

Sugar and Slaves

Integrated financial resources were quite practical because an *ingenio* required both a large amount of operating capital and a considerable supply of the crop itself. Both components, especially for the majority of the early planters on Hispaniola, were well removed from any single productive capability. Moreover, there was the consistently high volume of forced slave labor, a need that absolutely had to be filled if the industry were to survive at all. As sugar cultivation continued its rapid expansion, the industry demanded additional manual labor—literally hands—to gather the cane and work the crude machinery. With the near total elimination of the native Taino, the *encomienda* was replaced outright by a slave system with complete dependence upon African captives. During these opening years of the island's sugar production, the undertaking was rather ambitious, offering promise of substantial economic wealth for the untiring planter. At first, cane grinders were a basic manual wooden press operated by rotary animal traction (oxen or horses). This type of primitive sugarmill was known as a *trapiche*. Gradually, in those areas favored by the trade winds, stone windmills replaced these less efficient methods. The higher-efficiency mill, with initial export capacity of approximately three thousand *arrobas* (about thirty-eight short tons), was operated by hydraulic energy. By the year 1526, there were a reported nineteen *ingenios*, requiring the importation of about five hundred African slaves annually, operating in Hispaniola.³

The hydraulic mills experienced impressive technological advances as the Spanish Crown, naturally desirous of high yields, tended to underwrite the new industry. Because of its sophistication, the technology was brought into the Caribbean from Western Europe, mainly from Italy and Holland. In terms of further offshore dependency, the refining process took place in the sugar refineries, also located in Europe. Even today, such processing is often completed elsewhere than on the island. Production on the whole—even with the new technology—remained relatively simple. After crushing the raw cane and purifying the resultant liquid with lime, clay, or ashes, evaporation occurred in massive iron pans directly over constantly burning wood fires. Refinement consisted of melting the crystals, boiling the mixture, and then recrystallizing the sugar particles.

Sugar and Colonial Politics

The *ingenios* soon became unquestionably important and influential socioeconomic enclaves for the evolving Spanish settlement. The relative political clout of the island's towns was conditioned proportionately by the incidence of established sugarmills in the area. The mills were not merely centers of production, but were the hubs of communication and necessary social interaction as well. There were also strategically located official military units, garrisons, which guaranteed protection of the colony's economic interests. These military installations factored heavily in the mill's importance. Even today in La República Dominicana, the location of such units adheres to the traditional pattern of juxtaposing these two strategic components.

These mills would thus be transformed into a fortified defense against insurgency—uprisings by native groups, attacks from runaway slave bands, raids by pirates. Such unwelcome activity was gaining in frequency and intensity during this period. Overall sugar production remained appreciably high until about 1580, even given the serious disruptions by slave rebellions and major crop failures in the intervening years. Documented reports indicate that between eighty-six thousand and 100,000 *arrobas* were being exported to Sevilla by the time of the final phase of the flourishing sugar industry.⁴ Without question, Hispaniola depended upon the profitable sugar industry as its chief source of wealth. By the mid-seventeenth century, Saint Domingue and Brazil had emerged as the main sugar producers of the entire world.

Sugar's Decline

The decline of *azúcar* as the supreme economic base during this early period in the cultural development of the island was attributed to several key factors. In our previous discussions about the components of Hispaniola's cultural formation, we mentioned the flaw of an economy built exclusively upon forced slave labor, producing ruinous long-term consequences. Additionally, a prosperity founded and consistently dependent upon crop export would prove temporary. Another equally important circumstance was the rigid character of Spanish colonialism. Spain, despite its imperial status at the time, was really quite provincial in its concepts of the mercantile system, and lacked altogether an influ-

ential, well-organized bourgeoisie such as that which existed in England, France, or Holland—European countries that would prove later to be formidable economic and territorial rivals in the Caribbean. Consequently, even though Flanders and the Low Countries (Belgium and Holland), during the pending decline of Hispaniola's early sugar industry, were also part of Spain's imperial realm, Spain did not allow these territories to sell sugar and sugar byproducts to other European countries. Holland was actually trading aggressively with the whole of Northern Europe and could very readily have sold sugar from Hispaniola to this European region. However, the Spanish Crown had the rule that

ningún territorio español de América podía comerciar directamente con otro país, aunque se tratara de uno que era parte del imperio español.⁵

(no Spanish territory in the Americas could trade directly with another country, even though it—such trade—involved one that was part of the Spanish Empire.)

So, whereas Hispaniola could have had a ready and open market for its sugar and its sugar byproducts, it did not because of this royal edict restricting both navigation rights and export sales beyond Spain itself. American commerce was severely monopolized by Sevilla's Merchant Guild, or Casa de Contratación. Failure to secure a lucrative outside market delivered a crippling blow to the island's sugar oligarchy, which was fast developing as the focal point of the society's sociopolitical response to Hispaniola's colonial status. Being able to engage in international trade, expanding import-export commerce, and affecting cultural exchanges would have signaled the clear emergence of a firmly based local nucleus of individuals with powerful and strategic ties to potential allies in Europe.

Looming Threats

As it was, a local power base formed nevertheless, with somewhat awesome prestige and influence. From those rudimentary stages of limited sugar production in La Vega, the industry in time expanded with hurricane-force velocity throughout most areas of Hispaniola. *Ingenios* were operating successfully in San Juan de Maguana, Azua,

Ocoa (today known as San Cristóbal), Higüey, Bonaó, Puerto Plata, and of course on the outskirts of the capital city Santo Domingo. The tendency developed early to concentrate the establishment of sugarmills in a special zone located between Santo Domingo and Azua. Such concentration, the bulk of which was constructed during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, placed the mill within easy reach of the main port, Santo Domingo, for shipment to Spain. These operations were built on the banks of the Rivers Ozama, Haina, Nizao, Nigua, Ocoa, and Yaque del Sur. The seat of social authority in Hispaniola would rest with the mill owners and administrators, all wielding their considerable power from the enviable comfort of their bountiful mill operations, and not from public offices located in the capital.

However, there were certain very real forces that would present a threat to this comfort. Within the total island society itself there were two existing enclaves competing for space and unbounded freedom from restrictions, harsh or otherwise. The primary element, the larger of the two, consisted of the ambitious settlers and struggling small farmers, influential and prosperous planters, underpaid colonial administrators and officials, merchants, slaves, and ambivalent freedmen and -women of color. This first group comprised the formal colonial structure—the structured, orderly colony as a whole. The second group, by contrast, was not regarded as the true colonists on the grounds that this element did not accept or respect the edicts, rules, restrictions, and general regulatory impositions of the Crown, located in far off Madrid. This group elected to operate their affairs, their lives outside the restrictive margin of colonial order and management. It was characterized by a wide range of types: from the highly sophisticated and secret community of *cimarrones* to the boisterous, often violent and marauding, assemblage of *bucaneros* and *piratas* described earlier.

Notes

1. Frank Moya Pons, *Manual de Historia Dominicana*, p. 32.
2. Roberto Cassá, *Historia Social y Económica de la República Dominicana*, p. 67.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
5. Juan Bosch, *Composición Social Dominicana*, p. 40.

20

Invasion from the Northern Colossus

One of the most hotly debated issues concerning La República Dominicana, especially in contemporary times, is the controversial and onerous United States military intervention and occupation of 1916–1924. In fact, as we mentioned earlier, most of the reference material in English about the island nation deals almost exclusively with rather isolated aspects of the country such as the instances of North American military intervention. Dominicans themselves, whether serious commentators and analysts of history or ordinary citizens engaged in a fast-paced game of dominoes, still argue passionately about exactly why the United States invaded their small island. The Dominican Republic without its western neighbor Haiti is truly a tiny country. A mere 18,800 square miles, Quisqueya could easily fit twice inside the borders of either Nebraska or Kansas, with room to spare. There are more people living in metropolitan Philadelphia—some nine and a half million—than the total population of the island. What possible threat did this minuscule Caribbean nation pose to the colossal United States that military intervention was deemed necessary? What circumstances, real or imagined, warranted the total seizure of the country's customs operations, as well as the takeover of other internal financial institutions? And then for the United States Marines to remain for a period of eight years there—why?

Expanding United States Hegemony

Even the most cursory overview of North American entanglement in the domestic affairs of various Latin American countries after the

Spanish-American War (1898) reveals the evolving of a steadily aggressive interventionist policy. So the case of the Dominican Republic in 1916 was certainly not an altogether unrelated incident in the total scheme of things. The United States' presence in the Caribbean Basin became immediately prominent upon official North American acquisition of the tropical island paradises of Cuba and Puerto Rico. The very brief but bitter Spanish-American War ended with the vanquished Spanish Crown having to surrender Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Pacific islands of the Philippines to United States jurisdiction.

These territories subsequently were transformed into colonial dependencies of Washington, D.C. As the Northern Colossus penetrated ever more deeply into the internal affairs of the individual islands of the Caribbean, the more it was perceived—at least by Washington—that the route of military intervention in the region was essential for maintaining order and stability there. The United States military invasion and accompanying occupation of 1916–1924 in Quisqueya, therefore, was merely a key component of the rapidly emerging pattern of expanding North American political and economic hegemony in the Caribbean and Latin America generally. According to leading proponents of the widening role of North American capitalism during the era following the Spanish-American War, economic stability was regarded as the single basic tenet upon which any thoroughly modern, sophisticated nation could successfully be erected. All across the region, the United States had been fast positioning itself as mentor and master in terms of the ideal example for political and economic maturity. Direct United States intervention was thus inevitable once policymakers in Washington convinced themselves that solely by means of responsibly managing the finances of these countries could it then be feasible to restructure the existing political conduct—considered immature by North Americans—in the Caribbean.

Inter-American Relations: An Era of Shame

Upon examining inter-American relations from a historical perspective, one will readily find, without exaggeration, that such relations have been tarnished by gross misunderstanding and much misinformation, constantly resurfacing hostilities and antagonisms, dangerous suspicions, and mistrust over a rather lengthy period. In large measure and in a very shameful fashion, the United States in its dealing with the

nations of the Caribbean and Latin American, historically, has been propelled by a two-pronged objective: (1) to prevent the entry into the hemisphere of any competing economic rivals, and (2) to guarantee and secure the politico-economic hegemony of the United State alone in the region. Therefore, it has been perceived as absolutely vital that governments in the region be maintained as stable and dependable allies that could safeguard North American economic interests. Initially it was a matter of simply developing trade and financial investments; but these efforts were hampered by severe limitations imposed by belligerent European nations with similar motives.

Earlier, in 1823, after recognizing the sovereignty of the newly independent Hispanic nations,¹ and in part after preventing designs by either Spain or its European cohorts to attempt acquisition anew of American territories, United States President James Monroe issued a kind of restraining order. The Monroe Doctrine (1822), admit some commentators, has profoundly influenced United States foreign policy in Latin America by proclaiming its serious opposition to European intervention in the hemisphere. This doctrine established the very foundation of United States continental hegemony, clearly expressing the idea of political spheres of influence. Not unnoticed, however, were the frequently repeated instances of shameless hypocrisy on the part of the doctrine's creators. The United States itself appears to have been left unchecked regarding similar condemned acts of intervention.² North American commercial and political interests completely ignored the restraints. Never referred to as an act of intervention were such subsequent actions as the series of events leading to the United States-Mexico War (1846), Puerto Rican annexation of 1898, or the takeover of Cuba between 1901 and 1934.

The Big Stick and Dollar Diplomacy

It is generally conceded that the American public figure most closely associated with United States expansion into the Caribbean and Latin America, at the cost of regional sovereignty, is Theodore Roosevelt, the Rough Rider. Under President Roosevelt, the United States government began fostering the view that it alone had an absolutely legitimate right to control the region of the Caribbean and Central America. Aggressive economic investment or political and military pressures would achieve this hegemony. This same Rough Rider in 1904 redefined the

Monroe Doctrine by justifying those so-called pressures when he declared that it was "the duty of the United States to intervene in those wretched banana republics in order to protect and assure the economic investments and interests of the civilized nations."³ This novel interpretation of the original doctrine, the Roosevelt Corollary, thus introduced the period that became known as the Era of the Big Stick. Typical of the period was the frequency and degree of violent military interventions executed by the United States government. After Roosevelt, United States Presidents William Howard Taft and Woodrow Wilson both continued this interventionist policy in the region. The Caribbean Sea was fast being converted into the North American Sea. Taft's program focused on substituting dollars for bullets and was a program designed to insure regional stability by means of rather hard-to-ignore economic incentives. Taft's particular reading of the Roosevelt Corollary became the cornerstone of what was called "dollar diplomacy." La República Dominicana, among several other countries, was a classic example of just how initial North American private investment capital in the region almost overnight positioned the United States into easily monopolizing the national economies of these indebted nations.

President Wilson, for instance, promoted his own personal philosophy regarding how and what should be the specific nature of government in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. True liberty and democracy for all the countries in the region were not the lofty ideals allowed for determining the direction of United States foreign policy there. Under a variety of pretexts, United States military forces intervened most violently in Latin America: Panamá (1903-1914 and again in 1918-1920), Cuba (1898-1908 and 1917-1922), Nicaragua (1912-1925 and 1926-1933), Mexico (1914 and 1918), Haiti (1915-1934), and finally the Dominican Republic (1916-1924). So for the first three decades of this century, the United States had acquired supreme domination of a major portion—actually the lion's share—of the national economies of several strategic countries in the region.

This domination, perhaps most especially in the Caribbean, established a debilitating and certainly humiliating state of political dependency and subservience of these nations to the will and might of the northern colossus. Finally by 1933, another Roosevelt, a cousin to the former Rough Rider, Franklin D. Roosevelt, tried improving relations between the United States and Latin America. His Good Neighbor

Policy was designed to reject direct intervention into the domestic affairs of neighbor states. Repealing several notoriously offensive measures and withdrawing the Marines from occupied areas, Roosevelt sought to build a positive new spirit of cooperation and unity among the hemisphere's family of sovereign nations. Nevertheless, the utter shallowness and continued hypocrisy of this new focus became apparent with Roosevelt's approval and support of strong economic investment in the region. Roosevelt declared gone forever the earlier days of dollar diplomacy. Now more aggressively than previously, however, economic expansion was the clear and single objective. Of course, before such expansion could occur, totally assured social and political stability had to be solidly in place. Before any meaningful progress and modernization could be realized, the sociopolitical climate had to be most favorable.

The United States Marines in La República Dominicana

The assassination of the Dominican President Ulises Lilís Heureaux (1899), in addition to creating a leadership vacuum that pushed the nation to the brink of yet another revolution, seriously aggravated an already uneasy financial dilemma. The country was plagued by heavy financial indebtedness to various European creditor-nations, all demanding immediate repayment of outstanding loans. The creditors were threatening armed invasion of the island in order to collect their debts. At this precise moment, the United States stepped in with calculated strategies to prevent a foreign government (i.e., any of the European creditor-nations) from invading the hemisphere. Washington would act as a kind of collection agent for the foreign creditors. The United States was successful in exerting pressure on the Dominican government to permit American financial experts to assume total responsibility for the customs revenue of La República Dominicana. According to American officials, such a measure would satisfy the assertions of foreign bondholders that the *dominicanos* were "financially inept and irresponsible."

By the time Juan Isidro Jimenes was inaugurated as the new Dominican president (1914), a now irritated United States had imposed additional reforms on the Dominican government.⁴ This was without question a government that the North Americans had assisted very intensively in creating. Among the amended list of proposals tailored

to restructure the island's government was one in particular that prompted naked outrage in the Dominican Congress. This measure stipulated that a North American official be named director of public works in the island. Another bitterly contentious measure called for a special financial adviser, again another so-called American expert, to assist the Dominican president. This adviser would actually be responsible for shaping and drafting the national budget, which would then be enforced by requiring the adviser's personal authorization for each listed expenditure! Still another humiliating stipulation in the new set of structured reforms concerned the all-important customs receivership. This receivership was broadened by means of an entirely new and essential function: collecting and controlling all the internal revenue of the country.

Finally, the United States demanded that the Dominican government disband its armed forces and replace them with a national police force—commanded by North American officers. When the Dominican Congress vociferously refused to accept these drastic proposals, and after repeated threats by the United States to dispatch armed troops to force compliance and implementation of the reforms, the United States Marines finally landed in Santo Domingo in April and May of 1916. Occupation of Quisqueya was under way, with ominous warships sailing to Puerto Plata, Sánchez, and San Pedro de Macoris. The United States military government was set up under Marine Captain Harry Knapp. A parade of successive North American military governors was appointed to La República Dominicana with names like Anderson, Pendleton, Fuller, Snowden, and Robinson—none of whom, by the way, spoke a word of Spanish!

Remaking Dominican Society

The United States military government under the newly appointed military governor Knapp attempted to remake Dominican society from top to bottom, redefining and redesigning various programs to be executed on the island. These measures were meant to transform the country's political, economic, and social life. Any discernible degree of social discontent had to be quelled; any flames of insurrection had to be immediately extinguished. From the very moment that the occupation forces landed at Santo Domingo, the country had lost its autonomy. The United States was quite secure in its perceived mission of some-

thing called Manifest Destiny—a vague, self-professed notion of destined grandeur coupled with the obsession for territorial expansion. The northern colossus remained steadfast in its conviction—as it saw it—of manifesting the moral obligation to police and dominate the hemisphere, and also presumably to instruct the Latin Americans in self-governance and fiscal responsibility following a prescribed North American formula, until which time the North Americans regarded the Latins as having *advanced to maturity*.

One of the first measures enacted by the occupying government to ensure total control of La República Dominicana was to disarm the general population, prohibiting the citizenry from carrying armed weapons. If nothing else, some commentators have remarked, this action was effective in bringing about an end to the violent local wars among rival caudillos. Another enactment was local press censorship, thus putting an end to public hostile expression against the United States' military presence in the island.

In addition to the general resistance mounted by *dominicanos* who populated the major urban centers around the nation, a most spectacular resistance movement grew out of the popular antagonisms that had been long smoldering among the masses of inhabitants in the rural eastern region of the country.

In the province of El Seibo, in particular, the *campesinos* waged a tactical guerrilla war against the new foreign invaders. What was noteworthy about the character of this resistance campaign here (as opposed to the other, urban middle-class sector) was that this rural sector was made up of a heterogeneous sociopolitical cadre, unified by the common repudiation of the unwelcome presence of foreign military troops, the common enemy. The study of Dominican resistance during this period is a very pivotal component in the complete story of the occupation because the resistance itself is so closely tied to the military government. The opposition campaign became so strong that it seriously impeded the overall operation of the military regime, subsequently forcing the invaders to act upon definite plans to withdraw. Sugarcane workers, along with other agricultural laborers in the eastern region, were most defiant against the sophisticated weaponry and professional military training of the invasion forces. However, for all the technological superiority possessed by the United States forces, to their disadvantage they understood neither their Dominican target nor the nature of the war being fought.

The resistance effort of the rural eastern region was aided by certain outstanding notions about the region itself. The greatest number of *ingenios* was located here. This region had been the hardest hit by the effects of the earlier expansion of sugarcane estate owners, most of whom were foreigners. Even most of the export-import trade was in the hands of foreign ownership. North American and other foreign sugarmills were being converted into elitist capitalist enclaves, wholly insensitive to and disconnected from the lives of the masses of field laborers living in the area. Smaller sugarcane cultivators were rapidly being absorbed by the larger, better financed sugar producers. The smaller regional farmers became little more than peones (common day laborers), cane cutters, or even idle vagrants in many instances. Of special note in the new socioeconomic circumstances at this juncture throughout the eastern zone was the increasing degree of foreign domination of the region's industries—again, sugarcane and its byproducts. Outright disdain and resentment greeted this foreign domination. The anger grew out of the widely held opinion that monopoly of the local economy by foreigners was clearly an overt attempt to create a kind of neocolonial dependency. Most foreign investment, often eagerly encouraged by the Dominican governments over the years, in setting up sugarmills to supply the market of the investor-nation (or for export only) did nothing to stimulate development of local entrepreneurship. Consequently, there was no demonstrated concern or sensitivity on the part of these foreign investors for local economic growth or even employment.

Guerrilla Warfare in the East

Two crucial elements predating the North American invasion were present in the eastern zone that help further explain the growing hostility and resentment of most of that region's inhabitants. The zone was first of all in the midst of the economic transformation described above. The entire area changed quite rapidly from one that had long been dominated by traditional subsistence agriculture and grazing into a modern, capitalist-oriented sugar-producing center. Secondly, the unusual political system traditionally prevalent in the region was a key factor in trying to understand the nature of the resistance movement there. The archaic political model of the traditional caudillo system, a relic of nineteenth-century Latin America, might describe political power in the East. Long remaining out of the mainstream focus of progress and modernization that factored into the development of the

Republic's more sophisticated urban centers like Santo Domingo, Santiago, or Puerto Plata, that portion of the rural eastern zone only minutes outside the important urban hub of San Pedro de Macoris was ruled by very powerful, influential caudillos. These militaristic strongmen operated with unopposed authority and frequently by violent intimidation. They enjoyed a significantly wide popular allegiance among the inhabitants of very carefully delineated territorial boundaries.

Los Gavilleros

So with clear reasons, for five and a half blood-soaked years, the United States Marines were totally unsuccessful in controlling most of the eastern half of the occupied República Dominicana. The *campesinos* engaged in a formidable guerrilla insurrection in the east that nearly wrecked the reform campaign being implemented across the entire country. This impressive rural guerrilla movement was called *los gavilleros*, a word in the Dominican cultural context meaning rural bandit. But were these patriotic resistance fighters really bandits? Above all else, according to the island's most respected historians, *los gavilleros* were fiercely nationalistic, authentic Dominicans who were determined to reclaim the sovereignty of their beloved Quisqueya. Their goal was simple and direct: to end the United States occupation of the island. This was not unlike the goal of the original sandinista movement in Nicaragua some years later, in the 1920s.⁵

Many of the men and women who fought with the caudillo-led bands of *gavilleros* were laborers from the *bateys*⁶ (sugarcane workers' quarters) of the area. The battle contingents were made up of the rural dispossessed, the unemployed, the exploited sugar plantation workers, and even the threatened small landowners—all engaged collectively in an intensive campaign of resistance to the presence of armed and dominating foreigners. All too often, as has been recorded, the animosity among these easterners was fanned by the attitudes and practices of racial superiority on the part of the occupying military personnel. Such abusive, belligerent anti-Black sentiment openly exhibited by more than a few members of the invasion forces often heightened existing tensions and provoked physical altercations, even random murder of innocent Dominican citizens. The *gavilleros*, of course, were not unmindful of such arrogant and unacceptable abuses. The overwhelming rural population in the eastern zone was then, as it

is currently, dark-skinned. By contrast, the inhabitants of the island's northern zone are usually much lighter in skin color and were not met with nearly the degree of blatant racial bigotry from the North Americans.

One of the most well-known groups of *gavilleros* operating in San Pedro de Macoris and the eastern provinces was that commanded by Eustacio Bullito Reyes. The movement's most prominent leader overall, however, was a *campesino* named Ramón Natera. On many occasions group leaders had previously been popular regional caudillos who had participated actively in any number of uprisings against various Dominican governments during the period before the United States intervention. Martín Peguero, Vicentico, Chacha, and Tolete were leaders whose legendary names and heroic resistance are still remembered throughout parts of the eastern region. This nationalist peasant resistance was probably the very first instance in Latin American/Caribbean history wherein North American interventionist forces employed aerial bombing and machine gun artillery against local insurgents.

Consequences of United States Military Occupation

The occupation lasted a total of eight grueling years, with the occupying forces learning very little about the Dominicans, their history and culture, or their psyche. Exactly what, then, was ultimately accomplished by the designs of such a lengthy and costly military expedition on foreign shores? What may be questionable in the view of some contemporary analysts and interpreters of that particular episode in Dominican history is the actual extent of economic growth and modernization. On the other hand, what is certainly not debatable is the brutal enforcement of an obsessive policy of political stability favorable to North American investment interests in the island. This stability was guaranteed by the implementation of major programs and reforms such as the creation of the Dominican Republic's first adequate road network, expansion and improvement of the country's public education system, and the beginning of national public health and sanitation programs. There was also significant overhaul of the Dominican treasury, the tax system, the tariff structure, and the courts and the judiciary. It was precisely during this controversial and bitter period of military occupation that the notion of a public works program became a keystone in the strategic arsenal of future local administrations. Good and efficient government came to be synonymous with massive construction projects.

★
family popular
resistance

A very important economic consequence of the United States military occupation centered around major protectionist measures shrewdly tailored to favor the tax-exempt entry of North American manufactured consumer goods into La República Dominicana. Without question, such measures stifled the development and growth of local industry much in the same way that today's system of zona franca (free trade zone) operates in the country. The military government encouraged and was largely responsible for the almost miraculous expansion of the sugar industry. In fact, through a series of carefully crafted albeit questionable legislative maneuvers, North American sugar firms were permitted legally to expropriate land for the expansion of sugar plantations. The traditional Dominican land titles system had been completely altered and twisted in order to accommodate United States capitalist investments. As a result, the island's economy was converted into a plantation economy, dependent upon world sugar prices.

On the sociopsychological front, the military occupation must be viewed as having left indelible scars on the Dominican psyche. It may indeed be difficult to measure the exact severity of the North Americanization process that most assuredly took place in the island. A definite cultural incursion became obvious, however. Even in terms of seemingly innocuous social recreation, for example, this incursion was felt in considerable depth. North American-style baseball replaced forever the more widely played soccer (called *fútbol* in Latin America), which is easily the most common sport played throughout all Latin America. Simultaneously, though, the United States military presence engendered a stronger Dominican nationalism than would perhaps have been expected. What became evident was a more forceful and deliberate self-conscious celebration of things Dominican. The country's social elite, for instance, attached themselves more fervently with what was to become the national dance, the merengue. This dance and its rhythms had traditionally been closely identified with the proletariat class.

Finally, on the issue of sociopsychological consequences, some commentators have pointed out that the racism ingrained in the attitude and behavior of members of the occupying forces noticeably intensified the more subtle forms of this disease that existed in the island's society well prior to the 1916 invasion. Every conceivable facet of Dominican life was touched by the superimposed military presence of

the United States Marines. For eight years, the notion of Dominicans exercising the right of governing themselves was abrogated completely. One especially macabre aspect of the military governance was that it taught by painfully direct example the advantages of repressive methods of controlling human beings. The lesson was undeniably vigorously received by members of the *Guardia Nacional*, now solely responsible for maintaining order throughout the island.

Final Withdrawal

The cruel irony of the massive effort of the United States military government to bring order, stability, progress, and modernization to La República Dominicana was that the biggest winners were not the Dominicans but the North Americans. In fact, *los dominicanos*, according to many contemporary commentators, ultimately paid very heavily. The occupying military government had implemented a series of major reforms with the intention of remaking the very core and character of the Dominican system, sociopolitical and economic. While the eight-year ordeal of occupation did produce some rather tangible changes, nevertheless to this day the question remains controversial and debatable whether such changes were essential to the overall vitality of Dominican traditions. For all the pragmatic and immediate solutions to several lingering, pressing domestic issues and concerns, the ultimate consequences of the invasion were harmful in the view of many *dominicanos* today.

One of the most damaging results was the infectious anti-United States sentiment and antagonism that lasted for a long time afterward. Another harmful aspect of the military occupation to the *dominicanos* was their humiliating loss of hard-won gains to determine the course of their own national destiny and to charter creative, self-tailored blueprints and schemes for maximally developing their nation. The relentless struggle waged by fearless Dominican nationalists, both men and women alike, to regain and protect their sovereignty, ridding the island of foreign invaders and occupiers, was the primary cause of the inevitable United States military withdrawal. The intensely fought wars of resistance were extremely successful in making more difficult the already arduous task of operating a military government on foreign soil. For all its internal divisiveness and petty squabbling, the newly formed National Party (Unión Nacional) gained broad support across the is-

Plan
for
all
the
people

land and mobilized divergent segments of the Dominican populace in committed response to the intolerable repressiveness of military rule.

Upon its final departure from Quisqueya, the North American military machine did not dismantle altogether its repressive operation. Rather, probably the single most undisputed legacy of United States intervention was the very important introduction of a new stabilizing force in the country, the Guardia Nacional. Working hand-in-glove with the implemented reforms (especially the new, improved system of roads and communications facilities), the elite corps of Dominican military personnel was super-efficient and zealous in maintaining order. It quickly became the supreme instrument of control throughout the land. The Dominican masses, having been thoroughly disarmed, now lay naked and defenseless against the excesses of power executed by whichever military officer—now Dominican instead of foreign—was willful and bold enough to attempt grabbing absolute control of the Guardia.

Such an individual could ultimately reign with impunity over the entire country. With the exit of United States troops, the job of keeping the peace would be left to the new North American-created and trained Dominican military machine. The new commander-in-chief, El Jefe, of the sophisticated Policía Nacional Dominicana (National Dominican Police), whose name would change in 1928 to Ejército Nacional (National Army), was an obscure but obsessively ambitious young career soldier named Rafael Leonidas Trujillo. On September 18, 1924, after eight years of frustrating occupation, the United States Marines withdrew from La República Dominicana.

Notes

1. The proclamation of a slave-free, independent Republic of Haiti in 1804 did not receive official diplomatic recognition from the United States government until 1861.

2. The Platt Amendment of 1902 (named for United States Senator O. H. Platt of Connecticut) was designed to place restrictions upon Cuba's activities in order to make the island safe for foreign capital investment. Among other provisions, the Cuban government was limited in its power to make treaties with foreign nations. The Cubans also promised to provide fueling or naval stations to the United States. However, the most horrendous feature of the measure was the provision that unmistakably defined Cuba as a protectorate of the United States, virtually sanctioning the United States military takeover of the island. Abrogation of the amendment would not come until 1934.

3. CEDEE, *Escarbando las Raíces de la Explotación*, p. 34.

4. The United States was particularly vexed since it had covertly manipulated Jimenes's successful bid for the presidency. The new president, in addition to being grateful and indebted, was quite amenable to almost all the United States proposals for reform in the Dominican Republic.

5. During the period of United States intervention in Nicaragua, guerrilla leader General Augusto César Sandino refused to accept the imposition of North American military rule and thus led a protracted resistance struggle throughout the country. Sandino is regarded by Nicaraguans today as their most genuine patriot and national hero. The name Sandino symbolizes courage and resistance to oppression throughout Latin America generally.

6. *Bateys* are company-owned worker camps or villages adjacent to the sugarcane fields.

*
creates pretext for Trujillo's coup

21

The Era of Trujillo

1930-1961

In describing the Era of Trujillo, which refers to the period in Dominican history when the country was under the tightly clenched iron fist of General Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, one noted present-day social commentator puts it this way:

Para ser dominicano auténtico e integral es necesario conservar una memoria permanente e inmodificable de las vicisitudes y las declinaciones sufridas por la personalidad nacional en todos los sentidos, durante la Era de Trujillo.¹

(In order to be an authentic and complete Dominican, it is necessary to preserve a lasting and unalterable memory of the vicissitudes and deterioration suffered on the part of the national personality, in every sense, during the Era of Trujillo.)

These are the words of Dr. José Francisco Peña Gómez, leader of the Partido Revolucionario Dominicano.

Peña Gómez, quite the eloquent polemicist, over the years has argued vehemently the case for remembrance. It is now a generally accepted truth that the Trujillo Era converted the Dominican nation into a kind of chamber of psychological tortures, as well as physical and spiritual horror. Peña Gómez has presented the case for the neces-

sity of creating a national consciousness in the island's newer generations. Today's generations in La República Dominicana are being reminded constantly that the Trujillo Era, which saw the country turn into a tightly run prison camp, operated under the absolute control of a single man, governing with the roughness and oftentimes insanity of a sadistic plantation overseer of the earlier centuries in the island's history.

The power of Trujillo's reprisals was so great that it stretched even to the interpretation of intentions of practically every Dominican. Many people today say that, during this nightmarish period of fear and intimidation, some citizens were actually punished for not mentioning El Jefe (The Chief) at solemn public functions, or for listening to inflammatory anti-Trujillo radio programs that were, of course, broadcast from outside La República Dominicana.² One of the clearest consequences of the United States occupation by the marines from 1916 to 1924 was the very powerful military machine erected by the North Americans, and eventually the particular Dominican personality selected to head up its operation, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo. This ambitious military officer rose to prominence in the midst of a national economic crisis stemming from foreign debt obligations. He ruled in the most brutal and ruthless manner imaginable, eliminating his opposition by direct means of forced exile, torture, extortion, imprisonment, and even murder. Trujillo had organized a band of professional terrorists called La Cuarentidos (the Forty-Second), that spread fear throughout the island.

Trujillo's shameless acts of rape and pillage of the nation's economy began by his obtaining an exclusive contract with the Dominican army to provide laundry service to soldiers, whose monthly salary was taxed for this expenditure. From prostitution to house paint, from exporting fruit to acquiring monopoly rights to the production and sale of such staples as salt, meat, rice, and milk, Trujillo used cunning political power and the military to enrich himself and his family. *El banquito* (the little bank) was a loan-shark service managed by his wife, María Martínez. The operation, which was housed in an actual bank building, allowed public employees to cash their salary checks ahead of time—and they were encouraged to do so—for a stipulated fee. Moreover, all public employees, whether Supreme Court justice, senator, or humble office filing clerk, were required to pay 10 percent of their salary to the Partido Dominicano. It was said that during Trujillo's rule *los dominicanos* couldn't eat, sleep, wear shoes, or put

Opinión de la Patriarca

on any article of clothing without Trujillo or a member of his family benefiting in some form or another. From the very start, the Dominican government was a vehicle for Trujillo's personal aggrandizement. The reconstruction of state apparatus was a convenient pretext for the exaltation and promotion of his self-perceived glory. Trujillo was made to appear as the restorer of financial independence, for example, when he enacted measures to liquidate the enormous foreign debt. The administration of customs was placed back in the hands of Dominican functionaries, but all the collected revenue was deposited directly—and immediately—in the National City Bank of New York.

Economically, the thirty-two-year dictatorial reign of Trujillo uncannily duplicated the Somoza model in Nicaragua and the Duvalier pattern somewhat later in neighboring Haiti. Trujillo meticulously and very shrewdly brought huge portions of the Dominican national economy under his personal control. He turned the island into his personal fief. When it became expedient for him to occupy the presidency, he presented himself as a candidate amid the spectacle of farce. When it better suited his purposes on occasion for the country to offer an "acceptable image" for the international community, Trujillo duly appointed carefully selected individuals to occupy the presidential chair. Four such personally appointed individuals for this purpose included Jacinto Peynado, Dr. Manuel Troncoso, Héctor Trujillo (one of El Jefe's brothers), and Dr. Joaquín Balaguer. By the end of his life, Trujillo and his family controlled nearly 80 percent of the nation's industrial production; they possessed well over half of the island's economic assets. More than 45 percent of Trujillo-owned enterprises employed more than 40 percent of the total work force in La República Dominicana. Again, like the Somoza dynasty in Nicaragua, Trujillo industries were employing about 15 percent of the country's population. An estimated 60 percent of Dominican families depended upon Trujillo's economic octopus. It came as no surprise to anyone that all the newly constructed roads easily led directly to Trujillo's plantations and factories; most certainly the new harbors benefited Trujillo's shipping and lucrative export enterprises.

Father of the New Nation

Trujillo had hoped that the Catholic Church would bestow upon him the supreme title, Benefactor de la Iglesia (Benefactor of the Church).

However, the Church refused to do so. In just two or three years in power, all the institutions in the Dominican Republic were surrendered as pawns to the ruthless will of El Benefactor and his despotic reign. In an act of self-paid homage, he daringly changed the nation's capital city—which for centuries had been called Santo Domingo—to Ciudad Trujillo (Trujillo City). From the very outset, Trujillo the tyrant and Trujillo the capitalist were two distinct characters that were forged together in monolithic and calculating fashion, ultimately presenting an overpowering persona. As he grew richer and richer, gaining spectacular economic power and unquestioned supreme domination over the entire country, Trujillo simultaneously constructed a jealously guarded autonomy in terms of the nation. By the time of the outbreak of World War II, La República Dominicana found itself governed by the Trujillo Machine, not by Rafael Leonidas Trujillo the man. Throughout the long, agonizing thirty-two years of dictatorial rule, the Trujillo government executed the most grandiose plan of public works ever undertaken in the island until that time.³ These massive construction projects created an economic infrastructure that catered shamelessly to and benefited the exclusive interests of the bourgeois capitalist elite. This privileged sector was headed by none other than El Padre de la Patria Nueva (The Father of the New Nation).

In terms of agricultural development, La República Dominicana under the Trujillo Machine encouraged an effective campaign to stimulate crop production across the island. It might correctly be noted that a rudimentary kind of agrarian reform program was initiated when large numbers of *campesinos* were resettled on abandoned farmland, introduced to innovative methods of production, and then given the seeds to plant. The hope was to lift the country into the position of self-sufficiency in those designated areas of basic crop needs: corn, beans, rice. Another control of this traditional industry by Trujillo complemented the modernization process that was under way in the nation's economic and industrial sectors. Trujillo's economic power was still considerably less than that of the North American sugar corporations, which were growing steadily more intrusive in the economic, political, and social life of the country. El Benefactor utilized both state funds and his own private resources to buy up most of the other foreign *ingenios* that were operating around the island, thus easily becoming the principal noncorporation sugar producer. The only profitable sugarmills that Trujillo was not successful in acquiring were

those belonging to the highly influential and shrewd Casa Vincinci, and the powerful South Porto Rico Sugar Company, under ownership of the super-wealthy Central Romana.

The Parsley Test

Question: How do you distinguish on sight a Haitian from a Dominican? Answer: You can't. So, you give him or her the parsley test! This is exactly what happened during the infamous *Masacre de los haitianos* (Massacre of the Haitians) in early October of 1937, when Trujillo's death squads were given direct orders to kill Haitians! The macabre and sinister *operación perijil* (the parsley test) was considered the one foolproof method of uncovering who actually was or was not Haitian among the Black population within the Dominican society, especially those individuals of African descent living along the Dominican-Haitian border zone. Here, the term *castiza*⁴ is used to describe persons born to a cross-cultural Dominican/Haitian couple. Even today, many such unions in the border zone are quite commonplace. Trujillo had devised a strategy whereby the Dominican soldier would simply hold up in front of the suspected Black person a leaf of parsley and ask him, "What is this?" Haitians living among Dominicans, although possessing a thoroughly convincing knowledge of Spanish, often have serious difficulty pronouncing the language correctly. For instance, the Spanish *r* and *j* are especially troublesome for French speakers. Thus, for French- and Kreyol-speaking Haitians, it is practically impossible to pronounce with any degree of authenticity and rapidly the Spanish word for parsley, *perejil*.

During the 1937 massacre that began in the border town of Dajabón, roving bands of Trujillo militia administered the parsley test to unsuspecting Haitians who tried to pass themselves off as Dominicans. But not just Haitians became victims of the persecution. Throughout the border zone, anyone of African descent found incapable of pronouncing correctly, that is, to the complete satisfaction of the sadistic examiners, became a condemned individual. This holocaust is recorded as having a death toll reaching thirty thousand innocent souls, Haitians as well as Dominicans, and spread across perhaps seventy-five localities of La República Dominicana. Some observers today ask whether General Trujillo was afterwards satisfied that he had succeeded in diminishing the African presence in Dominican national life and on

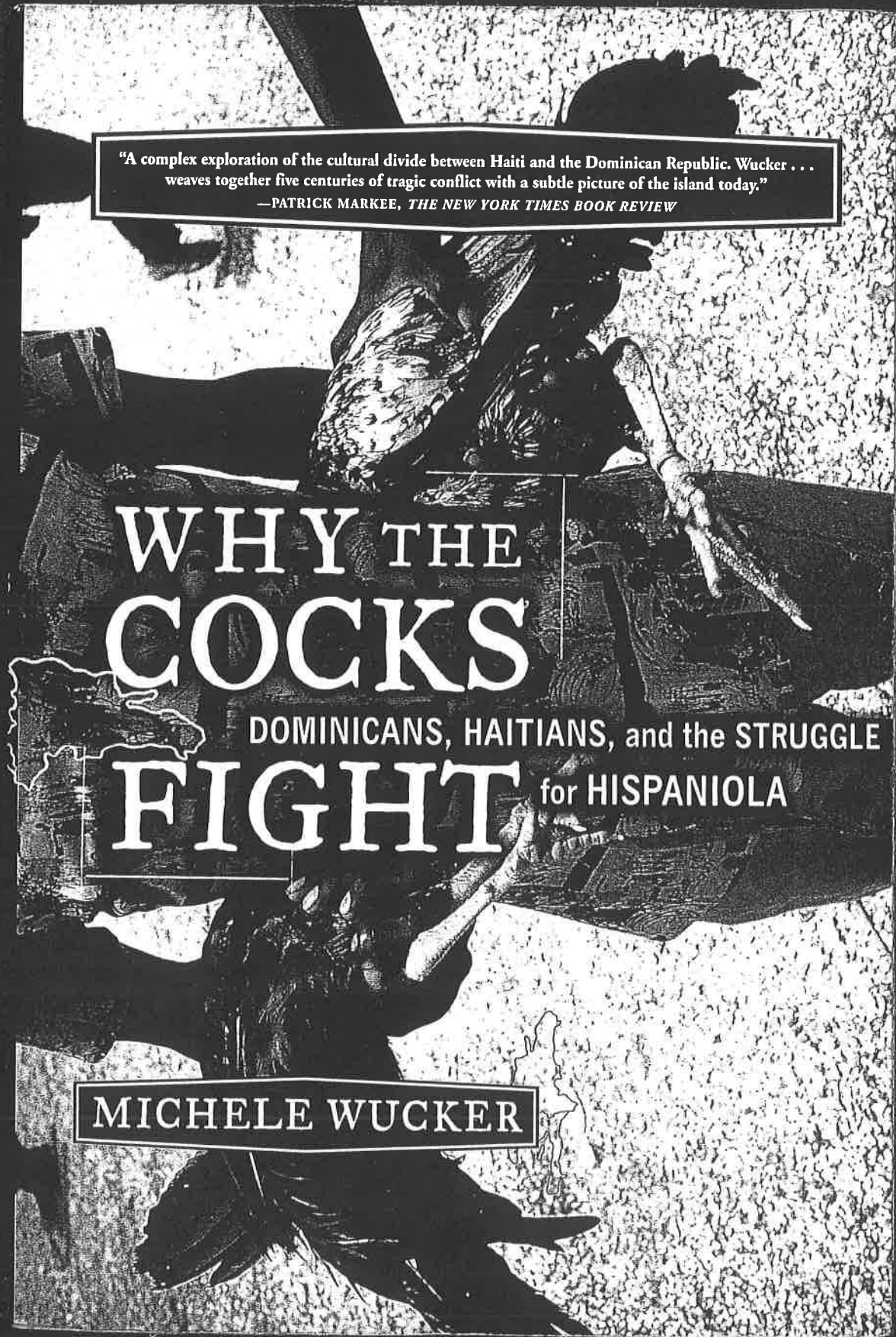
Dominican soil. Throughout contemporary Dominican society, Haitians number perhaps one million among the nation's population.

Trujillo's Haitian Phobia

It was often said that Trujillo was relentless in his attempts to gain acceptance into the select inner circles of the country's bourgeois elite. He had never been regarded as one of them. Rather, he was always the outsider, or the interloper. Although Trujillo was admittedly one of the nation's wealthiest individuals, he nevertheless possessed neither the prerequisite family geneology nor the racial stock nor the moral character that traditionally typified the composition of this exclusive sector of Dominican society. He therefore paid his way into favor by means of classic Machiavellian tactics, which he had mastered superbly. Trujillo quite early in his lengthy career had learned to manipulate to his best advantage a given situation or event that had potentially explosive properties if ignited. Haiti again proved one such instance.

Driven primarily by chronic economic depression and abject misery in their own homeland, Haitians seeking a better life for themselves and their families had been quietly trekking across the border into territory of their eastern neighbor since the period of the First Republic (1844-1861). They would settle as squatters on abandoned farmland, and work in the sugarcane fields as cutters or in Dominican households as servants. These Haitian immigrants also engaged heavily in commerce as traders and merchants. These various Haitian workers were always marginal people, staying safely just inside the limits of the law and avoiding all manner of conflict or antagonism with local Dominicans. Intermingling, intermarriage, and commercial interchange had long been commonplace. Haitian currency, for example, had been welcome as the medium of exchange in Mao and Santiago, and as far south as Azua. It is still not entirely known to what extent this occupation by large concentrations of Haitians seriously antagonized the masses of Dominicans in these areas. When Trujillo traveled to the border town of Dajabón in 1937, he is reported to have used the occasion to launch a venomous tirade against the growing presence and influence of Haitians throughout *la frontera*:

¡Los haitianos! Su presencia en nuestro territorio no puede más que deteriorar las condiciones de vida de nuestros nacionales. Esa



"A complex exploration of the cultural divide between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Wucker . . . weaves together five centuries of tragic conflict with a subtle picture of the island today."

—PATRICK MARKEE, *THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW*

WHY THE COCKS

DOMINICANS, HAITIANS, and the STRUGGLE

FIGHT

for HISPANIOLA

MICHELE WUCKER

ocupación de los haitianos de las tierras fronterizas no debía continuar. Está ordenado que todos los haitianos que hubiera en el país fuesen exterminados.⁵

(Haitians! Their presence in our territory can't do anything else but worsen the living conditions of our own people. The Haitian occupation of the border zones must not continue. It is ordered that all Haitians that are in the country be exterminated.)

The Massacre

A few days later, Trujillo gave the order literally to kill Haitians wherever they might be found throughout La República Dominicana. So quite insanely began the indiscriminate pogrom of thousands of Black Haitians and Dominicans alike. The River Dajabón after the horrendous butchering became known as the Río Masacre (Massacre River). Even as the international community expressed a numbed disbelief and outrage at this barbarous act of genocide, within the Dominican Republic itself there were staunch supporters of the regime who orchestrated an effective propaganda campaign to portray El Benefactor as having acted to defend Dominican sovereignty and nationhood. What had provoked this Caribbean holocaust? Was he uneasy about the widening sociopolitical influence of the Haitians residing in these border zones? Was he motivated by the already evident racism that was a traditionally persistent element in the psyche of the dominant social stratum into which the dictator himself fought so obsessively to penetrate?

The Process of Dominicanization

While we will perhaps never know the exact reasons, psychological or otherwise, that explain Trujillo's nefarious actions, we do know that just a few years following that gruesome event in 1937, Trujillo was fostering an aggressive immigration scheme to entice Jewish, Spanish, Lebanese, and other European refugees to resettle in Dominican territory. About 1939–1940, for example, the Trujillo government arranged for Jewish refugees, particularly German and Austrian Ashkenazim, to be settled at Sosúa on the north coast, on land donated by El Benefactor himself. The influx of Caucasians into the island was therefore not unintentional. Had this been El Jefe's way of blanqueando (whitening

up) a nation that he personally felt was just a bit too dark? Even by early 1937, the tone of the island's immigration policy had been set by a rather clear statement by Trujillo himself:

Se precisa una gran cantidad de inmigrantes de la raza blanca. Los emigrantes deberán de ser españoles, italianos y también de origen francés. Los de origen caucásico deberán pagar seis pesos por el permiso de residencia; los que no sean de ese origen deberán pagar quinientos pesos.⁶

(A great quantity of immigrants of the White race is needed. The immigrants shall be Spanish, Italian, and also of French origin. Immigrants of Caucasian stock shall pay a fee of six pesos for the residency permit and those not of such origin shall pay 500 pesos.)

What followed next in El Jefe's design to offset the disgrace of the so-called border conflicts, as the regime chose to refer to the holocaust, was a calculated government process that came to be known as Dominicanization. This scheme was to be implemented throughout the border zone. The plan included actually constructing entirely new towns and full communities, together with the required military installations, all along the freshly drawn borderline between the two countries. The underlying idea of this Dominicanization process was to regain Dominican territory that had been lost to Haiti during the period dating back to Toussaint L'Ouverture and to the Haitian invasions of the First Republic.⁷ With these successful efforts, the border issue was perhaps finally settled once these traditionally disputed zones were at last integrated into the central Dominican administrative unit.

The Fall of Trujillo

Generalissimo Trujillo succeeded in winning, although not surprisingly, the approval and support of the United States government by means of various channels of appeasement and compromise on the part of the Dominicans. Despite whatever manner and intensity of human rights atrocities were perpetrated against the Dominican (and Haitian) people, as long as Trujillo stabilized the country and made it safe and profitable for United States investment, Washington had totally deaf ears and blinded eyes on Trujillo's corrupt fiefdom. "Trujillo is a true

son of a bitch!" President Franklin Roosevelt is often quoted as having said, "but he's *our* son of a bitch!" By the late 1940s, Trujillo was proclaiming himself champion of anticommunism in the Americas. Of course, Duvalier and Somoza would do likewise. This particular stance of El Jefe garnered him considerable favoritism from United States government and business sectors.

The era of the 1950s really ignited the smoldering undercurrent of discontent and disillusion throughout La República Dominicana. Anti-Trujillo conspiracies became almost commonplace. A threatening economic crisis of major proportions in the country consumed the attention of the regime. Trujillo reacted with anticipated irrationality. His exclusion of foreign capital from lucrative domestic ventures and his unforgivable, despicable assassination attempts against the lives of strongly vocal opposition, both inside and outside the island, all became openly negative factors in the arsenal against El Benefactor. Trujillo's inevitable fall must also be placed within the broader context of the Caribbean regional crisis at this precise juncture, politically, economically, and socially. Instead of taking positive, rational steps to confront this regional turmoil, the Trujillo Machine, fast disintegrating as it was, greatly aggravated matters with counterproductive measures.

With the unexpected success of the Cuban Revolution (1959) when the young Fidel Castro trampled the United States-backed Fulgencio Batista government, tremendous fears surfaced that Trujillo himself was fomenting conditions for another Cuba. The names Enrique Jiménez Moya, Juan Isidro Jiménez Grullón, and Manuel Tavárez became names associated with an armed anti-Trujillo movement, Movimiento Clandestino 14 de Junio (Clandestine Movement of June 14). A bold, heavily armed expedition force made up of exiled *dominicanos* and *revolucionarios* from several other Latin American nations attempted an invasion of the island (1959). Although the invasion failed to achieve its determined mission of bringing down the Trujillo machine, its overall impact upon the political consciousness of *el pueblo dominicano* was incalculable.

Another sensational incident took place in 1960 when Trujillo made a truly bold assassination attempt upon the life of the president of Venezuela, Rómulo Betancourt. In immediate response and repudiation, the Organization of American States (OAS) imposed comprehensive economic sanctions, supported by the international community, against the Trujillo government. Again, however, as was

true in the earlier case of Trujillo's Haitian Massacre of 1937, there was a sizable and loyal contingent of waiting apologists for the regime. Even so, anti-Trujillo activity accelerated around the island. The government's reaction was again predictable: increased repression in the form of brutal reprisals, terrorism, torture, more assassinations. The jails throughout the Dominican Republic were nearly overflowing with arrested political prisoners and suspected conspirators. Still talked about today in the island is the almost storybook incident of *las hermanas Mirabal* (the Mirabal sisters). The Mirabal sisters came to symbolize most dramatically the dangerous yet strong resistance to Trujillo. Coming from one of the most socially prominent families in the town of Salcedo, the three sisters were murdered in brutal fashion because of their political activism against the Trujillo machine. The tragic tale of Patria, Minerva, and María Teresa, who refused to succumb to El Jefe's rule of terror, is presented with poignancy by the extremely talented contemporary Dominican-American author Julia Alvarez in her 1995 novel, *In The Time of the Butterflies*. It was becoming increasingly more apparent in all quarters that with each new incident, Trujillo was becoming more of a real problem for Washington and United States business investment interests. Trujillo had long outlived his usefulness to the United States. In May of 1961, Trujillo was assassinated by a trusted cadre of his personal staff officers, who are said to have used weapons that had been supplied by the CIA. The Era of Trujillo was brought to a close, but still today many *dominicanos* will openly admit that La República Dominicana continues living in the shadow of Trujillo.

Notes

1. José Francisco Peña Gómez, as quoted to the author by Helson Cruz Pineda in a series of taped interview sessions during the summer of 1993 in the town of Barahona. Cruz Pineda is in the process of compiling an anthology of the political and social commentary of Dr. Peña Gómez.

2. During the Trujillo Era it was extremely dangerous to be caught listening to radio programs like "Trinchera Antitrujillista" (Anti-Trujillo Ditch) or the very popular "La Voz de Quisqueya Libre" (The Voice of Free Quisqueya), both of which were broadcast from Venezuela. Most anti-Trujillo propaganda campaigns were naturally conducted from outside the country because of tightly monitored government censorship.

3. The public works ideal had begun at the opening of the century by Ramón Cáceres and was accelerated during the period of United States military occupation.

of the people who share the streets of Little Haiti with him. He barely even speaks Spanish, though he has lived for years in the Dominican Republic.

Today, he has changed his appearance. Above his black pants, he is dressed in a turquoise polo shirt and over it a black long-sleeved cotton shirt. The red sash around his waist is gone. He is no longer the dramatic martial-arts master but instead a fervent missionary. His name is Yvon. He says he has a wife and children, who live in a house on a hill on the edge of Santo Domingo. He doesn't remember exactly how long he has been here in Little Haiti, but it has been a long, long time. He says he used to sell clothes, whatever he could. But now, it is hard to figure out what he does. It is not clear if he even knows. "Times have been hard lately. So I'm not selling things right now," Yvon says under the hot sun. "I just write, write to New York so things will get better."

In this world of merchants and refugees, he is a hero of sorts, even to those who warn that he is *moun fou*. Instead of a lost soul in the streets, a man with nothing, the Karate Man lives in the eyes of his neighbors as something more, someone who achieved great things but lost them through a massive personal tragedy. In Little Haiti, people are not always so fortunate as to be built up to something more than they are, like the Karate Man; more often, they find themselves victims of myths created to make them less than themselves, less than human. Yet they keep on, trying to find the key to make their lives better.

"If you are going to New York, can you take a letter for me? A letter to Brooklyn, New York," the Karate Man asks one day. "I don't have the address. Do you think it will get there if I just send it to Brooklyn?"

Life on the Batey

A mí me llaman el Negrito del Batey, y para mí el trabajo es enemigo.

They call me the little black man on the batey, and work is my enemy.

—“El Negrito del Batey”

*A Trujillo-era merengue by Medardo Guzmán,
popularized by Alberto Beltrán*

Under the visor of his blue baseball cap, Julien Emanuel's right eyelid is permanently shut. All that remains where his eye should be is a small hollow. He lost the eye seven years ago, when an errant spear of sugarcane hurtled into his face from one of the creaking train cars carrying harvested stalks to be processed. After the accident, Julien spent a month in the hospital, and then couldn't work for another three months. He still can't imagine how he managed to live through the time after his accident.

Julien's thirty-five years have worn into his face as if they were sixty. On his back, he wears a red shirt, to go along with his blue cap. Together, they make up the colors of his country's flag. Fourteen years earlier, in the lovely town of Jacmel in southern Haiti, Julien listened carefully to the words of the Dominican men who came there one week: to work in the cane fields of the Dominican Republic—the land to the east Haitians called Dominikani—they promised pay of twenty-five dollars a day, real U.S. money, not Haitian gourdes or Dominican pesos. After hearing what the men had to offer, Julien joined a large group of workers who piled into a truck headed for the vast cane plantations in the southeastern Dominican Republic, at La Romana, on the coast. The workers stood up in the back of the truck, where cattle

chapter



would ride, during the whole dusty day's journey to the Dominican fields of the Central Romana corporation.

When they arrived, the Haitians went to work cutting cane under the hot Caribbean sun. Their thin shoes hardly stood up to the deep piles of cane stalks under their feet. Dust from the fields filled their lungs and worked its way into the cuts the sharp cane spears etched into their arms, legs, and chests. Their lunch was the same as breakfast: nothing but the sweet juice they chewed from stalks of sugarcane. At night, the cutters returned to their *bateyes*, the islands of cement-block barracks far out in the *cañaverales*, waves of cane that go on for miles and miles outside of La Romana. If the Haitians were lucky, dinner was a bit of rice, maybe with a tin of sardines, eaten by starlight, since there was no electricity.

When the plantation managers decided to move their workers somewhere else, the workers had no choice. After several years of cutting cane at La Romana with the others, Julien learned he was to be transferred along with a group of workers to the sugar plantation at Consuelo, about an hour northwest. That was bad news, because La Romana had a reputation for treating workers better than anywhere else. Julien's two children and their mother stayed behind in La Romana, where she could find work in the market.

At Consuelo, the barracks of the *batey* where Julien lives have no doors. Inside, the damp air rusts the stark iron beds and molders the few thin, ragged pallets that serve as mattresses. An empty light socket dangles from a dead wire in the ceiling of the main hallway.

Ruefully, he remembers the promise of dollars that brought him here from Jacmel in the first place. "There are no dollars," Julien says with a laugh too frank even to be ironic. The pay is so low that there are barely even Dominican pesos. It was at Consuelo that he lost his eye. He lived only by going into deeper debt to the plantation store. The store already had taken most of his pesos when payday came. For months after the accident, a whole paycheck wasn't enough to cover what he owed.

Scores of thousands of Haitians like Julien Emanuel have made the trek to the Dominican Republic from Haiti to cut sugarcane. Years ago, most of these migrant workers—or *braceros*, from the Spanish word *brazo* (arm)—came by contract between the Dominican and Haitian governments. Only a few came informally, *an ba fil*, under the wire, as they

called it in Kreyol. In those days, hardly any of them had much of what could be called rights, but the *an ba fil* workers lived even more tenuously, not sure where they would work or whether they would be hauled off in the middle of the night. There has been no formal contract between the Dominican and Haitian governments since 1986, so many workers arrive on their own and hope for an individual contract. Between sixteen thousand and twenty thousand Haitians arrive each October and November, when the harvest begins in the south. Officially, they stay only through May or June, when cane cutting ends in the northern Dominican Republic.

How many Haitians are in Dominikani is not certain. It depends on whom you ask. The Dominican politicians say there are a million—many, many more than the 300,000 to 500,000 Haitians that more judicious scholars have estimated. The more Haitians there seem to be, the more righteous a senatorial or mayoral candidate sounds when he pledges to protect Dominicans from the black hordes. For campaign purposes, it doesn't really matter whether the number, or the ostensible threat posed by the immigrants, is accurate.

Using charts and academic jargon, studies explain the same things that Julien Emanuel will tell you. The Dominican historian Frank Moya Pons and his team of researchers, in a thick study called *El batey*, estimated that a workday cutting cane averages 11.48 hours and brings a man or boy to the fields approximately 6.4 days a week, averaging 74.47 hours at thirty-one cents an hour, or twenty-three U.S. dollars a week. Barely a third of the Haitian workers can read; they are only half as likely as Dominicans to be literate, and slightly less likely than the average Haitian. The typical *bracero* has attended only a year and a half of school. One in five cane cutters is hurt seriously each year. Even the Dominican government recognizes that 85 percent of all workplace injuries in the country happen in the cane fields. The studies do not count the eyes or limbs damaged by the cane, the gallons of children's tears, the miles of cuts in black skin, the nights without dinner.

During the harvest, workers are not allowed to leave the plantations. The police, working with the state cane corporation and with the righteous conviction that they are protecting their communities from filth and disease, keep a sharp eye out for the Haitians and make them return if they rebel and go out on the streets of neighboring towns.