Introduction

At the Navel of the Americas

[T]he stranger [. . . ] showed no colors [. . . ]. It might have been but a deception of the vapors, but the longer the stranger was watched the more singular appeared her maneuvers. Erelong it seemed hard to decide whether she meant to come in or no—what she wanted, or what she was about.

—Herman Melville, “Benito Cereno” (1855)

The history of San Domingo was never completely written, and if it were, would never find a reader.

—J. Dennis Harris, A Summer on the Borders of the Caribbean Sea (1860)

In 1855, Putnam’s Monthly published Herman Melville’s novella “Benito Cereno” over three issues. Melville based the story on the real-life account of a revolt on the Tryal, a slaving ship with Spanish-owned subjects from West Africa en route to Argentina. Melville’s narrative develops from the perspective of Amasa Delano of Massachusetts, who spots a slaving ship from his seal hunting vessel off the coast of Chile. Delano sees that “the stranger [San Dominick], viewed through the glass, showed no colors,” and, thus, did not reveal its provenance, ownership, or purpose. From a better perspective, the ship then “appeared like a whitewashed monastery after a thunderstorm.” Closer still, it seems as if Delano has finally discerned what “the stranger” is about: “the true character of the vessel was plain—a Spanish merchantman of the first class, carrying negro slaves, amongst other valuable freight, from one colonial port to another.” And yet, Delano had not actually realized the “true character” of the ghostly ship, even after spending hours onboard the San Dominick asking its captain, the Spaniard Benito Cereno, his crew,
and some of the enslaved subjects what had caused the ship’s stranding. The rest of the story unspools the many ways in which Delano’s perception repeatedly fools him.

After several hours of growing confusion and dread, Delano suddenly realizes that the ship’s cargo, black “slaves,” had mutinied weeks earlier and were holding the (mostly white) crew hostage. The world order to which he had been accustomed had been turned on its head. He could not fathom that the enslaved subjects on the ship had mutinied and turned “the order of things” upside down. The terror humming beneath the story is that the San Dominick, named by Melville as a direct allusion to the Haitian Revolution, allegorizes the threat of slave insurrection and black self-governance. Although “Benito Cereno” was written in 1855 and the real-life slave rebellion to which it referred took place in 1805, Melville set the novella in 1799, the middle point of the revolts and other myriad events now called the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804).

I start this book about Dominican cultural expression with “Benito Cereno” because it is an apt allegory for what generations of scholars have been unable to see: that anxieties about Haiti often applied equally to the entire island, Hispaniola, which in the early nineteenth century encompassed both Haiti and the eastern colony of Santo Domingo. The ghostly ship and the events onboard confused Delano because his world contained white masters and black slaves, and not black subjects holding whites captive while pretending to be enslaved. His worldview prevented him from “reading” or “perceiving” reality. Similarly, the Haitian Revolution augured over a century during which outsiders often did not care to differentiate between the two sides of the island, even beyond the twenty-two-year span (1822–1844) when the entire island was no longer under Haitian governance. Analyzing a variety of cultural expression by and about Dominicans from the late nineteenth century to the present, including literature, government documents, music, the visual arts, public monuments, film, and ephemeral and stage performance, Colonial Phantoms explores how Dominicans have negotiated the miscomprehension, mis categorization, and misperception—or what I call ghosting—of this territory.

While my choice to open this book with the words of a canonical, white U.S. author may seem to undermine the project of centering Dominican cultural expression, I argue that it demonstrates how
inequalities of power influence perception, and, as such, fields of knowledge. This book is about Dominicans’ attempts to assert themselves in the face of a willingly amnesic and relentlessly self-assured U.S. imperialism, or what Anne McClintock calls “the administration of forgetting” in the process of “imperialghosting.” Indeed, dominant Western discourses have ghosted Dominican history and culture despite its central place in the architecture of the Americas not only as the first Spanish colony in the hemisphere but also, alongside Haiti, as an exemplar of black self-rule. However, what Haiti came to represent in the Western imaginary overshadowed the other examples of free black subjectivity as they predominated for centuries on the eastern side of the island. In associating Santo Domingo/the Dominican Republic (hereafter called only the Dominican Republic, although this name officially applies only after 1844) with revolutionary Haiti, outsiders conflated what had been the toppling of the Plantation society par excellence with the majority mixed-race, free population that lived largely from cattle ranching and other forms of non-surplus subsistence for centuries.

I contend that the understudied Dominican example exists beyond the recognizable, and often oversimplified, visions of Haitian insurrection that inspired fear or hope in broader Western imaginaries. The free black and mixed-race negotiations of a slaveholding, impoverished, and scarcely populated society that developed in Dominican territory are too murky, compromised, and foggy to grab the kind of attention reserved for narratives of slaves toppling masters. Looking at Dominican history and cultural expression across several centuries may leave us sympathetic to Delano’s confusion while gazing at the San Dominick: “It seemed hard to decide whether [it] meant to come in or no—what [it] wanted, or what [it] was about.” The Dominican cultural expressions that I analyze in this book evince more tensions, silences, and loose threads than anything else. These loose threads signal what McClintock describes as “the ambivalent presence of ghosts,” who “are fetishes of the in-between, marking places of irresolution” and who “embody the unsettling prospect that the past can be neither foreclosed nor redeemed.” According to Avery Gordon, “the ghostly haunt” points towards a something to be done. Gordon writes: “Something is making an appearance to you that had been kept from view. It says, Do something about the wavering present the haunting is creating.”
Indeed, Dominicans from the nineteenth century to the present day have endeavored to make themselves legible—to “make an appearance”—within New World histories and narratives that have erased, misunderstood, or inserted them as inferior Others—“kept them from view.” The “narratives of belonging” that I study throughout this book are Dominicans’ attempts to be legible as citizen-subjects with access to political, economic, social, and cultural participation within national spaces (including the Dominican Republic, the U.S., Spain, and elsewhere) and transnational or supranational imaginaries and histories such as the African diaspora, Latin America, the Latinx U.S., and the Atlantic world. Equally important to being legible and visible have been Dominican strategies of refusal, that is, of refusing the terms necessary for their legibility in dominant histories and narratives. Discussions of blackness have most frequently conjured these refusals since Dominicans have emerged in early twenty-first-century African American and U.S. Latinx discourses as exemplars of “black denial.” The country is often seen as “the racial pariah of the Americas,” to cite Raj Chetty. This propensity signals the illegibility of the country’s “strange” history within dominant Western discourses—including some African diaspora and Latinx discourses—because, in pathologizing Dominican ideas of race, these narratives do not consider that Dominican society beyond the capital city of Santo Domingo developed apart from, though in trade relations with, the Plantation system or what Ira Berlin calls a slave society (versus a society with slaves). Scholars of Caribbean and North American slavery have made the important distinction between societies with slaves and slave societies or what I prefer to call the Plantation, after Antonio Benítez Rojo. The Dominican context is singular in that, while it was a society with enslaved subjects for centuries, it was also, and crucially, a society with a majority free black population that lived beyond the purview of any colonial oversight, whether urban or rural. It should not be surprising, then, that distinct racial discourses would emerge from a slaveholding society structured in relationships not immediately legible to the novice imperial gaze, newly arrived to Dominican soil.

Through literature, music, and speech acts, island and diasporic Dominicans have expressed their dissatisfaction with how they have been described in dominant discourses. These Dominican cultural
expressions of refusal are not necessarily emancipatory. As I mentioned, they are often deeply ambivalent, signaling the persistent interruptions and unfinished imperial and national projects augured on the territory. These expressions run the gamut from ultraconservative, anti-Haitian nationalist literature to present-day Afro-Latinx activism. For instance, the canonization and subsequent whitewashing of an Afro-descendant woman poet (chapters one and two), portrayals and self-expressions of nonwhite Dominican men (chapter three), diasporic Dominican musical performers (chapter four), and female Dominican sex workers catering to foreigners (chapter five) cannot easily be understood through common dichotomies between a ruling class status quo, on one end, and subaltern resistance, on the other. My engagements with these examples of expressive culture and socioeconomic realms have necessitated nuanced analyses that challenge the dominant discourses of race, gender, class, and sexuality in the Americas and the African diaspora.

This book’s main goals are twofold. First, I seek to contextualize and analyze Dominicans’ cultural expressions produced after the nation’s founding in 1844 to the present. Dominicanist scholars have shown that many of these texts either critique or propagate nationalist discourses. I extend their arguments by proposing that Dominican cultural expressions attempt to counteract the territory’s ghosting within larger Western discourses, for better or worse. Second, I intervene at the level of knowledge production and analysis by disrupting some of the fields constructed to account for various modes of being in the Americas, which have not been able to discern, and, in some cases, have helped to obscure the kinds of free black subjectivity that emerged in the Dominican Republic. In so doing, Colonial Phantoms establishes a framework for placing Dominican expressive culture and historical formations at the forefront of a number of scholarly investigations of colonial modernity in the Americas, the African diaspora, geographic displacement (e.g., migration and exile), and international divisions of labor.

Techniques of Ghosting

Techniques of ghosting, erasure, and silencing comprise some of the most powerful ways in which colonial, imperial, and nationalist entities wield their power. My preference for the term “ghosting” instead
of erasure, silencing, fragmentation, trauma, or even haunting requires thorough explanation. While these other terms apply to some of the specific examples I investigate in this book, “ghosting” encompasses most of the ideas I wish to convey. In his Nobel laureate speech, Derek Walcott named fragmentation as integral to Caribbean history and culture: “[T]he way that the Caribbean is still looked at, illegitimate, rootless, mongrelized. [. . . ] No people. Fragments and echoes of real people, unoriginal and broken.”20 Literature and other forms of expressive culture, then, emerge as a “restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent.”21 While Dominican history and expressive culture can certainly be described as “fragmented,” the term does not evoke some of the active elements of the process or set of processes that created such fragments in the first place. Moreover, evocative words such as “shards” and “pieces” exist as objects beyond the realm of time. My analyses in this book rest more on continuities and repetitions, which exist through time. One of the most important ways in which hauntings manifest themselves is through repetition, either “ritualistic” (McClintock) or “involuntary” (Gordon). As Diana Taylor contends, “[t]he ghost is, by definition, repetition.”22 Thus, the mark of haunting is evident in the Dominican Republic, which has seen repetitions and rehearsals of several national and imperial projects.

For its part, while the term “haunting” urges us to consider what is being haunted, “ghosting” also compels us to ask who is responsible for creating the ghosts. “Silencing” also motivates us to name the actor(s) behind the act, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot does in his influential Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History (1995), but it can leave us with the sense that the act of silencing has produced inert historical gaps. Instead, “ghosting” implies that the acts of erasure that are part and parcel of colonial, imperial, and many nationalist projects have produced not so much actual silence as other unwieldy and recalcitrant presences. To cite Renée Bergland, ghosts “refuse to stay buried.”23 According to Avery Gordon, haunting “is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very discretely, sometimes more obliquely.”24 Colonial Phantoms endeavors to show how the ghosts of Dominican erasure have tried to
make themselves seen, heard, and recorded, as well as how Dominican subjects from the late nineteenth century to the present have engaged with them. Many of the cultural expressions that I discuss in this book suggest that acknowledgement of these ghosts opens us to the potential for redemption, healing, and, to cite McClintock, “the possibilities of alternative futures.”

It would be useful to outline the main ways in which the Dominican Republic has been ghosted within broader Western imaginaries:

1. Cultural producers (scholars, writers, journalists, cartographers, activists, and others) and policymakers, especially from Europe and the U.S., have ghosted how central the Dominican Republic was as a space where European and U.S. powers could rehearse their military, political, and economic imperialist projects.

2. Many Dominican nationalist cultural producers and policymakers, as well as cultural producers and policymakers from elsewhere, have ghosted the territory’s historical and demographic singularity. The Dominican Republic had a diverse economy based mostly on cattle ranching, wood, and tobacco (reliant on trade with Plantation neighbor Saint-Domingue/Haiti) with a majority free black and mixed-race population. This economic and demographic reality started in the late sixteenth century and endured, arguably, into the twentieth century.

3. Cultural producers and policymakers from outside of the island (non-Haitians and non-Dominicans) persistently called the entire island Haiti for most of the nineteenth century even when only the Western third of the island had this name and government. This matters immensely because when Haiti was founded, much to the dismay of the world’s ruling elite, especially those whose fortunes relied directly on slave labor, both sides of the island felt the cultural and material repercussions of the world’s wrath.

4. The ghosting of the Dominican Republic from dominant Western discourses, combined with at least a century of being associated (both accurately and inaccurately) with Haiti, means that categories of knowledge and disciplinary fields have been constructed and developed without considering its important example. This
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led to present-day scholars of the nineteenth century, for instance, repeating earlier inaccuracies and silencings, and thereby perpetuating the ghosting of the Dominican Republic.27

5. Because association with Haiti would prevent Dominicans from garnering the world respect necessary for economic and political survival—within the dominant white supremacist world order—many in the ruling and intellectual classes were desperate to show that they were nothing like Haitians.28 In so doing, these cultural producers also erased or, at least whitewashed, Dominican forms of black subjectivity. They also elided the ways in which many black and mixed-race subjects in the Dominican Republic partook in the set of events now called the Haitian Revolution on both sides of the island.

6. By the late twentieth century, what had been a unique territory within the Americas had become another “third world” island-nation providing cheap labor, sun, sex, and sand.29 This occurred through the consolidation of the Dominican nation-state, the persistence of U.S. involvement in Dominican politics and economy, the reliance on foreign tourism as the main driver of the national economy, and neoliberal policies and trade agreements that restructured the relationship between the Dominican Republic and other national economies. This present-day commonplaceness obscures—but does not eradicate entirely—the strangeness of prior centuries.

While these six forms of ghosting are deeply intertwined, their unequal effects reflect the difference in global power between the Dominican Republic and Europe/the U.S. I focus mostly on ghosting at the level of knowledge production, while remaining aware that extreme violence (e.g., state-sponsored genocide) has also been a central technique of ghosting. However, various forms of knowledge production have had immense material repercussions on the people who have lived on this island. For instance, mid-nineteenth-century scientific racism as a form of knowledge production emanating mostly from the Western powers and white elites in other parts of the world influenced how foreign visitors categorized the Dominican population. It also informed several Dominican scholars who wrote about the degeneracy of the country’s
mixed-race and black populations. These visitors and scholars often had
direct influence on policies that would affect the material circumstances,
even the lives, of Dominicans.30

Persistent misnaming of either or both sides of the island in various
fields of scholarship and over two centuries has compounded archival
erasure or miscategorization. That is, non-Dominican and non-Haitian
scholars writing about the island referred to either side accurately or
mistakenly as San Domingue/San Domingo/Saint Domingue/Santo
Domingo/Hayti/Haiti/Hispaniola/Española.31 The western side of the
island was first known as La Española/Hispaniola (alongside the rest of
the island), Saint Domingue, and finally Haiti. The eastern side occasions
more confusion; Hispaniola became Santo Domingo (also the name of
the capital city), Spanish Haiti, and finally the Dominican Republic.32

The ghosting of the Dominican Republic from dominant Western
discourses matters for several reasons. First, the vast diaspora of Do-
mincans in the U.S. and Europe, and the way that Dominican cultural
expressions (e.g., bachata and merengue, the literature of Julia Alvarez
and Junot Díaz) and labor (e.g., factory and domestic work, baseball)
have made deep marks in the U.S. and European mainstream, behooves
us to get to know the cultural background of an emigrant population
that tends to maintain ties to the homeland.33 Second, it matters because
the history of the Dominican Republic for centuries contained whispers
of a way of being in the Americas that to some extent evaded dominant
socioeconomic and political structures. And finally, it matters because,
in Trouillot’s words, “[h]istorical silences [signal] archival power at its
strongest, the power to define what is and what is not a serious object
of research and, therefore, of mention.”34 Even revisionist histories and
antioppression activist efforts, especially when issuing from the North
American and European centers of global power, can constitute acts of
“imperial ghosting.”35

The term “navel” in this introduction’s title serves as another allegory
that clarifies this project. The navel sits at the center of the body. In this
case, it symbolizes the geographic centrality of the island of Hispaniola
within the hemisphere. Too, the navel represents a conceptual central-
ity and importance that nevertheless has been ghosted. The navel is the
remnant of a once vital relationship, the umbilical cord that augured and
fueled a history of the conquest and colonization of the Americas with
all of its attendant violence. Celsa Albert Batista describes the colony of La Española or Hispaniola as the “center for the rehearsal of Spanish colonialism in America.”36 It was also the center for experiments in radical black freedom and self-governance as well as various forms of U.S. imperialism. That is, it is a symbol of the ghosted importance of this territory to the subsequent architecture of the Americas.

Because major fields of knowledge about the Americas have developed without revising their paradigms to allow for a conceptualization of the Dominican Republic, I have had to construct a reading practice that can discern the “lower frequencies,” to cite Lisa Lowe, humming beneath nationalist, imperialist, and diasporic narratives, both popular and academic.37 The texts I analyze not only “unearth that which the colonial experience buried and overlaid, bringing to light the hidden continuities it suppressed,” to invoke Stuart Hall, but also “produce identity” in a “re-telling [rather than discovery] of the past.”38 Seen differently, Hall here distinguishes between a text as a filler of historical gaps and a text as the living ghost created by prior silencings. In the latter case, the text/ghost is an active presence with its own complicated vision of “what happened” and why it is speaking now.

Consider, for instance, the Dominican mythical figure of the ciguapa, a simultaneously alluring and terrifying creature whose feet face backwards. Ginetta Candelario argues that the ciguapa “is not a legend of Taíno origins that predates Spanish colonization of the island,” as she is popularly understood.39 The ciguapa was, instead, the invention of Francisco Javier Angulo Guridi (1816–1884), a nationalist Liberal “navigating the Dominican Republic’s contradictory racial demographics, political economy, and geopolitics.”40 In this sense, the ciguapa as a figure of contradiction and ambivalence manages several ghostings, including the violent genocide of indigenous people on the island and the suppression of black freedom as it predominated in this territory. This interpretation of the ciguapa resembles Avery Gordon’s reading of Beloved, the adult ghost who returns after being killed as a child in Toni Morrison’s canonical novel.41 Like Beloved, the ciguapa is “visible and demanding.”42 Unlike Beloved, however, the ciguapa emerges as a figure of obfuscation and distraction, rather than as a figure of “reckoning” who “makes those who have contact with her [ . . . ] confront an event in the past that loiters in the present.”43 I want to suggest that
the act of invention for the purpose of denial and erasure does not produce vacancy or absence as much as it creates other contradictory, fleshy presences.

The Specter of Haiti

But if the revolution was significant for Haitians [. . .] to most foreigners it was primarily a lucky argument in a larger issue. [. . .] Haiti mattered to all of them, but only as a pretext to talk about something else.


While the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804) inspired many subjects of African descent, the world’s white elite recoiled in fear and horror. 44 Saint Domingue’s colonizer, France, denied Haiti recognition until the new nation agreed to an exorbitant debt payment that crippled the Haitian economy. Western powers did their best to banish Haitian history, culture, religion, and people from world history, demonizing what remained. 45 In Gina Ulysse’s words, “Haiti had to become colonialism’s *bête noir* if the sanctity of whiteness were to remain unquestioned.” 46

To be sure, as Sean X. Goudie writes, “an active silencing or disavowal of the Haitian Revolution in the archives has been at the heart of Western modernity, not the least in the nineteenth-century United States.” 47

At a time when U.S. government officials and cultural producers consolidated the ideal of a white (male) citizenry, Haitian officials drafted a constitution that named its citizens as black. 48 According to Eric J. Sundquist, “Haiti came to seem the fearful precursor of black rebellion throughout the New World, becoming an entrenched part of master-class ideology in both Latin America and the United States.” 49

This matters within the context of this book because the specter and fear of Haiti applied to the entire island, in terms both practical and theoretical. In a practical sense, texts about nineteenth-century Haiti/Saint Domingue/Santo Domingo are quite often about the entire island and even explicitly about the Dominican Republic—even when that latter name never surfaces. Its proximity to Haiti and its *oneness* with it from 1822 until 1844 meant that the fate of the eastern, formerly Spanish, territory was tied to Haiti’s.
As Trouillot argues, the Haitian Revolution and the creation of a black state of Haiti made world leaders and others so anxious that it was unmentioned or excised during some of the most crucial moments in hemispheric history. For instance, in 1819, U.S. president James Monroe ignored the existence of Haiti as a nation-state and, several years later, again made no mention of Haiti during his “articulation of the famous Monroe Doctrine asserting American primacy in the hemisphere,” to cite Sara Fanning. The subsequent Congress of Panama of 1826 systematically also excluded Haiti (the entire island at the time) at the insistence of the U.S. president, John Quincy Adams, and in the interest of slaveholders in his country. (Paradoxically, its absence from these moments of consolidation of U.S. imperial power did not protect Haiti from future U.S. aggression and involvement.) Haiti’s weight as representing what the world’s white ruling class most feared—black insurgency and self-autonomy—required a political and economic embargo. Thus, Haiti—the entire island for a crucial twenty-two years—underwent a systematic, sinister erasure, active and hostile, when the new nation-states of the hemisphere recognized each other.

Because of this global stance against Haiti, many nineteenth- and twentieth-century Dominican nationalists were eager to suppress Dominican connections to Haiti. In their efforts to convince foreign powers that Dominicans were nothing like Haitians, many Dominican officials rejected the ways in which many black and mixed-raced Dominicans had participated in slave revolts over the centuries, cheered for black insurrection in neighboring Saint Domingue, and welcomed Haitian governance over the whole island. Mixed-raced categories in the Dominican racial spectrum emerged as part of a strategy of communicating to U.S. imperial officials in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that, while most Dominicans were not “white” in the way that the U.S. government described it (which at the time could also exclude Spaniards, for instance), they were also not “black” in the way that the Haitian constitution of 1805 proclaimed the country to be. This book builds on and coexists with recent scholarly and activist attempts to undo some of the damage occasioned by anti-Haitian Dominican nationalism as refracted through anti-Haitian U.S. imperial desires.

At the same time, the Dominican Republic helped U.S. leaders consider the language of free black subjectivity because it already existed
there in a greater degree of autonomy and expanse than in the rest of the hemisphere. Pockets of black freedom, beyond maroonage, existed all over the Americas. However, what was unique to this territory is that this freedom from the surveillance of a white supremacist colonial and then national gaze was a predominant, if often suppressed, social element. During his time as U.S. president (1869–1877), Ulysses S. Grant pushed for annexation of the Dominican Republic: “The acquisition of San Domingo is an adherence to the ‘Monroe doctrine’; [. . . ] it is to make slavery insupportable in Cuba and Porto Rico [sic] at once, and ultimately so in Brazil.”55 Grant’s case encompassed nothing less than a future-driven map of a slavery-free, U.S.-led hemispheric order. To Grant, the Dominican Republic would not only host the rehearsal of this project, but already contained the seeds of this future. Grant did not have to go through the trouble of figuring out how best to deal with recently freed black subjects; Dominican territory provided a glimpse of free black subjectivity. In seeing that the future did not lie in slave-holding societies such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Brazil, Grant looked to the island that showed what universal free black subjectivity and (male) citizenship looked like.

A Singular Colony

In order to understand the depth of what Dominican nationalists and European and U.S. political and cultural leaders ghosted, I must expand on the various forms of ghosting I outlined above. The Dominican Republic was the site of the first rehearsals of European empire in the hemisphere. There, Spanish colonists experienced their first successes—the first European city, the first sugar mills, the first enslaved indigenous and African subjects, and so on—and, from the colonists’ perspectives, their first failures—the first indigenous rebellions, the first maroons (black and indigenous), the collapse of the first plantation economy in the Americas, and so on. Lynne Guitar argues that “[i]t was on Hispaniola that many of the patterns were formed that governed relations between African slaves and their new masters, patterns that spread to the other Spanish colonies across the Americas—patterns that included rebellion.”56 While many have learned about Spain’s conquest of places like Mexico and Peru, few consider that Spain used the administrative
knowledge and actual administrators they had rehearsed on Hispaniola to acquire better results elsewhere. The vast corpus of information available about other Spanish colonies such as Mexico and even Cuba stemmed in great part from their wealth and the strength of colonial control. Scholarship about the Dominican Republic has often been based on the scant writings of confused outsiders or local elites isolated in a few main cities.

The centuries that followed Spanish neglect of Hispaniola are worth describing. What is now the Dominican Republic became a “forgotten” Spanish colony by the late sixteenth century, after its burgeoning sugar mill economy declined and the Spanish crown turned its attention to other islands and the mainland. Unlike other Spanish colonies, a strong Spanish administrative presence had ceased to exist soon after the Spanish takeover of the island in the late fifteenth century. For hundreds of years, the territory became what Juan José Ponce-Vázquez calls a “de facto borderland,” in which buccaneering and a contraband trade in hides flourished, racial mixture was more the norm than the exception, and slavery ended with the unification of the island under Haitian governance in 1822. A society with a majority black and mixed-race rural population that was not centered on a Plantation system while reliant on one of the strongest Plantation societies the world ever saw—Saint-Domingue—rendered it unique among other slaveholding societies in the Americas. Analyses of race in the Dominican Republic that emphasize its strangeness, even absurdity, often adopt frameworks built to understand nations whose history and demographics differ markedly from the Dominican Republic.

Demographic data evince the inapplicability of racial and other paradigms constructed to apply to places such as the U.S., Cuba, and Haiti. Eric Paul Roorda, Lauren Derby, and Raymundo González argue that “[o]ne distinctive feature of the Dominican Republic is that by the seventeenth century, freedpeople were more numerous than enslaved people, a feature some travelers noted with a degree of shock and dismay.” In 1791, the total population of the Spanish colony of Santo Domingo comprised 125,000 people, 12 percent of them enslaved. The percentage of whites and nonwhites is generally unknown for this year. This gap in knowledge is noteworthy, since neighboring colonies recorded this information carefully.
total population of 50,089 on the eastern (Spanish) side of the island, 13,191 were white, 7,052 were black, and 29,992 were mixed race. Sibylle Fischer states that “there were relatively few slaves before 1822 in Spanish Santo Domingo—15,000 out of a population of 120,000—and the economy did not depend on large-scale plantations.” In 1791, neighboring Saint Domingue (soon-to-be Haiti) had a population of 520,000 (four times the number of people in half the space of the territory of Santo Domingo), 86.9 percent of them enslaved. In Cuba in 1827, when the island was still far from independence and the abolition of slavery, the total population was 704,487 with a 40.7 percent enslaved population. For the 1840s on the Dominican side of the island, David Dixon Porter, a U.S. Navy admiral, reported that “5,000 are white, 60,000 are quadroons, 60,000 are light-skinned mulattoes, 14,000 dark-skinned mulattoes, and 20,000 are of pure African descent.”

While any census data involving racial denomination is tenuous at best (e.g., how were degrees of racial mixture determined?), these numbers nevertheless reveal a few key points. First, the central government apparatus responsible for gathering population data was weaker in Dominican territory than in neighboring colonies. Second, distinguishing between the various racial classes and their attendant places in society was utterly important in places such as Saint Domingue and Cuba, where the Plantation predominated and which were French and Spanish colonial centers, respectively. Compared to these places, Santo Domingo was barely able to account who among the free people were white or not white for some of its colonial history. Pedro San Miguel corroborates that “unlike other Caribbean societies, in the Dominican Republic […] a plantation economy that prevented the rise and existence of a peasantry did not exist.” The thorough racial mixture of the majority of the population, the low density (in 1681, for instance, the territory contained less than 10,000 people), the low number of large plantations, and the relatively low number of enslaved subjects vis-à-vis the rest of the population means that it should be a challenge to consider the Dominican case alongside places such as Cuba and Brazil.

Although Plantation frameworks constructed to understand places such as Cuba and Jamaica do not apply neatly to the Dominican case, this territory was nonetheless a European slaveholding colony and, as such, a white supremacist and patriarchal hierarchy prevailed. Nonwhite
subjects, enslaved and free, resisted in both small- and large-scale ways but, however frail the colonial system, white men were still considered superior in law and in practice.70 In 1634, a free mixed-race woman had a party with her family and friends in Santo Domingo. One of the guests was a Spanish soldier who, reports Juan José Ponce Vázquez, “started to dismantle the decorations.”71 The hostess intervened, asking him to stop, and he asked her “whether she was crazy addressing him in such a manner and whether she thought she was talking to another mulato like herself.”72 The soldier also hit her on the head, creating a bloody wound. In 1680, colonial authorities “issued a summons” to a free mulata, Juana Maldonado, for having an affair with a white man of the upper class. This “caused a great deal of gossiping and scandal in this Republic” and Maldonado was ordered to move to another neighborhood and to cease contact with the upper-class man.73 Authorities also “scolded” her for good measure. The unnamed white man of the upper class was neither reprimanded nor punished. These seventeenth-century examples remind us of the crucial gender, class, and sexual dimensions to the question of race as they emerged in this colony. While this society spurred the creation of various forms of black freedom, it was still governed, however loosely, by a patriarchal colonial regime. That is, although “a colorful assortment of saucy and insubordinate characters continued to move about and resist authority,” the administrative and intellectual classes in power sought to curtail these recalcitrant behaviors.74

A form of the Plantation did arrive to the Dominican Republic in the late nineteenth century, following the abolition of slavery in the U.S., Cuba, and Puerto Rico.75 At this time, foreign owners acquired permissions and sanctions to open large sugar plantations, especially in the southeast region.76 There were long-term effects of the arrival of the most advanced form of the Plantation, including the imposition of a new form of land value that was the beginning of the end of the autonomous peasantry. Frank Moya Pons argues that “the plantation is [in the late twentieth-century] the dominant agricultural system in the Dominican Republic.”77 However, as Moya Pons also corroborates, “its appearance was not linked to the initial process of forming the Dominican nation.”78 In other words, the logic of the Plantation—which, according to Trevor Burnard and John Garrigus, “was the main driving force shaping most aspects of European colonization in the Atlantic World” in the
seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—never superimposed itself over the whole of Dominican society as it did in other Caribbean colonies.79

Black Masterless Men in *El Monte*

La caza era una actividad de los hombres. (Hunting was a man’s activity.)
—Raymundo González, “Ideología del progreso y campesinado en el siglo XIX” (1993)

I was struck by the free, frank, and manly way in which these men look and speak, evidently showing they feel their importance as freemen very different from the same class in Cuba.
—Samuel Hazard, *Santo Domingo: Past and Present, with a Glance at Hayti* (1873)

Some of the general characteristics of the Dominican society developed by former slaves, indigenous people, wayward white colonists, and their progeny include the subsistence farming of small sections in unfenced and shared land, the thoroughness of racial mixture, and the importance of free movement on horseback.80 It is a history of nonwhite subjects’ insubordination through, for instance, buccaneering—which Eric Paul Roorda, Lauren Derby, and Raymundo González, after Julius S. Scott, describe as a “contraband economy of black ‘masterless men’”—and various other forms of resistance to colonial power and white supremacy.81

In 1772, the governor attempted to reduce the number of free blacks and increase the number of whites in the colony. After reviewing the proposition, a prosecutor of the Council of the Indies agreed that the blacks, who were *derramados*, or spilled all over the island, constituted a significant threat to the colonial order.82 At the same time, he considered the governor’s plan to be a losing battle. A few years later, in 1784, Colonel Joaquín García was aghast at the behavior of free nonwhites on the island. He complains to colonial authorities that “[f]ree persons of color [ . . . ] travel across the colony with ‘absolute confidence and impertinence’ and confuse their identity with that of their white neighbors ‘as if there were no more classes [dividing society] than free or slave.’”83

As cited by Raymundo González, García recommends that the new
laws of the Código Negro Carolino (the Black Code) of 1784 in Santo Domingo be applied not only to slaves but also—and especially—to free nonwhite subjects who comprised the real threat to the colonial order in this territory.  

The white elite subjects clamoring for the Spanish crown’s attention yearned not only for a slaveholding society, which the colony was at the time, but also for a society organized by Plantation logic, in which nonwhites remained subservient to whites, especially in behavior. Spanish colonial laws supported this desire. Citing Dominican historian Carlos Larrazal Blanco, Franklin J. Franco writes, “although within the limitations of the time, most mulattos had no trouble in gaining their freedom [. . . ] the ordinances regulating everyday social interactions in Hispaniola stipulated that ‘blacks, mulattos, or terceroons shall be as submissive [and respectful] to every white person as if each one of them were his master.’” Unlike other Spanish colonies, however, Santo Domingo’s general impoverishment, combined with the lack of colonial infrastructure, prevented the ordinance’s stringent enforcement. Late eighteenth-century Martinican traveler, writer, and lawyer M. L. Moreau de Saint-Méry commented that in Santo Domingo, “prejudice with respect to colour, so powerful with other nations, among whom it fixes a bar between the whites, and the freed-people, and their descendants, is almost unknown in the Spanish part of Saint-Domingo.” The many laws preventing free nonwhites from parity with whites, observes Moreau de Saint-Méry, “are absolutely disregarded in the Spanish part.” After assuring readers that white elites “would turn with disgust from an alliance with the descendents of their slaves,” he makes the almost offhand comment that “the major part of the Spanish colonists are a mixed-race: this an African feature, and sometimes more than one, often betrays; but [. . . ] its frequency has silenced a prejudice that would otherwise be a troublesome remembrance.” To this white Martinican (French) member of the elite, the “white” Spanish subjects were only tenuously so; their bodies betray phenotypically their African ancestry. How could white elites enforce race hierarchies when their own non-whiteness was an open secret?

As these examples demonstrate, black insurgency and autonomy, along with other ways of expressing the self that subverted Plantation logic, worried colonial administrators and white elites living on and
visiting the eastern part of the island. The space in which this form of black freedom and autonomy proliferated was called *el monte*. Raymundo González describes *el monte* as “the site of thousands of dispersed and anonymous freed blacks and mulattos who were living in the mountains a life of autonomous subsistence in the wilderness.” \(^90\) Its archetypal subject, *el montero*, was a man who hunted wild pigs, goats, and cattle in a practice called *montería* (see Figure I.1). \(^91\)

Assuming that this socioeconomic role and archetype was gendered masculine, what can be said of the women of *el monte*? The archives I have consulted reveal examples of recalcitrant free black and mixed-race women in the cities, as the two examples I relayed earlier demonstrate. Moreover, the colonial archive includes many examples of “*mujeres de peso en la vida económica y social*” (women with social and economic weight), as Frank Moya Pons writes, as well as “poor women who went to church and supported their families by working as servants,

![Figure I.1. R. H. Beck, “Guides and Wild Pig Hunter [Montero],” Brewster and Sanford Expedition in the Dominican Republic, ca. 1916–1917. Image #236803. (Courtesy of the American Museum of Natural History Library, New York.)](image-url)
seamstresses, food sellers, dessert makers, prostitutes or concubines.”

But women living beyond the purview of the colonial administration, out in el monte, are almost entirely invisible in writings about montería. Because of the degree to which the practice of montería and other forms of black autonomy in el monte rendered the territory singular among its Caribbean counterparts, it is difficult to avoid the potential conclusion that much of this singularity existed in the realm of men as it emerges in most writings about Dominican rurality. I wonder about women in el monte (and men who were not or could not be monteros) because gender, both embodied and rhetorical, is a crucial component of analysis. In *La parole des femmes* (1979), Maryse Condé suggests that Caribbean women’s literature—and women’s perspectives—can offer a more holistic understanding of Caribbean society: “[T]his female literature has social content that goes beyond the anecdotal nature of the author. It is situated at the heart of more general social concerns.”

However, two challenges to this goal of centralizing women’s cultural expressions present themselves in a study of el monte. First, the written archive genders this space of black freedom and autonomy as masculine. And second, for much of Dominican history, women (and men) in el monte had limited if nonexistent access to recording their thoughts and ideas for posterity.

That the central mode of living in el monte, montería, was “man’s work” does not mean that women did not occupy central roles. Rather, women do not appear as distinctive from other Caribbean women in the sources I have consulted. If anything, writes Celsa Albert Batista, colonial administrators considered “the [enslaved] African woman as a ‘mechanism against insurgency’” and as a tool of domestication. While my focus here is on freepeople and not on enslaved subjects, there is a discursive precedent in this territory that enslaved female subjects and black women in general represented a domesticating force. To colonial administrators, free black subjectivity was tied to the masculine endeavor of montería and other subsistence activities unprofitable to the colonial administration, and, as such, as an always subversive identity and performance. Samuel Hazard, a white journalist traveling with an official delegation sent by President Ulysses S. Grant to consider annexation of the Dominican Republic, records his surprise at the “manli ness” of the men he encountered. Part of the same official commission
as Hazard, Frederick Douglass described the country as being “a place where the man can simply be a man regardless of his skin color. Where he can be free to think, and to lead.”

When nonelite women do appear in (male) foreigners’ nineteenth-century narratives, the writers’ heteronormative gaze circumscribes their accounts. Samuel Hazard’s “sudden” encounter with rural Dominican women washing clothes in a river, for instance, paints an Eden-like scene of “forty or fifty women of various ages [ . . . ]. Some were entirely nude, some with only a waist-cloth, but all industriously washing away and chattering like parrots.” The traveling group’s “astonished gaze” turned into outright voyeurism as they “stop[ped] to look.” For their part, Dominican elite writers “disavowed black women as ‘tristes extranjeras’ (sad foreigners),” as Lorgia García- Peña maintains. Conversely, argues García- Peña, “‘the (white) woman’ became the guardian of dominicanidad” as elite writers “whitened the nation-woman through Europeanized descriptions of feminine beauty.” These foreign and Dominican literary elite perspectives generally obscure, if not outright erase, a clear understanding of how women in el monte may or may not have subverted Caribbean models of free black subjectivity.

Some of the chapters in this book explore how the spirit of the montero emerges in late twentieth- and twenty-first-century quotidian and stage performances not only among Dominican men but also among Dominican women. As Lauren Derby argues, monteros became the model of masculinity that would evolve into the modern-day tíguere, a nonwhite, streetwise hustler and Dominican masculine archetype (chapter three). Thus, when Dominican women performers and writers adopt tíguere traits, they insert themselves into what had been a masculine genealogy for centuries, rejecting the single model of idealized white Dominican femininity (chapters two, four, and five).
Ghosting El Monte

The nineteenth-century urban bourgeoisie writing Dominican national identity into being feared the society and culture that predominated in el monte. Raymundo González emphasizes the extent to which el monte—and rumors about what happened there—made deep and long-lasting marks on what colonial administrators and other elites concentrated in the main cities and plantations thought. According to Pedro L. San Miguel, this anxiety stretched into the national period: “Since the founding of the Republic, in 1844, the peasantry had constituted a social sector difficult to control by state organisms. For this reason, starting in the late nineteenth century, state efforts were largely routed to ‘domesticate’ the peasantry.” El monte as a racialized imaginary was an allegory for a backwardness that prevented progress and modernity. As a space that existed in reality, many nationalists turned to modernization in the form of agricultural and land reform, an extreme of which emerged in the many foreign-owned sugar plantations in the eastern region of the country starting in the late nineteenth century. Others focused on widespread education as the primary vehicle for modernity and nationalization, thus folding Dominican citizens into the national body. This “fanatical” attention to education and other forms of modernization were central elements of positivist, Liberal ideology that predominated in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Dominican writing.

One crucial exception to this generalized attitude about modernization and progress in late nineteenth-century Dominican thought was Pedro Francisco Bonó, who wrote the novel El Montero (1856). Bonó’s nationalism connected the montero subject to the territory’s history of black freedom. What other intellectuals saw as rural backwardness, Bonó saw as the seeds of an inspiring future. In an 1887 letter to presidential candidate General Gregorio Luperón, Bonó describes the island of Santo Domingo as “the nucleus,” “the model,” and the “embodiment” of “the destinies that Providence is setting aside for the blacks and mulattoes in [the] Americas[s].” Bonó not only acknowledges that the country was primarily black and “mulatto” but also that, alongside Haiti, it was representative of the mixed-race and black future of the Americas. Unlike Bonó, most intellectuals at this time adhered to an idea of modernity reliant on the ghosting of el monte.
Technological, agricultural, and educational progress, and the literature that propagated these values, started to fold more Dominicans into a centralized nation. However, only a small group of people, mainly literate men of the leading classes, could perform and embody the role of being standard-bearers of patriotism in practice and in the national imaginary. Roberto Cassá notes that in 1850 “the vast majority of the population lived in the countryside, where there were no educational institutions of any sort. But even in the scarce small cities, the general population remained illiterate.”107 While the 1874 constitution required schooling for all Dominicans, as Neici Zeller points out, “the budget for such a goal was only 3 percent of the government’s total expenditures.”108 The intellectual elite in Santo Domingo and other major cities thus comprised what Angel Rama calls the *la cuidad letrada* (the lettered city), contrasting with the *cuidad real* (real city) that the rest of the population represented. The “real city,” which was in fact mostly rural, was home to “the illiterate, indigenous or Afro-descendent majorities.”109 Pablo Mella maintains that some of the periodicals that dominated the cultural scene in the country served “as a synecdoche that pretended to represent discursively the Dominican Republic as a whole.”110 Though useful, the binary of “real” versus “lettered” city has its limits in a late nineteenth-century Dominican context. For instance, intellectual elites in the Dominican case were not always racially distinct from the subjects in the “real city,” as this territory had had black and mixed-race political and cultural leaders since the colonial era.111

In ghosting el monte through and within these constructions of a “modern” imaginary, Dominican intellectuals also ghosted the African or black components of Dominican society and culture.112 In part, this stems from the fact that “blackness” as a signifier had been relegated both to el monte and, after the Haitian Revolution, to Haiti. Indeed, to many ruling elites, especially those in favor of foreign annexation, Haiti represented a national threat that required intervention from more powerful nations, including the U.S. However, antiannexationist intellectuals, often followers of the “Blue” political faction, considered the U.S. as a threat to Dominican sovereignty and national identity.113

Despite ruling elites’ and foreign scholars’ propensity to see elites’ writings as accurate reflections of the whole population, Dominican nationalist discourses themselves contain evidence of the singularity of the
territory’s history and society. For instance, it is remarkable that a Eurocentric, patriarchal elite considered an Afro-descendent woman, Salomé Ureña, the country’s most important poet in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. This occurred in the midst of many proannexationist Dominican officials’ and intellectuals’ attempts to render the population and its culture “whiter” to an interested U.S. gaze. Yet Ureña’s blackness was entirely unremarked during her lifetime and her image was phenotypically whitewashed in the many sculptures and paintings dedicated to her (chapters one and two). Another example of the contradictions evident in Dominican nationalism, the Dominican icon of montero masculinity, the tíguere, both resists white supremacist constraints and, at the same time, can perpetrate extreme forms of violence on noncompliant subjects (chapter three). These cases escape the frameworks of either triumphant resistance or abject failure, and, I argue, get to the heart of what is so strange and confusing about the Dominican case to many outsiders. Thus, dominant scholarly paradigms have not been able to account for Dominican modes of being in the hemisphere’s history and therefore ignore, misunderstand, and perpetuate its ghosting.

The Dominican Nation-State and Geographic Displacement

*Colonial Phantoms* traces the long arc starting from the late nineteenth century, when Dominican territory remained singular in the ways I described above, to the present day, when the Dominican Republic is a “third world” nation among many in dominant developmentalist thought. Smoothing out the prickly difference characterized by the autonomous, anonymous black subjects who proliferated in the most remote areas of the territory required strengthening the surveillance of both the nation-state and an increasingly powerful U.S. empire. The latter had a direct influence on the territory through the terroristic U.S. military regime in the country from 1916–1924. These changes, combined with the consolidation of a conservative Dominican nationalism during the Trujillo dictatorship (1930–1961) and after, especially under the governments of Joaquín Balaguer (1966–1978 and 1986–1996), transformed the Dominican population in significant ways. For instance, the majority of the population shifted from rural to urban. Frank Moya Pons writes that “for more than 400 years, and especially during the
eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, rural customs predominated in Dominican society. Still in 1920, in the midst of the U.S. occupation, 86 percent of the population lived in the countryside. But, by 2010, 74.4 percent of the country's population lived in cities. The vast emigration of Dominicans to places such as the U.S., Puerto Rico, Europe, and elsewhere also started in the 1960s. In 2010, the total population in the Dominican Republic stood at nearly 9.5 million, while the Dominican population in the U.S. alone was 1.5 million. There are also sizable populations of Dominicans in Europe and other parts of the Americas.

Unsurprisingly, scholarship on the Dominican Republic outside of the island has emerged most keenly in relation to the issue of twentieth- and twenty-first-century migration. Scholars have been particularly interested in how Dominican migrants influence the politics, the economy, and the culture of the homeland and the countries with significant Dominican populations. Some of the narratives I analyze demonstrate that the diasporic space is ambivalent in that it can echo and even surpass the nation's dominant racist and patriarchal ideologies or it can fuel dramatic reevaluations of nationalist narratives. Despite the diversity of viewpoints represented in the diaspora, as well as the racial, educational background, and gender of diasporic subjects, mainstream Dominican sources on the island often portray dominicanos ausentes (absent Dominicans) or dominicanos en el exterior (Dominicans in the exterior) as threats to national stability.

However, the long durée of this book gives me the opportunity to prove that conversations about dominicanos en el exterior emerge also in nineteenth-century writings. (Exile and migration were central concepts in prior centuries, but here I refer to the national period.) Cultural arbiters and government officials have considered emigration a problem to the cohesion of the Dominican nation-state since the middle of the nineteenth century (chapter one). Various forms of geographic displacement, especially exile and migration, have a long history in the Caribbean region and its letters. I group exile and migration under the single category of geographic displacement to emphasize that political (i.e., involuntary exile) and economic (i.e., voluntary migration) motivations to flee one's homeland are quite often inseparable from each other. When I write about the geographic displacement of Dominican subjects, I write also of how their gender, race, and class embodiment
and position emplace them differently within national, imperial, and diasporic imaginaries. In other words, I focus not so much on the fact of these waves of Dominican exiles and migrants as much as on the ways in which they have been perceived in these national and transnational contexts. Working-class and poor nonwhite Dominicans have also experienced the pain of exile or led transnational lives throughout the nation’s history. However, because they represent the ghosted singular history of Dominican territory that developed outside of dominant hemispheric paradigms, nationalist Dominican literature and history do not celebrate these subjects.

While I am aware that terms such as “migrant,” “exile,” and “refugee” can help identify different motivations behind displacement, they can also obscure the larger structural forces at play, including imperial aggression and neoliberal policies. Some of these terms are raced and classed to such an extent that the only reason some exiles are not considered migrants is that they are educated, from the elite classes, and raced as white. In the nineteenth-century Dominican context I analyze, some so-called exiles did not have to leave the country because of political persecution—the standard definition of an exile. Moreover, so-called migrants are often fleeing an instability both economic and political, but their racial and class status may preclude them from the privilege of seeking asylum or even calling themselves exiles.121

With this in mind, geographic displacement as an idea and experience has had an enormous influence on the work of Caribbean writers and intellectuals who have defined their respective nations and the region as a whole.122 According to Silvio Torres-Saillant, “Exile was and still is a constant element of the Caribbean experience.”123 The Dominican Republic is no exception to this regional characteristic. In spite of the recent claims by conservative nationalists that los ausentes are a threat to the stability of the nation, “[e]xile literature is often part of a nation-building project, despite its location outside of the geographic patria.”124 Many texts produced by diasporic Dominicans re-script national narratives, as I show especially in chapters two to five. However, going against some currents in the study of the Dominican and other Spanish Caribbean diasporas, I resist the impulse to see the diasporic space and the narratives it warrants as always emancipatory. Some of this scholarship overlooks the fact that many Dominicans who have never left the
country have also been activists, scholars, artists, and writers resistant to conservative Dominican nationalism. In the nineteenth century, many elites escaped political persecution by living in what they called destierro or exilio (exile). This fact has resulted in the almost comical irony that many present-day Dominicans call for the cultural and political exclusion of diasporic Dominicans while conjuring the ghosts of nineteenth-century patriots who spent more time living in exile than in the homeland. How, then, do we explain the dichotomy between present-day Dominican ideologues' veneration of some nineteenth- and early twentieth-century exiles as ideal patriots and simultaneous disavowal of current diaspora subjects? Throughout the Americas, the idea of a patriot is connected irrefutably with the creation of “modern” and “civilized” nation-states. Yet his image reflects the vestiges of European colonialism since these nation-states—with the partial exception of Haiti—handed European racial and gender hierarchies of what modernity and civilization meant. Colonial Phantoms pinpoints the racialized, gendered, and class-based contours of ideal patriots who can continue to symbolize the nation even when geographically displaced. For instance, although the white, upper-class Juan Pablo Duarte, the Dominican founding father (1813–1876), spent the last thirty years of his life in exile, he continues to exemplify the nation’s Eurocentric, patriarchal ideals. Nonwhite exemplars of Dominican patriotism, such as Francisco del Rosario Sánchez (1817–1861), undergo phenotypical whitening in commemorative imagery, tightening the knot that binds patriotism to whiteness.

When Dominicans migrate from the countryside to Dominican cities and when they emigrate from the Dominican Republic to other countries, they often carry traces of the country’s singular history and its subsequent ghosting in embodied memories (chapters four and five). The Dominican subjects that create and reside within the cultural texts I explore in this book re-create and engage with the ghosting of the territory’s history and singularity ephemerally in gestures and speech and more lastingly through the written word. We may consider not only diasporic Dominican writers such as Junot Díaz and Julia Alvarez, who have transformed U.S. Latinx literature, but also musical artists such as Romeo Santos, a Bronx-born Dominican–Puerto Rican singer whose medium is bachata, a rural Dominican genre. In
the summer of 2013, Santos performed two sold-out shows at Yankee Stadium, to an audience of 100,000, surpassing the ticket sales of Pink Floyd and only matched by the likes of Jay Z and Paul McCartney at this venue.128

However, migrant Dominicans also incorporate gestures, ephemeral acts, languages, and other cultural expressions of both mainstream and minority cultures in the “host” countries of which they become a part. As Michelle M. Wright warns: “While the passing down of knowledge from generation to generation is cherished by almost all collectivities, it does not operate as smoothly as most discourses describing it would prefer.”129 This nonlinear mish-mash is hardly a symptom of international migration; Dominicans on the island have been influenced by non-Dominican cultural expression for centuries. Nevertheless, as I endeavor to show throughout this book, Dominican nationalism, subaltern encounters with national and imperial powers, and Dominican narratives of blackness all engage with Dominicans’ coloniality and refuse various forms of ghosting.

Many of the works of Firelei Báez, a Dominican-Haitian artist who grew up in Miami, instantiate the processes of unghosting that I argue has shaped various forms of Dominican cultural expression.130 At least four of her artworks engage with the interplay between officialized forms of (Western) knowledge and, to cite Báez, the “often-inaccessible narratives dealing with histories outside of the global north.”131 These pieces—Prescribed Seduction (2012), Blind Man’s Bluff (2012), Man Without a Country (aka anthropophagist wading in the Artibonite River) (2014–2015), and Untitled (Memory Like Fire is Radiant and Immutable) (2016)—incorporate pages ripped from deaccessioned library books. Báez collates the portraits, words, and visualized ideas of the apostles of the Western canon with women “sourced from revealing videos online [. . .]. These women perform publicly, but are unable to act as the central figure outside these videos because of cultural norms.”132 In Man Without a Country and Untitled, Báez adds colorful rogue limbs and dancing feminine figures to the mostly colorless library pages and maps. Several pages show small, almost imperceptible, nonwhite men wading in large bodies of water. Recalling the treacherous journeys of Caribbean migrants surrounded by water, one of the men holds a large,
black plastic bag full of his belongings and another one is weighed down by two children on his back. Unlike the portraits of male scholars and government officials in the other pages, the waders’ and the dancers’ appearance in deaccessioned (i.e., worthless) books illuminate these subjects’ subalternity and marginality.

On the other hand, the artistic inclusion of these subaltern figures onto these newly value-less pages prevents what Báez calls the “erasure” of “unsavory histories.” Indeed, these waders, dancers, migrants, and, in other pages of this piece, laborers give new life to and highlight the grotesque qualities of official histories. On one of the pages, Báez drew women dancing irreverently on top of a dour portrait of U.S. chemist James C. Booth (see Figure I.2). Red flame-like lines shoot out from Booth’s head and eyes, turning him both devilish and carnivalesque. Other pages show the ghostly imprints of two photographs of Dominican dictator Rafael L. Trujillo and some of his officials, overshadowed by outlines of feminine, heeled bodies rendered in a botanical print.

On other pages, Báez obscures the portraits of “great men” with adornments both monstrous and beautiful, such as colorful dots of various sizes that resemble ink droppings. In *Untitled (Memory Like Fire is Radiant and Immutable)*, short, flowing hair strands cover three quarters of another portrait sitter’s visage. Because hair does not usually grow on that part of a man’s face, the result is both startling and comical. The serious countenance contrasts absurdly with the jellyfish-like waves of hair. He becomes a scholarly Chewbacca, a hapless prairie dog, or a Lucha Libre wrestler donning a furry mask (see Figure I.3). The hair strands reach backwards, suggesting a windy day that may at any moment obscure his vision. His eyes peek through temporary hair partitions. This specific man is Trujillo, a dictator who required veneration from his constituents on the pain of death. Báez’s revision of his portrait disrupts the respect, gravitas, and hushed tones images such as these demand from the viewer, inviting mockery and revulsion. These mangled portraits are akin to a schoolchild’s doodling, though certainly much more skillful and deliberate. As such, they repeat the almost sacrilegious act of not paying proper homage to either books or these outsized “great men” of history and knowledge. These acts of cheeky recalcitrance
Figure I.2. Firelei Baez, *Man Without a Country (aka anthropophagist wading in the Artibonite River)* (detail), 2014/15. Gouache, ink, and chine-collé on 220 deaccessioned book pages, 9 x 21 feet. (Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco.)
and refusal destroy the idealized visualities of imperial and patriarchal power through the creation of fragmented and irreverent images that invite the viewer to wonder: “What am I looking at?” Báez’s work urges us to scrutinize Captain Delano’s gaze and, in so doing, we render him the stranger.
The Chapters

Confirming the long-term transnationalism of Dominicans, the texts I analyze in this book were produced by and about Dominicans (and some non-Dominicans) either on the island or in the U.S., Europe, and other sites of the Dominican diaspora. The late twentieth century saw an important change in cultural demographics; the growth of the Dominican diaspora has accompanied an increase in access to information technologies, especially for Dominicans who migrate to the U.S., which has led to a democratization of who can record and share (not only produce) their cultural expressions. The book's shift from the written word in the nineteenth century to a great variety of cultural texts from the twentieth century to the present reflects this important shift.

The mid- to late nineteenth century, after the first republic (1844–1861) and a brief Spanish annexation (1861–1865), was a crucial period for the creation of a unified national culture. The herculean task of deciphering what it meant to be Dominican was always tied to either attracting or stalling imperial attention, depending on the political faction. Chapter one, “Untangling Dominican Patriotism: Exiled Men and Poet Muses Script the Gendered Nation,” studies the conundrum that is Salomé Ureña (1850–1897), a nonwhite woman of the lettered elite who became the most celebrated poet in Dominican history. Studying poems, letters, speeches, and essays by Ureña and some of her contemporaries, I propose that Ureña’s patriotic writings, and her never-mentioned blackness combined with her elite class status, allowed Dominicans of the intellectual and ruling elite to satisfy two intertwined impulses. The first was to construct a national identity that could explain Dominican difference from Haiti, and, as such, secure a seat at the (white supremacist) global table. The second, more subterranean or ghosted impulse, was a tacit acceptance that a nonwhite woman such as Ureña could only be considered “the muse of the nation” among an elite that valued whiteness because Dominican territory had a history of black freedom and leadership.

Chapter two, “Race, Gender, and Propriety in Dominican Commemoration,” homes in on the gendered and raced contours of nationalist commemoration from the late nineteenth century to the present day, especially as it pertained to Ureña. I argue that the endurance of Ureña’s
legacy as the face of Dominican literature and education relied both on her phenotypical whitening in sculpture and painting and on the perpetuation of a selective reading or total elision of some of the subversive desires expressed in her work. The first half of the chapter focuses on which visual and rhetorical motifs remained and which changed so that Ureña could continue to be celebrated as a national icon well into the explicitly antiblack Trujillo and Balaguer regimes. Although Ureña’s nonwhiteness was never mentioned either during or after her lifetime in the hundreds of pages dedicated to her life and work, her image was phenotypically whitened in commemoration, proving that her status as the nation’s foremost poet coincided with the white supremacist impulses of the nation’s elite. The second half of the chapter examines select writings by two twenty-first century feminist and diasporic Dominican women writers, Julia Alvarez and Sherezada (Chiqui) Vicioso, that resurrect an Ureña closer to the woman of “flesh and bone” and not the ghostly vestige she had become through commemoration. By the time that writers such as Alvarez and Vicioso create their versions of Ureña, feminist and critical race studies, the advancement of and greater variety of cultural dissemination technologies, the increase in Dominican literacy rates, and the astronomical growth of a diasporic Dominican community with a different vocabulary of race have all contributed to a moment when Alvarez’s and Vicioso’s recuperative acts are not only possible but could also compete with other dominant Dominican narratives.

Chapter three, “Following the Admiral: Reckonings with Great Men’s History,” examines how European colonialism, U.S. empire, and Dominican patriarchal nationalism intersected for over a century to create the Columbus Lighthouse Memorial in Santo Domingo. These entities, however, cannot account for subaltern subjects’ relationships to monuments such as the Lighthouse and the history that they celebrate. To get at this “history from below,” I analyze Junot Díaz’s The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, the Dominican-American film La Soga, and the controversy surrounding the 1985 murder of pop merengue icon Tony Seval in police custody. Juxtaposing these narratives, I contend that working-class island and diasporic Dominican men, most of them nonwhite, resist the persistent nationalist and imperialist violence that the Lighthouse celebrates through the performance of a distinctly Dominican hypermasculine performance known locally as tigueraje. While
resistant to Eurocentric patriarchal history, these performances are nevertheless masculinist and, as such, prioritize the enactment of violence on noncompliant subjects, including women and queer subjects.

Chapter four, “Dominican Women’s Refracted African Diasporas,” engages the creative and antihegemonic apertures that become possible from a diasporic space and imaginary by analyzing the cultural expressions, including literature, music, and performance, of several diasporic Dominican women. I resist the teleology of blackness in which Dominican subjects do not know that they are “black” until they arrive in the U.S. The women artists I analyze stretch the boundaries of who is an ideal national (U.S. and Dominican) and diasporic (Dominican and African) subject. I juxtapose the various ways in which aforementioned writer Chiqui Vicioso and musical artists Amara la Negra and Maluca Mala perform what they view as their black identity, which prompts us to acknowledge the prismatic—and nonlinear—nature of the African diaspora.

Chapter five, “Working Women and the Neoliberal Gaze,” focuses on several cultural texts about nonwhite Dominican women who work within economies created or strengthened by neoliberal policies. I focus especially on what Amalia Cabezas calls “economies of desire.” By analyzing the photo series and personal account of a U.S. sex tourist, a short story by Dominican writer Aurora Arias, sex worker testimonies, and several recent films, I argue that the sites of sex labor and sex tourism reveal the extent to which post-1980s global market demands have folded Dominican society and culture into a dominant neoliberal global paradigm based on so-called free trade agreements. I demonstrate that the temporal and spatial logics of these neoliberal paradigms are reinstatements of colonial world hierarchies, and that, as such, Dominican women working within these economies of desire negotiate centuries-old racist associations of nonwhite Caribbean women with hypersexuality or natural caretaking abilities, or both.

The brief “Conclusion: Searching for Monte Refusals,” ponders how subaltern subjects, before the democratization of who can record and disseminate their worldview, refused or in some way manipulated the interpellating, imperial gaze.

Together, these chapters evince Dominican negotiations with various forms of ghosting from broader Western imaginaries. The texts I analyze
show traces of the Dominican Republic’s singular history as a territory in which the white colonial gaze could not entirely eradicate black freedom in el monte. The narratives that emerge from the clashes between colonial/national/imperial purviews and these ghosted forms of black self-rule manifest Dominicans’ attempts to create inclusive (e.g., afrolatinidad) and exclusive (e.g., anti-Haitian Dominican national identity) forms of belonging, as well as their refusals to acquiesce to dominant racial narratives (e.g., the one-drop rule that determines blackness in dominant U.S. discourses).