

DEBATING *DOMINICANIDAD* IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

In October of 1882 Sarah Marinda Loguen Fraser took a steamship from Philadelphia to Puerto Plata, bringing along with her a trousseau, some furniture, and sturdy shoes—the moveable property of many nineteenth-century brides. She also carried one item that differentiated her from many women, whether white or African-descended: a medical bag. A practicing physician, Sarah Fraser was among the first African Americans to graduate with a medical degree and become a licensed doctor. She traveled with her new husband, Charles Fraser, a St. Thomas-born pharmacist who lived in the Dominican Republic.

The newlyweds owed their relationship, in part, to Frederick Douglass and his son, Charles. Frederick Douglass had visited the Dominican Republic in 1871 as assistant secretary to the Senate Commission of Inquiry into the Annexation of Santo Domingo. Afterward, and probably as a result of his father's influence, Charles Douglass served as the U.S. vice-consul in Puerto Plata, where he became friends with Charles Fraser and with Ulises Heureaux and Gregorio Luperón, heroes of the War of Restoration and political elites. As a close family friend, Charles Douglass encouraged Sarah to correspond with Fraser, and, after an exchange of letters, Fraser visited the Philadelphia World's Fair in 1876, where he met Sarah. They were engaged in 1881.

According to family papers, Frederick Douglass encouraged Sarah Loguen to marry Charles Fraser and live in the Dominican Republic. Just a decade earlier, in the 1870s, Douglass had been one of the leading proponents of annexing the Dominican Republic to the United States. He believed that in Haiti and Santo Domingo blacks and whites from the United States could seek their fortune on an equal footing. As he once wrote, Santo Domingo was where “you feel your full stature of manhood.”¹ The nation's reputation as a biracial paradise was, for Douglass, the product of its history; it was the island that witnessed the birth of white Christian civilization in the New World, African

slavery, and resistance to slavery and colonialism. This history inspired him to suggest that the annexation of Santo Domingo to the United States could help promote racial unity in both countries.

The same year Sarah and Charles Fraser met, Juan Amechazurra built the first steam-powered sugar mill outside San Pedro de Macorís, an otherwise forgettable small town located on the banks of the Higuamo River in the eastern part of the island. Amechazurra, who had fled Cuba during the Ten Years' War, brought with him the managerial and technical skills necessary to build his estate, Ingenio Angelina. Many regional elites believed Amechazurra and industrialized sugar production brought modernity to the country as a whole.²

We know much about the structure of labor in the eastern sugar zone and the important role played by Puerto Plata's political elites, such as Luperón and Heureaux, in the elaboration of a national project in the 1870s and 1880s. Yet, the Fraser and Amechazurra stories suggest new questions about the ways in which foreign investment and intervention shaped ideas about race and nation; about whether the idea of Dominican racial harmony and racial unity was farce or real; about the role that racial and gender ideologies—the quest to “feel [the] full stature of manhood”—played in making sense of international and regional power structures and emerging economic orders.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century was an especially transformative moment in Dominican history. In the 1880s and 1890s, the Dominican Republic's economy consolidated around tobacco, sugar, and cacao production. Foreign merchants resident in the country, particularly in Puerto Plata and, increasingly, in San Pedro de Macorís, linked the Dominican Republic with commercial networks that spanned the Atlantic and the circum-Caribbean.³ Some of these commercial ties brought expatriates and investors from the United States, who began to press their government to pay closer attention to Santo Domingo, as it was also known, either through commercial investment or with the establishment of a coaling station for the U.S. Navy on the Samaná peninsula. These early interactions would culminate with an effort to annex Santo Domingo to the United States in the 1870s.⁴

The Dominican War of Restoration, fought to end Spanish annexation of Santo Domingo (1861–1865), inspired independence movements in Cuba and Puerto Rico, Spain's remaining American colonies. Veterans of the War, such as Generals Gregorio Luperón, Ulises Heureaux, and Máximo Gómez, lent material support for these efforts; Gómez even fought in the Cuban Army. The unsatisfactory end of Cuba's Ten Years' War forced some of its leaders into exile in the Dominican Republic, where they joined their Puerto Rican counterparts. Independence leaders such as Antonio Maceo from Cuba and

Ramón Emeterio Betances from Puerto Rico lived in Puerto Plata and from there built a transnational movement against Spanish colonialism.⁵

The economic change that swept across the country in the 1870s and 1880s, the U.S. intervention in the 1870s, and anticolonial activism in the 1890s occasioned an opportunity for intellectuals and politicians (often one and the same) to reflect on *dominicanidad*. I argue in this chapter that neither anti-blackness nor anti-Haitianism were central concepts in competing ideas about *dominicanidad* that emerged in the works of men such as Pedro Francisco Bonó, Gregorio Luperón, and Eugenio María de Hostos. Anti-Haitianism was, however, present in Manuel de Jesús Galván's (1834–1910) more pessimistic reflections on the national question produced during the same period. Anti-Haitian rhetoric correlated directly with support for authoritarianism while Bonó's, Luperón's, and Hostos's arguments complemented the optimistic, democratic, and anti-imperialist impulses of men who had long been critical of Spanish colonialism and growing U.S. power in the region.

Appearing at the very moment when the Dominican Republic's and the United States' economies were becoming more integrated, there was much at stake in these debates. Complementing the question about who the Dominicans were as a nation (*raza*) was another: What was the relationship between sovereignty, governance, and race? As a *raza*, Bonó, Luperón, and Hostos argued, Dominicans were a culturally Hispanic people. Yet, their *hispanicismo* was not inherently antiblack. I argue that by the early decades of the twentieth century, *hispanicismo* had become more racially exclusive. At the end of the nineteenth century, however, a debate still raged over *raza* and race in the Dominican Republic.

. . .

On July 25, 1865, the last Spanish troops left Santo Domingo after a disastrous defeat by an insurgency that united elites and peasants in an effort to end Spanish rule. The rebellion against the Spanish regime had been fueled by failed economic policies and, some historians have argued, the contempt with which Spaniards treated Dominicans. Although Spanish officials respected the 1821 slave emancipation decree, they forbade Dominican military personnel from wearing Spanish uniforms, replaced Dominican officers with Spaniards, and appointed Spanish bureaucrats to administer government institutions. Additionally, they imposed the *bagaje*, a system of forced labor and tribute, on rural populations. Peasants were hit particularly hard by these policies; as a result, just two years into the occupation, an organized insurgency for Dominican self-determination erupted.⁶

Afterward, the War of Restoration became a touchstone for Dominicans. Documents produced long after the war ended often begin, “In the year of the Restoration of the Republic.” Letters, reports, and municipal documents express a pervasive sense of equality and social leveling through the language of citizenship. Officials and nonofficials alike addressed each other as “Ciudadano” (Citizen).

Local archives reveal, however, that victory over Spain also engendered internal conflict, especially for local authorities intent on creating governing institutions and wielding power over their jurisdictions. First, like independence wars throughout the Americas, the War of Restoration appears to have enlarged the power of regional strongmen-turned-generals (*caudillos*) and their mobilized, armed militias. These regional leaders plunged the country into incessant warfare for the duration of the Second Republic (1865–1882).⁷ In January of 1867, for example, the *caudillo* Pedro Guillermo sacked the eastern town of Hato Mayor. Days later, General Marcos Evangelista and Colonel Ciriaco Reyna raised an army of 150 “notable persons and soldiers from [Hato Mayor] and from the *común* [parish] of Higuëy for the reestablishment of order.”⁸

In addition to destabilizing local authority, incessant conflicts did much to undermine faith in Dominican sovereignty. In 1871 residents of Higuëy threatened annexation to the United States and sent notice of their pro-U.S. sentiments to Santo Domingo as officials there debated the possibility of creating a U.S. protectorate. Governor Andrés Pérez reported to the minister of the interior, police, and agriculture that troops in the eastern army had announced their support for annexation to the United States, “bringing along the star-spangled flag, [waving it] in victory [in honor] of the president of this republic and the American [republic].” He reported that “the population rose up so spontaneously that I conceded to their desires as they are also mine”—a likely response from a besieged official.⁹

Spain’s defeat helped cultivate a sense of national destiny but also unleashed power struggles that threatened national unity. Educated elites writing about the Dominican nation were faced with a difficult task: how, in the face of these conflicts and divisions, to cultivate a sense of common purpose? With an eye toward the imperialist machinations of the United States, commentators also wondered how to make the argument for Dominican sovereignty for a racially mixed people?

As happened with their counterparts throughout the Americas, the answers to these questions came through conversations about Dominicans as a unified *raza* (i.e., a collective of people who shared culture, history, and lineage) and about Dominicans’ race (i.e., whether the mixture of European, indigenous,