



Haiti – Harmed at the Hands of Others

Max Ray-Ellis

Centre for Caribbean Studies

Faculty of Arts & Science, University of Toronto

Max Ray-Ellis is an undergraduate student from North York, Ontario. He is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) degree at the University of Toronto with a major in Diaspora and Transnational Studies and a double minor in Canadian Studies and History. Outside of his studies, he is an avid reader of Canadian, North American, and Caribbean history.

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ABSTRACT

After a revolution that spanned over a decade, Haiti became the second nation to achieve independence in the Western Hemisphere after the United States of America. While the United States has since gone on to become a global superpower, Haiti is currently the poorest nation in the Americas. For over two centuries, there have been continuous cases of foreign intervention in the Caribbean's oldest republic. Initially, these cases were clear efforts by nations to protect their own interests. Later on, officials from different nations around the world began to tell their own populations that they needed to help the Haitian people through various measures. This paper details how foreign intervention has resulted in far more negatives than positives in Haiti. It examines cases of foreign intervention stretching from the early nineteenth century up until the recent United Nations-led initiatives of this century. The paper provides a chronological story of what has happened in the nation and how generations of Haitians have been harmed. Regardless of their stated intentions, nearly every case of foreign intervention in Haiti has resulted in lasting, negative impacts for its people. This analysis displays how Haiti has been consistently wronged by other nations and how it was essentially never given the chance to develop its potential as a sovereign state.

On January 1, 1804, Haiti officially proclaimed its Declaration of Independence, roughly two months after its forces led by Jean-Jacques Dessalines expelled the last remaining French forces from their territory. Their revolution had

begun in 1791, when enslaved people sought to break free of brutal French colonial rule that originated in the mid-seventeenth century. The subsequent Haitian Constitution, published in 1805, detailed a “free and form sovereign

state, independent of all the other powers of the universe,” known as the “Haitian Empire,” where “slavery is abolished forever” and “equality before the law is irrefutably established.” The future appeared bright for this newly independent Black nation in the Caribbean. Unfortunately, for Haiti and the Haitian people, this bright future was not to be. For the past two plus centuries, Haiti has been continuously disadvantaged and subjected to mistreatment by other nations, including France and the United States. The potential for Haiti to emerge as a prosperous nation has thus been quashed due to numerous cases of foreign interference, which are still ongoing today.

Haiti’s mistreatment by the international community began with its independence. Upon its founding as a nation in 1804, Haiti expected to be able to establish international relations with other countries just as the United States had done so several decades earlier after its successful revolution. Unfortunately for Haiti, most European colonial powers, such as Great Britain and Spain, refused to recognize its independence for several decades as they feared that providing recognition to a nation formed by slave rebellion would lead to similar revolts in their colonies; this fear was also prevalent in the United States.¹ Haiti had to operate as a de facto independent entity that did not have official recognition from the international community. Great Britain finally recognized Haitian independence in 1825, despite having recognized the independence of Mexico, Colombia, and Argentina in 1823 when these countries successfully revolted against Spain.² Most Western European nations had recognized Haiti as independent by 1860. However, the United States did not do so until 1862, over a half-century after the Haitian Declaration of Independence.³ Their recognition came under President Abraham Lincoln during the U.S. Civil War, as some white Americans advocated for resetting American Blacks in Haiti or

elsewhere.⁴ According to Frederick Douglass, a prominent American abolitionist and ex-slave, “after Haiti had shaken off the fetters of bondage, and long after her freedom and independence had been recognized by all other civilized nations, we continued to refuse to acknowledge the fact and treated her as outside the sisterhood of nations.”⁵

While establishing formal recognition was important for Haiti, achieving the recognition of its former colonial power, France, came at a massive price for the young nation. France had long desired to reconquer Haiti. In the 1780s, when Haiti was the French colony of “Saint-Domingue,” it was the wealthiest colony in the world, producing nearly half of its sugar exports and a more significant proportion of its coffee.⁶ Losing Haiti was a blow that France did not wish to accept, and it spent several decades attempting to negotiate compensation for the “property” lost by its citizens in Haiti, which included both land and the formerly enslaved people.⁷ France and Haiti attempted negotiations for this compensation on multiple occasions under different regimes before King Charles X of France issued a virtual ultimatum in 1825. He sent the Baron de Mackau, along with fourteen armed ships, to the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince, where the Baron delivered an ordinance to Haitian President Jean-Pierre Boyer.⁸ The ordinance declared that the King would recognize “full and entire independence” for Haiti so long as they met two conditions: French commercial ships would only be required to pay half of the docking rights, and Haiti would pay the former French plantation owners an indemnity of 150 million francs.⁹ Boyer, faced with the looming destruction of Port-au-Prince and a potential war, elected to accept the ordinance, which was not a treaty and did not provide security guarantees from France.¹⁰ The indemnity amount was later renegotiated to 60 million francs in 1838 when

¹ Gerald Horne, “THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION AND THE CENTRAL QUESTION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY,” *The Journal of African American History* 100, no. 1 (2015): 33-35, <https://doi.org/10.5323/jafriamerhist.100.1.0026>.

² Charles W. Wesley, “The Struggle for the Recognition of Haiti and Liberia as Independent Republics,” *The Journal of Negro History* 2, no. 4 (1917): 369-371.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/2713395>.

³ B.W. Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 151.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Wesley, “The Struggle for the Recognition of Haiti,” 376-377.

⁶ Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 147.

⁷ Liliana Obregon, “Empire, Racial Capitalism and International Law: The Case of Manumitted Haiti and the Recognition Debt,” *Leiden Journal of International Law* 31, no. 3 (2018), 604-609, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0922156518000225>.

⁸ Obregon, “Empire, Racial Capitalism and International Law,” 610.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 610-612.

France fully recognized the independence of Haiti.¹¹ Nonetheless, this debt was still enormous, and its imposition transformed Haiti into what some view as a “neo-colonial state” or nearly a “dependency of France.”¹² Haiti ultimately borrowed over 166 million Francs to pay off the debt. Its last payment occurred in 1910, over a century after independence.¹³

Even after achieving diplomatic recognition, Haiti experienced numerous problems due to the actions of other nations. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, several cases of “gunboat diplomacy” arose due to German citizens holding interests in Haiti. In 1872, a German Navy captain held two Haitian citizens hostage and took control of two Haitian ships because he believed two German businessmen were owed reparations for financial losses they accrued in Haiti.¹⁴ The Germans returned the ships and people after Haitian President Nissage Saget paid the amount demanded. However, they also defecated the Haitian flag, sending a message of immense disrespect to the entire nation.¹⁵ The incident was part of a growing series of occurrences where foreign businessmen used their home nation's navies as threats to gain a financial advantage in Haiti.¹⁶ These events resulted in a vast amount of wealth being uprooted from Haiti by foreign businessmen, which undoubtedly harmed the nation's financial state.¹⁷

Over two decades later, in 1897, the controversial and embarrassing Lüders affair occurred. Haitian police officers were searching for a man named Dorléus Prémumé, who was accused of theft.¹⁸ Prémumé worked as a coachman for Emile Lüders, who came to assist Prémumé and attempted to stop the arrest.¹⁹ Both men were sentenced to one year of imprisonment for assault, battery, and using force to resist arrest. However, Lüders contacted the German

embassy for support as he was half-German.²⁰ The resulting affair saw the German Chargé d'affaires demand the release of Lüders, the removal of all judges, and the dismissal of all police officers involved in the case.²¹ The Haitian President Tirésias Simon Sam issued a pardon to Lüders, and he was allowed to depart the nation; six weeks later, Germany sent two warships to the harbour in Port-au-Prince, demanding a letter of apology, financial compensation for Lüders, the ability for Lüders to return, a special reception, and a 21-gun salute to the German flag.²² President Sam was given four hours to decide and ultimately agreed to the terms, resulting in national embarrassment for the Haitian people.²³ Moments like these are examples of Haiti being treated as a second-class nation, which worked to destabilize the country and keep it from achieving economic prominence. They simultaneously damaged the national pride of the country. They lowered the popularity of the presidents forced to deal with these situations.

The biggest foreign offender in Haiti since the turn of the twentieth century has been the United States. In 1823, American President James Monroe declared that European countries should not seek any more colonies in the Americas or interfere in the politics of independent nations in the Americas; this was subsequently referred to as the “Monroe doctrine.”²⁴ While this may appear at first glance as the Americans stepping in for fellow nations and peoples in the Americas, it was effectively a tool for the United States to establish and enforce their hegemony in the region.²⁵ The U.S. had set its eyes on Haiti as early as 1868 when American President Andrew Johnson requested the annexation of the island of Hispaniola to “secure a defensive and economic stake in the West Indies.”²⁶ By the turn of the twentieth century, the Americans became

¹¹ Wesley, “The Struggle for the Recognition of Haiti,” 376.

¹² Wesley, “The Struggle for the Recognition of Haiti,” 376; Obregon, “Empire, Racial Capitalism and International Law,” 614.

¹³ Obregon, “Empire, Racial Capitalism and International Law,” 613.

¹⁴ Solon Ménos, “The Luders Affair,” in *The Haiti Reader*, ed. Chantalle F. Verna et al. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 147.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Jacques Nicolas Léger, *Haiti, Her History and Her Detractors* (New York: Neale, 1907), 249-250.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid, 250.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 198.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ “U.S. Invasion and Occupation of Haiti, 1915-34,” United States Department of State Archive, accessed December 24, 2022, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/wwi/88275.htm>.

increasingly concerned by Germany's position in the Caribbean and its influence over Haiti.²⁷ From 1911 to 1915, Haiti saw seven presidents either assassinated or overthrown.²⁸ This gave the United States government what they saw as ample reason to intervene and place Haiti under its influence. In 1914, the government of Woodrow Wilson sent U.S. marines to remove \$500,000 from the Haitian National Bank and transfer it to New York, which put the Americans in charge of Haiti's finances. The following year, they sent marines again to invade and occupy Haiti officially. They would stay in the nation until 1934, making this the longest of any occupation the U.S. carried out in the Caribbean.²⁹

The American occupation of Haiti was disastrous and devastating for Haiti and its people. American professor Robert Fatton Jr. stated that while the American occupation "may have created a semblance of an infrastructure and a form of centralised government," it "contributed neither to long-term self-sustaining economic development nor to lasting democratic forms of accountability."³⁰ With Haiti requiring a new president in 1915, the U.S. influenced the Haitian legislature into selecting Philippe Sadré Dartiguenave as their new president, angering many people.³¹ When the legislature refused to adopt a new constitution that would have overturned some laws since independence, the U.S. forced Dartiguenave to dissolve the legislature.³² This effectively placed the nation under the control of a gendarmerie controlled by U.S. marines and selected Haitians until 1929, when the legislature was finally allowed to meet again.³³ During this time, the U.S. troops and the gendarmerie practiced press censorship. They reinstated the long-outdated *corvée* system that forced peasants to perform unpaid labour.³⁴ The occupational force was also accused of mass murder, abuse, physical assault, rape,

torture, and forcing *corvée* labourers to work months beyond their mandated three-day maximum term.³⁵ In 1919, an American Brigadier General complained to a Colonel that U.S. troops and their associates were conducting "practically indiscriminate killings" of Haitian people.³⁶ When the United States finally left Haiti in 1934, they were criticized for doing little to alleviate the poverty that most Haitians faced or the near-universal illiteracy that persisted among the population.³⁷ Haitians lived with their country occupied by a foreign military force for nearly twenty years. They walked away with few substantial improvements to compensate for the oppression, death, and censorship they faced.

The United States' involvement in Haiti, official or unofficial, did not cease when their occupation ended in 1934. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is particularly noteworthy for its efforts to influence politics and governance in the Americas. From 1957 to 1971, Haiti was ruled by the dictator François "Papa Doc" Duvalier, and his son Jean Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier succeeded him from 1971-1986.³⁸ The CIA opted to support the Duvaliers as they feared official opposition to them would push them towards aligning with nearby Cuba and their communist ruler Fidel Castro.³⁹ Nonetheless, the CIA was discreetly involved with several groups that wished to overthrow Duvalier's rule in Haiti. They provided a rebel group named "Jeune Haïti" with arms, money, and special forces training in 1963, knowing that the group may have assassinated Duvalier during their unsuccessful coup attempt.⁴⁰ The CIA was subsequently involved in the "Coalition Haïti" scheme that involved Haitian expatriates unsuccessfully invading Haiti in 1968.⁴¹ Baby Doc Duvalier eventually fell from power at the hands of the Haitian people in 1986. However, the CIA continued to wield its power and

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 206.

³⁰ Robert Fatton Jr., "Haiti: The Saturnalia of Emancipation and the Vicissitudes of Predatory Rule," *Third World Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (2006), 128, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4017663>.

³¹ United States Department of State Archive, "U.S. Invasion and Occupation of Haiti."

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid; Patricia J. Lopez, "Clumsy beginnings: from 'modernizing mission' to humanitarianism in the US occupation of Haiti (1915-34)," *Environment and Planning A* 47, no. 11 (2015):

2246, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X15598262>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid, 2247.

³⁷ Dana G. Munro, "The American Withdrawal from Haiti, 1929-1934," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 49, no. 1 (1969): 26, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2511314>.

³⁸ Kathleen Marie Whitney, "Sin, Fraph, and the CIA: U.S. Covert Action in Haiti," *Southwestern Journal of Law and Trade in the Americas* 3, no. 2 (1996): 315.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

influence over Haiti in the following years.

In the late 1980s, a Catholic priest named Jean-Bertrand Aristide gained popularity in Port-au-Prince by preaching what some have termed "liberation theology."⁴² Haiti was set to hold its first democratic election since Papa Doc Duvalier's initial victory in 1957; the CIA, meanwhile, intended to fund candidates who opposed Aristide, who was calling for a boycott of the election by the poor.⁴³ An estimated 30-300 voters were killed on election day by troops led by a *Service d'Intelligence Nationale* (SIN) commander, and the election was not held.⁴⁴ The U.S. government ceased its funding of the Haitian military as a result, but the CIA continued funding SIN, an organization it had helped create with the stated goal of obtaining intelligence on drug trafficking.⁴⁵ The CIA often trained SIN agents. They subsequently spied on supporters of Aristide, participated in drug trafficking, and murdered as many as 5,000 members of pro-democracy movements between 1986 and 1991.⁴⁶ The CIA, an American governmental organization, actively funded a group that engaged in violations of human rights, criminal acts, and drug trafficking; this is a clear-cut example of foreign interference harming the people of Haiti.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the CIA's involvement in Haiti's politics continued after what they perceived as a surprise election win by Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1990.⁴⁷ Seven months after his inauguration, members of Haiti's army and national police force staged a successful coup and dismissed Aristide from power.⁴⁸ "Key members" of the forces involved in the coup were paid for information by the CIA, despite their well-known participation in drug trafficking.⁴⁹ The United States has denied playing a role

in the 1991 coup in Haiti. Nonetheless, CIA agents were stated to have been at the headquarters of the Haitian army during the coup. At the same time, key leader Raoul Cedras was previously supported by both the U.S. and France to oversee security during the previous year's election; Cedras and fellow coup leader Michel Francois were both partially educated in the United States.⁵⁰ Under the regime empowered by the coup, Haiti suffered from numerous human rights abuses that included extrajudicial killings, among other atrocities.⁵¹ The U.S., under the administration of President Bill Clinton, then embarked on "Operation Restore Democracy," a military intervention designed to reinstall Aristide as the elected ruler of the nation and remove Cedras and his associates from power.⁵² Supported by the United Nations, the broader mission to restore Aristide to rule also included the direct support of Canada.⁵³ Operation Restore Democracy was cited as failing to install a "stable political system" in Haiti; part of this failure has been blamed on the fact that the United States forces and the CIA both shared sympathies for the coup regime that they were sent to remove from power and investigate for crimes committed.⁵⁴

Recently, a United Nations peacekeeping force, MINUSTAH, intervened in Haiti from 2004 to 2017—the international force comprised primarily of Brazilians.⁵⁵ During this time, Haiti suffered from a cholera epidemic, later discovered to have originated from a Nepalese peacekeeping base in 2010.⁵⁶ In addition to bringing cholera to the nation, the force was noted for its sexual exploitation and abuse of Haitian women and girls, which resulted in numerous children being born to single Haitian mothers who suffered from social stigma.⁵⁷ Two centuries after independence, Haiti once again faced harm from other

⁴² Ibid, 318.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 319.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 316-320.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 319-320.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 320.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 321.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Philippe R. Girard, "Operation Restore Democracy?," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 8, no. 2 (2002): 70.

⁵³ Tarr, Michael, and Linda Robinson. "Haiti's Bloody Message to Clinton: Restoring Democracy Is Harder Than It

Seems." *U.S. News & World Report* 115, no. 16 (1993): 36.

⁵⁴ Girard, "Operation Restore Democracy," 79.

⁵⁵ Federico Neiburg, "The Brazilian Army in Haiti – Foreign Intervention and Domestic Politics" *Opinio Juris*, January 5, 2020, <https://opiniojuris.org/2020/05/01/the-brazilian-army-in-haiti-foreign-intervention-and-domestic-politics/>.

⁵⁶ Bartels, Susan A., et al., "Cholera in the Time of MINUSTAH: Experiences of Community Members Affected by Cholera in Haiti," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19, no. 9 (2022): 4974-2.

⁵⁷ Ibid; Vahedi, Luissa, et al., "'It's Because We Are 'Loose Girls' That's Why We Had Children with MINUSTAH Soldiers': A Qualitative Analysis of Stigma Experienced by Peacekeeper-Fathered Children and Their Mothers in Haiti." *Journal*

nations.

Haiti was the second country in the Americas to achieve independence. However, it is the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere today.⁵⁸ It is evident that since its founding, the nation has been dealt consistent blows, intentionally and unintentionally, from foreign nations. Desalines' vision of being "independent of all the other powers of the universe" never truly materialized for Haiti.⁵⁹ In November 2022, Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau did not dismiss the possibility of a Canadian military intervention in Haiti to help combat gang violence and control.⁶⁰ Suppose there is a lesson to be learned from the distant and recent past. In that case, most, if not all, foreign involvement in Haiti usually results in some form of harm to the Haitian people.

of Interpersonal Violence 37, no. 23-24 (2022): NP22674.

⁵⁸ Bartels et al., "Cholera," 4974-1.

⁵⁹ Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 192/

⁶⁰ Dylan Robertson, "Haitian political parties must all agree if Canada leads military intervention: Trudeau," *Global News*, November 20, 2022, <https://globalnews.ca/news/9293242/haitian-political-parties-canada-military-intervention-trudeau/>.

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