

## Second-generation U.S. Dominicans and the Question of a Transnational Orientation

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### ABSTRACT

Like their parents, second-generation Dominicans in the United States are generally described in the academic literature as transnational, a description that perpetuates the notion that Dominicans, as a whole, hold onto a transnational identity. This monograph focuses on the presumed transnational identity of Dominicans born in the United States. The analysis relies on empirical data extracted from 23 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with college-educated second-generation Dominicans, as well as findings from a probabilistic survey of 600 adult Dominicans living in households in New York City who answered questions related to everyday life issues. Three basic questions inform the analysis: (1) What characteristics do second-generation Dominicans exhibit that persuade scholars to describe them as “transnational” despite being born and raised in the United States? (2) Do second-generation Dominicans exhibit similar or different transnational practices as their parents? And (3) What is the likelihood that second-generation Dominicans will transmit a transnational identity to their children? The authors argue that transnational practices by U.S.-born Dominicans are highly selective and very distinct from transnational practices traditionally associated

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with immigrants. They further argue that second-generation Dominicans of higher socioeconomic status—as measured through levels of education, type of job, and income—are likely to identify less with transnational practices and more with mainstream U.S. social practices as compared to second-generation Dominicans of lower socioeconomic status. In addition, upwardly mobile second-generation Dominicans live in a diverse world, relating and interacting with non-Dominicans. Thus, even if they operate as ethnic-Dominicans, they are expected to be able to function in an ethnically-diverse context. A changing society where diversity and hyphenated ethnic identities prevail raises the question of what are the prospects for the continuation of the transnational Dominican cultural identity in the United States.

Keywords: Transnationalism, Dominicans, second-generation, assimilation, Dominican-Americans.

#### RESUMEN

Al igual que sus padres, la segunda generación dominicana en los Estados Unidos se describe como transnacional en la literatura académica, descripción que perpetúa la noción de los dominicanos aferrados a una identidad transnacional. Esta monografía analiza la presunta identidad transnacional de los dominicanos nacidos en los Estados Unidos. El análisis se apoya en datos empíricos extraídos de 23 entrevistas en profundidad, parcialmente estructuradas, realizadas con estudiantes universitarios de la segunda generación dominicana, y en datos obtenidos de una encuesta de probabilidad de seiscientos dominicanos jefes/jefas de hogar en la ciudad de Nueva York, quienes respondieron preguntas relacionadas con la vida cotidiana. Tres preguntas básicas conforman el análisis: (1) ¿Cuáles características exhibe la segunda generación dominicana que inducen a los académicos a describirles como transnacionales a pesar de haber nacido y de haberse criado en los Estados Unidos? (2) ¿Exhibe la segunda generación dominicana prácticas transnacionales diferentes o similares a sus padres? Y (3) ¿Existe la posibilidad de que la segunda generación dominicana transmita una identidad transnacional a sus hijos? Los autores arguyen que las prácticas transnacionales de los dominicanos nacidos en los Estados Unidos son selectivas y muy distintas a las prácticas transnacionales tradicionalmente asociadas con los inmigrantes. Argumentan además que la segunda generación dominicana de alto estatus socio económico—reflejado en niveles educativos, tipo de trabajo y nivel de ingresos—es menos propensa a identificarse con prácticas transnacionales y más inclinada a identificarse con prácticas sociales dominantes de la sociedad norteamericana, en comparación con dominicanos

de segunda generación de bajo estatus socio-económico. Similarmente la segunda generación de alto nivel socio-económico vive en un mundo diverso e interactúa con personas que no son de origen dominicano. Así, aunque los dominicanos de segunda generación se comporten como etnia dominicana, se espera que los mismos puedan funcionar en un contexto étnico diverso. En una sociedad cambiante donde prevalece la diversidad y las identidades étnicas son descritas con guiones, queda como interrogante la idea sobre la posibilidad de que la identidad transnacional cultural dominicana pueda continuar en los Estados Unidos.

Palabras clave: Transnacionalismo, dominicanos, segunda generación, asimilación, dominico-americano.

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Since the early 1990s—the heyday of globalization—the phenomenon of transnationalism, which emphasizes the trans-border activities, loyalties, and identities of immigrants, has gained ground at the expense of traditional nation-State oriented notions of assimilation (Bash et al. 1994). This has been accompanied by an assertion that nation-States and their borders are receding into insignificance (Soysal 1994; Jacobson 1997) and the repudiation of the allegedly widely-held notion that immigrants assimilate into a host society while leaving their homes behind for good.

Several major transnational scholars have described Dominican immigrants as the quintessential transnational group (Levitt 2001; Louie 2006 a,b; Guarnizo 1994; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Morawska 2007; Itzigsohn et al. 1999). The media has followed on their footsteps and has portrayed Dominicans as people who have a strong hold both in the U.S., the country where they now live, and the Dominican Republic, the country where many were born. Scholarly attention is now focused on U.S.-born Dominicans, a rapidly growing group that is transforming the demographic composition of the Dominican population in the U.S. and changing the city of New York, as well as the rest of the Northeast and Florida.

## 1. POLITICAL VIEWS/PARTICIPATION

Transnational immigrants, especially Dominicans, are thought to be highly involved in homeland politics. Dominicans running for office in the Dominican Republic regularly campaign in the United States seeking not only to raise large amounts of funding but also to secure votes among Dominicans. It has been argued that U.S.

Dominicans influence politics in the Dominican Republic in two ways: directly, by participating in electoral processes, either by voting here in the U.S. or by going to vote in the Dominican Republic; and indirectly, by convincing family members in the Dominican Republic to vote for candidates U.S. Dominicans support. As Pedraza notes, “In the last Dominican elections (1996 at the time), many Dominicans residing in New York quickly flew to the island to vote. In future elections, the trip will be unnecessary because electoral reforms ensure that they can vote while remaining in New York. This gives the Diaspora (whether Haitian, Dominican, soon Mexican) a role in homeland politics that is much larger than ever before” (Pedraza 1999: 380). Similarly, U.S. politicians running for office tend to visit the Dominican Republic hoping to secure U.S. Dominican votes. Transnational scholars found support for their views in the election of Leonel Fernández Reyna as President of the Dominican Republic in 1996. Fernández Reyna had lived with his mother in New York City returning to the Dominican Republic right at the age to enter college, and as a returning candidate in the presidential elections of 2004, Fernández Reyna secured the largest number of votes in New York City, among all candidates running for the presidency and among all Dominicans voting abroad, including Europe.

Contrary to the previous descriptions, the second-generation groups examined in both samples exhibited a pervasive lack of interest in and knowledge of Dominican politics. Conversely, the second-generation Dominicans showed to be largely interested in U.S. or New York politics and not necessarily in that of their parents’ homeland. In general, the respondents were focused on U.S. political institutions and on the political incorporation of the Dominican people in the U.S. The in-depth interviews revealed that if there is anything transnational about this group regarding Dominican politics is that they seem to have inherited their political and civic awareness from their generally highly politically-aware and involved Dominican parents. For example, when asked “are Dominicans political?,” Andrés, a black, U.S.-born Dominican who is heavily involved in New York City politics, answered:

Absolutely! Yeah. It comes from DR. It’s a political country. Dominican political institutions know they can use the influence of Dominicans here [...] The remittances [...] [etc]. Dominicans here have realized they are growing and they make changes. They are thinking about how to form a cohesive voice. That’s where it’s at. I know a bunch of people who are trying to run for office. At this rate, you’ll have so many [Dominicans] just flooding into positions. It’ll be like out of the blue [...] There are a lot of intelligent Dominican personalities in office [...] We have learned a lot about politics from DR [...].

When questioned about involvement with Dominican politics specifically, Irma, an educator, says:

I don't follow Dominican politics. This [the U.S.] is the country, I guess, I pledge allegiance to. It is this country's issues I am concerned about. I worry about this country, wanna improve it. Politically, I guess, it is my country. I also wanna learn more about my Dominican history. I feel like I'm not Dominican enough. I can't feel too American [Laughs.] I have to make sure I'm recognizing my Dominican identity. If I'm so aware of American politics, why am I not paying enough attention to Dominican politics? That stuff affects my family too. My parents pay some attention to DR politics.

Diana concurs:

But I'm *not Dominican in the political sense*. You would only make changes here. I can't tell Dominicans what to do about *their* country [...]

Yvette, on her part, a social worker, believes that President Obama motivated her family to be interested in American politics:

Specially now with an African American president; It was my parents' first vote. It was my first time voting too. We're [our family] Dominicans, minorities in general, more political now; more pro-politics; more engaged.

Obama's election has excited many of our respondents about the possibility of the political incorporation of minorities and children of immigrants of color. Irma explains:

Oh my God, I cried [When Obama was elected]. I felt proud about being American because I felt like we are opening up [...] But that doesn't mean everything will be better for people of color [...] But, it's like we can change our perspective [...] I don't like the ugly [racist] side [of U.S. history and politics]. I wanna be proud of the decisions we make; and this is a good decision. Some stuff we do is wrong but some stuff shows openness. Yeah, I was certainly proud [...] I felt like "the door is open." [...] Yeah but that doesn't mean everything will be better for people color. Why can't people who come from another country feel included? I don't want or like the exclusion. I don't wanna like talk about a fairy tale. But it's possible that people become more open, we can change our perspective. Obama has this energy. "Let's go beyond this bullshit, race and all that, let's recognize its importance in our life but move on; everyone: White, black, Latino. A lot of greatness can come out of it [...]"

Our respondents engage in a form of ethnic retention through their interest and participation in New York City and national ethnic politics. They participate in local

politics through ethnic/racial lenses that combine the Dominicaness with their racial understanding of themselves and social position in American society. Of course, New York's ethnicity-based machine politics history makes this easier for them than would be otherwise (Mollenkopf 1999; Kasinitz et al 2008; Jones-Correa 2007; Foner 2000; Waldinger 1996).

The in-depth interviews revealed that respondents also joined Latino or Dominican student associations and that they felt a connection with their Dominican or Latino identities while in college. These organizations celebrated their historical roots and offered them a space where they found many others who looked like them and with whom they felt connected. While transnational scholars may consider student organizations interested in preserving Dominican cultural and historical legacies as entities engaged in transnational practices, one can also see in these organizations a social behavior in consonance with the U.S. pluralist system in which people are often identified with a given group, whether ethnic, religious, racial, or sexual, etc., such as Italians or Puerto Ricans, Jews or Catholics, blacks or whites, or gays and lesbians, instead of political parties, ideologies, or social class. Andres, who was active in a Dominican student organization while in college and is now involved in a Dominican national advocacy organization, speaks of Dominican involvement in politics in the Bronx (New York) in this way:

There is an old Puerto Rican machine in the Bronx. And everyone remembers the Dominican- Puerto Rican divisions in the 1960s. They're [Puerto Ricans] losing their numbers though. It used to be you had to pay respects to the Puerto Rican leaders in the Bronx [...] Now the Dominican numbers are growing; Puerto Ricans might have to partner up with Dominicans. Behind the scenes, this is what I'm hearing [...].

Andres' explanation concerning the replacement of Puerto Ricans by Dominicans in the political scenario has been referred to as ethnic succession politics in the literature of migration and ethnic politics (Shefter 1994; Jones-Correa 2007). Along these lines, Andres suggests that the Civil Rights movement and, to a lesser extent, the earlier immigrant groups' experiences with political incorporation, shaped the current pace of Dominicans incorporation into U.S. politics (Kasinitz et al 2008). Dominicans build New York ethnic-American style political machines bounded together by co-ethnic interest, but focused on the country where they live, and not necessarily in the Dominican Republic. This approach of course impacts New York Dominicans' life-chances in their immediate and probably permanent surroundings much more directly. Carlos says:

Latino citizens are the object of attention due to their numbers. It's [about] demography. The inevitable impact will soon be seen with the [Latino] youth growing up. In 40 years, there'll be a Latino, probably Mexican-American president.

Nonetheless, our respondents don't see the road ahead as easy, though they perceive the incorporation of Dominicans into U.S politics as inevitable. Carlos continues:

The political incorporation of Latinos and Dominicans is not where it should be [...] We need improvements. It's still the first generation who is in office now. But I see improvements [...] There's a gap between registered voters and the general [Dominican] population. But it will close. It's still a young population.

He shows faith in an inevitability of demographic change in the New York structures of ethnic politics and ethnic succession. Carlos brings up the fact that city council district 10 in Washington Heights was carved specifically to facilitate representation of Dominican politicians in an area where six in ten residents were of Dominican descent:

The population is growing. It is being recognized. But the numbers are on our side... Latinos are about to flood the ballot box in this country, especially in New York. They have already elected a lot of people in New York.

In the quantitative survey, the group was asked how much attention they paid to Dominican politics. As graph 1 indicates, we found that only 19% of second and 1.5 generations paid *a lot* of attention to Dominican politics. In contrast, the percentage almost doubled, rising to 39% among the first generation identified in the survey as *purest* (D.R.-born). Similarly, the same graph shows that among the generations compared, the second and 1.5 generations have the highest percentage among those who *do not pay* any attention to Dominican politics (40%). Interestingly, the interest in Dominican politics decreases for all Dominicans as education levels increases: Among high school graduates, for instance, 28% paid *a lot* of attention to Dominican politics, versus 12.5% among those with a college degree, representing almost 10% difference between the two groups (see table 1).

Moreover, for the second-generation, attention paid to *American* politics in general, increases as education levels increase. This relationship is the inverse of what we see above in Table 1 as relates to second and 1.5 generations and *Dominican* politics and is consistent with general trends in American society.

## 2. WHO AM I? DOMINICAN, AMERICAN, A BIT OF BOTH, OR TRANSNATIONAL?

In the qualitative survey we asked our respondents to pick one identity above all, and then asked them to pick two if they wished, at each step asking them why they chose the identity or identities they did. The decision of encouraging them to choose more than one identity if they desired so, provided interviewees with the freedom to discuss multiple identities without being forced to choose just one and leave others that were significant to them, a judgment we thought in the end would have given us a less accurate view of how they felt about their identity. The selection process also helped to obtain a more nuanced and clearer picture of identity choices beyond a monosyllabic response obtained in the quantitative large survey.

Almost all respondents in the qualitative interviews picked a Dominican-American identity when forced to choose one option among many. We hypothesize that their selection of a hyphenated identity, Dominican-American, is based on their self perception derived from a concrete situation in which, on the one hand, they have been socialized in a household and a neighborhood where Dominican cultural and historical symbols were amply displayed everywhere in everyday practices and beliefs; and on the other, they were born and raised in the U.S, have gone through many years of formal schooling where they have been subjected to American social practices and beliefs, and have experienced the building of their own personal legacy in the U.S. In addition, their accumulation of formal credentials facilitated their wandering outside the borders of their ethnic milieu and helped them to build a life in mainstream American society. Interestingly, the conversation leads one to believe that they feel less than “100%” Dominican or American, and to link their hyphenated identity to self-evaluation against what they think makes a 100% Dominican and a 100% American. We learned, for instance, that their feeling as less than “100% Dominican” occurs when they are in the Dominican Republic or among Dominican immigrants, and that such a feeling has to do with self-evaluation as well as the perception of the others. Lester, a business executive, eloquently expresses this world of the hyphen:

I feel both Dominican and American. Back when I was little I thought I had to be either or. Now, I know I can be both. I'm equally at home with Americans and Dominicans.

Irma, an educator, puts it this way:

I can say and identify as an American. But more often than not, I feel like a hyphenated American. It's a duality I feel... Relative to other countries, yeah I'm American [...] [And] there are times I feel I'm not Dominican enough [...] [laughs] I feel guilty.

Diana, a civil servant, states:

I feel just as American as anybody else. *I just get extra add-ons* [...] I don't feel I have to choose. But I'm not Dominican in the political sense. You would only make changes here. I can't tell Dominicans what to do about their country [...].

Carlos, an activist, for instance, identifies himself as Dominican-American, explains his selection as follows:

I am not just Dominican. Not just American. I am both. My parents brought their culture here [and gave it to me. I have it] [...] And, I've also had a very American experience [...] I also like Dominican things. It's not one or the other. I strive for both things, Dominican and American: Dominican food, American TV, American music. I identify both as a Dominican and American.

Yvette, who also identifies as Dominican-American, gives it an interesting twist by referring to the Dominican Republic as "home":

I always thought of myself as Dominican and that's it. [But] When I go back *home* to DR, I'm not so Dominican. I'm American. I'm like I'm Dominican. So sometimes I feel like I'm not Dominican enough. Sometimes, I'm not American enough.

Respondents identify as both Dominican and as a certain kind of American (the ethnic-, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Latino, non-white kind). They still feel different from 5<sup>th</sup> generation Irish-Americans or whites in general. But by now, they are also very different from Dominicans in the Dominican Republic. They think their kids will be recognized as and become more American; but they also all want to teach their kids Dominican culture and Spanish. Spanish is very important to them as it was very important for their parents to teach it to them.

An interesting point to note regarding keeping language and transmission of culture to the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation is that many respondents co-habit with non-Dominican or even non-Latino partners or with white Americans. They are already mixing and it may be hard for their family in the future to sustain transnational ties or the nexus with Dominican culture as it exists for the first generation or even as experienced by the second-generation. Moreover, even if both spouses/partners are second-generation Dominicans or other Latinos, they often speak English to each other. It is clear that our respondents are a certain kind of Dominican, not the kind in the Dominican Republic as perceived by them; and that the transmission of Dominicanness to their children may be conditioned on their ability to be militant, conscious, and action oriented. To

complicate the picture further, the widespread use of the hyphenated name also has implications for identity formation beyond transnational views.

Lester, Irma, Diana, Carlos, and Yvette's responses and their sense of a hyphenated identity is in agreement with a pluralist but nonetheless somewhat unifying political and civic understanding of nationhood in contemporary U.S. culture as explained by Walzer, who noted that the hyphen is in fact a plus sign in American national identity, where everyone speaks of having various ancestries. In other words, despite Theodore Roosevelt's exigency of asking people to be just American and shed off any other cultural or ethnic ancestry, Walzer argues that the hyphen is by now, in the post-sixties, multiculturalism, and diversity-friendly America, part of mainstream culture, that is, quintessentially American (Walzer 1990). This is to say that while our respondents maintain Dominican as part of their identity giving credence to a transnational identity they, in fact, may be also adhering to the exigencies of the time and the traditions and social practices of the moment in American society.

In the probabilistic quantitative survey, which includes respondents of all social classes, a slightly different picture emerges. **Graph 2** indicates that among all the groups compared, second and 1.5 generations tend to privilege the single ethnic identity as compared to the hyphenated one. Indeed, over 40% of second and 1.5 generations perceived themselves just Dominican while 30% of the same group selected Dominican-American. Comparatively, an insignificant percentage of the same group, less than 10%, self-identified as American. Nonetheless, as expected, the percentage among those who identify as just Dominican is much higher among the first generation, or 60.6%. In addition, a point worth noticing about differences between the generations that may speak to acculturation is that a higher percentage of second and 1.5 generations self identify as Hispanic or Latino, while 14.8% of the first generation do the same.

Sociologist Roger Waldinger has proposed that the longer one lives in the United States, the weaker transnational practices become (Waldinger 2007). In line with Waldinger's research, those in the whole probabilistic sample that identify as just Dominican decrease steadily as time spent in the neighborhood increases: 90 % of those who have lived in their neighborhood, in Manhattan and the Bronx, for less than one year identify as just Dominicans; while less than 10% classify themselves Dominican-American. This is indicated in graph 3. Among those who have lived in their neighborhood for more than ten years, the former percentage sharply declines to 53.6% while the latter rises to 27.9%.

At the same time, second and 1.5 generations Dominican feel that they are not fully American, experiencing an in-betweenness feeling, which they think may be

connected to discrimination reflected in mainstream America's reluctance to recognize them as "regular Americans," on the one hand, and in Dominican society's insistence in perceiving them as other than "regular Dominicans," on the other hand. Indeed, some pointed out that when they visit the Dominican Republic, they realize they feel American after all and are treated as such by Dominicans. In fact, many are called *gringos* and some people often make fun of their strange Spanish language or bizarre habits, such as standing in line instinctively as soon as they enter a place where other people may be waiting. Despite a feeling of duality, ultimately, these respondents feel somewhat foreign in the Dominican Republic.

The perception of respondents as American goes beyond the Dominican Republic. Many of them admitted that they were seen as or they felt themselves to be as Americans in other countries as well. Thus travelling makes them realize (often to their surprise) how American they in fact are perceived to be. Evelyn, a civil servant and one of the few college-educated respondents that had difficulty identifying as American, nonetheless confessed that when she goes to the Dominican Republic, "They call me *gringa* there. They say I speak Spanish like a white girl, with an accent."

For now it seems that the concept of situational identity (Renn 2000) fits second and 1.5 generation Dominicans' situation best: They feel most American when abroad, at least some kind of American; and when in the Dominican Republic, with family members, and with other Dominicans, they feel Dominican, at least some kind of Dominican. As Federico puts it,

But it's all relative. I'm not as American as 5th generation Americans who don't speak another language [...] Depends on who I'm around [...] When I go to family parties or to DR, I'm definitely American [...].

Beatrice argued:

When I go there [to the Dominican Republic] I don't feel like I'm *Dominican* Dominicana; that's when my Americanness comes in. There are things that people there don't understand: My American parts.

Likewise, almost all respondents argue along this line:

Whether I am Dominican or American depends [on the situation]: I'm American abroad or with others.

Pablo notes that "When I went to Cuba; there, we were definitely Americans." Pablo was also an exchange student in Brazil; and he was treated as and felt like an American in that context.

### 3. SENSE OF HOME: THE U.S. AND THE ANCESTRAL LAND

For the most part, the college-educated second-generation feels at home in both places. Yet, it is clear that they feel less at home in their parents' country, which they consider a more symbolic and emotional home. All of our respondents indisputably expressed an attachment to the Dominican Republic, while mostly conceded at the same time that they wouldn't settle there. They may be perceived as bi-cultural due to their considerable ethnic retention, including their trips back to their parents' home country. But their main life orientation, especially when it comes to politics and daily life, remains in the U.S. and more specifically in New York. We argue that second-generation Dominicans are ethnic-Americans; minority-Americans; Latinos and Dominicans *in the U.S.* Their selection of Dominican as their primary identity, as reflected in the probabilistic survey, is not necessarily connected to their orientation to the Dominican Republic and an understanding of themselves as being part of that society. The conversation with this group leads one to believe that their members by no mean perceive themselves as temporarily living in the U.S. and as people who envision one day living permanently in the Dominican Republic. The previous statement does not invalidate the fact that they maintain a deep emotional attachment with the Dominican Republic and Dominican culture (as an ethnic culture recreated in and influenced by the U.S. context). Many frequently visit Dominican Republic, but many do not. As noted, they pay no attention to politics in the Dominican Republic and they showed to be more concerned about political incorporation through ethnic politics in the U.S. or NYC, or about plain non-ethnic national party politics. Obama especially made them excited about U.S. politics. But then again, they reacted to local politics as millions of Americans did, particularly the young who were energized by Obama's message of change.

When Diana was asked: "Do you feel a sense of belonging, like the U.S. is your country?" She responded: "Yeah. I don't get that feeling in the Dominican Republic." Irma answered the same question by saying: "Yes! Yes [...] [laughs...] I feel guilty. I don't feel Dominican enough."<sup>1</sup>

The interpretation of the in-depth interviews let us to believe that the feeling of not quite belonging, of judging themselves as less than "100" % Dominican and "100"% American, of been perceived by Dominicans (and others) as American, and at the same time, perceived as Dominicans by Americans, has tremendous implications for their position in both the Dominican Republic and the U.S., but that discussion escapes the scope of this writing. Their feeling of not "here nor there," while it may lead to the formation of a new identity characterized precisely by that fluidity and constant state of

self questioning whether one fits or not, belongs in one of the two societies, whether one can accommodate in either one with a sense of permanence without been pressed by a conscious mentality that sends the opposite message, it may also place them in a stage of inferiority in a world where physical and abstract walls to encapsulate people and demarcate spaces are constantly being erected, and where people are relentlessly pushed to place themselves in a given identifiable space that is distinct from others. Similarly, a number of questions come to mind with regards to the second-generation and their current understanding of themselves: Will the hyphenated Dominican-American identity disappear in the third generation? If so, will that also mean that doubts concerning where second-generation “really belong” will be also gone? What will the disappearance of the hyphenated identity really mean when their doubts are no longer part of their imagination? Obviously, more research is needed in this area to explore further the consequence of a Dominican-American identity and its corollary in the current context described above. For the purpose of this paper let us just add one more thing regarding second-generation Dominican identity: The in- depth interviews revealed that second- generation Dominicans indeed feel they are Dominican; it is just a different kind of Dominican as compared to their parents and Dominicans in the Dominican Republic.

As far as whether the U.S. or the Dominican Republic is home, Yvette comments:

Interesting question. I feel torn. When I went to DR in the spring, I felt so at home. I felt I can even see myself moving here. On the other hand, I'm so used to NY. I can feel at home in both.

Many are reluctant to settle in the Dominican Republic citing more opportunities in New York and a more comfortable life; not to mention a more culturally familiar terrain for these university-educated professionals who have been socialized in American institutions and mores, in addition to Dominican culture and norms. This is despite their intense emotional ties and devotion to the island, and to their Dominican roots; as well as their continued professed treatment of the Dominican Republic as a “cultural home,” a space where they get in touch with their cultural identity.

Sean says:

I'm home where I'm happy. The U.S. is a base where I formulated my life. I'd have to be in a very specific place to move to DR. Maybe if I'm older, for retirement...

Federico, a NYU-graduate who identified as Dominican-American, feels that (American) society treats him “as one of them, as a regular American.” He goes on to say:

I do feel at home [here, in the U.S.] [...] Always knowing that I have another home [DR]. I have visited DR a lot. There is always a duality in what I call home.[...]DR[...]that’s always part of my identity [...] That makes me feel that I don’t feel completely that I belong here [in the U.S.]. I have this duality [...] [When I go to DR to visit] they relate to me in a peculiar way. They know I’m from NY; they don’t consider me very Dominican. The people there felt that we were too good for them [...] We were made to feel that way. They pointed the things out that were not Dominican [about me]. I felt like a stranger when I came back to NYC too. But I also felt like coming home. Leaving DR was difficult too. I romanticize DR, my dad’s roots [...] my dad was illegal, going back to DR connects me to my dad. When he went there he was himself. He would change, be happier, he was home. He had left it behind. I grew up with the same feeling. I felt like I was leaving a part of me behind. I always put DR on a romantic pedestal. I respect DR’s food, culture.

It is almost paradoxical, but a feeling of distance from the Dominican Republic and level of assimilation/acclulturation can coexist with a real emotional attachment to the homeland, Dominicanness, and “the island.” But scholars have found that ethnic retention and assimilation are not mutually exclusive (Gans 1997), and neither are transnationalism and assimilation (Morawska 2007; Lucassen 2006). Consistent with previous research we have found that *concrete* connection to the Dominican Republic is so far manifested in three forms: (1) Emotional attachment, (2) hyphenated identity, and (3) visits to the Dominican Republic. A question worth asking at this point: Will these transnational practices remain constant with the passing of time and demographic transformation? Scholars suggest that transnational practices among immigrant communities are developed and sustained through a direct relationship with the sending society (Duany 2008; Guarnizo et al 2003; Levitt 2001). On this respect, an additional intriguing question that would be worth exploring in the future is to what extent have transnational practices been re-created and nurtured within the ethnic community itself and therefore, rather than considering them as transnational practices we may speak of *practices a la Dominicana, of an ethnic group that is distinct and has given way to a historical process and cultural life that respond to its milieu and circumstances* with the necessary links and delinks characteristic to a human group that has a past, builds on it, and makes use of its present to move forward? Portes and Guarnizo’s understanding of chain migration illustrates the connection of autonomous events. In explaining the causes behind Dominican migration, Portes and Guarnizo contend that irrespective of the forces that

may have originally activated the movement, the exodus has continued because once a migratory movement begins, it tends to move in *cadena*, becoming thenceforward a self-feeding process (Portes and Guarnizo 1991).

Andres was active in a Dominican student organization. He also notes the reluctance on the part of many Dominicans to identify as “just Americans,” and their insistence on retaining a certain kind of Dominicanness:

People born here in the 80s 90s, they say I’m Dominican, not American. But they don’t wanna be seen as traitors. They’ll say ‘I’m American’ too. They are very acculturated. I’m Dominican but I like apple-pie!

Irma says:

There are times, I will tell you, when I feel like I’m not feeling Dominican enough. There are times I feel that. I’m trying to think “what makes me Dominican?” Personally, there are a lot of things I criticize about my culture too [...] but I love the energy we have, the music, the food, a lot of things feel good to me as a Dominican. There are things I don’t like; I don’t accept it and I don’t take it. Some [Dominican] things are bad. There are times when I feel like I’m not as Dominican as my sister. She knows all this history. She wants to like move there [...] My sister has passion about this stuff (history, culture... I don’t know any of the history) [...] But also, because you’re here and you are seen like an outsider sometimes, or you feel like an outsider sometimes, so you also welcome the Dominican identity too. You feel that duality. I feel good about my culture, my Dominican identity, and the parts that I accept.

Evelyn, when asked, “Do you feel American?” responded:

Good question. I was born in DR, raised here (3 months old). I will always say I’m Dominican even if I have a U.S. passport. Mom traveled a lot until I was 5. I learned English watching Sesame Street. I spoke Spanish at home [...] [I’m] legally [American]. [But at the] naturalization ceremony, you leave all allegiance behind; it hurts.

Carlos, for his part, says:

I pronounced my name as in Spanish [...] So they knew. We’ve got to do something. Organize ourselves. Provide a positive presentation of ourselves. Pride, combating stereotypes [...] We need to do better economically, on education.

Many respondents—almost all respondents come from very working class background despite their successes—are considered by their community and consider themselves to

be on a mission to represent and make their Dominican families and the Dominican community in the United States proud.

This social commitment towards the well-being of the Dominican people in the U.S. seems to unite most of our respondents. Social solidarity seems to be at the root of their shared identity, of their link with the Dominican Republic. On this respect Federico further notes:

My name is always a reminder about how Dominican I am. It can't change. People are curious. What? It generates conclusions? You're Dominican aren't you? They want to know. My name is a very common name... I'm all dressed up. Clients see me as an authority. If I speak Spanish, they [the largely Hispanic clients] see me as my dad see me, one of us and an official, a person of authority, official of the state, They get proud. He's representing us.

Diana puts it in this way:

My father sends money. I used to go every summer. Now, I go every 3-4 years. My grandma is still there. My father is building a house there. [So] I still have ties [...] I would love to maybe live there [...] I would send my kids there. [But] most of my ties are here now though. It's difficult [to visit, live in DR] now [...] Once you have kids, you settle down [...].

Pablo has been to the Dominican Republic only twice even though he says he is proudly Dominican and is actively working for Dominican/Latino political incorporation, having also led a Dominican student organization in college: "Last time I went I was 12. I'm overdue to go back." He says he has not been back more because of:

Hesitation. So much family I haven't seen. It's awkward. [It's like] 'We're family [but] I don't know exactly who you are.' [...] I feel confident in my Spanish. But I can't communicate 100%. I have to go back with my family. Second reason, life is so busy, working [...] My life has been non-stop [...] Rush, rush' [...].

On a rare occasion, one respondent, who is very successful, noted that she feels at home in neither country. She is different enough from Dominicans in the Dominican Republic not to fit in, but as a deeply critical, left-wing child of immigrants of color, she feels that she will never be really, truly American either. As noted, the fear or suspicion that our respondents are not considered Americans by many white Americans (due to their skin color, immigrant-background, hybrid loyalties and emotions) is common among respondents. Most, however, find a way to belong in the United States: not as 100% Americans but as second-generation immigrants, and as Dominican-

Americans who still have ethnic loyalties, habits, and emotions that may be different from mainstream America.

Assimilation and transnationalism/ethnic retention are not incompatible, especially given the current definition of assimilation which incorporates hyphenated identities, cultural retention, ethnic identities, and considers assimilation a two-way street. In a similar manner, Dominicans' ethnic retention may be viewed by some scholars as transnational practices that co-exist with assimilation/acculturation, particularly among those members of the second-generation who possess high socioeconomic status.

The probabilistic survey questioned Dominicans regarding moving to someplace else given the opportunity. The difference between generations is once again apparent when the question of a desire to move to the Dominican Republic is posed. When given multiple choices, while 25.7% of the first generation would like to return, among second and 1.5 generations only 5.4% said they would like to move to the Dominican Republic (see table 3). When the question is "Are you planning to someday permanently move back to the Dominican Republic?" and there is only a dichotomous choice of yes or no answer, we see that while 23.2% of the second and 1.5 generations say yes, twice as many, or 47.4%, of the first generation says the same. The difference between generations is clear once again. This is reflected in graph 4.

The correlation between socioeconomic standing and the desire to move to the Dominican Republic someday shows that among second and 1.5 generations, the more education, and the more their unlikelihood of moving to their parents' native country. While there are fluctuations among those with less than high school and some college, the percentage drops precipitously among those with college degree and continue to drop among those with more than a college degree. As reflected on table 4, the percentages are respectively, 20%, 11.8%, and 8.3% of the second and 1.5 generations who may someday move to the Dominican Republic.

Interestingly, although the second and 1.5 generation does not see themselves returning to live in the Dominican Republic, this group has a higher level of property ownership as compared to the first generation. Indeed, 31.4% of second and 1.5 generations own property in the Dominican Republic as compared to 28.6% of the first generation who do. Speculatively, one may suggest that this stems from the fact that the second-generation in general has a higher socio-economic status and that they use this wealth to buy vacation houses but not permanent abodes in the island (the qualitative interviews confirm the vacation-oriented nature of second-generation visits.) Among the second-generation in our survey, the higher the education level, the more likely one is to own property in the Dominican Republic, buttressing this speculation (see table 5).

#### 4. LINGUISTIC VALUES AMONG THE SECOND-GENERATION:

The literature on linguistic and cultural assimilation is for the most part built on a consensus that the second-generation increasingly prefers English and takes on what are considered (either mainstream or working/under-class) American cultural norms and attitudes. However, there is also a consensus that especially the Hispanic second-generation and particularly the Dominican second-generation are largely bilingual; and that Spanish proficiency and use persist due in part to higher levels of transnationalism (Portes & Rumbaut 2001; Alba 2004) or through a pragmatic position that allows the second-generation to connect with Spanish monolingual family members and the Dominican Republic (Hernández forthcoming).

Formally educated second-generation Dominicans are, like most U.S. Dominicans, very interested in learning about Dominican history and culture, often reconnecting with these through U.S. institutions such as colleges. Almost everyone among the respondents in the qualitative interviews say they spoke Spanish, though many, by their own admission, say they have an accent in Spanish and have trouble sometimes with pronunciations. Respondents also say they listen to Dominican music and partake in family functions and in the Dominican community where virtually all public activities are held in Spanish.<sup>2</sup> However, the second-generation with college degrees and a high socioeconomic status is largely English dominant in their daily lives, particularly at work, with siblings who also speak English, and often respond to parents in English although their parents may communicate with them in Spanish. Such second-generation Dominicans modify the culture they receive from parents: By marrying it with mainstream, or inner-city, New York-American culture. They mix English and Spanish (Spanglish) when talking to some people; they speak in Spanish to some and speak English with others. However they all truly believe in the value of retaining the Spanish language and they plan to pass it onto their children. We cannot yet be sure that this will happen or in what manner. Yet, for them language retention is part of their future.

Some admit having difficulties speaking Spanish despite their desire to keep the language. Andres expresses this reality as follows:

I alternate between English and Spanish with my mom. [...] I get as far as I can with Spanish. [Then] I just give up and speak English.

Evelyn says she speaks the same amount of English and Spanish in her daily life. At work, she speaks English. She even speaks to her mom and her Puerto Rican boyfriend in English; and she gets teased for it. Federico says he speaks fluent Spanish, but has difficulties pronouncing some Spanish words: "It depends on if I have practice [speaking Spanish]... My English is better." His Dominican-born cousins taunt him for not being

Dominican enough because he doesn't know many of the slang. At the other end of the spectrum we found that although the majority wants to maintain Spanish and practice it, there are a few who speak very little or no Spanish and retain little taste for Dominican music.

While the transmission and retention of Spanish among second-generation Dominican may have been sustained through transnational practices, we also found that even if second-generation Dominicans would have stopped visiting the Dominican Republic, it would have been rather easy for them to retain the Spanish language through practice, to develop an emotional tie with their cultural and historical legacy, and a pragmatic view of the value to keep the language and transmit it to their future children. We found that language is retained through domestic-ethnic connections reflected in friendships, family ties, and other daily activities where ethnic identity may be put into practice.

In the quantitative survey we found that high percentages, 70.5% of the second and 1.5 generations and 78.9% of the first generation say that most of their friends are Dominicans or Dominican-Americans (see graph 5). Of course, the transmission of some sort of Dominican culture and the Spanish language is easy in these circumstances. We also find that a high percentage of all generations work with people who classify themselves as Dominican or Dominican American. In fact, 30.3% and 40.7% of the second (and 1.5) and first generation respectively work alongside people of Dominican descent (see graph 6). As suggested previously, we find that socioeconomic status impacts these percentages. As educational attainment increases, these percentages of ethnic co-workers decrease: While almost one in two high school graduates say that most of their friends are Dominicans or Dominican-American, the same is true for only two in ten of those with a college degree.

As for the likelihood of the second and 1.5 generation Dominicans perpetuating a transnational identity onto their children, the respondents in our qualitative and quantitative research alike say that they *all want* to teach Spanish and Dominican culture to their children. The responses reveal that there is virtually no difference between the second-generation and the first as far as their desire to teach children Spanish: 87% of the second and 1.5 generations versus 92% of the first want to retain Spanish. Almost 90% of the second and 1.5 generations want their children to speak Spanish fluently. However, one must bear in mind that the percentages who want their children to speak English fluently are identical, pointing to an expectation of settlement in the United States and bilingualism at the same time. The in-depth interviews allow us to explore the reasons behind the desire to keep the Spanish language: All respondents in the qualitative research

indicated that they want to take their children to visit their ancestral homeland and keep them in touch with their families. The retention of Spanish for the highly educated second and 1.5 generations then is a pragmatic decision to maintain family relationships with the Dominican Republic and which may not be possible otherwise.

Undoubtedly, a portion of the second and 1.5 generations will succeed in keeping and transmitting the Spanish language. But for the many respondents who out-marry, especially with whites, this will probably result in a tenuously Dominican-American or Spanish speaking third generation. For example, Ernesto, who is married to an ethnic-white American, says he definitely speaks English much more in his daily life. He doesn't really eat Dominican food and rarely listens to Dominican music. He will teach his children Spanish because it is useful. For Sean, however, teaching his children to speak Spanish is more of a social reality and the right thing to do in a diverse world:

My kids are gonna learn Spanish [...]. Most important thing at the end of the day [is the] actual person [that I'll marry, wherever she's from]. [But, the] kids are gonna learn Spanish. Instilling the idea of relating to different people is important too. They should be socially aware, not victims. Your job as parent is to make them aware. Society is changing; they would live in a more diverse place. That will be a topic of conversation [...].

## 5. CONCLUSION

The sentiments expressed above are typical among second and 1.5 generations as revealed in the in-depth interviews. While Sean wants to instill Spanish language skills and Dominican values in his kids, he also realizes that his children will grow up in a diverse world and that they will have to relate to others, non-Dominicans. Thus, they are expected to be able to operate not only as ethnic-Dominicans, one infers, but also in diverse setting. Of course, the predicted emphasis on a changing society where diversity takes the front seat makes one wonder where the Dominican and the hyphenated Dominican identities would sit and what their placement would really mean for the continuation of the Dominican cultural identity in the United States.

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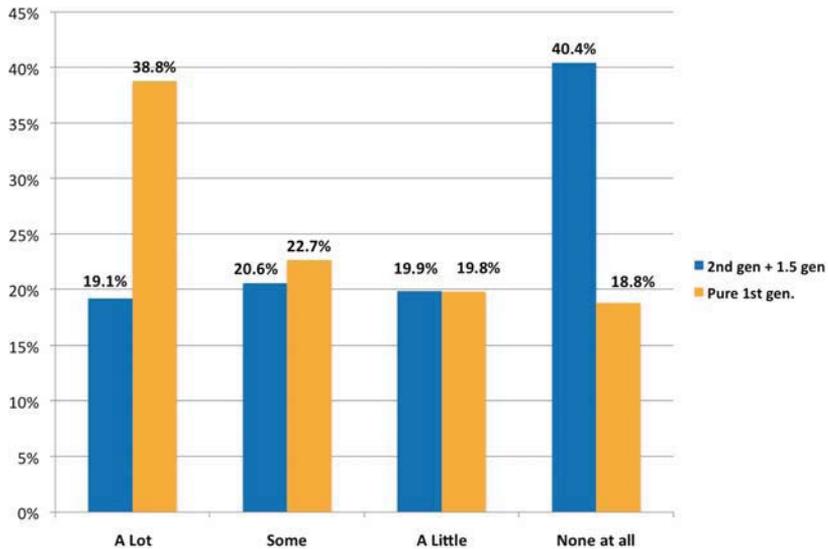
## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Conversation noted previously, 11.

<sup>2</sup> First author is invited to speak and attend public gatherings regularly in the Dominican community. The second author has participated as an observant, with the consent of organizers, in numerous public gatherings of the Dominican community while conducting research for his dissertation.

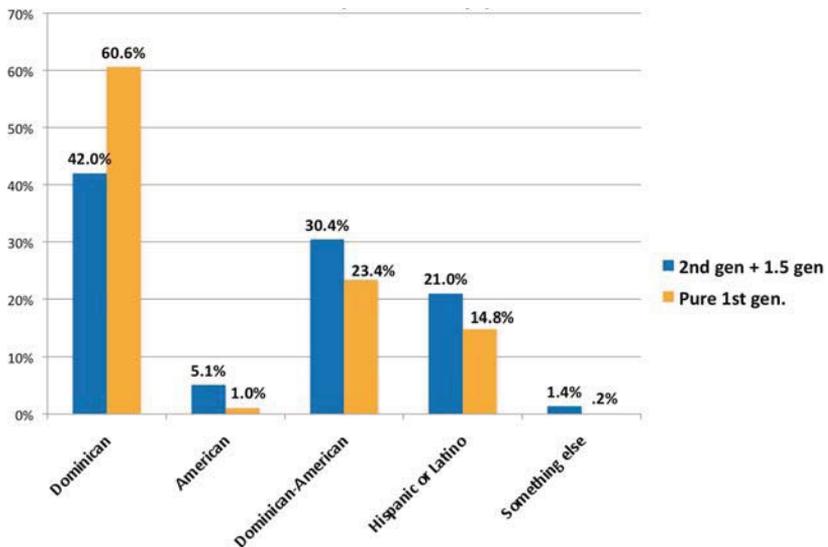
APPENDIX  
GRAPHS

Graph 1  
Pays attention to Dominican politics



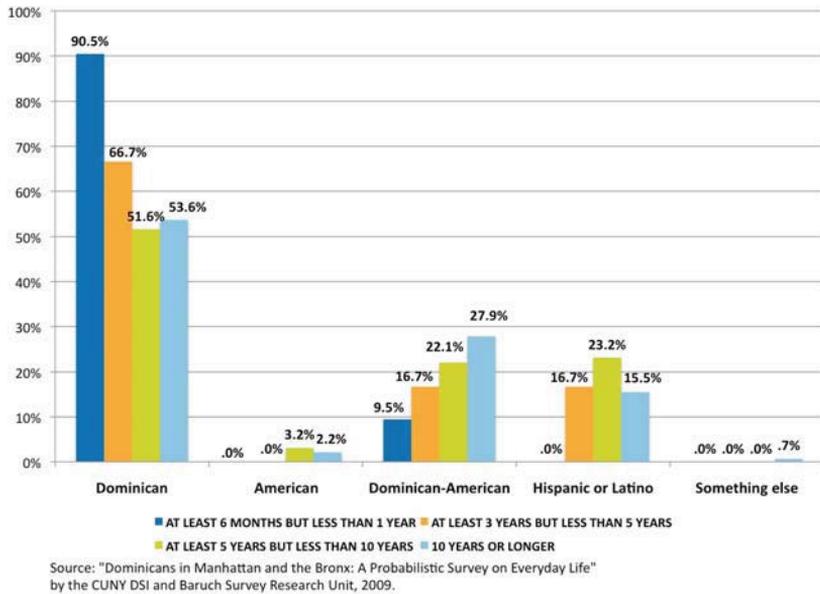
Source: "Dominicans in Manhattan and the Bronx: A Probabilistic Survey on Everyday Life" by the CUNY DSI and Baruch Survey Research Unit, 2009.

Graph 2  
How do you identify yourself?

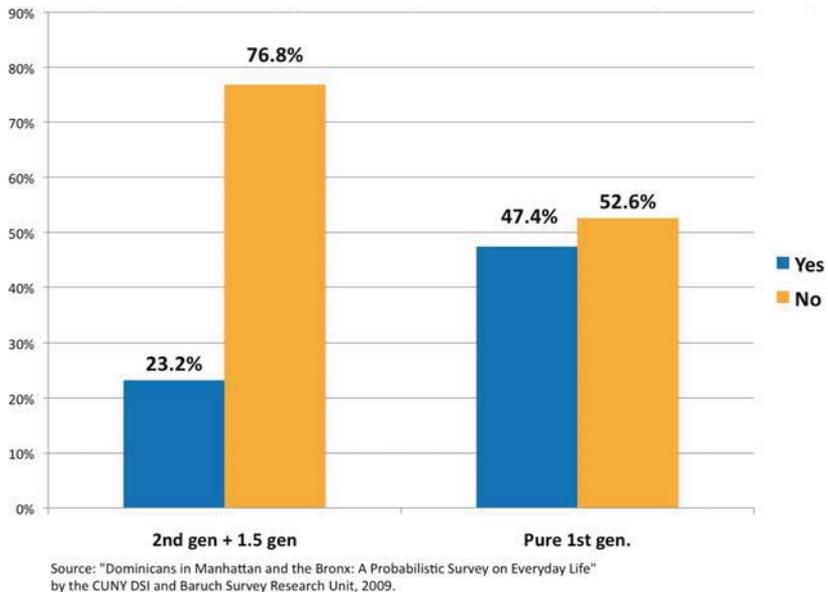


Source: "Dominicans in Manhattan and the Bronx: A Probabilistic Survey on Everyday Life" by the CUNY DSI and Baruch Survey Research Unit, 2009.

Graph 3  
 Identity by length of time residing in neighborhood  
 (Residence as Proxy for Time in the U.S.)

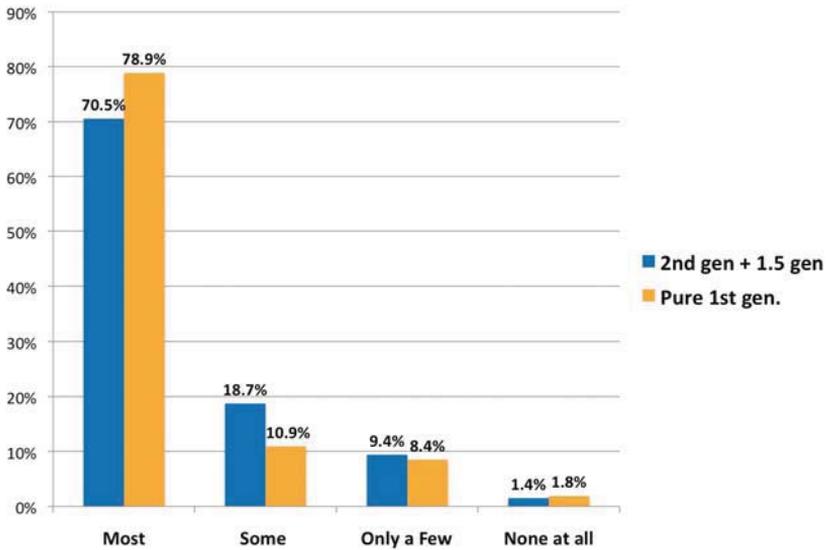


Graph 4  
 Are you planning to someday permanently move to the Dominican Republic?



Graph 5

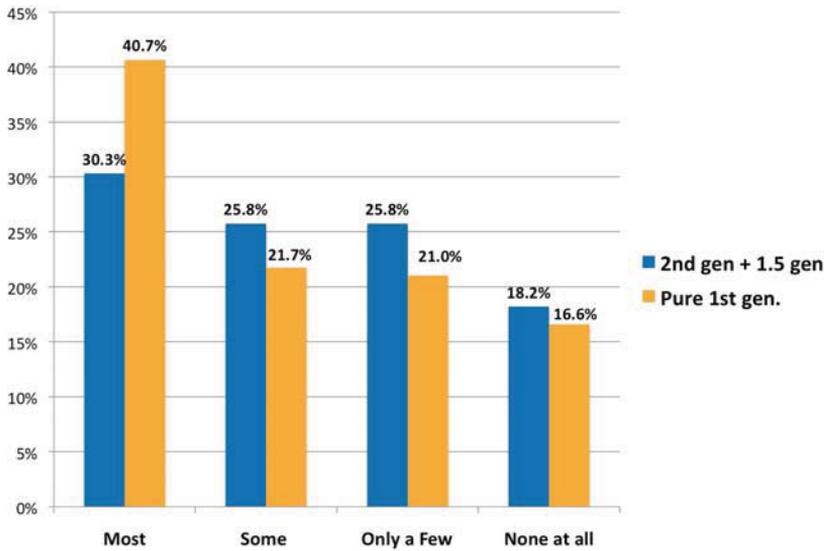
How many of your friends are Dominican or Dominican American?



Source: "Dominicans in Manhattan and the Bronx: A Probabilistic Survey on Everyday Life" by the CUNY DSI and Baruch Survey Research Unit, 2009.

Graph 6

How many of your co-workers are Dominican or Dominican- American?



Source: "Dominicans in Manhattan and the Bronx: A Probabilistic Survey on Everyday Life" by the CUNY DSI and Baruch Survey Research Unit, 2009.

TABLES

Table 1

How much attention do you pay to Dominican Politics? (Second and 1.5 generations)

	EDUCATION				
	< HS	HS/GED	Some Coll.	Coll. Grad	Coll. >
<b>A lot</b>	24.0%	28.0%	15.8%	16.7%	12.5%
<b>Some</b>	16.0%	12.0%	19.3%	22.2%	43.8%
<b>A little</b>	12.0%	24.0%	19.3%	22.2%	25.0%
<b>None at all</b>	48.0%	36.0%	45.6%	38.9%	18.8%

Source: "Dominicans in Manhattan and the Bronx: A Probabilistic Survey on Everyday Life" by the CUNY DSI and Baruch Survey Research Unit, 2009.

Table 2

How much attention do you pay to American politics? (Second and 1.5 generations)

	EDUCATION				
	< HS	HS/GED	Some Coll.	Coll. Grad	Coll. >
<b>A lot</b>	25.0%	28.0%	36.8%	44.4%	75.0%
<b>Some</b>	41.7%	32.0%	28.1%	44.4%	25.0%
<b>A little</b>	25.0%	12.0%	24.6%	.0%	.0%
<b>None at all</b>	8.3%	28.0%	10.5%	11.1%	.0%

Source: "Dominicans in Manhattan and the Bronx: A Probabilistic Survey on Everyday Life" by the CUNY DSI and Baruch Survey Research Unit, 2009.

Table 3  
If you could, where would you prefer to move to?

	2nd gen + 1.5 gen	Pure 1st gen.
<b>Other neighb'd in NYC</b>	28.6%	22.8%
<b>Other place, NY</b>	30.4%	19.9%
<b>Other place US, not NY</b>	32.1%	25.1%
<b>Dominican Republic</b>	5.4%	25.7%
<b>Other</b>	3.6%	6.4%

Source: "Dominicans in Manhattan and the Bronx: A Probabilistic Survey on Everyday Life" by the CUNY DSI and Baruch Survey Research Unit, 2009.

Table 4  
Are you planning to someday move permanently to the Dominican Republic?  
(the 2nd & 1.5 generations only)

	EDUCATION				
	< HS	HS/GED	Some Coll.	Coll. Grad	Coll. >
<b>Yes</b>	22.7%	20.0%	31.5%	11.8%	8.3%
<b>No</b>	77.3%	80.0%	68.5%	88.2%	91.7%

Source: "Dominicans in Manhattan and the Bronx: A Probabilistic Survey on Everyday Life" by the CUNY DSI and Baruch Survey Research Unit, 2009.

Table 5  
Do you own any property in the Dominican Republic?

	EDUCATION				
	< HS	HS/GED	Some Coll.	Coll. Grad	Coll. >
<b>Yes</b>	25.0%	28.0%	33.3%	33.3%	37.5%
<b>No</b>	75.0%	72.0%	66.7%	66.7%	62.5%

Source: "Dominicans in Manhattan and the Bronx: A Probabilistic Survey on Everyday Life" by the CUNY DSI and Baruch Survey Research Unit, 2009.