PROLOGUE

From Revolution to Subjugation

If one were to undertake the grim task of determining which country has been the most unfortunate over the past few centuries, Haiti would certainly feature prominently in one's research. From its French colonial roots to the United States’ Occupation during the twentieth century, Haiti has been summarily exploited by a multitude of foreign nations. The twenty-first century brought little respite: on January 12, 2010, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake tore the country apart, killing approximately 300 000 citizens and leaving millions more without homes.¹

For those familiar with Haitian history, the earthquake appeared as a grotesque physical manifestation of the hitherto invisible, yet no less destructive forces of colonisation that have haunted the former “Pearl of the Antilles” since the seventeenth century.

Haiti’s fate has always been intertwined with colonial powers. Founded in 1492 by Christopher Columbus, the island came under French control at the end of the seventeenth century. It was then named “St Domingue”, and over the next hundred years it became the richest of France’s colonies. At its peak, St Domingue produced 40 percent of the world’s sugar, as much as the entire British West Indies.² Yet this prosperity was founded on ‘a viciously exploitative plantation regime’ that bred

discontent among the island’s slave population. In 1791, the nation of Haiti was born when a slave rebellion in the country’s capital acted as the impetus for revolutionary war. Led by former slave Toussaint L’Ouverture and his general Jean Jacques Dessalines, the Haitians fought Napoleon Bonaparte’s army for twelve years until the Frenchman conceded that the former colony was no longer his. On January 1, 1804, the former slaves of St Domingue rejoiced in their newfound independence and declared the country, Haiti, for their own. It was just the second republic in the world, after the United States, and it remains the only contemporary nation in history born of a slave rebellion.

The victory, however, was short lived. In the 1820s, France successfully exacted reparations from the Haitian government for the lost profits of slave labour, profits the Haitian revolutionaries had paid for with their lives. The 150 million franc payment was later adjusted to a lesser rate, yet the debt undermined the already shaky foundations of the fledgling Haitian economy. The debt was compounded by a trade embargo sanctioned by American president Thomas Jefferson. That Jefferson, a man with a famously complex understanding of the ethics of slavery, should refuse to trade with a republic of black people is unsurprising. But across the United States, the

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3 Brown, Toussaint’s Clause, p. 30.
question of whether or not to quarantine Haiti was the subject of bitter debate: Northern traders favoured broadening the scope of the market for their goods, while Southern planters, fearing what inspiration their own slaves might draw from the revolutionary success of Haiti, were opposed to opening up trade routes. The Southern view prevailed until midway through the American Civil War, when President Abraham Lincoln officially recognised Haitian independence. Yet even after such recognition, Haiti was refused entry into the community of nations that enjoyed an amiable relationship with the U.S.

This was in large part due to the challenge Haiti’s Revolution posed to U.S. notions of exceptionalism, a fundamental tenet of the ‘(white) American national myth.’ Such a myth was constructed from the success in the United States’ own Revolutionary War against the British, and a promise to act as ‘the city on the hill’ for the rest of the “Old World.” The final expulsion of the French from the Caribbean (by a nation of black people, no less) only thirty years after the American Declaration of Independence dimmed the glow of these accomplishments. As historian Ifeoma Nwankwo explains, in the nineteenth century Atlantic world, ‘race, nation, and humanity were three major referents through which individuals defined themselves and others... but only one of the three referents was allowed to people of African

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7 Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti*, p. 28.


9 Baptist, ‘Hidden in Plain View’, p. 17.

It did not matter that the Haitian Revolutionaries had fought bravely for their freedom and overthrown a colonial master in a similar fashion to the Americans. They were black, thus the notion of engaging in a mutual friendship was never entertained. Any potential for a political solidarity between two modern republics was quashed, for in the eyes of American political elites blackness meant fundamental inferiority.

In regard to racial stereotypes, Haiti was not unique. In 1898, Cuba was engaged with its own war of independence against Spain and although the Cuban revolutionaries initially enjoyed enormous support in the United States, eventually the tide of public opinion turned. The military capabilities of the Cubans failed to meet the lofty expectations of the American media, and the Cubans were consequently deemed incapable of self-government. In 1898 the American government intervened, occupying Cuba until 1902, a move that prompted a brief war with Spain. This pattern of unilateral action was repeated in 1899 in the Philippines, another former Spanish colony and a site of the Spanish-American War. After signing a peace treaty with Spain, the U.S. occupied the Philippines in an attempt to suppress Philippine independence.

As was previously the case with Cuba, American imperialists justified their mission by combining racial and gender stereotypes, construing subjects as both uncivilised

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savages and wards of the American state.\textsuperscript{14} By 1902, however, reports of atrocities committed by American soldiers against Filipino soldiers and civilians turned public opinion against the war, and the force of domestic anti-imperialist sentiment was such that the American government was made to withdraw.

As the United States’ imperial ambitions grew, so too did their influence in Haiti. Under the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt the U.S. Navy routinely patrolled Haiti’s waters, and in 1910 President William Taft approved the takeover of Haiti’s national finances by the National City Bank of New York.\textsuperscript{15} These measures marked a break with the government’s previous interventions in Cuba and the Philippines. The cultural understanding of Haitians as inferior echoed the depictions of Cuban and Filipino revolutionaries, however, the American government’s early twentieth century Haitian policy was a result of ‘economic and strategic appraisals [rather than] a burning desire for combat or colonial adventures.’\textsuperscript{16} President Taft’s “Dollar Diplomacy” held that financial security in Latin America would guarantee lasting civil peace, and as such, American unilateral action in Haiti did not arouse the same anti-imperialist sentiment that forced the withdrawal of troops in the Philippines. Elected in 1913, President Wilson continued his successor’s Haitian policy but stressed the need for Latin American nations ‘to elect good men’ so as to ensure ‘a favourable climate for trade and

\textsuperscript{14} Hoganson, \textit{Fighting for American Manhood}, pp. 135-6.
\textsuperscript{16} Hoganson, \textit{Fighting for American Manhood}, p. 199.
investment.’\textsuperscript{17} Haiti, which had had six presidents between the years 1911 and 1915, clearly needed help electing the right people.

To complicate the internal instability in Haiti, the years preceding World War One saw Germany register its interest in establishing a naval base in the Caribbean. Haiti was a popular destination for German immigrants in the late nineteenth century, and German influence was therefore greater in the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince than anywhere else in the Caribbean.\textsuperscript{18} When war in Europe broke out in 1914, the officially neutral United States viewed the increased German presence in Haiti as a threat to its own national security. While imperial powers circled, the political situation in Haiti worsened. On July 28, 1915, President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam was dragged from the French embassy and murdered in the street by his opponents. Frustrated with how this latest instance of anarchy might affect U.S. economic interests and concerned about the presence of the German military, President Wilson ordered the landing of American troops. That afternoon 300 American Marines landed in Port-au-Prince, and the nineteen-year U.S. Occupation of Haiti began.

\textsuperscript{17} Emily S. Rosenberg, \textit{Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945} (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), p. 64.

INTRODUCTION

The Haitian Evolution

This thesis examines the competing representations of Haiti in the black and white American press during the United States Occupation from 1915-1934, and in the wake of the 2010 earthquake. While these events may appear dissimilar, the legacy of the Occupation coverage was made manifest in the days following the 2010 earthquake in both factions of the American media.¹ This specific point will be expanded on in Chapter Three. Across the entire thesis, I seek to demonstrate how the relationship between Haitians and African Americans informed the black press’ coverage of the Occupation and the earthquake. In doing so, I will also consider how the white press’ representations of Haiti reflected the United States’ understanding of itself as exceptional. The dichotomy between these two narratives is indicative of a broader schism in the American media regarding the historical awareness of U.S.-Haiti relations. This thesis aims to reconcile why such awareness was exclusive to the African American press.

The ignorance of Haiti in the white media was present even in 1915. The landing of troops in Port-au-Prince went largely unscrutinised by the white American press. That year saw the publication of just five editorials on the Occupation in the New York Times.

¹ Throughout this thesis, the term ‘faction’ applies to the division between African American and white American media rather than opposing political ideologies.
which was among the nation’s most popular daily periodicals. Much like the rest of the white media, the paper supported President Wilson’s Haitian policy, and as the months stretched into years, what little attention the Occupation had initially attracted was subsumed by coverage of the ongoing war in Europe. This was consistent with the United States’ relationship with Haiti, which since the Revolution had oscillated between steadfast denial of its existence and economic exploitation. The politics of successive administrations were reflected in the cultural attitudes of the white American press, which either ignored the Occupation entirely or characterised the Haitian people as wayward adolescents in need of stern discipline. In 1915, the only objection to the Occupation came from W.E.B. DuBois who, writing for the African American publication the Crisis, denounced it as a matter of national shame.

This expression of solidarity was not spontaneous. Since the Haitian Revolution the example of the independent Haitian state was used to further the American abolitionist cause. The kinship between African American slaves and Haitians was explored in the African American press and their radical allies. In the 1820s, Freedom’s Journal (the first African American newspaper) celebrated the victory of ‘our brethren of St. Domingo’ against the French army, and looked forward to what ‘descendants of Africa may be when blessed with Liberty, Equality and their concomitants.’ The notion

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that the success of the Haitian state was representative of the capabilities of African Americans gained traction throughout the nineteenth century and as such, the landing of troops in 1915 was viewed as a personal affront to black sovereignty. The evolution of African American-Haitian relations shaped the nature of black press coverage throughout the Occupation, a fact that will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Two.

Although Haiti remains a relatively obscure field for historians and other social scientists, what has been written can be roughly divided into three categories: the Haitian Revolution, the Occupation, and the Haitian state as a metonym for disaster. This thesis will incorporate aspects from all three. Although the Revolution itself is not discussed in detail, its influence is discernable in the American coverage of the Occupation and, to a lesser extent, the earthquake. Indeed in many ways the Revolution looms as a spectre over U.S.-Haiti relations in the twentieth century; certainly the absence of any reference to this event in the white coverage of the Occupation is notable for what it reveals about the narrow representations of foreign people in the white American press.

Haiti's invisibility in the white press is reflected in the historical canon, a fact oft-lamented by historians of the Haitian Revolution. In his book on Haiti and antebellum America, Alfred Hunt declares that despite a 'new awareness of blacks' role in American history', Haiti's influence on the United States remains a neglected area of
scholarship. Similarly, Doris Garraway describes how the history of the Haitian Revolution is 'subordinated to the French Revolution, [which is] seen as the original signifier of the modern political values of human liberty, equality, and natural right.' The tendency to privilege the French Revolution over its Haitian equivalent (which was undoubtedly more remarkable) reflects the general Euro-centricity of historical analysis. According to American history, the role of Haiti is only peripheral to the experience of Western civilisation.

Although Hunt and Garraway write with respect to the Revolution, the ignorance of Haiti's history is not limited to this specific context. America's occupation has generated only a moderate amount of scholarly attention, particularly when compared to the volume of work produced on other (shorter) U.S. interventions abroad: the role of the United States in Cuba, the Philippines, Vietnam, China and the Middle East has received far greater attention than its role in Haiti. Thus, the musings of historians regarding the under representation of the Revolution are applicable to my own work, and this thesis' conclusions regarding collective amnesia of the white American press owe their theories a significant debt.

This thesis is broken into three chapters. Chapter One examines how Haiti's

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9 Based on a canvass of the number of secondary sources available through scholarly databases.
history was variously represented in National Geographic, the Nation and the New York Times during the first five years of the Occupation (at least, when it was deemed sufficiently interesting to warrant coverage). This chapter will explore how black intellectual James Weldon Johnson's 'Self Determining Haiti' editorials, published in the Nation magazine, disputed the representations of Haitians in National Geographic and the New York Times and brought the issue of the Occupation to national prominence. The year 1920 is of particular interest as the year of the presidential election. The Republican candidate, Warren G. Harding used Johnson's account of the Occupation to challenge the foreign policy of incumbent president Woodrow Wilson. Thus, coverage of the presidential campaign mandated an analysis of the Occupation in the nation's daily newspapers.

National Geographic is an ideal source from which to analyse white coverage of Haiti in the early twentieth century because of its position as 'America's lens on the world'.\textsuperscript{10} The magazine communicated a national vision of American culture and was critical in transforming governmental foreign policy into a cultural obligation the United States owed to Haiti. Its depiction of the Haitian people as primitive and in need of salvation was a recreation of the paternalist aims of the Wilson administration. It relied on shared understanding of cultural differences between Haitians and the magazine's readers, most of whom were middle class Americans. By contrast, the Nation erased these differences by engaging with Haiti on its own terms. Johnson observed the Occupation's development from the viewpoint of the Haitian peasantry, and provided a

sympathetic account of their culture and history. Furthermore, he questioned the circumstances that led to the initial landing of troops in Port-au-Prince and concluded that the Occupation was a capitalist venture designed to profit the American economy, rather than an application of the moralistic zeal espoused by Wilson.

Johnson's investigation prompted increased coverage of the Occupation among the American daily newspapers, particularly the New York Times. This paper is worthy of study because of its position as among the most widely read daily publications in the United States. Unlike National Geographic or the Nation, the New York Times internalised the Occupation by viewing it through the lens of the presidential campaign and assessing its political ramifications for each candidate. The paper generally supported President Wilson and the Occupation, and it therefore did not engage with the day-to-day running of the Occupation in the same way as National Geographic and the Nation did. The New York Times is also the only publication common to all three chapters. Its popularity has always been assured, and it aims to reflect the concerns of the nation without the specific advocacy of the black press or publications with a narrower aim, such as National Geographic.

Chapter Two considers the American coverage of the Occupation from the years 1921-1934. Once the excitement of the 1920 election dissipated, the Occupation was forgotten by the politicians, and as such it was seldom reported in the white American press for most of the decade. This changed in 1929 after a massacre in the town of Aux Cayes, Haiti, when Marines opened fire on hundreds of unarmed Haitians assembled to protest the Occupation. The event drew international condemnation and forced
President Hoover to implement a withdrawal strategy, and once again the Occupation was thrust into the national spotlight. After Aux Cayes, however, the tone of the coverage changed. Even the *New York Times*—which had been a staunch supporter of the Occupation for most of its duration—now conceded that the growing civil unrest in Haiti imperiled the Marines' mission. This sentiment was reflected in other white publications such as the *Daily Boston Globe* — a paper with a similar readership to the *New York Times*, yet one that provided a slightly more insightful analysis of the merits of the Occupation.

In order to account for the change in the coverage of the Occupation in the white American press, it is necessary to examine the growing influence of the African American community throughout the 1920s. The decade was marked by the rise of a new black nationalism, one that was intimately tied to the artistic and cultural expressions of the Harlem Renaissance. The art produced in black locales like Harlem re-imagined black American identity and stimulated pan-African pride across the globe. In the United States, a new racial consciousness came into being. Traditionally held views of black people as inferior gave way to a veneration of black culture in some white circles, which now held that black culture enabled a more natural and unrestrained lifestyle. Coupled with this new belief was the ever increasing influence of black newspapers, which acted as advocates for the national (and in the case of Haiti, international) black community. While coverage of the Occupation dwindled in the white press throughout the 1920s, African American newspapers such as the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Chicago Defender* continued to champion Haitian sovereignty throughout
the decade, and indeed until the 1934 withdrawal. Both the *Courier* and *Defender* are examined in detail because of their position as the two most widely circulated black newspapers in the age of the "New Negro".\textsuperscript{11}

Chapter Three examines why the recognition of Haiti’s complex political history was unique to the black American media in the wake of the 2010 earthquake. I will interrogate how the denial of Haitian autonomy sought to reinforce the cultural superiority of white America, and continued a tradition established over the past century in the white press’ coverage of the Occupation. David Brooks' editorial 'The Underlying Tragedy'—published in the *New York Times* on January 14, 2010—will function as a lens through which to view a broader spectrum of articles in the white media. This examination reveals a collective amnesia regarding the history of U.S.-Haiti relations, particularly with regard to the Occupation. Rather than investigate how Haiti's colonial history may have affected the scale of the damage from the earthquake, the devastation is quantified in terms of Haiti's poverty and "blackness". This tendency is particularly evident in the comparisons that many white journalists made between the Haitian earthquake and the devastation inflicted on New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, another natural disaster that affected mostly black people. By contrast, the African Americans press consistently used Haiti's history—from its revolutionary origins to its twentieth century relations with the United States—to account for the tremendous loss of life from the earthquake. In doing so, the black press imbued the

Haitian people with an agency that was denied them by Brooks and his colleagues in the white press.

Because the earthquake happened only two years ago, and also because it happened in Haiti (which as we have seen, is a relatively obscure field in social science), the volume of secondary material on the disaster is limited. In order to justify my conclusions I will draw on analyses of media representations of the Third World, as well as research of other similarly catastrophic natural disasters. The analysis of Hurricane Katrina, which struck the city of New Orleans in 2005, is particularly pertinent considering the frequent juxtaposition of the two events in the white media’s 2010 coverage of the earthquake. My use of this material is not intended to justify such comparisons, or indeed sanction the representation of Haiti as part of the “Third World.” Rather it seeks to illuminate how such portrayals contribute to the complex process of racial stratification, inherent in terms like “Third World.” Although circulation of publications such as the Pittsburgh Courier (which was renamed the "New Pittsburgh Courier" in 1966) and the Chicago Defender has declined in the twenty-first century, the same is true for much of the American print media. As such, periodicals from both factions of the American press have registered an increased online presence in order to expand their readership. Most of the newspapers used in my analysis continue to print the articles that appear on their websites; the Daily Beast is the lone exception.

My use of newspapers is not unique amongst historians of Haiti. Several of the texts written on the Occupation feature an analysis of the role of the print media in
shaping the public opinion of both the Marines and the Haitians. Yet most texts focus on either the black or white press, and none assess the coverage of the Haitian earthquake. In contrast to this trend, my thesis compares black and white commentary in equal measure and extends the boundaries of such analysis to encompass the 2010 earthquake.

CHAPTER ONE

Problems of Paternalism

‘Here, in the elemental wildernesses, the natives rapidly forgot their thin veneer of Christian civilization and reverted to utter, unthinking animalism, swayed only by fear of local bandit chiefs and the black magic of voodoo witch doctors.’

- National Geographic Magazine, July 1920

From the perspective of the writers at National Geographic magazine, the United States’ Occupation of Haiti was a moral imperative. The civilisation established by French rule throughout the seventeenth century had become increasingly tenuous since the Haitian Revolution of 1804. With the assassination of President Guillaume in 1915, the situation was deemed critical. This was only the latest in a series of turbulent political events that plainly demonstrated the inability of ‘the little black republic’ to govern itself effectively. The writers at National Geographic lamented the ‘chronic revolutions’ that had plagued the island since 1903, and accepted with a kind of weary resignation the role of U.S. Marines in ‘bringing law and order to that distracted land.’

The Monroe Doctrine demanded that the United States maintain a certain standard of living within its sphere of influence, and the current state of Haiti, with its chaotic politics and mysterious paganism, was an embarrassment to the United States.

The characterisation of Haitians as incapable was only one of three major representations of Haiti in the American media’s coverage of the Occupation from the

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2 ‘Haiti and Its Regeneration’, pp. 503; 505.
years 1915-1920. While *National Geographic* endorsed the paternalist aims of the Wilson administration, the *Nation* magazine rejected the notion that Haiti was inferior to the United States and argued that the Occupation was not an application of high-minded idealism but a capitalist venture intended to benefit the National City Bank of New York, rather than the Haitian people.\(^3\) In contrast to both publications the *New York Times* examined in the Occupation in terms of what it meant for American politics, and how it might affect the 1920 presidential election. This chapter will explore the competing representations of Haiti in these three publications, and what influence (if any) the history of Haiti had in shaping such characterisations.

The overall aim of this thesis is to account for the differences between the representations of Haiti in the black and white American press, and in this chapter, the *Nation* magazine functions as a publication expressing the perspective of the African American community. Although the *Nation* was not a black owned or operated publication, its political radicalism meant that it shared more in common with contemporary African American newspapers and journals than it did with the mainstream white press. This is particularly true in respect to Haiti. For its coverage of the Occupation, the *Nation* relied on the reporting of prominent African American intellectual James Weldon Johnson.

*National Geographic’s* characterisation of Haiti and its people was a demonstration of support for the foreign policy of the Wilson administration. In the months prior to July

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1915, when the first wave of Marines landed in Port-au-Prince, Wilson had argued that
the Occupation was necessary not only to stabilise Haitian society, but also to protect
the island from the menace of a growing German presence in the Caribbean. The
driving force behind this sentiment was paternalism. The editors at National Geographic
wholeheartedly embraced this notion, characterising Haiti as an experimental yet
ultimately misguided adolescent. In the construction of such a narrative, the U.S. was
fashioned as a sternly benevolent uncle or cousin who was once again tasked with
setting Haiti on the right course:

Traditionally opposed to interfering in the affairs of its neighbors, the United
States has stood for years between the little black republic and the nations of
Europe when loans were due and unpaid or when citizens of foreign nations
were molested. Urging the sanctity of the Monroe Doctrine, our government had
repeatedly settled disputes and adjusted matters so that Haiti might receive
extension of credit from its creditors and avoid the forcible coercion its acts
threatened to provoke.4

Presenting Haiti as a diminutive but troublesome version of itself — a 'little black
republic' in constant need of U.S. guidance to settle its affairs — this version of history
implied that U.S. intervention was undertaken solely for Haiti's benefit. The interests of
the national economy were apparently of little concern to American policymakers. Such
mythmaking was palpably inaccurate. As the people of Cuba and the Philippines could
attest, the United States was not at all opposed to interfering in the affairs of its
neighbours. Far from acting as Haiti’s guardian, moreover, the American government
stood idly by when France demanded reparation payments from the island for lost
slave profits during the 1820s. Indeed as historian Edward Baptist points out, ‘the

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4 ‘Haiti and Its Regeneration’, p. 505.
United States itself threatened Haiti with invasion in 1850 if she did not meet its monetary demands for debt repayment,’ despite the Monroe Doctrine.\(^5\) *National Geographic* thus rewrote Haiti’s history in order to cast the United States in a favourable light, ignoring past and present realities of their government's involvement in Haiti for a simpler image of America as a beacon for democracy in its sphere of influence.

Leaving aside the inaccuracies of *National Geographic*’s account of Haitian history, the magazine’s unequivocal support of the Occupation is not difficult to account for. Founded in 1888, the *National Geographic* was the official organ of the National Geographic Society, the offices of which were located in Washington D.C. The editors of magazine cultivated alliances with government officials as the jingoism inspired by America’s swift victory in the 1898 Spanish-American War reached its peak.\(^6\) The renewed confidence in the U.S.’ imperial status, along with the acquisition of territory in the Caribbean and Philippines, was embodied by the National Geographic Society, who ‘touted its research in political and economic geography as a notable contribution to the nation in an era of new global responsibilities.’\(^7\) The editors of the magazine saw it as their patriotic duty to support the actions of their government by reinforcing the differences between the people of the United States and the rest of the world. Thus, in the case of Haiti, the macrocosm of the U.S. policy was reflected in the pages of the magazine.


\(^7\) Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, p. 18.
National Geographic differed from other monthly periodicals in that it defined itself as a scholarly instead of commercial publication. This pseudo-credibility appealed to its readership, which consisted largely of middle-class families with upper-class aspirations. In such a context, the cultural differences between Haitians and Americans were crucial. The National Geographic Society ‘positioned itself as a key actor in presenting “primitive” peoples for western perusal’, and the magazine acted as a means of highlighting the “progress” of American civilisation. Rather than challenge either the public perception of Haitian culture or the political interest groups behind the Occupation, National Geographic relied on a shared understanding of the cultural differences between the two nations.

These differences were emphasised at length in articles on the Occupation. For Sir Harry Johnston, the author of a piece that featured in the July 1920 edition of the magazine, the natives provided a wonderful spectacle:

The mountain people are a vigorous and comely negro race. The fine physical development of the men made one regret that they did not revert more to the most defensible African custom of wearing very little clothing, for they would evidently have exhibited forms that would be a delight to the sculptor’s eye.

The characterisation of Haitians as ‘African’ and ‘negro’ reveals the extent to which Haitian autonomy was denied. According to National Geographic, people of African descent were a single, homogenous group whose defining characteristic was their

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8 Lutz and Collins, Reading National Geographic, p. 17.
9 Lutz and Collins, Reading National Geographic, p. 17.
10 Lutz and Collins, Reading National Geographic, p. 19.
“otherness”. Haiti, as nation of black people, was plainly unfit for self-government, and the fact of Haiti’s “blackness” was reason enough to intervene.

Despite their obvious condescension for Haiti’s people, culture and customs, the writers at National Geographic maintained a kind of paternalistic affection for the hapless Haitians. This combination of a racist and protectionist ideology reflected the complexity of President Wilson’s foreign policy. Although the attitude of the administration was officially one of ‘conciliation and respect for smaller nations’, Wilson also insisted that ‘the United States had a moral responsibility to promote constitutional, democratic government in the Caribbean area.’\(^\text{12}\) The writers at National Geographic transformed this moral responsibility into a cultural imperative. It was the solemn duty American Marines, they argued, to uplift the Haitians, who prior to the Occupation had ‘lived among dirt and squalor, in tiny huts or huddled together like animals.’\(^\text{13}\) One author went on to assure his readers that ‘this is a true picture of conditions in Haiti when the United States forces first landed’, before hinting darkly that some details remain ‘not suitable for publication in the United States.’\(^\text{14}\)

The veracity of such claims was supported by the inclusion of photographs. Featuring as complements to the written text, the grainy black and white photographs reinforced the quasi-scientific nature of the magazine by ostensibly representing various facets of Haitian life without prejudice. The displays were almost always accompanied by helpful captions that interpreted the image for the reader: ‘MATERIAL EVIDENCE


\(^{13}\) ‘Haiti and Its Regeneration’, pp. 499-500.

\(^{14}\) ‘Haiti and Its Regeneration’, p. 505.
OF SANTO DOMINGO’S TROUBLOUS PAST’, read one.15 The cultural significance of these pictures cannot be overstated. As Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins explain, photographs were ‘one of the most culturally valued and potent media vehicles shaping American understanding of, and response to, the world outside the United States.’16 Not only were such pictures vital in delineating cultural “otherness” from without, they were vital in shaping Americans’ understanding from within. In the case of Haiti such stereotypes were a ‘fortress of tradition’ behind which Americans could feel secure.17 There was no need to expand on the circumstances of Haiti’s poverty when it could be accounted for with such stark clarity.

Such traditions were important as much for what they excluded as for what they included. The representation of Haitians in the white American media was not unique; it had its antecedents in the treatment of Native Americans and was paralleled in the contemporary experience of African Americans. In this respect, the Occupation was simply a transplantation of the same racist stereotypes that dominated domestic race relations within the United States.18 In the case of National Geographic, the writers embodied the same complex dichotomy of Southern racism and the Northern spirit of reform that characterised the African American experience in 1920 America. The indiscriminate use of the terms ‘black’, ‘negro’, ‘savage’ and ‘animal’ reflected the hostility of American Southern states, while the characterisation of Haitians as passive

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15 ‘Haiti and Its Regeneration’, p. 505.
16 Lutz and Collins, Reading National Geographic, p. xii.
children mirrors the attitude of the Wilson administration to African Americans.\textsuperscript{19} Therefore, \textit{National Geographic} articulated a truly national vision of both Haitian culture and the merits of the Occupation, one that rested on an unholy combination of Southern racism and Northern protectionism.

\textit{National Geographic} was not the only publication with a decidedly uncritical view of the Occupation. As World War One raged in Europe, the landing of troops in Haiti drew only mild interest from a media contingent distracted by the prospect of American entry into a European war. Indeed for the first five years of the Occupation few voices questioned the necessity of the intervention.\textsuperscript{20} For most of the American media, expressing their support of the Occupation was simply a function of their own patriotic pride, and a vital part of the protection of American colonial interests.\textsuperscript{21} As such, not only did the reasons for the Occupation go unaccounted for, so too did Haiti’s unique political history. Nowhere in any of the three articles that featured in July 1920 edition of \textit{National Geographic} were the circumstances of Haitian independence explained in anything other than racist epithets.\textsuperscript{22} The first paragraph of ‘Haiti and Its Regeneration By the United States’ reels off a list of ills that justified military intervention: ‘sedition, conspiracy, rebellion, plague, pestilence, famine, battle, murder, and sudden death.’\textsuperscript{23} In this we can see the construction of Haitians as passive historical

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\textsuperscript{19} ‘Haiti and Its Regeneration’, pp. 497-512.
\textsuperscript{21} Hans Schmidt, \textit{The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934} (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995), p. 120.
\textsuperscript{22} Two of the three articles are discussed in detail above; see also Major G.H. Osterhout, ‘A Little-Known Marvel of the Western Hemisphere: Christopher’s Citadel, a Monument to the Tyranny and Genius of Haiti’s King of Slaves’, \textit{National Geographic Magazine} 38 (July 1920), pp. 468-482.
\textsuperscript{23} ‘Haiti and Its Regeneration’, p. 497.
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agents. Rather than winning their independence, Haitians simply outlasted the French, who were themselves victims of ‘indescribable atrocities’ committed by ‘bands of armed negroes [that] roamed the countryside, pillaging and burning as they went.’ Much like the disparagement of Haitian culture, the reduction of Haiti’s history served as a means to differentiate it from the United States’ own revolutionary past.

The similarities between African Americans and Haitians were not limited to their common experiences with white Americans. Even prior to the Occupation, African Americans shared a strong sense of solidarity with Haitians. Toussaint L’Ouverture’s 1804 success in overthrowing the French colonial government provided African Americans with an alternative narrative to their existence, one that challenged the dominant mode of discourse on race relations within the United States. Rather than accept the notion that black people were naturally inferior and therefore incapable of self-rule, L’Ouverture proved that slavery (and slave owning) was not a fate determined by one’s birth. During the 1820s, thousands of African Americans emigrated to Haiti at the invitation of the Haitian government, strengthening the link between the two groups. Drawing on this relationship, the nascent African American press invoked the memory of the Haitian Revolution and L’Ouverture’s success in order to prove the equality of the black race on the eve of the American Civil War. In the years immediately prior to the Occupation, Haiti once again featured in the black

25 Renda, Taking Haiti, p. 20.
American press. An article in the *New York Age* declared ‘we long to see Haiti demonstrate to the world the capacity of the Negro for self-government and self-improvement... and each time she suffers from revolution and lawlessness we experience a feeling of almost personal disappointment over it.’

For African Americans, the success of Haiti was intimately bound with their own fate within the racist confines of American society.

In this context, several prominent African Americans lamented the circumstances of the Occupation. Booker T. Washington, a former slave and political advisor to Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Taft, expressed concern over specific instances of racism on the part of Marines, but largely accepted the Occupation as a ‘necessary evil.’

Similarly, James Weldon Johnson, a novelist, journalist and former diplomat, accepted the State Department’s justification for the intervention in light of Haiti’s political instability. A notable exception to the otherwise universal chorus of support was W.E.B. DuBois. As one of the co-founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP), DuBois urged his colleagues to reject the notion that Haiti’s government had failed, explaining that ‘these are the pictures white people have painted for us and with which engaging naïveté we accept.’

Three months after the Marines landed in Port-au-Prince, DuBois published an editorial in *Crisis* (the official organ of the NAACP) denouncing the Occupation as a violation of the

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independence of a ‘sister state’.\textsuperscript{30} He went on to compare the histories of Haiti and the United States, arguing that ‘the anarchy in Hayti is no worse than the anarchy in the United States at the time of our Civil War, and not as great as the anarchy today in Europe’, while ‘the lynching and murder in Port-au-Prince is no worse, if as bad, as the lynching in Georgia.’\textsuperscript{31} By contextualising Haiti’s political instability DuBois exposed the frailty of the supposed higher moral ground on which the Occupation was predicated. The cultural violence inherent to several Southern states was comparable to the violence of Haitian politics, and for DuBois, the intervention in Haiti was simply another facet of racist policy making sanctioned by the American government.

The similarities between Haiti and the American South were a recurrent feature in African American coverage of the Occupation, even among those who had previously supported military action. In 1916 James Weldon Johnson was appointed field secretary of the NAACP where he worked in close proximity to DuBois. The following year Marcus Garvey established a base for his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in Harlem, and championed a radical black nationalism.\textsuperscript{32} Amidst the changing political context of the African American community, Johnson re-evaluated his position on Haiti. By 1918, ‘he began to see the occupation, just as he had warned others not to see it, as white-cloth racism, linked intimately with the domestic racism he was determined to outflank.’\textsuperscript{33} In 1920 Johnson travelled to Haiti to report on the Occupation for the \textit{Nation}. His ‘Self-Determining Haiti’ editorials, published in four

\textsuperscript{31} DuBois, ‘Hayti’, p. 291.
\textsuperscript{32} Renda, \textit{Taking Haiti}, p. 190.
\textsuperscript{33} Renda, \textit{Taking Haiti}, p. 190.
parts throughout August and September, challenged the Wilson administration’s rationale for the Occupation and brought the issue to national prominence.

What most distinguished Johnson’s editorials from National Geographic’s version of events was his efforts to interrogate the circumstances of the Occupation. This effort was not limited to Haiti’s immediate political history. In a similar fashion to DuBois, Johnson placed Haiti in a broader historical context, comparing the Occupation to ‘Austria’s invasion of Serbia’ and ‘Germany’s rape of Belgium.’ He went further than DuBois, however, in his examination of the circumstances of American intervention, pointing out that as the Marines landed in Port-au-Prince:

> Our sons were laying down their lives overseas “for democracy, for the rights of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own government, for the rights and liberties of small nations”… [The American government] has enforced by the bayonet a covenant whose secret has been well guarded by a rigid censorship from the American nation, and kept a people enslaved by a military tyranny which it was [Wilson’s] avowed purpose to destroy throughout the world.

By illuminating the hypocrisy at the centre of Wilson’s foreign policy, Johnson challenged the assertion that the Occupation was a force for good. Yet his condemnation was not limited to the American government. Johnson was similarly critical of the white American media and its complicity in creating the myths surrounding Haiti and the Occupation. Like DuBois, Johnson rejected the paternalist narrative that justified military intervention. The legacy of friendship that the Haitian revolution inspired between Haitians and African Americans meant that Johnson was more loyal to the people of Haiti than to his own government’s imperial ambitions. For

Johnson and DuBois, both of whom were all too familiar with the insidious nature of American racism, any claims that the Occupation was of benefit to Haiti were patently false.

This is not to suggest that either Johnson or DuBois denounced the Occupation simply because they were black. For Johnson especially, the colour of his skin was not an automatic guarantee of support for the Haitian cause; indeed it took two years to convince him that military intervention was neither justified nor welcome. His experience as an African American did, however, allow him to engage with the country on its own terms. While the writers at National Geographic espoused the successes of the Occupation from the comfortable perspective of (white) Marines, Johnson travelled throughout the Haitian countryside so as to assess the Occupation from the point of view of the Haitian peasantry. In doing so, he concluded that American-led projects that were touted as improvements to Haiti’s infrastructure were often of greater benefit to Marines that to Haitians.36 This was particularly the case in regard to the American-supervised construction of a highway from Port-au-Prince to Cape Haitien. The system of forced labour imposed by Marines, Johnson argued, was not only exploitative, it wreaked havoc on Haitian families forced to cope in the absence of a patriarch. Thus Johnson noted one of the central ironies of the Occupation: the supposedly salubrious effects of U.S. paternalism were in fact leading to the destruction of the Haitian nuclear family.

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Of course Johnson’s efforts to illustrate the true nature of the Occupation would have been fruitless without a means for their distribution. *Nation* magazine was a weekly publication founded in 1865 by Englishman Edwin Godkin. By virtue of his mid-Victorian English liberalism, Godkin felt no obligation to America’s imperialist legacy.\(^{37}\) This was particularly evident following the 1898 Spanish-American War. While *National Geographic* embraced the advent of American imperialism, Godkin despaired at the jingoistic fervour the United States’ victory inspired. He disdained “yellow journalism” of rival publications’ ‘gross misrepresentation of facts, deliberate invention of tales calculated to excite the public, and wanton recklessness in the construction of headlines.’\(^{38}\) His insistence on objectivity had an impact: although the *Nation’s* national circulation never greatly exceeded 10 000 copies, by 1915 its influence was such that it was described as an ‘external conscience to other publications’.\(^{39}\)

It was Godkin’s vision for his paper as one that sought to present the facts removed from ‘the passions of the moment or the popular clamour’ that accounted for the printing of Johnson’s editorials.\(^{40}\) Not only did Johnson question the merits of the Occupation, he also challenged the characterisation of Haitians as primitive. Instead of tales of barbarism, Johnson demonstrated various aspects of Haitian refinement; their obsessive cleanliness, their good humour, their hospitality and capacity for hard work.\(^{41}\) Furthermore, he inverted the cultural hierarchy by remarking that in some respects,

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Haiti was actually superior to the United States: ‘nowhere in the country districts of Haiti does one find the filth and squalor which may be seen in any backwoods town in our own South.’

In making such comparisons, Johnson undermined the notion that the Marines were a positive influence in Haiti. Instead, he argued that the Occupation was nothing more than a capitalist venture made at the behest of the National City Bank of New York. To insist otherwise was an insult to the intelligence of both the Haitian and American people.

Although contemporaries credited the *Nation* as among the most influential publications in American history, the ‘Self-Determining Haiti’ editorials did not greatly change the nature of the Occupation coverage. While they brought the issue to national prominence, this was due in large part to the efforts of Johnson. Upon returning to the United States, Johnson lobbied Republicans in Congress and worked with anti-imperialist whites in order to prompt a withdrawal from Haiti. His most significant achievement was convincing the Republican candidate for the 1920 election, Warren G. Harding, that focusing on the Occupation could benefit his political campaign. As historian Mary Renda explains, after being briefed on the situation in Haiti by Johnson, Harding made the Occupation a central issue of the presidential

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43 An 1868 editorial in the *Springfield Republic* noted the influence of *Nation*, remarking that ‘[it] shows such vigor and integrity of thought, such moral independence of party, such elevation of tone, and such wide culture as to demand our great respect and secure our hearty praise.’ On July 1915, the fiftieth anniversary of the magazine, the sentiment was reiterated in the recollection of one journalist who described *Nation* as ‘a sort of external conscience to other publications.’ Following Godkin’s retirement from the editorship of the *Evening Post and Nation*, a rival editor of *Baltimore News* wrote that ‘the influence of the Nation and the Evening Post upon the history of the time has been incomparably greater than that of any other American publication.’ For more on *The Nation's* influence, see: Bleyor, *American Journalism*, pp. 289-291.
election and used Wilson’s most obvious foreign policy contradiction to his political advantage.\textsuperscript{44}

Once American politicians seized on the Occupation as a point of contention, the situation in Haiti received broader coverage in the American media, particularly in the \textit{New York Times}. As one of the most popular daily publications in the United States, the \textit{New York Times'} coverage of the Occupation differed to that of either \textit{National Geographic} or the \textit{Nation} in that its primary concern was how the Occupation affected U.S. politics. For the most part, its reporters were wholly uninterested in illuminating the machinations of the intervention and its impact on Haitian life. In fact, the reports printed in September offered little analysis of how Haiti was affecting even the candidates’ campaigns. Instead, large extracts of reports issued by the State Department were printed verbatim, with minimal contextual information.\textsuperscript{45} The introspective nature of the coverage can be attributed to the editors’ presumption of what would be of interest to their audience—with large circulation ‘in both the offices and homes of the substantial business and professional classes of New York City’, the editors clearly felt that the plight of Haiti was of little concern for the majority of their readers.

Later that month, however, the pattern of broadly apathetic \textit{New York Times} reportage was interrupted. Following the deaths of 176 Haitians at the hands of Marines, the publication’s writers offered an uncharacteristic analysis of the incident.

\textsuperscript{44} Renda, \textit{Taking Haiti}, p. 191.
Neither the fact of the slaughter nor the circumstances in which it took place were disputed—to the contrary, the editors declared the killings unpleasant but entirely necessary:

A lesson was taught the Haitian banditti, who were probably the tools of cowardly politicians in Port au Prince. It is not to be denied that a considerable number of Cacos have been killed in the policing of the island, but to talk of the slaughter of thousands of Haitians is to be hysterical. Americans are not in Haiti to exterminate the people... There have been mistakes, no doubt, and excesses may have been committed by men dressed in a little brief authority. But an honest and creditable work has been done by the American administration for the welfare of the Haitians.46

The *New York Times*’ excuse for the behaviour of the Marines amounted to a kind of “boys will be boys” admission of guilt, which of course was hardly an admission at all. In this, we see the familiar pattern of paternalism. Just as *National Geographic* characterised Haitians as unruly and incapable, the *New York Times* viewed the Occupation, and the violence associated with it, as a necessary part of the nation building exercise. This article was not unique: the following month, another report appeared that summed up the complexities of another controversy within a few brief headlines. ‘Reports Unlawful Killing of Haitians by Our Marines’ was the banner for one article, followed by several subheadings that read thus: ‘Evidence of “Indiscriminate” Slaying is Alleged by Brigadier General Barnett’; ‘COURT-MARTIAL GAVE CLUE’... ‘3,250 IN ALL WERE SLAIN’; ‘But Majority Fell in Warfare and Bandits Would Have Killed Many More, Says Barnett.’47 The fact that Haitians were dying at the hands of American Marines was evidently of little concern to the *New York Times*.

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Times reporters. In their accounts of the Occupation, one can discern the same tone of resignation that permeated National Geographic’s coverage, one that reinforced the notion that whatever teething problems military intervention may prompt, the U.S. government was morally obligated to rescue the Haitian people from their supposed misery, whatever the cost in human lives. That the Occupation might violate the integrity of Haitian independence was never considered. Haiti, it seems, was the unofficial property of the United States government. It was only right that the Marines occupy it.

The New York Times therefore refused to endorse Senator Harding’s calls for the withdrawal of Marines from Haiti, claiming that his attacks on the Wilson administration were ‘intemperate’ and ill-considered. Yet even without the paper’s support on this particular issue, Harding won the 1920 presidential election. Johnson’s efforts to make the Occupation a central feature of the campaign paid off, and the paradox of Wilson’s foreign policy, with its muddled isolationism, was exposed. Upon assuming office, Harding organised for his State Department to investigate the Marines’ activity in Haiti. The investigations into the Occupation came to nought. In 1922 U.S. control was consolidated through the appointment of a high commissioner, Colonel John Russell. That same year, Louis Borno, a man despised by his peers for his support of the intervention, was appointed Haiti’s President and the stratification of U.S. power in Haiti was streamlined. Meanwhile in the United States, Harding busied himself with

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49 Renda, Taking Haiti, p. 33.
the running of his own country; the news cycle moved on, and despite all former promises to the contrary the Marines remained in Haiti.

In the white American media’s coverage of the early years of the Occupation we can discern the influence of the United States’ earlier ventures in Cuba and the Philippines. To the writers at National Geographic and the New York Times, Haiti was simply another nation with the temerity to insist on the right to self-government without possessing the necessary maturity to do so. This belief persisted despite the fact that much like the United States, the Haitian state had existed for over a century without the supervision of a colonial power. The denial of Haiti’s history functioned as a means of differentiating between the revolutionary past of the United States and that of Haiti, as well as reinforcing the cultural superiority of white America. The African American press undermined this dichotomy by engaging with Haiti on its own terms. Rather than presume that American culture was inherently superior to Haiti, black journalists emphasised the vibrancy of Haitian life by demystifying its supposed exoticism. Furthermore, the black media interrogated the supposed benefits of the Occupation by emphasising what the United States stood to gain from maintaining control of Haiti, both financially and culturally. By drawing on their own experiences with Jim Crow racism, African American journalists transformed the Haitians from passive historical actors to autonomous agents capable of shaping their own destiny. Despite the widespread impact of their lobbying to get the Marines out of Haiti, their success was limited to the immediate political context. In early 1920s America, the concerns of
African Americans were largely unimportant to Washington policymakers, and although their campaign was enough to promote meaningful political dialogue it did not have the longevity to inspire real change. At least, not for another fourteen years.
CHAPTER TWO

A Changing Racial Consciousness

‘Negroes should take an especial interest in Haiti. It is a country of Negro blood which teams with talents and possibilities.’

- Pittsburgh Courier, March 23, 1929.

‘Small Nations, like large ones, like to work out their own destinies without coercion. It sits ill upon our great democracy to pursue courses which we decry in greater Nations.’

- Daily Boston Globe, September 8, 1932.

The period between 1921 and 1929 was one of relative stability for the Occupation. Once the clamour surrounding the presidential election of 1920 had died down, the issue of Haiti was largely ignored by the Harding administration and subsequently, the white press. The New York Times in particular was only ever interested in what the Occupation meant for American politics; apart from a few brief articles that pointed out that it was no longer a partisan issue, coverage of the Occupation dwindled.1 It was not until 1929—when a protest in Aux Cayes resulted in the massacre of unarmed Haitians—that the Occupation resurfaced in the white media. The nature of the coverage, however, was significantly different to the earlier articles on the subject. While the attitudes of publications like the New York Times and, to a lesser extent, the Daily Boston Globe were still racist, the writers were generally more circumspect about the right of the United States’ government to maintain a military presence in a foreign country.

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In order to account for this change one must examine the evolution of race relations in the United States throughout the 1920s. The Harlem Renaissance saw the artistic efforts of the black community shape a new racial identity, one that extended far beyond the realms of African American society. Artists such as Langston Hughes, Eugene O’Neill and Jacob Lawrence re-imagined Haiti in their works, reinforcing the sense of solidarity established by W.E.B. DuBois and James Weldon Johnson in the Occupation’s early years. Vital to keeping the issue of Haiti alive to the African American community were the efforts of the black and independent press. Publications such as the Pittsburgh Courier and the Chicago Defender urged their readers to support the plight of Haiti by agitating for the withdrawal of troops. Their early efforts were hampered by limited circulation, Southern racism and a lack of a coordinated strategy, yet by the late 1920s the Harlem Renaissance had inspired a heightened political activism across the country. The black press kept this energy focused on ending the Occupation. Following the disaster at Aux Cayes, these efforts climaxed in an unprecedented demonstration of African American support for Haitian independence.

The early 1920s marked a turning point in racial consciousness for black and white Americans. The devastation wrought by World War One prompted the re-evaluation of

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2 In terms of independent publications, only the Nation is explored in this chapter. Although my argument focuses on the differences between the black and white coverage of the Occupation, Nation’s publication of James Weldon Johnson’s ‘Self-Determining Haiti’ editorials in 1920 were representative of the interests of the black community. The Nation’s subsequent coverage of Haiti was informed by Johnson’s original findings, and was therefore atypical in the white media.

the merits of Western culture as people tried to account for the tremendous loss of life.\(^4\) In its place, a return to so called “primitivism” was advocated. The notion that one could become “overcivilised” gained traction, and ‘black people, held by science and popular belief not to have climbed as high on the evolutionary ladder, became models of how to live happily.’\(^5\) This was a clear departure from the moral high ground upon which colonialism was predicated. Although black people were still seen as inferior to whites, the conviction that white society was superior was undermined by a new curiosity about black culture. Importantly, the majority of white Americans did not recognise any cultural or biological distinction between black people living in the United States and black people all over the world.\(^6\) Black culture was mysterious, soulful, and above all uniform.

In regard to Haiti, the former model offered by publications like *National Geographic* and the *New York Times* was replaced by a celebration of the ‘marvellous strangeness of Haitian culture’.\(^7\) Popular contemporary texts published by white authors valorised the sensual, soulful existence of black people; in *Black Haiti*, white writer Blair Niles defended the ‘tragic history’ of Haiti and the peculiar local customs of singing, bartering and occasional sorcery.\(^8\) The great shame of the Occupation, Niles contended, was not the violation of the sovereignty of a foreign nation, but the reformist

\(^6\) Corbould, *Becoming African Americans*, p. 165.
tendencies of the U.S. Marines. This was typical of a great deal of the second wave of white American commentary on the Occupation. The positive view of Haitian culture made for a pleasant change from the earlier, highly critical accounts propagated by the white press. Yet Niles’ understanding of Haiti missed the point of the Occupation entirely. Her view failed to recognise the right of Haiti to autonomous rule and reinforced the cultural differences between black and white Americans. Thus, while the post-war racial consciousness was perhaps more favourable to black culture, the defining characteristic of “Negroes”, both in the United States and Haiti, remained race and was therefore just as limiting.

The change in white America’s racial rhetoric occurred in tandem with the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. Prompted by the lure of better economic and social conditions, the end of World War One saw the mass migration of African Americans to northern cities, especially Chicago and New York. These new communities were highly insular—while “blackness” was celebrated, it was apportioned specific locales that were peripheral to the experience of white America. Harlem was one such locale. As the site for Marcus Garvey’s radical nationalism, as well as the nexus of a new wave of black artists and musicians, the energy emanating from the New York borough was such that in 1925 Alain Locke declared ‘the pulse of the Negro world has begun to beat in Harlem.’ James Weldon Johnson agreed, describing it as the ‘cultural capital’ of the African American. To white Americans outside the experience, Harlem represented

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9 Dash, Haiti and the United States, p. 31
10 Dash, Haiti and the United States, p. 31.
much the same thing as the Haitian voodoo ceremony—both were a ‘safe safari into the world of the primitive... a plunge into the unknown, a salutary disorientation for those who were willing to indulge their wildest fantasies.’  

Like Haiti, Harlem was imbued with a mysterious exoticism, an unrestrained sensuality supposedly typical of black people everywhere.

Although white America’s understanding of the universality of black culture was a means of excluding African Americans from domestic society, by the 1920s black Americans themselves had begun to explore the connectedness of their ethnicity. In 1919 the Pan-African Congress was hosted by W.E.B. DuBois in Paris, which brought together people of African descent from all over the globe. Over the course of the decade the trip from Harlem to Paris became increasingly commonplace. The popularity of the Cubist movement, which was inspired by African masks, combined with a general appreciation of American mass culture meant that in France, black Americans received a warm reception. Paris was only one of many international destinations for the central figures of the Harlem Renaissance. Gradually, an international, intellectual solidarity was established between the black communities scattered across the world and ‘transnational circuits of expressive culture’ were established.

As always, Haiti featured prominently in the works of African Americans. Artists like Jacob Lawrence, Eugene O’Niell and Langston Hughes drew heavily on

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themes of the Haitian Revolution in order to draw parallels between their own experiences living in the United States and the Haitians living under the control of U.S. Marines.\textsuperscript{16} The radicalism of these artists made them distinct from the previous generation. Although both DuBois and Johnson had championed the rights of Haitians in the early years of the Occupation, with the emergence of the African diaspora came a more militant black nationalism. Their art was necessarily political, occasionally avant-garde, and entirely transformative.\textsuperscript{17} As Alain Locke explained:

The Negro to-day wishes to be known for what he is, even in his faults and shortcomings, and scorns a craven and precarious survival at the price of seeming to be what he is not. He resents being spoken of as a ward or minor, even by his own, and to being regarded as a chronic patient for the sociological clinic, the sick man of American Democracy.\textsuperscript{18}

In this we see the rejection of the same cultural clichés that dominated white coverage of the Occupation. As J. Michael Dash points out, ‘the stereotype of Haiti as an infected body turns up with depressing frequency in the twentieth century’; one only need remember National Geographic’s characterisation of Haitian politics as ‘chronically prone to revolutions’ to discern the similarities.\textsuperscript{19} Even the more favourable depictions of black people—such as the one offered by Blair Niles—denied the autonomy of Haitians by

\textsuperscript{16} In 1920, playwright Eugene O’Neill’s produced \textit{The Emperor Jones}, a play based on the life of the first self-proclaimed emperor of Haiti, Henri Christophe. In 1932, writer Langston Hughes travelled to Haiti to observe life under the Occupation. His experiences formed the basis for his 1940 autobiography \textit{Big Sea}.

In 1937-1938, visual artist Jacob Lawrence exhibited his critically acclaimed \textit{Toussaint L’Ouverture} series that depicted the life of the Haitian revolutionary. For more on representations of Haiti in African American artwork during the interwar years see: Krista A. Thompson, ‘Preoccupied with Haiti: The Dream of Diaspora in African American Art, 1915-1942’ \textit{American Art}, 21, no. 3 (Autumn 2007), pp. 74-97.


\textsuperscript{18} Locke, \textit{The New Negro}, p. 11.

reducing their culture to quaint folksiness. In response, most African American art and literature emphasised Haiti’s energetic vitality, the strength of its leadership and the robust physicality of its people. In doing so, they encouraged black Americans to view themselves in the same light.20

Throughout this explosion of artistic expression, the black press continued to champion the rights of Haitians. Their support was fundamental to keeping the issue alive for African Americans all over the country, not just in boroughs like Harlem. The post-war economic boom led to higher incomes and increased literacy among blacks, and as the circulation of papers like the Chicago Defender and Pittsburgh Courier increased, so too did their influence. By the mid-1920s newspapers were threatening the position of churches as the cornerstone of black communities.21 Indeed the editor and founder of the Defender, Robert Abbott, was credited with orchestrating the Great Migration by representing cities like Chicago as ‘a northern mecca’ in order to attract southern blacks.22 This is obviously an exaggeration, but it does indicate the importance of the black press to the community, which performed much the same function as the works produced by the Harlem artists. Both promoted black pride and encouraged readers to take an interest in their own political rights, as well as that of their Haitian brothers and sisters living under U.S. control.23

20 Thompson, ‘Preoccupied with Haiti’, p. 78.
In this sense both the *Courier* and *Defender* were advocates for the black community. It is interesting to note that as the white press moved incrementally toward objectivity throughout the twentieth century, black newspapers remained staunchly biased towards their mostly black readers. This is not to suggest that they were inaccurate, rather their function moved beyond a straightforward dissemination of information and aimed to mobilise the African American community so as to get their concerns recognised at a federal level. In regard to the Occupation, their success was dependent on providing readers with an alternate vision of Haiti, one that celebrated its achievements. A *Courier* piece published in March 1929 elucidated the finer points of Haiti’s culture and economy:

This small country has some of the richest coffee fields in the world. “Haitian coffee” is considered in not a few circles as a distinct stimulant of delight. Rich capitalists covet these fertile fields and have attempted diverse means of wrestling this prize from the Haitians. The Haitian natives take great pride in cultivating their coffee crops. They work religiously and unceasingly to keep their crops among the finest in the world.

The article sought to stimulate a pan-African pride in black Americans by highlighting the Haitian contributions to the diaspora—according to the *Courier*, Haiti’s distinct privilege as the purveyor of the world’s finest coffee was an achievement for which black people everywhere could take credit. The final line of the piece entreated readers to ‘watch out for the next article on the Negro republic!’ and is revealing for its use of the word ‘Negro’. It suggests that black Americans had more in common with Haitians than their fellow (white) American citizens. By the late 1920s, therefore, the

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26 ‘More About Haiti’.
strength of the diaspora was such that in the black press Haiti was scarcely even recognised as a foreign country.

Meanwhile, the attitudes of federal politicians were generally apathetic to the Haitian situation. Despite Herbert Hoover’s election to office with the overwhelming support of black voters in 1928, his attempts to address racial inequality were limited in their scope.\textsuperscript{27} In terms of foreign policy, the withdrawal of troops from Haiti was not a priority. In 1929, in Hoover’s first annual address to Congress, he reflected on the presence of Marines in Nicaragua, China and Haiti, and remarked that while ‘in the large sense we do not wish to be represented abroad in such a manner’, Haiti was ‘a much more difficult problem, the solution of which is still obscure.’\textsuperscript{28} Despite this, Hoover announced his intention to usher in a new phase of diplomatic relations with Latin America, one that renounced the interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine by the Wilson, Harding and Coolidge administrations.\textsuperscript{29} On the issue of Haiti, however, he remained largely ambivalent and the Occupation once again proved anomalous in US foreign policy.

Circumstances changed, however, later that year with a highly public outbreak of violence in the Haitian town of Aux Cayes. Prompted by a demonstration against the redistribution of scholarship funds, the student-led protest evolved into a national

\textsuperscript{27} In 1931, Hoover appeared before Congress and condemned lynching, yet he made no attempt to sponsor legislation that would definitively outlaw it. For more on Hoover’s efforts to improve race relations in the United States see David Burner, \textit{Herbert Hoover: A Public Life} (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), pp. 215-217.

\textsuperscript{28} Edgar Eugene Robinson and Vaughn Davis Bornet, \textit{Herbert Hoover, President of the United States} (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1975), p. 100.

\textsuperscript{29} Robinson and Bornet, \textit{Herbert Hoover}, pp. 99-100.
campaign against the Occupation. In December 1929, Marines shot into a crowd protesting new taxes on tobacco and alcohol and while official reports put the total at five dead, twenty wounded, the Nation claimed that the true number was twenty four killed and fifty one wounded.30 In any event, the massacre sparked international outrage. The Occupation was condemned in France as racist and unprincipled. The anger did not abate when the Marines Corps responded by awarding the Navy Cross to the officer in charge ‘for commendable courage and forbearance.’31 In response to allegations of American racism, President Hoover appointed Cameron Forbes to lead a commission that would investigate the origins of the civil unrest. In February 1930 the all-white commission travelled to Haiti and over the course of a month concluded that the agitation of the general populace made the Occupation untenable.32 Although the report was generally favourable to the conduct of American Marines, it made clear to President Hoover that there were few gains to be made by remaining in Haiti. Thus the best course of action was to implement a system of withdrawal.

For the black press, this acknowledgement was long overdue. The Courier was particularly scathing of Hoover’s appointment of the Forbes commission, contending that if the President had simply listened to the concerns of the African Americans who had voted him into office, the withdrawal would already be underway:

It is our belief that no such commission is needed to ascertain the facts about the American occupation in Haiti. The facts are already known in great detail. This government is there illegally and without the consent of the American or Haitian peoples... The American Government can never make amends for the crimes it

has committed against the Haitian people, but it can at least take the Hate out of Haiti by immediately withdrawing and leaving these black folk to work out their own destiny.33

The persistence of the Occupation, the Courier contended, was evidence of the contempt in which African Americans were held by the Hoover administration. The president’s loyalty to ‘Southern lily-whites’ had dictated his attitude of ‘studied indifference’ to the black community.’34 The writers at the Chicago Defender were in complete agreement. In a piece titled ‘We Told You So’ published in February 1930, the editors reminded its readers that prior to the 1928 election, President Hoover had ‘allied himself with the very forces which have operated against dark Americans since they came into being.’35 President Hoover, they claimed, ‘would be the last to violate customs of the enlightened society of the South,’ and therefore could not be expected to end a racist Occupation of his own volition.36

In response to the indictment of his administration in the black press, President Hoover appointed R.R. Moton—a prominent black intellectual and president of the Tuskegee Institute—to head a separate inquiry. The scope of Moton’s mission was significantly less than that of Cameron Forbes; he was to report solely on the nature of education reforms in Haiti.37 The appointment, which Hoover intended as a conciliatory gesture to the African American community backfired when the circumstances of Moton’s mission to Haiti became known. Moton’s findings on Haitian education were

33 ‘Take the Hate Out of Haiti’, Pittsburgh Courier, December 21, 1929.
35 ‘We Told You So’, Chicago Defender, February 22, 1930.
36 ‘We Told You So’.
secondary to the discrimination his party experienced when they were ‘temporarily stranded in Port-au-Prince because United States Navy ships refused to accommodate black passengers, even when they were official agents of the federal government.’ The black press was outraged by the treatment of one of the most respected members of their community. It is worth considering, however, that it was the influence of the black press that compelled Hoover to make the appointment in the first place. Although there was clearly still a long way to go in terms of attaining equal representation, the Defender and Courier had realised their aim to provoke a substantial political change at federal level.

Once the administration took an active interest in Haiti again, so too did the white media. After a lengthy silence on the Occupation, the New York Times revived its coverage in 1929 following the Aux Cayes massacre. In December the paper published an account of the history of the Occupation that was not significantly different to its previous account. Not only did it continue the colonial tone of the paper’s own earlier articles on the subject, it borrowed heavily from pieces that featured in National Geographic nine years prior. Yet in March the following year, in response to the findings of the Forbes commission and the outrage in the black press, the nature of the New York Times coverage changed. Gone were the references to Haitian voodoo or cannibalism; instead the editors acknowledged that the Occupation was lacking in several crucial areas:

39 The Crisis derided Moton’s status in Haiti as ‘second-class’; see Plummer, ‘The Afro-American Response to the Occupation’, p. 142.
The failure of the occupation to understand the social problems of Haiti, its brusque attempt to plant democracy there by drill and harrow, its determination to set up a middle class—however wise and necessary it may seem to Americans—all these explain why, in part, the high hopes of our good works in this land have not been realized.41

None of these failures could be attributed solely to the American government which, according to the article, had only been doing what it considered to be 'wise and necessary'. Instead, the failures of the Occupation lay with Haiti itself and America's inability to comprehend the country's 'social problems.' America had been too 'brusque' and tried too hard 'to plant democracy' in such obviously unproductive soil. In characteristic New York Times style, the state of Haitian politics prior to the Occupation was disparaged and the familiar paternalist discourse resurfaced with the suggestion that in a few years’ time, when the Haitians’ understanding of self-government was more “evolved”, the accomplishments of the Marines would be more fully appreciated.42 Yet even so, the article reflected a discernible shift in the attitudes of the white media to Haiti. While the editors were certainly not offering an unqualified apology, the pieces published in the wake of the Aux Cayes massacre betray, for the first time, a hint of doubt as to the righteousness of the Marines’ mission.

Even with such doubts, the white press’s assessment of President Hoover’s foreign policy was more favourable than the black media’s analysis of the withdrawal. In September 1932 the Daily Boston Globe examined the Occupation in the context of

42 The same article goes on to state that ‘It is to be hoped that the Haitian people will come in the course of the next six years to realize that an enlightened self-interest will require that the progress under the American Occupation be maintained, particularly in the matter of public health and public roads’; see ‘Hoover Adopts Plan to Get Out of Haiti’, New York Times.
similar Marine interventions in Nicaragua and Santo Domingo. The writers concluded the involvement of Marines, while well-intentioned, resulted in a misrepresentation of the ideals at the centre of American democracy. Such involvement was ill-befitting a country as fine as the United States, they contended, and ‘the best policy [is] to drop such tactics as speedily as we safely may.’\(^{43}\) In this respect, the measures taken by President Hoover to end the Occupation were nothing short of admirable.\(^{44}\) Although the *Globe* was a good deal more sensitive to the nuances of the intervention than the *New York Times*, its criticism of the Occupation differed significantly to that of the black press. In contrast to the protests made by the *Courier* and the *Defender*—which argued passionately for the right of Haiti to self-government—the *Globe* intellectualised the Occupation. It disdained the continued presence of Marines in Haiti because it reflected poorly on a country as distinguished as the United States.

For President Hoover, allegations of impropriety were especially problematic. His race credentials were not well-established enough for the Occupation to be construed as anything other than racism—not only by the black press, but also by foreign governments. From a practical perspective, the Occupation was an expensive exercise in bad publicity for the American government. The threat of European intervention in the Caribbean had long since expired and the retention of Haiti proved embarrassing ‘when cited by Japan as justification for her “Japanese Monroe Doctrine.”’\(^{45}\) Furthermore, incidences of lynching in the South remained alarmingly high. If Hoover could not protect the citizens of his own country, his Marines certainly

\(^{44}\) ‘Progress in Haiti’.
could not be expected to improve the lives of Haitians, who were not afforded the same rights as American citizens. In the lead up to the 1932 presidential election, the black press confidently declared that the concerns of ‘Black America’, particularly regarding the Occupation, would be a central campaign issue.46

Despite the best efforts of the African American media, this proved not to be the case. The state of the American economy three years after the Wall Street crash proved to be of more pressing concern. Even so, President Hoover’s decision to withdraw from Haiti after Aux Cayes ultimately came too late for black voters to reward him at the polls. In the context of a foundering economy Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected to office and continued Hoover’s initial strategy for withdrawal. The final terms of the transferral of power were negotiated by Roosevelt in a treaty that proved generous to the Haitians, and was well-received by the black press and their sympathisers. Writing in the Nation in 1934, Ernest Gruening celebrated a new era of Latin-American relations with Roosevelt at the helm:

The Administration at Washington has yielded more than is necessary… For the first time in its relations with Haiti the United States has truly played the part of the “good neighbor.” So this is not the occasion to dwell on the story of the eighteen years’ occupation. Events have more than justified The Nation’s attitude to the Haitian question… For the moment one may rejoice that the United States has abandoned the policy of force and is substituting the policy of fair dealing and good-will.47

Although Hoover had claimed in his first year of office that his administration would usher in a new era of foreign relations, by the Nation’s estimation, Roosevelt was the

first president to break significantly with the past.\footnote{For details of Hoover’s early foreign policy in Latin America see Robinson and Bornett, \textit{Herbert Hoover: President of the United States}, p. 99.} This appreciation of Roosevelt’s dealings with Haiti filtered through to the white press. In July 1934, the \textit{Daily Boston Globe} reported on the president’s tour of Haiti and gave a brief overview of the country’s history. Remarkably, the writers provided a sympathetic explanation for Haiti’s political unrest, the nature of which was unprecedented in the white media’s previous coverage of the Occupation. For the \textit{Globe}, Haiti was still a ‘land of mystery and woe’, yet it acknowledged that ‘white man’s greed and lust’ had irrevocably damaged Haiti’s social and political structures, and that the ‘exploitation and slavery’ perpetrated by colonial powers (including the United States) had left the island prostrate.\footnote{‘Haiti Last Southern Land Where Marines Remain’, \textit{Daily Boston Globe}, July 5, 1934.}

Thus the change in American racial consciousness of the 1920s was made manifest. The \textit{Globe’s} nuanced account of Haiti’s history reflected the true impact of the Harlem Renaissance and the rise of black nationalism. It did not, of course, reconcile the schism between black and white coverage of the Occupation over the course of its nineteen year history. Indeed a crucial point of difference between the competing narratives of the Occupation was the context surrounding each article’s publication. Haiti was a recurrent feature in the black press because it was a central component of an advocacy campaign, the aim of which was to represent the concerns of the black community to Washington policymakers. By contrast, the white media almost always framed the Occupation in terms of what it meant for American politics. The \textit{Globe} only offered its sympathetic narrative of Haitian history because President Roosevelt visited
Yet it was the change in the tone of the coverage, both on part of the Globe and the New York Times, that reflected the truly transformative effect of the previous decade. The outpouring of artistic expression from Harlem in the 1920s changed the fabric of American race relations. Black culture, with its supposed simplicity and easy, unrestrained emotion was exalted by white Americans seeking the thrill of the exotic. Of course such stereotypes were still reductive, but they did invert the established cultural hierarchy and promote a greater degree of cultural awareness. In terms of politics, the reinvigoration of racial pride amongst black Americans led to an increase in political activity. The black press’ dedication to championing the rights of Haitians focused the political energy of African Americans, and after Aux Cayes the chorus of disapproval was such that Hoover was forced to revaluate the merits of the Occupation. To suggest that the African American press substantially altered the American government’s rule of Haiti would be misleading; the decision to withdraw was as much economic as it was reactive. The black press did, however, increase Haiti’s visibility in the community, and its influence was such that it changed the nature of the white media’s coverage. To this end, their efforts were recognised by the Haitian president Sténio Vincent after the last of the American troops had left his country. In 1934, he

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50 See ‘Last of Marines Forces Leave Haiti to Itself’, Daily Boston Globe, August 16, 1934.
wrote to the *Crisis* to offer his personal gratitude to ‘all those American friends, colored or white’ whose endeavours contributed to the eventual freedom of his country.\(^{51}\)

CHAPTER THREE

An Unnatural Disaster

‘People need to know the history behind Haiti. They need to know that Haiti soldiers fought back 200 years ago on behalf of the United States’

- Chicago Defender, January 21, 2010

At seven minutes to five on the afternoon of January 12, 2010, an earthquake of 7.0 magnitude rocked Haiti. Its effects were catastrophic. Although the epicentre of the quake was located in the town of Léogâne, approximately 25 kilometres west of Port-au-Prince, the Haitian capital was pulverised. Initial estimates put the number of dead somewhere between 45 000 and 50 000, however that figure was later amended to 300 000 with thousands more injured and left homeless.¹ In March the Red Cross estimated that approximately 3 million Haitians had been affected by the earthquake, which was the worst in Haiti’s 200 year history.² As the scale of the disaster became clear, U.S. President Barack Obama pledged the full support of his government and vowed that the Haitian people would ‘not be forsaken’, would ‘not be forgotten.’³

Almost overnight a flood of journalists travelled to Haiti to report on the devastation and the American-led relief efforts. Celebrity news anchors such as Anderson Cooper, Katie Couric and Brian Williams broadcast live from hastily assembled relief camps, interpreting the images of Port-au-Prince in ruins for their

³ Brooks, ‘The Underlying Tragedy’, p. A27
viewers. Those watching at home learnt that Haiti, already the poorest country in the Western hemisphere, was scarcely able to ameliorate the devastation due to its poor infrastructure, inadequate medical facilities and corrupt government. In a poignant symbol of the chaos, the National Assembly, the Presidential Palace and the country’s main jail lay in ruins. The high visibility of the earthquake meant that even the journalists who remained at home could offer their own answers to the question everyone seemed to be asking: What do we do about Haiti?

David Brooks, a senior editor at the *New York Times*, offered one of the most polarising analyses of the devastation. Two days after the earthquake Brooks declared in ‘The Underlying Tragedy’ that in order for Haiti to be rebuilt, the United States had to acknowledge a few difficult truths about the nature of the island’s poverty. Haiti’s ‘poorly constructed buildings, bad infrastructure and terrible public services’, as well its ‘progress-resistant’ culture was what determined the horrifying scale of the disaster. To support his thesis, Brooks compared the 2010 earthquake with that which struck San Francisco Bay Area in 1989. The magnitude of both was the same, yet the extent of the damage to lives and property from the American quake was significantly less. For Brooks, then, the answer of what to do with Haiti was obvious: the United States must instil a kind of ‘locally-led paternalism’ based on ‘middle-class assumptions, an achievement ethos and tough, measurable demands.’ If Haiti wanted to avoid a

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disaster of similar proportions in the future it must, he argued, become more like the United States.

Although Brooks’ editorial was one of the more conservative responses to the Haitian earthquake, the issues he raised were not unique in the white American press. A survey of the white print media’s coverage of the disaster reveals three key themes: the politicisation of aid (in terms of what it meant for the United States), the emphasis of Haiti as a disaster-zone even before the earthquake, and the representation of Haiti as part of a homogenous Third World. These themes are reinforced by the absence of any reference to the history of U.S.-Haiti relations. Brooks is clearly well educated; he draws on scholarly texts to support his argument. Yet he, like most of his fellow journalists, made no mention of the Occupation. The fact that American Marines were in Haiti for nineteen years, during which time they significantly affected the country’s infrastructure and development, was completely ignored. Rather than examine how the actions of several American administrations might have affected the scale of the damage, Haiti was represented as another example of tragic Third World poverty, an anonymous nation in a state of constant turmoil.

This was certainly not the case for the black American press. Although most black journalists acknowledged that Haiti was indeed poor, they qualified their assessments by placing this poverty in its historical context. Every article on the

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7 My assessment of the media’s coverage of the earthquake is based on an analysis of twelve articles from nine major news dailies across the black and white American press.
8 Brooks cites What Works in Development?: Thinking Big and Thinking Small (New York: Brookings Institution Press, 2009), an anthology on global poverty edited by Jessica Cohen and William Easterly, as well as Lawrence E. Harrison’s book The Central Liberal Truth: How Politics Can Change a Culture and Save It from Itself (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) in order to argue that Haitian culture is the underlying cause of the country’s poverty. Neither text makes any significant mention of Haiti.
earthquake that featured in the black press referred to the Occupation, and implied that the United States was in part responsible for the scale of the devastation. This recognition functioned as a means of empowering the Haitian people, and was in keeping with the twentieth century African American coverage of Haiti under U.S. rule. The legacy of James Weldon Johnson, W.E.B. DuBois, and the twentieth century writers at the Chicago Defender and the Pittsburgh Courier was made manifest in the black press’ reportage of the 2010 earthquake. By providing a more complete account of Haiti’s 200 year history, the black media challenged the notion that the island was dependent on the United States for its survival and endowed the Haitian people with an autonomy they were denied in the white American press.

In order to fully account for the impact of the 2010 earthquake it is necessary to examine the development of the post-Occupation Haitian state. Although the American Marines officially departed Haiti in 1934, all of the succeeding Haitian administrations were sponsored by the United States government. The Occupation had bred high levels of social mistrust by instilling American racism where there was none, while Haitian governments were intolerant of internal political dissent. This dissatisfaction was compounded by the country’s weak economy—another effect of the Occupation—as well as a tangled civil bureaucracy and ongoing debt repayments to France. In 1957, 

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10 Farmer, The Uses of Haiti, p. 91.
11 Throughout the twentieth century, Haiti had continued to pay reparations to France for lost slave profits following the Haitian Revolution. It was not until after World War Two that the century-old debt was finally repaid. For more on Haiti’s economic woes following the Occupation, see Amy Goodman and David Goodman, Static: Government Liars, Media Cheerleaders, and the People Who Fight Back (New York: Hyperion, 2006), pp. 114-116.
François Duvalier (otherwise known as "Papa Doc") was elected president and presided over a brutal dictatorship that saw his political opponents outlawed, the right to freedom of speech revoked, and the murder of tens of thousands of his countrymen.\textsuperscript{12} From the perspective of the United States, embroiled in the Cold War with Russia, 'Haiti's right-wing Duvalier dictatorship was considered to be an important, if unsavoury ally'.\textsuperscript{13} As such, Duvalier received $40.4 million from Washington in the first four years of his presidency.\textsuperscript{14}

In 1971, Papa Doc died and was succeeded by his son, Jean-Claude ("Baby Doc"). The transition of power was relatively smooth; American President Richard Nixon promised to support 'the continuation of the Duvalier dynasty' in exchange for a new economic program designed to benefit American corporations.\textsuperscript{15} Fourteen years into Baby Doc's reign a series of irresponsible agricultural practices had ruined Haiti's once fertile soil and plunged most of the country into famine. In 1986, popular uprising swept Haiti and as it became clear the baby dictator's reign was over, the American government withdrew its support. In the meantime Henri Namphy—a former Duvalier general—assumed power and while his commitment to democracy was championed by the international press (including the \textit{New York Times}) for most of Haiti's people Namphy was simply 'a reborn Duvalier.'\textsuperscript{16} The first eighteen months of Namphy's

\begin{footnotes}
\item[12] Farmer, \textit{The Uses of Haiti}, p. 92.
\item[14] Farmer, \textit{The Uses of Haiti}, p. 93.
\item[16] Farmer, \textit{The Uses of Haiti}, p. 112; see also pp. 108-109.
\end{footnotes}
dictatorship saw him receive over $200 million in U.S. aid while Haitian security forces received extensive training and equipment from the CIA.17

It was not until December 1990 that Haiti had its first free elections. Former priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide was voted into office in an overwhelming majority and set about implementing a series of reforms designed to bolster the country's economy. Among these was a plan to raise the minimum daily wage. This decision drew the ire of the U.S. Agency for International Aid Development (USAID), which had invested millions of dollars in keeping Haitian wages low throughout the twentieth century.18 In 1991, Aristide's government was overthrown in a military coup d'état whose participants received financial backing from the United States.19 In 1994, American President Clinton sanctioned a second U.S. intervention of Haiti designed to restore civil peace and bring the exiled Aristide home so he could serve out the remainder of his term. Aristide returned to Haiti that same year and after a break between terms, in 2001 he was re-elected. Three years later, he was forced into exile for the second time. According to a report published in the Boston Globe in 2004 President George W. Bush's administration, along with the European Union and a coalition of international banks, had blocked $500 million in aid to Haiti so as 'to pressure the government to adopt political reforms.'20

The blockade weakened Aristide's authority and 'many of Aristide's supporters, in Haiti and abroad' contended that the United States 'abandoned the fledgling democracy

17 Farmer, The Uses of Haiti, pp. 112-120.
when it needed aid most.'\textsuperscript{21} In addition, the American government demanded its loans provided during the Duvalier dictatorships be repaid—in 2003, Washington received 90 percent of Haiti’s foreign reserves.\textsuperscript{22}

One of the central considerations of Brooks’ article is the manner in which aid is provided to Haiti. He contends that ‘we don’t know how to use aid to reduce poverty’, and that despite the ‘trillions of dollars [intended] to generate growth in the developing world’, there remains little to show for the expense.\textsuperscript{23} Other journalists raised similar concerns. Writing in the \textit{New York Times} opinion pages under the broad heading of ‘The Help That Haiti Needs’, Daniel Wolff mused that ‘government corruption may mean that aid and relief won’t reach those most in need in Haiti… [yet] that was true before the earthquake.’\textsuperscript{24} The suggestion in both pieces is that giving aid to Haiti was of little use, not only for the Haitians but for the millions of Americans who made private donations in the weeks following the earthquake.\textsuperscript{25} For Brooks especially, the earthquake, though tragic, furnished an opportunity for the United States government to reassess how best to disseminate foreign aid. Such introspection is of course

\textsuperscript{22} Goodman and Goodman, \textit{Static}, p. 126.  
\textsuperscript{25} On January 22, 2010, the “Hope for Haiti Now” telethon was broadcast over several major American networks including ABC, NBC, CNN, BET, CMT, HBO, VH1, CNN International, Fox, the CW and MTV Networks Worldwide. By the following day, an unprecedented $58 million had been raised, largely through text message donations and downloaded musical performances from iTunes. For more on how the telethon shaped America’s understanding of the Haitian earthquake see: Elizabeth McAlister, ‘From the Rubble to the Telethon: Music, Religion, and the Haiti Quake’, in Martin Munro, ed., \textit{Haiti Rising: Haitian History, Culture and the Earthquake of 2010} (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), pp. 96-101.
characteristic of the white press coverage of Haiti; one only need recall the nature of the analysis throughout the Occupation in order to discern its origins.

The politicisation of aid is one of the starker contrasts between the black and white American press’ coverage of the earthquake. While Brooks despaired at the extent of Haiti’s poverty and questioned whether the aid provided by American citizens would be of use, his black counterparts used the scale of the disaster to encourage further donations from their readers. Writing for the *Michigan Chronicle* in March 2010, Steve Malik Shelton recognised that the devastation wrought by the earthquake made the process of rebuilding Haiti difficult, but not impossible. More important than questioning the benefits of providing aid, he argued, was the fact of giving itself: ‘the tragedy in Haiti and the help that is needed there is ongoing, and it is how we respond to this need which will act as a barometer of our faith and of our very humanity.’26 The writers at the *Chicago Defender* echoed this sentiment. They too recognised the seeming futility of reconstruction, but maintained that the relief effort was important because ‘this disaster is literally right at our doorstep [and] Haiti is our neighbor.’27 The suggestion here is that Americans should provide aid to Haiti, not because it was the responsibility of the United States, but because it was the responsibility of humanity. The notion that the aid might somehow affect American politics or American foreign investment was entirely absent.

This is not to suggest that the white media was wrong in questioning whether the relief effort was an effective use of American money. The deployment of American

resources entitled the writers at the *New York Times* to consider the pertinence of providing aid to a country in a state of such chaos. The fact that the discussion was completely absent in the black media, however, speaks to a fundamental difference between the black and white American press’s representations of Haiti. In the black press, aid was construed as a purely humanitarian gesture, one that indicated the true extent of American compassion. Personal relationships between various African American communities across the United States and Haiti were emphasised, and writers questioned the validity of ‘planning what Haiti is going to be from now on’ while ‘leaving out the Haitians.’

By contrast, the white media’s discussion of aid distribution denied Haitian autonomy and acted as a means of reproducing the ‘Western hegemonic power over the Third World.’ This dichotomy is indicative of the broader tradition of historical recognition in the American press.

The politicisation of the earthquake was a recurrent feature of the white press’ coverage of the earthquake, one that extended beyond the realms of the white press. In response to televangelist Pat Robertson’s remarks that the Haitians ‘got together and swore a pact to the devil’ in order to overthrow French colonial rule, Rush Limbaugh, a conservative pundit, remarked:

> [The earthquake] will play right into Obama’s hands, [casting him as] humanitarian, compassionate. They’ll use this to burnish their, shall we say, credibility with the black community, in both the light-skinned and dark-skinned black community in this country. It’s made to order for him.

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28 Shelton, ‘Lending a Hand in the Haitian Struggle’.
These remarks were widely condemned by all factions of the American media, as well as the White House. Yet although the explicit racism of Limbaugh’s remarks was unusual, his suggestion that President Obama stood to gain from the disaster was not. In the days following the earthquake several news outlets drew comparisons between the Haitian earthquake and Hurricane Katrina, suggesting that the Obama administration’s response to Haiti could somehow atone for George W. Bush’s failings in 2005. Writing in the *Daily Beast*, Howard Fineman summed up the political situation thus:

Elected in part out of revulsion at the Bush administration’s response to Hurricane Katrina, Obama now finds himself confronting an even more devastating and complex humanitarian crisis. And, adding irony upon irony, the racial context of New Orleans is writ large in Port-au-Prince. Katrina cost George W. Bush what little standing he had among moderates in his own party in part because the shocking images of suffering in New Orleans were so racially imbalanced.

While Fineman’s language is more politically correct than Limbaugh, his suggestion that Obama’s presidential credibility rests on his response to the earthquake echoes Limbaugh’s sentiments. This notion is plainly absurd. It not only politicises a tragic event, but suggests that Haiti is something of an unofficial territory of the United States. Much like his predecessors’ coverage of the Occupation, Fineman erases Haiti’s history by directing his focus inward. In this, we can see the legacy of the twentieth century

33 Fineman, ‘Why Hurricane Katrina Looms Over Obama’s Relief Efforts in Haiti’. 
paternalism that justified the Occupation. Indeed the most compelling irony of the situation is not, as Fineman suggests, that Haiti and New Orleans have both suffered natural disasters of a similar magnitude; it is rather that he is seemingly unaware of how his comparison engages with a broader historical tradition typical of the white American press, one that assesses the events of Haiti only in terms of what it means for the American government.

A more disturbing aspect of the comparisons between Hurricane Katrina and the Haitian earthquake is the immense oversimplification it entailed. There were certainly similarities between the two events, as Chris Good pointed out in the *Atlantic*: ‘the mass human suffering of an impoverished community, the shortage of vital resources, and the government response that was lacking.’ These factors are consistent, however, with several natural disasters that occurred within a year of the Haitian earthquake—including the 2010 Chile earthquake, the 2011 Japanese tsunami and the 2011 severe storms across the United States—none of which were compared to Katrina. This suggests that the comparison between Katrina and Haiti functioned not as a means of quantifying the damage wrought by the earthquake, but as a way of reinforcing racial stereotypes about black people. Like Haiti, New Orleans is a predominantly black community and in the wake of their respective traumas, “black” became synonymous with “poor” in the white American press. The fact that two distinct disasters could be placed in dialogue with each other simply because they both affected mostly black

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34 Chris Good, ‘Haiti/Katrina Symmetry’.
people speaks to the extent to which racism was imbedded in the white American media. Erica M. Czaja offered her assessment of this phenomenon in her assessment of the impact of Katrina:

The strong notions of collective American identity that Katrina produced drew on a rosy, fictional view of history; the idea that Americans have always helped one another likely served to further obscure public awareness of negative historical and structural forces that influenced the lives of African Americans even before Hurricane Katrina made landfall in New Orleans.36

Although she writes with respect to New Orleans, Czaja could be just as easily writing about Haiti in the wake of the 2010 earthquake. The romantic view of the United States as a benevolent force in Haiti permeated the early accounts of the Occupation in the white press; the Marines were there to help the Haitian people, who plainly could not help themselves. The comparisons with Katrina functioned in much the same way. They denied historical agency to both the African American residents of New Orleans and the Haitian people, and thus rendered them entirely dependent on white America. The absence of any recognition in the white press of the unique historical forces that shaped Haiti throughout the twentieth century, coupled with a tendency toward introspection and the celebration of President Obama’s commitment to rebuilding Haiti obscured the role of the United States in shaping Haiti’s development.

Interestingly, the comparisons between Hurricane Katrina and the Haiti earthquake were exclusive to the white press; no African American journalist compared the devastation in Port-au-Prince to the situation in New Orleans five years prior. One

might assume that such comparisons would be drawn in the black press as a way of reinforcing the similarities between the plight of Haitians and African Americans, and the shared experiences of both groups with American racism. Yet rather than use Katrina the African American press drew on Haiti’s history in order to quantify the damage wrought by the earthquake. The *Michigan Chronicle* remarked that ‘the earthquake is only the latest in a sequence of events and machinations—political, economic, and otherwise—that has undermined and destroyed Haiti’s vibrancy as a nation.’

Similarly, Greg Mathis of the *New Pittsburgh Courier* accounted for Haiti’s poverty by examining its history:

Haiti is the world's oldest Black republic and the second-oldest republic, after the United States, in this hemisphere. It is also the only nation whose independence was gained as part of a successful slave rebellion. The U.S. occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934, and many argue that this created an unstable foundation and a financial system that drained the country's wealth, taking it outside the nation instead of reinvesting it in the local economy.

This sense of historical awareness was as ubiquitous in the black press as it was absent in the white press. The black press’s insertion of Haiti’s history in their coverage of the earthquake functioned as a means of rejecting the notion that the two groups were interchangeable. Although the relationship between African Americans and Haitians

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37 Shelton, ‘Lending a Hand in the Haitian Struggle’.
39 It is interesting to note the shift in the black press' representation of Haiti from the twentieth to the twenty-first centuries. Although the black journalists that covered the earthquake celebrated Haiti's history in the manner of their twentieth century predecessors, in 2010, the previous emphasis on the kinship between the two groups was replaced by a focus on Haiti as unique. This shift can be accounted for by the existence of a more assured black identity in the twenty-first century. Whereas the Occupation occurred in tandem with the emergence of a new racial discourse, one that sought to understand what it meant to be black in consideration of the African diaspora, by the time of the earthquake, the social identity of black Americans was more fully realised. Thus it was no longer as necessary to depict Haitians as brethren in the most literal sense of the term. For more on the evolution of the African American
was well established by 2010, the white press’ appropriation of Katrina after the earthquake suggested that the narrative that linked the two groups was one based on loss and poverty. By contrast, the black press’ acknowledgement of Haiti’s history was based on a specific appreciation for the contributions of Haiti to the African diaspora over the course of its 200 year history.

Why though, was any reference to Haiti’s history exclusive to the black press? It surely is not a question of who was more well-informed; David Brooks, for example, is a university-educated writer who has worked as a journalist for almost thirty years. His denial of Haiti’s history was therefore a means of reaffirming the supremacy of white American culture by condemning a black country’s past to ignominy. By appropriating broad theories of global poverty to a context specific to Haiti, Brooks erased the cultural and political forces in Haiti’s history in favour of establishing it as part of the homogenous Third World. Indeed the very fact of the earthquake coverage fortified Haiti’s status as a Third World country: as Leonard Sussman explains, ‘the news services are charged with reporting mainly the disasters, natural and man-made, in the developing countries; rarely the progress, or even a constructive analysis of

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development problems, in the Third World.' For Brooks to refer to Haiti’s revolutionary past would mean breaking with a well-established pattern of media coverage of the Third World.

Of course Brooks was not alone in his qualification of the Haitian state as a disaster. Even his more sensitive colleagues mused on the country’s tragic history in order to demonstrate that the Haitian people were accustomed to dealing with trauma. Mark Lacey, also of the New York Times, wrote eloquently of Haiti’s stoicism in the weeks following the earthquake. The country’s grief, he suggested, was beyond tears, yet not unusual: ‘It is no wonderful thing that Haitians have been through so much hardship in the past, natural and manmade, that they have become extraordinarily skilled at shutting down their emotions and going into survival mode.’ A similar theme emerged at the Washington Post. The subtitle of Manuel Roig-Franzia’s February 16 piece was ‘Already a Disaster’; he explained that ‘even before the quake, Haiti had the highest infant mortality rate in the Western Hemisphere… more than 2 million Haitians - two out of nine - lacked access to clean water’ while ‘five out of nine did not have adequate sanitation, according to the World Water Council.’ The white press did not, then, completely silence Haiti’s past. Instead it emphasised its poverty, which was admittedly undeniable, although without providing an adequate historical explanation for its root cause.

At heart of these accounts is a malicious insinuation that the prose of neither Lacey nor Roig-Franzia can quite conceal. In demonstrating the appalling extent of Haiti’s poverty, there is the suggestion that if the earthquake had to happen, it was probably best that it happened in Haiti, whose people were accustomed to suffering. I doubt it was the intention of either author to give such an impression; nonetheless, their selective portrayal of Haitian history and culture reveals the narrow analytic frameworks within which the white press operated. Such frameworks did not constrain the black American press. The writers at the New Pittsburgh Courier took exception to the suggestion that the Haitian state was a disaster:

Because positive stories from Haiti are rarely publicized in international media outlets, many come to know the citizens and the land—the first independent nation in Latin America—as the “poorest country in the Western hemisphere.” Haiti has been linked to voodoo, Satanism and zombie lore in contemporary films… [yet] Haiti’s overwhelmingly negative representation abroad has more to do with the media’s attempt to craft cookie-cutter images of a nation it does not understand.44

The African American press’ nuanced representation of Haiti only illustrated how little the white media knew of the island. Of course this was not specific to the earthquake: the dichotomy between white ignorance and black awareness had its origins in the American media’s coverage of the Occupation. By representing the earthquake as only a tiny fragment of Haiti’s history, the New Pittsburgh Courier continued the tradition established by its predecessors, one that celebrated Haiti’s distinct culture and its contribution to the African diaspora.

This brings us to the most disturbing aspect of Brooks’ article: his suggestion that root cause of the damage caused by the earthquake is Haitian culture. This, according to Brooks, is the ‘underlying tragedy’ that the politically correct discourse of aid and assistance does not acknowledge:

It is time to put the thorny issue of culture at the center of efforts to tackle global poverty… Haiti, like most of the world’s poorest nations, suffers from a complex web of progress-resistant cultural influences. There is the influence of the voodoo religion, which spreads the message that life is capricious and planning futile. There are high levels of social mistrust. Responsibility is often not internalized. Child-rearing practices often involve neglect in the early years and harsh retribution when kids hit 9 or 10.

We’re all supposed to politely respect each other’s cultures. But some cultures are more progress-resistant than others, and a horrible tragedy was just exacerbated by one of them.\(^{45}\)

The suggestion that Haitian culture is to blame for the scale of the earthquake’s devastation is not only insensitive, it demonstrates an astonishing ignorance. While Brooks assumes an air of authority on various aspects of Haitian culture—disdaining the practice of voodoo and local parenting conventions—he is silent on the history of American involvement in Haiti (a subject which one might reasonably expect him to be aware). This particular denial of Haiti’s history is more offensive than the others consistent in the white press. Instead of portraying Haiti as part of the homogenous Third World without a history outside its own poverty, Brooks uses his understanding of the specificities of Haitian culture in order to argue that Haitian primitiveness is responsible for the deaths of more than 300 000 people.

Yet Brooks' understanding of Haitian culture is entirely inaccurate. The child-rearing practices of Haitian families are not the vengeful, traumatic experience he describes. To the contrary the ties of kin are crucial to rural Haitians. As religion scholar Karen McCarthy Brown points out in her analysis of Afro-Caribbean spirituality, the first slaves taken from Africa were devastated by the loss of their extended families. To compensate for this loss, the modern Haitian peasantry has recreated a sprawling familial structure that invariably extends beyond the boundaries of blood to include less fortunate members of the community. McCarthy Brown acknowledges that the younger generation of Haiti's rural peasantry are often forced to migrate to urban centres on their own, yet the reasons for this phenomenon are economic, not cultural. Young Haitian men and women move to the country's cities in order to find employment, rather than to escape their punitive families. Furthermore, she explains that the urban voodoo temple, far from indoctrinating vulnerable young minds with the message that life is capricious, provides a 'fictive kinship network' that 'compensates for the missing large rural family.' McCarthy Brown (along with other social scientists, including anthropologists) explains that 'Vodou parents, like actual ones, owe their children protection, care, and help in times of trouble', help that includes tangible benefits such as food, shelter and employment. In this respect the voodoo temple approximates a

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social welfare system for Haitians who would otherwise have no such assistance, as well as offering 'a sense of purpose, consolation, belonging, structure and discipline.'

The next step for Haiti, Brooks argues, is to promote a system of ‘locally led paternalism.’ By instilling ‘an achievement ethos and tough, measurable demands’, Haiti’s outdated culture will be replaced with ‘middle-class assumptions’ that presumably will prove more effective protection against future natural disasters. Essentially, Haiti should become more like the United States. As we have seen from the white media’s coverage of the Occupation, Brooks is not unique in this assertion. In fact such a view predates the twentieth century. From the moment Haiti came into existence its status as a free black state ‘was openly qualified as a catastrophe.’ As Deborah Jenson explains:

Among this proliferation of discourses about Haiti’s disaster vulnerability, one can find references to “the Haitian disaster” as a kind of metonymy for the Haitian state and its history. These crop up particularly frequently in assessments of corruption in Haiti’s political economy, an approach which I find deeply worrisome, as it unintentionally closes the loop with that earlier tradition regarding the advent of the black state as disaster, and replaces it with a kind of apocalyptic signifier, as if nothing were there but what might replace it.

The understanding of Haitian culture as synonymous with political corruption is particularly relevant to the coverage of the Occupation; as we have seen, the white press explained Haiti’s twentieth century political turmoil—part of the justification for the

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54 Jenson, ‘The Writing of Disaster in Haiti’, p. 103.
landing of Marines—in terms of the island’s cultural strangeness. Brooks fits comfortably into this tradition. His biblical understanding of the earthquake providing something of a clean slate from which a new Haiti, and, more importantly, new Haitians could be fashioned recalls earlier accounts of the positive contributions of U.S. Marines to Haitian society. In both cases, white American culture is the standard to which all others should aspire.

The black press spurned this notion in its coverage of both the Occupation and the earthquake. In a report for the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, Kristin Gray remarked that Haiti’s landscape was not the nebulous site of voodoo sacrifice implied in the white press, but instead is characterised by ‘beautiful beaches, rich culture, and wonderful people’ like other Caribbean nations typically viewed as paradise.55 This demystification of the exotic was in keeping with the broader mission of restoring the autonomy of the Haitian people. It mirrors the earlier attempts of the *Courier* to provide an alternative narrative of Haitian culture to the one crafted by the white press during the Occupation. In contrast to Brooks’ call for the institution of capitalist infrastructure, the black press celebrated Haiti’s refusal thus far to bend to the will of major corporations: ‘[the government] will not allow their nation to become a tourist attraction for the benefit of outsiders and corporate-owned hotel chains while Haitians are shut out from sharing in development and profits.’56 Such reports suggest that although the country may be poor, its pride remains intact, no small feat considering its colonial history.

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56 Shelton, ‘Lending a Hand in the Haitian Struggle’.
The coverage of the 2010 earthquake in the American press indicated the true extent to which the Occupation influenced contemporary U.S.-Haiti relations. While the Occupation itself was only discussed in the black American press, its legacy was manifest in the ideal perpetuated by the white media, one that was predicated upon the belief that the United States was a force for good. This belief was reinforced by reports that focused on Haiti's poverty and alleged cultural primitivism, and comparisons of the earthquake to Hurricane Katrina. Both strains of reporting denied Haitian autonomy and rendered the Haitian state dependent on the United States. By contrast, the black press inserted Haiti's history in their coverage of the earthquake and used it to reject the white press' understanding of the United States as benevolent. While the black coverage also internalised the damage wrought by the earthquake, rather than use it to illuminate the differences between Haitian and American culture, the damage was offered as a critique of the cultural amnesia endemic to the white American press. For black American journalists, the underlying tragedy of the earthquake was not Haiti's poverty or the alleged failings of its culture, but the failure of the white press to acknowledge what impact U.S. colonialism might have had in the devastation.
CONCLUSION

Aftershocks

Writing to commemorate two hundred years of Haitian independence, in 2004 historian Edward Baptist deplored Haiti’s invisibility in American history, declaring it ‘long past time for Americans to acknowledge what they owe to Haiti.’¹ Six years later, Baptist’s mention of a figurative debt was eerily transformed into actual transaction of funds following the 2010 Haitian earthquake. In total, American citizens privately donated a reported $58 million to relief funds designed to assist the rebuilding of Haiti, along with the nearly $2 billion pledged by the U.S. government.² While this expression of aid was well-intended, it had the inadvertent effect of absolving the United States of any responsibility for the scale of the damage caused by the earthquake. For although nothing could have prevented the shift in the earth's tectonic plates on that day in January, the devastation in Haiti was not entirely the result of a natural disaster. The foundations of the tragedy lay in the country's colonial history.³

Ironically, the white media's denial of Haiti's history in their coverage of the earthquake fitted into an established pattern of U.S.-Haiti relations. Since the earliest instances of American intervention in Haiti, the white American press has perpetuated

cultural stereotypes of Haiti in order to undermine its 1804 revolutionary success. As historian Manning Marable explains, 'since "race" itself is a fraudulent concept, devoid of scientific reality, "racism" can only be rationalized and justified through the suppression of black accounts or evidence that challenges society's understanding about itself and its own past.\(^4\) Thus, the white media's suppression of Haiti's history has functioned as a means of protecting the American myth of exceptionalism, and the racial hierarchy on which it depends.

The determination to characterise the United States as superior dominated the white media's coverage of the first five years of the Occupation. While President Wilson spoke without irony of the need to protect the Haitian people from predatory politicians, the National City Bank of New York assumed control of Haiti's finances. In 1915, the first of the Marines landed in Port-au-Prince in order to protect their investment. Yet the writers at the *New York Times* and *National Geographic* remained determinedly blind to this fact, preferring instead to reproduce Wilson's rhetoric of paternalism within the pages of their publications. For both periodicals, military intervention was not only justified, it was *necessary* so that the Haitian people could be cured of their supposed primitivism.

Only the African American press questioned the legality of the Occupation. The most prominent voice of dissent came from James Weldon Johnson, who in 1920 denounced the Occupation as a capitalist venture far removed from Wilson's lofty

vision for international social reform. In addition to challenging the government's rationale for military intervention, Johnson disputed the white press' representations of Haitian culture by contrasting it with the supposed civility of the American South. In making such a comparison, Johnson found the United States, rather than Haiti, wanting. Johnson's illumination of Wilson's hypocrisy was therefore two-fold: it not only questioned the moral principles that ostensibly motivated the Occupation, it also criticised the alleged pre-eminence of American culture. While the wider American community proved reluctant to embrace Johnson's conclusions, his persistent lobbying of Congress was enough to convince presidential candidate Warren G. Harding of the benefits of making the Occupation a central issue of the campaign. Harding used Haiti to expose the contradictions of Wilson's foreign policy, and subsequently won the 1920 election. With Harding's victory the end of the Occupation seemed imminent; much to Johnson's disappointment, the president he had worked so hard to elect had no use for Haiti once his power was secure. As Harding settled into presiding over the post-war economic boom, the Occupation grew steadily more irrelevant for white politicians and the white press alike.

Though the issue of Haiti faded from view, the rise of black nationalism in the 1920s brought a new racial discourse to the forefront of American consciousness. The migration of Southern blacks to Northern cities led to the formation of black locales in which a burgeoning sense of racial pride was fostered. This was realised through the diverse modes of political and artistic expression that characterised the decade. African American artists such as Claude McKay and Jacob Lawrence embodied the pan-
Africanism championed by DuBois in their work, while the increasingly influential black advocacy press maintained the earlier expressions of African American solidarity with Haiti. As artists re-imagined Haiti's revolutionary history, papers like the Chicago Defender and the Pittsburgh Courier lobbied for the final withdrawal of American troops from Haiti.

Until 1929, the black press' campaign to end the Occupation was largely ignored by Washington policymakers. The massacre at Aux Cayes forced President Hoover to concede that the continued presence of Marines in Haiti was untenable, much to the exasperation of the African American journalists who had been saying as much for years. With the involvement of Washington, the white press once again focused on Haiti. Although the effect of the Harlem Renaissance was not so profound as to convince the white press of Haiti’s right to sovereignty, there was a discernable shift in the nature of the coverage. At the New York Times particularly, the stark didacticism typical of earlier coverage of the Occupation was replaced with a slightly more circumspect tone. This was also the case at the Daily Boston Globe; for the first time, the possibility was acknowledged that the Occupation was not simply a matter of black and white, so to speak.

When the last of the Marines left Haiti in 1934, there was renewed optimism for the post-Occupation state. Yet nineteen years of rule by American Marines had consolidated the power of the Haitian elite, and the remainder of the twentieth century

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saw the country's resources systematically siphoned off to secure their authority. After decades of tyrannous dictatorships and a few halting attempts at democracy, the twenty-first century saw Haiti establish a tentative stability. It promptly came undone with the 2010 earthquake, and as the international media rushed to Port-au-Prince to report on the damage, Haiti once again found itself in the pages of the American press.

But even under the unyielding glare on the international media spotlight, Haiti's colonial history remained hidden. For the white American media, the root causes of the disaster did not extend beyond the immediate context of Haiti's immense poverty. The readers of the New York Times, the Washington Post, and several other major news dailies were bombarded with statistics that supported Haiti's position as the poorest country in the Western hemisphere. That the legacy of U.S. imperialism might have determined such an unfortunate ranking was never mentioned. In the absence of an adequate historical explanation, Haitian culture was examined for a flaw that could be held accountable for the scale of the damage. David Brooks concluded that until Haitian culture was remade in the image of the United States, it would continue to be subject to the cruel forces of a world that seemed not to care for the island republic. In doing so, Brooks simultaneously dismissed Haiti's two hundred year history and in characteristic New York Times fashion, reaffirmed the superiority of the United States.

It was only due to the efforts of the black media that Haiti's history came to exist outside the void of Third World hegemony. The writers at the New Pittsburgh Courier, the Michigan Chronicle and the Chicago Defender, among others, acknowledged that Haiti's immense poverty had undoubtedly exacerbated the earthquake's devastation.

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6 Dash, 'Rising from the Ruins', p. 64.
Yet rather than portray such poverty as a spontaneous expression of the country’s "blackness", African American journalists inserted the history of U.S.-Haiti relations in their coverage of the earthquake. If there was not the explicit suggestion that the United States was at least partly to blame for the disaster, there was at least the question of why the white press was so determinedly blind to the history of American intervention in Haiti. In doing so, the black media broadened the scope of American coverage to include a more complete account of Haiti’s history, one that critiqued the version of events offered by the white media.

In her investigation of Haiti’s role in the formation of black American consciousness, Clare Corbould remarks that in the 1920s, ‘Haiti became something of an anvil on which to forge a diverse and vibrant African American identity.’7 In light of the Occupation and the earthquake, it is possible extend that metaphor further: for over a century Haiti has functioned as the anvil upon which an American identity can be forged. The white press’ attempt to erase Haiti’s history demonstrates the reliance of the American self on an antiquated racial hierarchy. Even in 2010, the success of a black revolutionary state—and the colonial legacy it inspired—were deemed such a threat to the myth of American exceptionalism that the only way to reconcile the history of U.S.-Haiti relations was to ignore it. Without the efforts of the black media, the white press’ attempts to distract the American public from the stubborn existence of the Haitian state may have been successful. Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the African American

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press has persistently illuminated Haiti's history—from its glorious revolution to its tragic exploitation—as a way of exploring the capabilities of their own race. The history of the island republic has proved sufficiently malleable to suit the various political needs of the black and white American media. Thus Haiti's representations in the American press are pertinent not for what they reveal about Haiti, but for what they suggest about America's view of itself.
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