The Dominican Republic under Trujillo

1. **1930s**
   - 1930: Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina becomes president of the Dominican Republic through rigged elections; in the same year a terrible hurricane hits the country.
   - 1937: Trujillo orders the massacre of Haitians living in the Dominican Republic.
   - 1939: World War II begins.

2. **1940s**
   - 1941: The Dominican Republic declares war on Japan, Germany, and Italy.
   - 1942: Trujillo arranges to repay all the foreign debt due to the United States.
   - 1945: World War II ends and the United Nations is established, with the Dominican Republic as one of its founding members.

3. **1950s**
   - 1950: Julia Alvarez is born in New York City.
   - 1955: Trujillo orders every household in the Dominican Republic to display a gold plaque that reads, “In this house, Trujillo is chief.”
   - 1957: Dominican intelligence and secret police are combined to create the State Security Secretariat for surveillance and control of the population.
   - 1959: Exiled Dominicans stage a failed invasion that spawns the Fourteenth of June Movement opposing Trujillo’s regime.

4. **1960s**
   - 1960: Julia Alvarez's family is forced to leave the Dominican Republic for New York after her father’s participation in the underground movement is discovered.
   - 1961: Trujillo is assassinated.

The Dominican Republic and Hispaniola

The Dominican Republic is located about 700 miles southeast of Miami, Florida, on the eastern two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola. The Atlantic Ocean laps the island's northern shore, and the Caribbean Sea washes its southern coast. Christopher Columbus landed on Hispaniola on his first voyage to the New World in 1492, when he was trying to reach the Indies in Southeast Asia. This new Caribbean region, composed of many islands, was soon named the West Indies and became a gateway for European conquest of the Americas.

Since the time of Columbus's landing, the island has suffered from tumultuous periods of political instability and corrupt regimes. The indigenous people, the Taíno, were eradicated by brutal treatment from the Spanish settlers and diseases from Europe. As the Taíno perished, the Spanish began bringing enslaved Africans to the islands to serve as laborers.

In the 17th century the French established a colony on Hispaniola and fought with the Spanish over control of the western third of the island. This area became Haiti in 1804 after
Toussaint L’Ouverture, a former slave, had previously led a successful rebellion of enslaved Africans, winning freedom from the rule of Napoleon I. Haitians controlled the entire island from 1822 until 1844, when nationalists seized control of the Spanish portion, declared independence, and formally created the Dominican Republic. Political unrest and a series of brutal dictatorships ravaged the nation until democracy was finally established in 1978.

Most Dominicans consider themselves multiracial, a blend of European and African heritage, and were historically Roman Catholic. Though the nation's economy used to be based heavily on agriculture, tourism became a growing industry as the country's political situation stabilized. Today most Dominicans work in service-related jobs such as the hospitality industry, tourism, and banking.

Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina (1891-1961)

Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina was born to a lower-middle-class family in San Cristóbal in the southern part of the Dominican Republic west of the capital, Santo Domingo.

In 1916, fearful that the Dominican Republic's faltering economy might destabilize the region, the United States sent Marines to occupy the island and protect shipping approaches to the Panama Canal, completed only two years earlier. During the American occupation, Trujillo was a cadet in the Dominican Army. He was trained by U.S. Marines, and rose quickly through the ranks. By 1925, he was the army's commander-in-chief.

In 1930, President Horacio Vásquez resigned after a revolt against his government. The seizure of power in 1930 confirmed Trujillo as the most powerful man in the Dominican Republic; control of the country was now in his hands. He ran unopposed in a bogus election. For the next three decades, he ruled as an absolute dictator who controlled both the government and the army either directly or through a series of hand-picked puppets.

Trujillo and his family also dominated every aspect of the country's economy, and amassed a great fortune while the masses of the Dominican people suffered from deprivation and political repression. Critics were subjected to torture, loss of property, and harsh prison sentences. In 1937, Trujillo ordered the massacre of thousands of unarmed black Haitians living in the Dominican Republic to racially homogenize the region, avenge old animosities with Haiti, and establish firm control of the country's borders.
By the 1950s, Trujillo's regime faced criticism from home and abroad. On June 14, 1959, with the help of Fidel Castro, Dominicans exiled to Cuba led a failed invasion of the Dominican Republic. Venezuelan President Rómulo Betancourt had been an outspoken critic of Trujillo, and the Dominican ruler despised him for it. Two assassination attempts orchestrated by Trujillo against Betancourt proved to be serious miscalculations, and fueled international outrage against Trujillo. The Organization of American States (OAS) voted to sever diplomatic ties with his regime and impose economic sanctions on the country.

Meanwhile, the underground revolutionary movement in the Dominican Republic continued to gain strength. As leaders in the group, the Mirabal sisters won admiration throughout the country for their efforts to restore democracy. Ironically, their murder on November 25, 1960, ordered by Trujillo, signaled the end of the dictator's power: six months later, Trujillo was assassinated on the road outside Cuidad Trujillo (now, again, Santo Domingo) by a group of gunmen, some of whom had been members of Trujillo's inner circle.