

U.S. and Haiti (1914)

Introduction:

The U.S. had fewer investments in Haiti than France and Germany. But by 1910 she controlled about 60% of Haiti's import trade and the National Railway Company. This was enough for her to become concerned about any possible European intervention in that country. French, German and American investors were making huge profits from investments in banking, public services and railways.

World War 1 began in 1914. The Haitians owed over \$32M to Germany and other European creditors. It was said that the Germans threatened to take over Haiti if the debt was not paid. Germany the aggressor wanted a base from which to attack Britain and U.S.'s possessions in the Western Hemisphere.

Haiti had serious political problems as well. She had a history of unstable and corrupt government. Between 1908 and 1915, there were seven Presidents! Matters got worst when in July of 1915, a revolt broke out. The then President, Vilbrun Guillaume Sam was widely viewed by the Haitian people as a cruel and unjust leader. It is rumored that he imprisoned, tortured and massacred a number of his opponents. Sam was murdered during the revolt.



Vilbrun Guillaume Sam

The U.S. applied the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. This basically gives them the right to intervene in any Caribbean or Latin American country which acts in such a way as to invite European intervention in the U.S. 'backyard'.

She could not afford for Germany to capture Haiti and become a threat to her precious canal or use the Windward Passage to attack her. Therefore in July of 1915, she responded swiftly. American marines led by Admiral Caperton landed at Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital to 'protect American life, liberty and property' and to restore law and order.

A treaty was signed in November 1915. It allowed the Americans to control Haiti's finances, sanitation, law and order and public works. They remained there until 1934.

Negative effects of U.S. intervention in Haiti

1. The U.S. was in control of Haiti. They lost their sovereignty.
2. Martial law was declared in September 1915. The freedom of movement of Haitians was restricted.
3. The revolt was brutally crushed. Hundreds of so called rebels were killed without even a trial.
4. American military officers were in charge of government operations.
5. The U.S. made changes to Haiti's constitution which allowed the U.S. to own huge acres of land.
6. Racial discrimination occurred
7. Many of the social programs were done in the towns where the Americans occupied while the rural areas remained destitute.
8. Haiti's culture was severely affected.
9. The new Haitian council was chosen by the Americans
10. The U.S. censored Haiti's press.

Positive effects of U.S. intervention in Haiti

1. Law and order was restored
2. A new Haitian police force was created (gendarmerie). This force was trained by the U.S. army.
3. The U.S. paid Haiti's debts and took control of their finances especially the Customs house.

4. The health care system was improved. New hospitals, clinics and health centres were constructed.

5. The sewages were drained and other sanitation measures were put implemented.

6. A mosquito eradication program along with vaccination helped to decrease the spread of diseases.

7. New roads, parks, wharves and light houses were built.

8. A number of new jobs were created