

Journeys through racial perceptions in the Dominican Republic

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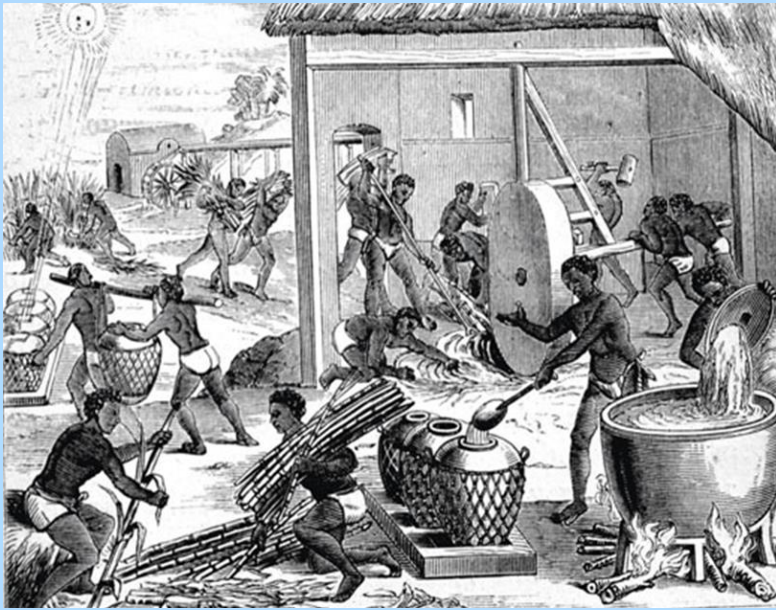
Racial perceptions are cultural

- They are fluid, not fixed
- They are different in different societies
- Categories change over time



History of slavery

- Different forms of slavery
- Different categories of people depending on skin color and origins



**Similarities between the
African-American community in
the US and the Dominican
Republic**

“Miscegenation” or mixing between groups or categories of the population



Categories inside the groups

- In the DR – *indio claro, indio oscuro, indio quemado, moreno, indio lavado, café con leche*
- In the US: *brown, light, dark*



Cultural practices

- “Marrying up”:
 - *mejorar la raza*
- Beauty strategies:
 - lightening creams
 - hair straighteners



Pride

In the US:

“Black is Beautiful” movement and pride in African heritage



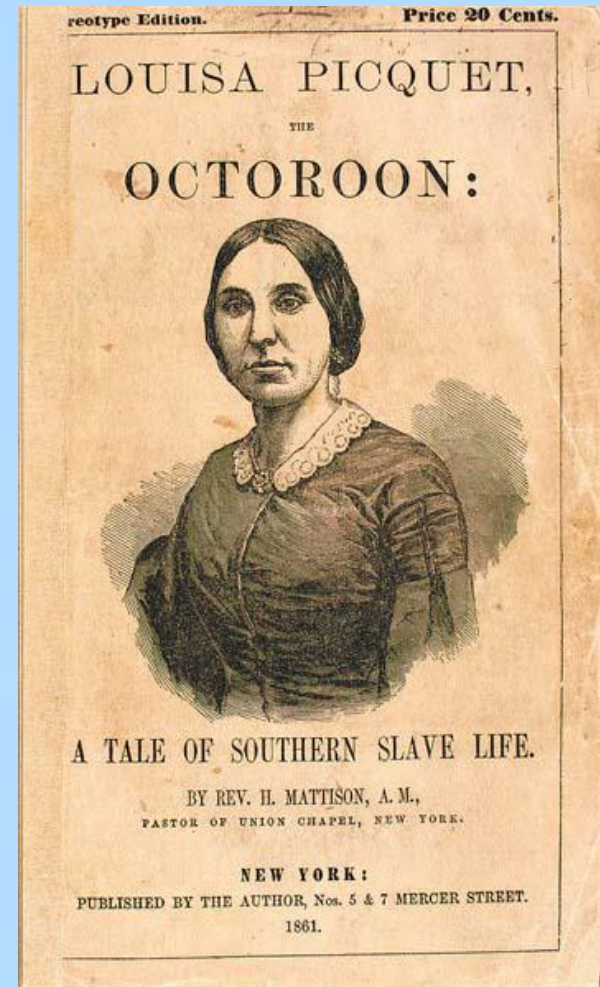
Pride

In the DR: pride in the pre-Spanish heritage (Taíno)



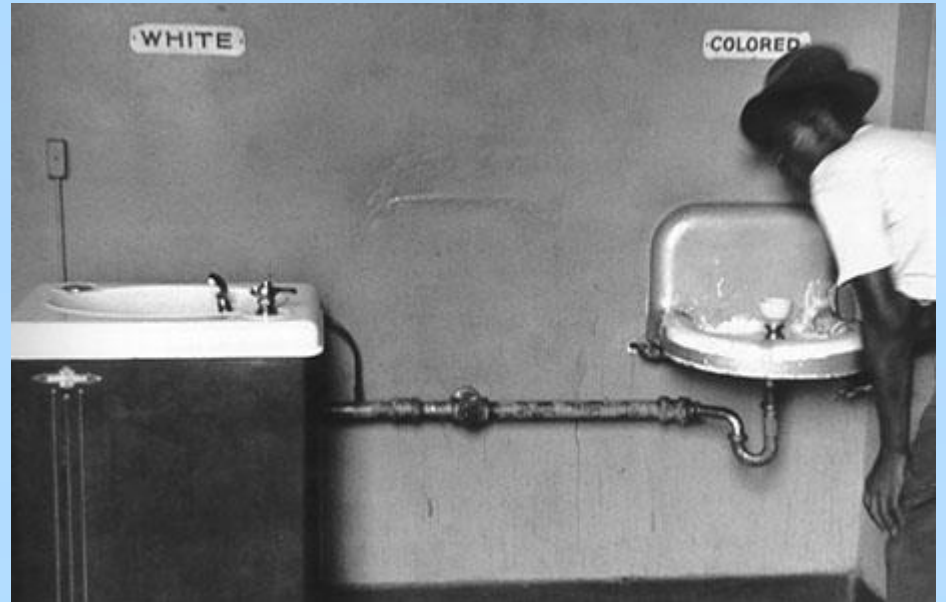
Changes in names and groups in the US

- During the 18th and 19th Centuries in the U.S., there were different categories: octogroon, hexadecaroon, quintroon, quadroon, and terceroon.
- Until 1920, the category *mulatto* existed in the U.S. census.



Changes in names and groups in the US

- Before the Civil Rights movement, the term *colored* was used, which nowadays is considered pejorative.
- That term was followed later by *black*, and then *African American*.



Changes in names and groups in the DR

- In the 18th Century, only slaves were assigned a “color”: *negro* (black), *mulato*, *tercerón*, *cuarterón*, *pardo* (brown). Slave owners were not assigned a color.
- *Moreno* was used to refer to a person who had previously been a slave but who had obtained his or her freedom.
- *Indio*, which is so commonly used today, does not appear in any of those 18th Century documents.



- During the period of political unification of the island under the Republic of Haiti, from 1822-1844, the categories *negro*, *blanco*, and *mulato* existed, but they were not commonly used, appearing in only 7 of more than 6,000 primary documents.



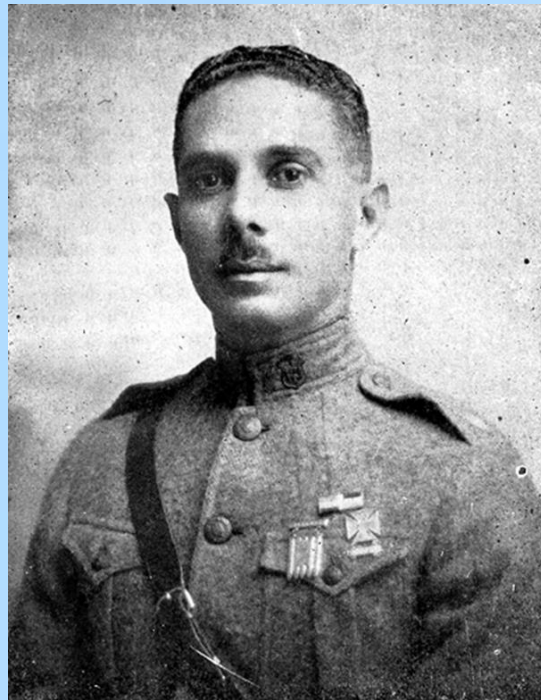
- *Moreno* was used the same way as before 1822, signifying a former slave who had attained his or her freedom.
- *Indio* does not appear in documents from this period either.



- By the end of the 19th Century, the Dominican Republic adopted use of the term “person of color,” which was used frequently in official documents, periodicals, literary works, and social reflections.
- At the beginning of the 20th Century, the term *mulato* appeared as a racial category



- In 1935, during the Trujillo Dictatorship, this term was officially substituted by the term *mestizo*, while *indio* was designated to denote skin color.



- In the 1970s, due to the flux of migration of Dominicans into the United States, the color category *trigueño* (wheat-colored), was added.



- The majority of Dominicans were classified as *indio*, or *indian*, in their passports, and upon becoming U.S. citizens they were classified in the group whose nomenclature most represented this category—*Native Americans*, a group to which, according to U.S. authorities, they did not truly belong.



- U.S. Government demanded that the Dominican Government eliminate the category *indio* from its passport.
- In 1998, the term *mulato* was once again included by order of the law in Dominican *cedulas* (Dominicans' identification cards).



- **Currently, amongst groups of social activists, the tendency to refer to oneself as *afro-descendent* has become common.**



Default category in US

- In the USA the default category is “white” (i.e. if you do not specify, the assumption is that you are white)



Default category in DR

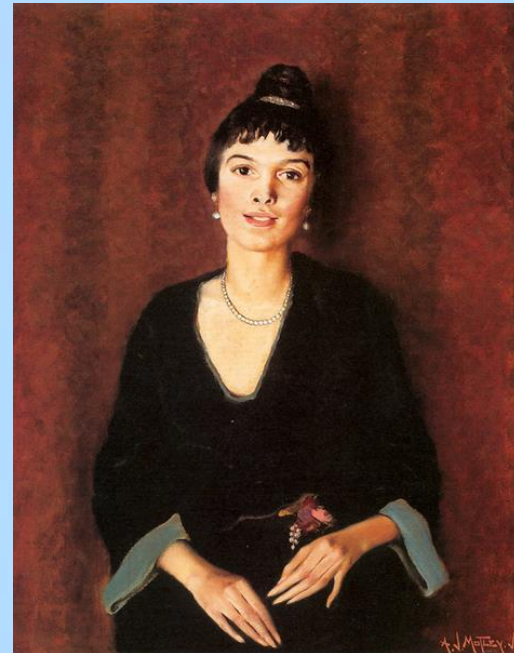
- In the DR, the default is «indio»



The «drop of blood»

- In the USA

-If you have one drop of “black” blood you are not “white” and you may be marginalized



The «drop of blood»

- In the DR:

-If you have one drop of “white” blood you are not “black” and you may find it easier to enter the mainstream.



Anti-immigrant prejudice

- In the DR strong prejudice against Haitian workers
- In the US also anti-immigrant prejudice
- In both countries this issue is politically manipulated



Differences between the US and the DR

Class and color

- In the U.S., economic status is not a factor in racial categorization.
- In the D.R., class and race are more linked and a person's economic position can influence classification.



More categories than in the States

Categories and racial stratification in DR.

- Negro (Black)
- Moreno (Dark)
- Indio: oscuro, claro, lavado (Indian: dark indian, light indian, washed indian)
- Trigueño (Tanned)
- Jabao (Black red headed)
- Rubio (Blonde)
- Blanco (White)
- Chino (Asian)
- Otras (Others)



- In the DR there are no ethnic groups, all share the same national culture
- Ethnic groups in the US: Italian American; Latino; Afro American; Native American; Irish American...



Dominant ideology has a strong hispanophilia.

Since legal segregation ended in 1822, the official ideology says that because there was no legal segretation there is no racism in the DR.

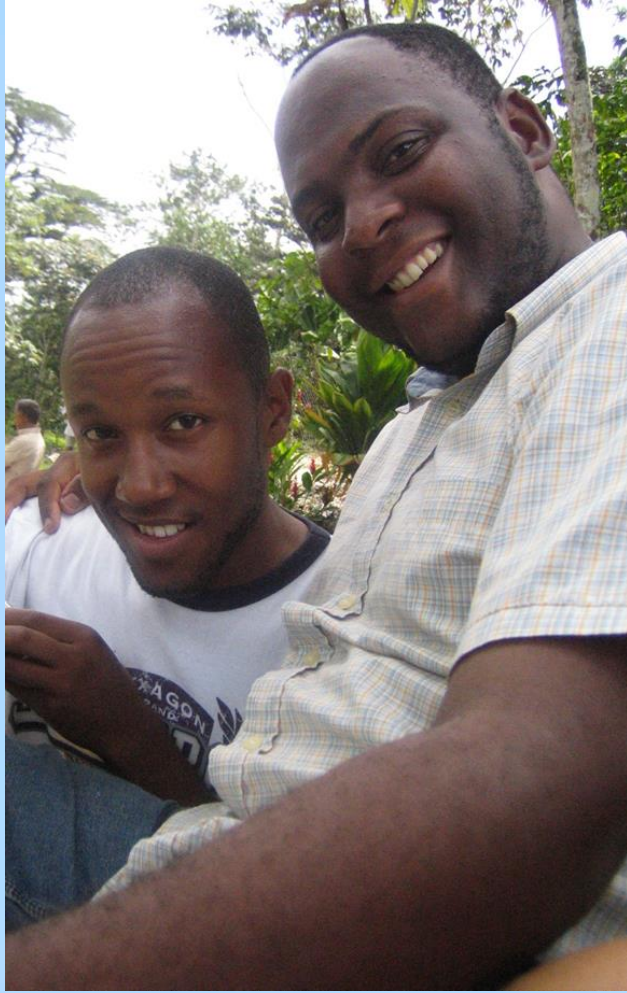


- **In the official ideology the Dominican identity is constructed in opposition to Haiti and Haitians.**
 - **Black equals Haitian.**
 - **Antihaitianism is a form of racism.**



- In the Dominican Republic, “race” and “color” are spoken about openly and publicly, while focusing on these themes in the U.S. can be perceived as politically incorrect depending on context.





- **“When people encounter new racial systems they have to negotiate ‘who they are’...” Kimberly Eison Simmons**

Questions?