

NEIGHBORHOOD REPORT: NEW YORK UP CLOSE; Some Dominicans Balk At a Diplomatic Import

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Body

To an outsider, the controversy might seem puzzling: the Dominican Republic's **new** consul general in **New York** is from . . . the Dominican Republic. But the recent appointment of Francisco Antonio Pena Guaba, who had served as the Dominican secretary of youth and had before never lived in **New York**, has stirred discontent among relentlessly political Dominican immigrants.

It had become custom in recent years to name a resident of the **New York** region to the post. The official oversees consular services for the 800,000 **Dominicans** in **New York** and **New** Jersey, serving as their official link with the island. In previous years, nominees came from the local chapters of Dominican political parties, whose donations make **New York** a required stop in presidential campaigns.

"People feel someone who has gone through the immigrant experience has a much better understanding of the day-to-day problems and concerns that the Dominican immigrant population has," said Anthony Stevens-Acevedo, a high school teacher in Washington Heights active in community causes.

The phenomenon has resulted in some strange career paths: one recent consul general had been a restaurant worker, another a building superintendent. Few, if any, had college degrees. By contrast, consuls general who represent Mexico, Colombia and Ecuador never come from the **New York** area and often have impressive resumes. (Mexico's consul general, Salvador Beltran del Rio, was a member of the Mexican Congress and studied law at Harvard.)

But the proportion of **Dominicans** living in the United States rather than in their home country is much greater than the proportions among Mexicans, Colombians and Ecuadoreans. So some took the appointment of Mr. Pena, the son of a prominent Dominican politician, as an affront.

Dr. Rafael Lantigua, president of the governing Dominican Revolutionary Party's United States chapters and a professor of clinical medicine at Columbia University, said he welcomed the appointment of Mr. Pena, but acknowledged that some party members were disappointed. "It was the belief of members of the party that it would be someone from here," he said. "The party has at least 25,000 members in **New York**, 2,800 in leadership positions. You would expect that among those 2,800 there would be a qualified person."

Sitting in the bustling Dominican Consulate in Times Square, Mr. Pena, 34, said being an outsider was not a problem. Speaking of consular nominees in general, he said, "The important thing is not that he is from here or from there, but that he is conscious that he has to do a job for the community, independent of politics or the party he belongs to."

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Whatever his qualifications, he does have more to get used to than his **New York**-savvy predecessors did. "It's not a third world country," he said. "Here, for example, the power never goes out." SETH KUGEL

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Graphic

Photo: Francisco Pena oversees consular services for 800,000. (Ting-Li Wang/The **New York** Times)

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