

HI3K3: A History of Human Rights in Latin America

Practical Written Assignment

Word Count: 2,965

2020/21

Black in Latin America

In 2011, PBS aired a four-part documentary series, *Black in Latin America*, focusing on Afro-Latinx communities and issues of rights, identity and citizenship. Presented by Professor Henry Louis Gates Jr., history is used in the documentary to analyse the roots of these contemporary issues. The first episode, 'Haiti & the Dominican Republic: An Island Divided', analyses the divisions between the nations sharing the island of Hispaniola.¹

Gates highlights a key theme of identity. He discusses how Dominicans have formed their sense of self as a mixed-race society, contrasted to how Haiti celebrates itself as the first black republic. Gates looks at how this has been represented in culture, arguing that merengue music is a display of the Dominican Republic's racial mixing, as it blends Dominican, African and Spanish influences. The work of scholars such as Ricourt and Howard have clearly influenced Gates' exploration of how Dominicans often associate with Spain more closely than Africa, with many identifying as 'indio' and 'Dominican', not 'black'.² Blackness came to be associated with Haiti, and due to the prevalence of anti-Haitianism in the Dominican Republic, blackness was seen as inferior.³ Gates attempts to explain the historical roots of anti-Haitianism by discussing the Haitian occupation of the Dominican Republic and how it created Dominican nationalism. Gates concludes that 'to a large extent, Dominicans' ideas about race have been formed from their negative views about Haitians', whereas Haitian identity is more focused on black pride and links to the African diaspora.⁴

Exploring anti-Haitianism is central to discussing Dominican identity. However, academics such as Chetty and Lyon have criticised how this exploration often leads to the view that Dominicans are living in denial of their blackness.⁵ *Black in Latin America* falls into this trope when Gates interviews an anthropologist who claims that 'Dominicans are in complete

¹ Ricardo Pollack, Diene Petherle and Ilana Trachtman, 'Haiti & the Dominican Republic: An Island Divided', *Black in Latin America*, PBS, 19 April 2011.

² Milagros Ricourt, *The Dominican Racial Imaginary: Surveying the Landscape of Race and Nation in Hispaniola* (New Jersey; London: Rutgers University Press, 2016); David Howard, 'Colouring the Nation: Race and Ethnicity in the Dominican Republic' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, Jesus College, 1997).

³ Ricourt, p. 143.

⁴ Pollack et al., 'Haiti & the Dominican Republic: An Island Divided', *Black in Latin America*.

⁵ Raj Chetty, "'La calle es libre': Race, Recognition, and Dominican Street Theater", *Afro-Hispanic Review*, 32:2 (2013), 41-56; Jacqueline Lyon, 'Inheriting Illegality: Race, Statelessness, and Dominico-Haitian Activism in the Dominican Republic', *FIU Electronic Theses and Dissertations*, 3765 (2018), <<https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/etd/3765>> [Accessed 8 February 2021], p. 178.

denial of who they are'.⁶ Chetty argues that the denial narrative centralises US conceptions of race as a binary between black and white.⁷ Ricourt furthers this argument by suggesting that the "I am Dominican" self-identification [...] signals the invention of an alternative identity that is not white or black and represents a now occupied liminal space between the predicaments of racial blending'.⁸ Therefore, the documentary overlooks how the concept of identity changes based on localities; anti-Haitianism and Dominican identity could have been discussed without accusing Dominicans of being in denial.

Perhaps the racial binary of black and white, based on US race relations, is used in *Black in Latin America* to make these conceptualisations more accessible to the audience. The documentary aired on PBS, an educational non-profit organisation aimed at Americans. Throughout this first episode, Gates uses the US as a reference-point; for example, he mentions how anti-Haitian prejudice in the Dominican Republic is similar to how African Americans were treated by white people in the US, and how US occupation destabilised the island. This creates a shared sense of history between the US and Hispaniola, which makes the audience more connected to the individuals of the documentary, allowing Americans to care more about the themes discussed. A historian and a sociologist interviewed also offer an analysis of the plantation economy in the Dominican Republic and Haiti, and these discussions of slavery would evoke images of US plantations in the minds of many Americans. Referencing the country in which most of the audience members reside, either implicitly or explicitly, makes the Dominican Republic and Haiti seem closer to the US, rather than an exotic Caribbean island with obscure issues.

However, this closeness is somewhat obstructed by the translator. Translations of Spanish and Creole speech are dubbed over the interviewees' voices. Dubbing is distracting to the audience as it removes the authentic voice of those speaking, often omitting certain intonations or emphases. Subtitles could have been used for the translations, as this would have maintained the connection between the audience and interviewees. Voice is also an important tool to ensure that the audience does not become bored of one presenter constantly speaking. Gates avoids this problem by interviewing a wide range of people,

⁶ Pollack et al., 'Haiti & the Dominican Republic: An Island Divided', *Black in Latin America*.

⁷ Chetty, p. 42.

⁸ Ricourt, p. 140.

visiting the Santo Domingo Museum of History and Geography, and conversing with academics, while also interviewing Haitian and Dominican citizens. This also means Gates uses a diversity of sources to allow different perspectives to come together.

The theme of identity in *Black in Latin America* is reinforced by Gates' discussion of how national memory is constructed through the presence of statues in the Dominican Republic and Haiti. He declares that the Dominican Republic's 'sense of itself – Spanish, Catholic, and if not exactly white, then most certainly not black either' is shown through the contrast between the monument to Christopher Columbus and the lack of statues of black heroes.⁹ This is the opposite of Haiti's national memory, with many proud displays of the black leaders in Haiti's struggle for independence against France. However, this difference could have been compared more effectively if the analyses of the Dominican Republic and Haiti had been integrated throughout the episode, rather than half-an-hour being dedicated to each state.

Gates successfully discusses the Dominican dictatorship of Trujillo (1930-1961) and how he legitimised anti-Haitian sentiment by using inflammatory rhetoric to frame Haiti as a problem.¹⁰ Although Gates overlooks some details, such as Trujillo's plans to deport Haitians before 1937, he pinpoints others, such as the skin-lightening powder Trujillo used, which is important in analysing the wider issues of colourism in the Dominican Republic.¹¹ Gates discusses the killing of thousands of Haitians in the 1937 Parsley Massacre, although he never uses this term and therefore does not explain that the pronunciation of the word 'parsley' was used to differentiate Haitians from Dominicans.¹² Instead, he uses the Massacre River as a poignant symbol of division and violence, evoking an emotional response in the audience.

However, Gates does not explore the political aftermath of Trujillo's dictatorship and how anti-Haitianism is still popular rhetoric used by politicians. For example, he does not

⁹ Pollack et al., 'Haiti & the Dominican Republic: An Island Divided', *Black in Latin America*.

¹⁰ Howard, 'Colouring the Nation', p. 70.

¹¹ Amelia Hintzen, "'A Veil of Legality': The Contested History of Anti-Haitian Ideology under the Trujillo Dictatorship', *New West Indian Guide*, 90:1/2 (2016), 28-54 (p. 28); Lyon, p. 175.

¹² Marlon Bishop and Tatiana Fernandez, '80 Years On, Dominicans And Haitians Revisit Painful Memories Of Parsley Massacre', *NPR*, 7 October 2017, <<https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/10/07/555871670/80-years-on-dominicans-and-haitians-revisit-painful-memories-of-parsley-massacre?t=1612779865235>> [Accessed 8 February 2021].

mention the highly racialised 1994 election campaign, where Balaguer (who rose to prominence under Trujillo) legitimised anti-Haitianism as his parades racially targeted his opponent, Peña Gómez, with chants of 'This negro isn't from here, so take him to Haiti'.¹³ The following campaign in 1996 between Gómez and Fernández saw a repeat of these chants.¹⁴ There were also mass deportations in 1991 and estimates of up to 12,000 Haitians are forcibly removed from the Dominican Republic each year.¹⁵ Although Gates discusses the persistence of anti-Haitianism amongst Dominicans, it would have been interesting for him to explore how the political climate is still dominated by this rhetoric, decades after Trujillo's demise.

Although Gates condemns portrayals of Haiti as poor and unstable, he does not counteract these negative stereotypes. He explains the prominence of Vodou in Haitian culture and how it has been demonised by media interpretations, and the documentary films some Vodou rituals. However, Gates does not attempt to explain the practice behind these rituals, how they came about or what Vodou practisers believe in. The documentary's images of people spitting liquid, slaughtering a pig, dancing and being carried off would confuse people with little to no knowledge of Vodou, and they would likely believe the stereotype of Vodou as a barbaric practice. Gates acknowledges the damage of Haitian stereotypes yet portrays one of Haiti's key cultural and religious practices as inexplicable. Instead, he spends a considerable amount of time explaining how Haiti came to be one of the poorest countries in the Western hemisphere; he discusses how European embargoes and blockades, as well as Haiti's despotic rulers, impacted Haiti's economy and political climate. While discussing the influence of these factors on Haiti is important, the focus of Haiti's half-episode on explaining its poverty reinforces the stereotype that all Haitians are poor. By framing Haiti as a poor nation and representing Vodou as a backwards practice, *Black in Latin America* falls into the negative portrayal of Haiti that Gates criticises.

The first episode of *Black in Latin America* brings attention to the divisive and tumultuous relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic in an accessible way to the audience. It is successful in framing these contemporary issues in their broader historical

¹³ Ricourt, p. 147.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 149.

¹⁵ David Howard, 'Development, Racism, and Discrimination in the Dominican Republic', *Development in Practice*, 17:6 (2007), 725-38 (p. 727).

context and situating them in US conceptualisations for ease of the audience. However, this also brings its problems, as Gates overlooks the localities of identity. He also omits broader political issues of anti-Haitianism outside of Trujillo's dictatorship, and he portrays Haiti in a negative light by focusing on its poor economy and not explaining Vodou. This could be due to time constraints, though, and it is unrealistic to expect every nuance of the history and culture of Hispaniola to be covered in a one-hour episode. Therefore, Gates accomplishes an effective overview of the Dominican Republic and Haiti, bringing attention to contemporary issues and their historical roots to a public audience.

Part 1 Bibliography

Bishop, Marlon, and Tatiana Fernandez, '80 Years On, Dominicans And Haitians Revisit Painful Memories Of Parsley Massacre', *NPR*, 7 October 2017, <<https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/10/07/555871670/80-years-on-dominicans-and-haitians-revisit-painful-memories-of-parsley-massacre?t=1612779865235>> [Accessed 8 February 2021]

Chetty, Raj, "'La calle es libre": Race, Recognition, and Dominican Street Theater', *Afro-Hispanic Review*, 32:2 (2013), 41-56

Hintzen, Amelia, "'A Veil of Legality": The Contested History of Anti-Haitian Ideology under the Trujillo Dictatorship', *New West Indian Guide*, 90:1/2 (2016), 28-54

Howard, David, 'Colouring the Nation: Race and Ethnicity in the Dominican Republic' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, Jesus College, 1997)

Howard, David, 'Development, Racism, and Discrimination in the Dominican Republic', *Development in Practice*, 17:6 (2007), 725-38

Lyon, Jacqueline, 'Inheriting Illegality: Race, Statelessness, and Dominico-Haitian Activism in the Dominican Republic', *FIU Electronic Theses and Dissertations*, 3765 (2018), <<https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/etd/3765>> [Accessed 8 February 2021]

Mayes, April J., *The Mulatto Republic: Class, Race and Dominican National Identity* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2014)

Pollack, Ricardo, Diene Petterle and Ilana Trachtman, 'Haiti & the Dominican Republic: An Island Divided', *Black in Latin America*, PBS, 19 April 2011

Ricourt, Milagros, *The Dominican Racial Imaginary: Surveying the Landscape of Race and Nation in Hispaniola* (New Jersey; London: Rutgers University Press, 2016)

Dominican Race History

The gallery exhibit of Dominican Race History is available here

<https://myportfolio.warwick.ac.uk/view/view.php?t=7vDegrcApOfEBwdR0y8I>.¹

¹ Mahara Portfolio was used in order to display pictures alongside text and allow easy embedding of the video in the last post. Posts 5 and 6 use examples from *El Listín Diario*, which was selected to highlight how one centrist newspaper uses anti-Haitian stereotypes; although a comparison between newspapers and their political leanings would have been effective, spatial constraints prevented this.

Part 2 Bibliography

[Anon.], 'Apresan a dos haitianos por muerte de una mujer en SJM', *El Listín Diario*, 17 May 2014, <<https://listindiario.com/la-republica/2014/05/17/322272/apresan-a-dos-haitianos-por-muerte-de-una-mujer-en-sjm>> [Accessed 9 February 2021]

Bishop, Marlon, and Tatiana Fernandez, '80 Years On, Dominicans And Haitians Revisit Painful Memories Of Parsley Massacre', *NPR*, 7 October 2017, <<https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/10/07/555871670/80-years-on-dominicans-and-haitians-revisit-painful-memories-of-parsley-massacre?t=1612779865235>> [Accessed 8 February 2021]

Blake, Jillian, 'Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Race-Based Statelessness in the Americas', *Journal of Law & Modern Critical Race Perspective*, 6:2 (2014), 139-80

Brodzinsky, Sibylla, 'Man lynched in Dominican Republic as tensions run high', *Guardian*, 12 February 2015, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/12/dominican-republic-lynching-haiti-fears-human-rights>> [Accessed 8 February 2021]

Charles, Jacqueline, 'Thousands march in Haiti over Dominican racism', *Miami Herald*, 25 February 2015, <<https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/haiti/article11180039.html>> [Accessed 8 February 2021]

Chetty, Raj, "'La calle es libre": Race, Recognition, and Dominican Street Theater', *Afro-Hispanic Review*, 32:2 (2013), 41-56

[Anon.], 'Colourism', *Google Dictionary*, [undated], <https://www.google.com/search?q=colourism+definition&rlz=1C1NDCM_enGB810GB810&oq=col&aqs=chrome.1.69i60j69i59j69i60l3j69i65l3.2094j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8> [Accessed 8 February 2021]

Craemer, Thomas, and Samuel Martínez, 'Anti-Haitian stereotypes in three Dominican daily newspapers: a content analysis', *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 16:1 (2021), 85-107

Davis, Nick, 'The massacre that marked Haiti-Dominican Republic ties', *BBC News*, 13 October 2012, <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-19880967>> [Accessed 8 February 2021]

Deibert, Michael, 'Dominican Republic: George Floyd protests spark reckoning with race as elections loom', *Guardian*, 15 June 2020,

<<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/15/dominican-republic-haiti-racism-election-protest>> [Accessed 8 February 2021]

[Anon.], 'Dominican Republic Flag', *The Flag Shop*, [undated],

<<https://www.theflagshop.co.uk/media/catalog/product/cache/1/thumbnail/9df78eab33525d08d6e5fb8d27136e95/d/o/dominican-republic-flag-std.jpg>> [Accessed 8 February 2021]

[Anon.], 'Dominican Republic: Police Put Down Anti-Racism Protest', *teleSUR*, 10 June 2020,

<https://www.telesurenglish.net/export/1591813137690/sites/telesur/img/2020/06/10/eqmyq3dy.png_1718483346.png> [Accessed 8 February 2021]

Dove, Rita, 'Parsley' from *Museum* (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon University Press, 1983), accessed through Poetry Foundation,

<<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43355/parsley>> [Accessed 8 February 2021]

Downs, Kenya, 'Haitian's Lynching Renews Protests Against Dominican Citizenship Law', *NPR*, 14 February 2015,

<<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/02/14/384344141/haitians-lynching-renews-protests-against-dominican-citizenship-law?t=1612791606075>> [Accessed 8 February 2021]

Espy, Jay, 'Advancing the Anti-Racist Struggle in the Dominican Republic', *La Galería*,

[undated], <<https://lagaleriamag.com/advancing-the-anti-racist-struggle-in-the-dominican-republic-2/>> [Accessed 9 February 2021]

Garcia, Sandra E., and Aimee Ortiz, "'Democracy Is in Play": What to Know About Protests in the Dominican Republic', *The New York Times*, 26 February 2020,

<<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/26/world/americas/dominican-republic-protests-elections.html>> [Accessed 8 February 2021]

Guilamo, Daly, 'Dominican Funnies, Not So Funny: The Representation of Haitians in Dominican Newspaper Comic Strips, After the 2010 Earthquake', *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 5:9 (2013), 63-82

[Anon.], 'Haiti - Dominican Republic : Increase in violence and xenophobia', *Haiti Libre*, 20 February 2015, <<https://www.haitilibre.com/images-a/g-13220.jpg>> [Accessed 8 February 2021]

[Anon.], 'Haiti – Social: Haitian assassinated, found dead hanged on a tree in DR', *Haiti Libre*, 12 February 2015, <<https://www.haitilibre.com/en/news-13166-haiti-social-haitian-assassinated-found-dead-hanged-on-a-tree-in-dr.html>> [Accessed 8 February 2021]

[Anon.], 'Haiti-Dominican Republic – Protest', *Getty Images*, [undated], <<https://media.gettyimages.com/photos/haitians-burn-a-flag-of-the-dominican-republic-in-front-to-the-in-picture-id464392472?s=2048x2048>> [Accessed 8 February 2021]

Hintzen, Amelia, "'A Veil of Legality": The Contested History of Anti-Haitian Ideology under the Trujillo Dictatorship', *New West Indian Guide*, 90:1/2 (2016), 28-54

History.com Editors, 'Rafael Trujillo', *History*, 9 November 2009, <https://www.history.com/.image/c_fit%2Ccs_srgb%2Cfl_progressive%2Cq_auto:good%2Cw_620/MTU3ODc5MDg2Njk4MDc5NTYx/rafael-trujillo.jpg> [Accessed 8 February 2021]

Howard, David, 'Colouring the Nation: Race and Ethnicity in the Dominican Republic' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, Jesus College, 1997)

Howard, David, 'Development, Racism, and Discrimination in the Dominican Republic', *Development in Practice*, 17:6 (2007), 725-38

[Anon.], 'Idole Skin Lightening Cream', *Dominican Desert Cart*, [undated], <<https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com/images/I/51EEcfwgc9L.jpg>> [Accessed 8 February 2021]

Lewis, Renee, 'Haitian man apparently lynched in Dominican city amid rising tensions', *Aljazeera America*, 12 February 2015, <<http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/2/12/Haiti-Dominican-lynching.html>> [Accessed 8 February 2021]

Lyon, Jacqueline, 'Inheriting Illegality: Race, Statelessness, and Dominico-Haitian Activism in the Dominican Republic', *FIU Electronic Theses and Dissertations*, 3765 (2018), <<https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/etd/3765>> [Accessed 8 February 2021].

Mayes, April J., *The Mulatto Republic: Class, Race and Dominican National Identity* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2014)

Medrano, Nestor, 'Notables piden a ONU que asuma responsabilidad frente a Haití', *El Listín Diario*, 17 July 2014, <<https://listindiario.com/la-republica/2014/07/17/330082/notables-piden-a-onu-que-asuma-responsabilidad-frente-a-haiti>> [Accessed 9 February 2021]

The People's Forum NYC, 'What Dominicans owe to the Haitian Revolution', *YouTube*, 15 November 2019, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=pEU4wYzHYO8>> [Accessed 8 February 2021]

Pollack, Ricardo, Diene Petterle and Ilana Trachtman, 'Haiti & the Dominican Republic: An Island Divided', *Black in Latin America*, PBS, 19 April 2011

Ricourt, Milagros, *The Dominican Racial Imaginary: Surveying the Landscape of Race and Nation in Hispaniola* (New Jersey; London: Rutgers University Press, 2016)

Roddy, Dennis, 'Trujillo's ghost: The effects of the dictator's bloody reign still linger in the Dominican Republic', *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 24 February 2019, <<https://www.post-gazette.com/opinion/Op-Ed/2019/02/24/Rafael-Trujillo-ghost-dictator-bloody-reign-Dominican-Republic-Dennis-Roddy-Next-Page/stories/201902240030>> [Accessed 8 February 2021].

Saint Louis, Catherine, 'Creams Offering Lighter Skin May Bring Risks', *The New York Times*, 15 January 2010, <<https://static01.nyt.com/images/2010/01/16/us/16skin2/articleLarge.jpg>> [Accessed 8 February 2021]

Williams, Janice, 'From Black to White: Why Sammy Sosa and Others Are Bleaching Their Skin', *Newsweek*, 13 July 2017, <<https://www.newsweek.com/sammy-sosa-skin-bleaching-lightening-636516>> [Accessed 8 February 2021]

Wolford, Ben, 'Life and death on the Massacre River', *The Week*, 6 December 2015, <<https://theweek.com/articles/579662/life-death-massacre-river>> [Accessed 8 February 2021]

Wucker, Michele, 'The Dominican Republic's Shameful Deportation Legacy', *Foreign Policy*, 8 October 2015, <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/10/08/dominican-republic-haiti-trujillo-immigration-deportation/>> [Accessed 9 February 2021]

Wyss, Jim, 'Protests continue in the Dominican Republic amid e-vote scandal', *Miami Herald*, 19 February 2020, <<https://www.miamiherald.com/article240446116.html>> [Accessed 8 February 2021]

Yuhas, Alan, 'Dominicans of Haitian descent turned into "ghost citizens", says Amnesty', *Guardian*, 19 November 2015, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/19/dominican-republic-violated-human-rights-haitians-citizens>> [Accessed 9 February 2021]