

POWER AND CULTURE IN 19TH-CENTURY HAITI:  
THE LEGITIMACY OF FAUSTIN SOULOUCHE<sup>1</sup>

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The political history of republican Haiti is a somber and perplexing one, a story of stagnation punctuated by atrocity in which "progress" is seldom a theme. This history has been written by Haitians, for the most part, in a spirit of national or class self-justification. Foreigners have generally approached it with a certain distaste -- handicapped as they mostly are by linguistic and cultural distance, covert racism and severely limited on-the-ground observation. As a result they have written about it, for the most part, with disapproval and in patronizing tones. In neither case has analysis generally gotten beyond the most conventional frames of reference; and in neither has the role of the Haitian people and their political culture in shaping the history of their own country loomed large.<sup>2</sup>

One reason for this unfortunate state of affairs is a bibliography which is so far heavily weighted in the late colonial and early independent periods (from the revolt of 1791

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<sup>1</sup>This essay is the product of collaboration across a wide stretch of time, race, language, nationality and disciplinary predilection between two young students of Haitian history. The first draft was a paper written by Sweet, a North American graduate student, for a seminar on "Political Legitimacy in Latin America" led by Professor Peter Smith at the University of Wisconsin in 1968. The second was a critical reworking of the same paper by Belizaire, a Haitian political activist and recent graduate in politics from the University of California at Santa Cruz, during the summer of 1992. At that time Belizaire had just finished offering an undergraduate "student-taught course" on the history of Haiti at UC Santa Cruz, under the supervision of Professor Sweet. Preparing the manuscript for publication has been a joint endeavor.

<sup>2</sup>Among the outstanding exceptions that prove this rule are James Leyburn, The Haitian People (New Haven, 1941); Maurice de Young, Man and Land in Haitian Society (Gainesville, 1958); Patrick Bellegarde-Smith, Haiti: The Breached Citadel (Boulder, 1990); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Haiti: State against Nation (NY, 1990).

to the death of Henri Cristophe in 1820), and in the contemporary period beginning with the U.S. occupation in 1915. Remarkably little attention has been paid by historians to the patterns of change during the "century in between," when the basic institutions of Haitian society were for the most part constructed without outside assistance or direction. Another problem is that there seem to be no great collections of published 19th-century official documents such as we have for most other Latin American countries, no volumes of the collected correspondence of statesmen or the testimonies of ordinary citizens, few important personal memoirs, very little historical fiction. The bulk even of archival materials for the 19th-century history of Haiti appears now to have been lost.<sup>3</sup>

The conclusion of most contemporary observers schooled in this highly unsatisfactory history has been that politics in the oldest Latin American republic is a dark mystery compounded with mayhem and ludicrous farce, in which the main themes are incompetence, brutality and bad faith. But the history of Haiti, like any other segment of humanity's experience, is by definition to some degree intelligible; and it can of course be told in such a way as to focus on actual human experience, without damage to the dignity of Haiti's people. There is as much "sense" to be made of it as there is of the history of Mexico or the United States or France; and this essay on an episode of the mid-19th century is written with that revisionist purpose in mind.

Of all Haitian governments prior to the dictatorship of François Duvalier, the one which has most frequently been the subject of censure and caricature, both at home and abroad, is that of Faustin Soulouque, who ruled the country as President and later Emperor from 1847 to 1859. Soulouque has been pictured variously as an ignorant and depraved despot, and as a posturing "Emperor Jones."<sup>4</sup> He has often been a case in point for those

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<sup>3</sup>Leyburn, Haitian People, p. 322.

arguing that the history of Haiti shows that Black people are less capable of governing themselves than the rest of the human race. But if we consider that Faustin Soulouque stayed in power for more than a decade (the fourth longest term of executive office in the history of independent Haiti), that he was a popular ruler during most of that time, and that unlike most Haitian presidents he was peaceably deposed and lived for many years in honorable retirement after his term of office, it seems likely that he has been seriously misunderstood.

The frame of reference suggested by modern social scientists with an interest in "political legitimacy" is one which can help us to reinterpret the regime of Faustin Soulouque, and its place in the history of Haitian politics. If the arguments we will advance with regard to the governance of mid-19th century Haiti are at all persuasive, it may be that they will serve as background for understanding the paradoxical behaviour, ideology and extraordinary durability of the Duvalier dictatorship and its institutions in the late 20th century -- and the prospects for political stability in the immediate future as well.

Our discussion will begin with a brief definition of political legitimacy and some forms it has taken elsewhere, as conceptual tools for our analysis. Then, following a brief survey of the political and relevant social and economic history of independent Haiti up to Soulouque's time, we will identify a number of specific political values which we believe to have been operative within the cultures of the two country's two basic political constituencies --its Black majority and its Mulatto minority -- in both in the mid-19th-century and today. Finally, we will review some of the specific political projects which Faustin Soulouque undertook during the period in which he ruled the country. These undertakings will be examined here as claims to legitimacy, whether conscious or unconscious -- claims which

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<sup>4</sup>All sources consulted convey one or the other of these images, except Rémy Bastien, "Vodoun and Politics in Haiti," in Religion & Politics in Haiti (Institute for Cross-Cultural Studies, No. 1; Washington, 1966). John Baur, "Faustin Soulouque, Emperor of Haiti," The Americas 6 (1949):131-66, presents the two images in an only slightly disguised form.

were put forth necessarily in the terms which were determined for them by the specific political values of the constituencies to whom they were directed.

### Political Legitimacy.

Legitimacy is consonance between the political undertakings (that is the behaviors and the explicit pronouncements) of a regime, and the political values or expectations of its specific constituent groups. In the case of a new regime, legitimacy is influenced by public attitudes toward the means of achieving power and toward the people to whom the leaders seem likely to listen and be responsible. But these bases for judgement quickly take second place to actual experience with the regime and its undertakings. Legitimacy is not an absolute quality, but a relative one. There is no entirely "legitimate" or "illegitimate" government. It is difficult to predict or to identify with certainty, and it is perhaps impossible to quantify. There are degrees and kinds of legitimacy, which vary greatly from government to government and period to period, and (most importantly) between differing constituent groups of the same government.

Nevertheless, some understanding of legitimacy and the basis for it in the values of a political culture is indispensable to an understanding of any country's politics. A high degree of legitimacy is conducive to widespread support within particular constituent groups, and therefore to the viability and stability of political systems. An unstable system, one which breaks down in significant ways during the transfer of power to new groups, is likely to be one which lacks legitimacy from the point of view of at least one powerful constituent group.

The concept of legitimacy can be made clearer and more manageable for discussion if we identify some of the universal categories of political value and political undertaking which comprise it. Max Weber observed that political systems can derive legitimacy from legality (the conformity of their undertakings to formal guidelines incorporated in a body of law which is acceptable to the constituencies in question), from traditionalism (the

preservation of time-honored institutions of authority such as a monarchy or the divine sanction of priesthood) and from charisma (the emanation of a "spiritual power" which conveys on its own merits the obligation to obey).<sup>5</sup>

Dorothy Emmet reinterpreted Weber's rather Germanic concept of charisma in the light of a more universal notion of "vocation," or quest for spiritual excellence, which may cause people to follow out of a rational respect for their own values as exemplified in a leader, rather than out of a presumed neurotic compulsion to be led.<sup>6</sup> It is in this more democratic sense that we use charisma as a category of legitimation. Legitimacy may also derive from achievement and expertise, from the material accomplishments of a regime and its demonstrated ability to deal effectively with new problems. This category implies a constituency alive to the possibility and the desirability of social change. The capacity for violence may also contribute to the legitimation of regimes, among constituencies which perceive dangerous enemies, as appears to have been the case in recent presidencies of the United States.<sup>7</sup>

The Haitian material suggests to us that at least three additional categories of legitimacy, applicable to many situations around the world, ought to be added to this list. The first is simple identity. Independently of other characteristics, a constituency may find leaders legitimate because it sees in them a reflection of itself, of its values and of its very limitations. This is the kind of legitimacy which President Reagan, for example, embodied more completely than President Roosevelt. The second additional category is generosity, which must be distinguished from achievement and expertise. A government which has not

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<sup>5</sup>In The Theory of Social and Economic Organization (NY, 1947), esp. pp. 328-29.

<sup>6</sup>"Prophets and their societies," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 86 (1956):13-23.

<sup>7</sup>The latter two categories were suggested by Peter Smith to the 1968 graduate seminar at Wisconsin to which reference is made above.

produced more or brought about "progress" may be found legitimate by a needy constituency for having been willing to distribute the existing wealth more equitably. A policy of land distribution, of "more bread and circuses" or of tax breaks for the wealthy would satisfy the demands implicit in this political value for one constituency or another.

Finally, we want to suggest that for many Haitians, as for other peoples around the world at any period in history, a great deal of legitimacy has inhered, paradoxically, in the inefficacy of government. That government has been most legitimate which has governed least, taxed least, repressed least, conscripted least for the army or public works, collected the least data about people, proved least capable of making its weight felt in the countryside. This same value may expressed by elite groups which feel competent to manage their affairs without government interference, and ask only to be left to their own devices.

These seven categories of political value and of claims to political legitimacy will be operative in the discussion of 19th-century Haitian history that follows. Our purpose is first to suggest what we take to have been their relative weight in the two principal competing political cultures of Haitian society, and then to make use of these analytic tools to rethink the political undertakings of the Faustin Soulouque regime, as conditioned by Haitian political culture.

#### Haiti to 1847.

The Western third of the island of Hispaniola was a forgotten corner of the Spanish Empire, frequented by buccaneer hunters of wild cattle, when it was ceded to France at the end of the 17th century. Within a hundred years, it had been developed by the introduction of hundreds of thousands of African slave laborers, and an advanced technology for raising and processing sugar cane, into the most profitable European colony in the world. In its heyday, Saint-Domingue was the archetype of a colonial plantation society: efficient in the production of a single commodity, dependent on imports for most others, opulent, arrogant, irreligious and corrupt.

In Saint-Domingue several hundreds of thousands of Black African slave laborers were brutally exploited by a few thousand French owners, soldiers and bureaucrats -- with the help of a small but growing class of locally born Mulattos. These "people of color" were themselves abused and discriminated against by the whites, and bound about by discriminatory legislation; but they were acknowledged to be indispensable as the artisans, non-commissioned officers and minor functionaries of colonial society. Some of them were even quite wealthy, especially in the mountainous South where a number of them employed slaves of their own in coffee production. Whatever the economic position and social disabilities of the Mulattos, they were exceedingly conscious and assertive of their superiority in status and opportunities to the Black majority. The Whites and Mulattos combined were never more than five per cent of the population of Saint-Domingue; Blacks comprised all of the rest.

Much has been written about the planter society of Saint-Domingue, and about the political and military history of the Revolution of 1791-1803 which led to the establishment of Haiti as the first independent nation of Latin America. Unfortunately for students of the history of the Republic, however, comparatively little attention has been paid to the society and culture of the Afro-Haitian slave majority in colonial times. Perhaps never in history has the political culture of an illiterate mass been more relevant to the structuring and operation of a national political system than in Haiti in 1803; but most of what can be said about that culture today must be based upon indirect evidence.

The death rate was high among slaves in Saint-Domingue, and the birth rate was low. The result was that large numbers of slaves had to be imported from Africa each year, to maintain the plantation labor force. As late as the end of the 18th century, nearly half of the inhabitants of the country were African-born. This meant that African cultural traditions, though battered by the traumas of the middle passage, ethnic mixing and the seasoning

process in the New World, were perhaps more vital in Saint-Domingue than anywhere else in America.

A pidgin Creole language was developed by the slaves, with French and African vocables in an African grammatical structure; an eclectic blend of African beliefs with elements of Christianity was achieved in Vodoun, the universal religion and focus of ceremonial and artistic activity among Saint-Domingue slaves. These elements of a unique Afro-Haitian culture were perfected in the slave quarters of large and impersonally managed plantations; and they flourished openly in the maroon settlements that proliferated in the mountains.<sup>8</sup> The Frenchmen and their priests were so few, and necessarily so remote from the everyday lives of most slaves, that they were unable to exert effectively that pressure for imitation of the "dominant" culture which over centuries made "second-class citizens" of Black people in most of the other plantation colonies. After 1803, it was only among the people (especially free Mulattos) who had been most closely associated with the French that the French language and Catholic religion were preferred.

The Revolution of the 1790's was won (despite massive military interventions by the British and French) by an enormous ragtag army of Blacks and Mulattos led by Dessalines, an ex-slave. Among his principal generals were Henri Christophe, once a slave, and Alexandre Pétion, a free Mulatto who had received military training in France. Dessalines was proclaimed Emperor, and ruled from the old colonial capital of Cap Français (renamed Cap Haitien) in the plantation area on the northern coastal plain. He governed with great energy for two years before being assassinated by a group of Mulatto officers. After his death, the country was divided between the successor Black kingdom of Christophe at Cap Haitien, and a rebel Mulatto republic headed by Pétion at Port-au-Prince in the South. Pétion died in 1818, and was succeeded by his close Mulatto associate, Jean-Pierre Boyer.

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<sup>8</sup>Melville Herskovits, Life in a Haitian Valley (NY, 1937), p. 39.



When Christophe died in 1820, Boyer succeeded in reuniting the country under his own leadership and remaining in power until 1843 -- the longest and most peaceful administration in Haitian history, but a period rather of complacent and ineffective government than of the rigorous nation-building that had been practiced by Dessalines and Christophe.

The infrastructure of Haiti's colonial sugar industry, its plantation buildings and cane mills, had been almost entirely destroyed during the twelve years of revolution and foreign intervention. Only the great plantation properties remained, abandoned since their French owners had been killed or forced to leave the country. Toussaint L'Ouverture, the Black general who served as Napoleon's last governor of the colony, had assigned these estates to his favorite Black and Mulatto officers or to Mulattos who could prove descent from their original owners. After Independence, all property which had belonged to Europeans was nationalized. Dessalines tried to have it distributed equitably among the veterans of the Revolution, but was unsuccessful because of Mulatto opposition. In the end, he was obliged to keep the latifundia intact, retain the system of leasing to private individuals, and employ the huge Army of Liberation to keep restless ex-slave sugar estate workers in line.

Christophe later institutionalized this oppressive regime in an elaborate Code Rural for the North, which established working hours and restrictions on the movements of field hands, and intensified the military supervision of forced labor. Thousands of field workers were used as coolies in the construction of his monumental Citadel la Ferrière and other defense works near Cap Haitien. The Army of the Revolution was never demobilized; and in the absence of any pre-existing civil service, it tended simply to assume the functions of bureaucracy at the local and regional level.<sup>9</sup>

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But freedom to Haiti's 400,000 ex-slaves meant freedom from working for other people under duress, even if ordered to do so for reasonable wages. Slavery had been abolished unequivocally and for all time in the new Republic; but the Northern regime's system of forced labor was too much like it to be popular. The whip, symbol of slavery, had been prohibited as an instrument for encouraging the productivity of estate laborers; but it was replaced under Dessalines and Christophe by the cane and the lash. Armed revolt against the Army was never a possibility for workers in the new regime; but many fled the plains along the old Maroon routes into the still-forested mountains where they squatted on the land and transformed themselves into an independent peasantry. This, naturally enough, led to a tightening of discipline over those who had stayed behind.<sup>10</sup>

In the republican South, where coffee cultivation by Mulatto smallholders had served to diversify the class structure and system of exploitation before the Revolution, republican government was less authoritarian but at the same time less efficient. Pétion distributed the new national domain among Army veterans (fifteen hectares for a soldier, more for officers according to rank); and put what was left up for sale to the general public in small parcels for low prices. The political system was an elitist democracy -- with constitutional restrictions on the power of the executive, an elected legislature, a free press and other trappings -- and there was strong popular resistance to anything which might smack of authoritarianism. Rather than enforce any sort of rural labor regulation, the government provided subsidies to estate owners during bad years. The result was a decline in agricultural production and export earnings, and a chronic deficit in the Treasury.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>John Candler, Brief Notices of Hayti: with its condition, resources & prospect (London, 1842), p. 36; Hubert Cole, Christophe, King of Haiti (London, 1967), pp. 209-12; Gerard Pierre-Charles, La economía haitiana y su vía de desarrollo (México, 1965), pp. 27-34.

<sup>10</sup>Candler, Brief Notices, p. 72.

<sup>11</sup>Earl L. Griggs, intro. to E.L. Griggs & Clifford H. Prator (eds.) Henry Christophe and Thomas Clarkson, a Correspondence (Berkeley, 1952), pp. 55-6.

When the country was reunited under Southern leadership in 1821, these policies and their results were extended to the North as well.

Owners of large properties were prevented from putting them back into sugar by the scarcity of capital, and by the abhorrence of the labor force for plantation employment. The world sugar market forgot Saint-Domingue; and it never got acquainted with Haiti. Europe satisfied its demand for tropical sugar by through trade with islands with more reliable governments. One result of this development was that most of the aspiring Mulatto latifundistes were obliged, as the government had been, to parcel out their holdings to aspiring peasant cultivators. Smallholdings became the basic pattern of land tenure through most of the country, and increasingly so as the century advanced and each peasant couple's land was divided equally among their heirs. Within a few decades, Haitian agriculture was established on the basis of production primarily for subsistence, providing less and less food for more and more families on smaller and smaller plots year after year, which persists to the present day. In the mid-19th century, however, the population of Haiti was about a tenth of what it is in the late 20th century; and large expanses of forested land still remained to be "homesteaded" and placed under cultivation.

The technology of peasant life was even less sophisticated in the 19th century than it had been during the colonial period. African crafts (ironwork and wood-carving) were to a large extent forgotten in the deculturation process of plantation slavery, which restricted slave laborers to the narrow range of employments required for sugar cane cultivation and processing. Crafts in which the plantation slaves had once specialized (sugarmaking and the skills of domestic service in elegant houses) fell into disuse after independence. The terrain of Haiti was for the most part not conducive to plowing or to raising the draft animals which had been used customarily on the plantations, nor could most of the new peasants afford the luxury of maintaining an ox. There were no roads, moreover, to allow for the extensive development of cart traffic. The 19th-century peasants therefore worked

their ground with the hoe and machete and little else, and rode or packed goods on donkeys.<sup>12</sup>

Virtually no technological changes took place on a wide enough scale to affect social arrangements during a century or more following the breakup of the plantation system. What little industrialization has occurred in Haiti is a phenomenon of the mid-20th century. There were no important natural resources whose exploitation by foreigners in the 19th century might have provided incidental benefits in improved communications, the institutionalization of services, or the proletarianization of a significant sector of the population. The government's tiny tax base provided few funds for education and development.

A major problem for Haiti during the first half-century of its existence as a republic was the reluctance of other countries to grant it diplomatic recognition. The French were the first to do so, but only after twenty years of waiting and at the price of an enormous indemnity for properties lost during the Revolution. The humiliating treaty that was signed by the Boyer government in 1825 saddled the country with a debt equal to several years' total government revenues, and in addition granted the French special privileges in trade. It was regarded by most informed Haitians as a "sell-out" on the part of the Francophile elite, and was long an issue with which to fan Black resentment against the Mulattos.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Harold Courlander, The Hoe and the Drum. Life and Lore of the Haitian People (Berkeley, 1960), p. 5.

<sup>13</sup>The indemnity amounted to 150 million francs, payable over a five-year period. To make the first payment in 1826, Boyer was obliged to borrow 30 million francs from a French bank. Only 24 million were delivered to Haiti after interest was paid in advance, and the remaining six million had to be provided from current revenue. Needless to say, Haiti was delinquent in its payments from 1827 onward. In 1838, the debt was renegotiated to 60 million francs with 30 years to pay, but the burden remained to plague the Treasury for most of the rest of the 19th century -- and was a major reason why funds for education and development projects could seldom be found. Rayford W. Logan, Haiti and the Dominican Republic (London, 1968), pp. 95-6; James Franklin, The Present State of Hayti (Santo

The British for their part, full of generous impulses after the abolition of slavery in their own colonies, extended diplomatic recognition in 1833. No American republic was willing to take this elementary step, however, until after the fall of Soulouque in 1859. The first to do so was Brazil, which sent its envoy to Port-au-Prince in the early 1860's. Simón Bolívar, the leader of the independence struggle in Venezuela and Colombia who had been a beneficiary of Pétion's hospitality during his period of exile in 1816, neglected even to invite the Haitian republic to his first Pan American Congress held in Panama in 18\_\_\_. The United States enjoyed a lucrative trade with the island in every period; but in the atmosphere of ante-bellum Washington, the mere mention of the possibility of diplomatic recognition would send Congress into paroxysms of racist oratory.<sup>14</sup>

Non-recognition had particularly ominous implications for Haiti during these critical decades, in view of the fact that the slave system was booming in the American South and in all of the Caribbean colonies during the same period. Haiti was the only nation of free Black people in America; and even in Africa at that time, the remaining free nations were rapidly coming under the colonialist heel. The Haitians lived their first years of independence with the permanent fear of reconquest by any one of the major powers, which they were certain would lead to their re-enslavement. Great Britain's new-found militance against the slave trade did little to allay these fears; on the contrary, by contributing to the general scarcity of slaves it may actually have increased Haitian anxieties. Spanish Cuba had replaced Saint-Domingue as the leading sugar producer of the world in the early 19th century, and her plantations (less than a hundred miles distant to the west of Port-au-Prince,

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Domingo, with Remarks on its Agriculture, Commerce, Laws, Religion, Finances and Population (London, 1828), p. 12.

<sup>14</sup>Rayford W. Logan, The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with Haiti, 1776-1891 (Chapel Hill, 1941). This carefully documented study is a scathing revelation of the degree to which the most vulgar racism permeated the thinking of American politicians from all parts of the country in the 19th century.

and in many cases operated by French emigré planters from Saint-Domingue!) were hungry for slaves until the 1880's. The result of this menacing international situation was to deepen the natural xenophobia of a people forged in the Haitians' particular historical circumstances, and to contribute to their isolation from all "normal" influences which might have filtered through to them from the outside world. Theirs was the spirit to which Dessalines gave eloquent expression in the first year of independence:

Tremble, usurping tyrants, scourges of the New World.  
 Our daggers are sharpened; your punishment is at hand!  
 Sixty thousand armed men, tempered in sacrifices to the  
 shades of their murdered brothers. If any nation is mad  
 or bold enough to attack me, let it come! ... Willingly shall  
 I abandon to them the coast and the sites where towns  
 once existed; but woe to those who approach too closely  
 to the mountains! Better would it have been for them to  
 have been swallowed up in the depths of the sea than torn  
 to pieces at the furious hands of the children of Haiti...  
 Never shall a colon or a European set his foot on this soil with

the title of master or owner. That resolution shall henceforth form the  
 fundamental basis of our constitution.<sup>15</sup>

The permanent state of anxiety about foreign intervention contributed to the survival of the Army as the principal institution of Haitian society.

Universal military service was required; every able-bodied man was a member of a militia unit which was assembled periodically for drill, and the number of paid soldiers was kept at between 25,000 and 50,000 (one to two per cent of the population!) until the middle of the

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<sup>15</sup>Candler, Brief notices... pp. 81-82; Cole, Christophe, pp. 144-45.

19th century. The Boyer government was obliged by a deepening economic crisis accentuated by the debt to the French, to follow Christophe in using the Army to force the lowland peasants to produce at least some crops for export; and by the mid-1820's, the regime had developed into a mild military dictatorship.<sup>16</sup>

This compromise of the original democratic principles of the Mulatto administration had lasting effects for Haitian politics, drawing the Pétion and Christophe traditions very close together in actual practice. Boyer was declared President for life, giving legal sanction to the idea that an "indispensable man" was the only means of holding country together. Presidential authority was then in principle absolute, except to the degree that limitations were imposed on it by factions of opposition within the military. There were no civil service employees who could not be hired and fired at the President's will, and the judiciary was an arm of the central authority. The military chef de section was the exclusive authority at the local level, and there was no appeal from his decisions.<sup>17</sup>

Regional military commanders were key figures in national politics. Since most of them were black men with followings among the peasantry in specific localities, the Army became the instrument of "Black power" in opposition to the Mulatto economic and bureaucratic elite of the towns. The maintenance of this restless and unwieldy military establishment represented a permanent drain on the national budget; and keeping the regional commanders at bay was the permanent concern of presidents.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Candler, Brief notices..., pp. 86-90; Franklin, Present State..., pp. 330-43.

<sup>17</sup>Logan, Haiti, p. 95; Logan and Martin C. Needler, "Haiti," in Needler (ed.) Political Systems of Latin America (Princeton, 1964), pp. 160-62; Richard Schaedel, preface to Religion & Politics in Haiti (Washington, 1966), pp. xi-xii

<sup>18</sup>Candler, Brief notices..., pp. 19, 75, 94-101 & 168; James Redpath, A Guide to Hayti (Boston, 1861), pp. 151-54.

An additional factor of great importance in molding the political culture of Haiti was the absence of the Catholic Church as an effective agency for communication between this developing and ostensibly Christian nation and the rest of the Western world. Church activity had been severely restricted in colonial times by the hostility of the French planters to any priestly meddling with their slaves. Most of the clergy (all but a half-dozen priests imbued with Jacobin ideals) had left the country with the French before 1803; and in the early years of Independence, the political situation was far too unstable to allow for the full reestablishment of a formal Church structure. After the reunification of 1821, Boyer assumed a Napoleonic attitude toward Rome and banished the Archbishop, declaring himself to be the head of the Church in Haiti.

The French culture of the Mulatto elite was itself only nominally Catholic, being primarily the result of contacts with Europeans of the generation of the French Revolution. Many of the influential personalities in Port-au-Prince were freemasons and agnostics, followers of the Gallican Abbé Grégoire. Religious tolerance was the policy of the Boyer government, and Protestant missionaries were given some encouragement. It was feared that the return of the Catholic Church hierarchy might be a wedge for French or American intervention. In these circumstances, the rupture with Rome was slow to heal; the Pope refused to send bishops so long as they would be subject to Presidential authority, and the anomaly of a Catholic Church with a miniscule priesthood and virtually no hierarchy persisted in Haiti for nearly forty years.

Curacies were filled during this period by presidential appointment; but there were no seminaries from which to supply them in Haiti, and the only candidates were defrocked Gallicans and other clerical misfits and dissidents from Europe and South America. Some of these men served in Haiti as idealistic "amis des noirs;" others came with the idea of making their fortunes. The opportunists were sadly disappointed, because government regulations discouraged the accumulation of Church revenues by making the tithe voluntary,



denying any official subsidies, and limiting the rates which could be charged for specific clerical services. In 1840, there were 70 priests in the country. Most of them lived in the towns and spoke no Creole, the language of the vast majority of the Haitians. Morale among these priests (not to mention the level of morality) was very low; and the net effect of their labors was rather to bring discredit on Christianity than to attract people to it. By 1850, their number had fallen to 30. This was the situation that prevailed in Soulouque's time, and it did not begin to be "regularized" until shortly after the fall of Soulouque, when a Concordat was signed with the Vatican in 1860.<sup>19</sup>

In the absence of effective Christian missions to the new Haitian peasantry of the first half of the 19th century, the Vodoun tradition which they had inherited from slave times developed freely. Embodying or at least entirely compatible with the rich folklore of stories and legends, herb remedies, magic, music and dance which had emerged from the cultural amalgam of Afro-American Saint-Domingue, Vodoun was a religion built of earthy symbols, a multifold pantheon and a wealth of ritual observances which gave expression to the complexity and harmony of the peasants' relationship to nature and to times past. It was a coherent and sophisticated system of beliefs concerning human activities, the relationship between the natural and the supernatural worlds, and the ties between the living and the dead -- a great intellectual and aesthetic achievement of folk culture. Christianity appeared to most Haitians, by contrast, to be a sterile and unsatisfying vehicle for religious and artistic expression.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Candler, Brief notices, pp. 72 & 94-101; Redpath, Guide, pp. 138-40; J.M. Salgado, "Haiti," in the Catholic Encyclopedia; Jean L. Comhaire, "The Haitian Schism, 1804-1860," Anthropological Quarterly 6 (1960):1-9; William A. Trembley, "The Status of the Church in Saint-Domingue during the last years of the French monarchy, 1781-1793," Caribbean Studies 1 (1961):11-18.

<sup>20</sup>This discussion of the origins and functions of Haitian Vodoun draws on Schaedel's preface, Bastien, "Vodoun..." and Harold Courlander, "Vodoun in Haitian culture" from Religion & Politics in Haiti (Washington, 1966); and John Baur's review of the same

Vodoun was not a church with a hierarchy; it was utterly decentralized, with its organizational focus in the family and the rural community. Its gods, and every believer's ancestors, were intimately involved in the details of people's lives. The houngan, or priest, was an independent practitioner who learned his craft by apprenticeship, and whose influence among his neighbors depended entirely upon his skill. Illiterate, and monolingual in Creole, he was a repository of esoteric knowledge, a teacher, an interpreter of symbols, a problem-solver, a herb doctor, a rudimentary psychotherapist, a ritual performer and a catalyst of human events. He might be an effective agent in molding public opinion, but in contrast to the Catholic priest in other Latin American countries, he had no relationship to the secular political and economic order. There was no national or regional organization of hougans, and apparently no regular channel of communication between them.

Lacking central organization, Vodoun could not easily be used as an instrument of government policy; neither was it a threat to the sovereignty of the state. It was, nonetheless, a force to be taken very seriously by politicians. Toussaint, Dessalines and Christophe opposed it as a focus of potential resistance to the new order, and hoped to establish Catholicism in its place. Boyer and the Mulatto elite despised it as barbarous and atavistic, and might use any taint of association with it to tar the political opposition. No government before Soulouque's time would acknowledge support for it -- but none felt free to take vigorous and meaningful action against it.

The reason for this seems to have been not only that Vodoun had a powerful hold on the populace, but that it was important as a force for the legitimation of political regimes as well. In Haiti as in most other countries before the modern age, supernatural power was an indispensable ingredient of political leadership. Vodoun made such power relatively easy to achieve. Whatever his private beliefs or public attitude toward the national religion, a

part of the strategy of any Haitian politician must have been "to accumulate so much power and to create so much fear about his iperson as to be able to impose himself on the whole Vodoun clergy."<sup>21</sup> To the extent that the houngans could be reached at all by government, they were certainly valuable allies -- and just as it was undoubtedly risky to do any thing which would antagonize large numbers of them, it must have been fatal to fail to inspire their respect.

The Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier makes an important point about this aspect of political legitimacy in Haiti, in his historical novel El reino de este mundo (The Kingdom of This World), set in Saint-Domingue and Haiti between about 1760 and 1820. The principal character, a slave who has been deeply influenced in his thinking about politics by the African stories told by the houngan at night meetings of slaves in the forest, is staring at one point at a picture of the foppish King of France. "This is not a real king," he muses, "He sends other men to fight his battles for him. A real king is a terrible warrior like Musa, the scourge of the Sudan, who spreads terror before him and is kindly only to his loyal followers."<sup>22</sup>

The implication of Vodoun for political culture was not only that it infused the idea of government with images of supernatural power and awesome capacity for violence. In addition, as a positive respose to exclusion from any active participation in politics, it provided an all-involving alternative pattern of thought and action which would in the end make it difficult for Haitiaian peasants to make the great leap to creative participation in the secular political process which is required by a genuine democracy. Government was something to be feared and respected, not something to be made use of in solving problems. Participation in politics was limited to occasional violent outbreaks in the service of a local

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<sup>21</sup>Bastien, "Vodoun..." , pp. 51-52.

<sup>22</sup>Alejo Carpentier, El reino de este mundo (Montevideo, 1963), pp. 6-8.

military chieftain. Vodoun absorbed peasant energies which might otherwise have been mobilized as a permanent source of pressure for social change. For all of its internal vitality, therefore, it was in practice the agency and the lasting expression of social stagnation.

There is some admittedly tenuous but also eloquent "documentation" for the political values of 19th-century Haitian Black people in the various collections of Creole proverbs. As measures of values these are of course problematic, since we have no idea of how frequently a proverb was used, or exactly by whom or in what circumstances, nor do we know how many proverbs might be quoted which embody contradictory attitudes and values. But the following seem to be especially suggestive of lessons learned from history that must have had relevance for political participation or non-participation. Most are obviously of slave origin, but they have proven their continuing aptness to the changing conditions of Haitian life by surviving to much later period. Here, in Creole and in English translation, are a few such proverbs, arranged by categories of the basic attitudes that they seem to express:

a. Distrust of strangers, or of those who hold power:

Pravette pas jamain gagné raison devant poule.

The cockroach never wins his case when the chicken is judge.

Cabrite qui pas malin mangé nen pie morne.

A smart goat doesn't eat near the foot of the mountain (that is, near settlements; a prudent man cultivates obscurity).

Coulevre que vlé vivre li pas promener dans grand chemin.

A snake that loves life doesn't travel along the highway.

Petit mie tombé, ramassé li; chrétien tombé, pas ramassé li.

If a piece of millet falls, it is picked up; if a person falls, no one gives a hand.

Rat mange canne; zandolite moure innocent.

The rat eats the cane; the innocent lizard dies for it (i.e. when the canefield is burned over).

b. Ordinary people are best

Bel Français, pas lesprit pou' ça.

Speaking good French doesn't mean you have any sense.

Dé morne pas capab' rencontré, dé moune capab'.

Two mountains can't get together; two men can.

Compot plus fort passé ouanga.

Conspiracy (or unity) is stronger than witchcraft.

Bois plus rwo dit'l wè loin, graine promène dit'l we plus loin.

The high tree says he sees a long way; the travelling seed says he sees further (the weak may be wiser than the strong).

Rayi chien, mais dit dent le blanche.

Despise the dog, but admit that his teeth are white.

c. Defiance

Badiñen bien avec macaque, main prin gade manier queu li.

Joke freely with the monkey, but don't play with his tail (Don't push even the humblest creature too far).

Hai moune, main pas baie yeux pañen pou chaier de l'eau.

Hate people if you must, but don't give them baskets to fetch water in.

Mapou tombé, cabrit mange fé li.

When the mapou tree falls, the goat eats its leaves (When the mighty fall, they are helpless even before the weak).

Meme baton que batte chien noir la pé batte chien blanc la.

The same stick that beats the black dog may beat the white.<sup>23</sup>

By the 1840's, the outlines of the new Haitian society were clearly drawn.

Monoculture on great estates had been replaced by diversified horticulture on small farms. Production for export had declined; production for domestic consumption had increased. The efficient colonial system of political control based on violence had given way to an inefficient authoritarian system of political control based on violence. The colonial middle class of "people of color" was now ensconced as a powerful oligarchy; the replenishment of population through forced migration had been replaced by its replenishment through natural increase; the oppressed mass of slaves had been transformed into a largely self-sufficient peasantry.

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<sup>23</sup>From John Bigelow, The Wit and Wisdom of the Haytians (New York, 1877) and Courlander, Hoe & Drum, pp.

The mid-19th century elite was distinguishable from the mass by its literacy in French (the exclusive language of government) and by its Catholic or agnostic religion. Both of these characteristics kept them in touch with the outside world of ideas; they also guaranteed that the elite would evolve culturally in a way that put it increasingly out of touch with the problems and reality of most Haitians. They were set apart as well by skin color, housing, dress, customs, aspirations and the experience of political participation. This was not a landed aristocracy of great wealth, such as was to be found in other Latin American countries during the period; but most French-speaking Mulattos lived quite comfortably off business or professional income, government salaries and rents. They engaged in no sort of manual labor; and they were able to educate their children both at home and abroad. The elite was confined to the towns, and owed its political power rather to a long experience of participation in politics and a monopoly of the essential skills for government, than to wealth or to the exercise of control over mass constituencies.

The Black peasant mass was illiterate and spoke only Creole -- and was thereby excluded altogether from participation in the national political process. Its cultural isolation was complete, and there was no public education which might begin to open cracks in it. The physical difficulty of communications was so great, in a mountainous country without roads, that most peasants might never visit a large town. On the positive side, this "parochialism" of the peasants was due to economic self-sufficiency, to a resourcefulness which enabled them to develop basic institutions for problem-solving (extended families, cooperative societies, communal work groups) without help from the government, as well as to their involvement in the dynamic other-world of Vodoun.

The peasants were an important factor in national politics, however, because of the independent position of the Army. The Army was for the most part recruited from among the peasants, and was the only avenue of mobility from the peasant class to any sector of the elite. Military leaders could, on occasion, mobilize peasant support for specific short-term

rebellions against the central authority. The officers spoke Creole better than French, were often firm believers and participants in Vodoun, and as competitors for power were deeply hostile to the Mulatto elite and its pretensions. Their constant participation in the political process enhanced the importance of peasant political values as a factor of relevance in determining the legitimacy and stability of Haitian governments.

### Political Values.

The foregoing review of the first half-century of the history of independent Haiti has been written with an eye to emphasizing the developments which gave evidence of, or were decisive in molding, a distinctive political culture. It would be an artificial exercise at this point to try and establish any direct, logical relationship between that historical-analytic narrative and any abstract conceptualization of the political culture that existed when Faustin Soulouque came to power in 1847. What we propose to do, therefore, is simply to list the political values which we believe on the basis of our reading to have existed generally in mid-19th century Haiti. Readers familiar with Haitian history and culture may question some of these; and it is our hope that making our list explicit in this way, we may encourage the kind of discussion which could eventually put this discussion on some solid ground than reasoning from mere inference.

For purposes of the present broad-gauged kind of analysis, there were only two political constituencies in Haiti: the urban, literate, French-speaking and primarily Mulatto elite of public functionaries and businessmen and their families; and the rural, illiterate, Creole-speaking and primarily Black peasantry. The Mulatto constituency was divided internally on economic, social and even racial lines; the Black constituency was divided between independent peasants, landless agricultural laborers, the urban poor and the professional soldiery. Neither class had a party to represent it, and neither was capable of coordinated political action. But both groups exhibited a degree of class consciousness and a sense of the conflict of their interests; and from the point of view of a national politician,



each of these classes must have appeared as a constituency with shared values to which claims to legitimacy might be directed. Each group could be expected to view specific undertakings of government with a certain measure of unanimity.

Black Haitians of the mid-19th century (the peasants and the Army) seem to have expected of government that it be: Black, Creole-speaking, respectful of Vodoun, monarchical, militaristic, supernaturally powerful, colorful, remote, violent in vengeance, xenophobic, active in the distribution of land, careless of the export trade and public works, and hostile to the Mulattos.

Mulatto Haitians, on the other hand, seem to have expected government to be: Mulatto, French-speaking, Catholic and anti-Vodounist, parliamentary but not genuinely democratic, civilian, centralist but limited in power, accessible, controllable, moderate in the exercise of violence, internationally oriented, internationally respectable, liberal in economic policy (good for business), energetic in promoting public works and the production of goods for export, concerned with the education of the elite, respectful of educated and wealthy men, and firm with the peasants.

This conception of political values as answers to the question, "What should the government be like?" is admittedly very crude. Values are more subtle, and for the most part less specifically focussed on the character of government. But in order to discuss them in relation to governmental undertakings seen as efforts to lay claim to political legitimacy, it is necessary that they be expressed in an unequivocal fashion. The values suggested above may be organized by categories of legitimacy (see pp. 5-6 above), as follows:

TABLE: PRESUMED POLITICAL VALUES OF HAITIAN POLITICAL  
CONSTITUENCIES IN THE 1840'S, BY CATEGORY OF POLITICAL LEGITIMACY

CATEGORY	PEASANT VALUES	ELITE VALUES
Legality		parliamentary, accessible,

		limited in power, civilian
Tradition	monarchic	French-speaking, not democratic, Catholic, centralist.
Charisma	supernaturally powerful, colorful, xenophobic	respectful of educated & wealthy, moderate in violence, anti-Vodounist, internationally respected
Achievement & Expertise		concerned with elite education, energetic in promoting public works & production for export
Capacity for Violence	militaristic, violent in vengeance, hostile to mulattos	firm with peasants
Identity	Black, Creole-speaking, respectful of Vodoun	Mulatto, internationally oriented
Generosity	active in distribution of land	liberal in economic policy (good for business)
Incompetence	remote, careless of exports & public works	controllable

The table helps make clear where the "weight" of political legitimacy may be expected to have resided for each of the two constituencies. Black Haitians appear to have placed little or no value on the areas of legality and achievement-expertise, and very little on the areas of tradition and generosity. Unless some important values have been overlooked here, legitimacy for them was a matter primarily of charisma, capacity for violence, identity and incompetence. The Mulattos, on the other hand, appear to have entertained a very comprehensive notion of political legitimacy with values in all categories, although de-emphasizing the capacity for violence and incompetence.

#### Faustin Soulouque's Undertakings as Claims to Legitimacy

What follows is a fairly detailed review of the administration of President and Emperor Faustin Soulouque, which we have broken up into groups of the specific actions

and pronouncements which we take to have comprised his five major political undertakings. In doing this, we have had little regard for causal or chronological sequence, but have sought rather to reduce the history of the regime to units which can be discussed from the point of view of the effort to establish the regime's legitimacy or lack thereof in the eyes of its two fundamental constituencies. The narrative of each "undertaking" will be followed by a brief appraisal which attempts to categorize the latent claims to legitimacy which the undertaking appears to us to embody.

Before coming to power in 1847, Soulouque had pursued a long but rather undistinguished career as a soldier. Born a slave in the Southern portion of Haiti before the French Revolution, he had been freed by the Mulatto general Rigaud to become a soldier of the Haitian Revolution at the age of perhaps thirteen. After independence, he served under Pétion in some unimportant actions against the forces of Henri Christophe, and then settled into a comfortable post with the Palace Guard. A story about him, often retold, is that on one occasion President Boyer pointed to him in the Palace and said that if political conditions in the country continued to deteriorate, "even so stupid a fellow as that" might get to be President. It was perhaps because of that appraisal of his abilities that Faustin Soulouque advanced only slowly in the military hierarchy.

Boyer held power for a quarter of a century. After he fell, there were four years of instability during which presidents were replaced every few months and the Mulatto elite lost control of the government to the Black leaders of the military. It was during this period that Soulouque had the good fortune to be made Commander of the Palace Guard. The only visible candidates for President by this time were generals with the backing of a portion of the army, and in 1847 the country was threatened with a renewal of civil war when the Senate found itself unable to choose between two such aspirants. Soulouque was put forth as a "dark horse" candidate, extolled as a man so lacking in ambition or ability that he might be manipulated by the president-makers. It is said that when the commission

arrived to inform him of his designation, he complained that he must be the victim of a cruel joke.<sup>24</sup>

The new President inherited a difficult package of problems. After twenty-three years of "liberal" Mulatto rule (thirty-seven in the southern half of the country) and four years of anarchy, the Treasury was in chronic deficit due to the decline in taxable agricultural production and foreign trade, the oppressive French indemnity and the demands of the oversized army. The Mulatto constituency, indispensable for the operation of the government because of its monopoly of literacy and other administrative skills, could not by itself keep him in power; the insatiable Army was divided into competing regional factions; and the unmobilized Black masses were beginning to respond to leaders who called for a complete elimination of Mulatto hegemony. The Dominican "Eastern Part" of the Republic had broken away from it in 1844, and was busily negotiating a surrender of its sovereignty to the foreign power which would guarantee its independence of from the much-feared Haitians.<sup>25</sup>

The several descriptions of Faustin Soulouque's person available in the literature are all patronizing in tone; but from a close reading of them there emerges the image of a handsome and powerfully built Black man of about sixty, who bore himself in such a way as to command respect from the people around him. He spoke Creole in preference to French, and his awkwardness in formal situations caused an impression of ineptness or of

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<sup>24</sup>Jean Price Mars, *La République d'Haiti et la République Dominicaine* (Port-au-Prince, 1953), pp. 159-60; Harold Davis, *Black Democracy* (New York, 1928), p. 120; John Baur, "Faustin Soulouque, Emperor of Haiti. His character and his reign," *The Americas* 6 (1949):133-37.

<sup>25</sup>The territory which is now the Dominican Republic had been ceded by Spain to France in 1795 and briefly ruled by Toussaint as Governor-General of Saint-Domingue. Returned to Spain after the fall of Napoleon, it was reconquered by the Haitians in 1822 and subjected to a very unpopular military government which was overthrown by the Dominicans after the fall of Boyer in 1844.

pomposity in foreign observers. But Soulouque was soon to disabuse those who had imagined him a puppet and a fool. After a period in which he inquired humbly into the way things ought to be done by a President of the Republic, he set about governing the country in a bold and original fashion. Illiterate, he employed a team of readers to keep him informed about national and international developments, and the contents of every bill he was asked to sign.<sup>26</sup> He proved energetic and decisive, and demonstrated great shrewdness in sizing up and doing away with any opposition. Within a few months he was undermining the position of the very people who had put him in power. Let us examine in succession five of the basic undertakings which characterized his twelve years of dominance over Haitian public life.

1) Elimination of the Mulatto opposition. In moving against the Mulatto elite, Soulouque gave expression to the general distrust and hatred felt by soldiers and Black people in general toward the arrogant and corrupt ruling class of the country -- and perhaps also to his awareness that the "aristocrats" did not take him seriously as a chief of state. Early in his term of office, Soulouque came to rely heavily on the collaboration of the fiery Black general Maximilien Augustin, known to contemporaries as "Similien." An alcoholic described as an extreme representative of lower-class Haitian racial attitudes, Similien was the veteran of many years of intrigue in opposition to the Mulatto government. For him even Black men were detestable, if they were rich and spoke French, or in other ways identified themselves with the hated elite. President Soulouque made him commander of the Palace Guard, and of a terrorist secret police force known as the Zinglins.

The popular opinion for which Similien stood as spokesman had its roots in the history which has been reviewed above. It was the result of several decades of oppressive

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<sup>26</sup>Baur, p. 133 provides a sample of these patronizing descriptions, and quotes several others. Gustave d'Alaux, "L'Empereur Soulouque et son empire" (parts 1 & 2), Révue des Deux Mondes (Paris) 8 (1850), p. 807, is rather more objective.

military rule and forced labor in the rural areas of the country (blamed by the people on the Mulattos and not, paradoxically, on the Army which had implemented the oppressive policies of all Haitian governments), and of the fact that despite the spread of peasant smallholdings in the early 19th century, there was a growing phenomenon of Black indebtedness to Mulatto merchants and landowners. The resentment was fanned as well by propaganda attacking the Mulattos for having agreed to the humiliating French indemnity of 1825.<sup>27</sup>

Early in 1848, Soulouque left the capital to make an inspection tour of the provinces, and to prevent plotting behind his back he took the entire Cabinet and most of General Similien's troops with him. Left virtually in charge at Port-au-Prince, Similien seems to have cooked up a Mulatto plot against the President involving several Cabinet members -- one of whom the General ordered shot as a traitor without any sort of trial. Soulouque returned from his trip to find the city in an uproar, and forthwith gave the Mulattos a second cause célèbre by clapping the country's most respected newspaper editor in prison and closing down his paper for the duration.

When news of the French liberal revolution of 1848 reached Port-au-Prince, a crowd gathered at the National Palace. Mulatto spokesmen demanded the abolition of the 1846 Constitution, which had restored the life presidency (under which Boyer had ruled for so long, but which had not been intended by its mostly Mulatto authors to prolong the tenure of any Black general), an a return to several of the more liberal provisions of the Constitution of 1816. Black protestors called for the removal of the Mulatto ministry. Soulouque fired the ministers, but ignored the demands for constitutional reform. By this time, Mulatto reservations about his rule seem to have given rise to a genuine conspiracy against him.

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<sup>27</sup>D'Alaux, "L'Empereur...", pp. 1049-51; Baur, "Faustin...", p. 134.

On April 16, 1848, the President summoned a group of Mulatto leaders suspected of plotting to the Palace, and had them set upon there by his soldiers. A Mulatto crowd in the courtyard was ordered to disperse, and fired upon when it refused. This incident ended in a widespread massacre of Mulattos in the city, large-scale destruction of their property by the mob, and a series of public executions of the conspirators and their families and friends. For several weeks thereafter, the Zinglins terrorized the population. Soulouque then continued on his tour of inspection in the south of the country, to supervise the execution and the expropriation of the goods of other leading Mulatto enemies of his regime.<sup>28</sup>

In several areas, the President found that local Blacks had joined the class war on their own account. The most important were the peasant piquets under Pierre Noir at Aux Cayes, who demanded the deportation of all Mulattos and a redistribution of their property among the people. Soulouque would not concede these demands, but did lend his support to the mob action against the Mulattos while carrying out his own program of retribution with great cruelty and indifference to foreign opinion. At the end of the tour, he returned to Port-au-Prince in triumph, granted a general amnesty to the surviving Mulattos, and had a Te Deum sung for himself at the Cathedral. Many hundreds of Mulattos in various parts of the country had lost their lives by then, and the political pretensions of the Mulatto elite had received a setback from which they would not fully recover for many years thereafter.<sup>29</sup>

Claims to legitimacy: The claims which may be seen as latent in this undertaking against the pretensions of the Mulatto elite are of course directed entirely to Soulouque's Black constituency. They fly in the face of Weber's legality and tradition, and are certainly not matters of either

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<sup>28</sup>Price-Mars, République..., pp. 161-61; n.a. "Joseph & Juliette Courtois," Bulletin of the Pan American Union 70 (1936):19-20; Dantes Bellegarde, Histoire du peuple haitien, 1492-1952 (Port-au-Prince, 1952), p. 155. In 1840, the population of Port-au-Prince included some 4,000 Mulattos and 19,000 Blacks. Candler, Brief Notices..., p. 76.

<sup>29</sup>Baur, "Faustin...", pp. 134-5.

achievement-expertise or incompetence. The claim on the basis of generosity is explicitly rejected, at least in part. The principal elements here seem to be an appeal to identity of race and sentiment, a manifestation of charisma, and above all an expression of the capacity for extreme violence against a common enemy -- even at the risk of wreaking havoc in the country and handicapping the implementation of other programs.

2) Redressing the balance. Soulouque's sponsorship of the elimination of some elements of the Mulatto hegemony in Haiti earned him an evil reputation abroad and among historians (most of whom have been Haitian Mulattos!). But he did hold back from finishing off the job in an effort to mobilize the support of Black people, by deporting the Mulatto survivors and redistributing their property and employments. He also refused to condone any abuse of resident foreigners (undoubtedly because, impoverished and unrecognized diplomatically, his government was in no position to risk antagonizing other countries); and he promised indemnification for any losses suffered by them during the popular upheaval.

Far from encouraging Mulatto emigration at this point, he made it a capital offense for anyone to try and leave the country, and decreed perpetual banishment and loss of property for any Mulatto who succeeded in getting away. By this means he kept the government and business supplied with the essential literate personnel.<sup>30</sup> In retrospect, it seems probable that Soulouque himself was not primarily motivated by racial hatred. He seems to have been simply a Creole-speaking ex-slave and soldier who sought to defend the sovereignty of people like himself in their own country against those whom he considered to be corrupt, effete and essentially un-Haitian. The Mulattos were welcome according to

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<sup>30</sup>Bellegarde, Histoire..., pp. 159-60; Baur, "Faustin...", pp. 137-38.



this view, if they accepted a secondary role in government and refrained from competing for power or abusing the Black peasants and workers excessively.

The policy of Soulouque with regard to Black supporters who got out of line was as harsh as his policy toward the Mulattos had been. Pierre Noir and his piquets rebelled in the South against him, and were crushed without mercy. General Similien, as it turned out, was more interested in power than in Black nationalism. Frustrated by the political shrewdness of the President, he got to intriguing with the embittered Mulatto leaders and seems to have imitated some of their cultural preferences. At one point he made the mistake of poking fun in public at the Vodounist beliefs of Madame Soulouque, and then failed to take precautions when the President's attitude toward him cooled noticeably. One day, in the presence of soldiers who were presumably loyal to Similien, Soulouque simply ordered that he be removed from his command and sent to prison, before the one-time favorite could mobilize any support.<sup>31</sup> In two years as President, then, Soulouque had employed shrewd maneuvering and bloody repression to eliminate all the centers, both elite and popular, of real and potential opposition to his rule.

Claims to legitimacy: In this undertaking, Soulouque seems, surprisingly enough, to have appealed to the Mulatto constituency on grounds of charisma and legality, with an element of capacity for violence. The appeal to the Blacks is almost exclusively in terms of the capacity for violence -- this time against his fellow Black people if they tried to resist him.

3) Establishment of the Empire. Once Soulouque had eliminated the Mulatto threat and established himself firmly in power, he determined to have himself crowned Emperor of

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<sup>31</sup>Baur, "Faustin...", pp. 137-38; Bellegarde, Histoire..., p. 155; Price-Mars, République..., p. 162.

Haiti. This decision, which suggests to some commentators a ridiculous and childlike vanity, may well have been based on more rational considerations. The "democratic" American republics were parvenus and bad neighbors from the Haitian point of view. None of them had yet recognized Haitian independence; and only the U.S. was an important partner in trade. Their cultural and political traditions were altogether different from those of Haiti, and most of these countries still tolerated slavery. None of them had in any sense been a model for the development of the Haitian polity; and the European nations which had been influential were both monarchies in Soulouque's time. Both of the great Black leaders of Haiti had been declared kings in the European and African tradition, and "republicanism" in Haiti was the heritage of the Mulatto elite which he had tried to destroy. It was reasonable to suppose, moreover, that a dynastic ruler would be dealt with more respectfully by other nations than the temporary president of an unstable republic. Christophe's kingdom had, after all, been the only Haitian government to attain a measure of administrative efficiency and economic prosperity.

Whatever the motives for his decision Soulouque had a petition circulated to demonstrate popular demand for his enthronement. Then the Virgin Mary herself appeared at an opportune moment, in a palm-tree on the Champs-de-Mars in Port-au-Prince, and this was widely interpreted as an endorsement. The President was proclaimed Emperor in August, 1849. He crowned himself in a hastily-prepared preliminary ceremony at the time, and then made elaborate and expensive arrangements (including protracted but ultimately unsuccessful negotiations for a Vatican representative to do the honors) for a full gala coronation to be carried out in 1853. Soulouque then created a very elaborate court ritual, made a speech calling for the unity of all Haitians under his divine beneficence, and appointed large numbers of people to dukedoms and baronetcies. Fabulous salaries were allotted to members of the royal family, but no lands or other emoluments to the new nobility. It was clear that he had no intention of allowing the formation of a true "feudal"

nobility as a potential check to his power. When the nobles, mostly rich Mulattos, appealed for royal allowances he responded by granting them heraldic shields to display on their houses, emblazoned with slogans of loyalty to himself.<sup>32</sup>

The public reaction to the coronation of the Emperor Faustin Soulouque was enthusiastic. According to one writer, this was because the masses saw in him their hero in the struggle against the Mulattos, and at the same time their ideal personality, the "typically jovial Haitian extrovert."<sup>33</sup>

Claims to legitimacy. In this undertaking, Soulouque may be said to have rested his claims to the Black constituency on Weber's tradition, and especially on charisma. Claims to the Mulattos were made in terms of tradition and charisma to a lesser degree, and rather more of incompetence (given their presumption that a Black government would waste its energies on frippery and leave the Mulattos to the serious business of administration and making money). A claim was perhaps also made, with tongue in cheek, on grounds of generosity.

4) Reinforcement of Vodoun. Soulouque was an open practitioner of the national religion (unlike any other chief of state before or since), and both he and his wife were known to be under the influence of a famous houngan in Port-au-Prince. In the last years of the Haitian "schism," before the signing of the Concordat of 1860, his semi-official sanction seems to have been an important factor in fortifying Vodoun against the Catholic, Protestant and Mulatto campaigns which would be mounted against it in later years. It is difficult to document this relationship, or even Soulouque's religious activity, because 19th-century Haitian writings were very reticent on the subject of Vodoun -- and because few

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<sup>32</sup>Baur, "Faustin...". pp. 153-54; Bellegarde, Histoire..., pp. 159-60.

<sup>33</sup>Baur, "Faustin...", p. 139.

observers were even aware in those days of the significance and universal popularity of this religion. Only fragments of information survive.

Coming to power after a period of great political instability, Soulouque was understandably fearful of his own life and tenure in office. He seems to have been convinced that his four immediate predecessors (none of whom lived out a full year in office) had been victims of black magic, and he was anxious to defend himself against this fate at all costs. He held Vodoun ceremonies at the National Palace, and if he heard drums while travelling, would abandon his escort to go pay his respects to the divinities. The sponsor of a Vodounist and also Catholic shrine called Saut d'Eau, he had religious pilgrimages directed there when war closed off access to the shrine of the Señora de Altigracia in the Dominican Republic.<sup>34</sup>

Claims to legitimacy. In making public his belief in Vodoun, Soulouque made a powerful claim to the Black constituency on grounds of identity, and to a lesser extent of charisma. It may be argued that there was an appeal to the Mulattos on grounds of incompetence, as he must have known and delighted in the fact that they would be appalled at this aspect of his character.

5) Defense of Haitian sovereignty. Soulouque maintained a dignified, even haughty attitude toward foreign powers, never allowing himself to be put in the position of begging them for favors. One manifestation of this policy earned him a respected place in the history books, but another was the principal cause of his downfall. In 1850, two Frenchmen in Port-au-Prince were imprisoned on Soulouque's orders for some violation of Haitian law. The French government responded quickly by sending the Admiral of their Windward

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<sup>34</sup>D'Alaux, "L'Empereur...", pp. 1044-45; Bastien, "Vodoun...", p. 51; Comhaire, "Haitian Schism...", p. 9.

Islands fleet with some gunboats to demand the immediate release of the men. Soulouque refused even to discuss the possibility, and while the challengers were recovering from their astonishment, took advantage of the anniversary of his coronation to declare an amnesty for all prisoners.<sup>35</sup>

The great mistake of Soulouque's career, on the other hand, was his refusal to acknowledge the independence of the Dominican Republic -- which had thrown off a hated military administration by illiterate, Creole-speaking Black men in 1844 and was determined to prevent its reestablishment at any cost. There was a rational basis for the Emperor's policy in this case, in the fear that the occupation of the Eastern Part by any other power would provide a springboard for reconquest and the re-enslavement of the Haitian people. The farmlands of the Spanish-speaking provinces were, moreover, the richest on the island. But Soulouque seriously underestimated the determination of the Dominicans to resist, and at the same time overestimated the power of his own outsized, but inexperienced and badly equipped Army. Had he calculated these factors accurately, he could undoubtedly have accomplished more for his country by diplomatic than by military means.

The independence of the Dominican Republic was recognized by the French and British in 1849. Soulouque instructed his ambassador in Paris to advise the French that if they persisted in this policy, he would refuse to continue the payments on the 1825 indemnity. When this brought no response, he prepared for war. In March of that year, he set out in person to lead ten thousand troops in an invasion of Santo Domingo, only to see his army roundly defeated by a much smaller Dominican force under Pedro Santana. Treating that defeat as a temporary setback, he then devoted six years to making elaborate preparations for another expedition -- spending a great deal of money on military equipment and investing much of his personal prestige in the undertaking. This second invasion,

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<sup>35</sup>Baur, "Faustin...", pp. 152-53.

mounted in 1855 with 30,000 troops and again led by the Emperor in person, ended in an even more humiliating defeat than the first -- and in the virtual annihilation of the Haitian Army. Soulouque's response to this failure was to have the principal officers of the defeated army shot as traitors and incompetents.<sup>36</sup>

Claims to legitimacy. In these cases, Soulouque may be said to have directed claims to both of his principal constituencies on grounds of charisma, tradition and capacity for violence, with an element of achievement-expertise (the principled effort to restore the original territory of the Republic). All of these claims backfired, of course, and this may have obtained for the Emperor some limited degree legitimacy on grounds of incompetence from the Mulatto minority whose ability to wield influence in the government was increased by his weakness.

#### Dénouement.

After the disastrous second Dominican campaign, the basis of Soulouque's support disintegrated quickly. The Army was disaffected by the military humiliation and by the vengeful treatment of its officers by the Emperor, but also because the experience of death and suffering in combat was painful in contrast to its customary simple, easy life in the exercise of authority over rural areas. A further bone of contention was that in peacetime Soulouque had taken to using soldiers as porters, and as laborers on the royal plantations. So strict was the discipline maintained among the men with those assignments, that a soldier might be beaten to death with the coco macaque (a knotty stick, the traditional instrument of physical punishment since the abolition of the whip) for such a crime as the stealing of an animal from the imperial livestock.

Resentment was general. The policy of repression against Black militants had left the popular hero, Pierre Noir, to languish in prison. The Emperor's own houngan fell from

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<sup>36</sup>Price Mars, République..., pp. 164-65; Bellegarde, Histoire..., p. 161.

grace, and was punished in the same way. The jails were "overflowing with Negroes." The story was told of a thief who stole the Empress' jewels and was caught and tortured, but refused to return the loot because, "though he had stolen the jewels, the Emperor had stolen the country." A plot was discovered the aim of which was to rouse the peasants to revolt.<sup>37</sup>

During 1858, the forces of the Mulatto and military opposition gathered around Soulouque's most trusted lieutenant, Nicolas Geffrard, a Mulatto officer who had distinguished himself in the second Dominican campaign at one point by preventing the complete rout of the Army. Geffrard led a revolt of 6,000 troops in December of that year, which brought down the Empire almost without bloodshed in less than a month. The manifesto issued against Soulouque charged him, interestingly enough, not with incompetence or with having led the country to defeat in war -- but with the unjust imprisonment of citizens and the shameless embezzlement of public funds. Geffrard saw to it that the deposed Emperor of Haiti and his family got away safely to exile in Jamaica, and was then made President by a quickly reconvened Mulatto Senate.<sup>38</sup>

The decline of Faustin Soulouque was due, not to the ridiculousness of the figure that he cut in some observers' eyes, or to his lack of respect for foreign opinion, or to the abuses of the free press or property rights or democratic process that occurred during his realm. It was the result of a failure of legitimacy, but not of a Western-style legitimacy based on legality, or on achievement and expertise, or even on tradition. Haiti rejected its self-styled Emperor for its own very Haitian reasons: because his charisma had failed him as his capacity for violence was shown to be an empty sham and something to be used only against his followers; because his generosity had never been forthcoming, and it was well known that he had used his position to stuff his own pockets; because he had violated the

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<sup>37</sup>Baur, "Faustin...", pp. 154-56.

<sup>38</sup>Baur, "Faustin...", pp. 156-60; Bellegarde, *Histoire...*, p. 161.

value of identity by subjecting the Army and the peasants to hardships as great or greater than those to which he had subjected the Mulattos. And finally, we believe, because incompetent though he had originally seemed, he had allowed the oppressive weight of government to fall too heavily on most of the people in both of his constituencies.

### Conclusions.

The political culture of Haiti in the mid-19th century is perhaps a useful case with which to test generalizations about legitimacy in non-industrialized countries everywhere, because precisely of the peculiar characteristics which it derived from the unique historical experience of the Haitian people. The most striking characteristic of that culture was its autonomy or autenticité -- its almost complete independence of influence from the outside world. This was due to the lack of continuity between the colonial and the republican political and economic systems, to the xenophobia resulting from a permanently defensive position in relation to other countries, and to the resulting predominance of non-Western influences in Haitian life. Other features of society which were of importance in giving a distinctive character to Haitian political culture were the absence of feudal social relationships and the predominance of a free peasantry; the comparative lack of urbanization (a population nearing one million by the mid-century, with no cities of more than 25,000 people); the virtual irrelevance of the Catholic Church to Haitian life; the country's relative independence of the world market as a buyer of its primary products and supplier of its consumer goods; its lack of any resources that could tempt foreign investors; and its lack of a national written language. The early independence of Haiti had cut short there the general Caribbean process of the "acculturation" of slave populations to European institutions and belief systems; and this had combined with the general poverty of opportunities in the 19th century to make Haitian political culture what it was.

There was no "legitimacy vacuum" in Haiti after 1804, as a Eurocentric political science might suppose. The vacuum, such as it was, had been created long before that time



by the slave trade. The political culture of Saint-Domingue and independent Haiti alike was one improvised by the people, with values based on their general experience coming gradually to focus on politics as a mysterious new set of possibilities. The government of plantation society was never "legitimate" for its slave caste, and it had directed no claims to legitimacy in the slaves' direction. Slaves were not, in fact, a relevant political constituency. The system had been less than ardent, moreover, in wooing even the Mulattos. To the extent that it did appeal to them, it had couched its claims in terms of simple generosity, of an occasional willingness to share the crumbs of prosperity and high social status with the more faithful retainers of the all-white plantocratic elite.

The slaves of Saint-Domingue had therefore entered the republican era with no specifically political values other than those implicit in their religion and folk-tales, but with a long and profound experience of systematic violence and humiliation at the hands of the powerful. In those circumstances, the natural thing for them was to look for identity in leaders, as the only readily conceivable basis for trustworthiness -- and at the same time to idealize and sometimes participate in violence (particularly violence against the light-skinned) as a clear manifestation of non-servility. What they were particularly ill-equipped to do was to forge the means of regular and active participation in the political affairs of the country.

The Mulattos of independent Haiti, on the other hand, sought a government which would continue to maintain them in the style to which they had long been accustomed. Since they considered themselves to be the only qualified people left in the country, they expected that this would be a government which they could serve and also to a large extent manage, after the fashion suggested to them by their French teachers of the post-1789 generation. The great failure of the Mulattos in this situation, due above all to the basic sense of alienation from the Black masses which had been engendered in them by colonial society, was that they proved unable to work out the channels of communication (or the

system of control and exploitation) which would have enabled them to become the acknowledged leaders (or the new masters) of the Haitian Blacks during the 19th century. They were therefore often marginalized from power in the country they thought themselves destined to govern.

The political system which evolved in republican Haiti, that curious blend of Pétion's liberalism with Christophe's military dictatorship which came to maturity under Boyer in the 1820's and 30's, was one characterized by "dynamic stability" -- by a continuity of form and procedure despite regular and sometimes violent changes in leadership. The system did not change radically when Soulouque introduced a terrorist secret police force directed against one of the major political constituencies, or even when he replaced the institutions of a republic with those of an "empire." It was an authoritarian system which allowed monolithic rule by the President through the military, with some elaborate pseudo-democratic trappings at the national level, but with no effective limits on the Presidential authority other than those imposed from time to time by the ambitions of the regional military commanders.

The comparative stability of this system was perhaps due, not so much to its legitimacy in the eyes of either constituent group (though in time both groups got used to it, and may have come to see it as "traditional"), but rather to the inability of either constituent group to impose an alternative system on the other. The Mulatto elite could not govern the country without a Black army to deal with the people; and the Army could not govern without the Mulatto elite to do the paper work. Both were obliged to live, therefore, with a system which was not very satisfactory to either -- a system which could achieve very little in the way of economic development, and which could provide only modest opportunity for the enrichment of any individuals other than the President. Support for such a regime was due mostly to the absence of alternatives.

If the distribution of political values by category of political legitimacy that is suggested by our table is any guide, however, the government and system that was presided over for more than a decade by Faustin Soulouque enjoyed a considerable measure of political legitimacy in the eyes of both its major constituencies. For the first six or seven years, it was even a popular regime. This system was exceedingly centralized, offering ample opportunities for charismatic behavior and sometimes for exemplary violence on the part of the President; yet at the same time it was so inefficient that it could seldom impose severe hardship on most citizens. It abused each constituency often enough to give satisfaction to the other. It resisted foreign pressures; and it tolerated all the national eccentricities. But at the same time it allowed a restricted space within which a semblance of "civilized living" could be enjoyed by the prosperous French-speaking elite.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to compare Haitian regimes in terms of their greater or lesser degrees of political legitimacy; but one set of contrasts may help to illustrate our main point. The regime of Henri Christophe seemed legitimate to some foreign observers because, though brutal, it was monarchic and achievement-oriented; the regime of Alexandre Pétion seemed legitimate to other observers because, though inefficient, it was republican and liberal. Historians have favored one or the other, according to their ideological preferences. But Haitian society itself seems to have rejected both of these early presidents quite decisively. Christophe's rule was too painful and Pétion's was too alien to find support in the political values of the Black constituency; Christophe was too uncontrollable and Pétion was too soft on the peasants to be fully legitimate for the Mulatto constituency. In his prime, Faustin Soulouque seems to have enjoyed more legitimacy and a greater popularity than either of those more illustrious predecessors.

Political power has shifted back and forth throughout the history of independent Haiti between comparatively unsophisticated but thoroughly Haitian Black soldiers and reasonably cultivated but aloof and alienated Mulatto professional men. Neither group has

served the people well; but both have been forged in the political cultures of their people, and they have sought to conduct themselves in accordance with the political values of their followers. Faustin Soulouque was able for a time -- as was François Duvalier in our own day -- to strike an almost comfortable balance between those constituencies, and by so doing to enjoy a considerable measure of legitimacy in the eyes of both Black and Mulatto Haitians. Both regimes then imposed immense suffering upon the Haitian people; neither contributed much of anything at all to their struggle for justice or livelihood. Both were also despised by foreign governments and the foreign press; but the hostility of foreigners was more likely to enhance than to undermine their legitimacy. These regimes fell from power when they lost legitimacy in the eyes of both Black and Mulatto Haitians, the bearers of the often contradictory political cultures upon which any viable government of Haiti must be constructed.