Contours of the Haitian Past; Glimpses of the Future

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Struggles of Nationhood
1822-1934
Jean Pierre Boyer

Autocratic rule: Boyer was the “true creator of the militaristic regime whose wounds, unhealable, still poison our national organism.”

indemnity and bloated military
1838: 30% of total annual budget for debt
50% for army; <1% on education

Code Rural and forced labor

annexation of Spanish Santo Domingo

revisionism: imperialism and Haiti
victim, perpetrator, or accomplice?
Independence: Juan Pablo Duarte, Ramón Mella, and Francisco del Rosario Sánchez
“Haiti and the United States grew up together.”

trade: lumber and food (meat and flour) for sugar and coffee

refusal of US to recognize Haiti: two-faced policy
“Our policy with regard to Hayti, is plain. We can never acknowledge her independence.”

abolitionists vs. slaveholders – symbol of Haiti

funeral for abolitionist John Brown held in cathedral in Port-au-Prince

President Grant and threat of annexation
John Brown

1859 Raid on Harpers Ferry
James Graham Leyburn summarizes this chaotic era in Haitian history. “Of the twenty-two heads of state between 1843 and 1915, only one served out his prescribed term of office, three died while serving, one was blown up with his palace, one presumably poisoned, one hacked to pieces by a mob, one resigned. The other fourteen were deposed by revolution after incumbencies ranging in length from three months to twelve years.”
Faustin Soulouque (r. 1847-1859)

- ex-slave – military officer
- ambitious and savvy
- nobility = governing coalition
- dismissed by foreign critics
- wary of annexation by US
- failed invasion of Dominican Republican 1855
- elaborate court ceremonies
- moved against mulatto elites
- overthrown by his own generals
Crown of Emperor Faustin I
Six Centimes

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Geffrard

President from 1858-1867

- reestablished Haiti as a republic
- decreased size of army
- returned power to traditional elites
- encouraged African Americans to settle in Haiti
- new era of Catholic activism
- expand access to education
- anti-Vodou campaign – concern about image abroad
- German merchants and French bankers exiled in 1867 – continuing cycle of uprisings
Residence of Geffrard

The ruins of the residence of President Fabre Nicolas Geffrard
Anse-a-Veau, Haiti
Lysius Salomon
Salomon Soulouque’s Minister of Finance

“I like coups d’état. You can’t govern without them.”
strategy: “take as much advantage as possible” of a crisis to justify autocratic rule

restart public education
fix Haiti's financial woes
restore agriculture productivity
improve public administration
modernize Haiti
controversy over reelection – forced into exile
National Bank of Haiti - 1881
Florvil Hyppolite
Troubles in Haiti 1891
Historic Iron Market
Revolving Door of Power

1911-1915: seven different presidents

United States solidifies its stranglehold on trade and finance

violence: explosion of National Palace and death of Cincinnatus Leconte in 1911

President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam vs. Rosalvo Bobo – July 1915
execution of political prisoners – public outcry
Sam dragged from French legation - torn to pieces by mob
Rise of United States as a Global Power
Roosevelt Corollary
White Man’s Burden
United States Intervention, 1915-1934

Violent Conditions and Temporary Solutions

1. Haitian Guard (Garde d’Haiti)
2. fruits of U.S. presence
3. issues of sovereignty and favoritism
United States Marines 1915
Les Americains Chassent Les Cacos
Nemours Vincent
Charlemagne Peralte (1886-1919)
Haitian nationalist opposed to the US invasion
Good Neighbor?