

THE U.S. OCCUPATION OF HAITI: POLITICAL

Politically, the United States transformed the Haitian government to further its own economic benefit.

The U.S. Senate ratified the Haitian-American Convention Treaty that granted the U.S. power to oversee security and appoint leaders of Haiti. One of the first changes the U.S. wanted was to get rid of a clause in the Haitian Constitution that prevented foreigners from purchasing Haitian land. U.S. authorities drafted a new Haitian Constitution, which was then rejected by Haitian legislators. In retaliation to this objection, the U.S. dissolved Haiti's Parliament. Between 1915 and 1917, the U.S. dissolved the parliament twice when they did not agree with U.S. policy, before completely dissolving it until 1929.



Gendarmerie d'Haiti

Armed Forces of Haiti



Instrumental to carrying out this imperialistic agenda was the Gendarmerie. Consisting of U.S. military members and Haitian elites, the Gendarmerie was created to be an authoritative occupation force that protected U.S. interests. It replaced many of the duties of the Marine forces and controlled the daily lives of Haitians.

Gendarmerie d'Haiti

Armed Forces of Haiti



In 1922, the U.S. Senate organized an inquiry into U.S. involvement in Haiti and Santo Domingo. This first effort to change the role of the U.S. in Hispaniola modeled the initial occupation – it was a failure. Although it created new leadership systems, it did not address the root issues of racism, imperialism, or concerns of the Haitians. These shortcomings led to more and more resistance from Haitians and Americans. Correspondingly, the Hoover presidency established the Forbes Commission in 1930 to create a withdrawal plan. The committee praised the material improvements the U.S. achieved like infrastructure and education but denounced the exclusion of Haitians from leadership positions. Overall, the committee concluded that the occupation was a failure and that the U.S. did not understand the social problems of Haiti.

The administration of Franklin Roosevelt completed withdrawal plans on August 1, 1934, with a commitment to the Good Neighbor Policy. There was a formal transfer of power to the new leaders of the Gendarmerie, which had some of the first elected officials in nearly two decades.

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