

CULTURE AND CUSTOMS OF LATIN AMERICA  
AND THE CARIBBEAN

---

# CULTURE AND CUSTOMS OF HAITI



J. MICHAEL DASH

NORTH ATLANTIC OCEAN

CARIBBEAN SEA

Île de la Tortue

Windward  
Passage

CUBA

Port-de-Paix

Môle St-Nicolas

Cap-Haïtien

Gonaïves

Puerto Plata

Monte Cristi

Mao

Santiago

Moca

Salcedo

La Vega

Dajabón

Elles Piña

Hinche

St-Marc

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

Bani

San Cristóbel

San Pedro de Macoris

Higüey

San Juan

Neiba

Jimani

Pedernales

Oriedo

Barahona

## Context

IF THERE is one feature of Haitian geography that has marked Haiti's history and the impression that it has inevitably left on visitors to that country, it is the ruggedness of its mountainous landscape. Almost every book written on Haiti makes reference to these mountains, majestic or forbidding depending on the writer's point of view, that dominate the landscape. For instance, in one of the best-known novels written about Haiti, *The Comedians* by Graham Greene, the main character on returning to Haiti is struck by the daunting spectacle of

the huge mass of Kenscoff leaning over the town that was as usual half in deep shadow; there was a glassy sparkle of late sun off the new buildings near the port which had been built for an international exhibition in a so-called modern style. A stone Columbus watched us coming in.<sup>1</sup>

The petrified figure of the discoverer, the town's fraudulent modernity, and the menacing shadow of the mountain typify many visitors' reactions to Haiti.

Christopher Columbus, after sighting the island of Hispaniola on December 5, 1492, is reputed to have demonstrated the forbidding nature of the island's terrain to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella by crumpling a sheet of paper in his hand and tossing it on the royal table. Mountains cover approximately two thirds of the land area of Haiti. The Spanish ultimately found the land uninviting, and in the seventeenth century it became the

haunt of buccaneers, infamous because of the pirate stronghold of Tortuga off the northern coast. The French, to whom the western third of the island was ceded in 1697, could establish control over only the towns and the few coastal plains, thereby contributing to the slave revolt that began in 1791 and ended French control of St. Domingue in 1804. Napoleon also failed in his attempts to reimpose French rule largely because of the mountainous terrain. Subsequently, the first black republic in the Western Hemisphere, and the only country created by a successful slave revolt in recorded history, was named Haiti from the Taino word meaning "land of mountains" and has managed to maintain a defiant isolation from the rest of the world.

Haiti gives the impression of vastness and impenetrability because of its extremely mountainous terrain, but it occupies only one third of the island of Hispaniola, the other two thirds of which is occupied by the Dominican Republic, and its area measures 10,714 square miles. It is bounded on the north by the Atlantic Ocean, on the south by the Caribbean Sea, and it shares an eastern border with the Dominican Republic. Haiti's closest neighbors are the islands of Jamaica and Cuba. The shape of the Haitian land mass is also quite remarkable: it is marked by two peninsulas, one in the north and the other in the south, that run east to west, further aggravating communication within Haiti. These two peninsulas have been described as jaws, with the Gulf of Gonâve as its wide-open mouth, within which the island of La Gonâve appears on the verge of being swallowed up. Mountains cover about two thirds of Haiti's land area, reaching their highest elevation in the Pic de la Selle (8,793 feet) in the southeast. There are four plains that form the country's main areas of agricultural activity.

The most important northern town, Cap-Haïtien, is situated on the Plaine du Nord, and Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, is on the cul-de-sac. Most of Haiti's main towns are ports, and some are still only easily accessible by sea because the mountain ranges make internal communication so difficult. The country is crisscrossed by numerous streams and rivers, but they are unpredictable in that they can just as easily stop running during dry seasons as well as overflow during torrential downpours. The largest and most important river is the Artibonite, which flows through the Artibonite plain and empties into the Gulf of Gonâve.

If Haiti's topography is dramatic, it is also desolate. It has been described as an ecological nightmare. When Haiti was sighted by Columbus, it was more than 90 percent forested. Today only 2 percent of Haiti is forested, as trees have been cut down for firewood since 70 percent of Haiti's energy needs are met by charcoal (which is created from wood). The supply of arable land decreases by 3 percent annually. Deforestation and soil erosion are the major hindrances to rural development in Haiti. A comparison is always

made with the western two thirds of the island because Haiti's rural population is 35 percent greater than that of the Dominican Republic but has less than 40 percent as much arable land.

Haiti is the only country that is considered Latin American but whose language and culture are predominantly French and whose population is predominantly of African descent. Haiti's ethnic and linguistic makeup contrast with that of its neighbor. It is not only in this area that the Dominican Republic is distinct from Haiti. The literacy rate, life expectancy, and other social indicators compare unfavorably with the figures from the Dominican Republic. This is not surprising, since Haiti has the lowest per capita income in Latin America and is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. This represents a dramatic change for Haiti, which was once the richest French colony.

### COLONIAL HISTORY

The legendary wealth of the French colony of St. Domingue depended on Europe's insatiable appetite for sugar, which had been introduced to the island earlier by the Spaniards. It was also the Spaniards who first turned to Africa for slaves to work on the sugarcane plantations after the decimation of the indigenous population through forced labor and disease. The inhabitants of the island Columbus called Hispaniola were called Tainos or Arawaks. They were described as peaceable and gentle, but it was these very qualities that made them vulnerable to exploitation, as the Spaniards soon put them to work in their gold mines. By the middle of the sixteenth century the indigenous population, which was originally estimated at one million, had been reduced to a few hundred on the entire island.

With the supply of gold speedily running out, and distracted by the quest for gold in the colonies of Peru and Mexico, Spain ceded the western third of the island, which would be known as St. Domingue, to the French. Colonization of St. Domingue was at first very unpromising. The colony was first populated by former buccaneers who made very unlikely farmers. It was only with new migration from France and the growing realization that sugar, coffee, and cocoa would flourish in the colony that the era of prosperity began. The next big obstacle was that of labor, as there was no native labor left to be exploited. The French, like their Spanish predecessors, then turned to African slavery, and St. Domingue became the destination for slave ships leaving the African coast. No one is sure how many African slaves made it to Haiti, but toward the end of the eighteenth century the slave population numbered half a million. The white population numbered 36,000 at the

same period. This population was as famous for its ostentatious and lavish lifestyle as for its cruelty to the slaves. The expression "as rich as a Creole" was commonly used in France. However, severe punishment, harsh discipline, and torture were inflicted so that control could be maintained. The legendary cruelty of the plantation owners also guaranteed such intense resentment that in less than a century after claiming St. Domingue, the French faced an insurrection that would eventually cause them to relinquish control of their wealthiest possession.

There were signs as early as the 1750s of the explosive possibilities latent in St. Domingue. Slaves called maroons, who escaped into the inaccessible mountainous terrain, would attack vulnerable plantations from time to time, but in 1758 they found a leader in Makandal, who used the vaudou religion to build a network of followers and succeeded in poisoning the water supply for the plantations of the Plaine du Nord. The spark that really ignited the explosion in the colony was the French Revolution, and the social class that was responsible was the *gens de couleur*, or free coloreds. This group numbered 28,000 and included all freed persons of African blood. They were the children of white planters and female slaves, and when liberty was granted they were entitled to French citizenship under the Code Noir (Black Code) emanating from Louis XIV. This class, often well educated and even owning slaves themselves, flourished particularly around the southern town of Jérémie and saw St. Domingue as their home.

Despite the liberal provisions of the Code Noir, there was strong resentment of the free coloreds by whites in the colony. As noted by Moreau de Saint-Méry, a visitor to St. Domingue on the eve of violent insurrection, this resentment against people of mixed blood was caused by

their growing demand for equality with the whites—to be addressed with the respectful "Monsieur" before their last names, to have full participation in the professions and the officer class in the army and to enter the government service.

The whites resisted such steps more determinedly than before, partly because there were now so many of these new rivals. The circumstance that so many mulattoes, who were nearly all freedmen, were coming to own plantations, especially in the Western and Southern parts of the country, made the whites uneasy.<sup>2</sup>

With the outbreak of the French Revolution, the mulattoes hoped that the increasing discrimination against them would end and that their rights as established by the Code Noir would be reinstated. However, when a young

mulatto named Ogé, educated in France, returned to St. Domingue and led a demonstration in 1791 with his friend Chavannes in Cap Français to demand the restoration of rights for the free coloreds, they were both seized and brutally executed. The white planters had thereby irrevocably alienated a class that could have sided with them but whose hostility was now made absolutely certain.

Precisely at this time, the slaves of St. Domingue revolted against their masters. This insurrection has become legendary because it was planned at a vaudou ceremony held in a forest called the Bois Caiman during a violent storm and was led by a priest named Boukman. The indiscriminate slaughter that followed was unprecedented in its savagery, and the planters did not have a chance against the pent-up fury of half a million slaves. The uprising of the slaves was viewed as a welcome event by the freed coloreds, who began to see that equality with the whites would come only through force. In the confusion that followed, two figures emerged as leaders of the insurrection: the colored general Rigaud, who led the mulattoes, and the ex-slave Toussaint Louverture, who led the half-million blacks. By 1796 Toussaint emerged as the only leader with the power to control St. Domingue and inspired enormous devotion among his followers. The only group that distrusted him was the mulattoes, because of their inability to accept an ex-slave who now wielded such power. However, a brief conflict between Toussaint and Rigaud saw Toussaint emerge as the supreme leader of the ex-colony and, at least for the time being, mulatto power was broken in Haiti.

The years that followed would mean the consolidation of power by Toussaint and the spread of his reputation for astuteness, leadership, and military skill. He was governor general of St. Domingue from 1799 with the reluctant consent of the French and by 1801 had conquered the Spanish colony on the east of the island. Under his absolute authority, the violence and anarchy of earlier years ended and prosperity was restored. The restoration of peace and stability meant that former slaves were ordered back to work on the plantations. The use of a repressive labor system to force the newly liberated masses back to the plantations was one of the early ironies of the pre-independence period. Nevertheless, economic success was one of the major achievements of Toussaint from 1799 to 1802. As one well-known account of Toussaint's role in the Haitian revolution described it:

Personal industry, social morality, public education, religious toleration, free trade, civic pride, racial equality, this ex-slave strove according to his lights to lay their foundations in the new State. In all his proclamations, laws and decrees he insisted on moral principles, the ne-

cessity for work, respect for law and order, pride in San Domingo, veneration for France. . . . Success crowned his labors. Cultivation prospered and the new San Domingo began to shape itself with astonishing quickness.<sup>3</sup>

However, despite his phenomenal success, the rise of Napoleon in France would inevitably lead to the demise of Toussaint in Haiti.

The period between 1802 and 1804 was a crucial time for revolutionary St. Domingue, as the retaking of the once prosperous French colony was a key part of Napoleon's plan to establish a New World empire. Napoleon sent his brother-in-law, General Leclerc, with a formidable military force to St. Domingue and attempted to persuade Toussaint that Leclerc should be allowed to succeed him as governor with the guarantee that slavery would not be restored in St. Domingue. However, after his arrival with his fleet in January 1802, Leclerc's advances were repelled and war broke out between Toussaint's army and Leclerc's forces. Toussaint made the fatal error of not arming the ex-slaves and trusted his generals, who eventually surrendered to Leclerc's advancing forces. Resistance to the French was eventually broken at the battle of Crete à Pierrot, and soon after Toussaint, lured into a meeting with Leclerc, was seized and sent to a dungeon at the Fort de Joux in the Jura Mountains in France, where he died in 1803.

Ultimately, Leclerc's mandate was to restore slavery in St. Domingue. This plan would never be carried out, as yellow fever took a tremendous toll on his forces. The news that he planned to reestablish slavery also helped to recreate resistance to the French. Toussaint's black generals joined forces with the mulattoes and fought Leclerc's now weakened forces. By the end of 1802 Leclerc himself was dead, and the conflict entered a particularly barbaric phase as Rochambeau, who had succeeded Leclerc, massacred every black or mulatto he could lay his hands on, and Toussaint's generals responded with similar brutality. By the end of 1803 Napoleon had abandoned his now catastrophic New World adventure, and Rochambeau gave up this futile struggle, retreating to the Mole St. Nicholas, the same point at which Columbus had landed 300 years earlier, inaugurating European domination of Hispaniola. /

## INDEPENDENCE

On January 1, 1804, St. Domingue, devastated by years of unrelenting strife, was declared independent and renamed Haiti by the black general Jean Jacques Dessalines in the town of Gonaïves. Motivated by absolute hostility

to France, the new constitution forbade any white person from owning land in Haiti and stipulated that all Haitians, regardless of color, were to be called black. Dessalines, in a fateful act, created the Haitian flag by seizing the French tricolor and tearing out the white band in the middle. Henceforth, Haiti's flag would be red and blue. Symbolically, with the whites gone, a struggle would ensue between blacks and mulattoes as to who would rule the world's first independent black republic and the second independent state in the Western Hemisphere.

Outside of Haiti, it is the genius of Toussaint Louverture that is admired. And even before his wretched demise, the English poet William Wordsworth had composed a sonnet to honor his legacy. Within Haiti, however, it is the fierceness and violence of his subordinate, Dessalines, that inspire approval. This admiration, which is evident in place names, postage stamps, and the national anthem, stems from the fact that he symbolizes the final break with the colonial power. The Dessalinian state also epitomized the more absolutist features of Toussaint's rule, which would mark public life in Haiti for the forthcoming decades and lead to the notorious cultural and political plurality that has divided independent Haiti. The revolutionary process that created the Haitian state was based on the need to put an end to plantation slavery and to promote the ideal of liberty for all. However, it seems clear from the first attempt at a Haitian state in Louverture's short-lived tenure as governor general that the state would replace the old plantocracy and remain attached to controlling the plantation system and that the liberated slaves saw themselves as an emergent peasantry. On the one hand, the freed slaves would be part of the machine of the state, and on the other hand, independence was defined in terms of personal freedom. Independence would put power exclusively into the hands of the new military state and would create important contradictions with the rest of the nation.

Apart from the contradiction between state and society, political independence had produced an internally divided state whose differences had been glossed over by the shared animosity toward the French. The fundamental division was between *anciens libres* (those free before independence) and *nouveaux libres* (those free after independence) and goes back to the pre-independence days when the *gens de couleur* saw their fate as different from that of the slaves on the plantations. Bitter rivalry between these groups in the period after independence would lead the Haitian state from crisis to crisis. For instance, very early in the rule of Dessalines, tensions emerged because of mulatto distrust of a Dessalines, a *nouveau libre* who had proclaimed himself emperor for life. Consequently, Dessalines began to be seen by the mulatto elite as an upstart, as uncivilized and brutish as the outside

world made him out to be because of the massacre of whites in the period preceding independence. Within three years of its creation, the Dessalinian state was in crisis. Dissatisfaction spread not only among the lighter-skinned generals, who resented his authority, but also among the masses who disliked his militaristic domestic and agricultural policies, since Dessalines had basically divided the nation into workers and soldiers. By 1806, insurrection spread through the mulatto strongholds in the south and west of Haiti, and he was assassinated at an ambush on Pont Rouge. On October 17 of the same year, after being in power for two years, Haiti's liberator and self-styled emperor lay dead.

The new Haitian state was caught in a tangle of contradictions. On one hand, a militarized agricultural state and a revival of the plantation system were the only immediate ways to ensure economic prosperity. On the other hand, the black labor force saw itself as a peasantry and justifiably avoided what they saw as the neo-colonial state. In all this, the refusal of the western world to recognize Haitian independence and the attendant desire to reimpose economic dependence on Haiti would exacerbate internal tensions. The emergent Haitian state with its legacies of massive illiteracy, internal dissent and economic precariousness suffered greatly from this ostracism. For instance, the refusal of recognition by the Vatican would "cripple the Haitians' chances of building a solid and wide-ranging system of formal education" since in Catholic nations "religious orders had always been the backbone of the formal education system."<sup>4</sup>

But no missionaries and teachers would be forthcoming from Rome until a concordat was signed with the Vatican in 1860. Similarly, the United States, which formally recognized the independence of other countries in the Western Hemisphere that had liberated themselves from Spanish domination by 1822, withheld recognition of Haiti until 1862. The precariousness of diplomatic relations with Haiti within the hemisphere was inevitably tied to U.S. disapproval, as was the attitude of European governments, who began to accept U.S. dominance over the hemisphere and whose attitudes to Haiti were arguably tied to U.S. ostracism. It also comes as no surprise that the expelled colonial power, France, would not grant formal recognition until 1825, after the payment of a massive indemnity of 150 million francs as compensation to dispossessed French planters. Neocolonial dependence meant that Haiti would not be easily accommodated in any global system, and with few international allies its sovereignty would be violated at will during the nineteenth century by warships of foreign powers seeking redress for their citizens' interests.

The fourteen years following Dessalines' murder were marked by dramatic

internal fragmentation in Haiti. Henri Christophe became Haiti's next ruler because of military seniority and soon acquired a reputation for grandiose projects such as the construction of a palace, Sans Souci, modeled on Versailles and the impregnable fortress of the Citadelle Laferriere. Before long, his authority was contested by mulatto generals whose strongholds were in the west and south of the country. The mulattoes created a republic in the south under General Pétion while Christophe was crowned king in the north and ruled over a semi-feudal state. Unlike Christophe in the north, Pétion, because he was light-skinned and an *ancien libre*, made concessions to the masses in the form of land grants. After Christophe's overthrow and Pétion's death in 1818, General Boyer united the country under mulatto control in 1820 and continued Pétion's practice of granting land to the peasantry and members of the army. By Boyer's presidency it had become clear that Haiti could not construct a viable agrarian economy from the ruined plantation system. As a rural peasantry became established, the infrastructure left by the French decayed, and remote rural districts became increasingly isolated. Whatever the color or ideological inclination of these four generals who ruled Haiti, their legacy was a militarized state that would dominate public life for years to come. As one scholar put it:

The army was the great power in the country, for the new state was a military one. Since fear of a return of the French required the maintenance of a large standing army, Dessalines made a virtue of this apparent necessity, using the soldiers to enforce discipline among the cultivators. On whom else could he rely for his local administration? Here again, the decision of a leader fixed the direction of Haitian life for decades to come. It is agreed by commentators that over-militarization was the bane of nineteenth century Haiti.<sup>5</sup>

The second and equally important legacy of this early period of independence is collapse of the plantations and the full-blown emergence of a peasantry in Haiti by the overthrow of Boyer in 1843. In this regard, Haiti in the nineteenth century was profoundly different from the rest of Latin America, whose post-independence experience was characterized by a land-owning aristocracy and peons who worked their large estates. Haiti's aristocrats did not own most of the land, and the peasants were not peons because they owned or squatted on their own small farms. This single fact would contribute to creating what James Leyburn defined with a little exaggeration as a caste system in Haiti, since the two strata are more closely related than one would expect in a traditional caste system. As the rural areas began to be

dominated by this unplanned and alienated peasantry, an elite established itself in the towns and jealously guarded its distinction from the rural peasantry.

Under the complaisant rule of Boyer, the people of color came to regard themselves as the unquestioned elite. Their claim was shared, though not always acknowledged by a small number of blacks (mostly from the north) who had been anciens libres in colonial St. Domingue or noblemen under Christophe.<sup>6</sup>

Much of the history and politics that follow is shaped by the contradictions of this social order: an illiterate, distrustful peasant majority; a numerically tiny elite divided by rivalry based on color; and the absence of anything like a middle class to exert a moderating or stabilizing influence on this precarious situation.

Increasingly, as the century wore on, the survival of a militarized elite would depend on the exploitation of the peasantry. With the large estates falling into disuse and the peasantry refusing to participate in regimented, state-run agriculture, the elite turned to the state as a means of consolidating their status by extracting whatever surplus they could from the peasantry. This is crucial to the period between 1843 and the U.S. occupation of 1915, as the military elite turned its attention away from the plantation system and became increasingly involved in the ruthless pursuit of political power. In these seventy-two years, political confusion increased as twenty-two heads of state came to power, all of them military men, of which fourteen were deposed by insurrections and three were killed in office, the last of whom was hacked to death in the capital by an angry mob. The most infamous presidency during this period must be that of Faustin Soulouque, who was chosen because he was a nonentity in the military. With his accession to power however, Haiti began a twelve-year nightmare. The brutishness of this regime both led to further economic ruin for Haiti and encouragement to Haiti's critics abroad, who saw the new state as simply lapsing into savagery without white control.

The seeds of national disaster were planted in this period as politics increasingly became a game of rivalry among urban elites and was marked by insurrection, economic failures, and parasitism. Indeed, the general tendency, as was rather disastrously exemplified in the case of Soulouque, was to put in power a black general who would be a puppet for the interests of a light-skinned elite or oligarchy. This phenomenon, called a *politique de doublure*, or government by understudies, dominated the nineteenth century as black

generals came to power manipulated by powerful mulatto interests behind the scenes. The general turned on his mulatto patrons, crowned himself emperor, and created a paramilitary force called the *zinglins*, an early model for the Tonton Macoutes. Under Soulouque, Haiti's image abroad sank to an all-time low as it became increasingly portrayed as a tragicomic example of black decadence. Meanwhile, the lives of the majority of the population were in no real way affected by the vagaries of Haitian politics. The two features that mark the political culture of Haiti between the fall of Boyer and the arrival of the Americans are (1) a massive growth in the state apparatus as (2) more and more sought to enrich themselves from the state. These parasitic state appendages included an army forever increasing in size, state employees, and various other professionals. As they grew in size and in their parasitic demands, the economy was stagnating and the peasantry becoming increasingly impoverished. Haiti therefore entered the twentieth century with the majority of its population as cut off from the outside world as it was from its own leaders and, at the other end of the spectrum, with a bloated, nonproductive state apparatus that had no interest in investment in the land or changing in any way whatsoever the lot of the peasantry.

The period from 1843 to the U.S. occupation of 1915 was one of steady descent into chronic disorder. Changes in head of state, constitutional crises, revolution and counterrevolution were the surface manifestations of a socio-economic system in crisis. Never in this period would productivity approach the standard of the early post-independence period. By the turn of the century, Haiti had become a land of small-scale peasant tillage with an external trade that was appropriated for the exclusive use of a tiny elite. A marginalized and silenced peasantry, then, was ruled by a state divided by competing interests, and rival factions constructed on an economic base of ever-shrinking returns led, by the beginning of the twentieth century, to political chaos and vulnerability to foreign interests. Between 1900 and 1915, after a hundred or so years of independence, Haiti faced a succession of incompetent short-term presidents. Between 1911 and 1915, a rapid succession of revolts managed to place six presidents in office. None naturally served out his full term, and the last of the six was killed by a mob in Haiti's capital. In the face of economic ruin, the Haitian oligarchy turned to heavy borrowing abroad, as much from France and Germany as from the United States. Indeed, desperation ran so high that there was even talk in the commercial sector of the desirability of annexation by the United States, whose domination of the northern Caribbean was by then almost total. It has been observed that:

Within Haiti there was, in fact, division of opinion. Foreign merchants were not the only ones prepared to believe that a thorough cleansing and a new start might be for the public good. No Haitian could openly advocate American intervention, but there seems to have been an undercurrent of opinion in that direction, though of necessarily uncertain proportions. As men of property or merely as government employees, the elite had nothing to gain from chronic disorder and instability.<sup>7</sup>

### U.S. OCCUPATION

The debate concerning the desirability of intervention, in any case, was overtaken by U.S. expansion in the Caribbean and Central America at the time. This strategy was justified by the use of the Monroe Doctrine, which argued for an exclusive U.S. sphere of influence in the Americas. U.S. policy at the time was based on strategic interests, particularly in relation to the recently completed Panama Canal and the need to keep Europe, by then embroiled in World War I, out of the hemisphere. The case for U.S. control in the region was described as follows:

It is usual to speak of the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico as the American Seas, and to consider them as part of our life and practically within the control of this nation. It is necessary that we should glance at the great seas and appreciate how they and the Canal are hemmed in by islands, which would become a menace to our commerce in case of war or hostility on the part of the nations of Europe.<sup>8</sup>

The actual pretext for the occupation of Haiti came on July 28, 1915, when a mob seized then-president Vilbrun Guillaume Sam from the French Legation and lynched him. Fearing the worst, various diplomatic missions asked the United States whose gunboats were conveniently anchored at Haiti's capital, to take control, and that night Admiral Caperton ordered his marines onto Haitian territory, initially to protect the lives of foreigners and its own citizens. They would stay nineteen years, representing a second phase of colonial rule for Haiti.

Despite the fact that the occupation was often justified in terms of bringing peace, progress, and democracy to a country that had reverted to savagery, the immediate effect of the intervention was to increase the power of the state and the overall dependency of the country on outside interests. After restoring order through military means, the first act of the occupying power was to install a puppet president and to legitimize the U.S. presence by having

the Haitian legislature approve a convention making Haiti a protectorate of the United States. A new constitution was also passed, giving the president increased powers and allowing foreigners to own land in Haiti. Militarism in Haitian society, already a massive obstacle to development, was further enhanced by U.S. use of martial law, military courts to judge opponents to the occupation, and the imposition of forced labor in the countryside, which led to short-lived Caco revolts under the leadership of a former army officer, Charlemagne Peralte. Peralte and his 2,000 or so peasant insurgents were unable to perform the feats of the army of liberation that led to Haitian independence in 1804. In 1919 he was shot to death in his own camp, and the pacification of the Haitian countryside was complete. With the end of organized armed opposition, a new army, called the *Garde d'Haiti*, would be formed that would bear no relation to the army that liberated the nation in 1804 and would exert a disastrous influence on the post-occupation period.

The occupation sought to reform an economy that for a century had become inefficient and to stabilize a society that continued to lack cohesiveness. The United States created vocational schools along the lines of the Tuskegee Institute, Booker T. Washington's school for vocational training for blacks in the United States, and increased expenditure on agriculture. They introduced various amenities like a telephone system in the towns and the road linking Cap-Haïtien with Port-au-Prince. Significant measures in health and sanitation were introduced. Bridges and roads were built, and the Haitian currency stabilized. However, many reforms were introduced so insensitively that they would be rejected once the United States was no longer in control. Quite often, the results of U.S. policies were very different from what was originally stated. Under the occupation, the United States controlled the collection of import duties, for instance, and it could also set budget priorities. Therefore, most of the money collected was spent on debt repayment to the United States, which would have been drawn mostly from peasant farmers. The United States thereby simply exacerbated a phenomenon that had plagued the Haitian economy since 1843, the extraction of surplus from the peasantry by a nonproductive state.

Perhaps the greatest single lasting effect of the occupation was the centralizing of state power in Port-au-Prince. The Caco uprising would be the last such phenomenon that any Haitian president would have to fear until the fall of Jean Claude Duvalier in 1986. Rural ports gradually lost their importance because of the new road system, and the countryside became more dependent than ever on Port-au-Prince. The centralization of the collection of custom duties in the capital may have helped to reduce corruption, but it increased the importance of Port-au-Prince. This centralization also

reinforced the power of merchants in the capital. Whatever the negative effects of regionalism in the past, and they are not difficult to pinpoint, it did provide a countervailing force to absolute state control. Since administrative and economic centralization was accompanied by military centralization, no president in the post-occupation period could resist using the concentration of state power that he had under his control.

The Haitian state needed no lessons in the use of military force to enforce its authority. Yet this is precisely what the United States managed to accomplish by 1934. All the authoritarian practices it originally criticized, it ultimately legitimized. Through the professionalization of the Haitian army, the disarming of the peasantry, and the creation of a military apparatus and a system of intelligence gathering controlled from the capital, the United States created a force with which it would maintain formal and informal links after the end of the occupation. Even though their stated intent was otherwise, the U.S. Marines demonstrated by their example the involvement of the army in the day-to-day running of the country. Even more unfortunately, the example was being set by an army that occupied the country. To this extent the Haitian army that emerged from the occupation often behaved like an army of occupation rather than a national army. The problems later posed by the Haitian military were already present in embryonic form in the Garde d'Haiti, which was created during the occupation. One scholar noted that

[one] cannot overemphasize the fundamental political difference between the Garde and the army that was dismantled by the marines. . . . Haiti's first army saw itself as the offspring of the struggle against slavery and colonialism. . . . Because of its stated role, because of its origins, and because of Haiti's position in the world, the nineteenth century Haitian army believed it had been assigned a national mission, even though history may have proved it wrong. . . . In sharp contrast, the Haitians Garde was specifically created to fight against other Haitians. It received its baptism in combat against its countrymen. And the Garde, like any army it was to sire, has indeed never fought anyone but Haitians.<sup>9</sup>

In 1930 Stenio Vincent was elected president in the first elections in which the Marines did not interfere. Vincent led Haiti to what he called its second independence when the Marines finally left in 1934. By then officials in Washington had begun to grow tired of the occupation, and the geopolitical rationale of its continuation no longer existed. Haiti's second independence had arguably much in common with its first. The occupation left Haiti with

very much the same destructive socioeconomic problems that it inherited from its colonial past. Beneath the veneer of political stability lay the same old problems of a militarized society: the ostracism of the peasantry and an elite divided by class and color rivalry. However, very much in the same way that rival factions of the elite joined ranks in 1804 to expel the French, the United States in the nineteen years of the occupation managed to do what no Haitian president had been able to do: unite the elite across the color divide. Indeed, the 1920s and 1930s in Haiti saw a nationalist cultural and literary resurgence that was unprecedented. This was an intellectual renaissance based on national and racial consciousness, and it spawned widespread debate as to whether Haiti's identity was French or African, whether its politics should be socialist or fascist, and, most important, it gave peasant culture an unprecedented intellectual and literary emphasis. However, much of this momentum would be lost as soon as the unifying force of the white foreign invader was no longer present and old color and class contradictions resurfaced. Material improvements also soon decayed as roads fell into disrepair and, for the mass of the rural population, life in the remote interior continued as before.

The occupation left Haiti in the hands of the mulatto elite, and the two light-skinned presidents between 1934 and the revolution of 1946 did much to antagonize not only the black elite and newly created professional class but also the intellectual avant-garde because of their authoritarian tendencies and the concentration of power in the hands of the mulatto elite. Mulatto insensitivity under these presidents reached an all-time low with the massacre of black Haitians in the Dominican Republic by the Trujillo regime in 1937. This massacre evoked relatively little response from the Haitian government. Equally bad was the persecution of the vaudou religion by Vincent's successor, Elie Lescot, in 1941 and the number of concessions made to U.S. companies for various business ventures in Haiti. When Lescot attempted to prolong his presidency by altering the constitution, strikes broke out in Port-au-Prince, and in 1946 a student-led protest forced Lescot into exile and the military stepped into the vacuum in the form of Major Paul Magloire, who organized elections that brought to power a black president, Dumarsais Estimé.

The Estimé presidency is important both in terms of the emergence of the army as a power broker in Haitian politics and the political manifestation of Haitian negritude in the choice of a black president. It was argued that a black president was the most authentic expression of the need to regain black dignity after U.S. and mulatto humiliation. The Black Nationalist ideology of *noirisme*, or Haitian negritude, became a pervasive intellectual movement

that would eventually sweep Francois Duvalier to power. The roots of *noirisme* can be traced not only to anti-Americanism during the occupation but also to a reaction among black Haitians and radical intellectuals against the contempt shown by mulatto rulers in the post-occupation period. Estimé's mandate was based on resentment of the mulatto faction, but he never went far enough, as far as the noiristes were concerned, in fulfilling this mandate. The noiristes were further frustrated when he was ousted in 1950 and replaced by General Magloire, who was seen to be just another example of the old nineteenth-century *politique de doublure*. When Magloire was forced into exile because of attempts to prolong his term, it was felt that someone was needed to complete the Estimé revolution. It was in such a context that the candidacy of Francois Duvalier won the approval of the noiriste camp, particularly and crucially the support of noiriste army officers. The army-supervised elections meant that Duvalier had the support of the Haitian military in 1957. More important, however, he had the support of the old Estimé faction and its deep conviction that a black president with close ties to the masses and the emergent black middle class was what was needed to complete the revolution of 1946, which had as its ultimate goal the destruction of mulatto rule in Haiti.

The story of Francois Duvalier's presidency is that of the transformation of a mild-mannered country doctor into a semi-divine absolutist leader. The word "Duvalierist" has become synonymous with "dictatorial," attesting to the nature of the dictatorship that Duvalier's presidency created between 1957 and 1971. As we have seen, there was nothing unusual about Haitian presidents assuming dictatorial powers. However, the extreme nature of the Duvalierist state makes it the most disturbing manifestation of state power in Haitian history. Duvalier consolidated state power by first of all neutralizing all the institutions in civil society that could pose a threat to his regime. Schools, churches, trade unions, universities, and the media were all undermined as priests were expelled, journalists tortured, and intellectuals forced into exile. Paranoid about security and having witnessed Estimé's downfall because of the army, Duvalier did not ignore the Haitian army in this process of neutralization. As he got rid of generals considered untrustworthy and closed the military academy, he enlisted the help of the United States in training soldiers loyal to himself. By far his most dramatic strategy was the creation of a civilian militia, officially called the *Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale* (Volunteers for National Security) but popularly known as the Tonton Macoutes, as a countervailing force to keep the army in check. (The Tonton Macoutes refers to a Creole expression for a traditional bogeyman who kidnaps children in his "macoute," or knapsack.) This civilian militia was not only a parallel institution but was drawn from a wide cross-section

of Haitian society, providing a network of intelligence gathering and nationwide intimidation of any potential opposition. It was this manipulation of state violence that protected the Duvalier regime from both internal destabilization as well as external invasion. It would be erroneous to believe that what distinguished Duvalierism from previous dictatorships was simply the ruthless and efficient manipulation of state terror. Violence alone could not provide security for this regime. Rather, it was the size of the social base that it could draw on as well as the shrewd manipulation of popular culture that made Duvalierism unique and eventually turned it into a hereditary dictatorship.

Duvalierism, as much as anything else, was aimed at ending mulatto domination of the state. The noiriste ideology spawned in the 1930s and the support of the *authentiques* of Estimé's regime guaranteed the allegiance of the emergent black middle class as well as support among the urban poor and the peasantry. Duvalier's experience as a country doctor also played a role in this strategic sensitivity to influential members of the rural communities. Crucial to the endurance of the Duvalierist state were these links it fostered with rural Haiti. Duvalierism certainly encouraged the links between the Tonton Macoutes and vaudou, and it used the peasant religion to enhance Duvalier's own aura of mysticism and infallibility. His very inscrutability, the somber formality of his dress as well as his secretiveness, all encouraged associations with the vaudou god, Baron Samedi, the keeper of the cemetery. The links with vaudou priests also helped him to keep abreast of happenings outside the capital. Forever the master of the dramatic symbolic gesture, Duvalier changed the color of the Haitian flag from red and blue to red and black to represent Haiti's African heritage. The same intent lay behind the creation of the statue of the unknown maroon (fugitive black slave) as a symbol of Haiti's black, revolutionary past. During Duvalier's presidency, Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia visited Haiti, and a main street was named for Martin Luther King, Jr., after his assassination. Duvalier used these occasions to propagate the ideology of international black consciousness even though it was a facade for state plunder that caused his regime to be labeled a "kleptocracy."

Even though Duvalier deliberately used his ideology of a racial and national mystique to create a hermit state that thrived on isolation, no Haitian regime can be expected to survive without the complicity of outside elements or at least tacit approval from the United States. Duvalier's relations with the Vatican are a vivid example of his ability to shrewdly manipulate outside elements and also carry out his own ideological reforms. Since 1959 Duvalier had shown overt hostility to the foreign clergy by expelling priests and closing religious institutions.

It has been noted that Duvalier and a number of the men he brought to his government in 1957 had been critical of the role played by the Roman Catholic church in Haiti and in particular of the control which it exercised over leading educational institutions in the country.<sup>10</sup>

This criticism was partly based on the belief in vaudou as the repository of Haiti's authentic values. Conflict with the Church reached a high point with the expulsion of Bishop Robert in 1962, which earned the president expulsion from the Catholic Church. In retaliation, Duvalier had the entire Jesuit order expelled for subversive activities in 1964. However, Duvalier was able to negotiate a settlement with the Vatican in 1966 that brought an end to this protracted feud and saw the return of the papal nuncio but also allowed Duvalier to have a hand in the appointment of a local clergy on whose support he could count.

Outmaneuvering the United States would be a more complex operation for Duvalier since Washington's blessing was crucial to his regime's survival. From early in his presidency there was mutual suspicion between the Haitian and U.S. governments. The United States was becoming alarmed at civil rights abuses, and Duvalier believed that Washington had a hand in attempts to topple his regime by invasion. However, after the success of the Castro revolution in overthrowing the U.S.-backed regime of Batista in Cuba, Duvalier became adept at playing on American fears of subversion in the Caribbean. The United States had some difficulty supporting a government that by 1961 had abandoned all pretense of democracy and by 1964 had declared Duvalier president for life under a new constitution. However, in the atmosphere of the Cold War and alarmed by civil war in the Dominican Republic, the United States softened its hostility to Duvalier. By the end of the 1960s aid was once more forthcoming, and diplomatic pragmatism prevailed. Duvalier used his crudely anti-leftist stance to both appease Washington and liquidate any local opposition. For instance, 1969 marked a bloody offensive against the Haitian Communist Party, and it happened to coincide with a much-publicized visit of the then New York governor, Nelson Rockefeller. In no time investment in Haiti was restored. Haiti began to produce every baseball used in the national baseball league. By Duvalier's death in 1971, Washington was willing to provide naval vessels, which patrolled Haitian waters to ensure a smooth transition of power from Papa Doc to his son, Jean Claude Duvalier.

In the early 1970s the Duvalier dynasty was not given much chance of success because of the singularly unprepossessing nature of the obese and inexperienced Jean Claude Duvalier, or "Baby Doc," as he was called by the

skeptical media. He claimed at the outset that he would lead an economic revolution in Haiti, but he generally continued the initiatives of his father even though there was a relaxation in the use of state terror and a toning down of the noiriste rhetoric. The “economic revolution” really meant attracting foreign capital, thereby giving a boost to the local bourgeoisie, who would benefit from these new investments. Much of the fear and hostility felt by this class for the older Duvalier was dissipated under Baby Doc, as they could now share in the profits from this new injection of capital, particularly in the light assembly industry. To seal the new coalition between the new regime and the commercial class, Jean Claude Duvalier in an elaborate ceremony married Michele Bennett, the light-skinned daughter of a speculator who had grown wealthy under the regime. The marriage symbolized the new phase of Duvalierism with its strategic alliance with the commercial elite. The choice of Michele Bennett, with her non-Duvalierist connections, was seen by hardline Duvalierists, or the “dinosaurs” as they were called, as a betrayal of Papa Doc’s noiriste politics. Michele Duvalier—who was soon to be proclaimed “The First Lady of the Republic,” thereby usurping the president’s mother—helped to foster the image of economic liberalism and reconciliation with old enemies.

Despite an increase in American investments, essentially in assembly plants using cheap, nonunionized labor, and the atmosphere of economic liberalism, little real development came to Haiti. The light assembly industry could not on its own transform Haiti, since most of the population in the countryside in no way benefited from increased employment in this area, and the disparities in income and amenities between the capital and the rural area only grew larger. This would turn out to be a disastrous error for Jean Claude Duvalier, who was slowly but surely weakening the very social structure that had kept his father’s regime in place. Furthermore, insensitivity to the plight of the peasantry reached an all-time low with the order to eradicate all local pigs because of an outbreak of swine fever. By 1984 more than a million animals belonging to low-income peasants were slaughtered and replaced by U.S. government-supplied imported animals that the peasants could not afford to raise. This further exacerbated the appalling plight of rural Haiti, whose misery had become evident from the increasing numbers of “boat people” trying to leave Haiti beginning in the mid-1970s. This did not in itself bother Duvalier’s government, but it was becoming an international embarrassment for the regime, which in 1981 signed an agreement with Washington to allow for the forcible repatriation of illegal Haitian immigrants by the U.S. Coast Guard. Desperation also drove the poverty-stricken peasantry to migrate to the Bahamas and the Dominican Republic, in the

latter instance to work under the supervision of the Dominican military in near-slavery conditions on the sugar plantations.

In the meantime, further problems were in store for the regime from outside as the neglect of human rights and economic mismanagement and corruption were attracting the criticism of the Carter Administration and later the Reagan Administration in Washington. President Carter had expressed strong disapproval of Baby Doc's human rights record. Being anti-communist was no longer good enough, and future aid would be tied to respect for human rights. The liberalism that resulted from these reforms was short-lived as the advent of a Republican administration, led by Ronald Reagan, suggested less sensitivity to such issues as human rights. The liberal facade disappeared after Reagan's inauguration, but Washington's disquiet now came from a different source. Foreign aid was increasingly diverted away from infrastructural improvements and into the pockets of the Duvalier regime. In order to deal with this new criticism of his regime, Jean Claude Duvalier appointed Marc Bazin, a World Bank official, as finance minister. He did not last six months, thus signaling the regime's determination not to respond seriously to pressures to modernize.

Baby Doc's regime was, therefore, facing a number of contradictions, both internal and external. The alienation of the mass base of the movement would prove to be as dangerous as the vacillating attempts to appease various administrations in Washington. One of the most dramatic instances of the regime's attempts to present an acceptable image to the outside world, which backfired, must be the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1983. On arrival in Haiti, the pope spoke explicitly about the need for social reform, taking as his theme the slogan "things must change." His words did not fall on deaf ears, as for some time progressive parish priests in Haiti who were inspired by liberation theology had been organizing groups of their parishioners for discussion of issues like social change and human rights. This movement, known as the Ti Legliz or "little church," was instrumental in organizing grassroots movements that would play a leading role in the riots that broke out in 1984. The Duvalier government had badly misjudged what it thought would be a public relations operation, and the pope's visit added further impetus to this movement toward change. As the grassroots churches became more militant, Christian radio stations, especially Radio Soleil, also became more explicit in their demands for reform.

By the mid-1980s the economic situation had grown progressively worse. Persistent droughts, a rapacious state, and the crisis of a country that exported little and depended massively on foreign assistance contributed to further deterioration of Haiti's weak economy. Tourism went into irreversible de-

cline when the U.S. Center for Disease Control in Georgia declared that Haitians were a high-risk group for the AIDS virus. The assembly industry was not making much of a contribution to the national economy and was simply taking advantage of the government's invitation to exploit the Haitian people. Resentment in rural areas was already high because of the eradication of the entire pig population in Haiti. By now cracks were beginning to appear in the Duvalierist dictatorship that were never previously apparent. The Haitian people began to react by resorting to violence in the food riots of 1984 and 1985 in Cap-Haïtien and Gonaïves. The formidable Duvalier dynasty was now pitted against an irreversible tide of people power. The crumbling of Duvalierism would also give increased independence to the institutions of the church and the army, which would be locked in conflict over the direction Haiti would take after 1986.

Twenty-eight years of Duvalierism had exacerbated the cleavage between nation and state that had been inherited from independence and that now made Haiti the poorest, most socially polarized country in the Americas. The statistics provided by various aid agencies are "starkly eloquent":

In 1985 public expenditure on education amounted to one per cent of Gross Domestic Product, or 43.70 per capita; public expenditure on health in the same year was estimated at 0.9 per cent of GDP, or 43.44 per capita. For each secondary school teacher in Haiti there were 189 members of the security forces, while for every secondary school there were 35 prisons. The country's infant mortality rate stood at 124 per thousand . . . average life expectancy in 1982 was calculated to be 48 years. And beyond the statistics there stood the simple truth that the great majority of Haitians were hungry and many were starving.<sup>11</sup>

Driven as much by desperation as politicization by the Ti Legliz, demonstrations became more frequent and violent. They were met in 1985 by a predictable show of force from the regime. Radio stations were shut down and the army began to fire on demonstrators. Repression reached its height with the shooting of four schoolchildren in November 1985. As demonstrations grew, Washington began to distance itself from the regime, further encouraging the demonstrators. The army—with little reason to remain loyal to a regime that had humiliated it for years, and dependent for its security on the ubiquitous Tonton Macoutes—began to grow restless, and there were rumors of a possible coup d'état by late 1985. By February 1986 Duvalier had lost control of the countryside and was putting up a brave show in the capital, Port-au-Prince, which as the seat of the state remained immune from

the crisis affecting the nation. However, support had begun to dwindle from both Duvalier's traditional supporters and his foreign advisors. It was becoming clear that Duvalierism as an extreme manifestation of the authoritarian state in Haiti could not survive much longer.

For the first time since 1804 the Haitian people, silenced and ostracized for so many decades, made it abundantly clear that they wanted a radical change in politics. The reasons for their courageous stand in the 1980s are complex. They have as much to do with desperation as they do with influence by the progressive elements in the Church, the expansion of communications and the media in particular, and the tentative efforts at liberalization under Duvalier. The people were literally given a voice through the small radio stations, usually manned by Catholic priests, which broadcast in Creole. Revolutionary sermons were circulated on cassette tapes. Indeed, one of the more remarkable features of the mass movement that eventually brought an end to Duvalierism was the absence of a central leadership. Mobilization was effected through neighborhood committees, peasant organizations, and self-help groups. This was an advantage because no person or persons could be identified and arrested to remove the source of authority and discourage supporters. However, it also meant that there was no coherent strategy for what was a genuinely popular movement. It also created a vacuum in leadership of the anti-Duvalierist movement after Jean Claude's departure.

The White House, which had begun to put distance between itself and the increasingly precarious Duvalier regime, showed its eagerness to see Duvalier depart by prematurely announcing that he had fled the country. However, the fact that Duvalier did not leave until a week later is significant, since it is during this period that he and his advisors set about organizing a Duvalierist government that would succeed him. Jean Claude and Michele Duvalier finally left in the early hours of February 7, 1986, on a U.S. Air Force cargo plane to join in exile in France a diaspora that had been created by his father.

#### AFTER DUVALIER

The news of the departure of the Duvaliers brought jubilation to Haiti. In an almost Dessalinian gesture of defiance, the statue of Columbus was toppled and tossed into the sea. The mood then changed to revenge as homes of prominent Duvalierists were attacked and looted. Suspected Tonton Macoutes were necklaced with burning tires. A crowd made its way to Papa Doc's tomb, demolishing the mausoleum, but there was no coffin inside. This did not mean that the last vestiges of Duvalierism had disappeared after

the euphoria of the first days had subsided. Haitians found that they were faced with a military junta led by General Henri Namphy, who had been handpicked by Duvalier and who would be less than willing to respond to their demands for *dechoukaj*, or rooting up the Duvalierist past.

The official position, corroborated by the U.S. State Department, was that the interim governing council would prepare Haiti for democratic elections. As aid from Washington for the junta increased, the confrontation between Duvalier loyalists and grassroots activists also intensified. A massacre of peasant activists in Jean Rabel in July 1987 attested to the brazen self-assertion of Duvalierists a little over a year after Baby Doc's departure. In a referendum in 1987 a new constitution forbidding Duvalierists to participate in elections for ten years and removing the supervision of elections from army control was approved by an overwhelming majority. In the elections of November of that year, however, Duvalierists thugs, with the support of the army, massacred voters, and the elections were called off. The Haitian army was asserting its old role as power broker and in January 1998 held its own elections, which were marked by a low voter turnout and the "victory" of the army-approved candidate, Leslie Manigat.

The intervention of the United States, France, and the Vatican in negotiating the departure of Jean Claude Duvalier both slowed down the revolutionary process in Haiti and elevated the army once more to a position of prominence in Haitian politics. The next few years would witness bloody confrontations between state militarism and a reanimated civil society, witnessed by a largely indecisive international community. The one thing that was needed to consummate the victory of the popular movement was a free and fair election. The army would again and again frustrate this desire so much so that the slogan "We cut down the tree but have not got rid of the roots" became popular among those advocating democratic change. The situation was further complicated by the fact that many who offered themselves for election did not represent the aspirations of the majority, and the grassroots movement did not have national leadership.

After twenty-nine years of political inactivity, Haiti now witnessed the frenzied explosion of new political parties, human rights organizations, and labor unions. The political parties were invariably led by men who had spent the last two decades in exile and had some difficulty reintegrating themselves into Haitian society. Even those who had remained, sometimes at great personal risk, seemed marginalized by the rapid and often violent evolution of events in Haiti. As traditional politicians got pushed to the sidelines or compromised themselves by their links with the military, the center stage was occupied by radicals of grassroots organizations, in particular the Ti Legliz.

The emergence of a credible leftist movement in Haiti was not welcome news for Washington. It became even more unpalatable when leadership fell to the ascetic and charismatic parish priest Jean Bertrand Aristide, who preached a message that was as inflexible as it was idealistic. The new Haiti must provide for all its people so that, as he put it, they could move "from misery to poverty with dignity." This could only be achieved outside the control of the traditional oligarchy and international capitalism. Aristide was immediately identified as a leftist firebrand and miraculously survived attempts by the Haitian army and the Catholic Church to silence him. When, under international pressure, the military was finally forced to accept democratic elections under UN supervision in 1990, the outspoken and increasingly influential Aristide won by a massive majority.

Aristide's victory in these elections meant that the will of the majority had finally prevailed, and for the first time since the departure of Baby Doc four years earlier there was jubilation in the streets. His Lavalas ("Flash Flood") movement had come to power bringing with it a loose coalition of peasant groupings, labor unions, and human rights organizations. Despite its popularity, the Aristide government was always precarious. Neither the elite nor the army nor conservative elements in Washington were pleased with the dramatic turn of events in Haiti. Aristide's presidency would last a mere seven months and was marked as much by populist gestures as by an often fiery rhetoric aimed at alienating the elite. In September 1991 the army, under General Raoul Cedras, staged a coup that ousted President Aristide and drove him into exile in Venezuela. With the Lavalas leadership in exile or in hiding in Haiti, a savage and systematic repression of the slums and countryside was conducted by the military. Thousands were killed in the next three years as the army tried to rule exclusively by force of arms. It was incapable of consolidating power and unable to persuade the international community, which had condemned the coup and imposed an embargo, that its actions were justified.

Ultimate resolution of the Haitian crisis was left in the hands of the United States, which remained reluctant to go beyond symbolic condemnation. However, a combination of the economic effects of the embargo and military repression drove thousands of Haitians to take to small boats in order to flee their country. They were forcefully repatriated by the U.S. Coast Guard, using the old agreement signed with the Duvalier government. It was this wave of boat people that finally forced action by the United States. The plight of poor Haitians driven to desperation on the high seas caught the world's attention and, more important, the attention of liberal elements as well as African American political leaders in the United States. Enormous

pressure was put on the Clinton Administration in 1994 to have the de facto coup leaders removed. The way was cleared for the United States to use military force to remove the coup leader through a UN resolution in July authorizing the use of "all necessary means" to remove the army. Direct invasion was forestalled by an accord negotiated by former President Carter with the Haitian military, allowing for the unopposed entry of the American forces. In September 1994, seventy-nine years after Admiral Caperton landed his marines in Port-au-Prince, 20,000 American troops were deployed in Haiti.

The United States led an intervention, but the return of President Aristide in October 1994 did not bring any immediate solution to Haiti's problems. From the outset, moral issues were complicated as the coup leaders were allowed to go into exile, and initially the U.S. troops allowed the local police and army to persist in human rights violations. Rumors spread of Washington's involvement with the repression during President Aristide's exile as CIA links with one of the most notorious paramilitary organizations, FRAPH (Revolutionary Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti), and its death squads were revealed. Perhaps most significantly, the U.S. Army never attempted to disarm the population. In the meantime, Haiti had been further impoverished because of the embargo and the basic elements of civil society crushed because of military repression. Haiti's recovery was also slowed down because the Aristide who returned was not the one who was driven into exile. Aristide had now become a politician. He did achieve the abolition of the Haitian army in 1995 but accomplished little else. He remained personally very popular, and in the elections of June 1995 the Lavalas coalition swept home with a massive majority. However, when he attempted to extend his term of office by the period of his exile he was forced to step down, and Rene Preval, with a last-minute endorsement, came to power in an election marked by a low voter turnout.

Returning Haiti to constitutional rule by restoring Aristide to power and then establishing the Preval presidency by constitutional means turned out to be the easy part. The real difficulty now is how to restore an economy after the more than ten years of turmoil that followed the Duvaliers' departure. The treasury is empty and more than half the work force is idle. Security and justice are also persistent problems, given the moral ambiguities of amnesties for coup leaders and the refusal of the U.S.-led multinational force to disarm the population. Most important, ideological contradictions have arisen between the Aristide people-based Lavalas platform and the international aid agencies, which have put together millions of dollars in aid based on a restructuring and a liberalization of the Haitian economy. Frustration

abroad at Aristide's stubborn insistence on a rigidly populist position has turned to alarm as he created his own party to facilitate reelection in the year 2000, thereby splitting the Lavalas coalition and paralyzing parliament as his supporters consistently block efforts at privatization of the Haitian economy and any attempt to implement the structural adjustment program. This has created an increasingly disillusioned population, which has seen the quality of their lives deteriorate further because of the political impasse and the consequent hesitation of financial institutions to release a multimillion-dollar aid package. The crisis has led the secretary general of the United Nations to report that "the consolidation of democracy in Haiti has been undermined."<sup>12</sup>

As the 200th anniversary of Haitian independence approaches, the fact that Haiti was the only island to achieve its independence by force of arms fades in the light of the face of a continuing political crisis that may have a tragic effect on the fledgling democracy established in the wake of the end of the Duvalier dynasty. After decades of turmoil and misrule, Haiti is undergoing a very difficult transition to constitutional rule and democratic government. Haitians still find themselves battling for economic survival and caught up in social unrest and political violence. Flawed elections and political infighting brought down the government of Rosny Smarth in June 1997. No prime minister has been appointed since then because ratification by Parliament has been withheld since opposing factions from within the Lavalas movement make agreement on a successor to Smarth impossible. Parliament as well as the Lavalas movement have been severely weakened by this political standoff, and an indecisive René Préval seems incapable of ending this political gridlock.

This parliamentary stalemate has cost millions of dollars in aid from international financial institutions. A revitalized economy is an essential aspect of the creation of a democratic Haiti. However, there is no sign that the feuding factions are prepared to heed the warnings of impending doom. The fate of democracy in Haiti is made even more precarious because an increasingly disgruntled population shows less and less interest in the electoral process. Voter turnout in elections, held since the restoration of constitutional government, has been alarmingly low. An old political culture based on divisiveness, an inability to compromise, and a lack of genuine concern for the mass of the Haitian people still haunts Haitian politics. Signs of the dire nature of the situation are the continuation of the UN mandate to provide security, as there is no confidence in the inexperienced police force that has replaced the army. In addition, more and more Haitians wish to leave their country; the boat people phenomenon shows signs of beginning again.

Equally disturbing is the fact that the only thing preventing the local economy from collapsing is the money that comes in from remittances from Haitians abroad.

Frustration with the Haitian crisis turned to alarm as President Preval in January 1999 effectively dissolved Parliament by insisting on upholding an electoral law that set January 11 as the end of the term for the majority of Haiti's legislative and municipal officials. Preval's action has been seen by his critics as a coup d'état and as paving the way for the return of his mentor Aristide. For some, Parliament, which has not endeared itself to the Haitian people, brought the action upon itself, and there is general distrust of all politicians, who seem to be motivated by little more than self-interest and greed for power. The period leading up to long-delayed national elections has been marked by political infighting, snags in voter registration, street protests, and a wave of violence that seems to be politically motivated. In the meantime more than \$300 million in World Bank loans and International Bank funds remain undisbursed as there is no parliament to ratify these loans. Haiti may well turn out to be Washington's saddest foreign policy disappointment. As the century drew to a close, Haiti, already the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, slipped to the 159th position on the UN human development index. In 1990, when President Aristide was elected, Haiti was ranked 124th of the 175 countries surveyed.

## NOTES

1. Graham Greene, *The Comedians* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1967), 43.
2. Louis Elie Moreau de St. Mery, *A Civilization That Perished: The Last Years of White Colonial Rule in Haiti*, trans. Ivor Spenser (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 257.
3. C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 24.
4. Michel Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti, State Against Nation: The Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990), 51.
5. James Leyburn, *The Haitian People* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1966), 36–37.
6. Ibid.
7. Ludwell Lee Montague, *Haiti and the United States 1714–1938* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1940), 193.
8. Ibid, 34.
9. Trouillot, *Haiti, State Against Nation*, 105.
10. David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 221.

11. James Ferguson, *Papa Doc, Baby Doc* (Oxford, England: Blackwell, 1987), 90.
12. Don Bohning, "Haiti Risking Loss of Support As Crisis Festers" *Miami Herald*, October 8, 1998.

# CULTURE AND CUSTOMS OF HAITI

---

J. MICHAEL DASH

Haiti is the only country that is considered Latin American but has a language and culture that are predominantly French and a population that is primarily of African descent. It is also the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and a country of extremes. *Culture and Customs of Haiti* fleshes out the evolution of this diverse society through discussions of the Haitian people, history, religion, social customs, media, literature and language, and performing and visual arts. This much-needed resource gives students and other readers a balanced picture of a Caribbean nation known in the United States mainly for its "boat people," the Duvalier dictatorships, and "voodoo."