



## **TEACHING BIRTHRIGHT CRISIS**

### **Lesson Plans for Social Justice Activism**

**Created by: Miriam Neptune &  
Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees  
January 2014**

## **Birthright Crisis – Lesson Plans for Social Justice Activism**

### **Background**

Birthright Crisis is a 15-minute documentary video produced by Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees, directed and edited by Miriam Neptune. It was originally created in 2005, in collaboration with Sonia Pierre, the late founding director of Movimiento de Mujeres Dominico-Haitianas, to inform audiences about the massive deportations of Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent from the Dominican Republic that year. From 2006-2012, the video was revised several times to illustrate that violence and legalized discrimination were ongoing and cyclical, beyond a single set of deportations. *Birthright Crisis 2013* was updated after the passage of a law in September 2013 that strips citizenship from hundreds of thousands of Dominicans of Haitian descent.

### **Why Teach Birthright Crisis?**

People of Haitian descent in the Dominican Republic have experienced scapegoating, poor work and living conditions, limits on human rights, and widespread social exclusion for many decades. However, conditions have worsened over the past 10 years, as a series of laws and constitutional amendments has legalized the practice of denying birth certificates, ID cards, and basic rights such as education to the children and grandchildren of Haitian migrant workers. On September 23, 2013, the Dominican Constitutional Court passed Resolution 168/13, which retroactively takes away citizenship from people with at least one Haitian parent. By extending the reach of this law back to 1929, when the current borders of the Dominican Republic and Haiti were defined, the Dominican government is now empowered to remove citizenship from anyone born in the DR in the past 84 years to foreign parents, as well as their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. The law has only begun its impact, forcing an estimated 210,000 Dominican nationals into statelessness, making it impossible for these people to further their education, participate in the political system, get married, own property, travel, or receive legal protection. As these Dominicans are forced into the shadows, they continue to be the targets of xenophobic violence and racism.

*Birthright Crisis 2013* is a tool for activists and educators to discuss the cycle of racism, exclusion and violence that people of Haitian descent experience in DR. It features the voices of deportees, Dominican children of Haitian parents, Haitian and Dominican activists, and ethnic Dominican allies who are willing to speak out about the injustices they have witnessed. These are voices that are not commonly heard in the media. We hope that by expanding the number of people who see and use this video, we can help to foster more voices of dissent.

## **PART ONE – Nationality, Ethnicity, Identity**

### **Objectives:**

- Students will draw connections between the immigrant experience in the United States and the experience of 1,2,3<sup>rd</sup> generation Haitian immigrants in DR.
- Students will have the opportunity to talk about nationality and identity in a way that affirms immigrant and African-diaspora heritage.

### **Opening Activity:**

Draw a map or picture that includes the country you live in, the place you consider to be “home,” the places that your parents are from, and the origins of your ethnic background. Go back as far as you can to illustrate where your grandparents and great grandparents came from. Share this image with your neighbor or the class.

Think about the journey that brought you here, from wherever your ancestors once lived, to where you live now. What are some of the reasons that our parents, grandparents, or great grandparents came here? How did they get here?

*Many of us came to the United States through immigration. We may have left the countries we lived in because of political problems, violence, poverty, or because we were looking for different opportunities such as a specific type of education or work. Globalization has forced many people to migrate, to earn an income in another country and send money to the family members they left behind. Many of us also come from people who were forced to leave their country through slavery or worker trafficking, where laborers were bought and sold by companies and brought to new places to work for free. Generations later, the descendants of African slaves still face racism, and legalized discrimination in the countries they were brought to.*

What are some challenges your parents or grandparents faced when they left one place to live in another?

Where do you see your origins in your daily life now? For example, is it part of the language you speak, your religion, your music, the way you dress, the food you eat, your ideas and values?

## **Birthright Crisis – Lesson Plans for Social Justice Activism**

### **Opening, cont.**

How are you different from your parents? Do you speak different languages, dress differently, listen to different music, believe in different things? If your parents are from a different place, do you see some differences between how you see the world and the way they see it?

What if you were forced to leave your current home and return to the place where your parents were from? What would that be like for you?

### **Possible extension activity:**

Discuss the article in Appendix A. One version of this article imagines that an immigrant group in the US is in danger of losing citizenship. The other is an Associated Press report on the September ruling in DR.

*Today we are going to learn about the experiences of people of Haitian descent in the Dominican Republic. These are people whose parents or ancestors moved from Haiti to the Dominican Republic, either recently or in the past 85 years. There are an estimated 210,000 Dominicans of Haitian descent who were born in the Dominican Republic, but whose parents originally came from Haiti. At birth, these people were considered Dominican citizens. But in September, 2013, a Dominican Court ruled that these people cannot keep their citizenship. This means that the Dominican government does not see them as Dominican, and will force them to either apply for the ability to stay in the country or face deportation to Haiti.*

*In the following video you will learn about the way these people have been treated in the Dominican Republic, and some of the basic rights that they have been fighting for, over the past several years.*

### **ACTIVE VIEWING: Screening Birthright Crisis**

**Note to educators:** Please screen the video before sharing with students. Although the narration is in English, much of the dialogue is in Haitian Kreyol or Spanish. You may find it necessary to pause the video while viewing to enable students to ask questions about content they did not understand.

*The video contains several testimonies of people who were deported, or have experienced violence because they are of Haitian descent. You will also hear from people who are not of Haitian descent, or don't live in the Dominican Republic, but feel strongly that these people are being mistreated.*

## Birthright Crisis – Lesson Plans for Social Justice Activism

*As you watch the video, take note of the different points of view that are being expressed. Think about whether you have heard these perspectives before? What did you learn from the speakers? Write down a quote from one of the following speakers, or choose your own. Who is the person speaking? Why are they concerned about this issue? What rights do they say are being violated? We will discuss what you heard.*

| Name/Description  | Quote |
|---|-------|
|    |       |
| Deported Nursing Mother   |       |
|   |       |
| Deported Student  |       |
|  |       |
| Young student at rally  |       |
|  |       |
| Haitian woman   |       |

## **Birthright Crisis – Lesson Plans for Social Justice Activism**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Sonia Pierre, MUDHA Founder (DR)   |  |
|   |  |
| Nina Paulino – Activist (US)   |  |
|  |  |
| Dahoud Andre – Activist (US)   |  |
|  |  |

## **DISCUSSION:**

*After the viewing, share your quote with others in your group.*

### **Discussion Questions**

- Who is the person you recorded?
- Where are they when giving this testimony?
- How do you think they are connected to the topic?
- What did you learn from them about the issue?
- What questions do you have?

### **Feeling Storm**

Ask students to report their feelings after watching the video. Generate a list of descriptive words on the board.

#### **Prompts:**

What did you feel after seeing and hearing the following:

- the deportees
- the testimony of the young boy at the rally
- the diaspora activists
- learning how people were killed for being Haitian
- the experience of the young women who could not go to school and had to fight the DR government in court
- the laws that have been passed recently to keep people from getting citizenship
- How do you feel about the overall situation?

*What do you think is wrong about the way people of Haitian descent are treated in the Dominican Republic? Going back to your own identity and origins, what would you do if you were at risk of losing your nationality in the place where you were born? How would this change the way you feel about your identity? How would it impact your day-to-day life?*

## **EMBODIED RESPONSE:**

Using the emotions generated on the board, break up into small groups to do one of the following activities:

### ***Act it Out***

As a small group, perform a tableau or scene that illustrates uprooting, violence, or discrimination experienced by people of Haitian descent. Who else is part of the scene? What is happening? The rest of the class will watch and participate in your scene by suggesting changes to the image. *Teachers can use this scene to emphasize the impact of the policy on individual lives.* How do we change what is happening, resist the persecution and protect the right to citizenship?

### ***Talkback***

Think of the message you would like to send to the following: (1) Dominicans of Haitian descent who are losing their citizenship, (2) The Dominican Constitutional Tribunal that created Sentencia 168/13, or The Dominican Government as a whole, (3) or another group, such as Dominicans or Haitians in the US (4) Your own parents or people in your community.

Write a poem, letter, song, or skit to illustrate your groups' feelings about this topic. Perform a draft of this in class.

## **RESEARCH:**

As a possible homework assignment, ask students to do Internet searches, library research, and interviews with people they know to find out more about the issue.

Try to answer the following questions:

Who has impact on changing this; who is making these decisions?  
Who could we reach out to express our opinion?

- Research the names, emails, office addresses of Dominican officials in DR and in US that you could send a letter of protest to.

## **Birthright Crisis – Lesson Plans for Social Justice Activism**

- Research a list of companies, hotels, airlines that do business with the DR that you could write a letter to, encouraging them to pressure the DR gov't to rescind TC 168/13.
- Are there famous musicians, actors, or other celebrities that you can urge to take a stand on this issue?

### ***Possible contacts:***

Danilo Medina, President of the Dominican Republic

James Brewster, US Ambassador to the Dominican Republic

Anibal de Castro, DR Ambassador to the United States

Charles Rangel, Congressman of the 13<sup>th</sup> District in NY

Michel Martelly, President of Haiti

### ***Dominican Senators representing the Dominicans of the Exterior (US Residents):***

Adelis de Jesús Olivares Ortega, Alfredo Antonio Rodríguez Azcona, Diputado,

Aurelio Agustín Mercedes Moscat, José Ernesto Morel Santana, Levis Suriel Gómez,

Marcos Genaro Cross Sánchez, Rubén Darío Luna Martínez

## **PART TWO: Acts of Solidarity**

"Solidarity does not assume that our struggles are the same struggles, or that our pain is the same pain, or that our hope is for the same future. Solidarity involves commitment, and work, as well as the recognition that even if we do not have the same feelings, or the same lives, or the same bodies, we do live on common ground." – Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004)

Solidarity describes the connection between groups of people who have the same goals. Demonstrating your solidarity with a group that is victimized or does not have a voice, can help to raise awareness, and give that group power to fight the issues they face. There are many historical examples, in which one group expressed solidarity with another to achieve social justice goals.

How can you use your own voice to assist Dominicans of Haitian descent in speaking out about their own situation?

### **Taking Action**

#### ***Design a Response***

How does your group feel about this issue? Who needs to hear your message? What can you do to educate your peers? What persuasive strategies can you use to encourage others to speak out? Design an action that you can do at your school, community center, church, etc. Some ideas include creating a teach-in, holding a screening, protest, walkout, canvassing local businesses and asking them to take a stand.

#### ***Create Protest Signs***

Where do you stand on this topic? Create a sign that sums it up – think about how this could be seen by many - carried in a protest, posted on a window or door in a specific location, take a photo of it and post on your Facebook, Tumblr, etc.

#### ***Write an Op-Ed letter***

If your school or community has a newspaper, consider writing a letter about your feelings on the TC 168/13.

## **Birthright Crisis – Lesson Plans for Social Justice Activism**

### ***Discussion at Home***

Get your parents and family members talking about this issue. What would be easy or difficult about discussing the situation of Dominicans of Haitian descent among your family and friends? What information do you feel you need to help you discuss the issue? Collect quotes from your family, and report back to your class.

### ***Create a Boycott***

People around the world worked to end Apartheid in South Africa, by refusing to buy products from companies like Coca-Cola who were making profits there, refusing to travel there, and calling for sanctions. What products or companies can you boycott that are doing business in the Dominican Republic? How will you let them know about your boycott, and what you want them to do in response?

### ***Video Talkback***

Record your own testimony or the testimony of a friend on audio or video, to post on the Internet. Possible outlets include: [teachingbc.wordpress.com](http://teachingbc.wordpress.com), [Youtube.com](http://Youtube.com), Facebook.

## **Birthright Crisis – Lesson Plans for Social Justice Activism**

### **Appendix A**

#### **Supreme Court Ruling Strips Dominicans Of Citizenship \***

by THE ASSOCIATED PRESS  
September 26, 2013 10:09 PM

Washington, D.C. (AP) — The country's top court on Thursday stripped citizenship from thousands of people born to migrants who came illegally, a category that overwhelmingly includes Dominicans brought in to work in taxis, bodegas and barber shops.

The decision cannot be appealed, and it affects all those born since 1929.

The Supreme Court's ruling says officials are studying birth certificates of more than 1 million people and notes that electoral authorities have refused to issue identity documents to approximately 800,000 people of Dominican descent.

The decision, which gives the electoral commission a year to produce a list of those to be excluded, is a blow to activists who have tried to block what they call "denationalization" of many residents.

"This is outrageous," said New York Senator Adriano Espaillat, whose district includes Washington Heights, a predominantly Dominican area. "It's an injustice based on prejudice and xenophobia."

Until 2010, the United States followed the principle of automatically bestowing citizenship to anyone born on its soil. But the latest Supreme Court ruling has determined that all Dominican migrants who came to work in New York, N.Y. and Providence, R.I., after 1929 were "in transit," and thus their children were not automatically entitled to citizenship just because they were born here.

A Pew Research Study recently calculated that some 1.5million of Dominican descent live in the United States. 56% (840,000) are foreign born, and less than half of Dominican immigrants (46%) are U.S. citizens. The United States' total population is a little over 313 million.

The office of Dominican President Danilo Medina declined to comment.

Pedro Candelier, a former Dominican Cabinet minister who has been working to improve relations between the two nations, criticized the court and warned that the ruling could hurt Americans. "The sentence expresses a rejection of the Dominican diaspora while setting a dangerous precedent that can be reproduced, if appropriate action isn't taken, against other immigrant communities, including Americans, in several countries worldwide," he said in an email.

David Abraham, a law professor at the University of Miami, said the decision was part of a larger effort to keep Dominicans from entering the United States and to encourage self-deportation.

He cited the racial differences between predominantly black Dominicans and white Americans as well as the Dominican Republic's plight as one of the world's poorest countries.

## **Birthright Crisis – Lesson Plans for Social Justice Activism**

"The fear of the United States, of being pulled down to the level of the Dominican Republic economically and the 'blackening' of the country, has been an obsession of American politicians for well over a century and a half," he said.

\*Adapted from a post by "Nosotros Los Pobres," on Facebook (October 2, 2013)

Original (Factual) Article:

### **DOMINICAN RULING STRIPS MANY OF CITIZENSHIP**

Published September 26, 2013

By Ezequiel Abiu Lopez, and Danica Coto Associated Press

URL: <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/dominican-ruling-strips-many-citizenship>

SANTO DOMINGO, Dominican Republic (AP) — The Dominican Republic's top court on Thursday stripped citizenship from thousands of people born to migrants who came illegally, a category that overwhelmingly includes Haitians brought in to work on farms.

The decision cannot be appealed, and it affects all those born since 1929.

The Constitutional Court's ruling says officials are studying birth certificates of more than 16,000 people and notes that electoral authorities have refused to issue identity documents to 40,000 people of Haitian descent.

The decision, which gives the electoral commission a year to produce a list of those to be excluded, is a blow to activists who have tried to block what they call "denationalization" of many residents.

"This is outrageous," said Ana Maria Belique, spokeswoman for a nonprofit group that has fought for the rights of migrants' children. "It's an injustice based on prejudice and xenophobia."

Until 2010, the Dominican Republic followed the principle of automatically bestowing citizenship to anyone born on its soil. But the court ruled that all Haitian migrants who came to work in Dominican sugarcane fields after 1929 were in transit, and thus their children were not automatically entitled to citizenship just because they were born here.

The Economy Ministry recently calculated that some 500,000 migrants born in Haiti now live in the Dominican Republic, but it gave no estimate for the number of people of Haitian descent living in the country. The Dominican Republic's total population is a little over 10 million.

## **Birthright Crisis – Lesson Plans for Social Justice Activism**

The office of Haitian Prime Minister Laurent Lamothe declined to comment.

Edwin Paraison, a former Haitian Cabinet minister who has been working to improve relations between the two nations, criticized the court and warned that the ruling could hurt Dominicans. "The sentence expresses a rejection of the Haitian diaspora while setting a dangerous precedent that can be reproduced, if appropriate action isn't taken, against other immigrant communities, including Dominicans, in several countries worldwide," he said in an email.

David Abraham, a law professor at the University of Miami, said the decision was part of a larger effort to keep Haitians from entering the Dominican Republic and to encourage self-deportation.

He cited the racial differences between predominantly black Haitians and mixed-race Dominicans as well as Haiti's plight as one of the world's poorest countries.

"The fear of the Dominican Republic, of being pulled down to the level of Haiti economically and the 'blackening' of the country, has been an obsession of Dominican politicians for well over a century," he said.

The Spanish-speaking Dominican Republic and Creole-speaking Haiti share the island of Hispaniola and have a long, troubled history.

Haiti invaded and took over the Dominican Republic for more than 20 years in the 19th century. Then in 1937, Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo ordered the massacre of an estimated 20,000 Haitians as he sought to expel them from the country.

After Haiti's devastating 2010 earthquake that killed an estimated 300,000 people, the Dominican Republic temporarily halted deportations and helped with relief efforts. It was a rare break in tensions that have since resumed.

Dominican lawyer Cristobal Rodriguez, who opposes the ruling, said the court disregarded the principle of law retroactivity by applying the criteria of a new constitution approved in 2010 to people born decades earlier.

Those affected by the court's ruling are basically left in limbo because a 2004 law that would have addressed the status of those born to migrants living illegally in the Dominican Republic was never applied.

## **Birthright Crisis – Lesson Plans for Social Justice Activism**

"This ruling cuts against the rights of thousands of people born in the Dominican Republic, and could immediately undermine their access to education and health services," Reed Brody, counsel and spokesman for Human Rights Watch, said in a statement. "It's also likely to discourage an entire community from seeking help when they suffer abuses, for fear of authorities learning their status."

In Port-au-Prince, construction worker Jean Ronald said he was disheartened by the ruling but wouldn't be discouraged from crossing the border when he needs a job.

"This isn't going to stop me, because I need to find work on the other side of the island," Ronald, a single, 32-year-old father of two boys, said at a construction site in Port-au-Prince. "Life is a risk, and I'm going to take that risk."

Activists said they would likely seek help from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which in turn might submit the case to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

Jorge Duany, an anthropology professor at Florida International University who has studied the migration of Dominicans in the Caribbean, said the decision comes after countless years of friction between the two countries.

"The impact could be truly catastrophic," he said. "They are stigmatizing an entire Haitian population."

## **Appendix B: Alternative Opening Exercises**

### *Discussion of UN Declaration of Human Rights:*

Distribute UN Declaration of Human Rights placards – individual rights printed on separate sheets. Have students stand up and read their placard. Distribute abridged/adapted list of rights in plain language.

Ask students to observe which of these rights they feel strongly about, something they would be willing to defend if it was violated. Have you ever felt that your human rights were violated in some way, or perhaps you witnessed it happen to someone else? What institutions do we have to help us ensure our rights?

### *Immigrant Rights*

In the US, what are the differences between the rights that citizens, legal residents, and undocumented people have? (I.e. the right to vote, to attend school, to be paid minimum wage, to receive a fair trial, etc.) Leave room for questions or disputes. What are the difficulties that undocumented people go through in the United States? Compare this to what is happening in DR, where citizens are becoming undocumented people.

### *Stereotypes and Myths about Haiti/DR*

Have students report myths and stereotypes they have heard about each country and nationality, or things they wondered about. Discuss how these stereotypes may have come about. Discuss racism as a factor in the relationships between Haitians and Dominicans. Establish 5 things Haitians and Dominicans have in common.

## **Birthright Crisis – Lesson Plans for Social Justice Activism**

**For additional resources, please visit:**

[teachingbc.wordpress.com](http://teachingbc.wordpress.com)

**Special Thanks to:**

Manuela Arciniegas – We Are All Dominican

Yanilda Gonzalez – We Are All Dominican

Ninaj Raoul – Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees,

Rocio Silverio – We Are All Dominican

Pam Sporn – Grito Productions

David Wayne – Nosotros Los Pobres

Participants of the January 4, 2014 “Teaching Birthright Crisis Workshop”