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Imperialism in the Caribbean: US Policies Towards Cuba and Haiti from the 1950s to the 1970s

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Loyola Marymount University
University Honors
Program

Imperialism in the Caribbean: US Policies Towards Cuba and Haiti from the 1950s to the 1970s

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements of the University Honors Program
of Loyola Marymount University

by

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May 10, 2022

ABSTRACT

Haiti and Cuba are two Caribbean islands which prove to be prominent particularly in revolutionary culture and discourse, despite the clear differences in present-day material conditions of the islands themselves. Alongside each of the islands' need for regional partnerships and aid, their significance in revolutionary culture connected the two islands in a distinct way. This connection is one that was forged mostly in the time period from the 1950s to the 1970s, when the Cuban Revolution began and gave way to many connections to the historic Haitian Revolution. Another major factor creating such solidarity during this time period, as well as the overarching policy being fought against in the Cuban Revolution, was US imperialism. This paper studies the various ways through which the US imperialised the Caribbean by looking at the country's policies towards Haiti and Cuba in the aforementioned time period. The different iterations of militaristic, diplomatic, cultural, and economic imperialism practiced by the US in these two nations demonstrate not only the long-term, comprehensive foreign policy of historical imperialism employed by the US, but also how the context of the Cold War proved to be key in such strategies. It is also resistance to such imperialisms from the US which continues to foster a sense of solidarity between the two islands.

Imperialism in the Caribbean: US Policies Towards Cuba and Haiti from the 1950s to the 1970s

I. Introduction

Haiti and Cuba, two widely known Caribbean countries, have shared a special sort of bond and allyship despite whatever differing governments they have had in power. Beyond the solid relations exemplified by the continuous dispatchment of Cuban doctors to Haiti in times of need, they also share a key commonality in the impact that their respective revolutions had on the international community. The Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), which abolished slavery on the island and won it independence from the French Empire, shocked the West, and especially the United States, as one of the largest and possibly the most successful slave rebellion. The ensuing isolation which occurred largely as a result of pressure from the US paid a heavy toll on the developing island at the time, and it would be plagued by underdevelopment and inadequate leadership. This devastating isolation from the West is something shared by one of Haiti's neighbors, Cuba. The Cuban Revolution (1953-1959) made a similar impactful statement to the international community, as a communist revolution startled the West and led to almost the same type of isolation from the international community largely at the behest of the US. They are two countries that had an impact which far outsized their physical masses in revolutionary culture and the ire they attracted from major powers.

Yet, despite the similar impacts their respective revolutions may have had and the warm relationships the people of the islands share, their states had clearly diverged in policy by the time the 20th century ended. Even immediately after the Cuban Revolution, their governments were vastly different in terms of political ideology and importantly, relations with the US. In fact, studying the impact of US imperialism in the two countries can provide a significant understanding as to how and why these two countries would diverge during the Cuban

Revolution and the subsequent decades. What makes this time period key is also situating US foreign policy within the context of the Cold War. During the Cold War, the US enacted a foreign policy that was anti-communist to preserve their interests in countries as well as to combat the formation of a bloc of allies to the Soviet Union. At large this would mean a continuation of US imperialism as they sought to maintain their influence and interests, and in this period, there would be significant efforts to maintain anti-communist, US-friendly governments whether it meant protecting a dictatorship or overthrowing a democratically elected, populist leader. The Caribbean was a key subject to such politics, as the region was important to the US not only because of its geographic proximity to the country but also because of the many prominent interests which had been staked throughout the region such as tourism, sugar farming, and human capital. The Cuban Revolution in the 1950s would jeopardise these interests, and that strategic importance of the Caribbean combined with an extreme anti-communist foreign policy led to not only more focus on the Caribbean, but also that focus being actualised with a tangible effort on the part of the US to maintain US-friendly states. This led to both Haiti and Cuba being subject to different aspects of the US's imperialistic policy from the 1950s to 1970s as new governments rose to power on the island.

Imperialist US policies towards Haiti and Cuba remained simultaneously different yet intertwined throughout the 1950s to the 1970s as the Cold War and the Cuban Revolution would shape policy towards not just Cuba, but more countries throughout the Caribbean. Haiti itself would be affected by US economic imperialism through financial aid as well as investments in the island by wealthy US businessmen. The US would also play a key role in lending the dictatorship of Francois Duvalier power and legitimacy. Policy towards Cuba, after the support of Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship, would shift towards being much more antagonistic and

forceful. The policies enacted by the US towards these islands, while different in tone due to the context of the Cold War, still demonstrated a commonality in US policy towards them which was a placement of interests over the islands themselves. Without a doubt, the imperialist policies enacted against these two countries during this period had an impact on their people and culture, one which continues today in connecting the two nations in solidarity for an ongoing struggle against imperialism.

II. Background and Literature Review

Haiti and Cuba, being two prominent countries in the Caribbean, have many studies done on them regarding the history of colonialism on the two islands. Prior to the time I am studying, the 1950s to the 1970s, the history of the islands is told taking into effect the context of imperialism in the islands beginning with their colonisation. Following Christopher Columbus's "discovery" of the Americas through the Caribbean, the islands would be promptly invaded and colonised, Cuba by the Spanish and Haiti by the French. Both would gain independence from their respective colonial governments, Cuba gaining independence from Spain in exchange for a US military occupation in the beginning of the 20th century following the Spanish-American War and Haiti winning independence at the beginning of the 19th century from France after a historic slave revolt known as the Haitian Revolution.¹

Many people throughout history and in Caribbean culture would recognise the prominence of these two revolutions, as some argue that the Cuban Revolution in 1959 was to

¹Klaus Kästle. "History of Cuba." History of Cuba - Nations Online Project. Accessed May 6, 2022.

the 20th century what the Haitian Revolution of 1804 was to the 19th century.² The chapter “Cuba 1959 / Haiti 1804: ON HISTORY AND CARIBBEAN REVOLUTION,” by Ada Ferrer (2019) does such a study, as it outlines the parallels between the Haitian and Cuban revolutions, from the fact that both resulted in various changes to the economic structures of the country to the diplomatic and economic isolation that resulted from the reactions of major powers to them. Some even see the Cuban Revolution as a full realisation of the Haitian Revolution over a century earlier due to these parallels and the respective reactions from the US.³

Yet despite such major revolutions against the existing power structures in their countries taking place, the past and present histories of Haiti and Cuba still remain impacted by imperialism; specifically, it would be the US emerging as the dominant perpetrator of imperialist policies towards these countries as it coincides with the country’s emergence as a global power. The book *American Imperialism* (2017) outlines the territorial and economic expansion of the United States into these two nations at the beginning of the 20th century, detailing key events which would highlight imperialism in US policies towards them. Against Haiti, the US would implement a 65-year embargo on them in 1806 in response to the massive slave revolt which liberated the island from the French. After the end of this embargo, the US would actively engage with Haiti due to its strategic position, both as an enticing naval base and as a nation that could potentially do damage should it become antagonistic to the US. After several naval visits made to Haiti by the US in the late 19th and early 20th century, the US Marines would enter the

²Ada Ferrer. "12. Cuba 1959 / Haiti 1804: ON HISTORY AND CARIBBEAN REVOLUTION" In *The Revolution from Within: Cuba, 1959–1980* edited by Michael J. Bustamante and Jennifer L. Lambe, 277-289. (New York, USA: Duke University Press, 2019), 277.

³Ferrer, 278.

country and occupy it due to the strategic destabilisation of the island and its massive debt.⁴ Regarding Cuba, Burns (2017) also highlights the expansion of the US's military interests through the establishment of its base in Guantanamo Bay. Today, the naval base serves as a prison for suspected terrorists and is particularly notorious for being a site of torture; it was taken by the US in 1898 as a negotiated part of the Cuban "liberation" from the Spanish. Although framed by the US as a base to protect Cuba's "independence," the base had been a desirable US asset prior to the Spanish-American War for its strategic location, and GTMO would serve as a base from which other US interventions around the Caribbean would launch, and operations on GTMO would even continue after the Cuban Revolution.⁵

Going into policy towards Haiti and Cuba in the time I will be discussing, the 1950s to the 1970s, most of the discussions in Cuba centered around the Cuban Revolution, while in Haiti most of the discussions centered around the dictator Francois Duvalier. There is a discrepancy in literature between the two countries specifically regarding US imperialism during this time, as there is much more research done into the aggressive US response to the Cuban Revolution than there is on US imperialism during the Duvalier administration in Haiti. Rather, there are more pieces written on the rule of Francois Duvalier's son, Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, and the relationship between him and the US in maintaining that dictatorship. Much research has also been done into the US's role in the coup against Jean-Bertrand Aristide, and how that shows the role the US plays in suppressing the Haitian people. Part of the piece, "The Rise and Fall of Duvalierism," (1986) focuses on the regime of Francois Duvalier, noting how the dictator rose to power by creating and maintaining relationships with an alternate business class as well as the

⁴Adam Burns. *American Imperialism: The Territorial Expansion of the United States, 1783-2013*. (BAAS Paperbacks. Edinburgh: EUP, 2017), 142.

⁵Burns, 167.

US.⁶ What is commonly acknowledged throughout discourse towards Haiti is a recognition of the links between US policy, profits, and hardships of the Haitian people. *The Uses of Haiti* by Paul Farmer presents us with this common recognition as through individual case studies it points out what the title indicates, that the US has used Haiti for many purposes, economically and politically, in a means which crushes the poor people of Haiti.⁷ Although the book does not specifically focus on the dictatorship of Francois Duvalier, the sentiment of the US using Haiti for its interests remains pertinent, and in studying US-Duvalier relations I hope to not only highlight it on another focused scale but also understand the role that Haitian officials and elites might also play in continuing imperialism in the country.

US imperialism in Cuba during this time is more recognised and studied across literature, due to the Cuban Revolution making a huge impact on relations between Cuba and the West. The substantial amount of US influence present in Cuba during their relationship with the Batista dictatorship starkly contrasts with the coercive policies implemented after Fidel Castro took power. Many comprehensive accounts of US-Cuban relations throughout this period exist, pieces such as *Cuba and the U.S. Empire: A Chronological History* (2016) do well to go into the year-by-year history of such relations detailing acts on sanctions as well as memos on covert operations. There are also many monographs studying the economic warfare the US employed on the island following the Cuban Revolution. One such piece I use in this paper, *The Economic War Against Cuba: A Historical and Legal Perspective on the U.S. Blockade* by Salim Lamrani argues that the sanctions imposed on Cuba by the US have effectively punished the Cuban

⁶David Nicholls. "Haiti: The Rise and Fall of Duvalierism." *Third World Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (1986): 1240.

⁷Paul Farmer. *The Uses of Haiti*. (Maine: Common Courage Press, 2006).

people, despite the sanctions failing to achieve their goal of leading to the overthrow of Castro or the total liberalisation of Cuba's economy.⁸ The increase in writing on US policy towards Cuba after the revolution also comes as panels at the UN and other organisations have moved to condemn US sanctions on Cuba in global forums. Discussing the imperialist policies against Cuba and Haiti during this time period is also paramount to understanding how the two countries remain key in resistance culture today. Historical iterations of US imperialism differ from their policy during the Cold War, in that much of it also came in the form of the anti-communist agenda which took shape in the Caribbean particularly after the Cuban Revolution. While this makes policies throughout all the Caribbean intertwined, the literature on the Cuban and Haitian Revolutions places particular emphasis on those two countries as they remain prominent instances of resistance to imperialism in culture and academia.

III. Methods

While the history of Haiti and Cuba would be shaped by direct colonisation from the Spanish and French empires between the 17th and 19th century, in the 20th century the islands would be impacted by imperialist policies and practices from the US and allies. *Imperialism*, as defined in this paper, will refer to the practice of extending a country's power and influence through economic, diplomatic, and militaristic means. Such extension of a country's influence is normally done for the purposes of maintaining or attaining their interests, whether it be political or economic. Actions within this can range from military occupation of another sovereign country to a large country dominating a smaller country's economy by taking ownership of key economic sectors. In studying US imperialism towards Haiti and Cuba it is worth noting that I

⁸Wayne Smith, Salim Lamrani, Paul Estrade, and Larry Oberg. "Prologue." In *The Economic War Against Cuba: A Historical and Legal Perspective on the U.S. Blockade*, 7.

will be doing a case study of these two islands, focusing on policy between the US and these countries during the period ranging from 1950-1970 as well as looking at some of its effects.

While the topic of US imperialism is something that is gaining more recognition and studies day by day, there is still relatively little research done with regards to US imperialism in the Caribbean after the beginning of the 20th century, especially when there is such a wealth of research to be done and shared on the history of colonialism in the Caribbean by the Spanish, French, and English empires before the 20th century. Furthermore, while individual case studies into Caribbean countries have been done, not many cross-case studies have done presenting and discussing the similarities and differences between US policy towards Caribbean nations under the overarching themes of imperialism towards the countries. In choosing to study Haiti and Cuba, I do this not only to present and analyse such differences, as they were present during this time period due to the Cuban Revolution, but also in recognition of the revolutionary significance of the two countries themselves. This is not to say that other Caribbean countries do not have any histories of revolution, as groups such as the Maroons in Jamaica similarly fought for freedom and obtained some degree of sovereignty, rather it is an acknowledgement that the Haitian Revolution and the Cuban Revolution remain some of the most well-known revolutions in common history. Both revolutions would have a significant impact, and both revolutions alarmed Western powers. Thus, it is because of the historical significance of revolution and these two nations that they come to mind in such a cross-case study.

Besides the historical significance of these two countries, there is also present-day significance to studying them as well. Both Haiti and Cuba can be viewed as standing out in the Caribbean, albeit in diverse ways. Evidently, Cuba still stands out in the region due to the ongoing revolution, and while the government is no longer led by the Castro's the island is still

considered to be governed by a socialist government. Haiti on the other hand, while not given the same antagonism as Cuba, unfortunately is the poorest nation in the Caribbean and in the Western hemisphere as well, poverty being a major problem on the island that well predates the infamous 2010 earthquake. Cuba, although not as bad as Haiti, also experiences economic instability which has led to protests against the government and against the US in the past few years. With their histories of revolution giving them something to have in common, both islands today also stand out and are still experiencing the effects of US policy towards them from decades ago I will outline in this paper.

IV. Haiti

Policy Towards Haiti

Haiti, through a slew of military dictatorships, occupations, and coups, was one of, if not the, poorest nation in the Caribbean and possibly in the Western hemisphere going into the 1950s. Its economy was virtually bankrupt and because of the fluctuations in inept leadership other countries felt discouraged from sending aid or loans to the island. The lack of international funds provided to Haiti was already a problem given the mostly underdeveloped economy was largely dependent on either foreign aid or coffee production,⁹ which could fluctuate depending on the global prices of coffee or the health of coffee crops. The economic underdevelopment of Haiti ultimately is something which would continue throughout the 1950s-70s despite whatever aid was given to Haiti.

⁹*FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1958–1960, Haiti, VOLUME V, Document 309.*

The major developments which can be defined as shaping US policy towards Haiti during this time period would be the deposition of Daniel Fignole and the subsequent election of Francois Duvalier in 1957. Daniel Fignole was a former popular labor activist of Haiti and one of the potential candidates for president in 1957 alongside Duvalier. Amidst chaos in Haiti and the need for a leader before the elections, Fignole was appointed as the provisional leader due to his massive popularity.¹⁰ Beyond being incredibly popular, he frequently spoke out against the “mulatto elite” of the country backed by governments and companies in France and America and also promised the people of Haiti an “FDR-style New Deal.”¹¹ It was these policy aspirations however, that would lead the US to see Fignole as a threat to their interests. The then director of the CIA Allen Dulles had warned President Eisenhower that these political aspirations made his program “comparable with the Soviets.”¹² Fignole was also mentioned by Eisenhower as potentially becoming similar to Jacobo Árbenz, the former social-democrat president of Guatemala who was ousted by a CIA-backed coup in 1954. Thus, the US, alongside the traditional elites backed by a colonial power structure, moved to push out Fignole. He was removed from power after only 19 days by the Haitian Armed Forces in collaboration with the CIA, and a military junta then went to set up supposedly democratic elections.¹³

¹⁰Lee Hall. “The Mob and Its Man Take Over in Haiti.” *LIFE* 42, no. 23, June 10, 1957.

¹¹“Chaos in a Caribbean Hotspot.” *LIFE* 42, no. 22, June 3, 1957.

¹²Jeb Sprague. *Paramilitarism and the Assault on Democracy in Haiti*. (Monthly Review Press, 2012), 312.

¹³John Marion. “Haiti: Remobilized Army to Join the National Police in Suppressing Workers.” World Socialist Web Site, November 23, 2017.
<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2017/11/23/hait-n23.html>.

Duvalier was popularly elected as president of Haiti in September of 1957, even though the election was wrought with claims of fraud and rigging,¹⁴ the margin of his victory remained high. In part because the leader of Haiti was chosen by a supposed democratic election as opposed to taken by force through a military coup or installed as a brief, temporary administration, the US looked favorably upon Duvalier initially.¹⁵ Furthermore, and more importantly, the US also moved to recognise the Haitian government after not having recognised the previous one and noted in a memorandum that, “The present Government is without Communist taint and is friendly to the United States.”¹⁶ This favorable view would ultimately be put in jeopardy though as Duvalier would take a prompt turn towards totalitarianism in harsh suppression of political opposition with a violent military police force. The US would even temporarily break negotiations with Haiti due to the death of a wealthy American citizen Shibley Jean Talamas at the hands of the Haitian police in December of 1957.¹⁷ Yet, despite this, maintaining relations with Haiti was deemed to be in the interests of the US state department; and Duvalier’s rule, although tyrannical, often governed in favor of US interests. Thus, while the US had misgivings about Duvalier, relations with the island continued in the effort to advance American political and economic goals.

¹⁴“Fignole Says Army ‘Stages’ Haiti Vote,” *The New York Times*, 14 Aug. 1957: 5.

¹⁵Adam Coleman. “The Devil You Know: US-Haitian Relations, 1957-1968.” Thesis, 2004: 1.

¹⁶*FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1955–1957, AMERICAN REPUBLICS: MULTILATERAL; MEXICO; CARIBBEAN, VOLUME VI*, Document 357.

¹⁷“Haiti: Murder by Beating.” *Time*. Time Inc., October 14, 1957.
<http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,862774,00.html>.

In a 1964 memorandum from the Director of the Office of Caribbean Affairs to the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs titled, “The Multiple Dilemma in Formulating U.S. Policy on Haiti”¹⁸ the US government discusses just how it should go forth in policy towards Haiti given the repressive policies and government of Duvalier on the island; there is a clear acknowledgement of this as well given a reference to the Haitian government under Duvalier as the “brutal Duvalier dictatorship.” Yet despite the knowledge of such a regime, along with the fact that there are clear and cited disadvantages to the United States of maintaining a relationship with it, the US still wanted to maintain a presence in Haiti with such relations. The interests on the island noted by the document mainly pertain to protecting its citizens and property on the island, making sure it can maintain an influence in Haiti after Duvalier goes, and ensuring that it can potentially use Haiti’s voice and vote in transnational groups to advance US goals in international forums. It is also worth noting that the memorandum makes it clear how the continuing economic deterioration of the island would, “work to the advantage of the communists;” thus, the worsening conditions of the Haitian people was also situated in the context of wanting to prevent the rise in communism. In weighing options to undertake considering this, Crockett puts forth four options. The first option was to actively work with Duvalier’s opposition to overthrow him; this, while beneficial to Haitians in the short term, was considered too costly and could cause a greater shift in foreign policy throughout the region. The second option was to work closely with Duvalier, offering full economic assistance to Haiti and therefore strengthening the Duvalier government. The third option was to maintain a presence in Haiti but make clear their opposition to the policies of the Duvalier; although this

¹⁸*Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XXXII, Dominican Republic; Cuba; Haiti; Guyana, Document 335.*

would effectively only be finger-wagging, it was still considered intolerable by Duvalier and would have likely forced a confrontation. The fourth and final option, which was considered the least attractive by Crockett, was to maintain the US presence in Haiti on a normal basis yet deny Duvalier any actual endorsements or economic assistance. What made the fourth option the “least unattractive” one to Crockett was the fact that it permitted for the US to be in a position to take effective measures should Duvalier leave or be overthrown, and it also allowed for “maximum application of our influence in attaining our policy objectives.” A major characterisation of this document is in fact a clear priority of the US government is to maintain relations with Haitian people not for the benefit of the island, but for the island's ability to help advance and protect US interests abroad. This is made clear because even though Crockett acknowledges that some of the policy options can better the conditions of the Haitian people, the policy option that is recommended was deemed as advantageous to maintaining US influence and enacting countermeasures in case of a rise in communist opposition.

Economically, the Duvalier regime without a doubt served in favor of US interests to the point where many refer to Duvalier as simply a puppet of the US, despite internal foreign policy memos indicating the potential that he could be difficult to deal with due to his authoritarian nature. While purging any mulatto elites that would be against his rule, Duvalier would then allow European and Arab oligarchic families to take control of Haiti's ports for commerce with the US and the rest of the West. He also expanded cities such as Port Au Prince by expanding historic slums like Cite Soleil for the purpose of housing low-wage workers for American companies.¹⁹ Although initially campaigning on a populist platform appealing to rural Haitians,

¹⁹Madame Boukman, Twitter Post with Commentary on Cite Soleil. March 31, 2021. https://twitter.com/madanboukman/status/1377276536856928258?s=20&t=lnDO_2GRRoHzrf87ZIO RnQ

Duvalier would enact policies which served to enrich and consolidate Haiti's wealth among a small class of wealthy capitalists. Furthermore, although there was not much vocal support for Duvalier from the US government, conditional economic aid and grants to the country continued, and according to a memorandum from December of 1963 the dictator was satisfied with relations between the two countries.²⁰

It is also worth noting that one of the major reasons for maintaining relations with Duvalier was his adherence to the anti-communist foreign policy agenda of the US. Duvalier would make his anti-communism most apparent to the US and the Caribbean in April of 1969 when he passed a harsh anti-communist law which declared, "Communist activities, no matter what their form, are hereby declared crimes against the security of the State."²¹ Thus within the context of the Cold War and the Caribbean following the Cuban Revolution, Duvalier's anti-communism would become more strategically significant to the US and it would be a legitimate advantage to keep him in power rather than to take actions to push him out of power as they did Figlole.

The consideration of the Haitian government as remaining pro-American throughout the foreign relations series²² also comes from the collaboration between Haitian military groups and the American government that continued throughout the 1950s-70s. The US and CIA collaborated with the Haitian armed forces to remove Figlole from his position of temporary

²⁰*Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XXXII, Dominican Republic; Cuba; Haiti; Guyana, Document 325.*

²¹Rep. *REPORT ON THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN HAITI*. Organization of American States, December 13, 1979.

²²*FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1958-1960, Haiti, VOLUME V, Document 309.*

leadership and force him into exile despite his popularity. Perhaps the most infamous example of this is the collaboration with the Militia of National Security Volunteers (MVSN). The MVSN, more commonly known as the Tonton Macoutes, were a paramilitary force founded to defend the Duvalier regime that were known for their corruption and violence. In a television interview business mogul Butch Ashton, who made a fortune during the governments of Duvalier and his son, revealed that he witnessed the US Marines training and arming the Tonton Macoutes to prop up the Duvalier regime.²³ An editorial note from the Foreign Relations series also corroborates this, noting that US Marine Training Missions in Haiti which Duvalier had requested in the late 1950s had been approved.²⁴ While such acts can be taken as an attempt to maintain stability on the island, it more so served to protect the brutal power structure in place. While the Tonton Macoutes committed violent crimes against many civilians, they were also extensively used to violently suppress communist opposition to the Duvalier government- an act which, while brutal, still went in favor of US foreign policy interests and did not threaten the wealthy elites and US-backed companies on the island.

Although the US did go head-to-head with Duvalier at times and there were internal disagreements with his politics, the US still legitimised and bolstered the Duvalier regime through military and economic aid to maintain commercial interests on the island and keep Haiti an anti-communist nation for geopolitical advantages. Furthermore, the initial decision to recognise the Duvalier leadership as opposed to that of left leaning Fignole who the US helped push out also, alongside the military and economic support, lends more culpability to the role of

²³Butch Ashton. The Tonton Macoutes. Interview. *Amara Public*, 2009.

²⁴*FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1958–1960, Haiti, VOLUME V, Document 309.*

the US in perpetuating such a dark time for Haitians. It is also worth noting that after the death of Duvalier, the US assisted in the transition to power of his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier, and generally supported his son's regime while encouraging economic liberalisation that would benefit US and Western multinational corporations even more.²⁵

Furthermore, along with the diplomatic, economic, and (as in the instances of training Tonton Macoutes) military imperialism the US policies and specifically media coverage would paint a patronising and racist image of the Haitian people. The common portrayal of Haiti in the mainstream press, often regardless of the time period, is one of Haiti as a failed state that has an inability to manage itself, either ignorant of or selectively omitting the role of the US in perpetrating Haiti's underdevelopment and poverty. This created a patronising image of the island that showed it as in need of aid and involvement from the US, and it also advanced the view of Haitians as lawless and savage. Although this type of portrayal of Haiti tends to exist regardless of which part of history one is studying, during the reign of Duvalier it was not only the threat of communism which would be depicted in US media, but there was also a particular emphasis on voodoo in Haitian culture. An archived *New York Times* article from September of 1970 describes a trip to Haiti by American tourists whose primary goal was to observe a voodoo ceremony, with a ritual of such also being pictured on the front page.²⁶ The couple, initially wary of the trip due to their knowledge of the brutal Duvalier dictatorship, still described their trip as "exotic and romantic" even though they could tell the country was being mismanaged.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the couple observed the Tonton Macoutes, but they were

²⁵David Nicholls. "Haiti: The Rise and Fall of Duvalierism." *Third World Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (1986): 1250.

²⁶Joseph Treaster. "HAITI." The *New York Times* Archives. The *New York Times*, September 27, 1970.

never threatened by them the same way that the Haitian people were. Their experience was shared by many other American tourists and their view of Haiti was shaped in part by the 1967 film, *The Comedians*. The film, adapted from a book of the same name, depicts the violence of Haiti's secret police, and while accurate to a degree succeeded in further advancing the view of Haiti as savage and demonic.²⁷ Films such as *The Comedians* were also accompanied by previous strings of low-budget horror movies such as *Voodoo Island* (1957) and *The Golden Mistress* (1954) which centered on the idea of savage and exotic adventures involving voodoo. The emphasis on voodoo stems from its history in Haitian culture, yet it was exacerbated to connote a demonic image of the Haitian people when Duvalier touted his practice of the religion and named the Tonton Macoutes after a Haitian bogeyman who kidnaps unruly children. This allowed US media to invoke more savage imagery of Haitians, yet it also left out the fact that the Macoutes were often trained by the US marines, and the state department legitimised the Duvalier regime.

Effects on the Haitian People

Undoubtedly, the effects of the US arming and training of the Haitian military and the Tonton Macoutes would be immediately felt by the people of Haiti in the form of their brutal suppression, as the US first established such an army during its occupation of the island in 1915 and would continue to train and arm it. The first major massacre would be that of Fignole supporters in 1957 following his removal from leadership, in which estimates vary from several hundred to a few thousand victims of the Haitian military suppression.²⁸ From then on any

²⁷Greene, Graham. *The Comedians*. New York: Viking Press, 1967.

²⁸Gérard Pierre-Charles, *Radiographie d'une dictature. Haïti et Duvalier*, Les Editions Nouvelle Optique, Montreal, 1973.

political opponents of the Duvalier regime would be violently targeted primarily by the Tonton Macoutes; and communist groups would become a particular target of them, for an anti-communist Haiti and neighbor to Cuba presented a strategic advantage to the US, and both the state department and Duvalier were aware of this and sought to maintain those activities to their advantage.²⁹ Duvalier also targeted rich mulattos and their families, writers, artists, and women and children; although not enough studies have been done to determine the total number of deaths that occurred during this period, but estimates range from 30,000 to 50,000 executions and assassinations that occurred at the hands of Duvalier's regime.³⁰

Even though Western businessmen were able establish profitable businesses in Haiti and the US repeatedly sent aid to the island on the conditions that Duvalier either soften his rule or liberalise the economy, any profits of this were not reflected back on the Haitian people or the overall economy. The economy remained weak, and the country continued to be impoverished throughout the rule of Duvalier, and internal memos from the US government indicate that the state of the economy deteriorated and cities became more overcrowded.³¹

An example of this would be the slum of Cite Soleil. Initially, the settlement was built in 1958 as a place to hold sugar workers for the Haitian American Sugar Complex (HASCO), and then further into Duvalier's reign the shanty town was expanded and briefly renamed Cite

²⁹US Central Intelligence Agency. *SPECIAL REPORT: The Situation in Haiti*. Washington, DC, 1963.

³⁰Belleau Jean-Philippe. "Massacres Perpetrated in the 20th Century in Haiti." Sciences Portal, April 2, 2008.

³¹US Central Intelligence Agency. *SPECIAL REPORT: The Situation in Haiti*. Washington, DC, 1963: 11.

Simone after his wife, Simone Duvalier. The shanty town would become even more crowded and impoverished, housing workers of factories for foreign companies that paid them low wages, taking advantage of Duvalier's favorable treatment towards them. Cite Soleil to this day remains a representation of inept governance and international exploitation of Haitian people, and it is frequently a site of protests and resistance against such policies.³²

The economic impoverishment and political violence that ensued in Haiti during this time led many Haitians to flee the country as economic and political refugees. Many economic refugees who immigrated to the US during this time remained undocumented as well and came to the US through unconventional standards, due to the glaring inability of many to be able to afford exit documents or airfare.³³ Unlike immigrants from Cuba who were welcomed by the US due to the ability to use them against the Castro government, the Haitian immigrants in south Florida were frequently mistreated and subject to racism and xenophobia. Some of the aid from the US to Haiti was given as part of an attempt to curb Haitian immigration, with hopes that it could contribute to Haitians staying on the island for jobs. Furthermore, the continuous entrenchment of Haiti within a state of poverty fueled images of people in the Caribbean as naturally violent and meant to be in the state of conflict and impoverishment. This was evident in the media portrayal of Haitian affairs, for instance while pundits in the US were initially optimistic of Duvalier's leadership given the fact he was elected, after Shibley Jean Talamas died

³²Madame Boukman, Twitter Post on Haitian Protests. May 28, 2020.
https://twitter.com/madanboukman/status/1266130501229858816?s=20&t=lnDO_2GRRoHzrf87ZIO RnQ

³³Gilbert Loescher and John Scanlan. "Human Rights, U.S. Foreign Policy, and Haitian Refugees." *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 26, no. 3 (1984): 319.

at the hands of Haitian police, *TIME* magazine referred to Haiti as having, “went back to the jungle law that has ruled the island.”³⁴

One cultural impact of American and Western imperialism on the people of Haiti would be the emergence of the Négritude movement in the early 20th century. The Négritude movement celebrated the black identity and served as an important counter to the white superiority within the ideology of the “White Man’s Burden” which fueled acts of Western imperialism. The movement, although global, had special meaning within Haiti as the island was considered the first black republic for a while. The American occupation of Haiti in the early 20th century, along with their backing of the mulatto elite that controlled much of Haiti up until the late 1950s led to the increased popularity of the Négritude movement. The glorification of the black African identity directly countered the colonial structure in place which disproportionately empowered more light skinned Haitians at the expense of darker, lower-class Haitians. However, despite the empowerment of dark-skinned Haitians such a movement offered, this was unfortunately taken advantage of by Duvalier. Both Duvalier and Fignole gained some popularity because of the Négritude movement in the time leading up to the election of 1957. Duvalier used the fact that he was dark skinned to his advantage, he was nicknamed “Papa Doc” and purported himself as a vodou priest, gaining a cult of personality for leaning into the traditional Haitian identity.³⁵ He also frequently put himself in opposition to the light skinned mulatto elites, even though in his reign he would actually empower other Western businessmen. To this day, Duvalier maintains some political support in Haiti because of the image he tried to

³⁴“Haiti: Murder by Beating.” *Time*. Time Inc., October 14, 1957.
<http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,862774,00.html>.

³⁵Marcus Loseau. “The Great Awakening: The Influence of the U.S. Occupation of Haiti on Black Transnationalist Cultural and Intellectual Discourse.” *The Yale Historical Review*, 2021.

maintain as a Négritude populist when necessary. Thus, even though the movement became co-opted to a degree by Duvalier, the celebration of the black Haitian identity remained a strong response to American imperialism.

Despite US interventions which Haitians endured often to the detriment of their society, they also remained adamant in celebrating their traditional culture while rejecting American culture. While Voodoo and traditional Afro-Caribbean practices were being demonised and othered by US media, Haitians continued to celebrate those tenants of their heritage. In the Caribbean at large, such a celebration comes out most commonly during Carnival, a massive street festival filled with dances, music, and elaborate decorations. In Haiti, what became even more important were there RaRa festivals, which resembled Carnival yet had much more performances of traditional African rituals and processions. Furthermore, what made the RaRa festivals important was that they were mostly celebrated by urban workers and lower classes; this also made the festivals become a platform for political organisation during times when opposition to a dictatorship could put oneself at risk.³⁶ These spaces served as an important form of cultural resistance to imperialism and a means to organise or achieve political significance against repression from a US-backed dictator. Unfortunately, artists and writers which were heavily involved in such festivities would be targeted and killed by the Tonton Macoutes, but the impact on Haitian resistance culture remained. Among the black diaspora, Haitians are often considered some of the people proudest of their culture, an acknowledgment common particularly in Miami where much of the diaspora resides. The pride in traditional Haitian culture almost appears in contrast to the poorer material conditions, yet many Haitians are aware of the

³⁶Elizabeth McAlister. *Rara!: Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora*. (University of California Press, 2002): 136.

roots of their material problems and use these celebrations to combat the imperialism which perpetrated some of their poverty.

Initially, the US was hopeful of Haiti being welcome to American influence culturally to justify Haitian workers producing several toys and products for American companies for low wages. One of, if not the most prominent example of this would be Haiti's steadfast rejection of baseball, America's favorite pastime as understood by popular culture. Haiti's rejection of baseball came despite the fact that it was one of the leading producers of baseballs in the 1960s and 1970s, alongside the promotion of figures such as the Alou brothers from Haiti's neighbor, the Dominican Republic.³⁷ The story of baseball being rejected amidst Haitians being exploited by baseball manufacturers serves as a representation of their resistance to American culture. Yet, much like the Négritude movement this was also occasionally co-opted by Duvalier to curry favor with the Haitian people, although such spurts of anti-Americanism from Duvalier were not commonplace due to his ultimate adherence to the US and their interests.

V. Cuba

Policy Towards Cuba

US policy towards Cuba during this time period would be shaped by the Cuban Revolution which began in July of 1953 against the dictator Fulgencio Batista. Prior to the Revolution, the US enjoyed good relations with Cuba. After Batista came to power again through a military coup declaring himself president on March 10th, 1952, the US promptly moved to recognise his government. A memorandum dated March 24th, 1952 recommended that the

³⁷Blackistone, Kevin B. "Perspective | Baseball Has a Debt to Haiti, and It's Time the Sport Repaid It." The Washington Post. WP Company, September 23, 2021.

president recognise the Batista government and continue relations with Cuba due to their commitment to fulfilling US corporate interests in private capital and taking steps to prevent communist activity within Cuba; this recommendation was shortly approved.³⁸ Taking advantage of the Batista dictatorship being friendly to the US, the government and American companies would increase their profits and stakes in the island. By the late 1950s, U.S. monetary interests included “90 percent of Cuban mines, 80 percent of its public utilities, 50 percent of its railways, 40 percent of its sugar production and 25 percent of its bank deposits—some \$1 billion in total.”³⁹

The turning point in policy towards Cuba would be without a doubt the onset of the Revolution led by Fidel Castro. Throughout the revolution, the US continued its backing of the Batista dictatorship in sending them aid and arms as they would fight the rebels led by Castro.⁴⁰ After the triumph of Castro’s army on January 1st 1959, the US initially moved to recognise the Castro government, as a memo from the Secretary of State dated January 7th 1959 recommends such.⁴¹ The relative peace between the US and Cuba following the victory of Castro’s army would be incredibly short-lived, as Castro would repeatedly condemn the US for its support of Batista and its prior imperialistic actions on the island. Members of the National Security

³⁸*FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1952–1954, THE AMERICAN REPUBLICS, VOLUME IV*, Document 327.

³⁹Natasha Geiling. “Before the Revolution.” Smithsonian. Smithsonian Institution, July 31, 2007. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/before-the-revolution-159682020/>.

⁴⁰*FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1958–1960, CUBA, VOLUME VI*, Document 1.

⁴¹*FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1958–1960, CUBA, VOLUME VI*, Document 217.

Council also grew increasingly concerned about the clear formation of a communist government, noting that appointments such as Ernesto “Che” Guevara to the head of the National Bank were a serious blow to US interests.⁴² Furthermore in a move which completely alarmed the US, the Castro government would nationalise property owned by US companies as part of a practice of “redistributing income away from foreigners and upper-income groups to the lowest-income groups and the lower middle classes.”⁴³ Members of the US State Department would continuously meet with representatives from corporations such as U.S. Cattle and Sugar Enterprises during this period of nationalisation in an attempt to mitigate the effects of their profits and revenue being disrupted.⁴⁴

With the refusal of the Cuban government to comply with US economic interests as well as their development of an alliance with the Soviet Union, the US government quickly began plans to forcefully remove the Cuban leadership from power. In March of 1960, President Eisenhower directed the CIA to develop a program for overthrowing the Castro government. A policy paper from that month detailed such a program of covert operations; the program included the creation of a Cuban opposition to the Castro government, the broadcasting of anti-Castro propaganda, the creation of a covert intelligence and action organization within Cuba that would be responsive to outside orders, and the organisation of a paramilitary force capable of

⁴²*FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1958–1960, CUBA, VOLUME VI, Document 402.*

⁴³*FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1958–1960, CUBA, VOLUME VI, Document 409.*

⁴⁴*FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1958–1960, CUBA, VOLUME VI, Document 397.*

carrying out operations in Cuba.⁴⁵ The policy paper, which made the official recommendation that the CIA be given authorisation to undertake the program, was approved by the president and the CIA would begin training and funding a force of counter-revolutionary Cubans known as Brigade 2506. After his election to the presidency in November of 1960, John F. Kennedy would continue to authorise the program; this program would fail after the brigade was defeated by Castro's forces in two days in April of 1961, this would be the notorious failed Bay of Pigs invasion. Despite the apparent failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion, the US government would continue its covert operations with the establishment of the more comprehensive program, Operation Mongoose in early 1962 with the same goal of overthrowing the Castro government and installing a more US-friendly government. The program, initially titled "The Cuba Project," given to President Kennedy on February 20th, 1962, outlined a full program containing plans for several political, economic, psychological, military, sabotage, and intelligence operations. The plans included several recommendations for a takeover of the island from actions violating Cuban sovereignty such as sabotaging the power supply or harassing Cuban airplanes and ships to cynical psychological operations containing instructions to "create atmosphere of a 'crusade' for human liberty" in order to dramatise and motivate the CIA-organised guerilla armies.⁴⁶ According to another memorandum from March 13th, 1962, several agents were already dispatched to Cuba and many other surveillance operations were approved and underway

⁴⁵*FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1958–1960, CUBA, VOLUME VI*, Document 481.

⁴⁶*FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1961–1963, AMERICAN REPUBLICS; CUBA 1961–1962; CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS AND AFTERMATH, VOLUMES X/XI/XII, MICROFICHE SUPPLEMENT*, Document 279.

indicating the commencement of this program.⁴⁷ Although the operation was underway, the full military operation it planned never materialised, and the US's main goal of the removal of the Castro's with this operation was never achieved; the US would suspend this operation following several intelligence reports of Soviet weapons arriving in Cuba.⁴⁸ Throughout the decades, heavy surveillance of Cuba would occur, and more covert operations would take place attempting to dispose of Castro. At present, Cuban officials allege that there were more than six hundred attempts against his life.⁴⁹

After the Revolution, and the apparent failure of the immediate attempts to dispose of the Castro government, the US would implement a series of economic measures deemed equivalent to a blockade of Cuba. In September of 1961, Congress would pass the Foreign Assistance Act, both as a countermeasure to the failures of any covert attempts at regime change as well as a means of economic coercion against communist countries and their allies. The act declares that, "No assistance shall be furnished under this Act, as amended (except section 214(b)), to any Communist country;" in the list of countries this would specifically apply to, Cuba was one of them listed.⁵⁰ Furthermore, in listing the necessary requirements former states of the Soviet Union needed to meet in order to be considered for aid, one of them was that they must end all

⁴⁷*FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1961–1963, AMERICAN REPUBLICS; CUBA 1961–1962; CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS AND AFTERMATH, VOLUMES X/XI/XII, MICROFICHE SUPPLEMENT, Document 280.*

⁴⁸"The Bay of Pigs Invasion and Its Aftermath, April 1961–October 1962." Office of the Historian. U.S. Department of State. Accessed May 6, 2022. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/bay-of-pigs>.

⁴⁹Patrick Oppmann. "Fidel Castro Survived 600 Assassination Attempts, Officials Say." CNN. Cable News Network, November 26, 2016. <https://www.cnn.com/2016/08/12/americas/cuba-fidel-castro-at-90-after-assassination-plots/index.html>.

⁵⁰*Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, Public Law 87-195, US Statutes At Large (1961): 221.*

support for Cuba, including trade subsidies and any other economic assistance.⁵¹ The act would also allow for President Kennedy to impose a comprehensive trade embargo against Cuba. Notably, although the US ceased economic engagement with Cuba, they maintained a physical presence there in the occupation of Guantanamo Bay and the maintenance of a prison there; the act also indicates that the surveillance of Cuba would resume as it brings up that intelligence collection would continue with the mention of intelligence facilities that were already known to exist on the island.⁵² The economic blockade on Cuba has been condemned multiple times by many countries, as there is an ongoing non-binding UN resolution which calls for an end to the embargo and sanctions on the country; however, the embargo would only decrease in popularity following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Popular media would also play a role in shaping attitudes towards Cuba during this time. Many political cartoons would depict Cuba not only within the context of the Cold War as detrimentally communist, but also with an almost patronising outlook viewing the country with historical attitudes of imperialism. For example, in the cartoon “Two more about to blow,” we see a depiction of several sombreros, two of which represent Cuba and Panama have erupted like volcanoes into being “Anti-American,” the other two sombreros in danger of erupting would be Brazil and Venezuela.⁵³ While the use of sombreros to blanketly depict different Latin American countries has some racist undertones in it of itself, the use of volcanic eruptions as a representation of popular revolts to American and Western colonial practices is also indicative of the reactions media may have hoped to generate against Cuba. What would become evident in

⁵¹*Foreign Assistance Act of 1961*, Public Law 87-195, *US Statutes At Large* (1961): 165.

⁵²*Foreign Assistance Act of 1961*, Public Law 87-195, *US Statutes At Large* (1961): 167.

⁵³Mauldin, Bill, Artist. Two More About to Blow. United States Brazil Panama Venezuela Cuba, 1959. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2016686934/>.

the media is that many American pundits and journalists naturally expected the Cubans to comply with US interests, emphasising the idea that revolutions in the Global South were acceptable as long as they adopted US standards.⁵⁴

Besides the patronising depictions in print media, Cuba would also fall into the genre of Cold War films, albeit taking a lesser role than that of the US or Soviet Union. There were movies such as *Topaz* directed by the famed Alfred Hitchcock and *Thirteen Days* directed by Roger Donaldson and starring Kevin Costner which depicted the tense environment surrounding the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. Many of these movies fall into the category of suspenseful espionage thrillers, which serve to romanticise and lionise the US state department and its activities against the Soviets or other communist countries for the purpose of garnering more support for the US in the Cold War.

Effects on the Cuban people

The US support of the Batista dictatorship and advancement of American interests on the island in the early 1950s took a great toll on the island. As they worked in Cuba prior to the revolution, the US would operate in a manner which would increase the profits of American private companies while the aid they would give to the Batista dictatorship would be primarily in the form of arms, strengthening his ability to suppress dissent and maintain his power through military might. Furthermore, the relations between the US, Batista, and organised crime combined with the already present American influence in the Cuban economy led to much of

⁵⁴Saul Landau. "U.S. Media Images of Postrevolutionary Cuba: Shaped by Government Policy and Commercial Grammar." *Latin American Perspectives* 33, no. 5 (2006): 122.

Cuba becoming an essential playground for American tourists, gangsters and celebrities.⁵⁵ While this led to Cubans in cities such as Havana having access to some American luxuries such as cars and Hollywood movies, the downsides of American influence for Cuban people far outweighed any benefits, and many revolutionaries would refer to pre-revolution Cuba as, “the brothel of the Western hemisphere.”⁵⁶ Cuban society also became increasingly segregated in the years leading up to the revolution due to both historical colonialism and present American imperialism encouraging a power structure of vast inequality based on race, as many darker Cubans faced discrimination and were denied access to some places in cities. Rural Cubans were also becoming increasingly poor as most of their work went towards enriching private US companies and their literacy rates remained low as well, enforcing detrimental social structures based on class as well.⁵⁷

After the Cuban Revolution began and the US enacted antagonistic policies to try and curtail its efforts, some of its goals against the island were achieved, even though the US did not achieve their final goal of overthrowing the Castro government. Due to the strict economic policies implemented against Cuba, they would effectively be isolated from most Western markets, and the American tourism which previously went freely through the island would decrease dramatically. Although Cubans welcomed the fact that the island was no longer considered America’s playground, the economic sanctions and embargoes, the totality of which

⁵⁵Natasha Geiling. “Before the Revolution.” *Smithsonian*. Smithsonian Institution, July 31, 2007. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/before-the-revolution-159682020/>.

⁵⁶“Pre-Castro Cuba.” PBS. Public Broadcasting Service, 2005. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/comandante-pre-castro-cuba/>.

⁵⁷Alejandro de la Fuente. “Race and Inequality in Cuba, 1899-1981.” *Journal of Contemporary History* 30, no. 1 (1995): 160.

was nicknamed “el bloqueo” for how strict it was, would take its toll on Cuba’s economy. Cuban officials, alongside a UN agency, alleged in 2018 that the economic blockade from the US had cost the country \$130 billion dollars over the course of the six decades since the revolution began.⁵⁸ The decline in American investments and influence in the island combined with an economy weakened by the economic blockade also led to Cubans within cities having an inability to enjoy some of the luxuries they did when such cities were tourist havens for a fair amount of time.⁵⁹ Reverend Annie Chambers who visited Cuba during this time recalled how many people had little to no opulent displays of wealth, and many people lived very modestly. However, despite the lack of large amounts of wealth, she recalls that there was less poverty and homelessness that ravaged the island prior to the revolution.⁶⁰ The coercive economic measures taken against Cubans would weaken their economy; yet rather than leading Cubans to liberalise their economy again or overthrow the Castro government as the US had hoped, it would lead to increasing economic dependence on the Soviet Union.

Besides the economic impact of the US’s coercive policies, they would also have a significant impact on the culture of Cuba. As a result of the US’s strict policies preceded by decades of influence on the island to its detriment, the revolution became immortalised. Rather than considering the Cuban Revolution over after Castro’s army defeated Batista, many Cubans, especially older Cubans, consider the revolution ongoing to this day; for not only do Cubans still

⁵⁸“U.S. Trade Embargo Has Cost Cuba \$130 Billion, U.N. Says.” Reuters. Thomson Reuters, May 9, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cuba-economy-un-idUSKBN1IA00T>.

⁵⁹*Cuba and the Cameraman*. USA: Netflix, 2017.

⁶⁰Annie Chambers. Mothers Day with Rev. Annie. Interview. *Slow News Day Show*, 2020.

battle what could be considered economic warfare from the US, but this can also be situated within the larger battle against imperialism. This attitude is evident in Fidel Castro's speech delivered to the UN in 1979; an excerpt from the speech reads, "The quintessence of non-aligned politics, in accordance with its original principles and fundamental nature, allies the struggle against imperialism, colonialism, neocolonialism, apartheid, racism including Zionism and any form of aggression, occupation, domination, interference or foreign hegemony, as well as the struggle against the policies of great powers or blocs."⁶¹ This refers to the alliance Cuba has formed with other revolutionary governments around the world. Cuba also became supportive of revolutionary movements within the US, as former Black Panther Party Member Reverend Annie Chambers recalls that many Panthers visited Cuba, and that the relationship between them and Cuba was strong.⁶²

The revolution would also be immortalised and even romanticised through art, poetry, and music in Cuba. The phrase, "¡Patria o muerte, Venceremos!" which translates to "Fatherland or death, we will win!" became synonymous with the Cuban nationalism that helped serve as a counter to American imperialism and antagonistic policies; it is a phrase still popularly used to this day with a more recent example being a Cuban boxer (name) shouting the phrase after winning a match at the 2021 Olympics.⁶³ The works of artists such as Raúl Martínez would become significant in depicting the revolution and its heroes, as Castro himself stated that, "one

⁶¹Fidel Castro. "ADDRESS BY COMMANDER IN CHIEF FIDEL CASTRO RUZ AT THE 34TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY." Transcript of speech delivered at the UN General Assembly in New York, October 12, 1979.

⁶²Annie Chambers. Mothers Day with Rev. Annie. Interview. *Slow News Day Show*, 2020.

⁶³"Julio Cesar La Cruz: Patria o Muerte! Venceremos! - Radiohc.cu," 2021. <https://www.radiohc.cu/en/noticias/deportes/265642-julio-cesar-la-cruz-patria-o-muerte-venceremos>.

of the fundamental goals or intentions of the revolution is to develop art and culture, precisely so that art and culture come to be a real heritage of the people.”⁶⁴ Cuban art, already rich because of the island's history and diaspora, would be given more inspiration from the revolution and as a result would flourish. Music, as is important throughout the Caribbean, would also play a role in romanticising the revolution. Perhaps the best example of this is the iconic song “Hasta Siempre” dedicated to Castro’s friend and leader within the Cuban army, Che Guevara by Cuban musician Carlos Puebla. The song translated into “until always” or “until forever,” serving to further immortalise revolutionary sentiments as the song glorifies not only Che, but the Cuban Revolution, specifically the Battle of Santa Clara. As a further demonstration of the sentiments behind the song becoming eternal, other artists have done many covers of the song, making there be about two hundred versions of the song old and new;⁶⁵ the song is even still sung by musicians on the street in Cuba and throughout Latin America.

VI. Main Findings & Discussion

Ultimately, the Cold War shaped policy towards both the Caribbean nations of Haiti and Cuba. This becomes clear as prior to the Cuban Revolution US policy towards the countries were partially shaped by not only maintenance of the US’s economic interests but also the emphasis on maintaining anti-communist regimes on the two islands. For instance, in Haiti the lack of

⁶⁴Riley Kaminer. “Art and Revolution in Cuba: An International Perspective.” Cambridge Globalist, August 9, 2019. <https://cambridgeglobalist.org/2019/01/23/art-and-revolution-in-cuba-an-international-perspective/>.

⁶⁵“Hasta Siempre Comandante (1965).” Web log, 2010. <https://alltheversions.blogspot.com/2010/06/carlos-puebla-1917-1989-cuba-spanish.html>.

recognition of Fignole's temporary government for fear of his leftist policies as well as his subsequent removal occurred before Fidel Castro's army officially achieved victory in early 1959. And in Cuba as well, part of the reason for the immediate recognition of the Batista government upon his assumption to power through a military coup was due to Batista's efforts to curb communism within Cuba.

Besides the Cold War fueling anti-Soviet and anti-communist efforts, what also remains the key tenant of US policy towards the two nations was an effort to maintain US economic interests in the two islands. It is worth noting that anti-communism often falls within the line of maintaining US economic interests, as many nations who allied with the Soviet Union would nationalise sectors of their economy which were previously supplying American companies with revenue and profits. Yet ultimately this overlap stems from the importance the US places on protecting its economic interests, and the history of the US and its allies acting in a manner to first protect such economic interests predates the Cold War and the presence of the Soviet Union. Furthermore in discussing the ideologies of capitalism and communism, and the fact that many US financial interests lied with large capitalists, it makes sense that economic interests would lead the US to clash with an ideology which in practice views imperialism as, "the final stage of capitalism."⁶⁶ Thus, while it was within the geopolitical interest for the US to engage in anti-communism abroad due to the presence of the Soviet Union, there were overarching economic interests which motivated this as well.

In many instances in policy towards Haiti and Cuba, the US would place its own interests over the wellbeing of the people in these islands, not wanting to jeopardise its ability to maintain its influence, or attempt to influence through force. In Haiti, the US would participate in pushing

⁶⁶From the title of the famous Lenin work, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*.

out leftist leader Daniel Fignole who posed a threat to their interests even though he promised a New Deal for the people of Haiti. The US would then recognise and maintain relations with the dictator Francois Duvalier despite the increase in poverty and brutal repression of Haitians; the US Marines would even be found training members of the Tonton Macoutes. Despite the US State Department recognising that Duvalier was ruling to the complete detriment of the Haitian people, his suppression of communists worked in their favor. Duvalier, although driving away previous mulatto elites, allowed for wealthy US and Western businessmen to gain stakes in Haiti and in some cases even brought workers to them with the expansion of slums for workers such as Cite Soleil. Going to Cuba, the US would not only maintain but even enjoy relations with Batista, as the US extended its influence into various sects of the Cuban economy and reveled in making Cuban cities a playground and haven for politicians, celebrities, and members of organised crime. Once again, this was done to the detriment of the Cuban people as inequality of class and race would increase under Batista, alongside the suppression of political dissent. Even after the triumph of Castro's rebels, this sentiment remained as the US purposely imposed El Bloqueo on Cuba willing to sacrifice the wellbeing of the island in hopes that the decrease in quality of life for Cubans would lead them to overthrow Castro, or at least liberalise its economy to mitigate the sanctions allowing for more companies to invest in the island. What did help Cuba in this instance of isolation is that this happened within the context of the Cold War, which meant that while the US and West isolated Cuba, they would be welcomed by the Soviet Union and receive aid from them.

Despite the overarching themes of continuing US imperialism towards the two islands, there would without a doubt be a divergence in approaches to extending US influence following the Cuban Revolution. While the US would largely maintain relations with Haiti during the

Duvalier dictatorship, it would take a much more antagonistic role towards Cuba under the leadership of Fidel Castro. Against the Duvalier government the US would legitimise the dictatorship, and US companies and businessmen would move into the island without resistance. Meanwhile in Cuba, the US would take a very coercive approach into forcing the island back under its thumb. As a result of the Cuban Revolution, the US would also pay more attention to the Caribbean, believing that its interests would be really threatened by the presence of a communist Cuba. This would lead particularly to the US leveraging aid throughout the Caribbean in moves similar to those outlined by the Foreign Assistance Act albeit on a smaller scale. This strategy would not be given an official name such as the Caribbean Basin Initiative until after the 1970s, but it was evident in policy towards Haiti. The US would leverage aid against the Duvalier government, despite the mismanagement of such aid, as part of this agenda, relations between Duvalier and Castro would be incredibly weak during this time despite the proximity of the islands. Thus, while the Duvalier regime was friendly with and even dependent on the US due to their imperialism, in Cuba they became more dependent on the USSR. This would also affect relations between the Haitian and Cuban governments, as Duvalier, in the effort to be more anti-communist would become more antagonistic towards the Cuban government, and official relations between their governments would decline as a result of Duvalier catering to the anti-communist agenda of the US.

Yet despite the weak relations between Haiti and Cuba during this time, as a result of US policy throughout the region, many revolutionary activists would feel motivated and united in an ongoing struggle against imperialism. This sentiment, although already present throughout history, would be strengthened by the Cuban Revolution, as Cuban revolutionaries would frequently extend their support to other people around the world oppressed by imperialist

policies. The US's support of the Duvalier dictatorship is also something resented by Haitians, and many protests occur today bearing this resentment, alongside historical imperialism, in mind particularly in shantytowns such as Cite Soleil designed to provide profits to US companies. Furthermore, despite the differences in tone of foreign policy to the two island nations, both countries were subject to the common way with which US media depicted them, in that both countries needed US leadership. It was particularly the savagery of the Tonton Macoutes in repressing Haitian dissidence that gave way to more depictions of average Haitians as savage and incapable of governing themselves. Then the Cuban revolution led US media to portray Cuba with such patronage as if it were a petulant child, ignorant of how vast amounts of people in the country suffered while US influence was prominent there. People in both Haiti and Cuba would reject US influence in the cultural sphere because of such detrimental policies enacted in and against their islands, such key facts being largely omitted from the media. Thus, these countries would become significant in revolutionary lore not only because of their actual revolutions, but also because of their cultural resistance to the US. Cuba would immortalise the revolution through music and art, and the glorification of their resistance to US imperialism remains present in revolutionary culture and literature. While the government of Duvalier had decent relations with the US, the US could never quite achieve the same level of cultural interference in Haitian society that it did in Cuban cities during the Batista dictatorship. Haitians continued to celebrate their traditional Afro-Caribbean heritage even as it was being negatively portrayed by the media. Although celebrations of traditional African heritage such as Voodoo rituals were co-opted by Duvalier on occasion, these processions remained most strong among the poor urban and working-class Haitians, who loudly and proudly participated in activities such as the RaRa festivals to engage in cultural resistance to imperialism and potentially organise politically. In

Haiti and Cuba, the active uplifting of their own culture and triumphs as well as an active rejection of US culture led them to be significant in resistance lore not only politically but also culturally. The history of US imperialism towards Haiti and Cuba is something which brought activists of those and other Caribbean islands together, and that sentiment was only invigorated as a result of the Cuban Revolution and other developments from the 1950s-70s.

VII. Conclusion

Haiti and Cuba have been united in a continuous struggle against US imperialism since the onset of the Cuban Revolution. The Revolution in Cuba, led by Fidel Castro who would go on to lead the government as well, invoked various callbacks to the slave rebellion that became Haitian Revolution of the 18th century. This was because both revolutions revolted against a detrimental and racist elite structure and hierarchy, but more importantly both revolutions invoked similar responses from the West, led by the US. This is a fact which connects the people of the islands, and studying that reaction in the time period of the 1950s-70s during which the Cuban Revolution began helps us understand the numerous ways in which the US enacted imperialist policies throughout the Caribbean.

The US imperialised the two Caribbean islands in many different ways. Both islands were subject to economic imperialism, as American companies enjoyed cheap labor from Haitians and Cubans under the dictatorships of Francois Duvalier and Fulgencio Batista. After the Cuban Revolution economic imperialism from the US to Cuba would take a coercive turn, and the subsequent sanctions which Cuba incurred from the US resembled that of a physical blockade. Furthermore, as a result of the Cold War the US would employ a strategy of intentionally leveraging aid to nations which adhered to their anti-communist agenda such as

Haiti. The aid which the Duvalier dictatorship received from the US was not only economic, but Duvalier also received military aid from the US mainly in the form of the US military arming and training his police force, which included the infamous Tonton Macoutes. Militaristic imperialism was also employed in Cuba, as internal documents showed the US engaged in several schemes to try and invade Cuba and overthrow Castro in favor of another US-friendly regime. The media would also follow suit in such imperialist policies by portraying the islands in a patronising light, in which the two Caribbean islands were being portrayed as better off when adhering to US interests and needing their help. While Cuba was shown as being anti-American and subject to antagonisation in the face of romanticised espionage operations, Haiti's problems led them to be depicted as savage and incapable of governing themselves, with a specific emphasis on voodoo.

These various forms of imperialism would take their toll on the Haitian and Cuban populations. With the aid the US provided to the Duvalier regime, they actively enabled the brutal repression of Haitian society, and despite the influx of American business into the island, poverty and underdevelopment still soared. Cuba experienced similar effects under the dictatorship of Batista, and after Castro rose to power the coercive economic policies led to shortages of goods and denied the government a significant amount of revenue. Both the coercive and more subversive types of imperialist policies enacted by the US during this time period demonstrated the willingness of the US to put its interests and agenda over the wellbeing of the actual people on the islands. This time period also found mass migration movements from Haiti and Cuba to the US taking place; and while Cuban immigrants were welcomed due to their potential to be used in an anti-Castro agenda, Haitian immigrants were stigmatised in part due to the racist portrayal of Haitians in media. Yet despite the negative effects the idea of resistance to

US imperialism remained actively romanticised in Haitian and Cuban culture. Although Haitian cultural movements such as the Négritude movement would be occasionally co-opted by Duvalier to bolster his image domestically, Haiti still remained resistant to American influence in their culture, as it was a well-known fact that Western companies were exploiting them to produce commodities for the US. And in Cuba the revolution would not only be romanticised, but it would also be immortalised by the people and through various mediums in art. This awareness of US imperialism by the people of both nations is one which continues to allow the countries to sympathise and maintain person relations with each other to this day.

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