



**Ms. Janna Rodriguez**

National Youth President

**Dominican American National Roundtable (DANR)**  
**Conference: United States Occupation of the Dominican Republic**  
Lehman College of The City University of New York  
250 Bedford Blvd. Park West (Room 330)  
Bronx, NY 10468  
Saturday, May 7, 2016, 4:30pm

Thank you!

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Dominican American National Roundtable and our Madam President the Honorable Claribel Martinez-Marmolejos, and our Chairman Nestor Montilla, Sr., I bring greetings to all of you. Thank you very much for being here.

I am a citizen of the United States of America. I am also a Dominican American woman who was born in the Dominican Republic and was raised in the United States. I am bilingual in English and Spanish, but feel more comfortable speaking in English. So I will address you in English and hope that someone here will translate my remarks into Spanish. Thanks.

I love the Dominican Republic and I love the Dominican people dearly. Everything that has to do with my country I take intensely at the personal level.

I know my country. It is our home country. We all agreed that our country has had a convoluted history. Since its founding in 1844, 172 years ago, its constitution has been modified over 40 times. The last modification was last year in 2015 to permit presidential reelection.

I am worried because despite of those modifications, there are more poor people now than at any other period in the history of our country.

Dominican society is crumbling; domestic violence against women is up; crime is up; assaults are common in the streets, public and private spaces and people's houses; safety is not guarantee; child abuse is up; under age sex is prevalent; drugs trafficking and use are alarming; many bright people have emigrated already from our country; our natural resources are being depleted and exploited by foreign corporations; our rivers are contaminated; our hospitals are in disrepair with no resources to take care of the people; education is mediocre; the education gap between the rich and the poor is growing wider every day; there is no future for our youth; they are desperate and frustrated due to lack of jobs and educational opportunities to escape poverty.

Our country foreign debt is out of control and increasing by the minute; I would say by leaps and bounds. The Dominican Republic spends more than what it produces.

Our country has failed to effectively deal with Haitian-Dominican relations, with the issue of Dominicans of Haitian descent, and with immigrants from Haiti. Our country has been accused of human rights abuses against Haitians. All these things are happening at a moment when the international community labels the Dominican Republic as having one of the most corrupt governments in the entire planet.

I am worried. We all should be worried about the fate of our beloved country. Of course I am worried.

We have to remember that every time our country has suffered internal strife and socio-economic and political instability, there has always been the possibility of foreign intervention.

Let's not forget that the United States has been interested in owning the Dominican Republic since its founding to the present.

Let's not forget that the United States intervened our country in 1905 and took total control of our customs and receivership because our country owed lots of money to Europe and could not pay it back. To prevent a take-over from European powers, US decided to intervene our country to serve as an intermediary to pay the debt.

Let's not forget that the United States then occupied our country from 1916 to 1924. Due to internal socio-economic and political problems, our country couldn't pay its debt to USA. You see how it was; first we owed money to Europe. US intervened us and then we ended up owing money to USA. How that happened? So because of that the United States invaded our country to collect debt themselves and supposedly to protect American interests. Our conference presenters will talk more about that later.

And today, as the Dominican Republic is about to hold its presidential elections on May 15<sup>th</sup>, we have learned that, coincidentally, the United States has sent already a military ship there to supposedly train future officers and merchant marine American civilians to ensure timely response in time of crisis.

You know, I really needed to get all of this stuff out of my chest. And I did.

Now, let us hear from our historians who will present to us their research findings about the United States Era in the Dominican Republic. With their presentations I am sure we will find answers to our many questions. So I encourage everybody here and particularly our youth, to pay attention so that they learn about what has happened in the history of our beloved country.

I conclude my remarks reminding each one of you of the famous saying indicating the following: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Thank you!