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“TWO COUSINS”: A SHORT STORY OF HAITI AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA DURING THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

By Watson Denis, Ph.D.²

INTRODUCTION.-

Once upon a time, to be more precise, on late 2003, a U.S. Ambassador to Haiti has emphatically declared in an interview broadcasted in a radio station that : «Haiti and the United States of America (USA) are two cousins». At first, I was in shock hearing that comment knowing that the USA are a rich country, a hegemonic power in the world affairs, meanwhile Haiti is considered by many as the poorest country in the Americas. Some time after, thinking seriously about this statement, I said to myself this is a good metaphor to speak about the relations between Haiti and USA, two different countries in many ways. In fact, Haiti and the USA are different in issues related to culture, politics, the military, commerce, economic and financial activities.

In this regard, if someone looks virtually, he or she will think there are more questions that separate the two countries than issues which may make them converge in the same direction. Anyway, in any family it happens that two cousins do not have resemblance. For instance, in Haiti there are cousins that are different in skin, weight, height, eyes and hair, and, of course, they do not share the same vision in

¹ This document is translated and adapted by the author from Haitian Creole into English. In this aspect, he wishes to point out that the English version is not a closed translation of the original text, some segments of the story have been modified by adding more information, but the initial format and the primary intention to account a short story between Haiti and the United States of America remain the same as in the Creole version.

² The author is Professor of Haitian Thought, Caribbean History and International Relations at the State University of Haiti (UEH). Presently, he is attached at **Latin American and Caribbean Center** (LACC) of Florida International University (FIU) as Visiting Research Fellow.

many questions that affect their life, but they are still cousins. I think the same thing might exist in the USA, where the multiculturalism is becoming every day a social and political reality. If this reality exists inside both countries it can exist as well within them, cousins who are different in their shape, appearance and vision but have developed and will continue to develop good relationship between them.

In these circumstances we may ask ourselves what make Haiti and the USA two cousins ? In my view, two main reasons can sustain such an idea: one is historical and the other diplomatical. From the historical point of view both countries liberated themselves against colonialism and proclaimed their independence ; that is to say they got their existence on identical conditions. The diplomatical reason is that after the liberation, despite many difficulties and some misunderstandings, they kept their diplomatic relations. In a few words, although the two cousins do not speak the same language, nor they they have the same color, and do not present the same physical appearance, they do share ideas that connect them to each other. In other words, even though they do not go through the same steps in their political evolution or their history, neither they took the same direction, they share together two main ideas, which are freedom and Human Rights. Under all the appearances these ideas represent the fundamental features of both countries in the 19th and 20th centuries. I believe, in the 21st century, their relations will continue to develop under the same ideological precepts.

Before I close this introduction, I wish to highlight one more thing. It is well known that there are big differences between Haiti and the USA, but taken the Ambassador's metaphor, I choose to title this lecture : «Haiti and the USA are two cousins». Without doubt this title can make room for of lot of debate, it can even shock many of you, some may even see it as a provocative subject. In definitive the more important is that the audience is informed on the historical and political nature of USA-Haiti relations and, eventually, every body can act in the interest of rapprochement of the two people involved in these important hemispheric relations.

19TH CENTURY: EACH COUSIN LOOKING AT THE OTHER IN CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

The USA and Haiti are the first two countries in the American continent having proclaimed their independence after fighting against European colonialist powers. The USA fought against England and Haiti fought against France. First a situation of contestation, then of political rebellion in some of the 13 colonies of the British Empire in North America open up to a revolutionary era in 1763, but the move toward the independence took a real momentum turned around 1774-1776. This momentum culminated with the foundation a federal State under the name of the United States of America and the Declaration of Independence on July 4th, 1776. Despite the solemn proclamation of independence, the army and the American people were obliged to fight even more against England power to achieve a complete emancipation. Finally, in 1783, after several political and military combats and diplomatic struggle, the USA was recognized as an independent State and a free nation in the world.

During the same period, between 1791 and 1804, the former slaves of the French colony of Saint-Domingue fought against their masters and the metropolis of France and proclaimed the independence of the Island on January 1st, 1804, under the name of Haiti. This was an exceptional event in the mankind. Haiti became the first black Republic of the world and second independent State in the Americas after the USA! But everything was not flowers and wine for Haiti and the Haitians. For the great powers the Haitian Revolution and the independence of Haiti appeared somewhat too radical. This revolution was realized both against the international colonialism system and the international slavery system. Furthermore, in the history of Humanity, it was the first time a rebellion leading by slaves gained strength until becoming a social and political movement that led to the foundation of an independent State among other States in the world. The great powers fostered among themselves a political consensus to isolate the new State by decreeing an international embargo against the country, blocking any kind of trade and cooperation with other nations and recognition of its independence.

Meanwhile the slavery was still in vigor in the USA. Seemingly, this was the reason why the leaders of this country followed the political isolation and the economic boycott decreed against Haiti. The USA lifted the embargo against this country in 1810, but did not yet recognize its country. The USA government finally recognized Haiti's independence in 1862, in the middle of Secession War. From this official recognition until today the relations between the cousins remained established. Sometimes the relationship between them are realized in perfect harmony, sometimes they are developed in misunderstandings as it is the case in any family, even among close relatives.

From 1862 to the end of the 19th century many events have formatted the relations between Haiti and the USA, but in this presentation we will only highlight one of them. It's about an event which took place between 1890 and 1891. In this period the USA wanted to rent the Môle Saint-Nicolas, a strategic costal area in the northwest of the country, in order to establish a military base and a coast station for American warships. It was an epoch when the Haitian elite of power was involved in a Francophilia agenda, it wanted to become even closer to France than to get a sort of understanding with the USA viewed as an Anglo-Saxon country. Further analysis made us understand that the U.S. Marine needed this area in the Caribbean Sea to develop American maritime potentialities, but Haitian authorities have refused to concede the area, using all political and tactical strategies at their disposal. This refusal, for a long time, cooled the political relations between the two States. On the other hand, this refusal shows us how the two countries, the two cousins, were living with each other, looking at each other through their cultural background. But despite the conclusions of the negotiations for the the Môle Saint-Nicolas, which appeared at that time as a dramatic failure to the USA diplomacy and a big victory for Haiti in the international arena, it remains a fact that at the turning decade of 1890 something

became more relevant in US-Haiti relationships: the USA have become more and more influential in Haiti's political life.³

20th CENTURY: ONE COUSIN DOMINATED THE OTHER

In the 20th century there is another event in the life of the two countries that remains a subject of continual controversy: the US military occupation of Haiti. The occupation lasted 19 years, between 1919-1934. Before the US occupation the Haitian power elite wanted to modernize the country, but for many reasons, including lack of capitals of investment, they did not succeed. The foreign occupation, as well, wished to realize some kind of modernization in Haiti.

Six months ago, before the devastating earthquake in Haiti, I have read an article in a leading Haitian newspaper suggesting that the US occupation pushed Haiti forward, especially if someone made a comparison between the period before the occupation and the period after the occupation. In the same topic, a week ago, I heard a political leader in a radio station in Port-au-Prince, after taking part in a public protest against the CEP (*Conseil Electoral Provisoire*),⁴ saying that the US occupation did not realize anything good for Haiti. Where is the truth, if we can speak about truth in History? On one hand, I think that the author of the article went too far. On the other hand, I believe that the political leader did an impartial evaluation of the US occupation. We have to recognize that the US occupation took some initiatives to change somewhat the Haitian socio-economical regime, especially in the fields of health and public hygiene, professional education, agriculture and agricultural production at a time when the country had lost its political independence and sovereignty. It was in this historical context that the occupation leaders have defeated the Haitian army and replaced it by an army force which performed

³ Now it is well documented that General Florvil Hyppolite was supported by capitalists from Wall Street and the U.S. Navy, in 1888-1889, in its fight against the government of General François-Deys Légitime. Finally, his government refused the concession of the Môle Saint-Nicolas to the U.S. government.

⁴ In 1987, the Constitution of Haiti has instituted a new and independent body to organize all kind of elections in the country this is the Council of Elections. For many political reasons, this institution is still provisional, not yet permanent.

aftermath in Haiti as an institution of security and control to the service of foreign interests. The US occupation ended in 1934.

There are a lot of domestic and international reasons to explain the end of Haiti's US occupation. Among them, we must highlight that the US occupation has never been popular in Haiti. At the very beginning, social groups and political forces demonstrated to show their opposition to the occupation. For instance, from 1915 to 1920, Haitian peasants, first under the leadership of Charlemagne Peralte and then Benoit Batraville, have formed a popular army to fight the occupation. In the same vein, writers, journalists, and intellectuals protested publicly against the US presence in "the soil of Jean-Jacques Dessalines."⁵ Despite the political efforts of the Americans to show the « good side » of the occupation, it seems that every day the opposition against the occupation gained more momentum. In these conditions, in 1929, the students of the College of Agriculture, formed by the Americans, have launched a severe and long strike against the US occupation. In the same year the peasants at Marchaterre, near the city of Les Cayes, armed with pikes and *manchèt* stood up against the foreign occupation. Without doubt, all these protestations, resistance and rebellion conducted the US authorities to change their strategy in Haiti by moving through the end of the military occupation.

On the other hand, the international arena was dominated by a series of political tensions and pressure between the great powers for the occupation of new areas of influence. In the American Hemisphere, the US President at that time, Franklin D. Roosevelt, wanted plenty of control of the situation. In other words, he did not want enemy in the frontiers near the USA. Consequently, his administration launched the « Good Neighbor» policy to show, among other things, that the USA is the good friend of all countries in the American continent. In conclusion, it was in this context of rebellion and protestation in Haiti and the new US diplomacy of Good Neighbor

⁵ Jean-Jacques Dessalines is the General in Chief of the *Armée Indigène* who proclaimed the independence of Haiti in 1804 and the first Head of State of the country (1804-1806). He remains the hero who symbolizes the Haiti's ideology of independence, nationalism and political sovereignty. In political discourse, every time somebody calls his name or makes reference to him, he or she wants to highlight his nationalist ideology against the foreign powers.

that the US occupation ended in Haiti. At the end of the US occupation Haitian politicians spoke with triumphalism about the « Second Independence » of the country.

After the occupation, the diplomatic, political, commercial, financial, and cultural relations between Haiti and the USA continued with great hope and promise. A more fruitful dialogue was established between the two cousins and cooperation between them became more open. A number of American artists, professors, researchers in different fields and other professionals continued to visit and work, and even decided to live in Haiti, where they could immerse themselves in the Creole culture. In the same way, the English language and the American culture became more acceptable in Haiti. Haitians started visiting the USA and some parents sent their children to study in this country where they could appreciate the American culture and better understand the US actions and policies in the world of affairs. In the same move, Americans with connection with Haiti started as well to accept Haiti and its culture with a more open mind. Without doubt, this situation, in both sides of the aisle, has facilitated dialogue and understandings between the two people.

As we can understand from the date of US occupation to the decade of 1950, the USA became even more influential in Haiti's political life. The U.S. embassy in Port-au-Prince has played a determinant role in every political change in the country. From 1957 until 1986, Haiti has evolved under the ferocious Duvalier's dictatorship. This regime, from François Duvalier to his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier (aka Papa Doc and Baby Doc), dominated Haiti's political life for about 29 years. During this period, in many Latin American countries and the Caribbean region, right dictatorship reigned in absolute authoritarianism. The « Doctrine of National Security » was established to fight communism ideology in the Western Hemisphere. In Haiti, the Duvalier regime formed and consolidated a militia force called the « *Volontaires de la Sécurité nationale*, » better known as the « *Tonton-Macoutes*, » with the main objective of fighting Haitian communists and all kind of opponents to the regime. At that time the world was functioning mainly according to two main

ideologies, not to say under an ideological Manichean view: the Capitalism or the Communism. The overall situation needed some kind of changes. The Jimmy Carter Administration started promoting the policy of the Human Rights in the world. In this context, it was suggested to the Haitian President for life in Haiti, Jean-Claude Duvalier, to realize some political changes and to make some democratic overtures. The regime reacted with no enthusiasm or even, in some occasions, responded defiantly to these propositions. The overall situation has allowed political contestations and demonstrations against the dictatorship. In 1984-1985 Latin America and the Caribbean region started a spring of democratization. In 1986, with Ronald Reagan in power in the USA, the Duvalier regime fell as a cartoon castle.

From this time until today, Haiti finds itself in what we can call a long period of transition, the longer one in Haiti's history. Many Presidents, either civil or military, including two instable presidencies of Jean-Bertrand Aristide and the catastrophic *coup d'état* of general Raoul Cedras, got power and lost power. A lot of governments, with and without the support of international community, had Haiti's destiny, but the political transition, not yet the democratic transition, never finalized. During this long period of transition, the army formed by Americans in the early years of occupation was disbanded (1995-1996). The United Nations has already promoted two military interventions, the first one in 1994-1996 and the second one commenced in 2004 until today. The USA has always played a preponderant role in all these political events in Haiti.

21st CENTURY: NECESSITY TO ESTABLISH A STRONG ECONOMICAL PARTNERSHIP

In the last two years, initiatives were taken by some government officials and the private sector inviting the international business community to invest in Haiti. It was in this context of openness of the Haitian market that an earthquake dramatically hit the country on January 12th, 2010. The metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince and other surrounding cities in West, Southeast and Nippes Departments have registered many losses and damages. Almost 300.000 people perished in the disaster, without

mentioning wounded people, disabled people, and refugees. Specialists estimated the losses to 11 billions of dollars. That means the reconstruction efforts will need about 12 billions of dollars in infrastructure and direct investment in the next 10 years to boost the Haitian economy.

Right away after the earthquake many countries mobilize themselves in solidarity with Haiti. The USA has played a leading role in this international solidarity. For instance, President Barack Obama spoke to the American people in many occasions, right after the earthquake. In these circumstances, he promised the American people support and the cooperation of its administration in the efforts of recovery and reconstruction. Some days after, the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, former President Bill Clinton, the First Lady Michelle Obama, and other officials of Obama's administration visited Haiti to express their solidarity and to discuss about reconstruction projects. Few days after the earthquake, the Obama's administration sent a contingent of the US army in Haiti «to support the Haitian authorities and to restore public order». In the same move, this administration sent rice, water and medical supplies to help the population in its disastrous situation. Some days ago, the same administration published a communiqué in which he advised that it will give US \$ 2.3 billion away as a contribution for Haiti's reconstruction Plan.

The American people also showed its solidarity to the Haitian people after the earthquake. In fact, many emergency teams went to Haiti to remove people under rubbles and assist them by providing medical and financial assistance. Other people organized fund raising to help the victims of the unfortunate disaster. In this context many new US NGOs emerged from the ground with the official purpose to help the Haitian people in their social, medical and financial needs. Without doubt, in this endeavor the Haitian people are favored by persons with good intentions. At the same time, in Haiti and in the USA alike, there are others who are motivated by their own interests. If somebody look only at *Champ de Mars*, Haiti's largest public park, where there are a numerous of tents stand, he or she will ask where is all the money which was collected for the Haitian people for the recovery not to say the

reconstruction? Nobody has the correct answer to this question. The strategy employed for the recovery efforts was not the best one, or the main players in this process have failed. Now we have to be careful in the execution of the projects of reconstruction. In history there is no example showing that NGOs have developed a country, no matter how small that country is. Meanwhile Haiti needs to open its market to private and foreign investments to improve its economy and create jobs and opportunities, Haitian people have to take their destiny in their own hands and emancipate themselves.

It is through these aspects and conditions that the history of the two cousins has been developed in the Western Hemisphere during 19th and 20th centuries and the beginning of the 21st century. As we can see, the cooperation among the two cousins, marked in the last years by a better understanding, continue its path today. As a matter of fact, the January 12th earthquake, despite its dramatic aspects, has contributed to connect the two cousins. But the two cousins can do better to show their family roots based on freedom and Human Rights, their political friendship and to demonstrate their good relationship by discussing and implementing a real **Economical Partnership** for the 21st century, a concrete and effective program of cooperation. As the following Haitian saying reminds us: «It's better to show a neighbor how to fish instead of giving him a fish every day».

Watson Denis, Ph.D.

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