UNDERSTANDING HAITI: Before and After the Quake

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Haiti was the first black republic in the world, established in 1804
Population estimated 8,924,553 in July 2008
Median Age 18.2, Infant mortality rate: 79 per 1000 live births
Official Religion: Roman Catholic
Voodooism: a kind of dance and category of spirits
Haiti is the poorest country in western hemisphere
The richest 1% control 50% of the wealth
Approximately 78% of Haitians live in poverty
DEFORESTATION
In 1923, 60% of Haiti was forested. In 2006, only 2%

Causes of deforestation:
- Forestry - wood for export, fuel
- Agriculture - sugar, coffee, indigo, tobacco
- Extreme weather - hurricanes, earthquakes

Deforestation is linked to:
- Soil erosion
- Poor food quality
- Landslides
- Unemployment
- Poverty
DEFORESTATION

Image from: svs.gsfc.nasa.gov/.../haiti_still_web.jpg
1492 Hispaniola discovered by Columbus
  • Native Taino (Arawack) Indians

1697 Treaty of Ryswick
  • Island Divided between Spain and France

1791-1803 Haitian Revolution
  • Slave rebellion
1804 January 1: “Ayiti” declared a independent republic
  • General Jean-Jacques Dessalines emperor.
  • Haitian Flag introduced
1838: France recognizes Haitian independence
- Haiti must pay 150 million francs.
- Haiti forced to loan over 70 million francs
- Portion paid in wood
- Most nations shun Haiti for ~40 years

1915-1934: US military occupies Haiti
- Haiti forced to pay 40% of national income to American and French debts
- US revives a law requiring peasants to perform road labor in lieu of taxes
- US maintains financial control until 1947
1954 Hurricane Hazel
- Killed ~1000 people
- Destroyed 40% of coffee plants, 50% of cocoa

1957-1971 “Papa Doc” Duvalier Dictatorship
- Tonton Macoute formed

1971-1986 “Baby Doc” Duvalier
1981: African Swine Flu Outbreak
- Mass slaughter of Haitian pigs
- Widespread hunger
- Uprising and revolt

Image from: www.timesonline.co.uk
1986 “Baby Doc” ousted

1990: President Father Jean-Baptiste Aristide

1991: Military Coup d’état
- Aristide ousted 7 months after inauguration, relocates to the Venezuela then US.
- Raoul Cedras takes power
- Embargo throughout Western Hemisphere
1993: Governors Island Accord
- General Cedras initially agrees to early retirement, return of Aristide
- Agreement not kept, leads to UN Embargo

1994: Multinational naval blockade
- US and Caribbean troops occupy Haiti
- Aristide returns, dissolves Haitian army
1995: Economic Restructuring Agreement with IMF
- Import tariffs on rice decline from 35% to 3%
- Domestic rice production declines
- Widespread hunger and unemployment

1996: Rene Garcia Preval elected president
- Aristide maintains power

2001: Aristide elected president
- Controversy due to corruption and inability to exert authority
2004: Haitian 200th Anniversary
- Growing political violence, poor economy, failed international mediation
- Rebel movement seizes towns
- Arisitide removed from power
- Questionable US involvement- kidnapping?

2004: Interim Government
- UN stabilization mission
2006: Democratic elections
  • President Rene Preval - controversial

2010 January: 7.0 Earthquake
  • ~230,000 killed
  • Widespread infrastructure damage

What are the obstacles to rebuilding in light of the historical context?
REFERENCES


