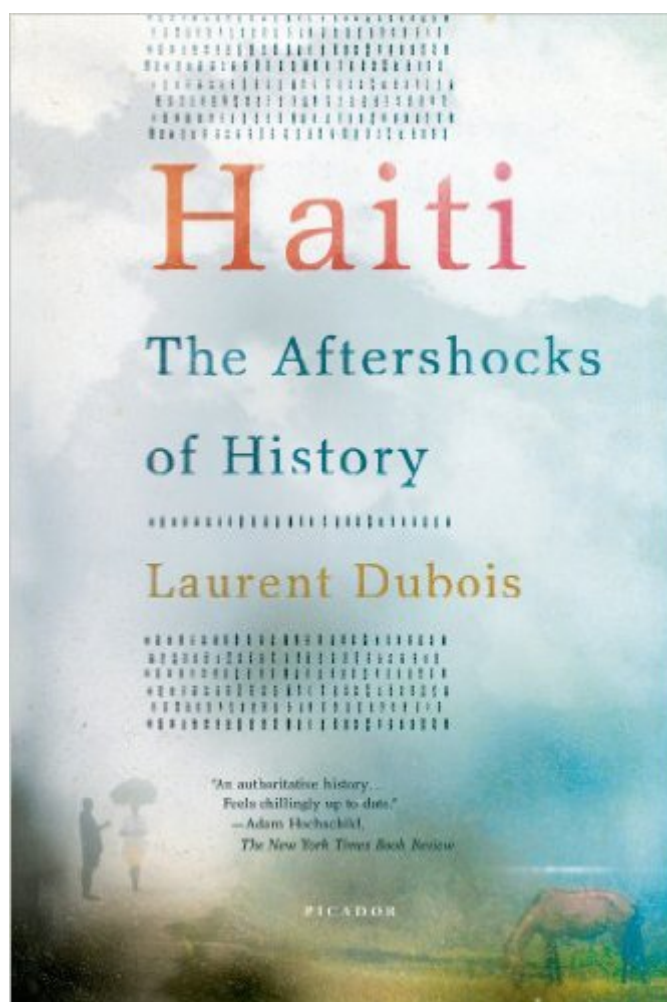


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Haiti: The Aftershocks Of History



Synopsis

A New York Times Notable Book of the Year Even before the devastating 2010 earthquake, Haiti was known as a benighted place of poverty and corruption, blamed by many for its own wretchedness. But as acclaimed historian Laurent Dubois demonstrates, Haiti's troubled present can only be understood by examining its complex past. The country's difficulties are inextricably rooted in its founding revolution---the only successful slave revolt in the history of the world; the hostility that this rebellion generated among the surrounding colonial powers; and the intense struggle within Haiti itself to define its newfound freedom and realize its promise. Revealing what lies behind the familiar moniker "the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere," this indispensable book illuminates the foundations on which a new Haiti might yet emerge.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I read this book based on the NYT review, from which I gathered that if one were to read a book on Haiti, this was it. It turns out that would only be true if we were living in 1963. Dubois covers the Haitian Revolution and early Haitian history with a great deal of detail, discussing people and events that, if not well known, make for interesting reading. If Haiti until Duvalier is your interest, this is the book for you. However, everything from the rise of Papa Doc to the present day is crammed into the final chapter and the epilogue. I don't mean to suggest that the most important part of Haiti's history has happened during this period (and perhaps this is the point Dubois is trying to make), but given the intricate discussions of the many leaders, coups, and rebels of the 19th century, the light touch on the modern era is terribly disappointing. For example, the entire coverage of the second fall of Aristide is as follows: "But the bicentennial instead became the occasion for an uprising: in February

2004, a small group of former military officers took up arms against Aristide, approaching Port-au-Prince from the north. The U.S. government made it clear that it would not intervene to support him, and at the end of the month, Aristide left the country in circumstances that remain the subject of tremendous controversy. He was escorted by U.S. troops and officials, who claimed they were simply helping him to flee to safety; Aristide himself, however, described the event as a kidnapping." That's it. Maybe knowing that there was a controversy is enough, but I would prefer a little more discussion of it and the people involved with it. The 1991 coup is similarly dealt with in a sentence or two.

It would be one of the greatest acts of moral vandalism in history. A man who had defeated the Ancien Regime in the service of the French Republic and held a territory in its name would die of betrayal by the new regime in a mountain fortress. In real terms he had betrayed the state, as he was governing in the interests of the people. Rare as that is in a statesman. I saw the picture of that man in a resplendent uniform with coal black face on a library bookshelf as a boy. It was the cover art that fascinated me and led me to the reading of Toussaint Louverture's biography. The book was part of a series meant for young students. It was the compelling story of a slave who started a nation. That nation's history has always been as compelling. Some would call it tragic or even comic, but there have been instances of triumph and glory. Laurent Dubois has retold the story in his book, *Haiti The Aftershocks of History*. There are more romantic books on Haiti. *The Serpent and the Rainbow* comes to mind with its alternative pharmacology and rural societal persistence. Kenneth Roberts' novel, *Lydia Bailey*, has an account of the battle of Crève-Coeur-Pierrot that is as inspiring as his description of General Dessalines is menacing. Even *Black Bagdad*, by the occupying Marine officer, John H. Craig, is a romance of sorts. Of course, a book with the title, *Best Nightmare on Earth* can only be about a place of chaos and fun. Yet such books are each only a small part of the story. All too many of my fellow citizens only know of Haiti as the place where the earthquake took place. One would suspect that fewer than one in a thousand realize that the country is our oldest sister republic in the new world. The great value in Mr.

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