Bryant C. Freeman

Selected Critical Bibliography of English-Language Books on Haiti

Institute of Haitian Studies
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SELECTED CRITICAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ENGLISH-LANGUAGE BOOKS ON HAITI

The present bibliography is included in the series of Occasional Papers of the University of Kansas Institute of Haitian Studies principally at the request of a number of persons preparing to work in Haiti and in need of a general guide to the main English-language studies on that country. It is intended as a selective as well as varied list of useful books on Haiti, with a brief description of the main thrust of each. It will be updated from time to time as new works appear and earlier ones are superseded.

This bibliography was originally compiled for an interdisciplinary area studies course given every fall semester at the University of Kansas entitled "Portrait of a Two-Thirds-World Nation: Haiti." Topics include "the Columbian exchange, piracy, slavery and plantocracy, Revolution and the burden of freedom, U.S. Occupation, Papa Doc and Baby Doc, the Tontons Macoute, liberation theology, peasant life, government and corruption, poverty and hunger, morality of foreign aid, Voodoo, folk medicine." The diversity of the subject matter corresponds to the diverse make-up of the some 100 students usually enrolled, who range from university freshmen to relatively senior U.S. Army officers preparing a Master's degree in Latin American Studies. Each student is responsible for a certain number of book reviews, with no knowledge of a foreign language assumed—though alternate bibliographies in Haitian and in French are also available for those fluent in one of Haiti's two official languages. Consequently, to match the extremely varied interests of the class, the list of books approved for the reviews is comprised of some twenty categories. Excluded are very brief works, those which are overly technical (e.g., on geological samples from a limited area of Haiti), ones which touch only peripherally on Haiti (e.g., Beebe's Beneath Tropic Seas), as well as ones whose highly allegorical nature would render them meaningless to all but those already thoroughly versed in things Haitian (e.g., Depestre's The Festival of the Greasy Pole). Since the course is centered on Haiti itself, Diaspora studies are generally not included. Lastly, excluded are works where invention reaches an unconscionable level (e.g., Vinogradov's The Black Consul, where Toussaint appears in Paris alongside Ogé and Chavannes, and where Dessalines is also in Paris after having been graduated from the Sorbonne!).

This is not to say, however, that all works included are necessarily ideal at every point for learning about Haitian history. Works by early writers such as Harvey (1827) or Bird (1869) have been far surpassed for much historical fact, but contain eye-witness material found no place else, and for this reason can be fascinating. Others (e.g., Craig's Cannibal Cousins) contain gross factual errors such as misdating by almost a century an event as important as the Treaty of Ryswick which officially created French Saint-Domingue (p. 112), but which are invaluable as a mirror of the implicitly and often explicitly racist attitudes which resulted in the failure of the first U.S. Occupation of Haiti. There are other works included where one may well question at times the author's veracity (e.g., Loederer), but which nevertheless have proven extremely popular with a number of students and which do peak their curiosity. If the student's interest is awakened, then all is possible—and each year a certain percentage of this class ends up going to Haiti, and some have even found careers in this way.
Since a list containing 169 titles (January 1998) might appear somewhat formidable to anyone relatively new to Haitian Studies, it would perhaps be helpful to identify what we consider to be the "Top Ten." In alphabetical order:

Bentivegna, Joseph. The Neglected and Abused: A Physician's Year in Haiti.
Davis, Wade. The Serpent and the Rainbow.
Greene, Graham. The Comedians.
Herskovits, Melville J. Life in a Haitian Valley.
James, C. L. R. The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution.
Leyburn, James G. The Haitian People.
Métraux, Alfred. Voodoo in Haiti.

Others which can well be considered in a class apart:
Dunham, Katherine. Island Possessed.
Farmer, Paul E. The Uses of Haiti.
Wilentz, Amy. The Rainy Season: Haiti since Duvalier.

Any such list is necessarily subjective, but nevertheless we believe these works represent a consensus of what many consider the most important studies on Haiti in English. These are the ones most frequently quoted and which tend to reappear in bibliographies. Some are quite controversial, such as Wade Davis’ The Serpent and the Rainbow, perhaps in part because of the horror movie of the same name, which has almost nothing to do with the book. Greene’s The Comedians earned him the distinction of being barred from Papa Doc’s Haiti, and Diederich and Burt’s Papa Doc encountered almost the same reception. The Heinl book is blamed for being too negative, while many others see it as the most complete book on Haitian history in any language. Wilentz’ The Rainy Season was faulted when it first appeared for devoting too much attention to “a little-known priest named Aristide.” James, with The Black Jacobins, is accused of being a rabid Communist. Métraux’ Voodoo in Haiti is criticized as being overly meticulous. And the list could go on. Perhaps the least generally known is Bentivegna’s The Neglected and Abused, but it is one of only two texts (along with Roumain’s Masters of the Dew) which are required reading for all students in the course described above. Year after year students say they cannot stop reading it, and then immediately phone home to their parents to say they are sending it to them. Perhaps more than any other book on this list, it “tells it like it is.”
Among the relatively large number of general bibliographies on Haiti, we recommend especially:


Laguerre, Michel S. *The Complete Haitiana: A Bibliographic Guide to the Scholarly Literature, 1900-1980*. Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus International Pub., 1982. Pp. lxxiii-xix-1,562 in two vol. A massive compilation containing more than 10,000 references to books, articles etc. in a number of languages, divided into 65 subject chapters. There are no descriptions for the references.

## GENERAL GUIDE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Authors/Books</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ANTHROPOLOGY</strong></td>
<td>Courlander, Freeman, Herskovits, Laguerre, Smucker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ART</strong></td>
<td>Christensen, Hoffman, Leon, Pataki, Rodman, Rodman, Rodman, Stebich, Williams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHRISTOPHE</strong></td>
<td>Christophe, Cole, Vandercook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DIASPORA</strong></td>
<td>Dougé, Lemoine, Miller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DOMINICAN REPUBLIC</strong></td>
<td>Lemoine, Logan, Plant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DUVALIERS</strong></td>
<td>Abbott, Diederich, Ferguson, Prince, Trouillot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ECONOMY/POLITICS</strong></td>
<td>Brinkerhoff, DeWind, De Young, Dupuy, Fass, Hippolyte-Manigat, Holly, Laguerre, Lundahl, Lundahl, Maguire, Moore, O'Neill, Paquin, Preeg, Rothenberg, Tata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GENERAL</strong></td>
<td>Bellegarde-Smith, Farmer, Foster, Francis, Lawless, Rodman, Rubin, Valdman, Weil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HEALTH</strong></td>
<td>Bentivegna, Bordes, Brodwin, Farmer, Freeman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HISTORY - GENERAL</strong></td>
<td>Davis, Greene, Heinle, Heinle, Léger, Leyburn, Nicholls, Nicholls, Rodman, Rodman, Weinstein, Weinstein</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HISTORY - EARLY</strong></td>
<td>Barskett, Bird, Brown, Candler, Dayan, Franklin, Harvey, MacKenzie, Moreau de Saint-Méry, St. John, Vastey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HISTORY - DIPLOMATIC</strong></td>
<td>Douglass, Logan, Montague, Plummer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HISTORY - INTELLECTUAL</strong></td>
<td>Antoine, Dash, Dean, Fowler, Price-Mars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NOVELS and POETRY</strong></td>
<td>Bell, Carpentier, Carse, Chauvet, Dash, Dash, Endore, Garrett, Gilliam, Greene, Moore, Roberts, Roumain, Thoby-Marcellin, Thoby-Marcelin, Thoby-Marcelin, Thoby-Marcellin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OCCUPATION</strong></td>
<td>Balch, Craig, Craig, Healy, Kuser, McCrocklin, Millspaugh, Niles, Plummer, Schmidt, Seabrook, Spector, Steedman, Wirkus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PERSONAL</strong></td>
<td>Cave, Gold, Loederer, Prichard, Riou, Seabrook, Taft, Thomson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>POST-DUVALIER</strong></td>
<td>Abbott, Aristide, Aristide, Aristide, Dupuy, NACLA, Perusse, Ridgeway, Rotberg, Wilentz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REVOLUTION</strong></td>
<td>Bell, Buckley, Dayan, Fick, Fouchard, Geggus, Hassal, Hunt, James, Ott, Pachonski, Parham, Perkins, Stein, Steward, Stoddard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOUSSAINT LOUVETURE</strong></td>
<td>Alexis, Beard, Bell, James, Korngold, Parkinson, Ros, Tyson, Waxman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SELECTED CRITICAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF HAITI
(English language books only)

All items listed are owned by the University of Kansas Libraries.


Bird, Mark Baker. (1807-1880) **The Black Man; or, Haytian Independence.** Deduced from Historical Notes, and Dedicated to the Government and People of Hayti. New York: American News Co., 1869. Pp. xxxii-461. Both historical and personal account from the beginnings to 1867, by an outstanding Methodist missionary who spent some 30 years in Haiti. The best of the accounts of this period.


St. John, Sir Spencer Buckingham. (1825-1910) **Hayti, or The Black Republic.** 1884. New York: Scribner and Welford, 1889. Pp. xxiv-389. For better or for worse, one of the most notorious - and sensationalistic - books on Haiti, by the British Consul-General there for 20 years.


Thoby-Marcelin, Philippe (1904-1975), and Pierre Marcelin. (1908- ) **The Beast of the Haitian Hills.** (Trans. from French) New York: Rinehart, 1946. Pp. iii-210. Novel concerning a Port-au-Princeian who moves out to the country, walls off a spring used by the peasant population, and has a tree sacred to Voodoo cut down on his property - with disastrous consequences.


