

Every year Haiti is mentioned on the news for a flood, earthquake, landslide, or perhaps to call attention to their struggling government and economy, or to be blamed for a disease like HIV/AIDS or cholera. It is known that Haiti's struggling infrastructure is unable to provide their citizens with basic public health, but who is really to blame for this crisis? To find the reason for Haiti's inability to control public health issues, one must look back into Haiti's history and sociocultural development to colonialism and France's dictatorial rule of the former colony. In doing so it becomes clear that three main factors that impacted Haiti's health system still to this day are the debt France placed Haiti's economy in, Haiti's history with political instability that began with colonialism, and the distrust of Western aid that also stems from colonialism.

France took possession of Haiti in 1697. What followed was years of slavery, economic abuse, and oppression of independence. After slavery was abolished in 1794, France still held their aggressive colonial rule until 1804 when Haiti gained their independence through years of militarizing and fighting for it. However, France still would not recognize Haiti as independent. Like the other colonial powers at the time, France saw enslaved people as "property." They felt their property had been stolen and wanted reparations. When Charles X came into power in France, he told Haiti that after over two decades of Haiti's independence, he would finally recognize Haiti as an independent nation, if Haiti paid France 150 million Francs (Khan Academy). On top of believing that France was owed for their loss of "property," he wanted to punish Haiti for freeing themselves (Khan Academy). Haiti agreed to pay this debt because they were facing "economic boycott" and "diplomatic isolation" from all of the surrounding nations that were also colonial powers or engaging in slave trade (Choices Program). Haiti had

to take out loans to pay France and did not finish paying them off until 1947. Doing so bankrupt Haiti's treasury and has left the nation as one of the poorest countries in the world (Koop). This bankruptcy has put Haiti in the position of being unable to create an adequate public health system. Haiti's "annual per capita health expenditure is estimated at about \$2.35" (2003 Report). Haiti has no private healthcare and "80% of the equipment in public institutions is defective or out of order" (2003 Report). With barely any money to spend on healthcare and creating basic public health systems, Haiti is extremely susceptible to illnesses and diseases like Cholera, that are not as common in countries that can prevent them with basic public health practices and treat them with wealthier healthcare systems.

Whilst being susceptible to illnesses and diseases, Haiti has to deal with large numbers of people entering their country. Haiti receives many foreigners through their borders due to their need for assistance in terms of public health and political instability. Unfortunately, more often than not the entering help brings with them more harm than good. An example of this is the UN sending the MINUSTAH troops to Haiti to assist them with their political instability. Haiti has experienced a rough history with many violent changes in political leadership. Since Haiti's independence in 1804, the country has had 57 presidents or heads of state until 2021, who were often overthrown, killed, or forced into exile. This is the aftermath of many years of the West fighting over Haiti and Haiti fighting for independence from the West. If one sees that violence and overthrowing the government is the only way to obtain power, they will continue this cycle. This cycle led to the peace keeping mission of the UN's MINUSTAH. However, the MINUSTAH troops did not protect the people of Haiti, they poisoned them. Most of

the troops were from Nepal, where there was a Cholera outbreak. The troops from the infected area were allowed to enter Haiti, and then released their infected defecation into Haiti's waters (Piarroux). The Cholera then spread to those using the water downstream for drinking and bathing. As Haiti already did not have the financial means to control this public health crisis, it was a years long catastrophe, stemming from the West's historical need to insert themselves in Haiti and do much more harm than good.

Haiti continues to struggle with public health crises at a much greater rate than most, even while receiving aid. This is, as mentioned, partially due to the nature of a lot of the aid, and also partially due to many Haitians' understandable distrust of foreign aid. After years of unhelpful Western interference, seen with colonialism and the MINUSTAH, most Haitians do not want Western aid and Western medicine. This includes vaccines for illnesses like Cholera and Covid. The Slate article titled, "Haitians Can't Trust Aid from NGOs or Their Own Government" expresses that "if you ask, ordinary, everyday Haitians are very wary of what looks like assistance, because a lot of assistance is actually help that harms. And they remember that" (Johnson 13). Therefore, when a vaccine is donated to Haiti or a Haitian needs medical treatment whilst there is an NGO available in the country to provide it, on top of perhaps not having the financial or safety means to travel to receive the medical treatment, Haitians may not want to receive this help after the traumatic experiences with previous foreign aid.

These factors put Haiti in a difficult position. The country is bankrupt from France's colonial economic abuse and then repaying their debt to France, and therefore unable to fund its own basic public health safety measures and treatments, yet they also

cannot trust the help of others and have lost many lives due to the previous “help” of foreigners. Haiti's long and traumatic sociocultural history of abuse and harm from Western powers has created an impossible public health predicament for the nation. One can only hope more people learn of Haiti's history that has directly led to their current public health issues, and feel compelled to learn the correct places to donate to - organizations that Haitians trust to help and not harm, such as Partners in Health.

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It has been fascinating to learn about the Francophone world through both a historical/sociocultural and public health lens. Genuinely neither approach has fallen short in allowing me to understand the issues at hand. I now see, especially in the case of Haiti, that one cannot fully understand current public health crises without looking into history and culture to what allowed them to occur. It would also be unjust to look at a historical event like colonialism without looking further into the current repercussions like the state of public health in that nation. These two subjects are much further intertwined than I expected. This could just be for Haiti since they have such an intertwined sociocultural and public health state, that is greatly impacted by their history, but I do not suspect so. I am excited to learn how these topics come together in our next segments.