

Name: Simone Swaby

Instructor: Dr. Joy Janzen

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Did you know that persons from the Dominican Republic make up the fifth largest Latino group in the United States today? Dominicans began migrating to the United States in 1965, after the American invasion of the island. At the time, both the Dominican and American government saw migration as a way to relieve political and social pressures in the Dominican Republic. Fast-forward to the 1980s, when a debt crisis hit the Dominican economy, and the mindset for migrating to the U.S changed to economic mobility. Dominicans are mostly based in New York City, and is the second largest Hispanic group living in NYC, after Puerto Ricans. Dominican presence and culture is effervescent in NYC, especially in Washington Heights. They are changing the culture and politics of their community, and are predicted “to shape the new forms of social stratification and the discourses of ethnographical categories in the years to come” (Grasmuck and Pessar, 1996). Even though the Dominican presence is alive and well in the states, there are certain societal, economic, and educational setbacks that generation of Dominicans are yet to overcome. In that, this paper looks at the history and impact of Dominican culture in the U.S.

**Socio-impact of Race on Dominicans**

The Dominican Republic is diverse in it origins. They share the island of Hispaniola with Haiti, and host approximately 5.5 million people. Traditionally and predominantly they are a Roman Catholic nation, with other religious communities such as Protestant, Jewish, and Afro-Christian. The people of Dominican Republic are diverse in skin color and hair texture due to the fact that it was home to African-descended slaves, Spanish colonizers, and Haitian invaders. Even though Dominicans sees themselves only as Dominicans, they have been subjected to “racialization” and racial discrimination in the U.S. According to the article, *Incorporation and Transnationalism among Dominican Immigrants,* by Jose Itzigsohn, “Dominican immigrants enter a society that immediately assigns them a position in a racialized system of classification of different groups” (Itzigsohn, 56). For Dominicans living in the U.S this can be very confounding especially with the history behind Dominican Republic and Haiti. Dominican ideology of nation and race centers on distance from blackness. “Dominican national discourses deny the blackness and African roots of the Dominican people” (Itzigsohn, 56). According to a research done in 2013 by Pew Research Center survey on how Dominican’s described themselves, 66% sees themselves only as Dominican, 16% sees themselves as American, and another 17% uses pan-ethnic terms like “Hispanic” and “Latino” to describe their identity (Lopez, 2013).

**Positive Factors**

Even though Dominicans have been coming to the U.S in very high numbers, they have a strong sense of culture and community that is portrayed through their music, dance, food, literature, sports and politics. As pointed in Sean Buffington’s article, *Dominican Americans,* “Despite the accusations by their compatriots that they have assimilated into American culture, Dominicans have tended to be seen by Americans as especially resistant to assimilation and committed to their country, culture, and language of origin” (Buffington, 1997). Many Dominican immigrants speak Spanish at home, and maintain close ties to their native country. First generation Dominicans and present day Dominicans live their life across borders. This new kind of migration is called transnationalism, where “immigrant’s networks, activities, and pattern include both the host society and home society”(Buffington, 1997). By doing this, Dominicans are able to create a community and reality that disregards national or cultural borders.

**Educational Implications**

Dominicans in the U.S are nominally more academically successful than their Mexican and Puerto Rican peers. However, they still lag behind academically when it comes to other U.S students, and other students from Caribbean islands like Jamaica, Haiti and Trinidad. Data gathered through Pew Research Center concludes that “Dominicans have higher levels of education than the U.S Hispanic population but lower levels than the U.S population overall” (Lopez, 2013). Overall, there is a wide educational gap especially for Dominicans and other non-English speaking immigrants in the U.S. As reported by the ASC, 55% of Dominicans speak English proficiently, 43% speak English less than well, whereas, 88% of Dominicans speak Spanish at home. The margin between Dominicans who speak English proficiently and the ones that do not speak English proficiently is not a wide one, however, it should not go unnoticed when it comes to how we service Dominicans students within the classroom. Statistics have shown that only 17% of Dominicans ages 25 and older, in comparison to others in the U.S population have obtained a bachelors degree. This begs to question, are Dominicans not obtaining bachelor degrees because they are not academically qualified, and how can policy makers and educators close this gap? This lack of higher education among the Dominican group within the U.S has affected how Dominicans are employed within the labor force, and has yield in a high poverty status for Dominicans. The list of Dominicans that live in poverty are higher than the rate for the general U.S population, and slightly higher than other Hispanics overall. Hernandez emphasized in her research that “Dominicans enter American society at the lower end of the occupational hierarchy and as such suffer all the problems of American working poor: unemployment, poverty, high rate of school dropouts” (Itzigsohn, 50). ” Like many migrants who migrated to the U.S for economic stability, Dominicans feel that their occupations do not match their pre-migration hopes.

**How to teach Dominicans in the U.S**

Immigrants from the Dominican Republic are more likely to be Limited English Proficient in comparison to the overall immigrant population. According to the article, *Dominican Youth in New York City Schools: A Community Stands Up and Delivers,* by Ofelia Garcia and Lesley Bartlett, found that, “ Dominican-born students in NYC public school system, accounting 3% of the total student body…. 22,805 were classified as “English language learners… 67% are emergent bilinguals working to develop their English” (Garcia & Bartlett, 98). Due to the new wave of migration (transnationalism), it is more difficult for Dominicans to acquire English at the rate that will make them successful academically, and in the workplace. Also, many immigrants that arrive in the U.S arrive as an adolescent that makes it even harder to grasp the language. “Fifty percent of new immigrant students in NYC, including Dominicans arrive as adolescents…. Dominican adolescent immigrants often have not only little English, as do all recent immigrants, but also different academic Spanish” (Garcia & Bartlett, 98). This in turn, leads to Dominicans being classified as *Long Term ELL’S (LTELLs)* and *Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE).* Not only aren’t NYC ENL programs favorable to non-English speaking immigrants, but also many children do not have the right educational foundation due to the poor educational conditions in the DR. However, there are things that policy makers, administrations, families and educators can do to ensure that Dominicans are on the right track to performing on par with their U.S born counterparts. In order to best reach the needs of these students without having to compromise their native language, schools should provide two-way immersion programs, or additive schooling for these students. Not only do these types of program demonstrate positive cross-cultural attitudes and behaviors, but also students will be able to develop high proficiency in their native language. Dominicans are attuned to their culture, and heritage, so as country it is important that they are provided with the necessities for being successful in the host country, and their own. Studies have also shown that students who receive bilingual/multilingual learning perform better linguistically, and academically.

School like Gregorio Luperon Preparatory has changed the face of bilingual education in the early 1990s. Luperon Preparatory School was created out of the need for educating Dominican immigrants, and other Hispanic immigrants. When asked how they support the “social, linguistic, and academic development of Latino adolescents, they gave praise to using an “Additive Schooling in Subtractive Times” (Bartlett and Garcia, 338). Also, they create a realistic view on teaching bilinguals students, and believed that bilinguals should not have to sacrifice giving up their language all together in order to learn a new language. Luperon School believed that, “young new immigrant could not keep up with rigorous academic work in a language that they did not understand, and thus content courses had to be in Spanish” (Garcia & Bartlett, 103). This is evident in our school systems today where students are expected to master content, but do not possess the language skill that they need to do well. Overall, in order for Hispanics, and other non-speaking English immigrants to do well in the U.S it is important that they are provided with bi/multilingual education.

**Findings and Implications**

Despite the high migration numbers from D.R to the U.S, Dominican immigrants have been relatively unstudied. Majority of the information that do exist, rely on data from the 1980s census. Another important finding is that first generation Dominicans live their life across borders. This plays a big part in them maintaining their culture and language. Dominicans are conscientious of the “ethnoracial discrimination” that they face on a daily basis, and have subdued to being labeled as “other” and not “black” or “white.” Like many migrants who migrated to the U.S for economic stability, Dominicans feel that their occupations do not match their pre-migration hopes. In that, many Dominicans have entered the labor market in unskilled occupation. Many of the research did not explain if Dominican born children performed better academically than Dominican migrants. This information would have been important to the research, and better inform future research.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, Dominicans play a vital role in the U.S culture through their music, language, sports and politics. Dominicans in the U.S maintain close ties to their native country, and for that reason have been participating in what is called transnationalism. In order to provide Dominican immigrants with a solid foundation, and for them to compete with other groups we need to first understand where they are coming from, and get them to where they ought to be. The best way for doing this is by maintaining a linguistic and cultural homogeneity within the classroom where Dominicans are concerned.

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