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## Legacies of the Occupation

The United States has endeavored to attain its objectives in the region by diplomacy—straightforward or devious but when diplomacy failed or patience, sometimes too meager, was exhausted, force and the menace of force occasionally were employed as instruments of national policy.

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On July 28, 1915, President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam was assassinated by a mob infuriated over the massacre of political prisoners.<sup>1</sup> The violence once again brought chaos to this troubled land. Because of it, President Woodrow Wilson ordered U.S. troops to Haiti on what was called a necessary mission for the “protection of foreign lives and property . . . and to preserve order.” Secretary of State Robert Lansing reassured the Haitian people, “The United States has no object in view except to insure, establish, and help maintain Haitian independence and the establishing of a stable and firm government by the people. Every assistance will be given to the Haitian people in their attempt to secure these ends.”<sup>2</sup> That mission as defined was in line with Wilson’s overall vision of extending democratic principles to troubled nations.

U.S. Marine forces that were monitoring events in Haiti moved in to take control of Port-au-Prince without any resistance. Pierre Sully, a Haitian soldier of little stature, remained on guard at the harbor and refused to give ground to the Marines. For this, he was summarily executed. For some time, he remained the sole hero who fearlessly resisted the Marines.

At the request of Admiral William B. Caperton, commander of the expeditionary forces, additional reinforcements arrived from the naval station at Guantanamo Bay and were assigned to other key points outside the capital city. Within a few weeks, U.S. forces were in control of the situation despite minor pockets of resistance.<sup>3</sup> The American occupation would last for a couple of decades. The original mission of restoring peace was changed to a policy aimed at achieving long-standing objectives and control of Haiti for the sake of American interests.

## The Legacies of Control

Now that the American occupation of Haiti nears its centennial, a look at the legacies of control might offer some perspective into why things happened the way they did. James Wittenberg of the Department of Political Science, University of California at Berkeley, finds that with this perspective, the “legacy arguments come into a variety of forms, but one similarity that they share is an attempt to assess the extent to which there is continuity or change between past and the present.”<sup>4</sup> After two decades of control that was entangled in innumerable dramatic events, the United States left in Haiti several historical legacies that imply both continuity of U.S. policies and change with the new realities in the country.

There are two views on legacies created by the dramatic events of the first occupation. Some historians focus on its more beneficial outcomes such as the return of peace after years of chaos and an improved quality of life, with new roads and buildings. Others, who sharply disagree with that assessment, have seen the occupation as a resounding failure.

On the positive side, historian Ludwell Lee Montague cites as examples of progress changes in the Gendarmerie (military), the Direction Générale des Travaux Publics (public works), and the Service National d’Hygiène (public health service), which established health programs in the country. Above all, a new interest by the occupiers in improving vocational and agricultural education is considered beneficial. Arthur Millspaugh, an advisor to the State Department’s Bureau of Foreign Trade, said 1,200 kilometers of highways were built during this time. While prior to the occupation Haiti had only “three operational automobiles . . . and no place for them to go, before the end of the occupation there were more than 2,600 motor vehicles in the country.”<sup>5</sup> Crowning the favorable chart, U.S. envoy Ferdinand L. Mayer declared that the occupation did not just give Haitians “their first taste of efficiency and honest government but real justice and liberty. . . . The large sums expended per annum by the occupational forces were of immense economic as well as psychological benefit to the country.”<sup>6</sup>

On the other side of the debate, Haiti’s President Sudre Dartiguenave complained to President Harding: “The Haitian people had the great hope that the support of the United States was going to enable them . . . to develop their moral and material wealth toward a rational uplift given to agriculture, industry, public education. I am sorry to say that nothing serious was done to fulfill this hope.”<sup>7</sup> Even though this was an early judgment, many historians

later agreed with his assessment; among these is Plummer, who contends that the occupation worsened Haiti's political problems and intensified its severe economic issues. She notes that the occupation made Haiti a commercial dependency during the interwar years by draining its capital to the United States and reducing its ability to become a self-sufficient country.<sup>8</sup>

There was no dispute that American occupation forces and Washington policymakers left behind legacies that still plague Haiti even at the beginning of the twenty-first century. These legacies are evident in the reorganization of the military, the restructuring of the administration, and the building of an infrastructure for economic development. The occupation gave U.S. officials the opportunity to reach their objectives of political and financial control to establish an orderly investment climate. Repercussions of this policy left Haiti politically and economically dependent on the United States.

## Control

Arthur Millspaugh was a U.S. financial adviser and general receiver of Haiti for two years beginning in 1927. He provided insights into U.S. policies and control of Haiti, underscoring the interference in elections and imposition of a treaty and a new constitution on Haiti. He also charged that the United States commandeered "the suspension from 1916 to 1930 of popular elections and an elected legislature."<sup>9</sup> U.S. officials engaged in these acts for their own interests rather than to propagate democratic ideals.

In the early months of the occupation, events confirm Millspaugh's analysis, beginning with the election of a president. Rosalvo Bobo was in line to become the next president since he successfully headed the revolution that led to the assassination of President Sam and he would have been elected by the sitting *Assemblée Nationale*. But the rules were changed under U.S. control. The Americans' goal was to elect a president who would pledge collaboration, if not allegiance, to the United States. The chief concern of military occupiers was to put in place men "mentally supple enough to carry out policies agreeable to the State Department in Washington."<sup>10</sup>

With this plan Captain Edward L. Beach, Admiral Caperton's chief of staff, was to select the right man for the office. This was an initiation into what historian D'Arcy Morgan Brissman has called a "de facto militarization of all aspects of the occupation."<sup>11</sup> Beach made overtures to prominent Haitians such as Solon Ménos, Tertulien Guilbaud, and Jacques Nicolas Léger, but they all refused to compromise.

Instead, Beach found Sudre Dartiguenave, president of the Haitian Senate, a more flexible candidate. American officials described him as a man who “realizes that Haiti must agree to the terms laid by the United States and said that he will use his influence with the Haitian Congress to have such terms agreed upon by Haiti.”<sup>12</sup> Washington approved this selection when, on August 10, 1915, Admiral W. S. Benson, acting secretary of the Navy, forwarded a cable to Admiral Caperton that read, “Allow election of President to take place whenever Haitians wish. The United States prefers election of Dartiguenave.”<sup>13</sup>

Confirming the American order, the *Assemblée Nationale* elected Sudre Dartiguenave as president of Haiti two days later, on August 12, 1915. Dartiguenave was nevertheless viewed as an American puppet. In 1917 George Marvin described the subservient role played by the Dartiguenave administration as “only a marionette. . . . His cabinet is a kind of Punch-and-Judy show. They also do what they are told to do. They can’t possibly do anything else.”<sup>14</sup>

After the 1915 election in Haiti, the Wilson administration took the next step to legalize the occupation, breaking any promise of upholding Haitian independence. U.S. officials provided a treaty, reportedly drafted by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, that included provisions the State Department had long sought. This treaty was submitted to President Dartiguenave for ratification. However, despite firm American control, getting that treaty accepted proved to be a daunting task. Members of the Haitian legislature, the *Assemblée Nationale*, exhibited open hostility to its ratification; their hostility ended when Admiral Caperton applied pressure.

On November 10, 1915, Caperton forwarded this statement to President Dartiguenave and his cabinet:

I am sure that you gentlemen will understand my sentiment in this matter, and I am confident that the intention to retain control in Haiti until the desired end is accomplished, and that it will forthwith proceed to the complete pacification of Haiti so as to insure internal tranquility necessary to such development of the country and its industry as will afford relief to the starving populace now unemployed. Meanwhile, the present government will be supported in the effort to secure stable conditions and lasting peace in Haiti whereas those offering opposition can only expect such treatment as their conduct merits.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, the Haitian legislature was offered an ultimatum of adopting the treaty or losing what little freedom it had and risking the appointment of an American governor. Given these alternatives, the *Assemblée Nationale* approved the

mandate, and the U.S. Senate followed suit on February 28, 1916. It provided that the United States would “aid the Haitian government in the proper and efficient development of its agricultural, mineral, and commercial resources and in the establishment of the finances of Haiti on a firm and solid basis.”<sup>16</sup> To achieve these objectives, American personnel were to be appointed in finances, public safety, public works, and sanitation. The treaty also provided for the appointment of a financial adviser, for the creation “without delay” of an efficient constabulary, and for engineers to work toward the public improvement of the republic. The treaty made the United States the “financial protectorate over the republic.”<sup>17</sup>

Haitians were divided about this invasion of their national sovereignty. Nationalists who opposed the occupation saw the treaty as wholesale loss of Haitian sovereignty; they repudiated it and called for a return to the way things were. One opponent was Representative Raymond Cabèche, who condemned the treaty “in the name of the Haitian people, in the name of its rights, sovereignty, independence, against the Haitian-American convention project.”<sup>18</sup>

Proponents backed American intervention because of the immediate benefits. They argued that the treaty resulted from Haiti’s failed political system. The task now was to promote “our national independence in order, true liberty, work.”<sup>19</sup> They tried to make the best of two possible worlds by maintaining independence and gaining the promised benefits.

With the treaty in place, American control of the political establishment of Haiti increased gradually. The occupiers overstepped their bounds of the treaty when in 1918 the State Department required that all proposed Haitian legislation be reviewed by the U.S. authorities. U.S. envoy Arthur Bailly-Blanchard served as the primary referee.

The treaty and its enforcement further encroached on “the remnants of Haitian independence.”<sup>20</sup> The Haitian legislature was suppressed when Major Smedley D. Butler, commander of the Gendarmerie, dispersed the *Assemblée Nationale* after the Haitian constitution was amended to accommodate American economic objectives. The new constitution provided a key point, strictly enforced since Dessalines in the constitution of 1805, that prohibited foreign real estate ownership in Haiti.

The challenge of approving the American-sponsored constitution prevailed. Since the *Assemblée Nationale* was dissolved, the occupiers formed a plebiscite that was supervised by the Gendarmerie that endorsed the constitution by a wide margin: 69,337 in favor and 335 against.<sup>21</sup> Throughout his presidential campaign, Warren Harding denounced the process by which the constitution