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ARTICLE

A Narrative from the Margins: Community and Agency during the US Occupation of the Dominican Republic, 1916–1924

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Abstract

While US and Dominican officials have traditionally received credit for the expansion of the public school system during the US military occupation of the Dominican Republic from 1916 to 1924, this article offers an alternative account by focusing on the role of guardians, or caretakers, in supporting and creating schools in this period. Drawing from sources from the Department of Public Instruction in the Dominican Republic and analyzing them "against the archival grain," I argue that Dominican guardians were pivotal to the expansion of the Dominican school system and key actors in shaping the educational landscape during this period. Not only did guardians construct and maintain most of the schools opened during the US occupation, but they also shaped school policy. Most significantly, through their grassroots efforts, guardians and other volunteers ensured that schools in the Dominican Republic continued to operate during the financial crisis of 1921 that bankrupted the school system.

Keywords: Dominican Republic; US Occupation; parents and schools; grassroots reform; education policy

On June 17, 1920, in a town located near the northwest border of the Dominican Republic, a group of approximately fifty guardians[1] and community leaders listened intently to a presentation made by local school inspector.[2] In his address to the citizens of Guayubín, L. T. Lithgow boasted about recent improvements in the local school and compared them with what had previously existed. Since the start of the US occupation in 1916, the school in Guayubín had become co-educational and

[1]I use the term *guardian* for two reasons. First, in the Dominican Republic, as in other countries, children were sometimes taken care of by an older relative or other adult, thus *guardian* is more inclusive of the various types of relationships between children and their caretakers. Second, the archival documents I examined almost exclusively use *guardians* rather than *parents* to refer to the caretakers of children, and I have used the term to reflect that.

[2]Letter from the school inspector of Guayubín to the regional superintendent of the northern department, June 19, 1920, document no. 00062, exp. 2, leg. 18, 115459, Correspondence, official notices, and circulars, SJPI, Archivo General de la Nación, Santo Domingo (hereafter cited SJPI, AGN).

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graded, teaching over two hundred students a variety of subjects that included history, geography, writing, arithmetic, and Castellano (Spanish), as well as health, hygiene, and physical fitness across three different grades. In addition to highlighting the expanded student body and school curriculum, Lithgow emphasized the importance of school discipline and urged families to continue the work initiated by school leaders through home education.

Although Lithgow's speech encouraged Dominican caretakers to become involved in their children's education, these guardians had already played active roles in the Guayubín school. They elected to enroll their children and made sacrifices to ensure they attended daily, oftentimes traveling long distances from a neighboring town. In addition to making choices that affected their immediate families, guardians also participated in decision-making on a higher level by engaging with local and regional school officials in school meetings and through letter writing. In those instances, guardians articulated their beliefs about education and advocated for the needs of their children and those in their community.

This article examines the actions of guardians in supporting and creating schools during the US military occupation of the Dominican Republic that lasted from 1916 to 1924. Drawing primarily from sources from the Department of Public Instruction in the Dominican Republic, I argue that Dominican guardians were pivotal to the expansion of the Dominican school system and key actors in shaping the educational landscape during this period. Not only did guardians construct and maintain a majority of the schools opened during the US occupation, but they also influenced school policy. Throughout the eight-year period, guardians influenced external aspects of schools, like their location, in addition to internal ones, such as their staffing or whether schools would be co-educational. Most significantly, through their grassroots efforts and collective advocacy, guardians and other volunteers ensured that schools in the Dominican Republic continued to operate during the financial crisis of 1921 that bankrupted the school system. Thus, between 1916 and 1924, Dominican guardians were vital to both the physical and financial maintenance of their local schools, even in the midst of the financial collapse of the public school system.

Despite being directly involved in schools, Dominican parents and caretakers have often been left out of histories of education during this period. Much of the literature on the US occupation of the Dominican Republic has centered US officials and their use of schools to create a democracy compatible with US interests in the country.[3]

[3]Traditional US accounts tended to treat the occupation as improving the social, political, and economic conditions of the country. See Marvin Goldwert, *The Constabulary in the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua: Progeny and Legacy of United States Intervention* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1962); Dana G. Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean, 1900–1921* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964). While the following work comes after this periodization, it is still very much in line with the traditional narrative: Stephen M. Fuller, *Marines in the Dominican Republic, 1916–1924* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1974). It was not until the US presence in Central America increased in the 1980s that historians in the US began to analyze its historical antecedents, examine resistance to the US occupation more critically, and highlight the impact of the intervention on the development of civil society and on state formation. Since then, studies of the occupation have been more critical of US efforts to reform the economic, political, and social institutions of the Dominican

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These accounts discuss how education reforms served US foreign policy in regions such as the Pacific and Caribbean. In his work, A. J. Angulo highlights the fundamental role played by guardians in the Dominican Republic through their work in Sociedades Populares de Educación (Popular Education Societies) by establishing and maintaining schools across the country when the national school system was in the midst of a financial crisis.[4] Most other histories of the occupation, however, have emphasized the significant increases in the number of schools established and percentage of students enrolled during the occupation without contextualizing how these changes occurred.

While there have been accounts written about rural resistance to the US military government more broadly, we know far less about the agency of non-elite Dominicans within schools or their perceptions regarding the education reforms during the occupation.[5] This is partially because there are so few histories of Dominican education. Within those that exist, they briefly discuss school reforms during the occupation and tend to highlight the role of the US military government in expanding rudimentary schools into the Dominican countryside and increasing attendance.[6] Much of this literature has overlooked patterns of self-determination, focusing instead on how, in 1916, 90 percent of the population in the Dominican Republic was illiterate.[7] Frequently cited illiteracy rates have reinforced the scholarly assumption that

Republic. See Bruce Calder, *The Impact of Intervention: The Dominican Republic during the U.S. Occupation of 1916–1924* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984); Robin Lauren Derby, "The Magic of Modernity: Dictatorship and Civic Culture in the Dominican Republic, 1916–1962" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1998). A. J. Angulo, *Empire and Education: A History of Greed and Goodwill from the War of 1898 to the War on Terror* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[4]Angulo, *Empire and Education*, 83–86.

[5]Pedro L. Miguel, "Peasant Resistance to State Demands in the Cibao during the U.S. Occupation," trans. Phillip Berryman, *Latin American Perspectives* 22, no. 3 (Summer 1995), 41–62; María Filomena González, *Línea Noroeste: Testimonio del patriotismo olvidado* (San Pedro de Macorís, República Dominicana: Universidad Central del Este, 1985); Félix Servio Ducoudray, *Los "gavilleros" del este: Una epopeya calumniada* (Santo Domingo: Editora de la Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo, 1976); Julie Franks, "The Gavilleros of the East: Social Banditry as Political Practice in the Dominican Sugar Region, 1900–1924," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 8, no. 2 (June 1995), 158–81.

[6]See Consuelo Nivar Ramírez, *Sistema educativo en la Republica Dominicana* (Santo Domingo: Librería Dominicana, 1952); Antonio Pimentel Francisco, *Historia de la educacion en la Republica Dominicana* (Santo Domingo: Editoria Centenario, 2003); José Luis Sáez, *Autoridad para educar: Historia de la escuela católica dominicana* (Santo Domingo: Archivo General de la Nación, 2008); Rafael Darío Herrera, *Historia de la educación en Santiago (1844–1961)* (Santo Domingo: Ediciones Rumbo Norte, 2012). Juan Alfonseca has published the most on this subject. His studies focus on education and imperialism in the Caribbean during the early 20th century as well as the feminization of the teaching profession and the schooling of ethnic minorities in the Dominican Republic during the US occupation and Trujillo dictatorship. Though his scholarship is quite extensive and acknowledges the key role Dominicans have played in implementing the education reforms, his work does not provide an overview of their work concerning the education reforms during the occupation. For a few examples, see Juan Alfonseca, "El imperialismo norteamericano y las vías antillanas a la escolarización rural," *Revista Brasileira do Caribe* 14, no. 28 (2014), 371–400; Juan Alfonseca, "Society and Curriculum in the Feminization of Teaching in the Dominican Republic, 1860–1935," in *Women and Teaching: Global Perspectives on the Feminization of a Profession*, eds Regina Cortina and Sonsoles San Román (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Juan Alfonseca, "Escolarización y minorías étnicas en la República Dominicana, 1918–1944," *Cuadernos Interculturales* 6, no. 11 (2008), 17–45.

[7]This statistic is often referred to in texts from the military government. See United States Military, *Santo Domingo: Its Past and Its Present Condition* (Santo Domingo: US Military, 1920), 31–37; Rufus H. Lane,

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non-elite Dominicans made little or no significant contributions to education policy during the occupation. Emphasizing illiteracy rates without examples of agency in the education system advances the notion that either non-elite Dominicans were powerless against the US military regime, or they were not educated enough to be involved in the debates of the period. This study revisits this assumption by examining the actions of Dominican guardians and their direct contributions to the educational landscape. Their voices, engagement, and agency complicate standard treatments of Dominican guardians as inactive or ineffective sources of change who were confined by their illiteracy or the structures of the military government.

While there has generally been a focus on US efforts in the literature on education during the twentieth-century US military occupations, silences around local agency are not distinct to this scholarship.[8] Similar gaps can be found in historical studies of schooling and educational policy in the US and Latin America as well as in other contexts. As a result, historians of education have often grappled with how difficult it is to retrieve the perspective of those affected by school reforms, particularly the voices of parents and children.[9] Scholars face these limitations mostly because the documents preserved in the archive tend to be official documents generated by upper-level administrators or school-based principals and teachers. The focus on preserving official documents has edged out other documents, voices, and experiences

"Civil Government in Santo Domingo in the Early Days of Military Occupation," *Marine Corps Gazette* 7, no. 2 (June 1922), 127–46. Secondary sources have also used these numbers, e.g., Calder, *The Impact of Intervention,* 34; José L. Vásquez Romero, *La Intervención de 1916 vencidos y vencedores: Un análisis sobre el gobierno militar Estadounidense en Santo Domingo* (Santo Domingo: Impresora Candy, 2003), 139–40.

[8]A considerable amount has been written about the role of schools in indoctrinating and Americanizing subjects of US empire in the early twentieth century. Scholars have argued that the US military effectively used schools as part of their endeavor to inculcate forms of democracy compatible with US interests as a key tenet of imperial foreign policy. However, very little has been written about the impact US education policies had on the ground. For perspectives that center on US officials, see Elisabeth M. Eittreim, *Teaching Empire: Native Americans, Filipinos, and US Imperial Education, 1879–1918* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2019); Sarah Steinbock-Pratt, *Educating the Empire: American Teachers and Contested Colonization in the Philippines* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Clif Stratton, *Education for Empire: American Schools, Race, and the Paths of Good Citizenship* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016); Angulo, *Empire and Education*; Jose-Manuel Navarro, *Creating Tropical Yankees: Social Science Textbooks and US Ideological Control in Puerto Rico, 1898–1908* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Julian Go, *American Empire and the Politics of Meaning: Elite Political Cultures in the Philippines and Puerto Rico during US Colonialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Léon D. Pamphile, *Clash of Cultures: America's Educational Strategies in Occupied Haiti, 1915–1934* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008); Aida Negrón de Montilla, *Americanization in Puerto Rico and the Public-School System 1900–1930* (San Juan: Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1977). Few books center on on-the-ground perspectives on education reforms during the US occupations. See Solsiree del Moral, *Negotiating Empire: The Cultural Politics of Schools in Puerto Rico, 1898–1952* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013); Yoel Cordoví Núñez, *Magisterio y nacionalismo en las escuelas públicas de Cuba, 1899–1920* (Havana: Editorial de ciencias sociales, 2012).

[9]Several historians of education have used oral histories to write about the experience of teachers and students who might have been left out of the documentary archive. For a recent example of a study that employs oral histories to examine the impact of a broad national policy (in this case, desegregation in wake of the *Brown v. Board* decision) on these stakeholders, see Vincent D. Willis, *Audacious Agitation: The Uncompromising Commitment of Black Youth to Equal Education after Brown* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2021).

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and has privileged those who interacted through memos, reports, and correspondence with members of the government. Additionally, the reliance on written evidence also benefits those who were literate or who had access to someone who was, and were thus able to leave traces of their thoughts and experiences through the written record. As a result of imbalances in archival collections, histories tend to rely on the documentary evidence available and to leave out significant contributions to education that other involved stakeholders made at the time.

To address this problem, many historians of education have turned to oral histories and documents outside of official government archives, including yearbooks and student newspapers. They also have analyzed official documents "against the archival grain" and through a critical lens to identify and understand the experiences of others discussed or mentioned in passing.[10] Drawing on this scholarship, I used this methodology to read the official documents of the Department of Public Instruction held in the Archivo de la Nación (National Archive) and constructed a narrative from the "margins" of the official record. This article illuminates the role of guardians in the occupation by examining the few letters written by guardians to government officials, along with other indirect references to the actions and contributions of guardians in letters written by school officials.

Doing so provides access to underexamined local views on education that reveal how guardians built and maintained schools for their children and those in their community. By piecing together brief moments and mentions of these ordinary citizens through their interactions with the occupation government that eventually became part of the archival record, this study offers an alternative account using limited source material written by the guardians themselves.[11] Highlighting the contributions and perspectives of guardians—which at times aligned with and at other times opposed US-backed educational reforms—provides an added significance, given that the US military government imposed gag laws to limit public criticism in newspapers and books.[12] While no single article can offer a comprehensive analysis, as many guardians who participated in the reforms were not captured in these

[10]Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009). For the use of traditional archives to piece together histories of actors who have been silenced and excluded from the narrative, see also Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

[11]Scholarship on slavery in the United States and the Caribbean provides a useful framework for understanding how those who have limited agency over their lives can still find ways to exert influence. See Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of an American Slave* (1845; repr., Mineola: Dover Publications, 2016); Thomas Webber, *Deep Like the Rivers: Education in the Slave Quarter Community, 1831–1865* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978); Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*; Aisha Finch, *Rethinking Slave Rebellion in Cuba: La Escalera and the Insurgencies of 1841–1844* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

[12]Letter from the general superintendent of public instruction to the regional superintendents and school inspectors in the country, March 19, 1920, document no. 0257–0259, exp. 1, leg. C_315, 112309, SJPI, AGN; Secretaría de Justicia e Instrucción Pública, "Orden Ejecutiva No. 385," *Colección de leyes, decretos y resoluciones emanados de los poderes legislativo y ejecutivo de la República, 1920* (Santo Domingo: Imprenta de J. R. vda. García, 1921), 7.

documents, this article provides a first step in tracing the impact of guardians on the education system during the US occupation.

This article also extends our understanding of local agency in schools. From choosing to bring their child to school daily to advocating for substantial shifts in policy, the Dominican case makes evident how schools have historically been spaces where local actors negotiated policies and exerted their influence on decisions that directly affected their communities. Since guardians operated under the conditions of a military occupation, we must consider power dynamics and examine a range of actions the guardians took as examples of local agency on the basis of their scope of influence. And while it is important to recognize how these examples can help broaden notions of local agency, this situation is also distinct, as it illuminates a case of how actors on the ground created their own schooling opportunities and maintained a national system when the government could no longer support it.

Finally, this article explores how local actors engage in community-based practices to negotiate influence within a hierarchical power structure. While government officials deemed rural Dominicans illiterate and in need of government intervention to access education, many Dominicans demonstrated their capacity to navigate the literate world. Drawing on "distributed literacy" practices, non-elite Dominican guardians used members of their communities as scribes to successfully advocate for the needs of their children and members of their community.[13] Leveraging collective power, non-elite Dominicans managed to shape education policy by fighting back against the top-down structures set up by Dominican government officials and the US military.

The Expansion of the Dominican Education System (1916–1920)

Prior to the occupation, there were several attempts by the Dominican government to create a centralized public education system. The country was only six months old when the first education law was promulgated. The Law of Public Instruction of 1845 called for the establishment of public schools in each commune and two in the capital of each province, requiring a total of thirty-two schools around the country. Although reforms by the minister of public instruction in 1860s aided the gradual growth of the school system, these efforts were hindered by national leaders who demonstrated little to no interest in the expansion of formal education.[14] In the 1880s, Eugenio María de Hostos revived these efforts by creating the foundation for the modern Dominican public school system. In his reforms, Hostos called for a secular and positivist education that was rooted in scientific methods and would

[13]The idea of distributed literacy differs from the long-standing notion that literacy is a singular skill that a person either does or does not possess. Instead, drawing on the notion of literacy as something that is informed by social and cultural practices, scholars have argued for the existence of "multiple literacies." They understand the variability of literacy as an outcome of different historical and cultural contexts and question traditional understandings of a 'text' as something that is only read. For examples of this scholarship, see Bruce Curtis, "On Distributed Literacy: Textually Mediated Politics in Colonial Canada," *Paedagogica Historica* 44, nos. 1–2 (2008), 233–38; and James Collins and Richard Blot, *Literacy and Literacies: Texts, Power, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[14]Sáez, *Autoridad para educar*, 41; Ramon Morrison, *Historia de la educación en la Republica Dominicana* (Santo Domingo: CENAPEC, 1985), 55–81, 121; Herrera, *Historia de la educación en Santiago*, 14.

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be accessible to both sexes.[15] Yet, despite these extraordinary efforts, a majority of the nation's school-age population still did not have access to schooling. After Hostos's reforms, there were only 175 schools across the country educating a little over 6,500 registered students, located primarily in urban areas.[16]

Because a key feature of a military government is its authoritarian structure, the Dominican government officials saw the US occupation as an opportunity to finally implement widespread education reform. The US military had begun its occupation of the Dominican Republic and instituted a military government in 1916. By November of that year, the US military had seized control over all legislative and executive functions of the national government, in addition to having complete oversight over the national budget. Prior to this moment, the US military had been concerned with the Dominican Republic being used as a naval base for enemy soldiers during World War I. Top officials argued that deploying troops to the Dominican Republic would be the most appropriate defense since the presence of US troops could quell the continuous civil wars that had been taking place in the country since 1911. US military officials argued that a reform of the Dominican public school system would be a central component in their efforts to create political stability. They contended that building schools, particularly in rural communities, would combat the country's illiteracy problem, which they identified as the root cause for volatility in the political system. Similar to US reformers who sought to transform society through schools, these military officials reasoned that if the Dominican non-elites were more educated, Dominicans would be able to pick better leaders and improve the country's democratic institutions.[17]

While US officials held top government positions and supervised projects underway throughout the Dominican Republic, Dominican education officials retained some control over creating and implementing educational policies. Dominican officials collaborated with the US military to expand and modernize the existing school system because they were also interested in bringing schools into rural communities and educating what they perceived were the country's "backward" rural masses.[18] Yet, even as US officials and Dominican education administrators played pivotal roles in

[15]Since the colonial period, the Catholic Church had maintained tight control over schools in the Dominican Republic. During the period before the occupation, the Church still held a considerable amount of influence over education. But the recent expansion of state-sponsored education posed a threat to its control. In particular, Hostos's anti-clerical stance and his secular reforms clashed with the Church because of his emphasis on science and rationalism. Sáez, *Autoridad para educar,* 62–63; Neici M. Zeller, "The Appearance of All, the Reality of Nothing: Politics and Gender in the Dominican Republic, 1880–1961" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Chicago, 2010), 29.

[16]Morrison, *Historia de la educación en la Republica Dominicana*, 136.

[17]Rufus H. Lane, "Report on Public Instruction to Military Governor; Santo Domingo-Report O-in-C, Dept. Justice and Public Instruction," Feb. 1, 1920, p. 1–2, Miscellaneous Collection of Records Relating to the Marine Occupation of Santo Domingo, 1916–1924, Record Group (RG) 127, Records of the United States Marine Corps, National Archives Building, Washington, DC (hereafter NARA I). For examples of US Progressive Era reformers, see David Tyack, *One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

[18]For more information about the education projects during the 1916 US occupation, see Alexa Rodríguez, "'For the Prosperity of the Nation': Education and the US Occupation of the Dominican Republic, 1916–1924" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2021).

drafting and enacting the policies implemented, Dominican guardians were critical actors in shaping how the policies functioned on the ground.

The level of parental engagement seen in Guayubín was not unique to the area or its neighboring towns. Guardians across the Dominican Republic were intimately involved in the reform of the school system from the start of US military intervention and worked with government officials to open and maintain local schools. Since the bulk of the nation's population lived in the countryside, education administrators targeted the expansion plan to rural areas and enlisted school inspectors to help determine where new schools should be opened. To ensure that newly introduced schools would be supported physically and, at times, financially by the local communities, education administrators routinely asked school inspectors to talk to guardians and other members of the communities under their jurisdiction to gauge how receptive communities were to expansion projects. These officials often found guardians who would assist them in the construction of these new schools, as guardians were often eager to locate the funds, materials, and locations to open a local school for their children.

Community members supported the efforts of government officials in local parent associations called the Sociedades Populares de Educación (Popular Education Societies). An executive ordered issued by the US Military government in March 1919 outlined the roles and responsibilities envisioned for these societies. The order noted that groups of guardians of both sexes would be established primarily in rural areas, and that membership to the Sociedades would also be provided to the corresponding school inspector, principal, and local government official. The chief purpose of the association was to provide and maintain both the land and building used to house the local rudimentary school. The executive order granted the local societies the ability to manage the funds allocated for these purposes, although they were often scarce since municipalities were severely underfunded. It also conferred on each community organization the right to determine whether its school would be co-educational or if boys and girls would be taught separately. The Sociedades were also given the option to decide whether the principal's position would be filled by a man or woman, determine the length and scheduling of school vacations, and set school hours, so long as they accomplished their primary charge.[19]

While the Sociedades Populares de Educación were technically established by the military government in 1919, this executive order represented the formalization of local efforts that had already existed. Prior to the occupation, Dominican rural and urban working-class families had long engaged with the state in the Dominican Republic and advocated for the needs of their families and communities.[20] There was also a long history of community-based organizations stretching back to the nineteenth century. The first society dedicated to the propagation of education in the Dominican Republic was founded in 1866, approximately twenty years after

[19]Rufus H. Lane, "Department of Public Instruction General Order No. 1-19," March 25, 1919, document no. 0383-0385, exp. 29, leg. 1_958, 10111, SJPI, AGN.

[20]Teresita Martínez-Vergne analyzes how non-elite Dominicans expressed their citizenship and advocated for their rights to education, property, and respect in the period before the occupation. See Martínez-Vergne, *Nation & Citizen in the Dominican Republic, 1880–1916* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 147–68.

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the country's establishment. In addition to education societies, other associations were founded to promote broader cultural and literary aims that also intersected with educational advancement.[21]

Nevertheless, the Sociedades Populares de Educación helped bring to fruition many of the initiatives touted by education administrators and US officials. Indeed, they were responsible for constructing the vast majority of rural schools using donated materials, resources, and local volunteers. Between 1918 and 1920, the associations built more than three hundred schools nationwide. Oftentimes, the members of the society engaged in these efforts fully aware of the obligations they were taking on. Domingo de Peña, the president of the Sociedad in Los Caimonies, noted that the society was formed "with [the] obligation and agreement to purchase, support, repair the school house, and with its own savings and buy the furniture of the classroom."[22] Guardians would set up the schools, either by building them with volunteer labor and supplies or by using locations offered by community members, sometimes free of charge.[23] One school official described the enthusiasm with which the community members helped, remarking that "they gladly agreed to give me a good house within 20 days according to the plan I presented, made with wood from the country and with its corresponding toilet, garden etc."[24]

The associations not only built the schools top to bottom but also furnished them, often by building tables and chairs for the children.[25] Once the schools were furnished, many associations would ask the government to contribute by paying the small sum for the teacher salaries. Inspectors often wrote about the work of the guardians in their reports to other government authorities. Writing to the regional superintendent, Federico A. Perez, the school inspector of Jarabacoa, noted, "The Popular Societies that you set up in the District have, for the most part, the local land, savings, etc. They are only waiting for a teacher sponsored by fiscal funds."[26] The following year, in his letter to the municipal government, Inspector Perez

[21]For more on associations dedicated to the pursuit of education or other causes during the turn of the century, see Emilio Rodríguez Demorizi, *Sociedades, cofradias, escuelas y otras corporaciones dominicanas* (Santo Domingo: Editora Educativa Dominicana, 1975), 161–219; Herrera, *Historia de la educación en Santiago*, 32–33.

[22]Letter from the president of the Sociedad Popular de Educación in Los Caimonies to the regional superintendent of the northern department, Aug. 1, 1919, document no. 0414-0420, exp. 3, leg. 1_683, 100729, SJPI, AGN.

[23]These efforts were visible throughout the country, particularly in rural areas. See Letter from the school inspector in Bajabonico to the regional superintendent of the northern department, Feb. 15, 1919, document no. 0113-0114, exp. 2, leg. 1_726, 100776, SJPI, AGN; Letter from the regional superintendent of the southwestern department to the general superintendent of public instruction, Nov. 7, 1918, document no. 0259, exp. 1, leg. 74, 110437, SJPI, AGN; Letter from school inspector of Jarabacoa to the principal in rudimentary school #4 in Yami, Oct. 19, 1919, document no. 0622, exp. 1, leg. C196, 104805, SJPI, AGN.

[24]Letter from school inspector of Jarabacoa to the regional superintendent of the central department, April 30, 1921, document no. 0097, exp. 1, leg. C196, 104805, SJPI, AGN.

[25]Colonel A. T. Matrix, "Report Submitted to the Military Governor: May to July 1920," exp. 6, leg. 56, 1700207, Military Government 1916–1924, Digitized Collection, AGN; Letter from the school inspector of Jarabacoa to the municipal government in Jarabacoa, July 31, 1920, document no. 0391-0392, exp. 1, leg. C196, 104805, SJPI, AGN.

[26]Letter from school inspector of Jarabacoa to the regional superintendent of the central department, Sept. 22, 1919, document no. 0614, exp. 1, leg. C196, 104805, SJPI, AGN.

updated the local official about the expansion of the schools into even more remote areas. He conveyed the strong desire of community members for a local school in his petition for funding, stating that the guardians in the rural towns of Pedregal and Buena Vista had already built two schoolhouses and fully furnished them. Perez recounted how guardians had collected money to pay the salary of a teacher they approved of, one that they felt would not harm their children. He remarked how this was quite notable since "they are mostly poor guardians and they barely manage to keep their children clean and provide them with their corresponding books and notebooks."[27]

In other instances, guardians formed private schools independently from the government. It was also common for many communities to request that privately founded schools later be recognized and designated as official public schools so that they would have access to greater resources and municipal funds. In the same abovementioned letter, Perez stated how the guardians in Pedregal and Buena Vista "want the school to be 'made official'" and how they "strongly ask that this council get the small sum of $120 gold to pay the two teachers during those three months of work, an insignificant sum." He also noted the preexisting efforts of the guardians as evidence of their support, and as more reason to grant their petition, noting, "They contributed the largest contingent of resources."[28] In a letter addressed to the regional superintendent of the northern department, a guardian, Ramon A. Jorge, wrote on behalf of several community members in the city of Santiago asking to transfer a private school of workers to the public school system. Acting as a scribe to advocate for the needs of his community members, Jorge leveraged collective power in his appeal:

> Currently, there is a private school (directed by us) here; and it is at our discretion that once declared Official, the worker who, due to his scarce resources, is unable to pay a monthly tuition, will go to that classroom with marked interest, since there he will receive useful knowledge for new vital orientations.[29]

Converting private schools into public ones was another practice that had existed prior to the US occupation. At the turn of the century, Dominicans often petitioned town councils to ask them to appoint teachers or "confer municipal status on schools they themselves had formed."[30]

Nevertheless, the US occupation did bring significant changes to the organizational structure and funding mechanism of public schools in the Dominican Republic. In 1918, the US military government instituted an educational code that centralized and expanded the school system. As these government officials sought to open new schools while keeping costs to a minimum, they leveraged volunteer

[27]Letter from school inspector of Jarabacoa to municipal government in the area, July 31, 1920, document no.0391-0392, exp. 1, leg. C196, 104805, SJPI, AGN.

[28]Letter from school inspector of Jarabacoa to municipal government in the area, July 31, 1920.

[29]Letter from Ramon A. Jorge to the regional superintendent of the northern department, June 1919, document no. 389-391, exp. 2, leg. 1_683, 100729, SJPI, AGN.

[30]Martínez-Vergne, *Nation & Citizen in the Dominican Republic*, 148.

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labor from individual guardians and the Sociedades Populares de Educación to expand the number of schools governed by the state system. In a letter to the local government in Jarabacoa, Inspector Perez stated, "This office has launched a campaign to encourage the Popular Societies to use their houses in the fields and thus avoid the large sums that are used to rent premises."[31] By exploiting guardians' sense of duty and their eagerness to provide access to education, government officials were able to continue the growth of the public school system despite the inadequate funding provided by municipalities.[32]

The main feature of the 1918 education code was a compulsory school law that would be implemented by local school officials. Education officials attempted to employ sanctions to compel guardians to bring their children to school. The emerging system, however, lacked the means and funding to effectively enforce the law or levy penalties. Despite the lack of enforcement, thousands of guardians willingly enrolled their children in public schools and ensured that their children attended regularly. In the years preceding the occupation, only fourteen thousand to eighteen thousand of roughly two hundred thousand school-age children had been enrolled in the decentralized school system. By 1920, more than one hundred thousand students attended state-sponsored schools. Despite the fact that only a modest number of graded and rudimentary schools were opened, enrollment increased by 600 percent and the average daily attendance more than doubled. Although the total number of primary schools changed only marginally, the classification of the schools and their location shifted to reflect the priorities of government officials. Initially, schools were predominantly graded and located in an urban center, but rudimentary schools had now become the majority, with almost seven times as many as in 1916.[33]

Throughout the country, Dominican guardians in both rural and urban areas supported the efforts to expand schools in their neighborhoods because they valued how schools provided students with basic skills in literacy and mathematics. R. A. Mosquea, a father in a northern community, stated to the region's superintendent, "A family man as I am, fully aware of my *deberes,* I have never allowed my children to stop fulfilling their *deber* to attend school."[34] As guardians, they believed it was their *deber*, or duty, to ensure their children received an education whether through schools funded with resources from the government or their community, or within their own homes. Guardians frequently assured officials that they neither needed to be threatened with the law nor compelled with fines to bring their children to school. Even guardians with limited means did everything in their power to make sure each

[31]Letter from school inspector of Jarabacoa to municipal government in the area, June 5, 1920, document no. 0338, exp. 1, leg. C196, 104805, SJPI, AGN.

[32]A. J. Angulo argues that guardians in the Dominican Republic experienced a "triple taxation" under the US occupation government. The argument builds on the concept of "double taxation" experienced by African Americans in the US South during Jim Crow. See Angulo, *Empire and Education,* 86. Also see James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 156, 170, 179, 183–85.

[33]Juan Alfonseca, "Las maestras rurales del valle del Cibao, 1900–1935: Un acercamiento de los espacios de la enseñanza femenina en contextos campesinos de agro-exportación," *Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación* 32, no. 118 (2007), 389–90; United States Military, *Santo Domingo*, 31–37.

[34]Letter from a guardian in Santiago to the regional superintendent of the northern department, Feb. 16, 1919, document no. 0266, exp. 2, leg. 1_683, 100729, SJPI, AGN.

child had what was needed to attend each day. They viewed schools not only as a space for academic instruction but as a place to "form character and inspire generous ideas" and instill in children the qualities needed to effectively navigate the changing country.[35] Like US officials and Dominican education administrators, guardians from all social classes supported the growth of the schools because they too believed education to be transformative. Guardians saw it as central to the progress of their community and to improving their child's future economic and social conditions.

Despite recognizing the duty to enroll their children, many guardians still faced difficulty bringing them to school every day. H. de Medina, a mother in San Francisco de Macorís, reached out to the regional superintendent of the northern department explaining the situation she faced. Since her family was destitute, she and her husband had to live separately so that they could both find employment to make enough to live on. To do that, she had to leave their children under the care of their father, making her unable to take them to school. For this particular mother, the desire to keep her children enrolled in school was so profound that she contacted the regional superintendent to request to transfer them to a school closer to where she lived.[36]

Even guardians with greater economic resources faced similar challenges bringing their children to school and adhering to the new policies. An owner of a trading house explained that he often had relied on his maid to bring his children to school but, since she had retired, he had to make an arrangement with his older children to care for their younger siblings until he could find a suitable replacement. The father was overheard saying, "Nobody can be as interested in the education of my children as I am because I am their father and those are my aspirations."[37]

Shaping School Policy

In addition to contributing to the physical aspects of the school, guardians were also actively involved in the curricular programming. They participated in school affairs and attended school ceremonies such as public examinations.[38] A custom that had endured since the Spanish colonial era, these examinations served to demonstrate the child's abilities and exhibit what students had learned to the rest of their community. Along with serving as a final assessment for students, exams were significant because they were a way for teachers to demonstrate their work to the public and for students to showcase themselves as future citizens in their community.[39] At

[35]Letter from a principal in Yerba Buena to the school inspector of the district, Sept. 20, 1919, document no. 0099-0100, exp. 1, leg. 1_718, 100765, SJPI, AGN.

[36]Letter from a guardian in San Francisco de Macorís to the regional superintendent of the northeastern department, Sept. 15, 1919, 111487, SJPI, AGN.

[37]Memorandum from the Secretary of the municipal government of San Francisco de Macorís, May 14, 1920, document no. 0238-0239, exp. 1, leg. C375, 116003, SJPI, AGN.

[38]Municipalities sometimes held parent assemblies where local school officials and administrators would make announcements about the progress of the schools. At one of these events, approximately fifty guardians attended. See Letter from school inspector in Monte Cristi to the regional superintendent of the northeastern department, document 0062, June 19, 1920, exp. 2, leg. 18, 115459, SJPI, AGN.

[39]Eugenia Roldán Vera, "'Towards a Logic of Citizenship: Public Examinations in Elementary Schools in Mexico, 1788-1848: State and Education Before and After Independence," *Paedagogica Historica* 46, no. 4 (2010), 511-24.

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one particular oral exam In Pinal Quemado, a rural town in the central part of the country, guardians of about half of the students were in attendance. In Constanza, another rural town in the central part of the country, guardians for 111 students, constituting approximately 70 percent of the enrolled students, attended the exams.[40]

Guardians also actively engaged the state on matters regarding curriculum, personnel, and facilities. Community members in Dajao wrote a collective letter to complain to the school inspector about a school principal who "does not have sufficient intellectual and pedagogical knowledge to teach."[41] They requested that, moving forward, educators be administered an exam to verify their competency. Guardians in La Joya, meanwhile, stated that they were keenly aware they were being asked "for resources for the work of a schoolhouse" and had contributed funds despite seeing that "nothing has been done." They demanded that a new treasurer be appointed and given the funds "so that we know who is administering the funds and what investment is made of the fruit of our work."[42] Citing their contributions, community members asserted their right to be involved in school finances and demanded inclusion in affairs of the schools.

While many non-elite Dominicans were considered "illiterate," they still employed other forms of literacy practices. Engaging in "distributed literacy," Dominicans drew on community members who possessed reading and writing skills to communicate their thoughts to government officials.[43] They often wrote collective letters or used members of their communities as scribes. Although most Dominicans were not technically literate, having access to distributed literacy kept them informed about local and national law, and helped them navigate state systems. Thus, communities leveraged collective power to effectively gain access to the literate world and make their way through it.

Guardians organized collectively to respond to the new 1918 education policy, particularly to vocalize their reactions to the potential implementation of a co-educational policy. To attain the minimum enrollment of a hundred students required in each school, school leaders were encouraged to operate *escuelas mixtas*, or co-educational schools.[44] Prior to the reforms, girls and boys attended separate schools. But as part of the expansion effort, co-education was touted as a favorable and efficient method for consolidating the number of school buildings and staff working in the system. Although education administrators highlighted benefits,

[40]School inspector of Jarabacoa, "Report to the Regional Superintendent of the Central Department," Aug. 6, 1921, document no. 0135-0139, exp. 1, leg. C196, 104805, SJPI, AGN; Letter from the school inspector in Jarabacoa to the regional superintendent of the central department, Aug. 12, 1920, document no. 0409-0413, exp. 1, leg. C196, 104805, SJPI, AGN.

[41]Letter from guardians in Bayaguana to the school inspector, May 24, 1926, document no. 0217, exp. 8, leg. 3, 115325, SJPI, AGN.

[42]This was also a situation that occurred prior to the occupation. See Martínez-Vergne, *Nation & Citizen in the Dominican Republic*, 147; Letter from guardians to the regional superintendent of the northeastern department, July 15, 1922, document no. 0451-452, exp. 1, leg. 116003, SJPI, AGN.

[43]Curtis, "On Distributed Literacy."

[44]Letter from the school inspector of Jarabacoa to the principals of rudimentary schools in the district, June 10, 1918, document no. 1023, exp. 1, leg. C196, 104805, SJPI, AGN; "Quarterly Report of the Military Governor of Santo Domingo, from July 1, 1918 to September 30, 1918," Quarterly Reports of the Military Governor, 1917–1923, RG 38: Chief of Naval Intelligence, NARA I.

those living in rural communities sometimes protested. As one school inspector noted, "The people are rebellious to the meeting of boys and girls."[45] The same school inspector pressured the principal of a rudimentary school in Jarabacoa to enroll both sexes, warning him to do so before his next visit. The inspector commanded the principal to explain the inevitability of co-educational learning to guardians and to continue implementing the law, despite the potential pushback. School officials in the south faced similar issues. One inspector commented to the regional superintendent that

> during the week that ends today, the rural schools have not been able to function as mixed schools, as a result of the guardians refusing to register their girls, claiming thousands of trivialities unworthy of being taken into consideration; therefore, judicial proceedings will be taken against all those who try to circumvent the prescriptions of the Law.[46]

But not all guardians were against the co-education policy. Some agreed with the new practice. A few guardians expressed their satisfaction and gratitude for the "vehement determination" officials had demonstrated in establishing a mixed school in their community.[47] They voiced their appreciation for their school's fusion of work and study and for helping to develop the character of their children. These guardians also praised the success of their new school, describing how children often came from neighboring villages to attend the only school in the area, which enrolled two hundred students and regularly offered six different classes across three different grades of primary instruction. When officials proposed to separate the co-educational school into two smaller schools, guardians in Guayubín voiced their disagreement. They stated that the "signatories neither feel, nor want, nor approve" the proposed separation, because doing so would create two schools that would lack the necessary student enrollment and would be forced to close. The guardians argued that the closing of the schools would then create "moral damage" to the town, as it would cause a reduction of instruction. This outcome would harm students, who would lose their school, and hurt the teachers, for whom the guardians felt a sense of genuine gratitude.

Along with the debates over gender-mixing policies, many guardians raised concerns about the 1918 education code's prohibition of religious instruction. Almost immediately after the prohibition was enacted, guardians throughout the country petitioned school officials to restore religious instruction to the curriculum.[48]

[45]Letter from the school inspector of Jarabacoa to the regional superintendent of the central department, June 14, 1918, document no. 0723, exp. 1, leg. C196, 104805, SJPI, AGN.

[46]Letter from the school inspector of Jarabacoa to the principals of the rudimentary schools in the district, June 10, 1918, document no. 1023, exp. 1, leg. C196, 104805, SJPI, AGN; Letter from the school inspector of San José de Ocoa to the regional superintendent of the southwestern department, Nov. 16, 1918, document no. 0391, exp. 1, leg. 74, 110437, SJPI, AGN.

[47]Letter from guardians in Guayubín to the school inspector and the regional superintendent of the northern department, March 10, 1920, document no. 00077-00079, exp. 2, leg. 18, 115459, SJPI, AGN.

[48]Letter from the school inspector of Peña to the regional superintendent of the northern department, Dec. 23, 1918, 100719, SJPI, AGN.

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School officials defended the ban, arguing that religious instruction in state schools was an outdated tradition. They described it as a relic from the previous system and asserted that the changes were introducing modernity through rationalism and scientific instruction.[49] While education administrators agreed that schools should teach children to be moral, inculcating virtues such as charity, they warned that schools should steer clear of teaching prayer and other practices of worship. In that way, schools—although ostensibly secular—were not entirely areligious and did indeed promote virtues and values rooted in the hegemonic religion, albeit not through religious practices. Although Dominican education administrators claimed that the values schools were teaching were universal, similar to the US administrators' claims about their common schools, the values the schools taught were often the norms of the dominant majority.[50] In the case of the Dominican Republic, the largest practicing religion was Roman Catholicism, with 98 percent of the country's population of nine hundred thousand identifying as Catholic in the 1920 census. Citing the new prohibition, education administrators closed those schools where "Protestant religious exercises" were being held.[51]

Guardians who were Protestant wrote collectively to protest the prejudicial treatment of their religion in state schools. One group of guardians complained to the regional superintendent of the northern department about their local school's principal, accusing her of mocking their religion and discriminating against their community, stating: "Can you believe Mr. Intendant that this Public School can give preference to three people and that the rest, because they do not sympathize with said religion, must suffer despite being recipients of public benefits like everyone else?"[52] Her mockery continued without consequence, so, while the guardians noted their previous attempts to find solutions through compromise, they now felt compelled to demand the principal's removal. Beyond their specific complaints about the principal, the guardians also employed their knowledge of school system's funding and policies in making their demand.

Guardians also navigated the implicit bias of education administrators, as school officials enforced the cultural practices of the majority by establishing Spanish as the language of instruction.[53] Areas like Samaná were home to British Caribbean

[49]Intellectuals such as Eugenio María de Hostos led this reform and the expansion of a secular, state-based education system. See Martínez-Vergne, *Nation & Citizen in the Dominican Republic*; Morrison, *Historia de la educación*; Raymundo González, "Hostos y la conciencia moderna en República Dominicana," *Clío* 71, no. 165 (2003), 205–24.

[50]In his analysis of common schools in the US, Kaestle describes how Protestantism infused the alleged "secular" curriculum. See Carl Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).

[51]Letter from the general superintendent of public instruction to the regional superintendent of the northeastern department, Feb. 4, 1920, document no. 0528, exp. 1, leg. C375, 116003, SJPI, AGN.

[52]Letter from guardians in Sabana Iglesia to the regional superintendent of the northern department, May 6, 1919, document no. 0348-0349, exp. 3, leg. 1_683, 100729, SJPI, AGN.

[53]It is important to note that the US military forces responded in extremely violent ways to Afro-religious communities' resistance to the extension of the Dominican state. See Lorgia García-Peña, *The Borders of Dominicanidad: Race, Nation, and Archives of Contradiction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); Secretaría de Estado de lo Interior y Policía, *Primer Censo de la República Dominicana* (Santo Domingo: Gobierno Militar, 1920).

migrants and descendants of African American freemen who had migrated during the nineteenth century. Many residents in this area spoke English rather than Spanish as their primary language, and 13 percent of Samaná's seventeen thousand residents were Protestant. Guardians in Samaná protested the military government's cultural assimilation efforts by continuing to enroll their children in private English-language schools established by African Methodist Episcopal and Wesleyan Methodist churches rather than in schools mandated by the Dominican government.[54] In these communities, guardians employed schools not only to strategically elude executive orders but, more significantly, to safeguard their rich linguistic and cultural heritage.

The Collapse of Dominican Schools and the End of the US Occupation

Although the school system continued to expand exponentially for the first few years, by 1921, the system quickly had started to disintegrate. Changes in school financing compounded existing financial issues, which bankrupted the school system and forced the US military government to suspend school instruction for months. Although schools reopened later that year, the system could not recover its previous enrollment. In only a month's time, the northeastern region saw a reduction of 539 students, and enrollment in the north fell by 1,500 students. To keep the existing system afloat, US officials and education administrators closed hundreds of schools permanently and then relied on guardians and community members to continue to volunteer their labor and materials. By 1924, the number of students still attending Dominican public schools had dropped to only one-third of the total students enrolled just four years earlier. In response to the failing system, many Dominicans guardians attempted to remedy the situation by working with the occupation government or by contributing to existing grassroots efforts to preserve schools in their communities.

While some Dominicans chose to keep their children in private schools for the purposes of ethnic preservation and in resistance to the occupation, others saw private schools as a way to address the reduced availability of public schools.[55] Other guardians and students protested school closures. They held the US occupation government responsible, given its control over the country's political and financial institutions. Although they expected governmental support, they did not wait for officials

[54]The African Methodist Episcopal church in the Dominican Republic was founded by African American freemen in 1830, following their migration to the Dominican Republic and Haiti during Haitian rule of the island (1822–1844). In subsequent years, the community included British Caribbean migrants who came to the Dominican Republic as laborers for the growing sugar industry. While Samaná has been an important epicenter for Black migrants to the Dominican Republic, Christina Davidson makes evident how these communities and religious institutions were not fixed to an isolated enclave but were in fact indicative of a prominent culture that existed throughout the southeast region of the country. Davidson, "Black Protestants in a Catholic Land: The AME Church in the Dominican Republic 1899–1916," *New West Indian Guide* 89 (Jan. 2015), 258–88. See also, Juan Alfonseca, "Escolarización y minorías étnicas en la República Dominicana, 1918–1944," *Cuadernos Interculturales* 6, no. 11 (2008), 17–45.

[55]Sáez, *Autoridad para educar*, 65–71; "Quarterly Report of the Military Governor of Santo Domingo, October-December 1921," W-A-7 Allied Countries - Santo Domingo, Reports of the Military Governor, Box 760 of 1630, Subject File, 1911-1927, RG 45: Records Collection of the Office of Naval Records and Library, NARA I.

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to assist communities in their efforts to provide access to public schooling. Dominican guardians and students began by writing letters—citing the education's essential function in fostering discipline and fighting ignorance—and respectfully asked top government officials to reopen their local schools. Fifty students in the city of Monte Cristi, for instance, described the "grave responsibility to reorganize our administrative order" and asked for the government's help to fix this "important and indispensable branch of the tree of public administration."[56]

Although signed by the students, the letter was likely drafted by their guardians and other members of the Monte Cristi community, and as such, it reflected the thoughts and concerns of a larger population. They expressed their hope that with government assistance, "the educational institution, the crystalline source where we go to quench the terrible thirst of ignorance will be circulated again through the now dry classroom sources." They noted that restoring the school system to its previous position was essential to "preserve our glorious people from falling in the disastrous chaos of corruption and vice" that would be the fate of their society without schools.

Unfortunately, letter writing did not always generate a change to the situation. The underfunded municipal governments still could not generate enough revenue from the property tax, which now funded the schools, and continued to operate at a deficit. The dire financial situation caused journalists to plead with their comrades, asking them to pay the property taxes so that "schools can flourish once again and educate your children."[57] Even after the termination of the military government, newspapers continued to comment on the poor state of the schools. They published editorials renewing calls to the government to reinstate education and prioritize schools as a way to modernize the country.[58]

Others took the schools into their own hands. Some groups of guardians and community members proposed to take on the operational expenses of schools that were scheduled to close because of financial reasons. As the third US military governor, Samuel S. Robinson (1921–1922), noted in his report in 1922, "The financial condition has not stood in the way of the activities of the Popular Education Societies."[59] Former teachers, many of them female, and other volunteers offered to teach the grades that were being cut. Individuals stepped in to fill the gap because they understood that schools were important, not just for promoting ideas about democracy but also to provide their children with essential skills.[60]

[56]Letter from students in Monte Cristi to Provisional President Juan B. Vicini Burgos, Nov. 14, 1922, document no. 0191-0193, exp. 4, 503598, SJPI, AGN.

[57]Letter from the general superintendent of Santo Domingo to the secretary of the state of justice and public instruction, document no. 0187, Exp_4, 503598, SJPI, AGN; "Editorial: El Impuesto Escolar," *Ecos del Valle*, May 10, 1923, Digitized Collection, Archivo General de la Nación (AGN).

[58]"Editorial: Nuestra Escuelas," *Ecos del Valle*, Dec. 6, 1923, AGN; "Edifiquemos la Escuelas, *Ecos del Valle*, April 17-May 8, 1924, AGN.

[59]"Quarterly Report of the Military Governor of Santo Domingo, from April 1, 1922 to June 30, 1922," W-A-7 Allied Countries - Santo Domingo, Reports of the Military Governor, RG 45, NARA I; "Quarterly Report of the Military Governor of Santo Domingo, from October 1, 1921 to December 31, 1921," W-A-7 Allied Countries - Santo Domingo, Reports of the Military Governor, RG 45, NARA I.

[60]"Quarterly Report of the Military Governor of Santo Domingo, October-December 1921," W-A-7 Allied Countries - Santo Domingo, Reports of the Military Governor; Box 760 of 1630, Subject File, 1911-1927, RG 45, NARA I.

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And while guardians cooperated with the plans of US officials and education administrators to expand schools into rural communities, their actions should be also understood with a special attention to power dynamics. While the US military government did focus on providing access to education, US occupations were a violent enterprise. Facing a foreign government in charge of generating and enforcing national policy, lower- and middle-class Dominicans were fully aware of the censorship laws, extrajudicial violence by US Marines, and overall loss of sovereignty.[61] This foreign government made decisions that affected everything from the land that people owned and the property taxes they would owe, to how much would be allocated to the national budget and what amount would be paid to the US for outstanding loans. Thus, to describe guardians as collaborators misrepresents their position.

Instead, guardians and community members exerted their agency within their limited sphere of influence and negotiated what was within their control. Aware of their status, guardians and community members leveraged opportunities by working with the government. They made decisions based on the choices they had, and obtained what they could out of a difficult situation. US and Dominican government officials worked with guardians and community members because, without them, there would be no way to compel Dominicans to cooperate. There was no mechanism to do so in a decentralized country. And when the national and local governments could no longer provide what the community members wanted, which was mainly the funding to pay for their teaching force, guardians and community members found ways around the funding gap. Guardians and community members continued to build schools, furnish classrooms, and locate teachers who would volunteer to teach their children because they understood that it was primarily their responsibility. In fact, guardians and community members worked tirelessly to ensure that children had access to schooling because they recognized that was their duty. They believed it was their obligation to help to preserve their local schools through financial contributions, volunteer efforts, or a combination of the two.

Conclusion

Through their actions and words, Dominican guardians demonstrated their commitment to providing and maintaining schools in their local communities. The value of self-determination was foundational to how many lower- and middle-class Dominican guardians and community members understood their responsibility in ensuring children had access to education.[62] While communities accepted financial assistance from the government, this was often understood as supplemental to what communities should provide. Since guardians felt a deep desire to control and sustain schools for their children, they viewed the role of the government as simply aiding their endeavors, and resisted efforts they felt were imposed on them or that

[61] April Mayes, *The Mulatto Republic: Class, Race, and Dominican National Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014); García-Peña, *The Borders of Dominicanidad*; Calder, *The Impact of Intervention*.

[62] Much like many communities of former slaves in the postbellum US South. See Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 5.

they disagreed with, such as the military government's co-educational policies and prohibition on religion in schools.

Through this examination of education during the US occupation of the Dominican Republic, with special attention to the role of guardians, another narrative emerges that at times contradicts or complicates the "official narrative." It reveals not only that guardians were active participants in education during the period, but that they were vital to the expansion and maintenance of the schools throughout political and financial turmoil. While US officials and education administrators have received credit in the literature for the exponential growth of the education system, particularly between 1918 and 1920, they would not have been able to do without the essential contributions of individual Dominican guardians and education societies. Recovering the voices and actions of these guardians is not just important for reconstructing the story of the education reforms, but also offers invaluable insights into how these reforms were actually received and shaped by various communities.

Alexa Rodríguez is a postdoctoral research associate at the University of Virginia and a research fellow in the Institute for Urban and Minority Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. The author is grateful to the archivists at the Archivo General de la Nación in the Dominican Republic and her mentors and colleagues who provided invaluable feedback. This research was supported by the NAEd/Spencer Dissertation Fellowship.

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