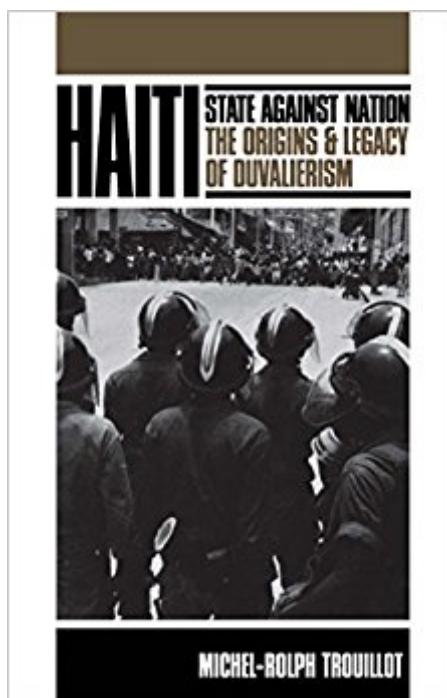


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Haiti: State Against Nation (Critical Social Thought)



Synopsis

In the euphoria that followed the departure of Haiti's hated dictator, Jean-Claude Duvalier, most Haitian and foreign analysts treated the regimes of the two Duvaliers, father and son, as a historical nightmare created by the malevolent minds of the leaders and their supporters. Yet the crisis, economic and political, that faces this small Caribbean nation did not begin with the dictatorship, and is far from being solved, despite its departure from the scene. In this fascinating study, Haitian-born Michel-Rolph Trouillot examines the mechanisms through which the Duvaliers ruthlessly won and then held onto power for twenty-nine years. Trouillot's theoretical discussion focuses on the contradictory nature of the peripheral state, analyzing its relative autonomy as a manifestation of the growing disjunction between state and nation. He discusses in detail two key characteristics of such regimes: the need for a rhetoric of "national unity" coupled with unbridled violence. At the same time, he traces the current crisis from its roots in the nineteenth-century marginalization of the peasantry through the U.S. occupation from 1915 to 1934 and into the present. He ends with a discussion of the post-Duvalier period, which, far from seeing the restoration of civilian-led democracy, has been a period of increasing violence and economic decline.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Trouillot efficiently covers a broad historical sweep from pre-independence through Haiti's ill-fated elections of 1987. He develops the thesis that Haitian history has been characterized by a growing

separation of state from the rest of political and civil society, an alienation which reached its peak under the Duvalier regimes, when Haiti became a polarized nation "divided into two parts: the 'authorities' . . . and the others." Although Trouillot ably documents Haiti's economic dependency, he is most compelling when describing the methods of and damage imposed by the Duvaliers. He ends with a plea to integrate the soul of Haiti--its peasantry--into the nation's political life. The book will appeal to scholars interested in Haiti in particular and national development in general.- Andrea Bonnicksen, Eastern Illinois Univ., CharlestonCopyright 1989 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Trouillot does an incredible job tying together historical themes from the time of the Haitian Revolution. Rather than writing a chronological narrative (and for that I would recommend Laurent Dubois' *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*) he analyzes changes in economy, military, race and government from the 19th to 20th century and focuses on the role of US occupation in creating a centralized state in the early 20th century. A state from which Duvalier could more easily rise to power. This book is essential for understanding modern Haiti, Trouillot's death was a great loss for the scholarship of Haiti, the Caribbean and the African Diaspora.

Readers of this book should know that it marked by a violent antipathy towards the "Mulatto" caste of Haiti. The role of the US military in the 20th century history of Haiti is poorly known in the USA, of course, and it is overwhelmingly destructive; but Trouillot, while eager to vilify Americans in his narration, sheds no light on the details. So be advised that when he describes events in ways that seem willfully malicious, there is understandable grounds for resentment which he never explains adequately. The other aspect of this book I found disturbing is his vilification of the "mulatre" (Mulatto) caste in Haiti, which we learn was the reviled "other" of the Noirist movement of post-WW2 Haiti. The mulatres are an insular group whom Trouillot regards as arrogant, aristocratic, commerce-minded, born to privilege, and ultimately anti-Haitian--or rather, hostile to his own dream of a hyper-regimented, Communist Haiti. Since the Duvaliers were inheritors of the Noirist movement against rule by mulatres, there is a tone in this book reminiscent of apologists for the Interhamawe/"Hutu Power" movement in Rwanda. Trouillot is therefore vehemently defending the Haitians who favored Noirism; but he absolutely does not defend the Duvaliers, who co-opted the Noirist slogans and imposed a ferocious totalitarian kleptocracy. His analysis of how their regime flourished, and the damage it did, is actually quite excellent, although he could have done a much better job explaining exactly what role foreign powers really did have in Haiti and the actual divisions

that were left BY the Duvaliers. This book can be recommended for its superb description of life under totalitarian rule, of social relations in Haiti, and the breadth of Haitian history since Toussaint l'Overture's death. It is also a good introduction to attitudes among camps of intelligentsia, and of course Mr. Trouillot is entitled to wish that Haiti had become a regimented socialist society at independence. But Trouillot's resentment against class/caste enemies must be mentioned and it damages what is otherwise a very useful book.

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