

- caretakers, and small business owners (Guarnizo 1992: 99).
3. It is estimated that in 1992, approximately 40,000 undocumented Dominicans resided in the United States (Warren 1994: 29).
 4. As a married woman, Carmen was not eligible to be petitioned as a dependent child by her parents. And even if she had been successful in hiding the fact of her marriage, she was not in the financial position to wait a year or more for a temporary resident visa.

2

Settling in New York

The ties of responsibility and obligation linking members of an immigrant *cadena* rarely terminate once a visa is granted. In fact, social relations usually intensify as the sponsor assumes an important role in anchoring the newcomer to his or her new home. The sponsor is often the one who meets the new arrival at the airport and arranges for temporary lodging. Such was the case for Gertrudes Pérez, a 33 year old, who emigrated to the United States in 1981. She recalled how nervous she was when she got out of customs, afraid to be alone with no English and no real sense of where she was. "But there just outside the gates was my brother, just like my guardian angel." He and his family applauded as she passed through the gates, and one of Gertrudes' nieces ran up with a bouquet of flowers. Gertrudes then lived with her brother and his family for about a year in their Washington Heights apartment, sleeping in a small bed with one of her nieces, and contributing to the family's rent and other household expenses.

As Gertrudes' case illustrates, Dominican immigrant households tend to be very flexible and accommodating of new arrivals; Indeed, it would be virtually inconceivable for established immigrants to request a relative or close friend to reside in a commercial establishment or alone during the initial period of settlement. "There is always room for one more," Gertrudes' brother told me, "even if it means having

the children double up or sleep on the sofa. We are a people who put family first." His statement is corroborated by a 1980 survey of Dominicans in New York, which found that recent immigrants tended to live in extended households with kin who were often not members of their immediate nuclear families. Only later in the immigrant process did Dominican New Yorkers tend to recreate nuclear households (Gilbertson and Gurak 1992).¹

Sponsors, and other close kin or friends, also attempt to find employment for the newcomer. Few are immediately whisked off to work as immediately as the protagonist in a merengue who complains that he is met at the airport by a cousin who "instead of inviting [him] for a drink," takes him to work at a factory (Luis Kallaff, "Un Cibaeno en Nuevo York"). Yet, in the past, jobs often awaited the immigrant or were found in a matter of days. Gertrudes' sister-in-law found her a job at the lamp factory where she worked. "I was really amazed; after months of finding no work back home, I was making lamps in a factory and making good money—\$3.75 an hour after being in New York for less than a week."

Of course the role of social networks in directing newcomers to employment opportunities is ultimately only as effective as the overall demand for immigrant workers. Consequently, in 1991, some ten years after Gertrudes' arrival in New York, she experienced some difficulty in finding a job for her newly-arrived daughter. Whereas Gertrudes had found a job immediately, her daughter Mercedes remained unemployed for more than three months before locating work as a waitress in a restaurant owned by a distant cousin. As Chapter 3 will demonstrate, this contrast reflects recent changes in the New York economy that have reduced employment opportunities for many Dominicans. There is the expectation that when assistance to the newcomer comes from close kin, it should be extended altruistically without a concern for possible profit. It is also anticipated that all monetary expenditures made on behalf of the immigrant, as well as services rendered (e.g., locating housing and a job), will be ultimately repaid in cash or in kind. Nonetheless, some established Dominicans have been known to profit from their recently arrived kin. Ana Rosario, who knew that I was friendly

with eight of the disgruntled in-laws whom she had recently assisted, had this to say about her assistance:

My husband's family expects our help as a *regalo* (gift). They did not like it when I charged them \$350 each for their papers, and when I charge them two percent interest per month on the money we lent them to make the trip and get settled. But to succeed your money has to be circulating and making more money. I work real hard for my money and work hard to help others get ahead too; but I won't do it for charity. They don't need charity; they work just like me.

In Ana's case, sponsorship, both before and after emigration, brought substantial rewards. In charging her kin \$350 per person for acquiring needed documentation, Ana reaped \$2,800. She also housed all eight family members, some for several months, others for over one year. At a monthly charge of \$85 per person, the rent (for the eight) more than covered her mortgage and utility bills. She stated that she was earning some additional "pocket money" on the interest she was charging her kin for their loans. While Ana's behavior is hardly unique, it is also not typical. In fact, one of Ana's relatives told me privately that in charging her kin so much for her services, Ana was being selfish and mean-spirited to folks who were, in his words, "just off the banana boat."

NEW YORK: THE CAPITAL OF DOMINICANS ABROAD

Even back in the late 1960s when anthropologist Glenn Henricks conducted his pioneering study of Dominican immigration to New York, he observed that immigrants seldom arrived as social isolates, forced to cope with the new environment alone. "The very nature of the process of recruitment into the United States almost obliges the individual to have some preexisting social linkages to New York" (Henricks 1974: 73). To this day New York remains the magnet for most Dominicans as newcomers continue to be recruited

into the social networks established by earlier cohorts. According to the 1990 U.S. Census, 70 percent of all persons of Dominican ancestry resided in New York. The Empire State was followed by neighboring New Jersey with 11 percent; Florida with 7 percent, and Massachusetts with 5 percent (Hernández et al.: 6). In other words, 93 percent of the Dominicans living in the United States resided in only four states. In Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut's words, "Migration is a network-driven process, and the operation of kin and friendship ties is nowhere more effective than in guiding new arrivals toward preestablished ethnic communities" (Portes and Rumbaut 1990: 32).

New York City hosts the largest concentration of Dominicans outside of their home island of Hispaniola. In 1990, a total of 332,713 were reported to be living in New York City, comprising 65 percent of the total Dominican population in the U.S. (Hernández et al.: 7). This is, however, a disputed figure. Dominican leaders insist that many undocumented Dominicans have avoided the Census takers and argue that the true number of Dominicans in New York City is twice or three times as large as the "official" count. What is undisputed is that the number of Dominicans in New York City has grown tremendously. A mere 9,223 were enumerated in the city's 1960 Census, placing Dominicans in 26th place among immigrant populations there. In stark contrast, they currently enjoy first place (Guarnizo 1992). Over the decade of the '80s New York City's Dominican population increased by 165 percent, a gain unmatched by any other major ethnic group (Hernández et al.: 8). The bulk of this growth has been due to immigration; in fact, of the 206,719 foreign-born Dominicans recorded in the 1990 New York City Census, more than one-half arrived over the decade of the 1980s (Grasmuck and Pessar, forthcoming)

SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

Distinct settlement patterns within the New York metropolitan area have evolved over time. Like European immigrants from an earlier era, Dominicans first congregated in Manhattan's Lower East Side where they were attracted to cheap

housing and jobs in manufacturing and services. In the late 1960s Dominicans could find three-room apartments for as little as \$35 a month, and they could walk to jobs in local apparel factories (Hendricks 1974). The Lower East Side was also one of the sites of Puerto Rican settlement and many Dominican "pioneers" acknowledge the initial assistance Puerto Ricans extended to them.

"Now there is a Spanish-speaker on every corner," said one man who arrived in 1962, "but back then if you got lost, if you needed help, you might have to search for hours and even then it was likely that you would not find anyone who could understand you....In those early years, we Dominicans were helped a lot by Puerto Ricans who already knew the ropes. I and most of my friends started out by living as boarders with Puerto Rican families. Puerto Ricans also helped us when we needed our own apartment or a job. In fact I got one of my first jobs from a Puerto Rican neighbor.

Unfortunately, the Lower East Side was also notorious for being overcrowded and disreputable. One woman described her early years in the neighborhood:

When we first arrived in New York I was eight years old. We lived just blocks away from the Bowery and every day on my way to school I had to pass filthy drunks who sometimes cursed me. I was always scared, and kept asking my mother why we came and when we were going back home.

Over the course of the 1960s, the more financially secure Dominicans rejected the squalor and decay of the Lower East Side and began to seek out middle-class neighborhoods in Queens (e.g., Corona) and Long Island (e.g., Rockville Center). These pioneers in turn became magnets for others from their home towns and villages. Indeed, the mass resettlement of large numbers of Dominicans from specific locales has

given rise to the "Dominicanization" of U.S. place names. *Corona*, Queens, for example, is fondly referred to as *Sabana Church* due to the large number of residents originally from the Dominican community of Sabana Iglesias (Hendricks 1974).

Another locale whose name has been appropriated and Dominicanized is the Upper Manhattan neighborhood of Washington Heights, or "Quisqueya Heights" (Quisqueya being the indigenous name of the Dominican Republic). Stretching north on the west side of New York City from roughly 145th Street to 190th, the neighborhood is reputed to be the home of approximately one-third of all Dominicans in New York City; and it has emerged as the heart of the Dominican community in New York. In the past Washington Heights received successive waves of immigrants and migrants from Ireland, Eastern Europe, Puerto Rico, and Cuba; it still remains the home of many ethnic groups. Nonetheless, today it is Dominicans who have placed their distinctive stamp on the cultural forms and institutions they have encountered, and who have, in turn, been challenged and changed by the social and cultural lifeways they have confronted in Washington Heights.

WASHINGTON HEIGHTS

The Dominican presence is clearly felt in the economic life of Washington Heights, where Dominican-owned businesses are burgeoning and the blend of Dominican and American elements is striking. Were you to enter a local Dominican *bodega* (small neighborhood market), its name would likely combine both Spanish and English words, such as in "*Puerto Plata Market*" or "*Tres Amigos Deli*." Bodegas are stocked with a variety of main line American brands, items produced for the U.S. Hispanic market (e.g., Goya can goods), Dominican staples such as *plátanos* (plantains), and Dominican brand names (e.g., Quisqueya cola, Presidente beer). While American-manufactured pharmaceuticals are available, so are certain roots (e.g., *maguel*) and tropical plants needed to make medicinal teas. Corner newsstands sell numerous Dominican newspapers, flown daily from the island, alongside locally

printed Spanish and English-language publications. If you were to dine at one of the many Dominican restaurants, you might find hamburgers on the menu; but Dominican specialties, such as *sancocho*, *mangú*, and *carne guisada* would surely predominate.

The presence of these numerous and diverse Dominican-owned enterprises demonstrates the existence of a Dominican ethnic economy centered in Washington Heights. One recent study of Washington Heights estimated that there are between 1,500 and 2,000 visible Dominican-owned enterprises (Guarnizo 1992:112). In addition to the neighborhood *bodega*s and restaurants specializing in *comida criolla* (Dominican cuisine), other local businesses include travel agencies, money transfer agencies (*envíos*), shops offering long distance telephone services, beauty salons, clothing stores, laundromats, pharmacies, and non-medallion "gypsy" cab operations.

Dominicans are also leaving their mark on neighborhood schools. Here Dominicans have had to struggle collectively to establish a respected place and powerful voice. Yolanda López still speaks passionately about the campaign in the early 1980s to gain greater community control over the schools in Washington Heights (Community School District 6), and to make the neighborhood schools more responsive to the needs and aspirations of their Dominican residents. "Even in the early '80s, our kids made up the bulk of students in the schools. But at that time our schools were the most over-crowded in the city, and many of our children left school without knowing how to read. We realized no one would help our kids if we Dominican parents did not struggle to take control."

The movement for empowerment and control in District 6 began in 1980 when the Community Association of Progressive Dominicans confronted the school board and superintendent to demand bilingual education and programs for recently-arrived immigrant families. Over the years Dominicans have gained a greater representation on the school board and have consequently been able to tailor programs to meet the needs of newcomers more effectively. Their success has been the product of an aggressive program of voter registra-

tion, the creation of a parents' network throughout the District (based in the parent associations in each school), and the formation of a coalition of parents, community organizations, churches, and educators (Linares 1989). Other gains have included the construction of additional public schools in the extremely over-crowded district, and in 1994 the appointment of a Dominican principal to head the community high school (three-quarters of whose student body is Dominican). It is a fitting commentary on the emerging presence of Dominicans in New York and the United States that the Dominican principal presides over George Washington High School!

At the same time, many Dominican parents remain justly concerned with what they view as a decline in educational performance in the district, and with a failure to maintain discipline in the neighborhood public schools. When Euclid Mejia took over as principal of George Washington High school, it was one of only six schools in the city whose low test scores and high drop-out rates provoked threats of a takeover by the Chancellor of the New York City Schools (New York Newsday 1994: 15). As a result of these problems, many Dominicans in Washington Heights have elected to send their children to parochial schools, and children with behavioral or learning problems are frequently sent back to the Dominican Republic for their education.

Concerns go beyond children's poor school performance, however, to a preoccupation with the general deterioration in public services and an increase in neighborhood violence and crime (González 1993). The existence of a thriving drug trade in Washington Heights is clearly on many people's minds. Among the drug industry's most unfortunate victims are those Dominican youth who participate in the distribution and sale of cocaine. In a recent study of a teenage drug ring located in Washington Heights, the author had this to say:

Money and drugs are the obvious immediate rewards for kids in the cocaine trade. But there is another strong motivating force...the desire to show family and friends that they can succeed at something. Moving up a career ladder and making money is especially important where there

are few visible opportunities....Washington Heights, which the police call a "hot spot," is a battleground in the war on drugs. And as in all wars, it is the young who are the first casualties (Williams 1989: 10, 26).

While recognizing that only a small segment of the community is involved in the sale or use of drugs, Dominican leaders have called for a concerted community effort to confront this problem.

In the 1970s...it was an issue mainly of dealing....They would tell you that I don't use drugs, all I do is sell it to the white people who come from Jersey. Well, that has changed completely. Now what we have are a lot of young crack addicts, young crack addicts among Dominicans (Gilbertson 1995: 8).

Dominicans ~~will have to increase~~ their political power in New York City to confront this and other problems facing their community. There are many hopeful signs of an increased political presence and influence. The struggle to gain greater control over the neighborhood schools marked an important step in political mobilization. In the words of Guillermo Linares, a Dominican activist who served as head of the school board, "The education struggle and Community School Board Elections are important vehicles for empowering the community, especially Dominicans and Latinos, who cannot vote in regular elections, but who can vote in school board elections" (Linares 1989:84). His words proved to be prophetic: in 1991 Linares was the first Dominican-born person elected to the New York City Council, where he represented the newly-redistricted community of Washington Heights. Dominicans continue to hold influential positions in city government and local community development. Such strides in political participation and representation were greatly facilitated by early efforts at community-building on the part of Dominican ethnic organizations, many of which were established in Washington Heights. Indeed, one researcher counted some 125 Dominican voluntary associations

in the Washington Heights-Inwood area in the mid 1980s (Georges 1988). Candidates for community and city government have emerged from the ranks of Dominican ethnic associations, and these organizations have been used to mobilize funds and votes (Goris-Rosario 1994).

The religious life of Washington Heights also has a decidedly Dominican cast. Many homes feature small altars devoted to Catholic saints, such as the Virgin of Altagracia, patron saint of the Dominican Republic. Like other Hispanic Catholics, many Dominicans believe that the saints will protect them from harm and help in their social advancement (Duany 1994). Some years back I was invited by a Dominican friend to a banquet organized to repay the Virgin of Altagracia for helping her children to obtain visas. Magaly explained that she prayed to the Virgin because the saint is very powerful, and Magaly needed a lot of help with immigration officials because many petitions for children were being denied. "The Virgin heard my prayers," she stated, "and I am fulfilling my obligation by honoring her with a fiesta."

Several local Catholic churches which once labored to integrate earlier waves of Puerto Ricans into their predominantly Irish and Italian congregations have now emerged as Dominican parishes. As such, these churches are especially responsive to the beliefs and practices of their Dominican practitioners. They hold mass in Spanish and invite religious officials from the island to participate in church activities. One Washington Heights church has even been named Our Lady of Altagracia. Perhaps because the Catholic Church has helped ease Dominicans' adjustment to U.S. society, participation rates at Sunday Mass among Dominican immigrants are far higher than those for Dominicans back home. Yet while the neighborhood churches foster a sense of continuity and belonging to a Dominican ethnic community, the Catholic Church also offers a bridge to the wider society, as, for example, when Dominicans journey downtown to attend the annual celebration of the Virgin of Altagracia (Our Lady of the Highest Grace) at New York's Saint Patrick's Cathedral (Goris-Rosario 1994).

Washington Heights also supports new cultural forms that draw upon the immigrant and working-class experienc-

es of the Dominican diaspora. There is a flourishing cultural movement comprised of many groups that promote Dominican poetry, theater, music, fine arts, and dance. In *Historias de Washington Heights Y Otros Rincones Del Mundo/ Stories From Washington Heights and Other Corners of the World*, co-editor Daisy Coco de Filippis observes that the Dominican authors included in this pioneering collection struggle with experiences of exile and transience. They experience exile as a search for "la casa materna" (the maternal home). "in these foreign lands and ways." By writing they begin, "to change words into stones; to find an anchor for their homesickness and their longing for permanence and a place for being" (Coco De Filippis and Gutiérrez 1994: 16).

In their private lives, Dominicans, like other recent immigrants, remain committed to a variety of cultural practices brought from home. For example, a recent study of Dominican households in Washington Heights found that 95 percent cooked mostly Dominican food, 88 percent spoke mostly Spanish at home, and well over half listened mostly to Dominican music and watched mostly Spanish television (Duany 1994: 37). Similarly, when Dominicans have some free time, they are most apt to socialize with family and Dominican friends. While some apartment dwellers complain about being isolated in their own units ("trancado," "locked in"), others have managed to forge a small community in their buildings, uniting with neighbors in frequent exchanges of favors, mutual aid, and emotional support (Ibid: 22).

ETHNIC SUCCESSION IN WASHINGTON HEIGHTS

Ethnic succession within U.S. neighborhoods and communities is rarely characterized by harmony and consensus. The many gains Dominicans have made in Washington Heights have not come without challenge to other established ethnic and racial groups in the community. The Dominican struggle to control the neighborhood schools, for example, came largely at the expense of the community's Jewish population, who despite their relatively small numbers, dominated the dis-

trict's school board until they were ousted by Dominicans (Lowenstein 1989). Although members of the Jewish community first tried to protect their vested interests by blocking the educational, economic, and political advances of newcomers to Washington Heights, a position of resigned accommodation now prevails. As one Jewish leader stated:

In order to save our...own congregation, we have to live with our neighbors, even if they are different from us, even if we don't like them. But we cannot help it. We have to live with the blacks, with the Spanish (Ibid: 321).

Tensions also exist between Dominicans and Puerto Ricans. Some Puerto Ricans criticize Dominicans for allegedly accepting low wages, thereby undercutting Puerto Ricans in the job market. Angry voices are also raised against Dominicans and their Puerto Rican "accomplices" for displacing Puerto Ricans as owners of neighborhood *bodegas*. In the words of Ramón Velez, a Puerto Rican community leader, 6,500 "Puerto Rican Judases, sold their *bodegas* to Dominicans in New York City (Guarnizo 1992: 107). Dominicans, in turn, often accuse Puerto Rican law enforcement agents and code inspectors of discrimination and abuse of power in their treatment of Dominicans (Guarnizo 1992). There is also the belief among some Dominicans that they are being held back in politics and community organizations by a Hispanic leadership that pursues a narrowly Puerto Rican agenda (Grasmuck and Pessar, forthcoming). "We all sit at the table when it comes time to draw lines [between Latinos and the others]," one Dominican politician stated. "When the time comes to determine who represents all of us, we no longer find ourselves at the table" (González 1992:B4). There is also concern over the apportioning of funds for the two groups. Another Dominican leader noted:

The Puerto Rican community has said we only get 3% of the state budget, the other 97% goes to white groups, African-American groups....In the same way that the Puerto Rican community [says they] deserve a better share because [they] are 9

or 10% of the state and only get 3% of the budget[,] we say, well, we are 25% of the Latinos and we get only 2% of the Latino budget (Gilbertson 1995: 11).

Although Dominican youth borrow elements of Afro-American culture and add them to their music, language, and dress, social encounters between Dominicans and African-Americans in Washington Heights can be confrontational. Contacts are frequently made in Dominican-owned, neighborhood businesses, where "African-Americans regard Dominican business owners more as adversarial, foreign merchants taking advantage of blacks' disadvantaged economic condition than as dark-skinned immigrants struggling for survival" (Guarnizo 1992: 109).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has focussed on social networks, both those linking individual immigrants and those which become far more densely enmeshed and linked to a particular locale, thereby creating an ethnic community like Washington Heights. The existence of vital ethnic communities, like Washington Heights, are crucial to the continued recruitment and maintenance of newer immigrants even after the favorable economic conditions promoting mass emigration have diminished or ceased.

END NOTES

1. The generosity extended by Dominicans to newly-arrived family and friends can cause problems, as well. Several of my informants complained of inadequate space for their children to play and study and escalating conflict among family members due to overcrowding. Indeed, a few of my informants temporarily shared cramped quarters with two or three families in apartments designed for only one.