“A Veil of Legality”

The Contested History of Anti-Haitian Ideology under the Trujillo Dictatorship

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Abstract

This article explores the history of Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo’s anti-Haitian policies by examining two unstudied dimensions of the government’s campaign against Haitian migrants. Archival records reveal that Trujillo attempted to implement a clandestine plan to deport Haitians prior to the 1937 massacre on the border. However, this plan failed because local officials resisted government attempts to supersede their authority. I contend this led Trujillo to order the massacre in order to compel obedience from rural authorities and to destroy Haitian-Dominican networks. While in the border region these goals were accomplished with violence, Trujillo pursued a different strategy in sugar-producing areas. Because of the economic importance of sugar, the Trujillo regime began to employ extralegal coercion to force Haitians in the country onto sugar plantations, and to inextricably link Haitian identity with cutting sugarcane. In implementing such policies, government officials again faced resistance from local communities.

Keywords

Caribbean history – Dominican Republic – Haiti – migration – race – sugar plantations

In 1920 the governor of the Dominican province of Monte Cristi wrote to the national Department of Interior and Police to complain about the deportation of Haitian residents living in his province. He accused American occupation authorities of having “a twisted interpretation” of immigration law and argued that, “most [of these] people are Haitians [who are] naturalized Dominicans, and some retain their nationality but have lived here for many years and are

land owners.” He continued, “soldiers’ ignorance of [these distinctions] ... has caused confusion ... and [towns] are being depopulated as a consequence.” The governor finished by demanding “better application of the law, in order to avoid unjust abuses.”¹ At the time, the Dominican Republic was home to large Haitian-Dominican communities both in border regions and on sugar plantations across the country, where Haitian migrants were an important source of labor. The central government based in the capital city of Santo Domingo had limited authority over national territory, and when American occupation forces took control in 1916 they worried about the fluid nature of the border and the seemingly unhindered mobility of Haitian immigrants. However, as this letter demonstrates, local officials often resisted outside attempts to police community members. Municipal and provincial leaders were more concerned with opposing efforts by the central state to control them than with removing their Haitian neighbors.

When dictator Rafael Trujillo took over the presidency in 1930 he attempted to quickly extend his hegemony over the nation’s territory, and he viewed the autonomy of rural communities as an obstacle to his authority. Utilizing newly uncovered archival evidence, this article examines how Trujillo attempted to implement policies limiting the number of Haitian immigrants living in the country prior to 1937. He did so in part to gain the support of anti-Haitian elite, but also in pursuit of his larger goal to bring rural areas more strictly under his control. His plans were frustrated, however, by local officials who opposed the imposition of central state power that threatened their own authority over rural communities. I argue that the government’s inability to carry out anti-Haitian policies influenced Trujillo’s decision in 1937 to order the massacre of an estimated ten to twenty thousand Haitians living on the border. This unprecedented act of state violence was therefore aimed both at Haitian residents, and at local authorities who had attempted to protect Haitian-Dominican networks from central government interference. Anti-Haitian intellectuals in Trujillo’s government used the rupture of the massacre to construct a timeless ethnic conflict between Dominicans and Haitians. Protecting Dominicans from the specter of a Haitian “passive invasion” thus justified the extension of dictatorial control.

Trujillo’s anti-Haitian ideology required both the absence of Haitians from Dominicans’ everyday lives and the widespread acceptance that Haitian cul-

1 Rafael R. Rodríguez Gobernador Civil Monte Cristi to Señor Encargado del Departamento de Estado de Interior y Policía, March 23, 1920, Secretario de Agricultura e Inmigración, 1920 Legajo 1ª, Archivo General de la Nación, Dominican Republic (here-after AGN).

ture posed a threat to Dominican society. Previous works on Trujillo's anti-Haitianism have generally focused on the border region where the government pursued these goals through the violent removal of Haitians. However, this was only one of the methods used to disrupt Haitian-Dominican networks. Trujillo could not eliminate all Haitians from the country because the Dominican sugar industry depended upon a mostly Haitian workforce to produce one of the nation's most important export commodities. This article for the first time examines how the Trujillo government sought to dismantle the Haitian-Dominican communities in sugar-producing regions, just as it had attempted to do on the border. Because of the importance of the industry, the Trujillo regime began to employ extralegal coercion to force Haitians in the country onto plantations, and to inextricably link Haitian identity with cutting sugarcane. In implementing such policies, government officials again faced resistance from rural communities. Trujillo's representatives had to convince local authorities to force Haitian residents to abandon their homes and businesses. By examining these previously unstudied dimensions of Trujillo's late 1930s anti-Haitian campaign, this article deepens our understanding of how the central government enforced anti-Haitianism across the Dominican Republic, and how Haitian and Dominican residents responded to, and resisted, this new ideology.

The Dominican Republic Prior to 1930

During the nineteenth century the Dominican central state had little interaction with rural communities because of its relative weakness. Autonomous peasants supported themselves through slash and burn agriculture and open ranching, and the export economy remained relatively small. Limited roads and means of communication meant that economic integration was low, and communities in the center of the country had few ties to the capital of Santo Domingo (San Miguel & Berryman 1995:42). Most people made their living through independent agriculture and ranching, and small-scale trading with Haiti. Cross-border networks that facilitated the sale of cattle, rum, and tobacco sustained many local economies and Haitian gourdes circulated widely (Lundius & Lundhal 2000:459). However, by the end of the century the Dominican economy began to change. During the 1870s Cuban sugar planters who fled during Cuba's independence struggles arrived in the Dominican Republic bringing with them capital and expertise, and set about creating modern, steam-powered sugar mills (Calder 1984:92). By the 1880s there were thirty sugar mills in the eastern region of the country. When a drop in sugar prices

disrupted world markets in 1884, United States corporations used the economic crisis to purchase smaller plantations and consolidate their holdings (Baud 1988:128). This sudden growth of an export enclave brought about rapid changes in Dominican society.

Prior to the ascendancy of the sugar industry, large tracts of land in the East were held as *terrenos comuneros*, or common lands, that were used to graze livestock (Franks 1999). As sugar plantations amassed landholdings, and broke up *terrenos comuneros*, many peasants struggled to find land to sustain their animals. In addition, in an attempt to create a more structured labor force the central government passed laws attempting to police rural residents' behaviors, limit open ranching, and criminalize vagrancy (Mayes 2014:39). For peasants who had long maintained usufruct rights to land and experienced little government interference in their lives, these changes came as a shock. The expansion of the sugar industry in part gave rise to groups of armed peasants in the sugar-producing East that attacked both plantations, and declared themselves in revolution against the central government (Franks 1999:116). Unable to find enough Dominican workers to meet their labor needs, sugar companies recruited immigrants first from the French, Dutch, Danish, and British Lesser Antilles, known locally as *cocolos*. As plantation management found that Haitian laborers could be recruited more cheaply than those from the Lesser Antilles, Haitians workers gradually became the largest ethnic group on the plantations (Del Castillo 1978:57).

The changes wrought by the export economy worried many Dominican intellectuals. The unwillingness of Dominican peasants to form a docile labor force led some to conclude that the peasantry prevented the country from modernizing (Derby 2009:30). Although some elites were troubled by the country's capitalist growth, they viewed peasant resistance to the foreign-controlled export economy as backwards (Mayes 2014:50). In addition, the increasing numbers of dark-skinned immigrants from Haiti and the West Indies stoked fears about the racial makeup of the Dominican Republic. Pedro Luis San Miguel writes that during the early twentieth century political elites viewed "the very racial composition of the country ... as ... limiting material progress and the advancement of 'civilization'" (San Miguel 2005:23). Haitian immigration threatened to "darken" the Dominican Republic, thus further preventing its development. In 1912 the government passed a law limiting the number of "non-Caucasian" immigrants who could enter the country. However, the sugar industry's influence allowed management to continue to employ Haitian migrants with little difficulty, and their numbers continued to rise (Murphy 1991:39).

Growing U.S. hegemony influenced these anxieties about the Dominican Republic's economic and political progress. As American business interests

in the country expanded, the U.S. government took escalating steps to control Dominican politics. In 1905 the United States took over Dominican customs houses. American officials targeted what they considered to be symptoms of the country's underdevelopment, including an autonomous peasantry and fluid borderland. In an attempt to increase customs revenues, U.S. military detachments struggled to control trade across the border, but faced widespread opposition from local communities (Tillman 2015). After another decade of political instability, the United States invaded in 1916. During the occupation, which lasted until 1924, American authorities worked to destroy peasant guerilla resistance in the East, enforce rural vagrancy laws, and better control the border. This led to resistance from rural residents across the country (San Miguel & Berryman 1995; Filomena González 2008).

Like some Dominican intellectuals, occupation officials closely associated the Dominican Republic's racial makeup with its potential for political and economic success. In comparison to Haiti, which U.S. officials viewed as decidedly black, the Dominican Republic appeared to hold more hope of becoming "civilized" because of its mixed ancestry.² Although the occupation government did not attempt to completely stop the entrance of Haitian immigrants working in the sugar industry, officials at times spoke out against the use of Haitian labor (Calder 1984:99). For example, in 1919 a U.S. Marine sergeant stationed near the border complained to his supervisor, "at present there are about seventy-five Haitians per day entering the Dominican Republic without passports ... on their way to the sugarcane mills. No action is being taken by the Guardia."³ U.S. officials were anxious about lax immigration enforcement, and attempted to dramatically increase control over the border region. This led to the deportations that the governor of Monte Cristi complained about in 1920. The occupation thus only strengthened elite Dominican beliefs that, in order to be considered a civilized nation, the government needed to exert more authority over the peasantry and minimize the threat of further racial mixture posed by the growing numbers of black immigrants (Wright 2015:30).

In 1924 U.S. occupying forces departed, leaving their hand-selected president, Horacio Vásquez, in charge. That same year a report sent to the president

2 García-Peña 2015:14 U.S. troops simultaneously occupied Haiti during this period, and while military leaders on both sides of the island saw their role as civilizing racially backwards nations, U.S. observers often argued that Dominicans possessed more "white blood" than Haitians (Torres-Saillant 1998:128–29).

3 Sgd. Joseph M. Feely to Director Department of the South, Guardia Nacional Dominicana, December 22, 1919, Secretario de Estado de Agricultura, 1920 legajo 1A, AGN.

worried that, “the Haitian is, slowly but surely, infiltrating [Dominican] habits, customs, religion, and language.”⁴ The occupation had helped expand American corporate holdings in the sugar-producing East, and with it demand for workers. In addition, the simultaneous occupation of Haiti, lasting from 1915 to 1934, and the displacement of peasants it caused also increased the number of Haitians traveling to the Dominican Republic in search of work. Having only recently reclaimed their national sovereignty, some Dominicans intellectuals viewed the entrance of thousands of Haitian laborers as a “pacific invasion” that could potentially dilute Dominicans’ white, Hispanic heritage (Sagás 2000:41; Mayes 2014:21). Despite these concerns, the Dominican state was not strong enough to effectively limit undocumented immigration. Even with the help of U.S. forces, many parts of the Dominican Republic remained unconnected from the central government, and openly hostile to attempts to exert central state control. Haitians could easily move through the bilingual, bicultural communities in border and sugar-producing regions. While during this period some elite intellectuals expressed anti-Haitian and anti-black sentiment, Richard Turits argues that, “we do not have any evidence of such prejudices having any salient or political impact on peasant life” (Turits 2003:279 n. 44). Although ethnic prejudices did influence community members’ understandings of difference, evidence indicates that rural residents perceived more distance between themselves and representatives of central state authority than between Dominicans and Haitians.

The Rise of Trujillo

In 1927 a former member of the private security force on the Boca Chica sugar plantation named Rafael Leonidas Trujillo secured the title of commander-in-chief of the U.S. organized and trained army. After this appointment, Trujillo began reorganizing and professionalizing the military in order to expand his authority. As the power of the army grew, so too did his political prominence. In 1930 he supported a coup against the sitting president, and while another conspirator initially took over the presidency, it became abundantly clear that Trujillo actually held the reins to power. During negotiations elections were set for the summer, and Trujillo ordered soldiers to intimidate any opposition.

4 Informe que al Señor President Constitucional de la República rinde el Gobernador Civil de la provincia de Azua, Dionisio Sanchez, relative a la labor efetuada del 12 de julio al 31 de diciembre de 1924, Gobernación De Azua, 1918 Legajo 12–18, AGN.

Through the use of violence and coercion, he was able to easily secure his election as president and took office August 16, 1930.

While Trujillo had the might of the military behind him, he lacked support from most other sectors of Dominican society. Valentina Peguero writes “Large parts of the elite rejected Trujillo because he was not one of them. The middle class scorned him because he lacked ‘outstanding intellectual qualifications’ ... [and] the majority of the lower class did not know who Trujillo was or were plainly indifferent to him” (Peguero 2004:70). He therefore sought to quickly bring the nation under his control through both persuasion and force. With the approval of the United States, Trujillo assumed emergency powers that he used to impose legislation and further grow the size of the army. Through increased funding and strategic purges, Trujillo created a powerful military apparatus loyal to him. Trujillo also incorporated some elite intellectuals into his government in an attempt to gain the support of the former ruling class. Despite viewing Trujillo as an outsider, many tacitly accepted his rule because they believed he could impose order.

Some of the elite intellectuals who joined Trujillo’s government blamed “Haitianization” for the Dominican Republic’s lack of progress, and hoped that the dictator could address the problem (Turits 2002:599). In response to these already circulating ideologies, in 1932 Trujillo attempted to prevent sugar plantations from using Haitian labor by requiring that sugar workers be Dominican. However, he soon had to back down from this demand after pressure from the U.S. government and sugar companies. Again in 1933 he tried to establish a treaty with Haiti overseeing the recruitment of workers, but could not wrest control of the process from North American sugar companies (Vega 1995:24). Trujillo may have been particularly eager to demonstrate his ability to address the “Haitian problem” because of his own Haitian heritage and the elite’s disdain for his mixed racial background.⁵ Yet, evidence indicates his foremost concern was exerting authority over the country; he did not necessarily hold the same fears of Haitian culture as some intellectuals in his government (Turits 2002:608).

In addition to the elite, Trujillo felt he had to gain the loyalty of the peasantry in order to remain in power. At this time the Dominican state’s control over its territory was still fragmentary. Most rural communities had little interaction with the central government and numerous sub-national actors, like regional *caudillos* or foreign sugar companies, competed for control. In crafting his own version of Dominican nationalism to support his rule, Trujillo drew on long-

5 Trujillo’s maternal grandmother was Haitian (Derby 2009:218).

standing peasant values, like the moral right to work land. His government surveyed, titled, and distributed land to previously seminomadic peasants (Turits 2003). In addition to these incentives to attract peasant loyalty, Trujillo also used state force to extend government authority over the often-autonomous peasantry. His regime worked to better surveil and police rural residents. By dramatically expanding the size and power of the government, Trujillo attempted to bring the diffuse Dominican population under the domination of the state.

Under Trujillo, the government was able for the first time in Dominican history to force a large portion of the country's population to pay for, and carry, nationally issued identification documents called *cédulas*. Beginning in 1932, residents had to travel to their local office of the electoral board once a year and pay to renew the document, which included place of residence and skin color (Turits 2003:86). For Haitians residing on plantations, the government held the sugar company responsible for paying for and distributing documents.⁶ New *cédula* laws therefore allowed the government to track people's movement for the first time. The fact that the sugar company paid for immigrants' *cédulas* often meant they remained attached to the company, and confined to employment on the plantation. Beginning in the early 1930s any resident could be arrested if caught without documents, and both citizens and immigrants were required to present identity documents to government authorities. However, increased enforcement caused conflicts and confusion: residents resisted having to pay for, and carry, documentation, and local officials often supported their opposition.⁷ In addition, rural authorities did not necessarily want to cede the role of policing their communities, including oversight of Haitian immigrants, to the central government.

In the early 1930s when local officials found Haitians without *cédulas* on or around sugar plantations they usually sided with the immigrants and blamed the company for their lack of documentation. While municipal and provincial authorities followed central state policies by arresting those without documents, they were often able to make their own decisions about punishment. For example, in July of 1936 the governor of El Seibo wrote to the head of the La Romana sugar plantation to inform him that several plantation employees had been arrested for not carrying their *cédulas*. The governor blamed the workers' lack of documentation on the fact that "some contractors, despite the memos that the company is aware of, withhold *cédulas* from their workers ... [It] seems

6 See Dirección General de Migración, 1936 Legajo 4, AGN; Dirección General de Migración, 1930—Legajo 73, AGN.

7 Lauren Derby (2009:159) writes "The *cédula* or ID was the most despised symbol of everyday life under the regime."

advisable to me that the company take action with respect [to this issue.]”⁸ A 1935 report from a district attorney in the province of Monte Cristi to a local judge described the predicament of eleven Haitian men who did not have documentation. The district attorney claimed that fault in the case lay with the nearby Monte Llano sugar company, which did not pay its workers in cash. Since workers received paper vouchers, good for purchases at the company store, they did not have enough cash on hand to pay their annual *cédula* fee.

The eleven men the district attorney described do not appear to have been seasonal laborers: he referred to them as farmers and as residents of the city of Monte Cristi, describing one man as “a citizen of Haiti and accidental resident of this city [who] declared that he does not have his *cédula* because [when] he came to work at Monte Llano he was told he would earn a lot of money and then they only paid him ten cents daily and only gave it to him in tokens to spend at the [company] store.”⁹ Since all of the offenders were described as residing in the city, not on the plantation, it is probable that they no longer worked for Monte Llano and were engaged in other agricultural work. The Monte Llano plantation was therefore not responsible for paying for their *cédulas*. Nevertheless, the district attorney still blamed the sugar company for not paying the men enough for them to acquire their own documentation. These local authorities clearly followed state directives to extract tax revenue from foreign-owned sugar companies and require immigrants to carry documentation. At the same time, these documents also make clear that officials did not worry about the mobility of Haitian migrants, and certainly did not see their presence in the country as a threat to the nation. They saw documentation as a way to obtain revenue from sugar companies, not as a way to control residents. Local officials already had ways of exerting authority through established networks of friendship, kinship, and economic exchange, and did not necessarily want to cede this control to a new central government surveillance scheme.¹⁰

The independence of rural authorities limited the ability of the government to better control the country’s immigrant population. In addition, these archival documents demonstrate that rural residents did not view the Haitian presence in the country in the same way as the urban elite did. Much of the population saw mobility free from surveillance as a right, and local officials

8 Antonio Ramírez Gobernador Provincial to Señor Ernesto L. Klock C.M. de los Centrales Romana y Santa Fe, July 31, 1936, Fondo Gobernación del Seibo, 1936 Legajo 18, AGN.

9 Benjamín Sánchez G, Juez Alcalde to Mag. Procurador Fiscal, September 14, 1935, Fondo Gobernación del Seibo, 1920—Legajo 28, AGN.

10 See also Fondo Gobernacion del Seibo, 1932, AGN; Fondo Gobernacion del Seibo, 1934 Legajo 4, AGN.

rebuffed government attempts to limit mobility for both Haitian and Dominican residents of their localities. In addition to protecting their authority, officials responded to public pressure that opposed new government rules imposing greater surveillance and control on rural communities. Unhindered mobility was a potent tool of resistance against state forces, and Dominicans and Haitians alike were loath to give it up.

Immigration Policy and State Authority

Once taking office the Trujillo regime attempted to better control Haitian immigration, but obstruction from local officials stymied their endeavors to do so.¹¹ In an effort to address these issues, the government introduced subtle changes to immigration oversight. In February of 1936 Reynaldo Valdés, the national Director of Immigration, wrote to the administrator of the Porvenir plantation about one of the latter's workers who, "has been detained here [and] is unable to justify his absence from the plantation. He will remain under arrest until the company sends [someone] to collect him."¹² During the 1920s when Haitian immigrants were found in the country without documents they were usually arrested and then deported.¹³ In the 1930s this policy began to quietly change. Soldiers and immigration inspectors under orders from the central government started frequently apprehending Haitian immigrants found outside of plantations and forcing them to return. When immigration officials found undocumented immigrants, they would send them to whatever plantation would agree to pay their immigration taxes instead of deporting them. This was not a systematic or even officially codified policy and coexisted with other tactics for several years. However, documents emanating from the National Department of Migration show the changes taking place in Trujillo's approach to the Haitian presence in the Dominican Republic.

In January of 1937 a captain in the national army wrote his superior about how he resolved an issue with a group of Haitian immigrants detained near the border without immigration permits. He explained that he had contacted the director of Immigration who told him "it is advisable for the government to force these laborers to pay immigration and *cédula* taxes." The Captain did

11 For more on conflicts between the regime and sugar plantations see Dirección General de Migración, 1930 Legajos 71, 73, 75, AGN.

12 Reynaldo Valdez Director General de Inmigración to Señor Administrador del Ingenio Porvenir, February 4, 1936, Dirección General de la Migración, 1936 Legajo 4, AGN.

13 See Secretaría de Agricultura e Inmigración, 1920–1922, AGN.

not attempt to extract these fees from the migrants himself. Instead he “spoke with an ... employee at the Barahona Company [sugar plantation], and [we] ... agreed on turning over these immigrants [for] ... the payment of immigration and *cédula* taxes.”¹⁴ These documents indicate that authorities were moving toward a system in which sugar plantations became the only legal spaces for Haitians, and were the first indications in official documents that Haitian immigrants were losing the right to mobility that they had long possessed in the Dominican Republic.¹⁵

In the summer of 1937 these subtle changes gave way to a major shift in immigration policy. Reynaldo Valdés wrote to local officials about a national, and clandestine, campaign against Haitians living in the southwestern border provinces. In a July 15th letter to the immigration inspector in Barahona, Valdés explained that “the Secretary of Justice will be in charge of the Haitian question [and] will direct the campaign that will be waged against them. You should, confidentially, approach the commanding officer of the national army and speak to him about this matter.”¹⁶ A few days later on July 20 Armando Mario Aybar, the immigration inspector for Barahona, sent a telegram to inspectors in neighboring municipalities instructing them to “gather as soon as possible every Haitian ... who does not have their immigration permit or *cédula*.”¹⁷

Given the rapid change in immigration policy Valdés demanded, the order to round up all Haitians living in the southern border regions undoubtedly came from the president. The central government also endeavored to keep this campaign against Haitians clandestine. Valdés's frequent communications to Aybar mention the need for secrecy. In one of several telegrams to Aybar on July 21st, Valdés asserted that he needed “absolute discretion.”¹⁸ In another letter he explained why: “so as not to appear [as if] the campaign is against Haitians.” If the true goal of the government's actions was known, “it may ruin the whole plan ... and create so many difficulties and complaints that we will have to abandon the whole plan.” Valdés ended the letter by enumerating exactly what

14 S. Mélido Marte Cap., Oficial Comandante 5ta. Co., Ejército Nacional to Jefe de Estado Mayor, Ejército Nacional, January 14, 1937, Fondo Ejército Nacional, AGN cited in Acostos Matos 2012:433.

15 See also Gobernación del Seibo, 1936 Legajo 17 and 18, AGN.

16 Reynaldo Valdés Director General de Inmigración to Señor Inspector de Inmigración de Barahona, July 15, 1937, Inspección de Migración Barahona, 1937 Legajo 39, AGN.

17 A M Aybar to Los inspectores de Inmigración y de puestos del Ejército Nacional, June 20, 1937, Inspección de Migración Barahona, 1937 Legajo 39, AGN.

18 Director Inmigración to Insp. Inmigración Barahona, July 21, 1937, Inspección de Migración Barahona, 1937 Legajo 39, AGN.

needed to remain secret. He wrote, “the public should not know from the beginning that the offenders will work on the highways nor that [we have] not included ... foreigners who are not Haitian.”¹⁹

Based on these letters, the secret “plan” handed down from the central government entailed arresting all Haitians in the southern border regions without proper documents and forcing them to work building road. Once localities had detained all Haitian residents without immigration permits, they were ordered to send them to public works. Sugar plantations were to be targeted as well, but Valdés urged inspectors to first work with plantation administrators to document workers, not to detain plantation employees without notifying the company. Valdés warned Aybar “[do not] go directly to the plantation and provoke discussions with the employees ... [Instead] give prior notice [to] the administrator in person to deliver permits to all his employees within a week.”²⁰ This campaign therefore focused on Haitians living outside of plantations near the border. The Trujillo government still struggled to control the bilingual and bicultural communities in this area. Lack of infrastructure, and the often-open hostility of transnational communities to urban visions of Dominican nationalism that emphasized whiteness, meant that the border was a haven for antigovernment rebel groups (Turits 2002:612). Prior to 1937, Trujillo’s government had attempted to encourage the “colonization” of the border by residents from elsewhere in the country as a way to Dominicanize the region, but was unable to significantly increase the number of new residents in the area (Turits 2003:156).

Trujillo saw the central government’s inability to control the border and to incorporate border dwellers into the Dominican nation as a major threat to his authority. It is therefore plausible that architects of the plan believed that they could solve two problems at once by detaining Haitian residents and using them as laborers to build roads, thus improving the state’s access to isolated communities. Trujillo undoubtedly hoped it would both help bring rural communities resistant to central control under the authority of the state, and help remove Haitian immigrants from the country. He clearly viewed both as crucial to his ability to extend his domination over the entire nation. This campaign appears to be a turning point in Trujillo’s immigration policy. Haitians on sugar plantations were still an accepted presence, but Haitians

19 Director Inmigración to Señor Inspector de Inmigración de Barahona, July 22, 1937, Inspección de Migración Barahona, 1937 Legajo 39, AGN.

20 Director Inmigración to Insp. Inmigración Barahona, July 21, 1937, Inspección de Migración Barahona, 1937 Legajo 39, AGN.

living elsewhere were not. Immigration officials were instructed to break the law, albeit carefully, in order to segregate undocumented Haitians and use them to facilitate Trujillo's state building efforts.

However, Trujillo remained unable to implement this plan. Communication about arrests dropped off by the end of July, until August 14 when Valdés wrote Aybar about the repatriation of just twenty-nine Haitians being held in the jail in Barahona. In addition, there are no records of large numbers of Haitians working on road construction in the south during this period. Why did this initial campaign against border dwellers fail? From the beginning, local officials questioned the legality of these actions, thus necessitating the frequent calls for officials' silence about the details of this plan. In one of his final letters on this matter, Valdés chastised Aybar for circulating requests to send Haitians to public works. He wrote, "the law does not authorize us to hand over [Haitians] to public works [and] put them to work." Valdés represented the central government, but at the same time had to convince local officials to accept state directives. His letters demonstrate an awareness that rural communities would not look favorably on this level of government intervention. He continued, "we should title these lists ... 'offenders of Law #739 to be deported' because it is necessary to keep up appearances, to protect all of our actions with a veil of legality, even though we are pursuing different ... objectives."²¹ In this letter Valdés expressed, perhaps unwittingly, the fundamental logic behind Trujillo's immigration policy. The Trujillo government still had to convince many Dominicans of the supposed threat Haitians posed to them, and convince local representatives to relinquish authority over the Haitian members of their communities. Maintaining a "veil of legality" allowed Trujillo to justify his actions to the Dominican population as necessary steps to protect the country.

In his copious instructions, Valdés often focused on the need to obscure the government's targeting of Haitian immigrants, as opposed to immigrants in general. While some members of the Dominican elite saw Haitian culture as a fundamental threat to Dominican culture, most residents of the Dominican Republic did not think this way in 1937. Official anti-Haitianism would have been unfamiliar to border dwellers, and while they viewed Haitians as ethnically different, an illegal campaign against all Haitians could have caused a backlash in an area where many people counted both Haitians and Dominicans in their families and economic networks (Derby 1994:493). It is clear that Valdés

21 Emphasis original, Reynaldo Valdés to Señor Inspector de Inmigración Barahona, July 30, 1937, Inspección de Migración Barahona, 1937 Legajo 39, AGN.

believed that local authorities would oppose the government specifically targeting Haitians. This was undoubtedly in part due to the fact that local leaders opposed state attempts to intervene in their communities and disrupt their authority. If the details of this plan became public the government would not be able to move forward, perhaps because those local representatives needed to assist in the arrest, transfer, and discipline of a conscripted Haitian workforce would refuse to help. Valdés also evidently thought that mandating forced labor for those found in violation of immigration laws, as opposed to deportation, was illegal and that border communities might not accept it. At this time central government officials assumed that much of the Dominican public was still opposed to blatant anti-Haitian government action. The lessons from this summer campaign would have been clear to Trujillo: even after seven years of brutal dictatorship he did not have absolute control over the nation. Local connections between Haitians and Dominicans had thwarted his ability to implement his policies.

The Massacre and Aftermath

Soon after this plan against Haitian border residents proved to be unsuccessful, Trujillo moved toward more drastic action. Unable to secure the support of local authorities, Trujillo decided to utilize the sector of the country most loyal to him: the army. In August of that year Trujillo embarked on an extensive tour of the border provinces, reflecting his concern about political control in the region. At a dance in his honor in the border town of Dajabón on October 2 Trujillo ominously spoke about the threat of Haitian depredation in the area, and promised to remedy the situation (Turits 2002:613). A few days later soldiers began entering the region around Dajabón. Over the course of several days an estimated ten to twenty thousand Haitians and people of Haitian descent were killed. Thousands attempted to flee and were murdered while trying to escape the country over the portentously named Massacre River. This time there was no room for local objection: the brutality employed in this unprecedented act of state violence terrified most border residents and even those who were not directly targeted spent the days of the massacre hiding from the army.

Many authors have argued that it is impossible to know why Rafael Trujillo ordered such a horrifically violent event (Derby 1994; Paulino 2005; Turits 2002). Indeed, we may never know exactly why he decided mass murder was necessary and justified. Yet, the incidents preceding the event provide new insight into why Trujillo ordered a massacre. Archival evidence suggests that

the regime was frustrated with the lack of support in rural communities for anti-Haitian policies. By demonstrating the power of the Trujillo government, the massacre attempted to compel obedience from local officials who had resisted central state involvement. Historical evidence indicates that Trujillo saw prevalent Dominican acceptance of a Haitian population as a threat to his consolidation of political control, and he believed that a dramatic act of violence was needed to break down the long-standing networks between Haitians and Dominicans. Trujillo therefore did not intend the massacre to remove all Haitians from the country, but instead to eradicate Haitian-Dominican communities and assert the authority of the central government over local officials. Following the massacre, as Turits and other scholars have argued, anti-Haitianism became an increasingly important part of official Dominican nationalism.

After most Haitians in the border zone had been killed or had fled to Haiti, the central government sent in priests, teachers, and agricultural colonists from elsewhere in the country to Dominicanize the border. Following the diplomatic resolution of the massacre, Trujillo was able to rewrite the incident as a necessary and measured response to the “passive” invasion of Haitian culture that threatened the Dominican nation. State-sponsored historians argued that fundamental conflict between the nations could be traced to the 1822–44 Haitian occupation of the Dominican Republic, and some went even further, claiming that the divergence started with clashes between French buccaneers and Spanish colonial authorities (Balaguer 1947; Rodríguez Demorizi 1955). These narratives sought to erase the long history of Haitian-Dominican communities on the island and justify government violence against Haitians and dictatorial control over Dominicans.

At the signing of an indemnity agreement with Haiti reached after the massacre, Trujillo released a statement to the foreign government representatives present reminding them that, “the only threat that hovers over the future of our children [is] that constituted by the penetration, pacific but permanent and stubborn, of the worst Haitian element into our territory” (Israel Cuello 1985:466). Haitians were no longer simply ethnically different; they were an anathema to the Dominican Republic and a fundamental threat to its existence. As Turits writes, “difference had been transformed into otherness and marginality” (Turits 2002:634). Following October 1937, Trujillo worked to drastically change the popular view of Haiti and Haitians in the Dominican Republic. In doing so he sought to undermine longstanding familial and economic networks between Dominicans and Haitians that limited the force of his state-sanctioned nationalism. Trujillo attempted to rewrite history and claim the massacre was the inevitable outcome of longstanding hatred between

the two nations by erasing a long and complex history that had linked residents on both sides of Hispaniola.

Anti-Haitianism was not a natural fact of Dominican identity, but a political tactic used by the Trujillo government to engage a now subdued Dominican population in the official nationalism of the state by taking power away from local authorities and pitting Dominicans against an abstract other. At the time of the massacre most did not imagine Haitianness as antithetical to Dominican identity. Ethnic conflicts and prejudices certainly existed, but a cohesive political ideology of “Anti-Haitianism” that emphasized fundamental differences between Haitians and Dominicans would have been unfamiliar to the majority of the population during this period.²² The letters between Valdés and Aybar reflect this fact. They both worried about the reaction if the public discovered that the government only targeted Haitians, or that officials violated immigration laws to coerce Haitian migrants into performing labor. After rural authorities frustrated his attempts to isolate Haitian residents, evidence suggests that Trujillo decided a violent rupture was the only way to fundamentally change Dominicans’ perception of Haitians. Trujillo’s intellectuals therefore fabricated an ethnic conflict to justify the imposition of national power over local authorities.

Anti-Haitianism and the Sugar Industry

The massacre was only one element of the state’s effort to make anti-Haitianism a fundamental component of state-sanctioned Dominican nationalism. After the Haitian population had been forced out of the border region, the Trujillo government turned its sights to sugar-producing regions, and worked to dismantle the Haitian-Dominican networks that existed there. An estimated 40 percent of the country’s premassacre Haitian population lived on sugar plantations, and following the murder of tens of thousands of Haitian residents, and the subsequent displacement of border dwellers, the percentage was undoubt-

22 Ethnic divisions between Dominicans and Haitians, as well as local understandings of difference between the two groups, certainly existed prior to the massacre. As Lauren Derby (1994:494) writes about pre-1937 border communities, “Dominican border culture must be understood both as furnishing a common Haitian-Dominican identity in relation to centers of power and outsiders, and as containing fissures of separation, invisible internal indices of difference and differentiation that could become divisive when conflict arose.” A similar statement could be made about Haitian-Dominican communities within plantations.

edly higher (Vega 1995:35). While there has been important work done on the impact of anti-Haitian policies on the border, there has not been any investigation into what happened on plantations following the massacre. In sugar-producing areas Trujillo could not afford to employ overt state violence, or even to attempt to decrease the Haitian population. After failed attempts to “Domnicanize” the sugar industry in the early 1930s, it would have been clear that the government could not simply remove Haitian immigrants from within Dominican borders without creating conflicts with the United States. Following the massacre, sugar companies began to recruit clandestinely inside Haiti almost immediately (Martínez 1995:45). Sugar labor was an important part of the Haitian peasant economy in many places, and economic hardship continued to produce willing recruits even following such widespread anti-Haitian violence. The number of Haitians traveling to the Dominican Republic, therefore, did not decrease following the massacre. Most importantly, the Trujillo government did not attempt to limit or stop Haitian migration to sugar plantations, but rather even encouraged it.

Writing about the massacre, Samuel Martínez states “no more chilling way could be imagined of conveying to Haitian immigrants the message that sugar *bateyes* would be their only secure space on Dominican soil” (Martínez 1999:70). While in the border region Trujillo attempted to expel any Haitian presence, in sugar-producing areas he pursued a strategy of containment. In doing so officials worked to fundamentally change the public’s perception about Haitians and their place in the Dominican Republic. This meant circumscribing Haitians’ role in the Dominican nation and their physical location, closely associating identity and place. Following the massacre Trujillo attempted to physically, economically, and culturally isolate Haitians by making sugar plantations the only acceptable space they could occupy in the country and sugar labor the only acceptable form of employment in which they could engage. However, the imposition of anti-Haitian ideology did not happen immediately or evenly across the country. This association between Haitian identity and sugar had to be imposed and negotiated locally. As in other parts of the country, local authorities in sugar-producing areas struggled to interpret this new systematic treatment of migrants, and at times resisted the government’s anti-Haitian policies.

The national government moved to force Haitians who owned their own land and businesses, or worked in other industries, onto sugar plantations. This emerging policy was not codified in law, but instead involved various levels of government officials using extralegal tactics to pressure Haitians to relocate to sugar plantations. Unable to use violence as they had on the border, the central government instead had to induce local authorities to comply

with this new policy. Over the next several years, the governor of El Seibo, an eastern province home to several sugar plantations, worked to impose this government directive while at the same time attempting to explain and justify the strategy to local officials in order to gain their support. In June 1938 the governor, Antonio Ramírez, wrote to a resident named Pedro García to ask him to evict a Haitian man who had created a provision plot on García's land. Confused, García wrote back to Ramírez to ask why he had to evict such an "honest and hardworking" man, to whom he had given express permission to cultivate on his land. Although García did concede that, "if it is an order of the government, I will comply," he was clearly confused about why this Haitian man no longer had a right to cultivate and reside outside of a sugar plantation.²³

This incident was part of a policy prohibiting Haitians from working outside plantations in sugar-producing regions.²⁴ In February 1939 Ramírez wrote to a local mayor about a Haitian migrant who had applied for a residency permit. While acknowledging that the applicant "fulfilled the legal requirements to obtain a residency permit," the governor noted that because of the "official ideology on this matter, he cannot continue working in agriculture ... he must reside in one of the [sugar company] *bateyes* located in this region."²⁵ The governor's allusion to "official ideology" probably referred to instructions handed down from the national government. It appears Ramírez had been tasked with convincing local officials to impose this new anti-Haitian ideology. In doing so, he acknowledged that his actions were extralegal: he admitted that the immigrant had a legitimate claim to immigration documents, but because of national policy he had to withhold them until the man moved to a sugar plantation. While Trujillo employed military violence to override the authority of local officials on the border, in sugar-producing regions his government attempted to recruit local officials to enforce anti-Haitian policies. Trujillo had been chastised by the international community for the massacre, and knew he had to maintain the support of the U.S. government and North

23 Pedro García hijo to Señor Don Antonio Ramírez Gobernador Civil Seybo, June 20, 1938, Gobernación Del Seibo, 1938 Legajo 10, AGN.

24 In the 1950s Jean Price Mars (1953:792) described the Dominican government's attempts to limit the mobility of Haitian workers following the massacre. In addition, Samuel Martínez (1999:72) also discusses the "increased police surveillance and bureaucratic regulations designed to wall Haitians off from employment in other sectors."

25 General Antonio Ramirez Gobernador Provincial to Señor Francisco Gómez Alcade Pedáneo El Cuy, February 14, 1939, Gobernación Del Seibo, 1930 Legajo 2, AGN.

American sugar companies.²⁶ He therefore had to utilize different political tactics to impose anti-Haitianism in sugar-producing areas. By removing Haitians from local communities, and associating them with sugar labor, the government attempted to disrupt established Haitian-Dominican networks.²⁷

Despite following orders from the national government, Governor Ramírez attempted to mitigate the impact of this new anti-Haitianism on the residents of his province. On September 27, 1940 Ramírez wrote to another mayor about a Haitian resident. He explained, “after talking with said Haitian, and in agreement with the immigration inspector, we have agreed ... upon his departure from this section, [and his relocation] to the Consuelo plantation.” Not only did the governor take the time to discuss this move with the Haitian man, he appears to have attempted to protect the man’s property despite his forced move. Ramírez continued, “since he has ... a piece of land that he has bought he will leave [it] to a Dominican who is his wife. You should try [to ensure] that this Haitian citizen does not lose what he has worked for on the aforementioned land.”²⁸ Ramírez followed instructions handed down from the national government. Yet, these letters reveal that at times he attempted to mitigate the impact of these actions on Haitians subject to those policies. Haitian migrants were deeply embedded in local networks, and the governor had to negotiate these ties in each individual case, attempting to appease community supporters while gradually erasing the Haitian population outside sugar plantations. As this process was repeated throughout the region, Haitian identity would come to be closely linked to sugar labor in the Dominican Republic.

Cultivation clearly connected Haitians and Dominicans in the East. The governor appeared to respect the work this Haitian man put into his own land, and did not want him to have to suffer its loss. In addition, public opinion in the region supported cultivation rights and the governor had to be accountable to this as well. When Pedro García wrote the governor about the ordered eviction of a Haitian resident, he referenced his friend’s hard work on his land. Dominicans and Haitian immigrants both came from Afro-Caribbean peasant backgrounds, which valued independence through cultivation. Many would have viewed the central government’s attempts to revoke cultivation rights as a violation of local autonomy. The governor demonstrated some respect for

26 For more on the international backlash following the massacre see Roorda 1998.

27 See also Gobernación Del Seibo, 1940 Legajo 20, AGN.

28 General Antonio Ramírez Gobernador Provincial to Señor Leo Rodríguez Alcalde Pedáneo Magarín, September 27, 1940, Gobernación Del Seibo, 1940 Legajo 13, AGN.

those rights, perhaps in an attempt to assuage the fears of local authorities. At the same time, the central government worked to ensure that Haitian immigrants were unable to assert ownership over any new plots of land. In 1940 an agricultural inspector for the eastern provinces wrote to the secretary of state for Agriculture, Industry, and Labor to report that he had visited the community of Ramón Santana to “give instructions to the president of the community agricultural committee ... to cancel the contracts issued by the committee [to] Haitians ... in the lands ceded ... by the Santa Fé plantation.”²⁹ This committee clearly believed that both Haitian and Dominican residents had a right to independent cultivation on former sugar plantation land. Farming was, after all, viewed as a fundamental right for hard-working men and women in Hispaniolan peasant communities (Turits 2003; Sheller 2012; Dubois 2012). However, the central government asserted that Haitians should labor on sugar plantations, not cultivate land available elsewhere. By slowly removing Haitian immigrants from peasant networks and isolating them on plantations, the government sought to persuade Dominicans that Haitians were fundamentally different from them.

Local residents and officials had to be convinced of this new guiding doctrine positing Haitians as an anathema to Dominican civilization and as synonymous with sugar labor. During the early years of his rule Trujillo enlarged the ranks of the *acalde pedáneos*, the state's lowest level officials who were in charge of small communities all over the country, and empowered them to carry out the regime's goals (Turits 2003:213). These newly appointed officials presumably possessed some loyalty to the Trujillo regime, and the government attempted to use them to further impose anti-Haitian ideology. A 1940 handbook for *acalde pedáneos* instructed them to be vigilante of “Haitianizing influences whose consequences will always be extremely fatal for Dominican society” (Sagás 2000:62). The government instructed this newly appointed group of local authorities about the supposed danger of Haitian immigrants undoubtedly in the hopes of gaining grassroots support for anti-Haitian policies.

The Trujillo regime had reason to believe that local officials would not immediately view Haitian cultural influences as dangerous. Community authorities did not fully support the government's crackdown on Haitian popular culture that followed the 1937 massacre. The Dominican elite had long used the specter

29 Informe que al Honorable Señor Secretario de Estado de Agricultura, Industria y Trabajo rinde el encargado del distrito agrícola este de la labor realizada durante el mes de agosto de 1940, Gobernación Del Seibo, 1940 Legajo 25, AGN.

of Haitian culture, and particularly Haitian popular religion, as an argument for limiting Haitian migration. Following the massacre, the government identified Vodou as an example of the cultural threat posed by Haitian contamination of Dominican culture. In a 1942 speech along the border, Manuel Arturo Peña Batlle, a noted anti-Haitian intellectual in Trujillo's regime, warned "if we now consider the increasing acceptance ... of the practice of the monstrous, fetishist practice of *vaudou*, ... [by] our [poor] population ... we will realize that if we do not act with a firm hand ... the time will come when evil is irremediable between us." He continued, "There is not a genuinely civilized and cultured government in the world that would not take decisive measures against such a serious threat" (Peña Batlle 1954:70). The next year, in September 1943, the Trujillo government passed a law that established a punishment of two months to one-year imprisonment for anyone found participating in Vodou ceremonies (Davis 1987:41).

The Dominican government was not alone in its opposition to expressions of Haitian popular religion: diplomatic representatives of the Haitian government articulated similar sentiments. In November of 1939 the Haitian consul in San Pedro de Macoris, the provincial capital of an eastern sugar-producing region, wrote to the local detachment of the national police about "the 'Judu' dances"—a Dominicanized word for Vodou—that took place on sugar plantations in the region. Employing similar language to Peña Batlle, he argued, "these unhappy Haitians would not dare attempt ... [such] a crime ... in Haiti ... and what is worse, [they] constitute a serious threat to public morals and the good name of my country" (Vega 1986:126). Four years earlier, the Haitian government had tightened the penal regime against Vodou, partially as a response to negative international press (Ramsey 2011:83–86). Only a few years after the massacre, central government officials in Haiti and the Dominican Republic found common ground in their opposition to popular religious practices, and collaborated on the repression of Vodou.

At the same time, the leaders of Dominican peasant communities collaborated with their Haitian neighbors to defend their right to engage in religious ceremonies, and opposition to Vodou was not entrenched among the popular classes during this period. Just a month after the Haitian consul complained about the practice, in December of 1939, a representative from the town of El Seibo wrote the governor to protest the actions of sugar company agents on nearby plantations. He accused them of "not allowing Haitians to celebrate dances" and "mistakenly interpreting them for the so-called dances of 'Judu.'" This tendency to "consider all [dances] as 'Judu' dances" had financial repercussions for the municipality. The city council reminded the governor that, "[these] measures tend to hurt the interests of this municipality, since

the income [from] dances is one of the [sources of] revenue that this council counts on.”³⁰ The governor passed these complaints on to the plantation, and a representative responded by arguing that his men had only targeted “Judu” dances and not “Dominican dances ... celebrated by Haitians workers.”³¹

Following the massacre the central government constructed Vodou as an external threat to Dominicaness. However, this policy came into conflict with arrangements that had regulated Haitian religious practices for decades. Up until the late 1930s, local authorities did not explicitly arrest people for performing religious rites: instead Haitian religious practitioners could be arrested for holding dances without a proper license. This policy was not limited to plantations: peasants elsewhere were also forced to seek government licenses for parties or dances.³² Navigating surveillance and repression of Vodou ceremonies was not necessarily a novel challenge for Haitian migrants. Kate Ramsey has argued that, while Haitian penal law technically criminalized Vodou practices during the early twentieth century, rural inhabitants often leveraged personal relationships and paid fees to local officials for authorization to perform particular rituals (Ramsey 2011:191). Plantation residents, therefore, often had experience negotiating with local authorities in order to protect their right to participate in religious ceremonies.³³ Haitian immigrants were able to come to agreements with local or plantation officials in order to secure safe spaces in which to perform ritual practices.

By the late 1930s these arrangements had grown into an important source of revenue for municipal governments. This was far more important to the El Seibo city council than a distant national policy against Haitian cultural expressions. The town representative ended his letter to the governor by stating “moreover [these actions] are unjust because ... Haitians living within this

30 Ramon Beras Sindico Municipal to Señor Gobernador Provincial, December 22, 1939, Gobernación Del Seibo, 1939 Legajo 5, AGN.

31 Orcilio Arias Jefe Guardas-campestres to Gobernador Civil de la Prvincia del Seybo, December 27, 1939, Gobernación Del Seibo, 1939 Legajo 5, AGN.

32 Popular forms of Catholicism and Christianity are practiced all over the Dominican Republic, and include syncretic, Afro-Caribbean forms of worship. There is a set of practices and beliefs known as Dominican Vodou. Scholars argue that both forms of Vodou emerged from similar origins and adapted to local circumstances. Popular forms of religion in the Dominican Republic were prohibited, and the government did use limitations on certain types of dances to police Dominican popular religious practices (Davis 1987).

33 For evidence of this prior to this period see Gobernación de San Pedro de Macorís, 1922–1923 Legajo 12, AGN; Gobernación de San Pedro de Macorís, 1927 Legajo 46–47, AGN.

jurisdiction cannot lawfully enjoy themselves.”³⁴ Undoubtedly the fact that Dominicans profited from established economic networks with Haitians motivated opposition to outside intervention. However, it is also clear that some people were morally opposed to what they viewed as an overextension of government authority. The author of this letter expressed his belief that the law should not prevent residents, be they Dominican or Haitian, from engaging in important and fulfilling religious ceremonies.

These conflicts between local officials and the Trujillo government demonstrate that, for the majority of the population, anti-Haitianism was not constitutive of Dominican identity in the years following the massacre. While ethnic stereotypes and prejudices did exist, local networks between Haitians and Dominicans took precedence over nationalist ideology. That Haitian culture was antithetical to Dominican culture, or that Haitians were only equipped for sugar labor, were not familiar concepts to residents of sugar-producing regions at this time. However, the regime proved adept at pressuring governors, mayors, and plantation officials to enforce changes in national policy. In this way, the central government began isolating Haitians on sugar plantations and changing the public perception of them. This meant that Haitian identity was associated only with certain spaces within the country: they could not be part of the peasant landscape anymore; they were only part of the landscape of sugarcane.

Conclusion

Prior to the ascendancy of Rafael Trujillo, residents of the border and sugar-producing regions had been able to take advantage of tenuous state power to form relatively autonomous Haitian-Dominican communities. Local officials opposed efforts to usurp their authority, and often sided with Haitian residents against government and sugar plantation forces. Opposition to anti-Haitian policies stymied the government’s attempts to isolate Haitian immigrants. In response, Trujillo employed military force to override the power of local officials and disrupt networks that bound Haitians and Dominicans together. Following the massacre, the regime constructed a state nationalism that posited Dominicans as fundamentally different from Haitians. Unable to use violence in the same ways in sugar-producing regions, the government instead began isolating Haitians on plantations and policing their cultural

34 Ramon Beras Sindico Municipal to Señor Gobernador Provincial, December 22, 1939, Gobernación Del Seibo, 1939 Legajo 5, AGN.

expressions. By removing Haitians from Dominicans' everyday lives, and marking Haitian culture as threatening, the Trujillo regime attempted to dismantle Haitian-Dominican networks. In the span of a few decades Haitians were transformed from ethically different but equal members of long-established economic networks to a racially inferior group of people only qualified for sugar labor.

The isolation of plantation communities continued following Trujillo's assassination in 1961. His former right hand man, and one of the intellectual architects of anti-Haitian ideology, Joaquín Balaguer, was elected president in 1966 and increased the use of state force to segregate Haitians on sugar plantations. While this policy had been clandestine under Trujillo, it now became officialized and was discussed openly in government correspondence. As the executive director of the state sugar company wrote to President Balaguer in 1968, "Haitians ... will only be tolerated in [sugar] cane areas where they dedicate themselves to cutting [cane.]"³⁵ The legality of Haitian migrants became even more closely circumscribed by location. When the sugar economy began to fail in the 1990s, and the government could no longer keep Haitian-Dominican communities segregated on plantations as they once had, the state dramatically stepped up its attempts to retroactively revoke the citizenship rights of Haitians of Dominican descent.³⁶

Contemporary controversies about the citizenship status of children of Haitian immigrants are rooted in Trujillo's pursuit of conflicting goals: the inculcation of anti-Haitian ideology in the Dominican population, and the simultaneous increased use of Haitian labor. In order to resolve this contradiction, Trujillo attempted to make Haitian identity synonymous with sugar labor and to make sugar plantations the only legal spaces in which Haitians, and Dominicans of Haitian descent, could reside. Nevertheless, this article has demonstrated that, as the Trujillo government worked to spread anti-Haitian sentiment among the population, many citizens balked at this new ideology that went against established ways of understanding and negotiating ethnic difference. The regime faced opposition as it attempted to coerce local officials in sugar-producing regions into forcing local Haitian residents to cut cane. The government would never succeed in completely dismantling Haitian-Dominican networks, and while resistance to anti-Haitian policies became less prevalent, it would never disappear.

35 Gaetan Bucher Director Ejecutivo Consejo Estatal de Azucar to Doctor Joaquín Balaguer Honorable Presidente de la República, January 20, 1968, Fondo Presidencia Palacio Nacional Sujeto: Braceros Haitianos, 1967–1989 Caja 14,455, AGN.

36 See Wooding 2009; Matibag & Downing-Matibag 2011.

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