

Fritz Desir
Keeping History Alive

My artifact is El Pilon that my mother bought straight from the Dominican Republic. A medium-sized wooden Pilon (Mortar and pestle) with a hammer type object to grind things, used in Hispanic culture but specifically in Dominican history is used to make dishes like mangu and used to crush garlic to make different spices. This artifact relates all the way back to the beginning of time and was mentioned in the Old Testament as a method of healing. The first evidence of it being used can be tracked all the way to 35,000 BC. The Egyptian Ebers (A medical document) contains the first few records of the mortar and pestle being used. Relating back to my Dominican heritage, El Pilon helped create again a famous dish like mofongo and give the chance for Dominicans to eat this delicious food, celebrate their culture and a way to bring the whole family together.

Back in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, the Spanish invaded modern-day the Dominican Republic, killing the Taino indigenous that lived their prior by diseases, weapons, and enslavement. Colonies were set around the country's capital, Santo Domingo. But in the 17th-century Barbados and Saint Dominique (modern-day Haiti) became sugar production and generated great wealth to France and British planters that worked the land. In 1822, the new founded Haiti was the first black sovereign nation in the world freeing itself from French rule. For the remainder of the century, Santiago Domingo won their independence from Haiti in 1844 and resubmitting to Spanish colonial rule in 1861. But Dominican claim to independence didn't come unchallenged in the 20th century. The United States attacked the country multiple times including 1916 to 1924 and again in 1965. This was done to set up military bases and to keep Germany from taking the land first. On April, 1965 42,000 American troops entered the Dominican Republic and by the end of the invasion about 3,000 Dominicans died and 31 Americans died. While the Americans were there back in 1916, the Americans came across a certain dish that they have never seen or tasted before. The dish was mangu and the locals there ate it all the time but when the Americans they loved it. Surprisingly the dish didn't originally come from the Dominican Republic but came from Congo during the slave trade, from a similar dish made with boiled plantains named mangusi. The word mangu coming from the West African word mangusi, which refers to any mashed vegetables from the earth.

My mom has very descriptive memories of her going to the Dominican Republic every summer with her brother Irving and literally eating that everyday for lunch. Not only that but she grew up on it, not knowing any American food that all the other kids ate. She would have all her aunts, cousins and other close family come and cook a great Dominican fest for the whole family. Growing up my mother didn't have much but the thing that always came frequently in her life was her family and the food that they ate. To this day mom still eats mangu and everytime I go to my grandma's house, I see her crushing all types of spices and food to make for me when I come to see her.

After researching my culture, reading the history of my country and honestly writing about it made me look at my background in a different way, giving me a wider understanding of where my family came from. Frequently looking at El Pilon being used in the kitchen and never really taking a deeper look in it made me curiously foster. Learning about how a Spanish dish mangu didn't even come from the Dominican Republic was really surprising and interesting to me. Truly learning how the Americans thousands of my people and try to control the land that they fought the Spanish over I wasn't really fond of but it was very informative for me to know. Finally, learning how my mother grew up, the food she ate

and the environment she lived really help connect with my mother more not only as a human being but of course as her son.