicaraguans into one group. Moreover, this student possesses a sense of future justice as he says that "God is in heaven and sees it." These Nicaraguan boys have an acute understanding of the Nicaraguan migration plight that many of their Costa Rican classmates fail to grasp.

> My critique the Nicaraguans only have one reason for living in Costa Rica, the economic weakness that Nicaragua suffers and they look to Costa Rica as a way to get ahead. In some occasions the Costa Ricans don't understand the purpose/intention of the Nicaraguans and they humiliate, offend them, etc. (NIC male)

> That the Costa Ricans don't want the Nicaraguans because supposedly they say that the nicas come only to do really bad things but all nicas are not equal . . . that the nicas are not animals like they say. The Ticos are selfish and egotistical that don't think and that is very bad, but God is in heaven and he sees it. (NIC – did not mark gender)

To summarize, there are some students who possess no idea of the impetus for the Nicaraguan migration to Costa Rica. These students are more inclined to express a negative opinion about Nicaraguans in Costa Rica. Their interactions with Nicaraguans are more likely to be racist in nature, discriminating, and unrelenting in their rhetoric that all Nicas should go back to their own country. On the other hand, those students who indicated reasons for the Nicaraguan migration displayed an understanding attitude and even welcomed them. Perhaps a little education in the schools on the economic histories of Costa Rica and Nicaragua might open more students up to the struggles of Nicaraguan immigrants and consequently change their attitude toward and behavior with Nicaraguans.

Culture

There is a general fear that the large Nicaraguan migrations to Costa Rica are causing Ticos to lose their culture. A total of 19 students made comments that relate to the culture of Costa Rica. Nine students said that Nicaraguans speak funny, four wrote that Nicaraguans stink, three said that Ticos are losing their culture due to Nicaraguan migration, and three said that Ticos are losing their light color of skin because the Nicaraguans darken it.

The particular accent of the Nicaraguans is looked down upon by many Ticos. While I was in Costa Rica, I heard several jokes told in various settings about the "horrible" Nicaraguan accent. On many occasions Ticos related that of all Spanish-speaking countries, Costa Rican Spanish was the most pure. One particular lawyer, someone highly educated and who had spent extensive time outside of Costa Rica, insisted to the point of anger that Costa Rican Spanish was the purest when I respectfully questioned his claim. A portion of the students seemed to reflect this sentiment.

> I think that they are funny because of the way they talk. (CR female)
>
> . . . the only critical thing I have to say is their form of speaking. (CR female)
>
> . . . and above all I don't like at all how they talk and that smell. (CR female)

It is also interesting to note that each counselor in the four high schools related that many Nicaraguan students attempt to hide their accent by adopting the Costa Rican accent. It is a source of embarrassment, and, in order to fit in, they intentionally disguise their accent.

As the female student in the last essay wrote, Costa Ricans tend to complain that Nicaraguans stink. Another female Costa Rican student wrote, "They smell bad and they dress ugly." The Costa Rican custom is to bathe daily and always in the morning. For example, the Tica family with whom I lived never left the house without showering – not even to run a block to the grocery store. Two counselors, at two different high schools, related that they had Nicaraguan domestic help. They were pleased with the quality of work, but complained that the Nicaraguan women never showered and stank up the house.

As part of my year-long study in Costa Rica, I was required to take a month-long introductory class on Costa Rican culture. Throughout the month, the professor referred to the light color of Tico skin several times and to its uniqueness. He also claimed that it was easy to tell Costa Ricans from Nicaraguans according to their skin color. I tested this theory and found, more times than not, that I could not determine nationality simply by assessing the skin color. Three of the nine teachers with whom I worked communicated that unless they looked at the student's file, they were unable to distinguish between Nicaraguans and Costa Ricans. Regardless of this fact, the desire for light skin is prevalent in Costa Rica. The excerpt below indicates its importance.

> If they keep permitting them to enter little by little, like what's happening now we will lose this unique skin color, that no other country has in Central America, this has occurred in the last decades. (CR male)

There is also a tendency to "lighten" one's skin color in everyday speech if one is Costa Rican despite the fact that the individual may indeed have a dark complexion. Sandoval writes that Nicaraguans are a threat with their "dark skin in a country obsessed with whiteness."[166]

The fear of losing Costa Rica's culture was a fear that appeared in a few students' essays. "We are losing our culture because of the Nicas," was expressed by two female students. One surprising response, also written by a Costa Rican female, explained, "The Nicas make us lose our culture and are not welcome, but if someone from the United States comes to our culture it's okay, but not the nicas." According to this student, there is a clear separation between accepted, welcomed cultures and rejected cultures.

According to the students' essays, xenophobia exists in Costa Rica. Fear of the "other" and the potential danger the "other" might bring is familiar rhetoric among students. It is interesting, however, that once a student has a positive interaction with the "other," his/her viewpoint of the "other" changes. The student still possesses a general, overall negative perception of Nicaraguans but at least distinguishes between "good" and "bad" Nicaraguans as the Costa Rican female does in her essay:

> There are good Nicaraguans and other bad ones I have Nicaraguan friends and they are good I have seen on TV some Nicaraguans kill their spouses and other ticos I only say the good ones are my friends and the bad ones that kill I hate.

Thus, it appears paramount that teachers facilitate opportunities that encourage positive interactions to occur between students of different nationalities. It is also important that differences be celebrated, not hidden or vilified. Likewise, an effort to highlight similarities among Costa Rican and Nicaraguan students is necessary. This type of environment is possible. In two of the nine classrooms I observed, two outstanding teachers that created a

---

[166] Sandoval 286.

welcoming atmosphere which made student and teacher relationships and student-to-student interactions a priority.

Summary of chapter

The students' essays demonstrate a range of responses to the essay titled, "Nicaraguans in Costa Rica." The majority reflect an overall negative attitude toward Nicaraguans living in Costa Rica. There exists some basis of truth for their negative perceptions, including statistical data. Additionally, because the research was completed in lower- to low-middle-class neighborhoods, it is possible that both poor Costa Ricans and poor, immigrating Nicaraguans are competing for the same jobs and resources. Such competition creates conflicts among both nationalities. However, the students tended to exaggerate facts and over-generalize perceptions. Interesting to note, those students who had one or more parent(s) from another country (not Nicaragua) held the same negative perceptions as their peers.

The minority revealed an empathetic attitude toward the Nicaraguan immigrants and showed an understanding of the economic conditions that force many Nicaraguans to cross the border in search of jobs and a better life. A small number of students commented that all are equal regardless of nationality. This minority reflects the possibility that the negative attitude toward Nicaraguans can be changed.

Chapter five

Conclusions

Their unique political, economic, and social histories have led Costa Rica and Nicaragua to arrive in the twenty-first century in very dissimilar positions. For the greater part of the 1900s, Nicaragua was characterized by harsh dictatorships, political upheavals, and often bloody struggles between parties of differing ideologies. This political unrest led to economic instability resulting in severe economic hardships for the people of Nicaragua. Costa Rica, on the other hand, with the exception of the short Civil War in 1948, experienced a mostly peaceful and democratic century. The economy of Costa Rica suffered little damage as a result of violence. Despite being hit hard by the neoliberal policies in the 1980s, Costa Rica's economy continues to fare significantly better than that of Nicaragua.[167] The differences of all these factors have influenced hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans to migrate to Costa Rica.

Throughout Nicaragua and Costa Rica's histories, there have always been Nicaraguans crossing the border – legally or illegally – for varying reasons. The last twenty-five years, however, have seen Nicaraguan migrations triple and quadruple in comparison to past decades. The brutality of the Somoza regime, the severe economic conditions and the continued political unrest in the 1980s and 1990s, the devastation of Hurricane Mitch in 1998, and the continued economic hardships of the 2000s are the principal factors that have forced hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans to migrate to Costa Rica.

The sharp spike in migration, particularly in the 1990s, has created multiple conflicts between Costa Ricans and Nicaraguan immigrants. The past fifteen years have witnessed

---

[167] A prime example (as presented in chapter 3) is the large difference in the GDP of each country. Based on 2004 statistics, Costa Rica's GDP was US$ 9,600 versus Nicaragua's US$ 2,300.

increasingly negative perceptions held by Costa Ricans about Nicaraguan immigrants. Nicaraguans are perceived by many Costa Ricans to be a threat to Costa Rica's peaceful way of living, democratic government, and financially superior economy. A strong sense of resentment and outright hatred is often directed toward the Nicaraguan immigrants. In fact, Nicaraguans have become a kind of scapegoat for all the political, economic, and social problems Costa Rica experiences.

The goal of this thesis was to describe the perceptions held by Costa Rican youth of Nicaraguan immigrants. As indicated in the introduction, many perceptions are negative. What feeds and encourages these negative perceptions? Why do negative perceptions continue to persist? Are they valid? Four high schools provided the context in which to answers these questions. Essays written by seventh-grade students provided the means by which to analyze the perceptions and determine, to the extent possible, the validity of the perceptions. The following paragraphs summarize the results of the analysis.

The students' essays demonstrated that an overall negative perception exists among Costa Rican seventh-graders about Nicaraguans in Costa Rica. Their perceptions, to a great degree, reflect those held by the adult Costa Rican population. Even foreign-born students (not of Nicaraguan origin) and students who had one or more foreign-born parent(s) possessed similar negative feelings. Several conclusions can be drawn as to why these negative perceptions continue to exist and permeate Costa Rican daily life.

Students tended to over-generalize. For instance, many students wrote that all Nicaraguans killed, robbed, and raped. They did not differentiate between the portion of Nicaraguans who do commit crimes and those who do not. They simply lumped them all together into one category.

Students exaggerated the facts. For example, one student reported that of every thousand people, eight hundred of them are Nicaraguans. Another student claimed that "the great majority 95.5% of the murders, rapes, drug problems, armed robbery are Nicaraguans." While it is true, for example, that Nicaraguans represent a larger percentage of convicted murderers than their proportion of the population, those Nicaraguans that murder are generally male, come from extreme poverty, possess very little formal education, and originate from rural zones. This is a small group, but some Costa Ricans over-generalize and say that all Nicaraguans kill. Another student wrote, "70% of the law violations are committed by Nicaraguans." This exaggerated number is then pushed onto law-abiding Nicaraguans. However, over time the stereotypes come to represent fewer and fewer Nicaraguans – migratory or otherwise – and create disharmony and conflict. Why do these seventh-grade students over-generalize and exaggerate facts?

Fear of other is one reason for the over-generalization and exaggeration of facts. It is also a possible explanation for the perpetuation of negative stereotypes. There are two types of fear that appear throughout the essays. One is a fear of the violent and dangerous image of Nicaraguans. As one student wrote, "One doesn't feel too good between so many Nicaraguans one feels scared about them because they are problematic." According to students, most have not personally had a bad experience with a Nicaraguan. Yet out of fear and misinformation, they adopt in their attitudes and beliefs the common rhetoric that all Nicaraguans kill, rape, and steal.

The second fear is a fear of losing one's culture. The students' essays reflected a fear of losing their unique skin color and "clean" and "pure" accent. They wrote that Nicaraguans bring violence and that Costa Rica will no longer be peaceful and democratic. As Carlos Sandoval's book title *The Threatening Others* indicates, the Nicaraguan migration threatens

to disrupt Costa Rica's national identity. Why might these students in the study so readily adopt this fear of Nicaraguans? What might bias these students to unhesitatingly assume overall negative perceptions of Nicaraguans?

The neighborhoods and provinces in which they live are poor neighborhoods that have high concentrations of Nicaraguans and thus might bias students' perceptions of Nicaraguans. The majority of both Costa Rican and Nicaraguan students come from low- to low-middle-class socioeconomic groups. Their parents are competing for many of the same jobs and resources. For a more complete understanding of the perceptions of Costa Rican youth about Nicaraguans, a study should be completed in schools in middle- to upper-class neighborhoods. For example, their parents are not competing for the same jobs as the Nicaraguans. Therefore, would their opinion on "Nicaraguans take Costa Rican jobs" match those of the lower-class students? A second factor influencing students' perceptions of violence was the number of murders committed in their province. All four high schools are located in the province of San José. As the table below demonstrates, the greatest number of murders committed in a ten-year period occurred in San José. A murder happened in San José nearly seven times as often as it did in five of the seven provinces.

Table 28 – Number of Homicides Committed in each Province 1991-2000

Year	TOTAL	San José	Alajuela	Cartago	Heredia	Guana-Caste	Punta-arenas	Limón
1991	132	56	17	9	1	9	18	22
1992	160	68	13	12	9	16	13	29
1993	160	61	21	8	11	13	13	33
1994	182	59	26	15	10	9	22	41
1995	184	72	23	12	11	7	15	44
1996	189	71	21	9	12	9	26	41
1997	210	70	36	20	10	9	28	37
1998	224	76	28	12	15	10	24	59
1999	245	101	25	16	12	15	24	52
2000	238	108	28	16	15	13	15	43
TOTAL	**1,924**	**742**	**238**	**129**	**106**	**110**	**198**	**401**

Source: Sección de Estadítstica, Departamento de Planificación

Proximity to crime could explain the reason why students in San José have a heightened awareness of murders, particularly of murders committed by Nicaraguans. The participation of Nicaraguans in murders is considerable. They made up almost 20% of all who were convicted of murders between 1998 and 2000.[168] To determine whether students living in the other provinces have the same strongly negative perceptions that "all Nicaraguans kill," studies could be conducted in those other provinces.

The Costa Rican students' parents are competing for the same jobs as the parents of Nicaraguan students. A recurring theme in students' essays was that Nicaraguans take Costa Rican jobs. The statistics show that Nicaraguans take jobs which Costa Ricans refuse. Many scholars claim that Nicaraguans are simply filling the much-needed labor force as Costa Rica's economy transitions from an agricultural to a service-oriented economy. The service sector has expanded leaving a shortage of labor in the agricultural sector. However, the agricultural sector has not suffered great losses because Nicaraguans have stepped in to fill the void. The students in the study, however, all live in poor, urban settings. Based on the parents' jobs (as self-reported by students), the Costa Rican and Nicaraguan parents are competing to some degree for the same positions. The two groups compete for jobs described as unskilled to semi-skilled, repetitive in nature, and requiring little formal schooling or vocational or technical training. This information validates the perception to some extent. Once again, in order to possess a more complete picture of Costa Rican students' perceptions of Nicaraguans, this same study should be repeated in schools in middle- to upper-class neighborhoods. Would their opinions match those of the lower-class students? Such a study would indicate the extent of the stereotyping.

---

[168] Sección de Estadítstica, Departamento de Planificación

Incidentally, one perception that appeared only four times was the belief that Nicaraguans ruin Costa Rica economically. One student wrote that when one goes to the hospital, one must wait in line behind all the Nicaraguans. Another student wrote Nicaraguans ruin Costa Rica's social security. These claims are made regularly by adult Costa Ricans as well as heard on news programs, which makes it surprising that this issue did not appear more often in the students' essays. I surmise that the seventh-graders are not quite old enough to be aware of or interested in economic matters. An ideal situation would be to return in five years when the students are seniors and once again measure their perceptions. As seniors, would they mention economic reasons?

It can be posited that students' environment plays a key factor in their development of negative perceptions of Nicaraguans. Additionally, societal factors that originate outside of their neighborhoods also influence and perpetuate negative perceptions. The following paragraphs highlight three such factors.

The need for a scapegoat is one reason for the continuing of negative stereotypes. One Central American historian related that before the Nicaraguans arrived, Costa Ricans blamed Colombians for corrupting Costa Rica. The blame for the apparent overall moral decline is now placed on the Nicaraguans. Costa Ricans have always considered themselves to be unique – the Switzerland of Central America. Indeed, as evidenced in the history chapter, they do have an unusual history that involves less political and social violence, a fairly stable economy, a larger middle-class population, and an overall better quality of life as compared to other Central American countries. However, when these characteristics are threatened, the tendency is to blame the outsider. Thus, Costa Ricans use Nicaraguans as the scapegoat for their problems such as increase in crime, perceived moral decline, economic

troubles, and, as of late, several corrupt politicians (including two ex-presidents who are in prison on fraud charges).

The media play a significant role in the perpetuation of Nicaraguans as violent people or possessing a propensity toward crime. Several students mentioned in their essays that they see "all the time" on the television Nicaraguans committing crimes like murdering, robbing, and raping. During my year in Costa Rica, I, too, noticed the number of times Nicaraguans appeared in a negative light on the news. I can recall very few instances of positive images of Nicaraguans. In addition to crime, the border control issue is a constant news item with most coverage being negative. Students thus obtain their image of Nicaraguans via the media and subsequently take those images and over-generalize or exaggerate reported facts.

The narratives that one repeatedly tells others and himself or herself become truth.[169] In other words, the stereotype, belief, or perception is repeated and heard so many times that it is then converted into truth. As a child is repeatedly told s/he is smart or dumb, s/he comes to believe that about herself or himself. This phenomenon is often called "self-fulfilling prophecy." This concept likewise works with repeated stereotyped images. The negative perceptions of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica have been repeated so many times that many stereotypes are accepted as fact or truth.

Lastly, *a general lack of cultural education in Costa Rican schools* contributes to the development and perpetuation of negative stereotypes of Nicaraguans. It was surprising the number of students who did not know why so many Nicaraguans were migrating to Costa Rica. They did not possess an understanding of the harsh economic situation in Nicaragua, nor did they possess an understanding of the violent political history of Nicaragua. I posit

---

[169] Vila, Pablo. "The Polysemy of the Label "Mexican" on the Border." In *Ethnography at the Border*. Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota Press, 2003.

that cultural education as well as a historical contextualization could engender a sense of empathy in the Costa Rican students toward the Nicaraguan migration plight.

Xenophobia and its remedy

In the introduction of this thesis, the comparison was made between the Latino migration to the United States and the Nicaraguan migration to Costa Rica. As the Latino population has increased in the U.S., communities, states, and regions have had to deal with xenophobia that resulted from the migrations. Xenophobia is not a phenomenon unique to the U.S., nor is it unique to Costa Rica. It exists wherever a new culture is introduced (usually in large numbers) into the physical, political, and social territory of another. The inter-mixing of cultures often engenders fear which is then manifested in people's words and actions, such as racial epithets, discrimination, and violence. The remedy is education – cultural, political, social, and geographical.

As a high school teacher, I was required to take several classes as well as attend many workshops on cultural diversity. Most school systems in the United States recognized a few decades ago that this was necessary in order to ensure all students an equal and quality education. The dispersal of cultural knowledge is crucial for the current and future successes of students and communities. As the number of Nicaraguans migrating to and living in Costa Rica continues to climb exponentially, cultural education and a global perspective will become more imperative than ever. Also, as the world becomes more inter-connected in this era of globalization, the ability to understand and appreciate people of different cultures will be paramount to the economic and political successes of individual countries.

While other researchers' work indicates the existence of negative perceptions held by adult Costa Ricans about Nicaraguans,[170] my research demonstrates that these same negative

[170] Sandoval, Morales, Abelardo and Carlos Castro.

perceptions are also deeply rooted in the psyche of young people in Costa Rica. The cultural, political, social, and geographical education must begin in the elementary grades so as to root out xenophobia as early as possible. The economic, political, and social futures of Costa Rica and Nicaragua depend on the ability of new generations to live amicably side-by-side. The quicker academia, investigators, governments, and human rights groups shed light on this issue, the sooner biases, racism, and unfounded perceptions can be eliminated.

Limitations of the Study and Future Study Possibilities

Time and space did not allow an analysis of the differences of opinions between genders. Several more chapters could be written regarding gender differences. For example, does one gender hold a more positive or a more negative perception of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica? Or, why are there a greater percentage of Nicaraguan girls in school than Nicaraguan boys? Why do boys drop out more often? Do boys enter the work force at an earlier age?

This study was limited to four urban high schools. The study could be duplicated in rural areas and then compared and contrasted to the urban schools. Likewise, the study was conducted in poor neighborhoods with large populations of Nicaraguans. Do students of the same age in middle- to upper-class neighborhoods possess the same perceptions?

The possibility to conduct this research again in five years with the same students would be a superb opportunity for a comparison study. How many of the same students would still be in school? Would they possess the same perceptions? How would their perceptions have changed? Would the attitude toward Nicaraguans have changed as a nation? Would it have improved, worsened, or stayed the same? The potential for further study on this thesis topic is substantial.

Bibliography

Abelardo, Bonilla, "Abel and Cain en el ser histórico de la nación costarricense," in Luis Ferrero, ed., *Ensayistas costarricenses*. San José: Lehmann, 1971.

Ameringer, Charles D. *Democracy in Costa Rica*. New York: Praeger Publications, 1982.

Amerigner, Charles D. *Don Pepe*: A Political Biography of José Figueres of Costa Rica. Alburquerque: NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1978: 76.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. 2nd ed. New York: Verso, 1991.

Arias Sánchez, Oscar. "Let's Give Peace a Chance," in *The Costa Rican Reader*. Edelman, Marc and Joanne Kenen, eds. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989: 369. (Speech to the United States Congress, September 22, 1987.)

ASTRADOMES (Asociación de Trabajadores Domésticas de Costa Rica). *Situación del oficio doméstico: Estudio por nuestra, Costa Rica*. San José, Costa Rica: ASTRADOMES-CONALCTRAHO (Confederación Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Trabajadores del Hogar), 1997.

Bell, John Patrick. *Crisis in Costa Rica: The 1948 Revolution*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1971.

Berryman, James L. "Case Studies of Interaction between Teachers and Students in Selected Nebraska School Districts with a High Percentage of Mexican-American Students." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1983.

Biesanz, Mavis Hiltunen, Richard Biesanz, and Karen Zubris Biesanz. *The Ticos*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publications, Inc., 1999.

Booth, John A. *Costa Rica: Quest for Democracy*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998.

Booth, John A and Thomas W. Walker. *Understanding Central America*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998.

Brockett, Charles. *Land, Power and Poverty: Agrarian Transformation and Political Conflict in Central America*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990.

Contreras Ramírez, Vilma. *Educación sin fronteras: Una exitosa experiencia para la atención a la diversidad sociocultural*. San José, Costa Rica: OIM, MEP, CR-USA, 2004.

Costa Rica Poder Judicial – Departamento de Planificación Sección de Estadística. *Anuario de Estadísticas Judiciales*. San José, Costa Rica: CR Poder Judicial, 2004.

Edelberto Torres Rivas. *Interpretation del desarrollo centroamericano*. San José, EDUCA, 1971: 283-287.

Gellner, Ernest. *Thought and Change*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1964.

Gould, Jeffrey L. *To Die This Way*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998: 10.

Gould, Jeffrey L., Charles R. Hale, and Carol A. Smith. "Memories of Mestizaje: Cultural Politics in Central America since 1920," unpublished manuscript, 1994.

Hamilton, Nora and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla. "Central American Migration: A Framework for Analysis." *Latin American Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (1991) 75-110.

Kempadoo, Kamala. *Sun, Sex, and Gold*. Oxford, England: Rowman & Publishers, Inc, 1999.

Kinzer, Stephen, "In Fearful Costa Rica, the *Yanquis* Are Welcome," in *The Costa Rican Reader*. Edelman, Marc and Joanne Kenen, eds. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989

Los nicaragüenses en Costa Rica: Enfoque de una problemática. San José, Costa Rica: Consejería en Proyectos para Refugiados Latinoamericanos, 1996.

Molina, Iván and Steven Palmer. *Educando a Costa Rica: Alfebetización popular, formación docente y género (1880-1950)*. San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Porvenir, S.A., 2000.

Morales, Abelardo and Carlos Castro. *Inmigración laboral nicaragüense en Costa Rica*. San José, Costa Rica: FLACSO, 1999.

Morales, Abelardo and Carlos Castro. *Redes transfronterizas: Sociedad, empleo y migración entre Nicaragua y Costa Rica*. San José, Costa Rica: FLACSO, 2002.

"*NICA/ragüense*." Dir. Julia Green Fleming. San José, Costa Rica: Collagemedia Productions, 2005.

Ritzer, George, ed. *Encyclopedia of Social Theory Vol. II*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005.

Rodríguez Vega, Eugenio. *Cinco educadores en la historia*. San José, Costa Rica: U Estatal a Distancia, 2001.

Rouse, Roger. "The Social Space of Postmodernism." In *The Anthropology of Globalization: A Reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2002.

Sandoval García, Carlos. *Otros amenazantes: Los nicaragüenses y la formación de identidades nacionales en Costa Rica*. San José, Costa Rica: Editorial de la Universidad de Costa Rica, 2003.

Stansifer, Charles L. "Elections and Democracy in Central America: The Cases of Costa Rica and Nicaragua." In *Assessing Democracy in Latin America*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998.

Tenenbaum, Barbara A., ed. *Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1996.

Vila, Pablo, ed. *Ethnography at the Border*. Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota Press, 2003.

Wiley, James. "Undocumented Aliens and Recognized Refugees: The Right to Work in Costa Rica." *Immigration Migration Review*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Summer 1995): 423-440.

Woodward Jr., Ralph Lee. *Central America: A Nation Divided*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1999.

Internet websites

Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL). "Panorama de la migración internacional, tendencias y aspectos distintivos de la inmigración y la emigración." To locate this document, follow these steps: 1) www.eclac.cl/ 2) publicaciones 3a) Series de la CEPAL 3b) Seminarios y conferencias 4) No. 24.

http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/goes/cs.html. 15 November 2005.

http://www.inec.go.cr. 28 November 2005.

http://www.poder-judicial.go.cr. June 2005

Costa Rican Government Agencies Consulted in Person

Corte Suprema de Costa Rica – Costa Rica Supreme Court

Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería – Department of Immigration and Foreign Persons

Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería, Departamento de Planificación – Department of Immigration and Foreign Persons – Department of Planning

Ministerio de Educación (MEP) – Minister of Education

MEP – Departamento de Estadísticas – MEP – Statistics Department

Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (OIM) – International Organization for Migration

Organismo de Investigación Judicial (OIJ) – Judicial Investigative Police

Appendices

Appendix A

Student Survey – English version

Name _____
F _____ M _____
High School _____
Name of Class _____

This first section of questions deals with general information.

1. How old are you? _____

2. Where were you born? (country) _____

3. What is your nationality? _____

4. Where was your mom born? (country) _____
your dad? (country)_____

5. Have you lived in other countries aside from Costa Rica? Yes _____ No _____
If you responded yes, which ones? _____
For how long? _____

This section of questions deals with your family situation. If there is a question that does not apply to you, write "NA."

6. With whom do you live? (dad, mom, siblings, aunts/uncles, cousins, etc.)
_____

7. What is your dad's occupation?
_____

8. What is your mom's occupation?
_____

9. What responsibilities do you have as part of a family? (for example, take care of your siblings, work outside of the house, chores)
_____
_____
If you work outside of the house, what kind of job do you have? _____
If you work outside of the house, how many hours per week do you work? _____

Appendix A – Student Survey – English version continued

In this section you will answer questions about your life as a student. Questions #10-12 are for those who are not from Costa Rica. If you are Costa Rican continue with question #13.

10. How long have you lived in Costa Rica? _____

11. How many years (months) of elementary and high school did you complete in your country of origin?
Elementary _____ High School _____

12. How many years (months) of elementary and high school have you completed in Costa Rica?
Elementary _____ High School _____

13. Did you repeat 6th grade? Yes _____ No _____

14. Are you repeating 7th grade? Yes _____ No _____

In this last section, answer questions about your future.

15. What are some of your goals that you have for your life?
_____
_____
_____

16. What goals do your parents have for you?
_____
_____
_____

17. In ten years, where do you think you'll be? What do you think you'll be doing? What type of life do you imagine?
_____
_____
_____

Appendix B

Student Survey – Spanish version

Nombre _____
F _____ M _____
Colegio _____
Nombre del curso _____

Esta primera sección de preguntas se trata de datos generales.

1. ¿Cuántos años tiene? _____

2. ¿Dónde nació Ud.? (país) _____

3. ¿Cuál es su nacionalidad? _____

4. ¿Dónde nación su mamá? (país) _____ ¿su papá) _____

5. ¿Ha vivido en otros países aparte de Costa Rica? Sí _____ No _____
   Si respondió sí, ¿cuáles? _____
   ¿por cuánto tiempo? _____

En esta sección son preguntas que se tratan sobre su situación familiar. Si hay una pregunta que no le aplica, escriba "NA."

6. ¿Con quién vive? (papá, mamá, hermanos, tíos, primero, etc.)
   _____

7. ¿En qué oficio trabaja su papá?
   _____

8. ¿En qué oficio trabaja su mamá?
   _____

9. ¿Cuáles son sus responsabilidades como para de una familia? (por ejemplo, cuidar a sus hermanos, trabajar afuera de casa, quehaceres en casa)
   _____
   _____
   Si Ud. trabaja afuera de casa, ¿qué tipo de trabajo es? _____
   Si Ud. trabaja afuera de casa, ¿cuántas horas trabaja cada semana? _____

Appendix B – Student Survey – Spanish version continued

En esta sección contestará preguntas sobre su vida estudiantil. Preguntas #10-12 son para los que no son de Costa Rica. Si Ud. es costarricense siga con pregunta #13.

10. ¿Cuánto tiempo lleva vivir en Costa Rica? _____

11. ¿Cuántos años (meses) de escuela y colegio hizo en su país de origen?
Escuela _____ Colegio _____

12. ¿Cuántos años (meses) de escuela y colegio ha hecho en Costa Rica?
Escuela _____ Colegio _____

13. ¿Repitió grado sexto? Sí _____ No _____

14. ¿Está repitiendo grado séptimo? Sí _____ No _____

En esta última sección, conteste las preguntas sobre su futuro.

15. ¿Cuáles son algunas metas que tiene Ud. para su vida?
_____
_____
_____

16. ¿Cuáles metas tienen sus padres para Ud.?
_____
_____
_____

17. En diez años, ¿dónde piensa que estará? ¿qué piensa que estará haciendo? ¿qué tipa de vida se imagina?
_____
_____
_____

Appendix C

Teacher Survey – English version

Name _____
High School _____
Class _____

1. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   A) Bachelor
   B) *Licenciatura*[171]
   C) Master
   D) Doctorate

2. From which university (ies) did you earn your degree(s)?
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. At the end of 2004, how many years have you taught full-time?
   _____

4. At the end of 2004, how many years have you taught at this high school?
   _____

5. Do you have a permanent contract? Yes _____ No _____

6. In addition to your academic degree(s), do you have an area of specialization? For example, a special education certification?
   Yes _____ No _____

7. Have you attended conferences or workshops about the different cultures that co-exist in Costa Rica?
   Yes _____ No _____

8. Do you believe that the education you received at your university (ies) has helped you manage teaching to the academic differences (different levels) of each of your students?
   Yes _____ No _____

9. If you could return to the university and start over, knowing what you know now about teaching, would you choose the teaching profession again?
   Yes _____ No _____

[171] *Licenciatura* is a professional degree in the Costa Rican higher education system between the Bachelor and Master's Degree.

Appendix C – Teacher Survey – English version continued

10. What type of class do you prefer?
    A) A group with high academic abilities
    B) A group with average academic abilities
    C) A group with low academic abilities
    D) A group with mixed abilities
    E) I don't have a preference.

11. If you could choose the school environment, which of the following options would you choose?
    A) Students with parents from the professional/upper-class
    B) The majority of students with parents from the professional/upper-class
    C) Students with parents from various classes
    D) Students with parents from the middle-class, but mostly lower-class
    E) Students with parents from the lower-class

    A) Students from the country
    B) Students from the city

12. Age:

A)	20-24	D)	40-49
B)	25-29	E)	50-59
C)	30-39	F)	60-65

13. Gender of teacher

A)	female	B)	male

Appendix D

Teacher Survey – Spanish version

Nombre _____
Colegio _____
Curso _____

1. ¿Cuál es el grado académico más alto que tiene Ud.?
   A) Bachillerato de universidad
   B) Licenciatura
   C) Maestría
   D) Doctorado

2. ¿En qué universidad cumplió Ud. su(s) grados académicos?
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. Al fin de 2004, ¿cuántos años ha enseñado de tiempo completo?
   _____

4. Al fin de 2004, ¿cuántos años tiene de enseñar de tiempo completo en este colegio?
   _____

5. ¿Tiene un puesto fijo? Sí _____ No _____

6. Además de su(s) grado(s) académico(s), ¿tiene además algún(os) área(s) de especialización? Por ejemplo, especialización de trabajar con niños especiales?
   _____
   _____

7. ¿Ha asistido a conferencias o talleres sobre las diferentes culturas que co-existen en Costa Rica?
   Sí _____ No _____

8. ¿Cree que el entrenamiento que recibió en su(s) universidad(es) le ha ayudado manejar la enseñanza a las diferencias académicas (niveles diferentes) de cada alumno?
   Sí _____ No _____

9. Si pudiera volver a la universidad y empezar de nuevo, con lo que sabe ahora sobre ser profesor, ¿escogería la profesión de enseñanza?
   Sí _____ No _____

Appendix D – Teacher Survey – Spanish version continued

10. ¿Qué tipo de clase prefiere enseñar?
    A) Un grupo con habilidades académicas altas
    B) Un grupo con habilidades académicas corrientes
    C) Un grupo con habilidades académicas bajas
    D) Un grupo con habilidades mezcladas
    E) No tengo preferencia

11. Si pudiera escoger el ambiente escolar, ¿cuál de las siguientes opciones escogería?
    A) Alumnos de padres de clase profesional/alta
    B) La mayoría de alumnos de padres de clase profesional/alta
    C) Alumnos de padres de varias clases (clase alta, media, baja)
    D) Alumnos de padres de clase media, pero la mayoría de clase baja
    E) Alumnos de padres de clase baja

    A) Alumnos de campo
    B) Alumnos de cuidad

12. Edad:

A)	20-24	D)	40-49
B)	25-29	E)	50-59
C)	30-39	F)	60-65

13. Sexo de profesor/a

A)	mujer	B)	hombre

Appendix E

Student Essay Directions – English version

Name (optional) _____ High School _____
Date _____ Class _____

_____ F _____ M

1) Indicate your nationality with an "X."
2) Write "by birth" or "by naturalization"

_____ Argentine	_____ Costa Rican	_____ Nicaraguan
_____ German	_____ North American (U.S.)	_____ Panamanian
_____ Canadian	_____ Guatemalan	_____ Salvadoran
_____ Chinese	_____ Honduran	_____ Venezuelan
_____ Colombian	_____ Mexican	

Where was your mom born? (country) _____
Where was your dad born? (country) _____

Directions: "NICARAGUANS IN COSTA RICA" I would like to know what you think about the Nicaraguans living in Costa Rica. Write a short essay about this theme describing your opinion.

Appendix F

Student Essay Directions – Spanish version

Nombre (opcional) _____ Colegio _____
Fecha _____ Clase _____

_____ F _____ M

1. Indique su nacionalidad con una "X."
2. Escriba "por nacimiento" o "por naturalización"

_____ argentino	_____ costarricense	_____ nicaragüense
_____ alemán	_____ estadounidense	_____ panameño
_____ canadiense	_____ guatemalteco	_____ salvadoreño
_____ chino	_____ hondureño	_____ venezolano
_____ colombiano	_____ mexicano	

¿Dónde nació su mamá? (país) _____
¿Dónde nación su papá? (país) _____

Instrucciones: "LOS NICARAGÜENSES EN COSTA RICA" Me gustaría saber lo que Ud. piensa sobre los nicaragüenses viviendo en Costa Rica. Escriba un ensayo corto sobre este tema describiendo su opinión.

STUDENTS PARENTS' OCCUPATIONS **Appendix G**

Costa Rican students' **fathers'** jobs:

Job	Lower-class	Lower-to-Middle Class	Middle- class	Upper- class
Accountant				2
Architect				1
Baker		1		
Bar/Restaurant owner				1
Boss at factory				2
Bus Driver	7			
Cleaning	1			
Construction worker	8			
Electrician			4	
Engineer				3
Gate Installer		1		
Government worker, city employee			5	
Grocery store	1			
Hotel Manager			1	
Judge				1
Machine operator	2			
Maker of handcrafts		2		
Manager type position in construction			5	
Mechanic			9	
Messenger	3			
Migration		1		
Nurse's Assistant	1			
Painter	3			
Police		2		
Project Administrator			1	
Railroad worker		1		
Red Cross		1		
Restaurant	2			
Salesperson – on Commission		6		
Secretary	1			
Security Guard	4			
Tailor		3		
Taxi Driver		8		
Teacher		1		
Ticket Collector	2			
Tourism		3		
Video game gallery worker	1			
Unload 18-wheeler trucks	1			
Workers' Union			1	
Total	**37**	**30**	**26**	**10**

Appendix G continued
STUDENTS PARENTS' OCCUPATIONS
Costa Rican students' **fathers'** jobs:

Costa Rican men

Socio-economic group	Total	% of total
Lower-class	37	36.0%
Lower-to-Middle-class	30	29.1%
Middle-class	26	25.2%
Upper-class	10	9.7%
Total	**103**	**100%**

Appendix H

STUDENTS PARENTS' OCCUPATIONS

Costa Rican students' **mothers'** jobs:

Job	Lower-class	Lower-to-Middle- class	Middle-class	Upper- class
Ama de Casa - Housewife	NA	NA	NA	NA
Assistant in surgery			1	
Beauty Salon		2		
Chicken packing plant	1			
Cleaning	2			
Cook in a restaurant	4			
Domestic worker	2			
Government worker			1	
Grocery Store	3			
Hotel – works in a hotel	1			
Lab testing			2	
Lawyer				2
Machine operator	2			
Maker of Handcrafts		1		
Nurse's Assistant	1			
Quality Control			1	
Salesperson – on Commission	8			
Secretary	2			
Student – both were wives of engineers				2
Tailor		1		
Teacher		5		
Works in a Bakery	1			
Works in a Soda (small cafeteria on street)	2			
Total	**29**	**9**	**5**	**4**

Costa Rican women

Socio-economic group	Total	% of total
Lower-class	29	62%
Lower-to-Middle-class	9	19%
Middle-class	5	11%
Upper-class	4	8%
Total	**47**	**100%**

**93 housewives – did not categorize

Appendix I

STUDENTS PARENTS' OCCUPATIONS

Nicaraguan students' **fathers'** jobs:

Job	Lower-class	Lower-to-Middle- class	Middle-class	Upper- class
Construction worker	3			
Electrician			2	
Factory worker	1			
Grocery Store	1			
Installs air conditioners		1		
Jeweler			1	
Mechanic			2	
Painter	1			
Salesperson – on Commission	1			
Security Guard	4			
Tailor		1		
Taxi Driver		1		

Nicaraguan men

Socio-economic group	Total	% of total
Lower-class	11	57.9%
Lower-to-Middle-class	3	15.8%
Middle-class	5	26.3%
Upper-class	0	0
Total	**19**	**100%**

Appendix J

STUDENTS PARENTS' OCCUPATIONS

Nicaraguan students' mothers' jobs:

Job	Lower-class	Lower-to-Middle- class	Middle-class	Upper- class
Amas de casa – Housewife*	NA	NA	NA	NA
Cleaning/Domestic Help	4			
Cook – restaurant	4			
Grocery Store	1			
Makes copies in a copy place	1			
Receptionist	1			
Salesperson – on Commission	2			
Secretary	1			
Works in a Bakery	1			

Nicaraguan women

Socio-economic group	Total	% of total
Lower-class	12	100%
Lower-to-Middle-class	0	0
Middle-class	0	0
Upper-class	0	0
Total	**12**	**100%**

**12 housewives – did not categorize

Appendix K

The below data provides information on the teachers.[172] All nine teachers were Costa Ricans by birth. Six had permanent contracts; three had one-year contracts. The age of the seven female and two male teachers ranged from 25 to 59 years of age. One teacher did not respond.

Table 1 – Age of Teachers

Age	# of Teachers
25-29 years	3
30-39 years	2
40-49 years	2
50-59 years	1
No response	1

Seven teachers had completed the minimum requirements necessary to obtain a teaching certificate. One teacher had obtained her *Licenciatura*, which is a professional degree in the Costa Rican higher education system between the Bachelor and Master's Degree. One teacher had completed her Master's degree.

Table 2 – Highest Level of Education Completed by Teachers

Degree	# of teachers
Bachelor Degree	7
Licenciatura	1
Master's Degree	1

The number of years the teachers had been in the classroom ranged from one year to seventeen years. The average was 7.8 years and the mean was 7.6 years.

[172] I borrowed the teacher survey questions from the doctoral dissertation of James L. Berryman. "Case Studies of Interaction Between Teachers and Students in Selected Nebraska School Districts with a High Percentage of Mexican-American Students." Lincoln, NE: May 1983, 204.

Appendix K continued

Table 3 – Number of Years of Teaching Experience

# of Years Teaching	# of teachers
1st year of teaching	1
1 and ½ years	1
4 years	2
7 years	1
9 years	1
14 years	2
17 years	1