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Haiti

a country study

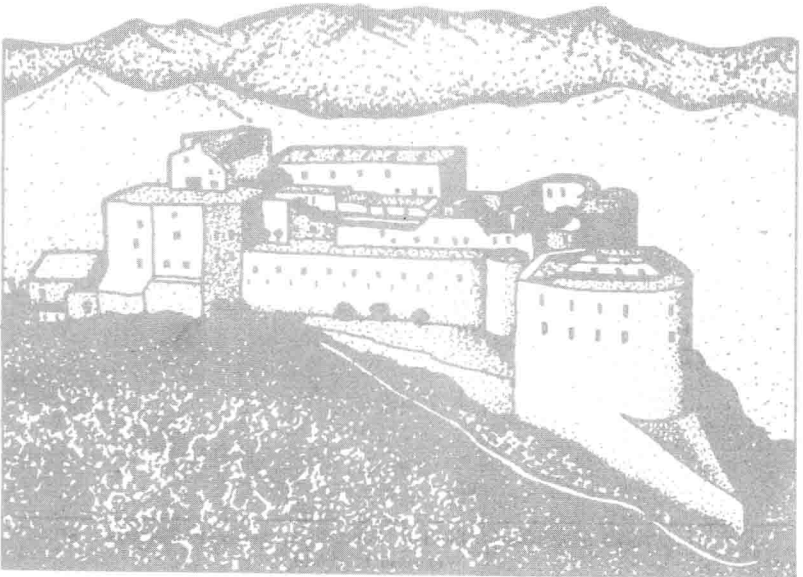


Haiti a country study

Foreign Area Studies
The American University

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FOREWORD

This volume is one of a continuing series of books written by Foreign Area Studies, The American University, under the Area Handbook Program. The last page of this book provides a listing of other country studies published. Each book in the series deals with a particular foreign country, describing and analyzing the economic, national security, political, and social systems and institutions and examining the interrelationships of those systems and institutions and the ways that they are shaped by cultural factors. Each study is written by a multidisciplinary team of social scientists. The authors seek to provide a basic insight and understanding of the society under observation, striving for a dynamic rather than a static portrayal of it. The study focuses on historical antecedents and on the cultural, political, and socioeconomic characteristics that contribute to cohesion and cleavage within the society. Particular attention is given to the origins and traditions of the people who make up the society, their dominant beliefs and values, their community of interests and the issues on which they are divided, the nature and extent of their involvement with the national institutions, and their attitudes toward each other and toward the social system and political order within which they live.

The contents of the book represent the work of Foreign Area Studies and are not set forth as the official view of the United States government. The authors have sought to adhere to accepted standards of scholarly objectivity. Such corrections, additions, and suggestions for factual or other change that readers may have will be welcomed for use in future revisions.

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PREFACE

The Republic of Haiti, which occupies the western third of Hispaniola, a near neighbor of the United States strategically located between the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, has attracted the attention of foreign powers throughout its turbulent history. Economic and political conditions in this densely populated country have been of particular interest to the United States. In the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century, the United States undertook to prevent intervention in Haiti by European powers; and between 1915 and 1934 the United States carried out a military occupation in the course of which projects designed to improve living conditions were introduced. In early 1973 the United States was extending technical and economic assistance.

This book represents an effort to provide a compact and objective exposition and analysis of the dominant social, political, and economic characteristics of Haitian society. Consultants with first-hand knowledge of the country have provided data not available in printed sources. The authors alone are responsible for the final draft.

English usage follows *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*. French and Creole words and phrases, used only when adequate English equivalents are lacking, are defined at first appearance. If employed frequently, they are listed in the Glossary. French is based on *The New Cassell's French Dictionary* (revised). Unless otherwise stated, production and commodity tonnage figures are in metric tons.

COUNTRY SUMMARY

1. COUNTRY: Republic of Haiti (République d'Haïti).
2. SIZE, TOPOGRAPHY, AND CLIMATE: Land area of about 11,000 square miles. Occupies western one-third of Hispaniola, second largest island in Caribbean; Dominican Republic occupies eastern two-thirds. Mountainous country in which only 20 percent of territory lies below 600 feet; topography dominated by five ranges with generally east-west axis. Generally well watered, but rivers have uneven flow. Prevailing temperatures vary with elevation, and sea breezes temper tropical heat in coastal lowlands; little seasonal change. Rainfall limited by fact that most of country lies in rain shadow. Precipitation generally heaviest in north, and heavier in highlands than in lowlands, but considerable local variation. Seasonal incidence also varies by locality.
3. POPULATION: One of most densely populated countries in the world. Population exceeded 4.2 million in 1971 census. Estimated growth rate averaged about 2 percent during 1960s. Urbanization proceeding slowly, and in early 1970s some 75 to 85 percent of population remained rural. Port-au-Prince, with at least half of urban population, was only large city.
4. ETHNIC GROUPS AND LANGUAGES: Great majority of the people are of African descent. Remainder are principally mulattoes—of mixed African-Caucasian ancestry—who, as a group, have occupied an elite position in the society. A small number of Haitian citizens are of Levantine or European origin. French is the official language but is spoken by less than 10 percent of the people. Creole, spoken by virtually all the people, is a combination of French dialects and certain African forms. The two languages are not mutually intelligible.
5. RELIGION: State religion is Roman Catholicism. All religious faiths tolerated. Protestant missionaries active throughout the country. Most of the people profess Roman Catholicism, but voodooism, based largely on West African religious practices, exerts profound influence on lives of the people.
6. EDUCATION: Enrollment of about 300,000 at all levels in 1970s; 90 percent of total in primary system. Most of primary and virtually all secondary and higher schools in urban localities. Only university is public institution in Port-au-Prince. Moderate increase in primary and secondary enrollments during 1960s; university enrollment declined. School instruction conducted in French, but most of rural population

speaking only Creole; as consequence, rural enrollments low, dropout rates high. National rate of literacy estimated at 20 percent or less in 1970.

7. **HEALTH:** Medical personnel and facilities concentrated in Port-au-Prince and a few urban centers. Demand for modern medical care in rural areas limited by survival of traditional health attitudes and practices. Principal health hazards aggravated by poor nutrition and inadequate sanitation. These include malaria, tuberculosis, dermatosis, diseases of early infancy, parasite worms, and respiratory ailments. Yaws, formerly a major hazard, virtually eliminated; intensive anti-malaria campaign resulted in sharp decline in its incidence during 1960s.

8. **GOVERNMENT:** Constitutional democracy, but power is centered in hands of president. Executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Constitution changed in 1964 to make President François Duvalier president for life. Upon his death his son Jean-Claude became president for life. Unicameral legislature with fifty-eight members.

9. **INTERNATIONAL MEMBERSHIPS:** The country is a party to the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance and a member of the Organization of American States, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the United Nations and many of its specialized agencies.

10. **CURRENCY:** Gourde; symbol is G. Rate of exchange is 5 gourdes equal US\$1. Currency stable.

11. **AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRY:** Agriculture is basis of economy. Coffee is major export crop, but many other crops grown for both domestic and export markets. Industry, second leading sector of economy; small plants assembling imported components for re-export have been fastest growing segment.

12. **LABOR:** In 1970 estimated at 2.78 million, or a little over half of population in labor force. Proportion among highest in Latin America and nearly twice that in some Latin American countries. Over 80 percent believed engaged in agriculture and most of remainder in service activities. Women and girls made up nearly half of total. Organized sector of labor force small and of limited significance; confined largely to Port-au-Prince.

13. **TRANSPORTATION:** Inadequate for needs of country. Roads in poor condition, and many towns connected only by animal trails. Domestic aviation fills a small part of gap, but larger role is played by hundreds of small craft engaged in coastal trade. One nonfunctioning government-owned railroad of three-feet-six-inch-gauge track.

14. **COMMUNICATIONS:** About 5,000 telephones in country in 1972. Some domestic telegraph service as well as international telephone and telegraphic service.

15. **IMPORTS AND EXPORTS:** Exports consist mainly of coffee, cacao, sugar, light manufactures, and bauxite. Imports are varied and

include consumer durables, machinery, food products, chemicals, and fuels.

16. ECONOMIC AGREEMENTS AND AID: Some bilateral agreements have been negotiated with a few countries, including France. Foreign aid provided by United States, international lending agencies, and foreign governments.

17. ARMED FORCES: Security forces consist of army, small coast guard, and air force (totaling about 6,000) and a militia estimated at 7,000 to 10,000. Unified command system by which army controls navy, air force, and police. Army units primarily infantry-type battalions.

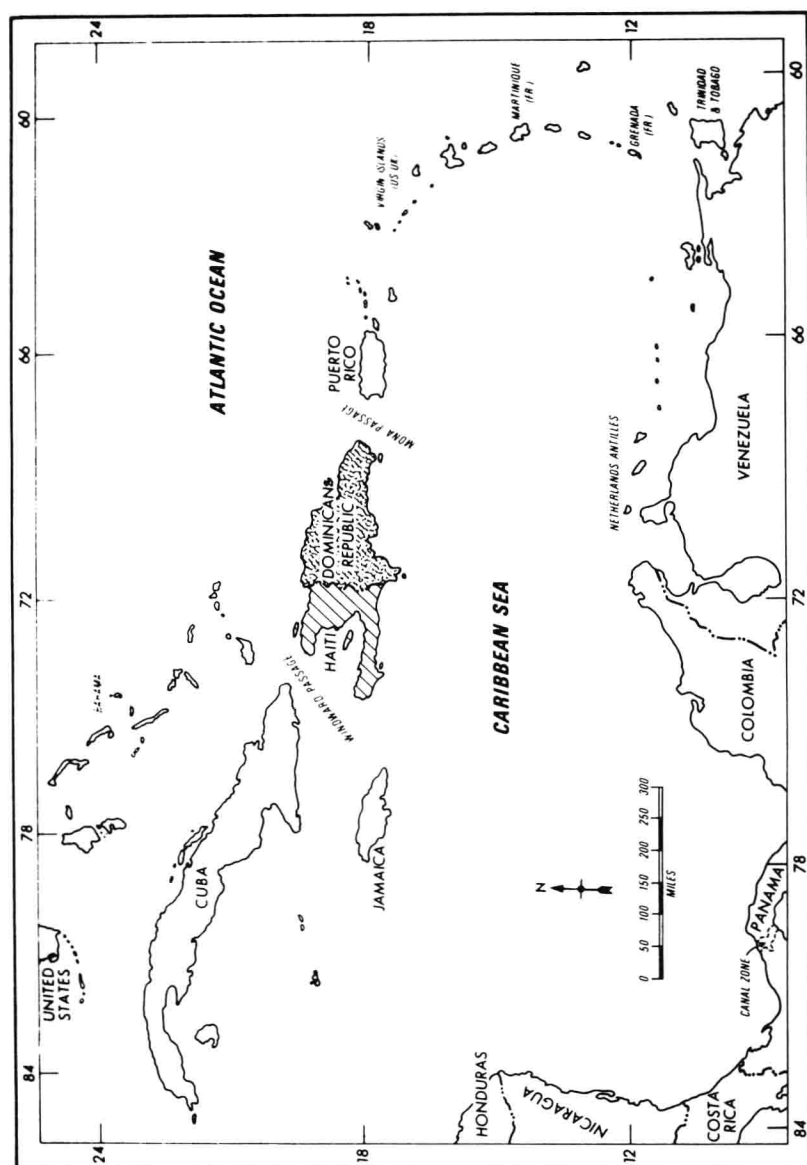


Figure 1. Haiti: Hispaniola and Its Position in the Antilles

HAITI

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SECTION I. SOCIAL

CHAPTER 1

GENERAL CHARACTER OF THE SOCIETY

In early 1973 the people of Haiti lived in a transitional period following the death of President Francois Duvalier, whose authoritarian regime had lasted for thirteen and a half years. Repressive measures were somewhat less in evidence; there were signs of an upturn in the economy after years of quiescence; and foreign relations were improving. After the death of Duvalier in 1971 conditions in the country had been relatively tranquil, but rivalry for political power continued among Duvalier's former followers.

Ever since the discovery in 1492 of the island of Hispaniola—the western third of which is occupied by the Republic of Haiti—the people of this territory have felt the effects of foreign intervention in one form or another. When Christopher Columbus, searching for a route to Asia, landed on Hispaniola and claimed it for the Spanish crown, what is now Haiti became part of a Spanish colony; and during the early years of Spanish occupation the indigenous peoples—Arawak Indians—were virtually destroyed by the cruel treatment inflicted by the colonists. As a result the population of modern Haiti, unlike those of most Latin American countries, shows virtually no trace of its indigenous peoples.

More than 90 percent of the people of modern Haiti are descended from African slaves, most of whom were brought in by French colonists to work on plantations. Ceded to France by Spain in 1697, the territory became one of the richest colonies in the French Empire, and the use of the French language and admiration for French culture shown by educated Haitians today had their origin in the French colony. Likewise Creole, the language spoken by virtually all Haitians, although characterized by the syntax of West African languages, is based largely on French dialects.

Present-day Haitians take pride in the fact that they gained their independence in 1804 after defeating French forces sent by Napoleon to put down a slave rebellion; and they are proud of the fact that in 1820 the country became the first Negro republic in the world. Although the economy of the country suffered badly after the departure of the French, the modern-day Haitian peasant, despite his poverty, cherishes his self-reliance and economic independence.

Ever since pirates, operating from what is now Haitian territory, preyed on Spanish galleons carrying treasure from the American mainland to Spain, foreign powers have recognized the importance of the Windward Passage, which separates Haiti from Cuba and serves as an important link connecting Central America and South America with North America and Europe. Through the years Haitians have witnessed shows of force by foreign powers anxious to protect their interests in the country; and between 1915 and 1934 the United States intervened militarily to protect the lives of its citizens and their property and to prevent intervention by European powers. In 1973 Haitians were receiving economic, technical and military assistance from abroad.

Haitians inhabit one of the most densely populated countries in the world. A large proportion of the population lives virtually outside the money economy; and agriculture, typically practiced on small, individual, family subsistence plots, is the mainstay of the country's economy. The proportion of the population that is economically active is substantially larger than the average in Latin American countries; and the participation rate of women is almost as high as that of men. Women play an important part in the rural economy—particularly in their role of vending or bartering produce in the village markets. At least 80 percent of the people live in rural areas, and most of the people working in urban localities are engaged in service occupations.

The people face the problem of extracting their living from plots of land, which are not only small but which have been overcultivated. Roughly two-thirds of the country is mountainous and unsuitable for cultivation. The rough terrain not only limits the amount of arable land but also renders internal communications difficult.

By 1973, although Haiti continued to be one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere, the government had attained a more favorable fiscal position; foreign investment was increasing, along with growing confidence among businessmen; and the tourist trade was reviving. Exports—principally coffee, sugar, handicrafts, bauxite, and manufactured goods—contributed to unusually high reserves of foreign exchange. A promising development was the increasing number of small factories in and around Port-au-Prince, the national capital, in which imported raw or partially finished materials were processed for export—largely to the United States. Light industries were producing, among other things, baseballs, athletic goods, and electric components.

In a country with one of the lowest literacy rates in Latin America, the number of pupils attending secondary schools in 1972—primarily in urban areas—was increasing rapidly. In most parts of the nation, however, educational facilities were extremely limited; and the fact that instruction was given in French, in a country in which the great majority of the people understood only Creole, inhibited the effective-

ness of education in public schools. Nevertheless, Haitians have developed a literary tradition; and among the people, folk music and painting play an important part in their lives. Artists and writers have created a consciousness of a distinctively Haitian culture, and emphasis has, in the twentieth century, been on aspects of Haitian life rather than on French models used in the past.

Freedom of expression, although guaranteed by successive constitutions, has often suffered under tyrannical governments. In 1973 newspapers and broadcasting stations avoided publishing or transmitting material that might be offensive to the government, but official censorship was not apparent. Because very few people were able to read, radio was the most influential mass medium in the country.

The small percentage of the population who enjoy the advantages of education and who are mainly responsible for intellectual activity are, for the most part, successors to the wealthy whites who constituted the elite in colonial times. When the whites were expelled at the end of the eighteenth century, the mulattoes—descendants of Africans and whites—became the elite. They preserved their position through generations of changing governments, whether the government was controlled by mulattoes or Negroes. In 1973 they continued to revere French culture and to support the Roman Catholic Church, but a society that had been sharply divided between the elite and the masses was changing. The beginnings of a middle class were apparent; and educated, wealthy nonelites were joining the old elite to form an upper class with a broader base. At the same time the masses in the countryside lived much as they had a hundred years earlier. Although the great majority were Roman Catholics, their lives were profoundly affected by voodooism—the Haitian religion based on West African religions—whose priests exercised a significant influence throughout the country.

In 1973 the people lived under a highly centralized government. Although the constitution provided for a system of checks and balances—with executive, legislative, and judicial branches—the president, supported by the armed forces, exercised strong executive power. In late 1972 legislative elections, which had not been held since 1967, were scheduled for February 1973. Various factions were jockeying for positions, as were individuals close to President Jean-Claude Duvalier, who had been designated president-for-life by his father, President François Duvalier. Meanwhile, in the countryside the people continued, for the most part, to live under conditions that had existed since the beginning of the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER 2

GEOGRAPHY AND POPULATION

The approximately 11,000 square miles that make up the territory of Haiti occupy the western one-third of Hispaniola, the second-largest island in the Caribbean; the eastern two-thirds is occupied by the Dominican Republic. Lying about 600 miles southeast of Florida, the island is separated from Puerto Rico on the east by the Mona Passage, and from Cuba on the west by the Windward Passage (see fig. 1). Because these two seaways are the principal water routes linking North America and Europe with Central and South America, the histories of Haiti and the Dominican Republic have been affected by external influences with unusual frequency.

In the aboriginal language, the word *haiti* means high land. The name is appropriate, for although the highest crests do not reach elevations as great as those of neighboring Dominican Republic, intricately convoluted mountains and hills cover most of the countryside. Less than 20 percent of the land lies at elevations below 600 feet, and about 40 percent is at elevations in excess of 1,500 feet. The mountain ranges, which follow a roughly east-west axis, make internal communication difficult and have contributed to the development of regionalism.

Once largely covered with tropical rain forest and Caribbean pine, the country has been subjected to extensive clearing of its woodlands for farming and for provision of timber and firewood. Erosion has been severe, and in the early 1970s very little commercial forest remained. Rodents of various kinds are the only native mammals, but there are numerous species of birds, reptiles, and fresh-water and salt-water fish. Mineral resources are limited.

One of the smallest of the American nations, Haiti is also one of the most densely populated countries in the world. During the 1960s and early 1970s the annual population growth rate was moderate in comparison to that registered in most other Latin American countries, but the limited amount of arable land coupled with massive erosion had resulted in severe rural crowding. A migration from country to town had been in process during the years since World War II, but its volume had been restricted by the urban economy's inability to develop industries in sufficient number to provide an increasing number of new jobs for the migrants. In 1972 four-fifths or more of the population continued to live in rural localities; a preponderant majority engaged in subsistence farming.

In the early 1970s more than half of the population was economically active, as compared with a proportion of less than one-third in Latin America as a whole. The participation rate for women, which was only slightly less than that for men, was the highest in the region. Most of the small urban labor force was engaged in service occupations, and — in the country as a whole — the number working for wages and salaries was far smaller than the number of employers and self-employed persons or the number of unpaid family workers.

BOUNDARIES AND POLITICAL SUBDIVISIONS

The 193-mile border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, the island country's only international frontier, was agreed upon in a treaty signed in 1929. Some 80 percent of its demarcation was completed by 1930, and five remaining disputed border sections were settled by a 1936 protocol. For the most part, the frontier follows mountain ridges and courses of streams. There are also several short distances that follow straight lines, and in a portion of the interior highlands it is defined by the International Route (Route Internationale), a highway that parallels the course of the Libon River (Rivière Libon), a stream that had served as the border before the road was built.

Because of the dense rural population in Haiti and the relative emptiness of the frontier zone in the Dominican Republic, there has been considerable pressure on the border. During the nineteenth century the line in some places shifted substantially to the east, a circumstance that explains the occurrence of Spanish names such as Los Palos and Los Pozos for places on the Haitian Central Plateau (Plateau Central). Haitian farmers occupying miniature farms close to the border have looked enviously at the relatively empty lands on the Dominican side, and the Dominican government has established a string of frontier-zone agricultural colonies in order to make the border secure. The Haitian government, on its part, has endeavored to minimize friction by forbidding the construction of homes within one kilometer (0.62 miles) of the border in certain localities. Illegal migration of Haitians seeking employment in the neighboring country has continued, however, and the border had been closed for most of a five-year period when it was reopened at the beginning of 1972. At the middle of the year, however, it was reported to be closed again.

On the eve of a conference on the law of the sea held in Santo Domingo early in 1972 and attended by fifteen states with Caribbean interests, Haiti issued a decree fixing the limits of its territorial waters at twelve nautical miles, plus a contiguous three-mile zone in which fishing rights were reserved. It also asserted the right to control the exploration of natural resources of its continental shelf, a principle later adhered to by the states attending the Santo Domingo conference.

The Constitution of 1957 and subsequent legislation call for the internal division of the country into nine departments (*départements*).