



A Haitian woman stands at the gate that divides Haiti from the Dominican Republic at the southern border crossing at Pedernales in February. JACOB KUSHNER

Haitians Face Persecution Across Dominican Border

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A NACLA investigation funded by the Samuel Chavkin Fund for Investigative Journalism finds the Dominican Republic to be openly discriminating against Haitians immigrants only two years after Haiti suffered a devastating 2010 earthquake.

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WHEN A 7.0-MAGNITUDE EARTHQUAKE STRUCK Port-au-Prince, in January 2010, the Dominican Republic, which shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti, responded immediately by sending doctors, rescue teams, and over \$34 million worth of emergency aid. Since then, the Dominican government has constructed a state-of-the-art university in northern Haiti and worked with Haiti's new government to improve conditions across the border.

But neither the Dominican state nor the majority of its citizens have shown any such mercy to the estimated 500,000 to 1 million Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent living in their midst.¹ Haitians living in the Dominican Republic continue to be persecuted by immigration and police authorities, ostracized by Dominican society, and indiscriminately denied political and human rights.

“The help that the Dominican Republic gave is used to negate all the prejudices, abuses, and discrimination that continues to occur,” says Jenny Morón, legal coordinator for the Movement of Dominican-Haitian Women, based in Santo Domingo. “They say, ‘Look how much we’ve helped Haiti.’ But why is it easier for Dominicans to help Haitians there than here?”

THE SOUTHERN BORDER crossing between the Haitian town of Anse-à-Pitre and the Dominican town of Pedernales is a microcosm of the conflicts that exist between the two nationalities. On a typical day, the talk of the towns revolves around the latest motorcycle that was confiscated by one side or another for lack of papers, or the pirating of small fishing boats navigating the Caribbean Sea to the south. Sometimes these escalate into violent episodes, such as a stabbing in February that took place in the river that divides the two towns, or the killing of a Haitian man by a Dominican border guard in 2009.

The mood was tense at the southern border when the earthquake struck Haiti in January 2010. Everyone—Dominicans, Haitians, and foreigners working in the area—agrees that Dominicans in Pedernales responded exceptionally well to the tragedy, opening the bor-

der to send food and supplies and traveling into Haiti to try and help any way they could.

Then, in October 2010, something changed at the Pedernales border. In the final days of that month, rumors arrived that a sickness that was killing Haitians in the central part of their country was indeed cholera, which had never before been recorded on the island.² Within days, the Dominican Republic ordered the border crossing at Pedernales closed in an attempt to keep the bacterial disease from spreading to their side.

The few thousand inhabitants of Anse-à-Pitre saw their livelihoods suddenly thrown into havoc. Hundreds of Haitian vendors depend upon the Pedernales market to sell clothes, food, and other items to the Dominicans and in turn buy, among other things, ice—a necessity in a town with no regular electricity. The market was closed for six weeks. Food spoiled and Anse-à-Pitre’s fragile economy stalled.

“The Haitians passed money through the fence, asking Dominicans to buy them things,” says Barbara Martin Diaz, a volunteer for Movimiento por la Autogestión y Educación, the Spanish aid organization in Anse-à-Pitre. “But they just stole it.”

When times get tough for the Haitians of Anse-à-Pitre, the most affected are Haitian mothers, who as heads of households are pressured to seek work on the Dominican side of the border. According to Rosette Santana, the 46-year-old mother of six who leads the Women’s Association of Anse-à-Pitre, crossing into Pedernales puts women in a vulnerable position.

“These women are sexual victims, economic victims. They suffer so much misery at the hands of the Dominicans,” she says. “They

take advantage of our weaknesses to do evil.”

According to Masani Accimé, a U.S. veterinarian of Haitian descent who has been working to conserve iguana populations in the Pedernales area since 2009, the culture in Dominican border towns condones sexual violence against Haitian women. Accimé says a group of Dominican men lifted her skirt up in public in 2009 and that she was also assaulted at knifepoint in 2010 by a Dominican man after she yelled at him for groping her in the street. In the latter case, Accimé pressed charges. She remembers one of the Dominican officials sitting on the judicial panel defending the assailant, saying, “He must have thought you were beautiful.” The perpetrator was given a restraining order but not convicted of a crime, she says.

“I’ve traveled to Africa, the U.S., Europe, Mexico—I’ve never felt before about a country that I don’t want to go back,” says Accimé, who now lives on the Haitian side of the border and carries a knife in her purse whenever she crosses to Pedernales. “The experiences I’ve had as a black woman are terrifying.”

ON A BUMPY RIDE IN A tap-tap, or public bus, along the 38-mile stretch from Port-au-Prince to the border at Jimaní, Haitians swap stories about how much money they’ve had to pay in bribes at the border and at roadside checkpoints on the Dominican side. “With a visa, you pay \$20 American. Without, they take whatever you have,” says one man. “You can always get in if you have money.”

The tap-tap stops in a cloud of dust to allow a man with an empty five-gallon tank to board. He’s crossing the border to buy gas after a weeklong shortage in Haiti. It’s illegal to export gas across the

border, but he says he manages with a small bribe to officials. Soon, the passengers turn to discuss how much harder things have become for them during the two years since Haiti's earthquake.

When the quake struck, the Dominican Republic officially stopped deporting Haitian immigrants under political pressure from human rights groups. But in January 2011, the deportations resumed and were carried out in the manner they always had been—indiscriminately and unlawfully. On a weekday afternoon that month, Dominican border agents in Jimaní drove a flat-bed truck around town detaining anyone who appeared to be Haitian and who did not have legal residency or immigration papers on their person. They picked up two women selling clothes on a street corner, and after processing them, deposited them on the Haitian side. Just days earlier, a Haitian named Erickner Augusten, who had been living in the Dominican Republic for 20 years, said he was detained as he exited a hospital where his wife was getting a prenatal checkup and immediately transported across the border.

"When we left to get some food, the police pulled up and told me to get into the truck," he says, adding that a friend who works for the border patrol helped him sneak back in.

The United Nations criticized these kinds of deportations in a 2008 report, which found that they were often arbitrary and undertaken without due process. "Dominican citizens of Haitian descent and long-settled Haitians," the report found, "are as likely as recent migrants to be deported without adequate opportunity to argue any distinctions."³

A Haitian rights group working in border regions claims the Dominican government deported 15,647 Haitians in 2011.⁴ Human

rights activists in the Dominican Republic say it was abhorrent of the government to resume deportations during what was arguably the most challenging and tragic year in Haiti's history. But it came as no surprise to Rosa Derival, a 20-year-old woman born in the Dominican Republic to Haitian parents, who has lived in Jimaní since she was an infant.

Derival was 15 when, in 2007, her older brother Juan, who is also Dominican-born, was stopped by off-duty border agents while riding a motorcycle home from school. After threatening to deport him to Haiti, one agent hit Juan across the head with his rifle. Neighbors who witnessed the incident rushed Juan to a nearby hospital, and he survived. But when his family sought justice with the help of the town's mayor, the prosecutor said he couldn't proceed unless the family discovered the identities of the alleged assailants—as if they had politely introduced themselves to Juan before attacking him.

"That's when I decided I was going to study law," says Rosa Derival. "I decided I'm not going to allow the authorities to treat us Haitians this way."

But the same reason Rosa's brother was targeted in the first place has also prevented her from enrolling in a law school. Though she was born in the Dominican Republic, Rosa is considered Haitian by a new Dominican constitutional amendment because her parents are Haitian. Until she obtains citizenship documents and a student visa in Haiti—a country she's only visited—she will be unable to attend class.

For now, she volunteers to help record criminal complaints and document crimes against Haitians and Dominican Haitians for the Jimaní office of the Jesuit Refugee Service. Employing a team of lawyers, social workers, and various community volunteers, the service advocates for the rights

of marginalized Haitians by building legal cases and employing monitors who observe interactions between Dominican authorities and Haitians at the border and at military checkpoints, or *chequeos*, along the highway leading inland.

This work has earned the Jesuits the ire of Dominican customs officers working on the border. "The Jesuits come to fill our town with Haitians," says Mally Cuevas from the window where she checks and stamps passports of people entering the country. "Our government is sustaining two countries—Haiti and our own—economically and educationally. What more do they want from us?"

Cuevas has been working at this border post for seven years. She tells stories about "problems" with Haitian immigrants and objects to the notion that Dominicans discriminate against them. When asked about a well-documented incident in May 2010 in which a Dominican immigration officer shot a Haitian woman who was attempting to enter the country illegally after she allegedly told him she had no money to bribe him with, Cuevas responds, "That's not possible that the woman didn't have money—they always come with money."

Outside the customs office where Cuevas stamps passports stands an overweight Dominican man wearing a worn-out T-shirt. Leonel Batista Díaz, 46, is what Haitian immigrants call a *buscón*, a sort of middle man who earns money by helping Haitians who are unaware of the required fees and policies enter the country legally. Although Cuevas and Batista Díaz have never traveled farther into Haiti than the Haitian customs office across the border, they have seen more of Haiti than most other Dominicans, so their opinions hold sway. Their view of Haiti—and Haitians—is one encountered frequently among Dominicans throughout the country.



Vehicles and merchants hustle to transport rice, cement, and other goods across the Haitian-Dominican border in Jimaní in February. On market days, the border opens and anyone can cross. JACOB KUSHNER

“Haiti is a country that is dead,” says Batista Diaz. “There aren’t many rivers, no agriculture. I think it may be the poorest country in the world. Haitians don’t cooperate.”

A FEW DOZEN MILES ALONG THE road to Santo Domingo, a 20-car train filled with freshly cut sugarcane rolls slowly toward the processing factories at the Dominican port of Barahona. Dark-skinned Haitian men in T-shirts and baseball caps walk alongside the road, each carrying a machete used to cut the cane by hand, just as their ancestors did before the Haitian Rev-

olution abolished slavery in 1804. At the end of the day—which can last 12 hours, sometimes more—they walk home to their company-provided housing or to the Dominican slums known as *bateyes*.

Modeled after the quarters built to house African slaves on the island’s sugar plantations, *bateyes* were constructed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to house imported cane cutters from Haiti who became indentured by their poverty. Alternately transported in from or expelled back to Haiti, depending on the sugar factories’ seasonal needs, many eventually settled in these slums long after the

sugar industry had mostly died around them in the mid-20th century. Today the *bateyes*—with their largely unemployed and often malnourished inhabitants—resemble rural life in neighboring Haiti. Yet they are located in the Dominican Republic, the nation with the second-fastest growing economy in North America and the Caribbean.⁵

The 2008 UN report on human rights described *batey* residents as living “far from health-care facilities or schools,” lacking “transportation of any kind,” and living “in informally constructed shelters with dirt floors.” It concluded: “They can find work only in dirty, dangerous and



A Dominican border guard regulates foot traffic at the Jimaní border crossing. JACOB KUSHNER

degrading jobs for substandard pay and without contracts. They are a permanently exploitable underclass.”⁶

Of the some 200,000 people still living on 250 public bateyes in the Dominican Republic as of 2001, an estimated 6% were born in Haiti. The rest were born there to a mix of Dominican and Haitian parents.⁷

The 1,335 families of Batey 6, near the town of Barahona, live in a manner not quite consistent with their

Dominican counterparts, yet not quite in the desperate poverty of rural Haiti. To one another, they speak neither Spanish nor Haitian Creole, but a mix of the two pronounced in a predominantly Dominican accent. “Sometimes only we understand ourselves,” says Ramón Batista, leader of a coalition of batey residents who work to improve their living conditions.

Batista was born to Haitian parents who migrated as children in the

1930s to cut cane. His father died on the batey, and his mother has since returned to Haiti. Little has changed during Batista’s 63 years on the island. The residents of Batey 6 and the other five bateyes along this deserted highway struggle to survive from what remains of the sugarcane activity in the fields that surround them.

Batista says Consorcio Azucarero Central, the multinational company that produces about 7% of the nation’s

sugar, employs only Haitians as cane cutters because it can pay them just 160 pesos—or about \$4—per day.⁸ Most agree that the biggest problem, however, for the workers and the rest of the Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent living in the Dominican Republic is the widespread lack of documentation, which the Dominican government has been reluctant to address. For decades, Dominican and foreign organizations and international bodies, including the United Nations, have documented the Dominican hospitals' denial of birth certificates to children whose parents appear Haitian, the deportation of citizens without regard to their legal documents, and the routine confiscation of documents by Dominican authorities.

In 2005, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the legal arm of the Organization of American States, ruled that the Dominican government was violating its own constitution as well as the human rights of two Dominican-born girls by denying them birth certificates necessary to attend school. So, in 2010, the Dominican government amended the constitution to definitively exclude children born to Haitian parents from the right to Dominican citizenship. The change even went so far as to retroactively deny citizenship to children already born—a provision said to violate international human rights treaties to which the Dominican Republic is bound. The same year, the Dominican Central Electoral Commission, the body charged with issuing identification documents, ordered government officials to stop producing duplicate birth certificates or identity documents to anyone they believe may not be eligible for Dominican citizenship.

As a result, many of the hundreds of thousands of Dominican-born children of Haitian heritage were effec-

tively rendered stateless. (Haiti extends citizenship to children of Haitian parents regardless of their place of birth, but obtaining the appropriate documents often requires travel to Port-au-Prince, the capital of a country many have known only through stories.)

To human rights groups and the United Nations, the policy seems discriminatory and backward: Even under the brutal 31-year rule of Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo—remembered best for ordering the massacre of some 15,000 to 25,000 Haitians in 1937—Haitians were issued official government cards identifying them as residents. But when the Joaquín Balaguer government declared those no longer valid in the late 1960s, residents of Batey 6 said they were not issued new ones. As a result, “there are generations of people—three generations—that don't have documents,” explains Batista.

Without birth certificates, children cannot attend school past eighth grade, and undocumented adults cannot receive travel documents, driver's licenses, or work permits. Haitian advocates point to a double standard in how the Dominican state treats Haitian immigrants, embracing the massive informal Haitian workforce without which its primary industries—agriculture, tourism, and construction—could not function, while simultaneously refusing to grant them paperwork to establish themselves as legal workers or residents in the country.

“It's not that Dominicans are racist or hate Haitians. It's that they create these barriers,” says Jenny Morón, legal coordinator of the Movement of Dominican-Haitian Women in Santo Domingo.

O N A SATURDAY NIGHT in February, Dominicans tuned in to the popular comedy show *Miguel y Ray-*

mond on the nation's most watched TV network, Telemicro. In one skit, a group of lighter-skinned actors waits impatiently on the side of a highway near the Haitian border for a *gua-gua*, or bus, to arrive. They complain of the delays that occur when Dominican soldiers hold the buses up at checkpoints to search for undocumented Haitians. “The only people these checkpoints are hurting are us,” says one, meaning Dominicans. The darker-skinned of the show's two star actors enters, and in a ridiculous high-pitched voice, begins to complain how the checkpoints are “eating” his peanuts—a euphemism for money that draws upon the stereotype of Haitians as street-sellers of peanuts. The skit's humor derives from all the misery that has befallen the dark-skinned man at the *chequeos* where he is forced to pay the soldiers a *macuteo*, or bribe. The skit ends when a uniformed Dominican soldier, who had apparently been hiding behind the crowd, grabs the “Haitian” by the arm and detains him. The studio audience applauds.

A variation of this scene appears frequently on the show. The dark-skinned actor, Raymond Pozo, puts on what amounts to a minstrel show, dressing up in a silly outfit, talking in a cartoon voice, and embodying a Haitian antagonist for the comedic relief of the Dominican public.

Such programming is an apt reflection of a Dominican society that, to varying degrees, rejects and distances itself from anything that can be labeled Haitian. In Dominican cities, nightclubs and *discotecas* refuse entry to Haitian-looking patrons. When something goes wrong in many Dominican communities—anything from a robbery or motorcycle accident to someone slipping on a wet sidewalk—Dominicans are known for whispering under their breath that *los haitianos* are to blame. On a recent

evening in the Dominican town of Jarabacoa, police detained a would-be burglar who was ousted by a neighborhood dog as he attempted to enter a house. “Was it a Haitian?” asked several neighbors the next morning. It wasn’t. In fact, according to a 2007 study, Haitians account for just 3% of all people incarcerated for major crimes in the Dominican Republic—a disproportionately low representation, since they make up 5% to 10% of the population, according to the United Nations.⁹

Often, the xenophobia toward Haitians is institutionalized. The Dominican national educational curriculum prescribes a unit on Dominican-American relations for all high school students. No such unit on Dominican-Haitian relations is required. Even to the extent that schools

touch on the history of the island, textbooks portray racist depictions of Haitians accompanied by incorrect facts such as that unlike slavery under the French in what is now Haiti, slavery under the Spanish on the Dominican side “was never arduous.”¹⁰

Anti-Haitian sentiments are often manipulated by those looking to gain political capital. In April 2011, Director of Immigration José Ricardo Taveras announced, without evidence or explanation, that there were 1.5 million to 2 million Haitians living illegally in the country—an outrageous exaggeration, but one that allowed him to demand more resources for combating illegal immigration. The International Organization for Migration, which monitors such trends, puts the total number of migrants of any nationality in the country at

428,000, including those who enter legally. But such facts rarely enter Dominican political discussion when it comes to Haitian topics.

During the 2008 presidential campaign, politicians spoke of “fixing” the Dominican economy by ridding it of the Haitians who work for lower wages than Dominicans, which is perhaps the single-most frequently voiced complaint about Haitian immigrants. President Danilo Medina reiterated the need to regulate Haitians living in the Dominican Republic during his election campaign in June 2011.

“We’ve allowed the international [Haitian] lobby to win,” Medina said. “Every time we try to implement our laws and exercise our sovereignty, we’re branded as racist and anti-Haitian.”¹¹

In the lead-up to the election on May 20, candidates shied away from

Life in a Border Town Marred by Tension

The part of the border that divides the Dominican Republic from Haiti on the southern coast of the island of Hispaniola is seldom reached by outsiders. To get to the Dominican town of Pedernales from Santo Domingo takes a seven-hour ride on a public bus, or *gua-gua*, through a desertlike region bordered to the south by pristine stone beaches on the Caribbean Sea. On the opposite side, the trip from Port-au-Prince to the Haitian town of Anse-à-Pitre requires switching between multiple *tap-taps* that drive along a worn-out road. For the second leg from Marigot, one must choose between a brutal dirt-road drive that has no mercy for the ancient vehicles that navigate it, or an overnight voyage on a perilous wooden raft over the sea.

The conflicts that transcend the metal gate between the two towns seem reminiscent of the children’s stories of Dr. Seuss that warn against infantile

stubbornness and teach the morals of cooperation. In early February, Dominican agents seized a motorcycle crossing an unguarded section of the border and refused to return it because of a dispute over the title of the vehicle, which had been purchased on the Dominican side. So, one Saturday morning, Haitian residents of Anse-à-Pitre retaliated by seizing the motorcycle of a Dominican crossing there to buy rum.

After a day of arguments, Dominican border officials negotiated the return of each bike to its rightful side. “They were exchanging them at the halfway point, just like some sort of movie,” said Barbara Martin Diaz, a volunteer for the Spanish aid organization *Movimiento por la Autogestión y Educación* in Anse-à-Pitre. “But the Dominicans had put sugar in the motor of the Haitian one, ruining it. The Haitians were very mad.” Now Haitian

residents say they are discussing how to strike back.

Dario Estevez Flores, director of customs on the Dominican side, smiles politely as he confirms the details of the story from his desk at an ostentatious new office building. “This sort of thing always happens here. And it always will,” he says.

An assistant enters through glass doors to the air-conditioned room bearing chocolates. The sporadic mooing of cows erupts now and then from the pasture outside.

“Here, we follow the procedures. Someone here on the border put in sugar, so we sent a mechanic to fix it. But in Haiti, there’s no authority, so the people take control,” Flores said.

The discrepancy between the two countries’ resources is striking. Estevez Flores estimates that Pedernales has over 130 police officers, soldiers,

controversial issues of immigration and rights for Haitian immigrants, says Adalberto Gullón, a journalist and producer of educational programming for Las Antillas TV in Santo Domingo.

“The parties have become Balaguerized,” says Gullón, referring to the radically anti-Haitian Dominican president Joaquín Balaguer, who followed Trujillo in the 1960s and served again in the 1980s and 1990s. “There is no liberal party anymore.”

Dominicans of Haitian heritage who involve themselves politically tend to gravitate toward the Dominican Revolutionary Party, whose leader in the 1980s and 1990s was a black man of Haitian heritage named José Francisco Peña Gomez. Still, “the PRD didn’t resolve the politics, the legality of the Haitian

issue,” says Gullón. The result is that “Dominican Haitians and Haitians right now don’t have a party that supports them. Unless a strong alternative party develops, rights of the Haitians and lower class will continue to be limited.”

The development of such a platform would likely require a news media intent on dissecting the posturing of Dominican politicians and committed to informing a public debate through intelligent reporting—a news media that does not exist in the Dominican Republic today.

“There are chronic opinions as opposed to facts. And the people with the most sway in the press are those who are most conservative,” Gullón says.

Even a carefree observer of Dominican television and radio stations or reader of Dominican papers will

notice how readily the country’s media adopt and repeat opinions spun at them by politicians.

In February, for instance, the national TV channel Color Visión ran a story about the inauguration of a new marketplace to house the twice-weekly market on the northern border in the Dominican town of Dajabón. The story was routine, yet it ran under a headline entirely unrelated to its content and emblematic of anti-Haitian sentiment: “Dajabón Is Losing Its Dominican-ness Each Monday and Friday During the Market.”

Anti-Haitian sentiments are reinforced in Dominican media by ultra-conservative Dominicans who call themselves *nacionalistas* and appear as talking heads to defend Dominican identity against the loosely defined threat of Haitian immigration.

border agents, and uniformed customs enforcers. On a Tuesday in February, a uniformed Dominican guard armed with a rifle guards the gate, allowing those he recognizes to pass. Another guard checks the registration papers and licenses of vehicles crossing the dried riverbed separating the two countries.

But on the Haitian side, exactly two Haitian customs officers sit inside their office—a shipping container. Farther into town, a lone Haitian police officer eats lunch at his desk inside Anse-à-Pitre’s one-cell jail. A Haitian woman enters, with stitches in her head, bruises across her face, and a warrant from the town judge for the arrest of her husband for domestic abuse. The officer apologizes to the woman that he can’t arrest her husband today because he can’t leave the office unattended. He’ll get to it later in the week when an additional officer arrives. “Look at this

office—it’s just me,” he tells her. “We have only one gun.”

Every now and then, the imbalance between well-resourced Dominican authorities and their unorganized Haitian counterparts results in disputes much more serious than a confiscated motorcycle.

In February, a Dominican stabbed a Haitian while he was swimming in the river that separates the two countries, presumably the escalation of a drug-related dispute. The Dominican fled back to his native side, where Dominican authorities arrested him. But the Haitian police chief says the Dominicans refuse to turn him over to face Haitian justice because “they say the jail here is too tough.” (Flores says it’s standard procedure that neither country hands over “one of its own” through extradition).

In an even more serious incident in November 2009, just months before the

earthquake struck Haiti, a Dominican border guard shot his rifle toward the Haitian side during a dispute, killing one Haitian and injuring another. When asked about the shooting, it takes Flores a moment to recollect. There have been so many incidents . . .

He remembers that some Haitians stole the motorcycle of a Dominican who was swimming in the river. An off-duty Dominican soldier crossed to the Haitian side to retrieve it, but as he entered the gates, Haitians threw stones at him, one of which struck the on-duty Dominican border guard in the shoulder. The 20-year-old guard shot his rifle, killing a Haitian man who had been attempting to help the Dominican man to safety.

Flores concedes that the on-duty border guard who fired violated the rules of engagement and says that he was transferred away for that reason. He says the man was not tried for the incident. —J.K.

Recent op-eds in the nation's premier paper, *Listin Diario*, personally attacked a Haitian professor for daring to question Dominican goodwill toward Haitians. They described "a passive invasion" that has led to "the reality that one can no longer walk on the street without finding themselves in the presence of Haitians," and noted that "this massive presence is dangerous."

Acts of vigilante justice and reprisal killings by Dominicans against Haitians may escape mention in history books, but their existence has been documented as recently as November 2011. That month, the Haitian immigrants' rights group Support Group for Returnees and Refugees (GARR) in the town of La Descubierta near the border reported that a Dominican mob killed four Haitians to avenge the death of a Dominican man who was allegedly killed by a stray bullet during a dispute between two Haitians.¹²

It would be misleading to say such things are the direct result of Dominicans' prejudice. Many of the people interviewed for this story point out that to blanket Dominicans as "racist" or "anti-Haitian" does not do justice to the reality that these are merely undertones in an otherwise welcoming and productive society.

"They are a deeply compassionate people," says Accimé, the Haitian American veterinarian working in Anse-à-Pitre and Pedernales. "But this anti-Haitian sentiment is very deeply engrained. It's a passive acceptance that Haitians are inferior."

The mentality she describes has developed over five centuries of conflict and distrust. Present-day Dominican-Haitian relations are a product of memories of a slave rebellion that successfully established the first black republic in the Western Hemisphere, the subsequent invasion and rule by Haitian forces of the Spanish side, the eventual Dominican independence following 22 years of Haitian rule, and the massacre of tens of thousands of Haitians at Dominican hands in 1937.

There is little doubt that Haitian immigration poses real challenges to the Dominican Republic, particularly to its already strained health care system, upon which immigrants heavily rely. But the United States is populated by immigrants at three times the rate of the Dominican Republic, and their U.S.-born children are at least granted citizenship.

PERHAPS THE MOST STARTLING conclusion of the 2008 UN report on human

rights in the Dominican Republic is that "the issue of racism is almost invisible in certain parts of society." The study found that Dominicans adopt the view that "a history of ethnic mixing has resulted in a harmonious multi-ethnic and multicultural society in which racism or discrimination are either absent or confined to isolated, individual incidents."

The UN Human Rights Commission began a special review of the country's human rights record in March, with a focus on the incidence of discrimination. But human rights advocates in the Dominican Republic worry that, until a fundamental shift occurs among Dominicans to recognize the often subtle barriers they construct to distance their Haitian or Dominican Haitian peers, the latter will continue to face the discriminatory and sometimes violent manifestations of that ideology.

"After the earthquake, everything changed," says Jenny Marón, the legal coordinator for the Movement of Dominican-Haitian Women. "Dominicans say, 'Things are good—look at these schools we built.' The ignorance doesn't allow us to know what a batey is, to know what's happening to the thousands of people here. People come to think that the life of a Haitian is worth nothing." **□**

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