

**TRANSNATIONAL CARCERAL REGIMES AND PUNITIVE  
ANTICOMMUNISM: THE CREATION OF THE TOTALITARIAN CARCERAL  
STATE IN HAITI (1957–1986)**

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**Abstract:** This article examines the rise of Haiti's totalitarian carceral state during the twentieth century through the lens of US empire. It takes up an absence in US carceral history by showing how what I call a "transnational carceral network" operated to discipline Haitians as a direct function and expression of US Cold War power to develop what I call punitive anticommunism. It also examines the impact of US and Cold War politics on social control, racial ideology, and racial capitalism in Haiti.

**Rezime :** Papye sa egzamine kouman yon leta kaseral gwo ponyèt ann Ayiti te pran chè pandan ventyèm syèk la sou lobedyans anpi ameriken an. Objektif papye sa a tou se konble yon vid sou istwa kaseral Etazini an mwen rele « yon rezo transnasyonal kaseral » antan m ap montre ki jan sistèm sa a te monte pou disipline Ayisyen yo nan itilize yo kòm yon fonksyon dirèk ak espresyon pouvwa Gè fwad la nan lide pou devlope sa mwen rele yon anti kominis pinitif. Atik sa a egzamine enpak politik Etazini ak Gè Fwad la genyen sou kontwòl sosyal, ideyoloji rasyal ak kapitalis rasyal ann Ayiti.

*In colonial regions, however, the proximity and frequent, direct intervention by the police and the military ensure the colonized are kept under close scrutiny, and contained by rifle butts and napalm.*

—Frantz Fanon,

*Wretched of the Earth (1963)*

*Neo-colonialism is also the worst form of imperialism. For those who practice it, it means power without responsibility and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress.*

—Kwame Nkrumah,

*Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism (1965)*

Rolande Michell was a prisoner at Haiti's Fort Dimanche prison for six months in the late 1970s after he was "arrested"—others describe it as kidnapped—by the dreaded militia known as the tontons macoutes. Like thousands of other prisoners at Fort Dimanche, he was denounced, imprisoned, and tortured after being branded a "communist." Michell describes Fort Dimanche as "a bad place" where he was starved. Yet he claims he "was fortunate": he lived, but "they starved men to death. They beat men to death." Michell, whose face is deformed from a beating he took with a broom handle in the prison, describes the torture that he witnessed: "I saw them cut into the muscle of one man's leg so he would limp. You could hear men screaming all the time."<sup>1</sup> During the Duvalier regimes (1957–1986), Haiti's prisons were used to eliminate political rivals and dissidents while the Duvaliers exploited Haiti's population to enrich themselves and their allies. Critically, the Duvaliers were able to do this with the support of the United States because they claimed to be containing communism. Together, under the guise of Cold War rhetoric, the United States and Haiti established a transnational carceral network that was premised on what I call a punitive anticommunist ideology that targeted the Haitian working class and rural peasantry, creating a Haitian oligarchy that preyed on and oppressed the people.<sup>2</sup>

The history of Haiti is one of power and predation based on foreign manipulation and internal class and racial divisions, which the United States was able to exploit for its own Cold War objectives.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Michell's story of captivity is one of many examples. This article chronicles the rise of Haiti's totalitarian carceral state during the twentieth century through the lens of US empire. Addressing an absence in US carceral history, I show how what I call a transnational carceral network operated to discipline Haitians as a direct function and expression of US Cold War power.<sup>4</sup> I also examine the impact of US and Cold War politics on social control, racial ideology, and racial capitalism in Haiti.

Michel Foucault defines a carceral network as "disciplinary mechanisms that function throughout the society," including schools, hospitals, prisons, churches, "public administrations and private enterprises," and any institution that works "in the normalization of the power of normalization, in the arrangement of a power-knowledge over individuals." Furthermore, "The carceral network, in its compact or disseminated forms, with its systems of insertion, distribution, surveillance, observation," normalizes power relationships in society.<sup>5</sup> Here, I use "carceral" to encompass the various tools, mechanisms, and institutions that the state uses to coerce, manipulate, and discipline individuals to conform to and normalize social relations in a modern bourgeois capitalist system. That is, carceral states

exist to protect free-market growth and its processes, while normalizing extreme wealth inequality and rationalizing poverty as a character flaw. This definition does not preclude race as its center of analysis: I also draw on internal colonial theory—which analyzes the exploitation and domination within a country's borders of a minority group by a dominant group, premised on economic, cultural, and racial subjugation—to show how the carceral state and neocolonial power relations occurred in tandem to secure patterns of racial domination.<sup>6</sup>

Carceral state scholars have placed the development of prisons and policing at the center of political power and racial oppression in the United States. They have analyzed this power in the contexts of Jim Crow-era extensions of coerced labor and enslavement, urban policing, Western settler-colonialism, Southern prison plantations, resistance against carceral regimes, and the effects of carceral discipline on notions of sexuality and gender.<sup>7</sup> Recently, more historians have begun exploring the global and transnational connections among the rise of mass incarceration, policing, and US empire.<sup>8</sup> But, aside from Stuart Schrader's study of policing policies as a function of the Cold War, historians of the US carceral state have yet to take up a transnational lens to better understand how state-to-state power arrangements shaped carceral discipline, power, and policing enforcement across national boundaries.<sup>9</sup> This article takes up that absence by showing how the transnational carceral network operated to discipline Haitians as a direct function and expression of US Cold War power through punitive anticommunism.

Within Haiti, François Duvalier ruled Haiti through necropolitics, which Achille Mbembe defines as the power of the state over life and death.<sup>10</sup> He did this through his personal police force, the *tontons macoutes*, which was embedded at the ground level within Haitian society. Through the *macoutes*, Duvalier could surveil, discipline, police, praise, reward, and control Haitian people. The *macoutes* were part of Duvalier's totalitarian carceral archipelago that stretched out from the urban capital of Port-au-Prince into the countryside.

This article also examines the impact of US and Cold War politics on social control, racial ideology, and racial capitalism in Haiti.<sup>11</sup> During the 1915–1934 US Occupation, US foreign policy toward Haiti was informed by racism that relegated Black Haitians to the margins of elite society. For example, during the Occupation, the United States restructured the Haitian Army from an army that protected its borders to an army that took over internal security.<sup>12</sup> Led by the occupying US marines and lighter-skinned Haitians, this official police force, or *Garde d'Haïti*, was created to stabilize Haitian society in a way that would protect US financial

interests.<sup>13</sup> The Army had become a policing force whose sole purpose was the oppression and subjection of other Haitians, while excluding Black Haitians from position of power.<sup>14</sup> In response, Black Haitians espoused a political ideology of *noirisme*—a form of Black power—that paved the way for Duvalier, with the support of Black peasants, to gain total control over the lives of Haitians.

### TONTONS MACOUTES

*François Duvalier was the political expression of a disparate gathering of social forces struggling to get a piece of the cake in the government, a position of power at the head of the nation. "Papa Doc" had behind him the black feudal lords, the middle ranked [sic] professionals, army officers and public administrators, small and medium sized businesses and a crowd fighting for social promotion. One could say that "Duvalierism" was the expression of some kind of an alliance of feudal landlords and petty bourgeoisie (middle classes).*

—From the pamphlet *"Human Rights and 'Liberalization' in Haiti under Jean Claude Duvalier"*<sup>15</sup>

*Gen bwa dèyè bannann ou.*

— *Kreyòl proverb, figuratively meaning having some connection to the Duvalier regime for personal protection*<sup>16</sup>

After the Occupation ended in 1934, President Sténio Vincent declared it "the year of [Haiti's] second independence."<sup>17</sup> Although Haitians celebrated *désoccupation*, the new year marked, as historian Matthew J. Smith notes, "the beginning of a long and intense ideological and political conflict that ultimately led, in 1957, to one of the most brutal dictatorships the Caribbean has ever experienced."<sup>18</sup> The Occupation had unwittingly inflamed the political ideology of the Haitian working-class to a more radical and nationalist footing.

In 1950, Haitian general Paul E. Magloire, with the support of the United States, staged a coup and became president of Haiti.<sup>19</sup> However, Magloire's power began to wane by 1956 as political rivals began lining up to take his place, and students began mobilizing mass demonstrations demanding his resignation. In 1957, Magloire's regime collapsed, and amid the chaotic election and political turmoil, the popular Daniel Fignolé was appointed provisional Haitian president. But after just nineteen days, Fignolé was toppled in another coup. Although not directly involved, the United States knew about plans in 1957 for the coup that overthrew Fignolé. Haitian operatives in Haiti told officials in Washington D.C. that

Figinolé's policies were "comparable with the soviets."<sup>20</sup> François Duvalier, who ran on a populist *noiriste* platform—a form of Black power that pushed back against the prominence of lighter-skinned urban elites within the state's hierarchy and promised the ostracized and oppressed rural peasant class a political voice—became president.<sup>21</sup>

Once in control, Duvalier quickly recognized that the army had been transformed by the Occupation into a tool for projecting US power into Haiti. He responded by undermining the military, dismissing the entire general staff and replacing them with loyalists. He took direct command of elite units in Port-au-Prince and dispersed the remaining 4,800 troops through the country, severely weakening the chief of staff's ability to mass a coup. Finally, he took personal control of much of the military's weaponry.<sup>22</sup> The most significant move that Duvalier made to solidify his control was the formation of the *macoutes*, also known as the *Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale* (VSN). Under the Duvalier regime, policing and security were maintained by the *macoutes*. The *macoutes* came from the rural peasantry, encompassing the poor, unemployed, and primarily dark-skinned Haitians who supported Duvalier during his campaign for president, and they pledged personal loyalty to Duvalier.<sup>23</sup> In forming the *macoutes*, Duvalier organized an army of loyalists who for the first time felt that they would have a say in Haiti's politics.<sup>24</sup> Joining the *macoutes* gave these peasants the opportunity to finally regain some power.

Duvalier ruled Haiti through necropolitics, and the *macoutes* were part of Duvalier's necropolitical regime. With control of the *macoutes*, Duvalier's totalitarian carceral archipelago extended from Port-au-Prince into the countryside. Through the *macoutes*, Duvalier controlled the lives of all Haitians. Georges Fournon, who escaped Haiti in 1974 because of the presence of *macoutes* in his university, describes them as "opportunists" who had "no political ideology." He argues that saying that the *macoutes* had a political ideology was "a misrepresentation of the *macoute*. There were mulatto *macoutes*, there were wealthy *macoutes*. They were in the army, everywhere you had *macoutes*. So, you had different types of *macoutes*, and they joined the regime for different reasons." One reason that Fournon said led to the large number of *macoutes* in Haiti was that "some [people] joined the *macoutes* for their personal safety. Because if somebody threatened you at that time, and if they knew you were [a] *macoute*, then they would back off." This was because a *macoute* represented Duvalier, and insulting, harming, or betraying Duvalier through his *macoutes* meant death. Conversely, to be a *macoute* meant staying alive.<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, the fear of Duvalier was prominent throughout Haitian society. Not only did people fear his necropolitical ideology and their own neighbors turning against them, but they also knew they would have little chance of getting a fair hearing. According to Fouron, Duvalier was the ultimate distributor of justice in Haiti:

[For] all issues that had to be resolved, you didn't go to court, you went to Duvalier personally and he gave you a card with his name, with his signature [on] it. Once you flash that card, everybody backed off. So, Duvalier had no ideology or anything like that, although he rambled about Black nationalism or this crap. It is not [ideological], it was part opportunism.

Joining the macoutes was an opportunity for Haitians of every class and color, male or female, to gain favoritism from Duvalier or protect themselves.<sup>26</sup>

François Pierre-Louis, who escaped Haiti in 1974 as a teenager, experienced the fear and terror that Duvalier's necropolitical operatives evoked in Haitian society. In fact, Pierre-Louis's story is a firsthand account of the power that Duvalier's necropolitics had over the lives of Haitians. As he described, his uncle was in the military and plotted against Duvalier. However, after burying a cache of weapons that he had collected for a possible coup, the uncle "was betrayed by some other people. He was asked to surrender. Instead of surrendering, he blew himself up with a grenade." After this, "Duvalier cut off his head, put it on a stick to go around the country to show the people what can happen if you betray him." After this incident, Duvalier had "all the males on my mother's side" of the family "killed." Because of this, Pierre-Louis' mother

was always afraid. My mother had two boys . . . so she was always afraid Duvalier would hurt us. So, I remember being young and one day, Haitian Flag Day, my brother and I were dressed in the red and black flag of Duvalier, and, you know, I always wondered why my mother did that. And then one day, I spoke to my mother about why would you dress us in that flag? And she said, "I was trying to protect my sons, not wanting Duvalier to hurt us because you are male, you are part of the people who are against him." The term for that is *Camoquin* [*kamoken*]. That term means people who oppose Duvalier.

Pierre-Louis's mother was fearful that, like her brother, her children could be labeled anti-Duvalierist by anyone in their community, so she hid them as best as she could.<sup>27</sup>

While Duvalier had taken steps to reduce the United States' influence in Haiti through weakening the army, he strategically supported its anticommunism efforts, ongoing throughout the Caribbean, by operating the macoutes as an anticommunist or counterinsurgency policing regime.<sup>28</sup> Papa Doc used the Cold War and the United States' fear of the spread of communism to his advantage. In 1958, exiled anti-Duvalier partisans invaded Haiti. These anti-Duvalierists were led by former Haitian army officers Alix Pasquet and Phillippe Dominique, along with Arthur Payne, a former deputy sheriff from Miami County who had traveled to Haiti but had been expelled by the Duvalier government after he was accused of plotting to help presidential hopeful Louis Déjoie overthrow the 1957 election results. There were further claims that former president Magloire had also assisted the rebels. Duvalier's forces were able to repel the invaders and maintain control, but Duvalier used the incident to strengthen his position as a vital anticommunist ally for the United States. Duvalier maintained that the rebellion was communist-inspired, outrightly accused Déjoie and Magloire of being communists, and declared that he had discovered and disbanded a "communist ring" within the Haitian army. Unsurprisingly, the United States, under the leadership of anticommunist president Dwight D. Eisenhower, responded to Duvalier's claims with more aid. US officials worried that an end to the Duvalier regime would disrupt stability in the region, paving the way for communist-inspired political revolutions.<sup>29</sup> Duvalier strategically employed the "Red Scare" to gain resources while his real goal was not to suppress communism but actually to increase his control over the Haitian people and domestic politics.<sup>30</sup>

The United States bought Duvalier's anticommunist rhetoric, which was coupled with his vote in the Organization of American States (OAS) to impose sanctions on Cuba, with financial and technical support. As a result, the US provided training for the Haitian Army, which Duvalier hoped would strengthen the effectiveness of his macoutes, and sent more than US\$43 million in aid to the Duvalier regime between 1958 and 1963.<sup>31</sup> In 1963, however, the United States moved from supporting Haiti and Duvalier to taking a vague position dictated on "coolness and correctness."<sup>32</sup> The idealistic president John F. Kennedy had been turned off by Duvalier's human rights violations, which did not fit into his principled and softer approach to communist containment in the Caribbean. Accordingly, Kennedy cut off aid and suspended diplomatic relations with Haiti.<sup>33</sup> After Lyndon B. Johnson ascended to the presidency

in November 1963, the United States' position shifted moderately to regain Haiti's support in the OAS against Cuba. The United States reversed an earlier veto of a US\$2.4 million loan by the Inter-American Development Bank to Haiti, and new US ambassador Benson Timmons attended the second anniversary celebration of Papa Doc's self-appointment as "president for life."<sup>34</sup>

However, when conservative law-and-order candidate Richard Nixon was elected in 1968, Duvalier thought he could gain further favor and solidify US support. In 1969, Duvalier passed "The Anti-Communist Law of 28 April 1969," which defines "communist activities, no matter what their form as crimes against the security of the state, punishable by the death penalty."<sup>35</sup> The macoutes were central to Duvalier's crackdown on communism in Haiti to appease US interests. He had hundreds of suspected communists arrested and presumably executed, after which he declared Haiti "the most solid bastion against communism in the Caribbean."<sup>36</sup> According to Fouron, the United States was aware of how the macoutes operated:

And for the Americans, it was a matter of supporting the regime to prevent the spread of communism in the region. That's all they got. They didn't care about the people who were being murdered. They didn't care about the people who were starving. It didn't matter to them.

In fact, a US ambassador to Haiti, Clinton Knox, was known as a macoute because of his "fierce" and "enthusiastic" defense of the Duvalier regime in the early 1970s.<sup>37</sup> Knox was so close to the Duvalier regime that he and US consul general Ward Christensen were kidnapped by unnamed anti-Duvalier activists on January 23, 1973, in Port-au-Prince. The activists targeted the two Americans instead of a member of the Duvalier regime because, as Rachèle Magloire explains, "It was . . . a way to denounce the United States' support of the [Duvalier] government in power." Targeting Knox and Christensen was an attempt to bring attention to the Duvalier regimes' oppression and US complicity. "The American Embassy," Magloire describes, "has always enjoyed a great influence on political decisions in Haiti." The activists felt that they would get more attention from the Duvalier regime by attacking the US diplomats who were close to Duvalier instead of kidnapping Haitian citizens or officials. The activists demanded the release of thirty-one political prisoners, a ransom of US\$500,000, and a flight for themselves and the released prisoners to Mexico. Knox and Christensen were eventually released, and twelve political prisoners, plus the kidnappers, were flown to Mexico.



The Haitian government, rather than acknowledge that it held political prisoners—which it denied—kept the incident under wraps and claimed that the activists were communist “terrorists” to protect its reputation with the United States.<sup>38</sup>

As Pierre-Louis notes, if “you were labeled a communist . . . it was a death sentence for you. Because they would take you to jail.” He continues:

And my memories of Duvalier, I remember when I was young . . . those World War II jeeps . . . came to your neighborhood at night. They came in to pick up someone from the house, someone’s house. And in the morning, you would see people as if they had a death in their family, but they couldn’t speak. And I remember one night, I mean, I don’t know why this is, you know, so vivid in my mind, the jeep coming. Could have been 1:00 or 2:00 A.M., picking up a neighbor, the son of a neighbor. And in the morning . . . no one could talk about it.

People in Haiti saw the crimes and violence of the macoutes under Duvalier, but they feared speaking out or they too would become victims.<sup>39</sup>

In this way, not only the macoutes but all Haitians who hoped to avoid the displeasure of Duvalier acted as necropolitical agents—operating in the name of Duvalier, the state, and US policy—who enforced anticommunism through carceral power. Throughout the Duvalier era, the macoutes upheld the predatory state and allowed the privileged Haitian elites, now typically consisting of current and former macoutes, to continue to exploit the poor. Functioning as Duvalier’s personal security force, they reinforced the totalitarian carceral state through necropolitics by eliminating political opposition and forcing most Haitians to live in fear.

### **DUNGEONS OF DEATH:**

#### **THE PRISONS OF HAITI DURING THE 1970s COLD WAR**

*First of all, when you go to jail, the regime does not consider you as a human being, but as an animal. They don’t send you to jail so that you ever get out one day; they send you to your death. Sure, they don’t always shoot you, but they kill you by mistreatment. Those who survive owe it neither to the good food, nor to medical attention, but to sheer luck. I don’t know what force allows one to survive at all.*

—*Prisoner at Fort Dimanche*<sup>40</sup>

While macoutes enacted Cold War anticommunism through necropolitics, the prisons of Haiti functioned as dungeons of Cold War transnational

carceral states. In the repressive totalitarian state, human rights were almost nonexistent in Haiti. After François Duvalier died and his son, Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier, took his place in 1971 and ushered in a new era of “liberalization” in Haiti, killings by state security agents continued, but now they were done clandestinely rather than in broad daylight to maintain Haiti’s new public image of respectability and concern for human rights. As an article in the *Village Voice* noted in 1977, “Baby Doc (Jean-Claude) and his associates have a keener sense of public relations. Now caring for the tourists’ digestions, the killers come at dawn while everybody is asleep.”<sup>41</sup>

During the Duvalier era, Haiti had many prisons throughout the country, with three major ones located in Port-au-Prince: Casernes Dessalines, Pénitencier National, and Fort Dimanche. Casernes Dessalines and Pénitencier National were smaller prisons, used to incarcerate, interrogate, and torture prisoners accused of communism or anti-Duvalier propaganda before moving them to Fort Dimanche.<sup>42</sup> While at Casernes Dessalines, prisoners were integrated by a man named Raymond, described by former captives as “the most savage torturer in Casernes Dessalines.” His methods of torture included forcing prisoners to spend “the entire day and night handcuffed, standing and facing a wall.”<sup>43</sup> While in this position, it was not uncommon for the interrogators to beat the prisoners in the legs, arms, back, and head until they confessed or passed out. The Pénitencier National was described as “a horrifying place.”<sup>44</sup> In both facilities, prisoners were crammed together in overcrowded cells, poorly fed, and denied hygienic and medical care. Certainly, these prisons were miserable places to be, even for a short period.

Fort Dimanche is the most infamous. Originally built by French colonists prior to the Revolution, Fort Dimanche was used by both François and Jean-Claude Duvalier to hold political prisoners.<sup>45</sup> Described by the *New York Times* as “the Auschwitz of Haiti,” the prison was notorious for the torture and murder of the Duvaliers’ political opponents. One former prisoner describes Fort Dimanche as “one of the most horrifying place[s] of detention in the world.”<sup>46</sup> Another refers to it as the “Dungeon of Death,” and claims to have “witnessed the annihilation of a generation, a silent genocide” of hundreds of Haitian prisoners at the prison.<sup>47</sup>

Fort Dimanche was the epicenter of the Duvaliers’ oppressive and violent regime. Prisoners, usually suspected communists, were routinely interrogated and beaten by guards. The guards would beat the prisoners until they confessed, passed out, or died. One former prisoner describes an interrogation session at Fort Dimanche in which he repeatedly denied that

he was a communist. "They tied my hands behind my back and forced me to sit down," he stated. "Then the torturer began to punch and slap. . . . I was hit constantly all over my head and face without a minute of rest. The commander told me that this treatment would continue as long as I did not admit that I was a communist."<sup>48</sup>

Another prisoner describes being "jacked," a technique commonly applied by the rural police against the peasants but now used within the prisons to coerce a confession. "The jack" consists of tying the prisoner's arms and feet, and "the bound arms are then imprisoned between the legs and the four limbs locked by means of a stick which is slid in transversally."<sup>49</sup> A prisoner says that the guards

would have him [the prisoner] suspended between two tables on which rested the ends of the stick. The victim thus found himself in a fetus-like position, face and buttocks exposed to the torturers. The latter then, by hitting the prisoner alternately, made him swing like a pendulum.<sup>50</sup>

Death was not an uncommon occurrence when this type of torture was used. Additionally, Duvalier paid bounties to the interrogators for each confession they acquired. Thus, obtaining a confession, real or imagined, was financially beneficial to the interrogators.<sup>51</sup>

The conditions in Fort Dimanche can only be described as terrifying, according to prisoners, who stated that the mental torture was just as bad as the physical. As one former prisoner remembers, "the electric light is on day and night," which made sleep difficult. They continue, "Inside the cell there is a pail for urine and defecation. . . . No bed of course, only a straw mat, as thin as cardboard, not long enough for a normal size person, on which we lay on the cement floor. The same mat has been used for 2, 3, 4 years."<sup>52</sup> Disease was rampant throughout the prison as prisoners were only allowed to shower once a day, usually very early in the morning, and this "shower" lasted less than one minute as a guards beat them with sticks before rushing them back to their cells.<sup>53</sup>

Another prisoner recounts that during his three years in the prison, he witnessed the death of 25 men, and another says that he counted 180 deaths during his eighteen months of incarceration.<sup>54</sup> In fact, prisoners would say that in Fort Dimanche, "when you die, you die in your coffin." This refers to the fact that when a prisoner died, guards rolled their body up in the straw mat that the prisoner used for bedding and dumped them in the ground. As one describes it, "They wrap and tie the corpse in it, put it on a wheelbarrow and throw it away in the *bayahonde*, the prison's

backyard.”<sup>55</sup> It is estimated that over three thousand people died within the walls of Fort Dimanche during the Duvalier era, but no one is certain.<sup>56</sup> Haitians who lost family and friends in the prison claim that the bodies were buried in the surrounding fields, and when those fields became full, the guards “just dumped the bodies on the ground and threw dirt over them.”<sup>57</sup>

Lionel Derenoncourt, a former prisoner, recounts his story of being detained by Haiti’s “secret police.” Derenoncourt had worked for Service Chretien Haïti, a faith-based community advocacy organization, where he came across “the corruption of some presidents of community councils [macoutes] engaged in our program of food distribution.” Soon after he recommended terminating certain programs to end the corruption, he received a “denunciation letter” that depicted him “as a person ‘likely to be a Communist.’” After two weeks of harassment against himself, his family, and his colleagues, he was arrested and sent to Cassernes Dessalines,<sup>58</sup> where he witnessed at least three incidents of torture and abuse that left the victims physically mutilated.<sup>59</sup>

Truly, Duvalier and his henchmen used violence and torture against prisoners to shock the population. Each act of violence against the bodies of the prisoners served as a performance that demonstrated Duvalier’s power, and their own complete lack of power. Duvalier purposefully targeted the bodies of his prisoners to display the entirety of his control. In fact, Duvalier’s embrace of torture made his rule total: he ruled the Haitian state, and he used torture to establish that he ruled the Haitian people’s bodies.<sup>60</sup>

Duvalier’s necropolitics stretched into the dungeons of Fort Dimanche as death was widespread and medical care was minimal. In 1975, 55 out of 170 prisoners died at the prison, and in 1976, 96 deaths were recorded.<sup>61</sup> In 1986, Amnesty International attempted to intervene on behalf of the prisoners. In a report on human rights in Haiti, the organization expressed concern over the treatment of political prisoners, noting: “One man arrested in November 1984 stated that he was taken to the Casernes Dessalines on 2 November and beaten several times with an iron bar covered with rubber.” The man further claimed, the letter states, “that a then government minister was present during some of the beatings, and at one point he said he was kicked in the face by the minister.”<sup>62</sup> In this way, the prisons of Haiti served as a location for political retribution and silencing—with the blessing of the United States, as long as it was in the name of anticommunism.

### ***LE SIPHONAGE* AND ANTI-IMMIGRATION POLICIES IN THE UNITED STATES**

While the Duvaliers' rural policing and torturous prison dungeons ensured Cold War punitive carceral discipline and power, they and their family extorted the nation with a rapacious kind of corruption and exploitation that was itself criminal. Throughout the liberalization process under Baby Doc, not only did the carceral state and the state violence grow, but the predatory state continued to feed off the Haitian working class. A 1982 report to OAS by the human rights group Lawyers Committee for International Human Rights noted that Haiti "is one of a handful of nations sometimes classified as 'fourth world' because of its economic situation." Despite the liberalization project, Haiti remained "the most desperately poor country in [the Western] hemisphere, with a per capita income of less than \$235," less than half that of the next poorest nation, Bolivia.<sup>63</sup>

The Duvalier regime appropriated a tremendous amount of money from the public treasury, which had a devastating impact on the Haitian economy. Baby Doc and his government stole more money from the Haitian people than was in the annual national budget. The estimated total, based on canceled checks and bank transactions, is more than US\$505 million. Journalists and activists in Haiti have reported that besides his annual salary, a US\$2.4 million expense account, and a US\$2 million supplementary account, Baby Doc stole US\$120.5 million and his wife Michèle Duvalier US\$94.6 million from 1981 to 1985.<sup>64</sup>

The Duvalier regime used the money to live a very lavish lifestyle. For example, in 1985, Michèle Duvalier spent more than US\$60,000 on airfare to travel from Haiti to Paris aboard the Concorde jet liner. Foreign diplomats noted that the amount Madame Duvalier spent in Paris was "astronomical." The *New York Post* claimed that while in Paris, "Michelle [*sic*] renewed her wardrobe for the coming year, purchased Christmas gifts for friends and relatives back home and bought a painting, perhaps a Picasso." The trip was never officially disclosed to the Haitian people who, the *Post* reports, are "impoverished" and "reeling from fuel and cash shortages, but the news spread quickly on the grapevine."<sup>65</sup> It was no secret to Haitians that the Duvaliers were stealing money from the public. They refer to this as *le siphonage*, or the siphoning.<sup>66</sup> While Duvalier built a carceral state to ensure his power, none of this economic exploitation was ever pursued as a crime against the nation and people of Haiti. Indeed, Duvalier's gains were part of his ill-gotten rewards for instituting the Cold War's punitive anticommunism and transnational carceral capitalism.

The US turned a blind eye to the corruption of the Duvalier regime and in fact encouraged its exploitation of the Haitian working class. Throughout this period, the United States continued to praise Haiti's "attractiveness . . . as a site for US investment," specifically "in labor-intensive assembly and transformation industries." A March 1982 report prepared by the American Embassy in Port-au-Prince, titled "Foreign Economic Trends and Their Implications for the United States," noted that "Haiti's greatest resource is its abundant supply of skilled and cheap labor." It also made a point to highlight Haiti's "favorable tax incentives, duty-free import privileges for equipment and related investment imports, and proximity to US markets." All this combined to make Haiti an excellent location for "labor-intensive assembly industries producing lower cost non-luxury goods."<sup>67</sup>

The US State Department reported that Haiti "is making progress toward improving the human rights situation in Haiti and progress toward implementing political reforms which are essential to the development of democracy in Haiti, including the establishment of political parties, free elections, and freedom of the press."<sup>68</sup> However, as Amnesty International noted:

The change in president from father to son has not altered the nature of the regime in any substantial way. There are, however, overall differences in detail which are significant when considering the overall power structure. The palace in Port-au-Prince contains today a group of people who are much more conspicuously interested in making money than they were in the days of Papa Doc's rule.<sup>69</sup>

While the Duvaliers and US capitalist interests were getting rich from the Haitian treasury and population, the Haitian government spent "less domestic revenue per capita than any other country in the hemisphere on such social necessities as public education, public health or agricultural extensions services." Only 1 percent of the rural population had access to clean drinking water; there was only one secondary school for every 35 prisons in Haiti, and one schoolteacher for every 189 security personnel. *Le siphonage* worked to reinforce the predatory carceral state. This state fed off the poor for the financial and material benefit of the few, and it incarcerated or eliminated political dissenters through massive carceral violence.<sup>70</sup>

During this period, many from Haiti's rural and working classes attempted to flee the country. These immigrants were escaping the poverty,

violence, and terror of the transnational carceral network between the United States and Haiti in the guise of Baby Doc's liberalization project. Many could not afford a plane ticket or obtain a tourist visa, so they traveled by boat. Media images of overcrowded and dilapidated boats filled with poor Black people seeking asylum did not sit well with the white US public, who had been fed decades of propaganda about Haiti as a backward and uncivilized country.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, in the United States, conservative law-and-order politicians were riling up support against the perceived threat of Black lawlessness and crime.<sup>72</sup> With the fear of Black criminality on their shores, US officials reacted to the first Haitians who arrived by boat as if they could soon overwhelm the country. Accordingly, US Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) officials labeled Haitians as economic rather than political refugees.<sup>73</sup> This meant that Haitian "boat people" could easily be denied asylum. Between 1972 and 1980, 50,000 Haitians applied for asylum, while fewer than 100 were approved. This is a stark contrast to the figures from places that were central to the United States' Cold War interests: Cuba and Southeast Asia had 600,000 and 200,000 asylum seekers approved respectively.<sup>74</sup>

To maintain control of and deter future Haitian immigration, the US adopted what federal judge James Lawrence King called "the Haitian Program."<sup>75</sup> The Haitian Program consisted of a collaboration between the State Department and INS to prevent Haitian asylum seekers from entering the United States. In addition to denying asylum seekers due process to enter the country, it also used detention, the denial of work permits, and expedited exclusion hearings to quickly return Haitians to Haiti.<sup>76</sup> As A. Naomi Paik observes, "The Haitian Program was the first of its kind, an anti-asylum policy directed at a particular national population."<sup>77</sup> Within the context of US punitive anticommunism, the carceral partnership between the United States and Haiti, and the rise of law-and-order politics, Haitians were only valuable to the United States if they remained in Haiti.

In 1980, Judge King ruled in *Haitian Refugee Center v. Civiletti* that the United States' Haitian Program was a "transparently discriminatory program designed to deport Haitian nationals and no one else."<sup>78</sup> The ruling prohibited INS from deporting future refugees. Additionally, the Refugee Act of 1980 made it illegal to give preference to refugees from communist countries over those from noncommunist countries.<sup>79</sup> However, the election of Ronald Reagan as US president that same year ensured that US anticommunism in the Caribbean would only be strengthened in the ensuing decade. One week after his election, Reagan had businessman and staunch anticommunist David Rockefeller travel throughout Latin



America to reassure the military dictators of Chile, Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay that Reagan was willing to work with them, no matter what their record on human rights might be.<sup>80</sup> Reagan's commitment to anticommunist in Latin America, regardless of the oppressive nature of the governing regime, was iron-clad, as the 1983 US invasion of Grenada made abundantly clear.<sup>81</sup>

In Haiti, one journalist noted that with "Reagan in the palace, [the Duvalier regime] could do whatever [they] wanted."<sup>82</sup> The month before Reagan assumed office, Baby Doc declared, "Le bal est terminé" (the party is over) for journalists and critics of the Duvalier regime. In response, journalist Jean Dominique, who would be forced into exile for his opposition to the Duvalier regime, wrote the editorial "Bon appétit messieurs," in which he warned the country what would happen without an independent media, and sarcastically stated that with its demise, "all will be beautiful, all will be peaceful, all will be idyllic, all will be pink and wonderful."<sup>83</sup> On November 28, 1980, less than one month after Dominique's editorial and three weeks after Reagan's electoral victory, the Duvalier regime launched an offensive directed against anyone seen as opposing the authoritarian rule of the government.

Reagan believed he had inherited "the worst immigration problem imaginable" and organized a task force on immigration that had two goals: to develop a contingency plan in the event of another large-scale exodus of "boat people" from Cuba and Haiti, and to stop immigration at its source.<sup>84</sup> The Reagan administration appealed and successfully overturned *Civeletti* in December 1980, which meant that he could continue to have Haitian refugees incarcerated in detention centers across the United States, Puerto Rico, and Guantanamo Bay. In September 1981, the Reagan administration, with cooperation from Jean-Claude Duvalier, expanded its carceral borders and established a cooperative agreement of interdiction.<sup>85</sup> This agreement allowed the US Coast Guard to enter Haitian waters and process Haitian asylum seekers and return them to Haiti before they even set foot in the United States.<sup>86</sup> In return for containing the loss of valuable labor from the Haitian workforce, Duvalier promised associate US attorney general Rudolph Giuliani, one of the architects of the interdiction program, that since the Haitian migrants were economic and not political refugees, they would not be prosecuted upon return to Haiti.<sup>87</sup>

A leaflet from a New York City-based Haitian immigration rights group vividly depicted the transnational carceral partnership between the United States and Haiti during the 1980s, showing how Reagan and Baby Doc conspired to keep Haitians out of the United States and in Haiti. It portrays Reagan in a Coast Guard cutter off the shores of Haiti,



chasing down a boat filled with Haitians. Baby Doc is on the shore with a gun saying to Reagan, “Ronnie, send them back to me. I’ll take good care of them.” In response, Reagan says, “Don’t worry Jean-Claude, they don’t have documents to prove they are refugees!” Indeed, their partnership turned Haitian migrants into carceral migrants who were perceived as criminals and subject to restrictive anti-Black immigration laws in the United States.<sup>88</sup> While in Haiti, their labor was exploited by the Duvalier regime, which used state hyperviolence predicated on punitive anticommunism to discipline and control them.

The legacy of US-Haiti relations over the twentieth century is fraught with foreign interference premised upon white supremacy and capitalist exploitation. Given the history of US imperial interests interfering in Haitian politics through the carceral state, it is not surprising over the last three decades that the power vacuum in Haiti has centered around Washington as Haitian politicians and elites jockey for Washington’s approval to be the next president of the island nation. With the history of the United States’ role in undermining popular reform and democracy both domestically and abroad, through the auspices of anticommunism, it leaves little doubt how US carceral empire operates in the interest of capitalism to the detriment of the Haitian people.

By adopting a transnational lens to reveal how state-to-state carceral discipline was shaped by US Cold War influence and power, this article illuminates how Haiti responded to US power with a combination of racial capitalism and the development of a transnational carceral network. Within this context, it was acceptable that Baby Doc could continue the oppressive and predatory carceral policies of the state as long as Haiti’s markets were open for foreign investment. If Haiti improved its public image and made superficial changes to its security regimes, the United States would turn a blind eye. In this way, it would be no surprise, as one prisoner of Fort Dimanche pointed out, that during police interrogations of suspected communists or anti-Duvalier activists, “the American embassy is sometimes directly or indirectly represented.”<sup>89</sup> The oppressive violence of the Duvalier regime and the interdiction policy of the Reagan administration reinforced the transnational carceral network that extended from the United States to protect capitalist interests. This carceral network engulfed Haiti, turning it into a massive jail where any dissent against the predatory state was silenced, through either incarceration or death.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Quoted in Bragg, “The Auschwitz of Haiti.”
- <sup>2</sup> Haiti Dechoukaj Collection, “Haiti: Political Prisoners Speak Out”; Bragg, “The Auschwitz of Haiti.”
- <sup>3</sup> Casimir, *The Haitians*; Trouillot, *Haiti*.
- <sup>4</sup> Robert T. Chase discusses the need to examine the carceral state through a transnational lens in *Caging Borders and Carceral States* (4).
- <sup>5</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*, 296–298.
- <sup>6</sup> Blauner, “Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt,” 394–395.
- <sup>7</sup> Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness*; Haley, *No Mercy Here*; Balto, *Occupied Territory*; Hernández, *City of Inmates*; Chase, *We Are Not Slaves*; Thompson, *Blood in the Water*; Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*; Suddler, *Presumed Criminal*; Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor*; Perkinson, *Texas Tough*; Chase, *Caging Borders and Carceral States*; Berger and Losier, *Rethinking the American Prison Movement*; LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence*; Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy*.
- <sup>8</sup> Historians who have examined policing and incarceration within a global context include McCoy, *Policing America’s Empire*; Kuzmarov, *Modernizing Repression*; Weber, *American Purgatory*.
- <sup>9</sup> Schrader, *Badges without Borders*.
- <sup>10</sup> Mbembe, *Necropolitics*.
- <sup>11</sup> I use Cedric Robinson’s definition of racial capitalism from *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983), to show how Haitians were subjected to transnational carceral networks and state-to-state punitive power predicated on systemic racial oppression and economic inequalities.
- <sup>12</sup> Trouillot, *Haiti*: 105.
- <sup>13</sup> Renda, *Taking Haiti*; Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti*.
- <sup>14</sup> Trouillot, *Haiti*, 105; Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti*, 104–106.
- <sup>15</sup> Haitian Refugee Collection, Lionel Derenoncourt, “Human Rights and ‘Liberalization’ in Haiti under Jean Claude Duvalier,” February 1977.
- <sup>16</sup> Fouron, oral interview.
- <sup>17</sup> Quoted in Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 1.
- <sup>18</sup> Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 1.
- <sup>19</sup> *New York Times*, “Paul Magloire, Former Haitian Ruler, 94.”
- <sup>20</sup> Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 179.
- <sup>21</sup> Abbott, *Haiti*, 60–65; Trouillot, *Haiti*, 130–131, 196; Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 179–181; Kivland, *Street Sovereigns*, 66.

- <sup>22</sup> DeWind and Kinley, *Aiding Migration*, 18; Haitian Refugee Collection, Lionel Derenoncourt, "Human Rights and 'Liberalization' in Haiti under Jean Claude Duvalier."
- <sup>23</sup> O'Neill, "The Roots of Human Rights Violations in Haiti," 91.
- <sup>24</sup> Trouillot, *Haiti*, 189–190.
- <sup>25</sup> Fouron, oral interview.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> Pierre-Louis, oral interview.
- <sup>28</sup> Sprague, *Paramilitaries*, 29.
- <sup>29</sup> *New York Times*, "US Fears Chaos in a Haiti Revolt"; *Jet Magazine*, "Duvalier and Trujillo Sign Alliance against Communism"; Office of the Historian of the United States, "Background Paper"; *Junio* 7, "Éphéméride: 22 décembre 1958."
- <sup>30</sup> Gerlus, "The Effects of the Cold War," 36; *New York Times*, "Haiti's President Quells Revolt."
- <sup>31</sup> *New York Times*, "Haiti's President Extols US Ties"; *New York Times*, "Meat Plant for Port-au-Prince."
- <sup>32</sup> Office of the Historian of the United States, "Letter from the Ambassador in Haiti (Knox) to the Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs (Meyer)."
- <sup>33</sup> Grandin, *Empire's Workshop*, 47–49; Gerlus, "The Effects of the Cold War," 37.
- <sup>34</sup> Scanlan and Loescher, "Human Rights," 325.
- <sup>35</sup> Haiti Collection, Amnesty International, "Haiti: Human Rights Violations: October 1980–October 1981."
- <sup>36</sup> Office of the Historian of the United States, "Intelligence Note from the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Hughes) to Secretary of State Rogers."
- <sup>37</sup> Fouron, oral interview; Byrd, *The Black Republic*, 243.
- <sup>38</sup> Moïse Yves, "Did You Know an American Ambassador?"
- <sup>39</sup> Pierre-Louis, oral interview.
- <sup>40</sup> Haiti Dechoukaj Collection, anonymous, "Haiti: Political Prisoners Speak Out," July 28, 1973, 7.
- <sup>41</sup> Hentoff, "Baby Doc King of the Zombies Now."
- <sup>42</sup> Haitian Refugee Collection, Lionel Derenoncourt, "Human Rights and 'Liberalization' in Haiti under Jean Claude Duvalier."
- <sup>43</sup> Haiti Dechoukaj Collection, anonymous, "Haiti: Political Prisoners Speak Out," July 28, 1973, 13.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid.

- 45 Bragg, "The Auschwitz of Haiti."
- 46 Haiti Dechoukaj Collection, anonymous, "Fourth Testimony," in "Haiti: Political Prisoners Speak Out," July 28, 1973, 5–6.
- 47 Lemoine, *Fort-Dimanche, Dungeon of Death*.
- 48 Haiti Dechoukaj Collection, anonymous, "Haiti: Political Prisoners Speak Out," July 28, 1973, 10–12.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Haiti Dechoukaj Collection, anonymous, "Haiti: Political Prisoners Speak Out"; Bragg, "The Auschwitz of Haiti."
- 55 Haiti Dechoukaj Collection, anonymous, "Haiti: Political Prisoners Speak Out," July 28, 1973, 6.
- 56 Bragg, "The Auschwitz of Haiti."
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 Haitian Refugee Collection, Lionel Derenoncourt, "Human Rights and 'Liberalization in Haiti under Jean Claude Duvalier.'"
- 59 Haiti Dechoukaj Collection, anonymous, "Haiti: Political Prisoners Speak Out," July 28, 1973.
- 60 Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*, 1–11.
- 61 Haiti Dechoukaj Collection, anonymous, "Haiti: Political Prisoners Speak Out," July 28, 1973, 7.
- 62 Haiti Dechoukaj Collection, "Amnesty International Report 1986: Haiti."
- 63 Lawyers Committee for International Human Rights, *Violations of Human Rights in Haiti*, 8–9.
- 64 Haiti Collection, "NACLA: Report in the Americas," vol. 21, no. 3.
- 65 Haiti Dechoukaj Collection, Balfour, "Fur Flies in Haiti: Christmas Shopping Spree for First Lady," *New York Post*, December 24, 1985.
- 66 Haiti Collection, "NACLA: Report in the Americas."
- 67 Haiti Dechoukaj Collection, "Foreign Economic Trends and Their Implications for the United States," *International Marketing Information Series*, March 1982, prepared by the American Embassy, Port-au-Prince.
- 68 Haiti Collection, US State Department, "A Report on the Emigration and Human Rights Policies of the Government of Haiti and its Cooperation with United States Development Assistance Programs in Haiti."

- <sup>69</sup> Haiti Collection, Amnesty International, “The Situation in Haiti.”
- <sup>70</sup> Lawyers Committee for International Human Rights, “Violations of Human Rights in Haiti.”
- <sup>71</sup> On Haiti, race, and US culture, see, Renda, *Taking Haiti*.
- <sup>72</sup> On Blackness and crime, see Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness*; Suddler, *Presumed Criminal*; Kohler-Hausmann, *Getting Tough*.
- <sup>73</sup> Stepick, “Haitian Boat People,” 164.
- <sup>74</sup> Lindskoog, *Detain and Punish*, 16; Paik, *Rightlessness*, 90–91.
- <sup>75</sup> Paik, *Rightlessness*, 91.
- <sup>76</sup> Shull, *Detention Empire*, 73.
- <sup>77</sup> Paik, *Rightlessness*, 92.
- <sup>78</sup> King quoted in Paik, *Rightlessness*, 92; Lindskoog, *Detain and Punish*, 29–30.
- <sup>79</sup> Lindskoog, *Detain and Punish*, 57.
- <sup>80</sup> Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop*, 180.
- <sup>81</sup> Pastor, *Exiting the Whirlpool*; Stewart, *Operation Urgent Fury*.
- <sup>82</sup> Duke University Libraries, “Henec Titus sou 28 novanm 1980,” November 28, 1986.
- <sup>83</sup> David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Katrina Martin, ““Radio Haiti, You Are the Rain. If You Didn’t Fall, We Could Not Bloom”: Repression and Remembrance on November 28,” *The Devil’s Tale*, November 20, 2015.
- <sup>84</sup> Quoted in Shull, *Detention Empire*, 78–79; Paik, *Rightlessness*, 94.
- <sup>85</sup> Shull, *Detention Empire*, 82.
- <sup>86</sup> Kahn, *Islands of Sovereignty*, 4; Lindskoog, *Detain and Punish*, 58–59.
- <sup>87</sup> Shull, *Detention Empire*, 87.
- <sup>88</sup> On carceral migrants, see Kurwa and Gurusame, “Carceral Migrants.”
- <sup>89</sup> Haiti Dechoukaj Collection, “Haiti: Political Prisoners Speak Out.”

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