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Tracing Dominican Attitudes Towards Race: A Historical Analysis

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TRACING DOMINICAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS RACE – A
HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

by

MARCOS POLONIA

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2018

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal
Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

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The common misconception is that all Dominicans are racist – that Dominicans live in a Fanonesque reality where we believe we are white, but we clearly inhabit black bodies. These attitudes permeate Dominican society from the highest echelons of power to the everyday experiences of Dominicans on the street. The notion that Dominicans are racist is widespread among Latinos and African-Americans as well. Recently, global attention was focused on the Dominican Republic as the country changed its constitution in order to prevent Dominicans of Haitian descent from becoming Dominican citizens. But, where do these notions of race come from? This thesis explores the different aspects that make up the Dominican racial identity in order to understand the historical context of these notions. To do this, I begin with a historiography of the Dominican Republic to understand the roots of Dominican ideas on race. I then look at the history of Dominican slavery to understand the racial make-up of the island colony and get a full picture of the racial reality of the Dominican Republic. I conclude with possible solutions for ultimately changing this notion that Dominicans are racists.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION.....7

CHAPTER 2 – DOMINICAN VIEWS ON RACE – A HISTORIOGRAPHY.....11

CHAPTER 3 - SLAVERY IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC 34

CHAPTER 4 – CONCLUSION..... 46

BIBLIOGRAPHY 51

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Dominican Republic has received a lot of attention of late, especially throughout social media, and not for the beautiful beaches or the balmy weather. The reason behind all of this attention is race. Recently, videos and stories have circulated in the media of men in disguise attacking Haitian migrants in Santo Domingo and Santiago de los Caballeros. Other videos show vigilante justice, as in one particular video where a Haitian day laborer was assumed responsible for a local crime, and was beaten by locals in the town of Baní. In another video, a Haitian man can be seen being kicked and punched by random people on the street near Boca Chica. In a widely publicized event, someone attended the famous carnival in La Vega dressed as a member of the Ku Klux Klan. Finally, worldwide attention was brought to the Dominican Republic when the government changed the constitution, barring children born of Haitian migrants from becoming Dominican citizens. It is easy to understand, therefore, the idea that Dominicans are a racist people would be readily accepted the world over. Occasional word would get out of some incident that would cause condemnation, as in the Haitian massacre under Trujillo in 1937, but for the most part, racism was thought not to exist in the Dominican Republic. The examples listed above are the most blatant - the physical manifestations of a racial issue that is rarely addressed, but other forms of racism are also rampant. If the United States followed a “one drop rule” to determine if a person was black, the reverse is true in the Dominican Republic. All it takes is one white relative for a person in the Dominican Republic to be able to claim white ancestry. Otherwise, you’re more likely to hear a person refer to themselves as *indio*, *trigueño*, or even mulatto, among other terms. Rarely does a person acknowledge their blackness in any social or official way. Though calling someone *mi negrito* or *mi negrita* can have positive connotations, more often than not, being called *negro* is seen as a negative. That does not even

begin to cover issues such as hair texture, body composition, manner of speaking, and other arbitrary markers that are used to highlight or negate blackness.

But from where does this animosity against Haiti and blackness stem? What aspect of Dominican history would support these attitudes towards our Haitian neighbors? Or, is the Dominican Republic just misunderstood? To understand the Dominican Republic, one must understand Haiti as well. For starters, Haiti and the Dominican Republic share a 376-kilometer border that splits the island; 2/3 of the island belongs to Dominicans and the remaining 1/3 to Haitians. In fact, while other nations throughout Latin America celebrate their independence from Spain, the Dominican Republic celebrates, perhaps problematically, independence from Haiti! The Spanish colonists settled in Santo Domingo, what is today the Dominican side of the island, from the earliest days of the conquest and exploration of the New World. It was not until the 18th century that the French settled the unoccupied western portion of Hispaniola, calling it St. Domingue. Though trade with other colonies was forbidden, colonists on the Spanish side of Hispaniola often traded with the French, thereby fostering at the very least a sense of understanding, if not outright camaraderie.

As the western part of the island was settled, colonists began planting sugar, much as Spain had done in the Canary Islands before venturing towards the New World. However, it was not until the French settled the western side of Hispaniola that sugar production became a true cash crop. St. Domingue eventually became the jewel of the French empire, a feat that was viewed enviously by Spanish colonists on Santo Domingo. Spain, however, had turned her attention to mineral wealth that was found on the South American continent as well as in Central America, and seemingly paid little attention to Hispaniola. While Cuba served as a way station of sorts for the Spanish fleet, Hispaniola was no longer along the shipping route. Ships would

leave from Spain to collect the empire's mineral wealth, would stop in Cuba in order to join a defensive flotilla to prevent piracy, and then return to Spain. And so, historically speaking we have two halves of an island, one half largely ignored by the imperial metropolis, another quickly becoming the key economic engine of empire. It is from this beginning that we can trace the historical roots of Dominican attitudes on race.

Chapter two begins with a historiography of the Dominican Republic. Here we see the construction race by the intellectual elites on the island. Utilizing the work of Pedro Luis Miguel, I delve into the initial rationalizations made by these lettered elites used to explain the precarious nature of the early colony of Santo Domingo. Pedro Luis Miguel also highlights how these early Dominican scholars, men such as Antonio Sanchez-Valverde & Pedro Francisco Bono, are responsible for what ultimately became how Dominicans see themselves, particularly as it pertains to Haitians. These scholars' writings form the early foundations of Dominican identity, juxtaposing as they do the European heritage of Santo Domingo against the distinct African feel of Haiti. In other words, it is in these early writings that Dominican identity was theorized. A key aspect of that identity is the imagined difference between Haiti and Santo Domingo. This chapter also focuses on the reunification of the island of Hispaniola under Haitian rule, another foundational event that forms one of the roots of Dominican ideas on race. As is typically the case throughout history, this chapter shows how historical facts grow and take on mythological proportions. In other words, many of the ideas Dominicans have regarding Haitians stem from a skewed view of historical events that took place during the unification of the island. The early thoughts espoused by Dominican lettered elites combined with facts and understandings that arose from the Haitian unification of the island form a composite sketch of how Dominicans view race.

Chapter three is an overview of the history of the slave trade in the colony of Santo Domingo. The chapter begins with a view of the Spanish side of Hispaniola in the early days of settlement and describes the first slave arrivals to the island. The evidence in this chapter negates the idea that Santo Domingo was a mostly white colony by showing the actual number of slave arrivals to the colony. Just as in Saint Domingue, slaves greatly outnumbered whites in Santo Domingo. This goes against the notions that slavery was a larger feature on the French side of Hispaniola. In addition, chapter two looks at some of the laws on the books in the colony of Santo Domingo that reflect colonial authorities attempts to control the slave population. Based on the information gleaned from these laws, we can be sure that colonial authorities in Santo Domingo concerned themselves with inter-racial mixing and strived to maintain the distinct European feel of the colony. This chapter also provides further details that explain why early lettered elites considered the initial part of the history of Santo Domingo as a “tragic” history.

Finally, the conclusion discusses figures of immigration to the United States, which began in earnest during the post-Trujillo period. This is arguably when Dominicans’ concepts of race are directly challenged. The chapter highlights the events that took place in the Dominican Republic that led to the beginning of a continued emigration of Dominicans to the U.S., and argues that it is through immigration that Dominicans are beginning to accept blackness as part of their identity.

Chapter 2: Dominican Views on Race – A Historiography

On February 27th, 1844, the Dominican Republic officially won its independence not from Spain, but from their neighbor to the west - the newly independent republic of Haiti. On September 23, 2013, the constitutional court of the Dominican Republic retroactively denied Dominican nationality to any person born after 1929 who does not have at least one parent of Dominican blood, following the argument that undocumented immigrants are considered “in transit.”¹ At first glance, both these events in history seem to be unrelated, but at the root of both of these issues is the question of race. Haiti is the first nation in the world founded by former black slaves. In contrast, the Dominican Republic sees itself as a nation descended from Spain/Europe and therefore white. The historiography of the period of Haitian domination in the Dominican Republic, a result of the unification of the entire island under Haitian rule after their independence, makes evident that anti-Haitianism has been a part of the historical narrative of the Dominican Republic. This anti-Haitianism clearly still affects policy today.

In order to understand the story of Hispaniola, we must begin at the onset of colonization, in the later part of the 15th century. Spain held control of the entire island, ultimately giving the island its name. Attention in Hispaniola centered on the largest city, Santo Domingo, and the Spanish made no real effort to settle the western side of the island. In fact, Hispaniola was floundering. “While the continental possessions became the core of the empire, the Caribbean declined to the periphery.”² As a result, Spanish citizens began leaving the colony to other, more lucrative outposts throughout Spanish America and those that remained eked out a living either

¹ Semple, Kirk. "Dominican Court's Ruling on Citizenship Stirs Emotions in New York." *The New York Times*, October 17, 2013, N.Y. / Region sec. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/18/nyregion/dominican-courts-ruling-on-citizenship-stirs-emotions-in-new-york.html>. Accessed December 1, 2015

² M. Fradera, Josep, and Francisco A. Scarano. *The Caribbean: A History of the Region and Its Peoples* (Chicago: U of Chicago, 2011), p. 167,

through subsistence farming or contraband trading. Eventually, even contraband trading was stopped in what became known as one of Spain's biggest colonial mistakes – the devastations of Osorio: “More than any other set of policies and events in the colonial Caribbean, then, the failed resettlements on Hispaniola in 1605 – aptly remembered as *las devastaciones de Osorio*, or Osorio's devastations – symbolized Spain's utter failure to contain contraband.”³ The French occupied this newly available land swiftly, and established a plantation economy, based almost entirely on sugar and dependent on slave labor. Spain officially ceded control of the western portion of the island to France as part of a peace treaty in 1697. Since that time, the island was split into Santo Domingo, dominated by the Spanish, and Saint Domingue, dominated by the French. The loss of this territory was not necessarily consequential to the Spanish empire at this time because Spain had found mineral wealth in other areas and relied less on agricultural production. Saint Domingue, however, had become the jewel of the French empire.

It was after this event that the Spanish subjects of Santo Domingo began to feel their isolation in regards to empire. Continental conflicts between European states oftentimes spilled over into their colonial possessions and Spanish citizens felt resentful towards Spain for “abandoning” them and for giving away half of the island – resentful, but never rebellious. They also felt resentment towards the French, not just for creating a successful plantation economy that was the envy of all of Europe and for importing vast numbers of African slaves to support the various sugar plantations, but because after years of conflict between France and Spain, these animosities naturally spilled over to Hispaniola as well. The main concern here was the loss of Spanish/European identity on the island. Spanish subjects felt that with ever-increasing numbers of African slaves, the unique European “flavor” of the island was being lost; in Saint Domingue,

³ Ibid., p. 185

African slaves outnumbered Frenchmen by 10 to 1. They also felt that Spain had lost a unique opportunity to expand its wealth through agriculture. These opinions “can be found in many of the major scholars and interpreters of Dominican history”, are still relevant today, and are commonly referred to as a “tragic” interpretation of events of the time.⁴

In this view, the period before the devastaciones was seen as a uniquely prosperous time for Santo Domingo. After 1605 and the loss of the western third of the island, Santo Domingo has only seen tragedy. Elites on the island sought to bring their cause to the attention of Spanish officials, ironically believing that the key to the colony’s success lay with slavery, despite insisting that the rise of slavery in Saint Domingue spelled certain doom for Spanish citizens. They argued that, “one of the consequences of the economic prostration in which Spain's ‘abandonment’ of its colony left Santo Domingo was racial mixing among the elite.”⁵ This is important because the foundation for Dominican views on blacks generally and Haitians more specifically were formed during this period. The combined effects of Spain’s abandonment of the island, Saint Domingue’s prosperity and Santo Domingo’s suffering, the expansion of African slavery and the increasing racial mixing, concerned the Santo Domingo elite, who fostered ideas of racial superiority that would taint relations for years to come.

Over in Saint Domingue, what the Spanish interpreted as a vastly successful colonial enterprise was in reality a thoroughly brutal form of slavery. The entire western portion of Hispaniola was almost completely deforested to make room for more and bigger plantations. Sugar was such an important crop for the French that it was more productive to

⁴ Miguel, Pedro Luis. *The Imagined Island: History, Identity, & Utopia in Hispaniola*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, 2005. (Kindle Location 123). Kindle Edition

⁵ Ibid, Kindle Locations 160-161.

import slaves than to take care of those that already lived on the colony. In other words, it did not matter if slaves were sick, were maimed or died because planters could just as easily purchase more. After nearly two centuries of this brutal treatment at the hands of white Frenchmen, the slave population, together with free people of color, finally rose up in 1791 and declared their independence by 1806. But “Haiti’s independence had been won at a terrible cost. The new nation’s ports and many of its plantations were in ashes. Combat, hunger, and disease had killed vast numbers of people – as many as 100,000 during 1802-1803.”⁶

Haiti’s newly won independence was not guaranteed; absolutely no nation in the world recognized the first free black republic. They were completely isolated. Haiti had been unthinkable to the rest of the western (white) world. Stories of the wars’ uglier atrocities (real or imagined) gradually spread throughout the Caribbean and eventually Europe. This proved to be a war to the death – the slaves knew they could not lose, lest they lose much more than just their freedom. Because of this, slaves quite literally had nothing but their lives to lose and fought to the death. It is easy to imagine the intense and widespread fear that such a complete break with the status quo did to those in power. How dangerous was this example to other European colonists? What if slaves in other colonies heard of this revolt? Would they follow suit?

We must remember, of course, that slavery was entrenched in that period of history and African slaves were at the absolute bottom of the society’s socio-economic ladder, in almost every possible way. Slavery was the economic lifeblood of the colonial system. The fact that a colony of slaves could rebel against one of the strongest militaries in the world at

⁶ Dubois, Laurent. *Haiti: The Aftershocks of [History](#)*. (New York: Metropolitan, 2012), p. 15.

the time was simply unimaginable. As such, retaking the island became of paramount importance for France as well as for other European states that envied the success of France. Spain, the Netherlands and England were all were eager to take a chance at re-colonizing Haiti. The new nation's early leaders understood that in order to ensure their survival, they would need to be vigilant against not only another incursion by France, but by other European world powers. It became imperative for Haiti to control the eastern half of the island, still nominally under Spanish control.⁷

For the elites of Santo Domingo, to become Haitians was simply unthinkable. Spanish citizens on the eastern part of the island saw themselves as fundamentally different in almost every way to the Haitians: Haitians were black, the Spanish/Dominicans were white; Haitians suffered under brutal slavery, but slavery in Santo Domingo was seen as a “benevolent” institution (according to them); Haiti insisted on being independent, Santo Domingo only sought stronger ties with Spain. And so, while the tension historically had always been between Spain and France in relation to Hispaniola, with the rebellion of the slaves in Saint Domingue the tension quickly became one between “civilization” and “barbarism”, a veiled way to describe tensions between whites and blacks. At no other point was the difference as stark between both halves of the island as it was after Haiti declared its independence.

Before Haiti could reunite the entire island, Haiti itself had to be reunited. Upon winning independence, Haiti was split between the northern kingdom of Haiti, where Haitian citizens were still compelled to work on the hated sugar plantations, and the southern

⁷ Interestingly enough, it is because of this war that the Louisiana Purchase was made possible – France was suffering such losses in the war against the rebels that they had to sell their land in North America in order to fund the war effort.

republic of Haiti, where the president was giving away parcels of land and Haitians who were still working plantations earned a salary. Eventually the nation was united under president Boyer, who “appeared before the Haitians not just as a benefactor, but as a uniter.”⁸ One of Boyer’s main objectives was to grant land to those who were former slaves as well as to his most loyal servants and soldiers. The idea was to parcel out as much land as possible, thereby tying people to the land and to an agricultural way of life. Since sugar and coffee had been such an important commodity for Saint Domingue, it was crucial to reestablish an agriculture-based economy. To do so, any land not in continual use would be confiscated by the state. This was already in place in southern Haiti and was well underway in the north, once Boyer took office. However, the specter of recolonization by a European power loomed large over the presidency. France still refused to recognize Haiti’s independence, and in fact “pressured the [Boyer] government to find an agreeable solution to the losses suffered during the revolution.”⁹ The “agreeable” solution was an indemnity of roughly 150 million francs. How would Boyer raise that amount of money, when economic activity had all but stopped in Haiti? How could Boyer protect against invasion from France again? The solution to both questions lay in the east.

With the demands for reparations from France and demands from below for their promised small parcels of land, it was only logical that Boyer would seek out a reunification of the island. In fact, Boyer and his followers felt that only they were the true followers and keepers of the ideals of the French revolution and the enlightenment. They were, after all, bringing freedom and liberty to the east! The eastern portion of the island was not as

⁸ Pons, Frank. *La Dominacion Haitiana, 1822-1844*. 4th ed. (Santiago: Universidad Catolica Madre Y Maestra, 1978) p. 22.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 67

populated as Haiti was and was still under Spain's control, so the occupation of the colony of Santo Domingo in 1821 made sense along two fronts. First, it would protect a larger Haiti from potential European invasions. Second, it would allow Boyer's government to parcel out more land to loyal supporters. Many Dominicans welcomed Haiti to their side, since it freed them from Spain. They took the name of Spanish Haiti. In the colony of Santo Domingo, land ownership was based on Spanish laws of communal lands, which benefited cattle ranching and the church. The poor mulatto or black peasant of Santo Domingo, however, was left out of the economic equation. Slavery was also still present on the eastern side of the island, though the slaves had been freed in the west. But the elites of Santo Domingo had a different opinion.¹⁰ "It is important to note that...these elites controlled significant resources and capital in Santo Domingo."¹¹ Many of these elites fled the island to Cuba, where Spain was still in power, or to places like Venezuela and Puerto Rico. They could not bear the thought of living alongside their newly freed slaves. More than that, Boyer had initiated a series of laws under which white elites of Santo Domingo chafed:

Boyer enabled some of the popular sectors to challenge the cattle ranching monopolies in the east and the Church's hoarding of large, fertile, and unused lands. One of Boyer's earliest acts, was to nationalize unused and abandoned lands and to distribute these among former slaves and other disenfranchised inhabitants.¹²

Those that fled, therefore, would lose their lands, regardless of how long that land had

¹⁰ Like in other places in Latin America and the Caribbean, much more is written about the elites than about those in the lower echelons of societies. Elites held the power, were the only ones that had access to education and for all intents and purposes, had sole ownership of the written word.

¹¹ Venator Santiago, Charles R. *Race, Nation-building and Legal Transculturation During the Haitian Unification Period (1822 - 1844): Towards a Dominican Perspective*. Proc. of Eighth Annual LATCRIT Conference: City & Citizen: Operations of Power, Strategies of Resistance, Cleveland State University, Cleveland. (Cleveland, Ohio: Cleveland State Law Review, 2005), p.52

¹² *Ibid.*, P. 52

been owned by that individual or family. Boyer also proclaimed that all citizens of Haiti, including those on the Spanish side of the island, were to be referred to as black. Another proclamation was that no white person could own property. White women could own property, but only if they married a Haitian man, and then only after 10 years. And still another proclamation stated that a tax needed to be raised on all economic activity, including imports, exports, etc. This was the only way to ensure that the indemnity could be paid to France, which was agreed to by Boyer out of a desperate need for world recognition and the fostering of a functioning economy.

Given the circumstances on the eastern portion of the island, these laws and proclamations were nightmares come true, as the reality was that the Spanish citizens of Santo Domingo never wanted to rebel against Spain. They saw themselves as loyal, white Spanish citizens. Even in the aftermath of the *devastaciones* of Osorio, citizens on the eastern side never wanted to renounce their Spanish heritage. The impact of Haitian policies on the average white citizen of Santo Domingo was tremendous. Dominican identity was tied to Spain and to whiteness, Catholicism and slavery. Suddenly, a country was established just a few short miles away, made up entirely of black freed people and former slaves. In the eyes of the Dominican elite, that new black country took over their part of the island, imposed emancipation, took away lands from individuals and the church, and called every citizen black. Not only that, but these occupiers have now imposed what the elite felt were unjust taxes for a war that you did not involve Santo Domingo. It is easy, then, to see how ideas of race, initially promulgated as a way to differentiate the Spanish from the French in the hopes of regaining a foothold on the whole island, became entrenched. Dominican identity was forged in direct conflict with Haiti.

After roughly 20 years, Boyer eventually lost popularity on the Haitian side and was already vastly unpopular in the east. A few rebels of the elite class, led by a young man of Spanish descent known as Juan Pablo Duarte and calling themselves *Los Trinitarios*, declared their independence from Haiti. After a brief war, Santo Domingo became the independent nation of Dominican Republic. Given the facts laid out in this chapter, naturally the question remains: why was a war against Haiti and independence from them ultimately a better solution than remaining under Haitian rule? According to Charles Venator-Santiago, “The 22-year unification of the island under the governance of the Haitian Republic was also the most progressive period of Dominican history in more than 400 years.”¹³ Yes, unused lands were confiscated and people were naturally relocated. However, Spain took away lands and relocated people as well, during the *devastaciones* Spain also sought to prohibit contraband trading, which is arguably much worse than having to pay a tax on economic activity. This suggests that race did, in fact, determine how Haiti and Santo Domingo related to each other. The notions put forth by the elites after the *devastaciones* – that the French and later the Haitians were barbarians, that the Spanish/whites were far superior, that slavery was much gentler on the Spanish side of the island, that Spanish/Dominican governance was better than Haitian/black governance – these notions remain a part of the national DNA of the Dominican Republic. These ideas are what led to the 1937 massacre of Dominicans of Haitian ancestry along the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, known as the “Parsley massacres”. And this is what ultimately led the Dominican government to strip citizenship from Dominicans of Haitian descent in 2013. The ideas are so engrained in official Dominican policy that their legitimacy is rarely questioned. This 20-year Haitian

¹³ Ibid., p. 47

blip in Dominican history, then, though progressive in some respects, is believed to be an embarrassment to Dominicans, which is why most Dominicans do not know or understand the events that took place. The next sections will delve into several works regarding Dominican and Haitian history. Finding specific information on the period between 1822 and 1844 has proven difficult, but the legacy of that time period can be felt in the various works I reference in this chapter.

Pedro L. San Miguel

As the previous section has shown, the countries known as The Dominican Republic and Haiti can best be described as “imagined” spaces where political states were formed. Nowhere is this concept dissected more thoroughly than in Pedro L. San Miguel’s work, *The Imagined Island: History, Identity and Utopia in Hispaniola*. San Miguel begins by looking at the works of elites in the Dominican Republic: Pedro Bonó, Antonio Sanchez-Valverde and Jose Gabriel Garcia. San Miguel uses these works to delve into the idea of a “tragic” vision of events in Santo Domingo’s past. From the outset, San Miguel shows us that the main objective of these three early historians was to recast Santo Domingo in a more productive light for Spain. For example, “Sanchez-Valverde’s purpose in writing...was to demonstrate to the Spanish Crown the possibilities for economic growth in Santo Domingo.”¹⁴ As you may recall, Santo Domingo’s neighbor to the west was doing incredibly well since Spain ceded that portion of the island to France. The key to this success was the abundance of slave labor, and “the colonists in Santo Domingo lacked this

¹⁴ Pedro L. San Miguel. *The Imagined Island: History, Identity, and Utopia in Hispaniola* (Kindle Location 133). Kindle Edition.

‘key’ due to the country's relative neglect by the metropolis.”¹⁵ Following this comparison to Saint Domingue is the “tragedy” of Dominican history: the ceding of Saint Domingue, the devastaciones of Osorio and the domination of Santo Domingo by Haiti. San Miguel presents a vision of history that puts the responsibility of failure squarely at Spain’s feet and shows us that Dominican historians sought greater ties to the colonial metropolis, not lesser ones. In presenting these aspects of history as “tragedies” San Miguel shows us that early Dominican historians looked to point out these errors in the hopes that they would be rectified. It is in this space that the seeds of Dominican views on race were planted, and it is here that one can begin to see the fetishizing of whiteness from Dominican elites.

Pedro Bonó, another of the elite writers that San Miguel studies, takes a different tact in regards to the tragedies that the Dominican Republic faced. According to San Miguel:

Bonó makes a distinction between the system of slavery in the Spanish colony and that of the French colony of Saint-Domingue. In the former, unlike the latter, "the Spaniard displayed supreme benevolence, great charity, and much tenderness, within the social inequalities that such a system [that is, slavery] required," so that between masters and slaves there was "relative equality, without the unthinkable suffering borne by the slave race in the French colony."¹⁶

Here we can see an interesting approach to the question of slavery – how can one form of slavery be less vile or less violent than another? Can one type of slavery really be seen as more “benevolent”? The answer, of course, is no. However, in presenting the idea of slavery in this way, San Miguel shows us how a racist institution such as slavery can be revised to fit a different national narrative. If slavery is more benevolent on the Dominican side, then it was not needed for Haiti to free slaves on the Dominican side of the island.

The following chapter will highlight slavery on the Spanish side of the island, which gives

¹⁵ Ibid., Kindle Locations 135-136

¹⁶ Ibid., Kindle Locations 179-180

a better understanding of how Pedro Bonó arrived at his thoughts on the institution.

Although San Miguel considers Pedro Bonó as less “racial”, perhaps less elitist in his insights, it is clear from Bonó’s own words we see that race does, in fact, inform aspects of his thoughts regarding this period of history:

Haiti has the unshakable basis for their preservation and progress, the exclusiveness of one race, while the Dominican Republic has the incomparable background of cosmopolitanism, the expansion of all races on its soil, although [with] quite [the] predilection for [the] white [race]...¹⁷

Bonó argues that this is the reason that the unification project failed. These “differences” provide reason enough to understand why Haiti and the Dominican Republic could not be a unified entity. In another discourse, Bonó fails to see why the Dominican Republic could not unite with Simon Bolivar’s Gran Colombia, seeing as both Colombia and the Dominican Republic share a Hispanic identity while Haiti was a French colony. According to Bonó, “Colombia began its regeneration without major crimes; Haiti, through hatred, extinguished two races from its lands...”¹⁸ Haiti, here, is not even afforded the benefit of revolution – they extinguished races from their land. In continuing with this theme of race, Bonó states, “the Spanish contributed kindness, sweetness and ultimate charity within the social system imposed on the colony [sic]”¹⁹ Based on the writings of Pedro Bonó (and San Miguel’s interpretation of them), it is clear that there is a lack of historical clarity regarding racial realities on the island of Hispaniola.

Referring to the Haitian side of the island, San Miguel speaks of Jean Price-Mars,

¹⁷ Bonó, Pedro F., and Emilio Demorizi. "Apuntes Para La Biografía De Bonó." In *Papeles*, 2a ed. (Barcelona: Academia Dominicana De La Historia, 1980), p. 42

¹⁸ Ibid., 90

¹⁹ Ibid., 219

who, according to San Miguel, felt that residents on the eastern portion of the island did not fully understand what freedom under a unified Haiti meant. For Price-Mars, the real tragedy of history in regards to Hispaniola is the treatment of blacks vis-à-vis slavery: “A crucial aspect of the historical drama of the "Negro" in Hispaniola is "the cruelty of slavery," especially in the French colony of Saint-Domingue.”²⁰ Thus, the belief that only a united Haiti could counter the aggression of Europe was what propelled an independent Haiti to unite the island. According to Price-Mars, Haiti is the true bearer of the legacy of freedom and enlightenment. Price-Mars does not reflect on the differences between slavery in Saint Domingue and slavery in Santo Domingo – for him, slavery was slavery and was just as evil on one side of the island as it was on the other.

The Black Jacobins

Although the book does not cover the period when Haiti was a unified entity from 1822 to 1844, “The Black Jacobins” by C.L.R. James provides insight into the events leading to the Haitian revolution. As we have seen, foundational Dominican historians such as Valverde and Bonó tend to view the colonial past as a series of tragedies that resulted in the unification of Santo Domingo to Saint Domingue. They argued that if Spain had given Santo Domingo more attention, it too could have been as productive as Saint Domingue. But what they leave out is the legacy of extreme violence and brutality that the French plantation system left in Saint Domingue. In fact, when slavery is mentioned, it is usually to describe the non-European makeup of the colony and this fact is then presented as yet another “tragedy”.

²⁰ Ibid., Kindle Location 906

Through his writings, C.L.R. James effectively removes these obstacles that prevent scholars on either side of the island from seeing the true barbarism of slavery and recognize how those on the ground truly struggled – and paid for with blood – in order to achieve liberty. James paints a picture not only of a brutal slave system, but also of a very long struggle to ultimately become free. It is difficult to reconcile the thoughts of scholars and historians such as Pedro Bonó with the details in this book – it seems that in order to justify a certain reading of history, key details of the history of the Haitian Revolution are either left out or ignored entirely. C.L.R. James discusses these details at length, beginning with slavers’ tactics in capturing slaves all the way through the many subsequent invasions and incursions on Haitian land. This book shows that in order to arrive at a whole picture regarding Dominican and Haitian history, both stories should be told in tandem. Though the book is about the Haitian revolution and the struggles to maintain freedom, no mention is made of the concern for re-invasion from the east and the desire to unite the island to prevent such an incursion.

La Dominacion Haitiana

No book has covered the unification period in greater detail than *La Dominacion Haitiana* by Frank Moya Pons. Pons, who wrote a definitive history of the Dominican Republic that is still used in many classes today, felt compelled to write about this historical period because no other record existed. Up until *La Dominacion Haitiana*, any mention of the unification of the island was usually tied to the “tragedies of history” narrative that is discussed in detail in Pedro San Miguel’s book. Pons discusses the unification period not just by dissecting the political machinations behind the scenes in

President Boyer's administration, but also how those machinations affected everyday citizens. Pons does an excellent job of explaining opposition the unification period from both the perspective of the Dominican Republic as well as that of Haiti.

Although unification was necessary to secure Haiti's newly won independence, it was not a uniformly easy operation. As discussed earlier, Boyer found it necessary to unify Haiti first, split between the north and south as it was. The other question that loomed large over Haiti was how best to wrest control of the eastern portion of the island, since it was still under the control of Spain. Luckily:

On one side were José Núñez de Cáceres and the most important members of the political and military elite of Santo Domingo, leading a movement for emancipation [in order] to create an independent state that would ally and seek a confederation with la Gran Colombia.²¹

Fortunately for Boyer, the Dominican Republic at the time was seeking greater autonomy from Spain. Pons points out that this period is unique in that it is known as the time of "La España Boba" – the period in which political continuity was unclear in Spain and was the opportune moment for colonists throughout Spanish America to declare their independence. According to Pons, this was done in the Dominican Republic more out of a desire to avoid France or another European power from retaking the colony, instead of out of a desire to be freed of Spain. The sparse population of Santo Domingo saw themselves as Spanish citizens, not as "freedom fighters" or adherents to the doctrine of the French Revolution. Thus, the push towards autonomy was seen as a declaration of fealty to the true Crown of Spain, who was deposed by Napoleon during the Peninsular wars. In other words, the motivation for autonomy was to deal with a usurper to the crown. Colonists

²¹ Pons, Frank. "La Invasión De Boyer." In *La Dominación Haitiana, 1822-1844*. Tercera ed. (Santiago: Universidad Católica Madre Y Maestra, 1978) p. 31

were still loyal to Spain.

Most pertinent to the question at hand, however, is Pons' breakdown of the grievances that inhabitants of the eastern portion of the island (as well as elites of the western portion) held in regards to policies initiated by Boyer. Several laws were enacted that directly affected Dominican elite lives. First among these was the emancipation of slavery. Though the eastern portion of Hispaniola was not as populated as the western portion, and by no means was slavery as extensive as it was on the western side, the emancipation of slavery caused economic upheaval for the few elites that remained on the island. The main economic activity (besides contraband trading) was cattle ranching. Cattle ranching was not as labor intensive as sugar cultivation; both slaves and masters rode on horseback and were afforded more unsupervised time than in any other agricultural task. But, once emancipation became a reality, slaves naturally chose their freedom.

Along with freedom, under Boyer's regime all newly freed slaves were given a small parcel of land. Any land not productive was confiscated by the state, which meant all those absentee landlords who fled the approach of the Haitian military were now landless. Many Spanish citizens who fled left their lands in the hands of family members or close, trusted attendants. But if the person on the land was not the person on the lease, that land was confiscated. Also, since cattle ranching was the predominant economic activity, those lands were not technically "productive" as they were mostly used for grazing purposes, thus they were confiscated as well. Also caught up in confiscation were the vast acres owned by the Catholic Church. Of all the laws in which Spanish citizens felt particularly slighted, probably the two most hated laws were the land ownership laws and what I refer to as the identity law. The land ownership laws stated that white people could not own land

in Haiti. It is true that elites ignored that law for most of the unification period; however, most residents of the eastern part of Hispaniola considered themselves to be white and therefore could not own land. Furthermore, at the outset of independence it was declared that any and all citizens of the newly freed Haiti would be known as black – no other racial identity was considered. Haiti was now a freed black republic.

Charles R. Venator Santiago delves into the question of the law in his piece, titled “Race, Nation-building and Legal Transculturation During the Haitian Unification Period (1822 – 1844): Towards a Dominican Perspective.” According to Venator Santiago, “what most Dominican nationalist narratives neglect to mention, however, is that the 22-year unification period of the island... was also the most progressive period of Dominican history in more than 400 years”.²² Ironically, it seems that many of these same legal institutions introduced by Haiti are features that can still be found in the Dominican Republic today. Venator Santiago cites the same laws mentioned by Pons; only here we are presented with these laws in the context of the world as a whole. Venator Santiago is able to show us that these land ownership laws, for example, were quite progressive in the region, especially at a time when slavery was still a reality in many parts of the world and throughout much of Latin/Spanish America, land ownership laws were tied to families who were normally of the elite classes. “From a legal perspective, it is evident that the Spanish legal narrative had been devised to legitimate a local elite in Santo Domingo with feudal pretensions.”²³ In Haiti, a peasant class was forged out of the slave population. Those former slaves, who had once been bought and sold, could now hold titles to land that they could farm and use for subsistence agriculture. According to Venator Santiago, one major

²² Venator Santiago, p. 47

²³ Ibid., 52

difference is that “the Haitian ideology embraced the French revolution’s egalitarian ideology, which was inconsistent with the traditional Spanish narrative”.²⁴

However, in assuming that the Boyer regime at the time was espousing revolutionary, enlightenment ideals and exporting them to the eastern side of the island, we leave out the level of complexity that was involved in changing land ownership laws that had been in place since the time of colonization. Also left out of Venator Santiago’s argument is the difficulty in implementation not just of the newly changed land distribution laws, but other laws regulating economic activity on the island. Though some laws may be construed as progressive, more attention needs to be paid to the implementation of these laws on the eastern side and whether or not Dominicans understood these laws to be beneficial to them.

Frank Moya Pons also contributed additional notes regarding the unification period in *Between Slavery and Free Labor: The Spanish-Speaking Caribbean in the Nineteenth Century*. Generally speaking, many of his contributions are reiterations of ideas presented in *La Dominacion Haitiana*, however there is a section that I believe truly sheds light on racial ideas that contributed to a breaking with Haiti and the ultimate dissolution of unification:

Meanwhile, a new battalion – Battalion 32 – was created to absorb those ex-slaves who wanted to be immediately free of their masters. This battalion became the principal military force responsible for the security of the Spanish part of the island. There is evidence suggesting that the *libertos* who were recruited into the armed forces may have been ill-treated slaves. According to a letter of Francisco Brenes, former proprietor of Santo Domingo, written in 1822: “The freed men insult their masters [especially] the freed men who are a part of the Haitian army.”²⁵

²⁴ Ibid.,

²⁵ "The Land Question in Haiti and Santo Domingo." In *Between Slavery and Free Labor: The Spanish-speaking Caribbean in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Manuel Friginals, Frank Moya Pons, and Stanley L. Engerman

This highlights a very interesting aspect of this period in history. Anecdotally, Dominicans have strong reactions to the unification period, and it is easy to understand how the truth of Battalion 32 led to many legends and false tales of their barbarity. You can ask any Dominican and they have a general idea of what the unification period meant to the Dominican Republic. My father, Jose Francisco Polonia, remembers learning about this time period and how much Dominicans hated living under Haiti. Apparently, according to what he was taught, Dominicans were made to learn French and abandon their Spanish customs. Dominican families were harassed. Dominican babies were thrown in the air and caught on bayonets. These are the types of things one hears when asking about the unification period. Based on the quote from Moya Pons, we can see that what may have begun as concerns over land ownership quickly gave way to ideas of barbarism, which we have seen formed the foundation of ideas regarding the history of Haiti and the nature of Haitians. Moya Pons does an excellent job of detailing the laws and promulgations that came out of the Boyer regime, but one needs to read between the lines in order to understand how his study can contextualize the construction of race.

The Unification Period – Other Perspectives

Laurent Dubois contributes more information regarding the unification period while discussing Haiti's history in its' entirety in *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*. The book delves into the history of Haiti in an attempt to understand the abject poverty and corruption that plague the island nation to this day. When discussing the history of the

(Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) p. 188.

period of unification, Dubois does not sugarcoat the facts on the ground. Dubois discusses the harsh realities of the unification period besides land laws and agricultural laws: “in sharp contrast to [Henri] Christophe, Boyer did almost nothing to encourage education in the country.”²⁶ Dubois argues that education was severely limited on the island; for a population in the hundreds of thousands, there were only a handful of schools. In addition, many of the institutions of higher learning were closed after students were heavily recruited to build up a military presence in Santo Domingo.

Dubois emphasizes that Boyer’s stance on education is one of the many reasons that Dominicans disliked him as a president and, as a result, resented Haiti as the political entity responsible for the whole island. Education, according to Dubois, was seen by Boyer as a gateway towards revolution, so education was not a priority for the careful president. Furthermore, education was secondary when it came to bringing Haiti back to the levels of economic prosperity it enjoyed under French control. Boyer, in his many proclamations and in the many laws implemented meant to spur agricultural activity, deemed it necessary for all Haitians to take part in agriculture. Therefore, a child had to ask permission to leave the farm in order to get an education.

The question of the military comes up in *Dominican Republic and Haiti: Country Studies*, one of a series of books in the area handbook series written by and for the federal research division of the Library of Congress, edited by Helen Chapin Metz. In it, we are introduced to the idea of the military on the eastern portion of the island, “Dominicans also resented the fact that Boyer, the ruler of an impoverished country, did not (or could not) provision his army.”²⁷ The book continues, discussing how Haitian troops would

²⁶ Dubois, Laurent. *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*. (Metropolitan Books, NY NY, 2012) p. 15

²⁷ Metz, Helen Chapin. "Dominican Republic: Historical Setting." In *Dominican Republic and Haiti: Country*

confiscate what they needed when they needed it, essentially stealing from citizens what they needed to survive. This would make sense, as economic activity on the island had all but stopped and though most everyone received parcels of land to grow food, one could not grow food for subsistence while patrolling the newly acquired eastern portion of the island.

This book also offers the first hard evidence on the question of race during the unification period. “Racial animosities also affected attitudes on both sides; black Haitian troops reacted with resentment toward lighter-skinned Dominicans, while Dominicans came to associate the Haitians’ dark skin with the oppression and abuses of occupation.”²⁸ Tied to the question of race is the question of religion. Helen Chapin Metz discusses how the Haitians associated the Catholic Church with abuses at the hands of former slave owners, all of whom were Catholic. Thus, when it came time to appropriate land in order to parcel it off to supporters of the regime and the military, the church was the obvious solution. This view of the church allowed it to become a sort of rallying cry for the eventual rebellion that severed the unification project. Juan Pablo Duarte, founder of the Trinitarios movement, incorporated the crucifix and an open bible in what would become the new coat of arms in the flag of the Dominican Republic. “Dominican nationality became defined in religious and Hispanic terms, which permitted contrast to Haiti.”²⁹ The question of religion is an interesting one. We know that the initial stirrings of the Haitian Revolution began with an African syncretic voodoo ceremony. Here, we see the movement to become independent from Haiti incorporating elements and symbols of the Catholic

Studies, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress: 2001) p. 21

²⁸ *Ibid.*,

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22

Church: the crucifix, the open bible, etc. Even the name *Trinitarios*, which refers to the number 3, is a nod to the holy trinity. This is an interesting angle in regards to independence movements in the Caribbean and could be explored with more detail. Concepts of religion and race clearly form ideas of nationality that inform political realities in Hispaniola, both historically and in the modern era.

As I have shown, the period between 1822 and 1844 is a fascinating case study in nation building, identity/nationality formation and race issues. Though small compared to other regions of the world, even compared to other colonies in the throes of independence movements at the time, the events that took place on Hispaniola sent shockwaves throughout the world. First, the fact that a colony made up of African slaves could rise up and defeat a major world power, becoming an independent nation in a sea of European colonies was earth-shattering. The reverberations of this incident could be felt throughout the colonized world. The events that took place reverberated as far away as the streets of France and throughout the colonized world.

Because of the incredibly unique nature of their independence, Haiti knew that it could not protect its borders forever. In the immediate aftermath of the war, incursions by France were commonplace and many attacks were initiated on the Spanish side of the island. Though France and Spain were technically enemies, the advent of the Haitian Revolution was so terrifying to these slave-holding societies that unity amongst former adversaries was the preferred course of action rather than let this example stand.

On the Dominican side, the economic policies undertaken during the “*España Boba*” years, combined with the history of neglect from the Spanish monarchy gave way to ideas of autonomy in Spanish Santo Domingo. Up to that point, Dominican elites viewed

the colonial history as tragic and one that could be remedied with increased attention from Spain. Eventually, incorporation with Simon Bolivar's newly independent Gran Colombia became the goal, chafing under incompetent Spanish rule as the Dominicans were. This would not come to pass, and Santo Domingo enjoyed for a brief period an independent country called Spanish Haiti, which was eventually joined to Haiti under Boyer.

As I have shown, though progressive in regards to land rights and emancipation, Haitian rule was seen as a negative amongst Dominican elites. We can see that differences in race play a part in this negative view of Haitian rule, but combine these racial thoughts and ideas with a series of harshly imposed rules and regulations and you can see how ideas become mutually reassuring. Of all the work written about the unification period, the most detailed is Frank Moya Pon's book, *La Dominacion Haitiana*, but until a critical eye is given to ideas of race, how they were formed in the crucible of unification and how those thoughts permeate political thought today, we cannot hope to get a full understanding of why these issues are still being felt today. Without critical attention being paid to race relations and their roots, laws much worse than the September 2013 ruling can be expected.

CHAPTER 3: SLAVERY IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Much has been written about the various iterations of slavery that existed throughout the colonial world, how African people arrived in the new world and what their day to day activities may have looked like. We even have information directly from former slaves, as is the case in the United States. Because of the growth of knowledge in the realm of slavery, we now know that the idea that slaves were treated better under Spanish rule versus other types of European rule is largely a myth, though differences did, in fact, exist.

What is little understood, however, is what happens to a slave system once the gaze of the imperial metropolis has moved on. In other words, how is a system of bondage maintained when the state has moved on to other conquests? One of Spain's very first colonies was Hispaniola, and a sugar industry was attempted there, with limited success. But once Spain found precious minerals in Central and South America, little attention was paid to Hispaniola; mining for gold and silver was easier and more profitable than maintaining sugar plantations. How, then, was slavery maintained on the island? How were colonists able to exert control over slaves' lives when even the mother country lost interest in her possession? And more importantly, what shape did slavery evolve into, once the institution was in full swing on the French side of Hispaniola? These questions prove all the more important because a direct correlation can be made between the history of slavery in the Dominican Republic and contemporary views on race in the same nation. As we shall see, the particular types of economic activity lent themselves to a different reality for slaves on the Spanish side of the island, a difference that informed elite views on the institution of slavery and the differences between the Spanish and the French side of the island, and arguably inform contemporary views on racism and blackness.

At the onset of colonization, Spain did not utilize African slaves in as massive a way as

other European colonizers at the time. In the beginning, when Columbus first “discovered” Hispaniola, the process resembled that which was adopted during the *Reconquista* of the Iberian Peninsula from the moors. According to Frank Moya Pons, “during the *reconquista*, the Spanish people became accustomed to occupying the newly conquered lands while forcing the defeated Moorish population to work for them as serfs.”³⁰ Native populations were used as slaves and as part of the newly developed *Encomienda* system, where native laborers/slaves were allocated per Spanish citizen, or *encomendero*, who was then responsible for their religious education and general well-being. Almost immediately, native populations began to dwindle due to diseases brought by the Spaniards, as well as because of violence perpetrated against them by the colonizers. These early years of the colony were desperate: native populations were dwindling, food was scarce, the economy was in tatters. Like in other places throughout the hemisphere, this first iteration of the colony was ultimately marked by disaster. It was not until Spain placed Nicolás de Ovando as governor in September 1501 that the island became peaceful enough to initiate profitable economic ventures.

Throughout the early part of the 1500’s, the colony of Hispaniola under Governor Ovando was focused mainly on mining. However, mining activities only served to further decimate the native population and create critical labor shortages. Between the appalling conditions of the mines, the diseases brought by the Spanish and the deaths arising during military expeditions, “only a small group of 500 Indians survived by fleeing to the mountains in 1519 under the direction of the cacique Enriquillo.”³¹ It is at this point that we begin to see a move towards other types of economic activity – namely sugar production and cattle ranching.

³⁰ Pons, Frank Moya. *Dominican Republic: A National History*. 1st ed. Princeton, NJ: Markus Weiner Publishers, 1998. p. 30

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 37

Cattle ranching provided the colonial elites with the original funds necessary to undertake sugar production, which was quite costly at the time:

Both sugar production and the livestock business offered good profits. There was an increasing demand for cowhides in Europe during the entire sixteenth century. As the interior of Hispaniola was being depopulated, the remaining inhabitants became herders and hunters of the hundreds of thousands of cattle and hogs that roamed wild in the plains and mountains. Those herds were descendants of the animals imported by Ovando in 1502.³²

This economic activity is what funded the first sugar enterprises that were undertaken on the island. According to Moya Pons, at least 25 sugar *ingenios* were active by the 1520's, dominated generally by colonial elites. Because the native population had been decimated and because many new arrivals on the island were known as "hidalgos", the call to import slaves was made. Sugar is an incredibly labor-intensive economic activity, so before long the population responsible for the labor at these sugar *ingenios* was mostly African. Recall that at this point, many colonists had begun to search for fortunes in other newly established colonies, such as Mexico, Cuba, the South American continent, etc. As per Moya Pons, "in 1546, there were already some 12,000 slaves compared to the white population of less than 5,000."³³

These numbers seem to coincide with findings presented in the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, a collaborative academic effort that seeks to document the details of the slave trade. According to the database, between the years 1501 and 1600 there was an increase in slave disembarkation to the Spanish Americas of 36%, or roughly an increase of 114, 939 slaves. These numbers support Moya Pons findings of the slave populations of Santo Domingo, where sugar production was concentrated. Because of an increase in piracy throughout the Caribbean

³² Ibid., p. 38

³³ Ibid., p. 40

due to the stunning amounts of mineral wealth coming from Spain's continental colonies, Spain was forced to implement a strategic flotilla that could protect her colonial wealth. This flotilla, out of necessity, was forced to avoid the port of Santo Domingo, which had become an easy target for pirates due to a decentralization of power. "After 1543, Havana became the most important port for the rendezvous of fleets, while Santo Domingo was left on the sidelines."³⁴ If a ship wanted to sail to Santo Domingo, it was forced to do so alone, opening them up to attacks by pirates. This increased the price of trade with Santo Domingo, further isolating the colony from the rest of Spain's possessions. A thriving contraband economy was initiated, much to the chagrin of the Crown, who implemented a forced depopulation of towns outside of Santo Domingo's watchful eye. This depopulation, known as *Las Devastaciones*, formed the final "death knell" for Hispaniola. Many people died, many heads of cattle were lost, and the economy of the island under Spain never regained the brief success that was witnessed in the earlier parts of the 1500's.

The *devastaciones*, combined with Spain's new ship routes and increased contraband activities exposing other European nations to Hispaniola eventually lead to interest in colonization:

Española had never recuperated from the *devastaciones*. The reason was simple: Santo Domingo had been set aside from the main navigation routes, and ships avoided going there due to threats posed by the Dutch privateers during the Thirty Years' War. The permanent lack of shipping facilities discouraged production. As exports decreased, the merchants of Seville lost interest in Santo Domingo. The sugar mills gradually stopped producing, and ginger farms were gradually abandoned.³⁵

Because of this, France was able to get a foothold on the western part of the island, eventually

³⁴ Ibid., p. 42

³⁵ Ibid., p. 58

establishing the colony of Saint Domingue. A sugar economy quickly developed there, making Saint Domingue the “pearl” of France’s colonial possessions. Saint Domingue’s sugar industry was providing so much wealth for France, and the Spanish portion of the island had become so impoverished, that colonial elites began to notice. Recall earlier how elites on the Spanish side of the island refer to this history as the “tragic” period.

Regarding slavery, because the Spanish portion of the island was so poor, it became difficult to maintain slaves, let alone an infrastructure that would allow for the ownership of slaves to begin with. As we have already seen, the sugar industry had become all but non-existent. Slaves during the sixteenth century in Hispaniola, if they had not died of disease or malnutrition, had run off to the mountains to join the remaining native populations. Little is known about these maroon communities; however, it has been documented that colonial elites were aware of runaway slave populations and attempted to address the issue. The slaves who remained were often on par with their masters, as far as their existence was concerned. The main economic activity had been cattle ranching, thus both slave and master tended to ride horseback, physically putting both colonial actors on the same level. One could not very well exert control or ownership over a person if they were quite literally on the same level as you, if not socially then at the very least within physical proximity. Attempts were also made to sell off slaves to passing ships in an attempt to recoup losses from their original purchase. It did not make sense to maintain slaves if you are poverty stricken, as was most of the Spanish side of the island at the time. Also, despite the Crown’s decree that a certain portion of slaves should be female, blacks and the Spanish often intermingled. Remember that the Crown had been focused elsewhere at the time, thus there were not as many newly arrived Spaniards or slaves with which to satisfy or replenish these populations.

Because the French were making more and more inroads into the Spanish side of the island and because Saint Domingue was at the time much more profitable than Spanish Santo Domingo, elites increasingly began to petition Spain for greater attention. They demanded more slaves in order to become as profitable as the French side of the island. This became a big concern for the lettered elites of Santo Domingo. According to Pedro L. San Miguel:

[Elites bemoaned] the fact that they had so few slaves, in contrast to the landowners of Saint-Domingue, the French colony that had emerged in the western part of the large island of Hispaniola and that was, in the eighteenth century, the flower of the colonies, the most lucrative European possession in the Americas, perhaps in the world. One of the consequences of the economic prostration in which Spain's "abandonment" of its colony left Santo Domingo was racial mixing among the elite.³⁶

This is ironic, because at the same time that the Spanish requested more slaves, they disparaged the fact that so many of their compatriots were intermingling with slave populations, creating an ever-increasing population of mixed-blood people. Also, it is curious that elites demanded increasing numbers of slaves. In a climate in which slaves were at least superficially equal to their masters, where slave populations were dwindling because more and more slaves fled to the mountains, where slavery was difficult to impose because elites were increasingly intermingling with their slaves, how did these colonists think they would be able to enforce slavery? Had the Crown decided to pursue agricultural activities on the island, the massive importation of slaves as in Saint Domingue would have been necessary. We know that slaves going to Spanish possessions had increased by 35%, but what percentage of that number went to the Caribbean is not known. It stands to reason that, given Spain's focus on mineral wealth, they quite possibly felt that the islands had enough slaves and that better fortunes were to be had in mining. It is also ironic that petitions were made for more slaves because the lettered elites were,

³⁶ San Miguel. Kindle Locations 158-161.

at the same time, criticizing the appearance of so many blacks on the French side of the island, arguing that it changed the dynamic of the colony and made it look more like an African country than a European possession.

Santo Domingo, as a result, was left without an increase in the number of slaves to the colony. Any increases that can be seen in the database are correlated to the advent of the sugar industry in Cuba, and to a lesser extent in places like Mexico. So, how were slaves treated on a colony that was essentially ignored by the Crown? Several scholars from the Dominican Republic shed light on the subject. Carlos Larrázabal Blanco reflects on the rules that relegated slave behavior in Hispaniola. Similar to other Spanish possessions, the *Siete Partidas* dictated what was and was not allowed, as well as how slaves were to be treated, what was expected of their owners, etc. This included rights to manumission, rights to property, and rights to petition the authorities in the face of mistreatment. In addition to the *Siete Partidas*, Larrázabal reflects on the Ordinances of 1528, which regulated how long slaves could leave their plantations, what was to be done with captured runaway slaves, the responsibilities of the slave owners to clothe and feed their slaves, etc.

What is most interesting about Larrázabal's treatment of the slave experience in Santo Domingo is how many laws and rules were put in place regarding how slaves could travel, where they could live, and what should be done with freed slaves, etc. Based on some of the descriptions of these laws, Larrázabal seems to lend credence to the notion that in the absence of a stronger "official" state presence, slaves took greater and greater liberties.³⁷ The laws seem to be a reflection of the issues that the elites faced on the colony. It can be argued that these

³⁷ For example, people were forbidden to rent homes to slaves or freedmen within the city limits. It was also forbidden for slaves of different plantations or haciendas to commingle and to leave the city without a signed document from their slave owner.

freedoms, combined with the ever-increasing numbers of slaves in Saint Domingue, contributed to anti-black and anti-Haitian views of Dominican elites.

Another interesting aspect in the discussion of the slave experience in Santo Domingo is the involvement of the church. Jose Luis Saez, in his book, *La Iglesia y El Negro Esclavo en Santo Domingo: Una Historia de Tres Siglos*, Saez shows us that it is theoretically possible to assume that the very first slaves that arrived on Hispaniola were already conditioned to European ways. According to Saez, “in 1505 the first seventeen slaves arrived in order to construct the Castillo de la Fuerza. We can assume that these slaves were ‘ladinos’ or slaves born in Spain, already baptized.”³⁸ This differs from places like Brazil and even Saint Domingue, in that these slaves had an understanding of Spanish customs, including those regarding their treatment. This lends credence to the notion that slaves were aware of their rights, despite the fact that they may not have known how to read or write. The data found on the slave database seems to confirm this, as not all embarkation points for slaves who arrived in the Spanish Americas were from an African port not unfamiliar with Europe. The data suggests that slaves had arrived from parts of Africa where a European influence was already felt, thereby making the adjustment period easier as well as making the conversion process unnecessary.

The data regarding slave relations and the slave experiences in Hispaniola are limited in scope. As with other areas of Spanish America, there is documentation that reveals when slaves arrived, how many of them arrived, the ratio of men to women, what regions of Africa they were from and where they ultimately disembarked. What little we know about their day-to-day activities can be gleaned from the types of rules and regulations that the colonial elites attempted

³⁸ Saez, Jose Luis , S.J. *La Iglesia y El Negro Esclavo: Una Historia de Tres Siglos*. 1st ed. (Patronato de la Ciudad Colonial de Santo Domingo, Coleccion Quinto Centenario, 1994), p. 28

to implement. In other words, based on some of the laws put in place in Santo Domingo, it stands to reason that once the Crown had shifted attention elsewhere, and the primary economic activity had become ranching, slaves and their masters were often on the same level, if only physically and not socially. Though just as barbaric an economic system as slavery was elsewhere, we can also assume that slaves had ways to mitigate the horrors of bondage. Slaves were on horseback, slaves learned trades, slaves lived in close proximity to their owners – all this is understood based on what the laws were trying to regulate. We also know that once Spain turned her gaze to mineral wealth extraction, the colony went into economic decline. At least superficially, this put both colonist and slave on the same level – both colonial actors were poor and starving.

We must also remember that the island was not entirely colonized. The original settlements to the north and west of Santo Domingo had long migrated to other areas and economic activity was now almost exclusively coming out of Santo Domingo. Population totals on the colony never reached higher than a few thousand, and though slaves had existed on the colony, economic activity was limited to cattle ranching and subsistence agriculture designed for the internal market. Thus, Spain had all but abandoned their first colony, leaving her subjects in poverty but with a slave population that outnumbered them. It is easy to assume that these people understood that they shared a common reality and were able work together, something that may have shocked colonial elites who were able to retain some semblance of wealth, even after Spain moved on to other areas of the empire. Also, it stands to reason that based on this reality, slavery in Santo Domingo was seen as vastly different as what was found in Saint Domingue. Thus, a pattern begins to emerge that helps to explain elite views on slavery and blackness as it pertains to Haiti.

Additionally, the data suggest that as soon as slaves arrived on the island they attempted to flee. We know that although some slaves came from Africa, some came from areas that already had a European presence and some could quite possibly have already lived within Spanish territory. This lends credence to the idea that the population was able to find a way forward and work together, as opposed to having as rigid a class system as the one found in other colonies. Because Spain had abandoned the colony and because the first slaves had an understanding, if limited, of Spanish customs, it stands to reason that this made for a different type of slave experience. The character of that experience would lead to notions of identity, especially when juxtaposed against what was happening on the western portion of the island, now a part of France and quickly becoming a massive economic success.

As sugar gained more and more importance on the French side of the island, it became more and more necessary to import massive amounts of slaves. Eventually the ratio of slave to white person was almost 10 to 1. This changed the dynamic between the two colonies. The Spanish side of the island was much poorer when compared to the French side. Though both sides of the island had slavery as a feature of the economy, slavery would never reach the scale that it did in French Saint Domingue. A massive plantation system was developed in Saint Domingue that dwarfed the *ingenios* that had earlier been a part of Santo Domingo. These new plantations were so productive, the planters so wealthy that it mattered little if their slaves perished, for they could always just purchase more. This must have been jarring for anyone on the Spanish side of the island to witness. Imagine what must have been the thoughts of slaves and colonists alike? Colonists must have seen the enormous wealth being generated and wondered why a similar outcome could not be had in Spanish Santo Domingo. Slaves on the Spanish side must have seen the suffering of slaves on the French side of the island. Could this

experience have galvanized a sort of identity? In other words, can it be argued that the slaves witnessing the barbarism of slavery in Saint Domingue would have felt themselves better off by living on the Spanish side? On an island where it was relatively easy to hide, could it be possible that slaves on the eastern portion of the island helped those on the western portion?

History provides some answers. We know that Santo Domingo's pleas for more slaves in order to expand sugar cultivation never came to fruition. Sugar was again ascendant on the island, but only because of the French. Spain's attention was focused on the vast amounts of mineral wealth being extracted from Central and South America. Other European countries, wanting to imitate Spain's success, attempted to mine, but found that their successes were tied to agriculture, which eventually led to the French gaining control of the western portion of Hispaniola. While it is difficult to ascertain how many slaves lived on the Spanish side as opposed to the French side while the island was still just one Hispaniola, we do know that once the French took official possession of the western portion of the island we know slavery greatly increased there. We know France's main economic engine was sugar production, and that demanded massive amounts of slave labor. This had to have affected the way slaves on the Spanish side of the island viewed themselves, so that once the Haitian Revolution was underway, they were able to find common ground with each other.

It is not hard to imagine, though historical facts are difficult to come by, that slaves on the Spanish side of the island were able to assist the slave revolt in Saint Domingue in many ways. We can glean from the writings of the letrados of the Spanish side of the island that the actions taken by the slaves of the French were shocking, to say the least, but that there was concern of a "contagion" effect. They must have witnessed some cross-island communication, or at the very least must have been worried that because the island was so poorly monitored by

Spain, it would be easy for their own slaves to revolt and join the Haitian slaves in their revolution. We know that the leaders of the revolution had promised freedom to any slaves who would fight on their side, so this must have led to greater and greater maroonage from the Spanish side. So we have a massive slave revolt on one side of the island, another side of the island that barely gets any attention from their colonial masters, a slave system that is marked by high amounts of maroonage as well as by the relative freedom afforded to slaves in relation their masters and you have the makings of an island-wide revolt. It is hard to imagine that anyone enslaved on the Spanish side of the island, where the slave masters looked as poor as the slaves did and were barely better off than slaves were, would have stayed very long or seen themselves as anything other than a slave fighting for their freedom. It is in the advent of the Haitian revolution that colonial elites on the Spanish side of the island try to forge an identity, a common notion of self that would combat the revolution or at the very least contain the spread of revolutionary ideals. This was not successful, as eventually the leaders of the Haitian revolution were welcomed to the Spanish side and were eventually, if briefly, able to unite the island under one flag. The history of slavery on Hispaniola is incredibly fascinating – not only is Hispaniola home to the first and only successful slave revolution in the world, but it is also home to a colony whose unique experience with Europe could shed light on the difference aspects of slavery. More work needs to be done to be able to uncover how the institution was maintained and what these people’s lives were like in a world where their masters fared little better than they did and where essentially no one was watching if you were free or in chains.

CONCLUSION

The Dominican Republic is an interesting country in Latin America, specifically because of the ways it differs from other nations in the region. As we have thus far seen, during the time of the Spanish empire, for example, the Dominican Republic was never more than an outpost or an afterthought for Spain. In fact, when returning to Spain with the mineral riches it obtained from its other colonial possessions, the Spanish fleet bypassed the colony entirely. Because of this isolation from the empire, the Dominican Republic has historically turned towards the rest of the world to guarantee her economic survival. In particular, since independence, the Dominican Republic has had a long and curious relationship with the United States, sometimes as a good neighbor, other times as a potential colonial overseer. At least since the time of the American Civil War, however, the United States has had her eyes on annexation, but did not become more actively involved in the internal affairs of the country until the twentieth century, having invaded to “protect American interests” both in the early 1900s and again in the 1960s. It is during this second intervention that en masse immigration to the United States begins.

During the 1960s, the dictator of the Dominican Republic, Rafael Trujillo, was assassinated. His death ended thirty years of tyranny, but the country was not prepared for a post-Trujillo government. Though involved with the country in some form since at least the early 20th century, it is at this point in time that “United States influence in the Dominican Republic, direct and indirect, increased dramatically.”³⁹ Chaos ensued and the country was plunged into civil war. The United States, right in the middle of the Cold War and dealing with the fallout of Cuba falling to Castro and his band of rebels, decided that it would not allow another Cuba to develop

³⁹ Grasmuck, Sherri and Patricia R. Pessar. *Between Two Islands: Dominican International Migration*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 33

in the Caribbean, which the U.S. considered its own “backyard”. The United States decided to actively intervene and sent troops to quell the situation, eventually establishing a provisional government until such time as elections could be held. John Bartlow Martin was appointed as the new ambassador and it was he who “... took the initiative in granting wider access to visas for Dominicans to enter the United States. This step was perceived as a safety valve against further radical political mobilization and as a way of improving bilateral relations.”⁴⁰ According to Ambassador Martin, “The Dominican Republic was small, but it was a testing ground. The success of U.S. policy in the Caribbean swung on the Dominican hinge.”⁴¹

Ambassador Martin partnered with the provisional government, known as the *Consejo de Estado* (Council of State), to determine who should be deported from the Dominican Republic.

In recounting the story in his book, *Overtaken by Events* (1966), Ambassador Martin shares:

The riots mounted. Cautiously, the Consejo began to deport agitators under the Emergency Law. The Castro/Communists denounced it in the name of freedom. So did the political parties, seeking the votes of deportees’ relatives. And we became involved – we had to issue U.S. visas for people that the Consejo had deported to the United States. So the Castro/Communists denounced us too.⁴²

The Dominican Republic at the time was coming apart at the seams. There was a provisional government in place, but the government had little to no control. Things were only made more complicated by the intervention of the United States. Desperate to gain and maintain control, the provisional government decided that it would be a good idea to deport anyone seen as complicating the peaceful transfer of power. The United States assumed Cuban agitators were also on the ground, and so they agreed to loosen visa restrictions, thereby accelerating the

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 33

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 66

⁴² Martin, John Bartlow. *Overtaken by Events: The Dominican Crisis from the Fall of Trujillo to the Civil War*. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, INC, 1966), p. 99

process of immigration from the Dominican Republic to the United States. Originally only a few hundred in number, year to year those numbers steadily increased into the thousands. Although many Latin American people immigrate to the United States, “the Dominican Republic is the only one at or near the top of the regional rankings with regard to both emigration and immigration. It has the second highest emigration rate in the region...”⁴³

As we have thus far seen, ideas of race in the Dominican Republic are quite complex, and immigration to the United States added several layers to this complexity. When ever-increasing numbers of Dominicans arrive in the United States, there is inevitably a bit of a culture shock that takes place. Though it is well known that Dominicans see themselves as more akin to their European ancestors than their African ones, this view gets challenged upon being presented with race relations in the United States. As stated previously, the “one drop” rule does not make sense to a Dominican. In the Dominican Republic, one white ancestor makes your family white, though on the surface one may clearly be black. In the United States, historically having a black relative made a person black, regardless of how white they presented themselves. Dominicans face this new reality almost immediately upon arriving at American shores. To the average person in the United States, a Dominican resembles very closely an African-American person, at least phenotypically. The sorts of classifications of race that were historically found in Latin America did not exist in the United States. Imagine the confusion that this presents both to Dominicans and to Americans.

Dominicans faced this new racial reality almost immediately. They encountered a conflagration of race issues that were taking place during the 1960’s, especially the civil rights

⁴³ Ondetti, Gabriel. "International Migration & Social Policy Underdevelopment in the Dominican Republic." *Global Social Policy* 12, no. 1 (2012): P.46

movement. In addition to this, there is no history of Jim Crow segregation in the Dominican Republic, or in much of Latin America for that matter. This means that notions of race are far more complex than in the U.S. Thus, calling someone from the Dominican Republic racist ignores a long history that colors perceptions on race. In the Dominican Republic, to be black means to be Haitian, and although the manifestations of racism I discussed at the beginning are as blatant as anything found in the U.S., we must be careful to understand them within the complicated historical context of race on the island of Hispaniola.

As I have shown above, the cultural reality of race in the Dominican Republic has at its' roots a comparison between two colonies. Race in the Dominican Republic cannot possibly be understood through the lens of U.S. race relations. What began as an understanding of a "tragic" history gave way to notions of difference that were predicated at the onset on differences in European customs. That meant that in Hispaniola, the sense of "other" or the sense of "us versus them" began as a difference between Spanish and French. To be Spanish meant to have lived through tragic mistakes that needed to be remedied; to be French meant total exploitation of land and massive increases in slavery. It is arguable, then, that to be French in the eyes of the colonists meant to be a plantation owner/slaver. To be Spanish meant a less barbaric form of slavery, at least according to the lettered elites in the colony. To be Spanish came to be associated with gentility, civility and traditional modes of economic activity. The Haitian Revolution upended all of these notions, which lead to the eventual equating of French with slavery, revolution, anti-monarchy and eventually with blackness. History conspired in such a way as to blur the lines of race, economics and colonization, which eventually bled into what are contemporary Dominican views on race. In other words, it can never be as simple as calling Dominicans or the Dominican government racist.

Immigration to the United States has complicated views on race even further. As more and more Dominicans reside in cities alongside African-American populations, a particular sense of self-awareness has taken hold. Traditional expressions of American Black culture become as important to Dominican youth as they do to African-American youth. Music, art, culture, dance, fashion, etc. all foster a sense of blackness among first generation Dominicans that does not hold true in the Dominican Republic. In other words, as more and more Dominicans are born in the United States, an awareness of their blackness has begun to take hold. Thus, though episodes of racism are still rampant in the Dominican Republic, Dominicans in the diaspora are combatting these images with a renewed sense of empowerment that was made possible through immigration. The awareness of blackness among African-American communities has started a process of identification with blackness among Dominicans that would not have been possible in the Dominican Republic. Dominicans then go back to their home country with a sense of blackness that has nothing to do with notions of “us versus them” that are so common among Dominicans and Haitians. It is only through acceptance of our true selves, made much easier through immigration to the United States, that the Dominican Republic can shed its’ historical identity as a racist people.

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