

Stephanopoulos historik innehåller uppenbarligen mycket information som tidigare varit förborgad. Hur mycket som är nytt och hur mycket som är tidigare känt är dock inte lätt eller ens intressant för en outsider att bedöma. Hans redogörelse är under alla förhållanden en nyttig sammanfattning av de kriser USA haft att hantera under 60 år och spännande i och med detaljeringsnivån med presidenter, ministrar och övriga i händelsernas centrum ofta ordagrant citerade.

**Dupuy, Alex, 2024. *Haiti Since 1804: Critical Perspectives on Class, Power, and Gender*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.**

Reviewed by Mats Lundahl

*Haiti since 1804*, by the Haitian-American sociologist Alex Dupuy at Wesleyan University, is a slim volume of some 160 pages, covering Haiti's entire history as a sovereign nation. Its four essays in different ways focus on 'the theme of class, power and gender and their interrelations and effects in Haiti in the context of its position and function in the capitalist world economy since 1804' (p. 1). The essays all stand on their own but putting them in relation to each other greatly increases the understanding of Dupuy's message.

The first essay, 'Indemnity, Debt, and Development: A Reprise', serves the useful purpose of exposing and exploding one of the most long-lived and toughest myths about Haitian history: that the main cause of Haiti's failure to develop economically and socially is the indemnity of 150 million francs that was forced upon Haiti by France in 1825 for the perceived damage to French property owners during the wars of liberation 1791–1803 as a *sine qua non* for French recognition of Haiti as a sovereign nation. The harsh indemnity clearly inflicted damage on the Haitian economy. It was so harsh that in the end, in 1838, it had to be lowered to 60 million plus interest payments of 30 million to French banks on loans taken to pay the first instalment on it. Taken together, these sums became known as 'the double debt'.

The most common story is that the double debt set back Haiti's development all the way up to 1947. This was the assumption when, in 2003, President

Jean-Bertrand Aristide calculated that France owed Haiti 21,685,135,571.48 million US dollars. However, the double debt was paid off already in 1888, and the 1874 and 1875 loans that were taken partly (much went into corrupt political pockets) to pay off the debt were liquidated in 1921–22 (Gaillard–Pouchet 2019; Gaillard 2021). More important, however, is the damage that the double debt did to the Haitian economy. In 2020, a series of *New York Times* articles put the Haitian loss of GDP as a result of debt payments between 1825 and 1957<sup>1</sup> at 21 billion dollars as of 2020, if the debt service money had instead been invested in Haiti and produced an output which would have grown at the same rate as the actual GDP, or 115 billion dollars in 2020, had it been invested in a way that would have put the Haitian growth rate close to the Latin American average (Porter et al., 2020). Now, making this kind of calculations, you are forced to assume your conclusions. The question then is what you should assume. Clearly not that Haiti, with its hopeless institutions, should have been able to get close to the Latin American average. The lower figure is more realistic, but even that may be too high. It is by no means certain that had the debt money remained in the domestic economy it would have made a contribution to growth comparable with what the actual investment yielded.

There are two reasons for this. In the first place, there should be diminishing returns to investment, given the physical infrastructure and the institutional setting. The return at the margin would have been lower than on the intramarginal investment. Secondly, in all likelihood, there would have been few improvements of infrastructure and institutions. Haiti had 22 presidents between 1843 and 1915. Only a single one managed to complete his term, four died in office and the remainder were toppled. Half of them held office for less than a year. All of them were in politics for the sake of personal income at the head of competing kleptocratic cliques. Besides accumulating private income, their main concern was staying in power (Lundahl 1985). Those were hardly circumstances likely to have promoted public investment. The tax money that would have been obtained if the money spent on debt payments had remained in Haiti would to a very large extent have been spent unproductively (or taken out of the country), possibly, or even probably, more so than what was de facto appropriated by the rulers during the 19th century and would thus have lowered the GDP growth rate. Even the lower of the *New York Times* estimates of the damage caused by the debt may thus be an overestimate. Retaining the debt payments in Haiti would have increased GDP, but not necessarily to the extent envisaged by the newspaper.

Dupuy presents argues that the debt was not main reason why Haiti failed to develop its economy during the 19th century. Two other main factors were

1 That is, the calculation includes loans taken after the double debt had been paid off (see Lundahl 1979, Chapter 8, for the Haitian debt history).

responsible. The first was the failure to exploit the former slaves. The attempts by Toussaint Louverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Henry Christophe and Alexandre Pétion to go back to the large estate system which had produced the wealth of Saint-Domingue failed and, beginning in 1809, the Haitian economy gradually turned into a smallholder system. (I have analyzed the reasons for this in Lundahl 1979, Chapter 6.) This, states Dupuy, made the emerging Haitian bourgeoisie concentrate on commerce instead of agriculture. The former in the end led to the establishment of foreign firms in Haiti and to a state of dependency vis-à-vis the international market, notably that of the United States. The lack of interest in agriculture, in turn, meant that no efforts were made to develop rural infrastructure, agricultural education and industries built on the processing of agricultural produce. The peasant-dominated sector was left to its own and therefore failed to develop.

The second reason was the perennial fights over the presidency already dealt with which characterized the 1843–1915 period. Dupuy's analysis here as well coincides with my own (Lundahl 1985). Politics in nineteenth-century Haiti was a game between small cliques whose only interest was the spoils of office and who did nothing to develop the country.

Dupuy's second essay deals with three periods. The first is the American occupation of Haiti 1915–34, the second extends to 1986 when Baby Doc Duvalier fell from power and the third covers the post-Duvalier period until the second coup against Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004. Dupuy focuses on the connection between military conquest and American business interests. In his view, the occupation was undertaken in order to further the latter in Haiti.<sup>2</sup> After suppressing the Haitian armed resistance, the Americans saw to it that a new constitution was drafted which for the first time allowed foreign ownership of property in Haiti. They modernized the infrastructure and prepared the way for direct American investment there. The country's finances were put under the control of American banks, the Haitian gourde was pegged to the dollar and the United States became the most important export market for Haiti. With the aid of the new constitution, land was transferred from peasants to large American companies, a measure which led to the proletarianization of the former and the creation of a docile labor force which could furthermore be employed on sugar plantations in Cuba and the Dominican Republic as well. (It should, however, be pointed out that little is known about the numbers displaced in this way.)

This is fine as far as it goes, but the reasoning omits two important facts. The occupation was not caused simply and probably not even primarily – by economic interests. One must keep in mind that it took place during the First World War. One of the standard works on the occupation by Hans Schmidt (1971) emphasizes strategic motives. There were many German businessmen

2 Cf. also Castor (1971), for a similar view.

in Haiti and German submarines were active in Caribbean waters where they threatened entente ships in the region. Above all, the United States wanted to secure the control of the strait between Cuba and Haiti. It already had Guantánamo on the Cuban side and badly wanted Môle St.-Nicolas as well.

The second fact that disappears in Dupuy's account is that the occupation was hardly an economic success story. Before the occupation, American business interests were unimportant in Haiti in comparison to the situation in other Latin American countries. The occupation increased their numbers, but few American investments survived the end of it, basically only the Haitian American Sugar Company (HASCO) (established before the occupation) and Plantation Dauphin (sisal).

Dupuy stresses that also after the occupation foreign companies invested in Haiti – bananas, cryptostegia (an indigenous vine rubber), copper and bauxite. Like the previous efforts these ventures, however, had one thing in common. They did not last for more than a couple of decades in the best case.

Politically, the post-occupation years saw the transformation of political power from the mulatto bourgeoisie to the black bourgeoisie and middle class, during the presidency of Dumarsais Éstimé (1946–50) and even more during that of François 'Papa Doc' Duvalier (1957–71) and his son Jean-Claude, 'Baby Doc', a regime that according to Dupuy had intimate economic ties with American business interests, notably in the export assembly industry sector while at the same time tariff reductions converted Haiti's food self-sufficiency into a dependence on imports of American rice. The latter argument is erroneous, however. Dupuy simply perpetuates a myth. In the first place, the rice tariff was not reduced until the mid-1990s, and Haitian agriculture was in decline long before that. Secondly, Haiti did not produce enough food to be self-sufficient in any meaningful sense of the word. Malnutrition statistics from the 1950s to the 1990s eloquently prove that (Lundahl, 2023, Chapter 4).

The third period discussed by Dupuy is the post-Duvalier era up to 2016, when Jovenel Moïse was elected president. He relates how Jean-Bertrand Aristide went from a leftist stance during his first short-lived presidency (he was in exile 1991–94 after a military coup) to submission to the international financial institutions (the World Bank and the IMF) and to neoliberal economic policies during his second presidency 2001–04. Dupuy also discusses what took place after the 2010 earthquake, when the Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission Led by Bill Clinton and the former Haitian prime minister Jean-Max Bellerive decided to follow a low-tariff, export-oriented economic policy. He points to the extremely uneven distribution of incomes in Haiti and relates that to the strategy pursued. This unfortunately to a large extent amounts to jumping to conclusions. No alternative strategy is sketched. We hence know nothing about the counterfactual that Dupuy has in mind, let alone about the probable consequences of it. Unfortunately, Haiti has lost the comparative advantage that

country once had in agriculture. What it has is a large, uneducated, labor force, and its comparative advantage is found in branches that make intensive use of such labor, among others various assembly industries (Lundahl and Söderlund, 2022). Food production behind high tariff walls stands out as an inferior strategy (Lundahl, 2023, Chapter 4) – one which in the worst case would lead to food riots because of higher consumer prices.

Dupuy's third essay deals with the gender issue in the Haitian context. He takes issue with the argument of Mireille Neptune Anglade (1986) that Haitian women are exploited by men in general, arguing, instead, that the exploitation takes place in a class context related to the insertion of the Haitian division of labor into the international economy. After a survey of some theories of class, capital and gender, he provides an account of the place of Haitian women in the rural and urban economy, respectively. The former in a sense fare better. Haiti has a long-standing division of labor between men and women in agricultural production and commercialization with women dominating the latter, exercising considerable autonomy. Dupuy is far from clear about how rural women are exploited by men and women on top of the local society. He points to the difficult situation of those peasants who don't own any land but have to rent it from well-off farmers, but it is difficult to see why this should discriminate more against women than against men. The situation of women in urban areas is different. They earn less than men, are more likely to be unemployed and more frequently work in the informal sector. Those employed in the formal sector are most often found in the apparel industry where, argues Dupuy, they are exploited by the factory owners and receive wages that do not suffice to cover their basic needs.

The last essay in Dupuy's book deals with the future of Haiti in the wake of the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in 2021: an effort which by necessity becomes speculative. Dupuy rightly stresses that Moïse was unpopular in wide circles, because he abolished the subsidies on fuel prices, because he embezzled aid money and because he employed armed gangs to attack areas where his political opponents were strong. He argues that the direct cause of Moïse's death was that he planned to turn over lists of people involved in drug trade to US authorities. Maybe, maybe not. Possibly, as already stated, the newly appointed prime minister, Ariel Henry, was involved in the murder. He did next to nothing to come to grips with the gangs. Instead, the common people began to form vigilante gangs and kill the gangsters that they could lay their hands on. Little by little, Haiti descended into chaos. Dupuy also stresses the connections between gangs, politicians and wealthy businessmen as responsible for the situation and the efforts to create a transitional government and an international security force that can break the power of the gangs. All this is seen against the dismal economic and social situation of Haiti: a situation which according to Dupuy has created by Haiti's insertion into the international capitalist

economy – an export pattern based on low wages, imports of food, emigration and remittances from the diaspora instead of domestic production – and which calls for drastic change. Dupuy insists on the necessity of going from a capitalist-run economy to a welfare state with a more egalitarian distribution of income. In his view it is only the state which can guarantee a decent living standard for the citizens. What he forgets to discuss is *how* the Haitian state, which has always been predatory, is going to be converted into a benevolent social guardian.

To conclude, in spite of its short format, Dupuy's book covers a vast territory: Haiti's entire history as a sovereign nation. The perspective is overtly Marxist. Dupuy consistently stresses the role of international – notably American – capitalism in the series of events that have shaped the fate of the country. However, he does not commit the common mistake of blaming everything on foreign powers but is careful to point out that the actions of domestic politicians have contributed substantially to the economic and social underdevelopment and the chaotic state that the country is in today.

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