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The African Diaspora in the Dominican Republic's Culture: It's More Prominent Than You Think

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CISLA Senior Integrative Project

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The African Diaspora in the Dominican Republic's Culture: It's More Prominent Than You Think

In the Dominican Republic, Dominicans often talk much about the Taíno and the European contribution to our culture and identity and so little about the African contribution. The Dominican Republic now holds the eastern two-thirds of the Island of Hispaniola, the current equivalent of Santo Domingo. Hispaniola, known as the first European colony in the New World, ruled the entire Island until France took control of the western third in 1697, now known as Haiti. European colonizers modeled future colonies on this initial colony, including using enslaved Black Africans as laborers to cultivate sugar cane and the political and religious control structures (such as the *encomienda* system), among other elements. Africans enslaved by Spanish Colonizers transformed the common elements of their culture in the Creole societies of the African diaspora, such as the Dominican Republic. The colonies' extensive Caribbean food traditions, music, and religious rituals found their roots in Africa. Nevertheless, in many parts of Dominican society, Blackness has become associated with Haitians and lower-class status. The lack of knowledge and understanding about the relationship between colonialism and the repudiation of Blackness in the Dominican Republic—for example, that there were even African slaves in the Dominican Republic can be attributed to the brainwashing tactics of many presidents of the Dominican Republic, global imperialism and the colonizers that took over the Island starting in 1492. An example of this brainwashing took place under the regime of General Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, who came to power in 1930. He established a repressive dictatorship on the Island until his assassination in 1961. Trujillo consistently promoted anti-Haitian sentiment and used racial and nationalistic fervor against Haitians and Afro-Dominicans. As Trujillo was called, *El Jefe* created secret police to arrest and sometimes assassinate dark-skinned (or phenotypically black) Dominicans. The impact of global imperialism can be seen during his dictatorship. An example is the *Negrismo* literary movement of the Hispanophone Caribbean in the 1930s and 1940s, which did not revolutionize the Dominican Republic as it did Puerto Rico and Cuba. Although this can be seen as an example of Dominicans' disavowal of their Blackness, it is not considered that the United States had just occupied the Dominican Republic for about a decade. During this time, the Dominican Republic was amid an antiblack authoritarian regime. Dominican elites and other political and literary authorities, such as Trujillo, considered it imperative to paint the nation white. Silvio Torres-Saillant explains it as "Dominican identity consists not only of how Dominicans see themselves but also of how they are seen by the powerful nations with which the Dominican Republic has been linked in a relationship of political and economic dependence. It is not inconceivable, for instance, that the texture of negrophobic and anti-Haitian nationalist discourse sponsored by official spokespersons in the Dominican state drew significantly on North American sources dating back to the first years of the republic [starting in 1844]." Taking into consideration their imperialist pressures and the traditional Dominican elite's long-term efforts towards white supremacy, it should be no surprise, for the most part, that Dominican literature and culture did not round up around its black heritage. As Dixia Ramirez explains in her article titled "Dominican Race and Gender before Trujillo and Beyond Caribbean Studies," "The issue of naming highlights that Dominicans in

elite circles and conversation with imperial powers have often decided that rallying against the country's blackness and toward whiteness was more likely to secure the country a seat at the global table" (Ramirez, 2000, p. 193). Ramona Hernández, director of the Dominican Studies Institute at the City College of New York, claims these expressions were originally a defense against racism. Hernández writes, "During the Trujillo regime, dark-skinned people were rejected, so they created mechanisms to fight rejection..." (Torres-Saillant, 2015)¹. Dominicans, who are phenotypically Black, comprise a significant minority of the country's population. Their ancestor's social and cultural formations are ingrained in and inseparable from the national identity." Despite this, Blackness in the Dominican Republic is denied. In this paper, I will analyze a significant aspect of Dominican cultural practices brought to the Island by enslaved Africans from Senegal, Sierra Leone, Congo, Angola, Ghana, and South Africa, to name a few. Specifically, Palos, Mangulina, and Carnival by analyzing these dances and the important social and cultural role they play in "Dominican Voodoo," also known as "Santería Dominicana" or "Las 21 Divisiones", I will show how the African Diaspora is still present in Dominican Culture, even if or despite the disavowal of Blackness in the Dominican Republic.

Santería Dominicana: What is it?

Santería Dominicana, also known as "Dominican Voodoo" and "Las 21 Divisiones" (21 Divisions), is a syncretic religion of Caribbean origin that developed on the Island of Hispaniola. In this context, syncretism is forming new religious ideas from multiple distinct sources, often contradictory. All religions possess some level of syncretism because ideas do not exist in a vacuum. People who believe in these religions will also be influenced by other familiar ideas, including their previous religion or another religion with which they are familiar. Contradictory sources have a far more pronounced influence on syncretic faiths. For instance, syncretic faiths are frequently found in the African Diaspora. They incorporate a variety of indigenous beliefs and Catholicism, which in its traditional form directly opposes these indigenous beliefs (Stewart, Charles, 1999). Dominican Voodoo is made up of three main divisions and an extra annex: The "Rada Division," also known as the white or sweet division, whose spirits are of African origin (generally Fon, Ewe, and Nago spirits); the Petro Division also known as the fire or bitter division (mainly spirits of Bantu origin); the Gede Division also called the black division (whose spirits deal with death and ancestors); and finally, the Native American Division, also called the Water Division, whose spirits are of pre-Columbian origin (generally referring to the ancestral spirits of the Taíno island). Most of the spirits are syncretized with an image of Catholic saints and deities of African origin. These are some of the main characteristics distinguishing Dominican Vodou (the Dominican counterpart to Haitian Vodou) from other forms of Vodou. Some principal deities revered in Dominican Vodou include Anaisa Pye, the loa of love and happiness. She is syncretized with Santa Ana. Belie Belcan, known as the law of justice and protection against demons, is syncretized with Saint Michael the Archangel. Candeló sé Difé, Loa of fire, is also a warrior and protective spirit. Considered as one of the Ogou, syncretized with Charles Borromeo. Santa Marta Dominadora, or Filomena Lubana, is the loa responsible for dominance

¹ This is an excerpt from a book. I did not get to read but I found this in another article.

over men. She is syncretized with Santa Marta. Ogun Balenyo, the loa of warriors and soldiers, is syncretized with Santiago.

Haitian Vodou continues to influence Vodou in the Dominican Republic primarily. However, throughout the last two decades, the evolution of Vodou in the Dominican side of the Island has acquired distinctive historical, linguistic, ethnic, and musical elements; there are significant similarities and co-evolution factors. Dominican Vodou religious practices are organized around private consultation and devotional activities of individual spirit mediums who form relationships with clients and other Vodou practitioners. Vodou spirit mediums may incorporate beliefs and elements of practice from various lineages, including from specific African, European, and indigenous healing traditions. The two religious variants also have a shared history based on the ongoing contact and migration of black between French and Spanish colonies dividing the Island of Hispaniola. Martha Ellen Davis agrees that Haitian Vodou is the dominant influence because the Dominican variant of the vote is less widespread and more simplistic in ritual and social structure than Haitian Vodou (Davis, 1987.) This correlation can also be seen through the names and characteristics of the mysteries of Dominican Vodou, which are associated with the lwas (lwas or loas) of Haitian Vodou. They can also be identified with Fon and Yoruba deities or represent aspects of Bantu religion and ancestor devotions from the Congo-Angola region of Africa. (Davis, 1987, p.134.) During the Haitian occupation of the Spanish side of the Island during 1822-1844, many refugees from the French colony integrated into the ranches and small farms on the Spanish side. Among these refugees were escaped enslaved people who became Vodou priests and formed militant black groups who used Vodou rituals as protection. During this occupation period (1822-1844), settlements of Haitian immigrants were founded in numerous provinces, including San Juan de la Maguana, San Cristobal, Peravia, and Villa Mella. It was because of the close contact of lacks from other colonial cultures that Dominican Vodou was formed.

Salves and Palos: Music of the Cofradias

Cofradia is a religious society with a limited social function compared to Cuban organizations; it is also reduced in social function and size. Cofradías (Afro-Dominican religious brotherhoods) sponsor rituals honoring ancestors and Catholic saints, syncretized with African-derived deities. These comrades initially acted as a mutual help group. This group which is now known as the Petro Division is one of the three Main "Divisions" of Dominican Vodou (Also known as "Las 21 Divisiones"). Petro Division, also known as the "Black Division," whose spirits are those who deal with death and the ancestors. With the pan-African concept of the ancestors as elders and the resulting prominence of the deceased, this included its significant role as a burial community.

Interestingly, while they represent some of the most highly African-influenced institutions of the Dominican Republic, Afro-Dominican cofradías have antecedents in Spain, where, already in the fourteenth century, Spaniards of African descent founded mutual aid societies under the aegis of the Catholic Church. Many distinct cofradías can be found throughout the Dominican Republic, each with its own religious and musical traditions. Due to this, the country boasts many distinct palo styles, which is why to be able to understand and

conceptualize the Dominican Republic, one must situate these instruments and their music within Dominican traditional music, particularly that associated with folk Catholicism.

Dominican Santeria music uses Afro-Caribbean percussion, often played with drums popularly known as "Atabales or Palos," which are of Kongo origin and a Guira (metal scraper). The Palos are the semi-sacred instruments of the Afro-Dominican religious brotherhoods (comrades). They are also used for funeral rites for brotherhood members and other drum enthusiasts and festivals sponsored by individual saints. The drummers are known as "Paleros," and the ceremonies they perform are usually called "Fiesta de Palo" or "Mani." "Palos," also known as the long drums from the Dominican Republic, was heavily influenced by the African descent left behind by the Transatlantic slave trade. "Palos," considered from the Kongo, is also widely known as "Atabales." Throughout the Dominican Republic, "Palos" is now connected to black and mixed-race communities in rural or working-class small towns in the regions with the highest concentrations of African settlers, namely in the colonial sugar cane and, secondarily, cattle areas.

One of Dominican folk Catholicism's most pervasive manifestations is in saints' feasts. Every night of the year, at least one person in the nation sponsors a saint's celebration to fulfill a "promise" (promesa), a legal agreement with a saint for healing. "A promise is a contract with the spirit or deity in return favor," explains Davis. The person's request is made to the appropriate deity and, if granted, promises to 'pay' for it with one of the various types of devotional action or velación (annually), a single pilgrimage (or annually), or any number of other actions. (Davis, 1981, 35) Later, the payment usually develops into an inherited, yearly responsibility to a deity who serves as the family totem. These ceremonies are frequently preceded by a novena, the final of the nine-night celebrations, an all-night public gathering with Catholic salves, a meal provided for the public by the host family or community, Palos, and Palos dancing.

Cana Andres:

During my Internship in the Dominican Republic, I visited San Gregorio De Nigua, Dominican Republic, for a Fiesta de Palos in honor of the Saint "San Antonio de Padua" in Cana Andres, an Afro-Dominican religious brotherhood whose principal sanctuary is hidden away deep within a rural valley of San Cristóbal. Cana Andres is known to be the oldest altar for San Antonio and the oldest Afro-Dominican brotherhoods in his name. This small community which is located near the rural area a few miles in the interior from Najallo beach is where a very large Velacion, which is a patron saint celebration, and fiesta, occur throughout the day on June 13 for San Antonio de Padua. Significantly, San Antonio de Padua is syncretized with Papa Legba. Papa Legba is represented in Haiti and the Dominican Republic as an older man smoking a pipe and hobbling with a cane. Although more commonly syncretized with Saint Peter in Haiti, San Cristóbal, and other parts of the Dominican Republic, Papa Legba is associated with San Antonio de Padua. Papa Legba, a deity, is the guardian of the crossroads between the human and spirit worlds. He is thought to open to door to opportunity,

This event is religious, both traditionally religious and socially modern; it has salves, Palos, and merengue típico. Salves are essential devotional musicals of popular Catholicism and Dominican Vodou. They are traditional songs performed before an altar or saint's icon. Dominican This fiesta de Palos first started with a prayer inside the church, which is the time for all attending to pray and give their offerings to San Antonio. The fiesta transitions into "canto de las

salves," led by Jin Luna, a folk priest and singer, accompanied by bells, as seen in [Figure A](#) (Video). Music plays as more people pack into the church, continuing the "canto de salves" with Tambora and guitar. The Dominican tambora originates in the Guinean Tambora, which has remained for generations without any structural change. Without a doubt, this instrument that has become one of the symbols of Dominicanity is one of the legacies our African ancestors left behind. The Tambora is a critical instrument in the rhythmic structure of the national Dance Merengue and Fiesta de Palos. The tambora was specially built on the Northwest Line, where they used a hollowed-out tree trunk mounting the heads on hoops tied with a pita cord. A goat's skin was placed on both sides, which is the part that is played with wooden sticks and palms. As the tambora plays, the food offerings pour in, including cake, grapes, bread and wine, and even candy for the kids. These food offerings are brought by individuals who made a promise and other attendees but shared with the whole community. In [Figure B](#), you can see different women going around the church offering bread and wine and handing out candy and pieces of cake to those in attendance. At the same time, those inside the church visit the altar and receive their blessing from the rezadora, who is in front of the altar. There are others outside visiting their loved ones who have passed away. In [Figure C](#), you can see four individuals dressed in traditional white and brown clothing, drinking and celebrating. As the day went on, the "Palos" started to play outside, with the musicians playing in a semicircle, surrounded by attendees. This part of the ceremony continues throughout the night until the following day.

Merengue and Mangulina: National Folklore Dance

The well-known merengue social dance represents the fusion of Dominican national culture (Davis 2002, 2006). The orchestrated, widely recognized Merengue and the folk merengue tipico are the two subgenres of the Merengue of today. Likewise, in the music of the folk-Catholic religious context, the Salve is also comprised of two subgenres: the liturgical Salve Regina ("Hail, Holy Queen"), popularly called the Salve de la Virgen,—a cappella, melismatic, and antiphonal or responsorial—and the non-liturgical Salve, an Africanized evolution of its progenitor, which is polyrhythmic, instrumentally accompanied, and in call-and-response form. These two subgenres of the Salve—the one Spanish and conservative, the other creole and constantly changing—coexist in the Saint's festival, indeed in a single event. Furthermore, together they co-occur in a saint's festival with the African-derived long drums (palos) and other musical genres. In the Dominican Republic, there is a mutual influence between salves' performance in San Cristóbal and traditional dance music, including Merengue, Pri-Pri, and Mangulina, all of which were commonly performed in Fiestas de Palo. Even Palos, in several areas of the country, has taken on influences of Merengue and its localized variants. Through the history of Merengue, specifically in the 1970s, Dominican intellectuals and artists started to challenge the Eurocentrism that surrounded Merengue at the time by celebrating the African contributions to Dominican Culture. This was done by looking at connections to Haiti. "Anti-Haitian sentiment and the tendency to hide the African roots of our culture on the part of the bourgeois intelligentsia have obstructed understanding and study not only of Merengue but of numerous forms of Dominican culture...[citation]" states musicologist Bernarda Jorge, alongside Fradique Lozardo, who discussed the African influence on Merengue and asserted that

"merengue's origin is in Africa" [citation]. Lizardo suggests that Bara and other African music were "combined with a Cuban form called the Danza to produce Caribbean Merengue" [citation].

As Merengue gradually cemented its ties with the northern Cibao region, a different dance took precedence in the South: Mangulina. Mangulina is often paired with the *carabiné*, which has contradance-like choreography in the Dominican Republic, and the European waltz. Mangulina and *carabiné*, or *mangouline* and *carabinier*, both existed in Haiti, though the latter was performed as a couples dance. Traditional mythology traces the origin of *carabiné* to Haitian soldiers dancing with carbines slung over their shoulders around 1805, the first period of Haitian dominance in the eastern part of the Island. In their form and sequence, these two-dance sets echo the structure and meaning of other Dominican folk expressions in that the first Dance in each pair is based on European models, and the second is an African-influenced, creolized Caribbean expression – much like the structure of Afro-Dominican rituals or of Merengue itself (see Davis 2003). And although today Mangulina is thought of as southern today, it was long practiced in the north, alongside Merengue.

Fiesta de la Sarandunga, Peravia, Bani:

The city of Bani was founded on March 1, [year]. Today, it is an urban center with traditional expressions such as its cathedral and its modernization, full of technology and commercial expressions, and mass and consumption centers. Before this population was founded, when the enslaved began the process of marronage from the enclave of the sugar industry and took the road to the southwest to reach the Sierras del Batoruco and Neyba, they made a rest stop in La Vereda, eight kilometers from Bani, which little by little became a temptation for the Maroons, who gradually stayed there in what was called a "Maniel de Transito ." In La Vereda, an interesting syncretic integration process took place with enslaved people from different parts of Africa, who brought their cultures and syncretized them with Spanish culture, especially on a religious level. The most famous figure of the Catholic saints of the time among the enslaved was Saint John the Baptist (San Juan Bautista), for symbolizing fire and water, especially the latter, which represented Africans' return to Africa and freedom. To praise San Juan Bautista, the music, dances, and songs of the Sarandunga arose. Two of these dances that arose from this community were the Mangulina and Merengue, which are still played at the yearly celebration of San Juan Bautista in Peravia, Bani, on June 29.

Under a mango tree, a "Perico-ripio" is played frantically accompanied by güira, Tambora, saxophone, and accordion, where the attendees, huddled together on a dirt floor, dance typical merengues from inland. At the other end of the festivity space in San Juan with the Sarandunga, attendees dance and sing in honor of the Saint. At the same time, famous artists improvise "chuines", an improvised form of poetry sung a capella. Sarandunga is the identifying music of the comrades de San Juan Bautista in Peravia, Bani. El baile de la sarandunga para miembros de esta cofradia, es una manifestación de devoción religiosa a San Juan Bautista. While in the Dominican Republic, I attended a Fiesta de Palo in honor of San Juan Bautista. During this fiesta de Palo, I experienced the baptism of the Saint in the river, the short pilgrimage from the river to the altar, the singing of the "chuines," the playing and dancing of the Mangulina, Sarandunga, Perico Ripiao, and Merengue. (Seen in [figures D-G](#))

Connection to Capstone:

Dance majors create a capstone in their senior year. Based on my research, my Capstone showcased Dominican traditional palos music and Dance, mixing West African, Magulina, and a small introduction to Carnaval. I wanted to showcase in dance form the connections of the African Diaspora in Dominican Music and Dance. At the beginning of my capstone piece, I showed a video. This video consisted of short clips from this Fiesta de Palo in Honor of San Antonio. In this video, I take the audience through what is supposed to be a Fiesta de Palo that I attended. Starting inside the church, offerings, canto de salves, and the "Palos" outside. While this video plays, I create a live version on the stage. In this section of my Dance, the dancers are like those who celebrate San Antonio, wearing white and brown. While the video is playing, the dancers are turned to watching the video with the audience, and as the video ends, they turn towards their left shoulder. After everyone is turned to the front, a clapping sequence starts. This clapping sequence represents the pattern of walking feet. Walking has great significance when it comes to fiestas de Palos. Ethnomusicologist Daniel Piper states that during his time doing research in Higüey, he "...joined the pilgrimage there were many people who had already been walking for a few days. I continued along with them for three days, walking for eight to ten hours each day." (Piper, 2012, p. 19) He continues to describe how the time he spent walking helped him gather his thoughts and influenced his personal life. In an article by Olga Idriss Davis, titled "The Door of No Return: Reclaiming the Past Through the Rhetoric of Pilgrimage," Davis writes that the rhetoric of pilgrimage reveals the African...search for identity and cultural collectivism." I wanted to include the theme of walking in my Capstone because I felt it necessary to showcase the extent people go through to celebrate the life and the legacy left behind by their ancestors. It can also be interpreted as a search for something, as Piper states, "crossroads." Understanding the significance of walking led me back to the history of the enslaved Africans brought to the Island by force, who had walked up to 3 months and some even a year after being kidnapped or "traded" into the transatlantic slave trade. Due to the many enslaved people, European colonizers made them walk, many from Senegal, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Congi, and Angola, to the various slave ports along the Coast of West Africa before they embarked on their journey across the Atlantic. During my trip to Ghana with Professor Shani Collins, I visited Cape Coast Castle and went through the "Door of no Return," which led slaves out of the castle and onto the ships setting off on the Middle Passage. This experience brought me back to the understanding that although 12 million or so enslaved persons walked through that door, their end destination was different, so there are three different clapping sequences happening simultaneously, all harmonizing to tell the bigger story.

The third part of this section of my capstone dance project starts in a circle formed after the clapping sequence is done. I include this depiction of a circle to express the importance of coming together and community during these celebrations. For this section, I took inspiration from different West African and Afro-Caribbean dances, such as Bata, a Nigerian Yoruba Cultural dance. The reason I took inspiration specifically from the Nigerian Yoruba culture is because of the significant influence it has on Dominican Santería. For example, Patron Santiago, who in Las 21 Divisiones (Dominican Vodú) is part of the Division Blanca (White Division), is also syncretized with Ogun from the Yoruba Orisha. Ogun is also known as Ogun Balenyo. San

Antonio, also part of the Division Blanca, is syncretized with Legba, also known as Papa Legba. The Yoruba religion also includes the concept of "ashe," a powerful life force; According to the Yoruba, Ashe is the energy found in all natural things. Like the Catholic saints, another commonality with Dominican Santeria is the Yoruba Orisha, who have defied forces of nature, like loa, who works as the intermediaries between people and the 'supreme' creator and the rest of the divine world. Lastly, another similarity I found was that the Yoruba religious celebrations have a social purpose, just like Fiesta de Palos; they promote cultural values and help to preserve the rich heritage of the people who follow them. Other similarities I found were the annual celebrations held for Deities and Orishas, the belief in reincarnation, and the influence of modern traditions, all present in modern-day Dominican Santeria. Another dance that influenced this section was Sinte, a West African Dance of celebration from Guinea. I came across this Dance when I studied with Truth Hunter in my Sophomore year of College in the West African I dance class. Although this Dance has no connection with the Dominican Republic, it is supposed to represent the diversity of different West African cultures in the Dominican Republic. Lastly, I created a small section inspired by the Yoruba Afro-Cuban Orisha, Chango (known as the Orisha of drumming and music), and Palos Dominicanos to help the transition to the next section.

Mangulina: Connection to Internship and Capstone

During my Internship, I visited "Escuelas de Bellas Artes: Musica, Danza, Teatro" in Santo Domingo, where I took a short dance class. During this short class, I learned how to dance Mangulina and the African history behind it. This experience stood out to me because the professor made it a point throughout the class to give credit to the enslaved Africans that influenced Dominican Culture and left behind Mangulina, was is now known as Mangulina. This was the first time during my entire trip that I heard this. [Figures H and I](#) show that Mangulina has various similarities to Afro-Cuban dance. I was reminded of the Dance for the Yoruba/Afro-Cuban orisha Yemaya, as they share intricate skirts- and footwork.

In the second section of my capstone dance project, I decided to include Mangulina, dancing skirts in partners, and solo. The reason I decided to add this was specifically to show the different celebratory dances that are common in Fiesta de Palos and Saint celebrations throughout the country. In this section, the song starts with a salve about Ogun Balenyo. The song titled 'Suero de Amor' by Kinito Mendez states;

“Yo soy Ogun-Balenyo, y vengo de los olivos

A darle la mano al enfermo y a levantar los caídos

Ay, yo soy Ogum y vengo de alla, Anaisa Pye y Papa Legba Ogum,

Belie Ogum Avagan, Barbaro ese tipo”

While this part of the song plays, five girls come in with skirts with a simple Mangulina step, "blessing" the five girls from the last section of the Dance who are now on their knees on the floor. This section quickly transitions to a partner part where six pairs come in from either side of the stage and form a circle, just as in the Palos section, to signal the significance of coming together as a community. This section reminded me of the transition in the Fiesta de Sarandunga in Pervaia, Bani, where the host of the fiesta blesses the drummers and "montaderas" before they transition from playing Palos to Mangulina. I found this transition essential and needed in the Dance, for it showcases the connection between the two dances.

Carnival: Relevance and Connection In Capstone

Although I didn't get a chance to study Carnival while at Connecticut College, I found it an essential part of Dominican Culture; Carnival is celebrated throughout the country during February as a celebration of Dominican Independence from Haiti on February 27, 1844. Dominican Carnival is the most vibrant celebration of Dominican culture and identity. It's a time when Dominicans of all ages and from all regions take to the streets, at home, or in neighboring carnival cities. Every Sunday during February, colorful parades occur in every major city and region around the DR—some extending through the first week of March. La Vega Carnival is the oldest, largest, and most popular, followed by Santiago. Other cities hosting unique parades include Santo Domingo, Montecristi, Bonao, Puerto Plata, Río San Juan, San Cristobal, and Barahona. Costumes, masks, and mystical characters are distinct to each area and reveal Dominican folkloric traditions and beliefs as diverse as the country's population. Carnival in the Dominican Republic dates back to 1520, during the Spanish colonial times. Some researchers say the first carnival events celebrated a visit by Fray Bartolomé de las Casas when inhabitants disguised themselves as Moors and Christians (Shafto, 2009, p. 56). Between 1822 and 1844, the tradition of wearing costumes during religious festivities almost disappeared during the Haitian occupation. But it returned immediately when the country became independent on February 27, 1844. Costumes were no longer associated with religious celebrations and evolved into actual carnivals, celebrated during the three days before Ash Wednesday.

In my Capstone, there were three different costumes from different regions; as seen in [Figure J](#), the first is known as a "Diablo Cojuelo." El Diablo Cojuelo is Carnival's leading character. This "limping devil" wears a colorful cloaked suit adorned with tiny mirrors, rattles, ribbons, and cowbells as a parody of medieval Spanish knights. A mask with large horns covers the devil's face as he carries a round whip or *vejiga*—made from a cow's dried and cured inflated bladder—and goes along the parade route, surprising distracted onlookers with a lash on their buttocks. The second (as seen in [Figure K](#)) is a Lechon. Los Lechones is the city of Santiago's main carnival character and is also a form of limping devil. They distinguish themselves with their masks—representing the face of a pig, with a long snout and tall horns—and their elaborate costumes featuring a colorful, beaded romper encrusted with bells and bows. Their role is maintaining order in the streets during festivities, which they attempt by swinging their feet in the air. Lastly, as seen in [Figure L](#), is a Taimascaro. Los Taimáscaros are Puerto Plata's main carnival characters. They are a version of the *Diablo cojuelo*, mixing three cultural influences in their outfits: a mask representing the Taino gods, blouses and coats representing Spanish heritage, and handkerchiefs representing African deities. This section of my Capstone gives the audience a feel for Carnival through the costumes, community feel, and music.

Conclusion:

In gran culmination, this paper was designed to illustrate and showcase the many different aspects of the African Diaspora in Dominican popular culture and history. First, since there is little direct intervention by outside groups and institutions in Afro-Dominican religion and music, these aspects of the African Diaspora have been syncretized from the Transatlantic Slave trade and Haitian occupation. Through the analysis of the history of Dominican Santería, Salves, Palos Music, Merengue, and Mangulina, this paper illustrates the African Diapora's

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current influence. In this paper, I have explored those aspects of the Diaspora African that I researched during my Internship and time studying at Connecticut College and shown how they show up in my Capstone.

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