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Haiti vs. Dominican Republic

Introduction

The countries of Haiti and the Dominican Republic are located on the same Caribbean island. As such, many would assume that they operate as sister countries with similar government and policies and that the citizens of each country have a mutual respect for each other. This, however, is not the case with these two countries. Throughout the history of Haiti and the Dominican Republic bitter conflicts have often erupted between the two. It is important to understand some of the history of these two countries and the history of their conflicts to have a greater understanding of why their relationship is what it is today.

Throughout this paper I will discuss the anti-Haitianism policies that the Dominican Republic has today and its origins. I will discuss the effects that this mind set has on both countries and their ability to work together as neighbors. In addition, I will discuss some of the effects that it has on the people of both countries.

Today, the countries of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, which share the same island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean are vastly different. The living conditions of the countries are distinctly different with the Dominican republic being relatively well off and the island nation of Haiti in new poverty conditions. In addition, the people of the two countries oftentimes look distinctly different, with the Dominican Republic ranging mostly from fair or light tan skinned to dark brown while the complexion of the majority of Haitians is a deep black-brown; thus, race may be a factor in the strained relationship between the two countries. In this paper, the reasons why the

aforementioned are true will be discussed. Furthermore, the effects of the Parsley massacre on the two countries today and how that impacted the relationships between the two countries will be discussed.

History of Haiti and the Dominican Republic

Christopher Columbus arrived on the island of Hispaniola in 1492. It named the island La Isla Espanola. The island was used and a Spanish colony as well as a base for further exploration in the region. In 1697, the western third of the island was ceded to France. Both sides of the island imported slaves from the country of Africa. However, the French imported slaves at a far greater degree causes the development of the demographics of the two countries to be distinctly different. “ According to a study by the American Library of Congress, by the end of the 18th century, there were about 40, 000 white landowners, 25, 000 black or interracial freedmen, and 60, 000 slaves in the Spanish colony, compared with approximately 30, 000 whites, 27, 000 freedmen, and at least 500, 000 black slaves in its French counterpart” (Silver, 2010). The slave in the French section of the island of Hispaniola revolted against the French and gained independence in 1804. It was then that Haiti, or the land of mountains, became the world’s first black republic. The Dominican Republic did not gain its independence until 1844. The country of Haiti had occupied the Dominican Republic for approximately 22 years before it gained its independence. President Jean Pierre Boyer led the Haitians to invade the Dominican Republic in an effort to push out the Spanish and prevent reoccupation by European settlers.

The Haitian occupation of the Dominican Republic was a time of domination over the Dominican Republic by its Haitian neighbors. In 1822, Jean Pierre

Boyer and his military invaded the Dominican Republic and declared an end to slavery. Next, the Haitian government, which still had a heavy military presence in the Dominican Republic, imposed stiff taxes on that citizens of that country in order to raise the money for the 60 million francs which the country owed to France. In addition, the military forces of Haiti terrorized the citizens of the Dominican Republic by confiscating food and supplies that they needed at gunpoint in order to survive while occupying the country. The Haitian military forces also confiscated land from white elite landowners as the Haitian constitution forbade them from owning land. This forced these landowners to relocate to the country of Cuba or Puerto Rico. In order to maintain control, the Haitian government and military imposed a very strict regime on the Dominican Republic. Citizens of the Dominican Republic were not allowed to run for public office, travel in groups, or have membership in any civilian organizations. In addition, the Santo Domingo University was closed down. This inspired the citizens of the Dominican Republic to support the ousting of their Haitian occupiers at all costs. The Dominican War of Independence ended in 1844 with the Dominican Republic a free, self-sufficient nation.

The country of Haiti was exploited both by the French and the leaders of its own country. The French depleted the country of coffee and sugar. In addition, they forced the republic of Haiti to pay an indemnity to gain their independence. Furthermore, Haitian leaders differed from those in the Dominican Republic who encouraged economic development. Haitian leaders, on the other hand, sold their people as field workers to it neighbor for revenue.

The Parsley Massacre occurred in October of 1937. In this massacre, more than 12, 000 Haitians, as well as Dominicans who tried to aid them, lost their lives by being killed by soldiers of the Dominican Republic. Although there are differing accounts of the reason, in 1937, the leader of the Dominican Republic ordered an attack of the border and the slaughter of Haitians trying to flee the area. Some speculate that the reason was to encourage the ‘whitening’ of the Dominican Republic, while other accounts state that Trujillo was in fear that the Dominican Republic would again face a threat of occupation. In addition, some suppose that the reason for the attack was sparked by Trujillo’s belief that Haiti was harboring his former Dominican opponents. However, it is known that in 1937, then dictator, Rafael Trujillo order thousands of Haitians in the border area to be killed and their bodies were dumped in what is known as Massacre River, the river that divides the country of Haiti from the Dominican Republic. (See Fieser, 2012). The relationship between the two countries immediately preceding the massacre was not of a level of tension where one who expect an event like this to take place. In fact, the countries enjoyed cordial relations for years before the event. The border was considered to be peaceful and operated smoothly. “That changed, however, over five days in early October 1937 when, acting on President Trujillo’s orders, soldiers killed thousands with machetes, bayonets, and rifles. Trujillo’s exact reasons remains unknown, although historians have speculated it was part of his effort to control the border and ‘whiten’ the country” (Fieser, 2012).

The Impact of Development on the Relationship Between the Two Countries

The countries of Haiti is a struggling nation with a significant number of its citizens living in extreme poverty. The country of the Dominican Republic, on the other hand, is relatively thriving and prosperous compared to its struggling neighbor. The U. N. human-development index evaluates a number of welfare measures in determining the ranking of countries compared to other on that index. According to the United Nations, out of 182 countries, the Dominican Republic ranks 90th on its human-development index. Haiti, on the other hand, ranks 149th on the human-development index. The average life expectancy in the Dominican Republic is 74 years, as compared to the average life expectancy in Haiti which is 61 years.

Furthermore, a person's likelihood of being able to read is affected greatly by whether the person resides in the Dominican Republic or its neighbor, Haiti. Additionally, the standard of living is substantially higher in the Dominican Republic. (See Silver, 2010). In addition, the geography of the island of Hispaniola and other natural factors are in favor of the Dominican Republic over the country of Haiti. Because of the way that the mountains are situated on the island, the country of Haiti receives less rainfall. Furthermore, northeast trade winds blow the rain that falls in the direction of the Dominican Republic.

It is important to note that around the middle of the twentieth century, the countries of the Dominican Republic and Haiti had comparable economies. However, both internal power struggles, large population growth, and embargos resulted in the country of Haiti taking a downturn. The population density of the country of Haiti in comparison to its resources has resulted in

the poverty that is apparent throughout the country of Haiti today.

The article “ Haiti and the Dominican Republic: A Tale of Two Countries” appearing on the TIME magazine website in January of 2010 states that the population density of Haiti combined with its lack of resources has led to Haiti being the poorest country in the western hemisphere today. (See Silver, 2010). This means that the way of life and job prospects in the two countries is different. These differences have caused many Haitians to cross the border in search of work to feed themselves and their families for many years. For years, there has been a regular flow of Haitians crossing the border into the Dominican Republic for purposes of finding employment. “ While the Dominican Republic has relied on these migrant workers to provide cheap labor for their sugar cane harvest and also in the building trades, some politicians have tried to win political capital by demonizing them” (The Guardian).

Despite the demonization by the government officials in the Dominican republic for years, Haitian workers were active encouraged to come to the Dominican Republic to perform labor in the sugar fields since the 1920s. In fact, a number of industries in the Dominican Republic employed Haitian workers because these workers could be paid less for performing the same job. Because of the number of jobs available to Haitian in the Dominican Republic, significant numbers of entire families have relocated to the Dominican Republic over eight or nine decades.

Recent Developments Concerning the Relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic

Although the migration of Haitians to the Dominican Republic is for the purposes of performing labor is welcome by some, it is also a big source of contention between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. In fact, illegal immigration by Haitians into the Dominican Republic is met with scorn by a large number of people residing in the Dominican Republic. Those in the Dominican Republic feel that this immigration negatively affects both their economy and their culture. These feeling of anti-Haitianism that the illegal immigration of Haitian into the Dominican Republic has brought along with it has sparked many politicians and other to call for the country to act in an effort to curb this illegal immigration. Recently, the government of the Dominican Republic took the drastic step of stripping several hundred thousand people living in the Dominican republic of Haitian decent of their citizenship.

The Dominican Republic recently reclassified many people who considered themselves to be citizens of that country to ‘in transit’ or non-citizens because they had Haitian ancestors. The article “The Dominican Republic and Haiti: One Island Riven By an Unresolved Past” published in The Guardian in October of 2013 states that “Just over a week ago the Dominican Republic’s highest court ruled to revoke the citizenship of children of illegal Haitian migrant workers – a measure to be applied to anyone born after 1929, and thus affecting not only migrants’ children, but their grandchildren and, in some cases, even great-grandchildren” (Gibson, 2013). Therefore, after this ruling, children born in the Dominican Republic must have one parent who is Dominican or at least a legal resident for those

children to be citizens of that country.

A substantial number of people are affected by this ruling. The government of the Dominican Republic has already informed approximately 40, 000 people that they will not receive their identity documents. These documents are necessary to gain access to services in the Dominican Republic such as schools and healthcare. In fact, it is estimated that there are approximately 210, 000 Dominican born children who are the descendants of Haitians. As the country of Haiti has a law that they must have lived in Haiti for five years to be considered citizens of the country of Haiti, these people are now ‘stateless.’ These people who were born in the Dominican republic and have lived in the Dominican Republic for generations are now facing the prospect of possibly being deported to a country where they don’t speak the language, have never resided, and will have a great deal of financial hardship in a country that is stricken by poverty.

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