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LITERARY, HISTORICAL, AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS OF RACE AND IDENTITY IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: A NATIONAL DELUSION?

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Abstract

The article discusses race, racism, and self-concept in the Dominican Republic. It explains the reasons behind the present view of race, identifies links between race and Dominican economic and political issues, and explores how the unique situation of the Dominican Republic in terms of cultural history and geography has contributed to racism toward Haitians. The article also deals with the negative self-image many Dominicans have as a result of the color of their skin and their ancestry. In conclusion, it offers suggestions on revaluing race that could be applicable to not only the Dominican Republic, but also racially-segregated groups of individuals elsewhere.

Introduction

Prejudicial acts and racist comments toward Haitians occurred daily in places I visited in the Dominican Republic. Officials at Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra, for example, would not let a group of Haitians into the computer lab. There were three African-Americans at the back of the group; once they identified themselves as Americans, the officials allowed only those three to enter. An African-American friend of mine was in a public car called a *concho*, similar to an American bus that picks up people on designated routes for low fares, that was full of Haitians. The driver of another *concho* drove by, full of lighter-skinned people. At a stoplight, the two drivers had a conversation about how lucky the one with the "*blancos*" was and how unlucky the one with the "*negros*" was. It is possible that these drivers were simply uneducated or ignorant, but it could also be the case that they only repeat the prejudicial traditions of the culture in which they have matured. As a result of stereotyping and overall prejudice against dark-skinned people, institutionalized and non-institutionalized racism seems to be over-arching themes of everyday life in the present-day Dominican Republic.

After watching numerous scenes of unfounded prejudice play out day after day against dark-skinned people in the Dominican Republic, I came to ask why blatantly discriminatory behavior developed among people at all levels of society and where it originated. It is particularly confounding that, although almost all Dominicans have at least a little "*negro tras de la oreja*" (black behind the ear)¹, prejudice against Haitians, African neighbors, co-workers, and

even darker family members is not only acceptable, but taught, modeled, and expected in a number of Dominican families. I will explore the origin of such thinking and how these thoughts influence Dominican life.

The Dominican view of race is a very complex issue that spans external and internal factors, time, and place. Geographical, political, cultural, and economic factors interrelated with history and literature have played a vital role in the Dominican formation of racial views. I explored race by speaking with Dominicans, Dominican Americans, and Haitians, as well as with fictional author Junot Diaz, a Dominican-American. I also studied Dominican literature from 1882 to the present and consulted literary and historical resources.

Working Definitions of Race & Racism

Although in the past the term "race" was used to imply a difference in peoples who shared certain characteristics, or in whom particular genes recurred frequently (Mörner 3), it has been argued more recently that race is a social construction rather than a biological truth. Peter Wade (2003) points out that scientists have now discovered that there are "no biologically defined entities called races" (185). He states that although certain patterns in looks and behavior are attributed to genetics, there are no biological differences among "races." Mörner found that racial mixing is not of true importance in a biological sense, though it is certainly important in a psychological sense. Racism may be simply defined as prejudice or discrimination based on one's conception of another's "race." Prejudice may be defined as antagonism toward an "other" group of people based on a negatively perceived generalization of some sort, while discrimination is one group's denial of uniform treatment to others based on these generalizations (Mörner 7).

Dominican Race and Ethnicity: A Multidisciplinary Approach

The majority of racial issues in the Dominican Republic are linked with the country's historical and political relations with Haiti and the establishment of slavery by Europeans. Over many years, numerous Dominicans have developed a fear, distrust, and aversion for Haitians. Since Dominican and Haitian people share their African heritage, the Dominican dislike of Haitians has turned into denial of national and individual history and ancestry.

Economic Disparity

Haitians, in particular, have moved to the Dominican Republic for numerous reasons. Overall, the Dominican Republic has historically been more stable than Haiti, its wages are higher, the education system is more respected, and the population is smaller in comparison to the size of the country. While riots are bound to take place at any given time in Haiti, particularly in the capital Port-au-Prince, the Dominican people are considered to be relatively calm, even in the capital Santo Domingo. In Haiti, the average annual per capita income is 1,500 U.S. dollars, while in the Dominican Republic it is 6,300 U.S. dollars (World FactBook 2006). Although the Dominican Republic makes up two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola, it has a population of 8,950,034, compared to Haiti's occupation of one-third of the island with almost the same number of people: 8,121,622 (World FactBook 2006). In short, fewer resources are spread over a larger population in Haiti than in the Dominican Republic.

Despite the opportunities for a better life in the Dominican Republic, there are a number of reasons Haitians hesitate to move to the Dominican Republic. The claims of better wages paid by Dominican sugar mill owners do not always prove to be true. Although the owners earn large profits, they pay their laborers minimal amounts. The poorest half of the Dominican population claims less than one-fifth of the gross national product, while approximately forty percent of the national income goes to the wealthiest ten percent of the people (World FactBook 2006). Cane-cutters in the Dominican Republic receive some of the lowest wages and are often subjected to conditions analogous to those that existed during the slave era. Although Haitian immigrants move to a land where greater supplies of resources should theoretically be spread over a smaller number of people, they frequently do not enjoy the benefits. Sometimes Haitians are brought from Haiti to the easternmost part of the Dominican Republic (commonly to La Romana), far from their homeland. They then have no way to return to Haiti, because they do not know where they are, do not speak Spanish, and do not earn high enough wages to afford bussing back to Haiti.

Politics and Economics

Although the political scene in the Dominican Republic is significantly calmer than it is in Haiti, Haitians have no political sway in the Dominican Republic. In fact, even third and fourth generation Haitian-Dominicans often do not have Dominican citizenship. The Dominican constitution decrees that people become citizens through *Jus soli*, i.e., children receive Dominican citizenship if they are born on Dominican soil, no matter which nationality their parents claim (Cedeño 139). There are two exceptions, however. The law excludes legitimate children of foreigners living in the country for diplomatic reasons and those who are "in transit". Since "in transit" is never defined, corrupt Dominican authorities can deny citizenship to whomever they wish for

as many generations as they wish (Cedeño 139). In the past, Dominican authorities have sent Dominican-Haitians "back" to Haiti even though they had never lived there. In reality, then, life is not easier for Haitians in the Dominican Republic than for those in Haiti.

For those Haitians who move to the Dominican Republic to attend college, benefits do seem to follow. There were a number of Haitian students at Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra (the top ranking university in Santiago, Dominican Republic). According to world standards, Dominican schools are much higher ranked than Haitian schools. In comparison to other Haitians living in the Dominican Republic, Haitian college students are more respected because they arrive with money, are educated to some degree already, usually speak English and Spanish, and have the potential to add to the Dominican Republic's resources in the form of human capital, rather than remove resources by taking jobs from the lowest level of Dominican society. Nevertheless, these Haitian students are still second class citizens due to their nationality and skin color.

Perhaps the greatest drawback for Haitians who consider moving to the Dominican Republic today is the overt and covert racism they are bound to experience. Denial of citizenship is only one form of institutionalized racism encountered. Haitian-Dominicans are often not allowed to vote, not only due to an inability to claim citizenship, but also due to an inability to obtain a personal identity card, called a *cédula*. Dominicans must have a *cédula* in order to vote, but to obtain one, one must have enough money to be able to purchase the necessary documents to prove birth status (Howard 47). Haitians, as well as Dominicans from rural areas, often lack such documentation (Howard 47), due both to financial constraints and to the fact that many, if not most, babies are born with the help of a wet nurse in the home, rather than in a hospital. Even with proper birth status documentation, many Haitian-Dominicans choose not to approach officials for fear of deportation.

There is no significant support for Haitian-Dominicans who want to participate in politics either. Fair-skinned candidates have been continually favored over dark-skinned candidates. As an example, in 1996 an opinion poll revealed that nine percent of the electorate would not vote for the darker skinned presidential candidate Peña Gómez because they believed that he was of Haitian ancestry, eleven percent stated that skin color would influence their vote, and more than twenty percent admitted that racial characteristics were important in electoral choice (Howard 153).

Over the years, Haitians have been invited by the Dominican government to fill open positions in the cane industry in the Dominican Republic and, subsequently, have been forcefully returned to Haiti when new leaders took over the government or more Dominicans needed jobs (Charles 151). Beginning with a contract between the Haitian and

Dominican governments, in 1952 the Dominicans "bought" 16,500 Haitians to work in the cane fields. By the 1970s, the Dominican Republic was paying up to \$3 million to Haiti per year for cane laborers (Wucker 105). Several leaders have executed Haitians as well. For example, Rafael Trujillo (to be discussed later) ordered several thousand Haitians killed in 1937 in order to "whiten" the Dominican population (Howard 31). In censuses, physical features have been used to label people either as Haitian or Dominican. In a 1981 census, there was a category called "*negro haitiano*" (Charles 151). This is significant because it distinguishes between those of African descent who are of Haitian nationality and all others of African descent. This illustrates that racism was institutionalized by the government, making it easier for people to accept. It also proves that black skin was tied to Haitian ancestry on government records and in the mind of every Haitian and Dominican person in the Dominican Republic.

The Trujillo Regime

Although there are a number of forms of institutionalized racism still in effect today, many scholars believe that the Rafael Trujillo dictatorship demonstrated the most horrendous examples of it. From 1930 through 1961, Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina created a regime based largely on racist thought and discriminatory practice. Trujillo came from a poor family, but worked his way up the military ranks while the United States was occupying the Dominican Republic from 1916 to 1924 (Wiarda 35). Although Trujillo was of Haitian ancestry, he expressed personal hatred toward Haitians and people of African descent. His maternal grandmother was the illegitimate daughter of the Haitian woman Diyetta Chevalier and a Haitian Army officer (Crassweller 27). It is unknown whether Trujillo denied his own ancestry, but sources describing his ancestry are abundant; thus, it is unlikely that he was able to successfully conceal or deny his ancestry if he tried to do so.

Trujillo implemented an entire political movement with the intent of bringing more white people to the Dominican Republic, pushing Haitians out of the country, and bettering the infrastructure in order to bring more unity to the country and to be more respected in the rest of the world. His program came to be called "Dominicanization" and its purpose was to reestablish "Dominican roots" and rid the country of Haitian influence. Trujillo revived the Dominican superiority complex, emphasizing that Dominicans were Catholic, Hispanic, and white, while Haitians were voodoo adherents, Creole-speakers, and black Africans. One tangible part of "Dominicanization" included deporting 8,000 Haitians (Wucker 47) and killing 12,000 to 18,000 Haitians (*el corte*) in 1937 and encouraging Italian and Japanese people to migrate to the Dominican Republic in order to "whiten" the society (*blanqueamiento*) throughout the 1930s (Howard 31). Trujillo constructed a number of highways to bring unity to

the country under his dictatorship. Once that was achieved, the corps of Frontier Cultural Agents distributed propaganda that explained and supported Trujillo's Dominicanization program (Howard 157). *Trujillismo* even became an important part of school curricula; one textbook recorded the following:

Haiti is inhabited by a mob of savage Africans. We Dominicans should be in debt to our own blood. The Haitian is an enemy. Haitians should be transferred to French Guyana or to Africa. The Dominican race and civilization are superior to that of Haiti. Haiti has no importance in the world. The poorest sectors of the Haitian population are an ethnic group incapable of evolution and progress. (qtd. in Howard 38)

Although Trujillo used Haitian laborers to staff the sugar plantations, from which he personally profited (Howard 25), he tried to indoctrinate the Dominican people with the belief that Haitians were hurting the society by bringing in unattractive physical features, poverty, lack of education, and voodoo. In fact, this was one of his justifications for his administration's killing of twelve to eighteen thousand Haitians or Dominicans of Haitian descent in 1937 (Howard 29). Trujillo's mindset and actions as a president led to extreme forms of institutionalized racism during his time as the country's leader, and some forms, such as denial of citizenship to Haitians, live on today.

Religion

Many negative religious generalizations are applied to those who are *negro* or *haitiano*. Dominicans associate themselves with Catholicism, while they associate Haitians with voodoo, even though both countries practice forms of Catholicism mixed with African beliefs. Ninety-five percent of Dominicans and eighty percent of Haitians claim Catholicism (World FactBook 2006). In Haiti, voodoo is openly practiced alongside Catholicism by about half the population. In the Dominican Republic, people do not usually admit involvement in voodooist or witchcraft practices. To the Dominican people, Dominican *brujería* (witchcraft) is known as *magia blanca*, or white magic, while Haitian *vodú* (voodoo) is known as *magia negra*, or black magic (Howard 36).

Many Dominicans deny any involvement in *brujería* or voodoo, although most of them believe at least in the *santos*, combinations of African deities with Catholic saints (Howard 93). Dominican and Haitian religious practices have much in common from an objective standpoint, yet practitioners of the religious practices in each of the countries use this as still another point of contention. Voodoo was originally spelled *vo du*, possibly coming from the language of the Fons tribe. *Vo* means "introspection", and *du* means "into the unknown" (Rigaud 8-9). Voodoo worship ceremonies always point to symbols of the sun, and ancestor worship composes a large portion of its rituals (Rigaud 11). The Haitian "religion" contains aspects of a number of African tribes as well as

Catholic influences from Europe, but some overarching themes within voodoo explain Haitian thinking to some extent.

Anthropological Studies on Race

As a result of this history, non-institutionalized racism pervades every aspect of life in the Dominican Republic. Anthropologist David Howard (2001) conducted surveys in four neighborhoods in the Dominican Republic and recorded his results. Howard's findings cannot be generalized to the entire Dominican population, since his polls were completed only in four neighborhoods. Approximately twenty percent of the interviewees from Santiago de los Caballeros, a city of about 550,000 in the northern part of the country, said that they did not think Haitians should even be allowed to work in the Dominican Republic (34). This reveals nationalistic tendencies and reflects the difficult economic situation in the Dominican Republic. Although Dominican frustration with Haiti has escalated over the years due to governmental relations alone, part of the problem is that Dominicans in the lower levels of society think that they could receive higher wages if they did not have to compete with Haitian laborers who are willing to accept lower wages.

Nationalism and a desire to keep a country's jobs with that country's people is not unique to the Dominican Republic. Even here in the United States, where life is comparatively better for even the lowest classes, Americans complain that foreign laborers are taking jobs away from them and depress wages. This argument is not economically sound from a free-market point of view. When left alone, consumers will allocate resources most efficiently within the economy by buying the least expensive products. Companies will efficiently allocate resources by hiring people who will do the work assigned for the lowest wage possible. In the long run, people are able to buy the products that are being produced by the laborers receiving less money and companies are able to pay less to produce their products, consequently saving money. The companies using these laborers and the average consumer can then put more money into the economy elsewhere. They may invest in their own or other businesses, which creates new jobs. Those who were jobless due to migrant workers would then have jobs. In the case of both the United States and the Dominican Republic, migrant workers should probably be appreciated. They allow nationals not to have to work at extremely undesirable jobs and save money on the products they are purchasing.

Just short of half the people with whom Howard spoke thought that Haitian laborers should be allowed at least some form of legal residency, while about half of them rejected without condition any notion of allowing Haitians to have residency in the Dominican Republic (36). Against the historical background, the figure of 50 percent of Dominicans thinking that Haitians should be allowed some form of legal residency seems high. This may reveal that Dominican society is moving toward a new degree of acceptance for Haitians,

albeit slowly and minimally. Some of the Dominicans view Haitians working and living in the Dominican Republic much like their forefathers did, but the percentage of Dominicans opposed to Haitians living and working in the Dominican Republic seems to be decreasing over time. Research is needed to confirm these trends and explore contributing factors.

Dominican Denial of Black Ancestry

Howard does not expound on the idea of Dominican denial of "blackness," possibly because he was culturally sensitive and knew that Dominicans would be offended by questions about race. However, this denial of one's own race is quite noticeable even to the most casual observer in the Dominican Republic, and numerous historians and fictional authors have documented it. Carolle Charles notes that Dominicans of all classes and backgrounds have come to use the same vocabulary to describe themselves and one another. The term *blanco* (white) is used to label lighter-skinned Dominicans and may be modified as *blanco trigueño* (wheat-colored white), *blanco rosadito* (pinkish white), *blanco acentado* (accented white), *blanco leche* (milk white), *blanco destinado* (white-maybe destined?), *blanco blanquito* (very white white), or *blanco jabao* (white-maybe soap?) (150). Actual "pure white" people are often called blonde-haired people, or *rubios*. The term *indio* has come to signify what would be *negro* in others' minds. People may be described as *indio claro* (clear Indian), *indio canelo* (cinnamon-colored Indian), *indio chocolate* (chocolate-colored Indian), or *indio oscuro* (dark Indian). In describing others, Dominicans sometimes use more descriptive forms of *indio*. Those who seem to be "pure black" but are more accepted due to their wealth, education, or background may be called *indios* of some shade or sometimes *morenos*, those who are "pure black" but not accepted (usually as a result of Haitian ancestry or occupation) are labeled *negros*. Black people are usually labeled *Haitiano*, regardless of whether they are Haitian, if Dominicans have no knowledge of them otherwise. According to Charles, "*en realidad, se considera que ser negro es idéntico a ser 'haitiano.'*" (In reality, being black is considered identical to being 'Haitian' 151). In everyday life, these terms may be used in a variety of ways. People frequently use the term *indio* to describe themselves in casual conversation. For example, my Dominican host sister compared her skin with mine, stating that she and her mom were *indios*, while I was a *blanquita* (white girl).

Other Generalizations about Haitians

A number of Dominicans think of Haitians in terms of various stereotypes and generalities. Often, Dominicans associate Haitians with AIDS, promiscuity, unemployment, and the inability to understand birth control (Howard 158). It is not uncommon to find Dominicans who express anxiety about being around Haitians because they feel that Haitians are likely to do others harm. A Dominican mother in *el*

*campo*² told her daughter not to go out of the house past a certain hour, as there might be Haitians hiding in the bushes that would hurt her. In poetry, music, and other forms of art, dark-skinned women, particularly Haitian women, are depicted as sensual and known to lead good men to ungodly activity, while fair-skinned Dominican women are depicted as innocent, submissive virgins. "La Mulata" (1849) by Francisco Muñoz del Monte, for example, portrays this image exactly (Howard 125)³.

Racism's Functionality

Since colonial times, there is a hierarchy in many countries, with blacks at the bottom, medium shades in the middle, and whites at the top. In the Dominican Republic, miscegenation occurred early on, and the Spanish crown even encouraged marriages between Indians and Spaniards. Today, this history has translated into a Haitian population at the bottom of the society with a color continuum of Dominicans above them. Color is only one indication of class, but if people are of a higher class, they may be labeled as having lighter skin. Research, real-life experiences, and poetry emphasize this color continuum and how the Dominicans use it within their society to separate into groups.

Racism is partially fueled by long-lived economic insecurity. Within the bottom levels of society, people always find a way to distinguish between the low, lower, and lowest classes. Instead of earning power, nationality and race determine one's rank. (Of course, black Haitians are at the very bottom.) The social hierarchy in terms of acceptance, respect, prestige, and usually earning power probably looks something like the following schematic shown in Figure 1.

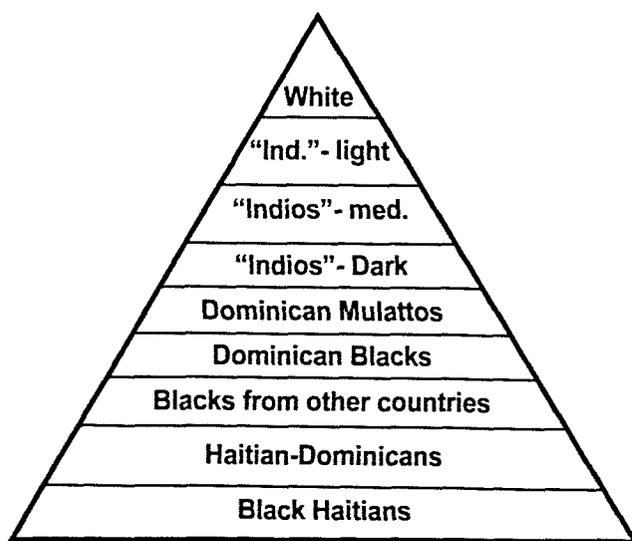


Figure 1. Social hierarchies of racism in the Dominican Republic.

Racism is still functional for the Dominican people. It provides a form of differentiation in a society composed largely of poor people. It also keeps Haitians or people of Haitian descent in the lowest paying jobs, unable to advance in the country or even within the confines of a company.

Revaluing Race

Much could be done to encourage the people of the Dominican Republic to revalue race. Of first priority in my mind is decreasing economic inequality and bringing the median of the population up to a standard of living above the poverty level. Multinational companies that have operations in the Dominican Republic could pay workers higher wages. New multinational companies could invest in plants in the Dominican Republic, creating new jobs., greater opportunities, and possibly higher educational levels for all people, which could result in greater equality.

Giving people new access to capital in the form of business loans could help them become entrepreneurs and have more earning power. Micro-lending to improve a community's governance, educational system, and infrastructure has been proven to be effective in raising people's living standards (Sachs 238) and could be used to assist rural Dominicans. Sachs' tells the story of women in India who must pay the majority of their earnings to rent the cart needed to sell food, keeping them from building any savings to purchase a cart. Loans with little to no interest can allow these women to take the first step out of poverty, and will impact their entire families. New forms of financing could be used to introduce new technology in schools, businesses, and industries. The cane industry, in particular, could benefit greatly from mechanization; this would reduce the number of available jobs at those levels of society, but it would allow people at those levels to have safer working conditions and learn new skills, which would become more and more valuable as the Dominicans attained higher levels of education and technology.

Education is the key to enabling Dominicans to reach their potential in terms of racial understanding and acceptance of Haiti and people from Haiti. Teaching farmers new ways to fertilize, protect plants, and keep the soil fertile for the following year's crops would assist Dominicans in dispelling economic concerns tied to race by bringing themselves and Haitians to a higher standard of living. Cooperative efforts between the farmers of each nation or foreign investment could aid in this effort. More jobs would be created, the two countries would be more stable, and fewer people would starve if such a program were implemented.

Higher education should be rewarded by better, more specialized jobs and higher pay. This will help students understand the value of learning and should encourage them to make school a priority. Higher teacher salaries and a more favorable teacher-student ratio could make teaching

more appealing to qualified candidates. Lectures could be given at universities to educate tomorrow's leaders on issues causing the Dominican Republic to remain behind other nations in terms of economics, education, and racial views. Educational events could take the form of literature workshops, concerts given by students of various ethnicities, art exhibits, or television documentaries. None of the educational improvements suggested are guaranteed to reduce or eliminate racism and prejudice in the Dominican Republic. However, racial issues are embedded in all parts of Dominican life. If people learn to think of all men as equal, their actions will reflect it.

Destroying myths about the ancestry of most Dominicans and unfounded generalizations about Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans would greatly assist the Dominican people in developing community and national unity. All children attending school could receive explicit education about the value of every human being, scientific proof regarding the non-existence of "races," and how the history of Haiti and the Dominican Republic has affected/influenced the Dominican perception of race. School activities could be planned to celebrate Haitian heritage or the common history of the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

Raising education levels and creating/enforcing standards would help students prepare to be future business leaders or to work in higher paying positions as new companies would move to or would be created in the Dominican Republic. In cities or villages, classes could be conducted to educate people on how to save, borrow, invest, and spend money wisely as the economy begins to grow. As with education, these steps to economic equality among all people of the Dominican Republic, regardless of race, do not guarantee the elimination or even decline of racism. Less economic disparity would only provide Dominicans with a solid economic foundation, allowing them to be less threatened by Haitian workers.

In order to ease the Dominican discrimination of Haitians, it is necessary to complete a number of tasks in the political realm. The Dominican government censored articles in newspapers and books for many years. For example, Ramón Marrero Aristy, author of the novel *Over* (1939) about the plight of sugar-cane cutters, was murdered under the direction of the Trujillo regime. Government censorship of the press needs to be permanently eliminated, and libraries and books need to be more accessible to everyone. *Cédulas*, or identification cards, should be given to all who are determined to be citizens according to Dominican law, regardless of their class, race, etc. Citizenship should be more clearly established in the constitutions of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The Dominican Republic, for example, should thoroughly detail what it means to be "in transit" so that people who have lived in the Dominican Republic for twenty years cannot be termed "in transit". It is also imperative that Haiti and the

Dominican Republic agree on what it means to be a citizen in each country. Since the Dominican Republic denies dual citizenship, it is difficult for Haitians to become permanent, legal employees in the Dominican Republic. Government documents that ask for racial information should not link race to nationality. For example, instead of "negro haitiano" (black Haitian) on an identification card, it would be logical to simply write "negro".

Trade and working agreements between the Dominican Republic and Haiti could be successful (if properly enforced) in helping to eliminate Dominican distrust for Haitians. Although the Haitian and Dominican governments have tried to establish a permanent border for many years, the terrain and lack of officials to enforce policy still allow residents from Haiti to live on Dominican soil and vice versa without even knowing it. Border laws to which both Haiti and the Dominican Republic agree should be established and enforced. Haitians already established in the Dominican Republic should be protected by these laws. Haiti and the Dominican Republic could agree to the maximum number of hours immigrants and even natives are allowed to work. They could also agree to fair wages, overtime pay, and decent working condition standards. The Dominican Republic and Haiti would also need to coordinate efforts to enforce such agreements.

Catholic and Protestant churches can take an active role in promoting unity, particularly among believers, between people of different races. They can also promote respect for all people and respect for oneself regardless of race. Since the Holy Bible firmly supports unity in the church (Ephesians 4) and states that all people are equal in God's eyes, regardless of their social standing or ethnicity (Galatians 3), these ideas can be emphasized from the pulpit, in religious schools, and in church classes to proactively influence people to think in new ways. All Haitian street children should receive care from adoptive parents or orphanages (some already do receive care), so they do not turn to criminal behavior when they are older. To implement a small-scale version of that process, privately-funded campaigns could be introduced to inspire Dominicans to be mentors in local churches, schools, or community centers. Ninety-eight percent of the Dominican people profess Roman Catholicism and usually have access to either a church or a Christian television program of some sort (if they have television). Thus, revaluing race through churches could be extremely effective.

The large Dominican-American population should eventually relieve some of the Dominican denial of race and ancestry. In the ethnically diverse and more egalitarian society of the United States, where black people can be top executives and government officials alongside white people it would be difficult for Dominicans living in the United States, or with relatives in the United States, to continue to divide people into classes, status, and acceptance by color and features alone.

Haitians are a part of the Dominican community as much as Africa is in Dominican blood. The only viable solution to solving any problem related to Dominicans not accepting Haitians or to denying their own ancestry is to first lead them to acknowledge that there are inherent problems in not accepting all people as equal and in not accepting oneself. Education, government reform, economic reform, and literary movements can assist in bringing people to this conclusion and continuing to develop a more refined view of race as time passes.

¹ "El Negro Tras de La Oreja" was a poem written by Creole Juan Antonio Alix in 1883.

² Literally, *el campo* translates as the countryside, but when said, it implies a somewhat desolate place outside the city that is impoverished.

³ "La Mulata" refers to a woman of both African and European heredity.

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Mentor Comments

Dr. Steven M. Bell provides an overview of the significance of Ms. Harris' research, describing how it evolved from the passion that stems from first hand experiences to a reasoned exploration of the topic of race in the Dominican Republic.

Megan Harris's thesis, from which the submitted essay has been distilled, shows an advanced understanding of the subtle and not-so-subtle dynamics of race relations in the Dominican Republic and on the island of Hispaniola, which the Dominican Republic shares with Haiti. Megan touches in due course upon the political and the economic, as well as the social, cultural, and historical implications of this important national and transnational issue. The level of understanding her thesis shows is not easily achieved, particularly by a student at the undergraduate level, and Megan has articulated these various dimensions of the phenomenon clearly, with very little of the kind of oversimplification normally inherent in such a broad and complex undertaking.

Miscegenation, rather than segregation, has historically been the predominant force shaping race in Spanish America. This fact has led some casual observers to conclude that racism, as such, does not exist in Spanish America. Megan's thesis chimes in categorically to reaffirm that nothing could be farther from the truth; that racism is indeed a universal phenomenon that nonetheless exhibits great variety in its concrete actualizations. Indeed, she shows how the Dominican Republic offers up a particularly acute example of the centrality of race in Latin America where, perhaps more than anywhere, the conclusion that race, rather than a biological fact, remains first and foremost an interested social and historical construct through and through, can quite clearly be drawn.

Megan's thesis was born, as many are, directly from her study abroad experience as a University of Arkansas exchange student in the Dominican Republic in the Spring 2005 semester. She brings to her subject, as a result, a passion and compassion derived from direct personal experience that greatly enrich and authorize her project. Her work confirms what many of us know all too well: that of the many kinds of academic opportunities we are able to offer our students, study abroad is one virtually certain to constitute one of those rare and truly invaluable, "life-changing" experiences.

Since that seminal moment when she first tentatively outlined her topic, Megan's views on the functioning of race in the Dominican Republic, and the shape and nature of her thesis, have evolved from a rather simple and visceral rejection of the patent contradictions coloring the surface of race relations on the island

of Hispaniola, to a much more human and humane, nuanced and comprehensive, understanding of the social and economic, political and historical conditions that shape the discourse on race today in the Dominican Republic. The “action list” that she proposes for the “reevaluation” of race in the

Dominican Republic in her conclusions is not only well reasoned and reasonable: it contains essential principles by which people everywhere in our planetary society would do well to abide.

I recommend her essay to you highly.