

## II. HISTORY

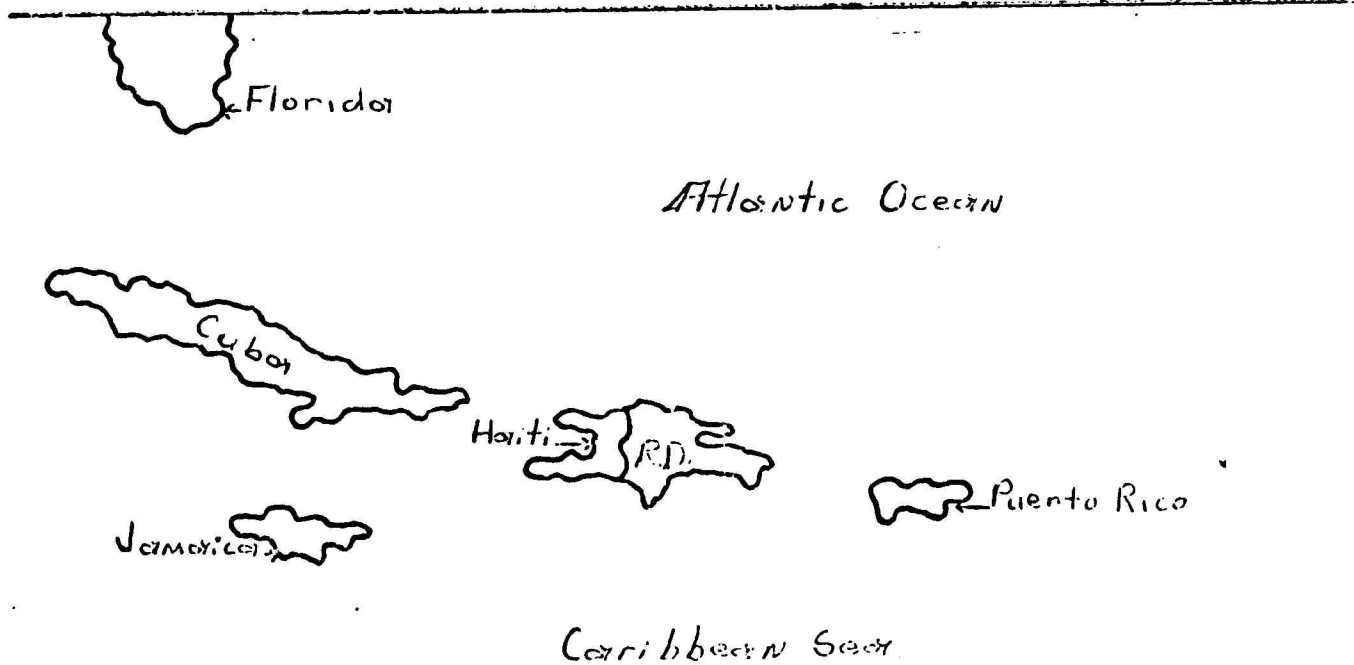
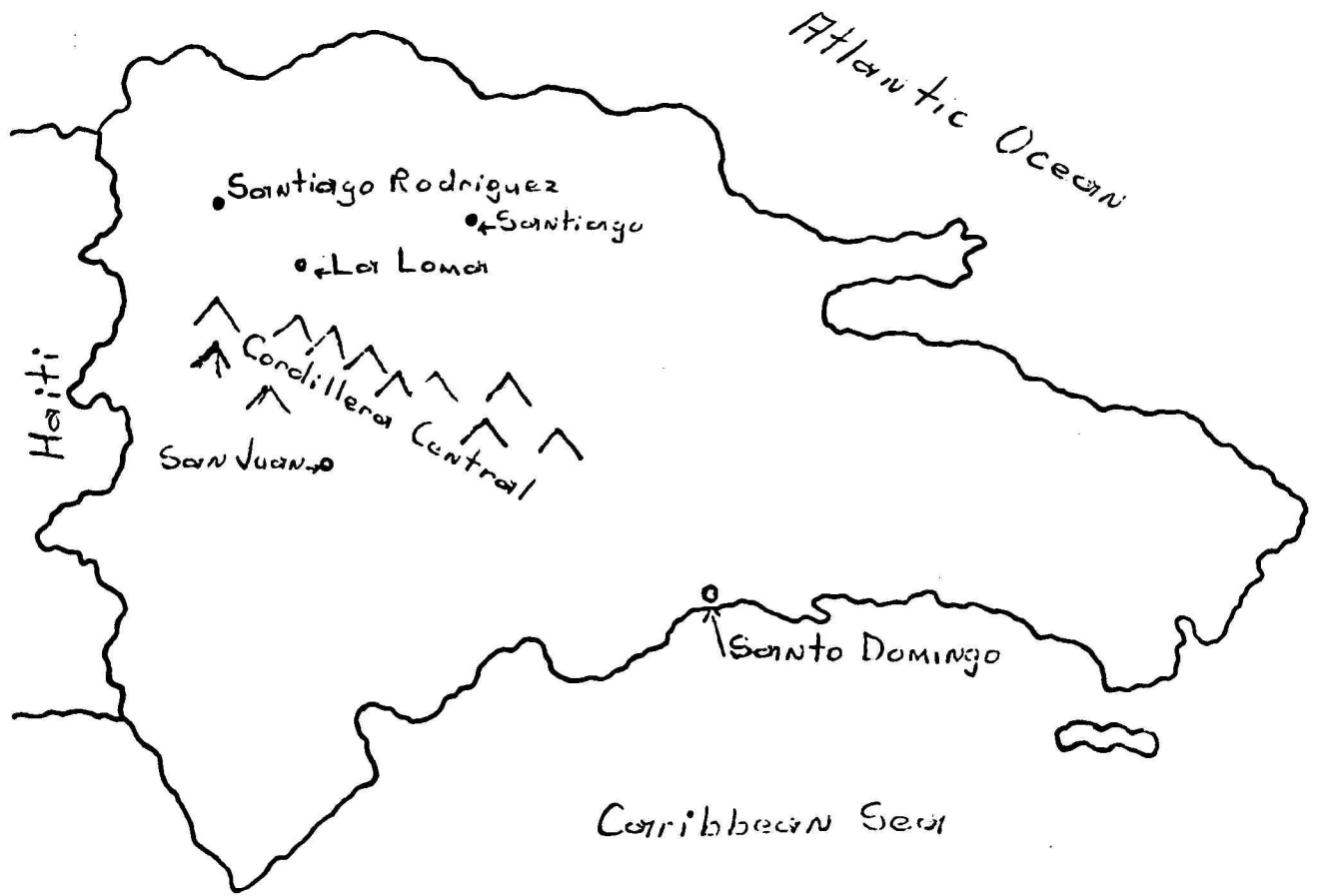
Insights into the why of a person's reaction to a situation must be sought partially in an examination of his history and development. This is no less true of the reaction of the community of La Loma to the crisis. There are certain elements in the history of the nation and the history of the community which put into perspective much of what was observed and tape-recorded. A brief historical treatment is therefore warranted.

### The Nation.<sup>2</sup>

The Dominican Republic is the country occupying the eastern two thirds of the island of Hispaniola, in the West Indies. On the north it is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean, on the South by the Caribbean Sea. On the east there is a waterway, the Mona Passage, separating the island of Hispaniola from Puerto Rico. On the west the Dominican Republic borders with the Republic of Haiti.

The island of Hispaniola was discovered by Columbus in 1492. For over three centuries the eastern part of the island remained a Spanish colony, until it was surrendered to the French in 1795--the French having secured for themselves a century earlier the western part of the island, today called the Republic of Haiti. But sickness and slave uprisings prevented the French from ever really securing possession of the Dominican Republic.

# The Dominican Republic



blic (not yet known by that name). Though Spain briefly recaptured Santo Domingo, independence was declared in 1821. But the recently liberated nation of Haiti soon invaded and temporarily conquered the eastern part of the island, until in 1844 a revolution led by the patriots Duarte, Sanchez, and Mella once again freed Santo Domingo.

Thus autonomy and identity as an independent nation came with difficulty to the Dominican Republic. Invasion and reconquest characterized its early years. Even after the second proclamation of independence in 1844 and the establishment of a Dominican national government under Santana, internal strife and threat of absorption continued as a stable phenomenon. In fact in 1861 President Santana once again annexed his country to Spain. But revolt soon followed and in 1865 the Dominican Republic was proclaimed free once again. But so unstable was the situation that only four years later Báez, the new president, again sought to annex the Dominican Republic--this time to the United States. President Grant was in favor of the move, but the U.S. Senate rejected it.

The following decades saw a period of dictatorship and apparent stability. (The old men in La Loma still refer to "Los tiempos de Lili".) But the economic situation had declined so drastically that the first five years of the 20th century saw four major revolutions in

the Dominican Republic. The nation was so badly in debt that European creditors threatened to take action. The United States, whose financial interests were also at stake, moved in and took control of the collection of custom duties (1905) to pay off the nation's debts. But political conditions remained so unsettled that the U.S. Marines landed and established (1916) a U.S. military government in the country.

Heavily criticized for the move, both at home and abroad, the U.S. government withdrew its troops in 1924 but retained control of custom collections. (This U.S. control of Dominican customs collections persisted until 1940.) Under the presidency of Vásquez the nation enjoyed six years of peace.

But in 1930 Vásquez was overthrown by General Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina. Trujillo had himself elected president and for the next three decades converted the island into the personal manor, for all practical purposes, of himself, his family, and a select group of friends. The political stability, economic progress, and internal improvements brought about during the era of Trujillo were offset by the almost complete suppression of political and civil liberties in the nation. Trujillo was assassinated in 1961.

The stopper was then removed and the country reverted into the political instability that had characterized it since its founding. Joaquín Balaguer, who was the

figurehead president at the time of Trujillo's assassination, was himself ousted (alive) by a military coup in 1962. Then followed a countercoup and a period of provisional government by a council of state. In December of 1962, Juan Bosch was elected president in a free election--the first to be held since Vasquez' election in 1924--and managed to stay in power almost a year before being ousted by the military. The subsequent civilian-military junta lasted until April of 1965, when a bloody civil war erupted, plunging the capital city into the most violent chaos it had ever experienced.

History repeated itself and the U.S. sent in the Marines again, as well as the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division. But 1965 was not 1916 and the world's reaction to unilateral military intervention was much stronger. Hence the U.S. requested the supporting presence of troops from the other countries in Latin America, an appeal to which only a few nations responded.

Late in 1965 an OAS-sponsored provisional government was established and in July of 1966 elections were held once again. The principal candidates were Juan Bosch and Joaquín Balaguer, both of whom had been in office before. Balaguer won the elections by a large majority and at present writing is still in office.

The Dominican Republic is very small, as most countries go, and there are no indigenous subcultures

isolated from the mainstream of the country's life, as in many other Latin American countries. In many ways the campesinos--especially in these latter years--have been affected by, and emotionally involved in, the political goings-on in the nation.

This means that a student of communities such as La Loma must view his data at least partially in the perspective of the nation's history, more so than, for example, a student of a South American Indian community which is physically and culturally isolated from the nation's life.

In the brief history which has just been presented there are certain elements which appear to have left visible traces in present day La Loma. It is difficult to isolate functional relationships between history and present day thinking, but certain attitudes found in the protocols seem to be the offspring of certain elements in the history of the country. The important historical elements are the following:

1. The nation has had only two historical alternatives for most of its existence: political chaos or strong political repression.

2. In the case of chaos, the country has tended to turn to a stronger, external force. The first president, Santana, re-annexed the country to Spain. The very next president tried to annex it to the U.S. In 1916 the U.S. took control of the island. And the U.S.

recently sent in troops to control the 1965 revolution.

3. For more than 30 years the Dominicans had at the head of the country a strong dictator who, means of simultaneous benevolent paternalism and ruthless "anti-communist" oppression of opposition succeeded in creating a political atmosphere of personal dependence on him as el Jefe and fear of opposing the government. Undoubtedly different sectors of Dominican society had different reactions to Trujillo while he was alive. But the protocols collected in La Loma strongly indicate that the campesinos there had formed a genuine attachment to him and that hostility came to be felt only after Trujillo's death--when it came in style to say "Trujillo era malo," what a bad guy Trujillo was. And even then the hostility does not appear to be strong; in the case of many campesinos, nostalgia might be a more accurate word than hostility.

Thus Trujillo's style--paternalistically benevolent to those who would support him and shout "viva el Jefe" in meetings; and devastatingly vengeful toward those who showed any opposition or dared utter a word against the government--more or less succeeded in channeling and strengthening certain norms of political behavior and thought in the campo.

It would be overstating the case to say that all of the present political situation in La Loma is strictly related to Trujillo's times; but on the other hand, many

of the political statements appearing on the protocols--startling to an outside observer--become less surprising when one remembers the nature of the government that had ruled the men speaking for much if not most of their adult lives.

To sum up: national history must be kept in mind when reading the protocols. Many of the attitudes, feelings, and fantasies that come out in the interviews are startling. To understand them they will have to be approached from several points of view. On the one hand it will be seen that these attitudes are understandable in terms of the need for regaining cognitive consistency, threatened by the new crisis. But on the other hand, it would be an error to attempt to understand the attitudes only in terms of their psychological function. To understand their etiology it is also necessary to take into account certain salient idiosyncracies in the history of the Dominican Republic. The features to keep an eye on are: the smallness and relative cultural homogeneity of the country, its problematic and ambivalent emergence from the status of colony to that of nation (and the frequent relapse back into colonial or quasi-colonial status), the alternating states of political chaos and political oppression and resulting equation of "stability" with foreign domination or domestic tyranny; the physical proximity, frequent political intervention, and resulting psychological salience, of the United States as a very large



cognitive object in the political sector of the campesino's mental landscape.

The community.

Of equal relevance in providing perspective is the history of La Loma itself, the circumstances accompanying the growth of this mountain community. Unfortunately there are no written records available--or none were found. A history of La Loma had to be collected by hearsay. But enough was able to be ascertained to reconstruct the general pattern of the community's growth and to suggest certain characteristic features in the history of this part of the island as explanatory of some aspects of the data.

One fact appears clear about La Loma, and about this section of the Cordillera Central in general: the present population came from outside during this century. These communities are not ancient villages with long histories and deep-rooted community identities and traditions. The oldest men in the community all came from somewhere else; they pulled up stakes from the drier lowlands as young men and went up into the pine mountains where rain was abundant and land was there for the taking by anyone who was willing to clear it of the trees. From the stories of the old men, the mountains used to be largely uninhabited. This century has seen several waves of migrants spreading out over the hills. In many ways the Cordillera

offered to the young men freedom of movement and hope of a future. They settled down and formed small communities, such as La Loma, and established relationships by *compadrazgo* and marriage.

This old generation has grown very attached to the Sierra. But it is not the self-defining identification with the individual community that is often found in many Latin American villages. Linguistically, the people do not use place-name adjectives to describe themselves; A person who grows up in the city of Santiago, for example, calls himself a santiaguero; a child in Vallejuelo (the village in the San Juan Valley where I lived as a Peace Corps Volunteer) sees himself as a vallejuelero. But the only adjective the people of the generally use in talking of themselves is serrano, mountain folk. If they have roots, they spread over the mountains in general, not down deep into their local communities.

A history of mobility and lack of deep attachments to individual plots of land; these are two characteristics of the serrano that make him different from the typical peasant as, for example, described by Redfield.<sup>3</sup> There is attachment--but it is to the mountains in general rather than to particular communities.

The type of agriculture that the serrano uses is conducive to this psychological mobility. A site is chosen on a hill; the trees are chopped, the brush is burned; the crop is planted and harvested. If the land

is exceptional it may be used for two or three years in a row; but then "se cansa," it grows tired and a new site must be chosen on some other hill. Pigs and cows were often set loose to wander and fatten themselves in the uninhabited hills and not sought for until months later. The men tend to idealize life in the old days. But even allowing for the artificial rosy glow that might be surrounding their memory of the past, it is clear that they had a life of considerable freedom: both freedom of movement and freedom of activity on the land. Knowledge of this historical situation sheds a great deal of light on some of the wishes and fears expressed during the interviews.

But the smooth course of this rosy life was interrupted by another historical event: la mensura, the measurement. Reports of this event are contradictory, but some picture can be formed nonetheless. Several years after Trujillo had taken over the government, the freewheeling serranos were visited by a team of surveyors, who began taking measurements of the hills. The stories told are confusing and time did not permit an investigation into official sources--if any are available. But it appears that Trujillo, acting as president of the country, sold thousands upon thousands of tareas of pine forest to the owner of a newly founded lumber company, the Compañía that is in La Loma today. The land around La Loma, almost entirely pine forest, was included in

the sale. Thus the squatters on no man's land became squatters on Company land.

But Trujillo, who was extremely conscious of his image and who did everything "legally," was not about to evict communities of serranos. When the purchase was made by the Company, back in the '30's, it was announced that all farmers were to declare how much land they "owned"; this would be excluded from the sale and the Company would have to buy it from the individual farmer. Any land not claimed would automatically become Company property.

Very few of the farmers claimed land. In the first place it was necessary to make the claim in the provincial capital of Santiago Rodriguez, a long journey for most of the farmers. Secondly--according to two independent sources, one farmer and one from the sawmill--someone (it is easy to speculate who) spread the rumour that the government was trying to find out who owned land in order to impose some sort of a tax, thus discouraging the campesinos, confused about what was going on, from staking any claims. And thirdly, the transient connection which the farmers had with most of the land which they planted offered small motivation to stake permanent claims. True, their life depended on land, but not on particular plots of land, which for planting purposes were good only for one or two years.

Those who didn't sell were able to retain their land

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for planting purposes; nobody was evicted. But to this day men in this category still don't know if they "own" the land that they had planted and harvested and set their animals out to graze in.

The old conucos were left alone; but the crux of the problem was that the freedom to make new ones was greatly curtailed. From that time on no more pine trees were to be chopped or burnt. Farming was to be allowed only on those hillsides (and there were still many of these) where there were no pine trees that required chopping. Violations were to be punished seriously by the government. In a sense, Paradise had been closed.

But when Trujillo was assassinated, "la cosa voivió y se aflojó.." things loosened up again. Chopping and burning came back into style, and another wave of land-hungry migrants came up into the hills. The restrictions were officially there, but who was going to enforce them? The old freedom was never restored, but life became liveable again.

In the meantime the Company had set up its own sawmill in La Loma (1958) and imported its workers from other parts of the country, lodging them in the company town alluded to later in the study. The Company has built all sorts of roads out into the hills; the truck goes out daily to haul back logs to be sawed up in the sawmill. The farmers and sawmill workers each led their lives independently of the other group and, as the people say, "se vivía," life was O.K.

"Lo bueno nunca dura" (what's good never lasts) is frequently heard in the campos. The brief respite came to an end. Sometime after Balaguer was elected, the news leaked out that the Ley Forestal, the Forestry Law, was to be reinstated in all its vigor, and that in an effort to preserve the national forests all sawmills were to be shut down. Moreover the Forestry Dept., backed by the government, was going to eliminate all conuco farming in the sierra because of the harm supposedly being done by the serranos. The government would try eventually to relocate the serranos on Agrarian Reform land in some other part of the country; but in the meantime the old restrictions were renewed. Heavy penalties were to be inflicted on farmers who chopped a pine tree--or even allowed the branches to be singed by the smoke from their brush-clearing fires. It was a replay of the old story: only now there were pine trees everywhere; the pine-less hillsides had all been planted.

In effect the men of this community had been condemned to economic death. The sawmill workers were soon to be left jobless--and homeless, since they lived in company houses. There farmers were now in a greater bind than ever before. Life instead of getting better was getting worse. And this was the situation in the community when this study began. The workers were under a guillotine, the farmers in a stranglehold.