April J. Mayes

The Mulatto Republic: Class, Race, and Dominican National Identity. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014. xiii + 195 pp. (Cloth US\$ 69.95)

As a mixed-race nation that, in the eyes of many outsiders, stubbornly refuses to acknowledge its blackness, the Dominican Republic is often cast as a Caribbean conundrum. How is it that a predominantly African-descended people could perceive itself as mixed-race creole, Hispanic, or “constitutionally white”? Scholars have considered this issue from various angles, including the nation’s economic formation outside of the plantation nexus of sugar and slavery, the early emergence of a freedmen majority, and the role of the United States, which invidiously cast the Dominican Republic as higher than Haiti on the evolutionary scale.¹

April Mayes’s book traces the articulation of race and nation in Dominican thought from the 1860s to 1940, the period when *hispanismo* and antiblack racism became dominant political discourses. The study focuses on San Pedro de Macorís, a town that experienced rapid social change when it became a sugar enclave in the early twentieth century, drawing Spaniards, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans en masse; it forged a multinational society that only began to meld together after the Depression when Antillean migrants were forced to remain since their travel subsidies were curtailed. Mayes shows how liberal thought whitened over time from the War of the Restoration (1863–65), which won independence from Spain (led and fought largely by African-descended men to produce a more inclusive model of *dominicanidad*), to the vision articulated by late nineteenth-century liberal statesmen such as Eugenio María de Hostos and Américo Lugo, who cultivated a model of state formation and civilization with a distinctly white cast to it, even if they acknowledged the nation to be mixed. A new immigrant elite forged through the sugar boom rallied together around their *hispanidad*, which came to signify modernity, progress,

1 See, for example, Ginetta E.B. Candelario, 2007, *Black Behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops* (Durham NC: Duke University Press); Michiel Baud, 1996, “Constitutionally White”: The Forging of a National Identity in the Dominican Republic, in Gert Oostindie (ed.), *Ethnicity in the Caribbean* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press), pp. 121–51; Silvio Torres-Saillant, 1998, Creoleness or Blackness: A Dominican Dilemma, *Plantation Society in the Americas* 5(1):29–40; Lauren Derby, 2003, Race, National Identity and the Idea of Value on the Island of Hispaniola, in Nancy Priscilla Naro (ed.), *Blacks, Coloureds, and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (La Jolla CA: Institute for the Study of the Americas), pp. 5–37; Eugenio Matibag, 2003, *Haitian-Dominican Counterpoint* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan).

and respectability vis-à-vis the new class of Afroantillean labor contracted by U.S. agribusiness firms. By the 1930s, this had morphed into a broader banner of *latinidad* at a time when smaller nations in particular were drawn to the idea of Panamerican cooperation.

By delineating and carefully parsing out several discursive threads that are frequently bundled together, this text challenges a literature that too often casts Haiti at the epicenter of Dominican national identity, and reduces hispanicism to racism. While anti-Haitianism dating from the Haitian occupation of 1822–44 is repeatedly cast as the original source of Dominican antiblack racism, Mayes reveals that in sugar zones such as San Pedro the backlash was initially aimed at migrant contract labor from the Lesser British and Dutch Antilles, and only shifted to Haitians after the 1937 Haitian massacre by the regime of Rafael Trujillo (1931–60). She also documents how feminists of color such as Petronila Gómez channeled *latinidad* into a nationalist project. This account is a potent reminder that notwithstanding periodic clarion calls to preserve the contours of *dominicanidad*, the origin of the Dominican nation was actually a melting pot forged through extensive immigration.

The Mulatto Republic provides an intellectual history of *hispanismo* until it became hegemonic under the Trujillo dictatorship, stopping short of its morphing into the central political currency of Joaquín Balaguer's Partido Reformista. Drawing on a range of sources, including consular reports, migration records, censuses, U.S. Marine records, municipal archives, and regional newspapers, Mayes provides a lively engagement with the secondary literature, including Dominican scholars who are often neglected by U.S. historiography. This sweeping study covers a period in Dominican state formation that has received attention by scholars, but the way it incorporates social history into the analysis is novel, as is the study's temporal frame, commencing not with the rise of the sugar economy in the 1890s, but rather the war against Spain in the 1860s, and ending with the emergence of feminism and its cooptation by the Trujillo regime in the 1940s. It thus brings gender into the long arc of Dominican state formation by considering how race articulated with issues of sexuality.

The book reveals how notions of *hispanidad* circulated among elites, and how they were contested and enacted on the ground in San Pedro, where civil authorities frequently found themselves at odds with immigrant entrepreneurs. We see how policing practices reshaped popular notions of race as West Indians—often English-speaking and educated and thus forming part of the middle sectors—were hounded by police for social protest, crime, “banditry,” and allegations of prostitution. Thus middle sectors that saw themselves as socially superior were “blackened” by allegations of criminality, revealing how in the *mestizo* nations of Latin America, race often becomes embedded

within notions of deviancy, sexuality, and disease. The book also charts the rise of Dominican feminism from its consolidation as a movement during anti-U.S. Occupation protests in the 1920s, through efforts to provide contraception and maternal health care to the poor, and finally to the absorption of Acción Feminista into the official Partido Dominicano during the Trujillo regime. Feminism was galvanized through anti-imperialism; social reformer Evangelina Rodríguez even sewed a flag for Augusto Sandino which she sent to him as a gift.

My one quibble would be the title, *The Mulatto Republic*, which quotes a U.S. Occupation text, since mulatto is a stigmatized term for mixed race which was rarely used by Dominicans themselves during this period. But this rich and highly readable synthesis of racial thought in San Pedro demonstrates that Dominican ideas about race evolved in dialogue and in struggle with a series of interlocutors, not just its western neighbor. It also leaves one wondering whether hispanicism may have been in part a legacy of extensive Cuban and Puerto Rican migration, since these groups had a much closer relationship to Spain, after all, than did Dominicans.

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