

The Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference

**This briefing was compiled by John Howard of Third Eye,
an educational organization based in Dallas, Texas.**

Haiti: The Untold Story

Haiti is the poorest country in this hemisphere. All Americans must learn what went on in the past to have any chance at all of understanding the present. It is critical for us to look back at the history of why Haiti is such an impoverished country and why Haitians should expect support and justice. I doubt the media will tell this story.

The United States and Haiti

Between Toussaint L'Ouverture's heroic rebellion of 1791 and exiled former Haitian president Jean Bertrand Aristide's stunning election in 1991, the United States has done some questionable and despicable things to the people of Haiti.

- During the rebellion itself, the **United States joined European powers in aiding France's violent suppression of the slave uprising.**
- *The United States blocked Haiti's participation in the Western Hemisphere Panama Conference of 1825 and did not recognize Haiti until 1862, when President Abraham Lincoln thought of Haiti as a convenient repository for freed American slaves. Said Sen. Robert Hayne of South Carolina in 1824: "We never can acknowledge her independence... The peace and safety of a large portion of our union forbids us even to discuss it."*
- *Placatory toward France, the United States accommodated its European ally as France pressed Haiti for 150 million francs to be paid in reparations to the slave plantocracy for losses suffered in the slave's successful quest for freedom. This served early on to destroy the new black republic's fragile economy.*
- *During the American military occupation of Haiti, which began under President Woodrow Wilson on July 28, 1915, and lasted for nineteen years, de facto slavery in Haiti was reinstituted; Haiti's constitutional system was dismantled; 226,000 acres of Haitian soil were given over in concessional lease arrangements to American corporations; fifty thousand peasants were dispossessed in the North alone; workers were forced to toil for twenty cents a day, and the U.S. Marine Corps "pacification" efforts claimed up to fifteen thousand lives.*
- *In 1937, three years after the American occupation had ended, Rafael Trujillo, ruler of the neighboring Dominican Republic, ordered troops to undertake a*

massacre of Haitians that claimed eighteen thousand to thirty-five thousand lives. Afterward, Cordell Hull, the U.S. Secretary of State, said: "President Trujillo is one of the greatest men in Central America and in most of South America."

- *President John F. Kennedy provided the murderous Haitian dictator Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier with broad military assistance, in the words of Noam Chomsky, "as a part of a general program of extending U.S. control over the security forces in Latin America, a long-standing project carried a long step forward by the Kennedy intellectuals, who recognized that 'in the Latin American cultural environment' the military must be prepared to remove government leaders from office whenever, in the judgment of the military, the conduct of those leaders is injurious to the welfare of the nation."*
 - *Under Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, the ruthless dictator's equally ruthless son, the United States funded efforts to establish American assembly plants in an environment of terror and pittance wages. Political activist and author Noam Chomsky wrote: "The consequences were profits for U.S. manufactures and the Haitian superrich, and a decline of fifty-six percent in Haitian wages through the 1980s."*
 - *The United States provided the post-Duvalier National Council of Government (NCG) with \$2.8 million in its first year, a year in which the NCG killed more Haitian civilians than Jean-Claude Duvalier had killed in fifteen.*
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France and Haiti:

"As punishment for creating the first free republic in the Americas (when 13 percent of the people living in the United States were slaves), the new Republic of Haiti was met with a global economic embargo imposed by the United States and Europe. The embargo was strengthened by a further demand from France for financial reparations of roughly \$21 billion (2004 dollars) as compensation from the newly freed slaves for denying France the further benefit of owning them. It would be the first time in history that reparations would be imposed by a defeated nation on the nation that had defeated it."

"American economic sanctions against Haiti would not end until the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, nearly sixty years after the founding of the free Haitian republic."

"In 1825, twenty-two years after L'Ouverture's death, the Haitian army was no longer the feared fighting force it had once been. France, threatening to reenslave Haitians, imposed an ordinance requiring from Haiti a payment of 150 million francs and a 50 percent tariff reduction for all French ships docking in Haiti.* To meet the first payment of 30 million francs under the terms of the ordinance, the government of Haiti was constrained to borrow the full amount from a private French bank, MM Ch Ternaux Grandolphe et Cie."

"After extended negotiations, in 1838, under the Traite' d'Amitie' (Treaty of Friendship), the original obligation of 150 million francs was reduced to 90 million francs, with the government

of Haiti required to make thirty annual payments of 2 million francs in order to pay off the 60 million franc balance. **Haiti had to make these payments in addition to payments it had been making to a succession of private banks from which it had to borrow at onerous interest rates in order to meet the terms of its original obligation to France.**

“And forcing slaves who had won their freedom to compensate their former masters for their lost property was recognized, even in the 19th century, as a violation of human rights and international laws. By the time of the 1825 Ordinance, the international slave trade had been abolished and the reintroduction of slavery into free territories forbidden by the Second Treaty of Paris and the Congress of Vienna – both of which France had signed in 1815.
Human Rights Advocates

“France was not the only Western society that would capitalize an industrial economy with proceeds amassed from slave labor. The United States, Spain, Holland, Denmark, and Great Britain would do much the same.”

Beyond Charity: Restitution and Justice

“Compare the **French imposed cost of Haiti’s independence – 150,000,000 francs** – to the price paid by the **United States to France for the Louisiana purchase – 80,000,000 francs for an area of land seventy-four times that of Haiti** and one can only begin to sense the enormity of the reparations burden and the extortionate terms imposed.”

“Over a century and a half, France not only appropriated the worth of Haiti’s enslaved population’s toil but also forced Haiti to pay reparations to France following the Haitian revolution. France’s real debt to Haiti thus amounts to the **\$21 billion France exacted, in addition to the assessed value of the labor of the Africans** France enslaved in Haiti from the mid-seventeenth century to the end of the slave revolt in 1804.”

“As late as 1915, 111 years after the successful slave revolt, some **80 percent of the Haitian government’s resources were being paid out in debt service to French and American banks on loans that had been made to enable Haiti to pay reparations to France.**”

“In 1922, seven years into a nineteen-year American military occupation of Haiti that resulted in 15,000 Haitian deaths, **the United States imposed a \$16 million loan on the Haitian government to pay off its “debt” to France.**”

“The American loan was finally paid off in 1947. Haiti was left virtually bankrupt, its workforce in desperate straits.”

“The Haitian economy has never recovered from the financial havoc France (and America) wreaked upon it, during and after slavery.”

“On April 7, 2003, The Bicentennial of Toussaint L’Overture’s death, President Aristide announced the findings of a restitution commission formed by his government. The commission determined that France owed Haiti \$21 billion, the value in current dollars of the money France extorted from Haiti following its successful slave rebellion. On October 12, 2003, the president convened a four-day international conference of experts at Haiti’s National Palace to further discuss Haiti’s restitution claim against France for repayment of the debt.

“If Britain owes reparations to the descendants of the enslaved Africans whose uncompensated labor, in large part, financed Britain’s industrial revolution, France owes Haiti a great deal more than the \$21 billion Haiti applied for in late 2003.”

“One month after the conference, in December 2003, French foreign minister Dominique de Villepin sent his sister to Port-au-Prince to tell Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the democratically elected president, that it was time for him to step down.”

The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank keep instituting policies that undermine Haiti’s agricultural base causing Haitians to abandon farming and flood the cities to find work. The recent IMF loan to Haiti required them to stop producing rice.

This briefing was compiled by John Howard of Third Eye, an educational organization based in Dallas, Texas. Quotations are from three major sources. Two books by Randall Robinson: An Unbroken Agony: Haiti, From Revolution to the Kidnapping of a President (pp. 21 and 57) and Quitting America: The Departure of a Black Man from his Native Land (p200); Human Rights Advocates organizational documents. The Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference appreciates John Howard’s permission to distribute this compilation.