Introduction

As a teenager growing up in Washington Heights, New York, Carlos Pierre, a twenty-four-year-old second-generation Dominican-American, attended public schools alongside Black and Dominican peers. When he was in school, he says

I didn’t feel any connection to those [newly arrived] Dominicans. . . . It’s just that they were just coming here. I didn’t have anything in common with them, or, you know, that’s what I thought back then. They were into merengue and even bachata and I was like, “Whoa, what the hell is this?” You know, give me my hip-hop and I was good, you know. I felt that I had more in common with Blacks growing up, you know. We were here, living and growing up in New York [City]. They were coming from the island. I knew we weren’t the same. There was something different with us Dominicans growing up here and Blacks, you know.

Carlos’ reflections on his identity changed once he went away to college and started working with other Latinos. During his early years in college, he began thinking about joining a fraternity. His first inclination was to join a Black fraternity: “You know, I wanted to feel that community, that feeling of brotherhood.” But as he started to meet and hang out with other Latinos who grew up here, in the United States, he opted to join a Latino fraternity. He explains,

I am identifying myself as a Dominican who grew up in the U.S., you know. Not exactly a Dominican-American really or an American of Dominican descent. It’s all in there and I know people see that all the time. . . . Yeah, you know, I definitely am Black and I have a lot in common with African-Americans, but I started to see that, also, there was the
Latino part of me that also needed a place, you know. I started to learn about Pedro Albizu [Campos] and Che [Guevara] and Emiliano Zapata, and all these other people I had no clue about before. I knew about Malcolm X and Black leaders but I didn’t know about my other roots. I became Latino in a new way then . . . and Dominican.

Carlos now works with young Dominicans—both the newly arrived and those born and raised here—through a youth program in Quisqueya United, one of the largest organizations in the neighborhood of Washington Heights. This neighborhood is home to the largest concentration of Dominicans in New York City, the city that boasts the second highest number of Dominicans globally (second only to Santo Domingo, the capital city of the Dominican Republic). Carlos speaks vividly of his experiences and identities, which include categories of Blackness, of becoming and belonging to a new community of Latinos, and of rediscovering his Dominican-ness. He also maintains a political-ideological connection to African-Americans and other Latinos, emphasizing to youth in the organization the importance of seeing connections. He and other staff members of the organization have shown films on the Black Panthers, the movie *Pa’lante, Siempre Pa’lante* about the Young Lords Party, and Spike Lee’s movie *X* about Malcolm X. Carlos’ youthful appearance (he is often mistaken for a teenager) and his ability to “speak the language” of youth in the organization—Spanish and English, but particularly Neuyorican Spanglish and Dominicanish (see Báez 1999), and Black English—has drawn many youth in the organization to the youth council, in which he is a lead staff person. His ability to identify with (and as) Latino, Dominican, and Black creates no direct contradiction; these identities represent, as he says, “my community of support. This is where I’m going to be. These are my people.”

When thinking of people such as Carlos Pierre, and other Black immigrants and second-generation youth, one must contend with cartographies of race, racialization, the power and re-creation of the nation, and community. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson suggest, “In the pulverized space of postmodernity, space has not become irrelevant; it has been reterritorialized . . . [and] it is this that forces us to reconceptualize fundamentally the politics of community, solidarity, identity, and cultural difference” (1992: 9). Today’s immigrants and their children work to create networks in personal and institutional settings and to construct local politics that extend beyond strict boundaries of race, ethnicity, and nation. In fact, through their work, many are challenging these boundaries. Contemporary immigrant groups in the United States are altering
local politics and transforming the communities and cities in which they live. This study examines the ways in which Dominican-Americans living in Washington Heights participate in local politics. Central to this study is the exploration of the extent to which Dominican-American community building and politics involve second-generation Dominicans as well as other racial/ethnic groups. It is a story about Dominican-American organizers in the neighborhood that is considered, in the words of one local organizer, “the Dominican Mecca” in the United States. However, this is not an account of fixed identities built around a static ethnic or racial lexicon “native” to the group under discussion. Rather than offer a detached and decontextualized analysis (á la Glazer and Moynihan 1963), I consider the way Dominican-American organizers continuously reevaluate the world and locale around them and alter their politics. That race and ethnicity become key factors (or tools) in their routes toward empowerment is understandable. As Manning Marable (1994) explains:

In the United States “race” for the oppressed has also come to mean an identity of survival, victimization, and opposition to those racial groups of elites that exercise power and privilege. What we are looking at here is not an ethnic identification or culture, but an awareness of shared experience, suffering, and struggle against the barriers of racial division. . . . [The] second distinct sense of racial identity is both imposed on the oppressed and yet represents a reconstructed critical memory of the character of the group’s collective ordeals. Both definitions of race and racial identity give character and substance to the movements for power and influence among people of color. (31)

It is within this context that we must understand Dominican-Americans and the politics of empowerment. The character of Dominican-American community organizing has changed since the first wave of Dominican immigrants arrived in New York in the 1960s. Through the generations, local organizers have altered the geopolitical focus of their efforts. That is, they have moved from sole emphasis on “homeland politics,” or the transnational sphere, to include organizing to confront local issues in the city of New York. Dominicans have a strong history of civic participation. In New York, in an attempt to build their power, they have expanded their organizational efforts to include other people of color, namely Puerto Ricans and African-Americans. A number of factors converged in the 1980s and 1990s that allowed the Dominican community in Washington Heights to establish a foothold in local politics. First, community organizers retreated from an exclusive concen-
tronation on “home politics.” Following this development, Dominican organizers began to focus on establishing organizations to take on local issues. In this process they reached out to Puerto Rican and African-American activists and established leadership in New York. And finally, a new generation of Dominican-Americans, raised and educated in public institutions in New York City, came of age and solidified the new direction of Dominican-American organizing.

Contrary to mainstream perceptions (see Suro 1998), the political transformations fostered by Dominicans have proven significant and have led to a multitude of local, community-based institutions (see Georges 1984; Ricourt 2002; Hernández and Torres-Saillant 1998). I examine the patterns of community organizing in the Dominican neighborhood of Washington Heights, New York, particularly from the 1980s to the present, focusing on the ways that second-generation Dominicans are envisioning themselves and their communities as a new American citizenry. In this reading, I extend the realm of politics beyond the formal electoral process to examine the numerous ways Dominican-American activists struggle for power and control of their community.

At first glance Dominican-American organizing in Washington Heights appears to be exclusively Dominican identified. I suggest that behind the appearance of “co-ethnic” community organizing and empowerment lies the reality of coalition building across racial and ethnic lines. Second-generation Dominican-Americans are at the forefront of many developments toward this end. This study seeks to bridge the gap between two bodies of literature, one focusing on first-generation immigrant politics and the other examining the second generation. While examining Dominican-American organizing and politics, it is important not to omit or marginalize the role of young Dominican immigrants and the second generation in these processes.

This study also examines the ways in which and the reasons why some Dominican activists in New York City have developed a particular framework of identity—as Dominican-Americans or as people of color or both—through their political mobilization and institution-building projects. Central to this study are the ways in which identity politics is understood and used in organizing efforts. The extent to which Dominican-American organizers build coalitions across racial and ethnic lines in this process raises questions about assumptions prevalent in contemporary theories on immigrants and the second generation. Through the use of ethnographic material, this text builds upon and challenges several postulations common in the literature on contemporary immigrant communities. Research on immigrant politics tends to em-
phasize transnational organizing, while that on the second generation and segmented assimilation privilege co-ethnic identity and action. This study follows the trajectory of this literature in moving beyond “straight-line assimilation” and “melting pot” theories of immigrant incorporation. The text also aims to move beyond these paradigms to present a more dynamic portrait of the ever-changing face of Dominican-American politics.

Embarking on an examination of the political developments of community organizing in Washington Heights requires that we pay attention to the historic, economic, and political circumstances in which this community operates. We must also begin to look at these factors as forces or macro-level processes with which local activists and organizations are in dialogue. Community organizing does not develop in a vacuum. Dominicans who arrived in Washington Heights in the latter part of the twentieth century have faced particular social and political conditions, including gentrification and housing shortages, government abandonment of the social safety net, erosion of the manufacturing industries in the United States, and a racialized educational system. Local activists and organizations have gradually but surely come to focus their efforts on these locally produced issues. The strategies they use in organizing to confront these issues and the modes of identification they call upon to do so are at the core of this study. Within this reading of Dominican-American organizing I will address issues raised in the literature on contemporary immigrants: transnationalism, segmented assimilation, racialization, and community politics.

The questions guiding this text therefore include, What constitutes Dominican-American organizing in Washington Heights? With whom have they collaborated in this community-building process? How does identity come to bear on the manner in which they organize? How does the new cadre of Dominican activists—composed in large part of the second generation—confront and organize local politics? To what extent do they work with co-ethnics and other people of color? And finally, is contemporary activism in Washington Heights grounded in specific geopolitical spaces and identities? To what extent is political organizing transnational, translocal, or New York–based?

Identity and Power

An identity and a community, as imagined as these may be (Anderson 1983), constitute a political space. People continuously reconstruct their communities and reconfigure their identities as members of those communities. Some
would argue that people not only alter their identities and community perspectives (that is, who makes up their community and what community they belong to) over a span of time, but that they also change their self-ascribed identities and roles according to the situations in which they find themselves. This notion of a situational identity is often discussed when speaking of the children of immigrants—that is, the second generation—thought to live “betwixt and between” the world of their parents and the world of their adopted country. Far from being schizophrenic self-ascribed definitions, however, the identities around which an individual or a group organizes and from which they draw collective strength are designated after prolonged study and involvement in micro- and macro-level processes. In the United States this necessarily involves an awareness of racial hierarchies and the power and consequences of the process of racial coding. People can at times choose to use particular identities in their attempts to attain a certain goal. Today’s immigrants of color select from the limited racially coded options available to them; these choices of identity do not however single-handedly determine the outcome of their efforts.

In the case of organizing and contemporary politics, identity appears to have taken center stage as people organize to confront the state (Castells 1982, 1997; Hale 1997). Studies on identity politics demonstrate that the relationship between politics and identity is historically specific, contextual, and multilayered. It is also constantly shifting in practice and in meaning. It is based on this understanding that I use concepts gleaned from studies of ethnicity, race, and community building.

The Transnational Paradigm

In recent years scholars have focused considerable attention on the ways in which today’s immigrants alter concepts of assimilation and identity. This scholarship encourages us to reevaluate our assumptions about immigration, assimilation, cultural hybridity, community, and political participation and suggests that such processes are manifested in new ways in the lives of today’s immigrant communities compared to those of earlier immigrants. The role of immigrants as active agents is at the forefront of such theories. Immigrant organizations and the geopolitical sites of their activities and political positioning have been at the center of contemporary literature on the new immigration. Current theory highlights the nature of agency and activism of im-
migrant groups, noting the significant role immigrant organizations have on “home politics.” Scholars such as Basch, Schiller, and Szanton Blanc (1994) and Duany (1994) have advanced interpretations of immigrant communities. They have defined immigrants’ invariable pull to “home” as transnationalism, interpreting this kind of purposeful involvement with their country of origin as the tool (and political strategy) through which immigrants gain a sense of empowerment.

Scholars writing about transnationalism argue that contemporary immigrants are identifying and positioning themselves between “home” and “host” countries; that is, although their daily existence occurs in their “host” country, their social, political, and economic existence continues to be in their “home” country. Some would argue that immigrants are reconfiguring their place, circumventing marginalized spaces in their “host” countries by building their social, political, and economic capital in their “home” countries. In this process, they create a new sense of community, nation, and identity. In a recent text about Dominican immigrants in Boston, Peggy Levitt (2001) describes this new space as a “transnational village.” According to Levitt, people on both geographic ends of this village form part of one social and political space, with most efforts aimed at developing the neighborhoods that émigrés left in the Dominican Republic. These types of studies offer insights into a historically overlooked pattern of immigrant politics.

The idea that immigrants somehow abandon all connections to their familial, social, and political relationships in their home country once they settle in a new host country has been confronted and disproven. On the other hand, scholars focusing on transmigrant activity do not sufficiently analyze the extent to which immigrants organize in ways that are not transnational. Recognizing these limitations, Levitt and Waters (2002) also suggest that there is a need for further research to determine the extent to which second-generation immigrants participate in this transnational space.

Contextualized within and beyond theories of transnationalism and community organizing, this study shifts the direction of research on immigrant politics to include an analysis of relationships that immigrant organizations have with local (that is, U.S.) politics and people of color, while reconsidering previous interpretations of community and immigrants’ identities and connections to their country of origin. I explore the nature of local organizing activities, examining the roots and routes of political efforts evident in the Dominican-American neighborhood of Washington Heights. Many of the or-
ganizations established by this population have, since their inception, worked to confront and change issues they face in New York: funding for public education, local environmental hazards, health concerns, bilingualism and English as a second language instruction, underemployment, lack of representation in local government, civic participation, and so on. The role of the second generation in these organizations has been crucial for the development of community organizing. Although local organizers and the major organizations—including those on which this study is based—have their distinct missions and fields of activity, they all appear to share similar goals of involvement in local and U.S. politics. These organizations have charted roads toward institution building in Washington Heights, engaging in and developing community and community-building efforts in multiple and converging ways, often invoking “home” in a manner that contradicts some of the focal points of current theory.

To date, there have been few accounts of the Dominican presence in local politics. In the studies that exist, Dominicans are generally seen as either transnational actors (see Levitt 2001; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Duany 1994) or local Dominican-American actors (see Hernández and Torres-Saillant 1998; Ricourt 2002; Georges 1984). Of the two paradigms, the transnational has been used more frequently to define the Dominican community. For example, two recent qualitative studies on Dominican-American politics declare that Dominicans comprise a truly transnational village (see Levitt 2001; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991). My research suggests a rather different focus and conclusion. I build on the work of those who dedicate much-needed attention to the local-actor perspective. The local-actor perspective does not necessarily deny the existence or importance of transnational work. Scholars focusing on local work choose to provide much-needed analysis of the ways in which new immigrants work to build communities, institutions, power, and culture in the United States.

Dominican-American organizers have established a strong local presence in New York, embarking on a new era of “power from the margins,” to borrow Milagros Ricourt’s phrase (2002). Authors such as Ricourt (2002), Ricourt and Danta (2002), and Hernández and Torres-Saillant (1998) discuss the different ways that Dominicans participate in local political and cultural spheres. They agree that Dominican immigrants are establishing power in politics and community development. They concur that this is a politically astute community with substantial background in organizing and civic participation. Nonetheless, their work, along with that of others who examine immigrant community
politics, does not analyze the role of the second generation in local organizing. They have left the question of the second generation, their identities, and their political behavior open for further investigation.

The Second Generation

A new body of literature has emerged under the auspices of scholars such as Alejandro Portes, Rubén Rumbaut, and others. Though it does not address the second generation’s role in local politics, this new literature seeks to address questions regarding the “new second generation,” their identities, and their prospects for social mobility in the United States. Scholars such as Portes, Rumbaut, Zhou, and Waters have developed a theory of segmented assimilation in their studies of the new second generation. Central to their theory is a discussion of the second generation’s identity choices. Portes and Rumbaut identify three possible avenues of assimilation that contemporary second-generation immigrants can take: They can assimilate into white America (a seemingly impossible task for most contemporary immigrant groups); they can identify with and assimilate into “native minority” groups, namely Puerto Rican, African-American, and Mexican-American, a choice that leads to “downward assimilation”; or they can remain rooted almost exclusively in their immigrant group, maintaining a “co-ethnic” identity.

Proponents of segmented assimilation theory argue that it is in the best interest of the new second generation, and of their immigrant communities, to maintain a “co-ethnic” identity and lifestyle that revolve around their own national ethnic group. They give a positive prognosis in terms of successful economic and social mobility for those who remain attached to the “co-ethnic.” Although these authors appropriately dispel any remaining fragments of a straight-line assimilation approach and insist that race was a crucial factor in the assimilation of earlier European immigrant groups, I argue that these contemporary analyses are limited. Implicit in their work is the assumption that people maintain strict adherence to a bounded, unchanging, homogeneous community—either that of white America, that of native minorities, or that of co-ethnics. Furthermore, in their assessments of “native minority” groups, they present a picture of a permanent underclass. These contemporary accounts also suggest that identity choices are the most important factors in social and economic mobility for the new second generation. Moreover, they do not adequately consider the ways in which second-generation populations inhabit numerous spaces, or identities, simultaneously. As I will argue later in the text,
the spaces occupied by second-generation Dominican-Americans include other people of color, and this has been a crucial component of the manner in which Dominican-Americans have constructed local power and political capital.

To summarize, mainstream literature on immigrant communities in the United States, particularly that examining organizing efforts, points to the transnational or co-ethnic strategies utilized by both first- and second-generation immigrants. In this study I seek to move beyond these approaches by exploring the process by which activists become involved in local politics and the ideologies that lead to and support their participation in these efforts.

Dominican-American Politics: Coming of Age in New York

During the period between the 1970s and 1990s, when Dominicans became the majority population in the northern Manhattan neighborhood of Washington Heights, New York City was undergoing massive economic upheaval. Working-class New Yorkers were hit especially hard by the erosion of the manufacturing industries in the northeastern United States. Yet ethnographic work demonstrates that people are creative and find ways—within the context of the social, economic, and political restrictions they face—to participate and intervene in this process. It was during this period that Dominican activists began to feel that the task of organizing and obtaining resources for the community rested on their shoulders and that they were best equipped to represent the Dominican immigrant community in local politics. They began to participate in local civic projects to garner power. Although such participation can constitute a form of resistance, it can also easily become a form of accommodation (Kelley 1996; Sacks 1988; Jones 1987).

While most Dominican leaders who participated in this study express their commitment to working to benefit the community, they have charted two distinct paths toward this end. Some have accommodated to local political machinery in order to obtain grants and other resources for local community development and service delivery. I refer to those who emphasize this direction as the ethnic entrepreneurs. I label those in the other organizing trend as the community mobilizers. Community mobilizers base their work on the assumption that community empowerment requires work from a grassroots level and that empowerment can be accomplished only if local residents take it upon themselves to demand resources and simultaneously challenge state policies.

All community leaders believe it is important to focus their efforts on local
issues. They all believe that the state must provide more resources to enable Dominican economic, social, and political growth. And regardless of the organizing ideology to which they subscribe, organizers understand the importance of working with other people of color. Their methods and ideologies may differ, but a critical reading of the modes of political engagement and participation would suggest that people, no matter their circumstances and position in society, struggle to have a say in their own lives, their communities, and the processes that affect them. And they do so using various strategies and ideologies. It is therefore not surprising that Dominican-American activists would use various strategies in their efforts to garner power for the community.

To focus on community-based organizing is to tell the story not only of these organizations and their constituents, but also of the possibilities for a new democracy built from the ground up. Marable's (2002) assessment of civic participation among the working poor and unemployed is pertinent in this discussion of immigrant community organizing and contemporary social movements. He notes, “In the postindustrial cities of America . . . the decisive battleground has shifted from the workplace to the living space,” and many disenfranchised people “express their political activism through civil society rather than in trade unions or formal electoral political parties. These small-scale, ad hoc, grassroots organizations represent a ‘great well of democracy,’ an underutilized resource that has the potential to redefine our democratic institutions” (2002: 222).

It is imperative that we continue to examine and understand contemporary immigrant organizing. Not only will we learn about the “new immigrant politics,” but we also stand to learn about the new possibilities for democratic movements in this country. The issue of “the color line,” as William E. B. DuBois analyzed it a century ago, resonates today. Its relevance and enduring legacy are particularly clear when we embark on a study of politics and power in the United States. An examination of the new immigrant politics necessitates an excavation of race and racialization and of the ways in which racialized groups challenge these processes.

Ethnicity, Race, and Community Mobilizing

In the past ten years there has been an increase in the literature that examines panethnic identities and coalition building. Scholars working in this vein examine the ways in which immigrants of color broker identities with other
marginalized groups in the United States (see Jennings 1994; Espiritu 1992; Ricourt & Danta 2002; Torres & Ngin 1995). They argue that groups organize around these panethnic identities for the explicit purpose of empowerment (Bonus 2000).

Social scientists have tended to explore identity from either a primordial or an instrumentalist stance. In an attempt to move beyond the limitations of these approaches, Rick Bonus’ (2000) ethnography of Filipino-American politics highlights Rodolfo D. Torres and ChorSwang Ngin’s (1995) primary thesis that when people identify themselves as one collective or when they associate themselves with other racial/ethnic groups, they do so for political empowerment. Torres and Ngin define this identification as “ethnicity for itself.” They argue that today’s racialized immigrant and “native minority” groups (or “racialized Others”) forge commonality under a unifying (racialized) ethnic category, such as Latino or Asian-American, to promote and protect shared goals and to create a space of inclusion and civil rights (17), an analysis in which Manning Marable (1994) concurs. This process is one of renegotiating and redefining the group’s relationship with the dominant society. It is also a process that can lead to alliances across traditionally defined racial and ethnic lines. Bonus explains that this “instrumentalist view” allows us to understand the development of a panethnic/pan-racial identity. He suggests that this type of identity arises from the “circumstantial manipulation of identities” by individuals gathering as one to suit their collective interests. Bonus’ discussion of the ways in which these processes have taken shape within the Filipino-American population of California points to identity formation as a “set of claims about ethnicity and nationhood” (Bonus 2000: 16). These issues, along with how identities enter local political efforts, are taken up in this text.

Guide to the Text

The book is organized around key issues of identity, political mobilization, and community building. Before delving into the ways these processes take shape in Washington Heights, I offer, in chapter 1, an analysis of recent research on immigrants and the new second generation. Matched by a now-voluminous and ever-expanding documentary literature, the growth of communities of post-1965 immigrants and their children marks a historical watershed. There has been a recent surge in scholarship on immigrant com-
munities. As noted earlier, one of the foci of this literature is contemporary immigrant politics and immigrant transnational activities. Another focus is the second generation and their ethnic “choices.” This chapter sets the stage for understanding Dominican-American politics in Washington Heights, New York, by bridging the gaps in current literature.

Chapter 2 offers an overview of the physical and social landscape of the neighborhood that served as the site of my research. Washington Heights’ history, its resources, and its contemporary demographics provide the context within which local Dominican organizing operates. Chapter 3 outlines the political developments in the Dominican Republic and in the United States that serve as the backdrop to migration trends and Dominican-American community building and political participation.

Chapter 4 presents a chronological account of major organizing trends in Washington Heights, paying close attention to developments since the 1980s. In this chapter I challenge the transnational framework presented thus far to describe the Dominican immigrant community and offer a chronological analysis that explores the development of community power in conjunction with Dominican collaborations with other people of color. I argue that a series of factors converged during the 1980s that allowed Dominicans to imagine a Dominican political space developed in consultation and in solidarity with other organizers of color in New York.

Chapter 5 highlights the work of the Dominican-American leadership. Today’s leadership is diverse in age, gender, class background, and, most important, in ideology. Though all the leaders described in this text focus their energies on New York—or U.S.-based issues affecting the Dominican community, they have generally emphasized one of two ideological paths to meet the needs of and garner power for Dominicans. This chapter illustrates these two ideological tendencies—ethnic entrepreneurship and community mobilizing—through the use of life histories, political statements, and community-organizing events.

Chapter 6 delves into an analysis of the new second generation and the ways they identify themselves, their communities (as Dominican, Latino, Black, and people of color), their racialized place in this society, and their work in politics. The manner in which they use different identities and establish coalitions across racial and ethnic lines is a driving force in this analysis.

Second-generation Dominicans are using a variety of methods and allies to address local needs and concerns. In chapter 7 I present two projects in which
Dominican-Americans are involved. Their involvement in these interracial/interethnic collaborations tell us about the ways in which Dominicanness, local Dominican politics, coalitions, and diaspora come together as Dominicans contend with conceptualizations of race, nation, and power in the United States.

A Note on Terminology

Numerous phrases used in this text require early definition. One of the key distinctions made in the literature on immigrant communities is that of first, 1.5, and second generations. The first generation is commonly understood to be the group who embarked on the emigration process as adults. Their children are referred to as either the 1.5 or the second generation. The 1.5 generation, as explored by Gustavo Pérez-Firmat (1994), defines those young immigrants who were born in one country and then spent their formative years in the country to which their parents immigrated. Scholars such as Sánchez (1993), Portes (1996), and Waters (1996) conclude that this generation stands in a unique position, as they spent some time in their country of birth but their teen years were shaped by life in a new land. Second generation is a term used to refer to those born to immigrant parents in the host country. The second generation is distinguished from the 1.5ers because their entire life experience is through the lens of a life lived in the host country.

For the purposes of this study, I do not distinguish between the 1.5 and second generations. Instead, I use second generation to describe Dominicans who arrived in the United States as children, as well as those born in the United States. For my analysis, the distinction between these groups is not necessary, particularly in light of the fact that as young people of color in the United States, they face the same processes of economic disenfranchisement, racialization, and sociopolitical marginalization regardless of their generation-based status. While the ideologies they adopt may be influenced by their experiences of life in one particular society (that is, either the Dominican Republic or the United States), I argue that it is their experience as young people of color in the United States that is most pertinent in their understandings and ideologies around race and politics in the United States.

I do, however, distinguish the second generation from the first generation. When using the term first generation, I am referring to the immigrants who embarked on their journey to the United States as adults. I also use this
term to distinguish between the “old guard” immigrant leaders who were activists in the Dominican Republic and the “new second-generation” leaders whose politicization began and developed primarily in the United States. I do not make these distinctions to suggest that they are disparate and disconnected populations with distinct ideologies. That would displace arguments of the macro-level context of political developments of a community through time. I make the distinction only for the sake of clarifying the ages and historical trajectories of these actors. Rather than seeing these two generations as disconnected and acting upon generation-specific ideologies, I examine the ways that they have developed politics in Washington Heights together. The two generations continue to interact considerably in local and national Dominican politics.

The uses of the terms *Dominican* and *Dominican-American* also require brief definition. *Dominican-American* is generally used to identify individuals who employ an ideology that leads them to focus their organizing in and for Dominicans in the United States. The term *Dominican* does not, however, imply the inverse. That is, defining someone as Dominican does not suggest that he or she is a transmigrant disengaged from civic life in New York. When discussing transnationalism or people involved in this process, I refer to them as Dominican transmigrants. The distinction between *Dominican* and *Dominican-American*, therefore, denotes the strong political inclinations of the person so labeled, with the latter term denoting strong identification with U.S. organizing.

Another set of terms that needs clarification is *African-American*, *Black*, and *Latino*. *African-American* and *Black* are used interchangeably at times, though *African-American* is popularly employed to distinguish U.S. Blacks from other Black populations. I use *Black* to talk about all the people of African descent in the Americas, including African-Americans, West Indians, and Dominicans. The term *Latino*, like Dominican-American, is used in this book as a political identity. It describes people with roots in Latin America or the Spanish-speaking Caribbean now living in the United States. There is still ample debate surrounding the use of this term (see Oboler 1995). Because it encapsulates so many different national groups with distinct histories, this category can obscure many important aspects of individual national groups; for example, Dominican history and immigration experiences differ greatly from those of the Cuban population. Using the term *Latino* can, unfortunately, gloss over such important distinctions. Yet, as I will demonstrate later,
Latino is an important political identity for Dominican-Americans organizing with or seeing themselves as a part of a broader body politic in the United States.

It is with these terms and many other tools in hand that I present just one of the many stories of resistance, community building, and empowerment found in the neighborhood of Washington Heights.