

MULTICULTURALISM IN THE UNITED STATES



A Comparative Guide
to Acculturation and Ethnicity

Revised and Expanded Edition

Edited by
John D. Buenker and Lorman A. Ratner



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In memory of Matt S. Meier, 1917–2003.
A true pioneer of the multicultural borderlands.

During the course of producing this volume, we lost a great soul. Matt Meier expired on August 11, 2003, at age eighty-six, after a long and courageous battle with leukemia. Those who knew Matt will not be surprised to know that one of his greatest concerns was to finish the essay on Mexican Americans that graces this volume before he succumbed to the inevitable. We would even like to think that his determination to finish his work kept him going a while longer. Like the whole of his life, the last few months were an exemplar of dedication, courage, and integrity. We are especially grateful to Matt's son, Professor G. Patrick Meier of Washington State University, and his colleague Professor Nancy C. Unger of the Santa Clara University history department, for their help in making sure that the final version of Matt's essay was worthy of its author. We respectfully dedicate this book to Matt Meier, who was the personification of multiculturalism.

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DOMINICAN AMERICANS

Silvio Torres-Saillant

The task of defining any culture is fraught with conceptual dangers, not the least of which is the temptation to construe whole populations as monolithic, uncomplicated blocs, on the mere basis of their sharing a common national or ancestral origin. Every culture harbors subcultural segments within it. But distinct ethnic minority groups who politically and economically occupy marginal spaces in relation to dominant mainstreams in society make the job of outlining a cultural community a bit less daunting than it would otherwise be. Such groups find it necessary to flaunt the trappings of their difference as a key instrument in their struggle for survival. Their perception of living under siege culturally leads to their articulating on their own an identity-focused discourse that the scholar can then draw from in approximating the formulation of a definition. The cultural presence of Dominicans in the United States exhibits simultaneously the traits typical of immigrant, ethnic, and diasporic social formations. Its dual location in a space that is informed by *here-elsewhere* and *us-them* binary oppositions spawns a pervasive tension between the desire to belong in the United States and the yearning to preserve the most cherished of the old country's values and ways. Dominican American culture achieves its distinctness by differing from the cultural expressions associated with the homeland in the Dominican Republic, the forms and practices characteristic of the U.S. mainstream, and the distinguishing traits of the other U.S. ethnic minorities, including the other subsections of the Latino population, while inevitably incorporating and integrating borrowings from all of them.

People who trace their origin to the Dominican Republic have lived in the U.S. population prior to the proclamation of Dominican independence on February 27, 1844, by Juan Pablo Duarte, the ideological architect of the nation, who had studied English in New York.¹ Throughout the nineteenth century, as

a result of U.S. involvement in Dominican affairs from as early as the administration of James K. Polk, who took office in March 1845, contact between people from the small Caribbean nation and their powerful neighbor to the north remained constant. After the Civil War, U.S. interest in the Dominican land evolved into a fervent desire to annex the country to the territory of the Union. President Ulysses S. Grant embraced this cause with passion, although the fierce opposition he encountered among influential U.S. legislators and popular nationalist leaders in the Dominican Republic thwarted the plan. Even so, the United States eventually dominated the Dominican economy, controlled fiscal life in the country by means of a protectorate from 1905 to 1940, ruled the nation directly through a military government from 1916 to 1924, disarmed the civilian population, and instilled in Dominicans a predilection for American consumer goods, pastimes, and popular culture.

As a result, the United States also became a natural destination for Dominican migrants, a process that initially involved statesmen, political exiles, entrepreneurs, and intellectuals, on the whole, people with sufficient means to finance their easy transposition to more auspicious surroundings. Among these were the children of poet laureate Salome Ureña and Francisco Henriquez y Carvajal, namely Pedro, Max, and Camila, an intellectual family whose lives Dominican American author Julia Alvarez has captured in her novel *In the Name of Salome*. Most notable among the entrepreneurs was Francis Rebajes, who achieved a degree of distinction unmatched by any other Dominican businessperson until the outstanding success of fashion designer Oscar de la Renta, who would become a household name in the United States toward the end of the twentieth century. Rebajes arrived in New York City's Harlem in 1923, took menial jobs of all sorts, roamed the streets with a gang of penniless intellectuals, and eventually discovered his talent for using the hammer and anvil to make beautiful and marketable tin, copper, and metal images of various kinds and ultimately attracted a large clientele. After opening his first store at 184 West Fourth Street in Greenwich Village in 1934 and single-handedly "centering the craft industry along Fourth Street" by the 1940s, his company opened outlets all over the country. He sold his factory operation and original designs and moved to Spain in 1958.²

Among the individuals who came from the Dominican Republic to make their mark on American society before the 1960s, two stand out for their remarkable careers. Maria Montez, known affectionately as the Queen of Technicolor in the heyday of her Hollywood stardom during the 1940s, became a preeminent entertainment personality. Her native city of Barahona, where the airport carries her name, remembers her with utmost pride. Having played major or leading roles in such Hollywood hits as *Arabian Nights* (1942), *Cobra Woman* (1943), *Bowery to Broadway* (1944), *Gypsy Wildcat* (1944), *Tangier* (1944), *Sudan* (1945), *The Exile* (1947), and *Pirates of Monterey* (1947), Montez remains, more than five decades after her death, "the object of an extensive fan cult thirsting for nostalgia and high camp."³ Another Dominican who achieved celebrity status in the United States, distinguishing himself as an adventurer and playboy, was Porfirio

Rubirosa. This modern-day Dominican Casanova numbered among his successive and famous wives the likes of Doris Duke, from the family of tobacco magnates and philanthropists after whom Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, is named; the show business celebrity Eva Gabor; and the wealthy heiress Barbara Hutton, the granddaughter of Frank W. Woolworth, founder of the famous merchandise store chain. Rubirosa had his life of luxury subsidized by his former father-in-law Rafael Trujillo, who ruled the Dominican Republic as a personal hacienda.

To the aforementioned personalities one should add a vast array of political dissidents and other expatriates who came to the United States during the thirty-year-long rule of the ruthless dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo from 1930 to 1961, as well as an equally substantial number of agents of the regime who served the Dominican dictator by promoting his interests in American society. Among the former, the most politically committed organized rallies that repudiated the dictatorship, and they joined the New York chapter of the Dominican Revolutionary Party, which would become a major political institution in their homeland after the fall of Trujillo. Most renowned among the latter was Ambassador Minerva Bernardino, who, after the end of the dictatorship, ironically went on to receive periodic honors for humanitarian service and women's-rights advocacy. Less well-known than she, her brother Felix W. Bernardino, a sanguinary henchman of the tyrant, ran a reign of terror against the anti-Trujillo émigré opposition during his years in New York as Consul General of the Dominican Republic.

The foregoing background no doubt forms part of the overall narrative of the U.S. Dominican experience, but research has yet to establish in precisely what ways this early history enters the cultural memory of the community, because it has evolved in connection with the large immigrant settlements that emerged in the 1960s. One can find a clear link in the voluntary associations, a prominent feature of U.S. Dominican neighborhoods that has received scholarly attention from as early as the mid-1980s.⁴ The available data suggest that several of the social clubs and community organizations that gained visibility in Dominican neighborhoods as soon as the group became numerically significant from the 1970s onward actually had their start in associations whose original purpose was to promote or repudiate the Trujillo regime.⁵ As time passed, those associations lost touch with their ideological beginnings and became "expressive," "affective," or even "instrumental" venues serving diverse needs for community members.

Turning to the field of literature, the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century chapter of U.S. Dominican writing has been explored by scholars.⁶ Two of the most salient figures among writers active in 2004, who have contributed decisively to the present visibility and vitality of U.S. Dominican literary expression, belong to families that settled in this country prior to the 1960s. The award-winning poet Rhina Espaillat, whose parents brought her to New York City from La Vega, Dominican Republic, in 1939, at age seven, comes first to mind. Espaillat's commitment to creating forums for the sharing of poetry through various workshops she organizes extends to her working closely with young

Dominican poets who write primarily in Spanish. Similarly, her verse frequently draws from her own immigrant background, even though she neither grew up nor ever lived in a Dominican ethnic enclave. Although she earned her spot in the literary community in isolation from any Dominican settlement, she has nonetheless joined the Tertulia Pedro Mir, a Dominican-led poetry reading series in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Her venturing into poetry precedes the boom of Latino writers that began in the 1980s, when it also became established practice to locate literary artists as voices of their respective ethnic constituencies.

At age sixteen, Espaillat became the youngest person ever to have been inducted as a member into the Poetry Society of America, beginning a string of honors that include the Gustav Davidson Memorial Award, the T. S. Eliot Poetry Prize, the Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award, the 2001 Richard Wilbur Award, and the 2003 Stanzas Prize, as well as her inclusion as one of the eighty writers nationwide invited by the First Lady and the Library of Congress to participate in the National Book Festival held in Washington, DC on October 4, 2003. Espaillat began publishing whole books only after she retired from her teaching job in New York City public schools, though by then she had built an impressive literary dossier with the inclusion of her work in various anthologies, numerous journals, and, occasionally, magazines. The reader will note that her poetry volumes—*Lapsing to Grace*, *Where Horizons Go*, *Rehearsing Absence*, *Mundo y palabra/The World & the Word*, *Rhina P. Espaillat's Greatest Hits*, and *The Shadow I Dress In*—invariably include at least one poem in Spanish. She has also produced an English rendition of *Trovas del mar* (Trove of the Sea), a bilingual volume of poems by the Lawrence-based Dominican poet Cesar Sanchez Beras. Though educated in the United States at a time when the group did not have a community to speak of, Espaillat is today a major contributor to the cultural production of Dominican Americans.

An equally expressive instance of the connection between the cultural experience of Dominicans in the United States “before the diaspora” and the expressive culture of the more recent emergence of the community is to be found in the writing career of Julia Alvarez, the offspring of a family of professionals and diplomats, who was born in New York City on March 27, 1950. The birth of this native New Yorker preceded, by over a decade, the great exodus from the Dominican Republic, a massive and unprecedented emigration beginning in the mid-1960s that would lead to the development of Dominican immigrant settlements in the United States. According to the 1990 U.S. census, 511,297 Dominicans were living permanently in the country, although the actual size of this population is considered to be appreciably larger since the official figures do not account for undocumented residents, whose number is estimated to be high. The number of Dominicans, who outnumbered all other immigrants in New York City and ranked sixth in the entire nation by the 1990s, continued to grow at a fast pace. After endeavoring to correct a problem in the official population census that had led to serious misreporting and, consequently, an undercount of nearly 200,000 people, a report released by the Lewis Mumford Center of State

University of New York at Albany, following the 2000 U.S. census, estimated the total number of Dominicans in the country at 1,121,257. Though over 65 percent of this group resides in the State of New York, and the greater bulk of them in New York City, the members of the community have found their way into every state of the Union. The most numerous non-New York contingents reside in New Jersey, Florida, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, California, Maryland, Texas, and Pennsylvania.

By 1950, when Alvarez was born, only a fraction of today's large U.S. Dominican population was around. Nor does the socioeconomic profile of the community today match the profile of those Dominicans who lived in the United States more than five decades ago. Generally light-skinned and boasting a higher education, they had in common a favorable socioeconomic status even if they occupied opposite ends of the political divide spawned by the dictatorship. Their class positions often fit the description one gets of Alvarez's extended family in such autobiographical essays as “An American Childhood in the Dominican Republic” and “My English,” which capture key stages of the writer's early education when she, having been brought to live in her parents' homeland, attended the Carol Morgan School, where American diplomats sent their children. Significantly, though her family's manner of incorporation into U.S. society did not follow the path of most of the more recent generations of immigrants, whose class extraction placed them in a position of social disadvantage from the moment of arrival, her family memories have largely dominated the narrative of the Dominican experience in the United States. Suffice it to mention that when WNET-TV, the prestigious PBS station in New York City, featured the screening of the documentary *The Dominican-American Spirit* in August 1999, in the midst of a membership drive, the station sought to lure new members by offering enticing incentives that included a must-read book about Dominican Americans, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, Alvarez's best-selling 1991 novel. A prolific and talented writer, Alvarez has mined Dominican history, the memory of her family's adjustment to life in the United States, and the old country's folklore in book after book.

Following *Garcia Girls*, Alvarez published *In the Time of the Butterflies*, a moving evocation of the lives of the Mirabal sisters, three women assassinated by the Trujillo dictatorship, *¡Yo!*, a clever return to the Garcia girls' story in which the other characters offer their perspectives on Yolanda, the narrator of the earlier novel, and *In the Name of Salome*, which explores the lives of the Henriquez Ureña family, focusing on parallels between poet laureate Ureña's civic involvement in nineteenth-century Santo Domingo and her daughter Camila's psychologically transformative years in early twentieth-century Poughkeepsie, New York. In her poetry—*Homecoming* and *The Other Side/El Otro Lado*—Alvarez delves into the tensions emanating from her dual Dominican and American cultural background, while her children's books celebrate Dominican history, legend, and the cultural contrast of life in Vermont versus life in the Cibao region of the Dominican Republic: *The Secret Footprints*, *How Tia Lola Came to Visit/Stay*, *Before*

We Were Free, and *A Cafecito Story*. Given the literary prominence that Alvarez has accrued, she, more than any other Dominican voice, enjoys the power to give currency to a particular version of the group's collective immigrant experience and to disseminate images that readers will construe as representative of the community's culture.

To some degree, the short fiction of Junot Diaz, the author of the highly acclaimed collection *Drown*; the novels *Geographies of Home* by Loida Maritza Perez; *Soledad* by Angie Cruz; and *Song of the Water Saints* by Nelly Rosario offer competing images of the immigrant experience of Dominicans in the United States. Produced by writers who share the unfavorable class position characteristic of the Dominican immigrant settlements that resulted from the great exodus, these texts tackle the trauma of uprooting as it affects the less empowered, who must contend with the material limitations that their marginal location places on them. The characters who populate these stories face obstacles that emanate from their ending up trapped in settings where they cannot take for granted basic amenities such as quality schools, clean neighborhoods, language-rich environments, adequate health services, amicable support networks, and downright physical safety. Their awareness of having been racialized, their social impediments, and their cultural otherness with respect to a distant and indifferent mainstream are thrust on them by the ordinary drama of their struggle for material and spiritual survival. The concerns that fuel the works of these authors seem to continue in the texts of emerging Dominican American writers who have not yet published their first books. Among these, Anney Baez, Marielys Divanne-Pichardo, Cleyvis Natera, and Leo Suarez made their literary and social sensibilities known when they joined their better-known colleagues in a reading series held in the spring of 2004 at the Brooklyn Public Library, sponsored by the library's Willendorff Division. Key among their common features is the memory of the Dominican past as a source of strength, even while they indict the less democratic and ecumenical characteristics of the ancestral culture. It is often by reconnecting with Dominican history that their characters enhance their ability to cope with the ethnic, racial, and cultural antipathies they face in the United States.

The writers who have risen to visibility with books issued by mainstream American publishers, with the exception of Diaz, are all women, so the literary construction of Dominican cultural identity that has gained currency thus far draws largely from the location, the perspective, the sensibility, and the experience of women. Their books, thus, evoke traumas associated with the unequal position of women in society, such as the consequences of out-of-wedlock pregnancy, the lurking menace of rape, the suffocating force of social norms bent on limiting women's sovereignty over their own bodies, and the resilience of phallographic regimes both in the Dominican Republic and in the United States. The gender-inflected quality of Dominican American literature is auspicious, particularly in light of the charge of machismo often imputed to Dominican society, where economic structures, the Catholic Church, and other institutions still cling fiercely

to patriarchal norms. Perhaps the fact that women have historically outnumbered men in the successive armies of emigrants from the homeland has thrust women into a socioeconomic reality that makes their leadership inescapable. On the whole, the numerical superiority of women has probably brought to the fore the harshness of gender inequity and the need to forge models of relationships based on partnership rather than domination.

One could argue, then, that U.S. Dominican culture exhibits considerably fewer misogynistic traits than its counterpart in the ancestral homeland. Witness the sympathetic, complex, and psychologically well-developed female characters in the fiction of Diaz, the one male Dominican American writer who has achieved fame. Something similar can be said about Alan Cambeira, the author of the novel *Azucar!: The Story of Sugar*, an evocation of the dehumanized existence of sugarcane workers of both sexes on Esperanza Dulce plantation, a setting that only thinly disguises the inhospitable arena of the notorious Dominican bateyes, (shantytown camps where Haitian sugarcane cutters live) where Haitian migrant and native-born laborers languish in dreadful working and living conditions. With his attention turned almost exclusively to the Dominican Republic and other Caribbean territories, Cambeira locates himself differently than the other Dominican American writers, as his work does not narrate his community's immigrant experience. A native of the city of Samana, he migrated with his family first to Barbados and later to Pennsylvania, where he completed his education, through graduate school. The author of an overview of his country's history and culture, *Quisqueya LaBella: The Dominican Republic in Historical and Cultural Perspective*, he has written widely on social issues in the Dominican Republic. One could conjecture that the author's humble origins and his own self-awareness as an African-descended Dominican motivate his attraction to the horrors of exploited and devalued workers. In that respect—in his choice of subject matter and cultural identification that inclines toward his own working-class perspective—Cambeira coincides with the other writers spawned by the great exodus.

We owe to Josefina Baez, a New York-based performance artist, arguably the most engaging statement on the complexity of Dominican cultural identity. Her collection of poems and performance texts, *Dominicanish*, launches an exploration of Dominicanity that discards nothing, no matter how seemingly alien, from the contours of the group's identity. The logic seems to be that any empirical reality that touches Dominicans must necessarily form part of the arsenal of ingredients that goes into the definition. Thus, experiences she collected during travels in Andhra Pradesh, a region in southeastern India, combine smoothly with the urban immigrant education she receives in her daily contact with such inexorable classrooms as the subway system in New York City. The main character in *Dominicanish* came to the Big Apple as a child, and she owes her knowledge of English more to the classics of jazz that she listened to assiduously than to the questionable efficiency of the public schools she attended. A native of La Romana, Baez; like Cambeira, is ancestrally connected to the bateye ex-

perience, and her work reflects a complex sensibility that combines world knowledge with working-class rootedness, a sort of proletarian cosmopolitanism.

As the foregoing discussion illustrates, class position, the chronology of the settlement that one belongs to, and a gender-inflected subject position all necessarily come to the fore in a discussion of the Dominican community's culture. Also connected with the foregoing, one's language use, choice of artistic form, religious practices, involvement with popular culture, racial self-identification, attitude toward the native land, view of sexuality, and sympathy for a heterogeneous model of community identity will inevitably emerge in any sustained reflection on the group's culture. Originally, Dominican settlers traveled to the United States in the company of their household gods and familiar forms of worship. Given their cultural ties through birth or ancestral origins to the island of Santo Domingo, a land conquered and colonized under the banner of Catholic Spain, Dominicans are mostly Catholic, though they simultaneously display African-descended forms of worship. Many Dominican homes in New York, for instance, make provisions for small shrines that pay homage to Catholic saints, especially the Virgin of Altagracia, the patron saint of the Dominican people. However, the accoutrements that normally decorate the small altars (flowers, lighted candles, food, water, rum, and other earthly goods) often recall the trappings of Santeria and other African-descended Caribbean religions, stressing the fundamentally syncretic nature of Dominican religious life.

This configuration of their expression of spirituality accords with the group's socioeconomic profile, which can be summarized through the specific example of those living in New York. The distinguishing socioeconomic characteristics of the Dominican community in New York City indicate that, as of the year 2000, nearly two-thirds of its members were foreign born, close to one-third lived at or below the poverty level, over 10 percent of persons 16 years of age or older were unemployed, 51 percent of persons 25 years of age or older had less than a high school education, and only 9 percent possessed college degrees. The per capita income of Dominican households, the mean age of whose members was 29.2 years of age in 1999, was lower than that of other Hispanics.⁷ The occupational distribution for members of the Dominican labor force 16 years of age or older broke down as follows: 30.2 percent operators, fabricators, and laborers; 27.8 percent service workers; 25.7 percent technical, sales, and administrative support; 11.6 percent managerial and professional; and 4.7 percent precision production, craft, and repair.

To a large extent, the texture of the group's daily life, its distinguishing characteristics, its sounds, its smells, its rhythm, in short, the sum of sensory elements that many would deem integral to the community's culture as manifested in predominantly Dominican neighborhoods, correspond fittingly to the preceding economic profile. Dominican-based ethnic enclaves such as one finds in Manhattan's Washington Heights visibly display the community's tropical colors, with numerous bodegas, supermarkets, beauty salons, travel agencies, and restaurants, contributing to what could be regarded as a Dominicanization of the phys-

ical surroundings. Observers of the community typically highlight the energy and vitality of the group, especially as the number of neighborhood business establishments has tended to grow apace with the continuous arrival of Dominican residents in formerly depressed areas. However, socioeconomic portraits of the community indicate that Dominican New Yorkers, as a group, are lagging behind blacks and other Hispanics economically. Among the reasons explaining their economic retardation, Dominicans have low levels of English-language proficiency, and they often lack the specialized skills that the job market increasingly requires as the economy of urban centers nationwide has become dependent on service. Exacerbating their precarious economic condition, Dominicans often retain economic commitments to relatives back in the native land (Hernandez 2002).⁸

The linguist Almeida Jacqueline Toribio has usefully explored the extent to which the Dominican community's ethn racial and cultural identity may be "mediated or ascribed via linguistic attributes."⁹ Second-generation U.S. Dominicans apparently assert their loyalty to their heritage by pledging "allegiance" to their "vernacular," even while they evince considerable erosion of "their parents' language practices" as well as "racial attitudes." Naturally, since the collective identity of any given group defies monolithic description, the data also show youths of the same generation strategically deploying a Dominican-inflected Spanish in order to avoid being taken for African Americans. By the same token, light-skinned Dominicans who find it feasible to assimilate into mainstream society may embrace an ethos that resembles an outlook attributable to the conservative segment of the European-descended majority, in that they adopt an ideology that stresses the power of the individual over the influence of social forces. A New York-based middle-class male interviewed by Toribio in New York described the United States as a place "where you can set your goals and accomplish whatever you want," and he decried the tendency of African Americans to remember unpleasant experiences of the slavery period. He felt that the readiness of African Americans to pull out "the race card," which he finds Dominicans and other Latinos aping, stifles their ability to get ahead.¹⁰ Another observer of the community from the perspective of language and identity, drawing on interviews conducted in Providence, Rhode Island, has noted that, through their "on-going contact with African Americans," second-generation individuals transcend the "essentialized ethnic/racial stereotypes of their parents," while exclusion and discrimination by mainstream society may lead them to see themselves in contradistinction to white Americans even as they maintain an ethnolinguistic understanding of their identity that fosters a sense of their difference from black Americans.¹¹

Just as language use, linked as it is to issues of ethnic and racial identification, functions as a marker of cultural identity among Dominican Americans, so does their attitude toward their ancestral homeland. Second-generation individuals, the majority of whom reside in an ethnic enclave of their own, remain attached to their native cuisine even as they inevitably develop a taste for "American" food,

which for many often becomes synonymous with products from the large fast-food chains. They may call attention to their ethnic difference by waving the flag of the Dominican Republic in parades and at other festivities or public events that feature major Dominican stars, such as baseball games involving the likes of Chicago's Sammy Sosa, Boston's Pedro Martinez, or New York's Alex Rodriguez. The display of Dominican flags on the occasion of the Rolando Paulino All-Stars' participation in the Little League World Series in August 2001 triggered remonstrances among some non-Latino fans who failed to see the success of the Bronx team as a real New York triumph on the grounds that "the kids are Dominican."¹² Second-generation individuals generally consume merengue and *bachata* among their favorite rhythms, reproducing their parents' musical taste while they enjoy the sound of hip-hop and the other popular music forms that the U.S. entertainment industry offers to audiences of every new generation. The dancer Vergi Rodriguez, whose professional credits include work with pop stars such as Whitney Houston, Jennifer Lopez, and Prince, got her first break when Dominican merengue/hip-hop group Sandy & Papo MC commissioned her to choreograph its entire 1995 tour. A graduate of New York High School for the Performing Arts, Rodriguez, a New York native whose flourishing career caused her to relocate to Los Angeles, relishes her growing up in New York City "around different sounds like hip-hop and pop," and she stresses the syncretism of her experience: "And coming from a Dominican background, merengue is very apparent in our culture. It's just a little bit of everything, growing up urban, with a little bit of Latin influence."¹³ Their aesthetic education, then, matches the socialization available to every American of comparable class status.

Second-generation individuals who often call themselves just Dominican may not know much of their parents' native land, and when travel becomes a possibility, many think of the Dominican Republic as their first option. Given the relatively young age of their settlement in the United States, rarely will members of the Dominican community lack close kinship ties to people back "home," and quite often the grandparents that young Dominican Americans can look to for affection or permissiveness live across the ocean in an urban Dominican city or rural town. That scenario, probably more typical of families located at the lower ends of the class scale and further complicated at times by the considerable volume of intermarriage with spouses of other ethnicities, makes for a constant balancing of life in the United States and life in the Dominican Republic as a binational space wherein to construct their cultural identity. The interplay of here and elsewhere, then, enters as an inescapable element of Dominican American culture insofar as individuals from that group do not typically regard their loyalty to the United States as requiring a de-linking from their parents' homeland.

Indeed, one might think here of Navy Petty Officer Ruben Rodriguez, one of the 225 victims of American Airlines flight 587, which crashed in Queens, New York, as it took off from JFK Airport on November 12, 2001, bound for Santo Domingo. A veteran of the U.S. military mission in Kosovo who had served for seven months on the USS *Enterprise*, Rodriguez had just returned to New York

from participating in the U.S. attack on Afganistan when, before taking on his next military assignment, he decided, as a respite, to go to the ancestral homeland to reconnect with the extended family. This sad example illustrates the condition that has given some scholars cause to think of Dominicans in the United States as a transnational community.¹⁴ But the example also shows a young man deeply grounded in the United States as the country of his citizenship and civic duty, his strong affective ties to the "old country" notwithstanding.

Whether or not Dominican Americans can be regarded as a transnational community, scholars have done little to show to what extent their transnationality differs from that of any other U.S. ethnic minority that owes its development to migratory flows in the aviation era. But, a feature that demands equal attention is the interlaced coexistence of U.S.-born and immigrant individuals in shaping the cultural image of the overall group. A telling detail in this respect is the foreign birth of the Dominican American writers already mentioned, with the exception of Alvarez and Cruz. The same frequency of foreign birth applies to the members of the community who have attained legislative positions, such as New York State assemblyman Adriano Espaillat, New York City Council members Miguel Martinez and Diana Reyna, Montgomery County (Maryland) Council member Thomas Perez, Providence (Rhode Island) Municipal Council member Miguel Luna, and Rhode Island state senator Juan Pichardo, to name only a few of those Dominicans who held public office at the end of 2003.

A notable feature of the political leadership of U.S. Dominicans is their need to remain attentive to the sensibilities of a dual political constituency, one made up of people with their hearts set on the affairs of one of the major parties back in the Dominican Republic, the other made up of people who recognize the American arena as the appropriate place for their political involvement and commitment. As the migratory flow of Dominicans from their homeland to the United States has remained unabated, one cannot escape the scenario in which second- and even third-generation members of the group, who may have little Spanish language proficiency, find themselves sharing room in the cultural arena with individuals who got off the boat or airplane merely ten or even five years ago and have not yet mastered the English language. Yet both partake in the construction of the cultural visage that the community presents to the rest of American society. In the realm of visual arts, for instance, nearly all painters and sculptors who have achieved a measure of visibility belong to a middle-class wave of migrants who left the Dominican Republic beginning in the 1980s.

Two timely documents from Dominican-serving institutions—the 2002 calendar of the Washington, DC-based Dominican American National Roundtable, which used the works of twelve Dominican artists to illustrate its pages, and the catalogue of *Crossroads/Encrucijada*, an exhibition of "contemporary Dominican American art" held at the City College of New York in mid-March 2004 under the sponsorship of the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute—give a succinct idea of the provenance of the cadre of artists who have gained ascendancy in the community (www.danr.org; www.ccny.cuny.edu/dsi). The list of

artists drawn from the aforementioned documents consists of Jose Arache, Hochi Asiatico, Delsa Camacho, Niccolo Cataldi, Luis Cepeda, Jose Guillermo Diaz, Felix Diclo, Scherezade Garcia, Reynaldo Garcia Pantaleon, Francisco Hernandez, Carmen Herrera, Luis Leonor, Luanda Lozano, Dario Oleada, Charo Oquet, Doris Rodriguez, Julia Santos Solomom, and Miguel Tio. Based mainly in New York, Florida, and Rhode Island, these artists, a good many of whom are alumni of the Altos de Chavon School of Design in the Dominican Republic and New York City's Parsons School of Design, came to the United States to pursue their artistic dream. Unlike the majority of individuals who have filled the ranks of the great exodus, they are not typical migrants who left their homeland in order to secure their material survival, but rather individual talents thirsting for a suitable ambience wherein their art could flourish and reach large audiences. This seems to be the predicament of those who pursue a professional interest in the artistic forms associated with "high culture." Witness the case of ballerina Michele Jimenez, a principal dancer of the Washington Ballet who starred at the Kennedy Center's Eisenhower Theater from October 31 to November 4, 2001, in the company's new production of *Carmen*, which artistic director Septime Webre had choreographed especially for her. Discovered in 1997 by Lorraine Spiegler, a teacher who had journeyed to Santo Domingo in search of new talent for the Washington School of Ballet, Jimenez at 17 had already outgrown the opportunities that her school—the Ballet Clasico Nacional de Santo Domingo—could afford her. So, when Spiegler offered her the opportunity to travel to Washington to audition, Jimenez had a clear choice before her: "I really wanted to leave, because I wanted more. And it was getting a little . . . restricting."¹⁵

Given the mixed profile of the U.S. Dominican population, a characteristic feature of the cultural identity of the group is to be found precisely in the continuous negotiation of traditions, practices, and beliefs inherited from the ancestral homeland and the transformative thoughts, values, and ways emanating from the experience of living as an ethnic minority in the United States. Dominican Americans emerge as a differentiated cultural group, then, in the historical context of the ethnic self-assertion and the affirmation of cultural alterity that minorities in the United States display, the vigorous legacy of the civil rights movement having rendered that self-recognition tantamount to a struggle for full citizenship. Concomitantly, the group's distinct features are similarly shaped by the Dominican Republic's conventional manner of understanding cultural identity and national belonging, which minimizes the significance of internal differences and posits adherence to an official formulation of the contours of Dominicanity as the basis of one's social identity. The creative tension produced by the confrontation of the legacies inherited from the ancestral homeland and the sensibilities forged in the United States largely accounts for the texture of Dominican American culture. The group at times embraces a worldview that breaks with ideologies and ways of thinking owed to the old country and yet at times distances itself from experiences collected within the framework of American society.

Scholars often note that U.S. Dominicans find it hard to accept the prevailing racial code that in this country seems to reduce social identity to a choice between the binary opposition of white or black. They often prefer to adhere to the less rigid code of their ancestral homeland that allows for distinct identity spaces between the extremes of black and white. But they at the same time recognize the need to distance themselves from the Negrophobia and the anti-Haitianism that has conventionally characterized the discourse on nationality and culture in the Dominican Republic. A look at the record of patrons using the research resources of the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute at the City College of New York from 1994 through 2004 reveals that Dominican students care more about the study of the African heritage in Dominican society than about any other subject of scholarly investigation in the human sciences. Similarly, a commemoration of the 155th anniversary of Dominican independence from Haitian rule, held on February 27, 1999, at the Centro Cultural Orlando Martinez in northern Manhattan, sought the cosponsorship of Haitian community and cultural organizations in New York. The program featured a presentation of *gaga*, a musical and spiritual performance born of the experience of Haitian migrant sugarcane workers in Dominican plantations, and concluded with a reading of the poetry of Jacques Viau Renaud, a Haitian-born poet who grew up in the Dominican Republic, where he died fighting for social justice in the revolution of 1965.

Perhaps ultimately the culture of Dominican Americans differs from that of the ancestral homeland as well as the cultures of African Americans and of the other subsections of the Latino population in its continuous wrestling with own internal diversity. The appreciation of the African heritage without skewing the vitality of the Iberian background in the formation of the ancestral culture, the desire to preserve Spanish while refraining from the temptation to privilege that language as a requirement for entering the identity space of the community, and the incorporation of democratic values written into the American creed of equality all emerge as pertinent ingredients in the arsenal of ideas that go into a formulation of the collective identity of the group. The Dominican American propensity to embrace diversity is perhaps best illustrated in the symposium "Up from the Margins: Diversity as Challenge to the Democratic Nation," a multidisciplinary, international undertaking held in New York and Santo Domingo over two consecutive weeks in the latter half of June 2001. Spearheaded by the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation, the symposium brought together Dominican and non-Dominican voices from Santo Domingo, Madrid, San Juan, and various U.S. cities to interrogate the principle of homogeneity that informs official and nationalist discourses on Dominicanity. Over sixty scholars, artists, community advocates, and cultural activists spoke, either at the City College campus in one week or at Hotel Santo Domingo the following week, about the urgent need to recognize ethnic, sexual, social, ideological, and other forms of diversity as a fundamental value for any nation that wishes to call itself democratic today. Collectively, they defended the

contention that distinct communities or constituencies have a right to preserve or even assert their difference without having to sacrifice their claim to national belonging and full citizenship.

The papers presented included coverage of Dominicans of Chinese, Haitian, Arab, Anglophone West Indian, and African descent, as well as reports on the Dominican experience of diasporic settlements in Holland, Spain, Puerto Rico, and the United States. The multiple faiths and forms of worship that make up the religious life of Dominicans despite the homogenizing claim that construes the group as fundamentally Catholic, the patriarchal assumptions and misogynistic values that gain the support of the religious and political leadership in Dominican society, the sentiments associated with homophobia and compulsive heterosexuality that inform conventional views of national belonging, and the class biases that seem to exclude the lower strata of the population from renditions of the national community in public discourse came to the fore in an unprecedented conversation about the complex, diverse, multilayered, and heterogeneous constitution of the Dominican people, whether in the ancestral homeland or in the diaspora. Divorced from homogenizing ideas of culture or national belonging, the imagination that conceived the symposium with the purpose of fostering a capacious conceptualization of the visage of the community is arguably a direct product of the living and the learning that U.S. Dominicans have done in their continuous effort to find and assert their place among the multiple, ethnically differentiated segments that make up the American population.

NOTES

1. Rosa Duarte, *Apuntes de Rosa Duarte: Archivo y versos de Juan Pablo Duarte*, 2nd ed., ed. Emilio Rodríguez Demorizi, Carlos Larrazabal Blanco, and Vétilio Alfau Duran (Santo Domingo: Secretaria de Educación Bellas Artes y Cultos, 1994), 40.
2. Wallace B. Alig, "Man With A Hammer," *Americas* 5, no. 5 (May 1953): 6–8, 43–45; Toni Greenbaum, *Messengers of Modernism: American Studio Jewelry, 1940–1960* (New York: Flammarion, 1996), 70–72.
3. Nicolas Kanellos, *Hispanic Almanac* (Detroit: Invisible Ink, 1994), 552.
4. Eugenia Georges, *Ethnic Associations and the Integration of New Immigrants: Dominicans in New York City*, Occasional Paper no. 41 (New York: Research Program in Inter-American Affairs, 1984); Saskia Sassen-Koob, "Formal and Informal Associations: Dominicans and Colombians in New York," *Caribbean Life in New York City: Sociocultural Dimensions*, ed. Constance R. Sutton and Elsa M. Chaney, 278–296 (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1987).
5. Silvio Torres-Saillant and Ramona Hernández, *The Dominican Americans* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 80.
6. See Silvio Torres-Saillant, "Before the Diaspora: Early Dominican Literature in the United States," in *Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage*, ed. María Herrera-Sobek and Virginia Sánchez-Korrol (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2000), 3: 250–267; Silvio Torres-Saillant, "La literatura dominicana en los Estados Unidos y la periferia del margen," *Punto y Coma* 3, no. 1–2 (1991): 139–149 (also published in *Brujula/Compass*

11 [1991]: 16–17); and Daisy Cocco de Filippis and Franklin Gutierrez, eds., *Literatura dominicana en los Estados Unidos: Presencia temprana* (Santo Domingo: Buho, 2001).

7. Marilyn Ramírez, "Selected Socioeconomic Information about Dominicans in the United States," CUNY Dominican Studies Research Briefs (New York, September 2002).
8. See Ramona Hernández, *The Mobility of Labor under Advance Capitalism: Dominican Migration to the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).
9. Almeida Jacqueline Toribio, "The Social Significance of Language Loyalty among Black and White Dominicans in New York," *Bilingual Review* (forthcoming).
10. Ibid.
11. Benjamin Bailey, "Dominican-American Ethnic/Racial Identities and United States Social Categories," *International Migration Review* 35 (2001): 703–704.
12. Edward Wong, "Multicultural Bronx Stars Strike Nationalist Chord," *New York Times*, August 23, 2001.
13. Melanie Feliciano, "Dominican Dancer Vergi Choreographer to the Stars," *LatinoLink*, March 16, 2000, www.latinolink.com/musicentertainment/theatreance/0316vrgi.php3.
14. Jorge Duany, *Quisqueya on the Hudson: The Transnational Identity of Dominicans in Washington Heights*, Dominican Research Monographs (New York: CUNY Dominican Studies Institute, 1993); Luis E. Guarnizo, "The Emergence of a Transnational Social Formation and the Mirage of Return Migration among Dominican Transmigrants," *Identities* 4, no. 2 (1997): 281–322; Luis E. Guarnizo "Los Dominicanyorks: The Making of a Binational Society," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 533 (1994): 70–86; Levitt, Peggy, *The Transnational Villagers* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2001).
15. Sarah Kaufman, "An Island Treasure: In the Caribbean, Michele Jimenez Became A Dancer. Here, She's Become A Star," *Washington Post*, October 28, 2001, sec. G.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

Although the scholarly literature on Dominican Americans is still relatively sparse, that scarcity is offset to a significant degree by the amount of autobiographical and semi-autobiographical works written by individuals who are actually living the Dominican-American experience. The best starting point is Sarah Aponte, *Dominican Migration to the United States, 1970–1999: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: The City Univ. of New York Dominican Studies Institute, 1999), the first of a projected series of Dominican Research Monographs to be published by the Institute. Also extremely useful, if the reader understands Spanish, is Daisy Cocco de Filippis and Franklin Gutierrez, eds., *Literatura Dominicana en los Estados Unidos* (Santo Domingo: Buho, 2001), and Silvio Torres-Saillant, "La Literatura Dominicana en los Estados Unidos y la Periferia del Margen," *Punto y Coma*, 3 (1991): 139–141. Torres-Saillant has also published "Before the Diaspora: Early Dominican Literature in the United States" in Volume 3 of *Recovering the United States Hispanic Literary Heritage* (Houston: Arte Publica Press, 2002), 250–267, edited by María Herrera-Sobek and Virginia Sánchez-Korrol.

The most comprehensive overview of the Dominican-American experience is Silvio Torres-Saillant and Ramona Hernández, *The Dominican Americans* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998). Also highly informative is Marilyn Ramírez, "Selected Socio-

economic Information About Dominicans in the United States" (New York: City Univ. of New York Dominicans Studies Research Briefs, 2002). Ramona Hernandez supplies an integrative context for understanding the Dominican diaspora in *The Mobility of Labor under Advanced Capitalism: Dominican Migration to the United States* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2001). Given the poverty of most Dominican immigrants, it is important to understand their interactions with the American system of social services, a need that is at least partially filled by two articles written by Ana Paulino: "Dominican Immigrant Elders: Social Service Needs, Utilization Patterns and Challenges," *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 30 (1998): 61-74, and "Dominicans in the United States: Implications for Practice and Policies in the Human Services," *Journal of Multicultural Social Work*, 3 (1994): 53-65.

Like all recent immigrants, Dominican Americans are undergoing a complex process of adaptation to mainstream society and culture. Eugenia Georges, *Ethnic Associations and the Integration of New Immigrants: Dominicans in New York City*, Occasional Paper No. 41 (New York: Research Program in Inter-American Affairs, 1984), looks at how the group's network of fraternal and benevolent societies has facilitated the process for many Dominicans. Saskia Sassen-Koob, "Formal and Informal Associations: Dominicans and Colombians in New York," *Caribbean Life in New York City: Societal Dimensions* (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1987), 278-296, edited by Constance R. Sutton and Elsa M. Chaney examines the operation of these organizations in a comparative framework. Two important studies deal with the critical issues of formal education and language retention: Dulce Maria Gray, *High Literacy and Ethnic Identity: Dominican American Schooling in Transition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), and Almeda Jacqueline Toribio, "The Social Significance of Language Loyalty Among Black and White Dominicans in New York," *Bilingual Review* (forthcoming). The manner in which American educational institutions relate to Dominican Americans is the subject of Ramona Hernandez and Silvio Torres-Saillant, "Editor's Preface: Dominican Quiddities in the U.S. Academy," *Punto 7 Review: A Journal of Marginal Discourse*, 3 (1996): 1-10.

The give-and-take of the adaptation process has clearly had a profound impact on identity formation in the Dominican-American community. Benjamin Bailey, "Dominican-American Ethnic/Racial Identities and U.S. Social Categories," *International Migration Review*, 35 (2001): 677-708, examines how the multiracial nature of Dominican identity makes it difficult to fit them into the social categories constructed by mainstream American institutions. Focusing specifically on the challenges faced by Dominicans and other Latinos in American higher education is Dulcic M. Cruz, "Struggling with Labels that Mark my Ethnic Identity," *The Leaning Ivory Tower: Latino Professors in American Universities* (New York: State Univ. of New York Press, 1995), 91-100. Much of the discussion concerning Dominican-American identity stresses the transnational or binational nature of that identity. One of the best treatments of the transnational nature of Dominican-American identity is Jorge Duany, *Quisqueya on the Hudson: The Transnational Identity of Dominicans in Washington Heights* (New York: City Univ. of New York Dominican Studies Institute, 1994). Equally enlightening is Luis E. Guarnizo, "The Emergence of a Transnational Social Formation and the Mirage of Return Migration among Dominican Transmigrants," *Identities*, 4 (1997): 281-322, and "Los Dominicanos: The Making of a Binational Society," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, 533 (1994): 70-86. Also very informative is Peggy Levitt, *The Transnational Villagers* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2001).

Several other scholars have dealt with the issue of Dominican-American identity by trying to reduce it to the level of individual migrants. Two studies that focus on the career of Francis Rebajes, the artist in metals who enjoyed great celebrity from the 1930s through the 1960s, are: Wallace B. Alig, "Man With A Hammer," *Americas*, 5 (1953): 6-8, 43-45, and Toni Greenbaum, *Messengers of Modernism: American Studio Jewelry, 1940-1960* (New York: Flammarion, 1996). Concentrating on Juan Pablo Duarte, the ideological architect of the Dominican nation is Rosa Duarte, in *Apuntes de Rosa Duarte: Archivo y Versos de Juan Pablo Duarte* (Santo Domingo: Secretaria de Educacion Bellas Artes y Cultos, 1994), edited by Emilio Rodriguez Demorizi, Carlos Larrazabal Blanco, and Vetilio Alfau Duran. Melanie Feliciano profiles the career of another successful Dominican American in "Dominican Dancer Vergi: Choreographer to the Stars," *Latino Link*, 16 March 2000, www.latinolink.com/music_entertainment/theatreance/0316vrgi.php3, while Sarah Kaufman, "An Island Treasure: In the Caribbean, Michele Becomes a Dancer, Here She Becomes a Star," *Washington Post*, 28 October 2001, examines the rise of another celebrated Dominican American. Examining the reaction of non-Latinos to the participation of the Rolando Paulino All-Star baseball team in the 2001 Little League World Series is Edward Wang, "Multicultural Bronx Stars Strike a Nationalist Chord," *New York Times*, 23 October 2001.

Even though the scholarly work on Dominican Americans is growing, the leading source of information is still the novels and semi-autobiographical books written largely by women. Perhaps the most prolific and famous of these is Julia Alvarez, an American-born Dominican who is best known for her novel, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 1991), and her moving evocation of the three Mirabel sisters, who were murdered by the Trujillo regime, *In the Time of Butterflies* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 1994). She has also written *Yo!* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 1997), which elaborates on the adventures of the Garcia girls, and *In the Name of Salome* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 2001), which explores the lives of the Henriquez Urena family during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She has also written several other books intended primarily for children: *The Secret of Footprints* (New York: Random House, 2000), *How Tia Lola Came to Visit/Stay* (New York: Knopf, 2002), *Before We Were Free* (New York: Knopf, 2002), and *A Cafecito Story* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing Co., 1987). Her works of poetry include, *Homecoming* (New York: Plume, 1984) and *The Other Side/El Otro Lado* (New York: Dutton, 1995).

Almost as prolific in her own genre is poet Rhina Espaillat. Included in her works are: *Lapsing to Grace* (New York: Bennett and Kitchel, 1992), *Where Horizons Go* (Kirksville, MO: New Odyssey Press, 1998), *Shadows of the Sea* (Santo Domingo: Editora Buho, 2000), *Rehearsing Absence* (Evansville, IN: Univ. of Evansville Press, 2001), *The World and the Word* (Evansville, IN: Univ. of Evansville Press, 2001), and *The Shadow I Dress In* (Cincinnati: David Roberts Books, 2003). Also worth consulting are: Angie Cruz, *Soledad* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), Junat Diaz, *Drown* (New York: Riverside Books, 1996), Loida Maritza Perez, *Geographies of Home* (New York: Viking Press, 1999), and Nelly Rosario, *Song of the Water Saints* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002). Among male writers, the one whose work presents the most insights into life in the Dominican Republic is Alan Cambeira, *Azucar: The Story of Sugar* (New York: Belcam, 2001), and *Quisqueya La Bella: The Dominican Republic in Historical and Cultural Perspective* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1997).



FILIPINO AMERICANS

Augusto Espiritu

THE SLEEPING GIANT

Over a hundred years ago, the legend of Bernardo Carpio animated the Filipinos who rose up against Spanish colonialism and ended its 300-year rule of the Philippines. The legend said there was a giant folk hero named Bernardo Carpio, who had been imprisoned in the caves of a mountain in Luzon. One day, he would break loose and emerge from the mountain and free his people, especially in driving out the Spaniards from the country.¹

Today, there are close to 2 million Filipino Americans in the fifty states, and they are like the sleeping giant, Bernardo Carpio. According to the 2000 census, they are the second largest group among Asian Americans (1.9 million out of 12.5 million), second only to the Chinese.² One-fourth of the working population over sixteen years of age is made up of U.S. born Filipinos. Meanwhile, three-quarters of the working population is foreign-born, testifying to the continuing surge in immigration.³ Unlike many recent migrants, Filipino Americans face few language barriers because of an almost universal knowledge of English.⁴

Meanwhile, they are economically and culturally well positioned to make further inroads into American life. A good proportion of Filipino Americans belong to the professional middle class. They are doctors, nurses, engineers, accountants, lawyers, and teachers. A sizeable number are computer-assembly workers, cannery workers, farm laborers, home caregivers, government employees, and hotel and restaurant workers. Women also slightly outnumbered men in the population, providing the basis for family formation and population growth.⁵ Filipino Americans are inveterate organizers, forming several hundred associations that reach out to the population's diverse interests.⁶ They are devoted members of the