

THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC:
Surveying a Century of Development and Change

Bruce Calder
University of Illinois at Chicago

- THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, 1850–1900: NOTES FOR A HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY.* By HARRY HOETINK, translated by Stephen A. Ault. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. Pp. 243. \$22.50.)
- THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, 1981.* By IAN BELL. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1981. Pp. 392. \$35.00.)
- THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: A CARIBBEAN CRUCIBLE.* By HOWARD J. WIARDA and MICHAEL J. KRZYANEK. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1982. Pp. 154. \$18.50 cloth, \$8.50 paper.)

History, in the sense that it has developed academically during the twentieth century, has only recently been written in the Dominican Republic. Although there have been a few capable practitioners of the discipline over the years, such as Américo Lugo and Emilio Rodríguez Demorizi, they managed to write and publish against odds that few overcame (as was also true in most other fields of intellectual endeavor). One of the problems was that intellectual institutions were little developed in the republic. In particular, the national university (the only university until 1962) produced few graduates with any training in history and was so poorly financed that professional historians could not gain a living from their teaching, leaving no time for research and writing. A second major problem was the Trujillo dictatorship that, besides being responsible for the poverty of the university from 1930 to 1961, also cast a pallor over intellectual life of any kind. As far as history was concerned, it was literally a life-threatening exercise to address most of the republic's twentieth-century history without writing it as a paean to Trujillo and the policies and ideas that he supported. Thus virtually no one commented on the U.S. occupation from 1916 to 1924, which had put Trujillo into a position of power within the Dominican military, until almost forty years later.

It was not until after the death of Trujillo in 1961 that a group of younger historians (and scholars in other fields) began to emerge; and it was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that their publications and the students they had trained began to appear. There have been basi-

cally two developing schools of historians, Marxist and non-Marxist. The Marxist school, often associated with the Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo (the national university) includes among others Emilio Cordero Michel, Franklin Franco, and Roberto Cassá. The non-Marxists, a much smaller group, are perhaps best represented by Frank Moya Pons of the Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra. In addition, there are a number of social scientists who, while not formally historians, work as much in history as in their own disciplines, such as Juan Isidro Jiménez-Grullón and more recently, José del Castillo.

The same scholarly neglect of the Dominican Republic was long evident among U.S. and European historians and other social scientists. As long as the Latin American field remained small, most scholars chose to study larger, more important countries, not to mention countries where research could be conducted more freely than under the Trujillo regime. Only in the 1960s and 1970s did a few North American and European scholars begin to look at Dominican history, anthropology, sociology, economics, and politics. One of the first of these was Howard Wiarda, whose third book on a Dominican subject is under review here. Another early foreign student of the republic was Harry (Harmannus) Hoetink, of Dutch origin, who began his Dominican researches in 1963.

Harry Hoetink originally published *The Dominican People, 1850–1900* in Spanish in the early 1970s. The book was then, and is now, one of the best histories yet written on the Dominican Republic, a fact recognized by the Johns Hopkins University Press in republishing the book in an English translation in 1982. The subject of Hoetink's work is change, particularly the social, political, economic, and cultural change that occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century in the Dominican Republic. The importance of this period for understanding Dominican history is critical because it was during this period that the island nation took on many of the attributes that today are basic to the life of the country.

Before the mid-nineteenth century, the Dominican Republic suffered a long eclipse. The center of Spanish civilization in the Americas in the early sixteenth century, it had fallen under the shadow of Mexico and Peru by the mid-sixteenth century, never to regain colonial importance. Neglected, impoverished, and underpopulated, half of the colony eventually fell under the control of France, becoming the independent state of Haiti in 1804. Not until 1844, following a series of wars and a twenty-two year occupation by Haiti, were the Dominicans able to assert their own independence. The country that came into existence was poor and sparsely populated, basically a ranching economy with some export-oriented tobacco farming in the northern region known as the Cibao. A few small cities and towns broke the rural landscape.

In the five decades of the nineteenth century that followed independence, the Dominican Republic underwent a fundamental transformation that began slowly but accelerated rapidly after 1870. Hoetink states that two phenomena were central to this transformation: internally, the development of modern sugar agriculture, and externally, the shift of the republic's economic dependence from Europe to the United States.

The beginning of the sugar industry in the 1870s was but one element, albeit the major one, in the development of a plantation economy in the Dominican Republic. The widespread cultivation of sugar, and secondarily of cacao and coffee, involved a basic shift in the nation's economy from ranching to an export-oriented market economy. Related to this shift were a series of other phenomena that Hoetink examines, drawing his information from archives, newspapers, and a wide variety of often obscure published sources. Land became more valuable. Land tenure patterns changed dramatically with the increasing privatization of land and the growth of large holdings, often in the hands of foreigners. Land use also changed, with the production of internal food crops falling off significantly.

The expansion of the sugar industry, centered in the south, caused a shift in the locus of national economic power (and then political power) from the Santiago-Cibao region in the north to Santo Domingo in the south. This shift caused the dramatic growth of the capital city, which soon far outdistanced its former rival, Santiago. One of the primary reasons for Santo Domingo's rise to preeminence was its port, through which a growing proportion of the country's burgeoning import-export trade flowed.

The increasing export trade was related to improvements in the internal transportation system and to new international ties, as North Atlantic connections replaced the traditional ones with the Caribbean entrepôts of Curaçao and Saint Thomas in the Virgin Islands. This shift was also seen in the transfer of the Dominican public debt, held locally until the mid-1880s, to European hands. When the Dutch firm holding the debt went bankrupt, it was bought up by a New York firm, the Santo Domingo Improvement Company. The transfer drew the republic ever closer into the U.S. orbit, a phenomenon that the growth of the U.S.-oriented sugar industry also encouraged. By the early twentieth century, the shift would have devastating implications for the republic's independence.

Hoetink devotes large sections of his book to social changes, many of them directly related to the new export economy. For one, the opening up of the economy brought an increasing number of immigrants from Europe, North America, and the Middle East, as well as from the adjacent Caribbean. These newcomers established themselves

as agricultural entrepreneurs, factors, merchants, manufacturers, technicians, artisans, and laborers, thus enhancing considerably the republic's economic life. Immigration, along with internal growth, was also responsible for a rapid growth in population, which increased from some sixty thousand in 1816 to almost half a million at the turn of the century.

The growth of capitalist agrarian enterprises was frequently associated with the loss of peasant landholdings and the consequent creation of a rural proletariat; at the same time, the payment of money wages and the creation of new jobs increased rural mobility. It also led to the development of a middle sector in the larger cities and towns and to a larger elite. In fact, argues Hoetink, the upper sector was becoming a national bourgeoisie by the end of the nineteenth century. This new phenomenon was facilitated by new means of transport and communication, which created a national system (although regionalism remained strong) and by the fact that the upper stratum had finally become numerous enough to exert effective social pressure and control.

There was a "notable social mobility" in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Hoetink notes that this flux was at variance with the Dominicans' "aristocratic" conception of their social order, which emphasized social distance and immobility (p. 165). The conflict between self-concept and reality was resolved by defining mobility in terms of individuals rather than social groups and by crediting an individual's social ascent to fame or fortune (as opposed to hard work or similar Calvinist conceptions).

Social mobility was of two kinds. Structural mobility was brought about by the new opportunities resulting from economic expansion, increasing urban educational facilities, a larger government bureaucracy, and similar developments. Second, a politico-military mobility existed through which individuals could distinguish themselves on the battlefield, become involved in government, and then begin to assure their fortunes economically. This phenomenon was a common one in the nineteenth-century Dominican Republic due to regionalism and numerous incidents of war and internal strife, and it produced a variety of high officials including cabinet ministers and presidents.

The politico-military route to social and economic mobility is an important element of Hoetink's analysis of the political system, a route that related intimately to the flourishing caudillo system. In explaining the origins of *caudillismo* and its modus operandi, Hoetink goes on to observe that during the second half of the nineteenth century, the military involved itself in a "marketplace," in which competing "generals" and their entourages offered their services for hire in the political arena (p. 96). Because these leaders could be bought by those seeking to make

revolution, governments were anxious to cultivate them and to keep them on the payroll.

Hoetink argues that during the mid-nineteenth century, warfare was so common and the army as a national institution was so disorganized that to a certain degree the entire society became militarized, with negative implications for political stability, economic development, and the welfare of ordinary citizens. The great caudillo dictator of the 1880s and 1890s, General Ulises Heureaux, tried more or less successfully to bring this phenomenon under control by reorganizing and formalizing the Dominican military.

The Heureaux administration is central to Hoetink's study because Heureaux represents an archetype of the most successful nineteenth-century Dominican politicians. With these figures there is no clear separation between the governmental and the personal, argues Hoetink, citing Weber's "structure of patrimonial authority" as a model (p. 81). This blending of public and private pervaded the whole governmental structure and offered numerous opportunities for what would today be defined as corruption. But as Hoetink points out in a fascinating analysis of the politico-moral code, it was not defined as such at the time. More important, the very meanings of words in the political vocabulary were defined differently, so that the concepts represented by the words *reactionary*, *opportunism*, *narcissism*, *convenience*, and *malice* did not have negative connotations.

Patrimonialism pervaded Dominican society in the nineteenth century, and along with caudillismo and patronage, it constituted a key element of the political system. It was a system based on practical survival tactics. Political parties existed, but there was little evidence of conscious ideology.

The great importance of Hoetink's *The Dominican Republic: 1850–1900* lies in two areas. First, it represents a pioneering effort in Dominican nineteenth-century history. Where virtually nothing existed before, Hoetink has developed historical information that was virtually unknown and certainly unused by twentieth-century writers, creating both a framework and a sensitive, skillful analysis. For this reason, his research has already had a major impact upon writers of Dominican history, including this reviewer. Second, Hoetink's unique understanding of the events of the nineteenth century in the Dominican Republic has important implications for students of Latin American history in general. He contributes significantly to our understanding of the development of export economies, immigration, caudillos, the nineteenth-century debt problem, class formation, and in numerous insightful ways, the social and political process in general. His book is indeed a significant work.

Hoetink's *The Dominican Republic* is a monograph in historical sociology, while the books by Ian Bell and by Howard Wiarda and Michael Kryzanek were written with a different intention. The latter books are intended as syntheses, surveying both the Dominican past and the contemporary scene (politics, the economy, social patterns and issues, religion, and foreign relations). Both books are meant for the general reader, and neither contains much scholarly apparatus, although Bell's book has a few notes and a useful medium-sized bibliography.

Surveying the contemporary scene in the Dominican Republic is a rather difficult task because so little has been written about the republic. On a wide variety of topics, even such basic ones as the modern Dominican economy, little descriptive or analytical secondary material exists. In that sense, both of these books represent a considerable research effort, a matter which was facilitated by the extensive first-hand experience of each of the authors in the republic.

Despite their similarities, Bell's *The Dominican Republic* is much the better of the two works for one basic reason. Wiarda and Kryzanek (or their editors) have set themselves the difficult, if not impossible task of limiting *The Dominican Republic: A Caribbean Crucible* to 143 pages of text. The cost of this brevity is somewhat evident throughout the book but is particularly noticeable in the history section, where the authors were often confined to chronological descriptions of the past at the expense of analysis and explanation. Bell had considerably more latitude, and he used his 370 pages to delineate details, present evidence, and analyze issues. The result is considerably more convincing.

Wiarda and Kryzanek's chapters on political institutions, public policy, and foreign policy are the strongest in the book. This strength may derive from the fact that Wiarda and Kryzanek are both political scientists, but it appears equally significant to me that in these chapters, which comprise about a third of the book, the authors grant themselves the liberty of examining a variety of issues in more detail. The results are clearer descriptions and more convincing arguments.

Wiarda and Kryzanek take a somewhat more liberal position than Bell. While sympathetic to the Dominicans, they criticize the present situation more overtly. Ironically, however, their general view of the recent past appears more optimistic. While Bell argues that economic and political progress has been limited, Wiarda and Kryzanek give the impression of more widespread and solid change as well as considerable Dominican accomplishments.

Ian Bell offers a thoughtful and well-written four-part review of the Dominican Republic past and present. The first two parts, about a third of the total book, survey the historical development of the Dominican Republic and its people from the Amerindian beginnings through the late 1970s. Although his text depends mainly on existing historical

literature, Bell utilizes some British consular documents for the years of the mid-nineteenth century. He also draws on his personal experience as British Ambassador in Santo Domingo from 1965 to 1969 to illuminate the events of the 1960s, a vantage point that provides unique British insights into a period usually described in terms of U.S. or Dominican concerns. Bell's view of recent Dominican history is moderately conservative, often favorable to members of the Santiago elite whom he met during his tenure as ambassador. But Bell often demonstrates that when his analyses of elite-dominated policies lead him to question their wisdom or effectiveness, he does not hesitate to say so. All in all, Bell has written one of the best reviews of Dominican history available in English.

The remaining two-thirds of Bell's work treats a number of topics on contemporary life in the Dominican Republic. Of these the most important concern Dominican society, social services (education, housing, and health), the political structure and political life (political parties, trade unions, and the church), and the economy (agriculture, industry, mining, tourism, and finance). Bell's skill in describing and analyzing these subjects and in identifying critical problems draws the reader into what could otherwise be dry reading material. Moreover, much of the information that Bell presents is valuable because it has not been gathered in one place before in English nor often in Spanish.

Bell's analysis of the contemporary republic is usually insightful, but it is less often hopeful. The reader quickly becomes aware of the large and deep-rooted problems brought about by a number of interrelated social and economic factors. Some of these factors can be controlled by the Dominicans and some cannot, such as the price the country receives for what it sells in the international market. It is against these large problems that Bell measures the efforts of the Dominicans to reform and develop their society, leaving the reader with the impression that progress has been limited. In education, for instance, a serious shortage of teachers continues to cripple efforts to improve primary and secondary schooling. Although more schools have been built and more children are attending them, Bell concludes that the overall quality of primary education has probably declined. Public health suffers from a severe and continuing shortage of nurses, with virtually no medical services of any kind in the rural areas. At the root of poor health, Bell argues, are poor living conditions (inadequate housing, nutrition, and other factors), which have improved little, if at all, for the average Dominican in recent years.

Solutions to the problems facing ordinary Dominicans probably lie in two areas, in restructuring and redistributing resources within the republic and in developing the country economically. Bell makes it abundantly clear that not much is happening in the first area under the

present system. A confluence of basically conservative forces, including the Dominican political and economic elite, the Dominican military, and the U.S. Embassy, operate to assure that no government, whether under Balaguer's Partido Reformista or the more liberal Partido Revolucionario, will be able to accomplish much restructuring or redistribution. The second possibility is then economic development. But here too, Bell finds recent efforts less than encouraging. As an agricultural country, the Dominican Republic remains caught in the traditional squeeze between unpredictable and often low prices for its exports (particularly true for the inefficiently produced sugar crop) and steadily rising prices for its imports, especially oil. Bell concludes that "no capital [is] being generated by agriculture" (p. 357), and therefore agriculture is not contributing to economic development. Nor is agriculture successfully meeting other needs, such as providing Dominicans with an adequate diet.

Outside of agriculture, the picture is only somewhat brighter. In recent years, the country has developed several mineral exports, particularly bauxite, nickel, and gold. But except for gold, all these commodities are extremely susceptible to international economic downturns, and because of this and other problems associated with extractive industries, they have not met expectations. Another new endeavor, tourism, has been successful so far, but it is very sensitive to economic recession as well as to political unrest.

It would seem that industrialization represents a potential solution to the problem of economic development. But Bell makes it clear that recent industrialization has been limited, providing some jobs in the Santo Domingo area but leaving the rest of the country almost unchanged. A more serious problem is that all but 3 percent of industrial investment has been directed toward producing "nonproductive and mainly consumer goods" rather than toward the creation of a capital goods industry. This situation Bell finds to be contrary to sensible policy: "To promote the production of consumer goods by machines that have to be brought in from elsewhere and thus add more to the import bill than the consumer goods can save—goods that, moreover, the vast majority of the population cannot even dream of affording—is a wasteful and, in the end, nugatory shortcut" (p. 357).

The attention that Bell, Wiarda, and Kryzanek all devote to the contemporary development process recalls a central theme of Hoetink's work on the nineteenth century. Then, as now, one of the essential preoccupations of the leaders of the republic was economic development. Then, as now, their motives were mixed, ranging from hopes of self-enrichment to altruistic desires to improve the general welfare. Then, as now, the results of their efforts were limited. Growth and development have occurred, but not enough to make the average citi-

zen prosper or to raise the nation to the level of the steadily increasing affluence of its North Atlantic neighbors. At the same time, the nation's leaders have experienced continuing failure in two related areas. They have not been able to regain the internal control over the growth process that was lost in the 1880s nor have they been willing to devise a way to distribute the benefits of limited economic development more equitably among all Dominicans. The result of their failure has transformed the economic question into an increasingly pressing political issue over the years. By the mid-1980s, the economic question has become the central issue facing Dominicans.