HAITI

Historical Trends to Present Tensions

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WEDNESDAY, MAY 22 AT 6:30 P.M.
Major Thoughts

• What comes to mind when you think of Haiti?
  • Poorest country in the hemisphere?
  • Vodou?
  • Civil strife?
  • Natural disasters?
    • What should come to mind?
Major Thoughts

• Is Haiti at the edge of the modern world, or very central to it?
  • Empires
  • Commodity Economies
  • Slavery & Abolition
  • Age of Revolutions
  • International Entanglements
  • Dictatorship vs. Democracy
  • Strains of States
Overview

• French Saint-Domingue – *boucaniers*, pirates, etc.
• Rise of Slavery & African ethnicities
• Haitian Revolution
• Louverture, Dessalines, & Beyond
• Haiti independent: universal citizenship, freedom, constitution
• Pétion and Latin American independence
• Boyer, Indemnity, & Pariah Status
• Setbacks & Soulouque
• U.S. Occupation
• What is Vodou?
• 20th-Century authoritarians
• The Duvaliers
• Aristide & Overthrow
• Earthquake
• Jovenel Moïse & Recent Turmoil
• What next?
Goals

• Must comprehend depth of history to frame pivotal events today.

• Speed run of the greatest hits of one of the most important and unique countries in the hemisphere about which you probably know little.

• Questions & Answers at the end.
Empires & Commodity Economies

Part 1
Saint-Domingue

- Hispaniola. 1490s.

- Eventually, pirates.

- Transitioned toward sugar and empire.

- Founded formally in 1697 by French; previously in North America, late to Caribbean.
Saint-Domingue

• From Taino home Ayiti, to barely inhabited, to world’s most profitable plantation colony.

• By 1789 it had about 500,000 enslaved out of 600,000 people. Most arrived in last half of 1700s.

• In a century 850,000 Africans captives arrived, almost double the sum of captives sent to North America.

• Larger population than 12 of 13 early US states.
Saint-Domingue

- 40% of sugar, and +50% of Europe’s coffee.
- Also tobacco, indigo, cotton, cocoa, salt, etc.
- **Incredible wealth** for French owners
- **Atlantic commodities** still in demand today
Saint-Domingue

• “Pearl” of Caribbean and French Empire.

• Profitability was built upon a brutal slavery regime and most imbalanced demography.

• Pressures of colonialism were more compressed chronologically, economically, and socially. Explosive results.

• Deforestation, soil erosion began
Saint-Domingue

- **Major social divisions.**
- Two “white groups” (basically, planters & all others); less than 50,000.
- **Grand Blancs**
- **Petit Blancs**
• Free People of Color (*gens de couleur*); less than 50,000.

• Mostly of African and European ancestry; some very wealthy children of planters; many had slaves & plantations.
Saint-Domingue

- A few thousand free Black people
- Vast majority *enslaved*
- *Average lifespan of male worker on sugar plantation roughly 7 years*
Age of Revolutions & Ending Slavery

Part 2
French Factions

- Social divisions
- Enlightenment tensions
- Regional rivalries
- Fractures abounded
French Revolution

- **Absolute Monarchy** – Louis XVI.
- Extreme debt (Seven Years’ War, American Revolution).
- First time in over 150 years; *Estates-General*; May 1789.
- By June 1789; *National Assembly*. 
French Revolution

- Demanded rights.
- Demanded French Constitution.
- By August, *Declaration of the Rights of Man*.
- Influences: Jean-Jacques Rousseau; Thomas Jefferson.
- Social contract; popular sovereignty.
French Revolution

- Monarchy began to crumble
- Opinion divided in colonies
- Ruling elites fragmented
Gens de Couleur

- Extremely wealthy.
- Led failed political efforts.
- Failed rebellion by Ogé, 1790.
Bois-Caïman

• 14 August 1791; **vodou** ceremony in northern Saint-Domingue sugar region. Female-lead oaths.

• **Dutty Boukman**, plotted revolt on many local plantations.
Cause/Effect

• Revolt from below.
• Brutality.
• Did not wait on French Revolution to expand.
• Pushed Enlightenment & citizenship far beyond.
Slaves Take Charge

• 21 August 1791. The enslaved across wealthiest plantations revolt together.
• Control of majority of Nord within 10 days.
• In first months, 100,000 enslaved were in revolt.
• Thousands killed on both sides of conflict.
Almost 13 years of continuous revolutionary warfare followed. Society in Saint-Domingue splintered into dozens of factions.

Major empires – French, Spanish, British – were all involved. All ultimately met defeat.

At least 200,000 people died.

Complex event.

The result was the only successful slave revolt in history, the defeat of the world’s most powerful militaries, and the foundation of the world’s first black republic.
Consider...

Have you ever really learned about the Haitian Revolution?

It not, then why?
Haitian Revolution

- Silenced in Western history, until very recently.
- Unspeakable power.
- Modernity disavowed.
1792-1795, Rise of Toussaint Louverture

• To 1795, tens of thousands of insurgents fought for Spain against defenders of the French Republic.

• Slaves simply self-liberated. To rally supporters French officials proclaimed *Universal Emancipation*, late 1793.
• “I am Toussaint Louverture. My name is perhaps known to you. I have undertaken vengeance. I want Liberty and Equality to reign in Saint-Domingue. I work to bring them into existence. Unite yourselves to us, brothers, and fight with us for the same cause.” – August 1793
Toussaint Louverture

• Born to Arada prince who had been enslaved; later during the revolution took the name Louverture, “The Opening.”

• Was an enslaved plantation overseer; extremely intelligent, learned geometry and Latin; was freed in the 1770s; later, owned a few slaves; worked as manager; devout Catholic.
French Churn & Abolition

- Republic declared.
- Guillotine Louis XVI executed.
- 1792-1793

- August 1793 – Commissioners Léger-Félicité Sonthonax and Étienne Polverel issued series of emancipation decrees. **First major abolition in the Atlantic.**
- National Convention confirmed abolition in February 1794.
Toussaint Louverture

- He proved **one of the most brilliant politicians and military strategists** of this age, rivaling Napoleon, Washington, etc.

- By joining the French Republic in 1794, his role was clear. He worked endlessly to limit lingering French racism and control, to protect the liberty of newly-freed blacks, to create a civil administration, and make a racially equal society.

- Most powerful person on Hispaniola until 1803

- His trusted officers **Jean-Jacques Dessalines & Henri Christophe** (both former slaves) later played major geopolitical roles on the island themselves.
1796-1801, Middle Years

By 1801 it was also clear that a French retreat from rights and resurgent racism, directed Napoleon Bonaparte, was greatest threat.

Saint-Domingue key to his plans for reviving French Empire in Americas
Bonaparte sent his brother-in-law, General Leclerc, with 60,000 veteran troops from French conquests in Europe.

After resisting, Toussaint negotiated a peace.

It was clear that the French planned to reinstitute slavery.

Toussaint was betrayed in 1803, arrested, exiled, and died in prison in French Alps.

The War for Independence against France was directed by Dessalines, Christophe, and Alexandre Pétion.
1802-1803, Toward Independence

- Vast majority of French troops died (yellow fever & warfare), including Napoleon’s friend General Leclerc.

- French plans for renewed slavery, and renewed American colonies, was smashed.

- The once enslaved had won.
• Took French Republic flag: liberté (blue), égalité (white), fraternité (red).

• Removed the white; anti-French, who did not believe in their own professions of equality.

• Blue, nouveaux libres; Red, gens de couleur.
1804 - Haiti

• “I have avenged America.” – Dessalines, 1804.

• January 1804, Dessalines declares independence. Colonialism crushed.

• Chose “Haiti” from Taino Ayiti, name for the island.

• Slavery abolished permanently; citizenship; independent state formed; world’s first black republic; formal equality; rule of law.
International Entanglements

Part 3
Promises Unrealized?

• Haiti transformed the Americas in many ways.

• With such bold starts, what happened to Haiti’s place in global events?

• What happened to the promise of rights from the revolutionary era?
**HAITI AFTERMATH**

**Louisiana Purchase, 1803**

Massive land sale from France to early US, often explained only by European imperial politics.

Haitian Revolution ended Napoleon’s design for grand French Empire in Americas. Crushed his armies and profits.

Doubled US size.
AFTER HAITI & 1804

Shockwaves of popular unrest across the Americas.

Stunned neighboring societies.

Challenged labor exploitation and racial hierarchies.

Independence more clearly a possibility.
AFTER HAITI & 1804

Free soil – that is, slaves who reach Haiti were free immediately.

Supported independence ideas and leaders around the region.

Haiti – public co-ed education, healthcare, literacy campaigns, stable internal trade, etc.

Proved capability of African-descendants, and built an alternative society on the ashes of colonialism.
AFTER HAITI & 1804

At times, Haiti vigorously funded, armed, and offered safe haven to Latin American independence leaders.

Haiti was yet excluded from most pan-American organizations of republics.

Revolutionary Black Republic = pariah status?
HAITI AFTERMATH

Setbacks:
- Dessalines assassinated, 1806
- Haiti divided
  - Northern kingdom, Southern republic
- Jean-Pierre Boyer administration reunified Haiti and entire island (1820-1840s)
Setbacks:

- Boyer paid massive indemnity to France for recognition freedom and commerce, enormous debt burden

- Originally, $150 million francs

- In 2020 terms, similar to US $21 billion from the Haitian economy (comparison, Haiti's GDP in 2020 was $14 billion)
Haiti & Setbacks

• 1844 Dominican Independence with Haitians Expelled
• Faustin-Élie Soulouque – 1849-1859
  • Declared himself emperor
  • Rise of authoritarians
Haiti & Hispaniola

- 1861-1865, Spanish Reoccupation of Santo Domingo under Isabel II
- 1863-1865 Dominican War of Restoration
- 1865 2nd Independence War

*Haiti officially and thoroughly supported neighbors threatened by European recolonization.*
US Occupation: 1915-1934

- Debt servicing troubles, economic hardships from unfavorable treaties and indemnity lingered
- Political turnover, rebellions, etc.
- “Gunboat diplomacy”
- Wilson intervened with Marines, who fought pro-sovereignty rebels
- Corvée system – basically, indentured servitude for infrastructure
- European banking claims (including Germans) in early 20th century
- The Cacos, Charlemagne Peralte, etc. – killed, bodies displayed by Marines
US Occupation: 1915-1934

- Many US troops from Jim Crow era cultures
- Unfamiliar with Haitian culture, Vodou, racist stereotypes
- “Zombie” trope of entertainment
- Damaging opinions of Haiti with ties also to this era
US Occupation: 1915-1934

- President Sténio Vincent declared “second independence” when the US departed.
- Lost favor when he accepted reparations from U.S.-supported dictator of the Dominican Republic, Rafael Trujillo, after the 1937 massacre of 20,000+ ethnic Haitians by the Dominican army.
Vodou: What is it?

- Successor, President Lescot, like many others, launched “anti-Vodou” or “anti-Superstition” campaigns
- Promoted to ingratiate with Catholic Church or US investors, etc.

- **Vodou** – surviving/remaking from African cultural ancestry
- **Salve against slavery** – marked meaning in life, made communities
- Intercessors, *loa / lwa* – to a great deity, **Bon Dieu**
- Most Haitians are not vodouizan
- Vodou is **deliberately demonized** and misunderstood
Dictatorships, Democracies, & Strains of States

Part 4
Haiti: “State Against Nation”

The Michel Rolph-Trouillot thesis

- Tiny minority hold bureaucratic power
- Few families, friends, influencers
- Haiti is a resource for them to squeeze
- Profits offshored, no public benefit
- The state, the apparatus for control, is against the nation
Dictatorships: The Duvaliers

- Duvalier family
- ‘Anti-Communist’
- Extremely Violent to Opponents
- U.S. Intermittent Support
Dictatorships: The Duvaliers

• “Papa Doc” François Duvalier (1957-1971, presidency)
• Shy physician with popular reputation for community service
• Yaws expert – became public health minister
• Unpopular Magloire presidency fell
• Ruling elite thought they could manipulate/manage Duvalier
• Duvalier – extensive network among peasantry
• Connected to noiriste thinkers & Vodou
Dictatorships: The Duvaliers

• “Papa Doc” François Duvalier (1957-1971, presidency)
• 1959, major heart attack
• US physicians flown in, saved his life
• Prolonged coma – some though changed his personality
Dictatorships: The Duvaliers

- “Papa Doc” - Installed *tonton macoutes* militia to enforce dictatorship
- *Impersonated* Vodou characters associated with death
- Thousands killed with impunity
- Suppressed; women, unions, clergy
- Papa Doc, heart attacks & diabetes, died in 1971
Dictatorships: The Duvaliers

- In 1980s, Haiti tourism crushed by false blame for AIDS
- Fault by world for swine fevers, livestock killed
- Accelerated agricultural decline, with soil erosion
- Capital city boomed in population
Haiti: A Shift?

- Late 1980s, attempted rebuilding of democracy
- Jean-Bertrand Aristide, 1991 – Liberation Theology priest; anti-imperial, anti-corporation, very popular
- Clinton intervention, 1994
- Restored Aristide
Haiti: A Shift?

- Reelected in 2001
- **Coup in 2004**
- Accusations of Abuse of Power, Corruption, etc.
- Accused of dealing with *death squads* for support
- Into Exile – he alleged US intervention against him

- **Vocal critic of international community treatment of Haiti**
- Demanded return of indemnity from France with interest, etc.
Haiti: A Coup

- Guy Phillipe
- Launched from Dominican Republic
- Later sentenced for drug trafficking
- Prison time in Georgia
Haiti: Earthquake

- January 2010
- Massive, catastrophic earthquake
- Port-au-Prince, built of concrete in low-lying, damp land near the ocean, was shaken to the ground
- 220,000 killed (UN estimate)
Haiti: Earthquake

- Permanent displacement
- Tent cities
- Rebuilding delayed
- Political/social strife impediments
Haiti: Cholera

- Troops sent by the UN to help introduced Cholera (likely from Nepal)
- Cholera decimated water supplies in capital during earthquake recovery
Haiti: Earthquake

- Aid – inefficiently distributed, graft/corruption
- Populous increasingly: underemployed, underfed, unheard
- Increase in “gang” activity in regions/neighborhoods, many former state employees
- Agricultural sector never recovered – soil erosion/deforestation cycle extreme
- Desperation
Haitian-Dominican – 2014/15 to Today

Mass citizenship revocation/deportation

“I am Dominican and I have rights.”
Jovenel Moïse & Recent Turmoil

- **Jovenel Moïse**: Banana exporter, car parts, water executive, etc., from Nord-Est
- Promoted by “Sweet Micky” – singer/president Michel Martelly (2011-2016)
Jovenel Moïse & Recent Turmoil

- Unpopular – allegations of fraud in ’15/16 elections
- Life quality declined, no help from state with post-earthquake era
- Fuel and food costs rocketed upward
- 7 July 2021, assassinated, dozens of Colombian ex-special ops mercenaries involved
- Ariel Henry?
Jovenel Moïse & Recent Turmoil

- Accusations against Ariel Henry, who had just become Prime Minister
- Resigned 2024, as conditions collapsed
- Provision/transitional council until next election
2024 Turmoil

• Newest intensity of crisis since at least 2018
• Nearly 5,000 violent inmates freed in March ‘24
• International airport almost captured
• Many Port-au-Prince residents fled
2024 Turmoil

In politics:
- “Gangs” not new
- Military interference not new
- Alleged corruption/fraud not new
- Dictatorship/crisis not new
- Health/natural disasters not new

The extent & severity might be new
2024 Turmoil

- Thousands have died
- Tens of thousands are refugees
- 4 million in food precarity
- ‘Brain drain’ to US, France, Canada, Brazil, etc.

Who holds power?
2024 Turmoil

- Port-au-Prince divided, 80% under control of varied armed groups
- **Jimmy Chérizier** – aka “Barbeque” – former national police officer
- Previously held major port hostage
- United rival factions to fight alleged corruption
- To some, a ‘Robin Hood’ figure
2024 Turmoil

- Some groups have political or egalitarian motives, some are tied to drugs/sexual assault, etc.
- Guy Philippe, who ousted Aristide, once imprisoned in US, returning to prominence
- Supposed new elections in two years
- Some offers of ceasefire from armed groups – if they are included in talks
2024 Turmoil

- State of Haiti in tatters – military/police divided or unresponsive
US & Canada are frequent interveners in Haiti – thus far, declined direct action

Stretched? – Ukraine, China, etc.

Hesitant to appear neo-colonial yet again

Kenya is sending 1,000 police officers to mediate a peace and open supply lines

Often, US involvement comes at crisis and if refugees reach the US

Haitians in the US treated very differently than other refugee historically (Cuba)

Only intervene if conditions deteriorate more?
2024 Turmoil

- Life quality plummeting
  - Possibility for:
    - Famine
    - Assault
    - Civil War
    - Health Outbreak
Concluding Thoughts

• What next?
• How should Haiti be treated or valued?
• Where does Haiti fit in narratives of the Americas?
• How should Haiti be remembered?

- French Saint-Domingue – boucaniers, pirates, etc.
- Rise of Slavery & African ethnicities
- Haitian Revolution
- Louverture, Dessalines, & Beyond
- Haiti independent: universal citizenship, freedom, constitution
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Thank you.

Question & Answer

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Historical Trends to Present Tensions