

CRISIS IN HAITI: THE AMERICAN OCCUPATION 1915-1934

by

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Under the Direction of Reinaldo Román

ABSTRACT

Following the assassination of President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam in 1915, Haiti experienced a period of political instability. With the Caribbean nation experiencing an internal crisis, President Woodrow Wilson deployed American Marines to protect American strategic interests. While Wilson alleged the benevolent intentions of the American occupation, charges of indiscriminate killings leveled against American Marines painted a different picture. Consequently, several political actors including African American leaders, journalists and national politicians became interested in how the United States was responding to Haiti's crisis. This thesis surveys the political crisis that emerged in both Haiti and the United States as a result of the occupation while assessing how and why various actors became involved in a decades-long conversation surrounding Haiti that unfolded in editorial pages, US presidential campaigns, military inquiries, and congressional hearings. The thesis investigates the significance of the Haiti debates in terms of the politics of race, citizenship, and self-governance in the United States. Seeing as divergent actors used Haiti to make very different claims, this thesis explores the reasons why Haiti emerged as a place where arguments over race, citizenship, and self-governance converged. This study uses Congressional records and, official and personal correspondence as well as articles

published in *The Nation* and *The Crisis* between 1915 and 1934, when US Marines finally withdrew from Haiti.

INDEX WORDS: Haiti, Crisis, Occupation, Sovereignty, Race, Citizenship

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“My subject is Haiti, the Black Republic; the only self-made Black Republic in the world. I am to speak to you of her character, her history, her importance and her struggle from slavery to freedom and to statehood.” In 1893, while serving as the commissioner of the Haitian Pavilion at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, former ambassador to Haiti, Frederick Douglass, delivered a critical speech on Haiti's relationship with the United States. Lecturing to fifteen hundred people, he alluded to the tension that existed between the two nations. “Haiti is black,” he declared, “and we have not yet forgiven Haiti for being black (applause) or forgiven the Almighty for making her black.” Although the United States prided itself on having a superior civilization, Douglass maintained that the United States lagged behind other nations in this aspect. “In every other country on the globe” he stated, “a citizen of Haiti is sure of civil treatment.” Even with this declaration, Douglass believed that there was a “deeper reason for coolness between the countries.” Pointing to the Mole St. Nicolas port located on the northwest coast of Haiti; Douglass argued that it was neither reasonable nor creditable for Americans to harbor angry feelings towards Haiti because of its refusal to lease the port to the United States. Instead, he insisted: “Haiti has the same right to refuse that we had to ask, and there was insult neither in the asking nor in the refusal.”¹ Despite vowing to use the Mole St. Nicholas port solely as a naval base, Haitian officials feared that the United States government would attempt to gain a foothold in or complete control over their territory.²

¹ Blassingame, John W., and John R. McKivigan. *The Frederick Douglass Papers - Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews* (Yale University Press, 1991), 510-514.

² Foreign Policy Association and National Popular Government League. *The Seizure of Haiti by the United States; A Report on the Military Occupation of the Republic of Haiti and the History of the Treaty Forced Upon Her* (New York, 1922), 4.

Positioning a U.S. Marine force in Haiti on July 28, 1915, President Woodrow Wilson would turn these deepest fears into a reality. Given Haiti's financial obligations to foreign countries, the recent establishment of the Panama Canal and the increasing activity on the part of foreign bankers, U.S. policymakers became increasingly convinced that the island and the Mole St. Nicholas port were strategically important to the United States.³ In the meantime, Haiti experienced a period of social, economic and political instability; this internal crisis soon created an opportunity for the United States to intervene. On July 27, 1915, just four months after Haitian President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam was sworn into office, a small group of revolutionaries attacked the presidential palace in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.⁴ In an effort to reassert his power and challenge protestors opposing his political administration, he ordered the massacre of 167 political prisoners. In response to his demonstration of force, an unruly mob initiated a violent revolt. As a result, Haitian President Sam would share the fate of his political prisoners. With European companies heavily invested in Haiti, the American government feared that this political instability would result in foreign intervention.⁵ Thus, when France and Germany sent soldiers to restore order in Haiti, President Wilson became concerned that their presence would become permanent and would cause competition for the territory. Immediately after the assassination of President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam, in an effort to pre-empt a looming intervention by both France and Germany, Wilson quickly inserted a U.S. Marine force in Haiti to protect U.S. strategic interest.⁶ The Wilson administration cited widespread violence, anarchy,

³ Schmidt, Hans, *The United States Occupation of Haiti: 1915 – 1934* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Pr, 1995), 31.

⁴ Girard, Philippe R. *Paradise Lost: Haiti's Tumultuous Journey from Pearl of the Caribbean to Third World Hot Spot* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 76.

⁵ Jones, Howard. *Crucible of Power. A History of U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1897* (Wilmington, Del: SR Books, 2001).

⁶ Sicker, Martin. *The Geopolitics of Security in the Americas: Hemispheric Denial from Monroe to Clinton* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002), 66.

and imminent danger to foreigners' lives and property as justifications for the American occupation of Haiti.⁷

As the crisis in Haiti developed, divergent opinions about the occupation—the armed seizure of Haitian territory by the United States government—emerged. Supporting President Woodrow Wilson's decision to place U.S. Marines in Haiti in his Annual Report, Secretary of State Robert Lansing declared: "The crisis in Haitian affairs demanded immediate and energetic action on the part of the Navy to protect American and foreign lives and property and to restore order throughout that distressed country."⁸ Agreeing with the Wilson administration, the majority of American journalists viewed the United States as a "benevolent neighbor" trying to help a backwards nation. Scholars studying the U.S. occupation of Haiti have accurately observed that American journalists widely held that the U.S. occupation of Haiti was the fulfillment of a responsibility of the American government. "Many journalists" historian John Blassingame remarks, "felt that it was America's duty to free the Haitians and Dominicans from the degradation, exploitation, and oppression of their rulers and then regenerate, guide, reform, and educate the dreadfully ignorant and superstitious natives."⁹ From the standpoint of mainstream American journals like *World Work's*, *The New York Times* and *The Chicago Tribune* the disorder in Haiti was a part of Haitian history and evidence of Haiti's savagery.¹⁰

⁷ Brenda Gayle Plummer. "The Afro - American Response to the Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934," *Phylon* 43, no. 2 (1982): 125.

⁸ United States. Inquiry into Occupation and Administration of Haiti and Santo Domingo. *Hearings Before a Select Committee on Haiti and Santo Domingo, United States Senate, Sixty-Seventh Congress, First-Second Session*, Pursuant to S. Res. 112 Authorizing a Special Committee to Inquire into the Occupation and Administration of the Territories of the Republic of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Washington: Govt. Print. Off, 1922. 4

⁹ Blassingame, John W. "The Press and American Intervention in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, 1904-1920." *Caribbean Studies* 9, no. 2 (Jul. 1969): 36.

¹⁰ Carter, Purvis M. *Congressional and Public Reaction to Wilson's Caribbean Policy, 1913-1917* (New York: Vantage Press, 1977), 13.

During the first five years of the occupation, the majority of white American periodicals remained either silent or supportive.¹¹ However, with the publication of Herbert J. Seligmann's exposé for *The Nation* magazine, Americans began to question the U.S. occupation and the conduct of American Marines in Haiti. In his 1920 article, Seligmann exposed that U.S. Marines had killed thousands of Haitian citizens. "The prevailing attitude of mind among the men sent to assist Haiti," he declared, "has been such determined contempt for men of dark skins that decency has been almost out of the question."¹² As such, Seligmann described the occupation as a commentary "upon the white civilization which still burns black men and women at the stake."¹³ Despite informing the American public that the official story of benevolence asserted by U.S. officials was incongruent with the behavior of American Marines, Seligmann's piece did not bring an end the occupation.

The debate over Haiti was not limited to journalists. African Americans, U.S. Marines and elected officials also politicized the occupation, albeit on different grounds. As Haiti became a focus of debates over race, citizenship, and self-governance, African Americans criticized the U.S. response and organized against the American invasion almost immediately. Shortly after the *Nation* issued Seligmann's exposé, James Weldon Johnson, the Acting Secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), published a series of articles under the title "Self determining Haiti" for the journal after completing an on-site investigation. Serving as the link between *The Nation* and *The Crisis*, Johnson published articles in both publications. African Americans believed that Haiti was a reflection on their community, and, given their shared African heritage, the consequences of the occupation would be immediate for

¹¹ Ridgeway, James. *The Haiti Files: Decoding the Crisis* (Washington, DC: Essential Books/Azul Editions, 1994), 11.

¹² Seligmann, Herbert J. "The Conquest of Haiti" *Nation* 111(1920):36.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 35.

African Americans. Haiti would advance the notion that all people of African descent lacked the capacity to govern themselves. Consequently, American policymakers would continue to prohibit African Americans from participating in the political progress in the United States. As American officials made decisions regarding the occupation, African Americans wanted to participate in the process. By claiming affinity for Haitians based on an understanding of a shared black identity, African Americans appointed themselves as representatives of the Haitian community. African Americans felt that they could make claims on Haiti's behalf. More importantly, they could encourage American policymakers to respect and protect the rights of both Haitians and African Americans. Thus, during this period, African Americans would consistently push for the withdrawal of American forces. Differing in their opinion from American journalists supporting the occupation, they also considered the U.S. intervention as an attack on Haiti's sovereignty; this is its ability to exercise its authority freely within its borders independent of American influence.

After, gaining national attention, Seligmann's exposé resulted in several investigations. Firstly, the naval court of inquiry appointed by Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels in the fall of 1920 investigated and recorded the conduct of United States Marines in Haiti. Subsequently, the U.S. Senate held hearings before a Select Committee on the American occupation in the closing months of 1921 and extending into 1922. Several years later, in 1929, Raymond Leslie Buell and the Foreign Policy Association also issued their findings. Then, in 1930, William Cameron Forbes led a commission, which surveyed the political crisis in Haiti. The occurrences in Haiti sparked debates, published reports, newspapers and Congressional records, all of which recorded the public conversations in the U.S. concerning the state of Haitian affairs. These documents figure prominently in this thesis.

This analysis also considers key periodicals tackling the issues surrounding Haiti. In stark contrast to the conventional storyline about the American occupation, articles written in *The Crisis* were critical of the U.S. presence in Haiti. Edited by W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Crisis* was widely read within African American communities. First published by the NAACP in November of 1910, *The Crisis* sold about 100,000 copies by 1918. Accordingly, this study uses *The Crisis* to stand for the opinions of African Americans. In this inaugural issue, Du Bois revealed that the mission of the magazine was to “record important happenings and movements in the world which bear on the great problem of inter-racial relations and especially those which affect the Negro-American.” The editorial page, he continued would “stand for the rights of men, irrespective of color or race; for the highest ideals of American democracy; and for reasonable but earnest and persistent attempt to gain these rights and realize these ideals.”¹⁴ Defending Haiti against the American intervention African American leaders and intellectuals seized the occupation as an opportunity to pursue the goals of equality within an expanded democracy as articulated in *The Crisis*.

While *The Crisis* circulated editorials addressing the American occupation almost immediately, reports published in *The Nation* helped the conditions in Haiti secure national attention. Founded in 1865 by writer E.L. Godkin, *The Nation* was one of the oldest anti-imperialist weekly publications in the United States. Beginning with a readership of 5,000, the circulation of *The Nation* had increased considerably by the 1920s. The editors at *The Nation* succeeded in making the periodical “the monitor and the mouth piece of intellectual America.” The publication centered primarily on “the maintenance and diffusion of true democratic principles in society and government.”¹⁵ Serving as the managing editor of *The Nation* from

¹⁴ Lee, Henry Moon., “History of The Crisis,” *The Crisis*, Nov 1970, 322.

¹⁵ Villard, Oswald Garrison. “The 'Nation' and Its Ownership.” *Nation* 101, no. 2610 (July 8, 1915): 53.

1920 to 1923, Ernest Gruening revealed in his testimony before the Senate: “My interest began and lay in the fact that from what I had learned through certain news items and through very occasional bits of information what the United States had done in Haiti was contrary to its most fundamental traditions.”¹⁶ The United States was, according to Gruening, “in violation of the principles we had always espoused; that it was in direct contradiction to the principles for which we engaged in the World War.”¹⁷ Determined to expose these direct contradictions, under his leadership *The Nation* published numerous articles concerning the American occupation of Haiti. Given that *The Nation* was the first publication to “break” the story and challenge the dominant discourse about the U.S. presence in Haiti, it serves as a chief source for this research.¹⁸

With this range of evidence, this thesis seeks to answer a central question about the American response to Haiti’s crisis: How and why did journalists, editorialists, U.S. military leaders, national politicians and African Americans become involved in the larger conversation surrounding Haiti? More importantly, what was the significance of this response in terms of the politics of race, citizenship, and self-governance? Several secondary questions also guide this study: What did these various investigations uncover about the claims made by these divergent characters and how did Haiti figure into their arguments? To what extent did these diverse groups successfully use Haiti to accomplish their conflicting aims? Finally, why did Haiti emerge as a place where arguments over race, citizenship, and self-governance converge? Through an evaluation of these different journalistic accounts and investigations, this study hopes to make clear how and why Haiti’s internal crisis became the subject of such intense debate in the United States.

¹⁶ Inquiry into Occupation and Administration of Haiti and Santo Domingo. Volume 2, 1199.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Gruening, Ernest. *Many Battles; the Autobiography of Ernest Gruening* (New York: Liveright, 1973), 88.

Using race as an instrument of historical analysis this thesis hopes to provide a nuanced interpretation and move beyond the previous strategic interpretations of occupied Haiti. Issues regarding race provoked people into action and inspired dialogue in United States and Haiti. As such, race still serves as a useful analytical tool. In order to understand historical occurrences, it is first imperative to recognize how people viewed themselves. In her article, “Slavery, race, and ideology in the United States of America,” historian Barbara Jeanne Fields notes: “If race lives on today, it does not live on because we have inherited it from our forebears of the seventeenth century or nineteenth, but because we continue to create it today.”¹⁹ Through an evaluation of the sources, it is clear that African Americans and Haitians alike understood themselves in terms of racial categories. The term Haitian nationalist describes both blacks and mulattos who advocated Haitian self-determination.

The discussions over occupied Haiti occurred among national politicians, U.S. military leaders, journalists, editorialists, African Americans and Haitians for very different reasons. As a presidential candidate on the Republican ticket, Warren G. Harding attacked the policies of Wilson’s administration and defended Haitians against the American occupation hoping to gain the support of African American voters. In spite of this political posturing, Harding did little to change American policies towards Haiti as president. U.S. military leaders, for their part, sought to defend Wilson’s foreign policies. Journalists, on the other hand, used Haiti to note American benevolence or, in the case of *The Crisis* and *The Nation*, to defend Haitians against the occupation. For African Americans, protesting the occupation was instrumental to the claims they wanted to make about race, citizenship, and self-governance at home. During this period, African Americans redefined and expanded their notions of citizenship. As historian Penny Von

¹⁹ Barbara Jeanne Fields. Slavery, race, and ideology in the United States of America, *New Left Review* (1990), 118.

Eschen points out, “for African Americans the litmus test for democracy acquired a global reach, including freedom for colonized people along with full citizenship for black Americans.”²⁰ Employing Haiti to accomplish objectives that were incompatible, these separate groups varied in their successful use of Haiti.

This study is historically significant because it assesses the manner in which various actors politicized the Caribbean republic and considers the larger implications of this response for the African American community in terms of the debates over race, citizenship, and self-governance. Additionally it details why African Americans were motivated to defend Haiti against the American occupation. While laboring to protect their citizenship in the United States, international affairs became the chief concern of the Wilson administration and the American public. Attention to the African American fight against Jim Crow laws in the United States subsided as discussions over international war took precedence. As African Americans reflected on their experiences in the United States, their encounter with racism created an opportunity for them to unite with Haitians. With global dealings gaining primacy over domestic matters, the U.S. occupation of Haiti represented a way for blacks in the United States to reengage the debate and make claims about citizenship that would benefit both communities. Sociologist Evelyn Nakano Glenn argues: “At its most general level, citizenship refers to full membership in the community in which one lives.”²¹ Experiencing limited membership in American society, African Americans simultaneously fought for full citizenship rights at home and found a common cause with other communities seeking to throw off colonial rule.

²⁰ Von Eschen, Penny M. *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 30.

²¹ Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002),19.

For African Americans, defending Haitians against the occupation was simultaneously a battle for their own citizenship rights within the United States. When considering how the United States responded to Haiti's moment of crisis and the subsequent response by various actors it is important, as Robin D. G. Kelly and Tiffany Ruby Patterson argue, to “think transnationally,’ to move beyond the limits of the nation-state, to think in terms of borderlands and diasporas.”²² Increasingly, African Americans turned to Haiti to help them reformulate black identity and as historian Patrick D. Bellegarde-Smith argues: “The contributions of Haiti and Haitians to the development of a worldwide black awareness and that country's tribulations have been neglected by most present day scholars.”²³ While documenting the development of a worldwide black awareness is beyond the scope of this investigation, this study hopes to add to the current scholarship by addressing the discussion that emerges among various actors about citizenship and the capacity for blacks to govern themselves.

Historians Henry Lewis Suggs and John W. Blassingame have both studied how U.S. periodicals responded to the American occupation of Haiti. In his article, “The Response of the African American Press to the United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934” Suggs centers his study on how black journals in the United States reacted to U.S. invasion of Haiti arguing: “Between 1915 and 1922 the African American press made the withdraw of U.S. forces from Haiti a *cause célèbre*.”²⁴ Lacking an effective strategy the African American press ultimately had limited success in their attempt to get the United States to withdraw its forces from Haiti.²⁵ Still, Suggs insists that African American journalists defined the issues and were able to keep matters

²² Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin D. G. Kelley. "Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World." *African Studies Review* 43, no. 1, Special Issue on the Diaspora (Apr., 2000): 12.

²³ Bellegarde-Smith, Patrick D. “Dantes Bellegarde and Pan-Africanism.” *Phylon (1960-)* 42, no. 3 (3rd Qtr., 1981):233.

²⁴ Suggs, Henry Lewis. “The Response of the African American Press to the United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934.” *The Journal of African American History* 87, no. The Past before Us (Winter, 2002): 74.

²⁵ *Ibid*.

surrounding the occupation of Haiti within the public's view.²⁶ Addressing the mainstream media in his 1969 article "The Press and American Intervention in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, 1904-1920," Blassingame maintains: "Diplomatic historians have generally ignored the press in their studies of the United States' relations with Haiti and Dominican Republic."²⁷ He reasons that editorial support for intervention in Haiti was prevalent from 1904 until 1919.²⁸ This study differs from Blassingame's by both addressing the first six years addressed in his examination and extending fourteen years until the end of the American occupation. By extending to the closing stages of the occupation, this study details how and why editorial support for intervention changed and the role of *The Crisis* and *The Nation* in facilitating this transformation.

Differing from both Suggs' and Blassingame's analyses, which illustrate how the American press responded collectively to the occupation, this study centers primarily on the two leading periodicals covering the U.S. invasion, *The Crisis* and *The Nation*. A side-by-side examination of *The Crisis* and *The Nation* is crucial because these two journals differed from other periodicals published during this period. *The Nation* was one of the foremost papers commenting on American imperialism. Publishing articles addressing the preservation of democratic principles, *The Nation* also documented the disenfranchisement of the African American community. "Whatever else may be said of *The Nation*," editor Oswald Garrison Villard declared, "no one can deny that it has never lost its interest in this still vital problem, or failed to devote much space to the championship of the least understood and the worst treated of

²⁶ Ibid., 79.

²⁷ Blassingame, John W. "The Press and American Intervention in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, 1904-1920." *Caribbean Studies* 9, no. 2 (Jul. 1969): 27.

²⁸ Ibid, 29.

our fellow-citizens.”²⁹ Committed to bringing attention to U.S. activity in Haiti to the American public, editors of *The Nation* consistently published articles on the occupation. These articles revealed that the Marines’ endeavors in Haiti were not as benign as American policymakers professed. Even as other African American journals worked to defend Haiti against the U.S. occupation, *The Crisis* differed in its approach. Speaking on the mission of *The Crisis* Du Bois explained: “We are trying something which had not often been done.” Recognizing the uniqueness of his vision, his charge was to “spread propaganda over a wide space where there is no territorial unity.” He continued: “We are trying to bring together people who have never seen each other, but simply have racial discrimination as a point of contact.”³⁰ Instead of focusing on journals that supported the occupation, this analysis calls attentions to periodicals that were at odds with mainstream American media. *The Nation* and *The Crisis* represented two very distinct voices in the debate over the American occupation. Articles published in these two journals help to illustrate that Haiti represented a place where arguments against American imperialism and for African American citizenship converged. Given the distinctive nature of the commentary published by these papers, they are central to this analysis.

Scholars studying the American occupation of Haiti have been preoccupied with very different matters. Whereas Henry Lewis Suggs and John W. Blassingame focus their studies on the reaction of the American press to occupied Haiti, historian Brenda Gayle Plummer concentrates on the black American reaction to Haiti, an area overlooked by Haiti scholars.³¹ Documenting the part they played in challenging the occupation, her 1982 article, “The Afro - American Response to the Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934,” maintains that the black American

²⁹ Villard, 53.

³⁰ Quoted in Sullivan, Patricia. *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New Press, 2009), 22.

³¹ Brenda Gayle Plummer. “The Afro - American Response to the Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934,” *Phylon* 43, no. 2 (1982): 125.

reaction to occupied Haiti was not limited to well-known race leaders. Acting in response to the racial discrimination believed to be taking place in Haiti, ordinary black Americans, Plummer remarks, “wrote letters to the State Department, to the black press, and to the President of the United States; they attempted to use their leverage as Republican voters; and they agitated for participation in policymaking that affected Haiti.”³² Beyond investigating how African American reacted to the American occupation, this thesis focuses more on *why* African Americans responded the way they did and the larger significance of this response to their community. According to Plummer, black Americans’ sentiment toward Haiti varied between expectation, pride, and missionary zeal, and embarrassment, despair, and irritation from the nineteenth century until the early years of the occupation.³³ Commenting on race, she argues: “Once black Americans stopped accepting racist views of themselves, however, they were increasingly able to break free of the apologetics that had shaped their outlook on Haiti.”³⁴ Differing from Plummer in this regard, this study maintains that ongoing ambivalence ultimately informed how African Americans worked to counter the American occupation. Although African Americans protested the occupation, they also sought to uplift Haiti so that it would better reflect on their community. Uplift ideology as defined by historian Kevin Gaines, “represented the struggle for a positive black identity in a deeply racist society, turning the pejorative designation of race into a source of dignity and self-affirmation through an ideology of class differentiation, self-help, and interdependence.”³⁵ This study builds on Plummer’s assessment by attending closely to the tensions in African American views of Haiti.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 127.

³⁴ Ibid., 128.

³⁵ Gaines, Kevin Kelly. *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 3.

In 1971, historian Hans Schmidt published the most comprehensive study of the occupation. His book, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*, focused on U.S. foreign policies towards Haiti and the tactical and strategic aspects of the occupation. Schmidt argues: “The occupation of Haiti was both a logical extension of America’s quest for empire and a clear example of many of the contradictions involved in that quest for empire.”³⁶ Intervening in Haiti to protect its strategic interest, U.S. policymakers found it hard to exit Haiti without accomplishing its self-imposed commitments. Lacking respect for Haitian sovereignty, Schmidt maintains, “Americans, as representative of an advance[d], modern, industrialized nation, felt they could transform backward, underdeveloped Haiti with American technology and practical ingenuity.”³⁷ The changes imposed by American officials only spurred a sense of resentment among Haitians. Centering on concepts of pragmatism and technical efficiency, American policymakers applied the American success formula to Haiti while violating the rights of individual citizens. According to Schmidt, “[t]he invasion of foreign territories and subjugation of alien peoples contradicted basic American doctrines of democracy and individual liberty.”³⁸ Even as Schmidt notes the conflicting aims of the occupation, he does not document how African Americans responded to the policies implemented in Haiti and the consequences for their community in terms of race, citizenship and sovereignty. Like American officials, this thesis argues African Americans also hoped to raise Haitians out of their poverty. Nevertheless, these two groups differed in their motives. Schmidt’s discussion of race centers primarily on the tensions that surfaced between Haitians and Marines because of the occupation. “Racism and awareness of black racial origins” the author notes, “had been important factors in Haitian social intellectual and political life for the American intervention.” He argues that Haitians insisted on

³⁶Schmidt, 17.

³⁷ Ibid., 154-155.

³⁸ Ibid., 17.

emulating French styles and mannerisms even as they demonstrated a strong sense of pride in Haitian independence.³⁹ During the early years of the occupation, interactions along racial lines were very fluid. However, Americans instituted Jim Crow racial segregation following the arrival of white women in Haiti. With the proliferation of scientific literature asserting the innate inferiority of blacks, the racial attitudes of U.S. Marines reflected popular American opinion.

Published in 1977, *Congressional and Public Reaction to Wilson's Caribbean Policy, 1913-1917* by historian Purvis M. Carter researched “how senators and representatives, while in contemporary congressional session, and the public through public opinion organs, reacted to the Wilson’s Caribbean policy.”⁴⁰ Concentrating on Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua and the Danish West Indies, Carter focused on the period between the start of Wilson’s administration in 1913 to the entrance of the United States into World War I in 1917. Carter found that: “The tone of American press, emphasizing the disorder that prevailed in Haiti, no doubt facilitated public acceptance of the intervention and the protectorate on the ground of humanitarian duty.”⁴¹ Carter focused largely on journals that supported Wilson’s policies. As a result, articles from *The Crisis*, a major periodical documenting the reactions of the African American opinion, are absent from his analysis.

On September 16, 1915 Haitian foreign minister Louis Borno, Haitian president Sudre Philippe Dartiguenave and Robert Beale Davis, a representative of the United States signed The Haitian American Treaty in Port-au-Prince. This agreement made Haiti a protectorate of the United States. In his chapter assessing the Congressional response to Wilson’s policies, Carter concluded that the treaty received little deliberation in both the House of Representatives and the

³⁹ Ibid., 136.

⁴⁰ Carter, Purvis M. *Congressional and Public Reaction to Wilson's Caribbean Policy, 1913-1917* (New York: Vantage Press, 1977), 1.

⁴¹ Ibid., 11.

Senate.⁴² The H.R.12835 bill, which provided for the organization and the management of the Haitian constabulary, received more attention on the part of Congressional officials. House debates discussing this bill focused primarily on the financial aspects of the proposed provisions but approved of the Wilson's administration policies overall. Similarly, Carter notes: "The reaction of the Senate to the measures relative to the administration's Haitian policy indicate, beyond a doubt, that it approved that policy."⁴³ Since Congressional reaction to The Haitian American Treaty was initially absent and Congressional officials approved policies proposed by Wilson, it is also important to consider how and why this changed. Wilson's time in office ended in 1921 and Carter's study ends in 1917, before politicians began seriously questioning American policies towards Haiti. For instance, Carter maintains: "Considering some of his public statements, the Haitians might have concluded that the new administration of President Woodrow Wilson did not pose a threat to their nation's sovereignty."⁴⁴ Since his analysis ends in 1917, Carter neglects to indicate how issues of sovereignty become central to debates over Wilson's policy toward Haiti. Lastly, the author does not assess the significance of public and Congressional reactions in terms questions of race and citizenship.

Discussing the American intervention of Haiti in her book, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940*, historian Mary Renda described it as a coordinated attempt to transform Haiti.⁴⁵ "At first glance," she writes, "it appears that the occupation had an obvious and far reaching impact on Haiti, but little discernible effect on the United States."⁴⁶ While the impact of the American occupation on Haitian society was evident,

⁴² Ibid., 35.

⁴³ Ibid., 37.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 30.

⁴⁵ Renda, Mary A. *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 12.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 11.

Renda argues that its influence on American culture was equally significant.⁴⁷ Centering her study primarily on the Marines who implemented U.S. policy, Renda documents the cultural significance of the American invasion on both Haiti and the United States.⁴⁸ Using gender as her lens of analysis, the author examines the role of Marines in Haiti. She poses this question: “How, then did the occupation position U.S. American men in Haiti, and how did they in turn, negotiate their relationship to the nation they were sent to occupy?”⁴⁹ In Renda’s view, historians have failed to notice the complexities of paternalism. Instead they have positioned it as “an obvious good, a mitigating factor, or transparent veneer to be ‘seen through.’” Consequently, scholars have overlooked an important element of U.S. foreign policy. Paternalism, as Renda defines it, “was an assertion of authority, superiority, and control expressed in the metaphor of a father’s relationship with his children. It was a form of domination, a relation of power, masked as benevolent by its reference to paternal care and guidance, but structured equally by norms of paternal authority and discipline.”⁵⁰ By positioning their work under the guise of paternalism, American policymakers influenced how others comprehended the American undertaking in Haiti.⁵¹ As Renda argues, American officials conceived and carried out U.S imperialism in Haiti within this cultural and ideological framework.⁵² Taking shape in both Haiti and the United States, the author notes that for American Marines, paternalism helped shape their understanding of the occupation. This rhetoric, in turn, served as the foremost cultural instrument used to draft American men into executing the American mission in Haiti.⁵³

⁴⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 12.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 12-13.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 15.

⁵¹ Ibid., 21.

⁵² Ibid., 303.

⁵³ Ibid.,13.

Principally concerned with understanding occupied Haiti as an event in the cultural history of the United States, Renda relied heavily on Marine narratives. “When we begin to look at who went to Haiti, how they interacted with Haitians, and how they wrote and talked about what they saw and heard,” she argues, “a new picture of the occupation, and of American culture comes to view.”⁵⁴ The Marines serving in Haiti represented a diverse group of “white” Americans from various regional, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. An American Marine serving in Haiti would confront, according to Renda, “his whiteness and his Americanness in some new ways when he encountered Haiti.” During the U.S. occupation, the Marines Corps served as a way of Americanizing men from immigrant backgrounds and as a result, leading the author to consider the occupation as a pivotal period that shaped American identity. Citizenship for Southern white men in the Marine Corps was racialized and consequently being American and being white was intertwined.⁵⁵ While this thesis focuses primarily on the contested citizenship of African Americans, the author argues that white American identity was also fragile during this period. By claiming American citizenship, and respect for Haitian sovereignty African Americans endangered this racial caste.

Renda considered next “the precise nature of U.S. paternalism towards Haiti.”⁵⁶ To do this, she examines letters from Major Smedley and the policies of Woodrow Wilson. Paternalism, in Renda’s view was critical to accomplish the political objectives of the occupation. Subsequently, using the writings of James Weldon Johnson and Eugene O’Neil, Renda examines commodification of Haitian culture by Americans. Although Johnson worked to counter negative images of Haiti, his writing inadvertently contributed to the American

⁵⁴Ibid., 12.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 54.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 35.

fascination with the island's exoticism⁵⁷ U.S. attraction to Haiti was evident by the popularity of *The Emperor Jones*, a play centering on a black criminal becomes emperor of a West Indian island. Critiquing American imperialism, the play resonated with Americans who were concerned with the pace of American advancement. Like Renda, this study notes that Haitian history became important for the African American community. Differing from her assessment, this thesis argues that although there were some aspects of Haitian history which African Americans could draw on to help them formulate a positive black identity, they hoped to reformulate Haitian identity into something that was acceptable to their white American counterparts. Beyond issues of racial identity, this study also addresses the public debate over blacks' capacity for self-governance that ensued because of the American occupation. Through her analysis of the U.S. invasion of Haiti, Renda positions the occupation within the larger narrative of American history.

The first chapter of this thesis explores the connections between the African American community and Haiti. It focuses on African American understandings of diasporic citizenship and the role of the U.S. occupation in strengthening the link between the Haitian and African community. Dispersed outside of Africa, African Americans as diasporic citizens remained invested in issues affecting the Haitian community. In 1998, social anthropologist Michel S. Laguerre coined the term "diasporic citizenship." Defining the concept of "diasporic citizenship," Laguerre maintained that it "adds the transnational aspect to the classic definition of citizenship."⁵⁸ "We conceive of diasporic citizenship," he wrote, "as the situation of the individual who lives outside the boundaries of the nation-state to which he or she had formerly held primary allegiance and who experiences through transnational migration (or the redesigning

⁵⁷ Ibid., 196.

⁵⁸ Laguerre, Michel S. *Diasporic citizenship: Haitian Americans in transnational America* (New York: St. Martin's Press. 1998), 12.

of the homeland boundaries) the subjective reality of belonging to two or more nation states.”⁵⁹ The American occupation represented the moment in which African Americans crystallized the notion of being diasporic citizens. Although African Americans embraced the idea of being diasporic citizens, they were still proponents of racial uplift revealing the shortcomings of this ideology. While they did not physically reside in Haiti, African Americans would make their defense of Haiti a part of their political strategy. Their activism illustrated that moving across boundaries was not required to be invested in more than one national community. Given that African Americans viewed the results of Haiti's crisis as a sign of their own political outlook, this chapter explores this concept. *The Crisis* documented the thoughts of African Americans on this topic.

The chapter that follows centers on arguments occurring among U.S. military leaders, politicians, and journalists over the occupation. Contextualizing the conflicts over Haiti within broader U.S. developments, this chapter begins by first addressing Wilson's presidential election and its role intensifying the debates over citizenship and sovereignty among African Americans. It also explains how and why various political actors become involved in the conversation over Haiti. Even as Americans slowly shifted their opinions in regards to U.S. Haitian relations, President Wilson continued to defend the occupation. In contrast, vying for African American votes, then candidate Warren G. Harding successfully transformed the American occupation into a campaign issue. Picking up an endorsement from NAACP secretary, James Weldon Johnson, Harding raised questions surrounding the issues in Haiti. Participating on the Select Committee on the American occupation, Harding also helped widen the discussion occurring within the African American community concerning Haiti and the ability of blacks to govern themselves and possess full citizenship. Using *The Nation* along with various investigations conducted

⁵⁹ Ibid., 12-13.

during this period, this chapter details this conversation while emphasizing the ways that race played into the debate.

The third chapter investigates the massacre at Aux Cayes and President Herbert Hoover's subsequent response. In his message to Congress on December 3, 1929, President Hoover declared: "If Congress approves, I shall dispatch a commission to Haiti to receive and study the matter in an endeavor to arrive at some more definite policy than at present."⁶⁰ Three days after Hoover made this announcement, American Marines engaged in a violent confrontation in the southwestern town of Aux Cayes, which resulted in several deaths. Widespread criticism from the international community forced President Hoover to take action. With the support of Congress, the President commissioned the Study and Review of Condition in the Republic of Haiti that following February. "The primary question which is to be investigated," Hoover charged, "is when and how we are to withdraw from Haiti."⁶¹ In spite of the Hoover's efforts, the massacre at Aux Cayes gained international attention. Accordingly, this section focuses on how President Herbert Hoover along with other pertinent actors navigated the political climate in the United States as well as the crisis at Aux Cayes. While President Franklin D. Roosevelt would eventually withdraw American Marines from Haiti on August 15, 1934, the effects of the intervention remained visible in Haitian society. In light of this, this study ends by reflecting on the consequences of the American intervention for both the African American and Haitian community, and some reflections on the current crisis in Haiti.

THE CRISIS AND THE DEFENSE OF HAITI

Issues surrounding Haiti were of particular interest to African American leaders because of the implications of the occupation for their community. Noting the sense of kinship that

⁶⁰ Buell, Raymond Leslie. *The American Occupation of Haiti* (New York, N.Y.: Foreign Policy Association, 1929), 392.

⁶¹ "The Haiti Commission's Report." *Nation* 130, no. 3379 (1930): 433.

existed between the Haitian people and the African American population, one writer for *The Crisis* stated in 1915: “The Negro citizens of the United States are much concerned in the solution of the Haytian question, inasmuch as Hayti is a Negro republic.”⁶² This sentiment stretched back more than one hundred years. Following the Haitian Revolution, Haiti emerged as a symbol of liberty for people of African descent. White slaveholders viewed the events in Haiti with apprehension. Historian David Brion Davis argues: “Its meaning could be rationalized or repressed but never really forgotten, since it demonstrated the possible fate of every slaveholding society in the New World.”⁶³ This was especially true in the North American republic where Thomas Jefferson declared: “The West Indies appears to have given considerable impulse to the minds of the slaves...in the United States.”⁶⁴ This impulse would prevent the United States from extending diplomatic recognition to the “black republic” until America’s Civil War in 1862.⁶⁵ “Haiti had fought France, England and Spain, but” as James Weldon Johnson noted, “the United States was the last of all the strong nations to recognize her independence, when, indeed, she should have been the first.”⁶⁶ Even with the efforts made by officials to isolate the island, historian Tim Matthewson maintains: “Haiti lingered in American consciousness,” throughout the early 1800s.⁶⁷

From a contrasting perspective, African Americans explored the meaning of Haitian independence and its implications for their citizenship long before the start of the American

⁶² “Hayti,” *The Crisis*, October 1915, 281.

⁶³ Geggus, David Patrick. *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina, 2001), 4.

⁶⁴ Jefferson, Thomas, and Paul Leicester Ford. *The Works of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), 383.

⁶⁵ Plummer, Brenda. *Haiti and the United States: The Psychological Moment* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 76.

⁶⁶ Johnson, James Weldon, and Sondra K. Wilson. *The Selected Writings of James Weldon Johnson Volume II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 245.

⁶⁷ Matthewson, Tim. *A Proslavery Foreign Policy: Haitian-American Relations During the Early Republic* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003), viii.

occupation. In 1829, David Walker gained national attention by encouraging slaves to rise up and take their freedom by force if necessary.⁶⁸ In his *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, Walker urged the “American slaves to actively emulate and promote black Jacobinism in order to bring about their own freedom and equality as the rebels of Saint-Domingue had done.”⁶⁹ Haitians, Walker contended, demonstrated that “a groveling, servile and abject submission to the lash of tyrants” was not the African man’s natural state.”⁷⁰ As Walker illustrated in his *Appeal*, African Americans wanted to represent themselves in contrast to white stereotypes of them. The legacy of the Haitian Revolution represented a black tradition of self-ownership, citizenship and sovereignty which differed from white stereotypes that insisted on the naturalness of black servility. As such, historian Alfred Hunt argues: “American blacks constantly cited the Haitian republic as an indication of the potentialities of black people. Haiti became a primary symbol for those blacks who were striving to counter the argument that free blacks were incapable of sustaining civilization outside the confines of slavery.”⁷¹ Indeed, colonization societies in the United States even considered Haiti as place where African Americans could emigrate and seek citizenship.

Haitian leaders, for their part, made it possible for people of African descent to acquire Haitian citizenship after residing in the country for just 12 months. During the 1820s, Haitian President Jean-Pierre Boyer made travel stipends available to African Americans hoping to relocate to Haiti.⁷² By the first quarter of the nineteenth century an estimated 6,000 African

⁶⁸ Quoted in Hine, Darlene Clark, and Earnestine Jenkins, *A Question of Manhood: A Reader in U.S. Black Men's History and Masculinity*. Blacks in the Diaspora (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 384.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Coupeau, Steeve. *The History of Haiti* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2008), 54.

⁷⁰ Hine and Jenkins, 385.

⁷¹ Hunt, Alfred N. *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 3.

⁷² Coupeau, 53.

Americans had moved to Haiti accepting the “standing offer of Haitian citizenship.”⁷³ Under the leadership of Episcopal minister James T. Holly, emigration to Haiti reached its pinnacle in the late 1850s following the *Dred Scott* decision in 1857.⁷⁴ In the *Dred Scott v. Stanford* case, the Supreme Court ruled that slaves and their descendants were ineligible for the rights of citizenship or any of its privileges. With their citizenship rights denied, African Americans began to debate the future of their community in the United States. In the case of Frederick Douglass, scholar Robert S. Levine notes, “[i]n the wake of the *Dred Scott* decision, Douglass clearly was inspired by the revolutionary black republic of Haiti. Here was a black nationality in the Americas[?] Douglass argue[d] in the 1850s and early 1860s, that African Americans could take pride in and perhaps even consider [it] as an alternative to U.S. nationality.”⁷⁵

In search of citizenship rights, African Americans remained consistent in their emigration to Haiti throughout the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, while initial reports from African Americans who had arrived in Haiti were favorable, James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton remark: “Many American blacks arrived in Haiti as urban poor people, and, despite their common racial heritage, they found Haitians an unfamiliar people.” The difficulties facing African American émigrés demonstrated how much African Americans had assimilated into American society.⁷⁶ With the limited success of African American emigration to Haiti, Pan-Africanism emerged during the start of the twentieth century as alternative vision that allowed blacks in the United States and in the Caribbean to oppose American and European

⁷³ Coupeau, 55 and Meehan, 12.

⁷⁴ Meehan, Kevin. *People Get Ready: African American and Caribbean Cultural Exchange* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009),12.

⁷⁵ Levine, Robert S. *Dislocating Race & Nation: Episodes in Nineteenth-Century American Literary Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 217.

⁷⁶ Horton, James Oliver, and Lois E. Horton. *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997),194.

imperialism.⁷⁷ Pan-Africanists, according to historian Penny M. Von Eschen, worked to establish “intellectually a bond between Africans and persons of African descent in the diaspora, and to demonstrate the importance of Pan-African unity for building an emancipatory movement.” As the founder of the Pan-African Congress movement, Du Bois would use his position as editor of *The Crisis* to detail the challenges facing the people of African descent in international terms.⁷⁸

Social anthropologist Michel S. Laguerre defined diasporic citizenship as a transnational form of citizenship, an identity that extended beyond national borders. Belonging to two or more nation states, diasporic citizens lived outside the borders of a nation-state which they previously held allegiance. Migrating to Haiti in large numbers during the nineteenth century, African Americans claimed an affinity for Haitian based on the shared African heritage. Even though African Americans did not physically reside in Haiti, they remained invested in the Caribbean nation and hoped to claim a political voice in American foreign policy towards Haiti. By analyzing articles published in *The Crisis*, this chapter intends to explain how and why African Americans advocated for the restoration of Haitian sovereignty. It also examines the role of the American occupation in crystallizing understandings of diasporic citizenship among African Americans while also revealing the limits of such understandings.

After the 1912 presidential election, debates over blacks’ capacity for full citizenship and self-governance escalated. Searching for a candidate who would address issues important to their communities, some African Americans leaders rallied behind Southerner Woodrow Wilson. As a presidential candidate on the Democratic ticket, Wilson had presented American voters with an

⁷⁷ Mitchell, Michele. *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004),70.

⁷⁸ Von Eschen, Penny M. *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 9.

alternative vision for America attractive to the African American constituency, which Wilson called The New Freedom. This philosophy, according to historian Nicholas Patler, characterized the United States as a place “where no man is supposed to be under any limitation except the limitations of his character and of his mind; where there is supposed to be no distinction of class, no distinction of blood, no distinction of social status but where men win or lose on their merits.”⁷⁹ For W.E. B. Du Bois, Wilson’s candidacy would serve as an indication as to whether or not the Democratic party would act in accordance to their political rhetoric. From his perspective, the time had come, as historian Patricia Sullivan notes, “to put such pronouncements to the test and see if the Democratic Party ‘dares to be Democratic when it comes to black men.’”⁸⁰ This shift in the African American electorate helped to bring about the first decisive victory for the Democratic Party in fifty years. Wilson’s success also represented the rise of Southern Democrats to the White House.

Receiving an estimated 20 to 30 percent of the African American vote, Wilson nevertheless did little to stop the solidification of Jim Crow practices and in fact extended segregation in the federal government.⁸¹ Despite their part in getting Wilson elected, African Americans would soon discover that the new president would fail to express his gratitude towards black Democrats for their support during the election.⁸² In fact, during his presidency leaders in the executive branch of the U.S. government worked to strengthen Jim Crow rule in the federal sector.⁸³ Southern Democrats, for their part, worked to limit African American citizenship by proposing bills that would ban interracial marriages, prohibit blacks from serving

⁷⁹ Patler, Nicholas. *Jim Crow and the Wilson Administration: Protesting Federal Segregation in the Early Twentieth Century* (Boulder, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 2004), 30.

⁸⁰ Sullivan, Patricia. *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New Press, 2009), 26.

⁸¹ Patler, 3.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 12.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 2.

in the army or navy, legalize segregated transportation and limit the immigration of people of African descent among other things.⁸⁴ The African Americans' leadership felt both betrayed and embarrassed by Wilson's apathy toward issues central to their experience.⁸⁵ At the same time, the president's unwillingness to take a forceful stance on pertinent topics energized African Americans to organize. From the outset, the still-young NAACP had focused their energy on combating segregation. Working to secure political and civil rights for blacks living in the United States, the NAACP increased its membership to over 100,000 by the end of Wilson's second term.⁸⁶

Seeing as President Wilson did little to combat growing racial prejudice in the government sector, African Americans searched for alternative strategies for securing their citizenship rights. They viewed America's entrance into World War I in 1917 as opportunity, historian David Kennedy explains, "to earn white regard and advance the standing of the race by valiant wartime service."⁸⁷ Although African Americans were hopeful that the war would have a positive effect on their community, this proved not to be the case. With the military draft giving rise to a shortage of workers in the North, World War I created an opportunity for African Americans to break into the industrial labor markets in that part of country. As Northern labor agents recruited workers across the black belt, a third of a million blacks migrated out of the Old South into thriving industrial centers like St. Louis, Chicago, Cleveland and Detroit. This period, referred to as The Great Migration, represented a large demographic shift of the African American population.⁸⁸ Resulting in anti-black riots, the migration of blacks to northern cities

⁸⁴ Sullivan, 31.

⁸⁵ Patler, 3.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 59.

⁸⁷ Kennedy, David M. *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 29.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 280-283.

during the war did little to advance race relations. Instead, as historian Jacqueline Jones argues, it “told a grime tale of white backlash.”⁸⁹ As the war progressed, Kennedy reveals similarly, “lynching parties took 38 black lives in 1917, some 58 in 1918, and more than 70 in 1919. Rioters, particularly in 1919, claimed the rest.” In all, an estimated two hundred African Americans died to due mob violence.⁹⁰

Previously optimistic about the capacity of the war to improve their standing in the United States, African Americans discovered that challenges to their citizenship rights had only intensified. Historian Beth Tompkins Bates observes: “Black soldiers who returned from fighting met massive resistance from white Americans, determined that black Americans would not assume an equal place with white citizens.” With lynching and race riots becoming commonplace along with the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan, African Americans grew more militant in their protest.⁹¹ Robert Bagnall, director of branches of the NAACP in the 1920s, commented on this shift by stating: “The old Negro had passed away—a new Negro is here. He is restless, discontented, eager, and ambitious.” African Americans attempted to take charge of their future. “This emerging militant attitude,” Patler explains, “manifested in several ways through diverse organizations, outlets, beliefs, activities, and methodologies.” Characterized by the development of black consciousness, this emerging militancy renewed the notion that African Americans could advance their cause by working with other people of color.⁹²

Multiple sources for the development of both black consciousness and identity emerged during this period. Marcus Garvey, for instance, founded the Universal Negro Improvement

⁸⁹ Jones, Jacqueline. *American Work: Four Centuries of Black and White Labor* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 303.

⁹⁰ Kennedy, 283.

⁹¹ Bates, Beth Tompkins. *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America, 1925-1945*. The John Hope Franklin series in African American history and culture (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 2.

⁹² Patler, 203.

Association (UNIA) in Jamaica in 1914, which promoted racial pride and black self-determination.⁹³ Advocating for racial consciousness in the United States, Garvey maintained: “Blacks living under Jim Crow had inadvertently achieved an awareness, togetherness, and racial identity because of white domination.”⁹⁴ Signaling a particularly important transnational turn in the development of that consciousness during this period, debates over the American occupation of Haiti was just one of many conversations occurring during this period addressing black racial consciousness. “Black racial consciousness,” historian Patricia Sullivan reasons, “was born from the daily fight and eternal vigilance against constant manifestations of racial prejudice.”⁹⁵ Attempting to spread race consciousness through *The Crisis*, Du Bois advanced this cause by encouraging African Americans to defend Haiti against American imperialism. As Paul Gilroy argues, “[t]he acquisition of roots became an urgent issue only when diaspora blacks sought to construct a political agenda in which the ideal of rootedness was identified as a prerequisite for the forms of cultural integrity that could guarantee the nationhood and statehood which they aspired.”⁹⁶ Seeking citizenship rights in the United States, Gilroy argues that African Americans realized that their experience of racism was not exclusive to their community. In order to acquire the citizenship rights they desired, African Americans believed that they had to create a political strategy which encompassed issues affecting all people of African descent. Previously, African Americans considered Haiti as a place where they could emigrate to and experience the entirety of their citizenship rights. With Haitian sovereignty at stake following the American occupation, African Americans began to view Haiti as place where blacks’ capacity

⁹³ Bates, 36.

⁹⁴ Rolinson, Mary G. *Grassroots Garveyism The Universal Negro Improvement Association in the Rural South, 1920 – 1927*(Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2007), 16.

⁹⁵ Sullivan, 37.

⁹⁶ Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993), 112.

for self-rule was being tested and where they could play a leading role in uplifting the race. As such, Haiti's internal crisis became a central part of the political agenda of African Americans who were battling for citizenship at home and linking their struggle to the occupation, the overthrow of colonialism in Africa and struggles for independence across the diaspora.

While African Americans reassessed the significance of Haiti for their citizenship, the connection between the two communities would become acutely evident in *The Crisis*. The citizenship rights of the Haitian people were threatened because Haiti's sovereignty was at stake. In order to protect Haitian citizenship rights, African Americans had to prevent American officials from seizing control over Haiti's government and its exploitation by U.S. financial interests. Immediately after the U.S. Marine Corps landed in Haiti, *The Crisis* circulated an editorial addressing the issue. In the September 1915 edition, an editorialist pleaded with readers to defend Haiti against American imperialism arguing: "Let us save Hayti. Hayti is a noble nation." Pointing to the Haitian Revolution as a reason why African Americans should come to Haiti's defense, the writer implored: "It is the nation that made slaves free. It is a nation that dared and dares to fight for freedom."⁹⁷ In Haiti, former slaves had succeeded in establishing "an independent constitutional nation of 'black' citizens."⁹⁸ "This is no time or place for us American Negroes who seldom have had the courage to fight" the author contended, "to point scornful fingers at our brothers." Searching for solutions to Haiti's crisis, African Americans renewed their ties to the Caribbean nation and reconsidered the country's meaning to their community. Offering a possible response to the incidents occurring on the island, the editorialist suggested: "The time calls for a Haytian Commission of white and colored men appointed by the President to co-operate with Hayti in establishing permanent peace and in assuring our stricken

⁹⁷ "Hayti," *The Crisis*, September 1915, 232.

⁹⁸ Buck-Morss, Susan. 2000. "Hegel and Haiti." *Critical Inquiry*. 26 (4): 821-865, 835.

sister that the United States respects and will always respect her political integrity.” By insisting on a “Haytian Commission [composed] of white and colored men,” the editorialist not only recognized the significance of African Americans actors in finding a resolution to the problems in Haiti, the author also imparted some responsibility as well.⁹⁹

Working to advance their own political agenda, African Americans defended Haiti against American imperialism as a means of securing citizenship rights for both communities in their respective states. Embracing this sense of responsibility, writers for *The Crisis* first analyzed the decision made by the Wilson administration to invade Haiti in 1915. In a letter to the Secretary of State published in *The Crisis* in November, Charles F. Dolf inquired: “May I venture earnestly to raise a question over the action of our government in Hayti, already unfortunately attended with bloodshed?” Criticizing the United States for failing to consider the will of Haitian people, Dolf expressed that he was surprised that a Democratic administration would choose to follow President Roosevelt’s “autocratic example, and seek to confirm another precedent of the same seriously questionable character.”¹⁰⁰ Likewise, editors for *The Crisis* considered Wilson’s claim of anarchy unsubstantiated and determined that the U.S. government had “no adequate excuse” for occupying Haiti.¹⁰¹ Even if the intentions of the Wilson administration were indeed benevolent, Dolf warned: “You know how easily ‘in the case of protectorates over uncivilized or half-civilized countries a development is inevitable: control quickly hardens into conquest.’ Does the United States meditate the conquest of Hayti?” Drawing parallels between conditions in the United States, Europe and Haiti, another writer explained: “The anarchy in Hayti is no worse than the anarchy in the United States at the time of

⁹⁹“Hayti,” *The Crisis*, September 1915, 232.

¹⁰⁰ Dolf, Charles F., “To the Secretary of State,” *The Crisis*, November 1915, 32.

¹⁰¹“Hayti,” *The Crisis*, October 1915, 291.

our Civil War, and not as great as the anarchy today in Europe.”¹⁰² Since the degree of lynching and murders, occurring in Port-au-Prince was comparable to some parts of the United States, the writer concluded: “Hayti can, and will, work out her destiny and is more civilized today than Texas.” The editorial condemned American leaders for their decision to shoot and disarm Haitian citizens, seize public funds, and enabling a monopoly over Haitian finances, declaring: “SHAME ON AMERICA!” Challenging the African American community, the editorialists for *The Crisis* inquired: “And what are we ten million Negroes going to do about it?” The opinion piece ended with a plea to readers, encouraging them to write President Wilson and ask for “a distinct, honest statement of our purposes in Hayti.”¹⁰³

Despite the unwillingness of the Wilson administration to render an accurate report of the state of affairs in Haiti, the NAACP was ready to facilitate this process and foster a relationship between the Haitian and African American community. When faced with questions regarding the occupation in 1915, leaders at the White House underscored their confidence in American action. Statements prepared by members of the Wilson administration promised “benevolent guardianship in Haiti with no intention to interfere with the political integrity of Haiti.” Nevertheless, American policymakers would later tell representatives of *The Crisis*: “In our reply to your request for a statement of our purpose in Haiti, the Department begs to inform you that it has refrained, for the time being, from making any statement regarding its policy in Haiti.”¹⁰⁴ Although American policymakers attempted to avoid addressing the occupation, editors for *The Crisis* sustained interest in Haitian affairs by reprinting articles from leading Haitian periodicals. Describing the American occupation, an article for the Port Au Prince paper newspaper *Le Nouvelliste* stated: “The American eagle is spreading its wings more and more upon our

¹⁰² Dolf, 32.

¹⁰³ “Hayti,” *The Crisis*, October 1915, 291.

¹⁰⁴ “Haiti,” *The Crisis*, December 1915, 80.

territory.” While advising Haitians that they had no reason for anxiety and maintaining that American Marines were re-establishing order and peace, the Wilson administration, the commentator held, was implementing a “plan long delayed” to establish a premature rescue of the island. Even as American officials attempted to placate opponents of the occupation, the writer reasoned: “But how can we lend an ear to such declarations when the American occupation... is not only an annexation, not even a protectorate, but rather a frank attempt at colonization, if we call things by their names, without ambiguity and without euphemisms.” The writer concluded: “The United States of America have for some time been introducing astonishing and strange innovation in international law.”¹⁰⁵ Though living outside of Haiti’s boundaries, African Americans remained invested in the nation that formerly extended citizenship rights to their community. By publishing articles from Haitian periodicals, *The Crisis* provided their readership with a different perspective on the occupation.

Whereas *The Crisis* largely viewed the defense of Haiti against the U.S. occupation as significant to African Americans’ political strategy, Booker T. Washington argued that African Americans did not need to turn to Haiti in their attempt to gain citizenship rights in the United States. Washington viewed the occupation as an opportunity for Americans to demonstrate their advancements in race relations. But he worried that the widespread racism in the U.S. placed American officials at a disadvantage in its dealings with Haiti. Reading frequently about lynching and rampant discrimination perpetrated against members of their own race, resulted in a “deep-seated prejudice against white Americans” among Haitians according to Washington. Documenting his thoughts in an article for the *New York Age* published in October of 1915, he argued: “The intervention of the United States in the affairs of Haiti should enable this country to change, if we are wise, the idea which the Haitians entertain regarding white Americans.”

¹⁰⁵ “Editorial from Le Nouvelliste,” *The Crisis*, January 1916, 133.

American interactions with Haiti would also challenge what blacks thought about citizenship. In Washington's opinion, Haitians were not the model for black citizenship; this standard was in the United States and the American occupation would prove this reality. It represented, in his view, an opening for African Americans to show that despite the wrongs inflicted upon them in America, "In all the real things of civilization these ten millions of black people in the United States are further ahead of any similar number of black people anywhere in the world." By embracing this opportunity to establish constructive policies, Haiti would be of increasing value, Washington reasoned "not alone to the Haitians but to our own country and civilization." In view of this, Washington urged the United States to be patient in its dealings with the Haitian people. "Ten million black people in the United States are watching this government prayerfully," he concluded, "watching to see if it will exercise the same patience with Haiti that it has exercised with larger and more important countries." Though Washington claimed that African Americans were further along in their civilization, he still acknowledged Haiti's worth.¹⁰⁶ Passing away shortly after the start of the occupation on November 14, 1915, Washington did not live to see how the occupation unfolded.

Invested in seeing the United States return sovereignty to Haitians, the NAACP launched an investigation with the help of James Weldon Johnson. As the Acting Secretary for NAACP, Johnson completed a six-week on-site investigation of the conditions in Haiti and published commentary in both *The Crisis* and *The Nation*. To start, Johnson wrote a series of articles under the title "Self determining Haiti" for *The Nation* shortly after Herbert Seligmann issued his exposé. In his first piece, subtitled "The American Occupation," published in August of 1920, Johnson maintained that the majority of people living in the United States believed that

¹⁰⁶ Washington, Booker T., and Louis R. Harlan. *The Booker T. Washington Papers. Vol. 13, 1914-15*(Urbana: Univ. of Ill. P., 1984), 397-401.

American intervention in Haiti was “purely humane.” Differing in his analysis, he reasoned: “The fact is that for nearly a year before forcible intervention on the part of the United States this government was seeking to compel Haiti to submit to ‘peaceable’ intervention.” After the United States occupied Haiti, the American government took control of Haiti’s finances and military forces. Moreover, the Wilson administration installed a new Constitution. Coming to Haiti’s defense, Johnson argued: “Even in its moments of greatest distraction it never slaughtered an American citizen, it never molested an American woman, it never injured a dollar’s worth of American property.”¹⁰⁷ For these reasons, Johnson argued that the United States should restore Haitian rule.

In the meantime, Marines perpetuated the idea that the crisis in Haiti was a reflection on the African American community and its alleged incapacity for full citizenship. American Marines projected characteristics associated with the African American community on to Haitians in an effort to demonstrate that Haitians lacked the capacity for citizenship and were unfit to rule. American Marines characterized Haitians as “congenitally and habitually lazy.” Johnson countered this argument by stating: “The mistake is often made of confounding primitive methods with indolence.” “For a women to walk eight or ten miles with bundle of produce on her head which may barely realize her a dollar is,” Johnson continued, “undoubtly, a wasteful expenditure of energy, but it is not a sign of laziness.” In order for the United States to be successful in Haiti, Johnson argued that the United States needed to recognize the rights of the Haitian people. “What the Washington Administration should have known was that in order to do anything worthwhile for Haiti, it was necessary to send men there who were able and willing to treat Negroes as men.” Commenting on the implications of the occupation for the African American community, he concluded: “The colored people of the United States should be

¹⁰⁷ Johnson, James Weldon, *Self-Determining Haiti* (New York: The Nation, 1920),5-11.

interested in seeing that this is done, for Haiti is the best chance that the Negro has in the world to prove that he is capable of the highest self-government. If Haiti should ultimately lose her independence, that one best chance will be lost.”¹⁰⁸

Even as African Americans challenged the notion suggested by the U.S. occupation that people of African heritage could not govern themselves, American Marines continued to infringe upon the citizenship rights of Haitians. U.S. policymakers attempted to justify the military occupation of Haiti by insisting that the civilized world could no longer tolerate the level of lawlessness and bloodshed reached in Haiti. Furthermore, they pointed to the benefits brought to Haiti by the Marine presence. With nearly three thousand American Marines in Haiti, Johnson countered this argument in his article for the NAACP by pointing to the thousands of Haitians killed since the beginning of the occupation. Although American officials cited anarchy as grounds for intervention, Johnson maintained: “Brutalities and atrocities on the part of American Marines have occurred with sufficient frequency to bring about deep resentment and terror on the part of the Haitian people.” Sitting at a table with a group of American men, Johnson received an account from a U.S. Marine. “Just before I left Port-au Prince,” he revealed, “an American Marine caught a Haitian boy stealing sugar on the wharf, and instead of arresting him, he battered his brains out with the butt of his rifle.” Marines also perpetrated this violence against Haitian women, as Johnson disclosed: “I learned from the lips of American Marines themselves of a number of cases of rape of Haitian women by Marines.” Further refuting the claims put forth by U.S. policymakers, Johnson concluded: “The United States has absolutely failed in Haiti”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸Johnson, James Weldon, “The Truth about Haiti: An N.A. A. C.P. Investigation,” *The Crisis*, September 1920, 217-224.

¹⁰⁹Johnson, James Weldon, “The Truth about Haiti: An N.A. A. C.P. Investigation,” *The Crisis*, September 1920, 217-224.

Haiti's moment of crisis compelled the African American community to act to defend the principles of self-governance for peoples of African descent. However, they were also somewhat ambivalent in their relationship with Haiti. Even as they vocally opposed the U.S. occupation, African Americans simultaneously positioned themselves as uplifters of the Haitian people. In the United States, elite African Americans believed that by assimilating into the dominant American culture that they could combat the notion that they were biologically inferior and lack the ability to exercise their citizenship rights. According to Gaines: "Cultural differences, then, rather than biological notions of racial inferiority, were said to be more salient in explaining the lower social status of African Americans."¹¹⁰ African Americans applied the same cultural politics of racial uplift to Haiti in hopes that Americans would recognize the humanity of Haitians. They argued that Haitians were not innately inferior. Instead, cultural differences should be used to explain Haiti's current conditions. In his role as editor of *The Crisis*, Du Bois used his platform to engage readers on the issues surrounding Haiti. But he also pressed U.S. officials for action. Writing to the President of the United States, Du Bois expressed his concern, stating: "I am so deeply disturbed over the situation in Hayti." Questioning the reasons behind the U.S. invasion of Haiti Du Bois declared:

Hayti is not all bad. She has contributed something to human uplift and if she has a chance she can do more. She is almost the sole modern representative of a great race of men among the nations. It is not only our privilege as a nation to rescue her from her worst self, but this would be in a sense a solemn act of reparation on our part for the great wrong inflicted by this land on the Negro race.¹¹¹

Du Bois viewed Haiti as the only representative for people of African descent. As Gaines aptly argues: "Although uplift ideology was by no means incompatible with social protest against

¹¹⁰ Gaines, Kevin Kelly. *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 3-4.

¹¹¹ Aptheker, Herbert, and W. E. B. Du Bois. *Selections, 1877 - 1934*. The correspondence of W. E. B. Du Bois / ed. by Herbert Aptheker, Vol. 1. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 211-212

racism, its orientation toward self-help implicitly faulted African Americans for their lowly status, echoing judgmental dominant characterization of ‘the Negro problem’.”¹¹² Despite Du Bois’ concern over the American presence in Haiti, he entertained the possibility that Americans—and African Americans in particular had a “duty” to rescue Haitians from their “worst” self.

As diasporic citizens, African Americans were not entirely selfless in their drive to rid Haiti of American Marines. African American viewed their defense of Haiti as part of their larger political agenda to secure their citizenship rights. Although African Americans were indeed diasporic citizens, they imposed their understandings of nationality onto Haiti. Even as African Americans celebrated Haiti’s contributions to the quest for black independence, it was imperative to their community that Haiti represented a specific type of citizenship.¹¹³ Since Haiti was viewed as a reflection on the African American community, the type of citizenship Haitians represented needed to mirror African American values. In a letter to Raymond Leslie Buell, researcher for the Foreign Policy Association, W.E. B. Du Bois wrote: “We ought to send to Haiti civilian helpers in every line of education and social uplift.”¹¹⁴ Historian Tera W. Hunter defined this concept of racial uplift as “partly a critique of notions of black inferiority, partly, an expression of hope in the capacity of the poor to improve their circumstance through proper training.”¹¹⁵ Using middle-class African American values as his frame of reference, Du Bois applied this notion of uplift to the Haitian experience in hopes that, as Hunter held, if “blacks as a group could demonstrate and achieve standards of ‘civilization,’ they could overcome racism

¹¹² Gaines, 4.

¹¹³ Aptheker, Herbert, and W. E. B. Du Bois, 212

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 404.

¹¹⁵ Lewis, Earl, Joe William Trotter, and Tera W. Hunter. *The African American Urban Experience: Perspectives from the Colonial Period to the Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 91.

and be granted full citizenship rights.”¹¹⁶ African Americans associated themselves with the Haiti because it provided their community with an alternative history. By virtue of being black, African Americans had a shared history with Haitians. This history was important to Pan-Africanism. For that reason, the occupation represented a threat to the development of Pan-African ideology. In the United States, slavery had barred them from citizenship and as Arthur Schomburg maintained: “The Negro has been a man without a history because he has been considered a man without a worthy culture.”¹¹⁷ Haitian history countered the messages that the American institution of slavery delivered to African Americans about their incapacity for citizenship. The consequences of the occupation would be immediate for both communities. Sovereignty and citizenship would escape Haitians and African Americans would lose a model of a “black republic.” African Americans believed that a sovereign Haiti would signify their capacity for citizenship. By focusing on uplifting the Haitian people, Du Bois hoped that the Haitian republic would repair its image to the world and reflect positively upon African Americans.

African Americans applied the strategies used in their community in their battle over citizenship rights in the United States to Haiti. As previously mentioned, the NAACP helped Haitian leaders establish *L’Union Patriotique d’Haiti*, a coalition of Haitian citizens and African Americans. The organization focused on crystallizing the “national aspirations of the Haitians for the return of their independence.”¹¹⁸ The NAACP would present their charges to the Senate committee chaired by McCormick once the government announced that they would be investigating conditions in Haiti. An opinion piece for *The Crisis* encouraged their members to

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Locke, Alain, *Harlem, Mecca of the New Negro*. Survey graphic, v. 6, no. 6.(Baltimore, Md.: Black Classic Press, 1980), 670.

¹¹⁸ “The Haitian Memorial,” *The Crisis*, July 1921, 125-126.

take advantage of this opportunity and write their Senators to push for the withdrawal of the United States army from Haiti. "Our chance has come!" the writer exclaimed. "It is not the greatest and best chance, but it is a chance," the writer insisted. It was important, the editorialists argued, for African Americans to use this chance to persuade the Senator to "treat black republics in the way in which white republics want to be treated." With a sense of urgency, the writer impelled its readers to: "Write now, and keep writing."¹¹⁹ Additionally, African American used their voting power to elect candidates that pledged the best resolution to issues facing the Haitian community. Speaking in regards to the 1920s election Du Bois explained: "Mr. Harding is certainly piling up Negro votes for next November" by pledging action in Haiti.¹²⁰ Even after the election, the African American community also worked to keep Harding accountable. In an editorial for *The Crisis* Du Bois expressed his dissatisfaction with Harding's administration. Du Bois explained: "How Warren Harding, after his categorical promise to free Haiti, can sit in the White House silent and limp while Russell and McIlhenny rape this little helpless land for the benefit of the National City Bank, passes our comprehension. Can he refuse to listen to the call uttered so clearly yesterday?"¹²¹ African Americans would consider Haiti again when they voted during the presidential election of 1924. One supporter of the Progressive party candidate Robert LaFollette and Burton Wheeler stated: "Especially am I pleased at his clear cut condemnation of the Klan and his promise to free Haiti"¹²²

African Americans maintained that the United States could not train the Haitians for self-government by taking their government away from them and having Americans manage it themselves. In his role as chairperson of the Select Committee on Haiti and the Dominican

¹¹⁹ "Haiti," *The Crisis*, October 1921, 247.

¹²⁰ "Opinion of W.E.B. Du Bois: The Army," *The Crisis*, July 1922, 106.

¹²¹ "Opinion of W.E.B. Du Bois: The World and Us," *The Crisis*, June 1922, 55.

¹²² "How Shall We Vote? A Symposium," *The Crisis*, November 1924, 13.

Republic, Senator Medill McCormick of Illinois forwarded a copy of the Committee's report of to James Weldon Johnson for commentary. In his review, Johnson pointed to "the utter illegality of the seizure of the Haitian Republic." For Johnson the fundamental issue involved was "the international and moral right of the United States to usurp, substitute or control the government of any country against the will of the people of that country." "The fact as to whether or not the Haitians were backwards, that their government was not entirely stable, does not to me affect this fundamental issue," he stated. In Johnson's view, the reasons specified by American policymakers for the occupation of Haiti were applicable with "greater force" to Mexico, a place where the United State had yet to intervene. Characterizing the statements before the committee as rehearsed; Johnson argued the majority of the shortcomings noted could "by a slight change in phraseology" be applied to most of the governments and peoples of the world. Instead, Johnson portrayed the shortcomings of the Haitian government as "common failings of humanity" "Of course," Johnson declared, "the Haitians are ignorant and primitive and lacking in development but in dealing with them are up against this truth—the more strong-handed our tutelage over them is, the less capable are they rendered of the self-development which is necessary." To have a vital and permanent effect in Haiti, Johnson believed that it was necessary for the Haitian people to trust that the American undertaking was not for their own advantage but beneficial to the Haitian republic.¹²³

In their effort to secure sovereignty for Haitians, African Americans attempted to leverage their American citizenship. In 1929 Raymond Leslie Buell and the Foreign Policy Association, a nonprofit organization, published a report with several recommendations to President Herbert Hoover on American occupation. In this report, the organization proposed that Hoover employ a Commission to further examine the occupation. Additionally, it suggested,

¹²³ "Mr. Johnson criticizes Senate Report on Haiti," *The Crisis*, September 1922, 217.

“any such commission should include in its membership an American Negro.”¹²⁴ Although African Americans were unable to experience the entirety of their citizenship rights, in this particular instance African Americans attempted to leverage their membership as American citizens of the United States and their racial identity secure a position on Hoover’s Commission. African Americans believed that they could provide the Commission with greater insight because of their shared African heritage with Haiti people. As diasporic citizens, African Americans lobbied for the right to shape American foreign policy towards Haiti. Concurring with the Foreign Policy Association, the NAACP held that the inclusion of African Americans on this Commission was particularly important because what happened in Haiti was of considerable significance to their community. Accordingly, the organization wired a letter to the president with their request. In their telegram, the NAACP urged the President to include African Americans. They reasoned: “What is needed in this case is a Commission of such character and experience that it will seek the truth, get the facts, and not be afraid to tell all it finds.” The NAACP added: “Twelve million American citizens of Negro descent are deeply and vitally interested in this matter which touches their legitimate racial pride and the fate of over two million fellow black folk.”¹²⁵ In spite of the recommendations put forth by the Foreign Policy Association, the Commission chartered by Hoover would proceed without any members from the African American community. “The Catholic Church,” according to Du Bois, “secured representatives but the Negro race did not.” Haiti represented an opportunity for African American to claim a public voice in U.S. international affairs. For that reason, Du Bois regarded President Hoover’s actions towards Haiti as disappointing. Du Bois believed that African Americans were better suited to address the issues facing Haiti and disagreed with Hoover’s

¹²⁴Buell, Raymond Leslie. *The American Occupation of Haiti* (New York, N.Y.: Foreign Policy Association, 1929), 392.

¹²⁵“Along the Color Line: America,” *The Crisis*, February 1930, 58.

approach. A doubtful Du Bois predicted: “From such a Commission we must await a coat of fairly thick whitewash for Russell and his marines; a disparaging criticism of the Haitians and advice to withdraw some time, perhaps in 1936, under cover of a Platt proviso and the financial tyranny of the Nation City Bank.”¹²⁶

Once African Americans attempted to leverage their contested citizenship, they faced challenges revealing the precarious nature of their rights within the United States. Even though African Americans vied for a position on the Commission, President Hoover would only agree to have African Americans complete a separate survey headed by Dr. Robert Moton, head of the Tuskegee Institute. While doubtful of the ability of the Commission to illustrate accurately the condition in Haiti, Du Bois was disappointed that Dr. Moton agreed to make a separate survey on education. Du Bois maintained: “He should have been made a full member of the Commission, both because of the importance of education in Haiti, and the miserable failure of America to encourage it, and because of his Negro descent.” Nevertheless, Du Bois maintained that Moton should have taken a lesser position on the Commission. He argued: “A firm refusal of Dr. Moton to accept a subordinate appointment and a calm insistence that Mr. Hoover attend his own racial chestnuts would have pleased *THE CRISIS*.”¹²⁷ Instead, President Hoover appointed to Moton’s board “two colored newspaper men, Carl Murphy of the *Afro-America* and T.F. Prattis of the *Associated Negro Press* accompanied the Commission.”¹²⁸ Expressing his disappointment with the implementation of the Commission’s recommendation, Du Bois later made this reference to President Hoover: “He refused to appoint a Negro member to the Haitian Commission, and while his commission made excellent recommendations, Mr. Hoover followed them slowly and with

¹²⁶ Du Bois, W.E.B., “Postscript: Haiti,” *The Crisis*, April 1930, 137.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ “Along the Color Line: America,” *The Crisis*, August 1930, 275.

long periods of hesitation, and still insists, at the dictation of great financial interest, that the United States keep indefinite control of Haitian finances.”¹²⁹

African Americans saw the outcome of Haiti's crisis as an indicator of their own political and economic futures. For the African American community, the American occupation endangered the political possibilities created by the Haitian Revolution and their own struggle for freedom and civil rights in the United States. Contextualizing the events that had occurred in Haiti since the start of the occupation in “The Truth about Haiti: An NAACP Investigation,” Johnson characterized the Haitian Revolution as a political and social revolution that had completely altered Haiti’s social landscape. In Johnson words: “The man who had been the chattel became the ruler.” “Haiti,” he continued, “gained her independence 116 years ago and maintained her complete sovereignty own to 1915, the year.” Although Haitians had maintained their sovereignty for years, the United States still considered their government an experiment. American officials continued to defend the longstanding view that Haitians were incapable of governing themselves. “The unfitness of the Haitian people to govern themselves,” Johnson argued, “has been the subject of propaganda for the last century.” Additionally, published books, pamphlets, articles and lectures also suggested Haitians were little by little gradually regressing into barbarism. Challenging this notion, Johnson stated: “An observation of the city of Port-au-Prince is sufficient to refute this oft-made assertion.”¹³⁰ Similarly, Du Bois argued: “The experiment of making the Negro slave a free citizen in the United States is not a failure; the attempts at autonomous government in Haiti and Liberia are not proofs of the impossibility of self government among black men.” The inability of the United States to help Haiti regain its footing among other democratic countries created apprehension among African Americans about

¹²⁹ Du Bois, W.E.B., “Postscript: Haiti and Liberia,” *The Crisis*, November 1932, 362.

¹³⁰ Johnson, James Weldon, “The Truth about Haiti: An N.A. A. C.P. Investigation,” *The Crisis*, September 1920, 217-224.

their own political prospects. The U.S. response to Haiti's crisis led many African Americans to worry that the United States could repeat its actions in other "black republics." The effects of the American occupation had political consequences for both the African American community and for people of African descent throughout the world.

Economically, African Americans viewed Haiti as increasingly central to their community. "Black America believe that this is what took place in Haiti, that with the excuse of putting down disorder and increasing the military and naval protection of the United States, we overthrew an independent government which had never defaulted on its debts and whose attitude toward foreign nations had been impeccable; and then, we saddled upon that country a debt so huge, a recognition of pretended obligation and contracts so vast that the country is bound to be in economic slavery to the United States for indefinite length of time."¹³¹ Writing for *The Crisis* in 1933, W.E. B. Du Bois maintained in his article "Pan-Africa and New Racial Philosophy," that African Americans needed to transform their thinking about all people of African ancestry. In order to prosper financially, African Americans needed to work with other people of African descent. Seeing as places like Mexico, South America, Asia, the West Indies and all of Africa were exploited for the sake of profit, Du Bois, insisted that people of color "draw together in spiritual sympathy and intellectual co-operation to see what can be done for the freedom of the human spirit." In order for a movement like this to be successful, Du Bois called for a "spiritual housecleaning" in which people of African descent would re-evaluate their relationship with other black communities. Du Bois wrote: "They must cease to think of Liberia and Haiti as failures in government; of American Negroes as being engaged in principally in frequenting Harlem cabarets and Southern lynching parties; of West Indians as ineffective

¹³¹ "Liberia," *The Crisis*, September 1933, 202-203.

talkers; and of West Africans as parading around in breech-clouts.”¹³² In order to survive monetarily, these communities had to work together.

Together, Haitians and African Americans turned the U.S. occupation into a public debate on blacks' capacity for full economic as well as political citizenship. In order for Haitians to experience full citizenship rights, it was important that they excel economically as well. Once American Marines landed in Haiti, American officials suspended the payment of all interest and amortization on Haiti's foreign and domestic debt, leaving them unpaid for a period of five years. “We are arranging in Haiti is for the debt-slavery of this island to the United States,” one writer for *The Crisis* remarked.¹³³ Similarly, in a letter to the editor of *The Nation*, Stenio Vincent documented the ways in which the American presence in Haiti inhibited Haitians from living up to their potential as economic citizens. Vincent warned, “[i]t should be remembered here that while before the Occupation the American dollar was equivalent of the Haitian gourde, the Occupation arbitrarily reduced the value of Haitian currency by four-fifths so that the present tax in dollars represent five times its equivalent before the Occupation.”¹³⁴ By creating economic policies detrimental to the Haitian people, the occupation inhibited their ability to experience their citizenship in its entirety.

Haiti emerged as a place of political contest because of the message it could deliver about African Americans and their incapacity for citizenship. The debate over Haiti was a conversation about black citizenship, which meant that the United States was in essence debating what kind of republic it wanted to become during the twentieth century. Would the United States compromise its values in favor of imperialism? African Americans continued to raise this question while they

¹³² Du Bois, W. E. B., “Pan-Africa and New Racial Philosophy,” *The Crisis*, November 1933, 247.

¹³³ “Haiti: What are we really doing there,” *The Crisis*, July 1926, 125.

¹³⁴ Vincent, Stenio, Guy Stevens, Warren Ryder, and Sagdigh-Es-Saltaneh. “Correspondence.” *Nation* 113, no. 2928 (1921): 176-177.

addressed issues with implications for their citizenship. During their Twenty-Second Annual Conference, the NAACP spoke out against the American occupation while connecting it to their campaign against lynching. “Under the law the Negro proposes to fight for his status as a full American citizen, to put down barbarism of lynching, to insist on justice in the courts, on the legal recognition of decent marriage and on the opposition to racial segregation,” one representative stated.¹³⁵ “Beyond this,” the spokesman continued, “the Negro is going to use his vote to compel the United States Government to keep its promise to restore the independence of Haiti.” While American policymakers were making decisions about what the United States would look like during the twentieth century, African Americans were also recreating American society and relating to other people of color through their activism. As African Americans looked towards independence and self-determination, it was important in the view of the NAACP for them to be “in sympathy with the whole movement in Africa.” One speaker explained: “All this, however, is simply to give us civil freedom, political power and intelligence, so as to help in the re-making of modern society.”¹³⁶ Although their defense of Haiti failed to affect their citizenship rights in the United States in a direct way, African Americans worked to combat the notion that people of African descent were unfit for citizenship.

In the end, African Americans campaigned for the restoration of Haitian sovereignty because of the implications they believed Haiti’s crisis had for their community. Working to secure their own citizenship rights in the United States, African Americans would make their defense of Haiti a part of their political agenda. During this period, the American invasion became important to African American politics in the United States. As one writer for *The Crisis* argued: “Dr. Du Bois, in a singularly spirited and scholarly speech, translated the story of Haiti

¹³⁵ “The Twenty – Second Annual Conference, N.A.A.C.P.,” *The Crisis*, August 1931, 271.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 284.

into a new and beautiful significance. He showed that the Haitians had been the forerunners of self-determinism on the part of small nations in the Americas and that though they had fallen on evil days they had left us a legacy of courage, persistence and culture.”¹³⁷ Believing that Haiti had both political and economic ramifications for their own communities, African Americans were adamant about safeguarding Haiti’s sovereignty and restoring citizenship rights. The events in Haiti would speak for not only the Caribbean nation but also project on to all people of African ancestry. Consequently, Haiti’s inability to exercise its citizenship would also reflect upon African Americans. As the crises in Haiti worsened, African Americans would conceive of their communities differently. Previously African Americans sought to immigrate to Haiti in favor of Haitian citizenship. Occupied Haiti represents a period in which their community implemented a different strategy to secure the citizenship rights of both communities. African Americans attempted to leverage their contested American citizenship. They believed that their shared African heritage meant that they had a better insight to the problems facing Haitians. Even with this insight, African Americans still insisted on uplifting the Haitian, revealing the shortcomings of African Americans as diasporic citizens.

¹³⁷ “The Thirteenth Annual Conference of the N.A.A.C.P.,” *The Crisis*, August 1922, 166-167.

CHAPTER 2

OCCUPIED HAITI: A DEBATE OVER RACE, CITIZENSHIP AND SOVEREIGNTY

“The future, ladies and gentlemen, is going to be very different for this hemisphere from the past.”¹ On October 27, 1913, in an address to the Southern Commercial and Congress in Mobile, Alabama, President Woodrow Wilson addressed the relationship between the United States and Latin American countries. “I want to take this occasion,” Wilson declared, “to say that the United States will never again seek one additional foot of territory by conquest.”² Instead, he maintained: “She will devote herself to showing that she knows how to make honorable and fruitful use of the territory she has.”³ Previously, the United States had occupied Cuba and Nicaragua in 1898 and 1909 respectively. Following the Spanish American War in 1898, Spain relinquished control of Puerto Rico to the United States. Historian Kevin Gaines writes: “What enabled a consensus on imperial control over Cuba, and later, in 1899, over the Philippines, was race—specifically, the belief in Anglo-Saxon supremacy. Imperialists argued that the United States would bring progress and civilization to childlike, primitive people, preparing them to exercise self-government at some unspecified future date.”⁴ Although Wilson outlined a new direction in U.S. foreign policy towards Latin American and Caribbean nations in his speech, his administration would soon occupy the Dominican Republic and Haiti. On July 27, 1915, Haiti experienced a political calamity with the assassination of Haitian President Vilbrun Guillaume

¹ United States, Woodrow Wilson, and Albert Shaw. *President Wilson's State Papers and Addresses* (New York: George H. Doran Co., the Review of reviews Co, 1918), 32.

² *Ibid.*, 36.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Gaines, Kevin Kelly. *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 96.

Sam. Fearing that France along with other European governments would initiate an aggressive agenda in the Caribbean, Wilson quickly installed American Marines as a response to Haiti's internal crisis.

Operating under the Monroe Doctrine, which stipulated that the United States would extend protection to weaker states in the Western hemisphere against foreign aggression, Wilson along with advocates of U.S. intervention cited Haiti's political instability and its foreign debt to justify an armed but allegedly benevolent occupation of the republic. Accordingly, on September 16, 1915, shortly after American Marines landed on the island, the Haitian-American Treaty made Haiti a protectorate of the United States. As the intervention dragged on, however, an exposé published in *The Nation* accused American Marines of senselessly killing hundreds of Haitian citizens, causing the crisis in Haiti to spill over into the United States. Shortly thereafter, a letter conceding to the charges levied against Marines forces, written by Marine Corps commandant George Barnett, surfaced. Given that the majority of American journalists had championed the U.S. cause in Haiti, the allegations levied by *The Nation* created a political test for the Wilson administration that led to a series of investigations. By examining articles written in *The Nation* along with documents detailing the Senate hearings, this chapter aims to illustrate how questions surrounding Haiti developed into points of debate among a variety of American actors. Placing emphasis on race, journalists, editorialists, U.S. military leaders and national politicians turned occupied Haiti into a public debate on blacks' capacity for self-governance and full citizenship.

After the 1912 presidential election, debates over blacks' capacity for full citizenship and self-governance intensified. Searching for a candidate who would address issues important to their communities, some African Americans leaders rallied behind Southerner Woodrow Wilson.

As a presidential candidate on the Democratic ticket, Wilson had presented American voters with an alternative vision for America attractive to the African American constituency, which Wilson called *The New Freedom*. This philosophy, according to historian Nicholas Patler, characterized the United States as a place “where no man is supposed to be under any limitation except the limitations of his character and of his mind; where there is supposed to be no distinction of class, no distinction of blood, no distinction of social status but where men win or lose on their merits.”¹ For W.E. B. Du Bois, Wilson’s candidacy would serve as an indication as to whether or not the Democratic party would act in accordance to their political rhetoric. From his perspective, the time had come, as historian Patricia Sullivan notes, “to put such pronouncements to the test and see if the Democratic Party ‘dares to be Democratic when it comes to black men.’”² This shift in the African American electorate helped to bring about the first decisive victory for the Democratic Party in fifty years. Wilson’s success also represented the rise of Southern Democrats to the White House.

Receiving an estimated 20 to 30 percent of the African American vote, Wilson nevertheless did little to stop the solidification of Jim Crow practices and in fact extended segregation in the federal government.³ Despite their part in getting Wilson elected, African Americans would soon discover that the new president would fail to express his gratitude towards black Democrats for their support during the election.⁴ In fact, during his presidency leaders in the executive branch of the U.S. government worked to strengthen Jim Crow rule in the federal sector.⁵ Southern Democrats, for their part, worked to limit African American

¹ Patler, Nicholas. *Jim Crow and the Wilson Administration: Protesting Federal Segregation in the Early Twentieth Century* (Boulder, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 2004), 30.

² Sullivan, Patricia. *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New Press, 2009), 26.

³ Patler, 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

citizenship by proposing bills that would ban interracial marriages, prohibit blacks from serving in the army or navy, legalize segregated transportation and limit the immigration of people of African descent among other things.⁶ The African Americans leadership felt both betrayed and embarrassed by Wilson's apathy toward issues central to their experience.⁷ At the same time, the president's unwillingness to take a forceful stance on pertinent topics energized African Americans to organize. From the outset, the still-young NAACP had focused their energy on combating segregation. Working to secure political and civil rights for African Americans, the NAACP increased its membership to over 100,000 by the end of Wilson's second term.⁸

The American invasion of Haiti opened up a political discourse among African Americans; however, other actors were also engaged in the debate over Haiti. Voicing disapproval of the occupation because of its implications for their community, African Americans discussed in chapter two differed in their opinions from the majority of mainstream American journalists. Echoing the notion that the United States was a benevolent yet powerful neighbor trying to improve Haiti, American journalists tended to argue that the U.S. invasion was a natural course of action given the country's political volatility.⁹ Throughout the United States, journalists mirrored the opinions expressed by the Wilson administration. Racial intolerance, concern over hemispheric security, and the instability of Haitian politics helped the United States government gain public support for American control of Haiti.¹⁰ As a result, many Americans viewed the intervention in Haiti as long overdue. Before the occupation, only four Haitian leaders completed their term as president, leading some journalists to question Haiti's

⁶ Sullivan, 31.

⁷ Patler, 3.

⁸ Ibid., 59.

⁹ Pamphile, Léon Dénius. *Haitians and African Americans: A Heritage of Tragedy and Hope* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 107.

¹⁰ Healy, David. *Gunboat Diplomacy in the Wilson Era: The U.S. Navy in Haiti, 1915-1916* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 123.

“brand of democracy.”¹¹ Addressing this issue, in 1920, the journalist Samuel Guy Inman observed: “Of the twenty five Presidents from 1816 to 1903, three were assassinated, one died from wounds received in his palace, one committed suicide, fifteen were driven out by revolutions, three died in office, and one lived out his term and died a natural death in his own country.”¹² Many journalists perceived Haiti’s inability to transition peacefully from one leader to another as an indication of Haitians lack of civility and their failure to understand the workings of democracy. The political instability occurring in the Caribbean island led many to question Haiti’s viability as a republic and with it, the capacity of persons of African descent for self-governance.

Positioned by American officials as a benevolent undertaking intended to teach Haitians how to govern themselves, the U.S. occupation initially resulted in three divergent views among Haitians towards the Marine presence. The first group consisted of a small mulatto minority who worked with the occupation believing that it was best for Haiti’s wellbeing. A second larger unit consisted of both black and mulatto rebels who cried loudly in defiance and asked for “justice and humanity from their oppressors.” With the majority of Haitians unaligned with either side, the third category existed between these two opposing groups. Helena Hill Weed, secretary of the Haiti-Santo Domingo Independence Society, described this group as “waiting, hoping, fearing [and] praying.” As American Marines fortified their presence in Haiti and strengthened the occupation, Haitians quickly reconsidered their stance on the occupation. “All Haitians were lumped by them as ‘niggers,’ mentally incompetent, physically inefficient, chronically dishonest, and wholly unfit for political or social responsibility,” Weed explained. For Haitian mulattos, their attitudes towards the occupation changed given that American officials failed to make the

¹¹ Tinker, Clifford Albion. “The American Occupation of Haiti and Santo Domingo.” *Review of Reviews* 66 (1922): 46.

¹² “Inman, Samuel. “Hard Problems in Haiti.” *Current History* 13 (1920):338.

social distinction between them and the larger Haitian community. Once American officials characterized Haitians as both politically and socially inept given their African ancestry, the larger Haitian population changed their position. Consequently, Haitians as a whole, with the exception of office-holders would soon unite for a common cause and solidly align in opposition to the occupation. Weed reasoned that Haitians were “speaking, in voices not to be misunderstood, though in differing tones, the same language.” Although various sectors of Haitian society differed in their motivations behind their desire to see Marines withdraw from Haiti, they all pleaded for the restoration of Haitian sovereignty. Steadfast their protest, Haitians demanded, Weed noted: “Immediate withdrawal of the military forces from the soil of the sovereign state of Haiti; immediate restitution of constitutional government, with the free election of a president by the votes of the people.”¹³

Following the occupation of Haiti, the majority of American periodicals supported Wilson’s Haiti policy. However, this attitude changed slowly because of the publication of “The Conquest of Haiti” an exposé by American journalist Herbert Seligmann for *The Nation* in July of 1920. In “The Conquest of Haiti,” Seligmann charged the Wilson administration with withholding information about the U.S. mission in Haiti from the American people. “Five years of violence in that Negro republic of the Caribbean, without sanction of international law or any law other than force, is now succeeded by an era in which the military authorities are attempting to hush up what has been done,” Seligmann wrote. In his article, he exposed the how American Marines charged with “restoring peace and order” had executed the occupation in Haiti: American Marines had killed an estimated 3,000 Haitian men, women, and children. In contrast, fewer than twenty Americans had been killed or wounded since the start of the occupation. Not only had U.S. forces shot and killed innocent civilians, they tortured Haitians into giving them

¹³ Weed, Helena Hill. “Fresh Hope for Haiti.” *Nation* 130, no. 3376 (March 19, 1930): 342.

information. Describing the crimes carried out by American Marines, Seligmann explained, “[t]heft, arson, and murder have been committed almost with impunity upon the persons and property of Haitians by white men wearing the uniform of the United States.” Still, U.S. Marines spoke offhandedly about their experiences in Haiti. Detailing a conversation with one officer Seligman wrote: “He remarked to me that if he had to draw a cartoon of the occupation of Haiti he would represent a black man held down by a white soldier, while another white man went through the black man's pockets.” An attitude of “determined contempt for men of dark skins” in Seligmann’s view prevented Marines from performing their duties with decency. As such, he characterized the occupation as “a commentary upon the white civilization which still burns black men and women at the stake.”¹⁴

Seligmann’s exposé brought much needed attention to the American occupation. Critical of U.S. imperial interests, he condemned President Wilson for contradicting his stated aims with Latin American and Caribbean nations. Wilson had formerly vowed that the United States would “never again seek one additional foot of territory by conquest.”¹⁵ From Seligmann’s perspective, his administration was practicing “the very aggressions and tyrannies it was pretending to fight to safeguard weaker states against.” Once U.S. Marines successfully occupied Haiti, the American government suppressed Haitian media, prohibiting journalists from criticizing the mission or the Haitian government. Seligmann revealed: “Even United States citizens in Haiti told me of their fear that if they too frankly criticised [sic] ‘the Occupation,’ existence in Haiti would be made unpleasant for them.” Marines in Haiti had violated the citizenship rights of Haitians and American citizens living in Haiti by preventing them from speaking out against the invasion. This allowed the American military command to maintain the “fiction of a Haitian

¹⁴ Seligmann, Herbert J. “The Conquest of Haiti” *Nation* 111(1920):35.

¹⁵ United States, Woodrow Wilson, and Albert Shaw. *President Wilson's State Papers and Addresses* (New York: George H. Doran Co., the Review of reviews Co, 1918), 36.

republic” and effectively control Haitian politics. The Wilson administration kept Americans in the “profoundest [of] ignorance” to the actions of American Marines in occupied Haiti.¹⁶ For this reason, his editorial publication represented a major turning point in U.S.-Haitian relations.

The publication of Seligmann’s article in *The Nation* provoked national politicians and U.S. military leaders to partake in a larger conversation surrounding Haiti and blacks’ capacity for self-governance. Testifying before a Select Committee on the American occupation, journalist and managing editor of *The Nation* (1920 to 1923), Ernest Gruening revealed his motivations behind his decision to print Seligmann’s article. Originally distributed by *Harper’s Magazine*, Gruening insisted that the outline of the events in Haiti were of “great importance.” From Gruening’s perspective, “[i]t revealed that many things had been happening in Haiti which were totally unknown to the American people, as we were then still in the era of pitiless publicity.” Gruening continued: “I thought it would be a public service to give them wider publicity, and accordingly he published an article in *The Nation*, which appeared, I believe, in July 1920.” Requesting comment and criticism from Wilson’s administration, Gruening sent the article to the Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Commandant of the Marines Corps. John A. Lejeune. Although Gruening only received one lone response from General Lejeune, his efforts generated a political storm for the Wilson administration.¹⁷

Positioned by American officials as a benevolent undertaking intended to teach Haitians how to govern themselves, the U.S. occupation initially resulted in three divergent views among Haitians towards the Marine presence. The first group consisted of a small mulatto minority who

¹⁶ Seligmann, 35-36.

¹⁷ United States. Inquiry into Occupation and Administration of Haiti and Santo Domingo. *Hearings Before a Select Committee on Haiti and Santo Domingo, United States Senate*. Sixty-Seventh Congress, First and Second Session Volume II, (Washington: Govt. Print. Office, 1922), 1200.

worked with the occupation believing that it was best for Haiti's wellbeing. A second larger unit consisted of both black and mulatto rebels who cried loudly in defiance and asked for "justice and humanity from their oppressors." With the majority of Haitians unaligned with either side, the third category existed between these two opposing groups. Helena Hill Weed, secretary of the Haiti-Santo Domingo Independence Society, described this group as "waiting, hoping, fearing [and] praying." As American Marines fortified their presence in Haiti and strengthened the occupation, Haitians quickly reconsidered their stance on the occupation. "All Haitians were lumped by them as 'niggers,' mentally incompetent, physically inefficient, chronically dishonest, and wholly unfit for political or social responsibility," Weed explained. For Haitian mulattos, their attitudes towards the occupation changed given that American officials failed to make the social distinction between them and the larger Haitian community. Once American officials characterized Haitians as both politically and socially inept given their African ancestry, the larger Haitian population changed their position. Consequently, Haitians as a whole, with the exception of office-holders would soon unite for a common cause and solidly align in opposition to the occupation. Weed reasoned that Haitians were "speaking, in voices not to be misunderstood, though in differing tones, the same language." Although various sectors of Haitian society differed in their motivations behind their desire to see Marines withdraw from Haiti, they all pleaded for the restoration of Haitian sovereignty. Steadfast their protest, Haitians demanded, Weed noted: "Immediate withdrawal of the military forces from the soil of the sovereign state of Haiti; immediate restitution of constitutional government, with the free election of a president by the votes of the people."¹⁸

Characterizing the blunders in Haiti as inevitable in a letter to editor of *The Nation*, General Lejeune portrayed the Haitian people as a group lacking the capacity to govern

¹⁸ Weed, Helena Hill. "Fresh Hope for Haiti." *Nation* 130, no. 3376 (March 19, 1930): 342.

themselves. As Ernest Gruening explained in his testimony, Lejeune considered the oversights exposed by Seligmann a part of the inevitable course of military occupations.¹⁹ Detailing the American involvement in Haiti, Lejeune explained: “The work of the Marine Corps in Haiti started with the occupation in 1915 when it became necessary to land sailors and Marines at Port au Prince for the protection of American lives.” Standing up for Wilson’s foreign policy decisions, Lejeune continued: “The President had been killed and many other murders and atrocities had been committed in the city of Port au Prince as well as in other parts of Haiti.” From his viewpoint, the conditions on the island warranted attention from the American government. Backing the U.S. mission in Haiti, he argued: “Since the occupation and the signing of the treaty with Haiti it has been the endeavor of the Marine Corps to carry out its instructions in Haiti in as efficient a manner as possible, every consideration and thought being given to the welfare of the Haitians and the advancement of the country.” Coming to the defense of the U.S. occupation, Lejeune also admitted some of the missteps his Marines had taken. “As in all work in countries like Haiti,” he lamented, “mistakes are bound to be made, and policies, orders, and instructions are sometimes not carried out properly.” Though he recognized the missteps of the occupation, he concluded by stating: “It has been and is the duty and aim of the Marine Corps authorities here and in Haiti to work solely for the interest and advancement of Haiti and the Haitian people.”²⁰ Even with atrocities committed by American Marines, Lejeune lauded the progress made in Haiti.

While Lejeune portrayed the Haitian people as a group unable to exercise their sovereignty, editors for *The Nation* argued that occupation provoked this era of anarchy. Viewing Lejeune’s response as an “admission of the truth of the charges against the American

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Lejeune, John A., F. L. Houston, and George Kessner. “Correspondence.” *Nation* 111, no. 2873 (1920):101.

occupation in Haiti contained in *The Conquest of Haiti* by Mr. Herbert J. Seligmann,” the editor for *The Nation* challenged Lejeune’s portrayal of Haiti. Defending Haiti against his assertions, the editorial claimed that anarchy prevailed in Haiti only after the American intervention “when the United States Marines were murdering, torturing, and robbing peaceable Haitians and provoking them to armed rebellion.” “American lives,” the editor declared, “had been safe for years and were safe at the time of intervention.” Criticizing Lejeune’s charge of inevitability, the editor argued: “To admit that ‘in countries like Haiti mistakes are bound to be made’ is to dismiss, in a phrase, cruelties, stupidities, violations of humanity and decency which, had they occurred in Armenia, Siberia, Ireland, India, or Belgium would have elicited storms of protest from United States citizens.” In characterizing the blunders in Haiti as inevitable, Lejeune tried to justify American action in Haiti. Even as Lejeune attempted to validate the Marine presence in Haiti by pointing to the ongoing anarchy in Haiti, the editor hoped U.S. officials would tell the American public the truth about Haiti. “As for the ‘duty and aim of United States Marines in Haiti,” the editorial concluded, “that is a secret which the Department of State has not yet seen fit to divulge to the American public.”²¹

By characterizing Haitians as a people lacking the capacity to govern themselves, American policymakers could rationalize the takeover of Haitian land and resources.²² In “Our Caribbean Imperialism,” an editorial for *The Nation*, one writer maintained: “What we are doing in Haiti and Santo Domingo is precisely what Germany would have done in our place; it is precisely what England is doing in Egypt and India.” In their view, the United States differed little from Germany or England. What made the U.S. distinct according to the editor was its

²¹ Editorials. *Nation* 111, no. 2873 (1920):101.

²² Glenn, 18. Glenn argues generally that by imagining non-European “other” as dependent and unable govern themselves, Europeans were able to rationalize the takeover of land, resources and labor. Applying Glenn’s concept, this thesis argues that this phenomenon occurs in Haiti as well during the American occupation.

ability to mask its imperialism “under high-sounding phrases.” The editorial insisted that the United States was “imposing its will on the same theory of might upon which Germany relied in its attack upon Belgium.” Notwithstanding, the United States positioned its venture into Haiti differently. Occupying the island for the “ultimate good” of Haitians, it was the mission of American Marines to teach Haitians “how to govern themselves with American excellence and efficiency.” “It is only by accident, presumably,” the editorial charged, “that some of our large corporations and shrewd capitalist are at the same time acquiring great quantities of fertile land in the island.” As occupation officials situated the mission in Haiti as a beneficial undertaking for the Haitian people, they failed to omit “a single concomitant of imperialism.” Following the lead of their European Allies, American officials espoused a vocabulary of conquest referring to Haitians as “bandits.” Four years after the start of the occupation, the editorial noted, “banditry” still flourished in Haiti. “It is curious, too,” the editorial continued, “that there should still be revolutionary elements in the capital itself after four years of beneficent rule under the Stars and Stripes.” American officials in Haiti had succeeded in building a few roads, cleaning several towns, and giving some Marines comfortable jobs, still there was “no constructive policy of any kind.”²³

Despite claiming to teach Haitians how to govern themselves and establish a civil authority, people living on the island received a lesson in American naval government, prompting some American politicians to voice their disapproval. Critical of the Wilson administration’s response to Haiti’s political calamity, Senator Warren G. Harding, a candidate for the presidency on the Republican ticket during the 1920 election, promised a different approach to the problems in the Caribbean under his leadership. Employing naval authority in

²³ Editorials. *Nation* 110, no. 2873 (1920):226.

Haiti, American officials rarely held American Marines accountable for their actions. Charged with murder and drunkenness, a court-martial acquitted First Lieutenant Samuel B. Ryan of killing two unarmed Haitians. Similarly, a court-martial also acquitted Captain George D. Hamilton of murder on the ground that there was no proof that he ordered his command to “shoot all native prisoners captured by them if such prisoner were considered ‘caicos’ or person in revolt against the Republic of Haiti,’ was obeyed.”²⁴ Statements issued by Franklin Roosevelt, then Assistant Secretary of the Navy, only added to Harding’s frustrations. In a speech delivered at Butte, Montana, Roosevelt, a vice presidential candidate on the Democratic ticket, asserted: “You know, I have had something to do with running of a couple of little republics. The facts are that I wrote Haiti’s constitution, myself, and I do say I think it is a very good constitution.”²⁵ Roosevelt’s declarations were in Harding’s view “the first official admission of rape of Haiti and Santo Domingo by the Wilson administration.”²⁶ Assuring a new course, Harding declared: “If I am elected president, as I expect to be, I will not empower an Assistant Secretary of the Navy to draft a constitution and jam it down the throats of a helpless people at the point of bayonets held by American Marines.”²⁷ Given the increased pressure placed on the Wilson administration by *The Nation* and national politicians, a series of military and congressional inquiries ensued.

The mounting concern about the inability on the part of American officials to set up a sound government in Haiti forced the Wilson administration to address the issue. In a letter that was inadvertently made public, Marine Corps General Barnett revealed that indiscriminate killing of Haitians had occurred for a substantial period. In light of the charges made by General

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ U.S. Senate, *Hearings Before a Select Committee on Haiti and Santo Domingo, United States Senate Volume I*, 195.

²⁶ U.S. Senate, *Hearings Before a Select Committee on Haiti and Santo Domingo, United States Senate Volume II*, 1528.

²⁷ Ibid.

Barnett, the Navy Department promptly created a special board of inquiry to investigate allegations of abuse of power, of favoring a financial monopoly, of establishing an iron censorship, and of unjustified killings.²⁸ Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels was determined to ascertain “whether any other unjustifiable acts of oppression or of violence have been perpetrated against any of the citizens of Haiti.”²⁹ He pledged to investigate the allegations “to the most minute detail.”³⁰ Led by Admiral Henry T. Mayo, the board was empowered by Secretary Daniels with the authority to “send for persons and papers, and sift evidence to the end that any men in American uniforms guilty of wrongdoing should be brought to trial and punished.”³¹ Testifying before the naval court of inquiry on November 11, President Philippe Sudre Dartiguenave, a Haitian mulatto, described the Haitian people as rejoicing “at the coming of the Americans, expecting liberty, prosperity and respect for their persons and property.”³² In spite of the allegations made by General Barnett, Dartiguenave insisted that he “had no official knowledge of indiscriminate killing of natives by United States Marines.”³³ Accordingly, the naval court of inquiry pronounced that there had been “no proper grounds” for the statements by General Barnett.³⁴ Moreover, Admiral Harry S. Knapp concluded that, “all the good accomplished in Haiti as a result of the American intervention will be lost, if the United States withdraws its military forces, for a great many years to come.”³⁵ The naval court of inquiry deemed General Barnett remarks ill considered and regrettable as they had failed in their view, to

²⁸ Staff. “The American Occupation of Haiti: Charges of Abuse of Power—Summary of Official Reports by General Barnett and Others” *Current History* 13 (1920): 342- 343.

²⁹ U.S. Senate, *Hearings Before a Select Committee on Haiti and Santo Domingo, United States Senate*, 1587.

³⁰ Staff, 347.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Editorial. “Haiti.” *Current History* 13 (1920): 466.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Editorial. “Cuba, Haiti, Santo Domingo: General Crowder’s Mission of Observation—Navy’s Report on Haiti Exonerates the Marines—End of American Rule in Santo Domingo.” *Current History* 13 (1920): 351.

³⁵ Editorial. “Haiti.” *Current History* 13 (1920): 467.

reflect on the “dangerous and delicate work” performed by the Marine Corps in Haiti.³⁶ In the end, the board absolved many of the Marines of any wrongdoing.

Conducted internally, the inquiry by the Navy Department was not very judicious in analyzing the problems of the occupation. Some military officials threatened to confirm some of the charges levied against the occupation. Their admission served as an indication that the naval court of inquiry did not go far enough in its investigation. Speaking of the findings of the investigation, one person argued: “It was not to be expected that a naval court of inquiry would do other than obscure charges brought against a branch of the navy.”³⁷ Secretary Daniels previously declared: “The court will include in its findings its conclusion as to whether ‘practically indiscriminate killings of natives has been going on for some time,’ as alleged in the letter from Brig. Gen. George Barnett.”³⁸ Invested in the American occupation, the special board of inquiry revealed only a small number of atrocities and ultimately paraded only a partial picture of situation in Haiti.

The dismissal of General George Barnett’s accusations by the department of the Navy would later create an opportunity for Haitian journalists to defend Haitian sovereignty. In a letter reprinted in *The Nation*, Joseph Jolibois, a delegate of the Haiti Patriotic Union of Latin America, and former editor of the *Courrier Haitien*, urged Americans to restore independence to Haiti as a testimony of the American desire to “cement good relations” between the United States and Latin American nations. Because the Chambers were dissolved in June of 1916, there had been no legislative elections since the beginning of the occupation. Jolibois added: “The ex-chief of the Marines of the United States, General Barnett, officially informed the Navy Department of the United States that 3,500 peaceful country men had been killed by American

³⁶ Staff, 348.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ U.S. Senate, *Hearings Before a Select Committee on Haiti and Santo Domingo, United States Senate*, 1587

Marines.” Although American officials insisted publicly that its aim in Haiti was to combat anarchy, the actions of American Marines contradicted their mission. Using Haitian history, Jolibois attempted to make his case for Haitian autonomy. He contended: “Haiti was the only county that aided the liberator Bolivar in the war of independence of Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Venezuela, and Colombia. Furthermore, 1500 Haitians fought at Savannah under Comte d’Estaing in the army of General Lafayette for the independence of your powerful country, and afterwards fought for thirteen years for the independence Haiti.” Characterizing the U.S. occupation of Haiti as inconsistent with American dogma, Jolibois hoped to illustrate the shared principle of self-determination that existed between both Haiti and the United States.³⁹

Even as policymakers disapproved of how leaders in Haiti executed the American mission, they ultimately believed it was the duty of the United States to establish a civil government in Haiti in view of its African racial background. Expressing his opinion on the crisis in Haiti Republican Senator Medill McCormick accused the American government of “exquisite hypocrisy.” In his editorial for *The Nation*, he declared: “We entered Haiti and Santo Domingo uninvited, and have ruled by right of superior force; and in the course of our rule we have committed unspeakable atrocities.” Falling short of criticizing the actions of the Marines Corps, McCormick instead endorsed the idea of investigating the charges made against the Department of the Navy. The senator firmly believed that the current state of affairs in Haiti was the consequence of a breakdown in American leadership. “The gross failure, the real culpability,” McCormick declared was “that of the Secretary of the Navy and the President of the United States, who together failed to vest in a single responsible officer.” From his standpoint, it was the duty of the United States to develop the political capacity and economic welfare of the Haitian people. Even with increasing criticism surrounding the mismanagement of the crisis in

³⁹Jolibois, Joseph. “A Letter to Mr. Hoover.” *Nation* 128, no. 3317 (January 30, 1929): 145.

Haiti, the Senator affirmed: “We are there, and in my judgment we ought to stay there for twenty years.” It was his estimation that the United States should make an effort to establish a “truly constructive policy under a new administration.” McCormick led the way among American politicians in his disparagement of the American occupation but he ultimately accepted the idea that it was duty of American government to “civilize” a rather barbarous people. In his remarks, McCormick pointed to several examples of Haitian savagery. “In parts of the interior of Haiti” he insisted, “it was possible a few years ago to see men and women naked at their work.” Additionally, he stated: “There were voodoo priests and priestess, papa-loi and mama-loi, voodoo groves which any inquisitive traveler might visit, voodoo feasts and voodoo sacrifices, voodoo orgies terminating, I am afraid, some of them in a cannibalistic climax.” For these reasons, it was imperative that American officers positioned in Haiti were “men keenly sympathetic with the purpose to develop the country, the Government, and above all, the civilization of the people whom the overwhelming majority have African blood in their veins.” While American missionaries were present in Asia and Africa, McCormick maintained Haiti needed “most devoted missionary effort to supplement what maybe done through government agencies.”⁴⁰

Applauding Senator McCormick’s pioneering voice of disapproval, *The Nation* still differed substantially in its opinions. Protesting the senator’s proposals, the editor wrote: “When he suggests that the gross failure and the real culpability lie in the failure of the Democratic Administration to vest all power in Haiti and Santo Domingo in a ‘single responsible office, a virtual dictator, *The Nation* must part company with him.’” It was the belief of editors at *The Nation* that occupying the island for twenty years was not a plausible solution to problem. Conversely, they insisted that the United States owed Haitians an “apology, reparations and temporary aid in the process of rebuilding the institutions of self-government which we have torn

⁴⁰ McCormick, Medill. “Our Failure in Haiti.” *Nation* 111, no. 2891 (1920): 615-616.

down.” The periodical also had little faith in the Republican leadership to change the conditions on the ground in Haiti and differed with McCormick’s depiction of the Haitian people and their religion. The senator characterized Haitians as “primitive African peasants who have managed to live and to multiply despite the anarchy into which their country had fallen.” Though the editor conceded that there had been occasional anarchy in Haiti, *The Nation* revealed that capital from the “civilized” United States often supported these rebellions.⁴¹ Comparing the United States to Haiti the writer observed: “There has been voodooism in Haiti just as there has been lynching and there is superstition and degeneracy in part of the United States.” To this end, the editor reasoned that the charges of barbarism were unwarranted. Bringing the opinion a piece to close, the editor confirmed: “*The Nation* does not accept the ‘manifest destiny’ of the United States to rule the Caribbean; it does not believe that our superior material civilization gives us an inherent right to interfere in and rearrange the affairs of small republics near our borders.”⁴² For Senator McCormick, the American presence in Haiti, excluding its approach, was justified. *The Nation* disagreed considerably.

Debates over Haiti’s sovereignty would travel from the pages of *The Nation* to a Select Committee on Haiti and Santo Domingo investigating the occupation. Nearly a year after making his opinions known in *The Nation*, Senator Medill McCormick served as chairperson this commission, which convened in the committee room of the Capitol on August 5, 1921. Several organizations including the Haiti-Santo Domingo Independence Society, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored people (NAACP), the Union Patriotique d’Haiti, the United States Marine Corps and Navy participated in these hearings. Established in response to the occupation, the Haiti-Santo Domingo Independence Society worked towards the

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Editorial. *Nation* 111, no. 2891 (1920): 616.

immediate restoration of full national independence of both Haiti and Santo Domingo.⁴³ Staffed by Americans, this group worked to complement the efforts of the Union Patriotique d’Haiti. Mirroring the NAACP, the Union Patriotique d’Haiti was a unified coalition of Haitian citizens and African Americans “having as its prime object the working in accord with the defenders of the Haitian cause in the United States for the abolishment of all restrictions placed upon the full exercise of sovereignty and independence on the part of the Haitian government.”⁴⁴ Established by Haitian nationalists, black and mulatto Haitians advocating for self-determination, this group consisted of 20,000 members throughout the cities and villages of Haiti. Representing the Union Patriotique d’Haiti, former president of the Haitian Senate, Stenio Vincent, a Haitian mulatto, issued a statement to the committee in which he declared: “From the view point of international law it is plain that the Wilson Government had no right to order an invasion of Haitian territory.”⁴⁵ At almost the same time, Vincent noted that President Wilson stated publicly that “no nation should seek to extend its policy over any other nation or people, but that every people should be left to determine its own policy its own way of development, unhindered, unthreatened, unafraid, the little along with the great and powerful.”⁴⁶ Vincent held an unfavorable opinion of Haiti policy put forth by the Wilson administration, as it was not in agreement with the president’s words.

While American policymakers characterized Haiti as a country where lawlessness reigned, the hearings before the Select Committee on Haiti and Santo Domingo created an opportunity for the U.S. government to gather different perspectives on the occupation. Testifying before the Senate Commission, Rev. L. Ton Evans, a Baptist missionary in Haiti,

⁴³ Allison, Madeline G., “Social Progress,” *The Crisis*, October 1921, 273.

⁴⁴ Editorial., *The Crisis*, May 1921, 8.

⁴⁵ U.S. Senate, Hearings Before a Select Committee on Haiti and Santo Domingo, United States Senate, 4.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

indicated that no condition existed that justified the intervention.⁴⁷ Whereas the United States government pointed to looming threat to foreigners' lives and property as grounds for the intervention, Stenio Vincent argued: "The fact is that while tragic events occurred in Port-au-Prince on July 27, 1915, resulting in the overthrow and death of President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam, throughout this affair the life of not a single American citizen or foreigner was taken or jeopardized. No property was destroyed."⁴⁸ During a cross-examination by Ernest Angell, attorney for the Haiti-Santo Domingo Independence Society, Admiral Caperton also admitted, "no foreigners or their property were molested in this revolution." On the contrary, Caperton described the intervention as a "precautionary measure." Supporting Caperton's testimony, Roger L. Farnham, vice-president of the National City Bank of New York stated: "Before the American Occupation there has never been any danger to any white man who traveled through the country. I have been through while 'revolutions' were on and a white man was never molested."⁴⁹ Prior to the occupation, the National City Bank of New York owned 2,000 shares of stock from the National Bank of Haiti. Purchasing additional shares of stocks after the start of the occupation, the National Bank of New York negotiated with France for the complete control of the National Bank of Haiti.⁵⁰ Farnham's admission to the Senate committee was significant as he was also an advisor to President Wilson on Haitian affairs and implicated.

Despite the fact that newspapers remained somewhat silent, writers for *The Nation* continued to place pressure on American officials positing that the U.S. government had much to gain from Haiti's period of anarchy. Shortly after the Select Committee on Haiti and Santo Domingo began their inquiry, Helena Hill Weed penned "Hearing the Truth About Haiti?" for the

⁴⁷ Weed, Helena Hill. "Hearing the Truth about Haiti." *Nation* 113, no. 2940 (1921): 533.

⁴⁸ U.S. Senate, *Hearings Before a Select Committee on Haiti and Santo Domingo, United States Senate*, 4.

⁴⁹ Weed, 533.

⁵⁰ Johnson, James Weldon. "Self-Determining Haiti. III. Government Of, By, and For the National City Bank." *Nation* 111, no. 2880 (September 11, 1920): 295.

periodical. In her article, Weed explored the discussions of committee members in an effort to uncover the motives behind the American occupation. Documents surfaced that disclosed that the U.S. government had planned an intervention prior to the assassination of President Guillaume Sam in 1915. His death only served as convincing explanation given that the United States government had already outlined a treaty in Washington granting it several rights over Haiti as early as July 2, 1914. A series of letters between Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan, Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels, and President Wilson also surfaced and revealed that the U.S. government previously arranged a naval demonstration in Haitian waters as a way of reinforcing the policies of the Wilson administration. Further, the United States Navy's secret dispatch-book suggested that leaders in the U.S. had already contemplated the landing of troops before Haiti's crisis. Many Haitians regarded the political crisis that occurred in Haiti as a referendum on the Haitian President Guillaume Sam as protestors believed that he was ready to sign a treaty with the United States that would grant American officials control to Haitian customhouses.⁵¹ The actions of the American government might have provoked Haiti's political calamity from the start.

Although the United States maintained publicly that it was committed to establishing a stable government in Haiti and returning autonomy to the Haitian people, *The Nation* uncovered documents that suggested otherwise. Subsequent to President Guillaume Sam's assassination, the Haitian Congress convened ready to elect his successor. Recounting the days that followed the killing of the Haitian president, Weed confirmed that the Wilson administration directed Admiral Caperton to "assume full military control of the capital." In a dispatch to Admiral Caperton, the Navy Department declared: "You will assure the Haitians that the United States has no other motive than the establishing of a firm and lasting government by the Haitian people and wishes

⁵¹ Ibid.

to assist them now, and at all time in the future, to maintain both their political independence and their territorial integrity unimpaired.” Convinced that Dr. Rosalvo Bobo would win the election, leaders in the United States ordered Admiral Caperton to delay the vote. “Haiti was ready, willing, and anxious,” Weed revealed, “to restore constitutional government but was not permitted to do so by American forces.” It was important to American leaders that the candidate sworn into office would pledge to ratify a treaty with the United States prior to the Presidential election.⁵² Fittingly, this person would submit to any request made by U.S. officials.⁵³ One favored candidate was J.N. Legere, former Haitian Minister to the United States. To the Admiral Caperton’s dismay, Legere possessed nationalistic sentiments and refused to go along with the admiral’s plans. Disillusioned with Caperton’s proposal, he stated: “Tell the Admiral that I cannot become a candidate until I know what demands the United States will make. I must be in a position to defend my country. I am for Haiti.” Given that Legere refused to go along with Caperton’s proposal, the Wilson administration settled for Philippe Sudre Dartiguenave and for good reason. “In Dartiguenave,” Weed discovered, “the Admiral finally found a candidate who would ‘agree in advance to any terms the United States demanded and professed to believe that any terms the United States might demand would be for Haiti’s benefit.’” Responding to this accusation in a letter, President Dartiguenave wrote: “I am dumfounded by this... allegation.”⁵⁴ Dartiguenave denied making any promises to Admiral Caperton prior to his elections. Caperton’s deposition before Senatorial Commission indicated otherwise.

In an effort to present a first-hand account, members of the Senatorial Commission went to Haiti for two and a half weeks. Still, many Senators were steadfast in their opinion that Haitians were unable to govern themselves. Covering this account for *The Nation*, Ernest H.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid. 534.

⁵⁴ Dartiguenave, Sudre. “The Haitian President to the Nation.” *Nation* 113, no. 2946 (1921):741.

Gruening acknowledged: “To the majority of Haitians the Commission’s coming meant deliverance.” For many Haitians, the Senate Commission was evidence that the American military occupation was nearing an end as the investigation in their view was bound to be different. After the Commission refused to order an end to martial law and failed to assure the safety of all witnesses, they soon realized that things were not going to change.⁵⁵ During the course of the inquiry, the Committee spent an entire day on questions “about Haitian history, Haitian education, designed to bring out the backwardness of the Haitians and other national defects.”⁵⁶ All through the investigation, Senators began with their answers in mind and designed questions to satisfy their previously held conclusions. Their study revealed more about the realities of the American occupation than that of the Department of the Navy. It was still, however, problematic.

The Nation suggested that the occupation created a sense of fear among Haitian residents, as many believed that the U.S. government would not only inhibit their ability to act as a sovereign nation but also rescind their rights to citizenship. The Wilson administration stated publicly to the international community that the American intervention in Haiti was simply to maintain law and order and to teach the Haitians constitutional government. Instead, American officials altered the Haitian constitution, a clear indication of Haiti’s self-concept, removing the following clause: “The Republic of Haiti is one and indivisible, essentially free, sovereign, and independent. Its territory and dependent island are inviolable, and cannot be alienated by any treaty or convention.” Alerted to the various changes to their constitution, Haitians grew increasingly alarmed as German authorities began to spread rumors about the presence of the United States government in Haiti. In his testimony, Mr. Evans revealed: “After American

⁵⁵ Gruening, Ernest H. “The Senators Visit Haiti and Santo Domingo.” *Nation* 114, no. 2948 (1922): 7.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

commercial investment began in Haiti in 1910, the Germans who had heretofore controlled 95 per cent [sic] of the commercial life, fearing American competition, began to tell Haitians to beware of the Americans, that they were coming to steal their land and reenslave [sic] them.” The actions of American officials did little to counter this notion. “After the American Occupation,” Farnham disclosed to the Senate committee, “many of the Haitians seemed to turn against the whites and all white men looked alike. The natives were aroused by the talk of the chiefs and generals that the whites were going to make slaves of them again.” Shortly after arriving in Haiti, the American government revised “the Haitian constitution so that foreigners—in particular the National City Bank of New York—might hold land.” The treaty presented to Haitian officials by the Wilson administration divested Haitians of their political independence and alienated their land.⁵⁷

By allowing foreigners to possess land, Wilson attacked a central component of Haitian citizenship and sovereignty. In the decades prior to the Haitian Revolution, people born in “foreign lands” and in Saint Domingue shared the same rights for a brief period. With foreigners and people of African heritage possessing the ability to buy land and slaves, historian Laurent Dubois argues: “There was, in principle, no discrimination solely on the basis of African descent or skin color.” This period, however, was short-lived as Saint Domingue slowly transformed from an open society to one imbued with racial intolerance.⁵⁸ Land, primarily a marker of social status, would soon serve as an indication of citizenship. Discussing the enslaved population in Haiti, Dubois notes: “They coined the term *petit blancs*—little whites—to refer to those who did not own land, contrasting them to the *grand blancs* (big whites), also classed *Blancs noirs*, or

⁵⁷ Weed, 533-535.

⁵⁸ Dubois, Laurent. *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 62.

‘Whites whites,’ whose ownership of property made them true whites. ”⁵⁹ With France at war with Spain and Britain at the end of eighteenth century, French delegates were willing to grant land and French citizenship to all people of African descent in an effort to gain their support and save the French republic. Land became a bargaining tool for the French and one of the privileges of citizenship. Given that plantation owners only allotted their slaves a small plot of land to work to feed their families, Haitians would later adopt the tradition of land and its relationship to citizenship in their constitution. Additionally, with threats from other nations following the Haitian Revolution, land ownership also became a matter of sovereignty. As such, Haitians would prevent foreigners from acquiring land in Haiti.

Moreover, testimony before the Senate Committee indicated that the reinstatement of an old Haitian law of *corvée* by American leaders on the ground only magnified the fear of Haitian residents that they would be re-enslaved and lose their freedom. Seldom used, the law called for Haitian citizens to work three days each year on public roads.⁶⁰ This system of enforced labor transformed during the occupation. When Haitians were “reduced to actual physical slavery and its accompanying cruel treatment under the illegal application of the old *corvée* law,” Mr. Evans told the Senate Committee “they believed that what the Germans had told them of the Americans was true.”⁶¹ In his statements before the committee, General Williams suggested that President Dartiguenave had authorized the use of the *corvée* system. Responding to these charges Dartiguenave stated: “It is not unknown that at the beginning of the Occupation workers on the public works were not paid and volunteered their services. But gradually this work degenerated into a *corvée*, and forced labor, and contrary to their terms [the Haitian government’s] of the

⁵⁹ Ibid., 35.

⁶⁰ Johnson, James Weldon. *The Conquest of Haiti: Articles and Documents Reprinted from the Nation* (New York: Nation, 1920), 8.

⁶¹ Weed, 534.

rural code the peasant were seized by the military and sent far from their homes to repair the roads.” After being made aware of these illegal practices, Dartiguenave indicated that he informed American leaders on the ground but this system continued.⁶² In the end, the corvée system resulted in the Cacos War of 1918-1922. For Haitians, Mr. Evans contended before the Senate committee: “It became a matter of loyalty to their country, their independence, and their human liberties to fight the Americans with every weapon at their command.”⁶³ The issue did not rest in the transformation of the corvée arrangement but rather in the message the system delivered to the Haitian people about their viability as a free republic.

National politicians, journalists, editorialists and U.S. military leaders become involved in the larger conversation surrounding Haiti for very different reasons. During his tenure as president, Harding did little to change U.S. policy towards Haiti and return power to Haitian officials. Following the Senate inquiry, which the committee completed under Harding’s administration, Senator William H. King of Utah presented Senate Resolution 202 to his colleagues. This resolution proposed that the United States allow the “Haitian people to set up and establish a government of their own choice, and assume control of their own Government and their own civil and political affairs.”⁶⁴ Though Senate committee took some steps in writing to change their policies toward Haiti, President Harding did not execute these ideas. Persuaded by leaders of the NAACP that he might gain votes especially among African Americans by denouncing the handling of the Haiti crisis by Democratic leaders, Harding did so and after becoming President his tone toward the American occupation shifted.⁶⁵ As an alternative to withdrawal, Harding focused on reorganizing American leadership subsequent to his election. In

⁶² Dartiguenave, 741.

⁶³ Weed, 534.

⁶⁴ Balch, 151.

⁶⁵ Gannett, Lewis S. “In Haiti.” *Nation* 125, no. 3247 (1927): 315.

1922, John Russell took over as High Commissioner, which only strengthened the American presence on the ground in Haiti. Paul H. Doulas, a professor of Industrial relations and a contributor to *Occupied Haiti*, a report by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) addressing the American presence on the Caribbean island, described it as a "thinly disguised military control."⁶⁶ The United States government retained control over every aspect of Haitian affairs with the exception of the Department of Justice and Education. Under this system, Haitians frequently complained about their exclusion from administrative appointments.⁶⁷ As a candidate for the presidency, Harding assured American voters of an alternative solution to the problems in Haiti under his leadership. In spite of this, American Marines would remain in Haiti for the duration of his presidency.

By successfully characterizing the country as a backwards nation unfit to govern itself given the African ancestry of its people, U.S. officials caused many Americans to fall short of indentifying the behavior of the American government as imperialist in nature. In 1926, several years after U.S. Senators conducted their initial hearing, five American women and one male college professor representing the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), an organization committed to generating dialogue among different races, visited Haiti. Compiled by Emily Greene Balch, the group criticized the Senatorial Committee for issuing an "on-the-one-hand-and-on-the-other" type of report. The Senate investigation gave people the impression that while the Marine Corps did engage in some unfortunate behavior the United States government could remedy the situation in Haiti. As far as Americans were concerned, the U.S. Marine Corps had killed "bandits." "The American people," Balch acknowledged, "engrossed in the European carnage, did not stop to notice that our own Marines had killed 3,000

⁶⁶ Balch, 33.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

Haitian's fight for freedom." In some ways, the lack of outrage initially on the part of the American public pointed to the "success" of the U.S. occupation and of the Wilson administration. The American government occupied Haiti and engaged in behavior that countered its fundamental values and the principles it hoped to instill in the Haitian people. This was the method used by other imperialist countries and as Balch noted, "the Marine Corps copy-boys know their job."⁶⁸ Instead of reporting on the lives lost, mainstream American journalists touted regularly "the astonishing achievement in health and agriculture of the American experts, and the desolate backwardness of the Haitians before the Americans uplift them."⁶⁹ Even with the investigation of the Senatorial Committee, the gravity of the crimes committed by the Marine Corps remained incomprehensible to the majority of Americans.

Preventing Haitians from acting as an independent nation, the committee concluded, was not only harmful to Haiti but also damaging to American democracy.⁷⁰ Examining topics ranging from the race relations to issues in education to the economic and financial aspects of the occupation the board determined that the problem in Haiti did not rest in the individual who misused power but rather in armed occupation itself.⁷¹ In their final analysis of the situation facing the Caribbean republic, the committee maintained: "Haiti constitutes a clear challenge to all who believe in the fundamental principle upon which the United States is founded, that government should rest upon the consent of the governed."⁷² Therefore, restoration of Haiti's independence was both a legal and moral obligation. Given that the occupation represented an unjustified use of power, the authors of the report believed that the evacuation of Haiti by American Marines would be beneficial not only to the Haitian republic but to the United States

⁶⁸ Gannett, 315.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 316.

⁷⁰ Balch, 149.

⁷¹ Ibid., vii.

⁷² Ibid., 149.

and its relationship with other republics.⁷³ It was their final recommendation that the American government return sovereignty to the Haitian republic “‘as soon as practicable’ with interim civilian control.”⁷⁴

Reflecting on the current conditions in Haiti, Balch wrote: “When Thomas Jefferson was President of the United States the black slaves and freedom fighters of Haiti drove their French masters into the sea and set up the second independent republic in the western hemisphere.”⁷⁵ In contrast, she continued: “When Woodrow Wilson was President in Washington United States Marines landed in Haiti, seized the gold in the National Bank, took over the customs-houses, closed the legislative assembly, and refused payment of salaries to Haitian officials.”⁷⁶ Comparing the conditions in Caribbean republic between the presidencies of Jefferson and Wilson, Balch posited that the policies initiated by the Wilson administration only worsened the conditions in Haiti. Although the assassination of President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam was a political crisis, it represented a calamity that was exceedingly familiar to the republic, a crisis of authority. President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam’s experience would not differ from that of his predecessors. Following his assassination, the Haitian Congress assembled and prepared to select his successor. But this time the course of Haitian affairs unfolded differently.

Seligmann’s exposé would have long-term consequences. It prompted writers for *The Nation* to sustain a debate over Haitians and their capacity for self-governance. It also caused the American public to question the role of the armed forces in Haiti. With grave charges leveled against the occupation, these discussions concerning Haitian self-rule would manifest themselves in a series of investigations. Reporters for *The Nation* accused the American government of

⁷³ Ibid., 151.

⁷⁴ Gannett, 315.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

abusing its power, promoting a financial monopoly, establishing an iron censorship, and committing unjustified killings.⁷⁷ As a presidential candidate, then Senator Warren G. Harding emphasized similar accusations in his campaign speeches, bringing attention to the issues surrounding Haiti.⁷⁸ Conducted internally, the naval inquiry led by Admiral Henry T. Mayo was inadequate as American officials actively tried to conceal the actions of their peers, they rendered an inadequate picture of the occupation for the American people. Subsequent investigations, however, were better equipped to give Americans a more telling illustration of the effects of the U.S. invasion on Haitian sovereignty. Seeing as the acts committed by American Marines were incompatible with the American mission to establish a stable government in Haiti, *The Nation* was able to raise public awareness and create a political test for the Wilson administration.

National politicians became involved in the larger conversation surrounding Haiti and its ability to rule because their own political motives. Though Senator McCormick was one of the leading figures urging the government to investigate of the actions of American Marines, he in fact believed in Wilson's mission in Haiti. For McCormick, the crisis in Haiti represented a failure of Wilson's Democratic administration. From his standpoint, the U.S. presence in Haiti should have continued only under Republican leadership. Likewise, Senator Harding's political ambitions motivated him to enter the debate on the crisis in Haiti. Vying for African American votes, Harding turned Haiti's political calamity into a campaign issue. Even as the African American community pressed Harding on his policies toward Haiti, the rest of the electorate remained ambivalent. Occupied Haiti failed to sustain the interest of the American public. Consequently, Harding did little as president to bring the occupation to an end. Only African-

⁷⁷Staff, 342-343.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 343.

Americans remained heavily invested in change because they believed that the occupation would have immediate consequences for their community. As Balch wrote: “The American people have shown scant interest in the facts or sympathy for the second republic in the Western hemisphere. Gas is cheap; and when it rains the movies are open.”⁷⁹ By 1927, the American people were scarcely aware of the issues surrounding Haiti.

⁷⁹Gannett, 316.

CHAPTER 3

DOWN WITH THE OCCUPATION

“A bas, l’Occupation! A bas Borno!” On December 5, 1929, after three American naval airplanes circled the port city of Aux Cayes, Haitian men, women and children protesting taxes on Haitian goods ran into the streets shouting, “Down with the occupation! Down with Borno!” In an effort to tame the crowd, the naval airplanes discharged machine guns, occasionally dropped shell-cases and then flew out over the bay where they released bombs. Taking place after a week of general strikes and rallies protesting the treatment of students at the agricultural school at Damien, this “demonstration of force” proved to have a reverse effect.¹ The next day a massacre occurred at Aux Cayes after group of 1,500 Haitians entered the city hoping to voice their complaints to local authorities.² Alarmed at the size of the assembly, American Marines fired their machine guns onto a crowd of unarmed protestors.

Correspondents from the Associated Press and the United Press broke the news of the Aux Cayes massacre reporting that American Marines had killed five Haitians and wounded several others. With Haitian media suspended, L.J. de Bekker, a writer for *The Nation* revealed that “[a]ll [of] Haiti knew [the] next day how inaccurate these figures were.” Unable to silence the sense of dissatisfaction among Haitians concerning the total number of deaths caused by the massacre, Colonel Cutts sent an official communiqué to Haitian newspapers a month later

¹ Bekker, L. J. “The Massacre at Aux Cayes.” *Nation* 130, no. 3375 (1930): 309.

² Plummer, Brenda Gayle. “The Afro - American Response to the Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934,” *Phylon* 43, no. 2 (1982): 140.

augmenting the initial reports to “ten killed and twenty-four wounded.” In reality, American Marines took responsibility for killing 24 unarmed protestors and wounding 51 others. Nevertheless, Colonel Cutts declared: “There is little probability that there will be any changes from this final report.”¹ Misleading the public in his communiqué, Colonel Cutts only worsened matters in Haiti.

The confrontation between Haitian protestors and American Marines at Aux Cayes was a significant turning point during the U.S. occupation. With dozens of unarmed protestors killed by U.S. forces, the Aux Cayes affair brought about political change, which sets it apart from other crises on the island. Beyond illuminating the events that transpired at this seaport town, this chapter focuses on why this particular incident resulted in the departure of American Marines from Haiti and the role of *The Nation* in facilitating that change. It also documents the response of *The Crisis* to the findings of the Forbes Commission, an investigative committee authorized by President Hoover, while detailing African American reaction to departure of American Marines. Rallying Haitians and critics against the occupation, the Aux Cayes massacre created a political crisis for U.S. officials that forced them to reevaluate American policies towards Haiti and finally abandon their mission. Facing pressure from Haitians and U.S. critics alike, the United States government would finally grant Haitians limited independence characterized by a lack of economic sovereignty but not before transforming Haitian politics of race and citizenship.

In order to understand why the Aux Cayes massacre provoked change, it is first necessary to understand the political climate in Haiti during this period. Following the end Dartiguenave’s term, the United States selected a member of the mulatto elite, Joseph Louis Borno, as Dartiguenave’s successor. Serving in various capacities under the Dartiguenave presidency, Borno had previously protested the decisions made by the American government. As president,

¹ Bekker, 309.

however, Borno expressed the hope that “the United States will continue its supervision over Haitian affairs.”² According to Historian Léon Dénius Pamphile, Borno stood firm in his support of the occupation and urged Haitians to embrace the principles of “confidence and cooperation” between Haiti and the United States as outlined in the Haitian-American Treaty of 1915.³ His stance on occupation would cause him to fall out favor with Haitian nationalists.

President Borno viewed the American occupation as an opportunity for Haiti to advance economically. While his predecessor staunchly opposed previous efforts made by the United States to intervene in the educational affairs on the island, Borno proved to be more accommodating on this issue.⁴ American officials criticized the Haitian educational system for being an elitist institution that only serviced the Haitian minority. Based on the French lycée model the educational curriculum in Haiti centered primarily on liberal arts and classics studies. Producing hundreds of lawyers who spoke Latin, one historian argues that the Haitian educational structure failed to produce anyone who knew “how to repair a steam engine.” By restructuring Haiti’s educational system to focus more on technical fields, American officials hoped it would ignite an industrial revolution in Haiti.⁵ In Borno, historian Hans Schmidt notes, the Harding administration found an “individual who shared a materialistic technocratic concept of progress.”⁶ Accordingly, he agreed to let the United States government establish an Agricultural school in Damien.

² “Haiti: What are we really doing there,” *The Crisis*, July 1926, 125.

³ Pamphile, Léon Dénius. *Clash of Cultures: America's Educational Strategies in Occupied Haiti, 1915-1934* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2008), 68.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Girard, Philippe R. *Paradise Lost: Haiti's Tumultuous Journey from Pearl of the Caribbean to Third World Hot Spot*. 1 ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 86.

⁶ Schmidt, Hans. *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1971), 15.

Inciting another crisis, Borno's support of educational reforms initiated by the American government galvanized Haitian students against the occupation. Tension in Haiti worsened following a dispute between students at the Agricultural school at Damien and Dr. George F. Freeman, head of the Service Technique, an American control agency that managed agricultural and vocational programs in Haiti. As head of this organization, Dr. Freeman recruited children of the mulatto elite by offering them generous scholarships. When the number of less educated students enrolled at Damien increased, Freeman reorganized the award structure to benefit the children of lower class Haitians. When mulatto students complained, Freeman suggested that they could leave the school, given that he could replace them without difficulty.⁷ The dispute between Freeman and students at Damien escalated, leading to student strikes on October 31, 1929.

The strikes at Damien created an opportunity for every sector of Haitian society to voice their dissatisfaction with the occupation. A month after the initial protests tensions in Haiti had only amplified. One journalist from *The Nation* reported: "The American Marines in Haiti are sleeping with their arms beside them, and are not permitted to stray away even for the usual diversions of golf and tennis."⁸ Relying on government salaries, mulatto leaders and their children had watched their standard of living decrease because of U.S. policies. Accordingly, they viewed Russell's proposal to build up a middle class and increase the standard of living among lower class Haitians through changes in Haiti's educational system as a threat to their own position.⁹ Even as American officials intended to address a legitimate issue in the Haitian educational system, one Caribbean researcher notes that it "ran afoul of local class prejudices

⁷ Shannon, Magdaline W. *Jean Price-Mars, the Haitian Elite and the American Occupation, 1915-1935* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 81-82.

⁸ "On Watch in Haiti." *Nation* 129, no. 3359 (1929): 573.

⁹ Munro, Dana Gardner. *The United States and the Caribbean Republics, 1921-1933* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), 309.

that the Americans did not understand.”¹⁰ Haitians with little economic standing, for their part, were frustrated with the falling price of coffee and new tobacco taxes, which hurt farmers.¹¹ Additionally, President Borno who in 1928, solemnly assured the Haitians that he would order congressional elections during the spring of 1930 and then retire, newly informed Haitians that there would not be any Congressional elections during the spring of 1930. According to an editorialist for *The Nation*, this seemed “to mean that he intends to continue as president and dictator until the United States treaty with Haiti ends in 1936, when the protection of the Marines will presumably be withdrawn.”¹² Disconcerted with Borno’s decision to halt popular elections, Haitian nationalists, blacks and mulattos who advocated Haitian self-determination, also embraced the plight of students, seeing it as a chance to voice their concerns. Students from Haiti’s school of law, medicine and applied science also joined the cause.

As Haiti experienced another moment of social unrest, Raymond Leslie Buell and the Foreign Policy Association, a nonprofit organization, reevaluated the American mission and proposed four possible strategies that the Hoover administration could implement. The first plan suggested that the United States evacuate Haiti immediately. Buell reasoned that those holding this view believed that the occupation demoralized Haiti’s educated class.¹³ Therefore, they were of the opinion that the Treaty of 1915, which was set to expire in six and a half years on May 3, 1936, should terminate immediately. Others like President Borno had confidence in the current strategy toward Haiti and thought that the occupation should continue until the termination of the treaty. With the help of the United States, Borno hoped to direct his energy towards “bringing about a

¹⁰ Girard, 87.

¹¹ Munro, 309.

¹² “On Watch in Haiti.” *Nation* 129, no. 3359 (1929):574.

¹³ Buell, Raymond Leslie. *The American Occupation of Haiti* (New York, N.Y.: Foreign Policy Association, 1929), 391.

program of reforms intended to put the country on the normal path of civilized peoples.”¹⁴ Others thought that Haitians would be less able to govern themselves if the present policy was continued. In view of that, it was vital for the United States to begin to prepare Haitians for American departure. Hoping to preserve the economic and educational advances inaugurated by the U.S. government, the last strategy called for an indefinite occupation. With controversy encircling the American occupation, the Foreign Policy Association pressed President Hoover to appoint a commission to investigate further the problems affecting Haiti.

The strikes at Damien culminated at Aux Cayes. Prior to the disturbances at Damien, General Russell frequently reported on the achievements of the American mission. However, as former American Minister to Haiti Dana Munro would later recount, in the closing weeks of 1929, Haiti had experienced “the first serious disturbances which the country had seen in nearly ten years.” Initially, the Garde d' Haiti, Haiti's military, did not interfere with the protest movement. However, once Haitians employed by the occupation joined in protest rallies, General Russell questioned the loyalty of the Haitian military. As a result, Russell reinstated martial law on December 4 and requested that the American government supply him with five hundred additional Marines.¹⁵ Armed with additional forces, American officials ordered Marines to release bombs into the Cayes harbor the next day. This demonstration of force only increased hostility on the island.

With thousands of Haitians protesting the occupation, tensions erupted on December 6, 1929. Describing the events occurring on the day of the Aux Cayes massacre, one eyewitness stated: “Except for the lingering emotion aroused by the day before, normal life has recommenced.” Things quickly changed when a large crowd from the town of Torbeck headed

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Munro, 311-312.

towards Aux Cayes hoping to join protesters and get American officials to abolish taxes on their goods. In his account, Colonel Cutts reported: “Leaders of the crowd were permitted to enter Cayes to reassure themselves, and declare on returning that the strike in Cayes was over.” According to Cutts, the mob violated their promise and refused to go home. Instead, the colonel claimed that the mob surrounded the Marines forcing them to fire in self-defense. “Even when Marines fired their arms,” Cutts maintained that it was “directed low against the legs, for the purpose of checking the mob while killing as few as possible.” Conversely, one bystander recalled hearing the “murderous rattle of the machine-guns.” Nevertheless, chaos ensued as men, women and children all scattered. Describing the scene an observer remarked: “One hears the screams and moans of the wounded (they are going to pass the night under the stars), the death rattles of those in agony.” When night arrived, the Marines withdrew from Aux Cayes and American physicians followed, leaving their Haitian colleagues to care for the wounded.¹⁶

To be sure, eyewitness accounts of the Aux Cayes massacre differed considerably from that of Colonel Cutts’. American officials later accused protestors of carrying machetes but as one witness observed “nearly all had empty hands.” While the Hoover administration agreed to allow Haitian dailies to publish the names of the dead, Marines only took responsibility for killing 24 unarmed protestors and wounding 51 others. However, as one reporter for *The Nation* discovered: “The unsupported evidence of some of the Haitians is that they counted the dead, that the total was 212, and the number of the wounded proportionally greater.” The State Department declined to address this discrepancy.¹⁷

Unlike previous incidents that occurred during the course of the occupation, the Aux Cayes massacre created fear of widespread chaos among American officials that helped affect

¹⁶ Bekker, 309-310.

¹⁷ Ibid.

change in American foreign policy towards Haiti. As one writer for *The Nation* observed: “There is fear of an uprising—fourteen years after the Occupation began!”¹⁸ The efforts of *The Nation* and *The Crisis* kept the American public cognizant of the events occurring in Haiti. Fearing that the negative publicity resulting from the Aux Cayes massacre would reflect negatively on his Latin American policy, President Hoover took heed of the recommendations issued by the Foreign Policy Association and established a commission to reassess the situation in Haiti. On December 3, 1929, President Hoover announced, “[i]f Congress approves, I shall dispatch a commission to Haiti to review and study the matter in an endeavor to arrive at some more definite policy than at present.”¹⁹ Previous studies on the situation in Haiti had already identified the reasons that prompted the United States to occupy Haiti in 1915. Chaired by W. Cameron Forbes, former governor general of the Philippine Islands, this group instead focused on understanding the conditions in Haiti and developing a strategy for American withdrawal.

The findings of the Forbes Commission, which *The Nation* reprinted, served as a clear indication that the American presence in Haiti had transformed Haitian politics of race and citizenship. The committee blamed many of the difficulties that American military and civil forces faced in Haiti on their lack of understanding of the racial dynamics present in Haiti. After more than a century of freedom, Haitians, the committee revealed, had developed a “highly cultured, highly sophisticated, race-conscious leadership.” Identifying the Haitian elite as the leading class, members portrayed the remaining population as “poor and ignorant” and being of “pure African descent.” With a small mulatto minority initially in support of the occupation, American officials tended to award them with the presidency. Chosen by the U.S. government to lead Haiti, presidents Sudre Philippe Dartiguenave, Joseph Louis Borno, Eugene Roy and his

¹⁸ “On Watch in Haiti.” *Nation* 129, no. 3359 (1929): 573.

¹⁹ “The Haiti Commission's Report.” *Nation* 130, no. 3379 (1930): 434.

successor, Stenio Vincent were all mulatto. By consistently selecting mulatto candidates for president and ignoring the opinions of the larger black Haitian population, American officials limited prospects for democracy. The Commission determined that it was not surprising that the attempt by occupational leaders to plant democracy in Haiti by “drill and harrow” and its resolve to set up a Haitian middle class was a complete failure. The Commission continued: “However wise and necessary it may seem to Americans—all these explain why, in part, the high hopes of our good works have not been realized.”²⁰ American leaders in Haiti failed to take an inclusive approach in their dealings with Haitians.

The U.S. occupation forced Haitian blacks and mulattos to unite temporarily to defend all claims to citizenship. The scholarship of Haiti scholar Elizabeth Abbott and Leon D. Pamphile supports this line of reasoning. Given that the presence of American Marines had an adverse affect on Haitian mulattos and blacks alike, the occupation facilitated a union between both groups. Describing the mulatto population in Haiti, an American brigade commander stated: “No matter how much veneer and polish a Haitian may have, he is absolutely savage under the skin and under strain reverts to type.” Abbott maintains that during the American occupation, Haitian mulattos “for the first time in their lives...were made to feel in their lighter skin the indignity of the same contempt they had meted out to their black countrymen for centuries.”²¹ In feeling the contempt experienced by the larger black Haitian population, the Haitian mulatto elite realized that citizenship rights were not exclusive to them. Consequently, Haitian mulattos would also join the larger black Haitian population in their cause to protect the citizenship rights of all blacks. The larger black Haitian population would also shift their views. Prior to the occupation, Emily Greene Balch noted that Haitians had a tendency to look down on “American Negroes, whose slavery is so recent, and

²⁰ Ibid., 433- 434.

²¹ Abbott, Elizabeth. *Haiti: The Duvaliers and their Legacy* (New York, N.Y.: McGraw-Hill, 1988), 39.

who are obliged to endure so much that is humiliating.” “This prejudice,” Balch remarked in 1926, “seems to be clearing away.”²²

The occupation transformed notions of citizenship among Haitians while encouraging them to reconsider how they practiced citizenship. As Haitians united to protect their citizenship they made decisions about what it meant to be a Haitian citizens moving forward. As such, new practices emerged during this period. For instance, Haitians changed the way that they educated their children about Haiti and about citizenship. Detailing the adjustments made in the Haitian educational system because of the occupation, historian Leon D. Pamphile wrote, “[l]ess attention was given to French and European history as student began to learn more about the backgrounds of African civilization.”²³ According to Abbott, elements of Haitian culture such as the Creole language and Voudou religion took on a newfound meaning for both mulatto and black Haitians. She argues that their contempt for the occupation caused them to revert to “their African roots, to their history, and to the black historical giants who had won their freedom.”²⁴ Being a Haitian citizen after the occupation meant being proud of Haiti’s African ancestry.

Concluding their report, the Forbes Commission ascertained that the ability of the American government to withdraw from Haiti depended largely on the Garde d' Haiti. In their findings, the members learned that occupation leaders had never promoted Haitian officers in the Garde d' Haiti beyond the grade of captain. Therefore, they advised that Haitian personnel should begin to replace American officers. At this point, the group determined: “It is too early to suggest in what form the American Occupation should be liquidated upon the expiration of the

²²Balch, Emily Greene. *Occupied Haiti; being the Report of a Committee of Six Disinterested Americans Representing Organizations Exclusively American, Who, having Personally Studied Conditions in Haiti in 1926, Favor the Restoration of the Independence of the Negro Republic* (New York: The Writers Publishing Company, Inc, 1927),120.

²³ Pamphile, Léon Dénius. *Clash of Cultures: America's Educational Strategies in Occupied Haiti, 1915-1934* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2008), 166.

²⁴ Abbott, 37.

treaty.”²⁵ While the Commission did not know what form of further aid and assistance the U.S. should provide the Haitian state, it urged President Hoover and his Administration to restore the constitutional government and take steps towards withdrawal. Hoover would later announce his plan to incorporate the recommendations of the Commission into his foreign policy towards Haiti.

Although the Hoover administration did not include any African Americans on the Forbes Commission, writers for *The Crisis* remained engaged in the issues. Characterizing the report of the Commission as contradictory Du Bois stated: “The Marines are praised. General Russell is found ‘whole-hearted and single-minded,’ and Haitian Government is blamed for its condition in 1915.” Continuing to list the accomplishments of the occupation noted by the Commission, Du Bois remarked: “The Commission finds ‘great material progress in the past fifteen years,’ and recites eight hundred miles of highways, a new and modern fiscal system, civil order, and a sanitary service.”²⁶ Even though the Commission attempted to cast a positive light on some aspects of the occupation, Du Bois agreed with their recommendations and urged the Hoover administration to fulfill immediately all recommendations put forth by the Forbes Commission.²⁷ Applauding the efforts of the Hoover administration, the Du Bois concluded: “It is the credit of Herbert Hoover that he has begun thus to retrieve the unforgivable error of Woodrow Wilson.”²⁸

Eight years after the Senators conducted their initial investigations into the conditions in Haiti, the atmosphere on the island had changed considerably. At first, Haitians were pleased with the effort put forth by President Hoover to develop an exit strategy for the occupation. This

²⁵ “The Haiti Commission's Report.” *Nation* 130, no. 3379 (1930): 433.

²⁶ Du Bois, W.E.B., “Postscript: Haiti,” *The Crisis*, May 1930, 173-174.

²⁷ “An Appeal to the President of the United States,” *The Crisis*, August 1931, 279.

²⁸ Du Bois, 173-174.

excitement, however, was short-lived. Upon their arrival, the Commission revealed that President Hoover did not invest them with any power to end the occupation, only the ability to make formal recommendations. Moreover, these recommendations would not be complete until several months after their visit. In an article for *The Nation* in 1930, Helena Weed pointed out that “[s]uch a wave of bitterness spread over the island that it seemed for a day as if political tragedy was imminent.” With the exception of President Borno’s administration, Haitians were solidly against the occupation and called for the immediate withdrawal of military force from Haiti. “The day is long past” according to Weed, “when an amelioration of these grievances would satisfy any Haitian.” Though there was a substantial amount of evidence pointing to the illegal conduct of both civilian and military leaders as well as the brutal treatment of all Haitians regardless of their class, there was no desire among Haitians to present their case to the Commission.²⁹

The threat of impending protest helped Haitians and U.S. critics finally push for a measured lifting of the occupation. More than a year after the Forbes Commission issued its findings to the Hoover administration, the occupation continued and again widespread disruption was on the horizon. Formerly, the Commission recommended that parliamentary rule replace the dictatorship of President Luis Borno and that a civilian Minister take the place of the current High Commissioner. In addition to gradually withdrawing American Marines, the Commission also proposed that the United States adopt a policy that would provide for “an increasingly rapid Haitianization of the services, with the object of having Haitians experience in every department of the government ready to take over full responsibility at the expiration of the existing treaty.” Haitianization was the process by which the occupation turned over services rendered by American officials to Haitian leaders. President Hoover succeeded in implementing the first two

²⁹ Weed, Helena Hill. “Fresh Hope for Haiti.” *Nation* 130, no. 3376 (1930): 342.

steps of this initiative. Even with these changes, an editorialist for *The Nation* revealed, “Marines are still in Haiti and Americans continue to hold most of the high government offices.”³⁰ Several periodicals including the Portland *Evening News* and the *New York Times* reported that the Haitian patriots were dissatisfied with the pace of American departure. Eager to complete the “Haitianization” process, Haitians considered the Haitian-American Treaty of 1915 invalid and believed that the United States should annul it and, if necessary negotiate a new treaty.³¹ “In view of the Forbes Commission’s recommendations,” the editorialist wrote, “they assume that even Washington admits the occupation to be illegal, and so they see no good reason for haggling over the terms of the withdrawal.” Haitian politicians seated in the national assembly with stakes in the end of the occupation pressed the issue as well.

Now that President Hoover wished to remove U.S. forces from Haiti, Dr. Dana Munro, American Minister to Haiti, and Pauleus Sannon, Haitian Foreign Secretary, experienced pressure from Haitian officials, American policymakers and journalists to negotiate an agreement between Haiti and the United States. From the point of view of the Haitian public, they were “quibbling over unessential details.” For that reason, one editorialist advised that the Hoover administration not concern itself with the political aspirations of Haitian politicians and the “the petty details of the withdrawal.” By disputing over such superfluous matters, the writer believed that the U.S. would fail to recognize the errors of the occupation. The Forbes Commission learned that “the acts and attitude of the treaty officials gave... the impression that they had been based on the assumption that the occupation would continue indefinitely.”³² Yet, in private many American officials frankly acknowledged that the American occupation of Haiti was a “miserable mistake and a practical failure, a tragedy and an outrage from the human

³⁰ “Editorials.” *Nation*, (July 15, 1931), 55.

³¹ Gruening, Ernest. “Haiti Marches Toward Freedom.” *Nation* 132, no. 3430 (1931): 364.

³² “Editorials.” *Nation*, (July 15, 1931), 56.

standpoint.”³³ American Marines, in one journalist’s view, should depart without insisting on formality and ceremony. Though this would undermine the claim asserted by American officials that Haitian leaders were not qualified to rule their own country, the writer held that in order to bring this chapter in American-Haitian relations to a close, it was essential that U.S. forces leave quietly. “Only by such a straight forward and honest course,” the journalist contended, “can we begin to right the wrongs we have done the Haitians these last sixteen years.” The postponement of Marine departure would only increase Haitian resentment against the United States. Furthermore, editor of the Portland *Evening News*, Ernest Chauvet hypothesized that a failure to act on the advice of the Forbes Commission would result in an “acute possibility of serious disorder.”³⁴

By forecasting the threat of widespread protest on the part of Haitians, journalists were able to influence occupation leaders and facilitate Marine departure. In an effort to quell rising tensions on the island, President Borno announced that the United States would remove its armed forces in 1936.³⁵ The announcement of withdrawal did little to ease the anxiety among Haitians. With a definite date for the removal of American Marines set for 1936, the Haitian elite in particular were apprehensive. They raised several questions: “Would the Occupation really get out? Could American promises be trusted after so many betrayals? And suppose Mr. Hoover should not be reelected in 1932, might not his successor reverse his policy?” Gruening characterized this sense of anxiety as a “state of psychic tension.” After experiencing the bloodshed that resulted after the occurrences at Aux Cayes, the Forbes Commission found Haiti in a “highly inflamed state of public mind.” Gruening compared the Haitian psyche to “a man long imprisoned who a few weeks before the end of his term risks all by making a break for

³³ Weed, Helena Hill. “Fresh Hope for Haiti.” *Nation* 130, no. 3376 (1930): 342.

³⁴ “Editorials.” *Nation*, (July 15, 1931),56.

³⁵ B., R. L. “The Haitian Situation.” *Nation* 126, no. 3281 (1928): 597.

liberty.”³⁶ The swift elimination of President Borno and the resignation of General Russell as High Commissioner along with the restoration of some aspects of Haitian self-government helped prevent the situation in Haiti from deteriorating into widespread uprising.

The United States government was unable to maintain order in Haiti but they also had little confidence that the Haitian people could preserve their government without any American support. Following Borno’s retirement, Eugene Roy, a respected mulatto entrepreneur, temporarily succeeded him on May 15, 1930. The Haitian Congress convened for the first time since American officials dissolved it in 1917, when members refused to ratify a new Constitution prepared by Washington.³⁷ In November of that year, they elected Haitian mulatto and ardent critic of the occupation, Stenio Vincent, as the next president of Haiti. His election represented a major victory for Haitian nationalists. “Privately,” Gruening confirmed, “Americans will tell you that ‘Haiti is bound to relapse the minute we take our hands off.’” Questioning the logic of occupation leaders in *The Nation*, Gruening asked, “And are we even ‘wiser men’?” With seven million people unemployed in the United States and crime rampant in larger cities, Gruening answered: “We might have thought so—in 1928. But today!” With all of its imperfections and shortcomings, Gruening believed that the best government was one people established for themselves.³⁸

It was the official position of the American government that the United States had an obligation to the people of Haiti to ensure an “efficient and stable government” before its withdrawal in 1936.³⁹ Earlier the Forbes Commission reported that under American rule although bandit gangs, however, the “social forces that created them still remain—poverty,

³⁶ Gruening, Ernest. “Haiti Marches Toward Freedom.” *Nation* 132, no. 3430 (1931):363.-364.

³⁷ Gruening, Ernest. “At Last We’re Getting Out of Haiti.” *Nation* 138, no. 3598 (1934): 700.

³⁸ Gruening, Ernest. “Haiti Marches Toward Freedom.” *Nation* 132, no. 3430 (1931): 366.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 364.

ignorance and the lack of tradition or desire for orderly free government...”⁴⁰ For that reason, a prominent United States official declared: “We want to be sure once we go out that we don’t have to come back.”⁴¹ In his rebuttal to the claims put forward by American bureaucrats, President Vincent pointed to the many Haitians who worked for the occupation, carrying out treaty services. It was his judgment that Haitians were more than capable of assuming the full responsibility of fulfilling government duties. Even with the lack of confidence among American leaders in the ability of the Haitian people to govern themselves, the United States slowly began restoring Haiti’s authority. Firstly, Hoover and Vincent ultimately signed a Haitianization Agreement on August 5, 1931. With the exception of Haiti’s military and financial services, this contract required the complete removal of U.S. personnel from administrative departments formerly controlled by the American government. This agreement ended martial law in Haiti as well.

As United States Minister Dana G. Munro and Haiti’s Foreign Minister Albert Blanchet worked to renegotiate the Haitian-American Treaty of 1915, the U.S. government insisted on maintaining fiscal oversight over Haitian affairs. “In all negotiations leading up to the treaty of 1932,” Gruening confirmed, “the United States was adamant for retaining the financial provisions.”⁴² Given that Haiti’s finances affected American and foreign bondholders, Hoover believed that it was imperative to have this provision in the treaty. Accordingly, under the new agreement an official nominated by the president of the United States would oversee Haiti’s finances, which would allow American official to preserve some control over the country. Haitian officials did not ratify the treaty, however, Hoover continued with Haitianization plans.

⁴⁰ “The Haiti Commission's Report.” *Nation* 130, no. 3379 (1930): 434.

⁴¹ Gruening, Ernest. “Haiti Marches Toward Freedom.” *Nation* 132, no. 3430 (1931):363.

⁴² Gruening, Ernest. “At Last We’re Getting Out of Haiti.” *Nation* 138, no. 3598 (1934): 700.

With the Hoover administration nearing an end, the questions surrounding Haiti remained an issue for the next administration to address. As president, Franklin D. Roosevelt continued Hoover's conciliatory policies towards Haiti. In his 1933 inaugural address, Roosevelt stated: "In the field of world policy, I would dedicate this nation to the policy of the good neighbor who resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects the rights of others."⁴³ Five months into the Roosevelt presidency, Norman Armour replaced Munro as the newly appointed United States Minister to Haiti. Vincent and Roosevelt decided to arrange for an Executive Agreement on August 7, 1933 between the two nations. By approving an Executive Agreement, both presidents circumvented their respective legislatures and expedited the process. The Executive Agreement differed only slightly from terms discussed in the past. It called for the Haitianization of the Garde d' Haiti by October 1, 1934 and required that a Fiscal Representative be in place by January 1, 1934.⁴⁴ In May of 1934, the two leader met to "discuss in the most friendly and cordial manner the different problem arising in the relations between the Government of the United States and of Haiti." In a joint statement pertaining to provisions for American withdrawal, the two leaders stated: "We are both inclined to the belief that the policy of the good neighbor...will be signally manifested in the results which will be obtained from this exchange of views and from negotiation which are now taking place."⁴⁵ Although the Roosevelt administration never officially defined the "Good Neighbor" policy, it implied that the United States would treat Latin American and Caribbean nation with equality and mutual respect.⁴⁶

⁴³ Smith, Joseph. *The United States and Latin America: A History of American Diplomacy, 1776-2000* (London: Routledge, 2005), 94.

⁴⁴Spector, Robert M. W. *Cameron Forbes and the Hoover Commissions to Haiti, 1930* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985),197.

⁴⁵ John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA. Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=14847>.

⁴⁶ Smith, 94.

Roosevelt's commitment to withdrawing American troops was a reflection of the transformation occurring in American foreign policy during this period. This change was evident throughout the Caribbean. In 1934 the Cuban government repealed the Platt amendment, a provision which in effect made Cuba a protectorate of the United States by granting American officials control of its foreign affairs following the Spanish American War. Roosevelt's decision to surrender U.S. control over Cuba's foreign affairs reflected the principles of The Good Neighbor policy. Even as American officials made progress in Haitian-American foreign relations, many criticized the negotiations between the two countries. Haitian politicians were outraged at President Vincent's decision to sign the Executive Agreement between Haiti and the United States. Writing for *The Nation*, reporter Hubert Herring captured their sentiment. Collectively, Haitian senators, deputies and other public officials regarded the Executive Agreement between Haiti and the United States as "a betrayal of Haiti's hopes and legitimate aspirations."⁴⁷ Denouncing his critics, Vincent praised the agreement for being "a great achievement for Haiti."⁴⁸ Members of the State Department likewise proclaimed, "the Haitian question settled."⁴⁹ Although American leaders promoted this contract as a new era in American-Haitian relations, Haitian politicians on the other hand differed in their assessment.

On August 15, 1934, four years after the Forbes Commission recommended American withdrawal U.S. Marines finally left Haiti. Following their departure, President Vincent "hoisted before a large and excited crowd the Haitian flag, in the same place where for 19 long years the flag of the United States of America has floated."⁵⁰ According to a journalist for *The Washington Post*: "The simple though dignified ceremony which accompanied the change in

⁴⁷ Herring, 596.

⁴⁸ Gruening, Ernest. "At Last We're Getting Out of Haiti." *Nation* 138, no. 3598 (1934): 700.

⁴⁹ Herring, Hubert. "Haiti's 'New Deal'." *Nation* 137, no. 3568 (1933): 596.

⁵⁰ "The President of Haiti Expresses Gratitude for America Aid," *The Crisis*, October 1934, 292.

flags also marked the withdrawal of the United States Marines from their former home at Cape Haitien on the north coast of Haiti.”⁵¹ In an open letter published in *The Crisis* dated September 6, 1934, Vincent expressed his gratitude to “all those American friends, colored or white, who, so willingly and so courageously have taken part, on our side, in the long and hard struggle of which the day of last August 21st marked the crowing victory.” He credited the publicity campaign launched by Americans with contributing to restoration of Haitian sovereignty. Characterizing their support, Vincent remarked: “The feeling of great sympathy that they have created about Haiti has made my hard task easier and helped towards the positive triumph of the Haitian Cause.” Addressing advocates of Haitian self-determination, he stated: “Tell them that we will never forget it, and that their names are written in the hearts of true Haitians.” For Vincent the withdrawal of U.S. Marines represented, in his words, “the regeneration of our native country in all the attributes of her political sovereignty.” Even as the agreement for withdrawal left Haiti devoid of economic independence, he was still optimistic. He argued: “If events follow the normal course which, in complete accord with the ideas of President Roosevelt, I have set in motion, they will soon lead to our financial freedom.”⁵²

American periodicals varied in their reaction to the end of the American occupation. Once the occupation ended, reactions in some newspapers again affirmed that Haiti was a reflection upon the African American community. As one article in *The Louisville Leader* suggested: “The world looks on to see what Haiti will do with the Marines gone—whether again she will start the assertion that a state under absolute Negro control is yet an impossibility.”⁵³ Despite the fact that newspapers continued to view post-occupation Haiti as a

⁵¹ “U.S. Marine Officers Get Posts Here: Are Coming From Haiti on Withdrawal of Sea Soldiers. Final Ceremonies Set for August 15 at Port au Prince,” *The Washington Post* (1923-1954), August 11, 1934, 10.

⁵² “The President of Haiti Expresses Gratitude for America Aid,” *The Crisis*, October 1934, 292.

⁵³ “From the Press of the Nation: Editorial of the Month,” *The Crisis*, October 1934, 303.

matter of consequence for African-American politics, mainstream newspapers failed to see the end of the occupation as a consequence of African-American protest. Many viewed the change that was occurring as part of the change occurring in American foreign policy towards Latin American and Caribbean countries. For instance, a reporter for the *Chicago Daily Tribune* stated: “By withdrawing the Marines from Haiti the United States government carried a step farther its good neighbor policy toward the nations in the south. The evacuation also closed the book of American intervention in Latin America.”⁵⁴ Describing the end of the American occupation, a writer for *The Christian Science Monitor* maintained: “Haiti comes into her own again. She becomes as free in reality as she was in international law, and the United States rids herself of a taint which was damaging their reputation as to her inner self.” Optimistic about the future of the West Indian republic, the journalist declared: “The Haitians regain their self-respect and the opportunity to carve out for themselves such a future as they themselves desire.”⁵⁵ Even as American newspapers largely viewed the withdrawal of American Marines from Haiti positively, they still varied in their opinions.

Reacting to the decision made by the Roosevelt administration to remove U.S. Marines from Haiti, writers for *The Nation* and *The Crisis* both celebrated their role in ending the American occupation. Covering the departure of American Marines from Haiti for *The Crisis*, one journalist stated: “By the time this is in type the last United States Marine will have left the shores of Haiti.” “In keeping with his promises to President of the island republic,” the writer maintained, “President Roosevelt has ordered our soldier out two months prior to the agreement made earlier this year.” Counting the campaign of *The Crisis* as a success, the article applauded both the efforts of the African American community and anti-imperialists. Commenting on their

⁵⁴ “Last of Marines Quit Haiti, End 19 Year Occupation: Cordial Ceremonies Mark Leavetaking,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 16, 1934, 14..

⁵⁵ “Haiti for the Haitians.” *The Christian Science Monitor*, August 14, 1934, 14.

role, the writer reasoned: “It was just fourteen years ago, almost to the day, when the first of four sensational articles by James Weldon Johnson on the American occupation appeared in *The Nation*.” As the reporter noted, articles written *The Nation* along with protest by the NAACP had launched “the long fight to end American imperialism in Haiti.”⁵⁶ Although it was too late for the United States to make amends with victims of American imperialism, one reporter for *The Nation* contended that the removal of the armed forces would lessen tensions throughout the Caribbean.⁵⁷

Writers for *The Nation* and *The Crisis* differed in their ability to directly influence U.S. foreign policy. After visiting Cap Haitien in July of 1934, Roosevelt named Ernest Gruening, an ardent critic of the occupation, as the director of the new Division of Territories and Island Possessions in the Department of the Interior. Gruening’s appointment to a cabinet post reflected his influence as editor of *The Nation*. Detailing his role in bringing an end to the occupation, one editorialist for *The Nation* stated: “Ernest Gruening’s long fight for justice to the peoples of the Caribbean was waged for many years through the columns of *The Nation*, which he served as an editor at two different periods.” According to the editorialist, “[i]t was largely through his investigation and unceasing demand for action that the first steps were taken that led eventually to the withdrawal of American forces from Haiti.”⁵⁸ Protesting American imperialism, both *The Nation* and *The Crisis* undoubtedly forced U.S. officials to respond to the events taking place in Haiti. Influence notwithstanding, Roosevelt did not consider the opinions of African Americans greatly in his foreign policy decisions regarding Haiti.

As the United States preserved its control over Haiti’s finances, writers for *The Nation* and *The Crisis* believed that the country would not be able to experience every aspect of its

⁵⁶ “Marines Out of Haiti,” *The Crisis*, September 1934, 269.

⁵⁷ “Editorial Paragraphs.” *Nation* 139, no. 3608 (1934): 225.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

sovereignty. One columnist for *The Crisis* wrote: “With the Marines gone, the next step is to work for the end of the control of Haitian finances by American government officials for the ‘protection’ of American investors, especially the National City bank of New York.”⁵⁹ For some Haitian politicians, the agreement between the United States and Haiti was meaningless if it meant that the Marine Corps departed but the financiers were able to remain in Haiti.⁶⁰ Mirroring this opinion, an editorial for *The Nation* insisted: “In these days[,] the power to repudiate or scale down burdensome debts is one of the most coveted attributes of national sovereignty.” In search of some positive aspects in the negotiations between the countries, the editorial concluded that there was some satisfaction in knowing that the U.S. government did not buttress this arrangement with the threat of physical force. Though Haiti had once fought for its independence, the writer suggested, “Haiti, can presumably, buy its way out to complete independence within a reasonable time.”⁶¹

With the American occupation ending two years before the expiration of the Treaty of 1915, Haiti received little attention in American periodicals once Marines departed. As early as 1939, D. La Fern, a writer for *The Nation*, observed: “Editorial America has taken it for granted that we washed our hands of the unsavory mess we got ourselves into in 1915.” Instead, a small number of magazines centered their articles on Voodoo, zombies and cannibalism.⁶² The extent of U.S. financial control in Haiti along with the lack of depth in the coverage addressing this issue prompted Fern to ask: “What does America intend to do with Haiti?” Proposing several theories, Fern maintained that many believed the United States government wanted Haiti to have a public image of independence while it continued to have economic influence over the island.

⁵⁹ “Marines Out of Haiti,” *The Crisis*, September 1934, 269.

⁶⁰ Herring, 596.

⁶¹ “Editorial Paragraphs.” *Nation* 139, no. 3608 (1934): 225.

⁶² Laennec Hurbon, “American Fantasy and Haitian Vodou,” in Consentino, *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, 182-187.

“It is even said,” the writer continued, “that the United States, with a serious Negro problem at home, is averse to having a Negro republic work out its own salvation and thereby rallying Negro aspirations.” Others, however, believed that the negative consequences of the occupation were unintentional. In the author’s perspective, plausible American intentions did not negate the current conditions in Haiti. Fern argued: “After invading the island on a flimsy pretext in 1915, we left it in the lurch in 1934.” Accordingly, Fern urged Americans to take an interest in the aftermath of the occupation and attempt to understand Haiti’s racial distinctiveness. Haiti, in Fern’s view, needed “American capital, but not at the price of monopolistic concession and exemption from the laws of the land.” It needed “tutelage, but as guidance, not control.” Even as Fern appealed to Americans for a renewed interest in Haiti, he conceded: “Haiti had become the land of the forgotten.”⁶³

⁶³ Fern, D. La. “Haiti - Land of the Forgotten.” *Nation* 149, no. 23 (December 2, 1939): 608-610.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

On January 13, 2010, a day after a massive 7.0-magnitude earthquake struck Haiti causing widespread devastation, televangelist Pat Robertson asserted: “Something happened a long time ago in Haiti, and people might not want to talk about.” During a broadcast of *The 700 Club*, Robertson tried to explain the current devastation in Haiti. In his version of the Bois Caiman ceremony, Robertson alleged that the devil came to an understanding with the Haitian people and agreed to remove the French from the island. Although the revolt resulted in freedom for Haitian slaves, Robertson believed that this “pact” explained why Haitians were “cursed” and “desperately poor.”¹ Many criticized Robertson for his lack of compassion towards the Haitian people; however, he was just one of many historians, scholars, and religious leaders who grappled with the questions: How do we explain the present conditions in Haiti? How should the American government respond to Haiti’s crisis?

Following the assassination of President Jean Vilbrun Guillaume Sam on July 27, 1915, American policymakers faced similar questions. With the Caribbean republic experiencing a crisis of authority, President Woodrow Wilson intervened in Haitian affairs. Positioning the United States as a benevolent occupier responding to a nation in crisis, the Wilson administration hoped that the American occupation would “terminate the appalling conditions of anarchy,

¹ Pat Robertson’s comments on Haiti available from <http://www.patrobertson.com/emailfeedback/haiti.asp> accessed February 6, 2010

savagery, and oppression which had been prevalent in Haiti for decades.”¹ Five years after American Marines landed in Haiti, Herbert J. Seligmann’s exposé for *The Nation* magazine helped spark intense debate over the American occupation. Consequently, Haiti’s internal crisis created a political crisis for President Wilson. Additionally, charges of indiscriminate killings leveled against American Marines only heightened these debates by provoking a series of Congressional investigations, which created an institutional scandal for the military.

Journalists, editorialists, U.S. military leaders, national politicians and African Americans became involved in the larger conversation surrounding Haiti for very different reasons. Initially, the majority of American journalists and editorialists supported the occupation. Seligmann’s exposé for *The Nation*, however, presented the American public with a different picture of the occupation that forced military leaders to address the actions of American Marines in Haiti. Shortly thereafter, James Weldon Johnson published articles in both *The Nation* and *The Crisis* that echoed Seligmann’s allegations. As opponents of American imperialism, writers for *The Nation* were critical of the Marine presence in Haiti. Like journalists for *The Nation*, writers for *The Crisis* staunchly opposed American imperialism. Still, they advocated for Haitian self-determination on different grounds. The inability of Haitians to sustain a functioning government reflected negatively upon the African American community because of their shared African ancestry. Working to secure their own citizenship rights in the United States, African Americans defended Haitian’s capacity for self-governance and full citizenship because of the implications for their community. Politicians became involved in debates over Haiti for political gains. Contending for African American votes, Warren G. Harding successfully transformed the American occupation into a campaign issue during the 1920 elections. Once elected, however,

¹Buell, Raymond Leslie. *The American Occupation of Haiti* (New York, N.Y.: Foreign Policy Association, 1929), 341.

Harding did little to change American policy towards Haiti. Harding's inability to live up to his campaign pledge was of little consequence to the larger American public. Nonetheless, African-Americans continued to advocate for the restoration of Haitian sovereignty.

As these diverse actors used Haiti to make very different claims, they could not all succeed. President Wilson effectively characterized Haiti as a republic that had been "downtrodden by dictators." Painting Haitians as innocent victims of repeated revolutions, Wilson contended that it was the mission of the United States to "to undertake the establishment of domestic peace."² By positioning the occupation as a benevolent endeavor, Wilson was able to garner the support of the American public along with the backing of many U.S. journalists. Consistently criticizing the American occupation, writers for *The Nation* were successful in their protest. In spite of this, they were unable to secure economic independence for Haitians. As the United States took steps to end the occupation, Ernest Gruening, former editor of *The Nation*, agreed to work for the Roosevelt administration. As director of the Division of Territories and Island Possessions for the Department of the Interior, Gruening was able to directly shape American foreign policy. Conversely, African Americans only experienced partial success in their effort to get American policymakers to withdraw Marine forces from Haiti. Citizenship rights for their community remained at stake in the United States. Even as *The Crisis* argued that African American opinion would benefit American foreign policy decisions of the United States, African Americans were not rewarded for their role in ending the occupation by the Roosevelt administration. Gruening's appointment indicated that the United States was ready to address American imperialism but not ready to address issues of citizenship facing African Americans in the United States. Unlike representatives from *The Nation*, journalists from *The Crisis* were unable to influence significantly the foreign policy decisions of American officials.

²Ibid.

This study adds to current scholarship on the American occupation of Haiti by collectively speaking to issues of race, citizenship and sovereignty. It also details *why* African Americans responded so forcefully to the presence of American Marines in Haiti. Facing challenges to their citizenship rights in the United States, African Americans embraced the Haitian cause and made their defense of Haiti a part of their political strategy. The relationship between African Americans and Haiti was complex. Previously seeking Haitian citizenship, African Americans celebrate Haiti and its history. As diasporic citizens African American claimed an affinity for Haitians and remained invested in Haitian affairs. Living outside of Haiti's boundaries, African American protest of the occupation illustrated that they did not need to move across boundaries to be invested in a community. The occupation also represented a period in which African Americans transformed their thinking about Haiti. With Haitian sovereignty under assault, African Americans believed that the occupation was testing black's capacity for self-rule. As such, African Americans believed that occupied Haiti had immediate consequences for their community. Coming to Haiti's defense, they were not completely altruistic in their motives. African Americans hoped to uplift Haiti and mold it into something that that would reflect positively on their communities.

Presently, American policymakers responding to the island's current calamity can learn several important lessons from occupied Haiti. From the outset, the United States had no clearly defined policy in Haiti.³ Moreover, U.S. officials neglected to take into account the centrality of sovereignty to the Haitian people. Referencing Frederick Douglass, historian David Nicholls argued in 1996 that "[t]here is perhaps no one point upon which the people of Hayti are more sensitive, superstitious and united, than upon any question touching the cession of any part of

³ Logan, Rayford W. "The Haze in Haiti." *Nation* 124, no. 3219 (1927): 281.

their territory to any foreign power.”⁴ The significance of sovereignty to the Haitian people ultimately helped unite black and mulatto Haitians alike firmly against the occupation. As the Forbes Commission illustrated, American officials also failed to understand the racial dynamics present in Haiti. By consistently investing power the mulatto minority, the occupation only created resentment among the larger black Haitian population, which ultimately undermined prospects for democracy. In order to respond effectively to Haiti’s current predicament, it is important for American officials to be cognizant of Haitian history and racial dynamics present as they generate policies. More importantly, it is necessary for them to have clearly defined goals and recognize when to change directions.

When American Marines prepared to leave Haiti in 1934, the central question that surrounded their departure according to historian Robert M. Spector was “[h]ow do we get a nation to gear itself for struggle, to gather its resources and its energies, and to lift itself by its own resources into a 20th century of civil liberty and economic prosperity?”⁵ Haiti’s recent disaster has forced those responding to its crisis to ask similar questions. While it is vital to consider how to respond to Haiti’s current crisis, it is also crucial to remember why it is important to assist Haitians as they attempt to make progress after their recent earthquake. As writers of *The Crisis* have illustrated, Haiti had larger historical implications for the African American community. Haiti’s significance, however, would reach beyond African Americans as occupied Haiti represented a period in which the United States tried to define its place in the world. American policymakers accomplished this in part through the occupation. The decision made by U.S. officials to remove Marines from Haiti after nineteen years of American rule was

⁴ Nicholls, David. *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Color, and National Independence in Haiti*. Rev ed.(New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996),5.

⁵ Spector, Robert M. *W. Cameron Forbes and the Hoover Commissions to Haiti, 1930* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985), 30.

one of many actions during this period signaling a change in American policies towards Latin American and Caribbean nations. Although the United States and Haiti shared a common experience in their defense of republican ideals, they differed in their ability to sustain their sovereignty. Despite this fact, it is imperative to acknowledge Haiti's contribution to conversations about race, citizenship and sovereignty. It is these kinds of contributions, which Haitians continue to make today despite their moment of crisis, that makes it important to support them as they recover from their natural disaster.

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