

In July, *el tiempo muerto*, the dead season, begins. Work pauses for a few months, and the cane cutters are left to fend for themselves harvesting either coffee or rice. Over the years, many of the Haitians have stayed on the cane fields after the harvests are over: some of them have been able to start little garden plots or cobble together jobs here and there, right in the cane barracks, to sustain themselves over the months when there is no work. They stay through season after season. Many of the *braceros*' children become cane cutters too, beginning when they are barely taller than a machete. The *braceros* who have been here longer are the old hands, the *viejos*. Often the Dominican guards give the *viejos* authority over the newcomers, who are called *kongos*, a derisive term that refers to their African roots.

Under the harsh noon sun, the feathery green leaves and brilliant red-orange flowers of a flamboyant tree cast little shadow over a small group of cane cutters gathered for a break. Sego Germain scratches his stomach through his white T-shirt, which has been cut to make long, knotted hanging fringes. Like most of the others here, he has no passport, because the soldiers tore up his papers when he first arrived years ago.

Because of turgid Dominican bureaucracy, difficult transportation, and ignorance of the importance of documents, most cane cutters do not register births with the authorities. As a result, Sego's children will most likely not have passports either. They will be nationless, paperless. They will not be recognized in the world outside the *batey*. In the eyes of the authorities, these people do not exist or, more precisely, are not people at all. To the Haitian soldiers, Sego Germain is no Haitian. Nor is he a Dominican. In short, his life is not of much concern to either of the countries that share the island of Hispaniola.

"Here, I often work until seven o'clock in the evening. Then, even if I am home and have just gone to bed, they can come call me and say, 'Do this.' And that is after I have started work at seven in the morning," says Sego Germain in a rapid mix of Kreyol and Spanish. A red plastic comb juts out of his hair. "I can't exactly say life is not good, but . . ." He pauses. "We need people in the *bateyes* to help us, but there aren't any. When the children are sick, there is nobody to take them to the hospital. There's no school for them." He hesitates again, then switches

to Spanish from Kreyol. "*Los grandes chupan a los chiquitos.*" The big ones are sucking the little ones dry.

His shirt is open to his navel. You can see the diet of rice, plantains, and potatoes doesn't go far to cut the hunger from a day of *koupe kann*. Sego Germain's wages leave little room for much more to eat, for him, his wife, Lotilia, their five-year-old boy, and their eight- and nine-year-old daughters. He is paid every two weeks with a slip of paper that he can cash in at the corporation store on the *batey*. His wages are calculated according to how much cane his work team has cut. Each ton is worth just 30 pesos—about \$2.40. Even so, a ton is not always paid as a whole ton of cane.

Why? The *pesadores*, Dominicans who weigh the cane to determine how much the Haitians will be paid, often cheat the workers. If a team has cut seventeen tons, the *pesador* will vouch for, say, thirteen tons but turn over the full seventeen to the *ingenio* and pocket the difference. In another trick used to cut wages paid to the Haitians, cane is often left to dry in the sun before it is weighed. As much as a third of the weight evaporates, and so does a third of the *bracero*'s pay. But the workers can do little to protest. In Florida, the average cane cutter harvests eight tons a day. In the Dominican Republic, he cuts only a ton or a ton and a half. It's hard to tell how much of that difference comes from the weakness of the workers, from the lies of the *pesadores*, or from the sun's sucking the liquid from the stalks.

"Papa Doc" Duvalier still ruled Haiti when Jacques Pierre first came to Dominikani, when he was eighteen years old, from the hamlet of Ouanaminthe, on the northern tip of the Dominican-Haitian border. "It was hard to get enough to eat even then. Worse, when I came here, they were killing people in Haiti," he recalls.

Even before Papa Doc became President of Haiti on October 22, 1957, martial law had settled on the country. A military junta took over after his election to make sure that terrorist attacks would not prevent him from taking office. Despite Duvalier's meek appearance, the doctor ruled unsparingly, using states of siege and assuming emergency powers to quiet constant unrest. He established a personal security force named after Tonton Macoute, Uncle Strawsack, the bogeyman who steals children from the Haitian countryside and stuffs them into his straw sack.

The name Duvalier became synonymous with terror. The first people to leave Haiti under his dictatorship were called the "Boeing People," middle-class professionals and intellectuals who could afford airplane tickets and qualify for U.S. visas. The poorest Haitians, like Jacques Pierre, left Haiti under contracts by which the Haitian government sold workers to the Dominicans.

Now fifty years old, Jacques is still cutting cane. He has never looked for work outside the cane fields and doesn't plan to do so. "Other work, like construction? I don't know how to do that kind of work."

Like Jacques, few of the *braceros* still think Dominikani can offer them a life better than the one they left, but they do not want to return to Haiti. Resigned, Julien Emanuel softly puts himself down, describing himself as one who, like his colleagues, has no choice but to remain at the mercy of the indifferent owners of the cane fields: "*Nou pa gin tet pou aide nou.*" We don't have the head to help ourselves.

Jacques Pierre speaks up: "*Nou pa gin tet ansanm.*" We haven't put our heads together. The other *braceros* nod in agreement. "*Fok nou mete tout tet ansanm.*" We need to put all our heads together, says Jacques. "If we would do that, we would maybe be able to solve some of our problems. But the minute we try to organize, they send the leaders to prison. They don't want us to put our heads together."

A woman walks down the sidewalk, flipping her feet out at each step. It appears that she broke her hip once and that it never healed right. Each leg goes up at the hip, swings out from the knee, and ends with a quick snap of the foot. It is a laborious process. When she finally arrives, she squats at the foot of the flamboyant tree and watches the men. But her stare seems to go beyond them, into nothingness. It could reach all the way back in history.

Columbus wrote glowingly back to his Spanish sponsors that Hispaniola's lush soil would yield riches as dazzling as the mineral wealth that could be mined from the hills. In his vision, the sugar fields of Hispaniola might eventually rival those of Andalusia and Sicily. Sugar was introduced to the island in 1505. In 1516, Columbus's men completed its first sugar-mill (*trapiche*), a crude affair powered by horses, oxen, or men turning a giant wheel. Slaves began arriving on Hispaniola in 1518. In 1546 the historian Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo recorded

that four *trapiches* and twenty water-powered *ingenios* were operating on Hispaniola.

By the seventeenth century, Spanish explorers had abandoned Santo Domingo in search of gold in Mexico and South America, while the French had established sugar plantations to the west. By the late eighteenth century, Saint-Domingue boasted 723 *ingenios* and half a million slaves. In Spanish Santo Domingo, to the east, the sugar industry shrank to nine *ingenios* and eleven *trapiches* worked by six hundred slaves. By the time of the French Revolution, sugar exports were the mainstay of the economy of Saint-Domingue. But after the war for Haiti's independence (1791–1803), all that was left behind was charred fields. The war had also cut off channels of trade to Europe, and Haiti's sugar industry never fully recovered.

For most of the nineteenth century, Hispaniola's sugar fields lay all but fallow as fights for power on the island sucked manpower and resources into conflicts instead of cultivation. The Haitians failed to revive agriculture during their 1822–44 occupation of Santo Domingo. Nor did the Dominicans' uneasy reannexation to Spain in 1861 bring the sugar fields to life in Santo Domingo. Sugar came back only after Spain left for good, in 1865.

In 1868 Cubans fleeing the civil war that had erupted on their island, fifty miles northwest of Hispaniola, brought to Santo Domingo new technology—most important, steam power. Meanwhile, civil war in the United States and the Franco-German wars had devastated American and European cane- and beet-sugar industries; entrepreneurs looking for new sources of the sweet stuff found it in the Dominican Republic. Flush with new money and technology, Santo Domingo's sugar industry entered a golden age, launching a perpetual-motion machine that would swing the Dominican Republic from boom to bust and back, knocking around the humble men who cut the cane.

The new Dominican sugar barons rolled in: the Hardys, the Hattons, and the Smiths; the Basses with their Central Romana and Consuelo mills; the Zanettis and the Vicinis. By 1875 money was flooding into the south of the Dominican Republic as foreigners snapped up land and Dominican peasants sought work in the sugar mills. Wages during harvest time were far higher than what the peasants could eke out tilling the earth. Even so, the new plantations could not find enough workers

to cut the cane and feed the mills. The Dominican plantations began importing workers from the English-speaking Caribbean (called *cocolos* for the way they cropped their hair so close as to be practically bald) to supplement the labor force. Times were very good.

As Santo Domingo prospered, the economy on the western end of Hispaniola was imploding. Haiti drifted from one dictatorship to another, and Haitians, despairing, took hope from word of the reviving Dominican sugar trade. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, a handful of Haitians had already begun to cut cane on the other side of Hispaniola, in a trickle that would later become a torrent.

Economic booms invariably attract charlatans looking to make easy money. The Dominican dictator Ulises Heureaux (Lilís), who became President in 1886, was in the right place at the right time to lure money from foreigners overeager to profit from Dominican sugar. Lilís was clever and greedy enough to line his pockets generously with foreign money. He drew loan after loan from foreign bankers and corporations, who provided the funds in return for lucrative concessions and, of course, a hand in the customs receipts for sugar and other exports. Just as much money from the leaky loans slipped into the pockets of Heureaux and his associates as found its way into productive investment.

With so much money falling by the wayside, it was impossible for the Dominican government to earn enough to pay back all it had borrowed. The debt spiraled out of control; by the turn of the century, it was close to \$34 million, while only \$2 million a year was coming in through customs. Just to service the debt, Heureaux had to line up new loans. He secretly sold off borderlands to Haiti for 1 million pesos, only 400,000 pesos of which made its way into the Dominican Treasury. The rest disappeared, and it is not hard to guess where it went.

By the time angry Dominicans assassinated Heureaux in July 1899, ending his fourteen years of dictatorship, Dominican finances were a disaster. The country was tilting toward civil war. And, as we have seen, the new political parties named themselves after fighting cocks, the long-tail-feathered *coludos* and the tail-featherless *bolos*.

With foreign creditors clamoring for their money, warships from Italy, Belgium, and Germany appeared off the coast of Santo Domingo in 1901 and 1903 to try to force the Dominicans to pay up. U.S. Pres-

ident Theodore Roosevelt looked on disapprovingly. The ships intruded on the U.S. sphere of influence and threatened the security of Roosevelt's pet project, the Panama Canal. American creditors had to be paid back, too, and the Europeans had to be placated. Roosevelt's solution in early 1905 was for the United States to guarantee the Dominican debt and to take over its customs procedures and 55 percent of the revenues, which would be used to pay customs salaries and repay creditors; 45 percent would be retained by the Dominican government.

With state coffers empty and Dominicans demanding jobs, the new Administration under President Ramón Cáceres knew that encouraging foreign companies was the only means by which it could bring the country back to prosperity. Cáceres was ready to exploit investors' short memories and consequent willingness to throw good money after bad wherever it looked as if a profit might be had. In April 1906, Cáceres lifted all taxes from sugar production and export, then turned his head when foreign companies acquired all the best sugar lands in the country, along the southeastern coast, often conniving to buy the property at far less than its real value. His sugar gamble was to pull apart the social fabric of Hispaniola, shifting masses of people around the island and creating pockets of near slavery that survived until the end of the century. Though he succeeded at bringing in foreign money, he angered so many Dominican businessmen (not to mention workers unhappy about the new rum taxes) that he lost control. In November 1911, a group of conspirators ambushed Cáceres on his Sunday-afternoon drive on the highway west of Santo Domingo, to Haina. In the ensuing gun battle, Cáceres died. Foreign investors and creditors, many of them still waiting to be paid back from the Lilís years, watched nervously as the Dominican Republic descended into civil war.

Across the island, meanwhile, Haitian politics similarly disintegrated. A mob in 1915 attacked the Presidential palace in Port-au-Prince and pulled the corpse of the unfortunate President Guillaume Vilbrun Sam to pieces. U.S. Marines took over Port-au-Prince and began a nineteen-year occupation of Haiti. They landed on Dominican shores a year later to keep disgruntled Dominicans from similar violent unrest against elderly President Juan Isidro Jimenes.

As the Marines kept a lid on Haiti and the Dominican Republic, the

Great War was raging in Europe, where sugar-beet farms were destroyed, and sugar once again became scarce worldwide. With their boys running things on Hispaniola, American corporations moved full force to the island. Between 1893 and 1934, when the Americans left Hispaniola, sugar land under cultivation expanded from just over 200,000 *tareas* (a Dominican land measure equal to one-sixteenth of a hectare) to nearly 3 million. Now the pattern of boom and bust was about to repeat itself.

By the early 1920s, when world sugar prices reached a new high of twenty-two cents per pound, the U.S. companies running most of the Dominican sugarcane industry were in a frenzy to boost production. To keep their mills running, the plantation owners experimented with hiring workers from Puerto Rico and more *cocolos* from the English-speaking Caribbean; but these reinforcements were not enough. For the man-hours they needed, the sugar growers looked to Haiti for desperate men who would accept lower wages than the Dominicans would. In 1920 there had been 28,258 Haitians in the Dominican Republic; by 1935, a year after the Americans left Haiti and eleven years after they had left the Dominican Republic, the number had nearly doubled, to 52,657 legal residents. The corporations had relied so heavily on cheap foreign labor that Dominicans no longer considered cutting cane themselves. That was "Haitian work," unfit for native sons.

The flow of foreign workers peaked just when the U.S. stock market crashed in 1929, beginning the Great Depression. Sugar prices plummeted. Dominican exports to the United States tumbled by two-thirds. Prices fell to under two cents per pound, less than a tenth of what they had been just seven years earlier. Two years later, the sweet stuff sold for under a penny a pound and stayed that way for ten years. That tens of thousands of migrant workers had come to the Dominican Republic for work and wages now seemed a cruel irony. How could the Dominican Republic support all these foreigners, producing crops worth nothing, when its own people did not have jobs?

When sugar prices fell, Rafael Trujillo had already risen to the Presidency from his humble early career as a cane-field guard. As the Great Depression began, Trujillo was well aware that the Presidents before him had fallen from power because they could not deliver prosperity, and he

had no intention of letting the same thing happen to him. His plan was to deflect attention from falling sugar prices by focusing on the many workers who had come to the country to support the sugar machine. If Dominicans directed their anger at foreigners, he would become a hero for fighting to keep the intruders out.

In January 1932, with the sugar harvest in full swing, Trujillo issued migration law number 279. The decree imposed a tax on all foreigners of \$6 for each entry and \$6 per year of residence—except for anyone unfortunate enough to be of Asian or black-African descent, who had to pay annual fees of up to \$300. The U.S. companies that depended on immigrant labor reacted with alarm. How could workers earning sixty cents a day pay this new tax? The ones who would foot the bill, obviously, were the multinational sugar corporations.

Three days after the migration law was passed, the administrator of the Central Romana sugar corporation paid a visit to Trujillo, an incident that the Dominican historian Bernardo Vega recounts. Reminded of the Americans' past generosity to him (and, most likely, pleased that he, a once-humble sugarcane guard, was now in a position to grant or deny favors to the United States), the dictator was persuaded to cut a deal: the *braceros* would be exempted, a loophole that virtually guaranteed that the majority of sugarcane cutters would remain Haitian.

Times were even worse in Cuba, where sugar became a symbol of all that was wrong with the times: at its height, the industry there had produced five million tons a year (supplying half the sugar demand of the entire United States), employed one out of five workers, and made up 90 percent of exports. When sugar's price collapsed to a tenth of its previous level, so did the country's fortunes. Even though the majority of the plantations in Cuba and Hispaniola were owned by U.S. companies, Washington's loyalties were to the producers back home; in 1930 stopgap protectionist barriers were created, and then the 1934 U.S. Sugar Act set up an elaborate system of quotas and domestic price supports that severely limited sugar imports and would continue to dictate the fortunes of the Caribbean sugar economies for decades.

The dramatic drop in the volume as well as the price of Cuba's sugar exports coincided with political turmoil; a general strike and the with-

drawal of U.S. support had forced President Gerardo Machado y Morales to resign in August 1933 and ushered in what would become the long rule of Fulgencio Batista. During a period of intense political intrigue, the government late that year moved to appease the masses of workers clamoring for jobs: it said it would employ no more foreign workers and barred Haitian boats carrying workers from docking; early the next year, it began expelling the tens of thousands of Haitians who had been lured to Cuba to cut cane during the previous decade. Fifty-four miles of ocean separated Cuba and Haiti, so it was nearly impossible for the expelled workers, once back in their Haitian homeland, to return to their old jobs in Cuba. They moved instead to the Dominican Republic, there being no watery barrier to keep them out.

As the new influx of Haitians arrived, Trujillo was doing scapegoating of his own. In 1933, he passed a law "Dominicanizing" the cane harvest, requiring that 70 percent of workers in the cane fields be Dominican. Again, the multinationals won exceptions, but Haitians working outside the sugar industry paid the price for the lenient treatment of the *braceros*. In July 1934, as the U.S. occupation of Haiti was about to end, the Dominicans deported eight thousand Haitians, in the first of many expulsions. A month later, the Dominican Congress passed yet another migration law, followed by a law promoting Dominican colonization of the border area. But the Haitians kept coming, until Trujillo decided to solve the problem permanently in October 1937, just as the cane harvest was about to begin.

How fitting that the massacre called *El Corte* stopped at the borders of the plantations where the real harvest took place, and the Haitian *braceros* on the property of the great multinational corporations were spared. Their blood did not mix with that of the more than twenty-five thousand Haitians that spilled into the waters of the Massacre River along the border.

Because the harvest had not yet begun that year, there were, in fact, very few workers in the fields. The Haitians stopped coming, leaving the plantation managers scrambling to find workers to cut the cane when the harvest began in November. Trujillo had his revenge on the corporations that had thwarted his efforts to keep Haitians out. In the end they were forced to import *cocolos* from the English-speaking islands, paying 30 percent more in wages. The *cocolos* were just as black as the Haitians,

but when the Dominicans sent them home, they could not return to Dominican soil so easily.

Like the cane-growing season itself, sugar prices move in cycles. So did the whims of Trujillo. As the world economy recovered and sugar prices began climbing, Trujillo saw the Haitians in a new light. By 1948 the price of sugar had more than doubled from its Depression low, edging above four cents per pound. That year, Trujillo bought his first sugar property, the Catarey mill and fields near Bonaó, an hour north of Santo Domingo. By 1952 he boasted (erroneously) that his new possession, the Rio Haina mill, near his hometown of San Cristóbal, was the world's largest.

Using threats, creative accounting, and selective strict enforcement of laws to buy land at close to nothing, Trujillo snapped up one plantation after another and drove out Dominican and foreign owners alike. In one memorable example, recounted by the historian Robert Crassweller, Trujillo extorted the Laguna Blanca fields to supply Rio Haina by ordering the assassination of their recalcitrant owner. Informed of his unfortunate predicament, the man agreed to sell Trujillo his land for a pittance, and the dictator graciously withdrew his murder command.

Once again, Haitians were not only welcome but in demand. In 1952, Trujillo and Haiti's President, Paul Magloire, agreed on a plan to ensure a steady supply of cane cutters: Dominican sugar mills would simply buy the workers straight from the Haitian government. The first year of the contract, the Dominicans "bought" 16,500 Haitians. Future harvests filled Trujillo's accounts with sugar dollars and the Haitian government's with profits from its sale of human beings. By the late 1970s the Dominican government was paying Haiti as much as \$3 million a year for the *braceros*.

By 1957, however, President Magloire was gone and François Duvalier was installed in the National Palace in Port-au-Prince. This strange little doctor, who had made his name fighting the disease yaws in the countryside, would soon rival Trujillo for excesses of monomaniacal rule. Though the two dictators on opposite ends of the island eyed each other with distrust, they shared an interest in making money, so they renewed the contract for Haitian workers. Duvalier's firm grip over Haiti guaranteed that workers would be available and pliant; his spy network ex-

import duties in a preamble to more drastic measures soon to follow.

Baby Doc was greedy but not as crafty as his father, and he lacked Papa Doc's sense of timing. He apparently didn't understand that sugar profits were down when he tried to wring more money out of the *bracero* contract in late 1977 by increasing the "head tax" for each worker from sixty-five dollars to seventy dollars. The Dominicans balked and threatened to have their own soldiers cut the cane if necessary. Duvalier backed down.

Just outside the town of La Romana, not far from where the cane cutter Julien Emanuel lost his eye, tourists swarm through a replicated seventeenth-century Italian artists' village, Altos de Chavón. Lining its charming cobbled pathways, there are four restaurants, a large coral amphitheater where international music stars come to perform, a design school, a writers' workshop, art shops, boutiques, and jewelry stores selling necklaces and earrings made from Spanish doubloons retrieved from shipwrecks off the coast of Hispaniola. The site is a perfect complement to Casa de Campo, a resort that began as an executive retreat for Gulf & Western (G&W) and is now playground to the rich and famous, including the likes of Henry Kissinger, Gloria Estefan, and the Dominican dress designer Oscar de la Renta. You can golf, play chukkers of polo, lounge on the beach, take a trail ride, pamper yourself at the spa, enjoy the good life.

The origin of the resort is as troubling as its contrast with the fields of workers around it. In the late 1970s, Charles Bluhdorn, chairman of G&W, the U.S. multinational that owned the vast cane plantations of Central Romana, struck a deal with Dominican officials, a deal that has been analyzed by the journalist Roger Plant. The plan was to speculate on world commodities futures markets using Dominican government, as well as Central Romana, sugar. Bluhdorn, making the right bets, walked away with \$65 million in profits. Under the verbal agreement, the Dominicans were to receive more than half of that money. But G&W used smoke and mirrors to hide some of the gains, then balked at handing over the funds. When the Dominican government threatened to sue, G&W agreed in 1979 to contribute funds to "important infrastructure projects." Altos de Chavón, the artists' colony at its retreat, was the

project the corporation chose to finance. Apparently, it defined broadly the concept of important infrastructure.

While wealthy North Americans and Dominicans cavorted in designer resorts, the workers who sweated to harvest the sugar were forgotten. In early August 1977 at the Rio Haina sugar mill, thousands of Haitians who had completed their work were ready to go home. Instead, they were forced to wait seventeen days during a bout of bad weather, which officials used as an excuse to delay repatriating them. Finally, the workers rebelled; they tried to storm the Rio Haina sugar mill offices before army officers violently put down their uprising. Haitian officials who were supposed to be helping the *braceros* barred them from speaking to reporters about the situation.

In 1979 the world began to take notice of the plight of the Dominican cane cutters. The Anti-Slavery Society of London picked up the case, on which it prepared a damning report that it presented to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva in August. The proceedings irritated the Dominican government, but the guilty parties did not bear the brunt of the scandal; the workers at the bottom of the system did. In June 1980, as the end of the harvest approached, the government took out newspaper ads warning that any employers hiring illegal workers would be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. Never mind that the migration statute invoked had not been dusted off for use in nearly twenty years or that the Dominican government itself was the country's largest employer of Haitians. That year and at the end of harvests in the years to come, Dominican soldiers rounded up all the Haitians they could find and deported them.

The Dominican government responded to a 1983 International Labor Organization inquiry into the status of the cane cutters with a disingenuous but accurate argument: "One of the worst forms of slavery today is practiced by the developed countries when they keep down the prices of basic products by subsidizing and dumping products competing with those that are vital for the countries of the Third World."

In 1981, President Ronald Reagan signed into law the highly protectionist Agriculture and Food Act. It spelled disaster in the Dominican Republic, for it established a sugar-price floor at 16.75 cents a pound, to increase to 18 cents by 1985. With this attractive price for sugar virtually

guaranteed, U.S. farmers immediately began making plans to increase their yields. Of course, the more sugar they grew and processed, the further prices fell, the harder it was for the government to maintain the price support, and the harder it was for countries like the Dominican Republic to get reasonable prices for their crops. World sugar market prices plunged from 29 cents per pound in late 1980 to just over 4 cents in mid-1985, when the worst blow fell.

With the U.S. budget deficit ballooning from Reagan's tax cuts, Congress voted to prevent Uncle Sam from using tax moneys to hold the sugar price up. Under that constraint, there were only two ways to support sugar: quotas and tariffs. Neither was good for the Dominican Republic (nor, for that matter, for Panama, Guatemala, Barbados, Honduras, Peru, Nicaragua, or the Philippines). The United States limited the foreign sugar allowed into its market by using quotas that allowed each country to sell it a specified amount, which would be changed each year according to U.S. needs; it slapped tariffs on amounts above those limits. Since the United States buys one-quarter to one-third of the world's total sugar production, the law sent world sugar prices into a downward spiral.

Cane sugar was still expensive for U.S. food manufacturers, who began switching to cheaper domestic substitutes: beet sugar, high-fructose corn syrup, crystalline fructose, dextrose, and honey. At the same time, the health craze caught on, replacing sugar with saccharine, then aspartame. By 1985, U.S. food manufacturers were using processed sweeteners more than sugar. By 1988 cane-sugar use had fallen to sixty-two pounds per person per year, down 40 percent over twenty years. And as the U.S. sweetener industry grew, imported sugar dipped from 25 percent of the sugar Americans consumed in the 1970s to just 6 percent by 1981. Things were so bad for the Dominican sugar plantations that even G&W gave up. In 1984, after Bluhdorn's death, the multinational sold its Dominican holdings to the Fanjuls, a Cuban sugarcane family exiled in Florida.

The economy of the Dominican Republic, which continued to rely heavily on sugar, was heading for disaster. Because it still had the advantage of a cheap, docile source of labor, however, the government postponed the hard decision of ending its dependence on an industry that had kept it swinging from boom to bust and back again and again. It

made little sense to invest in a dying industry; it was more efficient to direct economic resources to growing enterprises that could provide a higher income in the future. Yet more than half of the country's capital investment was in sugar; the crop provided half of Dominican jobs and one-quarter of the country's exports. By 1983 the Dominican Republic was having trouble paying its foreign bills and had to turn to the International Monetary Fund for more than \$450 million in help, in exchange for which it devalued the peso. By 1985 the government had raised gasoline prices by 33 percent and food prices by as much as 60 percent. Food riots followed in which more than one hundred people died. The country had not even hit bottom.

Sugar mills started closing, and the Haitians who had worked in them spilled out into the rest of the country. Some sought work in other cane fields, and the more ambitious of them went into other agricultural industries: rice, coffee, cacao. Some moved out of the fields into light assembly work in the industrial free-trade zones, service jobs in the hotels, construction, anything at all. With good reason, Dominicans feared that these Haitians would push down wages in this other work as they had in agriculture and take Dominican jobs. At the same time, Dominicans were emigrating in greater numbers to the United States.

In the fields outside Hato Mayor, near the Ozama sugar mill in the Dominican Republic, a Dominican handyman named Florentino Jesus melts down car batteries to retrieve the lead. He throws oil onto a cauldron of smoldering lumps of lead. On the floor lies a row of completed bricks he will sell to factories. His wild hair flops down over his Charles Bronson-like features. "Before, people used to throw out batteries," he says. "Now they don't. They want to get whatever they can for them."

On the side of the dirt road not far from his laboratory, a yellow mini station wagon is stopped next to a water pipe and spigot. A Dominican girl is stomping up a sidewalk complaining that she has to help the man kneeling at the faucet fill bottles of water to bring to the cane cutters. "I don't care if your work does help a Haitian," he yells at her in disgust. "Dominican. Haitian. Shit, chickens probably have bluer blood than we do."

Up the road, Liberades Pérez awakens from an afternoon nap in her crazy-quilt-painted aluminum hut. "Oh, how my head hurts," she la-

ments, patting the blue-and-green scarf above her freckled forehead and hazel eyes. Chatting with strangers as she stands on her tiny porch overlooking seas of cane, she points a mile away to a row of large, long pastel-colored apartment buildings standing incongruously against the sky. Those are the government housing complexes that President Balaguer built for the squatters he forced out of shacks they had erected on land where he wanted to build the Columbus Lighthouse. The complexes are eerie in this context—among the cane fields nearly an hour from the capital, out of their urban element—and stranger to the Dominicans of the *campo* than even the Haitian cane cutters are.

“*Sabe lo que es, un animal?*” You know what an animal is? Liberades mutters, rolling her eyes. “I’ll tell you. That’s it.” The lighthouse people keep to themselves, and nobody can figure out what exactly they do in their concrete government apartments or why they insisted, before, on living in their crowded tin shacks in Santo Domingo. “They are all crazy, stupid,” says Liberades. But she gets on fine with the Haitians who live down the hill and steps confidently down the path on the way to visit Cesar Saint Charles.

He came to the Dominican Republic from Ti Tanyin, in Haiti, fourteen years before, under the government of Antonio Guzmán. The story they told him was the same as always: If you go to Santo Domingo, you can earn fifteen dollars a day. The Dominicans didn’t even have to tell him, because all the Haitians knew. His whole family except one son has left Haiti, too, but they’ve all gone to New York. He won’t go because it’s too cold and expensive: “All you do is spend money.” Besides, he saved enough in the cane fields to build a little house. He had to pay 500 pesos to a Dominican lawyer a few months ago when the police took him to prison for living in a house he didn’t have a title to (who did out in the cane fields?). But he solved the problem and went back to his work fixing shoes, picking potatoes, and gardening. He also paints. Cesar does a slow dance to show how he paints a room: he reaches up, around, and stretches on one bare foot, then another, pointing to imaginary corners, covering them completely with paint in his imagination. “Life here isn’t particularly good,” he says. “But when you compare it . . . well.”

Isolated in the *bateyes*, the *braceros* see no future beyond the waving stalks of sugarcane. They hardly exist on paper. Their children have no

country. They are lucky if they get medical treatment. They have no hope. Dominicans will not do the work they do, and most Dominicans hardly blink at the subhuman treatment meted out to the immigrants. The cane cutters are animals, says Dominican common wisdom. They are good for labor and no more, worth consideration only to make sure they do not leave the *bateyes* and spread their dirty diseases, their inferior culture, their black, black skin. What concern is it that the Haitians do not receive proper medical care? They chose to come to Dominikani. What matter if Dominicans brought them here? They agreed to come.

To speak with cane workers is to learn how incredible it is that these powerless men, forced to work for almost nothing and prevented from leaving the *batey*, could be a threat to Dominicans, as the government argues. The voiceless Haitians cannot even defend themselves. Human-rights advocates say they are modern-day slaves. And in many ways the *braceros’* situation is like that of the original slaves who harvested sugarcane centuries ago. The Spanish colonizers justified working the Taino of Hispaniola to death in their barren gold mines with their belief that the Indians were not human. When the Taino died out, the black slaves brought from Africa harvested coffee, tobacco, and sugar for Europe, and they, too, could be mistreated because their owners believed they were not human.

It has been nearly two hundred years since Haiti abolished slavery and the white planters fled Saint-Domingue, but this denial of the workers’ humanity persists. In a way, today’s situation is even more tragic: Haitians who are in the Dominican Republic to cut cane have come on their own. They may be deceived about the opportunities in Dominikani, but they are not dragged to the cane fields in irons.

The *braceros* are caught in the logic of a time long ago, of the days of slave merchants and colonial plantations. This modern form of slavery is harder to define and more difficult to end because the driving forces behind it are intertwined. International human-rights groups blame the Dominicans, but the Dominicans are not alone. The United States, which has contributed to the problem, has been silent on the issue. It, too, is constrained by the past. Though U.S. interests left the island in the 1940s and 1950s, when Trujillo seized much of the best sugar land by force, later U.S. sugar policies did serious damage to Dominican sugar. And the Dominican government criticizes Haiti for failing to provide for

its people and protests that its own resources are too scarce to do more. Why should Haitians get better treatment when so many Dominicans themselves have no work? It notes that the Dominican Republic was doomed by U.S. sugar policy, which set up massive plantations, then cut back the market for Dominican sugar. It has blamed everyone but itself.

Few Dominicans argue that the Haitian cane cutters' lives are good. But rather than eliciting compassion, the truth of Haitian misery often becomes a circular argument: the *braceros* live miserable lives because they are pathetic, because they can't help it. In this twisted logic, the Haitians' sad circumstances are of their own making. What matter that the Dominican government made the mistake of depending too heavily on the caprice of sugar prices? What difference does it make that without the *braceros* the Dominican sugar mills would grind to a halt? International human-rights groups are embarrassing the Dominican Republic. There are too many Haitians in the country. Haitians are guilty; Haitians deserve their fate.

Bitter Sugar

*Never again will our brothers and sisters give blood to make
bitter sugar.*

—Jean-Bertrand Aristide

In the shining white National Palace in Port-au-Prince, the Duvalier family lived high off the payments they received for Haitian cane cutters sweating under the hot sun in Dominikani. The profits from selling human labor, horrible as they were, could be called the most honest of the Duvaliers' schemes for making money. At least the corrupt Haitian government was delivering something of value in return for the money it received.

When François Duvalier died in April 1971, his nineteen-year-old son, Jean-Claude, became President for Life. Papa Doc's mysterious, austere ways disappeared, replaced by Baby Doc's lax, free-spending lifestyle. In 1980, Baby Doc married a rich mulatto divorcée, Michèle Bennett, in a wedding that cost \$3 million. The First Couple's lifestyle was lavish: \$50,000 monthly flower bills, Michèle's frequent shopping trips, all financed by graft on an impressive new scale. Money flowed out of the government and into Duvalier bank accounts at the speed that blood had run under Papa Doc. The Central Bank, for example, paid a \$100,000 "salary" to Michèle each month. An International Monetary Fund monitoring team estimated that in December 1980 alone \$20 million leaked out of state accounts into Baby Doc's hands.

chapter



It was rare that the Duvalier family business left behind anything except gaping holes in government finances. One project, the Bon Repos Hospital, was different. It stood out not because there was no theft but because it had buildings that the Duvaliers could not spirit out of the country like dollars. As ambitious as she was greedy, Michèle Duvalier badly wanted to polish her public relations, especially with the foreign press. Seeking a cause to portray her as a woman of good deeds, she dreamed of building a hospital with an operating wing of international caliber and repute. Cooler heads convinced her that a charity maternity, children's, and teaching hospital was a more realistic goal, and one that would better project the image of a pious, warmhearted First Lady.

As so often happens on Hispaniola, the finished project did not resemble its glowing promise. The \$4 million spent to build Bon Repos by no means created a sparkling, competent facility. Who knows how much money creative accounting siphoned away from the building fund? Once the facility began operating, graft continued in an even more insidious way. In a particularly disgusting account in *Haiti: An Insider's History of the Rise and Fall of the Duvaliers*, the historian Elizabeth Abbott tells us how physicians abused the hospital as well, performing unnecessary surgeries—such as cesarean sections or hysterectomies, at a cost of twenty or thirty dollars—to pad their salaries. “The water used to bathe patients was so germ-ridden, it caused serious infections,” she writes. “And when patients appeared to be dying, the staff rushed them to the General Hospital so they would not be criticized for having so many deaths on their hands.”

If halfhearted attempts at charitable works could not lend an image of sanctity to the Duvalier regime, the First Couple hoped the approval of the Pope could. In March 1983, preparing for Pope John Paul II's trip to Haiti, Baby Doc and Michèle decked out the country. They spent \$4 million to redecorate the François Duvalier International Airport to welcome him. They hoped the visit would present a bright and shining image of Haiti, with throngs of smiling Haitians turning out to see the pontiff.

Instead of thanking the Duvaliers for their generosity, however, John Paul II delivered them a severe message: “There must be a better distribution of goods, a fairer organization of society, with more popular participation, a more disinterested conception of service on the part of those

who direct society,” he warned, speaking in Haitian Kreyol to an audience delighted that he had learned enough words in their language to address them directly. “I appeal to all those who enjoy power, riches, culture, to understand their urgent responsibility towards all their brothers and sisters.” The throngs of Haitians who turned out to see Pope John Paul II cheered on hearing his command: “*Fok sa chanje.*” Things must change here.

Change was coming in Haiti. On Hispaniola, sugar is a force so strong that it even drives political change. But like the crop, once the old stalks have been cleared out and burned, new political leaders and the men around them grow back to create a landscape that closely resembles the one that came before.

The Pope's forceful words must have come as a shock to the Haitian clerical hierarchy, which openly supported the Duvalier regime, especially because the dictator had helped its highest officials. When François Duvalier became President in 1957, Haiti's many light-skinned foreign-born clergy were a threat to his black-oriented, nativist politics of *négritude* (which stressed the values of African culture) and of the Vodou syncretic religion. For a decade his *tontons macoutes* threatened, bullied, even killed clergy; Duvalier was excommunicated. Nonetheless, in 1966 a Vatican concordat granted him the power he wanted to shape Haiti's Church: the right to appoint a new Haitian-born local Church hierarchy. For most of the next thirty years, many of those priests were largely complacent in the face of the Duvalier regime. But by the mid-1980s, that was changing.

Only a year before the Pope spoke in Haiti, a young priest had been sent out of the country because of his calls for change in the nature and tone of Haitian government. “Can we continue to find normal this situation of violence imposed on the poor?” Jean-Bertrand Aristide had demanded.

Aristide was born on July 15, 1953, in the southwestern town of Port-Salut. His father died not long after his birth, and his mother supported him and his sister, Anne-Marie, from her small business selling clothes and doing odd jobs. She arranged schooling in Port-au-Prince for the children, who returned each summer to their grandfather's home and taught their playmates to read and write. Aristide's grandfather was

a peasant who had acquired some land and taught the boy to help those less fortunate. In 1966 the thirteen-year-old Aristide completed grade school and was on his way to the seminary to study languages and work with the poor, following the teachings of the Salesian St. John Bosco. Aristide excelled at the seminary, both in the classroom and out. He was captain of the soccer team and became leader of the Roosters scout patrol.

The year Aristide entered the seminary, Joaquín Balaguer was elected President of the Dominican Republic. In 1974, at the end of Balaguer's second elected term, Aristide turned twenty-one, finished his seminary training, and went to study at the Salesian novitiate in the Dominican Republic. He then returned to study philosophy and psychology at Haiti's state university; in 1979 he received a three-year scholarship to study in Israel, Greece, and Egypt.

Against the wishes of his superiors, who urged another year of study, Aristide returned to Haiti in June 1982 to put his years of scholarship to work. His dissident preaching at St. Joseph Parish soon prompted Interior Minister Roger Lafontant to protest to his superiors in the Salesian order, who, complying with the official dissatisfaction, stripped the young priest of his assignment and sent him to Montreal for "pastoral reorientation." During nearly three years in Canada, Aristide completed a master's degree in biblical theology and course work toward a doctoral degree in psychology, two courses of study he linked under the theme of neurosis in the Old Testament.

When Father Aristide returned to Haiti in January 1985, the Pope's words were still echoing: Things must change here! Haitians no longer feared saying that they wanted no more of a government that had forced tens of thousands of their neighbors, cousins, sons, and brothers to brave hostile waters and possible death in rickety boats in hopes of reaching Miami. They wanted an end to Jean-Claude and Michèle's cronies' looting of what remained of their poor country, an end to the shopping expeditions in Paris while peasants starved or departed for Dominican cane fields. How much longer would Haitians prefer selling themselves into the hands of a pitiless foreign government to remaining in their own homeland?

Aristide was now assigned to a parish in Les Cayes, on the southern peninsula several hours south and west of Port-au-Prince. He spent a day each week journeying back and forth to Port-au-Prince to teach a

seminary Bible class. Ignoring the possibility that he might again be reprimanded, he resumed the fiery protests he had begun in 1982. The young priest's followers recorded his sermons and passed audiotapes around the country. "*Va-t-en Satan*"—Satan begone!—Aristide commanded Duvalier in January 1986.

The flesh of Haiti was wasting away. The country's vultures saw that soon there would be nothing left to gnaw. Alerted to the open looting of government accounts, multinational organizations were threatening to cut off economic aid. After fifteen years of Baby Doc, there was little left of Haiti to pillage. What else might the country have expected from a spoiled boy who became President at the age of nineteen? At least Duvalier *père* had once been a physician who had done something useful, but his son had never had much of a vocation beyond fast cars and fun. Soft-bellied Baby Doc did not have the strength to keep Haiti together.

Even the army was disgusted. For a system based on corruption to work, it must not appear that the opportunities for enrichment are being made available disproportionately. Jean-Claude Duvalier had failed to understand that and had given too much rein to his wife's father and brothers. Not only had they not left enough of the spoils for the armed forces, but also their drug trafficking in the United States brought trouble. Shut out of the sweetest deals, Haiti's military officers began to plot the end for Baby Doc. All they needed was an excuse that would make their takeover plausible. Aristide and the cane cutters would give them what they needed.

As the Duvaliers' hold on Haiti weakened, so did Haiti's arrangements with the Dominican Republic for contracting *braceros* to harvest sugar. As protests grew louder in Port-au-Prince, compliant workers grew scarce. For decades, Haitians had been hearing about the Dominican harvest from the official accounts given in radio broadcasts. Haitians believed they could provide well for their families by joining the truckloads of workers who went to Dominikani each winter. But in the last days of Baby Doc, more realistic accounts slipped through. As the 1985–86 harvest was about to begin, the story spread of what had happened the year before to workers returning from the Dominican Republic, their pockets filled with the meager wages they had somehow managed to save over the year. Officials responsible for changing Dominican pesos into

Haitian gourdes had robbed them at the border. To be sure the workers had not hidden money, the officials even stripped the Haitians of their thin clothes coated with the greasy black grime of the cane fields.

Meanwhile, the Dominican government was tired of foreign meddling and irritating human-rights groups. It was no longer sure it wanted the trouble that the Haitian workers brought with them. More important, by late 1985 the Dominican State Sugar Council (CEA) was running out of money to pay for them. And the country could not export as much of its crop at favorable prices after the United States drastically slashed its sugar quota. The United States imported 302,016 short tons of Dominican sugar in the 1985–86 harvest but in September announced that the next year's quota would drop by 44 percent.

Just as the harvest was about to begin in November, the Dominican government stated that it would not bring in more *braceros*. Instead, the state sugar company would recruit Haitians already in the country and try to attract Dominicans to do the work—a plan doomed from the start. The CEA had no money to pay for new recruits to work under barely human conditions, and even less to improve the *bateyes*. Even the government's heavy-handed recruiting, often at gunpoint, didn't fill the need. Independent cane growers, *colonos*, protested. With government sugar mills using most of the available manpower, there were not enough *braceros* to keep the *colonos'* mills open.

By 1986 the government had no choice. The cane was already taller than a man, ready to be harvested or rot. It had to pay for Haitian workers or lose the cane. On January 18, Haitian Ambassador Hervé Denis and two Dominican officials flew from Santo Domingo to Port-au-Prince on an urgent mission. The three of them delivered Duvalier two suitcases, each bearing \$1 million in cash: payment for nineteen thousand Haitian cane cutters.

The Dominicans never received the human cargo they had purchased. On January 28 thousands of Haitian peasants lined up at the recruiting center at the Leogane market, where Dominicans came every year to hire workers. A mob of demonstrators massed around the potential recruits and stoned the soldiers who were to have signed the peasants up. The Haitian army sent out backup forces, but the violence escalated. Twenty-six people died in two days of riots. When the government tried

to move the registration center to the south, at Jacmel, the townspeople protested, making that plan impossible to carry out.

It became clear that the sugarcane trade had been siphoning off the strong young men who might have risen up against the regime had they stayed in Haiti. By leaving for Dominikani, the *braceros* had unwittingly helped to keep Haiti from blowing up. Now the *braceros* themselves were at the center of protests. The same practice that had financed the Duvaliers, the pressure valve that had bought them time, would bring them down. The *bracero* protests gave the army the credible excuse it needed to push out Baby Doc. At first, it seemed like poetic justice.

On February 7 a black Mercedes whisked Jean-Claude and Michèle Bennett Duvalier to the airport in Port-au-Prince, where a U.S. military plane waited. The First Couple carried into exile the \$2 million in cash the Dominicans had given them not even a month earlier. A month later, when the Duvaliers had settled in the South of France, the street in front of the Dominican consulate in Port-au-Prince filled with throngs of protesters. Led by Aristide, they carried a coffin to bury symbolically the hated practice of selling Haitians to the Dominicans to cut cane.

On February 23 the Episcopal Conferences of the Dominican Republic and Haiti jointly issued a protest against the treatment of sugarcane workers. Haitian exiles in Canada and human-rights groups in the United States and Europe all joined in. The protests failed, however, to propose a solution. The meager sustenance the Dominican cane fields provided was better than what workers could expect in Haiti: nothing at all. Even knowing how badly the Dominicans would treat them, many Haitians saw no alternative but the Dominican cane fields. Misery in Dominikani was better than starvation in Haiti.

The Haitians tried their luck crossing the border on their own, without even the façade of protection in the official contract. Under the old formal arrangement, at least they had had a sure way of getting work. Standing in line at a migrant-cane-cutter center was one thing. Agreeing to accompany an unknown recruiter to whatever job he offered was another. Offers abounded for light farmwork, construction, anything that sounded better than cutting cane. They were all fictitious.

As the year went on, the Dominicans, desperate for workers to cut the grown cane before it rotted, created a new system of individual con-

tracts for the *braceros*. Still, there was no one to explain to the workers, many of whom were illiterate, what their few rights were nor anyone to translate from Spanish into Kreyol. Besides, as it turned out, the slips of paper, ostensibly "contracts," carried no legal weight at all but were merely identification cards, and then not even properly that, since the officials who filled them in inked in errors as often as not. Depending on how sloppy the bureaucrats were, the name on a worker's card could be somebody else's or nobody's. Most often, a *bracero* could not read well enough to tell the difference.

Even the new contracts didn't make up for the nineteen thousand missing workers. Strapped for manpower, the Dominican government had its soldiers patrol the streets looking for Haitians, round them up, and take them to the *bateyes*. Sometimes police would rush into one field where the harvest was drawing to a close, herd the hapless cane cutters into a truck, and sell them to another plantation.

As Haitian politics descended into chaos, the economy of the Dominican Republic became worse and worse. In seven years the Dominican harvest had shrunk by a fifth. From just over a million metric tons in 1980, the harvest dipped to 815,500 metric tons in 1987, the year the government closed the mills at Catarey, Amistad, and Esperanza. Rumor was that the New York real-estate mogul Donald Trump would build a five-hundred-room hotel on the north coast, on the old Montellano land, near the resorts of Puerto Plata. But like most rumors, this one never came true. Dominican workers, themselves desperate for jobs, worried that Haitians would stream from the cane fields into the cities. When the mills closed, many Haitians found work harvesting coffee and rice, but others headed for the cities. Dominicans began seeing more and more Haitians in heavy-construction jobs; these soon joined cane cutting as dirty "Haitian work." Despite the old paradox that Haitians were doing work Dominicans refused to do, the immigrants were nonetheless blamed for Dominicans' lack of jobs. The more Haitians appeared in Dominican cities, the more pressure grew to keep them on the fields and to make sure they remained docile.

But sometimes it was impossible to ignore the Haitians' plight. In February 1989 a Mack truck carrying Haitians to a cane field careened along a cliff-side Dominican highway. The truck's violent swerves and lurches threw its passengers up against one another and against the rough

sides of the truck. Their discomfort didn't matter much to the Dominican driver, who was drunk on rum he had coerced the Haitians to buy for him: he had promised that if they gave him drinking money he would take them to a field where they would be treated well. How much better conditions did they expect? Did they imagine running water, mattresses on the iron bed frames, perhaps a little medical clinic? Instead, the inebriated Dominican drove the truck over the edge of the cliff, killing the forty-six Haitians riding in the back.

The accident shocked the country, but a few months later it was all but forgotten when the police again started rounding up Haitians to meet a surprise boost in the Dominican sugar quota to the United States. In September 1989 the Americans cut off Panama's sugar quota and distributed the Panamanian share around; the new calculation nearly doubled the Dominican allotment from 185,328 to 333,035 tons. If the Dominicans couldn't meet the increased quota, they would lose windfall hard currency.

As the State Sugar Council sent everything it could produce to the United States, sugar disappeared from Dominican grocery shelves. Supposedly the government was importing inexpensive supplies from the world market to fill Dominican sugar bowls, but very little made its way to Dominican households. At the height of their own cane harvest, Dominicans could not find sugar to sweeten their dark, strong coffee.

After the fall of Baby Doc, Haitians wanted to inter forever the symbols of death and suffering from the Duvalier years. On April 24 demonstrators, led by Jean-Bertrand Aristide, gathered outside his church to cast away the past. On their shoulders they carried mock coffins, many representing the *bracero* system, to take to a symbolic funeral at Fort Dimanche, the dark prison where Duvalier's henchmen had tortured their victims. As word of the mock funeral spread through Port-au-Prince, soldiers from Fort Dimanche appeared, arrested protesters, and brought them to the prison. Late that night, Aristide drove to Fort Dimanche and convinced the guards to let them go.

"Haiti is a prison," Aristide wrote later, recounting the events. "In that prison, there are rules you must abide by or suffer the pain of death. One rule is: Never ask for more than what the prison warden considers your share. Never ask for more than a cupful of rice and a drink of dirty

water each day, or each week. Another rule is: Remain in your cell. Though it is crowded and stinking and full of human refuse, remain there, and do not complain. That is your lot. Another rule is: Do not organize. Do not speak to your fellow prisoners about your plight. Every time you get two cups of rice, another prisoner will go hungry. Every time another prisoner gets two drinks of dirty water, you will go thirsty. Hate your fellow man."

Two days later, on April 26, demonstrators worshipped in a Mass of Mourning at the Church of Sacré Cœur, then marched to Fort Dimanche—where, exactly twenty-three years earlier, François Duvalier had ordered a mass execution of political prisoners in retaliation for an attempted kidnapping of his children. The Duvaliers were gone now, but repression was not. As the demonstrators broadcast the mock funeral over the Church-owned radio station, Radio Soleil, truckloads of soldiers bore down on them, ejected canisters of tear gas into the crowd, then opened machine-gun fire. Throughout this shocking sequence of events, Aristide announced over the airwaves what was happening.

Loyal to the regime and intent on preserving the status quo, Haiti's Church leaders were displeased. Within a few weeks, the Salesian order warned Aristide to stop taking part in politics; when he did not, it transferred him out of Port-au-Prince. His angry parishioners went on a hunger strike until the order allowed him to return. He was building a new history of Haiti—telling the stories of the forgotten cane cutters, the murdered prisoners, the victims. One man, even backed by the soundless voices of the unheard, could not hope to stand up against the Haitian system. This new mythic history, though, had within it the power for change. In the meantime, the situation in Haiti remained the same, with its patterns of intimidation and theft. But as there was less and less to steal, the repression intensified.

The first Sunday in August 1987, shortly after he was reinstated at his church, St. Jean Bosco, Aristide said Mass, then headed to Port-Sonde for a memorial service for hundreds of peasants who had been murdered by soldiers at Jean-Rabel the month before. As Aristide stood up to speak, three white-clad men wearing hats waved their revolvers wildly and fired into the crowd. Aristide recalled later: "One of them pointed his gun directly at me, standing there . . . I was standing there because at that moment I was unable to run and leave everybody. I could

not take to my heels like a bad pastor, and leave my sheep behind to face the guns . . . I felt calm, and I stood there, and I saw the gun pointed at me and I saw the smoke coming from the gun and I heard the noise of the bullets. He missed me, and began again, and again I saw the smoke and heard the noise, and he missed me again." Finally, a woman pulled Aristide down under a pile of people. Somehow they all escaped, through a harrowing night and past treacherous roadblocks. Aristide lost a shoe, his car was crushed, but he was safe. The priest now had a reputation for having divine protection, and the military junta ruling Haiti was losing power.

Under intense international pressure, the armed forces were preparing to hold elections, planned for November 29. The eve of the elections, gunshots filled the night air, and on the morning of the balloting, hooded *tontons macoutes* descended on the Argentine-Bellegarde school, a voting place, and killed twenty-four voters. Terrified Haitians stayed home, and the elections were canceled. The junta followed that sad charade with a mock election in which a sociology professor named Leslie Manigat was "elected" President by barely more than 5 percent of the populace.

The armed forces had imagined that Manigat would be a weak puppet. Thinking himself a real President nonetheless, Manigat in June 1988 tried to assert his power over them. He fired General Henri Namphy as head of the armed forces, put him under house arrest, and replaced him with the notorious drug trafficker Colonel Jean-Claude Paul. But the army was loyal to Namphy and in three days made it clear to Manigat who really ran the country. It gave Namphy his job back and toppled the puppet president, sending him across the border out of the country. Poison found its way into Colonel Paul's pumpkin soup, and he suffered a fatal heart attack. In Santo Domingo, on his way to exile in New York and France, Manigat denounced Namphy as mentally ill. He was only the first of a long line of deposed Haitian leaders to make their way through the Dominican Republic. Soon there were so many that the rooms they occupied in the Dominican Concorde Hotel became known as the Haitian Presidential suite.

Namphy and his gang were as corrupt as the Duvaliers had been and showed no more propensity to let Haitians choose their own leaders than their predecessors had. For all their dissatisfaction about the faucet of foreign aid having been shut off at the end of the Duvalier regime, the

military governments that followed could not keep aid money flowing either. They resorted to random attacks and terror to create the illusion that they had real control of Haiti, but for all their guns and power to intimidate the soldiers were powerless.

Aristide kept on attacking the regime. The soldiers decided to silence him on September 11, 1988. At St. Jean Bosco, Aristide was preparing to consecrate the Sacraments when a band of armed men dressed in black and red burst in amid a barrage of stones and bullets. Parishioners whisked Aristide into his house adjoining the church. The thugs cut down parishioners trying to flee, then torched the church with people and corpses still inside. They searched Aristide's house hours later, then inexplicably let him go.

The next day, a Salesian superior flew in from Santo Domingo to speak sternly with Aristide. Three months later, the order expelled him; he was now a priest with no parish. Because he preached class struggle, Aristide was no longer qualified to speak the Word of Christ in public, they said in a four-page document removing him from his priestly duties.

On September 17, General Namphy, like Manigat only months before, found himself on the way to the Haitian Presidential suite at the Dominican Concorde Hotel. The general who sent him packing, Prosper Avril, lasted for a little more than a year before he, too, was on shaky ground. In March 1990, Avril handed the Presidency to Ertha Pascal Trouillot, president of the Supreme Court. She began the process that would lead to Haiti's first free elections ever. In October 1990 the leader of the *tontons macoutes*, Roger Lafontant, announced that he would run for the Presidency, but the leading candidate was Marc Bazin, Duvalier's Finance Minister and a former World Bank official. With the backing of the United States and tacit approval of the Dominicans, Bazin seemed a shoo-in.

Then came the surprise. A new party, the National Front for Change and Democracy (FNCD), named Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide as its candidate. Aristide was ready to step out of the Duvaliers' long shadow into the light. He entered the ring of politics under the symbol of "the cock, the bird that sings and rouses." His slogan was "*Kòk la chante, fok sa chanje*," The cock sings, we must change things—an echo of the words of Pope John Paul II. The image was ambiguous: though it suggested dawn, promising a new future, it also evoked the violence of the cock-

fight. Aristide was the *kòk kalite*, a top-notch fighting rooster, king of all fighting cocks.

Election day came on December 16, bringing with it brigades of international election observers. Haitians lined up early in the morning to cast their votes. When the ballots were counted, Aristide had won 67 percent of the votes. Marc Bazin, the second-place candidate and the favorite of the Dominicans, earned only 14 percent. The *kòk kalite* would be President.

For the first time since the days of Papa Doc Duvalier, Haiti had a leader whose personal mythology threatened that of the Dominicans' Balaguer. Aristide had already escaped death several times in public, making Haitians wonder if he were immortal. The young President-elect seemed to be under the protection of the Vodou spirits. But in Santo Domingo, Balaguer's power had been waning. When the May 16, 1990, Dominican elections approached and he prepared to fight desperately to be elected President a fifth time, popular frustration ran high. There had never before been so many *apagones*, blackouts. A popular merengue tune complained about mosquitoes biting when the power failed and the electric fans turned off. Dominicans joked that the government didn't do anything about the blackouts because the President couldn't see that the lights went out, which literally was true: when a *New York Times Magazine* reporter was interviewing the President shortly before the elections, the lights went out in the Presidential palace and Balaguer didn't even blink. Traffic continually jammed around stoplights that went dark every time there was a blackout. In the past the government had always brought blackouts under control for at least the few months before an election, but this time it couldn't even manage a week of consistent power. Prices were doubling each year. Housewives complained that they could barely afford their *pan de agua*, the soft, small "water bread" rolls that are a Dominican staple. Chickens were slaughtered and left to rot because businesses couldn't get dollars to buy imported feed. "*Ojalá que llueva café*," Juan Luis Guerra's hit merengue, pleaded: "So the people on their little farms do not suffer so much, O Lord, let it rain coffee in the countryside." He sang of the peasants' dreams of filling the mountainsides and their dinner tables with strawberries, sweet potatoes, wheat, and rice. While Dominicans went hungry, the government kept spending enor-

mous sums on the Columbus Lighthouse. Lines of Dominicans wanting to leave their country formed at the U.S. consulate before dawn. By the time the doors of the ugly white building opened, the hopefuls stretched almost out of sight. Businesses popped up around the line: a cafeteria and a passport shop across the street, a swarm of kiosk vendors and taxicabs hovering around the corner of Máximo Gómez and Cesar Nicolás Penson.

Balaguer and his old rival Juan Bosch were both in their early eighties, with thin white hair. For months polls showed Bosch in the lead. Trailing in third place was José Francisco Peña Gómez, the black leader of the Dominican Revolutionary Party who had won the nomination over Jacobo Majluta, who had served forty-three days as President after Antonio Guzmán killed himself in 1982. The disgruntled Majluta, running as the candidate of his own Independent Revolutionary Party, trailed a very distant fourth.

Bosch's Dominican Liberation Party (PLD) presented a politically and economically moderate platform that appealed enough to the nation's business interests not to cast it out of favor with the United States, which had invaded Santo Domingo in 1965 to keep him and his allegedly pro-Communist leftist ideology from returning to the Presidency. But now, a week before the elections, Bosch inexplicably announced that if elected he would disestablish Roman Catholicism as the national religion. This dramatic statement, in a vastly Catholic country, stirred the same old fears that an older generation of Dominicans had always had about Bosch. His 1963 Presidency, after all, had ended after only seven months and had led to civil war and an American invasion. Was he so unpredictable as once again to bring chaos to the country? People wondered about his mental state. They shrugged off the many rumors of Alzheimer's disease as concoctions of Balaguer's Reformistas; the story of the Cuban doctor who allegedly had treated him turned out to be a ruse. But what about his speech at Puerto Plata, in the north, which had begun with his addressing "my beloved people of La Romana," in the southeast?

When Bosch then announced that if elected he would stop all government construction projects—not just the Columbus Lighthouse boondoggle but even the housing projects that brought hundreds of jobs each—Dominican truckers jammed the streets in protest. Quickly, Bosch's lead in the polls slipped to a slim, slim margin, surely not enough

to overcome Balaguer's bag of tricks for winning elections. "Balaguer?" chuckled a Dominican sociologist. "He's won every time, but he's never really *won!*"

The morning after the election, the front pages of Dominican newspapers were filled with photos of rallies of Dominicans clad in purple and yellow: the colors of Bosch's PLD. Early returns showed that, as Bosch had promised, it would be "*el año de la victoria morada*," the year of the purple victory. By noon, however, official electoral council bulletins showed Balaguer in the lead. As darkness fell, it was clear that Balaguer had stolen another election.

Dominicans locked their doors that night and stayed inside. Word was out that Bosch was calling for blood on the streets to reclaim what was his. The next morning, all was calm. Bosch's party, realizing that his erratic behavior of recent weeks made it unlikely the country would rally behind him, had ignored his call for violence. The third-place candidate, Peña Gómez, working with former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, helped to mediate the situation. It was weeks before a recount of the votes was completed, but the fighting red rooster of Joaquín Balaguer was victorious with just over a third of the votes, and Bosch and Peña were not far behind him.

Balaguer was very weak. In Haiti, Aristide was just beginning to fight. Hispaniola had rarely supported two strongmen at once: each *caudillo's* power depended on his ability to preserve an aura that reminded his people that he was the only Great Leader on the island.

Rafael Trujillo stayed in power for only the first two years of Papa Doc Duvalier's rule. When Duvalier was first elected, the long-established Dominican dictator did his best to make sure he did not become a threat: he broadcast Kreyol-language anti-Duvalier propaganda into Haiti, harbored dissident Haitian exiles, and dispatched his feared security chief, Johnny Abbés García, to Port-au-Prince to stir up trouble. He backed off only after Duvalier threatened to welcome Dominican exiles in Port-au-Prince. Their uneasy truce could not have lasted long, and if Trujillo's own people had not assassinated him, he and Papa Doc would surely have escalated tensions to a breaking point.

After his father's death, Jean-Claude Duvalier was the ideal Haitian counterpart to a Dominican strongman like Balaguer. Once Baby Doc

was gone, none of the military governments that followed him lasted long enough to merit the blink of an eye. But with Aristide's election, Balaguer faced a real threat. Aristide was at the beginning of his political career and Balaguer at the end. The young priest was impetuous, erratic, and his political power came from his public rejection of the Duvalier regime before him. Balaguer was calculating and patient, traits he learned from his mentor and predecessor, traits Trujillo had shown in his rise from sugar-field guard to President. When Trujillo fell out of favor with the United States, some of Balaguer's old school companions had called him from exile in New York, urging him to leave the government and help them form an opposition party. "No," Balaguer had told them, "I'll stay here and pick the mangoes from the low branches." In opposing the past, Aristide was attacking the basis of Balaguer's entire political career.

Their differences were all the more provocative because the two men had much in common. Both were solitary, enigmatic. Aristide, mysterious, impulsive, let Haiti and the world wonder whether he was prophetic or power-mad. Balaguer shuffled his cabinet, issued cryptic pronouncements, kept Dominicans guessing as to who he really was. Aristide and Balaguer, the priest and the bachelor, remained aloof, mirror images of each other. It was little wonder that each had chosen the fighting rooster as his political symbol. And it was inevitable that they would face off.

Sugar was the obvious issue, the cane fields the obvious arena where Aristide would choose to fight. When he came into office, his country had empty coffers and people with high expectations. He needed symbolic moves that would produce quick psychological results while he waited for international aid to return to Haiti and boost its economy. The cane cutters had already proved their political strength: their plight had helped bring down Baby Doc. But what benefit had they received from his departure? The tragedy of the cane cutters was as dramatic as before, if not more so.

In the spring of 1991, wasting little time after his February inauguration, Aristide denounced the treatment of Haitians in the cane fields as no better than the slavery of colonial times. Every few years a chorus of international groups had launched staccato attacks on the Dominican Republic on this issue; they gave Aristide ample weapons.

Since 1988, the Quebecois Committee for the Recognition of the

Rights of Haitian Workers had waged a campaign urging tourists to boycott Dominican resorts—which was brilliantly well-timed, since the Dominican government was pouring money and cement into new hotels, resting much of its economic policy on attracting sun-hungry visitors, many of them Canadian. In March 1990 the UN Human Rights Committee had chastised the Dominican Republic for its glacial progress in submitting a requested report on the cane fields. Americas Watch, the National Coalition for Haitian Refugees, and Caribbean Rights all demanded that the United States withdraw its more than \$200 million in preferential trade benefits until the Dominican Republic dramatically improved its treatment of Haitian workers. U.S. trade representative Carla Hills came to investigate whether the country was indeed violating worker rights, in which case it would be ineligible for Generalized System of Preferences and Caribbean Basin Initiative trade benefits that allowed Dominican imports into the United States duty-free.

The Dominican Republic also stood to lose trade preferences and aid benefits from the European Community's Lomé Convention, an agreement to which it had been admitted only because it had applied jointly with Haiti. Combined, the populations and economies of Lomé's thirteen tiny Caribbean member states barely equaled those of the Dominican Republic, so the Dominicans represented an economic threat, but members could not justify refusing admission to Haiti, the poorest nation in the Americas. The Dominicans rode in on Haiti's tattered coattails but apparently hadn't given a thought to the continued rapprochement that they would need if they were to keep the benefits.

International pressure had intensified. In a September editorial headlined "Slaves of Dominicans," *The Miami Herald* had argued in favor of boycotting Dominican agriculture. When the International Labor Organization wanted to send a delegation to the Dominican Republic to investigate the cane fields, the Dominican government had flatly refused. Balaguer had called the allegations untrue, "foul and offensive," and a contradiction of Dominicans' "hospitality" to Haitians. On October 15, as the 1990 harvest was about to begin, he issued a decree providing individual contracts for the workers, giving them legal status as temporary residents or fixed-term day laborers. He promised to improve health, education, and basic living conditions on the *bateyes*. "The human rights of the *braceros* must be respected in the Dominican Republic," he de-

clared. His words rang hollow. Decree 417/90 was nothing but cosmetic, a cynical response.

Four months later, in February, Haitian Ambassador Albert Chasagne bluntly told *El Siglo* that he was still waiting to see action, not just words. The U.S. State Department's 1990 "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices" called the decree "essentially a reiteration of labor code provisions which in the past have rarely been enforced in practice."

Yet, strangely, it didn't seem to matter. Balaguer had made a clever move in erecting a paper decoy. For the United States the decree was enough. In April 1991 the U.S. trade representative reported that the Dominican Republic was taking steps to improve worker rights recognized under international law. What were those steps? Balaguer had created a blue-ribbon commission to reform the labor code (completed and neatly published a year later) and issued the October decree that in theory allowed Haitian immigrants to legalize their status. (This would work fine for new migrants, but what about the workers who had lived in the *bateyes* for decades? Or the children born there of parents without papers?) The U.S. Commerce Department turned down the Americas Watch petition. The Dominican Republic kept its trade benefits.

The United States' role in the whole Dominican-Haitian confrontation was a charade. It threatened Dominicans with economic sanctions in an industry it had, in effect, created; the Dominican cane fields were dying in part because powerful U.S. agricultural interests had won protectionist policies that shut out foreign sugar; and now the Commerce Department was accepting a farcical declaration as proof that things were getting better. Which was the greatest irony?

The human-rights groups did not give up. In May the New York City-based Lawyers Committee for Human Rights issued a report on Haitian children cutting cane in Dominican fields. In a 1991 interview given at Batey Palamarejo, on the Rio Haina cane plantation, two fourteen-year-old boys described to the Lawyers Committee representative how Dominican recruiters had convinced them to come to the Dominican Republic by promising that all they would have to do was gather eggs from henhouses and other light farmwork. A reporter and a cameraman from ABC's *Primetime Live* confronted a Dominican State Sugar Council official about the miserable treatment of an old, sick *bracero* they had interviewed: the bureaucrat pursed her lips, sighed, and in

florid, formal Spanish replied that she lamented it greatly but nothing could be done.

The truth was the sugarcane issue could not have emerged at a better time for Balaguer, who needed something to take his people's minds away from their other economic troubles. No one in the Dominican Republic had forgotten the food riots of 1984 and 1985, and the economic crisis of 1990-91 demanded austerity measures very similar to the ones that had brought those riots on.

Things were spinning out of control. The country had run out of dollars. Even the business community, which normally supported Balaguer, was restive. Dozens of vehicles were lined up at each gas station waiting in vain for fuel that never arrived. Poultry farms had to let chickens starve because they could not get dollars to import feed. Medicines disappeared from pharmacy shelves. Even toothpaste was hard to find. The government was arresting hotel owners who failed to convert their dollars to pesos with the Central Bank.

In the Dominican political calculus, letting things go to the brink of chaos was the only logical thing for Balaguer to do. Taking the measures needed to bring dollars back in would have been political suicide before the election. Halting his massive public-works projects would have left many Dominicans jobless. Slowing government spending would have slammed the economy to a stop. Balaguer allowed just enough uncertainty that his campaign slogan—*Un Camino sin Peligro*, A Path without Danger—resonated. What would happen if he were not there to run the country?

By holding food prices and the peso steady, Balaguer had kept the people on his side as long as he needed them. When the business community chafed under the currency crisis and criticized the government, Balaguer called a prominent insurance man who was also a vocal advocate of business-community interests to the National Palace and proposed that he become the director of a new investigation he was commissioning into fraud in the insurance industry. The businessman immediately picked up on the veiled threat that he would be investigated and agreed to become part of the Administration, from which point, of course, he could no longer protest against the government.

Shortly after his new term began Balaguer removed subsidies on flour, sugar, cooking oil, and other basic foods. He boosted gasoline

prices and began negotiations for funding from the international financial community. Businesses were relieved, but poor Dominicans were out in the streets protesting.

The Haitian cane cutters provided just the issue Balaguer needed to distract Dominicans. Cleverly, the octogenarian President turned the international scandal over the cane workers to his advantage. Just as Trujillo had done after the 1937 massacre, Balaguer more than fifty years later was rallying his people to the defense of their country, painting his government as their savior.

Balaguer's position had always been that, since the days of Toussaint Louverture and Boyer, Haitians had made no secret of their dream of uniting the island under Haitian rule. This time, he claimed, the Haitians were trying to fuse the island quietly, by sending hundreds of thousands of poor peasants across the border into the Dominican Republic. It was Balaguer's destiny to defend the Dominican reputation against accusations of practicing slavery. The *bracero* problem was not the Dominicans' fault, nor was it his. It was the Haitians' fault.

On June 14, President Balaguer issued a new decree ordering that all Haitian immigrants over sixty or under sixteen years old be expelled. If the human-rights groups did not like the way Haitians were treated in the Dominican Republic, they could all go home. The Dominicans had been hospitable enough. Why continue to accept the Haitians if scandal was all one got from it? Pragmatism and ideology went hand in hand. The harvest was over, the workers were not needed until November, and the Dominicans could be rid of the Haitians and the human-rights groups. Haiti's impertinent Aristide could have back the workers about whose fates he had been so concerned. No more Haitians in Dominican cane fields? That suited Balaguer fine. Let Aristide find them jobs in Haiti.

The "repatriations," Balaguer said, were "merely friendly interventions in order to look for certain arrangements." The soldiers rushed to follow his orders. They not only combed the cane fields for Haitians but patrolled the cities and roadsides for anyone they thought looked Haitian. Refugee organizations estimate that fourteen thousand Haitians were expelled; another forty thousand fled in fear.

Dominican and Haitian priests who publicized the cane workers'

plight received death threats. Soldiers prowled every neighborhood where Haitians were known to live, arresting people in Santo Domingo's Little Haiti and on the streets of beach and sugar towns like Boca Chica and San Pedro de Macorís, east of Santo Domingo. Haitians whose families had lived in the Dominican Republic for generations were torn from their children and spouses. Deported to Haiti, they had no family or friends in the country that was, yet was not, their own.

Dominican intellectuals watched the frenzy with dismay. "If it certainly created a euphoria among the anti-Haitian forces, it did nothing to confront technically the problem," commented the Dominican sociologist Rubén Silié. "Balaguer allowed to awaken anew among 'the good Dominicans' the idea that just as under Trujillo, they were protected by Balaguer against the new Haitian attempts at domination."

The Dominican authorities did not just deport cane cutters. Soldiers marched down Delmonte y Tejada Street, where they knocked on doors one by one, checking the documents of anyone who lived there. They helped the Haitians without visas to gather their things and carry them downstairs to a waiting bus, which took the Haitians to San Cristóbal, half an hour west of Santo Domingo. There the Haitians stayed for a week before many were released or escaped.

It took only a few weeks for them to return to the hotels, where their merchandise was waiting. The owners had the keys to their rooms ready.

"Hah! Within a month, they were back here!" Doña Julia laughs, retelling the story a year later. "I was glad to have them back. The Haitians you can trust. Almost all of the people who live here have been with me four or five years."

The second time the soldiers came, a month later, Doña Julia was ready. When she saw them coming down the street, she led the Haitians up to the attic, where they waited safely until the police left.

Doña Julia hardly rents to Dominicans anymore. In a country where family and community ties are strong, a Dominican who must rely for lodging on a cheap hotel for Haitian merchants is automatically suspect: a drug dealer or worse. "The Haitians are more simple people, good people," she explains. "I give them credit if they can't pay rent, because I know that it's just because business is bad. When they are doing better,