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# “El Negro Sin La Oreja”: A Dialectical Approach to the Blackness in Dominican Identity

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**“EL NEGRO SIN LA OREJA”: A DIALECTICAL APPROACH TO THE BLACKNESS  
IN DOMINICAN IDENTITY**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **“EL NEGRO SIN LA OREJA”: A DIALECTICAL APPROACH TO THE BLACKNESS IN DOMINICAN IDENTITY**

Kevin E. Nicholes  
Old Dominion University, 2017  
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This master's thesis examines ideologies of whiteness through the erasure and denial of blackness in the Dominican Republic and explores the manner in which racial identity has been reinforced and contested. A dialectical approach is utilized to analyze the discourse around the history of the Dominican Republic and a textual analysis is also employed to assist in supporting the findings. The rationale for this study is to access how whiteness became synonymous with Dominicanity and to resuscitate the blackness of Dominican identity which has been relegated to the classification of the “other”. Therefore, drawing conclusions as to how Dominicans negotiate their own identity. Considerable attention will be paid to the role that the United States has played in the shaping of Dominican identity during their interactions with the country as well as the role of the country's European conquerors.

To these assumptions, this inquiry addresses the following questions: How has whiteness become synonymous with Dominican identity? How has ideas of blackness been negotiated or situated within Dominican identity? How have ideas of race been transformed into the norm and maintained throughout the country's history? I will demonstrate that the prevailing ideas of race which constitute Dominicanity (Dominican whiteness) have been socially constructed and challenge its construction using one of the same instruments in which was used for its institutionalization, Science.

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This thesis is dedicated to my children.

Si no sabe de dónde viene, no sabrá para donde va.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Prologue

I have always been interested in the discourse which surrounds Dominican identity. Having family ties to the Dominican Republic, I wanted to know why the history which is taught in the Dominican Republic differs from that which is written about in the diaspora. In an effort to understand this, I have spoken with several friends and family members throughout this research. In a conversation with one of my family members I discussed the invitation of the Haitians by Dominicans to fend off the Spanish in 1822 and I was told to double check my research because the Haitians invaded the country forcefully. In a conversation with a friend that still resides within the country, I discussed how the *Tainos* died off 50 years after Columbus arrived on the island. This was interesting to me because none of my family or friends knew of this history. It is not something that is taught in the Dominican Republic. In that conversation, I was told that we are the descendants of the *Tainos* and therefore that information doesn't seem to be accurate. In another conversation, my aunt expressed that in Dominican Republic we are Dominicans, but in the United States we are black. This statement made me want to find out more information in regard to how Dominican identity is negotiated. Many other conversations followed with family and friends that live both within the Dominican Republic and within the diaspora. Just as the previous conversations, ideas of Dominican identity were compared to what is taught versus what is written about in the diaspora. In every conversation, what was considered correct was what had been the norm: that is that Dominican identity consist of an indigenous and European ancestry and that what is taught in the Dominican Republic is the most accurate. These



conversations lead me to further my research on Dominican identity. This thesis reflects my findings and conclusions.

On December 16, 2013, *Dominicantoday.com* reported that the former President of the Dominican Republic Leonel Fernández gave a speech on the previous day while standing over the tomb of former PLD party leader and founder Juan Bosch stating that Dominican Republic's mulatto society means that it's among the world's most tolerant racially, "because it precisely involves a mix of whites and blacks" (*Dominicantoday.com*, 2013). This statement resonated throughout the country and although the former President himself probably didn't know how his statement would be received, comments that were in response to his statement were in total opposite. One individual commented that the negroes [*sic*] are the Haitians. The very fact that many Dominicans commented in opposition to the former President's speech on the question of Dominican identity acknowledges that there is a lack of clarity.

Although the term Mulatto resurrects the acknowledgement of an African heritage within the identity of the majority of Dominicans, it also assists in the devaluation of blackness as a whole. April Mayes reminds us in the book *Mulatto Republic: class, race, and Dominican National Identity* that:

the term Mulatto is a particularly vexatious term, fraught with ideological and cultural significance. For centuries, European government officials, writers, and travelers worried that racial mixture between whites and blacks would lead to decadence. The Mulatto, then represented a process of creolization that would end up harming whites unless they remained physically and biologically distant from blacks (Mayes, 2014).

This thinking led to a disconnect in the making of Dominican identity which was reinforced through the US occupation of the island. As Mulattos, Dominicans were afforded the ability to distance themselves from their black neighbors thus clinging to their European ancestry and Dominican whiteness. It is worth noting that Trujillo implemented the term *Indio* after the U.S.

occupation and that after its implementation, Dominicans began to distance themselves from blackness completely under this new identity and lay claim to Dominican whiteness.

Dominicans are taught that their history began with the *Taino* Indians and the Spanish. The African ancestry is often left out of this history or portrayed as very insignificant to Dominican identity. The term *Indio* heavily influenced the belief that Dominicans descended from the island's *Taino* population and the Spanish. The term mulatto during the Trujillo regime was said to reflect the African mixture within the Dominican identity. It is because of that link that the usage of the word began to decline within the Dominican vocabulary. This decline eventually led to the rise of Dominican whiteness or *Dominicanidad*. However, it was not the Dominicans who began to promote and present themselves as white. Instead it was the efforts of the United States that began to introduce these notions to the world. It wasn't until the US occupation of the island that these notions began to emerge in the lives of many Dominicans.

Dominican Republic is not a nation of Mulattos, although Mulattos help to make up the country's population. It is not a country of whites, although some of the population may have white skin. Neither is it the most Hispanic because the term itself has a wide array of meanings which are all socially constructed. The majority of Dominicans are black yet the usage of the term *Indio* or white when discussing the largest percentage of the country's population allows for Dominicans to avoid the notion that they are a nation of blacks. This is not to disregard the syncretic mixture of many cultures that now make up the identity of many Dominicans; instead, it is to acknowledge the dominant additive which has throughout Dominican history been left out, the Afro-. The history of the Dominican Republic, like the history of other Caribbean countries have many parallels such as native inhabitants (Indians) and a Spanish/ European

conquest. This is important because it helps to concretize Dominican identity while at the same time give clarity to its construction.

This thesis engages in the discourse of how Dominican identity has been negotiated and maintained through the countries interactions with those who have controlled the island through military occupation and dictatorship. It calls for an acknowledgement and celebration of blackness within Dominican identity, demonstrating that blackness plays an integral role in the shaping of who Dominicans are. It also brings blackness from the shadows in an effort to reshape the discourse which has normally been associated with its presence, negativity.

## **1.2 Thesis Composition**

This thesis focuses on Dominican identity, specifically Dominican whiteness and how it is maintained through negative representations of blackness. Further, this thesis explores questions of Dominican blackness through the construction of Dominican whiteness and gaps within the Dominican history. Within my research, I explore two forms of the most powerful means of persuasion: the news and soap operas to demonstrate how Dominican identity is represented and maintained. These mediums were selected because television viewing leads individuals to perceive reality in ways that are consistent with that which is portrayed on television and in this way exposure to television over time cultivates audience's perception of reality (Bell, 2006). The composition of this thesis is organized as follows: Chapter 1, addresses the construction of whiteness to establish the ideological fundamentals that have contributed to the principal formation of Dominican identity. Using these fundamentals, I argue a step by step process in which Dominicans came to arrive to the notion of Dominican whiteness (*Dominicanidad*) revealing how these racial ideologies are maintained through the educational system and Dominican telenovelas, performing a textual analysis of the telenovela *Trópico* to

support my claims. Chapter 2 addresses the blackness of the Dominican Republic, putting Dominican whiteness in conversation with blackness. It is here that I address issues of erasure of the country's black identity as well as resuscitate the country's ties to Haiti and Africa, both through shared land and ancestry. At the end of this chapter, I briefly touch on issues of racial acknowledgement within Dominican diasporas and how Dominicans began to come to terms with their blackness. In chapter 3, I seek to dismantle the stabilized historical rhetoric of the Dominican identity arguing that the majority of Dominicans are black. I do this by leaning on the discourse within the first two chapters to introduce new ideas about the identity of the creole, indigenous, and mulatto people of Hispaniola. This allows for a different perspective on Dominican identity which eliminates the notion of whiteness.

Within this thesis, I use the terms *Indio* and indigenous synonymously in order to reflect the historical ideologies that are taught within Dominican schools of the "we are Indian because our ancestors (the indigenous Indians) were Indian." I also use the terms African and black interchangeably in order to connect the similarities of Africanness with the color of black skin. It is important to note that this in no way states that all Africans are black. It is merely to reinforce blackness within the Dominican Republic considering that the slaves came from West and East Africa which are black Africans. I also use the term Hispanic to describe the Dominican population within this thesis at various moments. While some scholars consider this a devaluation of Africanness, my use of the term is important to this work because it establishes a connection to the hegemony used in the misrepresentation of the Dominican identity. Further, to clarify the term Hispanic, in no way does it reflect the domination of the Spanish. Instead, the term Hispanic or *Hispanicus* (Latin) was the term given by the Romans to the inhabitants of *Hispania* (Latin), a collaboration of countries conquered by Rome in 218 B.C. which formed the

Iberian Peninsula. Thus, the term Hispanic has no direct correlation to the devaluing of blackness because it predates colonialism. Lastly, within this work I write in a passive voice. This is not to relinquish the importance of my work instead, it is to better educate those who choose to use this work to further Pan African studies at a global level. In stating this, it is my belief that the passive voice allows for a smoother read and a more critical understanding.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE CONSTRUCTION OF WHITENESS IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

#### 2.1 Introduction

A significant amount of scholarship in regard to the racial identities of the Dominican people have been limited to the countries interactions with Haiti<sup>1</sup>. It has often been argued that Dominicans see themselves as white due to a mixture of both Spanish and Indigenous heritage and that the country negates its African ancestry. There have been many theories that speak on the ideology of whiteness in the Dominican Republic using Post Colonialism, Colorblindness, Negrophobia, and Victimization.<sup>2</sup> Each of these theories help to build a base to establish thoughts on Dominican whiteness, but they seem to look pass a crucial element that helped to establish Dominican whiteness as a color. In other words, Dominican whiteness has not always been synonymous with the completion of one's skin. In order to understand how Dominicans came to see themselves as white, a critical analysis must first be done on the history of whiteness in the Dominican Republic beginning with their European conquerors. In this chapter, I argue that whiteness, which is often associated with *Dominicanidad* (Dominicanness), was constructed through the U.S. occupation over the island. I do this by first explaining the process in which the original inhabitants of the island were indoctrinated into European beliefs on religion, specifically Spain's Christian beliefs. Then, I elaborate on the transformation from religion to bloodline in order to show how and why the change came about. Next, I discuss the effect of the U.S. occupation of the island and how it made concrete the ideologies of race as a color. This is important because before the U.S. occupation, the Dominican Republic did not group a person based on color, but on religion and later bloodline, as did their European colonizers. Lastly, I will

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<sup>1</sup> See Ernesto Sagas, Orlando Inoa, and Henry Louis Gates

<sup>2</sup> See Kimberly Simmons, David Howard, April Mayes, Ginetta Candelario, and Silvio Torres-Saillant

discuss how ideologies of whiteness are maintained in the Dominican Republic and its relation to *Dominicanidad* or Dominican identity.

## 2.2 The Genetics of Whiteness

Dr. Roxann Wheeler in her book *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture*, suggest that the association between color and race first became commonplace during the eighteenth century and obtained particular currency in the new discipline of natural history (Wheeler, 2000). When the Europeans arrived in the new world in the fifteenth century, color did not signify race. It can be said that race and ethnicity were synonymous up until the eighteenth century. This can be seen throughout European history and especially in Spain, the conquerors of the island of *Quisqueya* known today as Haiti and Dominican Republic. For Spain, 1492 was not only the year that Columbus set sail, but it was also the year that Spain expelled all of the non-Catholic religious groups. For Europeans, religion was what separated individuals and not the color of one's skin. In Britain, Catholics were excluded from civil and university positions; heathens and Muslims were candidates for enslavement (Wheeler, 2000). Race had nothing to do with color, instead race was more so a belonging or what we would call today a nationality. To be Christian meant being European and being European meant being Christian. Understanding how race functioned in the fifteenth century allows for a better understanding of how Dominicans began to construct their racial identity. Dominican historian Frank Franco in his book *Blacks, Mulattos, and the Dominican Nation* suggest that in September of 1501, don Nicolás de Ovando, the Governor of Hispaniola was instructed to not allow Jews, Moors, or new converts to go to, or be allowed to enter the Indies. Instead he was instructed to allow the introduction of African slaves as long as they were born under Christian power (Franco, 2015).

When Columbus arrived on the island of *Bohío*, modern day Haiti, one of his main concerns was the conversion of the *Tainos* to the Christian faith. In a letter to his friend Luis de Santangel, Columbus writes:

I gave them a thousand handsome good things, which I had brought, in order that they might conceive affection for us and, more than that, might become Christians and be inclined to love and service of Your Highness and of the whole Castilian nation, and strive to collect and give us of the things which they have in abundance and which are necessary to us (Sagas & Inoa, 2003)

This concern of converting the *Tainos* into Christians would not only force the inhabitants into Spain's ways and customs, but it would also be the introduction to Europeanness. It is that indoctrinate into Europeanness that is often mislabeled as whiteness. In Europe, there were blacks who migrated from Africa, hence the expulsion of the Moors in 1492. Therefore, one cannot associate whiteness with being European before the eighteenth century.

Spain's conquest of the island and the conversion of the *Tainos* soon lead to the demise of the native inhabitants. Without anyone to work the land and produce for Spain, the request for Africans to be imported was made. This importation is important for two reasons; first, it marks the basis for the first shift in race from religion to class. Second, because it puts Africa in conversation with the Dominican lineage. In 1506, many of the new settlers had established relationships with the Indians, the most highly prized pairing with the nobles. By 1507, with the absences of white women and the lack of Indigenous women due to a harsh slave labor system and suicides, the colonists were forced to have relations with African women who were slaves (Franco, 2015). It is these unions which led to the first purchase of Europeanness. Many of the colonists did not want to see their offspring sold off into slavery. The ability to purchase these children which were half European and half African, allowed for the introduction to the first-class level among the slaves, a new form of race. It is important to note that this ability also



opened the door for further separation from the African heritage of many Mulatto born children which began to lay claims to their Spanish heritage. Dominican historian Franklin Franco expresses the event as such, stating afterward that nothing leads us to believe that other situations did not occur in Santo Domingo.

By the end of the sixteenth century, so many children had been born to Spanish fathers and black slave mothers that the Crown ordered, “because we are informed that some of our soldiers of this fortress [i.e. the fortress of Havana] have fathered children with some of our slaves, and they want to buy the children and set them free, if the children whom these soldiers have fathered with our slaves are to be sold, you shall give preference to their fathers who want to buy them for that purpose” (Franco, 2015).

The mixing of European and African or European and Indian led to a series of hierarchies within the new world, the *mulato* and the *mestizo*. These two newly formed categories were often freed slaves and considered European through blood lineage. This lineage, as the establishment of classism and the foundation for Dominican whiteness, is often what most scholars fail to explore. This is not to say that through the process of interracial procreation that Dominicans were born into whiteness, instead it is this mixed blood that led to the ideology that Dominicans could be considered white. According to the hierarchies of that period, we find above the black slave first, freedmen and freedwomen (blacks and mulattos), second, Mestizos (offspring of the Indian and the white), third, *Tercerón* (offspring of mulatto and a white), fourth, *Cuarterón* (offspring of a *tercerón* and a white), and last *Grifos* (offspring of an Indian and a Black) (Franco, 2015). It is argued that by the eighteenth century the bloodlines had been so mixed that the King of Spain had to issue a new Royal Decree to establish blood lineage. Ann Twinam in her book *Purchasing Whiteness: Pardos, Mulattos, and the Quest for Social Mobility in the Spanish Indies*, suggest that the purchase of whiteness lasted from 1795-1814 by way of the Royal Decree of *Gracias al Sacar* implemented by King Carlos IV of Spain. This decree also known as *la limpieza* allowed Mulattos, or individuals who were fathered by an interracial

relation which consisted of Spanish blood, a Spanish colonist, were able to purchase whiteness. (Twinam, 2015). This decree was the second part in the first steps to the racial ideology of the Dominican. It is noteworthy to state that although the inhabitants of the island, Spanish, African, and Indian did not yet recognize whiteness as a color, instead whiteness was recognized synonymously as being European, specifically Spanish. The closer one's bloodline was to the European colonist, the less likely that individual was classified as African. *La limpieza de Sangre* became a common occurrence that is still practiced today in Hispanic culture.

The last official piece to the first step in Dominican whitening came in the form of the Dominican Independence. Juan Pablo Duarte, *el padre de la patria* (the father of the homeland) was born a *criollo*. His victory over the Haitians in 1844 was viewed by the United States of America as a battle between white and black, with white being the victor. For many Dominicans, the color of one's skin had not yet made its way into Dominican racial ideology. Dominicans of color and Dominicans of pure European descent fought hand and hand in the fight for their independence from Haiti. This can be more so understood through the American visit to the new nation in 1845.

When in 1845 American Agent John Hogan arrived in Santo Domingo with the mandate of assessing the country for an eventual recognition of its independence, he sided with Dominicans in their conflict with Haitians. As such, he became weary of the predominance of people of African descent in the country. Addressing the Dominican Minister of Foreign Relations Tomás Bobadilla, Hogan wondered whether “the presence in the Republic of so large a proportion of the colored race” would weaken the government's efforts to fend off Haitian aggression, but Bobadilla assuaged his fears by stating “that among Dominicans preoccupations regarding color have never held much sway” (Torres-Saillant, 2010 p. 5-6)

This satisfied the United States of America, a country full of racial prejudice, urging that recognition of the new nation take place throughout most of Europe and in the United States.

This and the fact that most of the Dominican elites were of pure Spanish descent allowed for a

false reckoning of the history of the new nation and its inhabitants. This is not to say that the history constructed by these elites does not acknowledge that Africans once inhabited the Dominican Republic, instead it is suggested that those Africans merely disappeared or migrated to Haiti. The intellectual elites that have monopolized the conceptualization of Dominicanness are the ideological descendants of the Spaniards and white creoles who directed the colonial system in Santo Domingo. When they imagine Dominican history and the Dominican people only the experience of their ancestors comes to mind, the experience of all others, meaning the majority of the population, receiving only tangential, if any, treatment. (Torres-Saillant, 2010 p.38). This leaves the notion that the Dominicans are the result of Spanish and Indigenous relational intermingling. Juan Pablo Duarte was and is still seen as the father of the homeland, a saying that is synonymous with his image. “Homeland” is just as much as a reference to Spain as it is to the Dominican Republic, for Duarte had ties to both.

### **2.3 The United States Intervention**

Many books on the history of the Dominican Republic argue that the United States occupied the island twice; once from 1916-1924 and again from 1965-1966. Many forget that the United States have had interest in the Dominican Republic since 1844.<sup>3</sup> In December 1844, near the end of President John Tyler’s administration, U.S. Secretary of State John C. Calhoun spoke of the need for the fledgling Dominican state to receive formal recognition from the U.S., France, and Spain in order to prevent “the further spread of negro influence in the West Indies” (Torres-Saillant, 2010, p. 5). In the United States, slavery was still an institution until 1865 and because of the many European occupations, the United States saw Dominicans as non-blacks. This sparks interest in how race as a color emerged in the Dominican Republic. The United

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<sup>3</sup> See David Howard, *Coloring the Nation* & Juan Bosch, *Composicion Social Dominicana*

States, already a country that prided itself on the separation of blacks from whites, were already dealing with the problem of freed black slaves. They also had the issue of the 1801 constitution which stressed the majority rule movement throughout the Caribbean. Ben Sifuentes-Jáuregui, Miguel Martínez-San, and Marisa Yolanda Belausteguigoitia speak on this matter in the book *Critical terms in Caribbean and Latin American thought: historical and institutional trajectories* stating:

The *Liga Antillana* or Antillean League, initially promoted by Gregorio Luperón and Ramón E. Betances among others, proposed and fought for an alternative program to the instauration of the neocolonial regimes administered by the *criollo* elites. Their vision of majority rule was Saco's worst nightmare, and their proposal for a confederation of the five nations of the Greater Antilles (Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico) was a response to the expansionist agenda of the United States (Sifuentes-Jáuregui, Martínez-San, & Belausteguigoitia, 2016).

This movement enfranchised blacks in the Caribbean thus meaning that the US saw the Dominican Republic as a bulwark against this racial expansion. Ginetta Candelario in her book *Black behind the Ears* suggest that at various moments throughout the nineteenth century and into the first half of the twentieth century, U.S. government agents and North American capitalists colluded with Dominican elites in presenting the Dominican Republic as the most "Hispanic, Catholic, and white" of (Latin) American nations against the Haitian Other (Candelario, 2007). It is important to point out that the United States saw Dominicans as Spanish descendants, therefore white. Due to the enslavement of blacks in the U.S. and the racial ideology of their inferiority to whites, the United States did not want Haitians to reoccupy the new nation. It is possible to say that most citizens of the U.S. believed that all Dominicans possessed the same color as their creole elites such as Juan Pablo Duarte.

After the second Spanish occupation of the new nation and the failed presidency of Ulises Heureaux, the United States decided to take the over the country through military occupation.

This occupation was the second step to the rise of the Dominican racial ideology. When the U.S. marines entered the Dominican Republic, they left behind a country plagued with racial hatred. This hatred was now in transit to a land where the inhabitants have not been exposed racial discrimination and only saw differences based on bloodline. In 1916, the U.S. invaded the Dominican Republic, but it should be noted that this invasion was well planned. In order to suppress the inhabitants of the new nation and further separate them from blackness, the U.S. invaded Haiti first one year before the Dominican invasion. This gave the U.S. total control over the entire island and its inhabitants. Often when Dominican racial ideology is discussed, this occupation seems to be overlooked as a contributing factor to Dominican whiteness. One must look at the impact that this first occupation had on the new nation from the perspective of how issues of race were handled in the United States around the same timeframe. Reiland Rabaka in his book *The Negritude Movement* suggest that in 1919 many Negroes migrated across the U.S., specifically to the north. He argues that African Americans had many reasons for migrating to the north, including to escape lynching, Jim Crow laws, anti-black racist on their voting and civil rights, and the collapsing economy of the rural south (Rabaka, 2015). This insight to how blacks were treated in the United States within the beginning of the 1900s is synonymous to the treatment that many inhabitants of the island were subject to. It is the need to separate oneself from African ancestry and blackness that becomes a mode of survival in the Dominican Republic, whiteness becomes a color.

#### **2.4 The Trujillo Regime**

*La raza dominicana*, traditionally represents whiteness, Catholicism and a Hispanic heritage. It clashes dramatically with the popular Dominican image of Haiti- one of *negritud* or blackness, *vodú* and African ancestry (Howard, 2001). In 1924, the United States withdrew its

forces from Dominican Republic after 8 years of military occupation. While the United States Marines were no longer occupying the Island, the belief about racial superiority remained. One of the individuals who took these beliefs very seriously was an official named Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina. For more than thirty years, Trujillo ruled the Dominican Republic as his own personal fiefdom, plundering, looting, and raping at will. During these three decades, the Dominican people lived in constant terror (Chester, 2001). It is this terror which Trujillo used to reinforce ideologies of the new construction of whiteness. A whiteness that separates the Dominicans from their Haitian neighbors and in turn gives way to a denaturalization of many Dominicans. Moreover, the ultra-nationalist dictator would embark on an “ethnic cleansing” mission by trying to rid the Dominican Republic of Haitian migrants (Sagas & Inoa, 2003).

In 1937, Trujillo ordered the massacre of over 15,000 Haitians throughout the Dominican Republic, what is known today as “El Corte” to rid the country of blackness. Trujillo wanted a Dominican Republic free of Haitian immigrants because they represented everything African. The 1937 massacre of thousands of Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans in the borderlands was the violent expression of an ideology which aimed to fortify and rebuild the republic. Two key intellectual progenitors of *trujillismo* were Manuel Arturo Peña Batlle and Joaquín Balaguer. The Trujillist ideology re-stressed the Dominican Republic as a Hispanic, Catholic and white nation. African influences were considered non-Dominican and, thus, subversive of the state (Howard, 2001). During the *trujillato*, the term “people of color” became a way of talking about Haitians who were blamed for the “browning” of the Dominican Republic during the unification of the island in 1822-1844. The idea was that Haiti was Africa, and Africa was Haiti; Haitians became the “undesired” immigrants while Europeans became the “desired” immigrants (Simmons, 2009). This campaign to whiten the Dominican Republic by means of eliminating the Haitian

presence gave way to a new form of thinking. Trujillo not only wanted to sway the Dominicans living on the island that they had no ties to Africa, but he also wanted to ensure that he changed the way they categorized themselves in relation to race.

Trujillo saw whiteness as power and surely, he looked back on the days of the United States occupation from 1916-1924 and reflected on the power that the white marines had over the island. To Trujillo being of African ancestry would not allow for the separation of Haitians and Dominicans due to that similarity. It would also not allow for the full control of the Dominican nation, for the United States still controlled much of the country's affairs. The term *Indio* began to take prevalence in the country as a way to separate the Dominican roots completely from African ties. *Indio* is an ambiguous term, not least because the vast majority of the indigenous population of Hispaniola died or was killed within fifty years of Columbus' arrival. Historically, *Indio* has been used as a term to describe a brown skin color, and it was not until the dictatorship of Trujillo that *Indio* was established as an official and popular description of Dominican race (Howard, 2001). The term *Indio* accomplished much more than just describe the Dominican race, it also erased the term *mulato* by disregarding the African heritage of many Dominicans. The term *mulato* meant that one was of mixed African and European ancestry. Trujillo sought to negate this history for all Dominicans by nationalizing the term *Indio*. In doing so, this made way for negrophobic thinking and principles of the non-mulatto and the eraser of blackness. Looking toward Europe, Trujillo issued a "call for immigrants" in the newspapers and government memos; this was the beginning of targeted immigration policy to promote *blanqueamiento* (whitening) in the Dominican Republic (Simmons, 2009).

## **2.5 The Miseducation of the Dominican**

The result of a deracialized consciousness that precluded ethnic self-affirmation and the exposure to an education that proclaimed the superiority of whites entrapped the minds of

notable African-descended Dominican intellectuals. Thus, writing in the 1930s, Francisco Eugenio Moscoso Puello (1859-1959), while affirming his mixed ancestry as “representative” of the Dominican type “as far as race is concerned” since, he conceded, “we are mostly mulattos,” he espoused a racial phenomenology whereby he owed the ability to operate fine technology to the portion of white blood in his veins, accepting the myth of the mental superiority of whites (Torres-Saillant, 2010, p. 44). Many other Dominican writers followed in the same path as Moscoso Puello, writing in their literature anti-black messages which later helped to support Trujillo’s initiative to whiten the country. This racial ideology remains intact today and is most prevalent in Dominican history textbooks, the news, and Soap Operas that air in the Dominican Republic. The lack of crucial historical accounts is often left out of Dominican textbooks on history in order to focus on the historical relationship between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. With such chapters as *La invasión de Toussaint Louverture* (1801) and *La ocupación haitiana* (1822-1844), there is a connection between Dominican ideology of identity and negative images of blackness that are being portrayed and enforced in the Dominican education. The abolition of slavery by the Louverture in 1808 and the letters written by Dominicans requesting that the Haitians occupy the country in 1822 to protect them from the French are just a few examples of what is being left out. Torres-Saillant suggest that intellectuals of the new wave cannot do much more than they have already done to denounce the falsified presentation of Dominican history and culture perpetrated by the ruling class. We can expect the negrophobia and Eurocentric notions of Dominicanness to live on for as long as those who are in power remain there, controlling the official tools of cultural definition and the institutions that shape public perceptions (Torres-Saillant, 2010, p. 48). It can be said that educational institutions in the



Dominican Republic help to concrete the racial ideology of non-black ancestry, which in turn reiterates the link to whiteness in Dominican identity.

Whiteness as a representation of Dominican identity still reflects many of the ideologies that were instilled in the minds of many Dominicans during the era of Trujillo. As mentioned before, the news and soap operas that air in the Dominican Republic are key to the ways in which Dominicans relate to their identity. Soap operas giving that sense of a romanticized reality of identity and the news giving what is presented as fact. It is through these mediums that identities are formed and notions of what is believed to be reality is conceived. Antonio V. Menéndez Alarcón suggest in his book *Power and Television in Latin America: the Dominican Case*:

With the development of television, a certain awareness of public life has developed throughout the Dominican Republic. People receive opinions on subjects they would not know about without television, especially given the high illiteracy rate among the adult population. . . . Television is an apparatus through which people learn the culture of their society. As with family, school, and other factors, television constitutes an agent of socialization. Television is more and more responsible for providing the cultural basis on which Dominican people construct a meaning for their lives (Menéndez Alarcón, 1992).

This is to say that the ability to maintain the ideology of whiteness as the Dominican Identity was and currently is based on the ability to maintain power over certain mediums. In the Dominican Republic, today many of the major television networks are owned and operated by Dominican *criollos* whose parents or grandparents are from Spain and entered the country during the era of Trujillo. It can be said that many of these individuals were also exposed to the ideologies of Trujillo's whitening of the country and his representations of a country composed of white Dominicans. It is not suggested that the owners of the major networks are racist nor is it suggested that they want to whiten the Dominican Republic. It is merely stated that the ideology of the Trujillo regime is still prevalent in television both indirectly and directly as it was during

the time of Trujillo. Danny Méndez in his article “Charytin Goyco, la rubia de America: A Case Study of Television Stardom in the Dominican Republic in the 1970s” suggest that the intimacy of television makes it a very efficient and pervasive device for subsuming race and class differences in the televised depictions of national identities. He further argues that just as Puerto Rico has used the theatricality of nationalism embedded in *la gran familia puertorriquena* discourse to achieve a national or familial consensus that ultimately reinforces the racial and cultural *mestizaje*, the Dominican Republic has used a similar system that came about during the Trujillo dictatorship which enforces racial and brutal discourse which continues to permeate in the national media (Méndez, 2015).

As stated previously in this chapter, that these ideologies of Dominican whiteness came about due to the U.S. intervention with the country. Other countries such as Cuba refused to allow these ideologies to construct the national identity which in turn led to Cuba’s blockade. In the Dominican Republic, the ideologies took root mainly because the U.S. took over the country's debt, other forms of financial Independence, and later invaded the country. Louis Althusser theory of interpellation explains how the U.S. occupation of the island allowed for this racial ideology to offspring. In interpellation, there are Repressive State Apparatuses and Ideological State Apparatuses which are key to the spreading of the dominant ideologies in a society. RSA’s or Repressive State Apparatuses are the military and the ISA’s are private institutions such as the media, church, family, and schools. During the U.S. occupation of the Dominican Republic, the U.S. had full authority and control. The ideologies that the U.S. took with them to the island were those of racial discrimination and hatred towards those of dark skin individuals (blacks). Using Althusser’s hailing theory, the dark Dominicans became victims to racial ideologies based on skin color. The white and lighter Dominicans were viewed as non-

blacks, giving them privilege. After the U.S. left the island, those who trained under their military occupation in the Dominican militia, especially Trujillo began to use ISA's (media and education) to reinforce the ideologies that the U.S. instilled in the country.

## 2.6 Whiteness

Gwendolyn Audrey Foster in her book *Performing Whiteness: Postmodern Re/constructions in the Cinema* suggest that whiteness defined citizenship, freedom; blackness connoted slavery and bondage.<sup>4</sup> Whiteness moved from being just something to be proud of to a legal form of property<sup>5</sup> ... Whiteness became more than just a concept when it became a legal identity marker (Foster, 2003). To be white, especially to be viewed as white by other nations, meant to be equally respected amongst other dignitaries or political figures. Whiteness has had and still has a certain level of advantage over those who are considered non-white. When Foster writes, that whiteness defines citizenship and freedom, it is to say that to be free, protected under the law, and participate in sovereign state practices one had to be white. Thus, Trujillo's ability to gain complete financial control of the Dominican Republic in 1940 through the signing of the U.S. Good Neighbor Policy. In other words, his claim to whiteness powers this. Ruth Frankenberg in her book *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* suggest that whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a "standpoint", a place from which White people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, "Whiteness" refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed (Frankenberg, 1993)<sup>6</sup>. Although she was referring to the specifics of race as it pertains to white

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<sup>4</sup> See Susan Buck-Morss, Hegel and Haiti

<sup>5</sup> see Cheryl I. Harris, Whiteness as Property

<sup>6</sup> See also Morrison, George Lipsitz, Charles Mills

women, her statement can still be applied to other members of communities in which whiteness is a dominant ideology.

To be white means that there is a certain level of privilege and power that is possessed.<sup>7</sup> Whiteness is often looked at as invisible and it is often argued that this invisibility keeps those who are white from seeing their privilege. Orna Sasson-Levy argues in the article “A different kind of whiteness: marking and unmarking of social boundaries in the construction of hegemonic ethnicity” that whiteness is invisible mostly to white people, while it is quite visible to the “Other”, non-white groups; the latter, from their inferior position in the social hierarchy, are keenly aware of the color and privilege of whiteness (Sasson-Levy, 2013). Although this privilege is in place and has been for years, it must be maintained. In the past, it was maintained through education by keeping those of non-white groups uneducated and thus enslaved or in a lower social class. This same tactic can be seen in the case of the Trujillo regime where the education system chooses what to educate the Dominican population on the country’s history and what not to educate. In doing so, whiteness becomes the focal point of the country’s history associating white Europeans as the country's founders. It should be noted that whiteness is not just an association of color. It can be argued that in theory anyone can possess whiteness through the act of performing it. Whiteness as a kind of property invested with legal, material, and cultural privileges. Whiteness accumulates value in the exploitation and subordination of the lives and labor of blacks, but can be accessed to varying degrees (and in complicated ways) by whites from all socioeconomic backgrounds and migration histories as well as blacks.

Gwendolyn Audrey Foster in her book *Performing Whiteness: Postmodern Re/constructions in the Cinema* suggest that whiteness “thus depends on a disavowal of hybridity, an elimination of

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<sup>7</sup> See George Lipsitz, *Possessive Investment in Whiteness*

ethnicity, and an adherence to the “Othering” mechanisms of whiteness. It depends on correctly performing as white (Foster, 2003). In a sense, the racial ideology that Trujillo implemented within the Dominican Republic, which parallels with racial ideology in the United States, is the act of being white. This can be seen through the white powder make-up that Trujillo used when placed in front of the public.

Whiteness would not exist if there weren't any encounters with other cultural groups. Through the historical accounts which are given to various societies of a group of individuals who have always been more advanced than those with whom they encounter define how whiteness became the hegemony in many cultures. Raka Shome suggest in the article “Outing whiteness” that whiteness is understood as a process constituted by an ensemble of social and material practices in which whites (and often non-whites for survival) are invested, by which they are socialized, and through which they are produced (Shome, 2000).

### **2.7 Ideologies of Dominican Whiteness in *Trópico***

Dominican whiteness as presented through soap operas and the news parallel with the ideologies of privilege and power. In the soap opera *Trópico*, filmed and produced in the Dominican Republic, the main characters are all white. Dominicans come in all colors, but the majority of the country is comprised of *mulatos*. This representation of the Dominican Republic as a white nation with very few people of dark skin feeds racial ideologies of Dominican identity. *Trópico* is depicted as a Dominican soap opera although the main characters are from Venezuela and Mexico. Danny Méndez suggest in his article “Charytin Goyco, la rubia de America: A Case Study of Television Stardom in the Dominican Republic in the 1970s” that television personalities become a site which, below the surface of a managed homogeneity, reveals conflicts and tensions that are essentially connected to issues of power, race, and class

(Méndez, 2015). Through the use of white Hispanics, a particular message can be presented through representations of whiteness, power, and class in what is advertised as a Dominican soap opera. The main character is a white Hispanic woman who comes from a middle-class home where she works in a cigar manufacturing company. She later leaves her home to escape unwanted sexual advances from a white Hispanic middle-class man. She ends up living in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic where she enters a beauty contest and falls in love with a rich white Hispanic man. What is noteworthy to point out is that throughout the entire soap opera, the main character's encounters with the rich, middle class, and even the criminal were all portrayed by white Hispanics. In the soap opera, there were very few black Dominicans and when they were filmed it was mainly a 1 or 2-minute recording of them performing a task less desirable than their white counterparts. Jagoda Dworek suggest in the article "Discursive reproduction of racial attitudes, whitening and whiteness dominance in media texts in Peru," that:

In advertisement text, the meaning of the image is intentional. Certain attributes and signs are consciously used in order to transmit a certain, set of messages, which meaning was chosen in advance. This purposefulness is particularly important in discursive reproduction of racism and whiteness dominance in promotional media texts, such as advertisements and public campaigns. It is enough racism infiltrates national projects of identity creation and attempts of identity establishment (Dworek, 2010).

A soap opera can be seen as a form of advertising in that it shows the viewers that watch the shows race as a marketable product, emphasizing that whiteness is better than blackness. In doing so, blackness is erased completely and whiteness becomes the norm or the new racial identity for that particular society. In *Trópico* the erasure of blackness is done by allowing the viewers to see every character as a white Dominican. In the scenes where there are other Dominicans filmed in the background, there are no images of black Dominicans at all. For those times when blacks are present, it is for a 1 or 2-minute recording and they are negatively presented. For example, in the

opening scene of episode 1, black Dominicans are shown working the fields and cultivating the tobacco. This is what is considered to be hard work by many Dominicans because it demands an individual to be in the sun for majority of the day and it makes the hands of that individual very rough to the touch. There are no breaks given and the salary for this work is less than 150 Dominican pesos a day (less than 4 U.S. dollars and 16 cents). Another example can be found in episode 6 where in the midst of a party a black Dominican is serving drinks as a waiter in a restaurant. Although this particular job is not completely negative, in the Dominican Republic this position pays 10,000 pesos a year in a five-star hotel which is 277 a year and 5 dollars and 34 cents a week. This was the work that slaves performed during the colonization of the island and today this work is performed by Haitians. This further distances the relationship between the ideologies of Dominicans as black and reinforces ideologies of Dominican whiteness. Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter points out in the article “The Perceived Realism of African American Portrayals on Television” that African Americans are frequently portrayed with personality characteristics that are stereotypically negative. In one of the earliest examinations of African American portrayals, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (1977) found that African American television portrayals typically depicted the following stereotypic personality characteristics: inferior, stupid, comical, immoral, and dishonest (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008). In the U.S. beauty is not hegemonically associated with blackness, instead it is synonymous with representations of blonde hair, blue eyes, and white skin. Due to the U.S. influence on Latin American culture, it is safe to say that the same representations of blacks in the U.S. are synonymous with those of black Hispanics in Latin American television and media. Elena Padrón suggest in the article “Whiteness in Latina Immigrants: A Venezuelan Perspective” that in many ways, the United States holds power over other countries, dominating the world stage and playing an important

role in the socio-political history of many Latino countries (Padrón, 2015). It is the influence that the U.S. has had and continues to have over many Latino countries, specifically the Dominican Republic that continue to justify the ideologies of race as an identity.

## 2.8 Conclusion

The construction of whiteness in the Dominican Republic is often overlooked by many scholars when speaking of Dominicans identity. The history of the construction of whiteness in the Dominican Republic is essential to the understanding of both Dominicaness and the racial ideology that is prevalent in the country. The conversion of the island's original inhabitants to Christianity was just one of the first steps to the establishment of the Dominican identity. What followed was the birth and rise of the mulatto, a group of mixed European and African slaves which began to refer to themselves as European descendants. Lastly, the U.S. occupation of the island, which introduced racial ideologies of whiteness as the superior group. It was these ideologies that were indoctrinated in the country's dictator Trujillo during his training in the Dominican National Guard established by the U.S. during their occupation of the island that has led to the countries ideologies of Dominican whiteness. These ideologies are parallel to how Dominican identity is presented in the *telenovela Trópico*, specifically as it pertains to Dominicans as white. Throughout the history of the Dominican Republic, the U.S. sought out to portray the country as the most “Hispanic, Catholic, and white” of (Latin) American nations against the Haitian Other. Also, Trujillo saw whiteness as power and surely, he looked back on the days of the United States occupation from 1916-1924 and reflected on the power that the white marines had over the island. For that, he continued with the representation of whiteness as the Dominican identity. These same racial ideologies are reinforced through the *telenovela Trópico* as previously stated.



## CHAPTER 3

### DENIAL, ACKNOWLEDGEMENT, AND MISREPRESENTATIONS OF BLACKNESS IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

#### 3.1 Introduction: *El Negro que Se Lleva Atrás de la Oreja*

Dominicans have a long history which ties them to their African ancestry and which resuscitates repeatedly the blackness of a culture that has been repressed through government entities and the United States occupation of the island. Antonio Benítez-Rojo speaks on the country's African roots in his book *the Repeating Island* pointing out that the census of 1789 gives the following round numbers: white population, 40,000; mulattos and free Negroes [*sic*], 28,000, and slave population (blacks) 452,000 (representing 90 percent of the total population) (Benítez-Rojo, 1996). These numbers reflect a country that has a history of inhabitants in which the majority has consistently been comprised of individuals of color (blacks). The influence of the African ancestry which has predominance in Dominican food, dance, language, and music lay testament to a culture that will never be able to completely deny its relationship to Africa nor its blackness. Silvio Torres-Saillant in his article “Introduction to Dominican Blackness” suggest that:

Marking the start of the black experience in the Western Hemisphere, the arrival of Ovando’s fleet in July 1502 ushered in a social and demographic history that would lead in the course of five centuries to the overwhelming presence of people of African descent in the Dominican Republic today. Blacks and mulattoes [*sic*] makeup nearly 90% of the contemporary Dominican population. Yet no other country in the hemisphere exhibits greater indeterminacy regarding the population’s sense of racial identity (Torres-Saillant, 2010, p. 4).

Even after historical documents have revealed the true lineage of the country, many recent censuses taken by the Dominican government continue to enforce ideologies of the country's

white and indigenous ancestry. It is often that the blame is given to the Haitian occupation for the blackness of many Dominicans.

Many other scholars have taken a contemporary approach to the way that Dominicans see themselves in relation to their blackness. Kimberly Simmons suggest in her book *Reconstructing Racial Identity and the African Past in the Dominican Republic* that Dominicans do not deny their African heritage, but instead that the African heritage is downplayed and relegated to the place that is behind the ears (Simmons, 2009). It is arguable that the same downplay that is presented through Dominican discourse also allows for the negation and/ or the denial of the African ancestry within the country. The use of the term “black behind the ears” is a reference that speaks out to the denial of the African ancestry that Dominicans have. Its meaning is that everyone, no matter where you are from, has afro-descendants. At the time of its creation, it was meant to change the thinking of the Dominican People in regard to the country’s syncretic makeup. Ginetta Candelario in her book *Black Behind the Ears* suggest that Dominicans often say “*Tenemos el negro detrás de las orejas*” when speaking to matters of blackness and Dominican identity. She refers to the poem written by Juan Antonio Alix *El negro trás de la oreja* and concludes that Alix, when writing the poem, was telling other Dominicans that their preoccupation with whiteness may have not been an issue in old Spain (referring to the Spanish colonies in the country), but it will not suffice in the Dominican Republic. She goes on to say that Alix’s poem is implying that the obsessive referencing of a white heritage only highlights the blackness of the speaker (Candelario, 2007). While Candelario speaks on what her interpretation of the author's intentions was in writing this poem, it must be reiterated that race was not viewed as a color in the Dominican Republic until the U.S. occupation from 1916 – 1924. The fact that Candelario speaks of a poem that was written in 1883 by a Dominican Poet

just 39 years after the country's independence helps to reinforce just how strong the denial of African ancestry is and has been for years in the Dominican Republic.

African ancestry and its influence lay testament to a culture that will never be able to completely deny its relationship to Africa nor its blackness. It is a part of the culture and if it were removed, it is arguable that the culture would lose its identity completely. William Magenney in his book *Africa en Santo Domingo: Su herencia lingüística* speaks on the connection between the language that is spoken in the Dominican Republic and its relation to an African ancestry. Magenney suggest that traces of that heritage appear in the language Dominicans speak, the "ethnolinguistic modalities" that characterize the people's handling of Spanish, showing peculiarities in the "lexical structure" as well as in the "phonetics, morpho syntax, and intonation" that suggest retentions from the languages of African slaves in colonial times (Magenney, 1990). Many of these peculiarities are still very prevalent in the Dominican lexical structure which supports the claims to an African ancestry. Even though many other Dominican scholars such as Frank Moya Pons, Silvio Torres-Saillant, and Carlos Andújar have written of this phenomenon, the African ancestry and links to Africa continue to be a controversial subject for many Dominicans.

To be black in the Dominican Republic means that one is synonymous with being Haitian and being Haitian is to be African. There are sayings in the Dominican Republic which state: *los Negros son comida de Puerco; el Negro si no lo hace a la entrada, lo hace a la salida;* and *Negro en mí casa, sólo el teléfono*. These sayings express the undesirableness of being black in a country still plagued by colonial thinking and the influential racial ideologies of the US during the country's occupation from 1916-1924. They also lead to representations of blackness as worthless, untrustworthy, and undesirable. David Howard in his book *Coloring the Nation: Race*

*and Ethnicity in the Dominican Republic* suggest that color aesthetics are a major element of racial prejudice, but racism cannot be understood adequately without accounting for the wider economic, political and ideological context. State legitimization of racism, which reproduces racially structured situations in the public sphere, is key consideration (Howard, 2001). This state legitimization can be seen in the country's recent law of denaturalization in order to further expel Haitians and their descendants from the Dominican Republic through denial of citizenship.

### **3.2 The Blackness of Haiti and the Dominican Republic**

It is argued that the eraser of blackness came about years preceding the trade and sale of slaves into the New World. Although erasing blackness was not synonymous with skin color, but instead with being African and practicing African rituals. Norman E. Whitten, Jr. points out in his book *Black Frontiersmen: Afro-Hispanic culture of Ecuador and Colombia* that the first black slaves, already speaking Spanish (*Ladinos*), were servants recruited among the many black slaves who at the time were kept in Spain as well as in Portugal. Such *Ladinos* sailed with Columbus, with Vasco Balboa, with Francisco Pizzaro (Whitten, Jr. 1986). It can be implied that ideologies of black eraser began from the time of the *Ladinos* before the Spanish colonization with the converting of African slaves into Christians and the force adaptations to the Spanish language and customs. It is interesting to note that the presence of these individuals does not appear in historical Dominican text or in many other historical texts that are taught throughout the Americas. It is then arguable that by not placing these individuals in any historical text symbolizes that the blackness has then already been erased and continues being erased every time the history of blackness is written. It can even be taken further to say that blackness throughout the Americas is devalued in such that the term African American only pertains to those of African descent in the US, leaving the word African off the nationalities of all the other

black inhabitants of the Americas. Silvio Torres-Saillant suggest in the article “The tribulations of blackness: stages in Dominican racial identity” that Dominican society is the cradle of blackness in the Americas. The island of Hispaniola or Santo Domingo, which Dominicans share with Haitians, served as port of entry to the first African slaves to set foot on Spain's newly conquered territories following Christopher Columbus's eventful transatlantic voyage in 1492 (Torres-Saillant, 1998, p. 1). That is to say that the presence of African descendants or blacks in the Americas is attributed to the successful production and importation of products at the first point of entry, Hispaniola. It is due to this production that blacks should be regarded in a more valuable portrayal such as strong, hardworking, and driven. It is instead the opposite that stand in for the representation of blackness hence erasing the identity of what it means to be black. Torres-Saillant suggest that a large part of the problem of racial identity among Dominicans stems from the fact that from its inception their country had to negotiate the racial paradigms of their North American and European overseers (Torres-Saillant, 1998, p. 1).

The relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic has been one that has always been shrouded in darkness and replaced with a fictional clarity. Throughout many text scholars such as Franklin Franco, Frank Moya Pons, Silvio Torres-Saillant, and Orlando Inoa have claimed that the two countries both have worked side by side and that they have always had conflict. Moya Pons in his book *the Dominican Republic: A National History* suggest that by the fourth decade of the 19th century it was evident that two different nations coexisted, one beside the other, with their differences based not only on dissimilar economic systems but also on racial, cultural, and legal dissimilarities (Moya Pons, 1998). It is this coexistence that the US occupation hoped to destroy and separate through the use of racial ideologies.

### 3.3 Trujillo and Dominican/ Haitian lineage

The Haitian occupation of the island has been the base for the construction and the maintaining of racial ideologies of blackness instituted by the Trujillo regime and influenced through the US occupation of the island. Lorgia Garcia Peña in the article “Dominicanidad in Contra (Diction): Marginality, Migration, and the Narration of a Dominican National Identity” speaks on the way the Trujillo regime used the Haitian occupation of the Dominican Republic to manifest hatred against blackness stating:

Soon after the massacre and all through the decade of the 1940s, many Dominican intellectuals took on the task of justifying the genocide through an aggressive anti-Haitian campaign that reclaimed the history of the Haitian occupation (1822-44) and the various colonial border conflicts.... The decade that followed *el corte* resulted in a series of texts that minimized the transcendence of the events in order to justify them (Garcia Peña, 2008).

The most recent injustice to separate Dominicans from blackness is the denaturalization of Haitians (blacks) born in the Dominican Republic or Dominicans with close Haitian ancestry. The Dominican Constitutional Tribunal in September of 2013, issued and put in effect verdict 168-13, a verdict that highly affected Haitian migrants and Dominicans of Haitian descent by denying them rights to Dominican citizenship. This demonstrates the racial ideologies of blackness which were orchestrated by the Trujillo regime and are present in the country today. While Trujillo instituted racial ideologies that were anti-black in the Dominican Republic that were influenced through the US occupation of the island, the Dictator himself had close ancestral ties to Haiti and African heritage. Elizabeth Johnson in her article “Blood, Power, and Privilege: Why the man who ordered the slaughter of a race was not racist” reflects on the dictator’s early life in the Dominican Republic as a child stating: Trujillo grew up in a lower middle-class home outside of Santo Domingo, the nation's capital, in a family that had ties to Haiti; in fact, Trujillo's maternal grandmother was a Haitian (Johnson, 2006). It must be stated that not much can be

found on the publications of Trujillo's childhood and Haitian ancestry in Dominican history text or videos. This implies that Trujillo wanted the relationship of his Haitian and African ancestry hidden and denounced to the Dominican population as well as to the United States. In doing so, he was able to guide and maintain the country in a state of black hatred and denial.

### **3.4 *Soy Negro, pero Negro Blanco*: the "Act" of Denial**

When Trujillo is spoken of in the Dominican Republic, he is spoken of as the worst dictator that the country has ever seen. What is almost never mentioned is the fact that he wore white powder to hide his blackness. Trujillo, although not very dark in color, was the grandson of a Haitian woman. Jo-Anne Suriel in the article "The Myth of the Indio: Race and the Dominican Performance of Identity" speaks on this matter stating:

It's funny how Dominicans deny their blackness when they are more blacks in Dominican Republic than any other Spanish speaking country. Trujillo who had to powder his face every morning to appear lighter is a prime example of self-hate. Lucky now there are bleaching creams and soaps that does that job I guess Trujillo was ahead of his time. This guy even allowed any non-blacks to emigrate to the Dominican Republic (mostly Germans after [W]WII) in the Santiago section to intermix with the native Dominicans. (*Mejorar la raza*) This is a pure form of genocide (Suriel, 2005).

Trujillo, while erasing his blackness through putting white powder on every morning, is not the only Dominican to whiten his appearance. It is true that he was the orchestrator behind the ideologies of whiteness, but it must also be considered that the first influences of whiteness as a color came about during the US occupation of the island. Kimberly Simmons speaks on the eraser of blackness through lightening the skin with creams in the book *Reconstructing Racial Identity and the African Past in the Dominican Republic* citing an ad in the Dominican newspaper, *El Diario* from 1930 which states pearly white complexion is truly beautiful and the difference is appreciated instantly (Simmons, 2009). In that advertisement, a picture of a woman is displayed with one side of her face black and the other side white. The advertisement's date is

the most important piece to analyze because Trujillo didn't take power in the country until 1930 which supports the claim that racial ideologies of whiteness was introduced during the US occupation of the island which ended in Dominican Republic in 1924, but continued in Haiti until 1934.

The erasure or denial of blackness is so important that it can be seen through the whitening of the country's historical political figures as can be seen in these two images of General Gregorio Luperón.



Figure 1a.

Figure 1b.

General Gregorio Luperón in military uniform, 1833. Images captured from Wikimedia Commons.com and Encaribe.org (both images are considered public domain)

In figure 1a, General Gregorio Luperón is shown with black features and in figure 1b with a whitening to his image. In figure 1a, General Luperón has a rough texture to his hair which can be seen protruding from his hat on both sides. His eyes are a bit puffier as are his cheeks. This can be seen with the lines that appear on his face. His lips are full and nose well rounded on the tip, which are common traits of black people. His face and chin also are filled at the lower portion which also matches many traits of black people. In figure 1b, the General's image has been whitened. His face has been thinned out and his hair made to look straight. This is most



noticeable by observing his ears and how his hair is placed behind them unlike the picture on the left. His mustache has been made to appear straight as well as his complexion has been lightened. His nose has a pointed appearance instead of a round appearance. His lips have also been thinned out to assist in the whitening of this Dominican hero and ex-President.

Using Judith Butler's performance of identity theory, it can be argued that Dominicans just as everyone else performs their identity. Butler argues in the book *the Judith Butler Reader* that: the "performative" dimension of construction is precisely the forced reiteration of norms.

She states:

[I]t can actually lead to massive cultural misunderstandings, to real dissonant meanings and interpretations... what are being performed are the cultural norms that condition and limit the actor in the situation; but also in play are the cultural norms of reception, which may or may not accord with the ones that are constituting a situation so that we actually have a retrospective of constitution of the performance through the norms of reception- and this can produce really interesting problems of cultural translation and cultural misunderstanding. (Butler as quoted by Salih, 2004).

Analyzing key moments in Dominican history through Dominican scholars, it is safe to say that attempts to erase blackness have merely been acts of performance both intentional and unintentional. This is not to say that blackness is not still prevalent in the culture, food, music, dance, and rituals. Instead it is to suggest that the "other" identity has been performed so much that Dominicans have a hard time coming out of character. For those that do, they find it hard to return to the act of performing once more. This is what Juan Antonio Alix spoke of in his poem *El Negro tras de la Oreja* stating that the preoccupation with whiteness may have not been an issue in old Spain, but it will not suffice in the Dominican Republic. *Como hoy la preocupación/ a más de una gente abrumba/ Emplearé mi débil pluma/ Para darle una lección/ Pues esto en nuestra Nación/ Ni buen resultado deja/ Eso era en la España vieja/ Según desde chico escucho/ Pero hoy abunda mucho/ El negro tras de la oreja* (Alix, 1986) (Translation- like today the

worry/ overwhelms everyone/ I will employ my weak pen/ to give you a lesson/ well in our nation this/ will not result to any good/ that was in old Spain/ according to what I heard in my childhood/ but today there is a lot of abundance/ the black behind the ears)(Alix, 1986).

Realizing that the Spanish had been defeated and the island was full of people of African descent, therefore there wasn't a need to perform anymore. I argue that Trujillo himself began his role of dictator through performance. This can be seen through the fact that he put on makeup every morning for his public to help him get into his role of "acting" white. It can also be argued that he maintained that role throughout his time as dictator because of the US surveillance of the country. This can be seen through the US occupation of Haiti a year before the Dominican Occupation and the fact that after leaving the Dominican Republic, the US maintained its presence in Haiti for another 10 years. Further, I argue that Dominicans begin to perform blackness when they migrate to the United States. Edward Telles and Tianna Paschel in the article "Who Is Black, White, or Mixed Race? How Skin Color, Status, and Nation Shape Racial Classification in Latin America" state:

Even in the Dominican Republic, where the black movement is weak and legislative reforms have not occurred, scholars have noted recent changes in racial identification patterns. For example, educated Dominicans were beginning to experiment with mulatto identity . . . Dominican immigrants to the United States incorporate elements of U.S. racial classification, where they are often perceived as black. Similarly, Dominicans have recently begun to challenge traditional racial identities of whitening and classification as Indio by slowly embracing blackness. Scholars have argued that these changes in racial classification in the Dominican Republic are directly linked to out-migration to the United States and transnationalism among these immigrants (Telles & Paschel, 2014).

It is the grouping of many Dominicans with other people of color (black) in the US which causes them to take on another performance. It is through this performance that those Dominicans who migrate to the US and later back to the Dominican Republic that they begin to question their

relationship with whiteness and blackness. Juan Flores speaks on this phenomenon in his book the *Diaspora Strikes Back: Caribeño tales of learning and turning* stating that:

...the most highly charged field for the play of cultural remittances, however, has involved the issue of race and racial identity, and most of all, questions of blackness. Although the legacy of denial and the age-old myths of “racial democracy” do persist in Latino and Caribbean diasporas, significant alterations in regard to African heritage and awareness of racism are evident, sometimes dramatically so- especially among diaspora youth and, of course, Afro-Latinos (Flores, 2009).

Trujillo’s dark secret was not the only hidden truth in order to create and maintain racial ideologies of blackness. Dominican history textbooks such as *Ciencias Sociales, 7mo grado* describes the first attempt to abolish slavery by African descendant and Haitian Political Toussaint Louverture in 1801 as an invasion of the country. This is taught throughout the Dominican Republic and has been approved by the minister of education, which is part of the Dominican government. It is also taught in the same textbook that the Haitians invaded the Dominican Republic a second time in 1822 in which they remained in power until removed by the founding fathers. What is lacking in both accounts is that fact that neither of these attempts were invasions. In both accounts the slaves that inhabited the country under Spanish rule were set free by the Haitians who were invited to enter the country by Dominican elites and *criollos* in order to fend off what was seen as an unjust and brutal way of life under first Spanish rule and later French rule. Franklin Franco in his book *Blacks, Mulattos, and the Dominican Nation* speaks on the invitation of Dominicans to the Haitian General Magny to occupy the country in order to fend off the French stating:

...the commander of the stronghold of Monte Cristy himself, Diego Polanco, wrote to the Haitian General, Magny, “The people of San Fernando de Monte Cristo have deemed it appropriate to raise the Haitian flag and we have agreed. I am sending three commissioners to Your Excellency, don José Domínguez, don José Diaz, and don Gregorio Escarfúlez, to ascertain the intentions of your government. We expect Your Excellency to protect that city which, as of today, forms part of the Republic of Haiti (Franco, 2015).

While it is important to note the contributions of Haiti to the Dominican Republic and vice versa, it should also be noted that there was also resistance and animosity from both countries throughout their history. This is typical of all counties which share a border and have matured as a nation together. This is not to say that what has happened or is currently happening justifiable. This is to merely point out that both countries have an intermingling bond within each other's history that is shared not only through the piece of land that they share, but also through the blood lineage and mixture amongst the people that comprise the entire island. As stated in the previous chapter, Columbus arrived on the island of *Bohío*, what is now today Haiti and Spain maintained control of the entire island until a third of it was seceded to France in 1697. Before France received the portion of the island known today as Haiti, slaves were imported throughout Hispaniola. Carlos Andújar gives insight to the origins of slaves in his book *the African Presence in Santo Domingo* stating that:

According to the list compiled by C.E. Deive, during two periods of our history (based on the study of names and their possible relationship with places in Africa) Hispaniola had two sources that provided slaves. Between 1547 and 1606, twenty-eight ethnic groups were found. Most of these blacks came from Senegambia and Guinea, which by the sixteenth century were areas for the capture of slaves (Andújar, 2012).

It is arguable that many of the slaves who were captured and taken to the Americas to be sold often were from the same regions and even the same tribes. Slaves that were later raped or forced into sexual relations with their masters and gave way to children helped to spread the mixture of the island in both countries. It can clearly be stated that Haitians and Dominicans share the same lineage and ancestry.

### **3.5 *Lo Negro y Lo Prieto*: Blackness**

Dominicans associate blackness with being poor as well as having African ancestry. The ideology that somehow Dominicans must escape blackness and therefore escape their association

to their African heritage is maintained throughout the education system as well as the media. It is socially constructed in the clothing that is purchased as well as through the choice of physical appearance. Janelle Chevon Coleman in the *article* “Compositions in Black and Brown: Manifestations of Afro-Latinity in U.S. Black Latino/a Literary Discourse” suggest that many Black Hispanics are aware of their identity, but still attempt to hide it or assimilate within a culture stating that:

Afro-Latinos possess three main strivings. On the one hand, they are aware of their Latin American roots, but on the other, they are pressured to assimilate to the norms established by American society. Their Afrocentric appearances also make them susceptible to double racial discrimination by the dominant power group—usunony Whites or, at times, other Latinos. The tension between these three strivings—the need to assimilate, the connection to Latin American roots, and isolation as a result of racism—results in a unique identity formation (Coleman, 2014).

Although many black Hispanics still struggle with this dilemma, there has been some progress towards the acknowledgement of blackness in Latin America with the Afro-Latino movement. This is not to say that there are not still racial ideologies in place to prolong the movement from making progress. Such ideologies can still be seen in the media through representations of blackness in the news, soap operas, and movies. This stigma personifies blackness as everything that was synonymous with being black during the colonial periods after the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### **3.6 Representations of Blackness in the Dominican News**

There is no doubt that media, specifically television has a profound effect on what its viewers see as real and as fiction. While soap operas offer a romanticized view of reality, the news is portrayed as what is truly happening in the world. Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter in the article “The Perceived Realism of African American Portrayals on Television” suggest that cultivation hypothesis offers an explanation for the way individuals organize social reality and make social judgments of the world, that is, our perceptions of reality are “cultivated” or

developed by what we view in the media (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008). Often this representation of what is real and what is fiction is portrayed from an unfair advantage in which one group of individuals are represented in a positive manner and the other group is not. Misrepresentation of certain groups through media outlets such as the local or international news reinforces already stigmatized stereotypes and ideologies which continues to plague and put them at a disadvantage. Jannette Lake Dates and William Barlow in the book *Split image: African Americans in the mass media* have argued that Black images on television may cause viewers to conceive, alter, or even reinforce their beliefs and opinions about Blacks (Dates & Barlow, 1990). In the Dominican Republic, the local news is where you find out about issues that will affect each individual. Much like the news in the US, often what is reported on has been chosen carefully to reflect a certain image or provoke a certain way of thinking. Also like the news in the US images of whiteness are represented in a higher social class than those representations that are of blackness. Because the Dominican Republic is a nation that's population is comprised of 90 percent blacks and mulattos, one hope to see positive images of blacks and more images of blacks than the US in the news. This however is not the case due to the country's long standing racial ideologies of blackness. *Las mediciones del televisor* every week was checked weekly to see which local news channel had the highest ratings and the most views. In the Dominican Republic, the television show ratings are released every week in order to see what is working and what isn't for the networks. After checking the ratings for the week, a news channel was selected in order to see what type of message is being conveyed to the public. *Telenoticias*, news channel 11 that is presented and produced by Roberto Cavada consistently had that highest ratings and views over the one-month duration that his broadcasts were viewed. Roberto Cavada is a very popular Cuban news reporter and producer of *Telesistema*, who is also the director of the Dominican

newspaper and broadcast *Telenoticias*. The findings from his broadcasts do not imply that Cavada in any way reflect the views the negativity towards blackness.

In watching *telenoticias* channel 11, what was found was that although there were broadcasts done around political affairs, the majority of the broadcast were done around issues in the local neighborhoods, such as crime by Haitians, murders, poverty, and sexual assault on minors. All of these reports were on black Dominicans and they were presented as poor and struggling to maintain their neighborhood due to the natural disaster or the violence. A great example of this was the recent flooding of the island due to severe raining. Although these flood waters impacted many areas of the island to include Puerto Plata, a high tourist area, the only news reports shown were of poor black areas of the country. There were also representations of white individuals, majority being Dominican. When these individuals were being broadcasted, they were not depicted as poor and often were well dressed politicians. The portrayals of violent acts such as violation of minors, murder, drugs, and violent acts of aggression are given the face of black Dominicans in the local news in the Dominican Republic. It can be argued that black Dominicans are not the only individuals committing crimes in the country and that representing black Dominicans as the major law breakers has an effect on those who are not black in the country. Travis L. Dixon and Daniel Linz in the article "Overrepresentation and Underrepresentation of African Americans and Latinos as Lawbreakers on Television News" suggest that if Blacks and Latinos on television news are portrayed as criminals, then White viewers' mental categories involving Blacks and Latinos might develop from these depictions. Taken together, the cultivation hypothesis, an ethnic blame discourse, and social cognitive theories of stereotyping predict that White viewers would come to cognitively link lawbreaking behaviors with African Americans and Latinos as a group if they were overrepresented as

criminals on television news (Dixon & Linz, 2000). It must be stated that more positive news broadcasts of black Dominicans will not only assist in the acknowledgement of blackness in the Dominican Republic, but it will also help to remove the stigma that was placed on blackness through racial ideologies instituted by the Trujillo regime. As long as media outlets such as the local news continue to show representations of blackness as undesirable and synonymous with negativity, it will never be acceptable as a part of the country's identity. Those who are moving forward to progress the Afro-Latino movement and all that it reflects such as blackness as positive, will have to work even harder to break the barriers formed by the media, specifically local news.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

It is not enough that small groups of individuals are now starting to recognize this ancestry and begin Afro- movements within the country if these groups are not able to change the racial ideologies put in place from past regimes. As Juan Antonio Alix states in his poem, there is an abundance of black behind the ears. This blackness that Alix writes about not only demonstrates the African ancestry of the Dominican Republic, but it also supports the lineage that is shared among the two countries which makeup the island. It must be reminded that even the country's most anti-black dictator Rafael Trujillo shared a blood lineage with the country of Haiti and that some of the Dominican Republic's most notable heroes and dignitaries were black such as General Gregorio Luperón. The fact that Trujillo wore white powder every morning to erase his blackness through the performance of whiteness and the whitening of General Luperón also demonstrates the country's desire to erase blackness. There must be more diasporas and reasporas of Dominicans to and from the country in order to reeducate those that have rejected



blackness, such as in the work of prominent Dominicans scholars Silvio Torres-Saillant, Frank Moya Pons, and Ginetta Candelario to name a few.

## CHAPTER 4

### CREOLES, MULATTOES, & INDIANS: CONCLUSIONS AND REDEFINITIONS

#### 4.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1, I used the construction of whiteness to reveal the ideologies that have contributed to the formation of Dominican identity. Using these fundamentals, I argued a step by step process in which Dominicans came to arrive to the notion of Dominican whiteness (*Dominicanidad*). Finally, I revealed how those same racial ideologies are maintained through the educational system and Dominican telenovelas, performing a textual analysis of the telenovela *Trópico* to support my claims. In chapter 2, I reflected on the blackness of the Dominican Republic, putting Dominican whiteness in conversation with blackness. I addressed issues of erasure of the country's black identity as well as resuscitated the country's ties to Haiti and Africa, both through shared land and ancestry. I performed another textual analysis using Dominican news in order to reveal how blackness is devalued and negatively portrayed, which helps to maintain the country's racial ideologies of blackness. I also touched on issues of racial acknowledgement within Dominican diasporas and how Dominicans began to embrace their blackness. While I write these two chapters using a historical format working forward to the analytical artifact, I seek to dismantle the stabilized historical rhetoric of the Dominican identity in this last chapter arguing that the majority of Dominicans are black. I do this by leaning on the discourse within the first two chapters to introduce new ideas about the identity of the creole, indigenous, and mulatto people of Hispaniola. This allows for a different perspective on Dominican identity which eliminates the notion of whiteness. Then, I analyze the results of a DNA test administered in random areas of the Dominican Republic sponsored by the Museum of the Dominican Man in order to further support my claims about the discourse of Dominican

blackness. To explain how it is that I came to this conclusion, I must first explore the gaps in the histories of the three identities of Creole, Indian, and Mulatto while further bringing blackness into conversation with all three. Lastly, this chapter is constructed to mimic Dominican identity, as it is not a simple construction. This is to say that Dominican identity has been constructed through the influences of many different countries who have controlled the nation off and on and more than once.

#### **4.2 *Los Criollos* (The Creoles)**

The first people to claim this identity were those who helped to claim the country's "independence" in 1844. I say the word independence very lightly because in 1861, just 17 years after the independence, Spain was allowed to reoccupy the country which eventually led to the War of Restoration. Dominican Scholar Silvio Torres-Saillant reminds us of this stating:

The nationalist resistance leaders, aware of the decisive importance of blacks and mulattoes, launched a campaign which warned against Spain's plans to restore slavery. A document known as the St. Thomas Manifesto of March 30, 1861 illustrates this clearly. . . . Spain having sent its white troops to secure its newly regained Dominican colony, the color of the invaders contrasted sharply with that of the creoles, giving the war racial overtones (Torres-Saillant, 2010, p. 17).

This played a crucial role in the foundation of Dominican identity because as Saillant notes the troops from Spain were white, but the color of the *Criollos* (Creoles) contrasted sharply. This means that contrary to most research, the Creoles of country were not all white. Prominent scholars such as Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, and Mario Vargas Llosa to name a few have all presented criollos as white Europeans and in doing so have failed to acknowledge the Africans who also comprised this category. It must be noted that race as a color did not come about until after the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This makes it very plausible that *criollos* consisted of blacks as well as white Europeans. Such possibilities can be seen through famous black Europeans before the 18th century such as Alessandro 'il Moro' de Medici, Abram Petrovich Ganibal, Abram

Petrovich Ganibal, Ignatius Sancho, Chevalier de Saint Georges, Olaudah Equiano, and Thomas Alexandre Dumas to name a few. According to the Spanish Caste System, the child of a *Castizo* and a pure blood Spaniard would be considered a *Criollo*. Edwin Williamson addresses this issue in the book *The Penguin History of Latin America* stating:

The word *criollo* (which passed into English as creole by way of French) was originally used to distinguish acculturated blacks, born and bred in Spanish America, from newly imported Africans with no knowledge of Spanish, who were called *negros bozales*, by analogy with savage, unbroken animals requiring a muzzle (*bozal*). . . . if the mestizo daughter of a Spaniard married a white, her children would be considered *castizo* and could revert to juridical whiteness (Williamson, 2009).

This identity can be seen in one of the founding fathers of the Dominican Republic, Francisco del Rosario Sánchez, whose mother was a Spaniard while his father, a mixture of three races, was considered a *Castizo*. It is noteworthy to state that at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the United States began to take interest in the Dominican Republic as well as other countries in the Americas that race began to signify the color of one's skin.

Towards the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the creoles of the island of Hispaniola sought out to establish an identity that would separate themselves from that of the Peninsulars, Spaniards who migrated from Spain. Edwin Williamson reminds us of this, stating that an important feature of culture in this period was the creoles' growing desire to assert their own identity as *Españoles Americanos* in opposition to the Spaniards who had immigrated from the Peninsula (Williamson, 2009). This is what Dominican identity still follows today, inferring that Dominicans are Spaniards mixed with an ancestry of the indigenous peoples, but born on the Island of Hispaniola. This same establishment of a separate identity became one of the main foci for the independence of the Dominican Republic by the founding fathers and it also emphasized a culturally mixed yet united nation.

It is noteworthy to state that the Spanish caste system was not based on race, but on bloodline which eventually became a point of origin retained through color. It is this bloodline which Duarte saw as a separation of the people as well as what bound the people. For many of the founders of the nation, the Spanish caste system had to be enforced more so as what bound the nation in order to establish an identity. Prominent Dominican Scholar Franklin Franco addresses this in his book *Blacks, Mulattos, and the Dominican Nation* stating:

Juan Pablo Duarte, the leading figure in the Dominican independence movement, fought tirelessly against such outward appearances and ideas. His sister, Rosa Duarte, stated in this connection that the principles proclaimed by the Trinitarians included: the law recognizes no vileness except that of talent, aristocracy by blood being permanently abolished as contrary to the Unity of Race (Franco, 2015).

While Duarte may have sought out to unite the nation under the premises that all its inhabitants made one people, it is very possible that other individuals did not agree. For many of the African population that had been forced into assimilation, Spain wasn't part of their ancestry. As mentioned in the previous chapters, the intellectual elites that have monopolized the conceptualization of Dominicanness are the ideological descendants of the Spaniards and "white" creoles who directed the colonial system in Santo Domingo. When they imagine Dominican history and the Dominican people, only the experience of their ancestors comes to mind, the experience of all others, meaning the majority of the population, receiving only tangential, if any, treatment. (Torres-Saillant, 2010, p. 38). This leaves the notion that the Dominicans are the result of Spanish and Indigenous relational intermingling which negates the incorporation of the African slave.

### **4.3 The Indian in Dominican Identity**

While the island's original inhabitants are, what Columbus referred to as Indians, the Indians that help to compose Dominican identity are the product of racial intermixing before the

implementation of the Spanish caste system. It is important to note that I am not dismissing the presence of indigenous ancestry; instead, I am merely redefining it. There are many different views in the Dominican Republic and in the Dominican diaspora as to the construction of the term *Indio* (Indian). It has become such a controversial term that the magazine *La Galería* published a small quote stating:

The term *Indio* is actually quite a misunderstood term. First of all, let's get this straight, before the U.S. occupation in the 1910's the D.R. didn't even do racial censuses as it was too difficult to categorize races. People saw themselves in literal terms of color. The U.S., which was very segregationist/racist, came in and imposed black/white categories that were very hard to implement. We had a U.S. sponsored dictator called Trujillo who tried to push the term *Indio* (Indian/Native American literally) as an identifier for skin color that is between light brown and dark brown. With time, this only became a term associated with skin color but NOT with Native Americans. In other words, there is no linkage between the term *Indio* and being Native American, or us thinking we are natives. The real term used for someone who is Native American or of partial Native-American descent in the D.R. is "*Raza India*" (Indian race), or "*Gente India*" (Indian People) which is different from Indian color (*La Galería*, 2015).

Although, this statement may have been published to console the minds of many Dominicans both in the country and within the diaspora, the truth is that there were documented censuses before 1910, as discussed in the opening of the previous chapter. It must be noted that the term *Indio* was socially constructed under the Trujillo regime with the purpose of separating the country's black/ African heritage. Trujillo enforced the belief that Dominicans were a culture comprised of Spanish and *Taino* Indian ancestry. In fact, many Dominicans see themselves as having this very genetic makeup, which excludes African ancestry. The term *Indio* as it relates to the Dominican Republic was originally created to replace the term *mulatto*, which represents an individual or group of individuals which are of mixed white and black race. Robert Cottrol addresses the usage of the term *Indio* as it relates to an Indian heritage in the book *the Long, Lingering Shadow: Slavery, Race, and Law in the American Hemisphere* stating:

that myth certainly held a strong appeal for Dominican dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, a mulatto who shared the anti-Haitian prejudices of many of his compatriots. Trujillo was particularly active in promoting the myth that Dominicans were descended from *Taino* Indians, requiring that it be taught as history in the nation's schools (Cottrol, 2013).

Dominicans have laid claim to a European and Native Indian ancestry which has afforded them the ability to claim whiteness as their identity. This and the belief that their African ancestry is a myth also allows for the existence of negative portrayals and beliefs about those who are blacks. As stated in the beginning of this chapter many other Caribbean countries have a history that is parallel with that of the Dominican Republic. It must not be forgotten that Spain not only colonized the island of Hispaniola, but also the surrounding Islands of the Greater and Lesser Antilles. What this means is that the inhabitants of these islands: the Kalinagos (Caribs), Guanahatabeys, and the *Tainos* (Arawaks) all had similar histories. However, the people which comprise the other islands in the Antilles consider themselves black while Dominicans do not. To complicate this matter further, it must be restated that after the demise of the *Tainos*, the King and Queen of Spain ordered that Indians be shipped into the Dominican Republic from the West Indies. Franklin Franco reminds us of this importation of Indians to the island in his book *Blacks, Mulattos, and the Dominican Nation* stating a Royal Ordinance issued in Seville in July 1511 permitted Indians to be brought to Hispaniola, from islands where there is no gold, and in December of the same year there was a further ruling that Carib Indians may be enslaved (Franco, 2015). This importation of Indians included the Kalinagos which were not *Tainos*, but Caribs. As previously stated, the Spanish conquest soon lead to the demise of the Indian population and within fifty years of Columbus arrival the majority of the population was killed or died off. This is not to say that Dominicans do not have any Indian ancestry; instead it is to resurrect the ancestral history that the majority of the country shares but neglects, the Afro.

The Africans that were imported into the Indies, specifically the island of Hispaniola began to mix with the remaining Indians and European conquerors. Most of the Africans even began to follow some of the native customs and traditions. These can be seen in the history of the Garifuna. Once called the Garinagu, this group of Africans mixed with the Kalinago of St. Vincent and began to live as Carib Indians following their traditions and adopting their language. Samuel Wilson addresses this collaborative relationship in the book the *Indigenous People of the Caribbean* stating that Africans and indigenous peoples were united in being tyrannized by Europeans and saw the benefits of collaboration, as the emergence of groups such as the black Caribs suggests (Wilson, 1997). Surely if the African slaves were mixing and adopting indigenous peoples (Indians) traditions in other parts of the Antilles, it can also be said that it took place in the island of Hispaniola, part of the Greater Antilles. Prominent Africana scholar Ivan Van Sertima suggest a different history in the book *They Came Before Columbus: the African presence in Ancient America*. Leaning on the 1975 report of a Smithsonian Institution team Sertima suggest that the Caribs may have already mixed with blacks before the arrival of Columbus reminding us of the find of two Negroid male skeletons in a grave in the U.S. Virgin Islands stating:

This grave had been used and abandoned by the Caribs long before the coming of Columbus. Soil from the earth layers in which the skeletons were found was dated to A.D. 1250. A study of the teeth showed a type of dental mutilation characteristic of early African cultures, and clamped around the wrist of one of the skeletons was a clay vessel of pre-Columbian Indian design (Sertima, 2003).

The truth of the history of the island is uncertain, but it is important to note because Dominicans negotiate their identity based on the premise of a historical and ancestral link to the island's indigenous inhabitants. It must be noted that even Trujillo saw the country as a nation of blacks



and therefore started a campaign to whiten the nation by enticing those who came in from Europe with free land to take residence in the country.

It is important to state that the arrival of Columbus happened over 593 years ago, and like the histories of the other lands in the Americas, the indigenous people were those who first encountered the Europeans. However, with the introduction of African slaves into the Americas, it becomes less plausible that the indigenous populations remained intact without African assimilation. This is not to say that the indigenous population did not retain some of its traditions, instead that an important part of their history has been negated. Marie Gillespie suggest in the book *Television, Ethnicity, and Cultural Change* that culture is constructed by those whom we encounter and that culture is constantly changing. She states that:

Cultural change is, in a sense, a tautological term in any case. All cultures are lived and therefore always in flux. In fact, all cultures are hybrid, syncretic, creolized [*sic*], or impure. Culture, by its very nature, is changing in encounters with others, although it is also commonly reified as shared possession, as purportedly objective heritage (Gillespie, 1995).

If the indigenous inhabitants (Indians) died off 50 years after the arrival of Columbus, leading to the formation of a country of white Europeans and black slaves, then those indigenous peoples who may have survived did so through the mixing with black slaves and white Europeans. This is to say that those who may have claimed the indigenous identity was the product of a Spaniard and Indian (*Mestizo*) or a black slave and Indian (*Zambos/ Grifos*). It must be noted that the Spanish caste system was not established until between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century. This means that between 1601 and the 1800s, the Spanish caste system was put in place in the new world. Before its creation and establishment, individuals of mixed ancestry had no formal way of establishing identity. If the children of a Spaniard and an Indian was not claimed by the Spaniard, he/she would live as an Indian. The same could be said for the offspring of an

Indian and a black slave. History tells us that Columbus set sail in 1492 in which he arrived in the new world to be greeted by the indigenous population. This leaves almost 109 years that the Spaniards and Europeans interacted with the indigenous peoples. Accounting for the 50 years that left the Indians dead, that leaves 59 years for the offspring of the island's native inhabitants who mixed with the Spaniards and Africans to assume or assimilate the identity of the Island indigenous population. Irving Rouse addresses the identity of the *Tainos* after the arrival of Columbus in the book *the Tainos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus* stating:

The people who claim Indian ancestry tend to assume that it was exclusively *Taino*, yet, as we have seen, increasing numbers of Indians were brought as slaves from other parts of the Caribbean area. These non-local Indians could easily have interbred with the Spaniards because many of them became household servants. The biological composition of the contemporary population has also been modified by intermarriage between Spaniards and Africans (Rouse, 1992).

Although the Spanish later imported Indians from other parts of the Caribbean, it can also be stated that those Indians may have very well been *Mestizos* and *Zambos/ Grifos* as well.

Hispaniola was the site of the first arrival by Columbus whose inhabitants were indigenous and later African. It is through this history that Dominicans negate their African ancestry and celebrate their European and Indian heritage. What is noteworthy is that the other islands in the Americas to include some parts of the continents of North and South America do not negotiate their identities in the same manner as Dominicans. On the continents of North and South America alone there were more indigenous peoples than on the island of Hispaniola and yet the majority of the blacks recognized their black heritage.

#### **4.4 The Discourse of Science and Identity**

Dominicans have been able to deny their blackness under the false notion that their ancestral heritage was comprised mainly of white Europeans and the *Taino* Indians. Those that

have acknowledged a mixture which also includes the African ancestry, often diminish its importance. Dominican identity has become such a major focus within the country that in 2016 the Dominican Academy of History, the National Geographic Society, and the University of Pennsylvania, with the collaboration of the University of Iberoamerica performed random DNA test throughout the country on 1000 Dominicans. The results were published academically by the four universities with the collaboration of the Museum of the Dominican Man.

The results were as follows: the Dominican population possesses 39 percent European ancestry, 49 percent African ancestry, and 4 percent pre-Columbian ancestry (acento.com.do). This eliminates the notion of whiteness being the dominant ancestry within the Dominican identity because the dominant ancestry is that of the African. It is important to note that the 4 percent pre-Columbian ancestry does not imply that it is from the *Tainos*. As mentioned previously the *Tainos* died off and were replaced with other Indians, *Mestizos*, *Zambos*, *Grifos*. *El Museo del Hombre Dominicano* even acknowledges the presence of other Indians in the exhibits which are displayed throughout the Museum. Ginetta Candelario reminds us of this when describing the museum stating that, the first two halls present the predecessors of the *Tainos* encountered by the Spanish colonizers in 1492 (Candelario, 2007).

After the public announcement of the ancestral DNA results, many Dominicans both within the country and within the diaspora began to comment on the findings. Some of the discussions around the idea that Dominicans were black led to conversations of Haitian identity.

One individual stated:

*Prietos es lo que somos. Eso no nos quita nada, así que a toda honra. Aclaración: Eso no quiere decir que somos haitianos, porque nos diferencia, más que un color de piel, una cultura de valores y creencias abismal. Mucho cuidado con confundirse.*

(Blacks are what we are. That does not take anything from us, so to all honor.

Clarification: That does not mean that we are Haitians, because it differentiates us, more

than a skin color, an abysmal culture of values and beliefs. Be very careful about getting confused.)

Despite the national discourse of the country's most recognized institution on Dominican identity, many Dominicans still prefer to relegate blackness to the identity of the "other," specifically the Haitian. On August 10, 2016, the Dominican television show *ReXpuestas* addressed these negative statements towards the results of the DNA test stating:

*En la población dominicana predomina la ascendencia genética africana. Sin embargo, día a día muchos son testigos de episodios de discriminación, donde las personas rechazan y juzgan a otras por su tez oscura, sin tomar en cuenta que la misma responde a una realidad de herencia genética que todos los dominicanos tenemos. . . . de generación en generación se ha transmitido la idea de que el color blanco es sinónimo de honestidad, buen estatus social y belleza. Mientras que el color negro es relacionado con factores negativos y pobreza; planteamiento que es completamente falso, y que ha sido la base de muchas protestas (Féliz, 2017).*

(In the Dominican population, African genetic ancestry predominates. However, day by day many people are witnessing episodes of discrimination, where people reject and judge others by their dark complexion, without taking into account that it responds to a reality of genetic inheritance that all Dominicans have. . . . From generation to generation the idea has been conveyed that the color white is synonymous with honesty, good social status and beauty. While the color black is related to negative factors and poverty; Which is completely false, and which has been the basis of many protests) (Féliz, 2017).

The use of science to bolster racism has been used for many years to justify race.<sup>8</sup> It is not my intention to state that science in anyway has justified Dominican identity through the DNA test; instead, to inform what was the national discourse around its results. It is not what is found scientifically that can stand in for a culture's identity. It must be acknowledged that although science defines Dominicans as Black, it is not the DNA of a culture that defines the culture's identity. Blackness is about more than the color of a person's skin although skin color is one factor in its social construction.

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<sup>8</sup> See John Jackson and Nadine Weidman, *Race Racism and Science*

The use of science devalues blackness<sup>9</sup> and it must not be forgotten that race is a social construct which science has played more than a large role in its justification.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, one must look to culture in order to understand the blackness within Dominican identity. It is present in the food that is eaten such as sancocho, the national dish which was originally created by African slaves. It can be seen and felt in the Palos music and dance. It can be heard in the African vernacular language mixture with which Dominicans add *Sabor* (flavor or style) to the Spanish language. Without blackness, Dominicans cease to exist because blackness makes up such a large integral piece of the Dominican identity.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

In this thesis, I have argued that Dominicans negotiate their identities based on their past interactions with the United States and the racial ideologies instituted through a manipulated history forged by the country's dictator Trujillo. I have focused on key moments within the Dominican history that have allowed for the establishment of Dominicanidad (Dominican whiteness as an identity) as well as the rejection of blackness within Dominican identity. Lastly, I have reviewed the creation of the *Mulato* and the myth of the *Indio* in order to resuscitate the black identity of the Dominican. When Trujillo imposed the term *Indio* on a nation that had been searching for its identity since 1844, he allowed for the eraser of all of the suffering and history that accompanied the nation's black identity. The usage of the term *Indio* expresses that blackness never existed within the Dominican nation. That what happened to the black slaves was of no consequence to the making of the Dominican identity, because it disassociates Dominicans from the very idea of blackness. The portrayal of Dominican identity within the

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<sup>9</sup> See Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve*

<sup>10</sup> See Samuel Morton, *Crania Americana*

country continues to affirm and maintain the same ideologies that Trujillo established during the time of his dictatorship. Even today, Dominicans carry their Identification cards with the syllabi “I” for Indian. And until very recent, the letter “N” was forbidden; only occasionally someone may be recorded as “*Negro*” without the euphemisms (Usanna, 2010).

Implementing and maintaining these racial ideologies requires Dominicans to continuously iterate that the presence of African and blackness does not pertain to their history. The negation of the negro can be seen as a kind of performance of identity (Suriel, 2005), when the majority of the Dominican population see a black person every time they look in the mirror. Scholars such as Frank Moya Pons, Franklin Franco, Silvio Torres-Saillant, and Ginetta Candelario to name a few have all made it clear what Juan Antonio Alix had been saying for years, that Dominicans are black. This is not something that just happened nor is it something that can be erased with whitening skin creams. The physical characteristics of a person of color cannot be completely erased. Although many Dominicans have tried to eliminate their ties to blackness, they soon find out that within the diaspora they are black. This is not to negate the activist work that is being done to acknowledge the blackness of the Dominican Republic within the country.<sup>11</sup> It is to merely acknowledge that the activist work starts or is most prevalent within the Dominican diaspora.<sup>12</sup> This is due to the long history that surrounds ideologies of blackness within the country as addressed in this thesis.

It is not my intention to devalue the contributions that were made by the white Europeans in the construction of Dominican identity whether negative or positive. Nor is it my intention to

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<sup>11</sup> Although there are activists within the Dominican Republic that promote blackness, there has been no luck finding information on them. Further research to be explored through on the ground ethnographies.

<sup>12</sup> See Silvio Torres-Saillant, Amanda Alcantara, Dorothy Bell Ferrer, Ynanna Djehuty, Junot Diaz, & Taina Mirabal

negate any form of indigenous ancestry that may exist within the composition of Dominican identity. What I intent to do with this work is to educate those who are lacking the knowledge of their Dominican identity. For the information that comes out of this work, it is my hope that it will be shared and discussed. The construction of whiteness within the context of Dominican identity has allowed for an understanding of how Dominicans perform their identities in relation to the outside world. This includes the ways that the Dominican identity is presented in the media (television, radio, and the news) to be more specific. The denial, acknowledgement, and misrepresentation has allowed for many of the gaps in the construction of Dominican identity to be filled, bringing blackness in conversation with whiteness. The creole and mulatto has established an identity for the Dominican nation. Leaning on scholars to explore the rich histories of the nation that have be forced into the shadows of Dominican identity discourse.

It is important to state that Dominican Republic today, is comprised of many different cultural backgrounds that came out of Trujillo's invitation to many other countries to allow their citizens to take up residence in the country. The work that I have compiled in this thesis by no way suggests that these cultures are not Dominican. The process of acculturation and syncretism would not allow for such a discussion. Instead what I am emphasizing is that the practices of whitening the nation are still in use today, using the constant influx of migration into the country to whiten Dominican identity. This is important because Haitians are still facing deportation and denaturalization in the Dominican Republic because of their black identity. What complicates matters even further is that the black identity that the people of Haiti recognize is the same identity that is shared historically throughout the island. I want to be clear in stating that the racial ideologies of blackness that are viewed as a norm in the Dominican Republic is not something that Dominicans imposed on themselves, but it is also not something that they,

meaning the country as a whole, have tried so hard to eradicate. Activist measures on the ground to redefine Dominican identity have limited success in the country thus, depending on Dominicans within the diaspora. Dominicans essentially having some agency in the thought process and the growth of the racial ideologies put in place, as seen with the denaturalization of Dominican born Haitians.

The negotiation of the Dominican identity becomes problematic when all factors of their history are not being considered. It is not enough for scholars to focus on one particular aspect while neglecting another in the hopes of understanding how this identity became the norm. The acknowledgement of a black and European ancestry is the first step to achieving a concrete analysis. Knowing that the indigenous population died off 50 years after the arrival of Columbus due to a genocidal project of settler colonialism, and that the Spanish caste system was established between 1601 and the 1800s, scholars need to focus their efforts on the population that replaced or assimilated the identity of the *Tainos*. The next step would be to acknowledge the continued influence of the United States within the country and how the history of the encounters of the two countries have shaped not only Dominican identity, but also identities of other countries in the Americas. It is within this discourse that Dominicans will be able to negotiate and celebrate their national identity.



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