Experiential Blackness: Race, Identity and Memory in Contemporary Dominican Society

By

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Abstract

The controversial subject of blackness resides at the center of discussions of race in the Dominican Republic. Traditionally, scholars have painted the Dominican Republic as a society ignorant of its own history of blackness and devoid of a black consciousness. They argue that Dominicans deny their African ancestry because of their hatred toward their African descent Haitian neighbours, even though the two island nations share the same land mass, traditionally known as Hispaniola. In this thesis, I argue that despite blackness being pushed to the margins of official or State conceptions of *dominicanidad* (Dominicanness or Dominican identity), blackness is integral to the shaping of history, collective and individual memories, and identity on the island. My work focuses on *experiential blackness* to highlight the complexity of blackness in Dominican culture. Experiential blackness is a methodology that shows how individuals, despite racial classification, understand and relate to blackness in the past and in the present. A consideration of the unique and traumatic histories of the Trujillo dictatorship (1930-1961) and the authoritarian rule of Joaquín Balaguer (1966-1978) in the Dominican Republic, reveals the ways anti-blackness and anti-Haitian rhetoric have informed Dominican conceptions of race, memory, and identity to this day. At the same time, Black Dominican voices, throughout history, have attempted to amplify and record their experiences to quell traditional state practices of silencing, denigration, and erasure. I utilize a mix of traditional archival sources and non-traditional sources, including oral history and social media, to analyze how the past and the present are constantly informing and shaping one another. The purpose of this thesis is not only to center blackness and highlight its profound influence on the culture of the Dominican Republic but to demonstrate how the recentring of discussions of blackness can lead to radical change in any given society.

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Introduction

"El negro detrás de la oreja" or the black behind the ears is often used to describe the quandary of blackness in the Dominican Republic.[1] Blackness, Black bodies, and Black cultural elements all exist in Dominican society, yet they are often "hidden" in plain sight. On a world stage these hidden aspects of blackness are often interpreted as the outright denial of Black identity by Dominicans. When I arrived on the island in 2018, I also assumed that Dominicans actively ignored or did not believe in the existence of blackness. What I would come to learn is that the concept of blackness in the Dominican Republic is one that is historically contentious and complex, and that it serves as the center of many debates in both English and Spanish academic circles. "The black behind the ears" does not have one singular definition, and it can take on many different meanings depending on the context and circumstances.

As I embarked on this study, I naïvely sought to understand why Dominicans seemingly do not "accept" their blackness and why blackness sits on the "borders of *dominicanidad*" (Dominicanness or Dominican identity).[2] I drew my understandings of Dominican blackness from North American academic sources, which attempt to understand the island's racial structure through U.S. racial models. U.S. scholars like historian Henry Louis Gates have argued that countries such as the Dominican Republic are devoid of a Black consciousness. His 2011 PBS documentary, "Black in Latin America," argued that Dominicans deny their African ancestry because of their hatred toward their African descent Haitian neighbours. Instead, *Dominicanos* turn to models of European whiteness to shape their identity and culture. Scholars like Gates, view Dominican constructs of race as an anomaly, when compared to the way North Americans, particularly those of African descent, view and understand blackness. They tend to see dominicanidad as backwards, confused, xenophobic, and inherently racist.[3]

Over the next year of living, learning, and experiencing life in the Dominican Republic or Quisqueya, the Taino name of the island used affectionately by Dominicans, I realized that I was asking the wrong question. I learned that “black behind the ears” was more complex and did not mean denial. Rather, blackness is present in all aspects of Dominican life and culture and the experience of blackness in the Dominican Republic is one that is multifaceted and sits outside of traditional western racial models and understandings of Black identity. Dominican blackness is an experience understood through a unique yet turbulent history, characterized by colonialism, dictatorships, genocide, and a constant stream of revisionist history aimed at erasing the Black historical presence. As one person described it to me, “the experience of blackness in the Dominican Republic is like a war within oneself.”[4] There is a constant battle of trying to reconcile and understand one’s own experience with blackness and a history of anti-blackness and learned hatred toward Black skin.

My thinking about dominicanidad also changed after reflecting on some of the scholarship produced over the last twenty years. Historians now seek to move away from simplistic understandings of dominicanidad to explore the dimensions of its fluid and complex history. They contend that arguments about the denial of blackness are based on the assumption, rather than the fact, that all Dominicans uniformly reject their African roots.[5] They show that not only is an awareness of African ancestry present within Dominican consciousness, but that elements of African history and culture are central to the identity of many Dominicans. Secondly, scholars note that U.S and even European theories of race and racism cannot be arbitrarily applied to Dominican forms of racialization and identity formation.[6] By forcing a U.S. or European lens of race and the adoption of foreign racial terminology onto the Dominican Republic, previous scholars had ignored the complexities of dominicanidad, as well as the history of the island, which uniquely

informs both past and present Dominican understandings of race.[7] Lastly, recent scholarship argues that a failure to explore the complexities of dominicanidad reduces Dominican racial identity to a unique "Caribbean Other."[8] By applying Western racial paradigms, scholars ostracize Dominicanos and dominicanidad. The use of North American paradigms is often tied to an acceptance of "official" state narratives and the idea that this narrative is uncontested and embraced by all Dominicans. Recent work challenges this otherization through a recognition of a history that defies the state narrative. They unravel the concept that Dominicans sit outside of the "normal" Caribbean and that the formation of their identity and the history of their nation has not been influenced by surrounding island cultures.[9]

This project seeks to study blackness in the Dominican Republic by focusing on the level of the *experiential*.[10] My approach toward "experiential blackness" differs from studies on the Black experience in that it centres on the differing ways blackness affects conceptions of identity, history, and memory at the personal and at the state levels. Rather than looking at the Black experience writ large, I decenter whiteness as the sole instrument to assess the consequences of power and privilege. Instead, an exploration of the experiential centers and promotes the sharing of Black histories and contemporary experiences in order to demonstrate the ways governments and institutions have systemically exercised power throughout history. As a result, it forces individuals, despite race or ethnicity, to question and consider how blackness has positively or negatively influenced their life internally and externally in both the past and present.

A consideration of how blackness is experienced in the Dominican Republic does not rely on preconceived understandings of race, but instead focuses on how individuals and collectives of individuals reflect on blackness as a construct that evolves within collective identity and memory. Even though blackness has been relegated to the borders of dominicanidad, it has not been

completely erased or rejected by Dominicans. I argue that experiential blackness is shaped by the historical and collective memories of the population. Some of these memories and experiences are negative and traumatic and continue to influence current generations. Other experiences and memories of blackness are positive and enhance a sense of pride and belonging. By focusing on how blackness is expressed and practiced in people's lives and in their visions of past events, I explore how individual memories and attitudes are reflected in collective responses to the history of the island.

In this study, I address three crucial questions: In what ways does collective memory contribute to one's lived experience, specifically one's experience with blackness in the Dominican Republic? How do Dominicans, despite skin tone, interact with abstract and concrete notions of blackness? Lastly, is the experience of blackness solely based on negative, traumatic, and violent memories of the past, or do more quotidian, positive cultural experiences of blackness inform notions of Dominican blackness? To answer these questions, I ground my work in the current historiography on blackness in the Dominican Republic, including debates on why blackness is considered by some to be marginal to the history and culture of Dominican society and what "experiential blackness" on the island means. I also engage with theories on memory, since experiential blackness in the Dominican is integrally related to memory, history, and the archive or how and where memories of the past are stored. Lastly, I address the importance and power of oral history in reconstructing the past and analyzing the experience of blackness within the Dominican Republic.

Understanding Anti-Blackness and Anti-Haitianism

To understand the contradictory nature of blackness, I turn to key historical events and explain how they shaped memories and understandings still prevalent today. This thesis begins in the 1930's as I consider events during the rule of president, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina (1891-1961). Over the course of his thirty-one-year long dictatorial rule (1930-1961), one of the largest mass murders targeting people of African descent in twentieth-century America occurred.[11] Known as the Massacre of 1937 or the Parsley Massacre, the Dominican military under Trujillo's orders, murdered over 20, 000 Black Haitians and Dominicans along the Northern Dominican border.[12] Unlike other countries that have seen the impact of genocidal violence, the 1937 massacre was not prefaced by an ideological campaign against the victims. Instead, the violence served as a catalyst for anti-Black and anti-Haitian propaganda that not only propelled Trujillo's nationalist campaign but also allowed for the creation of modern *antihaitianismo,* (anti-Haitianism), a doctrine predicated on anti-blackness and xenophobia.[13]

Scholar Ernesto Sagás defines antihaitianismo as "a set of socially reproduced anti-Haitian prejudices, myths, and stereotypes prevalent in the cultural makeup of the Dominican Republic."[14] Central to this 1930s ideology is the certainty that racial, social, economic, cultural, and national differences divided the two halves of Hispaniola. This belief was transformed by the Trujillo regime into a totalizing nationalist ideology that went beyond the differences between two nations to a defense of a "Dominican race" of people of Indigenous and Spanish descent against a terrifying Black other. During the post-massacre period Trujillo forced intellectuals to go into exile and replaced them with his own officers. These sycophants helped to disseminate his nationalistic and anti-Haitian ideologies. Two of the most popular, Manuel Arturo Peña Battle (1902 – 1954) and Joaquín Balaguer (1906 – 2002) are credited with propagating and maintaining powerful anti-Haitian propaganda in wake of the 1937 massacre.

As a result of whitewashing efforts, many Dominicanos began to believe in the regime's philosophies and began to regard Haitian identity as the antithesis of dominicanidad by rejecting and demonizing all aspects of Haitian identity and culture.[15] Trujillo used the massacre of 1937 to materialize his "Dominicanization" plan, which transformed popular elite anti-Haitian prejudice and a partiality for Spanish (read: white) culture, into a dominant ideology.[16] As Trujillo worked to institutionalize antihaitianismo, he successfully conflated racial and national identities. The unification of the Dominican "race" and nation (by means of the glorification of whiteness) ostracized Black Dominicans. They were now placed outside of dominicanidad, because Black features were deemed to be Haitian.[17] Within this racial imaginary, dominicanidad then became a celebration of whiteness or light skin.[18] As a result, Black and poor Dominicans are sometimes labeled as *extranjeros* (foreigners) or *Haitianos* (Haitians), thus erasing their Dominican identity and making them more vulnerable to violence and societal isolation.[19]

Trujillo's regime also spread propaganda about the "Haitianization" of the country, creating fear that the "silent invasion" of Haitian migrants was causing a racial menace.[20] Not only did the architects of Trujillo's racist agenda instill fear of an invasion among the general populace, but they also emphasized the "backward" African dimensions of Dominican culture and society that were being brought to the Dominican Republic by Haitians.[21] Haitians, according to Trujillo-era intellectuals, were an inferior people.[22] As the pure descendants of African slaves, they were illiterate, malnourished, disease-ridden, and they believed in Vodu. In contrast, Dominicans were the proud descendants of the Catholic Spanish *conquistadores* and the Taino Indians. Such a bifurcated story of "race" essentially erased (and rejected) the profound history of Africans and African-descent people on the eastern side of Hispaniola.[23] Trujillo's ideology of *dominicanismo* left no room for Dominicans to recognize blackness within their identity, which is strikingly

different than denying one's African ancestry.[24] Dominican Blacks were thus viewed as a racial-minority group and, by extension, ostracized even further as a result of Trujillo's policies of exclusion and bifurcation.[25]

Some scholars argue that the Trujillo-era conceptions of antihaitianismo can be traced back to nineteenth century when *hispanidad* (pro-Spanish adoration) and *negrophobia* (a fear or hate for Black people), were popularized in the post-independence world. Like the members of other newly independent nations, nineteenth century Dominican elites wanted to create its own culture, that was unique from its former colonizers of Haiti and Spain. At the same time, they wanted to emulate the so-called "positive" elements of European and Spanish culture. Intellectual elites of the nineteenth century sought to conceptualize Dominican racial identity as one that was based on the descendants of Spaniards and white creoles from the colonial era.[26] *Hispanidad* was a desire to invest in whiteness and advocate for the racial superiority of mixed blood Dominicans.[27] Thus, Trujillo was not operating in a historical vacuum when he drew on a century-long idea of dominicanidad that supported whiteness as representative of Dominican identity.[28] Long-held attitudes of resentment toward Haitians, shame about the country's blackness, combined with the desire to augment the country's white population, also carried over into the Trujillo regime.[29]

This contentious racialized history continues to have a profound impact on Black populations. Violence and discrimination against Haitians, Dominicans of Haitian descent, and Black and poor Dominicans continues to this day. One can still regularly hear anti-Haitian rhetoric in conversations.[30] Anti-Haitian ideology is insidious and inherently works to deny dark skinned Dominicans and the poor their own sociocultural space, much less a cultural identity of blackness.[31] Some scholars believe that current-day anti-Haitian sentiment at the State level continues to deny Black Dominicans cultural and political citizenship. It limits them from making

partisan demands and fruitfully participating in politics. The State regularly finds ways of discriminating and manipulating this vulnerable population group.[32] The subtle nature of anti-blackness, dating to the Trujillo era, informs the day-to-day cultural production of blackness at both the individual and State levels in the Dominican Republic.

Collective and Historical Memory

Recent scholarly debates on the historical roots of anti-blackness in the Dominican Republic illuminate both the complexity of dominicanidad and the difficulties facing Dominicans in understanding blackness and its place within their identity. But the ways people remember, how they access the past, or how they reference traumatic events when discussing current events are all a part of how blackness is experienced. History and memory share a symbiotic relationship, since how a society remembers is uniquely linked to how the history of "race" was and is recorded and taught.

Scholars take different approaches toward memory and remembering. One perspective focuses on collective memory, sometimes referred to as historical memory. This approach emphasizes how group memories influence actions and identity formation, especially the creation of national identities. Many nations attempt to shape a nationalistic identity by revising and rewriting collective memories, which serve to benefit the power structure.[33] By taking control of the historical production of race, for example, these regimes are able to shape present realities and influence future generations.

Memory is also characterized by the actions of remembering *and* forgetting. Those who hold power are able to dictate what is remembered and forgotten, greatly affecting the collective memory of a society. Theorist Paul Connerton posits that "organized forgetting" is a key

characteristic of totalitarian states.[34] Dictatorial leaders use this tactic to control the collective memory of society. In these states, contemporary writers are proscribed and oppositional historians dismissed from their posts.[35] In the Dominican Republic, most anti-Trujillo intellectuals were forced to flee the island during his dictatorship. They were replaced with sympathizers like Joaquin Balaguer, Manuel Arturo Peña Battle, and several others who believed in and promoted Trujillo's nationalist, anti-Black, and anti-Haitian policies. Pro-Trujillo "historical" works often resembled a mix of myth, political propaganda, and the glorification of their leader.[36]

Power is also obtained and maintained by controlling historical memory.[37] That includes selecting, presenting, and recording "facts" in a certain way, and choosing what is to be excluded or commemorated. Haitian historian, Michel-Rolph Trouillot has argued that archives, and in turn a nation's collective memory, are neither neutral nor natural. Silences occur because of an active process of silencing chosen facts and individuals who have knowledge deemed to be dangerous, in the same way in which "a silencer silences a gun."[38] During the Trujillo era and beyond, intellectuals rewrote national narratives and suppressed inconvenient ones, while also proclaiming new national heroes to better fit within their new national "Dominican" identity, based on whiteness.[39]

While collective memory is key to understanding how societies remember and forget, it must be considered in tandem with individual memory. More traditional scholars tend to argue that individual and collective memory cannot be considered together, just as "collective guilt is not the same as individual guilt for a crime."[40] For these scholars, there are no crossovers in terms of the mechanics of memory, which is why individual memory and collective memory require different consideration. For example, theorist Maurice Halbawchs, argued that collective memory

is reflective of a collection of inaccurately shared histories over generations, while individual memories are much more accurate because they are the direct result of individual experience.[41]

However, more recent scholars believe that the connection between individual and collective memory is much more nuanced than once thought. Scholars who consider the interrelationship between individual and collective memory make two main arguments. Firstly, they argue that individual and collective memory are equally unstable. Individuals and communities continually create changing and conflicting stories about themselves. The only difference is that with communities, memories are conflictive and are comprised by several individuals claiming to be the sole voice of the body.[42] Secondly, scholars argue that individual memories shape collective memory reciprocally, and *vice versa*.[43] Memories, they argue, are both individually and socially constituted. The act of remembering and accessing memories involves being connected to one's self and to others.[44] One's personal life narrative is a part of a web of interconnecting sets of narratives, all influencing how an individual shapes their personal identity.[45] Both involve self-reflection and reflexivity. Like the individual, scholar David Carr argues, "the community exists as a coherent unit by composing and recomposing its own biography and projecting its future as it interprets and reinterprets its past."[46] For my own work, I argue that individual and collective memories are clearly interrelated. In the Dominican Republic, the contradictory and contentious relationship to experiences of blackness is a direct result of individuals and the collective constantly having to reshape and reconsider their identities in the wake of traumatic and conflicting memories.

To demonstrate this, I draw upon three differing theories of collective memory that relate to Dominican experiential blackness. The first, postmemory, describes the relationship of trauma between the "second generation" or "post generation" to the experiences of their elders.[47]

Specifically, it looks at the way the inter-generational transference of trauma affects the post generation's understanding of themselves and history.[48] The second, cultural memory, focuses on the ways collective memory is embedded into cultural practices and icons.[49] Cultural memory interrogates the reasons why certain cultural markers have either positive and negative collective memories attached to them and how that might affect the ways certain members of society are treated. The last theory, countermemory, works to attack one's understanding of authority in memory, and as a result, dismantles collective memory to create new understandings of history and memory in society.[50]

I draw on these theories of collective memory to consider how Dominicans, and particularly those who identify as Black, have been and continue to be dominated by histories that demonize and degrade blackness. As a result, blackness is relegated to the margins of society and collective identity. At times this occurs consciously, but often acts of anti-blackness are unconscious as they have become a part of the fabric of society, dating back to the Trujillo era, and a defining aspect of Dominican identity. Trujillo's anti-Haitian rhetoric and campaigns coupled with a desire for a national monolithic identity based on whiteness has led to an erasure of blackness within the collective memory of Dominican Society that still traumatizes people today. Those born in the aftermath of the Trujillo era remember and reconfigure this violence, thus experiencing it in a post-generational manner. Despite not having lived during the Trujillo dictatorship, the memories of that time exist within their consciousness and affect how they live their daily lives and how past memories shape their identity.

All communities have conflicting views of the past, and in recent years efforts have been made in the Dominican Republic to change collective memories as they relate to blackness. This change is most prevalent among younger generations and activists that believe in the importance

of uncovering the past, no matter how difficult it may be. Outside of cultural movements, including the move toward using the term "Afro" as a cultural identifier, new cultural institutions are helping to reclaim stolen memories of the past. In 2011 the "Museo Memorial de la Resistencia Dominicana" (Memorial Museum of Dominican Resistance) opened with the mission of commemorating and highlighting both the history of resistance by Dominican citizens against state violence during and after the Trujillo regime, and teaching this history to future generations to help bring about truth and reconciliation on the island.[51]

Oral History and the Interview Process

To understand how collective memories and ideas of blackness are expressed in this current generation, I conducted interviews with Dominicans about their memories as they relate to race, culture, and history. Documenting and using oral history techniques has enabled me to show the linkages between collective and individual memories of the past and identity creation. Most often, historians are more concerned with how collective memories are created, circulated, mediated and received and less so with how individuals produce and make meanings from their memories.[52] They tend to take oral interviews less seriously than archival sources, even though selective memory processes and active forgetting are integral to document creation as well.[53]

In my own work I draw on the work of Paula Hamilton, who is a strong advocate for oral history. She argues that oral histories involve both individual and collective memories and that collective memories are often derived from individuals.[54] Oral history's emphasis on individuals can help bridge the gap between the micro and macro-levels of experience.[55] Oral history's role then is to not only document individual lives but to make memory social or collective by "connecting individual life stories in public."[56] My interviews draw from a large cross section of

society to help demonstrate how the individual experience is directly related to a public and social aspect of memory, resulting in accessing and creating collective memories that are characterized by a shared but also diverse experience with blackness. I conducted forty interviews and follow-up interviews throughout 2019 and 2021 with Dominicans of various backgrounds, ages, and status in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic, and Montellano, a small town in the northern Puerto Plata province of the island. Participants were asked a series of open-ended questions that allowed them to elaborate on their relationship to and understandings of race, identity, culture, and to the remembrance of historical events such as the Trujillo dictatorship, the twelve- yearlong rule of Trujillo era intellectual, Joaquín Balaguer (1966-1978), and to present-day cultural movements like Black Lives Matter. I called upon participants to reconstruct past experiences that would help to better understand their relationship to blackness and their experience of blackness on the island.

These interviews, conducted in both Spanish and English, reveal how individual and collective memories have a symbiotic relationship. Individual memories, as expressed experientially through the interviews, contribute to the collective memory of a national consciousness, while state-sponsored ways of remembering or forgetting blackness, also influence how individuals frame their memories of national events that privilege or diminish blackness. Along with the interviews each participant was asked to complete a biographical data sheet that asked questions about age, gender, official and personal classifications of race (the government classifies each citizen's racial identity on their personal identification card known as the *cédula*), socioeconomic status, place of birth and current home, and level of education. By collecting these additional data, I was able to see how individual memories of the past are shaped by experiences of discrimination, poverty, wealth, and location.

My thesis combines interviews with other sources, including high school textbooks and speeches from state officials like Trujillo and Joaquín Balaguer. These sources help to better understand the official governmental perspective of events. I also make use of state literature from Balaguer and fellow ideologue, Manuel Arturo Peña Batlle, along with newspaper articles, from both national and international print media, including, *Listín Diario, El Nacional* and *The New York Times.* Using these sources in conjunction with my oral interviews helps to better analyze factors that influence experiential blackness. Additionally, it aids in understanding how official versions of the past and of race affect individual and collective memory, as well as contemporary personal and collective conceptions of dominicanidad. I also use social media sites like Instagram and Twitter as scholarly sources. As I conducted research, I found that the anonymity and horizontal forms of communication that is offered by social media platforms, allows for more honest and open discussion. This allows for a deeper analysis of the ways blackness, history, and memory are being experienced and discussed in the present. Overall, my objective is to give a voice to those who have not been given space in traditional academia and I believe this can be done by making use of a diverse source base, whether through printed, oral, or non-textual materials.[57]

Experiential Blackness

Oral history and memory are uniquely related to the ways that identity is understood both in the present and historically. Drawing on the historical literature on blackness in the Dominican Republic and on theories of historical memory, this study argues that identity, especially as it relates to blackness, is never settled. It is in a constant process of reciprocal narration, persuasion, negotiation, and revision. Like the individual, communities evolve and reconfigure the past in new

ways. Communities also change just as regimes change; they are not fixed entities but are always re-constituting themselves. Dominicanidad is thus in a constant flux, changing, questioning itself, and making itself anew.

This project assumes that the past and present are constantly in conversation with one another and being used to define the ways blackness is experienced by Dominicans, despite racial or ethnic identity. This is an important aspect of experiential blackness. Just as collective and individual memories are filled with inconsistencies, so too is history and historical production.[58] How we understand and experience the past is constantly evolving and changing. As a result, the past is constantly being re-made. In that sense, history is a verb, not a noun. That is particularly true with trauma, which is central to a study of blackness in the Dominican Republic. Traumatic events from the past are inherited by future generations, impacting their understanding of the past and the collective memory of society. Participants I interviewed spoke about "flashbacks" of collective events that have shaped their experience of blackness. These also include memories of childhood trauma from being ostracized because of the colour of their skin. One participant told me that throughout his childhood he was referred to as Haitian and was often excluded because people viewed him as an outsider, causing him to internalize this negative treatment and resent his dark skin for a portion of his life.[59] Amin's individual experience is just one of many examples of the reciprocal relationship between trauma, collective memory, and experiences of blackness that draw on the past and the present.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter One examines the Trujillo regime, and the era that many scholars claim gave rise to modern antihaitianismo on the island. Not only do I consider the roots of antihaitianismo and anti-blackness, but I also show the ways by which the Trujillo regime engaged in different expressions of silencing and active forgetting to configure

how blackness should be remembered on the island. I look at the relationship between the past and the present and how people today remember the 1937 Massacre and other events that sought to deny and erase blackness from dominicanidad. I consider the trauma present generations still face when they think about the history of violence and state terror. The legacy of Trujillo has actively shaped current collective memory while also shaping the ways in which blackness is experienced in the Dominican Republic. The rhetoric of anti-Haitianism and anti-blackness is still tightly woven into the fabric of Dominican Society. Events like the 1937 Massacre, which occurred nearly eighty-three years ago still impacts Dominicans today. Arguments surrounding the history and the place of Haitians in Dominican society can be heard on a daily basis in the streets.

Chapter Two moves out of the realm of trauma and violence to explore the intersection between culture and politics through the theory of cultural memory. I begin the chapter by discussing the political turmoil that occurred after Trujillo's death and how it opened a path for Joaquin Balaguer's rise to power in the mid-sixties. Throughout this tumultuous period, the commemoration and recognition of the horrible events of the dictatorship were traded in for a practice of what I am calling 'national forgetting.' By effacing the ways that Dominican culture had been altered, it eliminated the chance for needed public discussions. Once again, I use memories, shared to me through informants, to demonstrate the impact this national forgetting has had on their understandings and experiences of blackness within Dominicanidad. Although Balaguer dominated politics in the post-Trujillo era and continued to emphasize anti-Black rhetoric, a recognition and appreciation of African aesthetics in both the music and culture of the Dominican Republic also began to occur. I focus on the patrons of this cultural Black renaissance to better understand the historical Black experience and its effects on contemporary conceptions of experiential blackness. These historical actors attempted to reverse the marginalization and

erasure of blackness that had occurred throughout the Trujillo era. And, yet, as I shall argue, because of efforts made by Balaguer and his neo-Trujillista regime to suppress this cultural renaissance using state violence, the actions of those promoting the resurgence of African aesthetics does not reside in the collective memory of Dominicanos today.

The final chapter will examine the role of Dominican activists online and their attempts to center blackness in discussions of dominicanidad, history, and memory. These activists use online platforms to create virtual communities where people can both share and learn about Black histories and experiences. In this chapter I trade in interviews for comment sections and online posts related to the contemporary and historical Black Dominican experience. By centering blackness in their discussions, digital activists are creating counter memories and knowledge that are dismantling traditional historical processes of remembrance and commemoration. These activists, I argue, have equipped their Dominicans followers with tools to question and reject negative associations of blackness in the historical past. Instead, they have encouraged readers to actively engage and think critically about national mythologies from the Trujillo and Balaguer eras and how these mythologies influence the ways they might experience and engage with blackness in Dominican society today.

Michel-Ralph Trouillot reminds us that history transcends the archive and academia, and that historical debates have various narrators, all of whom are involved in historical production.[60] Following Trouillot's work, this project seeks to take academia beyond the academy by including the voices and opinions of those who are not only active agents in historical production but also whose voices are often silenced in its archive. I consider how different versions of the past have been silenced, where 'national forgetting' has occurred, and how those practices influence how blackness is experienced in the Dominican Republic today. The use of non-traditional sources such

as interviews provides a contrast to archival practices of active forgetting, since some have not forgotten, while others have clearly internalized state-sponsored anti-black rhetoric.

This thesis seeks to complicate the traditional view of Dominican blackness, which posits that it is neither invisible nor nonexistent in the historical culture of the island. This thesis will not only write Black bodies and voices into the historical record but also place them at the center of discussions about erasure, contradictions, violence, and beauty. Further, this work seeks to make an academic investigation accessible. I have always been troubled by the ways in which academic work discusses individuals and communities and rarely actively engages with them. This is part of the reason I chose to conduct interviews with Dominicans. I wanted to be able to weave their lived experience of blackness, violence, obfuscation, and the power of culture into the historical record and to allow them to tell their own stories.

[1] Simmons bases her argument on an 1883 poem by Juan Antonio Alix, entitled, "El Negro Tras de la Oreja." This stanza is often used to describe Dominican blackness, because it implies a hidden or concealed nature of African ancestry. Denial implies that Dominican do not believe or are not aware of African Ancestry, which is not the case. It is often acknowledged, she says, but downplayed or relegated to a place that is hidden or "behind the ear." Kimberly Eison Simmons, *Reconstructing Racial Identity and the African Past in the Dominican Republic,* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2010) 2.
[2] Dominicanidad is a complex term used to describe Dominican identity and all that it encompasses. See, Lorgia García-Peña's "Borders of Dominicanidad," In, Lorgia García-Peña, *The Borders of Dominicanidad: Race, Nation, and Archives of Contradiction*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).
[3] Eva Michelle Wheeler, "Race, Legacy, and Lineage in the Dominican Republic: Shifting Paradigms," *The Black Scholar: Dominican Black Studies* 45, no. 2 (April 3, 2015), 34; Eva Michelle Wheeler, "(Re)Framing Raza: Language as a Lens for Examining Race and Skin Color Categories in the Dominican Republic," (Dissertation, University of California, 2015), 2, 18; Silvio Torres-Saillant, "The Tribulations of Blackness: Stages in Dominican Racial Identity," *Callaloo* 23, no. 3 (July 1, 2000), 1086.
[4] Tayron Perez, Interview by author, Montellano, August 15, 2020.
[5] Milagros Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary: Surveying the Landscape of Race and Nation in Hispaniola*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 6.
[6] Ernesto Sagás, *Race and Politics in the Dominican Republic,* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 3
[7] Torres-Saillant, *The Tribulations of Blackness*, 1090.
[8] Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 15.
[9] Wheeler, *Race, Legacy, and Lineage in the Dominican Republic*, 43; Ricourt. *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 15, 16.
[10] Ginetta E. B. Candelario, *Black Behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); García-Peña, *The Borders of Dominicanidad.*
[11] Edward Paulino, "Bearing Witness to Modern Genocide," Center for Latin American Studies, UC Berkley, *Berkeley Review of Latin American Studies,* (January 25, 2017), 5.
[12] While "negro" or black is not widely used by Dominicans to describe their racial identity, I use it throughout the text to describe Dominican bodies that could be and are read as black in Dominican society. This thinking follows that of scholar Logria García Peña who notes that while the term is not used as an "ethnically distinguished category" as it is in the U.S., Dominicans who are viewed as "black" must deal with institutions that often impede their social mobility. Black Dominicans usually are described with the terms, *prieto* (dark skinned); *rayano*, a person who lives on the border; or Haitian, García-Peña, *The Borders of Dominicanidad,* 2.
[13] Edward Paulino, *Dividing Hispaniola: the Dominican Republic's Border Campaign Against Haiti, 1930-1961,* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016), 7; Richard Lee Turits, "A World Destroyed, A Nation Imposed: The 1937 Haitian Massacre in the Dominican Republic," *The Hispanic American Historical Review,* 82, no. 3 (n.d.), 628; Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 46.
[14] Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 4.
[15] García-Peña, *The Borders of Dominicanidad,* 188; Paulino, *Dividing Hispaniola*, 10; Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 46, 124; Turits, *A World Destroyed, A Nation Imposed,* 628, 633– 634.
[16] Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 46.
[17] García-Peña, *The Borders of Dominicanidad,* 2; Wheeler, *Race, Legacy, and Lineage,* 36, 39.
[18] David Howard, *Coloring the Nation: Race and Ethnicity in the Dominican Republic*, (Oxford: Signal Books, 2001), 1, 2, 194.
[19] García-Peña, *The Borders of Dominicanidad,* 2.
[20] Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 13.
[21] Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 13; Turits, *A World Destroyed, A Nation Imposed,* 606.
[22] Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 13.
[23] Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 47.
[24] Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 125.
[25] Paulino, *Dividing Hispaniola,* 10.
[26] Torres-Saillant. *The Tribulations of Blackness,* 1099.
[27] April J. Mayes, *The Mulatto Republic: Class, Race, and Dominican National Identity*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 144.
[28] Mayes, *The Mulatto Republic,* 3.
[29] Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 13.

[30] Paulino, *Dividing Hispaniola,* 162.
[31] Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 4.
[32] Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 122.
[33] David Rieff, *In Praise of Forgetting: Historical Memory and Its Ironies,* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2017), 27.
[34] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 15.
[35] Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 15.
[36] Rieff, *In Praise of Forgetting,* 27.
[37] Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 1.
[38] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1995), 48.
[39] Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 44-55.
[40] Rieff, *In Praise of Forgetting,* 66.
[41] Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 37.
[42] Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 37.
[43] Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 21; Elizabeth Langley, "Performing Postmemory: Remembering the Parsley Massacre in 'Nineteen Thirty-Seven' and Song of the Water Saints," *The Latin Americanist* 60, no. 1 (2016), 66.
[44] Langley, "Performing Postmemory," 66.
[45] Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 21; David Carr, "Cogitamus Ergo Sumus: The Intentionality of the First-Person Plural," *The Monist* 69, no. 4 (October 1986): 529.
[46] Carr, "Cogitamus Ergo Sumus," 529.
[47] Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory." *Poetics Today* 29, no. 1 (March 1, 2008): 103; Kathy Behrendt, "Hirsch, Sebald, and the Uses and Limits of Postmemory." In *The Memory Effect: The Remediation of Memory in Literature and Film*, ed. Eleanor Rose Ty and Russell J. A. Kilbourn. (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013), 51.
[48] Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," 10.
[49] Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995), 132; Blackmore, "Collective Memory," 90.
[50] Jarula MI Wegner, "Rethinking Countermemory: Black-Jewish Negotiations in Rap Music," *Memory Studies* 13, no. 6 (August 29, 2018): 1222.
[51] "¿Por qué un Museo Memorial?," Museo Memorial de la Resistencia Dominicana, accessed August 20, 2020, http://www.museodelaresistencia.com/museo-memorial-de-la-resistencia-dominicana/.
[52] "¿Por Qué Un Museo Memorial?," Museo Memorial de la Resistencia Dominicana
[53] Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 19.
[54] Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes, *Oral History and Public Memories,* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), x.
[55] Hamilton and Shopes, *Oral History,* x.
[56] Hamilton and Shopes, *Oral History,* xiii.
[57] Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 18; Trouillot, *Silencing the Past,* 19.
[58] Trouillot, *Silencing the Past,* 7.
[59] Amin Dominguez, Interview by author, Santo Domingo, April 14, 2019.
[60] Trouillot, *Silencing the Past,* 19.

Historical Perspectives of Blackness from the Post-Generation

My interview with Mitiko, a young self-identified Black musician and artist from Santo Domingo, was very enlightening. Like other participants whom I questioned, Mitiko was born after the dictatorial rule of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina (1930 – 1961). He had avoided living during a period of rule characterized by violence, intimidation, anti-Black racism, and antihaitianismo. Still, Mitiko, like others of the post-Trujillo generation, has inherited a deep and profound trauma. They were left with the need to heal their nation and themselves from a pain they did not directly cause or experience. What was special about my talk with Mitiko was his ability to root his present-day experience of blackness in the history of the past. He recognized that the violence, negativity, and isolation which often define the Black Dominican experience are not modern creations but rather are inherited from the preceding generation.

As we sat on his rooftop apartment in the Colonial Zone of Santo Domingo, Mitiko continually referred to past events to explain present-day behaviour. In one portion of his hour-long interview, Mitiko noted that *Dominicanos,* primarily elites and members of the government, have actively worked to erase blackness and Black identity through the destruction and silencing of physical bodies, history, and cultural practices and spaces.[1] Mitiko asserted that "If Dominicans were allowed to be themselves, they would look so different."[2] Different in dress, different in speech, and different in the way they articulate and express their dominicanidad. He noted that blackness is always present and expressed through people's daily actions, ways of speaking, and even cooking. But when directly confronted, blackness is suppressed and hidden, calling to mind the phrase "behind the ears."[3] Another participant, Claudio noted that even if you did express yourself and your blackness freely, it came at the risk of being ostracized and discriminated against by peers

and strangers.[4] Fear of rejection is symptomatic of a longer history that has glorified whiteness and denigrated blackness; a history that is internalized and unseen. Fear and post trauma are internalized and expressed through feelings of lesser worth, a lack of belonging, and an inability to express oneself and one's identity openly.

This chapter explores the ways by which the immense trauma and violence rooted in the history of the dictatorship has affected the ways blackness is experienced by Mitiko and others. To do this, I turn to postmemory, a developing theory born out of theories of collective memory created by Marianne Hirsch. Postmemory's focus is on the "generation after" which, Hirsch says, shares a relationship to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before them.[5] A post-generation is able to remember the trauma of others through stories, images, and behaviours with which they grew up. "Memories" exist because experiences of trauma have been transmitted to the next generation so profoundly that they became a part of what defines them.[6] While Hirsch's theory is based primarily around Jewish communities and their connections to the Holocaust, her arguments are applicable to communities that have faced similar generational trauma, including the Dominican Republic.[7]

Hirsch notes that postmemory is not only the simple recalling of memories but the way that those memories are shared. This occurs primarily through performance, imaginative investment, and creation.[8] Additionally, for Hirsch, postmemory is not a movement but rather a structure of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience.[9] For the post-generation growing up with inherited memories and dominated by histories that preceded their birth or the beginning of social consciousness, trauma can sometimes erase or repress their own current life stories, whether unconsciously or consciously.[10] As noted by Mitiko, inherited traumas inhibit the ways individuals experience blackness. Inherited traumas, or the "post" in postmemory,

are continually expressed in power relationships that translate from the past into the present, as scholar Elizabeth Langley reminds us.[11] The structures of power that existed during the Trujillo era continue to impede and inform the ways in which blackness is mediated and experienced.

Internalized expressions of anti-blackness and anti-Haitianism are rooted in historical events of the past, specifically events that occurred during Trujillo's tenure. Interviews reveal this sense of non-linear time because the stories interviewees told about themselves regularly slipped back and forth between the past and the present. In several instances, informants discussing anti-blackness and anti-Haitianism related those phenomena directly to Trujillo and the violence that occurred during his rule. The historicity of blackness, or the *continual* internalization of the past in the present, helps us not only to understand how Black Dominicans experience blackness but also the ways that non-Black Dominicans experience and interact with blackness.

This chapter also attempts to deepen our understanding of the symbiotic relationship between Dominican blackness and Haitian identity. Looking specifically at the 1937 Massacre, the birth of modern antihaitianismo and the policies that were created in its aftermath, helps us to understand why these two identities must always be considered together when attempting to understand experiential blackness in the Dominican Republic.

Lastly, I will consider how Trujillo's continued importance for historical memory limits the ability for this post generation to heal from the trauma of the past. Mythologies about Trujillo allowed for racist and xenophobic theories and beliefs to take hold. Furthermore, the ways his regime used propaganda and the media to control the narrative of the 1937 massacre reinforced and instilled a fear of blackness and Black bodies, which continue to be used to justify present-day violence and discrimination against Black Dominicans and Haitians.

This chapter will explore these themes by turning to modern-day examples of anti-blackness and anti-Haitianism in the Dominican Republic. First, I turn to an online discussion of race and nationality between Dominicans on Twitter to show the ways that the 1937 Massacre is still present in the minds of the population. I then look to the experience of one of my participants, Gipsy, to better understand the continued prevalence of Trujillo era discourse in the present day. In the second section of the chapter, I use an anecdote from a class experience to further reveal how violent anti-Haitian rhetoric is widely accepted by Dominicans. I connect this incident to the propaganda and mythmaking that was present in the aftermath of the 1937 Massacre, and which remained characteristic of the Trujillo regime. Finally, in the last section of the chapter, I introduce two of my interviewees, Agatha, and Dany to help explain the various ways the internal experiential aspect of blackness affects the lives of Dominicans. I thus come full circle by demonstrating how a history of anti-blackness and antihaitianism has had detrimental effect for Black Dominicans living on the island today.

Expressions of Anti-blackness

The internalization of anti-Black racism and discrimination is an issue faced by Blacks in many diasporic cultures. Internalized racism can be defined as "the acceptance of negative attitudes, beliefs, ideologies, and stereotypes perpetuated by the white dominant society as being true about one's racial group."[12] Studies have shown that internalized anti-blackness diminishes the quality of life for people of African descent. It affects mental health and in turn impedes the ability to live a full and prosperous life.[13] Discrimination conveys to individuals that they are different, devalued, and not respected in society and thus may evoke negative emotions and sentiments that become internalized.[14] These internalized feelings then reinforce the superiority of whites and maintain a

"self-perpetuating cycle of oppression," which causes harm to the self-esteem of Blacks, elevates feelings of self-worthlessness and -doubt, and obstructs the ability to express their true selves.[15] Race or *raza,* as it is understood in the Dominican Republic represents both nationality and colour. Therefore, racism and discrimination, when internally and externally experienced in the Dominican Republic, are reflective of both anti-blackness and anti-Haitianism, both of which have a history of immense trauma and violence attached to them. Therefore, experiential blackness and the expression of Black identity in the Dominican Republic are not only a result of contemporary discrimination; they are the product of the internalization of historical trauma, violence, anti-blackness, and anti-Haitianism born out of the Trujillo dictatorship.

Racist expressions are alive and well, and it is still possible to see the past in the present. Earlier this year as the world began to rapidly close due to the spread of COVID-19 many people were unable to return to their home countries. On April 13, 2020, *Remolacha News*, a Dominican online publication, posted on twitter news of a group of Dominican men who were stranded in Ecuador. These men were pleading with the government to help them get back home because they felt that they were in danger.[16] Along with the tweet was a link to a longer article about the story, along with a photo of the three men, who happened to be Black Dominicans.

On Twitter the response to the post was mixed. Some people responded in support of the men, tagging government accounts and requesting aid for them. However, most of the responses failed to focus on the men's distress and instead questioned the validity of the men's identity as *dominicanos*. One user, Leandro Garrido, tweeted that they could not believe that the three Black men could truly be Dominican.[17] He insisted that the men had to be Haitian, and that it wasn't his country's responsibility to care for them. Other users reposted the original tweet with captions saying "¿Dominicanos?" or "Dominique?," while other's commented that the Dominican men

must have made their request to the wrong government.[18] The responses took an even uglier turn when one user requested that the stranded men send a video to the government saying the word "perejil." The correct pronunciation of that word by trilling the Spanish "r" would confirm whether the men were truly Dominican.[19] This reshared tweet got over one hundred likes and a multitude of replies with laughing emojis.

The responses to the post about the marooned Dominican men on Twitter is important for several reasons. Firstly, it gives us a unique insight to the ways some Dominicans view blackness within dominicanidad. The overwhelming response from users was that these three Dominican men, because of their skin tone, could not be considered Dominican and that they had no legitimate claim to aid from the Dominican government. Secondly, the call from users for the men to pronounce the word "perejil," recalled the calculated use of the mispronunciation of that term by the Trujillo government to justify the deaths of over 20, 000 people during the 1937 massacre. The present-day use of the term on Twitter is a key example of how the trauma of the past is very much alive in the present day. Lastly, the post shows, as scholar Kelli Lyon Johnson notes, that the memory of the 1937 massacre is still so strong that "even now it is nearly impossible for Dominicans and Haitians to think of each other without some trace of tragedy of their mutual history."[20] To truly understand the historical implications of this online interaction we must return to the events of the massacre.

In the Dominican Republic, the massacre is colloquially known in Spanish as *El Corte,* the cutting, and in Haitian, Kreyol, as *Temwyaj Kout Kouto,* meaning "testimonies of the knife blow."[21] These two names specifically refer to the nature of the violence that took place, since machetes were purposefully used to kill thousands of innocent people, in order to disguise the military's culpability and instead place blame on farmers and local civilians. In English, the

massacre has two names. It is most popularly known as the Parsley Massacre, because it was rumoured that soldiers would ask the intended victim to pronounce the word *perejil* or parsley to distinguish Haitians from Dominicans. This potentially deadly litmus test determined whether a victim could trill the "r" in Spanish. If they could not, they would be sentenced to death. Some scholars have debunked this as popular mythology, since those living along the border where the massacre occurred would have been fluent in both Spanish and Kreyol, and that for some ethnic Haitians, Spanish was their mother tongue.[22] The second English-language referent is "the Haitian Massacre," which serves to commemorate the perceived targets of the genocide. Even in this instance, the use of the term "Haitian," is also inaccurate, since the violence was not only perpetrated against illegal Haitian immigrants.[23] In reality, the border region where the massacre occurred was bicultural and transnational, and made up of both ethnic Haitians and Dominicans.[24] I bring up the usage or misusage of the terminology used to describe the massacre to point out that these terms fail to recognize that the violence was not directed solely against an ethnic minority – the Haitians – but rather against blackness throughout the island.[25]

The massacre occurred on October 2, 1937. The tragic event, which is said to have lasted just over a week, transpired along the northern border region on the eastern side of Hispaniola, primarily in the town of Dajabón. The number of victims of this genocide, committed by the hands of Dominican soldiers and conscripted civilians under the orders of then president and dictator, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina, have never been officially confirmed. Over the years, sources have estimated that the number of deaths could have ranged anywhere from five thousand to thirty-five thousand. The discrepancy in numbers lies in the Dominican government's refusal, both then and now, to acknowledge this crime or to conduct or allow international agencies to conduct comprehensive investigations of the event, or even to count the dead. This purposeful denial at the

time, coupled with the fact that physical evidence is, to this day, virtually impossible to obtain, makes it difficult to truly verify the extent of the damage. At the time, witnesses confirmed that bodies were either burned, thrown into the Dajabón River, or buried in unmarked graves. Still, news of the event did leak out, and it is now considered one of the worst acts of violence of Trujillo's dictatorship and arguably one of the largest mass murders targeting people of African descent in the western hemisphere during the 20th century.[26]

Throughout the late 20th and early 21st centuries, historians managed to conduct interviews with remaining survivors of the 1937 Massacre. They were asked to divulge what took place in Dajabón that year.[27] Because of them, we now know that on October 2, 1937, while at party held in Dajabón to mark the end of a month-long tour of the border region, a drunken Trujillo encouraged attendees to initiate the slayings. In an inebriated stupor he reportedly stomped his foot on the ground and ordered his military men to "kill them fucking Haitians, kill them all!" [28] He went on to remark that the "remedy" had already begun in other parts of the island, with three hundred Haitians already dead in Bánica, another border town south of Dajabón.[29] Interviewees, both Dominican and Haitian, recalled that in the days that followed, military men systematically murdered those whom they perceived to be ethnic Haitians. By forcing Dominican civilians to participate and use machetes to kill the victims, the military hoped to conceal their involvement and spread a state sponsored account of the massacre as having been a spontaneous uprising by peasants who were defending their land and livestock.[30]

Several witnesses from the northern border region remembered that after Trujillo's declaration, Haitians in the area were given 24 hours to cross the border. Whether they believed the Dominican Republic was their home did not matter; if they were ethnically Haitian, they would soon become victims of a massacre that had already been set in motion. The military hung corpses

throughout towns to serve as a warning to others.[31] During the first days of the genocide, those who reached the border were permitted to cross, but on October 5th the border was closed. After this, those who were fleeing had to find alternative ways to escape the violence. Many were then forced to cross a dangerous river or survive by hiding out in the mountains of the region and avoiding military bands intent on killing them. Unfortunately, many failed.[32] Bands of civilian allies were forced to search the mountainous regions for those hiding. They were also required to cut off the ears of the dead before burning their bodies to prove they had completed the crime.[33] In the region of Monte Cristi, located about forty minutes outside of Dajabón, over one thousand people were forced to walk off the dock into the water as an effective way to quickly kill and dispose of bodies.[34] Despite only lasting a week, the violence and torture experienced in the massacre was gruesome, brutal, and unrelentless.

Despite efforts to suppress it, the memory of the 1937 Massacre remains present in the memories of Dominicans. As the example from Twitter shows us, race relations and questions of nationality are meditated and expressed by the post generation which continues to appropriate negative symbols of the massacre. The Twitter comment referencing the term "perejil" and the subsequent online discussion show how feelings about race are internalized and rooted in long-term sentiments of anti-blackness and anti-Haitianism. The deliberate use of "perijil" is a violent form of discrimination unique to the Dominican experience. Only those with acute awareness of the event can understand that its primary function is to reinforce the idea that blackness does not belong within dominicanidad.

The history of the massacre is alive in the Dominican population's memories; however, this online engagement also shows that experiential blackness is not the same for all Dominicans. For Black or Haitian descent Dominicans, recalling the massacre and the Trujillo regime is a

painful negotiation of race, nation, and identity.[35] While many Black Dominicans hold Trujillo in their memories as a negative figure, other Dominicans detach his violent actions from his political ones. This detachment (or, what some might call cognitive dissonance) is a direct result of the way Rafael Trujillo and his intellectual base created and maintained a mythology about the massacre. This mythmaking placed whiteness and Trujillo at center of life throughout the dictatorship and helps explain how blackness is understood and experienced negatively in the present day.

Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina is arguably one of the most important historical figures in the history of the Dominican Republic. To an international audience Trujillo is similar to many other twentieth century Latin American dictators like Augusto Pinochet (1915 – 2006) of Chile, Juan Perón (1895–1974) of Argentina, or Fulgencio Batista (1901–1973) of Cuba, though often times he is considered to have been the cruelest. While the commemoration of Trujillo and his regime has been outlawed in the Dominican Republic, he continues to remain present in the memories of Dominicanos. For nationals who have learned about Trujillo in history classes, he is more than a dictator. For them, the Trujillo era signifies a time of violence and corruption but also a period of order and prosperity in the country.

Take, for example the thoughts of Gipsy, one of my participants. A young professional from Santo Domingo, Gipsy noted that Trujillo's rule completely affected all aspects of Dominican life: from culture to daily speech and interactions. According to Gipsy, Trujillo, who is often referred to as "El Jefe," constantly demanded blind support from his subjects, which led to a culture of authoritative respectability on the island.[36] In her own family:

> My grandmother had twelve children and the oldest one was sort of like a mother for the younger ones and I always sensed this type of authority. When the older one says something, [they all would say] 'OK that's what we are supposed to be doing because the older one said so.' And when I start questioning it, because I don't have that much of an influence, they say 'you cannot question her she's the oldest!' But that's crazy,

> because what she's saying doesn't make sense. 'It doesn't, but you cannot change her, she's the oldest.'[37]

This type of behaviour even extends into the workplace, where employers require unwavering and unquestioned support from their workers. Along with the culture of top-down respectability, Trujillo's endemic corruption is still evident today. Dominicans are always looking to cut corners and would rather "cheat" their way to their desired goals than wait their turn. In a line up, for instance, Gipsy noted that it's never clear who is first or who is last; people simply wait in a big group and take their chance to get ahead when given it.[38]

While Gipsy wholeheartedly condemns Trujillo's rule and the negative ways his regime has affected contemporary society, she still sees positives that came out of it. "I am condemning Trujillo as we got so many negative things from him, but we also got good things from the dictatorship."[39] The positives she says, were Trujillo's ability to provide political stability and stop the constant battle for power occurring in the country prior to his coup in 1930. He was also able to improve the country's infrastructure and economy, which led to its modernization. Gipsy is not the only person who holds these contradictory sentiments.

In the discussion of Trujillo's legacy, especially amongst youth, people are often able to ignore his history of violence and discrimination against both women and Black Dominicans to praise his economic and political success. On many occasions I've heard people, often men, refer to Trujillo as "el mejor de lo mejor" (The best of the best) or "un gran líder" (a great leader). When questioned directly about his acts of violence, the response often is that Trujillo had to do what was necessary to advance the country. These sentiments are held by Dominicans of all shades. While that seems contradictory and shocking, it makes sense, since these opinions are the direct result of the mythmaking and propaganda that surrounded Trujillo's leadership.

Trujillo, who had both Spanish and Haitian ancestry, came to prominence during the US Marine occupation (1916 -1924). He joined the U.S. established Guardia Nacional Dominicana (Dominican National Guard) in the first class of Creole officers graduating from the Haina Military Academy.[40] The National Guard, as scholars have noted, worked hand-in-hand with U.S. military authorities to promote and uphold some of Latin America's most ruthless dictatorships.[41] After graduating, Trujillo advanced rapidly from second lieutenant to captain despite facing several allegations of rape and extortion during his court-martial.[42] In just nine years Trujillo managed to become commander in chief of the military, taking his post in 1927. Two years later, in 1930, he used this power to simulate a military uprising, which caused a political crisis that forced then sitting president, Horacio Vásquez, to resign.[43] After a sham election, Trujillo took official control of the country and remained in power for thirty years.

As one of the longest and most repressive regimes in Latin America, the Trujillato employed a multitude of tactics to maintain power, ranging from abductions of political dissidents, surveillance, to institutionalized forms of ridicule.[44] Unlike disappearances in the Southern Cone, abductions were often public affairs, which was a way of openly exhibiting power through terror.[45] Trujillo insisted on being the center of attention in both public and private life. Images and stories praising Trujillo were printed in almost every issue of the national newspaper, *Listín Diario*, especially in the early years of the dictatorship. Citizens were expected to display photographs of the dictator, as well as placards that read: "only Trujillo cures us" and "God and Trujillo are my faith" in their homes and offices.[46] While state sponsored violence and coercion were strong tools of control, it was mythology and propaganda that helped to sustain his power and supremacy throughout his rule and long after his death.

At the beginning of Trujillo's rule, he was not easily accepted by elites nor by the general population. In order to gain the favour of the people and to cast an image that matched his larger-than-life personality, Trujillo's intellectuals created mythology that characterized Trujillo as a messianic leader whose destiny was to become not only the leader of the country but its saviour. The myth was born out of a powerful storm, Hurricane San Zenón, that ravaged Santo Domingo in 1930 just months after Trujillo took office. The storm killed over two thousand people, caused damage to the agricultural fields of the south, and destroyed about fifty percent of the city's buildings.[47] Although Trujillo's government focused its efforts mainly on rebuilding the capital city, his propaganda apparatus turned the reconstruction into a sign of the nation's rebirth, making Trujillo's rise to power not a coincidence, but rather destiny.[48] Two years later, in 1932, the Dominican Congress passed an emergency bill to honor Trujillo with the title ''Benefactor de la Patria,'' (Benefactor of the Homeland) followed by that of ''Padre de la Patria Nueva.'' (Father of the New Homeland). Later in 1935 the Dominican Senate introduced a bill to change the name of Santo Domingo to Ciudad Trujillo.[49] These titles and accolades elevated Trujillo from a military usurper to the founder of a new Dominican nation, which he had single-handedly rescued from peril.

This myth extended into Trujillo's anti-Haitian and anti-Black policies as well. Joaquín Antonio Balaguer Ricardo (1906 – 2002), who was Trujillo's right hand and top intellectual, often wrote about the ways Trujillo would civilize and save both the nation and the Americas from an unnamed enemy that was threatening their progress.[50] Given the events of the 1937 massacre, which occurred quite early in his presidency while these myths were still taking form, it is easy to deduce that the uncivilized enemy was the Haitians, who served as the negative representation of blackness in the Caribbean during this period. The Trujillato did not need to name their enemy as

they made it clear through state violence and policies. Under Trujillo, according to historian Micah Wright, "the denigration of blackness was elevated to the level of state policy."[51]

Scholars often cite Trujillo's military training, which occurred during the U.S. Marine occupation, as an explanation for his anti-Haitian rhetoric, violent policies, and fixation on border control.[52] By layering their anti-Black and xenophobic ideologies on top of already existing anti-Haitian prejudices on the island, U.S. Marines were able to solidify Haiti as an undesirable Other, driving a deeper wedge between the two halves of Hispaniola. U.S soldiers worked to criminalize Afro-centered cultural practices like drumming and Afro-religious ceremonies as a way to discourage expressions of blackness. The confiscation of drums and the punishing of *santeros*, Afro-religious leaders, through vagrancy laws, became a common practice of marines in their effort to "civilize" the country and also as a response to their fears of blackness and Black culture.[53] As a trainee, Trujillo was indoctrinated into these beliefs and to viewing, not just Haiti, but blackness as an enemy against progress and modernity. In the same manner that the U.S. military exploited an already contentious relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, Trujillo would go on to do the same, making use of revisionist history to craft a nation based on the supremacy of whiteness and the fear of blackness.

The Trujillato used mythology and propaganda to justify racist policies and violence for over thirty years. As I will discuss shortly, this mythology was intricately created and disseminated beyond Dominican borders to help justify the deaths of the 1937 massacre. Understanding the mythologization of Trujillo's power also illuminates how and why his legacy is continuously praised in the present. Let us recall the teachings of Michel-Rolph Trouillot; "presences and absences embodied in sources or archives are neither neutral nor natural. They are created."[54] For the post-generation, the memories they hold are not only reflective of trauma but also of the

archives and histories that were generated to sustain the legacy of Trujillo as a hero of the nation. That is why many Dominicans, like Gipsy, hold contradictory opinions regarding the dictatorship. The danger that exists, as the example from Gipsy demonstrates, is that the acceptance and internalization of Trujillo's legacy is what gave birth to modern anti-Haitianism, and the ways these conflicting fables are embodied and experienced in the present.

Anti-Haitianism and the Afterlife of the 1937 Massacre

In 2019 I spent the year in the Dominican Republic teaching English while completing research and conducting interviews for my master's thesis. My students and I would often engage in long discussions. In one of my more advanced classes, the group became involved in a very heated discussion on the topic of blackness and Haitian immigration. In the middle of the discussion, I posed a question to the group: What is the difference between having white Venezuelan migrants in the country compared to having Black Haitian migrants? One of my students said that the difference was that Venezuelans are clean, they believe in God, and are productive in Dominican society. Haitians on the other hand, he continued, were dirty, their neighbourhoods and houses stink, they are always in the street, and they practice witchcraft. He went on to note that the only reason why Haitians come to the Dominican Republic is because they have destroyed their own land and now want to take over his. He went on to say that he would rather take up arms and kill his Haitian friends than allow them to destroy his country. I ended that class early as I was bit unsettled not only by his remarks but by the way almost all of the students, except for one, agreed with his assertions.

In reflection, this incident serves as a clear example of the ways anti-Haitian and anti-Black discourse are central to experiential blackness in the Dominican Republic. Incidents like this and

the one on Twitter over the use of the word *perejil* demonstrate the ways the memory of the Trujillo dictatorship and the suppression of the 1937 massacre have made the Black experience one that is partly characterized by violence and discrimination. This present-day desire for border protection against a dangerous Black Other is reflective of the propaganda and mythmaking that occurred directly after the massacre as a means of justifying the murder of thousands to Dominican and international audiences.

In the weeks following the events of the massacre, very little official information was released nationally. The first official report, came in the form of a national press release, nearly two weeks after the start of the massacre. Joaquín Balaguer, who was the acting Foreign Minister during this period, addressed the nation through the national paper, *Listín Diario*. In the published statement he stated that the incident along the border was a small clash between residents and that both Trujillo and the Haitian President, Sténio Vincent, were working together to resolve the matter.[55] It emphasized the peace that Trujillo would bring to the two countries and avoided providing actual details of what had occurred. For Dominican citizens, this silence would continue over the following months. News about the massacre in *Listín Diario* came from either Trujillo or high-ranking officials. International news outlets, on the other hand, provided graphic reports of what had happened in Dajabón.

The first international reports came out about a week after the incident, on October 21, 1937. *The New York Times* headline read, "Haitians Reported Shot by Dominican Soldiers." The article stated that a week prior a "border clash" between Haitians and Dominicans in the town of Dajabón had occurred.[56] There was no official confirmation, but it was speculated that the deaths, estimated to be in the hundreds, were a result of soldiers attempting to drive out Haitian squatters who were occupying land awarded to them because of a 1930 agreement between the two

countries.[57] A few days later on October 23rd, reports emerged in several American news publications that the border incident had been settled and that the two countries were involved in peace negotiations. The Dominican delegation, following the lead of Joaquín Balaguer, issued a formal statement that the incident had been a minor one with only a small number of civilians being injured.[58] A week of silence passed, followed by conflicting reports coming from American news sources.

On November 7, 1937 one reporter noted that the details of the events had been suppressed by both countries. Information was difficult to confirm, and rumors were swirling.[59] From what the reporters could discern, the death toll, which was disregarded by Dominican representatives as a small number of "injured civilians," was ticking up from hundreds into the thousands. On the same day, the *New York Times* reported an address given by the Foreign Secretary to Haiti, Georges N. Leger, confirming that the scrimmage along the border was actually a massacre committed by Dominican soldiers.[60] Leger explained that the incident was not a singular event but one that had begun in late September of that year, with over five thousand deaths having been confirmed.[61] The Dominican Republic then blocked reporters from entering the country. The only confirmed information to come out of the island was from Dominican state officials. Joaquín Balaguer and his staff continued to argue in American newspapers that the numbers were incorrect and maintained the story line that the massacre had only been a small dispute between civilians.[62] The insistence by the Dominican state to control the narrative and block outside media sources demonstrates the type of obstruction, mythmaking and propaganda that was already being circulated by the Dominican government to conceal their crimes.

In the Dominican Republic, the truth of the massacre took much longer to emerge. To this day, no official recognition has occurred. On October 28, 1937, Trujillo published a letter written

to the Dominican Ambassador to Haiti, Enrique Jiménez, stating that he wanted to work with the Haitian government to discover the culprits.[63] Above all he expressed that he wanted to maintain the friendly relationship between the two countries. A week later, just as the Haitian government was about to release details of the murders to international audiences, the Dominican government released another article in the national paper. In it they claimed that despite their goodwill attempts, the Haitian government had chosen to continue to cause unrest by spreading anti-Dominican propaganda.[64] The article went on to say that the people of the Dominican Republic were victims of the disagreement and that if the Haitian government continued actions against them it could lead to an armed conflict.[65] While a war did not occur, the example of these government news reports shows the ways the Trujillo regime worked to purposefully deceive the nation. Rather than being perpetrators, they were instead protectors of their nation defending themselves against the Black Haitian enemy that was attempting to destroy the Dominican people.

Trujillo refused to cooperate with international efforts to investigate and arbitrate the dispute. Instead he chose to compensate the Haitian government for an amount of $750,000, of which he only paid $525,000 and in doing so he evaded admitting the role the government had had in perpetrating a massacre that had not even taken place.[66] After being absolved of his crimes, Trujillo and his intellectuals then solidified a historically-based but diffuse anti-Haitian sentiment into official government discourse, silencing the truth of the historic collaborative relationship between Haitian and Dominican civilians.[67] The Trujillato used the events of the massacre to justify Trujillo's future attacks on Haitian immigrants and to ensure the erasure of Black identity on the island. Specifically, Trujillo was able to spread his antihaitianismo inspired nationalist project, which scholar Edward Paulino refers to as *La Dominicanizacíon de la Frontera* (the Dominicanization of the Border), throughout the island.[68]

For his project to be successful, Trujillo needed Haitians to be absent both in the minds and lives of the Dominican populace. He had already accomplished their physical erasure through the cleansing of the border region, but what was needed next was a reframing of the historic collaborative relationship of Dominicans and Haitians. Trujillo and his intellectuals tried to convince the Dominican public that Haitians were their enemies and whatever violence that may have occurred was done so in the defence of their nation. They argued that their efforts were a part of a long multigenerational fight for independence from Haiti.[69]

Joaquín Balaguer and Manuel Arturo Peña Battle (1902 – 1954), another top Trujillo era intellectual, completely transformed the way Haiti was remembered in the Dominican collective memory. They published articles and volumes of books historicizing Haitian attempts to occupy the eastern side of the island since Dominican Independence in 1844.[70] The regime focused on spreading propaganda about the “Haitianization” of the country and the “silent invasion” of Haitian migrants, who were deemed to be a racial menace.[71] Not only did they create fear of an invasion among the general public, but Trujillo era intellectuals emphasized the “backward” African dimensions of Dominican culture and society.[72] Milagros Ricourt says that the regime did this by assigning blame to Haiti for any and all aspects of African ancestry and culture present in the Dominican Republic. Haitians, according to Peña Battle and Balaguer, were an inferior people. As the pure descendants of African slaves, they were illiterate, malnourished, disease-ridden, and they believed in Vodu. In contrast, Dominicans were the proud descendants of the Catholic Spanish *conquistadores* and the Taino Indians. Through a conflation of race and nation, Black Dominicans became representative of a dangerous foreign Black other, pushing them essentially to the absolute borders of dominicanidad.

The comments from my students directly echo this propaganda. Trujillo's desire to remove blackness from Dominican identity in many ways was successful. Despite sharing a history of collaboration and an island that is only 650 kilometers in length my former students view Haiti as a duplicitous foreign nation from which they need to protect themselves. Due to the way the Trujillato linked national identity with race and colour, anti-Haitian rhetoric in the present is always connected to anti-blackness. In removing blackness from dominicanidad, Trujillo emphasized that its key components were whiteness and Hispanidad. It's not a coincidence that my student, who was a white Dominican, articulated the glaring differences between white Venezuelans and Black Haitians. This rejection of the Black body and the labeling of it as dangerously foreign has impacted the post-generation and how blackness is experienced in the Dominican Republic. How this othering of blackness is internalized, however is something that must be further explored.

Experiences of Anti-blackness

I turn now to a discussion of two of my participants, Agatha and Dany. Both are from Santo Domingo and identify as Black Dominicans. On two separate occasions, both interviewees expressed the ways internalized anti-blackness and assumptions about their identity has affected their lives, although in different ways. While Agatha spoke about her own internalized anti-blackness, Dany addressed the ways anti-blackness and stereotypes held by others have negatively affected his life.

Agatha is a trans woman with rich dark skin, skin that she says she had to teach herself to love and accept. Agatha shared that her skin had always served as a marker of her blackness since she could remember. Similar to Amín, discussed in the Introduction, she became conscious of her

blackness because of the taunting of others. Children, she said, would tease her about her dark complexion, call her a Haitian and exclude her from their collective games. Throughout her childhood others always viewed and labelled her as different. For years, she internalized these negative stereotypes and believed that Black people were not useful or wanted. It was after listening to a poem, *Me Gritaron Negra*, by Afro-Cuban poet Victoria Santa Cruz, that she began to reconsider her own internalized anti-Black sentiments and feelings of unworthiness. The poem is about Santa Cruz, who like Agatha, grew up hearing the word *Negra* as a slur. In the poem she goes on to say that she began to hate her hair and her big lips. She lived her life hiding herself, straightening her hair, lightening her skin and trying to hide her blackness, but people still called her Negra. In the poem, each line is separated by the word Negra, as if people are actually yelling it at her. Eventually she responds saying "y que?" followed by her declaring "Sí, soy Negra." The rest of the poem is a recognition that Cruz will no longer hide her blackness but instead embrace it pridefully. For Agatha, the poem helped her to realize that there was no need for her to ashamed of her identity, and that she could be proud to be both Black and Dominican.

Dany, who is a street performer, spoke to me about the pride he has in his Black identity and how he detests the way Hispaniola is segregated; separating a people that share one land. Dany shared that it is not his internalized feelings that affect his experiences as a Black man but rather the internalized anti-blackness of others. Dany, who was only twenty-nine years old at the time of our interview, has been arrested and sent to jail over forty-two times in his adult life. It's his skin, he says, that serves as marker for others who assume that he must be criminal and of low status. He told me about one instance where he had been performing in a park doing fire tricks and fire eating. After his performance, while he has sitting and eating peacefully, the police approached him and tried to arrest him because someone had accused him of burning a child. He knew that he

had not, and he tried to evade arrest by climbing up a statue in the park and yelling out to the crowd for help, since people who had watched his performance were still there. He said he screamed and screamed, but that no one helped. After a short while a man who was eating in a restaurant across from the park noticed what was going on and came out to support him. That man ended up being becoming a senator. Dany said after that exchange, the police apologized to him for the first time in his life for falsely accusing him of a crime. This incident occurred in the Colonial Zone, an area often considered as a liminal space in Santo Domingo, where most people can exist without judgement. Most people, that is, unless you are Black.

Both Agatha and Dany's life stories show how internalized notions of anti-blackness and a preference for whiteness affects experiential blackness. Their stories, much like the previous examples, demonstrate the difference in experiential blackness amongst the post generation. For Black Dominicans, the trauma of the past is very much present in their experiences of themselves in relation to others. At the same time, non-Black Dominicans are privileged in the sense that they do not have to contend with the historical erasure of their identity. In many ways non-Black Dominicans, whether consciously or not, continue to uphold and reaffirm much of anti-Black and anti-Haitian discourse from the Trujillo era that has characterized the Black Dominicans' experience as one of violence, exclusion, and isolation.

While the Dominican Republic is often viewed as having a mixed raced population, during the Trujillo era, mestizaje (mixedness) came to be viewed as an extension of whiteness, thus denying blackness even more. Theories on whiteness and anti-blackness generated during the Trujillo era were not new creations but rather an appropriation of elite discourse dating back to the nineteenth century. Throughout the nineteenth century Dominican elites who were concerned about the future of their nation actively encouraged the whitening of Dominican identity through

the creation of an Indo-Hispanic origin myth.[73] Trujillo draw upon that older literature propounding Black inferiority and used these historic fictions in his own nationalizing project.[74] Some of the nineteenth-century state sponsored literature romanticized historical events; including the "willing" assimilation of indigenous Tainos to Spanish culture and to explain the racial mixture present within the Dominican population. In one stroke, these writers erased both the remarkable African presence and Indigenous resistance to Spanish rule.[75] Nineteenth-century travel narratives written by elites were yet another literary expression used to promote the idea of the whitening of the Dominican population.[76] Travel narratives incessantly emphasized Dominican racial status as *los blancos de la tierra*, the whites of the land, and often compared the whiteness of Dominicans to the blackness and blackening of neighboring Haiti.[77] This body of literature disseminated the idea that Dominicans were, at best, white descendants of Europeans, and at worst, a mixture of Spanish and minimal Taino blood, but never Black nor related to the other half of Hispaniola in any way.[78]

Post 1937, the Trujillato used these elite ideas to make these ideas of whiteness accessible to the general population. Prior to this date, the term *mestizo* had been considered a transitional racial category, between white and Black, but holding the promise that all Dominicans could become white. At the same time, pre-1937 notions of the category mestizo carried the stigma of blackness.[79] Under Trujillo, the racial category mestizo transformed from a term that represented a transitioning to whiteness to an identity synonymous with whiteness.[80] By doing this Trujillo technically made whiteness available to all Dominicans. However, since black skin had also become synonymous with Haitian identity during this period, Black Dominicans were not allowed to be called mestizo. Instead, they were categorically pushed to the borders of dominicanidad.

Scholar Micah Wright writes that blackness during the Trujillo was "redefined as evidence of a foreign contagion" as a way to explain both the negative presence of blackness, and the country's divergence from the white Hispanic ideal.[81] By constructing a new white nationalistic Dominican identity, neighbouring Haiti became the marker by which to measure the Dominican Republic's success and whiteness. Under Trujillo, race came to be marked by an unstable set of rules that linked skin colour, Haiti, religion, language, and value itself.[82] Trujillo era intellectuals worked hard to create myths that justified their newly adapted racial structure, while turning Haiti into the nation's enemy.

Joaquín Balaguer was, once again, at the center of this campaign. Balaguer, who was arguably Trujillo's smartest official, created myths and theories that served as the blueprint for other Trujillo era intellectuals. On the topic of the presence of blackness in the Dominican Republic, he argued that Haitian promiscuity had led to an increased amount of racial mixing that both retarded the Dominican nation and polluted their white genealogical pool.[83] In the 1944 edition of his book, *Guía emocional de la ciudad romántica*, Balaguer went even further by arguing for the need to eradicate all traces of blackness from the country. Not only did he justify the erasure of blackness, but he also rationalized the 1937 massacre in that text. Trujillo's heroic actions in 1937, Balaguer argued, were done so as to put an end to the wave of ''Haitianization'' that threatened to destroy the country. Through these necessary actions, Trujillo guaranteed the survival of the republic.[84] In another book written in 1947, *La Realidad dominicana: semblanza de un país y de un régimen*, Balaguer again turned Trujillo into a messianic figure who had come to save the essence of the nation from the Haitian threat.[85] To achieve this goal, Balaguer claimed, "Trujillo had to strengthen the racial difference between the two peoples by implementing a demographic policy aimed at preventing the number of Blacks in the Dominican Republic from

ever being greater than the number of whites and mestizos."[86] This racialization campaign continued well beyond the end of Trujillo's tenure, since Balaguer went on to serve for twelve years as president. His own violent and despotic rule, which will be discussed at length in Chapter 2, helped to further establish modern antihaitianismo and anti-blackness as defining characteristics of Dominican society.

I would like now to return to my previous discussion of Agatha and Dany. The Trujillato's role in popularizing and maintaining whiteness demonstrates why anti-blackness and anti-Haitianism are central to how blackness is experienced in the present amongst the post generation. Their use of propaganda and mythology is important because for more than thirty years the state maintained these lies and they became a part of what defined Dominican identity; affecting the way race, culture, and ethnicity were understood. Agatha's feelings of unworthiness and Dany's being labelled as a criminal are just two examples of the ways that the post-generation contends with these inherited memories of trauma and violence dating from the Trujillo period. They also serve as examples of how experiential blackness varies amongst Dominicans. White, mestizo, and Indigenous (*indio*) Dominicans do not have to contend with the erasure of their identity. However, for Dominicans like Dany, Agatha, and Mitiko, their dominicanidad is always on the verge of being stripped away and they face the constant threat of violence and discrimination because of the colour of their skin.

Experiential blackness in the Dominican Republic is informed by a complex history of trauma, violence, racism, and xenophobia. It is deeply internal and internalized. It is not monolithic but is diverse and unique, depending upon one's position in society. And yet, it is also predicated upon the past, which is always present in new molten forms. For dark-skinned Dominicans, experiential blackness lives in their bodies and minds and in the shadow of the Trujillo regime.

These are feelings characterized by a sense of unworthiness and exclusion, but also resiliency. For non-Black Dominicans, how they experience and understand blackness is vastly different and usually is marked by a fear of blackness. As studies on postmemory demonstrate, the trauma and memories that have been inherited by the post-generation also carry with them deep-seated understandings of power differentials that are at the root of that inherited trauma. People like Dany experience racialized trauma that has been passed down from the Trujillo era. It continues to uphold power structures like white supremacy, which was fashioned by Trujillo to make blackness a foreign object within dominicanidad. But that is not to say that this trauma is never ending. The inter-generational cycle of trauma can be broken through processes like truth and reconciliation. And yet, part of the reason why Trujillo era myths and "perejil" jokes about the massacre still exist is because of the lack of recognition of Trujillo's hand in shaping imaginary racial hierarchies in the country. It is necessary to look clearly at the past to heal in the present. In addition, the fact that the government has never apologized nor officially recognized the 1937 massacre allows for the continuation of extreme violence against Haitian and Black Dominicans on the island.

At the beginning of this chapter, my participant Mitiko stated that, "If Dominicans were allowed to be themselves, they would look so different." While I'm unable to truly imagine what that could look like, I believe that eventually Dominican society can reach a place where it is not wholly burdened by past traumas and mythmaking. The following chapters will explore this sentiment a bit more as I step away from trauma and dive deeper into considering resistance and activism, two other dimensions of experiential blackness in the Dominican Republic.

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[40] Lauren Derby, *The Dictator's Seduction: Politics and the Popular Imagination in the Era of Trujillo,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 20.
[41] García-Peña, *The Borders of Dominicanidad,* 60.
[42] Derby, *The Dictator's Seduction,* 20.
[43] Derby, *The Dictator's Seduction,* 20.
[44] Derby, *The Dictator's Seduction,* 2.
[45] Derby, *The Dictator's Seduction,* 2.
[46] Derby, *The Dictator's Seduction,* 5.
[47] Derby, *The Dictator's Seduction,* 68.
[48] Derby, *The Dictator's Seduction,* 68.
[49] Médar Serrata, "Anti-Haitian Rhetoric and the Monumentalizing of Violence in Joaquín Balaguer's *Guía emocional de la ciudad romántica*," *Hispanic Review* 81, no. 3 (2013): 268.
[50] Serrata, "Anti-Haitian Rhetoric," 282.
[51] Micah Wright, "An Epidemic of Negrophobia," *The Black Scholar* 45, no. 2 (2015): 29.
[52] García-Peña, *The Borders of Dominicanidad,* 96, 207.
[53] García-Peña, *The Borders of Dominicanidad,* 61.
[54] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History,* (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1995), 48.
[55] Jaoquín Balaguer, "Comunicado Para La Prensa," *Listín Diario,* Oct 16, 1937.
[56] "Haitians Reported Shot by Dominican Soldiers," *New York Times,* Oct 21, 1937, 17.
[57] "Haitians Reported Shot by Dominican Soldiers," *New York Times,* Oct 21, 1937, 17.
[58] "Border Incident Settled," *New York Times,* Oct 23, 1937, 5.
[59] "Washington Fears Bloodshed In Haiti," *Daily Boston Globe,* Nov 07, 1937, A14.
[60] "Haitian Incidents Stir U. S. Concern," *New York Times*, Nov 07, 1937, 36.
[61] "Haitian Incidents Stir U. S. Concern," *New York Times*, Nov 07, 1937, 36.
[62] Anti-War Pledge Accepted by Haiti," *New York Times,* Dec 27, 1937, 6.
[63] Rafael L. Trujillo, "Importantes Declaraciones…," *Listín Diario*, Oct 28, 1937.
[64] "El Leve Incidente de la Frontera…," *Listín Diario,* Nov 5,1937.
[65] "El Leve Incidente de la Frontera…," *Listín Diario,* Nov 5,1937
[66] Roorda, *Genocide Next Door,* 303.
[67] Paulino, *Anti-Haitianism, Historical Memory, and the Potential for Genocidal Violence,* 266.
[68] Paulino, *Dividing Hispaniola,* 2, 3.
[69] Milagros Ricourt. *Dominican Racial Imaginary: Surveying the Landscape of Race and Nation in Hispaniola*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 13; Paulino, *Dividing Hispaniola,* 2.
[70] Paulino, *Dividing Hispaniola,* 1. February 27, 1844, marks the day of Independence for Dominicans from Haiti. Independence Day has been used to fuel anti-Haitian mythology and propaganda throughout the 20th and 21st century that center around the return or "invasion" of their former Haitian occupants. See Chapter 3 for further discussion of this topic.
[71] Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 13.
[72] Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 13; Turits, *A World Destroyed, A Nation Imposed,* 606.
[73] Ricourt. *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 11.
[74] Wright, "An Epidemic of Negrophobia," 22.
[75] Ricourt. *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 11.
[76] Ginetta E. B. Candelario, *Black Behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 14.
[77] Candelario, *Black Behind the Ears,* 13, 14.
[78] Candelario, *Black Behind the Ears,* 14, 259, 260; Milagros Ricourt. *Dominican Racial Imaginary*, 11.

[79] Derby, *The Dictator's Seduction,* 24.
[80] Derby, *The Dictator's Seduction,* 259.
[81] Wright, "An Epidemic of Negrophobia," 20.
[82] Lauren Derby, "Haitians, Magic, and Money: Raza and Society in the Haitian-Dominican Borderlands, 1900 to 1937," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 36, no. 3 (July 1, 1994), 490.
[83] Wright, "An Epidemic of Negrophobia," 30.
[84] Serrata, "Anti-Haitian Rhetoric," 270.
[85] Serrata, "Anti-Haitian Rhetoric," 266.
[86] Serrata, "Anti-Haitian Rhetoric," 266.

Memories of Violence and Culture

On May 30, 1961, Rafael Trujillo Molina, the current president, and dictator of the Dominican Republic, was assassinated. The elimination of Trujillo, which occurred while he was driving from the capital city to his hometown of San Cristobal, was a joint international plot crafted by the Kennedy administration, the C.I.A, disgruntled Dominican elites, and a handful of regime-insider defectors.[1] It took eight gunmen to complete the task. As he drove on a lonely stretch of highway, the hitmen created a blockade and fired into his car, killing Trujillo, and his accompanying driver in a hail of bullets.[2] But, the assassination of Trujillo was only one part of the plan. The perpetrators also intended to stage a coup. It was called off, in part, because the public could not believe that the larger-than-life dictator had been taken down so easily. In the collective imagination of many Dominicans, Trujillo was untouchable, immortal, and omniscient; he existed as a god-like figure.[3] If a coup had commenced without explicit proof of his death, it would have failed. Those involved would have faced severe punishment at the hands of those still loyal to the fallen dictator. And there were many.

We know, of course, that Trujillo was not an immortal being. And yet, in many ways, he did not die on that highway. Even sixty years after his death, he continues to exist vividly in the memories of Dominican citizens. Despite the government's prohibition of public commemorations of Trujillo and his thirty-year-long regime, his corrupt and prejudicial policies and authoritarian style of ruling continued through his protege, Joaquín Balaguer. Balaguer, who was the "titular head of the state" at the time of Trujillo's death, managed to evade fault for the crimes of the dictatorship and went on to serve off and on as president for more than twenty years, enforcing many of the same anti-Haitian and anti-Black policies of his predecessor.[4] The continuation of antihaitianismo and anti-blackness in the post-Trujillo era has had a great effect on the

development of black culture. It has made the reclaiming of a cultural space for Black Dominicans more difficult, in part, because of a lack of circulation of historical knowledge about the Black Dominican experience.

This chapter examines the important, yet often overlooked, intersection of culture and politics and its role in the contradictory nature of experiential blackness in the Dominican Republic. In the post-Trujillo era dominated by Balaguer, black-centred culture began to be recognized and celebrated on the island as exiles returned and foreign culture influenced the country. At the same time, Black Dominicans began reclaiming cultural and political spaces denied to them during the Trujillo regime. Yet, despite efforts to recuperate African-influenced cultural elements and history in the post-Trujillo era, anti-Haitian and anti-Black rhetoric continued. Following nationalistic agendas, officials denigrated blackness and employed state-sponsored cultural amnesia tactics to suppress the celebration of blackness and erase it from the collective memory of Dominican society. Official narratives of the Balaguer period sustained the collective memory crafted during the Trujillo era, by continuing to construct dominicanidad as an identity based on a Taino and Spanish past. The government's various attempts to denigrate and deny blackness continues to have a great effect on the collective memory of many of the interviewees who lived through this period (from about 1961 to 1996), thus influencing how they understand and express their identity.

While the Balaguer period resulted in an additional layer of trauma for many Dominicans, I am choosing to move away from an explicit discussion of trauma in experiential blackness to focus on self-perception. Self-perception in this context relates to how some Dominicans view and understand blackness, whether that be positive or negative. Focusing on self-perception in relation to experiential blackness allows for a deeper discussion of how the collective memory of the historical Black Dominican experience has affected how Dominicans currently understand their

racial and cultural identity as well as where blackness sits within dominicanidad. To do this I turn to two theories of memory: cultural and public memory.

Cultural and Public memory theories are similar in that they can be used together to break down our understandings of collective memory in the discussion of experiential blackness in the Dominican Republic. Both focus on how memories are analyzed and discussed collectively by a society or group. The work of Jan Assman is key here because to him cultural memory is collectively embedded and shared through cultural practices, objects, and icons. According to Assman, cultural and historical "texts, images, buildings, monuments, and landscapes all crystallize memory into stable formations that can be passed from one generation to the next."[5] These types of prejudicial cultural markers have been used historically to reinforce anti-blackness and anti-Haitianism in Dominican society. They enable negative impressions to reside in the collective memory of Dominican society and are transmitted by each generation to the next. Yet, cultural memory, in the context of Dominican experiential blackness, has also been used as a tool to create positive cultural symbols that challenge state forms of remembering and forgetting.

Understanding collective notions of blackness are further understood by applying the principles of public memory. Ana Liberato's work on Joaquín Balaguer draws from theorist Edward S. Casey to define public memory as a continuing "discussion and interchange of ideas, thoughts, opinions, and beliefs about a subject matter in the public."[6] "Discussion," as scholar Johann Michel notes, publicly problematizes or "troubles" memory and identity, leading to demands for change or recognition from official authorities.[7] The collective memory had been altered tremendously during the dictatorship. Trujillo sought to destroy cultural and public memory of blackness to craft his own narrative of the nation. Yet, memories that are embedded in culture and public discourse cannot be erased, only silenced for a time. In the period after Trujillo's death,

Dominicans throughout the nation began recovering these silenced memories by publicly debating culture, cultural practices, and memories that had been buried. This is a process that continues into the present. Black Dominicans now use cultural memory to challenge what is often is referred to as "official memory" (memory/myths recorded and supported by the State) and national identity production.

This chapter will focus on cultural and public aspects of collective memories that relate to blackness and the Black experience in both the past and the present. It also will explore how the erasure, silencing, and recovery of memory is uniquely tied to experiential Blackness in the Dominican Republic and how it specifically affects Black Dominicans' internal perceptions of their identity. The centering of the Black Dominican experience aids in reversing historical erasure and instead encourages people to consider their life experiences in relation to blackness rather than solely to whiteness.

I begin by focusing on how my participant-interviewees understood the ways by which Black Dominican cultural markers and icons have influenced past and present experiences of blackness. I have chosen three different symbols and expressions of cultural representation: group gatherings, music, and a key political figure. Specifically, I consider cultural clubs and activism occurring during the Balaguer period, merengue music, and the legacy of Jose Francisco Peña Gómez (1937 – 1998), one of the most memorable Black politicians and icons in Dominican history. By focusing on these three arenas, I explore how discussions surrounding the memory – or lack thereof – of these cultural markers have impacted Dominican collective memory and the way that blackness is understood and experienced on the island, both positively and negatively. I focus on aspects of Black Dominican history during the Balaguer era that have either been excluded or strategically included in the national state-sponsored historical record. Certain memories of Black Dominican

histories were prioritized in the official memory of Dominican society. In some cases that meant obfuscating blackness or African cultural elements, while in others, it meant emphasizing them. By focusing on the shaping of collective memory and dominicanidad in the post-Trujillo era, I argue that state narratives promoting anti-Haitianism and anti-blackness were not solely created and exercised by Trujillo. Rather, these cultural expressions of denial and discrimination continued and remain endemic, systemic, and impactful in Dominican society today.

Balaguer and Trujillo's Legacy

Trujillo's dramatic death sent shockwaves throughout Dominican society. Even today, the memory of the dictator and his rule are highly controversial. Michelle, an Afro-descendant artist, and activist from Santo Domingo, confirmed that Trujillo's ghost is very much alive throughout the island.[8] Many interviewees confirm that the former president and his policies continue to impact the nation's politics and the ways dominicanidad is expressed and understood. As we saw in Chapter One, contemporary Dominicans hold very contradictory memories of Trujillo. Many assert that he worked to break down class barriers and stabilize infrastructure growth and the economy. Luis, whom I met in Guachupita, a low-income and dangerous barrio in Santo Domingo, explained to me that people overlook Trujillo's having killed many people because he brought independence, stability, and strength to the island.[9] Jabid, another participant from Santo Domingo, had a different perspective. The memories shared with him by family elders involved a great deal of suffering, racism, and overall discrimination, and do not allow him to view the regime with any positivity.[10] Mitiko whom we met in Chapter One, explained that these conflicting realities make the memory of Trujillo extremely complicated to understand.

Mitiko says that his way of comprehending these contradictions is to view Trujillo as someone who had "a psychological disorder, a person who [was] traumatized by his own experience."[11] Trujillo, Mitiko explained, was extremely violent and gruesome, in part, because he struggled to understand his own identity as a *mulatto* (mixed race) of Haitian ancestry. For many Dominicans, but especially for those in power, blackness is both a flaw and a weakness; whiteness, on the other hand, is where power resides. Trujillo's African heritage led him to experience ongoing trauma and personal struggles, which he superimposed on the nation and which were absorbed into the identity politics of the social body. Such a legacy filled with contradictions — somewhat akin to a curse— is what all Dominicans, including himself, still experience. Even Mitiko, who is someone who actively and consciously works to understand his country's history and reads state-sponsored narratives critically, says he still struggles to understand who he is and what blackness means to his Dominican identity because of such an ambiguous legacy.[12]

Interestingly, the curse that Mitiko described is echoed by author, Junot Díaz, in his novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. The malevolent curse, known as the *Fukú*, is said to be passed down generationally and traces back to slavery. According to Diaz, Trujillo's god-like nature could control the Fukú, but upon his death it was once again released to wreak havoc on the population.[13] Politics professor and Latin American scholar, Ernesto Sagás disagrees. Sagás argues that persistent issues of identity, trauma, and the position of blackness within dominicanidad have less to do with curses and more to do with Trujillo's former ideologues and collaborators who continued to reinforce his anti-Black and anti-Haitian policies and practices after his death.[14] I argue that these collaborators, most notably Trujillo's former right hand and top intellectual advisor, Joaquín Balaguer, purposely avoided the public discussion of memory and recognition of state-violence as a way to continue the violent and racist practices of the dictatorship.

After Trujillo's death, Balaguer managed to remain president until the end of the year and was exiled at the beginning of 1962. During his last months in office, he had over two dozen conspirators in Trujillo's assassination plot arrested and executed.[15] In his autobiography, *Memorias de un cortesano de la "era de Trujillo"* (1989), Balaguer claims that after Trujillo's death he attempted to bring democracy to the Dominican Republic.[16] Despite the contestations of the military and the Trujillo family, he encouraged demonstrations of oppositional political groups and even attempted to convince the Trujillo family "to allow for the start of democracy on the island for the benefit of all citizens."[17] While he claims that it was radicals that forced him into exile, the reality is, he was unable to maintain power.[18] Once political expatriates returned to the island throughout the sixties, following Trujillo's death, there was a renewed desire to bring about true democracy, equality and liberation. To achieve this change, many from the Trujillo era, including Trujillo's family were forced to leave in November 1961, just a few months before Balaguer himself.[19]

Over the following five years the people of the Dominican Republic went through multiple political changes starting with the creation of an internationally mediated council of state and then its first democratically elected president, Juan Bosch (1909 – 2001), was sworn in on February 27, 1963. Bosch and his left-leaning party, *Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (*PRD, Dominican Revolutionary Party), which he formed while in exile in Cuba, was ousted by a U.S.-led coup only seven months later on 25 September due to Bosch's suspected communist views. In response to his removal and the political instability on the island a civil war ensued in April of 1965. The war lasted for almost five months, ending only because of a U.S. Military invasion. The tumultuous political period finally came to an end in 1966 with a return to an authoritarian regime led by Joaquín Balaguer.

Officially Joaquin Balaguer served six terms intermittently as president of the Dominican Republic, though he managed to maintain power and control over politics — even when not officially holding office— up until his death in 2002. His two presidential periods are most commonly referred to as *Los doce años* (The Twelve Years) which lasted from 1966 to 1978, and *Los años de regreso* (The Return Years) lasting from 1986 to 1996.[20] While Balaguer's administration was technically not a dictatorship, Dominicans refer to his rule as a "Neo-Trujillista" civil dictatorship or as "Trujilloism without Trujillo."[21] This is mainly due to Balaguer's implementation of similar anti-Haitian policies and his use of extreme state violence to control the population and suppress important conversations around memory, race, and culture. Balaguer's time in office had a great effect on the development of culture and understandings of blackness in the Dominican Republic.

Once Balaguer resumed power in 1966, he quickly aligned his administration with the same ideologies of the former dictator, reverting to Trujillo's "monolithic definition of a Dominican identity that was anti-Haitian, anticommunist, conservative, Catholic, white, and elitist."[22] Having been one of Trujillo's strongest intellectuals and apologists, Balaguer continued to promote a Hispanic Dominican past in his speeches and writing and placed blame on Haiti for the corruption and Africanization of the Dominican nation.[23] However, the global rise of the civil rights and Black Power movements in the sixties and seventies had an impact on Dominican society. Overt expressions of anti-blackness had to be suppressed and antihaitianismo, as it was known throughout the Trujillo era, had to be transformed. Ernesto Sagás refers to this post-Trujillo anti-Haitianism as "neo-antihaitianismo." It performed in the same way as antihatianismo but had stronger nationalist and cultural overtones, thus concealing the racist aspects of the ideology.[24]

Balaguer's 1984 best-seller *La isla al reves* (The Upside-Down Island), delves more deeply into "neo-antihatianismo."[25] Like his 1947 work, *La realidad Dominicana,* Balaguer considered it to be a misfortune that the Dominican Republic was situated geographically next to the backward nation of Haiti.[26] His text distorted the history of the island of Hispaniola, by claiming that the Dominican people were the underdogs that narrowly, but triumphantly, managed to survive and maintain their culture and civility under the oppressive thumb of the Haitian nation.[27] The main difference between the two books was that *La isla* emphasized cultural differences between the two sides of the island, including the widespread practice of vodou in Haiti. Balaguer made it known that "mixing" with Haitians would lead to the "de-nationalization" of the Dominican people, and the loss of their "Hispanic traditions" and customs.[28] Haiti, as it was widely recognized by 1984, was synonymous with the negative aspects of blackness. Although Balaguer's *La isla al reves* downplayed the use of explicitly racist language, it was easy to "read" the racist undertones in the text. This is a text that is now one of the most popular books in the Dominican Republic. It helped to reinforce the idea that blackness – read as Haitianness – did and does not belong in Dominican culture or identity.

To support his racist belief system, Balaguer exercised silences and state-sponsored forgetting through violence during his first presidential period, *Los doce años*. Instead of trying to bring about healing from the dictatorship and support the development of democratic institutions, as he claimed in his autobiography, Balaguer repeated the violent tactics of Trujillo to maintain power and control over the country. Since Balaguer did not have control over the military, he created a paramilitary force known as *La Banda Colorá* (The Crimson Gang) to carry out acts of violence and terror.[29] Between January and May of 1966, his first year in office, Balaguer had over

350 political activists killed.[30] During his first term, over 3000 Dominicans died. Balaguer brutally silenced the voice of dissidents to construct his version of dominicanidad and collective memory.[31]

Paradoxically, Balaguer is remembered in the collective memory of Dominicans, not as a violent leader but one who promoted stability and developed the infrastructure of the island. Balaguer, like Trujillo, recognized the importance of a solid National culture and encouraged the development of cultural spaces, but he did nothing to change the understanding of Dominican culture. He built locations like *Plaza de la Cultura* (Cultural Plaza) and *El Museo del Hombre Dominicano* (The Museum of the Dominican Man) in Santo Domingo: institutions that supported the promotion of a Hispanic-Taino past while relegating blackness and African ancestry to the background. Scholar Ginetta B. Candelario argues in her monograph, *Black Behind the Ears,* that El Museo del Hombre Dominicano narrates state-sponsored iterations of dominicanidad "as if it were part of a natural order of things rather than a contestable narration, one that is politically generated and ideologically coded."[32] These buildings, created by Balaguer, simply disguised anti-Haitian and anti-black ideology behind false symbols of progressiveness and culture.

Felix, a Black Dominican artist from Montellano who is affectionately known as "Tío Bobo," was in his teens during the Balaguer era. Having served in several student organizations and the *Movimiento Popular Dominicano* (The Dominican Popular Movement, MPD), a popular communist party throughout the sixties and seventies, he experienced firsthand the impact that the violence of the Balaguer regime had had on the erasure of culture and experiential blackness. To him, Balaguer did not attempt to change much during his presidential terms:

> I don't remember any difference or any interest on the part of the Balaguer government to develop culture. Balaguer and his government constructed buildings for education and culture but did not attempt to develop any system or methodology different from the culture that Trujillo left behind. Balaguer built buildings with empty classrooms.[33]

Felix clarified that the “empty” buildings were built for show, not substance. Balaguer pretended to support progressive understandings of black culture and identity on the island while not actually teaching or creating new knowledge. It was the youth, Felix said, who constantly called for change and revolution; “as youth we fought to commence the development of an advanced, liberal culture and we spent many sad moments together mourning when Balaguer would kill one of our own for our fight.”[34] It was these same youth who attempted to publicly discuss memory and keep the memory of the fallen alive. The publication of *El album de la muerte* (The Album of Death) in 1982 by an anti-Balaguer group, *Frente Nacional Antirregresionista Dominicano,* (Dominican National Antiregresionist Front, FRENADO) was one of the only public expressions that commemorated the victims of the violence of the Balaguer regime.[35] Outside of this community activist initiative, very little was done to memorialize the victims of either Balaguer’s or Trujillo’s regimes or to openly discuss the effects their authoritarian rules had on the development of culture and dominicanidad.

Yet, as Felix notes, despite the violence and silencing efforts, a political and cultural shift occurred. People began questioning the “official” Dominican narrative of Hispanidad, created by Trujillo and sustained by Balaguer.[36] With the return of many exiled Dominicans to the island and the resurgence of free speech and the free press, many people, despite state violence, continued to demand a more democratic society. They turned their focus to the way that art functioned and influenced the political climate.[37] These Dominicans sought to use culture to challenge “the elite hispanismo of the Balaguer administration” and its continued threat to erase culture and memory.[38] Within sectors of the left, academia, advocacy groups, and cultural organizations, there was a push to recover and celebrate African Dominican cultural components as a means to combat the Europeanization of Dominican national culture. This emphasis by community leaders and artists

brought about an increased popularity of African expressive culture and a display of African aesthetics in all areas of cultural practice and music.

Cultural Renaissance and Activism

Throughout contemporary Dominican history there has been little recognition of Black leaders. Dominican scholar, Silvio Torres-Saillant notes that Black historical actors are often excluded from both Dominican texts and teachings.[39] Consequentially, the histories of Black Dominican leaders remain in the shadows in classrooms and in the archives. One participant, Claudio, expressed that even today's generation tends to emphasize celebrities rather than historically significant Black figures.[40] Those figures who are mentioned tend to be whitewashed or minimized.[41] As we will see with the history of Afro-Dominicanistas of sports and cultural clubs of the sixties and seventies, and several other black Dominican leaders of this time, the government actively worked to hide the impact these historical actors had on their communities and on the nation. Throughout the sixties and seventies community leaders, musicians, and academics attempted to highlight many of the African cultural elements that had been repressed during the Trujillo dictatorship, while also using it to challenge the authoritarian and racist tenets of the Balaguer regime.

Throughout the Balaguer era, scholars and activists worked to correct much of the revisionist history that had come out of the Trujillo era. They began to search for African components in Dominican history and began to situate the island within the broader context of the African Diaspora and to have larger conversations related to global blackness.[42] In 1973, Dominican academics hosted the first "Symposium on the African Presence in the Antilles."[43] The late Spanish-Dominican scholar, Carlos Esteban Deive noted that this symposium was

groundbreaking because it not only connected the Dominican people to the larger Caribbean community but also challenged the common belief that the "Dominican Republic was a nation of pure Hispanic cultural characteristics."[44] Similarly, in the late 1970s, university professor, Narciso Gonzáles, encouraged Dominicans to celebrate October 12th, the date of Columbus' arrival to the Americas, as Dominican identity day.[45] Gonzales further encouraged the creation of the "October mulatto" or "October cimarrón."[46] Like Black History Month in North America, it was promoted as a time to celebrate and recognize Black Dominican history, identity, and narratives that differed from the official government-sponsored accounts of the origins of dominicanidad. Interestingly, in 1994, just days after openly calling out Joaquin Balaguer as a murderous and corrupt politician, Gonzáles "disappeared."[47] Twenty-seven years later, Gonzáles has still not been found.[48]

Throughout the Balaguer era, Dominican historians like Celsa Albert Batista and Franklin Franco continued to challenge the legacies of the dictatorship and the policies of Joaquin Balaguer by writing about the African influence in the Dominican Republic.[49] Their books challenged narratives surrounding racial and cultural production which allowed for more of an open dialogue about the history of slavery on the island.[50] Batista's work, in particular, contested many of the ever-present legacies of sexism and racism in the Dominican Republic by focusing on the female Black Dominican experience during slavery.

In the realm of activism, *Clubes culturales y deportivos* (cultural and sports clubs) served as the hub for grassroots initiatives. These clubs were neighbourhood communal associations created by activists, also known as *Afro-Dominicanistas* who wanted to improve the social conditions of poor and Black Dominicans by offering social services, communal space, and educational programs for youth.[51] These social clubs were often quite left-wing and encouraged the re-claiming of Afro-Dominican identity, which, at the time, was viewed as controversial and

subversive. The decision at that time to identify as Afro-Dominican was deliberately radical since racial discourse discouraged discussions of cultural and biological mixture.[52]

The leaders of the Afro-Dominicanista clubs created spaces that were both anti-Trujillo and anti-Balaguer. They were committed to remolding culture and identity away from state-sponsored Eurocentrism and attempted to do this primarily through education and art.[53] They taught classes and workshops on folk religions and created folk performance ensembles.[54] They also began to support and promote African representations of culture, like carnival, a celebration before the season of Lent, held in regions like San Cristóbal, Trujillo's hometown, and the southern city of Barahona.[55] These events had masqueraders portray historical characters like maroons to emphasize the power to resist African slavery on the island.[56]

While these clubs began as hubs for the teaching of Afro-Dominican history and culture, they quickly became safe spaces for left-leaning, anti-Balagueristas. Similarly, African cultural dances and music transformed into tools of political and cultural activism.[57] Inevitably, throughout *Los Doce Años,* the Balaguer government targeted anyone who did not enthusiastically support his model of dominicanidad. This resulted in the persecution of those individuals who frequented cultural clubs, as well as dissenters across the nation who dared to speak out against Balaguer's leadership. Those who chose to openly challenge Balaguer's policies were often forced back into exile, thrown into jail, or killed.[58] Felix, who was a communist, and very active in grassroots movements, explained that the Balaguer government, out of fear of progress, killed many activists who easily could have been the leaders of today.[59] Two of these important leaders who were arguably killed before the end of their fight were Florinda "Mamá Tingó" Muñoz (1921-1974) and Maximiliano "El Moreno" Gómez (1943-1971). Mamá Tingó was a peasant farmer and activist while El Moreno was a Marxist politician and leader of the MPD. Both leaders were

influential actors in their communities and focused their energies on movements that challenged the racist and oppressive ideologies of the Balaguer regime.

El Moreno, born Maximiliano Gómez in San Pedro de Macorís, was the young dark-skinned president of the MPD, a leftist political party created in exile in 1956 in Havana, Cuba.[60] Having been based in Cuba before returning to the Dominican Republic after the death of Raphael Trujillo, his party was heavily influenced by communism and Maoism and actively fought against fascism and U.S. imperialism.[61] Gómez joined the party in 1963 at the age of twenty and quickly rose to popularity, first becoming an active member and then president.[62] His popularity was due to his dedication to fighting against the authoritarian rule of Joaquín Balaguer, his "radical" ideologies, and his desire to bring about justice and equality for all Dominicans.

Gómez influenced discussions about blackness and liberation. He did not believe in state sponsored Hispanic dominicanidad that connected Dominicans to the whiteness of Spain. Instead, he identified the island with the Caribbean which he viewed as embodying blackness.[63] His writings and ideas were amongst the first in the era to be both anti- and post-Colonial as he actively fought for the Caribbeanization of Marxism as a way to bring about radical change to the island.[64] He believed that true liberation rested in establishing absolute economic, political, and cultural autonomy from foreign powers like the U.S. which included the active denunciation of Balaguer's government and its sustaining of Trujillo's legacy.[65] He used his essays to teach the masses about the falsities behind Trujillo era nationalism.[66] Due to his radical ideas, he was forced into exile and reportedly killed by the C.I.A. in 1971 at the age of twenty-eight. The direct influence of the United States on Dominican politics and the goal of eliminating communist activities, combined with Balaguer's desire to control dissidents, led to the silencing of El Moreno and the MPD in the historical record. Very few of my participants knew of El Moreno or his writing surrounding

liberation. The national archives have limited source material on him and the MPD. In effect, El Moreno is effectively non-existent in the visual and archival landscape of the island. While Mamá Tingó is a much more well-known and revered figure in the Dominican Republic, her story is equally tragic as she was killed before being able to see her efforts come to fruition. Both figures are different representations of the unnecessary violence and control of the Balaguer era and the powerful effects that silencing has had on the collective memory of blackness in the Dominican Republic.

Florinda Soriano Muñoz, known as Mamá Tingó, was a peasant farmer who lived in Villa Mella, a town located outside of Santo Domingo known for its large black population. Born in 1921, she lived through the Trujillo dictatorship and Los Doce Años of Joaquín Balaguer. Throughout her childhood, she and her siblings sold bags of carbon in the city to help support their family and from a young age, had always been referred to as "Tingó"[67] However, her life's purpose and the cause of her legendary status, came when she reached adulthood. Having worked as a farmer for her entire life, Muñoz's livelihood, like many others in her community, was dependant on owning land. In 1974, at the age of fifty-three, her land, along with the land of several other fellow peasant farmers in the township of Yamasá was seized illegally by the military.[68]

The story goes that at the beginning of 1974 the Balaguer government had been attempting to pay rural inhabitants the sum of one hundred pesos to leave their homes. When Mamá Tingó refused, she was illegally and forcibly removed from her home.[69] Throughout that year, Mamá Tingó worked tirelessly to mobilize the peasantry of Yamasá to fight for the return of their properties. Her activism was grounded in years of active resistance by farming communities against repressive and controlling regimes and Liberation Theology, which is centered around Catholic teachings on social justice, human rights and dignity, and the alleviation of poverty.[70] Her

protests focused on urging poor and displaced citizens to stand up for their rights. Her activism, however, was not tolerated by the state and she was arrested several times throughout 1974. In November of that year, she was assassinated, in many ways making her a martyr for her cause and another victim of Balaguer's neo-Trujillista regime.[71]

Felix explained that the deaths of Mamá Tingo, El Moreno, and thousands of other unnamed victims at the hands of the Balaguer administration, are the major reason why there is such a gap in the historical and institutional knowledge about them in the present. Their annihilation was both literal and figurative. Many people who lived through this violence remain guarded about their past. They are either afraid or unwilling to admit their beliefs or discuss former connections to what continue to be viewed as subversive and traitorous organizations.[72] While researching this topic, it was nearly impossible to find participants from this period who were willing to talk about their experiences. Felix tried to connect me to several of his former comrades to no avail. The Dominican Republic has not gone through any processes of Truth and Reconciliation nor has the government attempted to discuss trauma openly. What has occurred, instead, is the continuation of a culture based on secrecy and fear. Sadly, many Dominicans remain in the dark about El Moreno and others and are forced to search for this "subversive" history of black activism on their own. The purposeful suppression and fear of speaking out only reinforces the idea that blackness is not central to conceptions of identity or history in the Dominican Republic.

Very few of my participants knew about the Afro-Dominican movement that had occurred throughout the sixties and seventies. Those who did either belonged to a very educated left-leaning sector of society or were black identifying Dominicans who disclosed to me that they had to do their own research to discover a Black Dominican past. Alejandro, for example, a thirty-year-old

photographer from Santo Domingo, explained that coming to understand his black Dominican identity was a long process that involved him leaving the country and engaging with the Black Diaspora.[73] He says that it was only after discussing his global Black identity and engaging with black feminist and critical race theorists like bell hooks and Kimberlee Crenshaw, that he was able to find the language to describe his experience.[74] This discovery led to his desire to research and engage with his own identity as a Black Dominican. He and many other of my Black Dominican interviewees explained that an African or Black past is not something that is actively discussed in History or Social Science classes, but rather a topic that must be researched individually. Ernesto Sagás corroborates these claims by noting that schoolchildren in the Dominican Republic learn a national history full of "distortions, myths and prejudices."[75] Elementary school textbooks, he says, place a greater emphasis on Taino and Spanish influence, while scarcely teaching about the role of Blacks in Dominican society.[76] Such a narrowly-focused education forces generations of Black Dominicans into a constant cycle of independently relearning their history in an effort to discover and acknowledge the place of blackness in their history.

This paradoxical cycle of undoing erasures, reteaching, and relearning adds a unique layer of frustration and difficulty to experiential blackness in the Dominican Republic. Activists like the Afro-dominicanistas, Mamá Tingó, and El Moreno attempted in varying ways to uncover forgotten and repressed memories. Yet, ironically, in attempting to stop the violence of erasure they too became victims. The suppression of these missing pieces of cultural memory has created a disconnect between the past and the present, extending into all realms of identity and culture, including the realm of music.

Merengue

When I conducted my first round of interviews, I structured my questions into sections. The first section was always related to culture. I asked each person the same two questions: "What do you believe defines Dominican culture?" and "What parts of Dominican history, do you think have had the greatest effect on the development of current Dominican culture?" The answers would vary. Some would mention typical things like the beach or food, specifically *platanos (*plantain)*, la bandera* and *mangú*, while also referring to Dominican independence or the arrival of Columbus as being impactful historical moments.[77] However, without fail, merengue was almost always mentioned as a defining element of Dominican culture.

Being from Trinidad myself, where we have a culture that is very similar to the Dominican Republic, I thought it odd that many interviewees never mentioned the arrival of enslaved Africans as having a substantial impact on Dominican culture and society. To dig a little deeper, I would take the "cultural" question a bit further and ask each participant about the origins of specific cultural elements such as the island's gastronomy, carnival, and merengue. I was often met with puzzled looks, followed by a discerning glare, and then finally, a response that the food, the music, and many other aspects of culture were quite simply, Dominican. One participant, Dariam, a university student originally from Montellano, told me that mangú, carnival and merengue—specifically merengue típico, a very country style type of merengue— were unique to the Dominican Republic.[78] When I asked whether she believed that these cultural expressions were in any way tied to an African past and she said, "no." From what she had learned, very few aspects of Dominican culture were connected to Africa, because there had been very few enslaved Africans on the island.[79] According to Dariam, Dominican culture is far more rooted in Taino and Spanish influences.[80] When I addressed some similarities of mangú and merengue to my own family's island of Trinidad, which has a rich culture acknowledging its connection to the Trans-Atlantic

enslavement of African people, she disagreed, stating that while some aspects of Dominican culture may be similar to other islands, most are uniquely Dominican.

Dariam's (and many others') concept of "Dominican" cultural elements stems from the Trujillo and Balaguer era strategies to create a nationalist Dominican identity that is rooted in a Taino and Spanish past. As discussed in Chapter One, Trujillo designed a dominicanidad that negated blackness and an African past to create a national identity closer to the whiteness of Spain. He and his ideologues explained away blackness and African historical elements by attributing them to Haiti or simply claiming them as being of Taino origin, from Spanish European influence, or, as Dariam and several other participants identified, a uniquely Dominican creation. Balaguer worked to further bury these histories by continuing to silence the real historical connections between Africa and the Dominican Republic. He crystallized these revisionist histories into the cultural memory of the island without allowing any public meditation or contestation of these histories. While it is undeniable that Dominican culture and heritage are a hybrid fusion of Spaniards, Tainos, and African influences, official Dominican discourse argues that the origin of both race and culture are the sole result of Indio-Hispanic mixture, which consequentially erases all historical and present representations of blackness.[81]

A prime example of the erasure of blackness within cultural memory is merengue, a popular musical genre and dance that originated in the Dominican Republic but is known throughout Latin America. The Dominican musical genre, which is popular for its 2/4 beat and quick two-step, was essentially "white-washed" during the Trujillo era to fit Trujillo's image of a Hispanic dominicanidad.[82] When Trujillo named merengue as the national music of the country, he forced its acceptance onto both elite and common citizens alike. In order to fit it into the Hispanic nationalist identity that he was crafting he had the music stylized to strip it of its African

rhythms and insisted that it was Spanish in origin.[83] Trujillo went as far as outlawing Afro-Dominican music, drumming, religion and dancing to ensure the move away from an Afro-Dominican influenced identity and culture to a nationalist identity based in Hispanidad.[84]

Trujillo went as far as to pay composers like popular merengue artist, Luis Alberti, to create merengues with more melodic instrumentation by using big band ensembles with lyrical content that praised the dictator and his legacy.[85] In one of Alberti's songs, "San Cristóbal," on an album entitled *Los Merengues favoritos de Trujillo* (Trujillo's Favourite Merengues) you can hear the distinct differences in sound and lyrical content compared to that of modern merengues, which carry heavier bass notes and contain more secular content.[86] The music itself is very refined, as well as quite jazzy and light, and distinctly different from current-day merengue. The lyrics praise Trujillo, calling him both a "gran caudillo" (great caudillo) and "jefe de la nación" (leader of the nation).[87] Toward the end of the song Alberti repeats the ironically catchy refrain, "Trujillo Molina, Dios te bendiga, Trujillo Molina, nuestro presidente" (Trujillo Molina, God bless you, Trujillo Molina, our president).[88] This type of merengue characterized the thirty years of the dictatorship as copious amounts of songs were created solely in praise of the dictator. [89] The fact that Trujillo required the playing of his form of Merengue at local parties and elite salons throughout his presidency is one more example of how he exerted cultural control over the population.[90]

Dominican narratives on the origins of merengue mimicked the Trujillo-Balaguer nationalistic discourse by pointing to Spain as its place of origin and explicitly moving the dial away from Africa. The revered folklorist, Flerida Nolasco, argued in 1939 that, while there may have been some form of African influence in the development of culture and music on the island, it was the Spanish influence that managed to save the culture and music of Dominican society, especially after the island had experienced a Haitian occupation.[91] Musicologist Paul Austerlitz

has a different understanding. Merengue may be much more connected to Africa and the Dominican Republic's Haitian neighbours than many would like to admit. In neighbouring Haiti, merengue is a national symbol.[92] It evolved from a fusion of slave music and was possibly adopted in the Dominican Republic between the years of 1822 and 1844 during Haitian rule.[93] Not only did Dominican merengue most likely originate from a Haitian genre but also from the descendants of former African slaves. Prior to conducting this study, I did not know that the two countries shared the same musical tradition, and that merengue is the national symbol of both countries. But the link is *never* mentioned in the Dominican Republic. Given the history of the immense silencing that has gone on in the Dominican Republic this cultural omission is not surprising. Yet, we must wonder what kind of positive effect that the knowledge of this connection would have had on experiential blackness.

For a short time after Trujillo's death, connections between merengue and denied African influences began to be made. Black merengue singers played a role like that of social club Afro-Dominicanistas. They focused on creating music that discussed the changing social and political landscape of the island. They emphasized themes related to blackness and the resilience of the island's black population.[94] Popular black merengue artist, Johnny Ventura, who is often credited with the revival of merengue throughout the sixties and seventies, noted in an interview that immediately after the dictatorship ended, merengue continued to be identified with Trujillo's tyranny and not with the wave of liberty and progress that was sweeping through the island.[95] However, *merengueros* (merengue artists) worked hard to revive the genre to match changes occurring in the Dominican Republic. They did so by increasing the tempo of the music, incorporating Afro-Dominican folk music, and moving its performance out of the dancehalls of

the elite and into spaces that were accessible to the masses. They also returned it to the political art form it once was, prior to Trujillo, by refocusing lyrical content on political discourse.[96]

Ventura's album, *Figurando,* released in 1965 was a mix of merengue, salsa, mambo, and boogaloo. His merengue songs represented a stark contrast to the merengues produced during the Trujillo period. The songs reflected the happiness of the new era, with more up-tempo and exciting rhythms. The lyrics moved away from state-sponsored themes and discussed relatable and simple themes like sex, love, and rejection.[97] Other merengue artists like Cuco Valoy took on more political topics. In his 1975 song, "No Me Empujes" (Don't Push Me) Valoy sings about a Black foreigner or "gringo" who gets mistaken for a Black Dominican. In the song, the Black foreigner gets attacked and arrested by the police for suspicious behaviour and is forced to face the same unfair treatment and violence Black Dominicanos continually experience throughout the island.[98]

While important changes occurred in the post-Trujillo era, the same anti-Haitian and anti-Black doctrines also persisted. The rhythm of the music may have changed, but the knowledge of its African roots, as we can see in the responses of my participants, did not. One participant, Jabid, noted that African influence does exist in Dominican culture, but within a limited subculture, and it is only accessed by a few.[99] Connections to Haitian musical and cultural influences like vodou, he says, exist only on the margins of society.[100] Subversive cultural markers like vodou and African-influenced merengue are used to alienate and discriminate against Dominicans, who do not fit within the state-sponsored mold of dominicanidad as espoused by people like Jabid. That is because Joaquín Balaguer tactfully weaponized these "subversive" cultural and racial elements to alienate those who did not fit within the acceptable view of dominicanidad.

Like the histories of activists Mama Tingó and El Moreno, merengue has gone through a cycle of silencing of its origins to fit the genre into nationalist narratives of dominicanidad. By

erasing African aesthetics while continuing to encourage the nationalizing of the genre, merengue has become another cultural marker that can be used to control and inhibit the cultural and collective memories of Dominicans. In doing so, it can be used to justify anti-Haitianism, anti-Black racism, and myths that supports the denial of an African past and the separation of the Dominican Republic from the greater Caribbean. Merengue is just one example of the role erasure and state control can have in shaping important cultural memories and the defining of experiential blackness. As we turn to the discussion of José Francisco Peña Gómez, we will see how these crafted memories were weaponized to attack and alienate blackness in a political arena.

The 1994 Election

As one of the most popular political candidates in the history of the island, Jose Francisco Peña Gómez serves as a key symbol of blackness in the Dominican Republic. His eventual marginalization in public and cultural memory is also a reflection of the same exclusion faced by many Black Dominicans. Unlike the previous examples discussed in the chapter, his place within the collective memory of the Dominican Republic has not been erased or silenced, but instead ostracized and denigrated in a very public way. The memory of Gómez's struggle for power serves as a representation of the racism and xenophobia that has been intricately woven into the fabric of Dominican life.

When I discussed his legacy with participants, many recalled Peña Gómez's popularity and fame. Jairo, an athletics teacher from Montellano who grew up in the nineties, recalled that Peña Gómez was admired by many, and that people considered him to be, "*un gran conductor de las masas* (a great conductor of the masses)."[101] Jairo personally remembered Gómez as a revolutionary, "an intellectual, and diplomat full of great values."[102] In a like manner, Michelle

stated that "to the poor, he was considered a great leader."[103] In historical photos and videos of Gómez's rallies and speeches you often see him surrounded by thousands of supporters, suggesting that he was both loved and well-supported by the Dominican population. One photo taken in 1997 shows him being greeted by multitudes of people in Santo Domingo after returning from a trip to New York City.[104] In a video of a presidential rally in 1996, Jose Peña Gómez addressed a crowd of thousands packed into the streets of downtown Santiago de los Caballeros.[105] The crowd could be heard cheering as Gómez emphasized the changes he would bring about if elected president.[106] Participant Alejandro remarked that all the love that Peña Gómez received was because he was the "quintessential leader of the underdog." He was someone who had started from nothing yet who had almost assumed the highest office of the country.[107] However, as most participants noted, despite him being well-liked, and one of the most capable candidates in Dominican history, he was denied the presidency more than once because of antihaitianismo and anti-blackness sentiments fostered both by Trujillo's and Balaguer's regimes.[108]

While some consider Balaguer's third presidential stint, referred to as the Return Years (1986 – 1996), to be one that was more liberal and less brutal than his first two periods in office, I disagree. Balaguer simply adapted himself to the changing political climate. His authoritarian and anti-Haitian policies did not change but were simply handled in a more nuanced fashion. Now, rather than publicly and overtly using violence, he employed indirect attacks against his opponents. These attacks were reflective of cultural and racial biases that he and his predecessor Trujillo spent years embedding into Dominican society. Balaguer no longer had to explicitly use anti-Haitian or anti-Black rhetoric but only allude to specific tropes and ideas to evoke antihaitianismo, as well as xenophobic and racist thoughts amongst the population. The 1994 Dominican Presidential election serves as a great example of the use of implicit racism. It was one of the dirtiest in Dominican

history, primarily due to Balaguer's use of anti-Haitian and anti-Black racism to discredit top-running candidate, José Peña Gómez. These attacks, while aimed against one individual, José Peña Gómez, resulted in Black Dominicans of both the past and the present also being targeted. This is because Peña Gómez served as a representation of Black leadership, power, and individualism in the memories of Dominicans. The exclusion and discrimination he faced affected how Black Dominicans understand their place and role within Dominican society.

Peña Gómez was born on March 6, 1937, near the northern border town of Dajabon, to a Haitian mother and a Black Dominican father.[109] Only months after his birth his parents had to abandon him when they fled to Haiti during the massacre of 1937, a trauma that would later be used publicly as a weapon to block him from the presidency.[110] Despite the rocky start to his life, Gómez was adopted and worked hard to gain a sound education. He became a lawyer, completing his degree at the Sorbonne in France.[111] After finishing his education he returned to the Dominican Republic and began his career. He garnered popularity throughout the sixties working as a radio broadcaster who discussed politics. He specifically spoke out against the United States and their removal of the first democratically elected president and former leader of the PRD (Dominican Revolutionary Party), Juan Bosch in 1965. Gómez served as mayor of Santo Domingo for several years but ultimately went on to become the leader of the PRD, running for president for the first time in 1990.

During the 1990 election campaign, Gómez was repeatedly targeted for his blackness, mainly in the form of anti-Haitian rhetoric and by questioning his nationality. Nonetheless, it was not the main cause of his loss. The loss in 1990 was attributed mostly to a lack of unity in the party. During the following four-year presidential period, Gómez worked to rebuild the PRD, returning to the 1994 election both stronger and more popular than ever. In the days leading up to the

election, both top national newspapers on the island, *Listín Diario* and *El Nacional* predicted that Gómez would be the winner of the election. He led Balaguer in the polls by almost five points.[112] Despite facing off against Balaguer and Bosch, both at very advanced ages, Peña Gómez was still the candidate to beat and the main target of his opponents.[113]

Yet, at the same time, Peña Gómez experienced vicious racist diatribes. Personal defamatory attacks are generally common in Dominican politics, but Peña Gómez received more negative propaganda because of the deeply embedded anti-Black and anti-Haitian prejudice.[114] Peña Gómez essentially represented everything that the elite hated; he was a powerful, Black Dominican of Haitian descent, with a large following and command over the population who had a real chance of sitting in the highest office in the nation.[115] Simply said, Peña Gómez did not fit the mold. He had strong Black features and dark Black skin; he was not someone who could represent the most powerful families on the island. On the contrary: He was viewed as a threat to the power of the light-skinned Dominican elite. Thus, during the campaign, Joaquin Balaguer and his party, *Partido Reformista Social Cristiano* (PRSC, Social Christian Reformist Party) worked to destroy Peña Gómez by using anti-Haitian ideology and anti-Black racism as political weapons.[116]

Throughout the campaign, Gómez's Haitian ancestry was a main point of attack. His political enemies continually accused him of being Haitian, and thus a natural enemy of the state. They claimed he had a hidden agenda of reuniting the two halves of the island to enact revenge for the 1937 massacre.[117] This type of rhetoric was emblematic of Joaquín Balaguer and other right-wing nationalists. As discussed in Chapter One, the government has historically suppressed the memory of the 1937 massacre by sustaining a narrative that minimizes the number of deaths as well as the nation's role in the violence. Yet, when appropriate, negative associations with the

massacre were recalled by Balaguer to reinforce the idea that Haitians were the aggressors toward dominicanos and not the victims. Without directly naming Peña Gómez as an enemy, Balaguer used coded references in his speeches leading up to the election to impart fear and anti-Haitian sentiment amongst the population. Just a week before the election Balaguer addressed the nation stating that the results of the 1994 election were of extreme importance because it could determine whether the Dominican Republic would remain an independent nation.[118] The major threat Dominicans faced in the battle for their identity and nation was from Haitians: an enemy that Balaguer himself spent years writing and lecturing about. He insisted that it was the duty of all Dominicans to go out and vote, to make sure that "'the peace and tranquillity' that the country was experiencing" and their "dominicanidad" would remain intact.[119] This speech was a not-so-subtle dig at Peña Gómez and a nod to the numerous allegations against him about his supposed disloyalty to the nation.

Balaguer's camp also used Gómez's suspected Haitian identity to put his religious beliefs into question, and they accused him of believing in Vodou. Several weeks before the election, a videotape was released showing Gómez participating in what looked like a Vodou ceremony. In reality, it was a video recorded years earlier in 1983, during a healing ceremony with a Brazilian psychic.[120] The original recording was edited to add music and a voiceover to make it seem as though it was an authentic display of a Vodou service.[121] Gómez defended himself, releasing a statement "categorically denying his involvement in Satanic ritual." [122] Without naming anyone, he countered that his opponents had dug the video out of the archives as a last-ditch effort to discredit him. Because they could no longer keep up with the "movement of the masses," their only recourse was to shake the religious beliefs of the Dominican people.[123]

One of the final large campaigns against Gómez occurred in the week before the election. A suspicious flier, written in Kreole by a Haitian group in support of Peña Gómez was sent to fax machines across the island along with several political cartoons.[124] One of the most shocking ones had a caption that read: "this is what will happen to the Dominican population if the Haitian wins."[125] The image shows a picture of Peña Gómez with exaggerated African features dancing with a group of Haitian followers holding guns, while Dominicans, with white European features, are behind him tied up and gagged.[126] This image reinforces many stereotypes found in state-curated dominicanidad: specifically that Dominicans are innocent and white while the enemies of their nation are inhumane, violent, and Black. This type of propaganda, much like other attacks against Peña Gómez, used cultural memories and specific imagery to arouse fear amongst Dominicans of not just Peña Gómez but of blackness and the idea of a Black person in power.

On May 16, 1994, the Dominican Republic held their national elections. Balaguer claimed himself the winner even before the final count finished, with only 98% of the vote counted, when he led by only one percent, a slim margin.[127] Despite allegations of fraud from both the PRD and international audiences, Joaquin Balaguer was declared president for the seventh time in his life.[128] After the 1994 election Peña Gómez officially accused the Balaguer administration and the *Junta Central Electoral* (JCE, Central Electoral Board) of voter fraud.[129] Many of Gómez's supporters had been barred from voting and their names removed from voter lists.[130] Balaguer attempted to evade fault but eventually succumbed to international pressure. He agreed to a compromise known as *el pacto por la democracia* (the pact for democracy).[131] The pact allowed Balaguer to remain president for only half of his term, resulting in a special presidential election in 1996. The pact also required that in future elections candidates would have to receive fifty-one percent of the vote to win.

Gómez ran again in 1996, in an election that was just as racist and corrupt as the previous one. While Balaguer did not run, he threw his support behind Leonel Fernández of the *Partido de la Liberación Dominicana* (PLD, Dominican Liberation Party) given that his own party's candidate was not as popular. Despite coming close to winning in the first round of voting, Peña Gómez lost in the second round as members of the PRSC followed the lead of Balaguer and moved their support behind Fernandez. Sadly, soon after the election, Gómez was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, dying two years later in 1998.

While José Francisco Peña Gómez is remembered as being loved and appreciated by the masses, part of his position in the memory of Dominicans, specifically that of Black Dominicans, is one that is not wholly positive. For some, he exists in Dominican cultural memory as an important representation of anti-blackness and anti-Haitianism in present-day dominicanidad. His campaign is relevant to Dominican experiential blackness in the present because it serves as a reminder that blackness and Black people on the island are not wholly accepted or appreciated in Dominican Society. Some interviewees noted that Peña Gómez's political career in many ways served as a warning to Black Dominicans. It was as though the elite and the Dominican right-wing used Gómez to demonstrate how much political power they truly held and how little *could be* held by Black and poor Dominicans. Despite being popular, intelligent, and a gifted politician, the color of your skin is what qualifies you and defines your success in the Dominican Republic. The participant Mitiko explained that the memory of Peña Gómez is a "deep psychological process for Black Dominicans as a whole, because it tells them, no matter what you do, you're not going to succeed, [and] they won't ever let you in."[132] Mitiko's astute observation speaks to the larger discussion surrounding the constant struggle Black Dominicans face in mediating public and collective memories in the Dominican Republic. Public memories like that of Peña Gómez register

as cultural markers, like the 1937 Massacre, that can be evoked to inflict pain and trauma against Black Dominicans. These cultural associations can be contradictory and confusing, a fact that is present in almost all aspects of Dominican society and culture, as they can hold both positive and negative meaning in dominicanidad depending on one's position.

Public memories exhibited in statues, murals, and street names are ways by which the Dominican state promotes historical memory and commemoration of important historical figures. Yet, positive representations of Gómez through varying mediums are not abundant throughout the island. The most notable forms of commemoration of Gómez are a Metro stop named in his honour and the Las Americas international airport in Santo Domingo, which was officially changed in 2002 to Las Américas International Airport - Dr. José Francisco Peña Gómez. Even still, it continues to be referred to both locally and internationally by its original name, essentially erasing Gómez from his own site of commemoration. Photographer Alejandro, says that Peña Gómez, as well as many other Black historical figures, are some of the least represented figures in commemorative forms of art. Gómez's image, he says, is often distorted by highlighting and exaggerating his facial features to reflect Black stereotypes of large lips and broad noses. In a society like the Dominican Republic that is centered around Hispanidad and European standards of beauty, Gómez's portrayal has negative associations. Alejandro said, "it's almost like a joke, where they paint him in a very unflattering way, and the thing is, he was a very handsome man."[133] Those physical choices speak volumes about the feelings of the Dominican state towards certain representations of powerful historical figures, revealing that they turn to more palatable white leaders to demonstrate what should be deemed as aspirational representations of dominicanidad.[134]

Trujillo's legacy of anti-blackness and antihaitianismo did not die with him. While Black Dominican historical actors have clearly had a great impact on the development of the Dominican

nation, their position in the collective and cultural memory of the island ranges from non-existent to an inaccurate example of their lives. The current memory that exists is one that is controlled and carefully curated to promote a national identity that exalts a dominicanidad based on whiteness. This concept is ingrained in society, and every generation experience cultural memories that are interwoven with anti-Black and anti-Haitian prejudices. For Black Dominicans, this means the constant reteaching of histories adjacent to state narratives and the constant relearning of where their blackness fits within dominicanidad. They are forced to balance the numerous contradictions present within their society that encourage the recognition of *some* aspects of blackness while fiercely discouraging others. As a result, many Black Dominicans are forced into a constant struggle of acceptance and rejection of their identity, placing them at risk of repeating the erasure of blackness that is seen in each generation.

However, as we shall see in the next chapter, the current generation is attempting to find ways to finally break away from this ongoing cycle of repeating a traumatic Black Dominican experience. Digital communication has enhanced the uncovering of truths, spreading of knowledge, and re-crystallization of memory. What is considered public and even cultural memory is rapidly changing, as it is moving from airports and statues to Instagram posts and sixty-second videos on Tik Tok. These youth are working to create and promote knowledge of the experience of blackness within dominicanidad and to rescue the histories of Black Dominicans. The next chapter will take a deeper look into how the internet and the global community are using experiential blackness to disrupt traditional ways of knowing in the Dominican Republic. Black Dominican activists are currently encouraging more critical thinking amongst Dominican society in order to break the cycle of revisionist histories and state-sponsored forgetting.

[1] Lauren Derby, *The Dictator's Seduction: Politics and the Popular Imagination in the Era of Trujillo,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 204.
[2] Eric Paul Roorda, Lauren H. Derby, and González Raymundo, *The Dominican Republic Reader: History, Culture, Politics,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 325; Paul Austerlitz, *Merengue: Dominican Music and Dominican Identity*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1997), 76.
[3] Derby, *The Dictator's Seduction,* 207.
[4] Since 1962, Dominican Law 5880 has prohibited public praise of Trujillo's "tyrannical and anti-democratic" regime. Lisa Blackmore, "Collective Memory and Research-Led Filmmaking: Spatial Legacies of Dictatorship in the Dominican Republic," *Popular Communication* 16, no. 2 (April 3, 2018), 52.
[5] Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995), 132; Blackmore, "Collective Memory," 90.
[6] Ana S. Q. Liberato, *Joaquín Balaguer, Memory, and Diaspora: The Lasting Political Legacies of an American Protégé*, (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2013), 5; Edward S. Casey, "Public Memory in Place and Time," in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2009), 30.
[7] Johann Michel, "A Study of the Collective Memory and Public Memory of Slavery in France," *African Studies* 75, no. 3 (2016), 396.
[8] Michelle Ricardo, Interview by author, Online, November 26, 2020.
[9] Luis Estrella, Interview by author, Santo Domingo, April 28, 2019.
[10] Jabid Salcedo, Interview by author, Santo Domingo, April 25, 2019.
[11] Mitiko Mawon, Interview by author, Online, November 26, 2020.
[12] Mitiko Mawon, Interview by author, Online, November 26, 2020.
[13] Junot Diaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao,* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2007), 2-5.
[14] Ernesto Sagás, *Race and Politics in the Dominican Republic,* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 69, 70.
[15] Austerlitz, *Merengue,* 76.
[16] Joaquín Balaguer, *Memorias de un cortesano de la "era de Trujillo,"* 2nd ed. (Santo Domingo: Corripio, 1988), 168.
[17] Balaguer, *Memorias de un cortesano,* 151,152.
[18] Austerlitz, *Merengue,* 84; Balaguer, *Memorias de un cortesano,* 168.
[19] Austerlitz, *Merengue,* 75.
[20] Liberato, *Joaquín Balaguer,* 1.
[21] Austerlitz, *Merengue,* 91; Angelina Tallaj-Garcia, "Performing Blackness in a Mulatto Society: Negotiating Racial Identity through Music in the Dominican Republic," (PhD Diss., The City University of New York, 2015), 149.
[22] Tallaj-Garcia, "Performing Blackness," 30, 31.
[23] Tallaj-Garcia, "Performing Blackness," 62.
[24] Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 70.
[25] The 1984 book was essentially an updated version of his 1947, *La realidad dominicana.* Whole sections of the original text appeared in the 1984 book, Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 70, 72.
[26] Joaquín Balaguer, *La isla al revés: Haití y el destino dominicano*, (Santo Domingo, República Dominicana: Fundación Joaquín Balaguer, 1987), 63; Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 70.
[27] Balaguer, *La isla,* 63; Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 70.
[28] Balaguer, *La isla, 45.*
[29] Julie A. Sellers, *Merengue and Dominican Identity: Music as a National Unifier*, (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2004), 119.
[30] Tallaj-Garcia, "Performing Blackness," 149.
[31] Austerlitz, *Merengue,* 91; Sellers, *Merengue,*119.
[32] Ginetta E. B. Candelario, *Black Behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 84.
[33] Felix Ciriaco Green, Interview by author, January 27, 2021.
[34] Felix Ciriaco Green, Interview by author, January 27, 2021.
[35] The album consist of photos and accounts of people tortured and murdered during the 12 years of the Balaguer government. Frente Nacional Antirregresionista Dominicano, *Álbum de la muerte de los 12 años balagueristas*, (Santo Domingo: Frente Nacional Antirregresionista Dominicano, FRENADO, 1982.); Liberato, *Joaquín Balaguer,* 10.

[36] Ricourt. *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 143.
[37] Tallaj-Garcia, "Performing Blackness," 150.
[38] Tallaj-Garcia, "Performing Blackness," 150.
[39] Silvio Torres-Saillant, "The Tribulations of Blackness: Stages in Dominican Racial Identity," *Callaloo* 23, no. 3 (July 1, 2000), 1095.
[40] Claudio Troisemme, Interview by author, Online, January 20, 2021.
[41] Claudio Troisemme, Interview by author, Online, January 20, 2021. He specifically mentioned the Dominican poet, Salomé Ureña de Henríquez who appears on the 500 peso bill. He along with participant Michelle showed me several pictures to demonstrate how she has been slowly but carefully whitewashed over the years. They explained that she plays an important part in national Dominican history and having her pictured as a Black woman does not fit into national understandings of dominicanidad.
[42] Kimberly Eison Simmons, "Constructing and Promoting African Diaspora Identity in the Dominican Republic: The Emergence of the Casa de la Identidad de las Mujeres Afro," *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 5, no. 1 (December 13, 2011), 123; Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 7, 8.
[43] Carlos Andújar Persinal, *The African Presence in Santo Domingo*, (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012), xi.
[44] Carlos Andújar Persinal, *The African Presence*, xi.
[45] Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary* 145.
[46] *Cimarrón* is a term, like maroon, which was used to describe a runaway during slavery. Naming the month "October cimarron" was an act of acknowledging an African slave past in the Dominican Republic, as well as Dominicans being, in part, descendants of cimarrones (maroons).
[47] Hoy, "¿Quién Fue Narciso González? Un Poco De Memoria Histórica Para Los Más Jóvenes," *Hoy Digital*, May 25, 2012, https://hoy.com.do/quien-fue-narciso-gonzalez-un-poco-de-memoria-historica-para-los-mas-jovenes/.
[48] Fernando Molina, "La Esposa Narciso González Mantiene Esperanzas De Que Se Resuelva Su Caso," *Listín Diario*, October 29, 2020, https://listindiario.com/la-republica/2020/10/29/641634/la-esposa-narciso-gonzalez-mantiene-esperanzas-de-que-se-resuelva-su-caso.
[49] Celsa Albert Batista, *Los africanos y nuestra isla*, 2nd ed, (Santo Domingo: CEDEE, 1987); Celsa Albert Batista, *Mujer y esclavitud en Santo Domingo* (Santo Domingo: Ed. CEDEE, 1990); Franklin J. Franco, *Los negros, los mulatos y la Nación Dominicana* (Santo Domingo: Ed. Nacional, 1984); Franklin J. Franco, *Trujillismo, génesis y rehabilitación* (Santo Domingo: Editora Nacional, 1971).
[50] Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 8.
[51] Tallaj-Garcia, "Performing Blackness," 154, 155.
[52] Simmons, "Constructing and Promoting," 123.
[53] Tallaj-Garcia, "Performing Blackness," 156.
[54] Tallaj-Garcia, "Performing Blackness," 155.
[55] Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 145.
[56] Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 145.
[57] Tallaj-Garcia, "Performing Blackness," 150.
[58] Tallaj-Garcia, "Performing Blackness," 150, 155.
[59] Felix Ciriaco Green, Interview by author, January 27, 2021.
[60] Movimiento Popular Dominicano. *Biografía de Maximiliano Gómez Horacio (El Moreno),* (Santo Domingo: Movimiento Popular Dominicano, 1999), 3.
[61] Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 143.
[62] Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 144.
[63] Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 144.
[64] Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 144.
[65] Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 144.
[66] Maximiliano Gómez, *Los escritos de Maximiliano Gómez*, (2nd ed. Santo Domingo: Publicaciones Fuego, 1988), 38
[67] Juan Guaroa Ubiñas Renville, *Mamá Tingó,* (Santo Domingo, República Dominicana: Editorial Letra Gráfica, 2001), 3.
[68] Yamasá is a rural farming area located in the Monte Plata province of the Dominican Republic, just about an hour away from Mamá Tingó's birthplace, Villa Mella. Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary*, 4.
[69] Renville, *Mamá Tingó,* 6.
[70] Dianne Rocheleau, "Cultures of Peace: Women in the Rural Federation of Zambrana-Chacuey," *Development* 48, no. 3 (2005), 94, 99.

[71] Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 4; Rocheleau, "Cultures of Peace," 94.
[72] Felix Ciriaco Green, Interview by author, January 27, 2021.
[73] Alejandro Pé, Interview by author, Santo Domingo, April 14, 2019.
[74] Alejandro Pé, Interview by author, Santo Domingo, April 14, 2019.
[75] Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 79.
[76] Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 79.
[77] La Bandera is the Dominican national dish made up of rice, some form of meat, and stewed beans. Mangú is another traditional dish of mashed plantains, usually served with what is called "los tres golpes" or the three hits which consist of fried salami, fried cheese, and a fried egg. The dish is usually garnished with vinegar-soaked onions.
[78] Dariam Ciriaco, Interview by author, Montellano, May 10, 2019.
[79] Dariam Ciriaco, Interview by author, Montellano, May 10, 2019.
[80] Dariam Ciriaco, Interview by author, Montellano, May 10, 2019.
[81] Milagros Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary: Surveying the Landscape of Race and Nation in Hispaniola*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 46.
[82] Mitiko Mawon, Interview by author, Online, November 26, 2020.
[83] Roorda, Derby, and Raymundo, *The Dominican Republic Reader,* 435; Sellers, *Merengue*, 93; Tallaj-Garcia, "Performing Blackness," 111, 168.
[84] Law 391, 1943. Tallaj-Garcia, "Performing Blackness," 168.
[85] Tallaj-Garcia, "Performing Blackness," 111,168; *The Dominican Republic Reader: History, Culture, Politics,* ed. Eric Paul Roorda, Lauren H. Derby, and González Raymundo (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 435. Austerlitz, *Merengue,* 60
[86] Luis Alberti, "San Cristobal," n.d. track 6 on *Los merengues favoritos de Trujillo,* MSM Agency, 1988, Online.
[87] Luis Alberti, "San Cristobal," 1988.
[88] Luis Alberti, "San Cristobal," 1988.
[89] Luis Riviera Gonzales, *Antología musical de la era de Trujillo, 1930-1960; cien merengues,* (Santo Domingo: Publicaciones de la Secretaría de Estado de Educación y Bellas Artes, 1961). A songbook with over one hundred popular merengues dedicated to Trujillo. This music would have been played at parties, official events, and in clubs.
[90] Austerlitz, *Merengue*, 54, 55.
[91] Flerida de Nolasco, *La música en Santo Domingo y otros ensayos*, (Ciudad Trujillo: Montalvo, 1939), 17-19.
[92] Austerlitz, *Merengue,* 15.
[93] Austerlitz, *Merengue,* 15.
[94] Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 146.
[95] Johnny Ventura, "The People Call All of It Merengue," in *The Dominican Republic Reader: History, Culture, Politics,* ed. Eric Paul Roorda, Lauren H. Derby, and González Raymundo, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 437, 438.
[96] Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 146.
[97] Johnny Ventura, "La Justicia," track 3 on *Figurando,* Remo Records, 1965, Online.
[98] Cuco Valoy, "No Me Empujes," track 8 on *Merengue Clasicos*, 2009, Online; Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary*, 146.
[99] Jabid Salcedo, Interview by author, Santo Domingo, April 25, 2019.
[100] Jabid Salcedo, Interview by author, Santo Domingo, April 25, 2019.
[101] Jairo Hernandez, Interview by author, Online, February 6, 2021.
[102] Jairo Hernandez, Interview by author, Online, February 6, 2021.
[103] Michelle Ricardo, Interview by author, Online, November 26, 2020.
[104] Image in Fulgencio Espinal, *Imágenes De José Francisco,* (Santo Domingo, República Dominicana: Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo, 2003), 18.
[105] "Peña Gómez en el mitin más grande de Santiago | 05/05/1996," Historia RD, March 6, 2020, *Youtube*, 51:26, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wj5BKv0gb-A
[106] "Peña Gómez en el Mitin más grande de Santiago | 05/05/1996."
[107] Alejandro Pé, Interview by author, Online, November 27, 2020.
[108] Mitiko, Alejandro, Jairo, Michelle, and many others speaking online and in my interviews note that it was due to Peña Gómez's race and Black features that he lost the election.
[109] Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 143.
[110] Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 143.
[111] Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 143; Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 106.

[112] "Pronostico Electoral," *Listín Diario*, May 14, 1994, 5; *El Nacional,* May 13, 1994, 8.
[113] Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 106.
[114] Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 106.
[115] Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary,* 147; Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 107.
[116] Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 105.
[117] Sagás, *Race and Politics,*107, 108.
[118] "Balaguer alega presionan fusión RD con Haiti," *El Nacional,* May, 8, 1994, 5.
[119] "Balaguer alega presionan fusión RD con Haiti," *El Nacional,* May, 8, 1994, 5.
[120] Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 107.
[121] Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 108.
[122] "Peña niega fuera 'Satánico' hecho aparece en videotape," *Listín Diario* May 2, 1994, Política 4.
[123] "Peña niega fuera 'Satánico' hecho aparece en videotape," *Listín Diario* May 2, 1994, Política 4.
[124] Sagás, *Race and Politics,*108.
[125] Image in Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 138. This image is from the personal collection of Ernesto Sagas, he explains in the caption that it was gifted to him. While I attempted to find it in the archive, I, nor the archivist, was able to locate the image.
[126] Image in Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 138.
[127] Howard W. French "Dominican Tension Rises as Charges of Rigged Voting Mount," *The New York Times,* May 19, 1994, A5.
[128] "Mr. Balaguer's Dubious Victory," *The New York Times*, May 20, 1994, A26; Sagás, *Race and Politics,* 8,10.
[129] "Pena acusa amigos JB del fruade," *El Nacional*, May 18, 1994, 6; Ricourt, *Dominican Racial Imaginary*,148.
[130] "Dominican Republic Stops Releasing Tally," *The New York Times,* May 20, 1994, A2.
[131] Roorda, Derby, and Raymundo, eds., *The Dominican Republic Reader,* 370.
[132] Mitiko Mawon, Interview by author, Online, November 26, 2020.
[133] Alejandro Pé, Interview by author, Online, November 27, 2020.
[134] Alejandro Pé, Interview by author, Online, November 27, 2020.

Black Dominican Activism in a Digital Age

On June 8, 2020, the famous, outspoken Dominican American rapper, Cardi B, made a post on her Instagram account that caused controversy and provoked debate in Dominican communities both on and offline. The contentious post was a photo of a protest, in which two individuals were seen holding both the Dominican and Haitian flags tied together in a show of unity. A sign in the background read: "Las Vidas Negras Importan" (Black Lives Matter).[1] The caption accompanying the photo said: "UNITY is what I stand for and it's what I'm about."[2] Her position affirming the unity between the two halves of Hispaniola was met with immense backlash from Dominican media sources and ordinary Dominican citizens. Many of the comments underneath Cardi B's original post were both anti-Haitian and anti-Black. Users argued that she was advocating for the reunification of Haiti and the Dominican Republic and accused her of being ignorant of the historically contentious relationship between the two nations. Most of the critics cited a historical argument present in Dominican collective memory and scholarship that upholds the idea that when Haiti occupied the Dominican Republic and unified Hispaniola from 1821 to 1844, they enslaved and killed Dominicans: an historical argument that has been debunked by many scholars, most prominently by Anne Eller.[3]

Days later Cardi B posted a live video on Instagram to deliver a message to the Dominican community.[4] In Spanish, the rapper implored Dominican viewers to think critically about why her message of peace triggered responses of hate, racism, and even anti-Haitian sentiments amongst the Dominican people.[5] She posed questions that encouraged critical thinking about blackness, race, collective memory, and power in the Dominican Republic. Her first question asked viewers to consider why Dominicans are not only unwilling to work collaboratively with Haiti but are also unable to view and treat Haitians with respect. While the Dominican Republic and Haiti are two

different countries, they share one island, and therefore should be working together to sustain both nations. She noted that Dominicans often ignore the vital role that Haitians' bodies play in building the infrastructure of the Dominican Republic.[6] The second question focused on the tendency of Dominicans to vilify Haitians while glorifying Spaniards, thus ignoring the history of colonization that is often solely attributed to Haiti. In their recounting of the history of the Dominican Republic, Dominicans have a selective memory, fueled by anti-Black racism. Consider the violent history of Spanish colonialism, Cardi B, remonstrated, and why Dominicans seem to ignore *that* brutal and enduring past. Why is the same hatred that is regularly directed toward Haiti and Haitians not extended toward Spain and Spaniards?

Cardi B has over 86.9 million followers on her Instagram account. Her original post of the protest garnered over 1.7 million likes, her live video had more than 70 thousand viewers, and it has been shared and posted on several different platforms, pushing discussions of Dominican experiential blackness, collective memory, and anti-Haitianism beyond her personal page to other social media platforms, news sources, and even offline. While Cardi B's celebrity status aided in the tremendous reach of her post, the effectiveness of the hard-hitting message also serves as an example of the way social media is being used to have unfiltered discussions that confront state sponsored collective memory and revisionist histories that have long produced negative and positive expressions of experiential blackness and collective memory in the Dominican Republic. Further, Cardi B's Instagram post also demonstrates the ways that social media sites are creating spaces that allow people who are not considered "experts" or academics to question and debate memory and history in an uncensored way.

In recent years Black Dominican activists have taken advantage of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as virtual spaces to develop and discuss experiential blackness

in the Dominican Republic. Recall that experiential blackness, as a method, focuses on the (re)centering and critical analysis of blackness in relation to both personal and collective understandings of race, identity, memory, and history. By employing experiential blackness as a method, these activists create counter memories that disrupt state sponsored narratives of the past that have long silenced Black voices, culture, and history, and instead encourage a dominicanidad based on whiteness, antihaitianismo, and antiblackness. These activists use these platforms to disseminate new knowledge and forgotten histories that then become crystalized, or archived, in the online universe, and are available to be shared, recounted, and debated again and again.

This chapter will examine the ways social media is being used to mediate, (re)configure, and contest the position blackness holds within dominicanidad and Dominican collective memory. Recent scholarship on social media and memory demonstrates that the "bottom up, peer to peer, and horizontal communication enabled by low-end, easy to-use, and networked communication technologies" allow for the creation of counter memories and provide opportunities for regular citizens to "scrutinize and interrogate" historical information and collective memory in ways not previously available.[7] This ability, afforded through social media, allows for blackness to be experienced in news ways, most importantly through the unmitigated sharing of memories, histories, and experiences. Unlike the past, where mass media and state violence were able to control national narratives and suppress dissenting voices, online discussions and open forums now promote positive expressions of blackness more freely. These discussions compel individuals to consider their experiences with and in relation to blackness more deeply and to confront how internalized and externalized experiences affect collective understandings of blackness in history, memory and dominicanidad.

At present, few scholars have focused specifically on the relationship between memory and social media.[8] However, as the COVID-19 pandemic over the past year has demonstrated, social media technologies are becoming increasingly important to the ways people analyze, negotiate, and archive not only current events but also events of the past.[9] Current studies on social media and memory tend to look toward specific online events to demonstrate their impact on collective memory rather than looking at how memory is being continuously contested through social media platforms.[10] My goal is to analyze how social media apps are being used as daily platforms to debate collective memory and to create an online archive, often, but not always, in direct opposition to state sponsored narratives. Essentially, I am looking at the way experiential blackness, when centered in discussions, can disrupt not only memory but also the historical production of knowledge and what is stored and remembered.

Chapter One explored the post-traumatic effects that anti-Black and anti-Haitian violence of the Trujillo era has had on subsequent generations. As I showed, contemporary expressions of blackness and Black identity in the Dominican Republic are connected to a tumultuous historical past that has pushed blackness outside of the framing of dominicanidad. Experiencing blackness in the form of postmemory often comes with feelings of pain, fear, and an innate sense of violation even if it was not experienced firsthand; it carries on from one generation to the next. Chapter Two discussed state-sponsored efforts to denigrate blackness by employing state sponsored amnesia tactics to suppress overt expressions celebrating blackness in culture and in history. Despite efforts to control the cultural memory of how blackness was to be experienced and known in the press and in the archive, cultural figures showed how Blackness was positively integral to definitions of dominicanidad. Despite suppression, blackness is embedded in Dominican culture and is integral

to individual and historical understandings of the power and beauty of blackness in the body, in history, and in commemorative public displays and events.

Chapter 3 follows the arguments developed in previous chapters by considering changes in debates over blackness, history, collective memory and how it is currently being experienced in online public forums. It considers how expressions of blackness on social media serves as a disruptor or disruption to normalized and deeply embedded patterns and practices. Social media is allowing for the dismantling of power, held by the State and Dominican elites, who continue to endorse whiteness and Hispanidad as central to Dominican identity and history. In turn, social media is allowing blackness to be (re)centered in conversations surrounding identity, power, culture, and the past in new ways, thus interrupting individual and collective traditional understandings of history, memory, and blackness. It provides a space where blackness can be experienced and reconfigured as an integral component of the past and the present both on and offline, thus affecting the ways by which blackness can be internally and externally expressed.

Internet posts and discussions on blackness in Dominican history conform to what philosopher, Michel Foucault called countermemory, or expressions of engaging with the past that are "related to and in opposition of a memory that attracts veneration, identification, and absolute truth claims."[11] Social media postings by Black Dominican activists are expressions of countermemory because they directly oppose state influenced Dominican collective memories, which have been held as the absolute truth for generations. They unsettle collective, authoritative memories by "creating discontinuity between the past remembered and the present of remembering."[12] They question the very process of remembrance itself.[13] I argue that countermemory methods focus on blackness in positive ways to dismantle prevalent mythologies. These postings also bring to light the forgotten and silenced past to disrupt unquestioned

understandings of truth and power. Countermemory methods also ask audiences to examine the assumptions they hold about blackness, Haitians and to question how they learned to internalize these beliefs. They ask audiences to *experience* blackness in new ways, despite the prevalence of long-standing dominant racist and discriminatory patterns and understandings of history and dominicanidad that have long held sway.

I begin the chapter by considering accounts and postings on the social media platform Instagram, which includes a mix of organizational group pages and participating individuals who range in political affiliation from left leaning to ultra-right nationalism. It is important to examine both sides to show how debates and understandings of experiential blackness in Dominican online communities influence one another. To protect the identities of users, I only refer to people and groups by their displayed usernames and only analyze and reference public pages that are centred around teaching or reaching large audiences.

Next, I focus on two issues and events which have had a great impact on the ways people understand blackness as either integral to or separate from Dominican history. The first online discussion relates to "La Sentencia," a ruling made by the Dominican Supreme court in 2013 that rendered thousands of Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent in the Dominican Republic stateless. This ruling has led to further ostracization and violence against Haitians and their Black Dominican offspring. Further, La Sentencia serves as another example of the continued denial of a socio-economic and politic space for Black bodies in the Dominican Republic. Recent online discussions attempt to use counter memories to expose how those with power have continuously worked to sustain the history and memory of contention between the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

The second topic, which I consider to be more of an online event, discusses responses to the history of independence in the Dominican Republic and the commemorative landscape of that event. Dominican Independence is uniquely tied to historical state narratives and mythology that turns Haiti into a historical enemy of the state and downplays the historical Black experience. This narrative has fueled much of the propaganda and mythology discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. This past February, on Dominican Independence Day, two accounts, r29somos and inculturedco, made a post on what Dominican independence means to Black Dominicans and attempted to write blackness back into the story of this national holiday. The post went viral, and responses were mixed and for the most part very combative, not unlike the responses to Cardi B's postings. A focus on these topics helps to demonstrate what can occur when Blackness is at the center of discussions and debates, and how online "experiences" occurring through open discussions and interrogation disturb and disrupt the archive, history, and memory.

(Re)framing Blackness Online

Created in 2010, Instagram is one of the world's most popular social media platforms. What started as a simple photo sharing application, has turned into a multimedia social networking app where users can follow, share, and engage directly with content from various accounts, whether they be from a celebrity or a regular user. This open form of online engagement allows for more horizontal and inclusive communication across the platform. This inclusivity results in users feeling more at ease to participate in discussions and debates online and makes the sharing of information and opinions with large audiences easier.[14] Online activists across the world have used Instagram to share messages and jumpstart dialogues within larger networks.

For Black Dominican activists and content creators, the open and inclusive platform on Instagram has been used to share histories and information that focus on (re)centering blackness within dominicanidad and to contest collective memories and histories that have pushed blackness outside of Dominican identity. As this thesis has shown, discussions of blackness in the Dominican Republic have been silenced through acts of violence, suppression of thought, and the creation of mythologies and revisionist histories. Many of these activists tend to be young individuals of Afro-Latin background who are motivated by this history of violence and erasure of blackness not only in dominicanidad but Latinidad as well. As a result, these accounts challenge erasures by calling attention to the violence of the collective re-fashioning of memory and by circulating and archiving scholarly writings on blackness in the Dominican Republic in accessible formats: a process that creates counter memories. Through Instagram, these pages are also able to create online communities that allow their Dominican followers to share their experiences, carefully confront state sponsored memory and history, and gain access to information about the past that may have previously been inaccessible.

Instagram user, soyciguapa is a perfect example of how Black Dominican activists are using their platforms not only to share information but to create learning communities that help to teach about how to interrogate and think critically about the past and the present. With over 50, 000 followers, soyciguapa focuses specifically on re-educating followers about music and racism. Her posts often center around blackness. One aspect of her online activism is giving people the language and terminology to speak about racism in Spanish, and she translates and explains terms like intersectionality (the interconnected nature of different categorizations and overlapping forms of discrimination) and colourism.[15] This task is extremely important because this vocabulary gives people the ability identify, contextualize, and contest racism, anti-blackness, and anti-Haitianism.

For example, understanding intersectionality, a theoretical framework that helps people to analyze and interpret how their unique political and social identities are affected by discriminatory power imbalances, gives individuals the power to recognize and call out targeted, and sometimes covert, forms of oppression and discrimination. At the beginning of 2021 she started a series called, "Racismo 101," to define and teach users basic concepts to discuss racism; providing an important tool for individuals not only to recognize and discuss racism in the present but also to analyze the past.[16] Significantly, soyciguapa, like many other activists, uses her platform to break down barriers through accessibility; instead of gatekeeping knowledge and scholarly debates, she makes them available to her followers in formats that are easily understood; and, in doing so, encourages discussions on issues relevant not only to the Dominican Republic, but throughout Latin America.

Fellow Black activist blactina follows a different format from soyciguapa, though her aim of centering blackness in the Dominican Republic is the same. Blactina, who is originally from Panama, lives and works in the Dominican Republic as an artist and activist. With over 15,000 followers blactina uses her account to share "Afro- latinx and Caribbean stories," that she says have often been suppressed.[17] She mainly accomplishes this through the display and discussion of the day-to-day experiences of Black Dominicans on the island. During her three years on the island she has worked to document and share the stories of Black Dominicans, specifically in the northeastern province of Samaná, a location with a rich Black history and a place of migration for formerly enslaved people of African descent who settled there in the nineteenth century.[18] In April of 2020 she shared a post with highlights of her trip to the city of Samaná, and included the personal stories of Black Dominican locals about life on the island.[19] The sharing of Black stories by Black people helps to decenter whiteness as the default narrative and encourages people to consider experiences of blackness in relation to their own personal life experiences. Further blactina, also

focuses on sharing information about Haitian and Dominican history and culture to help highlight the connections and to help break down animosity between the two sides of Hispaniola. One of her most prominent posts discussed the similarities between two folk musicians, the Haitian, Rara and the Dominican, Gaga, on both sides of the island.[20] As Chapter 2 demonstrated, culture in the Dominican Republic has always been defined in contrast to Haiti rather than in relation to it. Highlighting cultural similarities demonstrates that Haitian culture is not that different from Dominican culture, as leaders and intellects like Balaguer and Peña Batlle so vigorously argued in the past. Her posts and commentary on anti-haitianism, anti-blackness and the relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic have resulted in her being attacked online by the Dominican right.

One of the most prominent accounts in the Dominican Republic is an organization called In Cultured Company. Known by the Instagram handle, inculturedco, this group page has over 23,000 followers and over 1000 posts dedicated to what they describe as "building bridges where others [have] built barriers." [21] This is a sentiment that most dominicanos would most likely not agree with, but nonetheless a statement that rings true for a portion of the population on the island which inculturedco tries to represent. With posts in English, Spanish and Kreole, the group focuses not only on the Dominican Republic but also outlines the need to build bridges with Haiti by "decolonizing Hispaniola" and dismantling "antihaitianismo, machismo, and homophobia."[22] In the account's highlighted stories they have an FAQ that helps to further outline the group's mission and beliefs.[23] Many of the posts in the FAQ directly attack Dominican national mythologies and give tools for followers to think more critically about Dominican history.

One of the pedagogical and critical thinking tools is entitled, "7 steps for Dominicans who want to confront Antihaitianismo."[24] The first and most important step they outline is for

Dominicans to "learn Dominican history not nationalist myths," and they provide a list of sources for followers to read.[25] The list mentions how to critique and "analyze and call out power Dynamics" and to "compare and contrast the experiences of immigrants across the world" to that of immigrants in the Dominican Republic.[26] Another highlighted story teaches followers how to recognize and discuss media bias in the Dominican Republic.[27] Soyciguapa and inculturedco's choices to equip and empower their followers with the ability to seek a deeper historical knowledge about anti-Haitianism and anti-blackness clearly challenges structures of power in the Dominican Republic. It also shows how they are working to dismantle anti-Haitian and anti-Black collective memory and historical narratives not only by providing countermemories, but by encouraging people to find resources that explore those oppressed histories.

It is not just that Inculturedco and other sites are trying to break historical silences and turn viewers' attention to suppressed historical evidence and acknowledging that there are other pasts that need to re-surface through commemoration. Inculturedco forces Dominican followers to look at their own biases and internalized anti-Haitianism and anti-blackness tendencies. It asks readers to question their deep-seated assumptions. In 2019, playing off of the term "white fragility," the group coined the term "Dominican Fragility," which they defined as the "disbelieving defensiveness that some Dominicans exhibit when their ideas about race, Haitians, blackness, and racism are challenged – particularly when they feel implicated in the white supremacy and antihaitianismo that fuels toxic Dominican nationalism."[28] Along with the term, they created a test for Dominicans to evaluate their level of fragility. The test asks readers questions like: "Do I feel he needs to prove that I'm not anti-Black?" and "Do I use an imagined 'Haitian Invasion' and Dominican 'independence' from the 1800's to deflect from real human rights abuses occurring in the Dominican Republic today?"[29] These types of challenging questions are effective as they

compel Dominicans who interact with the post to question their beliefs and why they might believe them. This gets to the heart of one of the key aspects of experiential blackness: internalized feelings.

While incluturedco, blactina, and soyciguapa are just some of the few pages working to change the ways people interact with Dominican experiential blackness, history and memory, several other accounts are working to do the opposite. They are creating online communities that seek to uphold systems of power by promoting negative mythology, fascism, and violence. These pages tend to be anonymous or represent a group, whose individual members' identities are not disclosed. This anonymity gives these groups and their followers the power to make very dangerous and violent statements. Two of the most prominent pages are noticiasdelainvasion and nativosdelaisla. Both usernames are anti-Haitian and literally translate to "news of the invasion" and "natives of the island." Noticiadelainvasion references the argument that there is a Haitian invasion occurring in the Dominican Republic, while nativosdelaisla refers to another nationalist argument that Dominicans are the rightful owners of Hispaniola since they are the only ones with Indigenous ancestry. One of the more established accounts on Instagram is the paramilitary organization Antigua Orden Dominicana, known as Antigua_orden_dominicanard. The group is not focused solely on online engagement but has almost 5,000 followers on the Instagram platform. Their bio states that they are "ultranationalist and militaristic" and against "communist, liberals, and Haitians."[30] These groups function in similar ways by sharing propaganda, reproducing historical myths, and attacking Black Dominican activists.

These pages are often reactionary and do not create original content. Nor do they rely on scholarly sources but rather on collective memory to substantiate many of their claims. When I began this study, the opinions and beliefs of these pages were shocking, however, as I have

demonstrated throughout this thesis, beliefs and support of state sponsored narratives are so common and integral to Dominican society, that it is the dissenting voices who can easily be viewed as frightening and dangerous. Ironically though, these apologists inadvertently aid in the online distribution of counter memories and counter knowledge on Dominican experiential blackness, because they reproduce images and videos from activists' accounts on their pages. Their defensive responses also show that the centering of experiential blackness is starting to disrupt traditional patterns and understandings of history and memory. A good example of this can be seen in three prominent debates happening online on anti-Haitianism, the 2013 "La Sentencia" ruling, and the celebration of Independence.

Antihaitianismo in the Twenty-First Century: La Sentencia

On September 23, 2013, the Dominican constitutional court ruled that all children with parents who were illegally in the country at the time of their birth, dating back to 1929, would be stripped of their citizenship if they could not provide proof of their parents' legal status. While the law technically applies to anyone who meets this criterion, it is well-known that it has been arbitrarily applied to Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent, who, for generations, have traveled to the eastern side of the island to work in households and in sugar cane fields. The landmark ruling, now known as *La Sentencia,* stripped over 200, 000 Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent of their citizenship, making them stateless. Simply explained, a person who is stateless is without a nation; however, stateless individuals experience much more than the loss of identity. Affected individuals often face extreme poverty, a denial of basic services like education and health care, and a loss of a legal identity. They are subject to arbitrary deportations and incarcerations and because they lack official documents, their freedom of movement is extremely limited.[31] In the

Dominican Republic this ruling has been the source of increased violence against Haitians and has invigorated anti-Haitian and anti-Black rhetoric. In 2021, newly elected Dominican president, Luis Abinader put forward a plan to build a wall along the Dominican-Haitian border, further antagonizing debates surrounding invasion and threats of violence from Haitians.

In the virtual world, La Sentencia and the newly proposed border wall have been central to arguments and discussions on Dominican activists' and nationalists' sites. For Dominican nationalist groups, these off-line events only help to legitimize their mission of creating a "pure" Dominican nation free of Haitians. Nationalist social media posts also benefit and support the State because they reinforce and reproduce myths and revisionist histories that continue to villainize Haitians and justify extreme measures like La Sentencia or a border wall.

The most popular tactic used by these pages is to create the fear of an impending Haitian invasion: a throwback strategy used by Trujillo and Balaguer to justify their violent anti-Haitian rhetoric and actions. Most prominently, the ultra-nationalist organization, Antigua Orden Dominicana has created many false posts meant to instill fear and anger amongst their Dominican followers. The self-proclaimed anti-Haitian nationalist group focuses heavily on proving the validity of the upcoming invasion. This imagined invasion allows them to spout anti-Haitianism and spread anti-blackness as well. In a post on February 9th, the group posted a picture of the map of Hispaniola, highlighting the lands along the Dominican side of the border. On the Haitian side of the map, the label read: "Próximo terreno que serán Ganado." (The next land that will be won) and on the Dominican side: "Próximo terreno perdido de RD" (The next land to be lost by the Dominican Republic.) The caption of the post cautioned users to pay attention to their words with the hashtag #reconquista (reconquest).[32] Several days later, to further support this point, the group posted a video of a woman in a grocery store looking at Dominican souvenirs of female porcelain

dolls dressed in traditional Dominican clothing. The woman in the video picked up a dark-skinned doll and said in disgust, “this doesn’t represent us, this is a Haitian.”[33] Bringing together antihaitianismo and anti-blackness, the woman then found what appeared to be a light-skinned doll and noted that this doll best represented the Dominican Republic, which is comprised of “una mezcla” (a mixture) of people and not pure Africans.[34]

Antigua Orden Dominicana strategically left no caption, leaving their followers to make their own connections as to how a Haitian Invasion is becoming a reality on the island. One user, presopld, fell directly into this trap by tagging a friend and commenting, “La fusión es inevitable” (the fusion is inevitable). The word “fusion” is another term used by ultra-nationalists to describe what they fear to be the political and cultural fusing of the two halves of the island. Another user, furthered the conspiracy by accusing Dominican businesses of supporting the fusion and upcoming Haitian invasion.[35] These fears, however, are unfounded as Haitians have historically travelled across the Dominican border, most notably because of employment opportunities. In recent years they crossed for humanitarian reasons, after the earthquake in 2010 and because of Haiti’s unstable political environment. A study conducted by the U.N. in 2017 found that while Haitians comprise the largest immigrant group in the Dominican Republic, they make up less than seven percent of the total population of the Dominican Republic.[36]

Not only do these radical websites promote the false idea of an imminent Haitian invasion, but they argue that Haitians will bring their violent tendencies with them. On 27 January, the site Noticiasdelainvasion shared a still of a video that depicts two men whom they claim to be from Haiti, holding a human arm and a machete. The caption noted that the gruesome picture was from the La Saline massacre that had occurred in 2018 in Haiti, and referred to in the press as, “the worst massacre in Haiti in more than a decade.”[37] Rather than showing respect for the victims of this

crime, the group remarked that the photo proved why the Dominican Republic needed to block vicious Haitians from entering Dominican territory.[38] They even went as far as to say that the government needed to remove all Haitians from the Dominican Republic. User, dianaesthermercedes wrote that the government needed to kick out "las buenas y a las malas porque ya estamos cansados" (the good and the bad because we are tired).[39] Other commentators went as far as to call Haitians cannibals, despite the photo not depicting such acts. Days later, on 9 February, noticiasdelainvasion made another post encouraging followers to call the Immigration office, with a caption that read: "No hay espacio en nuestro país para el desorden y para que los nacionales de otros países agreden nuestro pueblo. Llama y reporta." (There is no room in our country for disorder and for nationals of other countries to attack our people. Call and report.) These sorts of posts are dangerous, as they have ability to evoke unfounded fears of a Haitian incursion and revenge. Such false narratives go beyond the confines of these nationalist Instagram pages and are used to justify violence and discrimination both online and in real life.

That is why activist groups like inculturedco choose to focus on how live events and online fearmongering are connected to larger conversations around power and privilege in history, memory, and the archive. These Dominican activists use their platforms to demonstrate how the 2013 ruling and the 2021 border wall are a part of a much longer history of anti-Black racism in the Dominican Republic. By specifically focusing on blackness, incultureco is creating counter memories to dispel fears and encourage open discussion on how to combat antihaitianismo and anti-blackness to change the future and stimulate a new kind of Dominican experiential blackness. They provide examples of anti-Haitianism in Dominican society and encourage their followers to think more critically about the implications of anti-Haitian and anti-Black rhetoric, that is so normalized in Dominican society.

To help facilitate reflective learning and help individuals to internalize new ways of thinking about blackness, the group shared a photo of an article about the Ocoa Director of Culture who had stated that she felt "like a foreigner in his own country because of the Haitian invasion."[40] The writers for inculturedco used the comment section to facilitate a discussion on the troubling aspects of the article. The group noted that comments like the one made by the Director, Betty Pimentel, would typically result in her removal from the position. But due to the government's "systemic racism and xenophobic policies," no such firing would occur.[41] The writers at inculturedco remarked that it was ridiculous for her to feel like a foreigner because of an increase in Black people, when the Dominican nation itself is majority Black. Instead, they argued, Black Dominicans are generally the ones made to feel like foreigners.[42] In the comment section, users turned to the topic of immigration to note the hypocrisy within Dominican society. Victorsdaddio noted the absurdity of calling Haitian immigration an invasion, as Dominicans themselves emigrate to other countries for better opportunities.[43] Another user, sisita_bebesita, noted that technically Dominican emigration to the United States should be considered an invasion.[44] The U.S. holds the largest population of Dominicans living outside of the island. More than one million Dominicans reside there, with over seventy percent residing in New York City alone.[45]

The organization's account actively disputes false historical claims made by nationalist pages to alert their followers to both explicit and covert forms of racism and xenophobia. The group reshared an image from the discontinued page, thefirstlatinos, that was entitled "Reparations for Dominicans."[46] The image was a list of baseless demands the group had made to the Haitian government, ranging from closing its borders to demanding money to pay back Dominican taxpayers for every time "a pregnant Haitian woman takes up a hospital bed."[47] Inculturedco explained that the post was propaganda and could easily be invalidated as false. They also iterated

that many of the issues surrounding anti-Haitianism in the Dominican Republic are the result of state sponsored forgetting and historical racism that absolve Spain and the U.S. of their crimes in the Dominican Republic, while holding Haiti, Haitians, and Black Dominicans accountable for crimes that they did not commit.

Inculturedco's focus on historical patterns and the larger conversation around power inequalities within the Dominican Republic is important. The 2013 La Sentencia traces back to the early 2000s, when right wing politicians found a loophole in birthright citizenship laws that stated that citizenship would not be granted to those deemed to be "in transit."[48] The term "in transit" had previously been used to describe a person who had been in the country for ten days or less. But law makers found a way to extend the definition to include migrant workers, the majority of whom are Haitian and who had stayed longer than ten days in the Dominican Republic. These included children born and raised in the Dominican Republic who could no longer claim Dominican national identity.[49] Even though the Inter-American court ruled in 2005 that the Dominican Republic's policies were discriminatory against Dominicans of Haitian descent, no action was taken by the Dominican state to remedy this issue.

After 2007, Dominican authorities stopped giving birth certificates to Dominican born Haitians and destroyed ones that had already been issued. Without a birth certificate you cannot obtain a *cédula de identidad*, a national identification card that is needed to travel, vote, and work. The *cédula* was introduced by Trujillo in 1932 to track and control population movements.[50] Possession of a cédula is mandatory under law. If you are caught without it, you can incur fines, face imprisonment and possibly be deported. The difficulty for ethnic Haitians to obtain birth certificates for their children began when the Dominican civil registry agency slowly stopped

accepting their identification documents, whether Haitian or Dominican.[51] Eventually some offices simply stopped serving Haitians altogether.

What initiated the retroactive ruling of *La Sentencia* was the initial case brought forward by Dominican born Haitian, Juliana Depuis Pierre. Pierre went to court after having her *cédula* confiscated by local authorities. She used her birth certificate to prove that she was Dominican born, but the court deemed that her birth certificate was invalid because she had no proof of her parents being legal immigrants at the time of her birth.[52] The Dominican constitutional court used this ruling to apply a blanket retroactive ruling toward all children of migrants. The Inter-American court found the Dominican Republic to be in violation of human rights obligations. Instead of complying with their ruling, the Dominican state chose to withdraw its membership from the court.[53]

Following this ruling, violence against Black bodies in the Dominican Republic both on and offline has increased, a fact shared with me by several informants. In 2015, a Haitian man named Henry "tulile" Claude Jean was found lynched in a public square of Santiago de los Caballeros, the second largest city in the Dominican Republic. He was left there with his hands and feet bound.[54] Police blamed it on two other Haitian men, saying that Henry had enemies and had stolen from these men. However, his wife disagreed and said that the police were simply trying to cover up his death to avoid the publicity of a hate crime. In its watch dog role, Inculturedco does not allow such events that can serve to disrupt Dominican collective memory to be forgotten. On the anniversary of the 1937 massacre in 2020, the group referenced the lynching of Henry Jean and iterated that much work still needs to be done by Black Dominican and Haitian activists to stop violence against Haitians in the Dominican Republic.[55] The group purposely connected the present to the historical past to demonstrate how structures of power dating back to the Trujillo regime

continue to have control in the Dominican Republic. Further, their purposeful remembrance of violence against Black bodies works to reconfigure the ways by which people recognize, remember, and discuss trauma and blackness within dominicanidad. Their efforts help to break the cycle of silencing and forgetting of blackness in Dominican collective memory.

For activists and groups, like blactina and inculturedco, this disruption of traditional practices and understandings of Dominican history and collective memory is central to their goal of (re)centering blackness in dominicanidad. That work, however, is not always met with support and praise, especially from nationalist groups who strongly believe that activists are fighting for a reunification with Haiti rather than equality for both Haitians and Dominicans. When the proponents of right-wing nationalist sentiments feel threatened by Black Dominican activist postings, they encourage their followers to incite violence against them, most often through hate speech or by reporting their pages in order to have them removed from the Instagram platform. This sort of violence took place most recently on Independence Day in 2021.

Independence Debate

The history of Independence in the Dominican Republic is arguably one of the nation's biggest myths. It is the nationalist master narrative upon which other fictions are based and has been used to justify violence like the 1937 massacre. The story of independence is what solidified the imagined battle between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Dominican Independence, unlike most Latin American nations, is not celebrated as the day when colonial relations with Spain were permanently severed, but rather when independence from another former colony and neighbour, Haiti occurred. The state sponsored narrative argues that from 1822 to 1844 the newly liberated nation of Haiti violently and tyrannically occupied the Dominican Republic and that on February 27, 1844 the Dominican nation revolted against their oppressors and proclaimed themselves to be

an independent nation. Even though the Dominican nation did not exist until 1844, citizens, citing from collective memory, continue to maintain that the Dominican population was distinctly different, in language, culture, and race, from the Haitian one and that they were being discriminated against by the Haitians because of that difference. These are arguments I have observed online and in person throughout my research. Contemporary understandings and conceptions of Dominican identity supersede the creation of the Dominican Republic in 1844. This, I presume, can arguably be linked to the writings of apologists like Joaquin Balaguer and Manuel Arturo Peña Batlle, who worked throughout the Trujillo dictatorship and beyond to solidify the historical precedents for the never-ending battle between Haiti and the Dominican Republic along national, racial, and cultural lines.

Activists like blactina and intercultured co are currently disputing this official version of the history of independence which frames the historical experience of non-black Dominicans as one of victimhood. Haitians were not aggressors, they argue, but allies in the freeing of the Spanish side of Hispaniola and the Africans who remained enslaved. These users recognize that in countering and dispelling this crucial national myth they are helping to dismantle anti-blackness and anti-Haitianism within Dominican society, revising notions of dominicanidad, and forcing people to question structures of power throughout Dominican history. On Independence Day, Afro-Latina influencer, blactina, posted art by the Dominican artist, Thelma Vanahí. The piece of art was of the map of Hispaniola with a realistic heart placed in the center along the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic.[56] In the caption, blactina wrote that she considers Dominican Independence Day actually Separation Day as it was the day when Haiti and the Dominican Republic separated after years of "working hard to end enslavement."[57] Since that separation, she

added, the two countries have struggled in varying ways. This powerful statement directly contests the idea that Haiti had subjugated the Dominican state.

To refute her claims, Dominican nationalist pages chose to attack her personally. Nationalist page, nativosdelaisla, reposted her Instagram post, along with one of her Instagram stories commenting on the prevalence of anti-Haitianism in the Dominican Republic. Commentators called her anti-Dominican and pro-Haitian because she "disrespected the Dominican people by stating that our liberation from Haitian enslavement was a sad day."[58] They presented no scholarly evidence to support their arguments but instead presented her sentiments in a dichotomized and rigid way. For them, one could not be pro-Dominican and pro-Haitian at the same time. The most unsettling part of their attack against her was that they shared her name and residence. Followers called for blactina's deportation to Haiti, which is not her home, while others offered more serious threats. One user, a.r.n.13.03, commented, "Para especímenes así, hace mucha falta Trujillo" (For specimens like this, Trujillo is much needed), making reference to Trujillo's desire to kill Haitians and their supporters.[59] As discussed in Chapter 1, the memory of the Trujillo's dictatorship is a source of inherited trauma and pain in Dominican experiential blackness and the recalling of Trujillo's targeted violence was a posttraumatic act of violence against Haitians and Black Dominicans who were previously the victims of Trujillo's systemic erasure.

The responses on the nativosdelaisla page provide a glimpse into the hostility that is faced by activists who attempt to challenge collective memory and create counter memories by focusing on the ways blackness is suppressed. In the documentary, *Stateless*, filmmaker, Michèle Stephenson highlights this violence by following the story of a young Haitian Dominican activist and attorney, Rosa Iris.[60] Throughout the film, Iris is seen receiving calls of intimidation and threats against her life for activism and political activity. She seems unintimidated by the threats and small attacks

against her, but by the end of the film, Iris was forced into exile after having received serious death threats against the life of her young son.[61] This violence is also reflective of the inherited trauma of the past and the unaddressed propaganda that plagues Dominican collective memory. If the stories of the past were true, as nationalist groups claim, there would be no need for anger and hate. However, feelings of defensiveness and hatred arise because of the possibility for nationalist groups that what was once believed to be true, can no longer be held to be true. Dismantling the myth would lead to another kind of trauma. Dominican identity, like most nationalities, is based on their story of independence. Challenging that history, also challenges conceptions of identity, collective memory, and all events in Dominican history that have stemmed from it. This past Independence Day, blactina was not the only activist who experienced violence at the hands of Dominican nationalists. Inculturedco along with Latin American social media page, r29somos did as well, because they, too, chose to highlight inconsistencies in the collective memory of Dominican Independence.

Inculturedco in conjunction with Latino lifestyle account, r29somos took to Instagram to share what they considered to be a more accurate retelling of the history of Independence. The post, entitled, "Dominican Independence Day: What to the Afro-Dominican is the 27th of February?" is a clever play off of a speech, "What to the slave is the Fourth of July?" written by famous American abolitionist Frederick Douglass. In the post, which was comprised of a series of infographics, the two accounts recall the history of Dominican Independence by focusing on the historical Black experience. While laid out as a retelling of history, the post was modeled on Douglass's speech. It discussed why Independence Day might need to be revaluated when retold and understood through the lens of blackness.

The infographics began by highlighting the experience of Black slaves and free persons in 1804 at the end of the Haitian Revolution as the enslaved and mixed population of Spanish Hispaniola rebelled to free themselves and unite with the new nation of Haiti.[62] Years later, in early February 1822, Haiti, answering the call of the Black enslaved and free population, entered the Dominican Republic, abolished slavery and united the island, protecting the newly united nation from threats of invasion from former colonial powers. This information is corroborated by scholar Anne Eller, who notes that unification of the island in 1822 was welcomed and supported by many on the Spanish side of Hispaniola, as they celebrated being the only independent nation in the Caribbean.[63] The post goes on to argue that the state sponsored story of a forced occupation was actually created by the Church and former slave holding elites who seemingly did not want Haiti to take over and felt threatened by the power being extended to the formerly enslaved. The post stated that, "the white Dominican elites declared that this Black liberation was actually a Haitian invasion."[64] The two accounts go on to argue that while February 27, 1844, is the date white Dominican elites declared the Spanish side of the island to be the Dominican Republic, it was referred to as "The Separation" at the time, and not as independence.[65] True independence actually came in July of 1865, when Black Dominicans with the help of Haiti defeated the Spanish, and stopped them from recolonizing the island and re-establishing slavery.[66] The entire history recounted in this post referenced scholarly sources at the end of the photoset.[67] The photo set was shared on r29somos in English and on inculturedco in English, Spanish, and Kreole, most likely to engage their entire base of followers, but also possibly to recognize that the history is one that is shared on both sides of the island.

The captions for the posts on each page demonstrate how these groups intentionally shared the history in order to (re)center blackness, and to create a counter memory that troubles the

collective memory of independence in the Dominican Republic. Each page highlighted the fact that Independence Day in the Dominican Republic was related to a history of anti-blackness, with r29somos noting that “the day has nothing to do with Spanish colonizers, but rather the country's autonomy from Haiti in 1844, a fact that has set the groundwork for centuries of anti-Black animus.”[68] Incultredco took a more radical position by stating that they purposely used the reference to Douglass’ speech as a way to put “Dominican "Independence" Day in the context of the ongoing Black liberation struggle it masks,” and further highlighted that “celebrating Dominican Independence Day on February 27th is antiblack.”[69]

Naturally, the provocative posts went viral, and the pages were met with a mix of responses. Those who supported the posts shared their thanks to both accounts, while disclosing their own personal stories of learning biased histories in school.[70] One user, adriellita, commented on another post made by r29somos on Independence saying that she was glad that the page was sharing fact based information about Dominican history, “I graduated from high school in 1996 back when I could not fact check what my social studies teachers were teaching me in my Dominican social studies class.”[71] Much of the animosity and hate, however, was propelled at r29somos, who, unlike inculturedco, does not have a page dedicated to social justice and politics. Most users view r29somos as a beauty and cultural page since they are a subsidiary of the larger parent company Refinery29, a multinational digital media and an entertainment brand focused on young women. While inculturedco focuses explicitly on the Dominican Republic and Haiti, R29Somos serves the entire Latin American community. While Dominican Instagram users would have expected inculturedco to share a post about the myth of Independence Day to their online community, having a large and popular Latin American page, like r29somos discussing Dominican anti-blackness and anti-Haitianism would have been shocking and upsetting to say the least.

Dominicans overwhelmed the r29somos page with comments, to the point that the group had to remove the comment section to protect their followers and staff from targeted hate and discrimination.[72] The influx of hate comments was triggered by famous Latina actress Zoe Saldaña, who is of partial Dominican descent. The actress, who has over seven million followers on Instagram shared a post saying: “waiting for your apology about this post. Shame on you and shame on all platforms who reposted it – you all know who you are! But that’s okay, the sun will always continue to shine on la bella Quisqueya.”[73] She went on to demand an apology from the r29somos staff, "you owe all Dominicans — regardless if their [sic] Black, white, or Taino — an apology. On our Independence Day, we do not need to be schooled by others on what we “should’ know about ourselves."[74] Her commentary was reflective of those Dominican ultra nationalist pages that resort to anger when they feel that the collective memory of historical events is being challenged.

Saldaña’s outrage sparked hundreds to spam the r29somos account. Because users could not comment on the original post many moved to other photos and videos to harass the page. Most users bombarded the comment sections with Dominican flags and accusations that the page was lying and pushing a “Black agenda.” One user, m0r3n4z4, accused r29somos of using Dominican Independence Day to gain popularity by spreading “a bunch of lies.”[75] Another user, flawless4lyf, added fuel to the fire by tagging a Dominican nationalist page to alert them to the controversy, “@dominicanos_patriotas, mira esta página diciendo que los haitianos nos salvaron de esclavitud en día de la independencia.” (Look at this page saying that the Haitians saved us from slavery on Independence Day.)[76] Jamie Rincón, a prominent Dominican online personality, with over 43,000 followers, posted a video praising Saldaña for her comments and calling her a defender of the nation, while referring to the r29somos writers’ as shameless charlatans and Black supremacists.[77]

Ricón, a self-proclaimed "social activist," essentially accused r29somos of being anti-Dominican and enemies of the state, a charge he has made against similar users, including blactina.[78] The negativity attached to the centering of blackness in the Dominican experience, serves as another example of the ways by which blackness is bound to Haitianness in the Dominican Republic in the conflation of nationalism and race. Because Haiti is the enemy of the Dominican state, one who is pro-Haitian is also pro-Black and automatically assumed to be an anti-Dominican enemy.

Over the following days, both r29somos and inculturedco gave open responses to Saldaña whom they held responsible for the hate mail they had received. Inculturedco created a meme with a photo of Saldaña on the film poster of *Judas and the Black Messiah*, a movie about the betrayal of Black panther leader Fred Hampton.[79] A line on the poster reads, "you can kill a revolutionary, but you can't kill a revolution," insinuating that while she may have attacked them and their supporters the centering of blackness in history and memory would not and could not be stopped. They also included a video snippet of the song "Demasiado Negro (Too Black)," by Dominican rap artist, Patogeno Musa, in which he raps about Black pride and the claiming of Black identity in the Dominican Republic. The whole post essentially sent a message to Saldaña and others stating that they are unapologetically Black and would not be intimidated by efforts to limit their talking about the role of blackness and Blacks in the Dominican Republic and the need to dismantle powerful mythologies.

R29somos wrote an open letter entitled "Dear Zoe Saldaña: I'm A Proud Dominican. I Also Want To See Us Address Anti-Blackness." The author of the letter, Thatiana Diaz, a Dominican American r29somos writer, noted that she grew up with anti-blackness and anti-Haitianism in her home and community. She said that she wanted "to interrogate our history, to practice real inclusivity, and to understand that we can't celebrate the things that make us beautiful

without working to heal the ugly parts of our identity, too."[80] In the letter she holds Saldaña accountable for encouraging users to make hateful comments against their page and the post. Because "Saldaña is a celebrity with over seven million followers her words have power. Because of her posts calling for my contrition, I've received death threats and ongoing harassment from her fans."[81] She noted that the attacks on February 27 are just a reflection of the constant physical threats received by somos writers, as well as Dominicans who choose to write and speak about ongoing and historic anti-Haitian discourse in the Dominican Republic.

One of the final comments that Diaz made in her open letter stated, "when you center Blackness in discussions of history, people get angry." That anger stems from the fact that sharing experiences of blackness in the past and in the present serves to disrupt, dismantle, and trouble history and the archive as it creates counter memories and knowledge that can be stored and accessed. It is also about pain: the pain of trying to forget or deny discrimination or the pain of being a victim of hate and violence. These counter memories in turn question the ways people understand and interpret historical understandings and identity. In the Dominican Republic where national identity, structures of power, and even culture are heavily based upon national anti-Haitian and anti-Black myths, having to confront other realities and other truths is not easy. Yet, Black Dominican activists recognize that the centering of blackness in discourse, history, and collective memory is necessary to save the lives of many living on the island. Afro-Dominicanistas from the 70s and 80s were doing the same work as groups and individuals like inculturedco and r29somos are doing in the present. Diaz ended her letter by stating, "I hope that those like Saldaña take a beat here to understand how hollow it is to celebrate something if you all refuse to see it for all it is. "The sun will always continue to shine on la bella quisqueya," she wrote on Instagram Stories. But practicing real love means looking in the shadows, too."[82] Diaz final reflections highlight an

important aspect of experiential blackness which is that everyone, not just people of African descent, need to confront anti-blackness and heal from the violence of the past. Without that healing everyone is vulnerable to experiencing pain and trauma.

Social media has allowed for Black Dominican activists to define experiential blackness and Black Dominican identity on their own terms. They ask followers to question the ways they experience blackness: whether that is something negative or positive, and to see the direct association between anti-Blackness and anti-Haitianism. They ask readers to rethink what it means to be Dominicano and to face suppressed truths in order to heal. Apps, like Instagram have become democratic spaces that allow for the sharing of information and ideas, that sometimes, in real life, are censored and deemed to be dangerous. As scholar Jun Liu has noted, social media's "embrace of individuals in the production of knowledge" has allowed for a collective questioning of state collective memory to occur, thus diminishing traditional top-down approaches that allow the elite or the state to claim historical "truths" as theirs.[83] Liu notes that prior to social media's horizontal forms of communication, authorities were able to monopolize and control historical narratives and collective memory through propaganda and state influenced mass media.[84] Now, activists, celebrities, and regular citizens have the power to access and share knowledge in uncontrolled ways. That does not mean that other points of view do not try and suppress these new expressions and ways of experiencing blackness in the Dominican Republic. The violence is still there, and it is active. But it is now more difficult to suppress other points of view.

The information and history that is shared and discussed on these social media platforms becomes archived. A lot of Black history in the Dominican Republic is not stored in state archives or recorded in history textbooks. Social media accounts have allowed a new kind of archive to be created - an archive of the present – that points out the flaws in state archives and in textbooks

used in school curricula. Everything is being saved; including hate speech to information acknowledging the contributions made by Blacks in the Dominican Republic and the difficulties some have faced. The digital platform also makes this newly created historical information easily accessible. Videos to comment sections can easily be retrieved and revisited to reopen old discussions and to create new ones. These practices affect collective memory, as traditional forms of remembrance and commemoration are forced to change. Slowly, the landscape of the past in the present is beginning to change. Black Dominican activists are causing Dominicans to experience Blackness in new and exciting ways and to question, when possible, assumptions and internalized myths that have driven understandings and representations of anti-Blackness and anti-Haitianism for decades and even centuries.

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Conclusions

Recently, I attended a gathering with young Dominicans, where the topics of politics and the past were brought up. A member of the group knew about my thesis project and asked that everyone share their true feelings about both former presidents, Rafael Trujillo and Joaquín Balaguer, so that I could hear the "real" opinions of Dominicans. I listened intently as the group discussed the authoritarians in Spanish. For one unnamed woman, the Trujillo and Balaguer eras were the golden age of Dominican society, because the two leaders brought stability, safety, and financial security to the Dominican population. I implored the woman to also reflect upon the inhumane events, like the 1937 massacre and other forms of state violence, that plagued both the Trujillo and Balaguer eras. To my shock, she remarked that the version of those events with which I was familiar were lies and that the truth about the Trujillo and Balaguer eras had been destroyed. She went on to say that sometimes death is necessary for the building of a nation and that I, as a foreigner, could never truly understand what the history of Trujillo and Balaguer means to Dominicans.

While the woman shared an opinion that I had heard many times before, I left the conversation feeling angry and defeated. I questioned the purpose of my project and whether I even have the right to study and write about Dominican history and blackness as a non-Dominican. However, days later, I watched as a White Dominican man berated a local dark-skinned Haitian woman, Miranda, who goes around everyday selling vegetables and fruits door to door. I watched as Miranda, who is usually talkative and joyful, was silenced as this man exerted his power and privilege over her. After the man left, she shared with me that people often show her little to no respect because of her position in Dominican society. The pain I saw in Miranda's face was all too familiar as it reminded me of the many times I had experienced racism and did not have the ability or power to address and confront it. I realized in that instant that this project *is* purposeful

and important. It is not just a discussion of the peculiarities of Dominican history but rather about creating a shift in the ways blackness is understood and treated across the world. It is about the introduction of a methodology that will help break down power structures that allow for the open discrimination of a Black woman in the streets and the denial of historical and contemporary violence against Black bodies.

In this way, this thesis contributes not only to Dominican scholarship, but more importantly to scholarship surrounding blackness and the global Black experience. My creation of the term and method, "experiential blackness," encourages everyone, across cultures, to consider how individual and collective identity, history, and memory are related to and affected by how we experience and understand blackness. Unlike the Black experience, which looks more at the qualities, characteristics, and activities that are unique to the Black community, experiential blackness asks people, whether Black or not, to define and evaluate how historical Black trauma, erasure, and reconfiguration impact their own personal life experiences. Abstractly, experiential blackness is about history being a living thing that can be continually reinterpreted and renegotiated, thus allowing for people to analyze how the past, as it is remembered, affects, influences and connects to present experiences. Further, it creates a space of belonging that allows for experiences of blackness to be known and accessed, whether through cultural practices, talking or reading historical accounts, retracing memories and trauma, or exploring different forms of commemoration and channels of communication.

The use of the method of experiential blackness in this study has allowed me to demonstrate the necessity and merit in sharing and analyzing Black histories, which have often been silenced, excluded, and misrepresented in the historical record. In the context of the Dominican Republic this is extremely important as memories of blackness within Dominican collective memory and

dominicanidad have been distorted. This distortion has mainly taken place through the sharing of revisionist histories and propaganda, both in the past and present, which encourage the use anti-Haitian and anti-Black rhetoric and the acceptance of an imagined Indio-Hispanic past. The use of this method has also demonstrated the importance of using oral histories in conversations of memory, history and identity. Allowing people to share their personal memories and experiences aided in analyzing and contextualizing blackness in the Dominican Republic and the historical process that led to blackness being placed in the shadows of Dominican history and identity. The recording and sharing of oral histories also helped to create a project that was truly reflective of the community in which it was discussed. Oral histories, I found out, can show how the past is embedded in language, perception, and in feelings of shame or anger. Trauma experienced by previous generations is real, but so is *post*trauma. It is visible in the eyes, in language and in the stories we tell about who we are.

Throughout this project I have shared some of the dimensions of experiential blackness that work to make blackness central to the configuration of history, memory, and identity. Throughout each chapter I purposefully highlighted a different aspect of experiential blackness to demonstrate how a focus on the *experiential* can bring about healing, reflection, and change. Chapter One considered experiences of trauma and the ways by which historical anti-Black violence, erasure, and denigration has been transferred into the bodies and minds of present generations. This trauma, which often goes unresolved and unrecognized in societies, becomes deeply embedded into contemporary understandings of self and community, whether consciously known or not. *Everyone,* not just people of African descent, need to heal from the post-trauma of denying blackness its place. In the context of the Dominican Republic, we see that all Dominicans are traumatized by continuing to buy into racist myths and anti-Black ideologies. Ideally, however,

a focus on experiential blackness can heal that trauma. Experiencing blackness in new ways encourages the reconciliation and acceptance of historical anti-Black violence and the effort to mediate painful and traumatic memories that tear down fears of centering Blackness in discussions. The result is the acknowledgement of the effects that anti-Black violence and Black trauma have on the experiences and memories of the social collective and on individuals. That acknowledgement and acceptance presents new opportunities for commemoration, inclusion and giving voice that can situate blackness in history, memory, and identity as a source of pride rather than as a taboo.

In Chapter 2, *Memories of Violence and Culture,* I focused on self-perception within experiential blackness. Self-perception in relation to experiential blackness encourages people to look internally to the ways blackness affects their own personal life experiences. This form of self-reflection encourages people to question and reflect on their own feelings toward blackness and why it is that way. It also shows how blackness, despite often be relegated to the margins of one's conceptions of identity, has influence and meaning in the everyday mnemonic practices of any given individual or society. Actively reflecting on the many ways blackness actually influences cultural practices and historical traditions places blackness and Black histories to the forefront. As a result, people are able to find new ways to discuss and experience blackness. The centralizing of blackness in one's conception of self, moves the dial away from whiteness, which has historically been used as the root from which all other understandings of identity, culture, and history have grown. At the same time experiential blackness is not totalizing in the way that whiteness has historically been, but rather ask individuals and societies to look beyond a sole focus of whiteness.

The last function of experiential blackness, covered in Chapter 3, *Black Dominican Activism in a Digital Age,* focused on experiential blackness as a disruptor. Not to be confused with destruction, disruption, similarly, to self-perception in experiential blackness, focuses on the dismantling or troubling of traditional and historical understandings of blackness and the structures of power in society that have made blackness an outlier. This disruption occurs through the discussion and sharing of Black histories and experiences that have often been strategically silenced and forgotten. The acknowledgement of these histories disrupts traditional forms of collective remembrance and historical production. In this way, experiential blackness takes the onus of the teaching about blackness and Black histories off Black and Afro-descendant peoples as it calls everyone to actively assess their roles and positions within blackness, whether negatively or positively. It takes away the pressure felt by Black people who often use their experience and trauma to advocate for human rights and equity in societies. Disruption in experiential blackness then reveals that a focus on blackness can open new pathways to break down the power structures of totalitarian governments, that have worked to silence oppositional experiences and opinions.

Each dimension of experiential blackness functions in unique ways, yet they also work in a reciprocal manner, as they are technically functioning in tandem to oblige individuals to really consider how experiences of blackness in the past are continually affecting contemporary conceptions of blackness and understandings of race and identity. Moreover, these dimensions also affect present populations' reconfiguration of the past, as it encourages individuals to question and consider how new perspectives, informed by blackness, might change how the past has been recorded and remembered by the collective. While this experiential method can be used in scholarship, its purpose is to also be used by ordinary people. My hope is that the discussion

of experiential blackness in scholarship will help to disseminate this method so that people across cultures can reckon with the violent and traumatic histories that continue to affect the experiences of African descendant peoples and to consider how that experience is deeply intertwined with their own.

The Dominican Republic is just one of many nations that has had blackness pushed to the borders of its national identity, collective memory, and history. That is why understanding and exploring experiential blackness beyond the context of the Dominican Republic is necessary. This thesis serves as a case study and a blueprint for the ways the functions of experiential blackness can be applied to the history and memory of many societies. Locations across the world, like Cuba, Brazil, and even Canada, have their own unique histories and relationships with blackness that need to be explored to facilitate a global conversation surrounding the importance of blackness. This conversation can and will lead to the creation of more equitable societies not only for Black and African descendant peoples, but for all.

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Appendix: Research Ethics Approval

December 16, 2020

Nyah Hernandez
Master's Student
Department of History
Queen's University
Kingston, ON, K7L 3N6

GREB Ref #: GHIS-080-20; TRAQ 6031264
Title: "GHIS-080-20 Experiential Blackness: Race, Identity and Memory in Contemporary Dominican Society"

Dear Nyah Hernandez:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled **"GHIS-080-20 Experiential Blackness: Race, Identity and Memory in Contemporary Dominican Society"** for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS 2) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (Article 6.14) and Standard Operating Procedures (405), your project has been cleared for one year.

You are reminded of your obligation to submit an annual renewal form prior to the annual renewal due date (access this form at http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html/ click on "Events;" under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Annual Renewal/Closure Form for Cleared Studies"). Please note that when your research project is completed, you need to submit an Annual Renewal/Closure Form in Romeo/traq indicating that the project is 'completed' so that the file can be closed. This should be submitted at the time of completion; there is no need to wait until the annual renewal due date.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one-year period (access this form at http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html/; click on "Events;" under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Adverse Event Form"). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example, you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementation of new procedures. To submit an amendment form, access the application by at http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html; click on "Events;" under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Request for the Amendment of Approved Studies." Once submitted, these changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, GREB, at University Research Services for further review and clearance by GREB or the Chair, GREB.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Sincerely,

Chair, General Research Ethics Board (GREB)
Professor Dean A. Tripp, PhD
Departments of Psychology, Anesthesiology & Urology Queen's University

c: Dr. Nancy Van Deusen, Supervisor