
The Dominican Republic continues to be a country that draws scholars and serves as the backdrop for analysis of critical issues facing less-developed countries and, in particular, the increasingly important Caribbean Basin region. Jan Knippers Black now joins an ever widening group of Dominican specialists who see in this small nation a microcosm of the problems and possibilities facing most of the Third World. As Black observes in her fine book on the current status of the Dominican Republic, the challenges of burgeoning debts, mounting social demands, and a shaky democratic base are creating enormous tensions that could easily return the country to an earlier era when society was polarized between the proponents of leftist revolution and strict authoritarianism. The manner in which the Dominicans are dealing with these challenges and responding to democracy, revolution, and authoritarianism is at the core of Black’s study.

The strength of this latest book on the Dominican Republic is that Black has concentrated her efforts on the complex of political forces at work in the country. As a result of extensive personal interviews and an effort to meet a broad range of political actors, Black is able to present a contemporary picture of the Dominican political system that goes beyond a general introduction. The chapters on current history, political institutions, and the Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (PRD) in power not only are helpful in understanding the conflicts in Dominican society, but add a human touch to the analysis as they seek to show the motivations of key figures, the social forces at work in the country, and the political impact of public policies. For those familiar with the Dominican Republic or interested in understanding the contemporary scene, Black’s analysis mixes solid scholarship with interesting commentary.

If there is a weakness in the book it is that Black has not expanded on the themes of development and sovereignty as presented in the title. Although she has more than adequately covered the numerous development challenges facing the Dominican Republic and described at length the external relations of the nation, it would have been helpful if these themes were reintroduced in the conclusion and their impact on the future of the country analyzed. This criticism is minor, however, in light of the fact that Black has written a book that fills a noticeable void in the study of the Dominican Republic. Her accent on politics and the interplay of important political institutions and forces contributes significantly to a broader understanding of a country that bears watching in the future.

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