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Bringing Democracy to Haiti

When Christopher Columbus touched shore, on December 6, 1492, on the West Indies Island which he named La Isla Española (Hispaniola) and claimed for the Spanish crown, it was inhabited by Arawak Indians, whose own name for their island was Haiti.



The Spanish failed to develop their hold on the island in a systematic way, focusing their efforts primarily on the mining of precious metals in its eastern end and leaving the west unsettled, after annihilating most of the Arawaks there. During the 17th century French and English adventurers established their own presence on Hispaniola, especially in the western end of the island. By the latter part of the 17th century the French had de facto control of much of the west, and in 1697 this control was given de jure

status by a formal agreement between the French and Spanish governments. The French renamed their western third of the island Saint-Domingue, while the Spanish called their colony on the eastern part Santo Domingo. The mountains and jungle of the interior provided a natural border between the French and Spanish parts of Hispaniola.

Unlike the Spanish, the French developed their new colony efficiently, establishing plantations and importing Black slaves from Africa as laborers. By 1750 sugar, coffee, cocoa, indigo, and cotton were being produced in such quantity that 700 ships were kept busy carrying these goods back to France. During the 18th century Saint-Domingue was the most prosperous of all the European colonies in the New World. Its fertile northern plain was dotted with the white manors of the French landowners, each surrounded by green fields and the dwellings of slaves; and its bustling cities, most notably Le Cap Français on the northern coast, were filled with fine, stone buildings.

In 1789, on the eve of the French Revolution, the population of Saint-Domingue was about 35,000 Whites and nearly 500,000 Black slaves. In addition there were approximately 25,000 free non-Whites, most of them mulatto offspring of the earliest White male colonists and Black female slaves. By the latter part of the century, however, enough women had arrived from France to balance the French population

sexually, a color line was firmly established, and intimate relations across this line were taboo.

Saint-Domingue, alas, was not spared the intrigues and agitation which, in Europe, led to the disaster of the French Revolution. The Republicans and the Royalists both had their partisans among the colonists. In addition there were crazed zealots who deliberately sowed the seeds of rebellion among the Black slaves and the mulattoes. Some of these zealots were unhinged by the same egalitarian madness which led to the Reign of Terror in France; others, including a number of priests, seem to have been under the influence of radical Christian notions: together they were loosely organized in a semi-secret society known as Friends of the Blacks (Amis des Noirs).

The Whites could have saved themselves and the colony if they had united on the basis of race and hunted down and exterminated the Amis des Noirs. Unfortunately, class hatreds divided the Whites more strongly than their common racial interests united them. The middle-class Whites envied the wealthy landowners and the aristocrats, and the White rabble which had accumulated in the port cities envied all their betters.

The mulattoes and the Blacks also hated each other. The former were more intelligent and industrious than the latter, and many had taken advantage of their freedom to better themselves; more than anything else they dreaded being reduced to the status of the Blacks. The Blacks realized this and hated the mulattoes for it. This division between the mulattoes and the Blacks complicated the situation, but in the end it did not really matter. What mattered was that the Whites were outnumbered 15 to one; they refused to put their political and class differences aside until it was too late; and France, first torn by a self-destructive revolution and then preoccupied by a series of European wars, was unable to provide assistance when it was needed.

The first Black insurrection in Saint-Domingue occurred in August 1791. Inspired by the Amis des Noirs and by their own Voodoo leaders, the latter of whom persuaded them that they were immune to the Whites' weapons, the slaves in the northern part of the colony began attacking their masters as they slept on the night of August 22. White men were hacked to death immediately, if they were fortunate; otherwise, they were butchered by the Voodoo-inflamed Blacks in ways too horrible to describe here. The fate of the White women was even worse. The Blacks who marched on Le Cap Français carried as their standard a White baby impaled on a spear.

The Whites--or at least most of them--rallied to their own defense, and Le Cap Français was made into an armed stronghold, while similar measures were taken in other parts of the colony. Nevertheless, more than 2,000 Whites were murdered during the first two months of the 1791 insurrection.

The following 13 years were chaotic. The race war between the Whites and the Blacks was intermittent. The mulattoes sometimes took the side of the Whites and sometimes

the side of the Blacks. The White rabble, often swayed by Republican propaganda and by their own greed and envy, were nearly as undependable as the mulattoes. A substantial portion of the colony's upper-class Whites, despairing of any possibility for the restoration of order and sanity, left for France or America.

The French government vacillated, sometimes aiding the colonists against the rebellious slaves and sometimes attempting to make Saint-Domingue conform to crackpot Republican theories of universal *égalité et fraternité* by appointing mulattoes and even Blacks to positions of authority in the colony. Where the latter held sway, they ruled like African potentates, using a combination of capricious terror and the dispensing of government largess to their favorites to maintain their positions. The two most prominent of these Black Republicans were Pierre Dominique Toussaint L'Ouverture and Jean Jacques Dessalines, both monsters of iniquity.

In 1794 the French government, still in the thrall of Republican madness, proclaimed the emancipation of Saint-Domingue's Blacks. Toussaint L'Ouverture, despite his bloodthirsty cruelty and extraordinary bent for deceit and treachery, proved himself the ablest leader of the Blacks. After a successful incursion into the Spanish end of the island in 1801, he became the Black warlord of Hispaniola, with the blessing of the Republicans.

Although he was happy to parrot back to the various Commissioners sent over by France the Politically Correct slogans about "equality" and "liberty" which they wanted to hear, Toussaint L'Ouverture understood that in order to retain the favor of the French government he had to restore the colony to production, and the only way to do that was to force his fellow Blacks, who had been happily idle since 1794, to begin working again. Without calling it slavery, he used an iron hand to bend them to his will. His Black generals, most notably Dessalines, knew how to deal with their own kind. They toured the plantations trailed by retinues of executioners. Idlers and shirkers were seized and buried alive or tied to boards and sawed in half. These demonstrations were remarkably effective in inspiring the other Blacks to work harder than they ever had under their White masters.

More than brutality was required to repair the damage which Republican folly and Black rebellion had done to Saint-Domingue, however. Toussaint L'Ouverture could compel his Blacks to work, but he could not replace the genius for organization and administration with which the Whites had built a stable, peaceful, and productive colony. Disorder, punctuated by atrocities and massacres, continued to make the island a hellish proof of the incorrectness of the egalitarian theories which had brought on the disaster in the first place.

Back in France, the star of Napoleon Bonaparte was rising. By 1801 Napoleon had become virtual dictator and was well on the way to winding up, at least temporarily, the various wars in which post-revolutionary France had been involved, so that he was free

to concern himself with the affairs of Saint-Domingue and France's other colonial possessions. And Napoleon, unlike his Republican predecessors, was blessed with a clear head, untroubled by fantasies of "equality." In January 1802 he sent an army to Saint-Domingue under the command of his brother-in-law, General Charles Leclerc, who quickly routed Toussaint L'Ouverture's Black army and took the Black leader himself prisoner.

The Blacks, despite their overwhelming numbers, could not stand against a disciplined White force. The Whites, however, could not stand against the natural defenses which the tropical climate threw up against them: in particular, Yellow Fever. General Leclerc himself succumbed to the disease in November 1802, along with more than half of his army. The remaining French troops, raddled with sickness, unable to continue their work of restoration, and losing ground to renewed Black and mulatto insurgencies, withdrew at the end of 1803. Dessalines shortly thereafter declared the colony independent, restored the Arawak name Haiti, and in October 1804 assumed the title "Emperor Jacques I," mimicking Napoleon's recent action in France.

Concerned at first that Napoleon might send another army to the island or that rival Black chiefs might combine against him, Dessalines took a conciliatory stance. He invited the French settlers who had left after 1791 to return, promising them their safety and the return of their property. Many foolish Whites, perhaps befuddled by Republican doctrines of interracial brotherhood and equality, accepted his offer.

When, a few months later, Dessalines had cowed his rivals and it became apparent that Napoleon was again too preoccupied by conflict in Europe to concern himself with matters in the faraway Caribbean, he decided that conciliation no longer was necessary. His promise of security and property rights for the Whites was forgotten. Ordinary Blacks soon realized that they would not be punished for transgressions against Whites. If they saw a White woman they wanted, they seized her. If they saw a White man with a piece of property they wanted, they took it. White resistance to these depredations infuriated the Blacks. By the first days of 1805 Black gangs were murdering Whites on the streets of Port-au-Prince, and the practice quickly spread to other cities.

Unlike 1791, in 1805 there was no real urgency about the slaughter. The Whites were completely at the mercy of the Blacks. There were no military considerations. Killing Whites was simply a sport. A mob could entertain itself for hours putting a White man to death in the most horrible ways savage minds could invent. White women could provide amusement for days before they perished. In April Dessalines gave official sanction to the butchery. By the beginning of May every White man, woman, and child in the former colony of Saint-Domingue had been murdered.

With the Whites gone, the Blacks and the mulattoes were able to give full rein to their hatred of one another. Dessalines was killed in a mulatto uprising in October 1806. One

of his generals, Henri Christophe, took his place as leader of the Blacks in the north, while the south was held by the mulatto Alexandre Sabès Pétion in Port-au-Prince.

Like Toussaint L'Ouverture and Dessalines, Christophe forced the Blacks under his rule into virtual slavery. He declared himself "Emperor Henri I" before losing his life in an uprising in 1820. A mulatto, Jean-Pierre Boyer, took his place as maximum leader. Intermittent civil war between Blacks and mulattoes has been a condition of life on Haiti ever since.

One may with good logic view the Black rulers Dessalines and Christophe as predecessors of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, just as the mulattoes Pétion and Boyer were predecessors of Raoul Cédras. The mulattoes have been in the saddle more often than not: their inferior numbers have been compensated for by superior intelligence and by the fact that many Blacks have preferred mulatto rule to the generally more brutal and arbitrary reign of their own kind.

Left to its own devices Haiti sank into a squalor unparalleled outside of Africa. The Haitians gradually destroyed what remained of the agricultural potential of their land by stripping it of trees and letting erosion take its course. Poverty, disease, superstition, and political instability, with a revolution or a coup every three or four years, have been constants.

The Monroe Doctrine, which declared Latin America and the Caribbean, excepting those few enclaves where other European powers already were established, an exclusively American sphere of interest, discouraged foreign intervention in Haiti. American businessmen were not reluctant to make investments in Haiti, however, despite its history. When those investments were imperiled by internal disorder in 1915, U.S. Marines were sent in to manage Haitian affairs.

The immediate problem was that a mulatto-led conspiracy in Port-au-Prince had culminated in an armed assault on the palace of Black President Vilbrun Sam during the early morning hours of July 26. This was the seventh revolution in as many years, and Sam knew what to do: he ordered the immediate massacre of all mulatto political prisoners being held in Port-au-Prince's jails. Sam himself was caught by a mob and hacked to pieces the same day. The Marines landed to restore order and safeguard American investments.

The Marines, who stayed from 1915 until 1934, were given the mission by President Woodrow Wilson of "bringing democracy to Haiti." What the Marines actually did was engineer the replacement of the Black government by a somewhat more reliable mulatto government. They also forced the Haitians to accept a new constitution, giving American businessmen the right to own land in Haiti.

Many Haitians were glad to see the Marines. In the 72 years preceding the arrival of the latter there had been 102 civil wars, insurrections, revolts, and coups. Of 22 presidents during that period, just one had served a complete term, and only four had died of natural causes. Even the Haitians were getting a little tired of the disorder. It was utterly false of Wilson to claim that what the Haitians needed was democracy, however. Clearly, they already had it, albeit with a peculiarly African flavor.

Wilson aside, most Americans were genuinely naive about all things Haitian. When briefed on the Haitian situation, Wilson's secretary of state, William Jennings Bryan, marveled: "Dear me! Think of it. Niggers speaking French." Actually, few Haitians outside the mulatto elite speak French. The language of most Haitians is Creole, a bastardization of French with a number of African dialects and intelligible only to the Haitians themselves.

The Marines were horrified by the conditions they encountered. The filth and stench in the streets were almost unbearable to Whites. Ordinary sanitary measures were unknown to the Blacks. There were no working telephones or telegraphs in the country. The roads built more than a century earlier by the French had fallen into such disrepair that vehicular travel outside the cities was hardly possible.

The Marines distributed food to the Haitians, set up medical treatment facilities for them, and then began rebuilding the entire physical infrastructure of the country. They did not find the Blacks willing to assist in this work, so they rounded them up into labor gangs and made them work on the roads at gunpoint. This rough treatment, plus the Blacks' perception that the Marines favored the mulattoes, led to Black uprisings and guerrilla assaults on the Marines.

The U.S. Marines were unhampered by the sort of "rules of engagement" which tied their hands later in Vietnam, and they made short work of the Black guerrillas. One of the guerrilla leaders shot by the Marines in 1919 was Charlemagne Peralte. His corpse was tied to a board and propped up as a warning to other Blacks. Peralte quickly became a martyred hero to the Black masses.

By the time the Marines pulled out in 1934, they had become thoroughly unpopular with everyone except the mulatto elite, even though they had practically rebuilt Haiti. They had built 1,000 miles of new roads and 210 bridges. They had gotten the 200-year-old French irrigation system going again and installed a reliable telephone network. Dozens of hospitals and clinics had been built, and Haitian doctors had been trained to staff them. (One of these new Black physicians was François Duvalier, later known by his nickname "Papa Doc.") A Black police force had been trained, and the currency had been stabilized. The Haitians had had 19 years of enforced "democracy."

As soon as the Marines left, however, the Haitians returned to their customary way of doing things. No effort was made to maintain the new infrastructure built by the

Marines. Sanitation facilities were abandoned. The grossest corruption and brutality again characterized the government. Coups and rebellions followed one another with monotonous regularity. "Papa Doc" Duvalier was elected president in September 1957, after a succession of six governments during the preceding 10 months.

Duvalier understood his countrymen and how to govern them better than most of his predecessors. He organized the Tonton Macoutes (a Creole term meaning "bogeymen"), whose job it was to hunt down and murder his political opponents. Duvalier also was a devotee of Vodun (Voodoo), and he used his knowledge of the national religion to play on Haitians' superstitions. These tactics enabled him to remain in power longer than any previous Haitian leader and to pass the presidency on to his son Jean-Claude ("Baby Doc") upon his death in 1971.

When the United States sent a military mission to Haiti in 1958 in order to help "Papa Doc" reorganize his army, the U.S. personnel who arrived were as appalled by the conditions they found as the Marines had been 43 years earlier. Historian Robert Heinl, who was a Marine colonel with the U.S. mission in 1958, found the "telephones gone . . . roads approaching non-existence . . . ports obstructed by silt . . . docks crumbling . . . sanitation and electrification in precarious decline."

This was a time when millions of dollars in U.S. aid was available to any Third World country which would promise not to provide a haven for Communism. "Papa Doc" professed anti-Communism, and the U.S. dollars came flowing in, but the sewage continued to run in the streets of Port-au-Prince, and the Tonton Macoutes continued to make their nightly rounds.

"Baby Doc" lacked his father's toughness and political skills, but with the aid of the Tonton Macoutes he nevertheless had a remarkably long and peaceful tenure in office. He was ousted by a military coup in 1986, and Haitian politics soon reverted to the disorder and violence which were the norm.

The current U.S. candidate for "bringing democracy to Haiti" is Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Elected in December 1990 and deposed in a coup in September 1991, Aristide is a Marxist priest of the Roman Catholic persuasion instead of a rightist priest of the Voodoo persuasion like "Papa Doc," but he agrees with the latter that the proper way to control one's political opponents is to terrorize and murder them.

More specifically, Aristide's way is the way of the "necklace." Instead of employing a corps of professional thugs to kill dissidents, during his brief period in office Aristide incited his ragtag mob of Black supporters to burn to death anyone who displeased him. In a 1991 address to a mass rally in Port-au-Prince he told his partisans that if they see "a faker who pretends to be one of our supporters . . . just grab him. Make sure he gets what he deserves . . . with the tool you have now in your hands, the 'necklace.' . . . You have the right tool in your hands . . . the right instrument. . . . What a beautiful

tool we have! What a nice instrument! It is nice, it is chic, it is classy, elegant, and snappy. It smells good, and wherever you go you want to smell it." Dozens of Haitians were burned to death with "necklaces" by Aristide's supporters, before General Cédras stepped in.

Cédras' own method for maintaining order was the use of "attachés": gunmen in civilian dress carrying submachine guns in attaché cases and acting somewhat in the manner of the Tonton Macoutes, but without the Voodoo trappings associated with the latter.

It is easy to understand why the Clintonistas prefer Aristide and his "necklaces" to Cédras and his "attachés." In the first place, the Clintonistas have an instinctive hatred for anyone in uniform. In the second place, Aristide is a Negro, and Cédras is a light-skinned mulatto. In Haiti social ranking is determined to a large degree by skin color, the rule being "lighter is better." Mulattoes are overwhelmingly predominant in Haiti's wealthy elite. The Clintonistas, on the other hand, have a distinct affinity for the dregs of society, whether in the United States or Haiti. "Necklacing" by a howling mob of Blacks is a more "democratic" method of governing than machine-gunning by a professional assassin. Last but not least, General Cédras is a proud man, and he was less amenable to taking orders from the New World Order planners than Aristide is.

With reasonable luck--and the continuing presence of U.S. troops in Haiti--the Clintonistas will be able to persuade most Americans that they have improved the Haitian situation by replacing Cédras with Aristide. For one thing, they can point to the substantially reduced flow of Haitian "boat people" trying to reach the United States. The real cause of that reduction, of course, is the ending of the United Nations embargo against Haiti, not Aristide's popularity, but most Americans won't figure that out if they're not told. With sufficient money U.S. troops can do again what they did during the previous occupation of Haiti: they can rebuild the country's infrastructure, and they can shoot Haitians who get out of line. They can keep Aristide in office as long as they want, and then they can go through the motions of another election and keep his successor in office the same way.

What they cannot do, however, is change the basic nature of the Haitian people. When the U.S. troops leave, Haitians will go back to being Haitians again--which is the way it should be.