Permanent Illegality
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Abstract: In the age of unprecedented wealth and growing international interdependence, tens of millions of people are still condemned to a life as refugees or in refugee–like situations. In refugee-receiving countries, people are seen as unwanted and in many unfortunate cases, worldwide, they are made to feel unwanted as well by expressions of violence and coercion. This paper will discuss the human rights violations of Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent in the Dominican Republic. These migrants and their children are in a state of ‘permanent illegality’ because their country, the Dominican Republic, refuses to implement international treaties they ratified. These persons are thus impeded attaining economic and social advancement and barred from entering primary and/or secondary school. Many are deported and excluded from the opportunity to work in non-laborious sectors. Although migration is a controversial topic in itself, especially in light of some states’ aversion of outside interference of these political issues I will make suggestions based on the literature reviewed.

"The most radical form of travel, and the most tragic, is migration. Looking at her birthplace the soul may well recoil; she may find it barren, threatening, or ugly."  
--George Santayana

Immigration has existed throughout the ages from the Khoisan traveling throughout Africa thousands of years ago to today with the de-territorialization globalization it brings as can be seen in the case of EU integration allowing Romanians to work in Italy more easily today than before. Estimated at over 200 million worldwide, migrants have provided not only cultural contributions to their adopted states but also economic benefits. I argue that in an age when a state’s economic growth has fundamentally increased due to the presence of immigrant populations in a state, mechanisms must be put in place in order to protect their human rights. It is important for a nation to guarantee human rights to its immigrant population because their well-being and security are crucial to the state’s economic growth and social stability. In the

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1 Credits philosopher George Santayana as author. 11 Apr. 2008 <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jshie/migration.html>.  
case of the Dominican Republic these mechanisms have not been in place to protect its minorities of Haitian descent. I will defend my thesis by first defining some key terms frequently used in this discussion, second provide a historical context of the relations between Dominicans and Haitians, third examine the human rights status of those classified as Haitians and Dominico-Haitians in the Dominican Republic and international actors involved in this situation, and finally propose suggestions.

**Background:**

The Dominican Republic is located on the eastern two-third side of Hispaniola and Haiti occupies the western one-third. As of July 2007, the populations of the Dominican Republic and Haiti, respectively, are estimated at 9.365.818 and 8.706.497³. Although their geographic proximity is close, relations between these two groups have been the opposite. The majority of the island’s inhabitants is of African stock but due to being colonized by different countries; by the French in Haiti and the Spanish in the Dominican Republic cultural and linguistic separation exist. The majority of the population, approximately 73% of Dominicans, classify themselves as mixed and 95% of Haitians classify themselves as Black, in a condescending manner.⁴ Their does not seem to be a racial difference between the two groups but Dominicans usually identify Haitians as being “black” than them, referring to the darker skin tone.⁵

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⁴ The color that is commonly characterized as being Haitian-looking is the skin tone of David Ortiz, Djimon Honsou, and Wesley Snipes. Those that classify themselves as mixed skin tone may range from Mariah Carey to Oprah Winfrey.
Dominican resentment of Haitians can be traced back to Haitian occupation of the Dominican Republic until 1844. As a result, Dominican independence from Haiti brought on a new brand of nationalism that sought to distinguish itself from the Haitians in any form, which includes perceiving itself racially different from Haitians. Since this time persons of Haitian descent in the Dominican Republic have been the subject of gross human rights violations including Dominican Dictator Rafael Trujillo’s 1937 order to the Army and Dominican citizens to kill all Haitians on its side of the border. This action resulted in an estimated 30,000 deaths of Dominicans of Haitian descent (also known as Dominico-Haitians), Haitians, and dark-skinned Dominicans of no Haitian descent. The way of identifying them at the time, which is still used today, is by the darkness of their skin. According to black feminist Sergia Galvan, Dominicans largely perceive those of dark skin, who are classified as Black as being involved “with dark, illegal, ugly, clandestine things”.

Anything dark was connected to being Haitian, dark-skinned Dominicans created different categories of race to describe themselves in order to avoid using the term black, such as classifying themselves as—Indian, burned Indian, dirty Indian, dark Indian, cinnamon, Moreno, or mulatto, but rarely negro.

**Issue:**

Although seventy years has gone since Trujillo ordered the death of all Haitians in the Dominican Republic, violence against Haitians and those of Haitian descent continue to persist in other forms, such as denial of citizenship to Dominico-Haitians, mass deportations and expulsions, refusal to provide education to anyone of Haitian descent.

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6 Records on the file of the author of interviews conducted in Haiti, Spring 2008.
Citizenship:

Under Article 11 of the Dominican Constitution “all persons born in the territory of the Republic, with exception of children of diplomats and those in transit” are considered Dominican. At first glance it appears obvious that those, regardless of their family’s ethnicity, deserve Dominican citizenship as long as they were born within the country’s border. Unfortunately the small clause at the end of that sentence is the reason why Dominico-Haitians are not given citizenship. The government unfairly classifies all those of Haitian descent as “in transit”, so it does not matter if a person of Haitian descent is a third or fourth generation Dominican because the law will not recognize him as a citizen with the same rights as others who are of non-Haitian descent (with the exception of children of diplomats) before the law. It is in the hospitals where the decisions to hand out birth certificates are made, if the mother or father does not have documentation proving they are Dominican than the child will not receive a birth certificate thus violating the Constitution because the child is born within the territory and should be given citizenship. According to Human Rights Watch, a major human rights organization that has been monitoring and speaking out against this perversion of the law has observed that even if Haitian migrant workers are in the country legally they still receive “in transit” status, without explanations why their children are not able to be considered a citizen of the Dominican Republic.

Another issue with registering Dominican children of Haitian descent with the civil registry is that many of these children are born in bateyes, shantytowns in the sugar cane fields where many Haitian migrant workers live with their families, so once these children are born their parents do not attempt register them because of the hassle of going into the government centers to face possible deportation, whether they are legal or not legal, for attempting to attain their child’s right to be recognized before Dominican law as

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a citizen. Article 15 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, and subsequent relevant international and regional legal texts prescribe: “Everyone has the right to a nationality. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality”.

Another reason why many of these hundreds of thousands of Dominco-Haitians do not receive documentation is because their parents who may be Dominican born most likely do not have “maternity papers” (papeles de maternidad) because the laws view all Haitians as “in transit” thus their children also become stateless. There are many problems with this act of denying citizenship to these children such as creating a stateless citizen, increase their vulnerability in society, and irreparable damage to the individual, which is most often is the case to these persons. The Inter-American Commission of Human Rights has criticized the Dominican government for creating, what they call “a class of citizens with permanent illegality”.  

Haiti, unlike the United States and many European countries, does not allow dual citizenship. So once these Dominico-Haitians are born and are not provided with any Dominican documentation, they are not only ineligible to receive any state services such as welfare, healthcare, or education in Dominican Republic but also in Haiti. Their position is further compounded by the fact that even if their parents have Haitian citizenship and decide to move back to Haiti (or are deported) these children do not have proof of where they came from and no entitlement to the services provided in Haiti.

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These stateless people are also further marginalized because the average to high paying positions require applicants to provide documentation, and because they are not given their birth certificate they are forced to take menial and dangerous positions such as cutting sugar cane in the fields for 15-18 hours a day just to make $3 a day. Often times these individuals when injured at work are denied medical care offered by the state, whether or not they were born in the Dominican Republic, because they do not have proper documentation and at times when they are able to provide documentation they are still refused care for being of Haitian descent.

Politicians also use anti-Haitian bias to their advantage by frequently blaming them for any economic or political problems in the country such as unemployment and increase in crime. Because they do not have documentation they are seen as perpetrators of many crimes although it is unfair to blame these issues on this group when non-Dominicans commit most of the crimes. The provocation these politicians cause, such as Ex-President of the Dominican Republic Balaguer, create a tense environment with violence against Haitians committed often by policemen, military personnel as well as citizens in order to express their nationalism. The Dominican Republic, by virtue of treating these person they way they do, is contravening treaties it has ratified such as the American Convention on Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Mass Deportations and Expulsions:

As a result, Haitians not having proper documentation, they are more susceptible to arbitrary expulsions. This also occurs with Dominico-Haitians with documentation to work. There have been several reports made under the American Convention on Human Rights, and the United Nations Human Rights Committee on deportations of Dominican citizens lacking proof of citizenship. These reports detail that military personnel usually stop citizens on the streets and request those that “appear” Haitian. If documentation is not provided that individuals are put into a van and transported directly to arbitrary spots in Haiti and do not receive the opportunity to speak to legal counselors in order to refute the claim they are illegal, or a government advocate on their behalf. They are usually not given an opportunity to clear their obligations with their family or employer (such as being able to gather their belongings, paycheck or even children) or letting them know about their detention and deportation to Haiti. There have been complaints by some individuals who do provide documentation that they are either told they must pay the detaining military officer a bribe or their documentation is destroyed. In addition, there have been cases reported of dark-skinned Dominicans deported to Haiti even though they had proof they are Dominicans. Persons who complained about detention in cells prior to

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12 When asked by Human Rights Watch (HRW) how migration official recognize Haitians, Romulo de los Santos, the Migration Department’s sub-director for Haitian affairs says “by their way of living, they’re poorer than we are, their way of walking, and they’re much blacker than we are. They’re easy to recognize”, undated on file of the author.

deportation have reported that the conditions are deplorable and food and water are denied for days\textsuperscript{14}. 

The problem with these frequent expulsions are that they disrupt the employment sector. Constant danger of deportation of agricultural employees create a sense of incertitude and a certain vacuum for the work force. This plays a significant role in the Dominican economy. Those that are being deported are usually second, third, and even fourth generation Dominicans with Haitian ancestry. These people are then taken to a land that they are not familiar with much less the culture or language. Once arriving in Haiti they are even more susceptible to exploitation because of the language barrier, because they only speak Spanish not French or Haitian Creole, and lack family connections in a country to which they are assumed to belong to by the Dominican government.

The Dominican Constitution and immigration laws are social contracts that the Dominican government made with its citizens, which it is uphold. However by expelling persons of Haitian descent, regardless if they are documented or not, is a violation of the law 95 and regulation 279 that provide reasonable due process procedures to impending deportees. Law 95 and regulation 279 require immigration officials to have reasonable cause on an individual’s status prior to investigation, which does not fit the many complaints against the Dominican government according to Human Rights Watch and under the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. By targeting dark-skinned individuals on the street because they are suspected of being Haitian is a race-based action and is against not only the Dominican Constitution, which prohibits racial discrimination but also against the international _______

\textsuperscript{14} On file with the author from interviews in Haiti, spring 2008.
treaties it has ratified, as mentioned earlier. Deporting those suspected to be illegal to random locations in Haiti violates the Bilateral Agreement made with Haiti; it stipulates how these deportations are to be conducted.\textsuperscript{15} The agreement also states the days, and times when deportation may or may not occur as well as the location where the deportees must be taken to. This has not been the case for several thousand Haitians left off in many random parts of Haiti.\textsuperscript{16} By leaving deportees off elsewhere these individuals confront even more difficulties reaching a populated area since these sites are usually deserted. To add insult to injury for those that are from the Dominican Republic but were refused documentation because of suspected heritage, it is difficult to refute the deportation with a government official. The Haitian government has also been accused of its attitude in its monitoring of this agreement by not assisting Dominican Republic in relevant border patrols. Based on the cases made against the government, as mentioned above, the Dominican government is in clear violation of The American Convention of Human Rights: Article 8. Right to a Fair Trial:

1. Every person has the right to a hearing, with due guarantees and within a reasonable time, by a competent, independent, and impartial tribunal, previously established by law, in the substantiation of any accusation of a criminal nature made against him or for the determination of his rights and obligations of a civil, labor, fiscal, or any other nature.

2. Every person accused of a criminal offense has the right to be presumed innocent so long as his guilt has not been proven according to law. During the proceedings, every person is entitled, with full equality, to the following minimum guarantees…\textsuperscript{17}

Education:

\textsuperscript{15} Ferguson, James. \textit{Migration in the Caribbean: Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Beyond}. OAS. http://www.oas.org/atip/Regional%20Reports/MigrationintheCaribbean.pdf.

\textsuperscript{16} The drop off points for the deportees are: Dajabon, Elias Pina, Jimani, and Perdanales in order to guarantee these suspected Haitian citizens receive Haitian identity documents.

As mentioned earlier, Dominicans of Haitian descent being denied citizenship are left in a legal limbo. One of the results of not having citizenship is that several Dominico-Haitians (whether 3rd or 4th generation Dominican born) are prohibited from matriculating in school. Formally, the government does not require children to have documentation when entering school; unfortunately it is in the schools where they face much difficulty registering. Lack of education is one of the many sources that leaves these individuals vulnerable in the society because without education they are limited to low paying jobs that further traps them in a low socio-economic status in society and perpetuates the stereotype that Haitians are not capable of moving up in the social ladder. This seems to be an attempt of the public and private sector to keep these persons without perspectives, which pushes some individuals into engaging in illegal activity to make ends meet.

Although it is unfair to generalize that all the school districts practice this discrimination, especially when in some regions it is not an issue for Dominico-Haitians to enroll in primary school, but overall it is difficult in most districts for these children to enroll in secondary schools. Even if they are permitted to enroll in secondary schools many have been denied a diploma, which is a requirement for those who intend to pursue a higher education. Again the Dominican Republic is in clear violation of the treaties it ratified such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 24 (e), which states that nations must provide public education to all children. The school systems in the Dominican Republic are also violating Article 1(a) of the 1960 Convention against Discrimination in Education, by denying access to education to certain groups (those of Haitian descent). One famous case exemplifying the injustices Dominico-Haitians face

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in attempting to enroll in secondary school and receiving a diploma is Claubian Jean Jacques who was denied a secondary education because of his lack of citizenship even though he was born in the Dominican Republic.\textsuperscript{19}

**Responses:**

In reaction to these violations of human rights committed by the Dominican Republic many, especially the Human Rights Watch, the United Nations, and the Organization of American States have monitored and reported on these cases. The Inter-American Court has also criticized the actions of the Dominican government. One famous case that the Court ruled on against the Dominican government is Yean and Bosico (both of Haitian descent) vs. the Dominican Republic. They ruled that the nation’s current system of registration not only defied the country’s own constitution, which extends citizenship to all born within its borders, but had violated the fundamental human rights of Yean and Bosico.\textsuperscript{20} The court also ordered that all Dominican schools must enroll all children despite status and end its discriminatory practices against its Haitian minority,\textsuperscript{21} and that deportees are entitled to basic rights such as being provided legal assistance, right to appeal, and opportunity to resolve family and labor problems prior to deportation. The Inter-American Commission of Human Rights has called the Dominican Republic’s practices of denying citizenship as creating a class of citizens with “permanent illegality”.\textsuperscript{22} The American Convention on Human Rights has adopted

\textsuperscript{19} BBC. "Un Certificado que equivale a la vida." *BBC Mundo.* http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/latin_america/newsid_1422000/1422248.stm.


\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{22} "Illegal People": Haitians and Dominico Haitians in the Dominican Republic." *Human Rights Publication* 14, no. 1B (2002): 2-6.
measures in the issue of Dominican Republic’s arbitrary deportation actions “in cases of extreme gravity and urgency, and when necessary to avoid irreparable damage to persons”. The United Nations Human Rights Committee has also dealt with this issue repeatedly.

The Haitian government has commented on this problem of deportation by stating that it fully acknowledges Dominican Republic’s sovereignty and its right to deport illegal immigrants; the issue is the violation of their bilateral agreement as well as the expulsion of Dominican citizens into Haiti.

The Dominican government has responded to international criticism in different ways. Former Dominican Republic President Hipolito Mejia announced that schools would no longer require parents to provide birth certificates to schools in order to matriculate their children, in compliance with the Inter-American Court. The Dominican government has also agreed to establish a joint committee to monitor its compliance on the rulings of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. There still is fierce resistance against granting citizenship to Dominicans of Haitian descent. Manuel E. Polanco, head of the Dominican Army in an interview with Human Rights Watch, stated “an illegal person cannot produce a legal person” and these are strong words coming from a man whose employees are involved in randomly deporting Haitians daily.

Analysis/Conclusion:

In most cases of human rights abuses, it appears common sense might solve the issue eventually. In our view these are some of the sensible things the Dominican Republic and Haiti can do in order to end these human rights violations.

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First, the Dominican Republic must ensure that immigration law 95, regulation 279, its Constitution, and the international treaties it ratified are followed not only to reduce international criticism against the Dominican Republic but also to provide a more stable society. If a significant percent (approximately 10% are of Haitian descent) of society is subjected to fearful tactics by the government and deportations this will disrupt its business sector that relies on these people to be at work and will create a society filled with broken families since many parents are sent to Haiti while their children remain in the Dominican Republic.

Second, the Republic of Haiti must recognize its crucial role in this issue by not only creating a supportive environment, such as providing income-generating opportunities and more incentives for workers to stay by waiving education fees, etc. This should reduce the number of people leaving Haiti in order to search for jobs illegally because their home country is in a dire situation. Haiti especially must increase its efforts on border patrol to prevent large numbers of Haitians illegally entering the Dominican Republic. The Dominican Republic should grant all Dominican born children citizenship since the current system of selectively choosing who is truly Dominican is not working and perpetuating a discriminatory environment.

Third, the Dominican Republic should abide by the terms of the 1999 Protocol of Understanding between the Dominican Republic and the Republic of Haiti. If changes must be made than these nations should work together to create a more practical plan on deportation of these groups, such as creating more drop off locations near the border if it

Note: GDP of Haiti (PPP) is $14.76 billion compared to the Dominican Republic’s $77.09 billion as of 2006. 54% of Haitians live in abject poverty and 80% live under the poverty line. Remittances make up 25% of Haiti’s GDP. –CIA.Factbook.
is unfeasible for the Dominican immigration officials to reach the designated four checkpoints.

**Fourth**, the Dominican Republic should provide services for the undocumented people living on its territory to register, and by no way should hospital officials be permitted to decide who is entitled to receive a birth certificate and who is not.

**Fifth**, the international community (for example states, relevant UN bodies, media and private organizations) must continue to put pressure on the Dominican Republic and Haiti to provide better living conditions for persons living within its borders.

**And last**, Haiti must also provide these same services within its borders especially since there are undocumented Haitians living in Haiti because healthcare is not accessible in the rural areas. Some of these undocumented Haitians move to the Dominican Republic for work and further compounds their problems when they are deported back to Haiti without any proof of being Haitian since they were not born in a Haitian hospital or registered with the civil registry and not entitled to state benefits.

The work conducted by Human Rights Watch is important, especially since the cases they investigate are not so clear-cut when it comes to issues of sovereignty. Another aspect is the theoretical aspect of human rights and its effectiveness, and of states, concerned United Nations bodies, especially the Organization of American States. Are they sensitive to not only a culture’s perception of what human rights are and if they are, is this realistic in a complicated world?

Until agreement is reached on these points and the question if human rights are universal, monitoring and enforcing these issues need to be supported. So does the self
monitoring because it is not a machine that observes the practices of governments with abusive tendencies, such as the Dominican Republic, but it is people who do this work and they tend to have their own biases which may downplay or over-dramatize a situation.

This subject has fascinated me for some time which led to my research in Haiti and the Dominican Republic in mid-March 2008. Interviewing Dominico-Haitians, Dominicans of no Haitian descent, and Haitians demonstrated the urgency that is needed in solving this issue. The Dominico-Haitians clung to their dual heritage and are disappointed in both their countries reactions to this issue that directly affects not only their safety but most importantly their lives. The Dominicans whom I interviewed conveyed their frustrations of having illegal immigrants in their country who beg for money and of the international community’s response in over-simplifying the problem by siding with Haitians. They also voice their concern of their borders that they feel are not being protected properly.

The Haitians migrating to the Dominican Republic vocalized their sadness for leaving their homeland for a more prosperous and politically stable one. While Haitians traveling to the Dominican Republic expressed their frustrations with their government for not providing a stable environment in which they could purchase basic supplies, such as medicine, that are not available in Haiti. They also expressed concern over the state of Dominicans of Haitian descent. Despite having different views and concerns over the legal status of Dominico-Haitians they all agreed that now is the time to confront and resolve the issue it for everyone’s sake.
There are many possible solutions to this complex issue but what is clear is that as long as humans continue to treat other in the way they do, the two states, their relevant institutions and organizations such as the Human Rights Watch, Inter-American Court, and local NGOs like El Movimiento de Mujeres Dominico-Haitianas (MUDHA) will continue to have to serve a crucial role in protecting these persons discussed above in particular and migrants in our anarchic world in general.

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