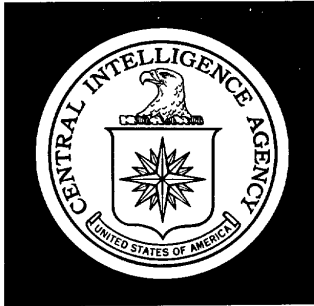


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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

# Intelligence Memorandum

*Perspectives on Haiti*

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May 1969



## Perspectives on HAITI

Haiti has long ranked as one of the poorest nations in the Western Hemisphere. Although it achieved independence before any of the other colonies in Latin America, its 165 years of self-rule have been characterized by dictatorial, corrupt, and inefficient leadership that precluded significant economic, political, or social growth. Under the repressive rule of François Duvalier during the past 12 years, the country's low level of development has deteriorated even further. Problems created by Haiti's weaknesses are compounded by proximity to Communist Cuba and to the politically unstable Dominican Republic. The former lies 48 miles across the Windward Passage to the northwest, and the latter shares a land boundary to the east.

As the first Negro republic in the world, Haiti emerged in 1804—after more than a decade of rebellion against France—with an economy in shambles, a landscape devastated by pillaging and burning, and a disparate Negro-mulatto society that lacked the skills needed to mold a new state. After independence, racial disunity increased. The majority of Negro ex-slaves scattered throughout the countryside, either settling on abandoned plantations or fleeing to interior hills and valleys. There they remained in self-imposed isolation, illiterate, speaking only Creole, and developing a culture more African than French. Most mulattoes, on the other hand, remained in urban areas. In colonial Haiti, they had occupied a social position between French master and Negro slave. When independence was attained, many were literate, French-speaking, urbane freedmen of some financial means. Being an elite group, they readily assumed exclusive management of both the government and commercial structure of the new republic. Negroes still make up most of the population, whereas the mulatto elite have never constituted more than 2 percent. Although the latter have currently lost political control to an aggressive urban middle class of Negroes, their influence continues far out of proportion to their numbers.

Power is so centralized in Haiti that the country is facetiously referred to by some as the Republic of Port-au-Prince. All authority has been assumed by Duvalier, who appoints and controls key personnel of the legislative and judicial branches of the Government, as well as the local administrators of the country's five *départements* and numerous lesser civil divisions. Duvalier's 12-year rule, long by Haitian standards, is due in part to his control of the army—traditionally the center of power in Haiti.

### RURAL HAITI

The world of the rural Haitian is narrowly circumscribed by a complex variety of physical, social, and economic limitations. The land is a composite of denuded hillsides, rugged mountains, grasslands, cultivated fields, scrub trees, and hedgerows. Hills and mountains constitute nearly three-quarters of the country, the highest

being the La Selle Range with a maximum elevation of approximately 8,000 feet. The remaining flat to gently rolling terrain is fragmented into several large noncontiguous units—the Plaine du Nord, the Plaine de l'Artibonite, the Plaine du Cul-de-Sac, the Plaine des Cayes, and the Plateau Central—and numerous small intermontane valleys and limestone depressions.

The original forests of Haiti have been cut back drastically by both the inroads of agriculture and the exploitation of timber reserves for use as fuel and for export. Forests are now confined generally to the upper slopes of the principal mountain ranges. Thorny bushes, stunted trees, and cactuses characterize the northwest peninsula, the coastal areas in the southeast, and numerous less extensive areas of low rainfall throughout the country.

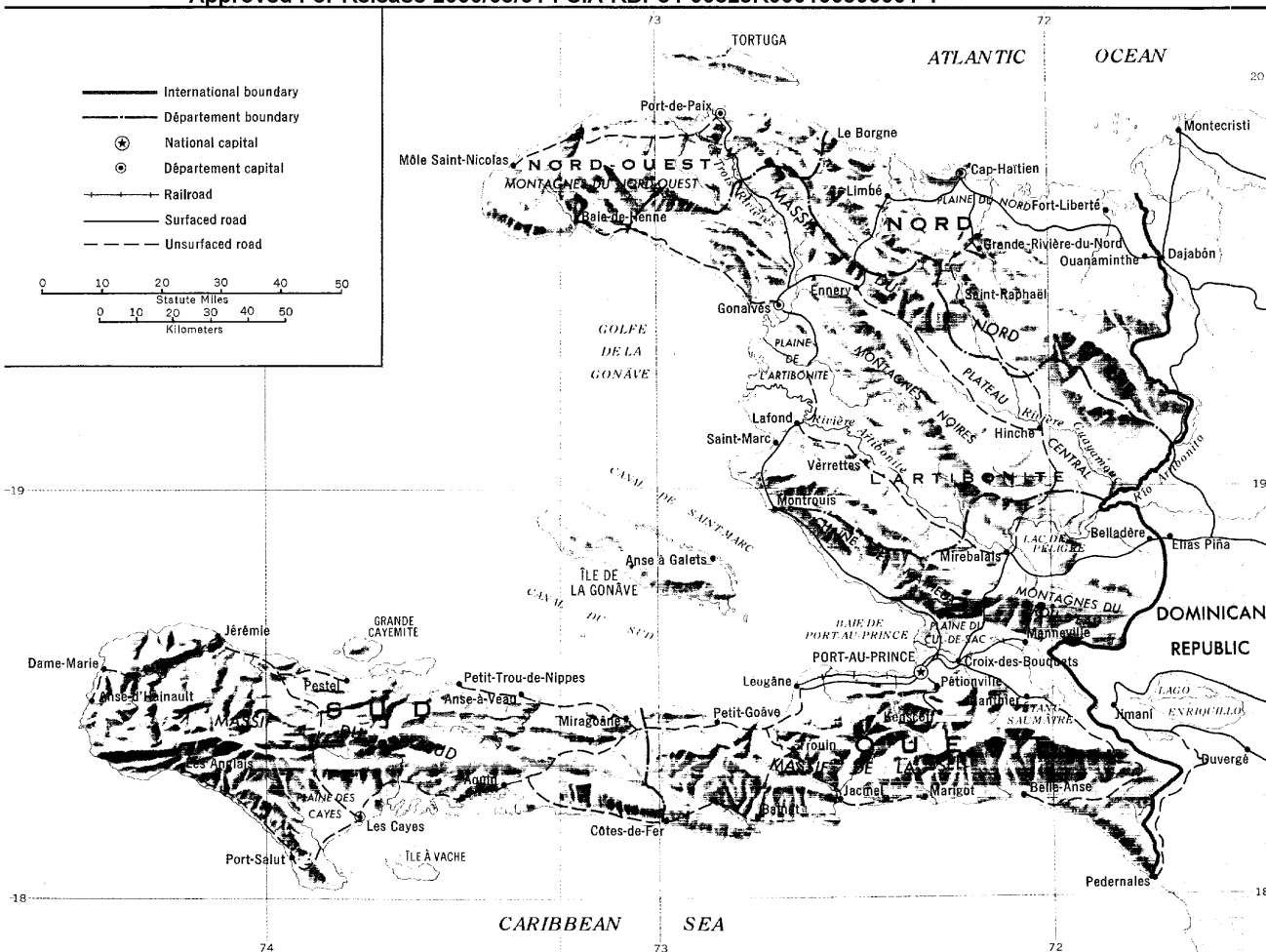
Temperatures throughout the year are uniformly warm to hot in the lowlands and somewhat more temperate at upper elevations. Annual rainfall ranges from 20 inches in parts of the northwest to more than 100 inches at upper elevations in the mountains of the southern peninsula. For much of the country, annual amounts average 40 to 50 inches. Monthly differences in precipitation determine the seasons, with a wet season from April into November and a relatively dry season the rest of the year. Rain usually falls in brief, intense showers that frequently cause local flooding, road and bridge washouts, and earth slumps. Hurricanes, which generally occur between August and October, have struck the southern peninsula three times in this decade.

The physical environment often thwarts the efforts of the Haitian farmer. Although temperatures are sufficiently mild to permit year-round cultivation, inadequate rainfall sometimes limits production. Widespread areas require irrigation for at least part of the year. Even localities where irrigation normally is unnecessary may have year-long droughts or delays in the start of the rainy season, which result in reduced harvests or outright crop failures. Measures to provide irrigation and to reduce the hazards of seasonal flooding are either nonexistent or improperly utilized—ruins of canals built by the French colonials and more recently by the United States are scattered throughout Haiti.

Approximately 88 percent of all Haitians live in rural areas. This ratio has varied little since independence, and the effects of a century and a half of occupancy by a primitive peasantry show clearly on the countryside. Few unoccupied areas remain, and the aspect is of an endless and haphazard pattern of tiny cultivated patches and small villages. The only areas of relatively low population density are scattered throughout semiarid sections of the northwest and southeast and at upper elevations in the forested, rugged terrain of the southern peninsula mountains. Based on a UN estimate of 4,485,000 persons in 1966, the population density is 418 per square mile.\* In terms of density per square mile of cultivated land the ratio is in excess of 1,000.

\* Compare with the following densities per square mile: Cuba 177, Dominican Republic 199, Jamaica 419, Trinidad 507, Puerto Rico 774, and Barbados 1,482.

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Most Haitian peasants lead a hardscrabble existence. Like their forebears, they live in dirt-floored, mud-walled, thatch-roofed huts. Unlike the landless peasantry in much of Latin America, about 85 percent of all Haitians are landowners. Legal title to the land often rests only on community acceptance, however, since cadastral surveys are virtually unknown. Insecure and nonexistent titles foster peasant apathy and facilitate official seizure of land. Furthermore, traditional inheritance laws, whereby property is equally divided among heirs, have decreased the size of landholdings with each passing generation. Over half of the family holdings total less than 6 acres

in size—often too small to provide subsistence, much less an adequate cash income—and virtually all of the holdings consist of several scattered plots.

Annual plantings of corn, beans, sorghum, manioc, and rice are cultivated with an intensity unbelievable to a temperate-zone farmer, for they must provide nearly all of the family's needs. Mixed among these field crops are mango, plantain, avocado, coconut, and other fruit trees. Any surplus foodstuffs, as well as the annual coffee harvest, are sold in the local market. The income thus earned probably amounts to less than \$50 a year but is usually sufficient to provide such necessities as



Mud and thatch dwelling in Artibonite Valley



Slum in Port-au-Prince

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salt, cooking oil, and cloth. The family may own some scrawny chickens, a few lean pigs, and a donkey.

Food shortages cause temporary famine, although death from starvation is not yet a widespread problem in Haiti. The daily caloric intake averages only 1,850 per capita, and much of this is in starchy foods. Malnutrition prevails in rural areas, particularly among the children, and lowers resistance to the many diseases that are prevalent throughout the country. In addition, few people are free of intestinal parasites caused by polluted drinking water and contaminated food. The general mortality rate is estimated to be 21.6 per 1,000, highest in the Western Hemisphere, and life expectancy averages about 40 years. Various clinics and hospitals administered by foreign religious and charitable organizations provide almost the only medical assistance available in rural Haiti, as most Haitians trained in medicine are reluctant to serve in such areas. Countrywide, there are only seven doctors per 100,000 persons, and more than half of them live in the capital or its environs.

Illiteracy approaches 100 percent in some rural areas, despite adult literacy programs sponsored by Duvalier. Progress has been negligible because programs often are not implemented, educational facilities and teachers are lacking, and materials printed in Creole—the only language most peasants know—are scarce.

Through the years, with the increase in population and the encroachment of large-scale commercial agriculture, many peasants have been forced to farm marginal land in semiarid or mountainous areas. Subsequent clearing of slopes for cultivation, along with the indiscriminate cutting of trees for firewood and charcoal, has denuded many watersheds and created a severe soil erosion problem. Some peasants, unable to maintain their families by subsistence farming, have sought additional means of support. Several sisal and sugarcane plantations in Haiti provide seasonal employment, and some peasants are sharecroppers on the farms of relatively prosperous neighbors. Migration to urban areas, notably Port-au-Prince, has increased of late but still is less common than in most Latin American countries. In the past, many thousands of Haitians have worked on sugar harvests in the Dominican Republic and Cuba. Haitian labor is still recruited for the Dominican harvest, even when the border is closed as it has been since 1967. In addition, Haitians illegally infiltrate the Dominican Republic the year around in search of food and employment. The past decade has also seen a significant increase in the number of peasants who fled from the depressed northwest to the Bahamas, although this exodus has been officially curtailed of late.

Despite perennial hardships, the majority of rural Haitians have remained independent, proud, and self-sufficient, with a vitality that has enabled them to survive and in the process to form a unique cultural identity. The family is the basic social unit of rural Haiti, and its bonds of loyalty are strong. Often the family provides the only security available to an individual, there being few social and political organizations with which people can become identified. Kin several degrees apart may live together or close by in the same settlement. Remarkably, the strength of the family unit exists despite loose mores that by Western standards would lead to family disintegration. Nearly three-quarters of all children in Haiti are born out of wedlock; common-law marriages are the rule, and in one out of four of these polygamy is practiced. The husband is the head of the family, though not in the extremely authoritarian manner common to many Latin American countries. The wife generally has a more enlightened outlook, however, because of her frequent marketing trips to town.

The life of the Haitian peasant is highly mystical and is dominated by a host of supernatural spirits, throwbacks to ancestral African gods. These are manifested in the practice of Vodun (commonly called Voodoo),

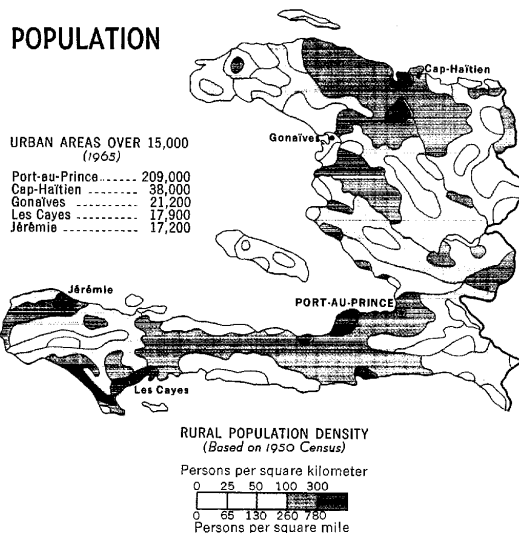
which—contrary to popular belief elsewhere—is not black magic but a complex body of beliefs and practices that guides the Haitian in his social behavior, explains otherwise inexplicable events, effects cures, and establishes order where there might otherwise be chaos. Vodun contains both Roman Catholic and African elements, particularly the latter. Disparities between these two diverse creeds are ignored by most Haitians, who commonly attend Sunday mass after participating in a Vodun ceremony the night before. Protestantism, with influence over about 10 percent of the population, is less compatible, as it requires severance of all ties with Vodun. The *houngan*, or Vodun priest, acts as medium and is an integral part of each rural community.

Throughout rural Haiti the National Government makes its presence known with a widespread network of secret police and local informants. The army or the civil militia usually carries out the wishes of the regime in the countryside. Representative local government is nonexistent. The National Government appoints the chief of even the lowest administrative unit, the *section rurale*, on the basis of political reliability as well as status within the community. When regimes change in Port-au-Prince the local chief usually is adept at shifting allegiance, thus insuring a lifetime tenure in office. He is not responsible to his constituents and frequently is the antithesis of a civil servant. He performs favors for a price and often exacts tribute. Such practices have been common at all levels of government throughout Haiti's history, contributing to the peasant's mistrust of government in general. Section chiefs and local military commanders usually collaborate in both legal and nefarious activities.

### URBAN HAITI

About 12 percent of Haiti's population is urban, and approximately half of these people live in Port-au-Prince and its suburbs. Port-au-Prince is the nation's political, economic, and military center and is the only real city in Haiti, as the provincial towns are more rural than urban in aspect. One might even question the capital's "city" status in terms other than size, for such amenities as potable water, sewage disposal, public transportation, electricity, and telephone service are distinctly substandard.

Urban Haiti, unlike rural Haiti, is divided along upper, middle, and lower class lines. The upper class, comprising about 2 percent of the country's population, consists of the mulatto elite, who generally trace their ancestry back to the colonial era. It also includes a small colony of Levantines, Europeans, and North Americans, some



but under prevailing conditions the rewards have benefited him little. Integration of the peasant into the mainstream of Haitian life would require major innovations in a governmental structure that has been characterized by a lack of continuity from one regime to the next, little concern for the public welfare, and reluctance if not actual fear of any dispersal of authority beyond the capital itself. Also required would be changes in tax administration and other fiscal policies, civil registration, education, and control of natural resources. Currently, a pilot project of the Organization of American States has teams in Haiti assessing these problems.

At present, Haiti is faced with an inadequate food supply for its increasing population. Temporary famine has been reported in various localities during the past year, and the situation is likely to deteriorate further in the coming decade. The current rate of population growth, estimated at 2 to 2½ percent a year, is not high for Latin America but is too high for a society of subsistence farmers. Food production must be increased, and the growth of population must be checked. Large-scale emigration is impractical, if not impossible, as a sizable number of Haitians would not be permanently welcome anywhere. Curtailment of the birth rate—a difficult project among illiterate and fatalistic people—holds the most promise.

Haiti's future is inextricably tied to agriculture, since the capital, skills, markets, and natural resources for major industrial growth are virtually nonexistent. Although land productivity is declining, attempts to change

the deeply rooted system of subsistence farming on small plots—perhaps to a plantation economy—might be disastrous to a society that invests so much of its physical and spiritual self in the land. Initially, steps need to be taken to legalize land titles and to introduce rudimentary practices such as pruning, terracing, irrigation, and fertilizing into the existing system of small farms in order to increase food production without disrupting peasant society. A properly administered system of small landholdings may prove in the long run to be the most suitable system of agricultural land use for Haiti. Certainly the concept of an independent, landowning farmer stands in favorable contrast to the landless peon characteristic of many Latin American latifundia societies.

Constructive measures to solve the Haitian dilemma will require outside assistance, and this in turn is contingent on either of two unlikely possibilities—a change in direction of the present leadership or the establishment of a new and more enlightened regime. Haiti's course in the immediate years ahead could be of major significance in considering the future of the many other Caribbean islands that are beset by similar problems of overpopulation, rural poverty, depleted soils, and a meager resource base. Solutions to their problems will become more difficult as the trend toward independence continues throughout the West Indies and the obligations of the United Kingdom, France, and the Netherlands phase out. The prospect of a dozen or more Haitis in the West Indies by the turn of the century is bleak but not entirely unrealistic.



Road on southern peninsula after rainstorm



Children suffering from malnutrition

provide important employment locally but are relatively insignificant to the national economy, partly because of contracts that give Haiti an inequitably small share of the profits. Combined, bauxite and copper exports amount to about 14 percent of the value of all exports.

Manufacturing is confined principally to the processing of sugarcane and sisal. Light consumer items are produced mostly in the Port-au-Prince area. Haitian wood products for export and for the tourist trade are of good quality, but the supply of valuable hardwoods such as mahogany has been badly depleted. The principal manufacturing development in this decade, and a promising one, is the fabrication of various imported materials for re-export as finished products. Manufacturers have located in Haiti because labor costs are the lowest in the Caribbean and are competitive with those of Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Despite some favorable aspects, there is little reason to hope for improvement soon in Haiti's economy: foreign investors are discouraged by the repressive political atmosphere; Haitian investors usually are subjected to Government extortion; and resources other than a large but illiterate and unskilled labor force are few. Furthermore, transportation facilities are limited almost entirely to a sparse network of badly maintained roads. After heavy rains some parts of the country are isolated for weeks by washed-out bridges and impassable roads. There is only one rail line, and that is used to haul sugarcane to the refinery at Port-au-Prince. The recently completed airfield near Port-au-Prince can accommodate large jetliners. Local air service is restricted to a few weekly flights from the capital to the major towns. The capital has a telephone system, but service is frequently poor. Haiti remains a country in which donkey, sailboat, and shanks' mare are the most widely used means of travel, and personal contact is the most reliable means of communication.

### EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The United States did not diplomatically recognize the Haitian Republic until the US Civil War, largely because southern planters opposed recognition of a nation of freed slaves. Even after recognition the United States paid scant attention to Haiti until 1915 when, because of financial chaos that brought threats of European intervention, US Marines occupied Haiti; the occupation lasted until 1934. Material accomplishments during this period were impressive, but when the Haitians resumed sovereignty over their affairs, corruption and inefficiency returned, and improvements in transportation, communications, and other facilities fell into disrepair.

Since World War II, US economic assistance totaling approximately \$100 million has been extended to Haiti. Much of this money, however, has been swallowed up by graft and mismanagement. Worthwhile projects, such as an irrigation scheme for the Artibonite Valley and the Poté Colé project to reform agriculture in northern Haiti, were abandoned in 1962 when it became apparent that Haitian officials were not interested in the benefits of the plans but only in their personal enrichment. Subsequent US Government assistance has consisted largely of contributions to a malaria eradication program and gifts of food and medicine. Nevertheless, Haiti currently is receiving a significant amount of external assistance. Besides the US Government, major contributors include private religious and charitable groups, the Organization of American States, the United Nations, and various foreign governments.

The island of Hispaniola has been divided between Haiti and the Dominican Republic for the better part of two centuries. Cultural dichotomy is marked—French with strong African overtones in Haiti, and Spanish with a deliberately muted African background in the Dominican Republic. Although the Negroid composition of the Dominican population increased significantly during two decades of Haitian occupation in the first half of the 19th century, Dominicans consider themselves racially superior.

Relations between Haiti and the Dominican Republic have never been harmonious, and currently only minimum diplomatic representation is maintained. The 224-mile boundary, closed since 1967, is inadequately policed, so Haitians filter into Dominican territory relatively easily. Reliable figures are not available, but recent official Dominican estimates place the number of Haitians in their country at 200,000, most of these being illegal entrants. Dominican antagonism in its extreme resulted in the massacre of many thousands of migrant Haitians in 1937, and it still persists. Peasants, especially along the border, strongly resent the presence of Haitians with whom they must compete for land and employment. Friction may also develop over water rights, inasmuch as some Haitian rivers have their sources in Dominican territory.

### OUTLOOK

Haiti's problems will not be alleviated without improvement of the peasant farmer's lot. His labors brought riches to the French and wealth to the select few who have subsequently ruled the country. His rewards—land and the freedom to manage it—are still largely unattainable in many other countries of Latin America,

of whom are very wealthy. Usually the mulatto elite observe in-group marriage, but occasionally they marry foreign nationals. Although skin color as well as family background may distinguish the elite, there are no strict guidelines and their color may range from near white to very dark hues. Lightness, however, is more usual and much preferred. The elite are fluent in both French and Creole (the latter being necessary for most daily activities) and adhere to the Roman Catholic or Protestant religion. A few elite families reside in the outlying towns of Cap-Haïtien, Les Cayes, or Jérémie, but the majority live in the better suburbs of Port-au-Prince. Mulatto political and economic standing has gone downhill since 1946, when the last mulatto president was turned out of office. By threats and blackmail the present Government has forced many mulattoes into exile. Nevertheless, those who remain must still, by virtue of their education and wealth, be considered the social elite.

An emerging urban middle class, amounting to about 4 percent of the total population, has been evolving over the past quarter century. It is composed principally of Negroes and individuals with a dominant Negro strain, although there are mulatto elements. Middle-class status requires a primary school education, fluency in French, and a job free of manual labor. Because these requisites are achieved most readily in Port-au-Prince, the middle class is concentrated there. Currently, the more prominent members of the middle class are the so-called "black bureaucrats" who are Duvalier's close followers. Many are little more than petty thugs who have used their Government position to amass a fortune. More typical middle-class Haitians—government clerks, shopkeepers, teachers, professionals, office workers, and skilled artisans—have not benefited significantly from Duvalier's decade of power.

The urban lower class—Negroes all—comprises about 6 percent of the population and is at least as impoverished as the rural peasantry. The majority have migrated to Port-au-Prince from the countryside, thereby trading one form of misery for another since the slums of the capital are among the worst in the hemisphere. Although rural-to-urban migration is less pronounced in Haiti than in many other Latin American countries, the population of Port-au-Prince is estimated to have increased nearly 80 percent between 1950 and 1960, a growth that would have been impossible without a significant influx from the countryside. This increase has continued in the present decade. Most migrants retain their distinctive cultural traits such as the practice of common-law marriages, adherence to Vodun, and virtually exclusive use of Creole.

The majority of lower class urban people are unemployed or underemployed, as is evidenced by the hordes of beggars, peddlers, and refuse pickers who roam the streets of the capital. They do, however, have certain advantages over rural folk. Opportunities for education are better, so fewer people are illiterate; residence in the capital—Haiti's window on the world—broadens their view; and theoretically they can rise to middle-class status, although in practice economic opportunities at that level are limited. Numerous lower class urban men enhance their prestige by joining Duvalier's volunteer militia (popularly referred to by Haitians as the "ton ton macoutes"). It is the urban slum dweller who might be most apt to create civil unrest. He is continually exposed to extreme disparities between classes—disparities that are far less marked in rural Haiti.

ECONOMY

The Haitian economy is almost wholly agricultural, and the export of farm products provides a significant share of the country's foreign exchange earnings and of Government revenues. Agriculture employs 85 percent of the 2.6 million labor force, but most of this number are self-employed subsistence farmers and unpaid family workers. The precarious nature of an economy heavily

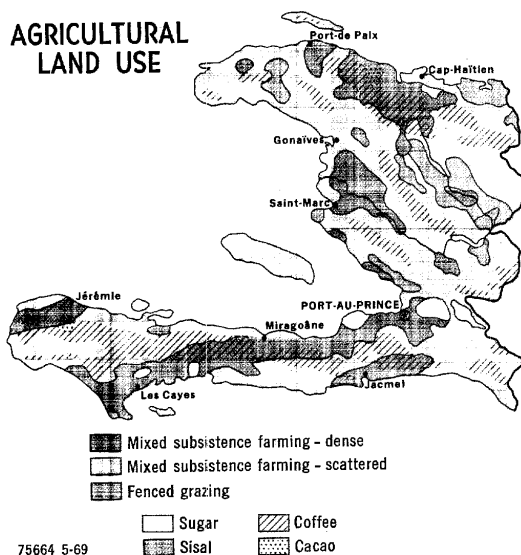
dependent on the export of a single crop—a common situation in other parts of Latin America—is compounded in Haiti by grossly inefficient production methods.

Dominating the list of export crops is coffee, followed by sugar and sisal. The coffee industry provides an insight into the inefficiency that pervades much of the Haitian economy. Only one producing unit has more than 100 acres, and most of the crop comes from innumerable small farms, some with only a few bushes. Exports were higher during the colonial era than they are today, even though coffee at that time was secondary to sugar. The decline is due in part to decreasing yields caused by infrequent pruning and fertilizing and by trees that are too old. Also, as population increases, more land must be converted from coffee to subsistence-crop cultivation. Incentives to improve production are lacking, chiefly because of a marketing system that gives the peasant too small a share of profits.

The sugarcane and sisal industries are more modern and efficient, mainly because they are owned and operated by foreigners. Although many small sugar mills are scattered over the countryside, two US-owned mills, HASCO (Haitian American Sugar Company) at Port-au-Prince and Dessalines at Les Cayes, process the bulk of the cane for both export and domestic use. Of the several sisal plantations in Haiti, the most important is the Dauphin plantation, a US holding in the northeast near the Dominican border. This is an efficient operation that produces fibers internationally known for their high quality. Competition with artificial fibers during the past decade, however, has depressed the world sisal market to such an extent that the Dauphin plantation was forced to close for 6 months in 1967 (it has since reopened on a limited basis) and another plantation farther west along the north coast has been closed for several years.

Cacao, citrus fruits, and a few other crops complete the list of agricultural exports. The most recent attempt at commercial banana production was begun on the north coast in the late 1950's, but within a few years it succumbed to a combination of disease and natural disasters.

Haiti has few natural resources other than its farmland, scattered mineral deposits, and scenic attractions suitable for the development of tourism. Reynolds Metals produces about 400,000 metric tons of bauxite annually from deposits near Miragoâne on the southern peninsula. A Canadian company mines copper north of Gonaïves, but its production declined from 5,900 metric tons in 1963 to 2,700 metric tons in 1966, and the entire operation was temporarily closed in June 1968 because of damage from a flash flood. Both bauxite and copper mines



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