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Competing Identities? Race, Ethnicity and Panethnicity Among Dominicans in the United States¹

Jose Itzigsohn^{2,3} and Carlos Dore-Cabral⁴

In this paper we explore the racial and ethnic self-identification of Dominican immigrants in the United States. This issue is central in understanding how immigrants experience the process of incorporation into American society. We argue that as Dominican immigrants incorporate to American life, they adopt a Hispanic or Latino identity. This identity serves both as a form of racial identification within the American racial stratification system and as a form of assertive panethnic identity. This identity, however, does not supersede national identification, which remains the anchoring identity.

KEY WORDS: panethnicity; race; identity; immigration; incorporation

“How do you identify racially?”

“That is a complicated question, and not fun when you are living through it.”

INTRODUCTION

This was the candid answer of a successful black Dominican professional. The answer points to the relevance and complexity of identity defini-

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tions. Upon entering the United States, Dominican immigrants discover that they are part of an ethnic group, Latinos or Hispanos,⁵ whose existence they did not know before arriving to these shores. Moreover, they encounter the dichotomous American racial classification system (White/Black), which is different from the racial classification systems prevalent in Latin America and the Caribbean. In the United States, the color line divides Whites from Blacks in a binary division; in Latin America, race is organized along a continuum of categories that denotes different degrees of racial mixture. This continuum is hierarchically organized—whites on top, blacks on the bottom—but it establishes the presence of a number of intermediate categories in between. Moreover, the intermediate categories are defined not only by skin color, but also by socioeconomic status and cultural elements (Denton and Massey, 1989, Rodriguez, 1992).

Most of the Dominican population is racially mixed, but while in the Dominican Republic most people with mixed African and European ancestry identify themselves as non black—as “indios”⁶—, upon entering the United States the “one-drop rule” categorizes most of them as Black. Dominican immigrants face the tasks of finding a place within the American symbolic racial and ethnic classification systems and of forging an assertive self-identity and group identity. This article analyzes the ways in which Dominicans confront these tasks. What forms of ethnic and racial self-identification do Dominicans adopt in the process of incorporation into American society?

IDENTITY, RACE, AND PANETHNICITY AMONG LATINOS

Studies of the process of identity formation among Latinos focus on two issues: the formation of a panethnic Latino identity and the reaction of Latinos to America’s binary racial classification system (Bean and Tienda, 1987; Oboler, 1995; Padilla, 1985; Rodriguez *et al.*, 1991). Panethnicity refers to the expansion of ethnic group boundaries to include different national or ethnic groups that share a common language, a common culture, or a common regional origin into an encompassing identity. Espiritu (1992) highlights the importance of the political process in panethnic identity formation. She focuses on processes of “categorization,” that is, the agglom-

⁵In the East Coast the Hispano/a is the Spanish equivalent of Hispanic. If a Latino/a immigrant refers to him/herself as hispanic in Spanish, she/he would use this term. Similarly, Latino immigrants in the Northeast constantly use terms such as “comunidad hispana” (hispanic community), “prensa hispana” (hispanic press) or “representante hispano/a” (hispanic representative).

⁶“Indio” means “indian,” but in the Dominican Republic this label is used to designate people with mixed African and European ancestry as non-Black.

eration by state agencies of different national groups under one ethnic label. Lopez and Espiritu (1990) argue that structural commonalities—among which they include race, class, generation, and geography—are a better field for the rise of panethnicity than a shared culture. They conclude that since Latinos diverge more along structural lines than Asian Americans or Native Americans they are less likely to develop panethnic organizations. They add that the rise of panethnic organizations is ultimately the result of the mobilization of middle-class activists.

Race is central in determining the life chances and social positions of persons and groups throughout the Americas, but as Omi and Winant (1994) argue, racial identities are not fixed. They are the result of different racial projects. Accordingly, Waters (1994) shows that immigrants choose between different identities following their perceptions of the opportunities open to them in America and their understanding of the dynamics of race and ethnic relations in this country. Immigrants can choose among different identities in order to gain access to certain material benefits, to achieve what they perceive as higher social recognition, or to recreate an imagined community that will provide them with a sense of understanding and control of their social reality. For immigrants of color, however, the ethnic choices are severely restricted by the imposition of racial and ethnic labels by mainstream society (Waters 1994). Dominican immigrants, then, have to find their position within the limits of the dominant racial symbolic system—a symbolic system that is alien to them and assigns them negative characteristics.

One of the most important works on the rise of a Latino panethnic identity is that of Felix Padilla (1984, 1985). Padilla argues along the lines of the political construction of ethnicity thesis which claims that the character of the new ethnic groups is political: Ethnic identities arise in those places and times in which ethnicity is recognized as a base for making political claims. Padilla argues that a Latino ethnic consciousness, which he calls “Latinismo,” arises out of the interaction of two or more Latino groups in a situation in which those groups share common interests. This identity is situational, that is, it arises out of a specific political situation and does not necessarily continue after that situation is resolved. This Latino consciousness does not replace a national consciousness, but it coincides with the national consciousness throughout the time that the circumstances that gave rise to “Latinismo” continue. Moreover, Padilla reminds us of possible contradictory interests among those Latino groups that have been historically oppressed minorities in the United States, particularly Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, on the one hand, and other newer immigrants who enjoy a better situation in this country, such as Miami Cubans.

Some scholars (Andrade, 1990; Bean and Tienda, 1987; Moore, 1990) suggest the possibility of the development of a Hispanic identity along the lines of the emergent ethnicity thesis. According to this thesis, the rise and resilience of ethnic groups are a result of certain structural features of urban immigrant life such as employment in specific industries or residential concentration in ethnic neighborhoods (Yancey *et al.*, 1976). Moore (1990) argues that among the different Hispanic groups there is a growing need for a collective common identification. This need arises out of the changing situations of Hispanics at the regional and national levels, but it transcends the simple need for political alliances. She suggests that the second generation of Hispanics may grow up identifying with a pan-Hispanic identity that will be a form of secondary identity, looser and shallower than the national origin identity which will still be the primary basis of identification.

Oboler (1992) argues that there is a generation of Latinos who were born or risen in the United States and who grew up between two cultures, belonging simultaneously to both and to neither of them and experiencing discrimination as Latinos. These conditions may lead some Latinos to identify as a unified ethnic group in the United States and thereby erasing, or at least attenuating, the national and historical differences that separate them. Oboler (1995) affirms, however, that the adoption of a panethnic label is often the result of labeling by mainstream society. Moreover, she warns us that the formation of a Latino identity is not a simple nor an unambiguous process, but it is mediated by gender, class, and race.

Portes and Macleod (1996) study the relation between the adoption of a panethnic identity and a sense of being part of this society. They analyze a large survey of high school children of immigrants in the Miami/Ft. Lauderdale area and find that the more acculturated children—defined as those with longer periods of residence and a better knowledge of English—are more likely to adopt hyphenated American identities while the less acculturated ones were more likely to identify themselves as Hispanics. In other words, they found that incorporation into American society was inversely related to the adoption of the Hispanic label. The largest differences in the choice of ethnic/national labels, however, were between national groups. Portes and MacLeod found that Cubans were the group least likely to identify as Hispanics, while Nicaraguans were the group most likely to do so.

The results of these works point to the emergence of a panethnic identity in spite of the large structural and cultural differences between different Latino groups. This panethnic identity, however, is limited in its scope and is affected by national, class, and generational differences.

Moreover, the results of Oboler (1992) and Portes and MacLeod (1996) could be seen as partially contradictory. The former finds that middle-class Latinos are more likely to embrace a panethnic identity, the latter find that the better-off group, the Cubans, are less likely to embrace it.

The work of Clara Rodriguez addresses the question of racial identification among Puerto Ricans (Rodriguez, 1992; Rodriguez and Cordero-Guzman, 1992). Looking at racial formation among Puerto Ricans in the United States is very important, since the social construction of race among different Caribbean peoples has a lot in common. Rodriguez argues that Puerto Ricans in the United States do not accept the American dichotomous construction of race. Moreover, when Puerto Ricans answer "other" or write in a hispanic answer to the racial identification question in the Census, they are choosing culture and ethnicity as bases for racial identification rather than an intermediate racial category (Rodriguez and Cordero-Guzman, 1992). Rodriguez (1992) finds that racial self-identification is closely related to socioeconomic position, those who identify as whites are in a better socioeconomic position than those who identify as "others" in the census racial question. She does not find significant differences in degrees of assimilation—in terms of knowledge of English and language spoken at home—between Puerto Ricans who identify as "white" or "other."

To summarize, panethnicity among Latinos has been analyzed as a situational political identity and as a secondary identity that coexists with national identifications (Moore, 1990; Padilla, 1985). One important question in the study of identity among Latinos is that of the relationship between panethnic identities and the process of incorporation into American society (Portes and MacLeod, 1996). Panethnic identities have also been studied in relation to the racial classification system (Rodriguez, 1992). Indeed, panethnic identities can be constructed as either ethnic or racial categories or in relation to both classification systems. As Cornell and Hartmann (1998) point out, although ethnicity and race are different social categories, they are not mutually exclusive; ethnic groups in America are positioned within the more encompassing racial stratification system.⁷ This paper analyzes where Dominicans fit in this complex picture.

⁷According to Cornell and Hartmann (1998), racial categories are based on perceived physical differences, assignment by an external group, they are the product of power relations, and they imply worth judgments. Ethnic categories, on the other hand, are constructed around internal and external definitions and they may or may not reflect power relations and worth judgments. These authors affirm that race has been the most persistent group boundary in America, creating a distinction—sometimes a devastating one—between the experiences of those who have been classified as whites and those who have been classified as non-Whites.

RACE, ETHNICITY, AND NATION AMONG DOMINICANS

Dominicans began to migrate in large numbers to the United States after 1965. Following the invasion of the island in that year, the United States began to accept Dominican migration as a way to lower the social tensions in the country. The early migrants were mostly urban, lower-middle-class people. With the deterioration of the economic conditions on the island in the early 1980s, migration to the United States became an option for almost every sector of Dominican society from unskilled laborers to middle-class professionals (Grasmuck and Pessar, 1991, 1995; Hernandez *et al.*, 1995).

Dominican immigrants entered the American labor market mostly as low-wage manual workers. They are concentrated mainly in clerical, operatives/labor, and personal service occupations. The Dominican community is also affected by a high percentage of unemployment (Hernandez *et al.*, 1995). Table I presents a comparison of the Dominican population

Table I. Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Dominican Population in New York City*

	Dominican	NYC Average	Non- Hispanic Whites	Non- Hispanic Blacks	Hispanic
Mean household income (\$)	27,005	47,145	59,961	36,558	30,726
Per capita household income (\$)	6,336	16,412	23,276	10,984	8,515
Poverty (%)	36.6	17.2	8.2	22.9	31.4
Female headed households (%)	40.7	21.7	9.2	38.4	34.3
Less than high school (%)	52.3	20.8	11.7	24.9	40.4
Occupations (%)					
Managerial and professional	9.6	28.8	38.5	19.6	13.9
Technical, sales and administrative support	27.1	34.9	35.6	36.6	30.9
Service workers	22.5	16.2	10.1	24.0	23.1
Precision	9.6	7.7	7.8	6.6	9.6
Production, craft and repair					
Operators, fabricators, and laborers	30.9	12.1	7.6	12.8	22.1
Self-employment (%)	7.0	8.9	12.0	3.9	5.8
Unemployment					
F	18.4	8.1	4.9	10.9	3.6
M	15.7	8.7	5.5	14.3	12.4

* Source: Hernandez, Rivera-Batiz, and Agodini, 1995. Tables 4, 8, 10, 13, 16, 17, 22.

in New York City to other racial and ethnic groups according to the 1990 Census. The table shows a community that is employed in the declining industrial sectors and is affected by poverty and unemployment. This bleak picture, however, needs to be qualified. Guarnizo's work (1992, 1994) shows that a growing number of Dominicans are opening their own businesses and searching upward mobility through self-employment.

In spite of the economic hardships presented in Table I, Dominican immigrants in the United States maintain a vibrant Dominican cultural life. Duany (1994) argues that Dominicans in New York create a transnational identity that encompasses elements from the home country and American cultures. The main orientation of this identity, in terms of significant symbolic elements and long-term expectations, is toward the Dominican Republic. Dominican migrants attempt to reproduce their life on the island in the streets of New York City (Duany, 1994; Guarnizo, 1994). Duany (1994) also affirms that second-generation Dominican youngsters are creating a differentiated version of this transnational identity incorporating more American cultural elements.

Dominicans in the United States maintain close ties with the island. They have become an important factor in the economy of the Dominican Republic: migrant remittances are second only to tourism as a source of national revenue and immigrants are increasingly important as a source of investment. Nevertheless they are rejected and stigmatized by large segments of Dominican society (Guarnizo, 1994). Indeed, Dominicans in the Dominican Republic often use the pejorative term "Dominicanyork" to refer to New York Dominicans.

A central element of the experience of Dominican immigrants in the United States stems from the different social construction of racial differences in the two countries. The social construction of race in the Dominican Republic combines elements of color and nationality. Dominicans use different terms to refer to different shades of skin color, such as "mulato," "jabao," "trigueño," and others, all of which are intermediate categories between Black and White. All these terms are included within the category "indio," a term that encompasses all the intermediate categories. Dominicans distinguish between shades of color referring to people as "indio claro" ("light Indian") or "indio oscuro" ("dark Indian"). In the Dominican Republic, Haitians fulfill the most menial jobs and the category "Black" refers to Haitian immigrants and their offspring. The Haitian population is less racially mixed than the Dominican population, but Haitians are physically indistinguishable from dark skin Dominicans. Nevertheless, only the former are referred to as Black, while the latter are referred to as "indio oscuro" ("dark Indians"). In the absence of visible physical markers, the boundaries between Dominicans and Haitians are expressed in lan-

guage—Dominicans speak Spanish while Haitians speak Creole—and in certain central cultural elements such as music or religion (Dore-Cabral, 1995; Torres-Saillant, 1998).

Thus, in the Dominican racial classification system the main distinction is that between Dominicans and Haitians. This distinction is based on a superposition of racial and national categories. The category “Black” is synonymous to Haitian, a stigmatized category to which Dominicans, the dominant group, do not belong. When Dominicans move to the United States, they enter a society in which race is a central feature of daily life and where they suffer discrimination due to their skin color and ethnicity.⁸ The question that inspired our research was how Dominicans would identify racially and ethnically when confronted with a society that defines them as black. Has the American experience changed their self-perception?

STUDYING DOMINICAN RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION

The studies on Latino ethnic and racial identity reviewed at the beginning of this paper used either qualitative (Oboler, 1995; Padilla, 1985) or quantitative methods (Portes and MacLeod, 1996; Rodriguez, 1992; Rodriguez and Cordero-Guzman, 1992). Our study is based on a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative findings are based on a small survey ($n = 60$) of first-generation Dominican immigrants conducted in Washington Heights, upper Manhattan, in the spring of 1991. The qualitative findings are the results of a study in which we are currently engaged.

The purpose of the survey was to capture Dominicans' racial and ethnic self-identification and their perception of other ethnic groups in New York City. The sample was built using the snowball technique with multiple points of entry (to avoid getting locked into only one network). The interviews were conducted in person with a structured questionnaire. The interviewees were Dominicans and the interviews were conducted in Spanish. Table II presents the main characteristics of the sample. The mean age of the respondents is relatively high, a large proportion of them graduated from high school, and a high percentage are married. Most of our interviewees work as employees, although there are also a high proportion of self-employed people. More than half of the sample arrived in the United States

⁸It is important to note that there are no racial differences between the different waves of Dominican migration.

during the 1980s, a decade of deep economic crisis in the Dominican Republic.

Several variables in Table II address the degree of incorporation of our sample to American society. Close to half of the sample report a good command of the English language while a third say that they speak it poorly or not at all. Three quarters of the sample socialize mainly with other Dominicans. Compared to the Census data presented in Table I, we see that our sample has a higher level of education, a higher percentage of self-employment, and a lower percentage of unemployment. It seems that the subjects in our sample were better-off and more incorporated into American society than the community in general. A very small number of respondents are citizens of the United States. This was very common until recently. In the last couple of years, however, changes in welfare and immigration legislation designed to exclude permanent residents from benefits such as food stamps or social security, added to the current anti-immigration political climate—expressed, for example, in the votes for propositions 187 and 227 in California—have driven large numbers of permanent residents to naturalize.

The survey was small and the sample suffers from problems of size and representativeness. How seriously, then, should we look at its results? We have previously reviewed three main types of quantitative studies in

Table II. Characteristics of the Sample

Variables	Numbers and Percentages ^a
Female	29 (48.3%)
Age (mean)	34.8
Years of education (mean)	12.0
High school graduates	47 (78.3%)
Employment:	
Employee	42 (70.0%)
Self-employed	9 (15.0%)
Unemployed	8 (13.3%)
Married ^b	42 (70.0%)
Years in the United States (mean)	10.8
Arrived before 1980	24 (40.7%)
Knowledge of English	
Good	27 (45.0%)
Not so good	11 (18.3%)
Bad	18 (30.0%)
U.S. Citizen	10 (16.7%)
Want to become a citizen	23 (47.9%)
Most friends are Dominican	45 (75.0%)
Would like to return to the dominican republic	45 (75.0%)
Plan to return to the dominican republic	29 (48.3%)

^aSome numbers do not round up due to missing values.

^bThirty respondents are married and three live together.

the field of understanding identity formation among Latinos. One type is the analysis of the results of the racial self-identification question of the census (Chevan, 1990; Rodriguez, 1992). The second type is the analysis of large surveys (Portes and MacLeod, 1996). The third type is the analysis of small purposive samples. Several studies by Clara Rodriguez and her collaborators (Rodriguez, 1992; Rodriguez *et al.*, 1991; Rodriguez and Cordero-Guzman, 1992) have used this method, and in spite of their methodological limitations, small and non random survey studies have made an important contribution to our current understanding of racial identity formation among Latinos.⁹ The strength of this type of studies is that they allow a closer look at the questions we are interested in than the census. Their weakness is their small size and the nonrandomness of the selection. For these reasons we look at the results of the survey as posing questions that need to be addressed and as suggesting possible trends rather than conclusive results.

In our study we attempted to capture racial self-identification by asking an open-ended question. We asked the respondents to which race they belong in the United States. We did not give the respondents any particular set of choices. Since the interviewers were Dominicans and the interviews were conducted in Spanish, our results indicate how Dominicans identify racially to other members of their group. This is a very important component of the process of identity formation because it indicates the ways in which a group sees itself.

The sample data allow an initial look at the processes of racial self-identification and its changes. We intend to compensate for part of the limitations of the survey by comparing its results with those obtained from the other study in which we are currently involved. It is a large comparative study of transnationalism, during which we interviewed thirty two Dominican key informants in New York City (22 men and 10 women) and 23 (19 men and 3 women) in Providence, Rhode Island. Most of the people interviewed were first-generation immigrants with the exception of two cases who were second-generation Dominicans. The respondents were chosen by virtue of their central position in and broad knowledge of their community. The sample was not random or representative, but intended to capture the views and opinions of key actors in both communities. We

⁹Rodriguez and her collaborators (Rodriguez, 1992; Rodriguez *et al.*, 1991) use a snowball sample of 58 people to analyze different types of identity formation among Latinos. Rodriguez and Cordero-Guzman (1992) analyze a sample of 240 Puerto Ricans interviewed at the New York airport in a pathbreaking study on Puerto Rican racial identity. Also Phinney *et al.* (1994) used small surveys to measure ethnic identity among Mexican-Americans and African-Americans (they interviewed 46 Mexican-Americans and 52 African-Americans). Small purposive samples are then, in spite of their problems, a very important tool in racial/ethnic identity research.

selected the first informants based on our knowledge of the communities and we followed a series of snowball-chains after that. The interviews took place in the fall of 1996 and were conducted with a semistructured questionnaire. The interviews included an open-ended question about racial and ethnic self-identification that often derived in long conversations about the issue showing its importance in the personal life of the interviewees.

The combination of two different methodologies raises the question of the validity of the different results. Do the survey and qualitative results refer to the same phenomena? We dealt with this problem by asking the same open-ended racial identification question in the survey and the qualitative interviews. In the qualitative interviews we also asked other questions on ethnic and racial identification to see how the answers vary when the questions changed. The ethnographic research allows us to see how people talk about identity, race, and ethnicity in settings where the topic is not brought up by the researchers. We will use quotations from the qualitative studies in order to elaborate and expand on our interpretations of the quantitative data. These quotations represent points of view and ideas held by key actors within the community. These quotations allow us an in-depth understanding of the processes of identity formation suggested by the quantitative results. We believe that the combination of these different observations strengthens and enriches our conclusions.

The combination of findings from two different places raises the problem of the compatibility of the findings from the two places. To what extent are the processes of identity formation similar in the two cities? Research on identity formation among Latinos show that the process varies by locality, depending on the relative size and political and economic power of each Latino group (Cortina, 1990; Moore, 1990; Oboler, 1995; Portes and MacLeod, 1996). Nevertheless, we think that in this case the use of findings from the two places is valid. New York is the center of Dominican settlement in the United States and Dominicans in Providence are linked to New York by a dense web of political, social, and economic networks. In both cities Dominicans are one of the largest Latino groups, but in both places there are other large national groups, mainly, but not only, Puerto Ricans. In neither of the two cities do Dominicans constitute an absolute majority in numbers among Latinos, like Mexican-Americans in California, nor have they established themselves at the center of political and economic power, like Cubans in Miami. More important, our research revealed similar responses to racial and ethnic identity questions in both places, as well as similar patterns of community political organization and relations between Dominicans and other Latino communities. It is our knowledge of both communities that allows us to combine data from the two places without compromising the validity of the results.

THE MEANING OF HISPANO/A: RACIAL AND PANETHNIC IDENTITY

We began our research inquiring about Dominican racial identity in the United States and found that the answer to our question regarding racial self-identification was expressed in panethnic terms: *Hispanos* or *Latinos*. Table III presents the results of the racial self-identification question. The table indicates that 46.7% of the sample identifies as "Hispanos," and another 16.7% identifies as *Latinos*. Only 23.3% identifies as Black and 8.3 as White. As a mode of comparison, in the 1990 census 24.3% of New York Dominicans identified themselves as white, 25.2% as Black, and 50.1% as other (Grasmuck and Pessar, 1995). The survey, as mentioned, is small and it is not representative, nevertheless, the fact that so many people gave a panethnic answer to a question on racial identity presents a very interesting puzzle.

We need to understand the reason for this pattern of answers. It could be argued that it is the result of certain forms of language use. In the everyday Spanish of Dominicans and other Latino groups the word "raza" has a different connotation than the English word "race." It is very common to hear Dominicans use "raza" to refer to the Dominican people, to other Latino nationalities, or to *Latinos* in general, hence the ethnic answer. The problem with this explanation is that we also asked a question on racial

Table III. Self-Identification and Perception of Discrimination by Other *Latinos/as*

Racial Self-Identification in the United States	Survey	Census (New York)
Hispano/a	28 46.7%	
Latino/a	10 16.7%	
Black	14 23.3%	25.2%
White	5 8.3%	24.3%
Other	2 3.3%	50.1%
Believe other <i>Latinos/as</i> discriminate against Dominicans	43 71.7%	
Experienced Discrimination by Other <i>Latinos/as</i>	15 25.9%	

self-identification in the Dominican Republic and the answers used the Dominican racial categories, suggesting that the respondents understood the question in racial terms. Concerning racial self-identification in the Dominican Republic, 38.3% of the sample identifies as Black, 40% identifies as "indio,"¹⁰ and 6.7% as White. It is worth noting that the percentage of respondents who self-identify as Black is larger for the Dominican Republic than for the United States.

Why then the panethnic answer? The following quotation from a man who came as a teenager to Providence and became a successful entrepreneur is revealing. He asserted:

I think my children will be Dominican-Americans, my grandchildren, I don't know. But you know, we will always be Latinos. You Argentinians look like Italians, you can merge in this country, but look how we look, our skin is different, our color is different, and also our culture is different and you know how much we value very much our ways. We can never merge, we are going to be like other communities, different, powerful but different. We are going always to be Latinos.

This answer is telling. It associates "Latino" identity with skin color. Latinos will always be different, this respondent argues, because they "look different," being non-White in American society marks you as a racial other. This suggests that the labels "Hispano/a" or "Latino/a" operate as racial categories. They represent an attempt to find a place in the racial symbolic stratification of the United States. This is best expressed in the answer of a Dominican woman we interviewed in New York, an immigrant who arrived in the United States in the mid-1980s and is actively involved in the New York branch of one of the large Dominican political parties. She affirms "*I am Hispanic, Dominican, I am not Black nor White*. In her answer, panethnic and national labels are used to express a racial position that rejects the white/black dichotomy.

These findings seem to coincide with the Puerto-Rican case described by Rodriguez and Cordero-Guzman (1992). Similarly to Puerto Ricans, Dominicans reject the White/Black dichotomy. Nevertheless, their choices are limited by the classification system of mainstream society. In their choices of identity, as Waters (1994) suggests, Dominicans cannot transcend the system of classification established by mainstream American culture. The reference to skin color in the first quote suggests that the Hispano/a or Latino/a answer functions as an intermediate racial category that is related more to the experience of race in the United States than to national cultural elements. This appears clearly in the words of a recent immigrant living in New York. When asked about his racial self-identification he

¹⁰Forty percent of the sample used intermediate categories between Black and White to describe their racial identification in the Dominican Republic. "Indio" was the modal category, so we included all the intermediate categories under the label "indio."

answered "*I am Hispanic that is how we are called here.*" The self-definition as Hispanic is linked in this case to the way mainstream society define Dominicans. Dominicans choose these panethnic labels because these labels allow them to find a place within the American system of racial classification. In other words, panethnicity is experienced in a racialized form.

Are those who identify themselves racially as Hispanic or Latino/a different in any meaningful way than those who do not? This question is addressed in Tables IV and V. Given the small number of cases, we grouped those who defined themselves as *Hispanos/as* and *Latinos/as* together. Since

Table IV. Some Social Characteristics of Those Who Self-Identify as *Hispano/a* (The percentages indicate the proportion of each category who identify as *Hispano/a*).

	Identify as Hispano/a	Total
Gender		
Female	19 65.5%	29
Male	19 61.3%	31
Employment		
Employee	24 57.1%	42
Self-employed	8 88.9%	9
Unemployed	5 62.5%	8
Status		
Citizen	9* 90.0%	10
Non-citizen	28* 58.3%	50
Knowledge of English		
Good	19 70.4%	27
Not so good	7 63.6%	11
Bad	9 50.0%	18
Social networks		
Most friends are Dominicans	26 57.8%	45
Most friends are not Dominicans	12 80.0%	15
Relations with other <i>Latinos/as</i>		
Believe other <i>Latinos/as</i>	29	43
Discriminate against Dominicans	67.4%	
Experienced discrimination by other <i>Latinos/as</i>	12 80.0%	15

*Chi-square test significant at $p < .05$.

Table V. Mean Age, Years of Education, and Years in the United States by Self-Identification as Hispano/a

	Hispanos	Other
Mean age	34.9	34.7
Mean years of education	13.0	12.2
Mean number of years in the United States	12.5*	8.0*

**T*-test significant at $P < .05$.

most respondents choose the Hispano/a label, we refer to this group in that way. The table looks at those who self-identify as Hispanos/as along a series of socioeconomic and attitudinal variables. Two of them are statistically significant—those who define themselves as Hispanos/as have been in the country a longer period of time and they tend to become citizens. The table also shows that the Hispano/a self-identification is related to a better knowledge of English. On the other hand, those who socialize mainly with other Dominicans (“most friends are Dominicans”) are less inclined to identify themselves as Hispanos/as. The two latter variables are not statistically significant but they point in the same direction as the first two variables: those who participate more in American life tend more to adopt the Hispanic self-identification. Adoption of the Hispanic or Latino identity appears to be related to the process of incorporation of Dominican immigrants to American society.

A conversation with a young Dominican activist in Providence illustrates this point. He was describing a discussion he had with an older political activist over whether to support a Puerto-Rican candidate for the City Council or to run a Dominican candidate against him. The argument for running a Dominican candidate was that Dominicans are the majority in the district in which the Puerto Rican candidate was running. While the older activist supported the idea of running a Dominican candidate, the younger one argued that Dominicans should support other Latino candidates rather than compete with them. Where the older activist came to America as an adult and has concrete plans to return to the Dominican Republic, the younger one came to the United States as a teenager, grew up in Providence, and sees himself as living his life in this country and being a part of American society.

The survey results and the quotation above point to a process of acculturation among Dominicans. Those individuals that are more embedded in the host society tend to accept the definitions of identity established by that society. The evidence is tentative, but it corresponds to much of what we know about the experience of immigrant incorporation. For exam-

ple Duany (1994) finds a similar process among second generation Dominicans who construct their identity using much more American cultural elements than that of the first generation. Second-generation Dominicans often speak English among themselves and adopt the hip-hop style of African-American and Puerto-Rican youngsters. This process of incorporation and acculturation though is not into the mainstream identity but into racialized identity categories constructed by the mainstream culture.

In spite of the large percentage of people who identify themselves as *Hispanos/as* or *Latinos/as*, a majority of the sample—43 respondents, representing 71.7% of the sample—answered that they believe that Dominicans are discriminated against by other *Latinos/as*. When asked to identify which Latino group discriminates against Dominicans, 30 respondents mentioned Puerto Ricans—the other main Latino group in New York—10 answered that Cubans discriminate against Dominicans, five mentioned South Americans in general, four indicated Colombians, and there was one answer each that referred to Ecuadorians, Argentineans, and Central Americans. The sum of these answers is larger than the number of cases who said that Dominicans are discriminated by other *Latinos/as* because respondents could name more than one group in their answers. A smaller group—15 cases representing 25.9% of the sample—claimed to have actually experienced discrimination by other *Latinos/as*. The experiences of discrimination reported referred to bad treatment, derogatory commentaries about Dominicans, and blocked employment opportunities. Again, among those reporting discrimination experiences, a majority pointed to Puerto Ricans as the main discriminating group, but in this case the differences with other groups were much closer than in the case of the perceptions of discrimination. Ten respondents reported experiences of discrimination by Puerto Ricans, six pointed to Cubans, and seven pointed to South and Central Americans either in general or to a specific group—again, the sum of these numbers is larger than the number of people who reported experiences of discrimination because several people reported discrimination by more than one group.

The results reported above suggest that there is a perception of discrimination by Puerto Ricans that is much larger than the actual cases of discrimination. The responses of two people whom we interviewed, one in New York and one in Providence, shed light on this issue. Both referred to existing tensions between Dominicans and Puerto Ricans. Both argued that Puerto Ricans have been fighting for political and economic access for a long time and see Dominicans as recently arrived competitors. In the words of one of them, "*Dominicans often have to compete with Puerto Ricans and African Americans for access to the system. African Americans see all Hispanics as outsiders, Boricuas see Dominicans as immigrants.*" As differ-

ent groups attempt to attain political and economic power, they compete with each other, generating ethnic tension. Nevertheless, the relationships are complex. A well-known Dominican activist in New York City stated that "*at the grassroots level the relationships with Puerto Ricans are very good, but at the level of leaders it is different.*" He added that there is an increasing number of marriages between Dominicans and Puerto Ricans.

Perceptions or experiences of conflicts with other Latinos/as do not seem to affect identification as Hispanic. Table III shows that those who report having experienced discrimination from other Latinos/as tend more to self-identify themselves as Hispanos/as than those who did not experience it. We do not suggest that there is a direct connection between experiences of discrimination by other Latinos/as and self-identification as Hispanic. The two are a result of the processes of incorporation into American society. Those Dominican immigrants who are more incorporated into American society are exposed to and compete with people from other Latino national groups, and as a result, they are more likely to experience discrimination or conflict with these groups. Since those immigrants who are more integrated also tend to define themselves as Hispanos/as, a relationship arises between Hispanic self-identification and discrimination by other members of this panethnic group.

So far we have argued that the self-identification as Hispano/a or Latino/a works as a form of finding a place within the American racial classification system, and that it is related to the process of incorporation into American society. We have also argued that self-identification as Latino or Hispano does not erase tensions between the different Latino groups. In the last part of this section, we argue that self-identification as Hispano/a also operates as a form of emergent ethnic identity, an identity that, as Moore (1990) argues, exists in addition to an anchoring national identity. The words of the young Dominican activist from Providence we quoted before reflect this sentiment. "*I am equally Dominican and Latino*" he argues.

Other responses reinforce this point. A community activist in New York responded "*I am Dominican by nationality, Latino because I speak Spanish, and Black due to the African heritage.*" An old immigrant to Providence, who has been in this country for more than 30 years argued "*when I arrived to this country there were in the Census only two races, Whites and Blacks, now there are many more, Hispanics, Asians, Portuguese. . . . here all of us who speak Spanish are Hispanic.*" The first respondent identifies racially as Black, the second associates Hispanics with race, but both point to the rise of a common Hispanic identity, in these cases based on a common language.

Another respondent in New York argued, "*the Dominican identity is*

very important for me, but my political identity is Hispanic." This response associates the rise of a Hispanic identity to politics. The paradox in this case is that the political activities of this respondent are focused almost exclusively on the Dominican Republic. This respondent lived in New York for more than 30 years, and during all those years he had been continuously involved in Dominican politics as an important member of one of the large Dominican parties. Moreover, he argues that "*Dominicans here are as Dominicans as those who live there.*" Nevertheless, he defines himself politically as Hispanic.

Our findings suggest the need to go beyond Padilla's view of Latinismo as a situational identity that arises for specific political purposes. A large number of the people whom we interviewed saw no contradiction in defining themselves as both, Dominican and Hispanic or Latino. Many of them emphasized that they participate in efforts to build Latino as well as Dominican organizations. In the words of the president of a Dominican cultural organization "*I am very proud of being Dominican. That is always my first answer, but I relate to other Hispanics, Guatemalans, Puerto Ricans as if they were Dominicans.*"

It is true that in our qualitative research we have also witnessed many instances that corroborate Padilla's thesis. We found people who chose to identify solely as Dominican or Dominican-Americans and reject the Hispanic or Latino/a identity. We also found many instances of ethnic tensions between Dominicans and other Latino groups. For example, in a recent Dominican cultural event in Providence, a Dominican politician from New York City argued, while professing commitment to Latino unity, that Dominicans ought to be counted separately in the census, so their numbers are known and they can press for political and economic recognition as Dominicans. Another national Dominican leader described Latino unity with the image of the "sancocho" (a thick soup made of a mix of different vegetables and meat). She argued that every group has to bring something to make the "sancocho." She added that Dominicans are bringing their numbers and organizations, and, rhetorically, asked what are the other groups bringing? Nevertheless, as we have shown, among a large segment of Dominicans there is a sense of belonging to a larger panethnic group. This identity however, does not supersede their own national identification that remains the anchoring ethnic identity.

TOWARD A PANETHNIC FUTURE?

The labeling of all the people with origins in a Spanish-speaking country as Hispanic or Latinos/as has been strongly criticized due to the fact that

it combines peoples coming from different countries with different, often conflictive, histories. Such labeling puts together people from different classes and races, mixing people with a history of oppression in the United States with new immigrants who arrived in search of a better economic future (Gimenez, 1992; Massey, 1993; Melville, 1986). These critiques are appropriate as the population whose origins are in Spanish-speaking countries is indeed extremely heterogeneous. They do not take into account, however, the fact that the constant use by different social actors of these inappropriate names can sometimes "give rise in reality, by the specific effectiveness of evocation, to the very thing they represent." (Bourdieu, 1991:224).

Our research suggests that Dominican incorporation into American life promotes the rise of a Latino/a or Hispanic identity. Our findings indicate that this identity operates, in some cases, as a form of accommodation to the American racial symbolic hierarchy, a reaction to racial labeling processes in American society. Our interpretation of the use of the *Hispano/a* label as a racial category by Dominicans is different from that of Rodriguez (1992) concerning the Puerto-Rican case. Rodriguez argues that when Puerto Ricans reject the Black/White dichotomy they choose cultural elements over phenotype as the base for their racial identification. We argue that in the Dominican case the *Hispano/a* label functions as an intermediate racial category, similar in many ways to the category "indio" in the Dominican racial classification system. In other cases, however, the *Hispano/a* label constitutes an assertive form of panethnic identification. Dominicans not only react to being labeled as *Hispanos/as*, but they often appropriate the *Hispano/a* or the *Latino/a* label and construct social, cultural, and political projects based on those identities. Dominicans certainly hold on strongly to their national identity. National identity is paramount in most cases and when the national and panethnic identities are in conflict people align along national lines. Nevertheless, the *Hispano* or *Latino* identity is also important and meaningful as a group identity in the lives of many Dominicans in the United States.

We argue that Dominicans in New York and Providence go through similar processes of panethnic identity formation. We are conscious, however, that there are large regional differences in the process of identity formation among *Latinos/as*. Our results, for example, contradict those of Portes and MacLeod (1996) regarding Cubans in Miami. Those researchers found that the more incorporated second generation Cuban children tend to reject the panethnic identity and identify on a national base while we found that the more incorporated Dominican immigrants are those who tend to adopt the panethnic level. The Miami Cuban's case, as Cortina (1990) points out, is special in the sense that Cubans in Miami have acquired

an unprecedented amount of political and economic power that they don't intend to share with other Hispanic groups, leading them to focus on their national identity. Access to political power or a privileged class position may lead the members of an ethnic group to shed their linkages to other ethnic groups that are less powerful or in a lower class position. This is implied in Portes and MacLeod results which find that greater parental status led to a rejection of the panethnic label among the youngsters in their study. We can pose the following hypothesis for further research: In those places in which one national group is hegemonic in terms of numbers, political, or economic power, that hegemonic group will tend to reject the panethnic identity. On the other hand, situations in which there is no hegemonic group are more propitious for the rise of a panethnic identity.

The processes of panethnic identity formation described in this paper are similar in many ways to other cases documented in the recent literature on this topic, such as the renewal of American-Indian identity (Cornell, 1988, 1990; Nagel, 1994, 1996), the rise of a European-American identity (Alba, 1990), and the rise of Asian-American panethnicity (Espiritu, 1992). A brief comparison of these different cases can illuminate common elements and important differences in the way in which particular panethnic identities are constructed. For example, Native Americans do not share a common language the way Dominicans share Spanish with other Latinos—although it is important to remember that many second-generation and beyond Latinos do not speak Spanish. Native Americans, however, do share a common history of cultural subordination and land dispossession in the United States. Native-American panethnic identity is, in part, a form of resistance to that common history (Nagel 1996). The modes of incorporation of Latinos into the United States, on the other hand, encompass a large variety of historical experiences including immigration (as in the Dominican case), territorial expansion by the United States, and political refugees.

In the Native-American case, the common panethnic identity is superimposed on very strong ethnic identities. We described a similar situation among Dominicans in our study. This is also the case among Asian Americans, who do not share a common language nor a common history outside the United States. Moreover, the historical, cultural, and national differences among the different Asian-American groups are perhaps the greatest among the different panethnic groups. However, as in the case of Latinos, labeling by state agencies such as the Bureau of the Census, a common experience of racialization in the United States, and the activities of Asian-American activists, have led to the emergence of forms of panethnic identification. Studies of Asian-American panethnicity have also shown the importance of class differences in the process of formation of panethnic identities (Espiritu, 1992; Espiritu and Ong, 1994). Among European Americans,

on the other hand, cultural differences have been greatly attenuated by intermarriage and the process of assimilation into the mainstream of American culture. Ethnicity remains mostly a matter of symbolic choices (Waters, 1990).

From the above comparison of different panethnic groups, we can point to a number of key dimensions for a comparative study of panethnic identity formation. These are the varied histories of incorporation of ethnic groups into the United States, the different processes of racialization of the various panethnic groups, the particular processes and institutions through which the panethnic identities are constructed, the internal class differentiation of the panethnic group, and the strength of ethnic group identities vis-a-vis the panethnic identity. In spite of all the variation, what all these cases of panethnic identity formation have in common is the superposition of racial and ethnic identities. In all these cases, panethnic groups emerge out of processes of categorization of ethnic groups according to the American racial classification system (including the transformation of European immigrants into White Americans). As a result, we can expect panethnicity to play an increasingly important role in structuring ethnic and racial relations and identities.

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