

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

FORTY-TWO APRILS LATER:  
THE DOMINICAN REVOLUTIONARIES  
WHO CHANGED NEW YORK

FINAL PROJECT  
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## I. Introduction: The Lasting Echoes of an American Intervention

On April 24 1965 a military revolt erupted in a base outside Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic. It was the result of a conspiracy by young officers and center-left politicians to restore legally-elected President Juan Bosch, who in September 1963 had been ousted by a right-wing coup d'état after seven months in power. The rebellion could have been yet another event of military meddling in the country's politics, a common occurrence since the republic had been thrown in turmoil by the assassination of longtime dictator Rafael Trujillo in May 1961. But in a matter of hours the *golpe* became a popular revolution when thousands of civilians who wanted to see Bosch return to the National Palace swarmed the streets in support of the officers. Right-wing military leaders reacted by strafing the palace and the neighborhoods close to the Duarte bridge, the main point of access to the city from their base. A civil war had started.

The war lasted four days, which was the time it took President Lyndon B. Johnson to decide he could not countenance the possibility that the revolt might turn the Dominican Republic into "a second Cuba." Starting April 28, over twenty thousand U.S. troops would land in Santo Domingo and help stop and vanquish the rebels. Although there were a few all-out battles and numerous skirmishes, the defeat would come through extended negotiations while the Constitutionals –as the pro-Bosch side became known– were cordoned off inside the Ciudad Nueva section of downtown. The following year, American-favorite Joaquín Balaguer won questionable elections and became a dictator in thin disguise for

twelve years – during which he was supported and abetted by the U.S.

What Dominicans know as the *Guerra de Abril*, *guerra patria*, or *Revolución de Abril* was one in a string of occurrences of U.S. intervention in Latin America during the Cold War, which sometimes was exerted through diplomatic pressure, and in other occasions through the landing of American troops. Guatemala 1954, the Bay of Pigs 1961, Brazil 1965, Chile 1973, Central America in the 1980s, have become shorthand for historical events determined by one overall logic: U.S. hegemony over the Western Hemisphere in the midst of the East-West confrontation and its proscription of any sign of dissent by the region's governments.

These events have been duly narrated from various points of view. But Cold War History has been mostly concerned with policymaking, international relations, and similar subjects. We know a lot about what presidents, ambassadors, generals, and intelligence officers did, thought, and wrote during each crisis. Narrations of the individual histories of the "minor," anonymous, street-level protagonists are harder to find – although some exist too.<sup>1</sup> What we very rarely find out, though, is whatever became of those faceless people, how their lives were affected in the long term by the larger Cold War history in which they were just one more fighter, one more protester, one more detainee.

This study aims to tell the stories of one particular group among the Dominican revolutionaries who in 1965 fought American Marines and paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne Division in the streets of Santo Domingo. In

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<sup>1</sup> One excellent example is Greg Grandin's *The Last Colonial Massacre* about the Guatemalan Indian peasants who fought on the losing leftist side in that country's long civil war.

an ironic but not entirely coincidental twist of Cold War history, a great many of those rebels ended up migrating to New York – some immediately after or even during the revolution, others many years later. The city which any self-respecting Latin American anti-imperialist considered "the belly of the beast" became home to many Constitutionalist. On May 2, 1965 President Johnson explained his decision to intervene to the American public saying that the Dominican "popular democratic revolution" had been "taken over and really seized and placed into the hands of a band of Communist conspirators."<sup>2</sup> Today, many of those purported "Red agents" live in New York as part of the city's largest immigrant group. They are members of the city's local government bodies, they lead community organizations, they work in American and Dominican political parties. Many became American citizens. Their children and grandchildren were born here. The Constitutionalist have become part of the nation that one day invaded and defeated them.

As I hopefully will show on these pages, this is a story of imperialism's unintended consequences. Like the proverbial elephant in the china shop, during the Cold War the United States repeatedly threw its weight –and military might– around Latin America. On the receiving end of those unsubtle interventions were thousands, millions of people whose lives were changed forever. That is what happened to the Dominican revolutionaries of 1965, the Constitutionalist New Yorkers whose personal histories I intend to narrate here. To them and because of them, the events of 1965 in downtown Santo Domingo still resonate in 2007 in

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<sup>2</sup> Gleijeses, Piero. *The Dominican Crisis: The 1965 Constitutionalist Revolt and American Intervention*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978, 258.

the neighborhoods of Uptown Manhattan. When the first Marines landed in the Dominican Republic forty-two Aprils ago, they were forever changing the history of New York City.

### ***A Note on Methodology***

This study is based on personal interviews I conducted with ten men and women who were participants in the Dominican revolution of April 1965. Four of them were members of the Dominican military; the other six were civilians who joined the uprising. The interviews were conducted in Spanish in New York City between April and October 2007. They were recorded in audio and each of them lasted between one and three hours, with most running about two hours. One was a joint interview where two of the subjects were interviewed at the same time. The rest were individual.

In addition to the interviews, I read a copious amount of material—including books, journal articles, Dominican and American newspapers and magazines—mostly dealing with two main subjects: the Dominican revolution and American intervention of 1965 and subsequent events; and Dominicans in New York, with an emphasis on the community's social, political and civil organizations.

I have not been able to corroborate all the events described by my interviewees, although I was able to confirm some of them through scholarly and journalistic historical accounts. Because of this, some of their assertions remain unchallenged and would need further corroboration. However, I do not think this

detracts from what I set out to achieve in this project.

( \* Some of the interviewee's names have been replaced by initials on this version for public dissemination on the web.)

## II. A Radio Broadcast, A Revolution

Early in the afternoon of April 24 1965, José Francisco Peña Gómez, a young and charismatic leader of the *Partido Revolucionario Dominicano* (PRD), informed listeners of the party's daily radio show *Tribuna Democrática* that a military rebellion was afoot. He had just got off the phone with Capt. Mario Peña Taveras, who had asked him to broadcast the news that Army Chief of Staff Gen. Marcos Rivera Cuesta was under arrest by a group of officers who wanted the return to power of democratically-elected President Juan Bosch. Bosch had been ousted by a right-wing coup d'état in September 1963, seven months into his tenure. Over the stirring notes of *La Marseillaise*, Peña Gomez urged Dominicans to take to the streets to show their support for the revolt.<sup>3</sup> His impassioned speech became the stuff of legend – most of this study's interviewees recalled hearing it. Thousands of people flooded the streets of Santo Domingo and other cities demanding Bosch's return to the presidency. Thus started *la Revolución de Abril*, the April Revolution, which would soon thrust the unwitting Dominicans into the global whirlwind of the Cold War.

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<sup>3</sup> D'Leon, Nexcy. "La proclama electrizante de Peña Gómez estremeció al pueblo en abril del 65." *Listín Diario*, April 23, 1997.

The historical origin of the April '65 revolt is not easy to pinpoint, since Dominican history in the 19th and 20th century featured repeated instances of political instability, *caudillo* wars, dictatorial rule, and foreign occupation<sup>4</sup>. The closest precedents from which a more direct relationship can be drawn are the American military occupation of 1916-1924 and the soon-to-follow 31-year dictatorship of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, who ruled the country with an iron hand and a greedy eye until he was assassinated by a group of conspirators in May 1961. Trujillo's death meant the start of turmoil in the Caribbean nation, which was placed in the hands of a State Council until Bosch won a popular election which some consider the first legitimate one in the country in the 20th century. Bosch arrived to the presidency with a newly-sanctioned Constitution of a marked progressive bent, which guaranteed basic civil liberties, prohibited the deportation of political dissidents, legalized divorce, and ended the special status Trujillo had granted the Catholic Church.<sup>5</sup> This won Bosch even more enemies than he already had among Santo Domingo's elites and the right wing. Conservative sectors including the Catholic Church and media outlets soon started accusing him of being too close to Communists. "Christian reaffirmation" rallies were organized against the government. A coup seemed a foregone conclusion by the time it finally took place on Sept. 25 1963. A triumvirate replaced the president. Pro-Bosch political sectors failed to defend him, which they had vowed to do. During the next year and in early 1965, several groups

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<sup>4</sup> A good survey of Dominican history is to be found in: Moya Pons' *The Dominican Republic: A National History*.

<sup>5</sup> Chester, Eric Thomas. *Rag-Tags, Scum, Riff-Raff, and Commies: The U.S. Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965-1966*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001.

started plotting against the de facto regime. When the government tried to quell one of those conspiracies by arresting a group of officers, Capt. Peña Taveras, who was in on the plot, reacted swiftly by ordering the arrest of the chief of staff and his deputy. "A page in Dominican history was irrevocably turned."<sup>6</sup>

Among those who followed the captain's order was Army Sgt. Major Cristian Estévez Gil, a clerk at the offices of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. A 22-year-old from the town of Moca in the North, he had joined the armed forces when he was 16, even though his father –an Army sergeant himself– had been killed by the Trujillo dictatorship. Estévez Gil would lead one of the *comandos* in which military and civilian fighters were organized in the following days<sup>7</sup>. Positioned at the head of the Duarte bridge, he fought in the bloodiest battle of the civil war when the Constitutionals stopped "loyalist"<sup>8</sup> tanks and troops from entering the city on April 26 and 27.<sup>9</sup> When Estévez Gil helped start the *War of April* by arresting the chief of staff, he became part of an event that would reverberate across the nation thanks to Peña Gómez's impassioned broadcast.

Throughout Santo Domingo, radios were tuned in to *Tribuna Democrática*, the PRD's daily show. On Las Damas Street in the downtown Zona Colonial, C., a young Catholic activist and bank employee, was listening. Upon hearing the announcement, she joined other young members of the Social Christian party to

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<sup>6</sup> Gleijeses, *The Dominican Crisis*.

<sup>7</sup> José Moreno's *Barrios in Arms* provides a sociological approach to understanding how the mixed civilian-military units known as *comandos* functioned. I will use their name in Spanish because the way in which they were organized was very specific to this conflict.

<sup>8</sup> I will use the term "loyalist" to identify the regular troops that fought against the Constitutionals. The quotation marks are due to the fact that they were not really loyal to the government, since the commanding officers led by Gen. Elías Wessin y Wessin did not attempt to sustain the Triumvirate after the rebellion started.

<sup>9</sup> Author interview with Cristian Estévez Gil, April 3, 2007, New York.

march towards the main thoroughfare of El Conde, where a crowd gathered to show its support for the rebels. In the following days, the Social Christians created their own *comando*, which C. joined. Few women joined the actual fight and most of them performed supporting tasks, like cooking or helping out in health clinics. C. –donning "bourgeois clothes" every time she had to leave the rebel zone– served as an emissary between the *Constitucionalista* leaders and the Papal Nuncio, a mediator in the months-long crisis.<sup>10</sup>

North from C.'s home, in a working-class section close to the Duarte bridge, a young man by the last name of Ramírez was having lunch<sup>11</sup>. He was a student activist at a high school and a member of the leftist *Movimiento 14 de Junio* (1J4), the biggest party of the Dominican left. "I didn't finish my food, I dropped my fork and ran out to the street, looking to see where the demonstrations were. Down Benito González (Street), a river of people were coming from the working-class areas close to the docks (...) The city was flooded with people everywhere."<sup>12</sup> Ramírez would join the fight in a 1J4 *comando*, remaining in the Northern section of the city which saw heavy fighting after U.S. troops arrived. He would stay outside of the rebel zone when the Americans cordoned it off, working clandestinely for the 1J4 after the *Constitucionalistas* were defeated in the Northern neighborhoods.<sup>13</sup>

Seventeen-year-old Obdulia Guzmán lived across the street from *Radio Comercial* and on that day she was trading collectable cards with a friend when

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<sup>10</sup> Author interview with C., May 3, 2007, New York.

<sup>11</sup> This leftist activist and former civilian combatant in the revolution asked to be identified only by his last name.

<sup>12</sup> Author interview with Ramírez, September 26, 2007, New York.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

she saw Peña Gómez leaving the station after his historic broadcast. The politician, whose children went to the same school as Guzmán, gestured to signal that the revolt had started. Although she was still a teenager, Guzmán had many friends in the 1J4. In the following days, she involved herself in the *comando* formed by women of the 1J4 and the *Movimiento Popular Dominicano* (MPD), another leftist organization. She would be close to being killed or tortured at the hands of "loyalists" when she returned to the rebel zone after a clandestine trip to San Francisco de Macorís, where the *Constitucionalistas* attempted to ignite a second front in the civil war. Detained by police officers, she managed to destroy a letter detailing the plans for the uprising before her captors found it. Thanks to a neighbor who was a police officer, Guzmán later was freed. After dyeing her hair and changing her clothes, she managed to re-enter Ciudad Nueva a few days later to remain there until the end of the conflict.<sup>14</sup>

José Santana was a 29-year-old employee of Monte de Piedad, a government pawn shop. Born in the countryside of Valverde Mao province, like numerous other poor Dominican peasants he had migrated to the capital six years earlier. There he started both high school and a political education as a member of the 1J4. On April 24 Santana left work at noon and, after hearing the news, he joined the uprising in his San Carlos neighborhood. He soon managed to get a rifle and fought until the end of the conflict. First he was part of the San Carlos *comando* two blocks from his home. Then, unhappy with the lack of discipline there, he and other 1J4 and MPD cadres formed a separate unit. Stationed close to the American cordon, those groups faced a heavy offensive on

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<sup>14</sup> Author interview with Obdulia Guzmán, October 27, 2007, New York.

June 15 and 16 when U.S. troops attempted to enter the rebel zone and took over a good amount of blocks before being ordered to stop.<sup>15</sup> Santana's first son was born during the revolution on May 2 and he named him Fidel Ernesto as an homage to the leaders of the Cuban Revolution. Santana says the baby's arrival was accelerated because his wife got very nervous after a bullet struck their home's tin roof.<sup>16</sup>

M., a 19-year-old a few exams short of graduating from high school, also lived in San Carlos. She was not formally a member of any political group, but she had many activist friends and she had started reading leftist literature and developing her political identity. "There was a revolutionary fervor. In those years, there was the revolution, Che, all of that. All the young people were involved in that trend (...) There was a commitment but it was also like a fad (...) To say that you were a leftist or that you worked with a party sounded good in the circles that I was a part of. And if you had a leftist boyfriend, even more so."<sup>17</sup> M. also heard Peña Gómez's speech and went out on the streets with her friends and brothers. They did not sleep that night, awaiting developments in the crisis. When the first casualties of the civil war started arriving at a health clinic on her block, M. was there to help the medical workers. Seeing two young men die with their fists raised, yelling insults against Trujillo and Balaguer, cemented her budding revolutionary ideals. She kept on working at the clinic every day over her mother's objections. When U.S. troops cordoned off the rebel zone and her block was left outside of it, she went to Ciudad Nueva every day until she finally stayed

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<sup>15</sup> Author interview with José Santana, September 16, 2007, New York.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. Today Fidel Ernesto Santana is a lawyer and leftist leader in the Dominican Republic.

<sup>17</sup> Author interview with M., October 19, 2007, New York.

there as part of a medical *comando*. This was a bold move for a young, single woman to make at the time – and M. was embarrassed to go home when the Constitutionlists put down their weapons after the four-month standoff.<sup>18</sup>

In the town of Tamboril near Santiago, the country's second-biggest city, Anastacio Jiménez, a 1J4 local leader, listened to Peña Gómez's speech with other militants. At age 25, Jiménez had already been part of the movement's disastrous attempt to start several guerrilla *focos* in 1963 after Bosch's ouster.<sup>19</sup> His group had been captured after a couple of skirmishes that left four inexperienced *guerrilleros* dead. After over a year in jail, they were amnestied in December 1964. Upon hearing the news of the Constitutionlist uprising, the Tamboril militants took over a local radio station while people celebrated the revolt in the streets. (The police would expel them from the station later that evening). They also tried unsuccessfully to convince the commanding officers at the Santiago military bases to join the uprising and distribute weapons to civilians. The next morning, Jiménez and others led a group of 39 men to Santo Domingo to join the uprising. In an example of their lack of understanding of the situation in the early days of the revolt,<sup>20</sup> the 1J4's leadership dismissed the group saying the rebellion was probably a trick to arrest any leftists who joined it. While most of the delegation returned to Tamboril, Jiménez and two friends stayed in the party's *comando*. He also remained in Ciudad Nueva until the end

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> The failed guerrilla brought the death of the revered 1J4 leader Manuel Aurelio Tavárez Justo and dealt a severe blow to the organization.

<sup>20</sup> Gleijeses, *The Dominican Crisis*.

of the conflict.<sup>21</sup>

The April 24 revolt was the rushed conclusion of the Enriquillo plan, a conspiracy among PRD politicians and military officers who wanted to see Bosch finish the term he had been elected for. The plotters had agreed to launch the revolt if an attempt was made to arrest any of them. Still, when Capt. Peña Taveras did just that he took by surprise not only the Triumvirate but also his own co-conspirators.<sup>22</sup> April 24 was a Saturday and most officers were on leave and not easily reachable. The same applied to more junior officers.

Julio Viterbo Pujol Peguero was a 25-year-old Navy captain assigned to a patrol boat at the port of Haina. That Saturday he was enjoying his leave in Santo Domingo. When he heard Peña Gómez urging all members of the military to return to their bases, Pujol Peguero –a PRD militant for a few years already– did just that. The base's commanding officer gave subordinates the option to go to the capital to join the popular revolt. Peguero told the captain he "was going to join the people"<sup>23</sup>. Several others joined him and, armed with weapons from his boat's arsenal, they left in a bus. Pujol Peguero took part in the early fighting, when the rebel troops were quite disorganized. Then he joined a *comando* at the Customs building, across the Ozama river from the Americans. His unit faced the June 15 attack by the Americans until it had to retreat under heavy fire. The rebels regrouped at a street corner where Pujol Peguero was scraped in the head by a bullet that pierced his helmet. After that battle, he remained in Ciudad

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<sup>21</sup> Author interview with Anastacio Jiménez, September 21, 2007, New York.

<sup>22</sup> Gleijeses, *The Dominican Crisis*.

<sup>23</sup> Author interview with Julio Viterbo Pujol Peguero, September 19 and October 10, 2007, New York.

Nueva until the negotiations ended the siege.<sup>24</sup>

Gabriel Guzmán, 21, was also in the Navy, but he was part of an elite unit of divers known as the frogmen. He was about to finish the demanding training to graduate as a sergeant. Guzmán was also on leave when the revolt started, so he returned to his base outside Santo Domingo. The capital's main TV station had been overrun by rebels who appeared on air to broadcast specific messages or just to voice their support for the uprising.<sup>25</sup> Guzmán's commander Capt. Ramón Montes Arache went in front of the cameras to tell his men they were to join the rebellion. After talking themselves out of being arrested by cadets from a nearby base and tying up another officer at their base, Guzmán and some comrades crossed the Ozama River into the city in a tugboat. He joined the revolt not out of principle but out of discipline. "When I joined, I didn't know what imperialism was, what democracy was. I didn't know anything, I was a soldier."<sup>26</sup> He would start his political instruction –and meet the woman who became his wife, Obdulia– in the Constitutionalist zone. On that first night, Guzmán helped take over police stations where civilians obtained weapons. On April 30, he took part in the massive attack on the Ozama Fortress where numerous police officers were captured and 4,000 weapons were distributed to rebel fighters.<sup>27</sup> Later on, when Col. Francisco Caamaño Deñó was named president by the Constitutionlists in replacement of the exiled Bosch, Guzmán was assigned to his personal guard. He remained with Caamaño until the latter left the country

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Gleijeses, *The Dominican Crisis*.

<sup>26</sup> Author interview with Gabriel Guzmán, September 22 and 29, 2007, New York.

<sup>27</sup> Gleijeses, *The Dominican Crisis*.

after the agreement that ended the conflict. The leader's exile was accelerated by a battle in Santiago that took place in December, after the peace accord and a provisional government were in place. Guzmán fought there too.<sup>28</sup>

That April Saturday H., a 23-year-old cadet at the Batalla de la Carreras Military Academy, intended to visit his family in San Francisco de Macorís in the north. But then the cadets were ordered to dress in combat uniform and await orders – their superiors soon decided to join the revolt.<sup>29</sup> On Sunday evening about 150 officers and cadets marched out of the academy heading East. A few hours later they arrived in San Pedro de Macorís and captured a local fortress without firing a shot.<sup>30</sup> The next day, they were strafed by a P-51 plane under the orders of "loyalist" Gen. Elías Wessin y Wessin, the leader of the regular forces combating the Constitutionals. The officers decided to leave San Pedro. The column would end up crisscrossing the east and north of the country, only to reach Santo Domingo two days after leaving the Academy. According to Piero Gleijeses, "the 'epic' of the constitutionalist cadets ended ingloriously, unspectacularly" when they were arrested by a small group of "loyalist" troops.<sup>31</sup> H., however, stayed in his hometown of San Francisco de Macorís where he was part of the failed uprising that attempted to open a second front in the revolution. He lost many friends among the civilians who were a majority of the rebels there.<sup>32</sup>

The Constitutionals were close to victory after rejecting the advance of

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<sup>28</sup> Gabriel Guzmán interview.

<sup>29</sup> Author interview with H., April 3, 2007, New York.

<sup>30</sup> Gleijeses, *The Dominican Crisis*.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>32</sup> H. interview.

Wessin y Wessin's tanks at the Duarte bridge, which left the regular forces dispirited and disorganized. But the landing of American troops on April 28 saved the "loyalists" from total defeat. The Marines and paratroopers sent by President Lyndon B. Johnson corralled the rebels in Ciudad Nueva and supported a virulent assault on the northern barrios by the regrouped regular Dominican forces. While political considerations stopped the U.S. troops from definitively quashing the revolt,<sup>33</sup> their presence ensured that the Constitutionlists submit to most of the conditions American officials pushed for during the negotiations to solve the crisis. On Sept. 3 both Caamaño and Imbert Barrera, president of the Government of National Reconstruction created by the "loyalist" side, gave way to interim President Héctor García Godoy. He was in charge of organizing the June 1966 elections where American-favored Joaquín Balaguer would triumph. The campaign was marked by severe repression against PRD activists – so intense that their candidate Bosch mostly campaigned through radio broadcasts from his Santo Domingo home. That violence set the tone for what would come during the twelve years of the Balaguer regime, when many militants were killed or disappeared, and when many left the country to stay alive.

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<sup>33</sup> Chester, *Rag-Tags, Scum, Riff-Raff, and Commies*.

### III. After The Revolt: The Constitutionalist Soldiers

The Dominican crisis was by no means over with García Godoy's arrival to the National Palace. The battle at the Hotel Matum in Santiago in December –where Cristian Estévez Gil and Gabriel Guzmán fought alongside other Constitutionalist– gave a measure of the extreme instability the country was going through.<sup>34</sup> In a climate of unrelenting violence and agitation from every side, García Godoy increased the pressure on the leaders of both Constitutionalist and regular forces to leave the country. The exile of "Communists" had been a condition U.S. officials insisted upon since early in the negotiations.<sup>35</sup> Col. Caamaño left in January to become a military attaché at the Dominican Embassy in London, while frogmen commander Capt. Montes Arache was sent to Canada and Capt. Peña Taveras, the initiator of the revolt, to Chile.<sup>36</sup> The chiefs of the regular forces resisted ejection, however, generating a crisis that almost ended in García Godoy's resignation. Finally, Wessin y Wessin (sent to the Miami consulate) and another top officer left the country while two more generals stepped down, vacating the military's top posts.

García Godoy had promised that lower-ranking Constitutionalist officers and enlisted men would be reintegrated to the Armed Forces. There had been

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<sup>34</sup> The battle was set off when the main Constitutionalist leaders led a group of rebels to a Santiago cemetery to pay their respects to Col. Rafael Fernández Domínguez, the Constitutionlists' main military ideologue, who died during the war. The rebels were attacked while having breakfast at the hotel and the battle lasted for most of the day until international troops (see below) forced a cease-fire.

<sup>35</sup> Slater, Jerome. *Intervention and Negotiation; the United States and the Dominican Revolution*. 1st ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1970.

<sup>36</sup> Chester, *Rag-Tags, Scum, Riff-Raff, and Commies*. According to Gleijeses, in 1967 Caamaño vanished during one of his European trips. He made his way to Cuba to prepare for a guerrilla war in the Dominican Republic, which he finally attempted to disastrous results in 1973. Two weeks after landing in a southern beach with nine other men, he was killed in the mountains by government troops. (Gleijeses, *The Dominican Crisis*.)

about 1,500 of them at the start of the uprising, but many had walked away and some 700 remained by September<sup>37</sup>. "Pending their reintegration" they were sent to a military camp where they were watched by the Inter-American Peace Force (IAPF.)<sup>38</sup> Pressure from the regular forces, which at times got close to outright rebellion<sup>39</sup>, prevented García Godoy from fulfilling his promise. Although he signed a reintegration decree after the presidential election,<sup>40</sup> it was never fully executed by Balaguer. Only about a hundred men would actually be taken back,<sup>41</sup> "with most being assigned to meaningless guard-duty tasks. According to PRD charges, two years later even those few were still being harassed or had been forced to resign."<sup>42</sup> "The few who remained have not had dazzling careers," Gleijeses reported in 1977, with only one officer having been promoted in eleven years.<sup>43</sup>

While a handful of Constitutionalist leaders were granted what could be considered a comfortable exile in consular postings, some of their lower-ranking comrades were also given the opportunity to leave the country of their own accord. As far as I have been able to determine, this part of the story of the April Revolution has never been told in detail. History has trained its spotlights on the major actors, the leaders of the revolt, not on those who supported them and

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<sup>37</sup> Chester, *Rag-Tags, Scum, Riff-Raff, and Commies*.

<sup>38</sup> Slater, *Intervention and Negotiation*, 153. The IAPF was created by the Organization of American States after the American intervention. With the exception of a group of Costa Rican police officers, the troops in the IAPF came from countries under right-wing dictatorships: Brazil, Honduras, Nicaragua and Paraguay.

<sup>39</sup> Slater reports two plots by high officers to assassinate the provisional president.

<sup>40</sup> "Former Rebels Back In Dominican Force," *The New York Times*, July 1, 1966.

<sup>41</sup> Burks, Edward C. "Dominican Republic Remains A Divided Country." *The New York Times*, June 13, 1967.

<sup>42</sup> Slater, *Intervention and Negotiation*, 161.

<sup>43</sup> Gleijeses, *The Dominican Crisis*, 411, n111.

fought by their side almost anonymously. This brief reference by Jerome Slater is all I have encountered in the literature regarding the fate of enlisted men and lower-ranking officers like the ones I interviewed:

"After the Balaguer government took office, most of the remaining constitutionalist leaders were sent abroad as 'military attachés,' and about three hundred of the enlisted men, including most of Montes Arache's frogmen, accepted offers to come to the United States for retraining in civilian skills. Many of them found jobs in the States and remained here."<sup>44</sup>

Although documentary evidence needs to be collected to support my interviewees' recollections, all four of the former military men interviewed reported having been part of an initiative to bring Constitutionalist uniformed personnel to the United States.<sup>45</sup> The help they received in terms of immigration documentation, job training and placement, and even cash payments, points to a joint effort between the American and Dominican governments to ensure that these potentially troublesome men stayed outside of their country.

This will not be all that surprising to those who have studied Dominican migration to the U.S. since the '60s, since it has been shown that there were many reasons for which both the American and Dominican governments favored the migration of Dominicans to the U.S. However, this agreement –tacit or otherwise– has been mainly thought of as limited to the liberal provision of visas on the part of American consular authorities. The initiative that I will describe here based on interviews with those who benefited from it went much further than

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<sup>44</sup> Slater, *Intervention and Negotiation*, 161.

<sup>45</sup> It must be noted here that the four interviewees referred to this initiative without being asked about it. After I had heard about it from the first interviewee, I refrained from mentioning it to the others until they brought it up in the course of narrating their arrival to the U.S.

the mere granting of visas: its existence implies an organized effort between the two governments, and the provision of legal and economic assistance long after the Constitutionalist had left the Dominican Republic. Until now, the history of the Dominican Revolution of '65 has not featured this parallel narrative: the story of the Constitutionalist soldiers who once were accused of being Communist and after migrating with help from the U.S. ended up becoming American citizens. Until now, these men have only appeared, literally, in History's footnotes.

### ***From Ciudad Nueva to New York City***

With the provisional government in power, the Constitutionalist military were quartered at a camp outside Santo Domingo. "We were sent to the 27 de Febrero camp in the East, where we were surrounded. Honestly, although we were armed, we were like 'trusted' prisoners because if we wanted to get out we had the Americans and the regular forces right next to us," says Julio Pujol Peguero, the former Navy captain.<sup>46</sup> A few violent, heated months passed as García Godoy struggled to stay in control of the situation. Caamaño and the other top Constitutionlists left; Wessin y Wessin followed; the presidential election was held June 1, 1966; Balaguer was inaugurated in July. Then, Pujol Peguero says, there was "a government-to-government agreement" between the U.S. and Balaguer to send the Constitutionalist military men to the U.S.<sup>47</sup> Pujol Peguero was part of a committee who negotiated with the president at the

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<sup>46</sup> Pujol Peguero interview. A New York Times reporter who interviewed Capt. Montes Arache in the camp reported some 500 men were there. (Burks, "Dominican Rebels Isolated In Camp." *The New York Times*, Dec. 31, 1965.)

<sup>47</sup> Pujol Peguero interview.

National Palace. "In the middle of the conversation with Balaguer, when we were refusing to leave the country, he said: 'Either you leave the country or I will get you out militarily, by force, because I can't allow any more bloodshed between you and the regular forces.'"<sup>48</sup> In the end an agreement was reached that the Constitutionals would be granted U.S. residency and come to the United States for training in civilian trades, which coincides with Slater's account. Pujol Peguero says ninety-three men were involved in the initial deal. Roughly half of them went to San Pedro, Ca. and the rest, to Corpus Christi, Tx., where they stayed at military bases. He was at Fort McArthur in San Pedro and took English classes and construction and carpentry courses in nearby Long Beach.<sup>49</sup>

Not all of those quartered at the 27 de Febrero barracks accepted the offer to leave the Dominican Republic. "We understood that the country was in a critical situation and if we stayed our lives were in danger. There were many who refused (to leave) in the negotiations. Many *compañeros* did not want to leave and they were killed, many of them. And those who were not killed, they are alive until today but they have not been able to get jobs and are going through a lot of problems: hunger, misery..."<sup>50</sup>

Gabriel Guzmán, the frogman,<sup>51</sup> was also among those who left. After Caamaño exited the country in January, Guzmán, who had been one of his guards, remained in the city. He now guarded Héctor Aristy, a civilian leader of the revolt and a friend of Caamaño. On the night of June 3, those at Aristy's

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Capt. Montes Arache's frogmen earned a reputation as a fearsome military unit during the revolution. Even today some Dominicans speak of them in awe.

home engaged in a shootout with National Police and armed forces units. One of the frogmen and Aristy's cook were killed.<sup>52</sup> Guzmán says he survived all night inside a water well and surrendered in the morning to the Papal nuncio.<sup>53</sup> He was kept under arrest for a week and then sent to the 27 de Febrero camp. He says Juan Bosch met with the Constitutionals there. "He told us we had to leave the country (...) that the imperialists had a plan to eliminate us all, that those who didn't leave would be killed and that he was leaving. We felt betrayed, that he wasn't carrying on with the struggle. But we were not politicians, he was the politician who knew what was happening. So some stayed, I was among those who agreed to leave."<sup>54</sup> In the U.S., Guzmán trained as a plumber and learned English. After about six months, the group returned to the Dominican Republic, apparently with hopes of rejoining the uniformed services. "They did not allow me to reintegrate to the armed forces. They said we were rebels, that we were not a part of them."<sup>55</sup> Guzmán says repression of Constitutionals was becoming a reason for concern. "They killed some of us who went to public places. Sometimes my house was surrounded."<sup>56</sup> He says the Constitutionals then met with Balaguer and he offered them to leave for the U.S. with residence permits.<sup>57</sup> Guzmán arrived in New York on Oct. 3, 1967 with his residency documents in a brown envelope. At the time, there was no sizable Dominican community in the

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<sup>52</sup> The incident was so serious as to merit a story in *The New York Times*. (See: Montgomery, Paul L. "Bosch Aide's Home Scene Of Shooting." *The New York Times*, June 5, 1966.)

<sup>53</sup> The Times' account corroborates Guzmán's version of events.

<sup>54</sup> Gabriel Guzmán interview.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Since Guzmán places the meeting after their return from training in the U.S., it is not clear whether this is the same meeting Pujol Peguero narrated—in which case one of the two informants has misplaced it in time—or whether there was more than one meeting between the president and the Constitutionals.

city – in fact, the turmoil after Trujillo's death and the revolution of 1965 contributed to start the migration that would become massive in the late '60s and '70s. But Guzmán says he decided he wanted to come to New York because he thought he would be less conspicuous, and hence safer, in an English-speaking place. "If I go to Puerto Rico, everyone speaks Spanish, if they try to kill me, they can kill me easily."<sup>58</sup>

Pujol Peguero came shortly after Guzmán on February 2, 1968. He says the Constitutionalist were given U.S. residence papers and a three-month deadline to leave the Dominican Republic. "It seems that was part of the contract between the governments, to get us out with every legal document."<sup>59</sup> To obtain them, he went to the American consulate in Santo Domingo along with a comrade. "The consul asked us, literally: '*You siendo Comunista?*' 'No, we're not Communists.' 'But you participated in the revolt?' 'Yes, we did, because we think that's possible, that's legal.' The only thing he said was, 'Come back in the afternoon to pick up your residency.'"<sup>60</sup> He planned on visiting some cousins in New York to then go on to California, where he had made some acquaintances. But he found a job five days after arriving and stayed in New York for good.

Pujol Peguero says most of those who had trained in Texas and California migrated to the U.S. after returning to the Dominican Republic for a short period – a few months when they were not allowed to even enter military facilities. "But in addition to those many others left later, after the negotiations."<sup>61</sup> He says the

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<sup>58</sup> Gabriel Guzmán interview.

<sup>59</sup> Pujol Peguero interview.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. Pujol Peguero narrated this in Spanish.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

total number of those who came to the U.S. could be close to two hundred (Slater mentions three hundred.) One of those who came later not having participated in the civilian skills training was Cristian Estévez Gil, the former Army sergeant major. His exit was different from that of Pujol Peguero and Guzmán. He says that he and some fifty comrades were loaded onto a truck and taken to an airplane, not knowing which foreign country it was destined for. They soon landed in New York, where they went through Migrations using a letter each of them was given. "Migrations told us, 'In a few weeks you will receive your residency.' (...) They sent us to a hotel."<sup>62</sup> It was the Hilton in Manhattan, where they stayed for about a month until they received their residence papers. "They told us when we arrived, 'You will receive your residency card but you must not engage in politics of any type.' That was the first thing they said to us."<sup>63</sup> From then, Estévez Gil led the life of an immigrant rather than that of a political exile. He found a job at a factory, then at a restaurant in New Jersey. Since 1974, he has been a building superintendent in a quiet section of Riverdale in The Bronx. He raised three American-born children, one of them a New York police officer.

Just two floors above from Estévez Gil's apartment, another Constitutionalist spends his days nowadays. H., the former cadet, met Estévez Gil in New York and the latter helped him find a home in the building where he works and lives. Instead of returning to their studies, the cadets had an early exit from the Dominican Republic on March 19, 1966<sup>64</sup>. "Caamaño asked President

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<sup>62</sup> Estévez Gil interview.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> H. interview. Glejeses also says they left in March 1966.

García Godoy to send us abroad to finish our studies to become officers."<sup>65</sup>

While Gleijeses says all the cadets were sent to Chile,<sup>66</sup> H., who went to Chile with other cadets, says two other groups went to France and Venezuela.<sup>67</sup> During his two years in Chile, H. graduated as a lieutenant and met his wife; the first of his two daughters was born there. After declining an offer to join the Chilean armed forces, he returned to the Dominican Republic where he learnt that there was no chance of being reintegrated into the Dominican uniformed services. In late 1969, he came to New York with a 10-day visitor's visa. After it expired, he remained here illegally, "completely disoriented."<sup>68</sup> But then he ran into some former comrades who told him that all Constitutionalist here were going to be granted U.S. residency.<sup>69</sup> They invited him to a meeting at a home on Dyckman Street in Upper Manhattan. There, he says, "forty or fifty military men" met with a Cuban man sent by the U.S. State Department and Immigration authorities to talk to them. "He told us that the State Department had asked him to solve the issue of our residency, but the only thing he wanted was that we refrained from engaging in politics in the United States. He wrote down our names and on Monday we went to Immigration (...) We had to go to the 15th floor, where (a sign) said 'Deportation', and I said, 'OK, this is the end. We're getting deported

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Gleijeses, *The Dominican Crisis*.

<sup>67</sup> According to Gleijeses, "it would seem that the military studies of the cadets were not very successful: not one of them ever became an officer. In 1972 six remained in the armed forces, still as cadets! This was the punishment they endured for having chosen the side of the constitution on 25 April 1965." (Gleijeses, *The Dominican Crisis*, 411, n110.) H.'s example shows that whatever their academic success, their problem was they were rejected by the Dominican armed forces.

<sup>68</sup> H. interview.

<sup>69</sup> This would seem to show that others had arrived in the same situation as H. and, unlike those who left shortly after the war, without U.S. residency.

again."<sup>70</sup> Instead, the Constitutionals met with a high Immigration official<sup>71</sup> who reiterated that they would be granted residency and that all that was asked from them was that they stay away from political activity. Since H. did not have any documentation with him, a week later that same official went to his apartment to fill out the necessary forms for him and his wife. The official even gave them his business card to use as a safe-conduct in case their workplaces were raided by Immigration inspectors before their residence papers arrived. "And that's exactly how it happened. (...) I showed them the card (...) They took a lot of people with them, but they never touched us. And we could get our residency thank God."<sup>72</sup> In 2007, H. worked as a laboratory supervisor at a factory in New Jersey.

After Balaguer took office, a list of people who could not reenter the Dominican Republic was created. It included civilian and military Constitutionals. That meant a twelve-year exile for many people, until Balaguer lost the 1978 presidential election to the PRD's Antonio Guzmán. One of them was Estévez Gil, who once attempted to go home and was refused entry to the country at the Santo Domingo airport.<sup>73</sup> Gabriel Guzmán remained separated from his wife for the twelve years that Balaguer was in power. He was also barred from attending his father's funeral.<sup>74</sup> Pujol Peguero returned for the first time in 1974, when Balaguer's grip on power had started showing some strains.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> H. says the official's last name was Guglielmo.

<sup>72</sup> H. interview.

<sup>73</sup> Estévez Gil interview.

<sup>74</sup> Gabriel Guzmán interview.

<sup>75</sup> Pujol Peguero interview.

### ***The Cuban Man on Park Avenue***

In the course of their interviews and without prompting, all four former Constitutionalist military men<sup>76</sup> mentioned one person: the Cuban man who helped them settle in New York. Both Peguero and Guzmán identified him as Roberto Fernández (H. and Estévez Gil were not sure about his name.) Although they remembered different things about him and especially about whom he worked for, I have been able to piece together a likely explanation of who he was and why he helped the Constitutionlists.

Julio Pujol Peguero, referring to the alleged agreement between Dominican and American officials, says: "The government contracts (sic) they made said that when we got here, there was an office –I don't know whether it was the CIA, I don't know who it belonged to– where they received us and they gave us money weekly until they found us a job."<sup>77</sup> (He personally never needed the thirty-five dollars that office gave to each Constitutionalist weekly because he had brought some money with him –he owned a business in Santo Domingo– and he had relatives here who helped him find a job soon after he arrived.) "That office was directed by a gentleman named Roberto Fernández, who was Cuban. (...) And that man, Roberto Fernández, was the one who received the exiled Cubans coming from Cuba, to give them the same assistance we received, or better (...) That was at 386 Park Avenue South."<sup>78</sup> Despite having such a good memory as to remember an address after four decades, Pujol Peguero could not say what agency that office belonged to – although he was sure it was a U.S.

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<sup>76</sup> H. and Estévez Gil were interviewed together at the latter's home.

<sup>77</sup> Pujol Peguero interview.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

government agency.

Gabriel Guzmán, who arrived shortly before Pujol Peguero, says, "When I arrived in New York, there was a gentleman named Roberto Fernández, who worked with Juan Bosch too.<sup>79</sup> They put him in charge of finding us jobs and finding us winter clothes. (...) There was a Cuban refugee center on Park Avenue, that's where I got my first coat. And he (Fernández) dedicated himself to finding us jobs."<sup>80</sup> He did, and Guzmán worked delivering paint for a Long Island factory and then at a lamp factory. He thinks Fernández worked for the U.S. government, "because he had contacts in the Labor Department. Because he was also there (in the Dominican Republic) with Juan Bosch's government. I don't know if he was a spy for the United States, but that gentleman always helped us since we got here (...) I can't tell you whether it was an agreement that the government had with the United States, but that gentleman always helped us."<sup>81</sup> H., as seen above, said the Cuban man worked for Immigration. Estévez Gil –whose cousin got him a job as soon as he left the Hilton– did not mention having resorted to the Cuban man's help, although he apparently did meet him or at least heard about him.<sup>82</sup>

The address Pujol Peguero remembered used to be the address of a New York office of the International Rescue Committee.<sup>83</sup> That the Constitutionals could have received help at the local IRC office would make sense. The

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<sup>79</sup> Guzmán had just mentioned Sacha Volman, a Bosch associate with links to the CIA.

<sup>80</sup> Guzmán interview.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> When H. failed to recall the Cuban man's name, Estévez Gil offered "Rafael Pérez."

<sup>83</sup> 386 Park Avenue South is listed as the IRC's office in a New York Times 1992 news item about relief agencies collecting donations during a humanitarian crisis in Somalia. ("Mission To Somalia." *The New York Times*, Dec. 21, 1992.)

organization had concentrated since the 1930s on helping European refugees, "first from Nazi Germany and later from Iron Curtain countries."<sup>84</sup> But on July 1960 it launched a Caribbean program to help Cubans and Dominicans. At that time, Trujillo was alive and well and still ruling the Dominican Republic. The IRC put him into the same category as Fidel Castro when it announced the new program. Its president John Richardson Jr. was joined in a press conference by an anti-Castro Cuban leader, Aureliano Sánchez Arango, who was involved in planning the Bay of Pigs invasion at the time.<sup>85</sup> Sánchez Arango accused the Cuban revolutionary government of being "the first Latin-American satellite of the Soviet Union," with "the whole Soviet bloc" behind it.<sup>86</sup> Throughout the 1960s, the IRC's Caribbean program would spend three million dollars, two thirds of which came from government grants while private donors –among them companies with Latin American interests– contributed the rest.<sup>87</sup>

At first glance, the fact that the Constitutionlists were likely assisted by a non-governmental relief organization would seem to disprove rather than support the idea that the U.S. actively helped the rebels settle and find jobs in its own territory. In fact, the opposite appears to be true. Eric Thomas Chester has shown as much in his book *Covert Network: Progressives, The International Rescue Committee, and the CIA*, supported by primary source material from more than twenty different archives. Created during World War II to assist those

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<sup>84</sup> "Group to Assist Cuban Refugees." *The New York Times*, July 13, 1960.

<sup>85</sup> Chester, Eric Thomas. *Covert Network: Progressives, the International Rescue Committee, and the CIA*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1995.

<sup>86</sup> *The New York Times*, July 13, 1960.

<sup>87</sup> Chester, *Covert Network*. Large numbers of Cubans settled in the New York metropolitan area, including several New Jersey towns across the Hudson River. Chester says 15,000 Cubans had been helped at the IRC's New York office by the spring of 1963.

fleeing totalitarian regimes irrespective of the latter's ideology, "the IRC followed a different set of policy guidelines during the Cold War, when most of the organization's resources were devoted to helping refugees from the Communist countries."<sup>88</sup> As it became increasingly co-opted by the American foreign policy establishment and intelligence services, the organization "used its early history, and its few programs for exiles from right-wing dictatorships, as a smoke screen for its role in the covert network."<sup>89</sup> (Chester uses this term to refer to "the interconnected set of organizations helping the U.S. intelligence community to implement a variety of clandestine operations designed to destabilize the Soviet Union and its dependent allies."<sup>90</sup>)

"Throughout the Cold War years, almost all of those receiving IRC aid had fled from Communist-controlled governments, rather than from right-wing dictatorships benefiting from U.S. aid. There were exceptions, such as the Committee's modest program for Haitian refugees and the limited effort to aid political refugees from the brutal Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, but funding for these exceptions constituted a small proportion of the organization's total budget."<sup>91</sup>

The former Constitutionalist soldiers –probably three hundred people at the most– may have been among those small exceptions. But serving as part of the IRC's "smoke screen" would not have been the sole or even the principal reason for providing assistance to people like Gabriel Guzmán or his comrades. As the present study's interviews show, the decision to encourage Dominican dissidents to leave the Dominican Republic for the United States was a

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<sup>88</sup> Chester, *Covert Network*, 212.

<sup>89</sup> Chester, *Covert Network*, 213.

<sup>90</sup> Chester, *Covert Network*, 1.

<sup>91</sup> Chester, *Covert Network*, 193.

conscious foreign policy move. As Mitchell says, the migratory wave which started after the 1965 revolution "paid important political dividends for both governments"<sup>92</sup> – even more so in the case of the most active opponents of Balaguer, the Constitutionalist rebels. Their exit from the Dominican Republic served to further the interests of both the American government –which placed a high value on stability in the Caribbean and the pre-emption of "a second Cuba"– and its ally President Balaguer who –as detentions, torture and assassinations proved– was willing to get rid of "hotheads" by whatever means proved necessary.<sup>93</sup>

There is another recollection shared by two of the former Constitutionalist soldiers that details how closely the American government was involved in their immigration to this country. Pujol Peguero says they were monitored by intelligence agents during their stay in California. Estévez Gil says he was followed by an agent during his first few months in the U.S.

Pujol Peguero says that "a man who was a member of the CIA" was in charge of monitoring him and some comrades while they were taking English classes at a California university.<sup>94</sup> Other purported CIA agents did the same with the rest of the 43 Constitutionlists in training in San Pedro. "There was a CIA member assigned to every four or five of us."<sup>95</sup> A man named Bill Allen, ostensibly an American studying Spanish at the same school, befriended Pujol

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<sup>92</sup> Mitchell, Christopher. "U.S. Foreign Policy and Dominican Migration to the United States." In *Western Hemisphere Immigration and United States Foreign Policy*, ed. Christopher Mitchell, 89-123. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992, 104.

<sup>93</sup> Further research in IRC documents, not possible under this study's time constraints, could confirm the organization's assistance of the Dominican former military men.

<sup>94</sup> Pujol Peguero interview.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

Peguero and a few other Constitutionalists. He took them on off-day leisure excursions and occasionally engaged them in conversation about Dominican politics. He even invited Pujol Peguero to have dinner at his parents' home and took a group of Dominicans to Las Vegas, all expenses paid. Later, Pujol Peguero says, "He opened up to me and told me, 'Look, our job was to investigate you and that's why, you see, every step you took we took with you, to see if it was true you were Communists. (...) The reports we've submitted are that none of you are Communists.' And it is true we were not."<sup>96</sup>

Estévez Gil, who was not among those who went to California and Texas, says he was followed by "an Immigration detective" during his first few months in the U.S. when he was working at a restaurant in Union City, NJ.<sup>97</sup> After about three months on the job, one morning his boss summoned him to a table where he was sitting with a stranger. He told him that the man had been following him for three months. "He knows where you live, he knows that you work with me here, and he says that you came to this country to work. That you are a good person and not the person they thought you were.' They thought I was a hothead who had come to make trouble in this country."<sup>98</sup> The detective told Estévez Gil that from then on he would not follow him any more.

### ***A Dwindling Group***

Since they arrived in New York, many of the former Constitutionalist

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Estévez Gil interview. Estévez Gil first said the man was from Immigration, then after being asked whether he was "Immigration or CIA?" he said he was a CIA agent.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

soldiers stayed in touch with one another. Early on, they created a group which today is called *Fundación 24 de Abril*. The foundation was oriented towards ensuring the Constitutionals' well-being, not so much towards political objectives. Guzmán described it as more of a "mutual aid" group whose members refused to mingle with former civilian combatants and other Dominican activists concerned with more politically-charged activities<sup>99</sup>. During those early years, it was important to support one another since the men "did not know anyone" here<sup>100</sup> – and they had been barred from returning home by Balaguer. The former military men used to meet at a tailor shop on Broadway and 157th Street called *La Embajada*,<sup>101</sup> where sometimes they would be joined by Sacha Volman. He was a Romanian with links to the CIA who had become involved in Dominican politics after meeting Juan Bosch in the 1960s and serving as an advisor to him during his short-lived presidency.<sup>102</sup> "Sacha Volman came from Santo Domingo and always met with us (...) He always kept up with the group."<sup>103</sup> Pujol Peguero was also part of those weekly meetings. "I understand (Volman) was the link between the American government and the Dominican government (...) He had a very important role for us, I don't know what was his role in the American government, but he did a good job (...) He had a very active

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<sup>99</sup> Gabriel Guzmán interview.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Chester says Volman had started working for the CIA in Europe after fleeing Soviet-controlled Romania. He met Bosch when the Dominican taught at the Costa Rican Institute for Political Education, an effort at training U.S.-friendly Latin American social democrats, which Volman had helped create. Volman "served as an intermediary between the rebel leadership and the White House" during the Dominican revolution and became "a confidential advisor to Balaguer after the 1966 election." (Chester, *Rag-Tags, Scum, Riff-Raff, and Commies*, 340)

<sup>103</sup> Gabriel Guzmán interview.

role in the process of our exiting the country."<sup>104</sup> Political issues, however, were not discussed in Volman's presence.<sup>105</sup>

In 2007, Estévez Gil kept at his home a list showing eighty-two members of the foundation – but many of those listed had died or moved away. A recent meeting had attracted only twelve members and Estévez Gil, who was in charge of leading the group, kept a box filled with medals honoring the veterans of the revolution – which no one had bothered to pick up. The main concern for those few still active in the foundation –which works with a parallel organization based in the Dominican Republic– was that the Dominican government would finally put in effect a law granting the former Constitutionalist uniformed personnel pensions in accordance to their ranks at the time of the revolt. The group's other main activity has been commemorating the 1965 revolution every 24th of April.

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<sup>104</sup> Pujol Peguero interview.

<sup>105</sup> Pujol Peguero and Guzmán, as we will see below, remain deeply involved in Dominican politics to this day and were active in conspiring against the Balaguer regime.

#### IV. After The Revolt: The Constitutionalist Civilians

Unlike the rebel soldiers, it appears that most of the civilians who fought on the Constitutionalist side did not receive any help from the government once the civil war was over. They were not offered work or education opportunities in the U.S., nor were they automatically granted visas and residency permits to come to New York. I have found no evidence that those civilian revolutionaries who did arrive in New York ever benefited from the weekly cash payments or the job placement services provided by Roberto Fernández.<sup>106</sup> "When the negotiation was carried out in the Dominican Republic, they were not included in the negotiation (...) Many of them had to go to Europe by their own means, because there was not so much difficulty in going to Europe. And many left for Europe, and then many came here from Europe."<sup>107</sup> However, this does not mean that those who wanted to leave the country found it difficult. According to Torres-Saillant and Hernández,

"The (Balaguer) government undertook a pacification campaign that included political repression, killings, incarcerations, and opening the doors to expel unwanted voices that antagonized the regime. Though no written agreement existed, the U.S. and the Dominican governments acted in unison. Political dissidents received visas to travel to the United States. Others would apply for a passport and the government would simply grant it."<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Further research, particularly in IRC archives if available, could shed light on this.

<sup>107</sup> Pujol Peguero interview. Europe was not the only option, however: Eugenia Georges interviewed two Santo Domingo activists who left for Venezuela and later moved to New York. (Georges, Eugenia. *New Immigrants and the Political Process: Dominicans in New York*. 1984.)

<sup>108</sup> Torres-Saillant, Silvio, and Ramona Hernández. *The Dominican Americans*, 39.

In fact, as in the late 1960s New York City became the principal magnet for Dominicans leaving their country, many former combatants found their way to the United States and to New York.

During the times of Trujillo, only few and select Dominicans were allowed to leave the country. With the dictator's assassination in 1961, the floodgates were open. The number of Dominicans who received U.S. immigrant visas climbed from 464 in 1960 to almost ten thousand in 1963. From 1965 on the pace of immigration never diminished significantly – it would reach annual figures of over twenty thousand in the mid-eighties.<sup>109</sup> "U.S. foreign policy played a major role in initiating large-scale Dominican migration, as U.S. policymakers sought (especially from 1961 to 1966) to limit political tensions in a nation where governmental instability was taken by Washington as an open door to radical revolution."<sup>110</sup> Mitchell says American foreign policy only influenced the migratory flow in those early years.<sup>111</sup> As Hoffnung-Garskof points out, thanks particularly to family reunification provisions in U.S. immigration law, that would prove enough to create an irreversible exodus that resulted in what today is the largest immigrant community in New York City.<sup>112</sup> This author describes the Dominican colonization of New York as a side-effect of U.S. imperialism.

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<sup>109</sup> U.S. Department of State figures cited by Mitchell, "U.S. Foreign Policy and Dominican Migration to the United States," 93.

<sup>110</sup> Mitchell, "U.S. Foreign Policy and Dominican Migration to the United States," 90.

<sup>111</sup> That influence was very concrete: Facing what he termed a "visa uproar," with long lines of Dominican applicants assembling every day at the consulate, ambassador John Bartlow Martin vastly expanded consular operations in Santo Domingo and granted "dramatically higher numbers of visas." (Mitchell, "U.S. Foreign Policy and Dominican Migration to the United States," 99).

<sup>112</sup> Hoffnung-Garskof, Jesse. *Nueva Yol: Migration and Popular Culture in Santo Domingo and New York, 1950-1992*. Ph.D., Princeton University, 2003.

"Migration was not a long-term conspiracy, nor even a short term 'safety valve.' It was rather an unintended consequence of economic and political meddling in Santo Domingo and an example of exactly how difficult the prospect of centralized imperial control really was. It was an example how crises on the periphery of an imperial system can create profound, unanticipated transformations at the core. Political maneuvers in Santo Domingo, designed to solve an immediate crisis, set in motion the Dominicanization of New York City."<sup>113</sup>

I agree with Hoffnung-Garskof's explanation although I take exception to his downright rejection of the "safety valve" argument.<sup>114</sup> He explains his rejection in that the safety valve "probably overstates the intentions of United States representatives."<sup>115</sup> From my point of view both explanations can and do coexist, describing different aspects of the Dominican migratory wave. The initiative to bring up to three hundred Constitutionalist soldiers to the U.S. described in the previous section appears to be a clear example of American officials' purposeful actions to relieve pressure from Balaguer – especially in the first months and years of his government, when the Constitutionalist troops were sent to the U.S. The means through which civilian Constitutionalists arrived in New York after the defeat of the revolution, on the other hand, illustrate what we could call Hoffnung-Garskof's "imperial side-effect" argument.<sup>116</sup> I hope that, in telling the stories of the civilian revolutionaries I interviewed, I will be able to demonstrate this in the present section.

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<sup>113</sup> Hoffnung-Garskof, *Nueba Yol*, 91-92.

<sup>114</sup> The idea of migration as a safety valve was formulated by Grasmuck and Pessar, and Levitt

<sup>115</sup> Hoffnung-Garskof, *Nueba Yol*, 91.

<sup>116</sup> Taking into account the organized plan to get the military men out of the Dominican Republic, it would not be a stretch to assume that the Consulate may have knowingly granted visas to civilian Constitutionalists so that they would also leave the country.

The exploding migratory flow between Santo Domingo and New York was not only a consequence of political turmoil. "Massive migration from the Dominican Republic developed in response to the development policies put into effect after 1966" which "privileged industry and commerce" and foreign investment, but increased unemployment and underemployment and widened the inequality gap in the country.<sup>117</sup> Of course Balaguer's economic policies were part of a government program whose implementation required U.S. support in the form of financial aid and a high level of repression which encouraged the exit of dissidents. Former rebels were violently persecuted but also barred from finding employment. "Voluntary exile was a way of escaping imprisonment or assassination, but it was also its own window of opportunity, a way for individuals to negotiate the process of migration in order to provide for their families."<sup>118</sup> Some families decided to leave so as to protect their activist children, whom Hoffnung-Garskof defines as *llevados*.

It is impossible to determine what portion of the migratory flow was composed of Constitutionlists who left for purely political reasons. One scholar noted that many of those leaving the Dominican Republic in 1966 were supporters of or combatants in the revolt.<sup>119</sup> Another estimates that "there were probably never more than a few thousand Constitutionlist exiles, voluntary or involuntary."<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Torres-Saillant and Hernández, *The Dominican-Americans*, 36, 38.

<sup>118</sup> Hoffnung-Garskof, *Nueva Yol*, 128.

<sup>119</sup> Graham, Pamela. *Reimagining the Nation and Defining the District: The Simultaneous Political Incorporation of Dominican Transnational Migrants*. Ph.D., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1996.

<sup>120</sup> Hoffnung-Garskof, *Nueva Yol*, 128.

The final touch in the creation of a well-worn Dominican path from the Caribbean to the American Northeast came about with the immigration reform act passed in 1965 by the U.S. Congress. While scholars have pointed to this law as one important reason behind the start of the Dominican migration, Hoffnung-Garskof states that the law went into effect in 1968, by which time the Dominican migratory wave was well under way. Besides, he says, the act came with a limit on the number of visas to be granted to applicants from Western Hemisphere nations. Still, since one of the main new provisions was the creation of family reunification visas, the law "had the effect of favoring migrants from the Dominican Republic, who already had a firm foothold on North American soil and a large, efficient consulate. Dominicans used family unification to keep the flow of visas open."<sup>121</sup> Dominicans had been given a head start in the early 1960s and they took full advantage of it. It is no coincidence that all six of the former civilian combatants interviewed in this study arrived in the U.S. thanks to their relatives' already being in New York. Four of them used reunification visas; one overstayed a visitor visa she obtained thanks to a relative in New York; the other one used a visa granted before the revolt to come to New York and get married.

### ***A Letter From New York***

M., the young woman who worked as a nurse in the rebel zone, left the Dominican Republic shortly after Balaguer's electoral victory. Her stepsister, who was already in New York, formally invited her in a letter and that was enough. "In

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 115.

those times it was really easy to get a visa."<sup>122</sup> M.'s stepmother agreed with her leaving, "because many people were disappearing and I didn't have a lot of money."<sup>123</sup> She went to the Consulate in fear since rumors circulated that the Americans kept lists of those who had been involved in the revolt; some people said it was in order to deny them visas, others said it was to help them exit the country, "to weaken the movement, to get the conscious people out."<sup>124</sup> M. felt embarrassed that she would leave her country for the one she had opposed a year before. Other than wishing her a good trip, however, the consular officer said nothing exceptional. (M. has come to believe there was some truth to the Santo Domingo rumors since over the years she has seen so many former revolutionaries in New York.) After overstaying her visitor's visa, she went on to obtain legal residency. Arriving here was a traumatic experience. M.'s stepsister told her not to mention her role in the revolution to anyone. M. took that instruction to heart – so much so that she never spoke publicly about her participation in the revolution until she granted this interview in October 2007. Although she saw her dream of becoming a doctor thwarted by the needs of immigrant life, she worked and raised two children between the U.S. and the D.R.

C., the Catholic activist, exited Santo Domingo even before the revolution was over. Her fiancé was studying in New York and her father convinced her to leave dangerous Santo Domingo behind to get married in New York – which she did against her wishes. "On July 16, I left the revolution on my way to the airport

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<sup>122</sup> M. interview.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

to come here."<sup>125</sup> C. already had a visa; the Papal nuncio Msgr. Emanuele Clarizio paid for her ticket. She had a melancholy farewell Mass inside the Constitutionalist zone. "The fact that one was coming here hurt a lot, it pained me deeply."<sup>126</sup> Since then she has stayed in New York, working at a bank in the early years. "I grew roots here, I had my children, my family is here."<sup>127</sup>

Anastacio Jiménez went back to Tamboril after the revolution. Because he was a leftist leader and former guerrilla, the Balaguer regime tried many times to co-opt him. "They had offered me, among other things, consulates, leaving for the U.S. with a legal visa, being a National Police captain without having to visit bases."<sup>128</sup> (Although he did not accept the visa deal, Jiménez's account raises the possibility that at least some former civilian combatants may have migrated to the U.S. with help from the Dominican and American governments.) Jiménez studied to become a lawyer and a psychologist and opened a law practice in his town. In 1994 he found himself in dire financial straits and decided to migrate to the U.S. with his family. They benefited from the family reunification provision, since a sister of his had obtained residency status for them a few years before. Despite his two university degrees, his lack of English proficiency left him to work menial jobs like hauling rocks for a contractor, maintaining sports fields, and working at a perfume factory. After a three-year stay in the Dominican Republic due to his son's having been deported, Jiménez returned to the U.S. in 2003. But

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<sup>125</sup> C. interview.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Anastacio Jiménez interview. As will be shown below, Jiménez would finally give in to the regime's pressure in 1974.

instead of looking for a job again, his failing health –and his being over sixty years old– led him to apply for a Social Security disability pension.<sup>129</sup>

Ramírez, the 1J4 student activist, came to the U.S. solely because of his elderly mother's insistence. By the late eighties, he was a holdout in a family where everyone else had already moved to New York. "If my mother dies I won't be able to go, because I have no papers, I have nothing. That's going to be a smear, a family opprobrium which I'm going to carry for ever on my conscience."<sup>130</sup> So his relatives "asked" for him and he obtained the residency and migrated to New York in 1989.<sup>131</sup> Over time, Ramírez also became a Social Security beneficiary due to health reasons.

José Santana, the other 1J4 member in Santo Domingo, also arrived in the U.S. thanks to the family reunification rule. A sister of his who lives in New York requested residency papers for him and his wife. He has never quite settled in the U.S. – instead he and his wife have shuttled back and forth between Santo Domingo and New York since 1991. Nowadays, he receives a six-hundred dollar disability benefit – which he considers "a humiliation" because it is a small amount.<sup>132</sup> Santana had first attempted to immigrate in 1967, when he entered the country with a visitor's visa he got thanks to a friend who was acquainted to a consular officer in Santo Domingo. He says his main motivation back then was improving his economic situation. He spent ten months working in New York but when his wife failed to obtain a visa through the same friend, he decided to return

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ramírez interview.

<sup>131</sup> Latin American immigrants usually refer to an immigrant's requesting residency for her relatives abroad as *pedir*, to "ask for someone."

<sup>132</sup> Santana interview.

to the Dominican Republic. At the time, he saw no contradiction in attempting to migrate to the U.S. after the American intervention, because "this nation does not belong to (Americans), this nation belongs to humanity. Planet Earth belongs to humanity."<sup>133</sup>

Obdulia Guzmán had met her husband Gabriel Guzmán, the frogman, in the Constitutionalist zone. After the revolt ended, they moved in together and had a daughter. But when Gabriel left for New York on October 1967, she remained in Santo Domingo. "He was sent over here and they banned him from entering the country. And I could not leave, they would not let me leave. They wouldn't give me a visa."<sup>134</sup> During the twelve years of Balaguer's regime, they did not see each other. Since they had not married before Gabriel Guzmán left, he was unable to "ask" for her. At first they kept in touch through letters. "We were desperate."<sup>135</sup> But the years passed and they lost contact. They both found new partners. With Balaguer's 1978 defeat, Gabriel was finally allowed to return to the Dominican Republic. By then, both he and Obdulia were again single. They married two days after they saw each other for the first time in over twelve years. Obdulia was finally able to obtain legal residence in the U.S.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Obdulia Guzmán interview.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> However, the Guzmán's could not wait for the bureaucratic process to run its course. According to Gabriel Guzmán, Obdulia entered the U.S. "illegally through Miami" and they both traveled to Ciudad Juárez to obtain her residency at the Mexican border.

### ***Life Under Balaguer***

Those twelve years<sup>137</sup> were not easy for Obdulia Guzmán or anyone else who had had a role in the War of April and now found themselves under the regime of a bitter enemy.

"Once inaugurated in July 1966, Balaguer acted quickly to decimate the opposition. Death squads killed dozens of left-wing militants, as well as many of those who had led the commando units that had patrolled the rebel zone during the popular uprising. Even those on the moderate left were targeted, with hundreds of activists from Bosch's party, the PRD, brutally executed. During Balaguer's first two terms in office, 1966 to 1974, more than three thousand left-wing activists were assassinated (...)"<sup>138</sup>

As evidenced by the experiences of the former combatants I interviewed, there were many ways in which Balaguer and his security apparatus could make a dissident's life hard. José Santana contracted a permanent illness after being imprisoned in inhumane conditions; after a long campaign of persecution, Anastacio Jiménez was forced to campaign for Balaguer's reelection; Ramírez was arrested several times; in addition to her visa troubles, Obdulia Guzmán was detained and harassed, and saw many friends and comrades disappear.

Even today, José Santana says he remains a convinced Marxist-Leninist. "I'm a man who doesn't zigzag, who has only one line of thought. I believe in humanity, I believe in revolution, I believe in socio-humanistic principles, I believe

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<sup>137</sup> Balaguer was re-elected in 1970 and 1974. He left the presidency after losing the 1978 election to the PRD's Antonio Guzmán.

<sup>138</sup> Chester, *Rag-Tags, Scum, Riff-Raff, and Commies*, 272.

in justice and I believe in equality."<sup>139</sup> Throughout the Balaguer years, he stayed involved in revolutionary movements –specifically the 1J4– although he says he did not take part in or espouse armed struggle. "We immediately stayed organized (after the revolution.) We created nuclei, cells, revolutionary groups. I was the leader of the Oscar Santana group in San Carlos (...) But there was a big, big repression. Dead people, many dead people. Those of us who are alive, we are the remains."<sup>140</sup> Santana was persecuted and finally detained in March 1973. He was kept incommunicado for thirteen days in a dank cell at police headquarters. To this day, he suffers from asthma as a consequence. Soon after Balaguer's victory, the 1J4 would cease its existence for all practical purposes – leaving behind several splinter groups. Santana would not be active in another party, but with his son Fidel Ernesto and other old time militants has recently formed a group called *Frente Duarteño* where he remains involved.<sup>141</sup>

Ramírez remained active in the 1J4's student organization –the *JECAJU* or *Juventud Estudiantil del Catorce de Junio*– after the war. He was also caught up in the divisionism that snarled the Dominican left in those dark years of repression. But he says one bright side of those times was an artistic and cultural spring among Dominican youth which "kept the progressive fervor and the search

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<sup>139</sup> José Santana interview.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Gleijeses describes the 1J4's demise thus: "...after the electoral debacle of June 1966, even the shadow vanished, leaving only the memory of a glorious name and transitory splinter groups. (...) For many *catorcistas*, the year 1966 marked the end of active political participation. Nursing an idealized memory of the 1J4, they could not bring themselves to join some other party." (Gleijeses, *The Dominican Crisis*, 408, n78.)

for a democratic government."<sup>142</sup> When the movement started splintering, Ramírez stayed in the *Línea Roja del 1J4*, the historic movement's main offshoot.<sup>143</sup> Later on, he joined the *Partido de los Trabajadores Dominicanos*, a new Marxist-Leninist organization. Throughout the Balaguer years, he was able to avoid personal persecution since, not having entered the rebel zone during the revolution, he was not identified as a Constitutionalist. He was arrested several times during police raids on the university or during street confrontations with the police. Ramírez also worked in attempts to organize peasants and workers. "We did not concede one inch to the Balaguer government, and that was an extremely repressive government where young people were attacked mercilessly."<sup>144</sup>

Obdulia Guzmán, who had not been part of any organized movement before the revolt, joined the 1J4 after living in the rebel zone until the end of the war. "I was already another person."<sup>145</sup> She says those who had been among the rebels were in constant danger of being informed on and of disappearing. She was a known Constitutionalist and she had lived with her husband, one of Montes Arache's frogmen. "For any reason, they came and searched your home."<sup>146</sup> She was arrested a few times. Once, her brother was detained when the police went looking for her at her parents' home. "It was dreadful, after the war it was worse."<sup>147</sup> After the 1J4 disappeared, she joined the *Movimiento*

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<sup>142</sup> Ramírez interview. Eugenia Georges notes that after the war the creation of *clubes de barrio* where these cultural activities took place became an established political practice of the Dominican left. (Georges, *New Immigrants and the Political Process: Dominicans in New York.*)

<sup>143</sup> Despradel, Fidelio. *Abril: Historia Gráfica De La Guerra De Abril*. Santo Domingo, República Dominicana: Secretaría de Estado de Cultura de la República Dominicana, 2005.

<sup>144</sup> Ramírez interview.

<sup>145</sup> Obdulia Guzmán interview.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

*Popular Dominicano* (MPD), another leftist group; following one of its leaders, Rafael "Fafa" Taveras, she would later become part of the PRD along with her husband.

Back home in Tamboril, Anastacio Jiménez would suffer years of persecution, manifested first in his inability to secure a job. "Orders were given to the companies in my province that I could not be hired in any of them."<sup>148</sup> He was detained for six days, accused of being involved in clandestine *comandos*. For a time, he lived in hiding. When he finally found employment as a traveling salesman, he was harassed in other towns too. "Those were very difficult years."<sup>149</sup> Although he says he was not involved in violent militancy, in 1971 Jiménez was charged with leading a band that had robbed a government tax agency. He spent three months in jail until his innocence was proven in court in Santiago. He remained a member of the *Línea Roja* until 1971, when he quit in a letter where he explained he could not remain in the movement because his "ideological weakness" prevented him from continuing to adhere to Marxism-Leninism as interpreted by the party.<sup>150</sup> In 1978, he would join the social-democratic PRD. But before that, the government forced him to "feign capitulation,"<sup>151</sup> joining Balaguer's reelection campaign in 1974. A Balaguer associate who was in charge of the campaign gave him an ultimatum that he join the campaign. Another former guerrilla fighter from that province had been brutally murdered shortly before, so Jiménez knew what to expect if he did not go

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<sup>148</sup> Anastacio Jiménez interview.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

along with the regime. He refused to be paid off but he had to join the Balaguer campaign in activities in his town. "They had an interest: showing off the revolutionary militant, the guerrilla fighter."<sup>152</sup> When he refused to say "*Viva Balaguer*" at a rally, he was arrested for a day. After the campaign was over, he was given a job as an inspector in a state-owned molasses plant. When he tried to investigate an illegal scheme diverting unaccounted quantities of molasses, he was detained and beaten and finally fired from the job. That was the end of his association with the Balaguer regime.

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

## V. Exiled Revolutionaries, Imported Activists

Dominican migration, that unintended consequence of American imperialism, has produced unforeseen and profound changes in New York. I argue here that through military and political intervention and the dependent economic relationship that came with them,<sup>153</sup> the United States produced changes in the Dominican Republic that in turn generated changes in the geographical heart of American capitalism: the island of Manhattan and neighboring districts.

One lasting legacy the early generation of Dominican immigrants –whether their migration was economically or politically motivated, or both– has left to the numerous Dominican and Dominican-American residents of Upper Manhattan is community organizing, expressed in dozens of social services agencies, political groups, social and sports clubs, and issue-oriented associations. Many people who had taken part in the *Revolución de Abril* were instrumental in this process, participating in the creation of the first Dominican political groups and community organizations. According to a 1984 study of Dominican political organization in New York, the fraction of the immigrant stream which had left the Dominican Republic for political reasons was the one "which took the organizational lead among Dominicans in New York."<sup>154</sup> Hoffnung-Garskof concurs: "*Llevados* and exiles (...) had a disproportionate influence on the formation of political

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<sup>153</sup> Moya Pons says, "The amount of money the United States poured into the Dominican Republic between 1966 and 1973 was enormous in proportion to the small size of the country's economy." The U.S. goal was to prop up Balaguer as a stable ally and a successful counterexample to Fidel Castro's Cuba. The Dominican Republic became so directly dependent on American support and policies that in 1973 Balaguer offered to tender his resignation to President Nixon "in case he constituted an obstacle to securing the (Dominican Republic's) sugar quota." (Moya Pons, *The Dominican Republic: A National History*, 397-399)

<sup>154</sup> Georges, *New Immigrants and the Political Process: Dominicans in New York*.

organizations in New York (...) The experience of exile, though numerically small, had a profound influence on the way that Dominican national identity was expressed in New York..."<sup>155</sup>

It was in the Constitutionalist-controlled Ciudad Nueva in 1965 where many Dominicans developed an awareness of social ills that in their view needed to be solved. For some that experience translated into a Marxist education and leftist militancy; for others, it would be expressed in a concern for their community and an engagement in social activism. That awareness was part of the baggage Dominican exiles brought with them to New York. Over time, the socio-economic conditions in which they and their compatriots lived in the city inspired in these socially-conscious immigrants a desire to improve their new environment.

"It is no coincidence that the early Dominican progressive movement in New York was composed of people who survived political persecution in the Dominican Republic in the 1960s and 1970s. These political immigrants brought with them a drive to engage in politics and create democracy from the ground up; their field of vision was focused on fighting imperialism and fostering economic, social, and racial justice in many countries."<sup>156</sup>

The people who had not been allowed to change Dominican society –neither with ballots nor with bullets– would then set to work to change American society.

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<sup>155</sup> Hoffnung-Garskof, *Nueva Yol*, 129.

<sup>156</sup> Aparicio, Ana. *Dominican-Americans and the Politics of Empowerment*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006, 61.

### ***Revolutionaries On Broadway***

Since the late 1960s, the growth of the Dominican population in New York and its subsequent geographical concentration in Northern Manhattan were paralleled by the emergence of numerous Dominican associations in the area. "During this period, a foundation for future political mobilization was laid in the flowering of the Dominican associations, social clubs and self-help organizations."<sup>157</sup> One early study found that in those first years the associations "more often (were) instrumental in providing a basis for continued linkages to the Dominican Republic than in providing a basis for integration into life in New York."<sup>158</sup> By the end of the 1970s, a scholar found thirty-six Dominican organizations, including hometown-based cultural and sports groups, branches of Dominican political parties, and groups involved in the defense of human rights in the home country.<sup>159</sup> The *clubes de barrio* which had become popular in Santo Domingo and were a haven for progressive community activists were replicated here.<sup>160</sup> The parties which had representation here included the PRD, the MPD and a host of other leftist groups.<sup>161</sup> The PRD organized demonstrations to commemorate the first few anniversaries of the April 24th uprising, with militants in military garb parading down Broadway in Upper Manhattan.<sup>162</sup> Almost all

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<sup>157</sup> Georges, Eugenia. "A Comment on Dominican Ethnic Associations." In *Caribbean Life in New York City: Sociocultural Dimensions*, ed. C. Sutton and E. Chaney, 297-302. New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1987.

<sup>158</sup> Hendricks, Glenn L. *The Dominican Diaspora. From the Dominican Republic to New York City: Villagers in Transition*. Publications of the Center for Education in Latin America. New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1974, 107.

<sup>159</sup> Sassen-Koob, Saskia. "Formal and Informal Associations: Dominicans and Colombians in New York." *International Migration Review*, 13, no. 2 (1979): 314-332.

<sup>160</sup> Georges, "A Comment on Dominican Ethnic Associations."

<sup>161</sup> Hoffnung-Garskof, *Nueva Yol*.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid*.

groups "were directed at events occurring in the Dominican Republic, or promoting and preserving a given definition of Dominican culture."<sup>163</sup>

C., Julio Pujol Peguero and Gabriel Guzmán were among those early militants.<sup>164</sup> "This generation of 1965 'lived' on the streets, making demonstrations and denouncing. It participated a lot," says C.<sup>165</sup> She was one of the founders of the *Comité de Defensa de los Derechos Humanos en la República Dominicana*, which denounced the abuses of the Balaguer regime. "Every time there was a death in the Dominican Republic, there were demonstrations. I remember we went on hunger strike once in support of the political prisoners. We lay down on Sixth Avenue in front of the (Dominican) Consulate."<sup>166</sup> The committee included militants from the MPD, the 1J4 remnants, the *Partido Comunista Dominicano*, and PRD youth. One scholar says it was the "first broad-based Dominican association in New York."<sup>167</sup> Gabriel Guzmán was a member too – the committee used to meet in the formerly-abandoned Columbus Avenue building he and other squatters had taken over and where he still lives nowadays.

Guzmán still attended the meetings of the Constitutionalist military men and joined other groups. One was the *Movimiento de Exiliados Políticos*, created by militants who were barred from returning to the Dominican Republic – their sole objective was to protest and oppose that prohibition. The group, Guzmán

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<sup>163</sup> Graham, "The Politics of Incorporation: Dominicans in New York City." *Latino Studies Journal* 9, no. 3 (Fall, 1998): 39-64.

<sup>164</sup> M., the other interviewee to arrive in the 1960s, stayed away from militancy until she returned to the Dominican Republic in 1976 and stayed there for ten years. She became an activist upon moving back to New York.

<sup>165</sup> C. interview.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Georges, "A Comment on Dominican Ethnic Associations."

says, included left- and right-wing activists. Another group, *Ex Militares y Ex Combatientes Constitucionalistas*, included former civilian and military rebels – many of them from the MPD. Margarita Cordero, a journalist and leftist activist who had arrived from Cuba, "gave us Marxism classes."<sup>168</sup> Up to a hundred people attended the organization's meetings; the group organized demonstrations, and it even published two issues of a magazine, *El Combatiente*, denouncing Balaguer's abuses. But it was disbanded because authorities started closing in on Cordero, who had entered the country illegally, and she had to leave. "That's where I started to grow a conscience politically, to understand what politics, governments, were. And that helped me be more of a militant."<sup>169</sup>

Julio Pujol Peguero, who has been a PRD member since before the Bosch presidency, says that in those years he was "always, let's say, conspiring, trying to get Balaguer out by whatever means possible, because we understood he was a continuation of Trujillo."<sup>170</sup> He says some Constitutionalists went to Cuba from New York to contact Caamaño when he was preparing his expedition to the Dominican Republic. "In the 1970s, there was even a conspiracy to try to go and kill Balaguer. There were some *compañeros* of us who went (to the Dominican Republic) but it didn't happen."<sup>171</sup> The different Dominican parties and groups seem to have been quite close at the time, as reflected in an incident Pujol Peguero narrates: Cordero, who was more of a radical leftist than the center-left

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<sup>168</sup> Gabriel Guzmán interview.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Pujol Peguero interview.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

PRD militants, spent a couple of days in hiding at his home, which was considered more secure and safer from monitoring.

Dominican activists in New York were closely watched. "There was a system of surveillance, to see what steps we took, who visited us."<sup>172</sup> Gabriel Guzmán says that Federal Bureau of Investigation agents came to see him when Caamaño landed on Dominican soil. "They wanted to make sure that I wasn't in the movement (...) They asked me if I knew anything, and I didn't know anything."<sup>173</sup> Had he known, he would have joined Caamaño in the fight. "I was one of his people, I had the same ideals."<sup>174</sup>

### ***From Exiles to Immigrants***

The PRD's victory in the 1978 elections was a watershed moment not only for Dominican domestic politics but also for Dominicans in New York. With Balaguer out of power, no one was barred from entering the country any more. The need for an exclusive focus on national politics was no longer obvious. Activists started to realize the community where they lived faced many quotidian problems to which the political organizations had not been paying attention. At the same time, a generation emerged of younger militants educated in New York public schools and the City University of New York, who had acquired political experience there – in part thanks to their contact with activists from other ethnic groups with a longer history of community organizing.<sup>175</sup> The coming of age of a

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid. C. says the Dominican community was "one of the most watched" in New York.

<sup>173</sup> Gabriel Guzmán interview.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Aparicio, *Dominican-Americans and the Politics of Empowerment*.

generation that had lived most of their lives in New York also meant that some Dominicans started seeing themselves as one more hyphenated identity in the U.S., more as an ethnic group than as a foreign nationality.<sup>176</sup> Put together, these factors had one concrete consequence: "the political agenda of many Dominicans in the U.S. began to change."<sup>177</sup> The ways in which Dominicans organized was therefore altered, going from "more particularistic hometown associations, social clubs, and single-issue organizations toward larger scale ethnic affiliations."<sup>178</sup> One scholar found that none of the seven organizations formed in the 1980s that he studied had a programmatic involvement with the Dominican Republic.<sup>179</sup> This newly-found concern for local problems instead of Dominican Republic issues was also probably related to the fact that the grim economic situation back home and a continued migratory flow were convincing long-time immigrants "of the difficulty of permanent return and the need to address conditions in New York and the Dominican Republic."<sup>180</sup>

M. left New York for Santo Domingo in 1976 after getting divorced from her first husband. She worked at the national telephone company and participated in union activities and cooperated with social movements, but she

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<sup>176</sup> Georges, *Dominican Self-Help Association in Washington Heights: Integration of a New Immigrant Population in a Multiethnic Neighborhood*. New York: Inter-University Program for Latino Research and the Social Science Research Council, 1988. The same author reports there was a generational break between the strong anti-imperialist attitudes of the old guard and the youngsters' desire to get involved in American politics. One young activist told her, "They kept talking about going to the mountains to fight the revolution. What mountains? The Catskills?" (Georges, *New Immigrants and the Political Process: Dominicans in New York*.)

<sup>177</sup> Georges, "A Comment on Dominican Ethnic Associations."

<sup>178</sup> Georges, *Dominican Self-Help Association in Washington Heights: Integration of a New Immigrant Population in a Multiethnic Neighborhood*.

<sup>179</sup> Sainz, Rudy Anthony. *Dominican Ethnic Associations: Classifications and Service Delivery Roles in Washington Heights*. D.S.W., Columbia University, 1990.

<sup>180</sup> Graham, Pamela. *Reimagining the Nation and Defining the District: The Simultaneous Political Incorporation of Dominican Transnational Migrants*. Ph.D., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1996.

was never an organizer herself. When she returned to New York in 1986, her principles and her desire to be active were invigorated. She became engaged in the parents association at her children's school; she joined a successful struggle to reclaim her dilapidated building from a neglectful landlord; and she participated in the creation of the *Centro de Desarrollo de la Mujer Dominicana*, the first Dominican-American organization created and led by women, where she has worked for nineteen years and leads a program that addresses domestic violence.<sup>181</sup> Ramírez, who arrived in New York in 1989, got engaged in local organizing. He is a member of *Acción Comunitaria La Aurora*, a grassroots group dealing with varied issues that affect immigrants, workers and lower-income New Yorkers. "From the economic point of view, I have not done well, but I don't regret it because I didn't come here looking for riches. I don't regret this because I haven't strayed from the struggle to see my country free one day and from working day and night for the Dominican community and the Latin American community here."<sup>182</sup> Anastacio Jiménez, who migrated in 1994, is one of the organizers of a weekly literary debate series at an Upper Manhattan Spanish-language bookstore.

An expectable result of Dominicans' becoming more concerned with local problems was their engagement of the mainstream American political system – which many had pretty much ignored for years. Washington Heights activists gradually got involved in the Democratic Party<sup>183</sup> and in local government bodies.

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<sup>181</sup> M. interview.

<sup>182</sup> Ramírez interview.

<sup>183</sup> As most of New York City, Upper Manhattan is a heavily Democratic area. In recent elections, some Dominicans have started working with Republican candidates.

In the 1980s, Dominicans started reaching positions as Democratic district leaders, members of the local school boards,<sup>184</sup> advisors to Gov. Mario Cuomo and Mayors Andrew Koch and David Dinkins, and the now-defunct Area Policy Board.<sup>185</sup> One defining campaign was the successful drive to register large numbers of parents before the 1986 school board elections. These, because non-citizens were allowed to vote, were "one of the more accessible targets for greater Dominican political incorporation."<sup>186</sup> The registration of some ten thousand new voters,<sup>187</sup> led to the election of a majority of Dominicans to the board. Guillermo Linares, a member of the new generation of New York-educated activists, became the head of the board. Linares had emerged from the *Asociación Comunitaria de Dominicanos Progresistas*, created by militants of the *Línea Roja* of the 1J4.<sup>188</sup> Other organizations also created in the early 1980s were the *Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights* and *Alianza Dominicana*, today two of the biggest social service groups in Upper Manhattan.<sup>189</sup>

Gabriel and Obdulia Guzmán, who live south of Washington Heights, were also involved in school board elections in their neighborhood of Manhattan

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<sup>184</sup> A Dominican named Sixto Medina had been elected to the District Six school board in the 1970s but the body remained under control of Jewish area residents until the 1980s. Graham, "The Politics of Incorporation: Dominicans in New York City."

<sup>185</sup> The local Area Policy Boards advised the city's Community Development Agency on the distribution of anti-poverty funds in their respective neighborhoods. In 1985, the creation of a Dominican Political Front led to the election of eight Dominicans to a board of twelve seats. The funds assigned to Dominican groups tripled the next year. (Lescaille, Fernando. *Dominican Political Empowerment*. New York: Dominican Public Policy Project, 1992.)

<sup>186</sup> Graham, *Reimagining the Nation and Defining the District: The Simultaneous Political Incorporation of Dominican Transnational Migrants*.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Aparicio, *Dominican-Americans and the Politics of Empowerment*. In a final twist to a drawn-out political evolution, Linares –an ideological heir to the biggest party of the Dominican radical left– is currently Mayor Michael Bloomberg's commissioner for immigrant affairs.

<sup>189</sup> Lescaille, *Dominican Political Empowerment*.

Valley. In 1993 Gabriel ran unsuccessfully for the District Three school board; in the next try in 1996 he became the first Dominican to join that body<sup>190</sup>. One of his main campaign issues was ensuring that immigrant children received a bilingual education. (The Guzmán's also created a community garden in a vacant lot and used to organize a block party in their neighborhood.)

Julio Pujol Peguero –who volunteers at the local Community Board– took part in the Dominican drive to take over the Washington Heights school board. In the 1990s he was also part of the next step in Dominicans' political incorporation. After electoral districts in Northern Manhattan were redrawn, Dominicans elected their first city councilman –Linares in 1991– and state assemblyman –Adriano Espaillat in 1996–. Pujol Peguero, who became a registered Democrat in 1991, says the first meeting for Linares' successful campaign was held at his home. Many of the Dominicans who had taken part in the school board movement were now engaged in the City Council election.<sup>191</sup> C. also worked for Linares that year and has remained involved with one of the local Democratic clubs. She is also a member of the *Asociación de Mujeres Progresistas*.

This growing involvement in American politics has not meant a disengagement from Dominican politics. Even in 2007, most of the politically-active interviewees were involved in supporting candidates for the 2008 presidential elections in the Dominican Republic: the Guzmán's, Pujol Peguero and Anastacio Jiménez were campaigning with the PRD; José Santana and Ramírez, with leftist organizations.

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<sup>190</sup> Gabriel Guzmán interview; Steinberg, Jacques. "Neighborhood Report: New York Up Close; School Board Election Results." *The New York Times*, June 23, 1996.

<sup>191</sup> Pujol Peguero interview.

### ***Keeping Up the Fight, or Not***

One interesting observation emerging from this study's interviews is that social activism and political militancy seem to have been more widespread among the former civilian combatants than among the former Constitutionalist soldiers. All six civilians interviewed remain active in politics or community groups,<sup>192</sup> while the two former military men who are politically active are apparently the sole exceptions among their comrades. For the civilians, activism has been a defining feature in their lives, since to the degree they are known around Washington Heights it is because of their involvement with social struggles, party politics or cultural activities.

On the other hand, the former soldiers have mostly stayed out of politics or activism. It appears that for most of them the *Fundación 24 de Abril* has been the only venue where they engaged in any formal collective activities. When speaking of their own active involvement with the community, Pujol Peguero and Guzmán compared themselves favorably to their comrades. "The group of Constitutionalist military men still exists, but it is inactive (...) that group almost doesn't meet."<sup>193</sup> Estévez Gil and H. said they had stayed away from politics ever since they arrived in the U.S. In fact, they traced this lack of political involvement all the way back to the warning to stay away from politics they heard when they were granted residency.

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<sup>192</sup> The only civilian Constitutionalist who is not a member of any New York-based organization is José Santana, who spends more time in Santo Domingo than in the U.S. and, accordingly, is politically active back home. Still, when Santana is in New York, he attends meetings of community-oriented groups, like the San Romero de las Américas church where I met him.

<sup>193</sup> Gabriel Guzmán interview.

## VI. Dominican Rebels, American Citizens

Over time, six out of ten interviewees –all four former soldiers and two of the six civilians– became American citizens.<sup>194</sup> This decision would seem at face value to go against what they fought for in 1965, when the American intervention turned the revolt of April 24 into an anti-imperialist struggle. However, the relationship between Dominicans and the U.S. is a lot more complicated than that, as reflected by a bit of graffiti that reportedly graced Santo Domingo walls in the 1960s: "*Yankee go home... y llévame contigo!*"<sup>195</sup> Since the nineteenth century, the Dominican Republic and the United States have sustained a "patron-client dependency relationship, but not entirely so or in any simple way."<sup>196</sup> An important part of that relationship was New York's becoming in the Dominican consciousness the unrivaled symbol of modernity and progress – and hence the main destination for those who wanted to advance in life.<sup>197</sup> This ambivalent relationship with New York was reflected in what a PRD militant told a *New York Times* reporter in 1971: "Because of our economic misery, we have been forced to come to the United States and place ourselves in the grips of the monster that forced us to flee. Fortunately, American public opinion would not permit the

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<sup>194</sup> Another civilian, Obdulia Guzmán, expressed a desire to become a citizen but said she had not applied for fear of being rejected, after the U.S. denied her entry for twelve years.

<sup>195</sup> Hoffnung-Garskof, Jesse. "Yankee, Go Home...and Take Me with You!": Imperialism and International Migration in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, 1961-1966." *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 29, no. 57-58 (2004): 39-65.

<sup>196</sup> Atkins, G. Pope and Larman C. Wilson. *The Dominican Republic and the United States: From Imperialism to Transnationalism*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998, xi.

<sup>197</sup> Hoffnung-Garskof, "Yankee, Go Home...and Take Me with You!": Imperialism and International Migration in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, 1961-1966."

American Government to suppress us here the way it has in Santo Domingo."<sup>198</sup>

Coming to New York was seen through an anti-imperialist perspective as entering "the belly of the beast," but at the same time it meant landing on the proverbial land of opportunity and becoming a member of a functioning democracy and a society that provided for the welfare of its weakest – what the Constitutionals had fought for in the first place. It is through this complex rationale –rather than anti-imperialist dogmatism or capitalist proselytism– that the Dominican revolutionaries as American citizens are better understood.

The interviewees explained their decision to become citizens in many different ways: there were concrete, prosaic reasons like the desire to "ask" for relatives from the Dominican Republic, or to preempt any immigration trouble; only a couple provided more civic-minded explanations. But most Constitutionals also displayed their own individual rationalization of why becoming an American citizen did not go against what they had fought for and most still believed in. This conscious elaboration of an argument –in some cases it appears they worked hard at convincing themselves of the validity of their decision– shows that formally becoming an American was not an easy step. For most of these Constitutionals, it was the result of an intellectual and emotional evolution.

In 1965, C. cried on the airplane leaving Santo Domingo in the midst of the revolution. She saw the American man who asked her what was wrong as "an enemy, as a representative of the people who invaded my country. But later, with

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<sup>198</sup> "Illegal Status of Dominican Shaping Their Lives in City." *The New York Times*, November 9, 1971.

political maturity and without the anguish of leaving my country and coming here in such a difficult moment, I understood that the people is one thing and the government is another."<sup>199</sup> C. says her principles not only were not lost by coming here but they actually were reinforced when she realized there was also social injustice in the U.S. She presents her activism –like participating in rallies and protests against the Iraq War and in support of immigration reform– as a social duty. "We believe that our insertion here must be a fact, because we must add to the ranks of the Americans who want changes."<sup>200</sup>

Gabriel Guzmán offered a similar explanation for his becoming a citizen in 1982, after fifteen years here. Coinciding with the Dominican community's increasing involvement in city politics, he saw the need to participate in politics more fully. He aspired to one day run for City Council himself. By that time, he had joined the PRD and the party's leader Peña Gómez was encouraging Dominican participation in the American political process so that the community could become more influential in the U.S. Also, having participated in the anti-Vietnam war movement and other collective initiatives like the squatter movement, Guzmán realized there was a "dignified people (here), the African-American people, who spend their lives fighting for their achievements."<sup>201</sup>

H. and Cristian Estévez Gil also explained their American citizenship as the consequence of a desire to be integrated into U.S. society. Their impulse, however, was not so much to actively change society but to partake in the benefits that come with being a citizen of a relatively peaceful and economically

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<sup>199</sup> C. interview.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Gabriel Guzmán interview.

stable country. "What we wanted was to work, we did not want to be in politics or anything like that."<sup>202</sup> Although Estévez Gil thinks the Dominican Republic would be "freer" today had U.S. troops not invaded it in 1965, he says he feels "part of here." "I had three children here, I'm a person who feels accomplished in this country, and I'm not interested on what happened any more. I don't want to think in what did not happen in the War of '65."<sup>203</sup> Similarly, H. says he did not feel any personal enmity against the American troops or the American people, despite his country's sovereignty having been "sullied". "I was just a student in the military school and I have adapted to the American system (...) Most of us have changed our ideas, we have more advanced democratic ideas now than in that time."<sup>204</sup>

M. became a citizen after her second migration to the U.S. One of the main reasons was that she was planning on requesting residency permits for some of her relatives. The decision represented an inner conflict: "How can I become an American citizen?"<sup>205</sup> But a friend persuaded her to apply, saying it would not hurt her to have it. "I don't think that I will lose my principles because of that. Some people say it's surrendering but I don't think so."<sup>206</sup> Asked whether she feels American, she says, "I live here. And I have fought in my community for the things we need. And I think the United States is part of the same continent where I was born. I don't think there is such a big difference. The difference is in the governments, not in the people. There are many good people here too."<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Estévez Gil interview.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> H. interview.

<sup>205</sup> C. interview.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

Julio Pujol Peguero also had misgivings about applying for U.S. citizenship, which he did after over two decades here in 1991. "I became a citizen even though I didn't want to (...) That wasn't my thing, honestly. I had a revolutionary mind."<sup>208</sup> His wife convinced him to do it in the process of applying for citizenship herself (which she did to be able to get a public sector job.) He finally gave in because he owned his own business and he did not know what could happen in the future. "When I took the oath, later I thought to myself: 'Is this me or am I going to change or am I going to be the same? Because, I thought... an American citizen."<sup>209</sup> He did not harbor resentment against the U.S. but he felt that he had betrayed his own ideals. "If you fight the enemy and then you become an ally of his... But these are things one goes through because one has to."<sup>210</sup> Today, Pujol Peguero sees himself as part of the United States – although he still opposes American foreign policy.<sup>211</sup>

The only two interviewees who made explicit their opposition to becoming American citizens were Ramírez and José Santana. Ramírez simply "never had the motivation" to request U.S. citizenship.<sup>212</sup> Santana, who has never settled in New York, expressed his regret of having to resort to the U.S. social security system. "In all earnestness, there's nothing I could be thankful for in the policies imposed by these people (...) What I could thank them for is the fact of my humiliation and being forced to come to these lands (...) For me it's a humiliation

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<sup>208</sup> Pujol Peguero interview.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Pujol Peguero and Guzmán underlined the fact that since the 1990s Dominicans enjoy double citizenship. Georges had found reluctance toward naturalization among Dominican activists in the early 1980s, because they considered it shameful for anyone to renounce Dominican citizenship. (Georges, *New Immigrants and the Political Process: Dominicans in New York*.)

<sup>212</sup> Ramírez interview.

having to leave your country to see if you can get a small pension, one of those handouts they give to people."<sup>213</sup>

Perhaps against what could be expected, seldom did the former revolutionaries display negative views of the United States. The differentiation between the U.S. government and "the American people" was common; some interviewees singled out especially worthy sectors of society like "African-Americans" or "democratic sectors"; another common recognition was that the United States is a country that functions as they wished the Dominican Republic did. "Each combatant desired that in each of their countries there were a government that functioned as the United States system functions internally. There are not that many countries that respond to their citizens with the guarantees with which the United States responds. I imagine that many leftists in my town would feel bad if they heard this, but this is what I think. That's what I looked for and still look for."<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Santana interview.

<sup>214</sup> Anastacio Jiménez interview.

## VII. Conclusion: A Dominican Revolution that Changed New York

The *Revolución de Abril* upended many lives. M. defied his mother and a conservative society when she joined the rebels; Obdulia Guzmán put her young life at risk trying to extend the revolt to the interior; Gabriel Guzmán, H. and others forfeited their military careers for having joined the uprising; Anastacio Jiménez earned a decade of persecution for his role. Multiplying their stories by the thousands would give us an idea of the impact this crisis inscribed in the larger stage of the Cold War had on the lives of individual men and women.

When they took to the streets that April Saturday to express their support for the uprising and for the return of their democratically-elected president, these Dominicans –the military officers and enlisted men and the civilians in Santo Domingo and beyond– were unwittingly throwing themselves headfirst into the global whirlwind of the East-West superpower rivalry. As former Sgt. Major Cristian Estévez Gil puts it,

"I did not know that the political implications (of the revolt) would lead to our being deported from the country (...) We wanted a free government, that the country would be free and had a democracy (...) At no time did we think that this was going to be so big. We thought it was going to last a few weeks, we didn't think it was going to take years."<sup>215</sup>

For Estévez Gil, who still plans to return permanently to the Dominican Republic one day, it has taken forty-two years and counting.

Those were Cold War times. Although real Communists were a not-so-well organized minority among the Constitutionals and had limited influence on the

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<sup>215</sup> Estévez Gil interview.

movement, the United States had neither time for nuance nor patience for "soft-hearted" progressives like Bosch. In a way, the fighters who populated the masses behind leaders like Caamaño did not know what they were getting into. Most assuredly, they never imagined that one consequence of joining the revolt would be their growing old in the empire's symbolic capital.

But that was what happened. Both conscious state policies and unintended side-effects of imperialism forced numerous Constitutionlists to New York. Examples of the former are the successful plan to exile hundreds of rebel military men, or the liberal provision of U.S. visas to civilians. Among the latter we can count Dominicans' benefiting from family reunification visas or American support for the Balaguer economic policies that pushed so many Dominican workers out of the country.

The "mysterious" Cuban man on Park Avenue, the surveillance of Constitutionlist soldiers and civilians, the warnings that those who received automatic residency on arrival not mess with politics in the U.S.: these measures show that American officials were at least somewhat concerned about what these "imported revolutionaries" might do in the U.S. The Constitutionlists were well aware of this. A majority of the former military men seem to have heeded the warnings and gone along with the authorities' desires. All those men wanted, it appears, was peace and the opportunity to work and provide for their families – things they had not been granted back home. Others decided to stay engaged and remain so until today. With their work for the Democratic Party or the *Asociación de Mujeres Progresistas*, for *Acción Comunitaria La Aurora* or the

*Centro de Desarrollo de la Mujer Dominicana*, these people are in fact strengthening American democracy. (They are also contributing to Dominican democracy through their continued involvement with political parties there.)

Being based mostly on personal interviews with direct participants of the events studied, this work cannot claim to know everything about the Dominican activists' early years in the U.S. and whether they engaged in illegal activities in the course of their militancy. To the extent that their activism was clandestine, it seems to have been made so by the surveillance they were subject to and their conditional status in the U.S. as immigrants. If we were to judge from the present and from their first-person accounts, though, it would appear that they have mostly made positive contributions to the construction of an engaged civil society in their communities. In one way or another, be it working and minding their own business or engaging in politics and minding everyone's business, the Constitutionlists have become part of the system. The concern shown by U.S. officials may have been misplaced. Then again, President Lyndon B. Johnson's concern for "Communist conspirators" taking over the *Revolución de Abril* seems to have been misplaced, too. The April Revolution was not conceived as an anti-imperialist struggle –the president it sought to return to power, Juan Bosch, saw himself as an ally of the U.S.–; the revolt was a fight for democracy and social justice. So has been the work of the Constitutionlists as New York activists.

But the U.S. did act on that misplaced, exaggerated fear and ended up "importing" activists whom it judged too dangerous had they been left to their own devices in Santo Domingo. This unintended consequence of imperialism

strikes me as the most relevant finding of this study: in attempting to solve one of the Cold War's crises, the U.S. ended up taking in individuals who would dedicate their lives to changing American society from within.

Although there is no way to ascertain how many they were, we can safely assume that the Constitutionlists who ended up here numbered in the hundreds, and probably in the thousands. This "generation of '65" had a considerable influence in the genesis of the ample network of Dominican organizations existent in the city; they helped define "Dominican-ness" in New York. The social consciousness and sense of solidarity these men and women developed or reinforced in the now-epic days in the Constitutionlist zone was put to work in the neighborhoods of Upper Manhattan and elsewhere in New York. In Ana Aparicio's words, once in the U.S. the former rebels kept striving to "create democracy from the ground up."<sup>216</sup>

The process set off by the April Revolution led to a conclusion that seems logical yet presents at first glance a fundamental irony of this Cold War story: that the revolutionaries who were vanquished thanks to the arrival of American Marines and paratroopers would one day become American citizens, campaign for American parties, elect their peers to U.S. government bodies; that some of them would aspire to become elected officials themselves. In short, the rebels have become a willful and engaged part of the American people.

When they heard José Francisco Peña Gómez appeal to the masses on the afternoon of April 24 1965, those young men and women dived into the river of history, a river whose strong currents would end up stranding many of them on

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<sup>216</sup> Aparicio, Ana. *Dominican-Americans and the Politics of Empowerment*, 61.

these distant shores. Here, each followed his or her own path, and sometimes those paths crossed. Some of my interviewees are renowned activists and admired veterans of the *guerra patria*; others have kept their revolutionary past to themselves. Those who have remained engaged in social and political militancy display a lasting commitment to improving the lot of their compatriots. Forty-two years after the United States barred them from having a say in the Dominican Republic's destiny, they continue to do their best to change their society.

Their society is now, of course, the United States.

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Guzmán, Gabriel. September 22 and 29, 2007, New York.

H. April 3, 2007, New York.

Pujol Peguero, Julio Viterbo. September 19 and October 10, 2007, New York.

**Civilian Participants in the April 1965 Revolution:**

C. May 3, 2007, New York.

M. October 19, 2007, New York.

Guzmán, Obdulia. October 27, 2007, New York.

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Ramírez. September 26, 2007, New York.

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