

Warwick University Caribbean Studies

From Dessalines to Duvalier



David Nicholls

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This history of Haiti traces the ideas of race, colour and national independence through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, examining the relationship between these ideas and the principal social and political developments. National independence was regarded by Haitians themselves, as well as by foreign observers, as a symbol of black independence and 'regeneration'. Some of the important laws of the newly-independent country were explicitly racial. Although ideas of race provided a bond, linking Haitians together and strengthening their determination to achieve effective independence and economic development, colour divisions dating back to colonial times have been one of the principal threats to national independence. Divisions between black and mulatto have been reinforced by other factors such as class, religion, education and region; and each group has been willing to invite foreign intervention in Haiti, rather than permit its opponents to gain political power. Thus, while ideologies of race have provided one of the principal bases of national independence, colour factors have been important causes of foreign intervention.

The author suggests that the regime of Duvalier can be understood only in the light of this history and that in many ways the Haitian experience provides a pattern of post-colonial politics which other more recently independent states might be expected to follow.

Dr David Nicholls is a major authority on Haiti, and was in the country as a newspaper correspondent during the 1987 election disaster. His other books include *Haiti in Caribbean Context* also published by Macmillan. He is vicar of Littlemore, Oxford.

'Probably the best book written about Haitian history after its independence, a thorough, thoughtful, extremely well-researched work . . .'

(Franklin Knight, *Handbook of Latin American Studies*, vol. 44)

'All students of Haiti and the Caribbean should read his book to understand the plight of the black man in the New World.'

(Dr Paul Latortue, *Third World Quarterly*, Oct. 1982)



ISBN 0-333-65026-3



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Preface Contents

Series preface	v
Preface to the third edition	xi
Preface to the first edition	xliii
Note on terminology	xlvi
Map	xlvi
1 Introduction	1
2 Fathers of national independence (1804 – 1825)	33
3 Pride and prejudice (1820 – 1867)	67
4 Liberals and Nationals (1867 – 1910)	108
5 Occupied Haiti (1911 – 1934)	142
6 Literature and dogma (1930 – 1945)	165
7 Authentics and their adversaries (1946 – 1957)	191
8 Culture and tyranny (1957 – 1971)	212
9 Conclusion	239
Notes	256
Bibliography	319
Index	337