



Dominicans **IN PHILADELPHIA**



he first Dominicans came to Philadelphia more than 100 years ago. The main immigration period for Dominican immigration to Philly, though, was the 1960s to the 1990s. The primary reasons for Dominicans coming to Philadelphia during this period were less expensive housing and an opportunity for a better life.

Many Philadelphians were leaving the City in the 1960s, resulting in vacant and deteriorating buildings. These structures became a hazard, increasing the City's liability.

Philadelphia welcomed the newly arrived Dominicans. One important way that the City showed this was to offer deteriorating or vacant houses to persons willing to repair them—for only \$1. The Dominican immigrants enthusiastically embraced this offer; Casa Dominicana, a Dominican community association, got its first office for \$1.

Talk of this opportunity made its way to New York City, which had the largest Dominican population of any U.S. city. NYC Dominicans came to Philadelphia in greater numbers, since home ownership in Philadelphia cost less than renting in New York City. As the community's numbers swelled, the Dominican government opened a consulate in Philadelphia to support them.

Dominican-American entrepreneurs began to provide neighborhoods with important services. One of these was the corner bodega, or grocery store. In New York City, many Dominicans worked in bodegas—but in Philadelphia, Dominicans could afford to *own* a bodega.

By the late 1990s, Dominicans were the main owners of bodegas in Philadelphia. Other small businesses, like barber shops, auto repair, and money forwarding, grew in the wake of the bodegas' success.

These new Dominican Philadelphians worked hard to maintain their culture and traditions, aided by the Dominican Cultural Center and Casa Dominicana. These organizations also provided ESL, Citizenship, and other necessary services.

15-20 years of community building and outreach efforts are now bearing fruit for Philadelphia Dominicans. Organizations like Casa Dominicana continue their mission of coordinating and maximizing the impact of the various Dominican programs in the City.

LEFT: Dominicans show their pride for the traditions that are on display at the annual Dominical Parade in north Philly. This celebration attracts many Philadelphians and teaches them about Dominican culture.

BELOW: Dominican dancers at an outdoor event show the merengue, sometimes called the national dance of the island.







LEFT: Armando Diaz started repairing flat tires a few years ago. He now owns two tire and auto repair businesses, this one on Allegheny Avenue.

ABOVE: A Dominican-owned hair salon business on 5th Street in the Olney section of the City.



LEFT: Dante Sanchez is a Dominican community advocate. With an M.D. at home, he is now the CEO of Cognitive Behavioral Services Inc., a multiethnic behavioral health clinic on North 6th Street. Many Dominicans pursue advanced professional degrees when they come to Philadelphia.

ABOVE: Pedro Rodriguez is the director of the Human Resources Department of the City of Philadelphia. Dominican professionals work in public agencies and private businesses throughout the City.

RIGHT: Facundo Antonio Knight, Director of the Dominican Cultural Center (DCC), conducts a citizenship class for Dominicans. The DCC organization also holds ESL and citizenship classes for Hispanics in the City.





A Dominican Republic Independence Day flag-raising celebration held at City Hall in February 2017.

LEFT: Dominican students watch the event.

RIGHT: Benito Bravo displays the Dominican flag.





ABOVE: Visitation BVM Catholic Church, on Lehigh Avenue, has parishioners from many different cultures, including Dominicans. Pastor John Olenik is a strong advocate for immigrants within and beyond his sanctuary, providing his personal support city-wide.

RIGHT: Two youngsters share a kind moment during a service at Visitation BVM church.







LEFT: The “flag,” consisting of rice, beans, salad, and meat, is considered the Dominican national dish because it is eaten almost every day. *Tostones* (smashed fried plantains) make a delicious addition.

ABOVE: Classic Philadelphia preparations like the cheesesteak are a mainstay in this bodega. It’s a fusion of faraway and nearby that has spelled success for many Dominican entrepreneurs.



ABOVE: This Dominican bodega, at Lancaster and Westminster Avenues, kick-started the rehabilitation of the entire block. Senior subsidized housing was constructed behind this store once it was established and attracting everyday traffic.

RIGHT: Estimates are that there could be over 2,000 bodegas (corner grocery stores) in Philadelphia, with most owned by Dominicans.







LEFT: For Dominican youth, baseball is an incredible incentive to work hard. Many dream of making it in the major leagues.

ABOVE: Willis Otañez was a professional baseball player with such teams as the Baltimore Orioles and the Toronto Blue Jays. Now retired, he holds a baseball clinic for Dominican kids in north Philly to teach the sport and life skills.



ABOVE: Like the Dominican Republic itself, a typical Dominican band is a rich mix of parent cultures. The instrument called the *guira*, at upper left, is a legacy of the native Taino, originally from the northern part of South America. The *tambora* (drum) is an African import; the *acordeon* (accordion) has European roots.

RIGHT: Dominican artist Renny Molenaar has a studio and gallery on Germantown Avenue, the iMPeRFeCT Gallery. Renny holds regular Friday night rumbas for the large immigrant artistic community in Germantown.

FAR RIGHT: Young Dominicans participate in the annual Dominican Parade. The *diablo cojuelo* (little limping devil) is one of the main characters of the carnival.







ABOVE: Young Dominican ladies prepare for a beauty pageant that celebrates the Restoration of Dominican Independence.

RIGHT: Lights, color, loud Latin music, merengue—standard features of a Dominican night club in Philadelphia.



