

La dominicanización de la frontera and the Institutionalization of antihaitianismo Under the Trujillo Dictatorship



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University
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Est. 1981

Argument

The Trujillo regime, which institutionalized anti-Haitianism for the first time in Dominican history, sought to consolidate and maintain hegemonic power in the border region. This region was considered a threat to due to having a history of autonomy from the state, a culturally and racially mixed population, and economic dependency on Haitian markets and products. By manipulating events, ideas, and threats from the previous century in a racist nationalization project, *la dominicanización de la frontera* taught Dominicans in the border region to reject both Haiti and blackness.



Dimensions of dominicanización: Physical

- Legal definition of the border established in 1935. One problem: Haitian people and towns are now officially in Dominican territory. Another problem: the official border was often ignored by the semi-autonomous region.
- The Haitian Massacre of 1937: 15,000-20,000 Haitians were killed. There was a racial basis, proven by the fact that dark-skinned Dominicans were also victims.
- Following the massacre: The regime establishes colonies in a once marginal territory. This is the demarcation of Dominican territory and creation of a physical buffer.

Anti-Haitianism / antihaitianismo

- “a set of socially reproduced anti-Haitian **prejudices, myths, and stereotypes**...based on presumed racial, social, economic, and national-cultural differences between the two peoples.” (Sagás 4).
- Haitians are associated with Africa, blackness, crime, inferiority, slavery, barbarism, disease, and Vodoun. They embody everything Dominicans are not as the “**Haitian Other**.”
- Tied to **nationalism**, but undeniably a racist ideology. The connection to nationalism allows some to claim the prejudice is just a result of national rivalry or differences.

Ideological

- To explain and justify the massacre, ideologues of the regime - Manuel Peña Battle and Joaquín Balaguer - produce anti-Haitian literature.
- The writing portrays Haitians as an enemy within or “passive invaders,” and says Dominican culture is at risk.
- The intention is to evoke old fears of unification, military domination, and cultural/racial mixing.



Race in the context of the D.R.

- **Race** is understood on a scale of gradation
- Skin color, hair color and texture, eye color, facial features, and bodily features all determine one's race.
- *La raza dominicana* is conflated with the idea of nation. To belong to the nation, one's self-understanding of race must match the national standard.
- Standard elite rhetoric says that the Dominican people are light-skinned, Catholic, and of Spanish heritage, despite the majority mulatto population and undeniable influence of African culture.
- Race and class are intrinsically linked.
- **Blanqueamiento** is the process of whitening the race through marrying and having children with a lighter-skinned partner. This is not unique to the Dominican Republic.



Institutional

- Schools and churches are established by the government throughout the border, intended to “de-Haitianize” the population through cultural instruction and monitoring.
- The linguistic options for race in government documents popularize words for mixture that do not denote African heritage. The census used “mestizo” and the ID card used “Indio” (which is still the most popular racial term).

Historical influences on anti-Haitianism

- **Colonial Period:** Saint Domingue (Haiti) had a thriving sugar plantation economy with nearly half a million African slaves. Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic) was impoverished and neglected by Spain, with an economy based on cattle and the contraband trade.
 - Slavery was less widespread, and the slavery that did exist was less exploitative, more paternalistic, and included cooperative or intimate situations between slaveholder and slave.
- International response to the **Haitian Revolution** of 1791-1804: encourages anti-Haitianism in the D.R. Haiti was scorned and alienated economically, diplomatically, and even academically.
- The **Haitian Unification**, 1822-44: The D.R. was the only New World colony to gain independence from another colony.
 - The birth of the nation was based in rejecting Haiti. However, blacks and mulattos benefitted from the unification due to the abolition of slavery.
- Until the late 19th century, anti-Haitianism was primarily based in a fear of Haiti's economic and military power. When U.S. entrepreneurs build sugar plantations in the 1870s, anti-Haitianism takes on a racial cast as a result of **ethnic labor segmentation**.
- **The U.S. occupation**, 1916-1924: Anti-Yankee feelings reinforce anti-Haitian feelings, as the D.R. become more and more dependent on Haitian labor during the occupation.

Conclusion: Modern-Day Scars

- The institutionalization of anti-Haitianism under Trujillo left deep scars on the national understanding of race and the opinion of Haiti. Blackness is displaced onto Haitians.
- Haitians are still a marginal group in Dominican society.
- In 2013 citizenship was stripped from people of Haitian descent who could not prove the legal residency of themselves or their ancestors. Tens of thousands of Haitians fled the nation before the due date to submit papers in fear of what would happen if they didn't.

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