

Haiti's Troubled Past

1492

Christopher Columbus lands and claims the island of Hispaniola for Spain. The Spanish build the New World's first settlement at La Navidad on Haiti's north coast.

1697

Spanish control over the colony ends with the Treaty of Ryswick, which divided the island into French-controlled St. Domingue and Spanish Santo Domingo.

For over 100 years the colony of St. Domingue (known as the Pearl of the Antilles) was France's most important overseas territory, which supplied it with sugar, rum, coffee and cotton. At the height of slavery, near the end of the 18th century, some 500,000 people mainly of western African origin, were enslaved by the French.

1791-1803

A slave rebellion is launched by the Jamaican-born Boukman leading to a protracted 13-year war of liberation against St. Domingue's colonists and later, Napoleon's army which was also assisted by Spanish and British forces. The slave armies were commanded by General Toussaint Louverture who was eventually betrayed by his officers Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Henri Christophe who opposed his policies, which included reconciliation with the French. He was subsequently exiled to France where he died.

1803

The Haitian blue and red flag is devised at Arcahie, by taking the French tricolor, turning it in its side and removing the white band. The Battle of Vertières marks the ultimate victory of the former slaves over the French.

1804

The hemisphere's second Republic is declared on January 1, 1804 by General Jean-Jacques Dessalines. Haiti, or Ayiti in Creole, is the name given to the land by the former Taino-Arawak peoples, meaning "mountainous country."

1806

Emperor Jean-Jacques Dessalines is assassinated.

1807-20

Civil war racks the country, which divides into the northern kingdom of Henri Christophe and the southern republic governed by Alexandre Pétion. Faced with a rebellion by his own army, Christophe commits suicide, paving the way for Jean-Pierre Boyer to reunify the country and become President of the entire republic in 1820.

1821

President Boyer invades Santo Domingo following its declaration of independence from Spain. The entire island is now controlled by Haiti until 1844.

1838

France recognizes Haitian independence in exchange for a financial indemnity of 150 million francs. Most nations including the United States shunned Haiti for almost forty years, fearful that its example could stir unrest there and in other slaveholding countries. Over the next few decades Haiti is forced to take out loans of 70 million francs to repay the indemnity and gain international recognition.

1862

The United States finally grants Haiti diplomatic recognition sending Frederick Douglass as its Consular Minister.

1915

President Woodrow Wilson orders the U.S. Marines to occupy Haiti and establish control over customs-houses and port authorities. The Haitian National Guard is created by the occupying Americans. The Marines force peasants into corvée labor building roads. Peasant resistance to the occupiers grows under the leadership of Charlemagne Peralt, who is betrayed and assassinated by Marines in 1919.

1934

The U.S. withdraws from Haiti leaving the Haitian Armed Forces in place throughout the country.

1937

Thousands of Haitians living near the border of the Dominican Republic are massacred by Dominican soldiers under the orders of President General Trujillo.

1957

After several attempts to move forward democratically ultimately fail, military-controlled elections lead to victory for Dr. François Duvalier, who in 1964 declares himself President-for-Life and forms the infamous paramilitary Tonton Macoute. The corrupt Duvalier dictatorship marks one of the saddest chapters in Haitian history with tens of thousands killed or exiled.

1971

"Papa-Doc" Duvalier dies in office after naming his 19 year-old son Jean-Claude (Baby Doc) as his successor. Baby Doc proves more ruthless than his father.

1972

The first Haitian "boat people" fleeing the country land in Florida.

1976

Widespread protests against repression of the nation's press take place.

1970s-1980s

"Baby-Doc" Duvalier exploits international assistance and seeks to attract investment leading to the establishment of textile-based assembly industries. Attempts by workers and political parties to organize are quickly and regularly crushed.

1980

Hundreds of human rights workers, journalists and lawyers are arrested and exiled from the country.

1981

International aid agencies declare Haitian pigs to be carriers of African Swine Fever and institute a program for their slaughter. Attempts to replace indigenous swine with imported breeds largely fail, causing wider spread hunger and despair.

1983

Pope John Paul II visits Haiti and declares publicly that, "Things must change here."

1984

Over 200 peasants are massacred at Jean-Rabeau after demonstrating for access to land. The Haitian Bishops' Conference launches a nation-wide (but short-lived) literacy program. Anti-government riots take place in all major towns.

1985

Massive anti-Government demonstrations continue to take place around the country. Four schoolchildren are shot dead by soldiers, an event which unifies popular protest against the régime.

1986

Widespread protests against "Baby Doc" lead the U.S. to arrange for Duvalier and his family to be exiled to France. Army leader General Henri Namphy heads a new National Governing Council.

1987

A new Constitution is overwhelmingly approved by the population in March. General elections in November are aborted hours after they begin with dozens of people shot by soldiers and the Tonton Macoute in the capital and scores more around the country.

1988

Military controlled elections - widely abstained from - result in the installation of Leslie Manigat as President in January. Manigat is ousted by General Namphy four months later and in November General Prosper Avril unseats Namphy.

1989

President Avril, on a trade mission to Taiwan, returns empty-handed after grassroots-based democratic sectors inform Taiwanese authorities that the Haitian nation will not be responsible for any contracts agreed to by Avril. Avril orders massive repression against political parties, unions, students and democratic organizations.

1990

Avril declares a state of siege in January. Rising protests and urging from the American Ambassador convince Avril to resign. In a campaign marred by occasional violence and death, democratic elections finally take place on December 16, 1990. Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide a parish priest, well known throughout the country for his support of the poor, is elected President with 67.5% of the popular vote.

1991

President Aristide is inaugurated on February 7th, five years after Duvalier's fall from power. A Government is formed by Prime Minister René Préval promising to uproot the corruption of the past. In September President Aristide addresses the UN General Assembly. Three days after his return military personnel unleash a coup d'état, ousting President Aristide. Over 1,000 people are killed in the first days of the coup. The OAS calls for a hemisphere-wide embargo against the coup régime in support of the deposed constitutional authorities.

1992

Negotiations between the Washington, D.C. based exiled Government, Haiti's Parliament and representatives of the coup régime headed by General Raoul Cédras lead to the Washington Protocol, which is ultimately scuttled by the coup régime. U.S. President George Bush exempts U.S. factories from the embargo and orders U.S. Coast Guard to interdict all Haitians leaving the island in boats and to return them to Haiti. The OAS embargo fails as goods continue to be smuggled through neighboring Dominican Republic.

1993

In July, President Aristide and General Raoul Cédras sign the Governors Island Accord, which inter alia called for the early retirement of Gen. Cédras, the formation and training of a new civilian police force, and the return of the President on October 30, 1993. General Cédras refuses to step down as promised. President Aristide's Justice Minister Guy Malary, responsible for the formation of a civilian police force is shot dead in Port-au-Prince weeks after local businessman and Aristide supporter

Antoine Izmerly is executed outside of a local church. The UN calls for "strict implementation" of the embargo against the de facto authorities. The Civilian Mission's human rights observers are allowed to return in small numbers.

1994

In May additional sanctions were levied against the régime through a naval blockade supported by Argentine, Canadian, French, Dutch and U.S. warships. Tensions increase as human rights violations continue. On September 15th, U.S. President Clinton declares that all diplomatic initiatives were exhausted and that the US with 20 other countries would form a multinational force. On September 19th these troops land in Haiti after the coup leaders agree to step down and leave the country. On October 15th, President Aristide and his Government-in-exile return to Haiti.

1995

In June Haiti hosts the annual OAS General Assembly at Montrouis. Legislative elections take place that month and in December the presidential contest is won by former Prime Minister René Préval. (President Aristide is precluded by the Constitution from succeeding himself). In November Prime Minister Smarck Michel steps down and Foreign Minister Claudette Werleigh becomes President Aristide's fourth Prime Minister.

1996

President Préval is inaugurated in February. A Government is formed under Prime Minister Rosny Smarth.

2000

Municipal and legislative elections end in disarray because of a flawed vote count, alleged irregularities and fraud charges. The controversy triggers a boycott of the presidential elections later that year, won by Aristide.

2004

The crisis sparked by the allegedly fraudulent election deepens amid a failure of international mediation efforts, a foundering economy and growing political violence. A few weeks after the nation celebrates its 200th anniversary in January, a rebel movement seizes control of a number of towns in an uprising that leads to the resignation of Aristide on Feb. 29, 2004.

2010

Haiti experience an earthquake measuring 7.0 in magnitude. With its epicenter near Leogane in southwest Haiti, it killed an estimated 250,000 persons and rendered 1 million homeless. Worldwide relief efforts created many tent cities and making matters worse, a cholera epidemic took thousands of lives as well.