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# Why the US Owes Haiti Billions – The Briefest History

by **Bill Quigley**

Why does the US owe Haiti Billions? Colin Powell, former US Secretary of State, stated his foreign policy view as the "Pottery Barn rule." That is - "if you break it, you own it."

The US has worked to break Haiti for over 200 years. We owe Haiti. Not charity. We owe Haiti as a matter of justice. Reparations. And not the \$100 million promised by President Obama either - that is Powerball money. The US owes Haiti Billions - with a big B.

The US has worked for centuries to break Haiti. The US has used Haiti like a plantation. The US helped bleed the country economically since it freed itself, repeatedly invaded the country militarily, supported dictators who abused the people, used the country as a dumping ground for our own economic advantage, ruined their roads and agriculture, and toppled popularly elected officials. The US has even used Haiti like the old plantation owner and slipped over there repeatedly for sexual recreation.

Here is the briefest history of some of the major US efforts to break Haiti.

In 1804, when Haiti achieved its freedom from France in the world's first successful slave revolution, the United States refused to recognize the country. The US continued to refuse recognition to Haiti for 60 more years. Why? Because the US continued to enslave millions of its own citizens and feared recognizing Haiti would encourage slave revolution in the US.

After the 1804 revolution, Haiti was the subject of a crippling economic embargo by France and the US. US sanctions lasted until 1863. France ultimately used its military power to force Haiti to pay reparations for the slaves who were freed. The reparations were 150 million francs. (France sold the entire Louisiana territory to the US for 80 million francs!)

Haiti was forced to borrow money from banks in France and the US to pay reparations to France. A major loan from the US to pay off the French was finally paid off in 1947. The current value of the money Haiti was forced to pay to French and US banks? Over \$20 Billion - with a big B.

The US occupied and ruled Haiti by force from 1915 to 1934. President Woodrow Wilson sent troops to invade in 1915. Revolts by Haitians were put down by US military - killing over 2000 in one skirmish alone. For the next nineteen years, the US controlled customs in Haiti, collected taxes, and ran many governmental institutions. How many billions were siphoned off by the US during these 19 years?

From 1957 to 1986 Haiti was forced to live under US backed dictators "Papa Doc" and "Baby Doc" Duvalier. The US supported these dictators economically and militarily because they did what the US wanted and were politically "anti-communist" - now translatable as against human rights for their people. Duvalier stole millions from Haiti and ran up hundreds of millions in debt that Haiti still owes. Ten thousand Haitians lost their lives. Estimates say that Haiti owes \$1.3 billion in external debt and that 40% of that debt was run up by the US-backed Duvaliers.

Thirty years ago Haiti imported no rice. Today Haiti imports nearly all its rice. Though Haiti was the sugar growing capital of the Caribbean, it now imports sugar as well. Why? The US and the US dominated world financial institutions - the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank - forced Haiti to open its markets to the world. Then the US dumped millions of tons of US subsidized rice and sugar into Haiti - undercutting their farmers and ruining Haitian agriculture. By ruining Haitian agriculture, the US has forced Haiti into becoming the third largest world market for US rice. Good for US farmers, bad for Haiti.

In 2002, the US stopped hundreds of millions of dollars in loans to Haiti which were to be used for, among other public projects like education, roads. These are the same roads which relief teams are having so much trouble navigating now!

In 2004, the US again destroyed democracy in Haiti when they supported the coup against Haiti's elected President Aristide.

Haiti is even used for sexual recreation just like the old time plantations. Check the news carefully and you will find numerous stories of abuse of minors by missionaries, soldiers and charity workers. Plus there are the frequent sexual vacations taken to Haiti by people from the US and elsewhere. What is owed for that? What value would you put on it if it was your sisters and brothers?

US based corporations have for years been teaming up with Haitian elite to run sweatshops teeming with tens of thousands of Haitians who earn less than \$2 a day.

The Haitian people have resisted the economic and military power of the US and others ever since their independence. Like all of us, Haitians made their own mistakes as well. But US power has forced Haitians to pay great prices - deaths, debt and abuse.

It is time for the people of the US to join with Haitians and reverse the course of US-Haitian relations.

This brief history shows why the US owes Haiti Billions - with a big B. This is not charity. This is justice. This is reparations. The current crisis is an opportunity for people in the US to own up to our country's history of dominating Haiti and to make a truly just response.

(For more on the history of exploitation of Haiti by the US see: Paul Farmer, [The Uses of Haiti](#); Peter Hallward, [Damming the Flood](#); and Randall Robinson, [An Unbroken Agony](#))

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