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Dominican Creole Emigration: 1791-1861

by

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ABSTRACT

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The present-day Dominican Republic prides itself on being the offshoot of Spain's first New World colony. A look at the population of that country, however, would seem to indicate that its people are considerably darker in complexion than Spain's. For the racist, or one who shares an interest in race, this can be explained by, among other things, the twenty-two year occupation of the eastern, Spanish part of Hispaniola by the black Haitians and even the prior incursions dating back to Toussaint L'Ouverture's invasion at the start of the nineteenth century. Another factor which, in addition to augmenting the process of "darkening" the Dominican people, greatly hampered the potential of the future Dominican Republic for effective self-government, was the emigration of Creole families from Spanish Santo Domingo in times of crisis ranging from the late 1700s up to the Second War of Independence in the early 1860s. Although a certain "darkening" of Spanish Santo Domingo was a result of this emigration, of far greater importance to this writer was its negative effect on the already strong proclivity for caudilloism (*caudillismo*), which has plagued the Dominican Republic to the present day.

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From the earliest days of European settlement, the Caribbean has been an area very much affected by emigration. The colonization of Cuba, Mexico, and, later, South America was facilitated, to a large degree, by the emigration from Spanish Santo Domingo before that colony even had a chance to develop.¹ Recently the Caribbean Basin has been the focal point of a new kind of emigration to the United States and other areas, in which the emigrants are not only holding on to their indigenous culture more strongly, but are also displaying a tendency to return home or shuttle back and forth—very much counter to the classic pattern of European emigration to the United States.²

Although there have been varied reasons for Caribbean emigration over the years, a common thread seems to have been political and economic hardship as a motivating factor. This writer's own ancestors are likely to have come from the island of Hispaniola as a result of the great slave revolt which happened in the late 1700s.³ It is probably a fact that the island of Hispaniola has been the site of more political and economic hardship than most Caribbean localities. Certainly, the history of the Dominican Republic can be said to have been affected by emigration of well-to-do families at a time when Spanish Santo Domingo desperately needed colonial development in the early sixteenth century. Significant emigration also occurred at several critical junctures between the time of the slave revolt in French Saint-Domingue in the 1790s and the Second Dominican War of Independence in the 1860s. This emigration robbed Spanish Santo Domingo of leadership, capital and overall political and economic capability, making it a society virtually ungovernable save by *caudillos*.

The bases of *caudillismo* include the necessity of an ignorant and docile population. For example, in talking about one of the Dominican Republic's most malignant *caudillos*, Buenaventura Báez, Frank Moya Pons contrasted Báez's support in the area around Azua. Although it must be admitted that Azua was the home base of Báez and his relatives, another significant factor in the hold Báez exerted in that region was the nature of the economy in that region: its fragile economic infrastructure and the concomitant presence of large numbers of vagabond-like men (easy cannon-fodder for any political moves that Báez contemplated). On the other hand, the Cibao, long recognized in the Dominican Republic as the center of what has passed as Dominican liberalism, has had a much stronger and varied economy, capable of offering people more sustained employment.⁴

¹Helen Miller Bailey and Abraham Nasatir, *Latin America: The Development of Its Civilization* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 89-91.

²Aaron Segal, "The Caribbean Exodus," paper presented to the 1986 meeting of the South East Council on Latin American Studies, April 4, 1986.

³William Javier Nelson, "Los mulatos en la isla la Española y los Estados Unidos: Un estudio de 'marginalidad,'" *Eme Emé* (Estudios Dominicanos) XII(67) (July-August 1983): 71-81.

⁴Frank Moya Pons, *Manual de historia dominicana* (7th ed.; Santiago, Dominican Republic: Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra, 1986), 404-5. For an interesting discussion of *caudillismo*, see

The Slave Revolt and Santo Domingo

The revolt which rocked French Saint-Domingue was the beginning of a devastating conflict which lasted from 1791 until the birth of the Haitian nation in 1804 and which actually was a five-part struggle:

1. Social: a struggle between masters and slaves;
2. Racial: a confrontation between and among whites, blacks and mulattoes;
3. Civil: an internal insular fight between Toussaint L'Ouverture (black) and Rigaud (mulatto);
4. International: struggles for supremacy involving French, Spanish and British;
5. Of national liberation, culminating with the birth of the second independent nation in the Western Hemisphere and the first black or Latin independent nation.⁵

The effects of this multi-part struggle were varied and many, involving, of course, the French western part of Hispaniola but also gravely affecting Spanish Santo Domingo. For one thing, the conflagration in Saint-Domingue awoke the Spanish from their three-hundred-year-old slumber of isolation from the rest of the world.⁶ Prior to the slave revolt in 1791, Spanish Santo Domingo had enjoyed a reciprocal trade relationship with Saint-Domingue, trading hides and meat to the French in exchange for manufactured goods and some agricultural products.⁷ This, of course, was to abruptly end, causing many in Santo Domingo to contemplate emigration.⁸ However, the worst was yet to come. Toussaint L'Ouverture, an ex-slave who was to rise to greatness as the greatest black leader of those times, was able, through a series of clever moves, to break Spanish military control in Santo Domingo.⁹ This set the stage for the incredible Treaty of Basel, in which Spain gave away her two-thirds of Hispaniola to France.¹⁰ To the Spanish Creoles of Santo Domingo, this was a stunning event on the order of a national disaster. Many of them resolved to leave, being held from doing so only because of (a) financial inability to leave,¹¹ and (b) a belief that, perhaps, the switch of affiliation would not be permanent.¹²

Harry Hoetink, *The Dominican People 1850-1900: Notes for a Historical Sociology* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 123-5.

⁵Valentina Peguero and Danilo de los Santos, *Visión general de la historia dominicana* (Santo Domingo: Editora Taller, 1981), 128-9.

⁶Sumner Welles, *Naboth's Vineyard: The Dominican Republic 1844-1924* (2 vols.; New York: Payson & Clarke, Ltd., 1928), I, 7-10.

⁷Rosario Sevilla Soler, *Santo Domingo: Tierra de frontera 1750-1800* (Sevilla, España: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1980), 151. Peguero and de los Santos, *Visión general*, 114.

⁸Frank Moya Pons, *Historia colonial de Santo Domingo* (Santiago, Dominican Republic: Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra, 1974), 357.

⁹Selden Rodman, *Quisqueva: A History of the Dominican Republic* (Seattle, WA: The University of Washington Press, 1964), 35. See also Robert D. Heinl, Jr., and Nancy G. Heinl, *Written in Blood: The Story of the Haitian People 1492-1971* (Boston, MA: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1978), 67-69.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 35. Also Rayford W. Logan, *Haiti and the Dominican Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 91-2.

¹¹D. José Francisco de Heredia y Mises, "Informe presentado al muy ilustrisimo Ayuntamiento de Santo Domingo, capital de la Isla Española, en 1812," in Emilio Rodríguez Demorizi, *Invasiones haitianas de 1801, 1805 y 1822*, Academia Dominicana de la Historia 25to Aniversario de la Era de Trujillo (Ciudad Trujillo: Editora del Caribe, 1955), I, 162. See also Rodman, *op. cit.*, 35-6.

¹²Antonio Monte y Tejada, *Historia de Santo Domingo* (3rd ed., 6 vols.; Ciudad Trujillo: Biblioteca Dominicana, 1952), III, 210.

Toussaint, however, had his own troubles. He was aware of the vulnerable position of the ex-French colony in the international arena, having had to deal diplomatically, and sometimes militarily, with the French, Spanish, British and Americans in order to protect the sovereignty of the territory he controlled (in addition to struggling against his insular enemy, Rigaud).¹³ To protect his eastern flank, he invaded Spanish Santo Domingo in 1801, thus controlling the entire island.¹⁴ This was more than a great number of Creoles could take. Even before Toussaint's invasion, 40,000 inhabitants of Spanish Santo Domingo had already forsaken the colony.¹⁵ With the ascension of Toussaint to power in Santo Domingo, the flood of the river of emigration of the 1790s became a torrent. It started with the exit of Spanish Governor General Joaquín García and the remaining Spanish civil and military authorities, who went to Cuba.¹⁶ They were promptly joined by waves of religious officials and other prominent citizens, who were generously allowed by Toussaint to take their property with them.¹⁷ Where did they go? By most accounts, they went to Cuba, Puerto Rico and Venezuela. When the number of French Creoles fleeing the destruction of Saint-Domingue and the United States takeover of Louisiana is added in, it is estimated that over 30,000 persons went to Cuba alone.¹⁸ The great majority of these went to the Parte Oriental of Cuba where they planted sugar and coffee and greatly aided the agricultural production of those areas.¹⁹ Their immigration to Cuba was encouraged by the Cuban Creoles, who feared the increased slave population in Cuba, and many prominent Cuban families are descendants of the people who left Santo Domingo at this time.²⁰ Toussaint, truly an heroic and benevolent historic figure, tried in vain to induce the Spanish Creoles to stay but their Negrophobia and francophobia precluded this, resulting in a situation in which the only prominent families who stayed in Santo Domingo were those who simply could not afford to leave.²¹ The implications for the future economic health of Santo Domingo would be obvious.

Venezuela also was a prominent destination for the Spanish Creoles, providing boats and supplies for emigrants. Between January and February of 1801 alone, Venezuela received some 1,988 people fleeing Santo Domingo.²² Puerto Rico, the third common destination of Creole emigrants from Santo Domingo, contains, even today, "archivos notariales" in which some lists of immigrants from Santo Domingo are presented.²³

The gains of Cuba, Venezuela and Puerto Rico were the losses of Santo Domingo. Persons of talent and distinction who eventually were to help the economies of those localities could have used those same talents to help Santo Domingo. It is ironically significant that Pedro Santana, the first president of the Dominican Republic and the first real Dominican *caudillo*, was

¹³Heinl and Heinl, *Written in Blood*, 70-91. See also Rodman, *op. cit.*, 35-7.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁶Otto Schoenrich, *Santo Domingo, a Country with a Future* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1918), 32.

¹⁷Samuel Hazard, *Santo Domingo, Past and Present* (London: Sampson Low, Marston Low and Searle, 1873), 137. See also Rodman, *op. cit.*, 39.

¹⁸Ramiro Guerra, *Manual de historia de Cuba* (Madrid, España: Ediciones R, 1975), 218. Franklin W. Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba during the 19th Century* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), 12-3. Francisco Pérez de la Riva y Pons, *Orígen y Régimen de la población territorial en Cuba* (Habana, Cuba: El Siglo XX, 1946), 136.

¹⁹Guerra, *op. cit.*, 218. See also Schoenrich, *op. cit.*, 33.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹Rodman, *op. cit.*, 39-40.

²²Moya Pons, *Historia colonial*, 369.

²³*Ibid.*, 371.

born into a family which elected to stay and not emigrate from Santo Domingo.²⁴ Although population estimates were quite unscientific and subject to contradiction at this time, some estimates place the 1812 population of Santo Domingo at 80,000, down from 45,000 from the pre-1791 population.²⁵ When it is realized that Santo Domingo had experienced a slight revival after 1805 under the French general Ferrand, the losses to emigration become more apparent.²⁶

The Effects of Boyer

The weak state of Santo Domingo was apparent when the president of Haiti, Jean Pierre Boyer, was able, in 1822, to simply order his soldiers to walk into his eastern neighbor and assume control.²⁷ Once again, emigration appeared as a necessary option, with predictable destinations: Cuba and Puerto Rico. Whole families emigrated, from all classes.²⁸ The initial emigration was probably caused, as much as anything, by Negrophobia and the lingering memories of the frightful invasions of 1805, in which the Haitian soldiers of Dessalines and Christophe committed horrible atrocities.²⁹ Boyer, aware that the Creoles represented a valuable resource, tried to stem the tide of emigration. On February 8, 1823, he issued a decree in which he threatened to confiscate the property of the emigrants; by and large, this was not successful.³⁰ Desperately, Boyer held out hope, at least initially, that the emigrants would return, threatening to shoot anyone who molested the creoles' property that they left behind.³¹ None of Boyer's measures stemmed the tide of emigration.

The early emigrants were the lucky ones. Boyer's Haiti proper was decaying from within, evolving into a society of peasants, without systemized, concentrated work, without clear-cut national goals (except, possibly, to remain an independent nation) and saddled with an indemnity to be paid to France for recognition of Haitian independence which amounted to more than a much wealthier country could have paid.³² Boyer, presiding over a Haiti already divided by a color caste system pitting blacks against mulattoes, split into an increasing number of little farms on which squatted a population of isolated, illiterate peasants, and opposed by almost every "civilized" nation on earth, could ill afford to extend any kind of effective leadership to Santo Domingo.³³ Ironically, the indemnity which, in effect, bought protection from France (as opposed to a situation in which it would be necessary to prepare to fight for it) helped create a

²⁴Juan Daniel Balcacer, *Pedro Santana: Historia política de un despota* (Santo Domingo: Editora Taller, 1974), 25-35.

²⁵Moya Pons, *Historia colonial*, 403. Also see Nelson, "Los mulattos en la isla la Española y los Estados Unidos."

²⁶Welles, *op. cit.*, I, 39-40.

²⁷Logan, *op. cit.*, 32.

²⁸Louise L. Cripps, *The Spanish Caribbean : From Columbus to Castro* (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall & Co., 1979), 115. See also Emilio Rodríguez Demorizi, *Santo Domingo y la Gran Colombia: Bolívar y Núñez de Cáceres*, Academia Dominicana de la Historia, Vol. XXXIII (Santo Domingo: Editora del Caribe, 1971), 106. See J.A. Osorio Lizarazo, *La isla iluminada* (Ciudad Trujillo: Editora del Caribe, 1953), 68.

²⁹There are many treatments of these invasions, but the most graphic (perhaps fueled by the author's prejudice against blacks) remains that of Welles, *op. cit.*, I, 34-9.

³⁰Moya Pons, *Manual de historia*, 228.

³¹Cuy-Joseph Bonnet, "Recuerdos históricos, 1822," in Rodríguez Demorizi, *op. cit.*, 280.

³²Logan, *op. cit.*, 95-6. See also Jacques Nicolas Leger, *Haití, Her History and Her Detractors* (Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1970), 184.

³³Although there are a number of works which ably describe the state of Haiti under Boyer, including several sources already cited, an excellent article which does this and more is Robert K. Lacerte, "Xenophobia and Economic Decline: The Haitian Case 1820-1843," *Americas* XXXVII, 4 (April 1981): 499-515.

military which became more slothful, as opposed to more diligent.³⁴ Boyer's soldiers which occupied Santo Domingo were not even paid—they simply exploited the hapless people of Santo Domingo in lieu of being the recipient of real wages.³⁵ Boyer tried to implement his Code Rural in Santo Domingo. The Code Rural, which featured a system of serfdom, had the same disastrous effects in Santo Domingo as in Haiti for probably the same reasons: Boyer's failure to intelligently manage the system.³⁶ The effects on Santo Domingo were predictable: commerce declined, emigration continued, the churches³⁷ Aside from a general flow of emigration which took place throughout the twenty-two year period of Haitian occupation, there were two other times in which there was a sharp rise in emigration: (1) in 1824, when a pro-Spanish conspiracy was crushed, and (2) in 1830, when the Spanish king naively requested from Boyer a return of Santo Domingo to Spanish rule.³⁸

It was not until the arrival of an "immigrant" (young Juan Pablo Duarte, returning to his native land from a stay in Europe in 1838) that the rule of the Haitians would begin to break. A combined force of Haitian liberals and Dominican patriots finally managed to oust Haitian rule on February 27, 1844.³⁹

Forced Emigration of Another Sort

The establishment of the Dominican Republic as an independent nation did not, of course, end the strife and hardship of the eastern portion of Hispaniola. Yet to come were the Haitian invasions of the 1840s and 1850s, the Second War of Independence, the corrupt "presidencies" of Buenaventura Báez, the dictatorship of Heureaux, the ascension of U.S. economic control and the tyranny of Trujillo.⁴⁰ The first years of Dominican independence saw the emergence of a new style of emigration: forced exile of political figures and their supporters, resulting in precisely the same type of drain as the earlier examples of emigration. Ousted political opponents of incumbents did not constitute a loyal opposition (to be counted upon to provide constructive criticism); instead they were frequently in exile. The "father of the Dominican Republic," Juan Pablo Duarte, was exiled almost immediately after the founding of the Dominican nation.⁴¹

³⁴Rodman, *op. cit.*, 48.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 46-8.

³⁶Welles, *op. cit.*, I, 32. See also Logan, *op. cit.*, 33. For a more detailed look at the Code Rural and its characteristics, see Peguero y de los Santos, *op. cit.*, 160. According to Rodman, *op. cit.*, 47-8, the Code didn't work partly because the easy-going Boyer failed to enforce it.

³⁷Analyses of this period range from those of the racist Sumner Welles to those writers who point out that, at least, the Haitians abolished black slavery in Santo Domingo. Most of the works cited here have descriptions of the disastrous Haitian occupation.

³⁸Schoenrich, *op. cit.*, 42.

³⁹Welles, *op. cit.*, I, 58. See also Charles Callan Tansill, *The United States and Santo Domingo: A Chapter in Caribbean Diplomacy* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1967), 124.

⁴⁰Starting with the takeover of Dominican customs receipts in the early twentieth century, the United States has assumed unquestioned dominance in Dominican affairs. See Jan Nippers Black, *The Dominican Republic: Politics and Development in an Unsovereign State* (Boston, MA: Allen and Unwin, 1986); and Howard J. Wiarda and Michael J. Kryzanek, *The Dominican Republic: A Caribbean Crucible* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982).

⁴¹This is a fairly common fact. What is not generally recognized or acknowledged is the almost routine "housecleaning" of political enemies made after the assumption of political office during this time period.

Conclusions

A great amount of attention has been given to the counter-production actions of various central figures in the course of Dominican history. In an assortment of historical discussions, the actions of Santana, Báez, Heureaux and Trujillo have been cited as having had pivotal negative impacts on the future of the Dominican Republic.⁴² Although this writer would be the first to agree with assertions of this sort, it is believed that far too little attention has been given to the waste of talent, capital, manpower and resourcefulness resulting from emigrations from Santo Domingo throughout its history and specifically for the times mentioned in this paper. It is understandable that more emphasis would be placed on something that actually happened, such as Baez's unbelievable Hartmont loan of 1869, as opposed to subjunctive conjecture—e.g., “What would the Creole emigrants have done had they stayed in Santo Domingo?” (see footnote 42).

Presently, the Dominican Republic is experiencing a great deal of emigration, although not as spectacular as that of the 1700s and 1800s. Pressed by a depressed economy and high unemployment, Dominicans are emigrating to the United States, where their diligence and intelligence serve to strengthen “the Colossus of the North.”

⁴²Báez's assumption of the Hartmont loan while the Dominican president set the stage for increasing domination of the U.S. in Dominican affairs. See Logan, *op. cit.*, 50-2.

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