

# DANR History

## 1997 - Present



**1997.** The Roundtable concept emerged in December 1997, when over 200 Dominican American leaders from around the country met in Miami, FL, to discuss the educational, economic, legal, social, and political status of the more than one million people of Dominican ancestry in the United States. This historic gathering was organized by and hosted by The Dominican American National Foundation of South Florida under Margarita Cepeda, President, and Radhames Peguero, Executive Director; Assemblyman Adriano Espaillat's office; and Juan Pichardo of Rhode Island's Quisqueya in Action Youth Organization.

**1998.** A broad spectrum of Dominican community leaders met at Alianza Dominicana in NYC and created a National Interim Steering Committee to develop the formal structure and initial agenda of the Roundtable. In April of 1998, the interim steering committee met at the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute to plan a path forward that included several other gatherings designed to secure the grassroots and leadership buy-in necessary to ensure the Roundtable's success and effectiveness.

**1999.** In January 1999, the National interim Steering Committee elected the Official DANR Board of Directors, its officers, and its first president, Mr. Victor Capellan, from Rhode Island. In 1999, The Roundtable gathered again in Rhode Island at a public conference attended by over 600 people. The main topic of the 2nd Annual Conference was "Toward the New Millennium: Strengthening Organizational Development for Dominican Communities in the United States."

**2000.** In February 2000, the Roundtable was incorporated in Washington, D.C. With the theme, "Dominicans in the United States: America's New Face," the 3rd Annual Conference was celebrated in NYC on October 6-8 with great success, and the DANR Board elected its second president, Adriano Espaillat, from New York. DANR partnered with Columbia University and major corporate sponsors and established membership participation. It also obtained the Federal Exempt Status.

**2001.** The Roundtable opened its headquarters in Washington DC and appointed José R. Bello as its Executive Director on October 1, 2001. With the theme, "Empowerment through Education: The Way for Dominican Americans," the 4th Annual Conference took place on December 7-9 in Washington D.C. At the closing of this conference, Ana García Rees was elected the third president of the DANR, leading a diverse-27-member Board of Directors with an Executive Board made up of eight members, of whom seven were women. DANR visited Capitol Hill for the first time with an impressive agenda of advocacy on behalf of Dominican Americans.

**2002.** During 2002, DANR registered thousands of new voters with the Dominican American Voter Registration and Participation Program in Manhattan, New York. DANR ran the Dominican Internship Program, which places Dominican students in the World Bank, the inter-American Development Bank, and the U.S. Senate Committee for International Relations. DANR also held two important meetings in Washington D.C., the Dominican American Business Legislative Meeting, where Dominican business leaders met with U.S. legislators to discuss policy issues affecting the community. The 5th Annual Conference was entitled "Our Local Empowerment Builds our National Power." During this conference, Ms. Margarita Cepeda was elected the fourth president of the DANR.

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**2003.** In April, DANR organized its first Congressional Delegation to the Dominican Republic, with 10 Members of Congress led by Rep. Charlie Rangel (D-NY) and Rep. Cass Ballenger (R-NC). DANR celebrated in New York City its second Business Legislative Meeting and another successful edition of the Dominican Internship Program. This time, in partnership with a Group of Dominican Professionals from Washington, D.C., DANR celebrated its 6th Annual Conference in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on October 10-12 with the theme “Dominican American Future: Health, & Economic Empowerment. Creating Access in Health, Finance, and Education through Political Participation.” Mr. Cid Wilson is Elected DANR’s fifth president.

**2004.** The DANR enters the international debate on free trade by lobbying the United States Congress and the U.S. Trade Representative to include the Dominican Republic in the Central American Free Trade Agreement negotiations. The DANR invited members of the Dominican and Puerto Rican communities to hear opinions and comments from Congressman Charlie Rangel, Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrion, and representatives of the Dominican and Puerto Rican governments to discuss the positives and challenges of a free trade agreement between the United States and the Dominican Republic. DANR releases its comprehensive report on Dominican Voter Capacity in the United States and celebrates its 7th Annual Conference at The City College of New York – CUNY, on September 17-19.

**2005.** The DANR embarked on a National Unity Tour Around America, which included meetings, listening, supporting, and strengthening the local Dominican communities in 15 U.S. states and territories. The “Tour” took a whole year and 35,000 miles of travel around the country, including Alaska, California, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, and Texas. From the 3rd year onward, DANR hosted a congressional Day in Washington DC where DANR officers and members met with Congress representatives and U.S. Senators from both political parties to discuss pro-Dominican legislation initiatives. DANR held its 8th Annual National Conference in Boston, MA, at the University of Massachusetts-Boston on October 7-9.

**2006.** The DANR reaches a milestone in the organization’s development and accomplishments. It has ensured that Dominican Americans living throughout the U.S. and Puerto Rico are represented in the primary policy debates and decision-making forums and builds collaboration with all major national organizations. On April 27, the DANR hosted its 4th Annual Legislative Day in Washington, DC, at the Longworth House Building.

**2007.** The DANR elects Victor Capellan as its sixth president. It is Mr. Capellan’s second time as President. Pennsylvania and Connecticut are added as states that would have national board representation. The organization held its fifth Annual DANR Dominicans On The Hill in Washington DC with record attendance by members of the U.S. Congress. DANR fought for comprehensive immigration reform, against the increases in fees by the USCIS, and the Dream Act’s support. The 10th Annual Conference convened in Miami, Florida, where it started ten years earlier.

**2008.** DANR held its most successful fellowship program, training them as immigration advocates. DANR established a partnership with the US Navy, the Consejo Nacional Para Las Comunidades Do-

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minicanas en el Exterior (CONDEX), and the Institute For Latino Studies in New Jersey, for the production of the Documentary *Los Panfleteros de Santiago*. The 11th Annual Conference was held in Providence, Rhode Island, on October 10-12 with the theme, “Communities at Work: Best Practices for a Stronger Community.”

**2009.** The DANR elects Mr. Néstor Montilla, Sr. as its seventh president. The organization takes “The Accurate Count of Dominicans in the 2010 U.S. Census” as its major advocacy issue. It hosts a series of town hall meetings across the United States on the 2010 Census and issues affecting Dominicans and Hispanics in the USA. It lobbies the U.S. Congress to pass legislation to include a stand-alone box for Dominicans in the U.S. Census 2010 and makes this the theme of its 7th annual legislative day in Washington D.C. Under President Montilla’s leadership, the 12th Annual Conference was held in Walt Disney World, Florida, on December 4, 2009. Civil Rights Assistant U.S. Attorney Thomas Perez attended the event, as well as singer Nini Cafaro, Comedian Freddy Beras Goyco, and among others, Sonia Pierre, Dr. John Mollenkopft, Adriano Espaillat, Guillermo Linares, dozens of elected officials, and hundreds of participants from across the United States, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic.

On behalf of the DANR board, President Montilla bestowed the Guanin Award to Hostos Community College President Felix V. Matos Rodríguez, Ph.D., for being an outstanding national educational leader. He also honored the following leaders with Guanin awards in their respective professions: Columbia University Professor Feniosky Pena-Mora, Ph.D.; Temple University Professor Rosario Espinal, Ph.D., musician Rafael Solano, actress Celines Toribio, Prosecutor Camelia Valdez, Julio Tavárez, Dr. Ramón Antonio Veras, Cid Wilson, and Elias Alcántara.

**2010.** The DANR Board of Directors undertakes a sweeping restructuring of the organization. The bylaws are amended to reflect significant changes: the size and composition of the board, the addition of “research” to the DANR’s mission, and the launching of the National Dominican American Council (NDAC) on November 18-20, 2010. NDAC would be the civic-engagement-community relations organ of DANR, consisting of local councils in cities, urban and rural areas with a significant Dominican population. The Councils would set the national agenda by casting their votes at the DANR annual convention. President Montilla sets out to visit and work with Dominican leaders in every U.S. city where they live. DANR establishes a collaboration agreement with UNAPEC University, *Asociación Hispana de Profesionales de la Salud* (AHPSI), and *Asociación de Cronistas de Arte* (ACROARTE).

DANR produces a redistricting assessment report to educate the community about the redistricting process. DANR sought to seize the opportunity resulting from demographic shifts to advocate for creating a minority-majority congressional district. DANR hosts its National Leadership Summit at Howard University, the National Press Club, and the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center in Washington, DC, Nov. 18-20.

At the summit, President Montilla delivers his second State of Dominicans in the U.S. Address titled, “The Strength of our communities is not in Washington, DC yet.” President Montilla delivered the speech from the US. Capitol Visitor’s Center and held a moment of silence to posthumously honor Freddy Beras Goyco, a patriot and highly respected comedian and TV personality from the Dominican Republic.



**2011.** The DANR elects Dr. María Teresa Montilla as its eighth President. The DANR undertakes the Dominican American Redistricting Project (DA-R) to engage the Dominican communities in the United States in the Redistricting-Appropriation Process to achieve adequate political representation. The Project provides education and technical assistance to the Dominican American leadership and partners with other organizations to guarantee a fair redistricting process. Ultimately, DA-R will ensure that new legislative maps reflect our population's growth at the municipal, state, and federal levels.

**2012.** The DANR undertakes the First National Gathering of 100,000 Dominicans celebrating over 50 Years of Presence & Contribution to the United States, at the National Mall in Washington, DC. As part of the celebration, it launches The Dominican List, an original 45-minute documentary and 125-page publication about Dominican presence and contributions to the United States over the past 50 years.

**2013.** The DANR Board of Directors elects Francesca Peña as its ninth President. The DANR takes public positions on three major issues: 1. Denationalization of children born to Haitians in the Dominican Republic by the Constitutional Court findings. 2. The appointment of Thomas Perez as Secretary of Labor, and 3. Continued advocacy for comprehensive immigration reform.

**2014.** President Francesca Peña led DANR towards successfully undertaking public advocacy positions and actions on important issues, including strongly supporting the National Museum of the American People. The museum aims at showcasing the contributions of the different groups that have arrived and settled in the United States of America. President Peña summoned DANR past presidents and community leaders to the U.S. Capitol for "Introspection: A Call to Action," the first historic national summit of Dominican American leaders. She commissioned a blueprint report of the conference. Presenters included Dr. Silvio Torres-Saillant. Professor Rev. Alejandro Benjamin and DANR Chairman Néstor Montilla. Public Accomplishment: President summons DANR past presidents and community leaders to the U.S. Capitol for "Introspection: A Call to Action," the first historic national summit of Dominican American leaders. A blueprint report of the summit is produced by DANR VP, Professor Rev. Alejandro Benjamin.

**2016.** DANR elects Claribel Martínez-Marmolejos as its tenth president at a ceremony in San Juan Puerto Rico. President Martínez-Marmolejos delivered a speech titled: "Estado de los Dominicanos en Los Estados Unidos de América." She paid homage to DANR presidents including, Victor Capellan, Adriano Espaillat, Ana García Reyes, Margarita Cepeda, Cid Wilson, Néstor Montilla, Sr., Dr. María Teresa Montilla, and Francesca Peña. President Martínez-Marmolejos made a call to action to strengthen the organization's national agenda and operations. She unveiled her action plan at the DANR annual retreat held on Saturday, February 11, 2017, at Rutgers School of Law, 123 Washington Street Newark, NJ 07102. The Retreat's Agenda also included orientation for new board members, the election of new officers to the Executive Committee, DANR President's 2017-2018 Action Plan, budget, fundraising plan, debriefing on board members fiduciary responsibilities, the collaboration agreement between DANR and a coalition of health professional organizations, and among other items, a joint session with the Board of Directors of the National Dominican American Council (NDAC). President Martínez-Marmolejos introduced the board's agenda priority. Priorities include education, economic development, and political representation.



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**2019.** DANR elects Reverend Alejandro Benjamin as its eleventh president. Bob Menendez, U.S. Senator for New Jersey, administered the oath of office at Rutgers's School of Law in Newark, NJ. President Benjamin's action plan included strengthening ties with Dominicans in the Diaspora and the Dominican Republic. He met with the Dominican Republic former President Leonel Fernández to further collaborate on socio-economic initiatives. He also invited Luis Abinader to deliver the keynote address at National Dominican American Council's Annual Leadership Summit at Rutgers University.

Besides, President Benjamin swore in the new President of the National Dominican American Council and the board of directors. President Benjamin completed his first term in office and convened a meeting about DANR governance and its future. The meeting was held at Berkeley College. President Benjamin appointed Claribel-Martínez Marmolejos as Chair of DANR. President Benjamin announced his decision to retire as Professor of Bergen County Community College and as President of DANR. Considering the organization's financial standing and governance structure, DANR Chair Martínez-Marmolejos convened an extraordinary meeting on Thursday, May 16, 2019, at 9:30 pm. Agenda item discussed: DANR governance, restructuring needs, and future. The board of directors decided to dissolve its Executive Committee and appointed a Steering Committee commissioned to reorganize and relaunch the organization. Néstor Montilla, Sr. was tapped to chair the Committee and spearhead efforts to restructure and relaunch the organization.



Annual retreat of the Dominican American National Roundtable at Rutgers's School of Law in Newark, New Jersey. Archival photo by Eduardo Hoepelman.