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***“Se fue pa’ la azúcar”:¹ Film Review of
The Price of Sugar and The Sugar Babies***

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***The Price of Sugar.* Directed by Bill Haney. Uncommon Productions, 2008. 90 minutes.**

***Sugar Babies: The Plight of the Children of Agricultural Workers in the Dominican Republic.* Directed by Amy Serrano. Siren Studios, 2007. 99 minutes.**

These two powerful documentaries—*The Price of Sugar* and *Sugar Babies: The Plight of the Children of Agricultural Workers in the Dominican Republic*—very effectively expose the deplorable conditions faced by Haitian sugar cane workers today in the Dominican Republic. Haitians replaced British West Indians as the central labor source for the sugar industry in the Dominican Republic in the 1920s. Sugar plantation agriculture expanded rapidly as a result of U.S. capital investment in the 1880s and for much of the twentieth century was the central pillar of the Dominican economy. Originally these workers were employees of U.S. firms, which actually developed the contract labor system through which these importees were solicited and transported. Chronically malnourished, living frequently without potable water or adequate health care and paid miserable piece-work wages of frequently less than two dollars a day—much of which is spent purchasing overpriced food at the company store—these conditions became the subject of international human rights concerns attracting journalistic outcries in the early 1980s and more direct intervention recently as concerns over global human trafficking have grown. For one, at the United Nations, the London-based Anti-Slavery society denounced allegations that Haitians were forcibly sold to sugar enterprises, padlocked in barracks at night, and clear only a few dollars after the harvest. The prominent role of the Dominican army in facilitating the movement of Haitians to the *bateyes* and keeping them there helped give rise to a debate over whether Haitian cane cutters in the Dominican sugar sector should be rightfully termed slaves or not.²

These two films do not just document these political struggles and provide the perspective of Haitian workers themselves; they have themselves become ammunition in a war of positions with significant legal repercussions. Indeed, Dominican sugar barons, the Vicini corporation,

filed suit in U.S. district court in Boston against filmmaker Haney for presenting misleading material, forcing him to spend some \$50,000 in legal protection—a travesty since the film was made on a shoestring budget. And Haitian human rights activist Christopher Hartley—a central protagonist in both films—has since been transferred out of the Dominican cane fields by the Catholic Church (Piccalo 2007).

The Price of Sugar thus chronicles a key battlefield in the struggle to raise the issue of human rights violations for Haitian sugar workers in the Dominican Republic. There are approximately one million Haitians living in the Dominican Republic, and sugar cane cutters suffer extremely impoverished conditions and isolation in the *bateyes* where Haitians are housed. Resembling slave barracks, these dormitories were originally designed for single men, although today these dwellings are often home to families of up to seven people. The film treats a plantation run by the privately-owned Vicini corporation, a venerable family which entered the Dominican sugar industry in the late nineteenth century during its rapid expansion, developing the largest private sugar firm in the nation from what was originally just two plantations in 1893 when Juan Bautista Vicini first arrived in the Dominican Republic from Italy (he later served as president during the 1920s). Over time the Vicini's built up a family-based conglomerate which expanded into banking and the media to form one of the largest sugar corporations of the Caribbean, its singular economic position in the country developed through its astute ability to play ball with a wide variety of political regimes, from the strongman rule of Ulises Heureaux (1887-99, whom Vicini came to know as his chief money-lender) to the U.S. Marine government during the occupation (1916-24). It is important to note that today, king sugar is but a shadow of its former self, however. The Vicini enterprise is the last remaining private stronghold in an industry that over centuries gave shape to modern Caribbean nations but today is in its last dying days.

As exposés, both films are very effective at revealing a system of forced labor that does resemble slavery in important respects. Indeed, in some ways Haitian labor is treated far worse than under slavery since as the most significant capital investment, slaves' basic needs were frequently met whereas at two dollars a head Haitian labor is "virtually expendable" (Murphy 1991:57). At the height of the sugar boom, Cuban planters hired their best physicians to maintain their most important factor of production. This is patently not the case here. While an important political tool, the label slavery glosses over some key differences in the meaning of labor, however, within processes of capital accumulation and neoliberalism.

The Price of Sugar discusses the conditions facing Haitian sugar workers through the story of Christopher Hartley, a Belgian priest

inspired by liberation theology, the movement which encouraged priests to create the Kingdom of God in their own lives and inspired a far more activist form of Catholicism. Hartley made it his personal mission to campaign for basic human rights for the *batey* workers, from primary health care to the right to strike for wage increases. The film is character driven, the narrative revolving around Hartley's remarkable life and career and sense of commitment to and mission for the poor. The use of a fine-grained profile of an extraordinary persona as a point of entrée to current political events thus may invite comparisons to *The Agronomist*, a documentary which treats post-2000 developments in Haiti through the life and untimely death of Jean-Dominique, a charismatic radio journalist (Demme 2003). It also helps that Christopher Hartley is handsome and his deep commitment to the poor developed under the tutelage of no less a storied figure than Mother Teresa herself since she was his mentor in Calcutta working among the indigent poor there before arriving in the Dominican township of Los Llanos, in the eastern sugar zone around San Pedro de Macorís. Hailing from a privileged background—his father inherited the British Hartley preserves company based in London—the film includes interview segments with Hartley family members who testify with admiration and support for Christopher's deep sensitivity to and passion for the needs of the poor. The film is narrated by Paul Newman, whose star power is incidental to the true hero here who is clearly Hartley.

Inspired by Vatican II principles of the moral necessity of addressing poverty and empowering subjects to enact social change, Christopher Hartley set out to document and challenge the systemic violence enacted against Haitian laborers in the Dominican Republic today. He traveled with them to recruiting sites and witnessed Dominican army beatings of illegal laborers, and even discovered an unmarked gravesite which he alleges houses those killed by plantation guards. His efforts to better conditions were systematically thwarted by authorities, however. He set up feeding centers in the *bateyes* which were forcibly shut down. He asked the government to build new housing, but most of the clean new concrete homes landed in Dominican hands. He brought in doctors to form rotating clinics to address the many chronic illnesses common to the plantation zone, where over one-half of the adults have tuberculosis, HIV and infant mortality are high, and preventable conditions such as skin disease are rife. He then commenced efforts to imbue laborers with a sense of their own agency, encouraging them to strike or leave if they are unhappy. In response, the Dominican community in the neighboring township turned on Hartley, and angry crowds took to the streets and burned tires, claiming he was "haitianizing the country." The film includes chilling footage of angry mobs calling for Hartley's withdrawal

(although some say that the protesters were actually paid by the Vicini firm). Staged or not, the protests achieved the desired effect. Another priest serving the *batey* population, Father Ruquoy (who testifies in *Sugar Babies*) who came to be seen as pro-Haitian, was forced to leave the country after death threats, and now Hartley has himself been transferred.

Antihaitianism is represented in the film as a deep ideological structure, and indeed the images of enraged crowds and death threats are deeply disturbing. Nor are the Los Llanos incidents portrayed in the film isolated; they were part of a broader series of attacks on Haitian immigrants and Haitian-Dominicans since 2005 on the part of the army and general population that included more than 10,000 deportations, with Haitians even burnt alive and beheaded (Neptune 2006; Peguero 2005).³ These acts of ritual defilement bespeak a level of moral panic which begs for explanation. Unfortunately, in presenting in stark relief the challenges facing Haitian victims, what actually motivated the Dominican perpetrators and the broader context shaping their action are missing here. In a Manichean ethos which divides the world in hobbesian terms into perpetrators and innocents, we can only assume that Dominicans are relentlessly evil, that all antihaitianism is inevitably eliminationist and murderous.⁴

Dominicans are frequently cast as harboring a primordial hatred of Haitians stemming from the fact that their nation was occupied by Haiti in the nineteenth century (1822-44). But in fact, as a form of racialized "ultranationalism" (Sagás 2000) which structures Dominicans in opposition to Haitians, antihaitianism has its own historicity and has ebbed and flowed over time. Antihaitianism receded around the turn of the twentieth century during the U.S. Marine occupations of Haiti and the Dominican Republic as both nations were faced with the common threat of the United States. At that time, Dominicans and Haitians found common ground in the anti-imperialist cause as organizations such as the Union Patriotique which drew Dominicans and Haitians into anti-occupation publicity and activism built a bridge across the border. Moreover, the reigning ideology of the 1930s during the regimes of Stenio Vincent and Rafael Trujillo was actually Haitian-Dominican friendship and "confraternity" until 1937, when Trujillo called for the ruthless slaughter of some 15,000 Haitians by machete. Indeed, official Haitian-Dominican relations had never been more amicable than in the period immediately preceding the massacre (Turits 2002).

A virulent style of antihaitianism emerged during the early twentieth century as Haitians came to be associated with cane cutting, a labor form associated with slavery, their presence thrust upon the Dominican Republic by U.S.-owned companies. In the nineteenth century, Haiti had

been seen as a more cosmopolitan nation, with a superior military, and the Haitian occupation, of course, found support among former slaves who found their freedom under Haitian rule when slavery was abolished. It was only in the 1920s that the stereotype of Haitians as indigent cane cutters became univocal and hegemonic, as Haitians in the Dominican Republic came to reside at the bottom of the new status hierarchy that emerged with the rise of sugar monoculture in the 1920s. Yet as Aviva Chomsky has discussed for the case of Cuba, antihaitianism was not mere racism; it combined with and was augmented by resentment towards the U.S. As she states, critics “argued that the West Indians were undesirable because they were imported by foreign companies, and their presence facilitated foreign profits from Cuban resources,” thus twentieth-century antihaitianism has a strong component of anti-imperialism. She continues that in times of crisis, immigrant scapegoating was a “way of displacing critiques of power-holders, both native and foreign, onto the most powerless” (Chomsky 2000: 421, 425).

As one strand of conservative nationalist thought, antihaitianism was later codified and officialized during the Trujillo regime (1930-61) in state-sponsored history texts by Manuel Arturo Peña Battle and others which were promoted and disseminated by the state as a means of justifying the 1937 Haitian Massacre after the fact. Books like Joaquín Balaguer’s (1984 [1947]) *La isla al revés: Haití y el destino dominicano* (Balaguer was undersecretary of foreign relations during the massacre and was responsible for defending the act in the face of international criticism) took the idea of nineteenth-century Haitian imperial aggression and recast it in demographic terms as an impending polluting poison seeping across the border and contaminating the Dominican nation.⁵ In the political arena, antihaitianism is an ethnicized nationalist discourse frequently deployed as political currency to discredit political rivals, one that became disturbingly common under neoliberalism as the national economy came to be perceived as under siege from powerful U.S. financial interests.⁶ Not surprisingly, Joaquín Balaguer’s *Reformista* party was frequently the one responsible for making political capital out of anti-haitianism. The most striking case in point was the electoral campaign of José Francisco Peña Gómez, who was widely believed to have won the election in a landslide until the opposition party saturated the media with sensationalist images of Haitian *vodou* (his birth parents were Haitian immigrants) landing Balaguer in the presidency for the third time in 1994 (Matibag 2003). Indeed, Balaguer has played a singular role in keeping the antihaitian flame alive, even if this cannot entirely explain its popular purchase.

While these films highlight a horrifying problem, the lack of serious attention to the Dominican context makes it hard to explain what

may actually be causing this recent surge of violence towards Haitians. A sense of doom and powerlessness in relation to U.S. economic and political control and the vagaries and vulnerabilities of globalization has often been taken out on Haitians, a ready and available scapegoat to combat status anxiety. Yet antihaitianism has not always had the hegemonic power portrayed here. It varies greatly by social class and national location; it is articulated in far more strident and equivocal terms by elite nationalists than by the poor, a far more convincing motivator to those for whom the Haitian is a total stranger than those who know and trust Haitians. In contact zones such as the *bateyes* and the frontier where there has been close contact and intermarriage between the two groups, images of Haiti and Haitians are far more complex. Indeed, *viejos* have been successfully recruited into Dominican labor unions, and in the border Haitians and Dominicans formed a binational culture in which concubinage was common before 1937 and remains so today (Plant 1987: 125).⁷ Not that film may not be the best medium for complex discussions of ideology, but these films miss an opportunity to interrogate what may be driving the current moral panic. Some open-ended *Shoah*-style interviews with Dominicans aiming at unearthing the culturally-engendered stereotypes undergirding the collective hysteria these films reveal might have been helpful in this regard.⁸

These documentary films should be commended for having very effectively mobilized a wider audience than texts such as Roger Plant's (1987) *Sugar and Modern Slavery* or Maurice Lemoine's (1985) *Bitter Sugar*. Yet the individual dramas brought so vividly to life are sketched without the broader structural conditions which might cast a different light on these human rights issues and ultimately how blame should be apportioned. One important issue neglected here is the question of timing, since the campaign against Hartley emerged at a moment of great vulnerability for the Dominican economy. Since the 1980s, the Dominican Republic has embarked upon a neoliberal model of economic reform including IMF stabilization measures which have hit the poor very hard. The U.S. decision to drastically cut sugar quotas to the Dominican Republic in the early 1980s made it even harder for the nation to conform to their orders to encourage exports. A peso devaluation and a wage freeze was intended to make the country more appealing to foreign investment, but it did so at a great human cost, as wage levels sunk to the lowest in the Caribbean (even lower than Haiti), and agricultural employment declined by over 50% (Martin, Migley and Teitelbaum 2006).⁹ Since the 1980s there has been a shift to tourism and free trade assembly, but the fact that over 60% of those hired are women has caused social strain since men are virtually excluded from job growth, as have rising levels of 15% unemployment and 40% underemployment (Morri-

son and Sinkin 1982). For those who do not find work in export free trade zones, the only other growth sector is tourism, which has engendered a dramatic spur in prostitution as well as emigration. Indeed the two are related since Dominican women travel to Spain and Switzerland to work as domestic servants and cabaret dancers often resorting to sex work due to its higher remuneration; and Dominican prostitutes have long found ready work in Port-au-Prince.¹⁰ To make matters worse, in 2003 a large bank failure and government bailout triggered a major financial crisis in the Dominican Republic involving skyrocketing inflation and peso devaluation which painfully squeezed the fragile middle sectors. Given these conditions, it should not be a surprise that when the IMF froze a \$657 million standby agreement, people took to the streets in a two-day general strike (Gregory 2007: 236).¹¹

Nor was this the first time that Dominicans had protested in response to crippling IMF austerity measures. In 1984, the government imposed a 200 percent price increase on imported goods including medicines and a rise in basic foodstuff prices. In response to these overnight price hikes, incensed mobs ransacked and looted stores, burned vehicles and damaged buildings, engaging in pitched battles with the police in twenty Dominican cities, and resulting in the closure of the national university, the public transport system, and a radio and TV station. All told the cost of the violence was 100 dead, 3,300 arrested and more than 1,000 people injured (*New York Times* 1984a, 1984b, *Los Angeles Times* 1984). Then-Dominican president Jorge Blanco was forced to kowtow to popular demands in the face of what he termed a “grave economic crisis.” These protests later spread to Caracas and elsewhere in Latin America as the debt crisis spread, forcing U.S. banks to cobble together a \$500 million emergency loan package for Brazil, Mexico and Argentina (Farnsworth 1984).

In these films the Vicini family enterprise could be taken to be the face of a rapacious landholding elite similar to the infamous “fourteen families” of El Salvador who since the late nineteenth century monopolized land and ruthlessly repressed any hint of popular mobilization to improve the lot of the rural proletariat. Now diversified into banking, media and real estate, the Vicinis, however, represent the only private Dominican sugar firm left in the Dominican sugar industry. Dictator Rafael Trujillo bought out the lion’s share of sugar properties held by foreign firms, owning a full 12 out of 16 concerns by 1960, and after his assassination these devolved to the Dominican state. Much of the last privately-held large sugar plantation, Central Romana, was sold by Gulf and Western in the 1980s to the Dominican government. Sugar is cast as a powerful and villainous industry in these films, yet while it did bring great wealth in the earlier twentieth century, the profits accrued to huge

primarily U.S.-owned multinational firms, patently not to Dominican elites. Moreover, sugar prices have dropped precipitously since the 1980s largely due to the rise of alternative sweeteners such as corn syrup which has caused global sugar prices to plummet (cf. Woolf 2008). Rather than a formidable lion, sugar could be more aptly portrayed as a polar bear tagged for extinction.

If these films inspire anger at the ill treatment of Haitians in the Dominican Republic, the issue of who is to blame is quite a bit more complex than these films portray it. Certainly the Dominican government is a large part of the problem, and the harsh system of repression portrayed here which includes army surveillance of the *bateyes* to keep the Haitians on site, and military involvement in recruiting and transporting workers from centers in Leogane to the plantations, is undeniable and unforgivable. Yet let us not forget that the contemporary contract labor system in the Caribbean was devised by U.S. entrepreneurs at the turn of the twentieth century. By 1925, most Dominican sugar centrals belonged to foreign corporations, and 98 percent of exports were sold to the U.S. (Plant 1987:14). First British West Indians and later Haitians were imported since Dominicans had ample access to land and thus little incentive to engaging in sugar harvesting at the low wages offered, which is why firms devised a scheme which took advantage first of the relative labor surplus in the highly depressed postabolition economies of the British West Indies where slaves had formed a majority. Haitians eventually took over as a key labor source at a time when conveniently both nations were under U.S. occupation, and U.S. sugar conglomerates had restructured both economies as sugar monocultural producers with rapidly expanding cane production. Although to be fair, both nations' economies were locked in stiff competition from Cuba which sold almost its entire sugar harvest to the United States and through the reciprocity treaty had a highly protected and privileged relationship to the U.S. in relation to the neighboring islands. And the Cuban harvest was also staffed by Haitian *braceros* pushed out by demographic pressure at home.

Local governments became more directly involved with the *bracero* issue during the 1930s depression, when sugar prices took a tumble and immigrant labor was scapegoated leading to calls for labor nationalization in Cuba and the 1937 Haitian massacre in the Dominican Republic.¹² The contract labor relationship between the Dominican and Haitian governments was formalized under the regimes of strongmen François Duvalier and Rafael Trujillo, the latter looking to secure a labor source for an industry in which he had an important private interest; while for Duvalier it became part of a broader system of extortion from the national coffers which totaled some \$10 million a year from the Haitian

treasury (Plant 1987:54). The 1952 accord (drafted under Paul Magloire and Rafael Trujillo) which became the basis for subsequent bilateral contracts, provided for a kickback to the Haitian government and supposedly guaranteed rights to workers such as salaries on a par with Dominican workers and paid return transport, but these have been in name only. The provisions in the contracts are actually quite generous; the problem has been one of compliance. Roger Plant reported that none of the Haitians he interviewed were aware of its provisions, a fact which only serves to further underscore just how impressive was Father Hartley's job of politicization.¹³ The fact that Haitians are paid in piece work makes it near impossible to guarantee that they meet the Dominican minimum wage, which is hourly.

Sugar Babies raises a key issue that underscores the central absurdity of the whole framing of the Haitian labor issue as a bilateral one, however. The fact is that many of the residents of the *bateyes* today are not Haitian at all, but rather Haitian-Dominican since they were born on Dominican soil and should be recognized as such (Ferguson 2003:6). Yet the government changed its migration law in 2004 to specifically exclude the offspring of Haitian migrants from citizenship. A case was brought to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights to protest the denial of two Dominican-born Haitian children, a ruling which the Dominican supreme court parried, defining them "in transit" and therefore Haitian not Dominican (Lacey 2008). There is systematic discrimination affecting poor darker-skinned children of Haitian immigrants, a deeply disturbing pattern especially given that this group is by no means a minor subculture. Haitians have now moved out of the sugar sector and into virtually every crevice of the informal economy, especially the lucrative coffee and rice industries but urban construction as well. This film addresses a wrenching issue that the international community should pressure the Dominican government to address.

Sugar Babies covers some of the same ground as *The Price of Sugar* but focuses on the Fajol sugar firm, a Florida-based conglomerate which bought Central Romana and the luxury tourist resort Casa de Campo in 1986. This film structures the story of Haitian children in terms of the contradiction between the glossy image that the Dominican Republic wishes to present to the world for purposes of tourism, and the ugly realities which are "hidden in paradise," and indeed this juxtaposition works well for the Romana plantation since the tourism complex is aimed at a celebrity market, and yet the Haitian abuses documented include 19 year old Julienne Inocent who was raped and robbed, dying with her two children en route to the *bateyes*, as well children cutting cane as young as ten years old. A Vicini representative testifies that the company wishes to contribute to the growth of citizens and workers yet disabled sugar

workers are given no compensation. While owner Fanjul is profiled in his luxurious abode, Haitians have no beds at all in their barren rooms. Indeed, if anyone should be pressured to improve conditions it should be Fanjul, who is the single largest beneficiary of the U.S. price support program. Prominent Haitian novelist Edwige Danticat serves as the narrator of *Sugar Babies*, and the film includes talking head interviews with prominent academic Sidney Mintz, *batey* residents, and Fathers Ruquoy and Hartley. It builds upon the documentary *Birthingright Crisis* (Neptune 2006) which also focused on a population which as Haitian *batey* activist Jhonny Belizaire put it, officially does not exist.

Yet sugar is no longer the global monster commodity it once was. If as Mintz (1985) demonstrated in his classic *Sweetness and Power*, the rise of monopoly capitalism could be traced through the development of a global sugar economy, the U.S.-dominated neoliberal era is ruled by king corn. Sugar prices peaked in 1920 during the famed “dance of the millions” when prices hit \$20 per quintal due to war-induced global shortages, only to fall to 2 cents per pound by 1929. And sugar has always been an export vulnerable to global price fluctuations and gluts due to overproduction. Sugar has been highly vulnerable to competitors: first the German beet which caused sugar prices to crash in the 1890s, and more recently corn, which today is the single most important sweetener and preservative for U.S.-produced processed foods.

If the U.S. helped give rise to the sugar monocrop economy which for so long defined the Caribbean, its free trade policies have rendered sugar superfluous. For one thing, U.S. farm subsidies have made high-fructose corn syrup the sweetener and preservative of choice in manufactured food products, drastically reducing the market for sugar and driving down world prices for sucrose. If corn was once the staple crop of southern U.S. slaves, since the 1950s it has become the success story of intensive capitalized agriculture, of which U.S. farms now produce seventy percent of global production. Between 2003 and 2005 American taxpayers spent 34.75 billion in crop subsidy benefits to farmers to produce corn fit only for livestock feed and corn syrup, which has made processed foods such as soft drinks shrink in price since the mid-1980s (Woolf 2008). The rise of “king corn” has expanded American waistlines accounting for much of the growth in obesity here, while the same period has seen sugar prices drop precipitously, thus causing food shortages in the Caribbean. Americans eat four times the amount of corn syrup they did in 1970, as well as a diet of grain-raised beef that is higher in saturate fats than cattle fed on grass, and our profligate consumption of corn byproducts has made sugar all but obsolete and brought the cane sugar industry to the point of near collapse. While many Caribbean islands such as St. Kitts have abandoned sugar altogether, others have sought

solace in tourism which offers very little if any significant job creation. And unlike Great Britain, whose sense of responsibility for its former colonies has ensured a steady market for British West Indian bananas at the European Economic Community, the U.S. has left its former colonies to free fall on their own.

These larger structural constraints combined with the fact that the Dominican Republic is the largest net recipient of Caribbean immigrants in the region have caused immense pressure on the Dominican economy and given rise to a large and growing informal sector, a Dominican subproletariat which often lacks "*papeles*" and is itself subject to arrest alongside Haitian migrants (Lattimer 2003; Gregory 2007:36-37).¹⁴ Notwithstanding the fact that the Dominican Republic boasted high rates of economic growth in 2000, nearly a third of young people age 15-24 are unemployed, and more than one-fifth of Dominicans live below the very low official poverty line of \$2 per day (Michael 2001). The Dominican national debt had quadrupled by the 1980s, and while debt servicing locks the country into sugar exports, the collapse of sugar prices has made it even harder to pay off the interest, which consumed more than one-third of sugar earnings in the early 1980s (Plant 1987:140). These provocative and moving films missed an opportunity to instruct viewers of the powerful constraints imposed by existing terms of trade, as well as U.S. consumers of their own link in these global commodity chains. The Dominican government had a point when it said, "One of the worst forms of slavery today is practiced by the developed countries when they keep down the prices of basic products by subsidizing and dumping products competing with those that are vital for the countries of the Third World" (Plant 1987:139). And here the U.S. has played a significant role. In the 1970s the U.S. started flooding Haiti (via Haitian entrepreneur middlemen) with subsidized rice so cheap that it came to replace the locally-grown tubers, rice and corn that had been Haitian dietary staples, driving local farmers out of business and into the slums of Port-au-Prince and across the border seeking work (Williams 2008). Today "Miami rice" has become a dietary staple and Haiti imports three-quarters of its demand, making Haiti the fourth most important market for imported U.S. rice (through provisioning wheat as food aid to the Dominican Republic, the U.S. has fostered dependency there by establishing bread as a primary subsistence product).¹⁵ To make matters worse, the price of rice has doubled over the past year causing food riots in Port-au-Prince largely due to soaring petroleum costs. Of course, the U.S. is not solely responsible here and some protectionism on the part of host governments could have forestalled this dependency on an item now critical to the domestic subsistence economy but the debt trap did not make this option easy.

Another party which gets off scot-free in these films is the Haitian government, yet in its investigation of the treatment of Haitian *braceros*, the International Labor Organization (ILO) railed against Haiti, heaping much of the blame for the horrendous conditions of migrants on Haitian governmental neglect. Indeed, the non-person status of migrants was addressed in the convention which stipulates that *bracero* travel documents were supposed to be left with the Haitian embassy, an institution which is actually charged with monitoring *batey* conditions (Plant 1987:109). The Haitian Ambassador collects a share of wages that is supposed to be returned to the *braceros* at the end of the harvest, yet which they fail to do (Lemoine 1985:143). Yet while profiting substantially from the *bracero* head tax—which was the chief source of internal revenue for some years—the Haitian government has patently failed at fulfilling its responsibilities to these workers (Moral 1941:94). Moreover, François Duvalier made off with a shocking 2 million dollars profit from *braceros* at a time when Haiti was in far better shape than it is today. Haitian government officials are also complicit with the system of coercion since they also staff the border with auxiliary police who prohibit Haitians from returning to Haiti (Lemoine 1985:152-153).

These two important films deserve a wide audience and hopefully will result in international pressure to address these egregious human rights violations—especially the lack of legal personhood for Haitian-Dominicans—while leaving historians the task of revealing the wider ethical dragnet of these injustices. As *Sugar Babies* says, “in the end, no one country can ever be absolved of the shared historical responsibility for the grave inhumanity, the glaring misery that continues to afflict the descendents of those very first individuals” who came to the Americas as slaves.

Notes

- ¹ Citation from the song “Disco Azúcar” (1995) by C. Pedroso and performed by Juan Formell y los Van Van (Caribe Productions Inc.).
- ² I wish to thank Carel Alé who collected some of the data presented here, as well as Drexel Woodson and Martha Arguello who both provided critical feedback and suggestions for revision. Those that agreed Haitians should be termed slaves include Maurice Lemoine (1985), Roger Plant (1987), and Ramón Antonio Veras (1983); those in contra include Frank Moya Pons and associates (Moya Pons et al. 1986), and Martin F. Murphy (1991). See also Samuel Martínez’ fine-grained ethnography of Haitian sugar workers in the Domini-

can Republic (Martínez 1995). For a thoughtful consideration of the utility of slavery as a metaphor for other forms of political and economic oppression, see Giovannetti (2007).

- ³ One which continues today; see the newspaper piece by Ricardo Santana (2008).
- ⁴ This critique is developed in C. Fred Alford's (1997) insightful review of Daniel Johan Goldhagen's book (1997) *Hitler's Willing Executioners*.
- ⁵ As Pedro San Miguel notes, however, the oppositional view of Haiti was shared even by progressive liberal thinkers such as Pedro Francisco Bonó (San Miguel 2005:35-66).
- ⁶ See Sagás (2000) for more on the use of antihaitianism as political currency; and for more on inflation and nationalist anxieties in the Dominican Republic, see Derby (1998).
- ⁷ This applies to state-owned as well as private firms. This is even more significant due to the restrictions on Dominican labor organizing, which was near impossible under the Trujillo regime and severely constrained under Balaguer. For more on Haitians and Dominicans in the frontier regions, see my essay, "Haitians, Magic and Money" (Derby 1994). Keep in mind that Dominicans have a very high rate of informal unions, so the fact that most unions with Haitians were informal does not in itself indicate status differentials between the two groups.
- ⁸ On cultural stereotyping and ethnic hatred, see the work of Sander L. Gilman (1985).
- ⁹ Comparative hourly wage levels in the Caribbean for the Dominican Republic are .55 and .58 for Haiti in 1988, a gap which widened 30 cents more by 1998 (see Safa 1995 and the United Nations Human Development Report 2003).
- ¹⁰ For more on the gendered implications of these trends, see the working paper by United Nations INSTRAW (2007).
- ¹¹ There are some positive growth sectors, however, such as Dominican success at cornering the European organic banana market, but this is still a relatively small, boutique niche; see the work of Laura Raynolds (2008).
- ¹² Cuba's ousting of Haitians was violent as well, however (see Joel James Figarola et al. 1992); the reasons for the 1937 massacre are treated in Turits (2002).

- ¹³ This should not come as a surprise since the contracts have all been secret except during the PRD regime of Antonio Guzmán.
- ¹⁴ Of course, NAFTA has served to augment the informal sector throughout Latin America, especially Mexico (see Salas 2006:15).
- ¹⁵ Under the food aid program called the Agricultural Trade (see Warman 2007:204). Wheat was also provided to Haiti and has made its way into Haitian food practices as bread with peanut butter has become breakfast for many (Woodson, Sept. 19, 2008).

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