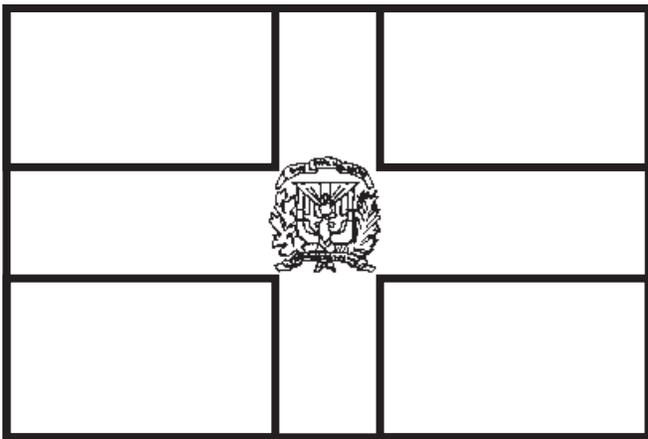# The Flag of the Dominican Republic

The Spanish words *Dios, Patria, Libertad*, which mean God, Country, and Freedom, are written on the coat of arms in the middle of the Dominican Republic's flag. The cross in the middle is white, while the top left and bottom right areas are blue and the top right and bottom left areas are red. This has been the official flag of the Dominican Republic since 1844.

History—Four Times Independent

The Taino [Tie-no] people lived on the now-called island of Hispaniola when Christopher Columbus arrived in 1492. The Taino were peaceful people who farmed crops like corn, beans, and sweet potatoes. Columbus mistakenly called the Taino "Indians" because he thought that he had arrived in the East Indies of Asia. Taino cave paintings and carvings can be found all over the island.

Santo Domingo was the first city settled by Europeans in the "New World." It would be Spain's headquarters in the Americas for decades, and Columbus made Santo Domingo his home. Spaniards seeking gold came to Hispaniola and forced Taino people to work in the mines. In the early 1500s, slaves were brought from Africa to work in growing sugarcane.

In 1697, Spain recognized the French control over the western third of Hispaniola—which led to the eventual formation of Haiti. The Dominican Republic gained independence four times—from Spain in 1821 and 1865, from Haiti in 1844, and from the United States in 1924.

In the last century, the Dominican Republic was ruled by several dictators. The modern government is democratic and recent efforts have been made to encourage **free trade** and foreign investment.

Dominicans

The Taino people, who first inhabited the island of Hispaniola, are now **extinct**. Many died from contagious diseases that they caught from the Spaniards. Others intermarried with Spanish colonists. The slaves from West Africa also intermarried with Europeans.

Today, the population of the Dominican Republic is more than 9 million people. Around 73 percent are of mixed race, 16 percent are white, and 11 percent are black. It is estimated that around 500,000 illegal Haitians also live in the Dominican Republic. A small population of Jews, who fled Nazi Germany, still lives in the city of Sousa—the Dominican Republic offered these refugees a safe **haven**.