



Chamber
of Commerce
and Industry
HAITI-BENELUX

Culture Name

Haitian

Orientation

Identification. Haiti, a name that means "mountainous country," is derived from the language of the [Taino Indians](#) who inhabited the island before European colonization. After independence in 1804, the name was adopted by the military generals, many of them former slaves, who expelled the French and took possession of the colony then known as Saint Domingue. In 2000, 95 percent of the population was of African descent, and the remaining 5 percent mulatto and white. Some wealthy citizens think of themselves as French, but most residents identify themselves as Haitian and there is a strong sense of nationalism.

Location and Geography. Haiti covers 10,714 square miles (27,750 square kilometers). It is located in the subtropics on the western third of Hispaniola, the second largest island in the Caribbean, which it shares with the Spanish-speaking Dominican Republic. The neighboring islands include Cuba, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico. Three-quarters of the terrain is mountainous; the highest peak is the Morne de Selle. The climate is mild, varying with altitude. The mountains are calcareous rather than volcanic and give way to widely varying microclimatic and soil conditions. A tectonic fault line runs through the country, causing occasional and sometimes devastating earthquakes. The island is also located within the Caribbean hurricane belt.

Demography. The population has grown steadily from 431,140 at independence in 1804 to the estimate of 6.9 million to 7.2 million in 2000. Haiti is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Until the 1970s, over 80 percent of the population resided in rural areas, and today, over 60 percent continue to live in provincial villages, hamlets, and homesteads scattered across the rural landscape. The capital city is Port-au-Prince, which is five times larger than the next biggest city, Cape Haitian.

Over one million native-born Haitians live overseas; an additional fifty thousand leave the country every year, predominantly for the United States but also to Canada and France. Approximately 80 percent of permanent migrants come from the educated middle and upper classes, but very large numbers of lower-class Haitians temporarily

migrate to the Dominican Republic and Nassau Bahamas to work at low-income jobs in the informal economy. An unknown number of lower-income migrants remain abroad.

Linguistic Affiliation. For most of the nation's history the official language has been French. However, the language spoken by the vast majority of the people is *kreyol*, whose pronunciation and vocabulary are derived largely from French but whose syntax is similar to that of other creoles. With the adoption of a new constitution in 1987, *kreyol* was given official status as the primary official language. French was relegated to the status of a secondary official language but continues to prevail among the elite and in government, functioning as marker of social class and a barrier to the less educated and the poor. An estimated 5–10 percent of the population speaks fluent French, but in recent decades massive emigration to the United States and the availability of cable television from the United States have helped English replace French as the second language in many sectors of the population.

Symbolism. Residents attach tremendous importance to the expulsion of the French in 1804, an event that made Haiti the first independently black-ruled nation in the world, and only the second country in the Western Hemisphere to achieve independence from imperial Europe. The most noted national symbols are the flag, [Henri Christophe's](#) citadel and the statue of the "unknown maroon" (*Maroon inconnu*), a bare-chested revolutionary



Haiti

trumpeting a conch shell in a call to arms. The presidential palace is also an important national symbol.

History and Ethnic Relations

Emergence of a Nation. Hispaniola was discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1492 and was the first island in the New World settled by the Spanish. By 1550, the indigenous culture of the Taino Indians had vanished from the island, and Hispaniola became a neglected backwater of the Spanish Empire. In the mid-1600s, the western third of the island was populated by fortune seekers, castaways, and wayward colonists, predominantly French, who became pirates and buccaneers, hunting wild cattle and pigs unleashed by the earliest European visitors and selling the smoked meat to passing ships. In the mid-1600s, the French used the buccaneers as mercenaries (freebooters) in an unofficial war against the Spanish. In the Treaty of Ryswick of 1697, France forced Spain to cede the western third of Hispaniola. This area became the French colony of Saint Domingue. By 1788, the colony had become the "jewel of the Antilles," the richest colony in the world.

In 1789, revolution in France sparked dissension in the colony, which had a population of half a million slaves (half of all the slaves in the Caribbean); twenty-eight thousand mulattoes and free blacks, many of whom were wealthy landowners; and thirty-six thousand white planters, artisans, slave drivers, and small landholders. In 1791, thirty-five thousand slaves rose in an insurrection, razed a thousand plantations, and took to the hills. Thirteen years of war and pestilence followed. Spanish, English, and French troops were soon battling one another for control of the colony. The imperial powers militarized the slaves, training them in the arts of "modern" warfare. *Grands blancs* (rich white colonists), *petits blancs* (small farmers and working-class whites), *mulatres* (mulattoes), and *noirs* (free blacks) fought, plotted, and intrigued. Each local interest group exploited its position at every opportunity to achieve its political and economic objectives. From the mayhem emerged some of the greatest black military men in history, including [Toussaint Louverture](#). In 1804, the last European troops were soundly defeated and driven from the island by a coalition of former slaves and mulattoes. In January 1804 the rebel generals declared independence, inaugurating Haiti as the first sovereign "black" country in the modern world and the second colony in the Western Hemisphere to gain independence from imperial Europe.

Since gaining independence, Haiti has had fleeting moments of glory. An early eighteenth century kingdom ruled by Henri Christophe prospered and thrived in the north, and from 1822 to 1844 Haiti ruled the entire island. The late nineteenth century was a period of intense internecine warfare in which ragtag armies backed by urban politicians and conspiring Western businessmen repeatedly sacked Port-au-Prince. By 1915, the year in which U.S. marines began a nineteen year occupation of the country, Haiti was among the poorest nations in the Western Hemisphere.

National Identity. During the century of relative isolation that followed independence, the peasantry developed distinct traditions in cuisine, music, dance, dress, ritual, and religion. Some elements of African cultures survive, such as specific prayers, a few

words, and dozens of spirit entities, but Haitian culture is distinct from African and other New World cultures.

Ethnic Relations. The only ethnic subdivision is that of the *syrians*, the early [twentieth-century](#) Levantine emigrants who have been absorbed into the commercial elite but often self-identify by their ancestral origins. Haitians refer to all outsiders, even dark-skinned outsiders of African ancestry, as *blan* ("white").

In the neighboring Dominican Republic, despite the presence of over a million Haitian farm workers, servants, and urban laborers, there exists intense prejudice against Haitians. In 1937, the Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo ordered the massacre of an estimated fifteen to thirty-five thousand Haitians living in the Dominican Republic.

Urbanism, Architecture, and the Use of Space

The most famous architectural accomplishments are King Henri Christophe's postindependence San Souci palace, which was almost entirely destroyed by an earthquake in the early 1840s, and his mountaintop fortress, the Citadelle Laferrière, which survives largely intact.

The contemporary rural landscape is dominated by houses that vary in style from one region to another. Most are single-story, two-room shacks, usually with a front porch. In the dry, treeless areas, houses are constructed of rock or wattle and daub with mud or lime exteriors. In other regions, walls are made from the easily hewn native palm; in still other areas, particularly in the south, houses are made of Hispaniola pine and local hardwoods. When the owner can afford it, the outside of a house is painted in an array of pastel colors, mystic symbols are often painted on the walls, and the awnings are fringed with colorful hand-carved trimming.

In cities, early twentieth century bourgeoisie, foreign entrepreneurs, and the Catholic clergy blended French and southern United States Victorian architectural styles and took the rural gingerbread house to its artistic height, building fantastic multicolored brick and timber mansions with tall double doors, steep roofs, turrets, cornices, extensive balconies, and intricately carved trim. These exquisite structures are fast disappearing as a result of neglect and fires. Today one increasingly finds modern block and cement houses in both provincial villages and urban areas. Craftsmen have given these new houses traditional gingerbread qualities by using embedded pebbles, cut stones, preformed cement relief, rows of shaped balusters, concrete turrets, elaborately contoured cement roofing, large balconies, and artistically welded wrought-iron trimming and window bars reminiscent of the carved fringe that adorned classic gingerbread houses.



Haitians in Gonaïves celebrate the deposition of President Jean-Claude Duvalier in February, 1986.

Food and Economy

Food in Daily Life. Nutritional deficits are caused not by inadequate knowledge but by poverty. Most residents have a sophisticated understanding of dietary needs, and there is a widely known system of indigenous food categories that closely approximates modern, scientifically informed nutritional categorization. Rural Haitians are not subsistence farmers. Peasant women typically sell much of the family harvest in regional open-air market places and use the money to buy household foods.

Rice and beans are considered the national dish and are the most commonly eaten meal in urban areas. Traditional rural staples are sweet potatoes, manioc, yams, corn, rice, pigeon peas, cowpeas, bread, and coffee. More recently, a wheat-soy blend from the United States has been incorporated into the diet.

Important treats include sugarcane, mangoes, sweetbread, peanut and sesame seed clusters made from melted brown sugar, and candies made from bittermanioc flour. People make a crude but highly nutritious sugar paste called *rapadou*.

Haitians generally eat two meals a day: a small breakfast of coffee and bread, juice, or an egg and a large afternoon meal dominated by a carbohydrate source such as manioc, sweet potatoes, or rice. The afternoon meal always includes beans or a bean sauce, and there is usually a small amount of poultry, fish, goat, or, less commonly, beef or mutton, typically prepared as a sauce with a tomato paste base. Fruits are prized as between-meal snacks. Non-elite people do not necessarily have community or family meals, and individuals eat wherever they are comfortable. A snack customarily is eaten at night before one goes to sleep.

Food Customs at Ceremonial Occasions. Festive occasions such as baptismal parties, first communions, and marriages include the mandatory Haitian colas, cake, a spiced concoction of domestic rum (*kleren*), and a thick spiked drink made with

condensed milk called *krémass*. The middle class and the elite mark the same festivities with Western sodas, Haitian rum (Babouncourt), the national beer (Prestige), and imported beers. Pumpkin soup (*bouyon*) is eaten on New Year's day.

Basic Economy. Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and one of the poorest in the world. It is a nation of small farmers, commonly referred to as peasants, who work small private landholdings and depend primarily on their own labor and that of family members. There are no contemporary plantations and few concentrations of land. Although only 30 percent of the land is considered suitable for agriculture, more than 40 percent is worked. Erosion is severe. Real income for the average family has not increased in over twenty years and has declined precipitously in rural areas. In most rural areas, the average family of six earns less than \$500 per year.

Since the 1960s, the country has become heavily dependent on food imports—primarily rice, flour, and beans—from abroad, particularly from the United States. Other major imports from the United States are used material goods such as clothes, bicycles, and motor vehicles. The Haitian has become primarily domestic, and production is almost entirely for domestic consumption. A vigorous internal marketing system dominates the economy and includes trade not only in agricultural produce and livestock but also in homemade crafts.

Land Tenure and Property. Land is relatively evenly distributed. Most holdings are small (approximately three acres), and there are very few landless households. Most property is privately held, though there is a category of land known as State Land that, if agriculturally productive, is rented under a long-term lease to individuals or families and is for all practical purposes private. Unoccupied land frequently is taken over by squatters. There is a vigorous land market, as rural households buy and sell land. Sellers of land generally need cash to finance either a life crisis event (healing or burial ritual) or a migratory venture. Land is typically bought, sold, and inherited without official documentation (no government has ever carried out a cadastral survey). Although there are few land titles, there are informal tenure rules that give farmers relative security in their holdings. Until recently, most conflicts over land were between members of the same kin group. With the departure of the Duvalier dynasty and the emergence of political chaos, some conflicts over land have led to bloodshed between members of different communities and social classes.

Commercial Activities. There is a thriving internal market that is characterized at most levels by itinerant female traders who specialize in domestic items such as produce, tobacco, dried fish, used clothing, and livestock.

Major Industries. There are small gold and copper reserves. For a short time the Reynolds Metals Company operated a bauxite mine, but it was closed in 1983 because of conflict with the government. Offshore assembly industries owned principally by U.S. entrepreneurs employed over sixty thousand people in the mid-1980s but declined in the later 1980s and early 1990s as a result of political unrest. There is one cement factory—most of the cement used in the country is imported—and a single flour mill.

Trade. In the 1800s, the country exported wood, sugarcane, cotton and coffee, but by the 1960s, even the production of coffee, long the major export, had been all but

strangled through excessive taxation, lack of investment in new trees, and bad roads. Recently, coffee has yielded to mangoes as the primary export. Other exports include cocoa and essential oils for the cosmetics and pharmaceutical industries. Haiti has become a major transshipment point for illegal drug trafficking.

Imports come predominantly from the United States and include used clothing, mattresses, automobiles, rice, flour, and beans. Cement is imported from Cuba and South America.

Division of Labor. There is a large degree of informal specialization in both rural and urban areas. At the highest level are craftsmen known as bosses, including carpenters, masons, electricians, welders, mechanics, and tree sawyers. Specialists make most craft items, and there are others who castrate animals and climb coconut trees. Within each trade there are subdivisions of specialists.

Social Stratification

Class and Castes. There has always been a wide economic gulf between the masses and a small, wealthy elite and more recently, a growing middle class. Social status is well marked at all levels of society by the degree of French words and phrases used in speech, Western dress patterns, and the straightening of hair.

Symbols of Social Stratification. The wealthiest people tend to be lighter-skinned or white. Some scholars see this apparent color dichotomy as evidence of racist social division, but it also can be explained by historical circumstances and the immigration and intermarrying of the light-skinned elite with white merchants from Lebanon, Syria, Germany, the Netherlands, Russia, other Caribbean countries, and, to a far lesser extent, the United States. Many presidents have been dark-skinned, and dark-skinned individuals have prevailed in the military.



Both music and painting are popular forms of artistic expression in Haiti.

Political Life

Government.Haiti is a republic with a bicameral legislature. It is divided into departments that are subdivided into arrondissements, communes, commune sectionals, and habitations. There have been numerous constitutions. The legal system is based on the Napoleonic Code, which excluded hereditary privileges and aimed to provide equal rights to the population, regardless of religion or status.

Leadership and Political Officials.Political life was dominated between 1957 and 1971 by the initially popular, but subsequently brutal, dictator François "Papa Doc" Duvalier, who was succeeded by his son Jean-Claude ("Baby Doc"). The Duvalier reign ended after popular uprising throughout the country. In 1991, five years and eight interim governments later, a popular leader, Jean Bertrand Aristide, won the presidency with an overwhelming majority of the popular vote. Aristide was deposed seven months later in a military coup. The United Nations then imposed an embargo on all international trade with Haiti. In 1994, threatened with the invasion by United States forces, the military junta relinquished control to an international peacekeeping force. The Aristide government was reestablished, and since 1995 an ally of Aristide, Rene Preval, has ruled a government rendered largely ineffective by political gridlock.

Social Problems and Control.Since independence, vigilante justice has been a conspicuous informal mechanism of the justice system. Mobs have frequently killed criminals and abusive authorities. With the breakdown in state authority that has occurred over the last fourteen years of political chaos, both crime and vigilantism have increased. The security of life and property, particularly in urban areas, has become the most challenging issue facing the people and the government.

Military Activity.The military was disbanded by United Nations forces in 1994 and replaced by the *Polis Nasyonal d'Ayiti*(PNH).

Social Welfare and Change Programs

The infrastructure is in a very poor condition. International efforts to change this situation have been under way since 1915, but the country may be more underdeveloped today than it was one hundred years ago. International food aid, predominantly from the United States, supplies over ten percent of the country's needs.

Nongovernmental Organizations and Other Associations

Per capita, there are more foreign [nongovernmental organizations](#) and religious missions (predominantly U.S.-based) in Haiti than in any other country in the world.

Gender Roles and Statuses

Division of Labor by Gender.In both rural and urban areas, men monopolize the job market. Only men work as jewelers, construction workers, general laborers, mechanics, and chauffeurs. Most doctors, teachers, and politicians are men, although women have

made inroads into the elite professions, particularly medicine. Virtually all pastors are male, as are most school directors. Men also prevail, although not entirely, in the professions of [spiritual healer](#) and herbal practitioner. In the domestic sphere, men are primarily responsible for the care of livestock and gardens.

Women are responsible for domestic activities such as cooking, housecleaning and washing clothes by hand. Rural women and children are responsible for securing water and firewood, women help with planting and harvesting. The few wage-earning



Haitians expect to haggle when making a purchase.

opportunities open to women are in health care, in which nursing is exclusively a female occupation, and, to a far lesser extent, teaching. In marketing, women dominate most sectors, particularly in goods such as tobacco, garden produce, and fish. The most economically active women are skillful entrepreneurs on whom other market women heavily depend. Usually specialists in a particular commodity, these *marchan* travel between rural and urban areas, buying in bulk at one market and redistributing the goods, often on credit, to lower-level female retailers in other markets.

The Relative Status of Women and Men. Rural women are commonly thought by outsiders to be severely repressed. Urban middle-class and elite women have a status equivalent to that of women in developed countries, but among the impoverished urban majority, the scarcity of jobs and the low pay for female domestic services have led to widespread promiscuity and the abuse of women. However, rural women play a prominent economic role in the household and family. In most areas, men plant gardens, but women are thought of as the owners of harvests and, because they are marketers, typically control the husband's earnings.

Marriage, Family, and Kinship

Marriage. Marriage is expected among the elite and the middle classes, but less than forty percent of the non-elite population marries (an increase compared with the past

resulting from recent Protestant conversions). However, with or without legal marriage, a union typically is considered complete and gets the respect of the community when a man has built a house for the woman and after the first child has been born. When marriage does occur, it is usually later in a couple's relationship, long after a household has been established and the children have begun to reach adulthood. Couples usually live on property belonging to the man's parents. Living on or near the wife's family's property is common in fishing communities and areas where male migration is very high.

Although it is not legal, at any given time about 10 percent of men have more than a single wife, and these relationships are acknowledged as legitimate by the community. The women live with their children in separate homesteads that are provided for by the man.

Extra residential mating relationships that do not involve the establishment of independent households are common among wealthy rural and urban men and less fortunate women. Incest restrictions extend to first cousins. There is no brideprice or dowry, although women generally are expected to bring certain domestic items into the union and men must provide a house and garden plots.

Domestic Unit. Households typically are made up of nuclear family members and adopted children or young relatives. Elderly widows and widowers may live with their children and grandchildren. The husband is thought of as the owner of the house and must plant gardens and tend livestock. However, the house typically is associated with the woman, and a sexually faithful woman cannot be expelled from a household and is thought of as the manager of the property and the decision maker regarding use of funds from the sale of garden produce and household animals.

Inheritance. Men and women inherit equally from both parents. Upon the death of a landowner, land is divided in equal portions among the surviving children. In practice, land often is ceded to specific children in the form of a sales transaction before a parent dies.

Kin Groups. Kinship is based on bilateral affiliation: One is equally a member of one's father's and mother's kin groups. Kinship organization differs from that of the industrial world with regard to ancestors and godparentage. Ancestors are given ritual attention by the large subset of people who serve the *Iwa*. They are believed to have the power to influence the lives of the living, and there are certain ritual obligations that must be satisfied to appease them. Godparentage is ubiquitous and derives from Catholic tradition. The parents invite a friend or acquaintance to sponsor a child's baptism. This sponsorship creates a relationship not only between the child and the godparents but also between the child's parents and the godparents. These individuals have ritual obligations toward one another and address each other with the gender-specific terms *konpè* (if the person addressed is male) and *komè, or makomè* (if the person addressed is female), meaning "my coparent."

Socialization

Infant Care.In some areas infants are given purgatives immediately after birth, and in some regions the breast is withheld from newborns for the first twelve to forty-eight hours, a practice that has been linked to instruction from misinformed Western-trained nurses. Liquid supplements usually are introduced within the first two weeks of life, and food supplements often are begun thirty days after birth and sometimes earlier. Infants are fully weaned at eighteen months.

Child Rearing and Education.Very young children are indulged, but by the age of seven or eight most rural children engage in serious work. Children are important in retrieving household water and firewood and helping to cook and clean around the house. Children look after livestock, help their parents in the garden, and run errands. Parents and guardians are often harsh disciplinarians, and working-age children may be whipped severely. Children are expected to be respectful to adults and obedient to family members, even to siblings only a few years older than themselves. They are not allowed to talk back or stare at adults when being scolded. They are expected to say thank you and please. If a child is given a piece of fruit or bread, he or she must immediately begin breaking the food and distributing it to other children. The offspring of elite families are notoriously spoiled and are reared from an early age to lord it over their less fortunate compatriots.

Tremendous importance and prestige are attached to education. Most rural parents try to send their children at least to primary school, and a child who excels and whose parents can afford the costs is quickly exempted from the work demands levied on other children.

Fosterage (*restavek*) is a system in which children are given to other individuals or families for the purpose of performing domestic services. There is an expectation that the child will be sent to school and that the fostering will benefit the child. The most important ritual events in the life of a child are baptism and the first communion, which is more common among the middle class and the elite. Both events are marked by a celebration including Haitian colas, a cake or sweetened bread rolls, sweetened rum beverages, and, if the family can afford it, a hot meal that includes meat.

Higher Education.Traditionally, there has been a very small, educated urban-based elite, but in the last thirty years a large and rapidly increasing number of educated citizens have come from relatively humble rural origins, although seldom from the poorest social strata. These people attend medical and engineering schools, and may study at overseas universities.

There is a private university and a small state university in Port-au-Prince, including a medical school. Both have enrollments of only a few thousand students. Many offspring of middle-class and



The carnival that precedes Lent is the most popular Haitian festival.

elite families attend universities in the United States, Mexico City, Montreal, the Dominican Republic, and, to a much lesser extent, France and Germany.

Etiquette

When entering a yard Haitians shout *outonè*("honor"), and the host is expected to reply *respè*("respect"). Visitors to a household never leave empty-handed or without drinking coffee, or at least not without an apology. Failure to announce a departure, is considered rude.

People feel very strongly about greetings, whose importance is particularly strong in rural areas, where people who meet along a path or in a village often say hello several times before engaging in further conversation or continuing on their way. Men shake hands on meeting and departing, men and women kiss on the cheek when greeting, women kiss each other on the cheek, and rural women kiss female friends on the lips as a display of friendship.

Young women do not smoke or drink alcohol of any kind except on festive occasions. Men typically smoke and drink at cockfights, funerals, and festivities but are not excessive in the consumption of alcohol. As women age and become involved in itinerant marketing, they often begin to drink *kleren*(rum) and use snuff and/or smoke tobacco in a pipe or cigar. Men are more prone to smoke tobacco, particularly cigarettes, than to use snuff.

Men and especially women are expected to sit in modest postures. Even people who are intimate with one another consider it extremely rude to pass gas in the presence of others. Haitians say excuse me (*eskize-m*) when entering another person's space. Brushing the teeth is a universal practice. People also go to great lengths to bathe before boarding public buses, and it is considered proper to bathe before making a journey, even if this is to be made in the hot sun.

Women and especially men commonly hold hands in public as a display of friendship; this is commonly mistaken by outsiders as homosexuality. Women and men seldom show public affection toward the opposite sex but are affectionate in private.

People haggle over anything that has to do with money, even if money is not a problem and the price has already been decided or is known. A mercurial demeanor is considered normal, and arguments are common, animated, and loud. People of higher class or means are expected to treat those beneath them with a degree of impatience and contempt. In interacting with individuals of lower status or even equal social rank, people tend to be candid in referring to appearance, shortcomings, or handicaps. Violence is rare but once started often escalates quickly to bloodshed and serious injury.

Religion

Religious Beliefs. The official state religion is Catholicism, but over the last four decades Protestant missionary activity has reduced the proportion of people who identify themselves as Catholic from over 90 percent in 1960 to less than 70 percent in 2000.

Haiti is famous for its popular religion, known to its practitioners as "serving the *lwa*" but referred to by the literature and the outside world as voodoo (*vodoun*). This religious complex is a syncretic mixture of African and Catholic beliefs, rituals, and religious specialists, and its practitioners (*sèvitè*) continue to be members of a Catholic parish. Long stereotyped by the outside world as "black magic," *vodounis* actually a religion whose specialists derive most of their income from healing the sick rather than from attacking targeted victims.

Many people have rejected voodoo, becoming instead *katolik fran* ("unmixed Catholics" who do not combine Catholicism with service to the *lwa*) or *levanjil*, (Protestants). The common claim that all Haitians secretly practice voodoo is inaccurate. Catholics and Protestants generally believe in the existence of *lwa*, but consider them demons to be avoided rather than family spirits to be served. The percentage of those who explicitly serve the family *lwais* unknown but probably high.

Religious Practitioners. Aside from the priests of the Catholic Church and thousands of Protestant ministers, many of them trained and supported by evangelical missions from the United States, informal religious specialists proliferate. Most notable are the voodoo specialists known by various names in different regions (*houngan*, *bokò*, *gangan*) and referred to as *manboin* the case of female specialists. (Females are viewed as having the same spiritual powers as males, though in practice there are more *houngan* than *manbo*.) There are also bush priests (*pè savann*) who read specific Catholic prayers at funerals and other ceremonial occasions, and *hounsi*, initiated females who serve as ceremonial assistants to the *houngan* or *manbo*.

Rituals and Holy Places. People make pilgrimages to a series of holy sites. Those sites became popular in association with manifestations of particular saints and are marked by unusual geographic features such as the waterfall at Saut d'Eau, the most famous of sacred sites. Waterfalls and certain species of large trees are especially sacred

because they are believed to be the homes of spirits and the conduits through which spirits enter the world of living humans.

Death and the Afterlife. Beliefs concerning the [afterlife](#) depend on the religion of the individual. Strict Catholics and Protestants believe in the existence of reward or punishment after death. Practitioners of voodoo assume that the souls of all the deceased go to an abode "beneath the waters," that is often associated with *lafrik gine* ("L'Afrique Guinée," or Africa). Concepts of reward and punishment in the afterlife are alien to *vodoun*.

The moment of death is marked by ritual wailing among family members, friends, and neighbors. Funerals are important social events and involve several days of social interaction, including feasting and the consumption of rum. Family members come from far away to sleep at the house, and friends and neighbors congregate in the yard. Men play [dominoes](#) while the women cook. Usually within the week but sometimes several years later, funerals are followed by the *priè*, nine nights of socializing and ritual. Burial monuments and other mortuary rituals are often costly and elaborate. People are increasingly reluctant to be buried underground, preferring to be interred above ground in *akav*, an elaborate multi chambered tomb that may cost more than the house in which the individual lived while alive. Expenditures on mortuary ritual have been increasing and have been interpreted as a leveling mechanism that redistributes resources in the rural economy.

Medicine and Health Care

Malaria, typhoid, tuberculosis, intestinal parasites, and sexually transmitted diseases take a toll on the population. Estimates of HIV among those ages twenty-two to forty-four years are as high as 11 percent, and estimates among prostitutes in the capital are as high as 80 percent. There is less than one doctor per eight-thousand people. Medical facilities are poorly funded and understaffed, and most health care workers are incompetent. Life expectancy in 1999 was under fifty-one years.

In the absence of modern medical care, an elaborate system of indigenous healers has evolved, including



Women are typically responsible for household maintenance and marketing garden produce.

herbal specialists know as leaf doctors (*medsin fey*), granny midwives (*fam saj*), masseuses (*manyè*), injection specialists (*charlatan*), and spiritual healers. People have tremendous faith in informal healing procedures and commonly believe that HIV can be cured. With the spread of Pentecostal evangelicalism, Christian faith healing has spread rapidly.

Secular Celebrations

Associated with the beginning of the religious season of Lent, Carnival is the most popular and active festival, featuring secular music, parades, dancing in the streets, and abundant consumption of alcohol. Carnival is preceded by several days of rara bands, traditional ensembles featuring large groups of specially dressed people who dance to the music of *vaccines* (bamboo trumpets) and drums under the leadership of a director who blows a whistle and wields a whip. Other festivals include Independence Day (1 January), Bois Cayman Day (14 August, celebrating a legendary ceremony at which slaves plotted the revolution in 1791), Flag Day (18 May), and the assassination of Dessalines, the first ruler of independent Haiti (17 October).

The Arts and Humanities

Support for the Arts. The bankrupt government provides occasional token support for the arts, typically for dance troupes.

Literature. Haitian literature is written primarily in French. The elite has produced several writers of international renown, including Jean Price-Mars, Jacques Roumain, and Jacques-Stephen Alexis.

Graphic Arts. Haitians have a predilection for decoration and bright colors. Wood boats called *kantè*, second hand U.S. school buses called *kamion*, and small enclosed pickup trucks called *taptap* are decorated with brightly colored mosaics and given personal names such as *kris kapab* (Christ Capable) and *gras a dieu* (Thank God). Haitian painting

became popular in the 1940s when a school of "primitive" artists encouraged by the Episcopal Church began in Port-au-Prince. Since that time a steady flow of talented painters has emerged from the lower middle class. However, elite university-schooled painters and gallery owners have profited the most from international recognition. There is also a thriving industry of low-quality paintings, tapestries, and wood, stone, and metal handicrafts that supplies much of the artwork sold to tourists on other Caribbean islands.

Performance Arts. There is a rich tradition of music and dance, but few performances are publicly funded.

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