

“WE DIDN’T CROSS THE COLOR LINE, THE COLOR LINE CROSSED US”

Blackness and Immigration in the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and the United States

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Abstract

We examine the interlinked migrations between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, between the Dominican Republic and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and, finally, migrations from these three countries to the United States. The literature tends to draw stark differences between race and racism in the United States and the nonracial societies of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. However, although *Blackness* is a contextual category, through analyzing how “Black” migrants are racialized using these three contexts, we find that there is a simultaneously global and local derogation of “Blackness” that places Black migrants at the bottom of socioeconomic hierarchies. Further, these migrants remain largely outside of conceptions of the nation, and thus Blackness is constructed as a blend of racial phenotype and national origin, whereby native “Blacks” attempt to opt out of Blackness on account of their national identity. This dynamic is particularly true in the Caribbean where *Blanqueamiento*, or Whitening, is made possible through a dialectical process in which a person’s Whiteness, or at least his or her non-Blackness, is made possible by contrast to an “Other.” Consequently, we argue that immigration becomes a key site for national processes of racialization, the construction of racial identities, and the maintenance of and contestation over racial boundaries.

Keywords: Race, Immigration, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Puerto Rico

INTRODUCTION

It is important to note that, through discussing Blackness, we are seeking to understand the complex interactions between phenotype and perceptions of nationality. A

one-to-one relationship between the two obviously does not exist in the Americas. In the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and the United States there are people, natives as well as migrants, both documented and undocumented, who are perceived and treated as Black. However, despite the complexity within each of these contexts, Blackness routinely marks a person as outside the nation, as some version of an unwanted outsider. In order to understand this process, we briefly examine the interlinked migrations between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, between the Dominican Republic and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and, finally, the migrations from these islands to the United States. While these migrants may have different immigration or citizenship status within the United States, their Blackness profoundly marks each of them. At the same time, racialization is not a process that occurs only in the United States. The cases of the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico expose the layers of racialization for “Blacks” and demonstrate the ways in which race, nation, and identity interact through migration. The Dominican Republic and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico have both sought to limit migration, to deport the undocumented, and to erect barriers between migrants and their respective countries, while simultaneously arguing for the humane treatment of their own co-nationals living in the United States. Though we might think of this dynamic as unique, these layered forms of racialization are more the norm than the exception. In particular, Central American migrants must frequently traverse Mexico, often having to stay in Mexico for a significant time period as a part of their migration to the United States. While Mexican migrants are racialized in the United States, Salvadoran, Honduran, and Guatemalan migrants, despite linguistic similarities, are exploited and maltreated in the Mexican context.

Blackness produces, therefore, what we identify as a *global anti-Black racism*, which stems from the logics of the transatlantic slave trade and continues into our contemporary moment in almost every nation of the world. Howard Winant also captures this phenomenon in *The World is a Ghetto: Race and Democracy since World War II*: “The crucial point is that these racial dynamics, so characteristic of contemporary society both local and global, arrived in the present only through a profound gestation, a genealogy that eventually embraced the entire modern world” (Winant 2001, p. 19).

Immediately after independence and the abolition of slavery, many Latin American countries sought to “Whiten” their populations by limiting the number of Black migrants (Andrews 2004). Consequently, immigration policies in Latin America in the early twentieth century were a key source of racialization. In fact, despite the absence of Jim Crow–like segregation laws in most Latin American countries, the one type of policy where racial hierarchy and racism were made explicit was immigration policy. On the one hand, such legislation sought to encourage immigration from Western Europe through campaigns that recruited White migrants; on the other hand, it sought to restrict immigration from African countries and other Black populations. Thus, during a key period for nations such as Cuba, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and others, immigration policy was pursued as a way to Whiten nations that were increasingly seen as Black on the global stage.

Despite policies aimed at limiting Black migration, in the cases we look at here there were nonetheless substantial flows of migrants labeled *Black* to the host countries. Examining the case of Cuba, Aviva Chomsky (2000) argues that Black migrants acted as a trigger, unsettling serious underlying issues in domestic race relations:

Black Cubans were quite aware that, white protestations to the contrary, anti-immigrant campaigns in fact jeopardized their status as well. If immigrant work-

ers were undesirable because they were black, this in fact undermined the entire myth that the descendants of black slaves were as “Cuban” as whites, even new white immigrants (Chomsky 2000, p. 462).

This was certainly the case for Haitian migration to the Dominican Republic, Dominican migration to Puerto Rico, and the migration from these groups to the United States.

Anthropologist Jemima Pierre (2003) and sociologist Vilna Bashi (2004) have both alluded to the global nature of anti-Black racism. Pierre describes the articulation between the local and the global in understanding anti-Black racism (Pierre 2003). She specifically discusses how the similar racist discourse that travels across national borders is mirrored by the similarity of racist discourse in the work of Joseph Conrad, who in two different pieces encounters Haitians and Africans. For Pierre this demonstrates the uniquity of anti-Black racism:

It reminds us of not only the similarities of experience in the socio-historical and political construction of black identities, but also that local articulations and practices of racialization always occur in dialogue with powerful, if partially inchoate, global discourses of blackness (Pierre 2003).

Bashi extends this idea to immigration policies. She examines how Blackness throughout Western industrialized states is contiguous with immigration restriction, as immigration policies tend to present a preference for Whiteness (Bashi 2004). However, when we include inter-Caribbean migration, we begin to understand that what constitutes *Whiteness* or *Blackness* is a sliding scale and contextually determined. While anti-Black racism is a constant between the Caribbean and the United States, who counts as Black changes dramatically. We find that, while the category of *Blackness* is flexible and changing, whoever falls in that category is universally placed at the bottom of social hierarchies. This provides a framework for comparative studies of race and immigration across spaces where modes of racial categorization may differ dramatically.

THEORIES OF RACE IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, PUERTO RICO, AND THE UNITED STATES

The general literature tends to draw stark distinctions between how race operates in the United States, on the one hand, and in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, on the other. In the past, the United States, with its legacy of Jim Crow and racial immigration policies, was seen as a site of racial oppression, with Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic cast as uniquely nonracial societies. The literature has consistently identified the United States as operating under the idea of *hypodescent*, and the Dominican Republic as having a much more flexible sense of race. Some commentators in the past have suggested that, either in absolute terms or in comparison to the United States, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico are devoid of racial prejudice, given their multiplicity of categories and their lack of a history of formal segregation. The data and a close reading of history tell a very different story.

A growing literature has demonstrated that prejudice is a serious problem in both Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, and, despite multiple categories and a lack of formal segregation, levels of anti-Black racism are in many cases lower than those in the United States. For longtime observers of race relations in the Spanish

Caribbean, this is not surprising. Both Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, along with countries such as Cuba and Brazil, recognized race mixture in order to de-emphasize the existence of Blackness and to emphasize Whiteness—a eugenic strategy through which the country would supposedly become more developed and modern by utilizing race mixture to “Whiten” the population over time. Race has been a central concept in defining nation in the context of the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and the United States (Sawyer et al., 2004).

The Dominican Republic

The Dominican Republic was established in contrast to a Black republic, emphasizing its Hispanic and Mestizo (Indian and Spanish) populace and defining itself as racially distinct from its Black neighbor, Haiti. As Torres-Saillant notes, negrophobia and negrophilia have historically coexisted in Dominican society (Torres-Saillant 1998). Haitians are perceived as Black and often derided as subhuman in Dominican society, where they have been relegated to the lowest levels of the labor market (mainly as sugarcane cutters) and remain in desperate poverty (Sagás 2000; Torres-Saillant 1998).

In order to fight political opposition and identify the country as more “European,” the U.S.-backed dictator Rafael Trujillo instituted laws making it illegal to participate in African religious and cultural rites (Torres-Saillant 1998). In 1962, the Dominican government violently repressed a community that opposed the reigning regime and sought to assert the cultural and religious spirit of maroons. Following a period of upheaval and civil war after the death of Trujillo, the dictator Joaquín Balaguer came to power in 1966 with the aid of the oligarchy and the United States. He encouraged a decidedly Eurocentric, Hispanicist definition of the Dominican nation (Torres-Saillant 1998; Howard 2001).

Balaguer, a light-skinned Dominican, continued to promote the sense of *Hispanidad*, or connection to Spain, which was Trujillo’s calling card. The masses and elites recognized some contributions of African heritage to their makeup, but both consistently argued that, in contrast to Haiti, the Dominican Republic was a “Caucasian, Western Nation.” Afro-Dominicans have never directly challenged these racist statements in an organized fashion. Torres-Saillant points to the irony of this:

In the Dominican Republic, where blacks and mulattos predominate, Balaguer can publicly proclaim the mental and moral superiority of Whites and warn about the country’s “Africanization” without ever needing to recant his racist statements (Torres-Saillant 2000, p. 1089).

Alongside these explicitly racist statements by the former leader of the nation, the general belief that there is no racism in the Dominican Republic has survived. However, rather than stamp out Blackness in the Dominican Republic, Dominicans are asked to do their part via miscegenation to improve the nation. By marrying “lighter,” even dark-skinned Dominicans can help to “improve” the Dominican Republic (Gregory 2006). Further, dark-skinned Dominicans are given the opportunity to have citizenship status and to claim rights, so long as they do not self-identify as *Black* and, by implication, *Haitian*. Thus, the Dominican Republic includes such racial terms as *Indio Oscuro* (or Dark Indian) to describe Dominicans who have very dark skin and African features. Studies of prejudice have shown that, despite these categories, Haitians and dark Dominicans are subject to prejudice and situated at the bottom of the social order (Sidanius et al., 2001; Sawyer et al., 2005; Peña et al.,

2004; Gregory 2006). But these levels of prejudice in the Dominican Republic are slightly lower than in Puerto Rico, which has been influenced by the struggle against racism in the United States.

Puerto Rico

It was not until 1873, however, that slavery was finally abolished in Puerto Rico. Currently, there are over 3 million Puerto Ricans on the island. According to the 2000 U.S. Census figures, 80.5% identify themselves as White, 8% as Black, and approximately 10% as some mixture of races. If these figures are correct, Puerto Rico is less miscegenated than either Cuba or the Dominican Republic. In the 1980s, a former governor of Puerto Rico delivered a controversial speech in which he described Puerto Rico as the “Whitest country of the Greater Antilles” (Santiago-Valles 1994). In contrast, many Puerto Ricans have lauded their inclusiveness and lack of racial problems. However, government commissions have occasionally pointed to economic and social disparities based upon race (Santiago-Valles 1994). As in the Dominican Republic, there has been little political organizing or conflict based upon race in Puerto Rico. Few organizations in Puerto Rico are recognized as Black organizations, despite its proximity to the United States and the experience of U.S. models of race relations by Puerto Ricans. In fact, objective reports indicate that racial inequality is a serious problem on the island.

Complicating the case of Puerto Rico is its connection to the United States. Puerto Rico is a territory of the United States, and U.S. influence abounds. Puerto Ricans are citizens of the United States and have fought in every major war of the twentieth century. There is also a substantial Puerto Rican migration to and from major cities in the United States. Puerto Rican migrants flow freely to and from the island to major population centers such as New York, New Jersey, Miami, Chicago, and Los Angeles, following economic opportunities. If regarded as a state, Puerto Rico would rank near Mississippi as one of the poorest states in the Union. Thus, while Puerto Ricans think of themselves as a separate nation with an Iberian approach to race, many Puerto Ricans, including Black Puerto Ricans, are familiar with and have substantial experience with U.S. models of race. In fact, during the early part of the twentieth century, U.S.-style segregation was maintained on the island in many contexts in order to satisfy U.S.-based tourists (Santiago-Valles 1994). Within the borders of the United States, Puerto Ricans of all colors are racialized. As a result, Puerto Ricans from the island are more likely to self-identify as White than as Puerto Ricans in the United States, despite there being no clear difference in skin color or phenotype. Thus, “Whiteness” is contingent upon living on the island where being “White” is available to Puerto Ricans. Conversely, since there is little recognition of Blackness on the island, Puerto Ricans are “Black” generally only in the context of the United States.

The United States

Racial inequality in the United States has been well documented. In particular, the legacies of slavery and segregation loom large in defining the Black experience in the United States. However, less documented has been the experience of racialized migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean. Many authors, despite a growing literature on racialization, still view Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in the United States as “ethnic” rather than “racial” groups. While there is no clear phenotypic marker that delineates one as “Mexican” or “Puerto Rican,” the perceived impossibility of

assimilating Latinos regardless of skin color speaks more broadly to the way in which relations of colonial domination and perceived inferiority racialize what would otherwise be “ethnic” differences (Grosfoguel 2003). However, within the United States, non-White migrants, and especially Black migrants—regardless of origin—have been racialized and face varying levels of *de facto* and *de jure* segregation.

HAITIANS IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Any analysis of race in the Dominican Republic is fundamentally one of the relationship between the Dominican Republic and Haiti and, consequently, a story of immigration and national identity. Although racial hierarchy and colorism exist within Haiti, the ways in which race operates there—both materially and symbolically—are very different from the ways in which race operates on the other half of the island, in the Dominican Republic. Unlike the Dominican Republic, Haiti has historically boasted of its African heritage, stemming mainly from its history as the first and only free Black republic in the Americas. Although many scholars note that a culturally French, mulatto elite class has dominated both economics and politics since the Haitian Revolution in 1703, today many Haitians have been socialized in a political climate that has at least rhetorically celebrated the African cultural elements of Haitian society. On the other side of the island, the national discourse has been very much the opposite, where national identity has been consolidated through an embracement of the Hispanic roots of the country and a marked rejection of everything African, as well as Blackness more generally. Thus, Haitians who migrate to the Dominican Republic find that, in addition to crossing a territorial line, they are also crossing a color line.

In Dominican nationalist discourse there is a historic juxtaposition between, on the one hand, Haiti as African, savage, poor, and Black, and, on the other, the Dominican Republic as Spanish, civilized, and economically superior. David Howard states, “Haiti in popular prejudice, stands for all that is allegedly not Dominican: negritude, Africa and non-Christian beliefs” (Howard 2001, p. 7). This means that Dominican identity has been defined through and depends on the invention of Haitians as the perpetual *Other*. Further, the dialectic between Haitians, on the one hand, and Dominicans, on the other, is not only a question of race defined in terms of phenotype, but also that of a cultural or ethnic hierarchy in which African culture is seen as degenerate. Thus, Haitians become the epitome of Blackness, both culturally and biologically.

There are an estimated 700,000 Haitian citizens living in the Dominican Republic. Unlike the migrants of the past, this new exodus of Haitians to the Dominican Republic is the result of increased political and economic stability in Haiti. Whereas previous waves of immigrants from Haiti, beginning in the 1930s, were much more regulated and included mostly uneducated rural workers with seasonal contracts to work in the *bateyes* or sugar plantations, this new wave of immigrants is increasingly urban, relatively educated, and includes a higher proportion of women.

Although Dominican racial identity has historically been defined by contrast to Haitians, these binaries have become concretized through the intensification of Haitian immigration to the Dominican Republic. The U.S. State Department estimates that some 650,000 undocumented Haitian migrants live in the Dominican Republic. Others estimate that between 1961 and 1986 there were roughly 500,000 Haitian migrants to the Dominican Republic (Gregory 2006). The majority of these migrants were *braceros*, or male seasonal workers, contracted to work in the *bateyes* [sugar plantations], in the western part of the Dominican Republic (Howard 2001). These migrants—the majority of whom are Creole speaking and from rural back-

grounds in Haiti—began to develop a border culture in which they interacted more with Dominicans, creating a zone where both Catholicism and Afrosyncretic religions were practiced.

Acting on fears of an “invasion” of the Dominican Republic by Haitians, between 12,000–30,000 Haitians were massacred under President Trujillo in 1937. This was part of a policy of a de-Haitianization by the Dominican Republic, which in many ways served a dual role: to ethnically cleanse the Dominican Republic of Haitians, and to “cleanse” Dominico-Haitians and Dominicans themselves of African cultural practices. In the latter case, Trujillo used Haitians as scapegoats, arguing that Haitians were responsible for cultural degeneracy and a wave of cultural poisoning. Thus the expulsion and the extermination of Haitians in the Dominican Republic has a double significance: it is both a question of the Blackening or Africanization of the Dominican Republic, and an exposure of the Blackness and Africanness present within the Dominican Republic itself (Howard 2001). Ironically—or perhaps appropriately—Trujillo, much like Hitler, boasted of his own racial purity. Trujillo claimed a pure Spanish and French ancestry, but historic records show that he, like the vast majority of Dominicans, had some African ancestry as well.

Several new studies conducted by the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO) (Silié et al., 2002) indicate that the Haitian immigrant population works mostly in the service and construction sectors and has higher degrees of transnationalism in its material connections with Haiti. The visibility of these new immigrants in places where they had not traditionally been has exacerbated the anti-Haitian sentiments expressed both in politics and by the general population. Successful presidential political parties in 2000 were successful largely because, along with making political promises of punishing corruption, decreasing unemployment, and generating jobs, they also promised to “de-Haitianize” the country.

This process is as much about immigration as it is about national identity and race in the Dominican Republic. In January of 2007, the *Dominican Today* newspaper reported that a high government official, Marino Vinicio Castillo, said that the country needed to avoid the Haitianization of the country. Although, at first glance, this statement might seem to be about immigration and economics, Castillo was concerned with “protect[ing] the identity of the Dominican people.” Still, the Dominican Republic, both officially and in terms of social popular discourse, considers itself a racial democracy and thus sees issues related to Haitians as questions of nationality and history. One rarely sees the Dominican state or people characterize either anti-Haitian policies or employment policies—for example, which sanction those who do not straighten their hair—as “discriminatory” or even “racial.” This could not be more evident than in the Dominican Republic reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The 1999 report states: “It is worth emphasizing that there is no racial prejudice [in the Dominican Republic] . . . there is absolutely no foundation for the belief that there is discrimination against Haitians living in the country” (CERD 1999).

Yet, 54% of migrants surveyed said that they were Catholic, and only 3% said that they practiced *vudun*, an African-derived religion. Although there are no reliable statistics on religious practices in Haiti, it is reasonable to assume that Haitian migrants to the Dominican Republic are among the most impoverished and traditionally rural sector of Haitian society, in which the practice of vudu, or voodoo, is prevalent. Although statistics like these may help to reverse the demonization of Haitians based in racist moral hierarchies, it may be that, given the severity of racial and cultural discrimination, Haitians are simply hesitant to admit that they practice an African-based religion. In a sense, they live with a double consciousness very similar to that which Du Bois theorized. Ironically, other results of this survey help to validate state and popular notions

that there is no racism or racial discrimination in the Dominican Republic. However, as in all state-issued surveys in the Dominican Republic, FLACSO did not specifically ask about racial discrimination. In the absence of such measures, the question “Have you ever been offended by Dominicans?” is illustrative. Less than one-third of respondents (28.3%) reported that they had been offended. The words *race*, *racism*, and *ethnicity* were not used at any point during the survey.

The experience of Haitians in the Dominican Republic demonstrates that large flows of Black migrants, in particular, raise very specific issues about racial and national identity. But this is more than an identity issue: it is also linked to serious issues of human rights and discrimination. The mass expulsions of those perceived as Haitian, and the refusal by the Dominican state to adhere to the constitution and grant citizenship to those of Haitian descent born on Dominican soil, have led the Dominican Republic to become one of the most serious sites of human-rights abuses in the Americas (Mariner and Strumpfen-Darrie, 2003). Because of their status as immigrants, Haitians in the Dominican Republic find themselves on a par with the most vulnerable population in any country. Moreover, as elsewhere, these migrants’ racialization as Black further exacerbates their condition, casting them as outsiders at the bottom rungs of the social hierarchy. In 2004, the Inter-American Human Rights Court ruled that the practice of denying citizenship to Dominican-born children of Haitian parents was in violation of the Dominican constitution. In response, the state passed Immigration Law 285-04, which grants citizenship to those born on Dominican soil of parents from any country *except Haiti*. In 2005, the Dominican Supreme Court upheld this law as constitutional.

Although some have argued that, in the Dominican Republic, Blackness has become synonymous with being Haitian, this perspective conceals the very real way in which the Dominican Republic’s system of pigmentocracy involves a color line that painfully marks difference between Dominicans of different shades and cultural practices (Sidanius et al., 2001; Howard 2001). Still, because of the historical relationship between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, including the migration of Haitians to the Dominican Republic, Haitians have come to symbolize pure Blackness, which is neither desirable nor attainable for Dominicans. In this way, Haitians have become the ultimate *Other*, the embodiment of everything that the Dominican nation does not want to be: phenotypically Black and culturally African. Of course, darker-skinned Dominicans, particularly those who show visible signs of nonconformity with dominant discourses of Indianness (e.g., women who do not straighten their hair), are subject to similar treatment as Haitians and Dominico-Haitians (Dominicans with Haitian parents or grandparents). One example of this can be found in the growing number of Dominicans targeted by authorities in deportation raids. Since there continues to be a tension between state definitions of citizenship and actual policy practices, it becomes difficult to classify or even discuss individuals of Haitian descent living in the Dominican Republic. Dominico-Haitians and darker-skinned Dominicans perceived as Haitian are not immune from mass expulsion. They have found themselves trapped on the other side of the border in part because they lie on the wrong side of the color line.

DOMINICANS IN PUERTO RICO

Official statistics show that roughly 120,000 Dominican nationals have been legally admitted into Puerto Rico. However, because this figure does not include the considerable undocumented immigrant population, official statistics underestimate the actual size of population. It is known that the overwhelming majority of the esti-

mated 34,000 undocumented immigrants living in Puerto Rico are from the Dominican Republic (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service 1998). Because of Puerto Rico’s status as a commonwealth of the United States, Dominicans looking to work and live in Puerto Rico confront many of the same barriers to migration as they would within the United States. Further, Dominicans face similar challenges adjusting to life once they migrate to either place. Still, there is a notable difference in the profile and experiences of Dominicans who migrate to the United States versus Puerto Rico (Duany 2005). However, with the exception of Duany’s work, very little research has been done on Dominican immigration to Puerto Rico. Moreover, no work to date has shed light—whether theoretically or empirically—on the racialization of Dominicans in Puerto Rico.

Although the histories of race formation in the United States and Puerto Rico differ in many respects, Dominicans get racialized as Black in both contexts. In the former, Dominicans struggle with the fact that, although there is some acknowledgement of them as Latinos, they are incorporated as either Black or Black Latinos, at best. Dominicans are very familiar with the prevailing racial classification system in Puerto Rico. Yet, instead of being at the lighter end of the spectrum, Dominican migrants to Puerto Rico suddenly find themselves being classified as Black. This combination of being perceived as unwanted, unskilled, uneducated, manual-labor immigrants who are phenotypically close to Blackness means that Dominicans living in Puerto Rico ironically are subject to many of the negative stereotypes that they themselves have historically associated with Haitians. Although the stereotypes of Dominicans in Puerto Rico are consistent with those associated with immigrant manual laborers in most any context, they are highly racialized and do not match up with the actual profile of Dominican migrants.

One can hardly open the newspaper in Puerto Rico without reading about illegal immigration from the Dominican Republic. Although many media portrayals of the issues are alarmist, rarely are they explicitly racial in public discourse. Headlines read: “The Dominican Problem,” “Dominicans Repatriated,” “Dominicans Try to Penetrate.” Still, such portrayals of “The Dominican Problem” are highly coded with race. Duany has argued that the precarious status of Dominicans in Puerto Rico stems, in part, from the fact that they are marked as Black in a nation which had been historically constructed as either White or moving toward Whiteness (Duany 2006). Recently, a number of organizations have emerged to serve the Dominican population in Puerto Rico and are increasingly framing the issues in terms of racial discrimination against Dominicans. These organizations include the Centro de la Mujer Dominicana, the Comité Pro-Niñez Dominico-Haitiana, and the Movimiento de Unidad Obrera Dominicana.

HAITIANS, DOMINICANS, AND PUERTO RICANS IN THE UNITED STATES

Haitians

Haitian migrants have faced unequal treatment and discrimination in the United States since the first days of the republic. When Haiti declared its independence in 1804, it became the first pariah state in the international system. Slave-holding colonies and nation-states such as the United States wanted to send a message that such efforts would fail. Further concerned about the influence of Haiti and Haitians on Black populations in the United States, French refugees and their “property” (Haitian slaves) were barred from entering the United States. Nonetheless, Haitians began over time to migrate to the United States.

Since the Immigration Act of 1965, the number of Haitian migrants to the United States has increased. Currently, the population of Haitians in the United States is around 1 million, including a substantial portion of undocumented immigrants. While most Haitian immigrants have fled poverty and extreme political repression in Haiti, unlike Cubans and others, few have been offered refugee or any other status. In fact, the treatment of Haitian refugees has highlighted the relationship between race and immigration policies. Over the years, many activists, as well as key actors such as senior members of the Congressional Black Caucus and TransAfrica, have denounced U.S. policy toward Haiti as fundamentally racist.

According to INS figures, between 1972 and 1981 over 55,000 Haitian “boat people” arrived in Miami (Mitchell 1994). Community estimates indicate that perhaps more than 100,000 migrants eluded detection and settled in either Miami or New York City. Faced with this migration, the U.S. Coast Guard made arrangements to intervene and return Haitians to Haiti. These numbers increased dramatically again in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when political unrest in Haiti and economic collapse forced thousands to flee. Since earlier Haiti had been widely portrayed as a haven for HIV/AIDS, poverty, and lawlessness, the arrival of these migrants touched off a moral panic. The first Bush administration, despite widespread reports of political violence, took the approach of interdicting and repatriating Haitian asylum seekers without allowing them a hearing and in violation of the Refugee Act of 1980. Many were jailed at Guantánamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba and subsequently returned to Haiti, while Cuban migrants were admitted into the United States.

Haitians in the United States have faced the racism and residential segregation experienced by African Americans and other Afro-Caribbean populations. They have a poverty rate of slightly over 40% and have been subjected to the same kinds of police abuse and violence that African Americans have faced. Striking examples of this are the shooting of a Haitian migrant in Liberty City in Miami, touching off the Liberty City riot in 1980, and the torture of Haitian Abner Louima by New York City police officers in 1997. The experience of poverty, racism, and police violence, along with differential treatment (as compared to that of other “refugees”) by the federal government, illustrates the perceived Blackness of Haitian migrants to the United States. Similar inequality has been experienced by their island-origin neighbors, Dominican migrants.

Dominicans

Since the Immigration Act of 1965, political repression and economic problems in the Dominican Republic have led to a vast migration of Dominicans to the United States, mainly to New York City. Currently, the Dominican population is nearly 1 million, almost half of whom live in New York City. Dominicans, like African Americans, face high levels of residential segregation and are concentrated in ethnic enclaves such as Washington Heights in New York City. Dominicans have a poverty rate of almost 30%, and an unemployment rate that parallels that of African Americans and Puerto Ricans. A significant part of the Dominican population is undocumented. Dominican Americans are now one of the largest Hispanic groups in the United States—less numerous than the Mexican American majority and Puerto Ricans, and about even with Cuban Americans.

While many first-generation Dominican immigrants try to distance themselves from Blacks, identification with Blacks increases with the second and third generations as Dominicans face discrimination based upon their phenotypical similarity to other Black groups in the United States. In fact, according to the 2000 U.S. Census,

about 12% of Dominicans self-identified as *Black*, which would be altogether inconceivable on the island (Logan 2004). Dominicans have the highest rate of Black identification among Hispanics in the United States, and that identification increases in the second and third generation. Thus, for Dominican migrants, “race” or Blackness is acquired as they move to new places, such as the United States, Spain, or Puerto Rico. As Duany (2005) notes, most of the Dominicans who self-identify as *Black*, even in the ethnic enclave of Washington Heights, where Dominican forms of identity might be reinforced, would not choose *Black* as a category on the island.

Puerto Ricans

More than 4 million Puerto Ricans reside in the United States. The major cities with the largest Puerto Rican populations in 2000 were New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, Newark, and Hartford. Despite what many experts would call underestimates of the true population, in the 2000 U.S. Census, only 8% of Puerto Ricans self-identified as both *Hispanic* and *Black*. Puerto Ricans, unlike Dominicans and Haitians, are U.S. citizens by birth. However, citizenship is not enough. Puerto Ricans of all colors have been racialized within the United States and have faced discrimination that has resulted in deep inequality (De Genova and Ramos-Zayas, 2003).

Puerto Ricans suffer one of the highest poverty rates in the United States (23%), and Puerto Ricans have a high school graduation rate of only 63%, as compared to 84% for Whites. As a result of this racialization, Puerto Ricans have often allied themselves with African Americas in labor struggles and in support of affirmative action and antipoverty programs (Davila 2004). Grosfoguel describes this experience of racialization in the United States:

As a white middle-class man in Puerto Rico who migrated to the United States, I have had the contradictory experience of living the privileges of whiteness on the island and the discrimination of a colonial/racial subject in the metropolis. An Afro-Puerto Rican does not have the same privileges, resources, and benefits (economic, symbolic, and political) that I enjoy as a white middle-class male in Puerto Rico. However, my experience of migration shifted my location in the racial/ethnic hierarchy, placing me at the bottom of the U.S. spectrum of ethnic and racial prejudices (Grosfoguel 2003).

Grosfoguel describes a litany of negative stereotypes associated with Puerto Ricans that include laziness and criminality (Grosfoguel 2003). These negative associations lead a plurality of Puerto Ricans to choose *Other* when asked to indicate a racial category in the United States, while over 70% on the island choose *White* to describe themselves (Duany 2002). Since there is no reason to believe that Puerto Ricans in the United States are any darker than Puerto Ricans on the island, it is their experience in the United States, such as described by Grosfoguel above, that alters their racial identity. This experience of racialization transcends citizenship status and, in many cases, skin color.

CONCLUSION

In a recent article on Dominican immigration to Puerto Rico, Duany states: “Ironically, the dominant discourse on Dominicans in Puerto Rico resembles that of Haitians in the Dominican Republic or, for that matter, Puerto Ricans and Dominicans

in the United States” (Duany 2005, p. 260). Duany’s statement is insightful and touches on the crux of our arguments here; however, we argue that, instead of looking at these experiences of immigration and racism as operating distinctly in different contexts, we should analyze the ways in which these all stem from similar racial discourse. To be sure, the same logic that governs all of these cases is one that stems from dominant racial discourses that not only racialize these immigrants in a particular way but, especially in the case of Latin American countries, necessitate it. For this reason, we have chosen to examine the situation of Haitians in the Dominican Republic, Dominicans in Puerto Rico, and immigrants from these countries to the United States in order to understand the ways in which people get racialized in similar ways across different contexts. That logic is one of racial hierarchy that privileges Whiteness over Blackness, but which allows for the transcendence of racial categories through *Blanqueamiento* [Whitening].

Still, this process of *Blanqueamiento*, whether biological or symbolic, is one that operates within a dialectical relationship. In this sense, a person typically has access to Whiteness, or at least non-Blackness, in contrast to an *Other*, making immigration one of the most important sites in domestic processes of racial formation. Thus, a lighter-skinned, Catholic-mass attending Dominican is White in contrast to a darker-skinned, *vudun*-practicing Haitian or Dominico-Haitian counterpart. This creates the perpetual need for Blackness as an affirmation of *non-Blackness*, or what Fanon calls an “insurance policy on whiteness” (Fanon 1967, p. 129). Moreover, these cases point to the fact that, particularly in the case of immigration between demographically and racially similar countries, phenotype interacts with other factors in the racialization of these immigrants. In this way, our analysis illuminates that racial meanings are fluid, and by crossing a border one might very well find oneself on the other side of the color line.

Race relations do not remain static in any of the contexts that we have explored here, and thus the large outflows of migrants and high levels of transnationalism among Haitians, Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans affect the sending countries as well. Some preliminary studies point to the ways in which Dominican immigrants to the United States, some having internalized or at least come to terms with the fact that they are identified as *Black* in this new context, may be reshaping popular notions of race in the Dominican Republic (Howard 2001; Torres-Saillant 1998). The reggaeton music explosion has touched off a debate about race and racism in Latin America and has provided a means of connecting urban youth cultures through this particular branch of the hip hop lexicon. The parallel youth movements of hip hop in Cuba, *reggaetón* in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, the United States, and samba reggae in Brazil all connect to Jamaican and U.S. Black music styles while maintaining local flavor. These hybrid forms also confront race and racism, and the artists have taken to speaking out. These movements reflect a growing activism about race in the Americas that is gaining greater attention and recognition in combating anti-Black racism (Sawyer 2005).

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