

Haiti's past, a reflection of its future?

We cannot try to even begin to comprehend why Haiti, one of the poorest countries on the planet was hit by such a devastating earthquake. What is evident, however, is that past mistakes, which involved planning for growth, coupled with a culture of corruption and terror, provided the seeds for this disaster. Amazingly, at one time Haiti, or Saint Dominique as it was then called, was one of the richest colonies in the Western Hemisphere. A look at this country's past can help us understand how the richest colony in this Hemisphere became its poorest country.

Saint Dominique was a French colony, as were Martinique and Guadalupe, which had been colonies since 1635. However, it was not until the Treaty of Ryswick with Spain that Saint Dominique became a de-facto French colony. From 1700 to 1704, more than 100 new sugar plantations were established.

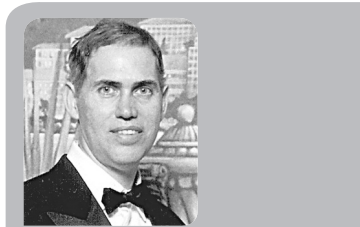
African slaves were imported to work on these plantations. Given

the lack of French women, it was therefore not surprising that by 1789, there were 30,000 people of mixed European-African ancestry and 40,000 Europeans. At the time, the slave population of Saint Dominique numbered 500,000 or more.

The labor-intensive plantation system comprised huge numbers of slaves. As a result of the harsh conditions to which they were exposed, the birth rate of the slaves was not enough to keep up with the demand for sugar. Therefore, slaves had to be imported at a rate of almost 30,000 per year.

Both the American Revolution, with its proclamation of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," and the French Revolution, with its proclaimed "liberté, égalité, fraternité" had a profound impact on the 500,000 slaves. Why could they not enjoy similar freedoms than those aspired to by their "white" countrymen?

In spite of these grandiose proclamations, in the first phase of the French Revolution, France would



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Commentary

not even consider the possibility of letting go of its rich colony, which in any case was needed to finance the goals of the revolution, and some time later, of the Napoleonic wars. Interestingly, the capital, Port-au-Prince, was a relatively modest settlement while Cap François was the cultural capital. It was said that this city was the size of Boston, "with a beauty and grandeur that made it be known as the Jewel of the Antilles."

By 1793, Toussaint Louverture (a good comparison might be George Washington) started to

organize the slave population to create a free and independent nation run by former slaves. He defeated the great army of Napoleon. The British, sensing an opportunity to capture this rich colony, invaded Saint Dominique. They were able to capture a small section of the colony, but at a cost of 20,000 men. They were also defeated by Louverture. Finally, on January 1, 1804, Haiti declared its independence.

Unfortunately, the success of these former slaves scared their neighbors. The economies of the European colonies of the Caribbean and Latin America, as well as the Confederacy of the United States, depended on slave labor to keep their plantations profitable. As they had no intention of freeing the slaves, nor did they wish to have them rebel as they had done on Saint Dominique, the European masters and the United States effectively boycotted trade with Haiti, sending its economy into a perpetual slide.

The history of violence perpet-

uated among the slaves, the boycott, and the emigration of talent that all revolutions foster, resulted in the development of the weak social and structural infrastructure we see today. Even the 20 year occupation of the U.S. Marines, which began in 1915 could not restructure these institutions.

Will the efforts to stabilize Haiti succeed this time? They can, and hopefully they will. However, the structures that supported corruption, terror and mismanagement of talent have been around for more than 200 years. It will take time as well as patience to undo this damage.

For additional information on Haitian history consider reading "Toussaint Louverture" by Madison Smartt Bell, published in 2007 by Pantheon Books.

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VOICES

What ever happened to slavery

It was perplexing to learn in Catholic school that coveting your neighbor's servant is a sin. Because my mother had done it, she'd offered the lady more money. It was decades later I learned that God meant slaves. That makes sense though. You have to buy a slave, just like a car or a stereo.

So slavery's okay? The Commandment, after all, is protective of the institution. God might answer that slavery's not really over. The bad guys just realized that if you own the farms, the stores and the factories, the dispossessed have to work for whatever pennies you feel like paying them. If they get sick and croak, you've now lost nothing. And then there's immigration, illegal being the best kind. And that's where we are today. God?

*Javier Acevedo, Ocean Park
Jan. 14*

Aftershock

A poem for Haiti:

Hearts are breaking, lives are bleeding, souls are shattering.

This torture you have wreaked upon our atmosphere, upon this land that deserved naught your murder.

And I wish I could gather the pieces of dust that was you, right into my arms and hold you near the warmth that is the blood rushing through my saddened heart.

But, alas, I cannot, for my arms are weakened and brittle, not strong enough to hold you or heal you.

And I pine for your pain, I weep for your misery, and I ache for my uselessness, for I am one person, alone.

But this sadness is shared, and it's causing an outward ripple, flowing on and on, reaching the corners of the globe.

It's an aftershock of disaster: pain, sympathy and love.

And now know that you're not alone, and I will add even my own frail arms and hope to make the slight-

est change, because a drop of water is better than a desert wasteland.

*Carola Alexandra Rivera Garminelli, 14
Jan. 17*

Politics can really make strange bedfellows

When I read Robert Friedman's "Fate of P.R. under health reform hangs in balance" (Jan. 18), the following popped out and got my attention: "Brown, of the GOP, has said he can't wait to become the state's next senator, so that he could kill the health care reform that Kennedy had fought for much of his life ... Gov. Fortuño was in Washington last week to continue lobbying for the island to get a fair shake in the health care legislation ... Observers have noted that the Massachusetts race seems to have turned into a referendum on the health care bill. A Brown victory, the pundits say, could be a sign of the revival of the Republicans on the national scene. So where does Fortuño stand on the Massachusetts race? ... Apparently, the governor would rather sit this one out." — End of quotes.

Does Republican Governor Luis Fortuño talk out of both sides of his mouth, especially went he goes to Washington begging for Health Reform funds from the Democratic Obama Administration and Democratic members of the United States Congress? Is he two-faced? However, when he contacts members of his Republican Party, does he mouth all kinds of support for his party's members, who have every time as a solid block voted, against the Obama Health Reform Bill? I wonder what the Democratic White House and the Democratic United States Congress really think about Fortuño's hypocritical double talk. Why doesn't he also contact members of his Republican Party to convince them to support the Obama Health Care Reform? What is making it difficult to include Puerto Rico in Health Care Reform is the GOP's obstruction of health care reform. Does Fortuño secretly believe in the Republican program to help the insurance companies and oth-

er health care corporations while he begs Democrats for money from Health Care Reform for Puerto Rico? He cannot have it both ways. Is Fortuño being dishonest with the people of Puerto Rico. What are his true colors?

When GOP (Gone Obsolete Party) Fortuño leaves a Democrats office in the White House or the United States Congress do they open the windows to get rid of the foul smell of disingenuous political deceit from a tricky Republican and to allow the honest fresh air of truly compassionate Democratic Washington to flow into their Democratic offices.

Fortunately (no pun intended), Democrat Resident Commissioner Pedro Pierluisi has managed not to be identified too strongly with the true colors of the sneaky Republicanism of the Fortuño Administration

When Democratic Secretary of State Kenneth McClintock contacts stateside Democrats, do they wonder if he too is now talking out of both sides of his mouth as does his boss in Fortaleza. Does Democrat McClintock have the same respect and credentials that he had before he hooked up with Fortuño? He had the true colors of a 100 percent pure honorable Democrat when he was President of the Puerto Rico Senate. He loved my friend Eleanor Roosevelt. She must be rolling over in her grave or weeping in Heaven with sadness. Today, as a member of the Fortuño Administration, McClintock sounds very Republican when he talks out of one side of his mouth and an disingenuous Democrat when he talks out of the other side of his mouth. McClintock was my idol in those days when he hung out with Hillary Clinton during the Presidential Primary. Then, he knew how to give the Republicans hell as his idol Harry Truman often did. It troubles me greatly to see a Democratic political friend cozy up to a smooth Republican playing both sides for trickle-down money and power. Politics can really make strange bedfellows.

*Robert McCarroll, Carolina
Jan. 18*

These remarks do not necessarily represent the views of the Daily Sun.