

The History of Haiti...



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Haiti is about the size of the state of Maryland and has over 10,000,000 people; more than fifty percent of whom cannot read or write. Haiti occupies the western third of the island of Hispaniola, which it shares with the Dominican Republic. Two-thirds of Haiti is mountainous with the rest of the country marked by valleys, plateaus and small plains. Life expectancy is around 63 years.

Haiti was discovered by Christopher Columbus in December 1492. At that time the Indians, who inhabited the island, fell victim to Spanish rule. Fifty years after the arrival of Columbus most of the Indians had been killed. It was then decided to import slaves from Africa to work on the plantations.

Later, the Spanish left the island to go to South America; it was then in 1625 that the first French adventurers landed in the northern part of Haiti on the island of Tortuga. The French dominated Haiti and renamed it St. Dominique. The French imported thousands of slaves from Africa who were subjected to the same cruelty, torture and abuse that the Spanish had subjected them to...many were buried alive.

In 1697, Spanish control over the colony ended with the Treaty of Ryswick, which divided the island into French-controlled St. Dominique and the Spanish Santo Domingo. By the end of the 18th century over 500,000 people, mostly Africans, were enslaved by the French. Slowly the slaves began to form a rebellion against their masters. They would meet secretly and amongst their Voodoo ceremonies they would plot and plan how to kill and overthrow their masters. In 1791, Boukman, a slave and Voodoo priest, led a rebellion against the slave owners. This marked the beginning

of civil war between the black-dominated north and the mulatto-dominated south.

Toussaint L'Ouverture, an educated herb doctor and military man, emerged in 1798 as the leader of the former slaves in the north. He restored order, ended the massacres and restored some of St. Dominique's former prosperity.

But in 1801, Napoleon Bonaparte dispatched an army of 34,000 to subdue the slave armies and retake the colony for France; this mission was unsuccessful. The leader of the army, Leclerc, ultimately had Toussaint L'Ouverture seized and deported to France, where he died within a year. **However, in 1804, a slave uprising declared Haiti the first independent black republic.**

Henri Christophe later became a tyrannical ruler, crowning himself King. He built a palace and citadel at Cap-Haitien in the north, at a great cost of Haitian lives. Upon his death, General Boyer took over. From 1843 to 1915, Haiti saw the rise and fall of twenty-two heads of state, most of whom left office by violent means. It was a period of great instability. The United States invaded Haiti in 1915 and remained there until 1934.

In 1957, Francois Duvalier, a doctor and union leader, was elected President. He was an evil man, also known as "Papa Doc." He terrorized the country, rooting out any opponents to his administration.

He was a practicing Voodooist, his spirit being "Baron Samedi," the "guardian of cemeteries" and a harbinger of death.

Papa Doc kept his power through Voodoo and his private militia, the "tonton macoutes," which in Creole means "uncle bogeyman." Duvalier changed the constitution in 1964 to say that he could be President for Life.

Papa Doc died in 1971 and was succeeded by his son Jean-Claude Duvalier, "Baby Doc." **By this time, Haiti was the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and remains so today.** In February 1986, the Duvalier regime collapsed under "Operation Deschoukay" and Baby Doc fled to France.

From 1987 until 1990, there was more political instability in the country, as Haiti went through several more presidents. In 1990, the majority of Haiti's poor elected Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a former Catholic priest, as President of Haiti. But in 1991, Aristide was ousted during a "coup d'etat." Over 1,000 people were killed. The Organization of American States called for a world-wide embargo against the regime. Embargo sanctions continued in Haiti through May 1994. On September 19, 1994, President Clinton ordered a multilateral force to Haiti. The coup leaders agreed to step down and leave the country.

President Aristide returned to Haiti



on October 15, 1994. In 1995, the December presidential election was won by Prime Minister Preval. (Aristide was precluded by the constitution from succeeding himself.) In February 1996, Preval was inaugurated. But the elections of 2000 were in disarray because of a flawed vote count and fraud charges. The controversy triggered a boycott of the presidential elections later that year won by Aristide.

Widespread violence continued until 2004. A few weeks after the nation celebrated its 200th anniversary, rebel forces seized control of a number of towns in an uprising that led to the resignation of Aristide on February 29, 2004. Haiti's Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Boniface Alexandre, was sworn in as interim President.

In the election of 2006, Haiti's poor elected Rene Preval as their President. He maintained that role through 2011. Michel Martelly assumed the position of President on May 14, 2011. He will

continue to serve in this role for a five-year term through 2016.

Haiti suffered severe natural disasters between 2004 and 2010. The worst of which was the magnitude 7.0 earthquake on Jan. 12, 2010, killing more than 300,000 people and displacing over 1.3 million from their homes. Many families are still struggling from the devastation.

From Riches to Rags...

From that dark night in 1804 when the African slaves made a pact with Satan in their Voodoo ceremony, Haiti silently began its decline. Haiti's people began to cut down the country's trees, using them for charcoal. Now, only 2% of Haiti's forest is left. Flood waters wash down the mountains like an avalanche. Rivers and lakes are drying up. Tons of garbage and contaminants are breeding diseases.

The hungry resort to eating tree bark, rock and a dirt clay, called "te." One in ten children dies before the age of five.



"Haiti's children suffer the most..."

On July 1, 1991, Bobby and Sherry Burnette obeyed the calling of God to move and live in Haiti. Why Haiti? Haiti is our neighbor. Jesus said that we should love our neighbor as ourself. Thank you for allowing the team at Love A Child to be your missionaries in Haiti. Every time we feed one hungry child or provide garden seeds to hungry families or hold a malnourished baby in our arms, we know "why" God has sent us here. That's what makes life worth living!