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Mask of hypocrisy : Wilsonian racism and Germanophobia in the United States dictatorship of Haiti the formative years, 1915-1918

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the United States dictatorship of Haiti, the formative years,
1915–1918**

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San Jose State University, 1991

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MASK OF HYPOCRISY:
WILSONIAN RACISM AND GERMANOPHOBIA
IN THE UNITED STATES DICTATORSHIP OF HAITI
THE FORMATIVE YEARS, 1915-1918

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

By James R. Hambelton

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ABSTRACT

MASK OF HYPOCRISY: WILSONIAN RACISM AND GERMANOPHOBIA IN THE UNITED STATES DICTATORSHIP OF HAITI THE FORMATIVE YEARS, 1915-1918

By James R. Hambelton

This study examines why, after intervening in Haiti in 1915, the United States in the next three years repressed all forms of representative government, conducted a farcical constitutional plebiscite, and established a dictatorship lasting until the closing days of the occupation in the early 1930s.

Based primarily on seldom-cited State Department papers, the study concludes that the Germanophobia of the Wilson Administration and the rabid racism of occupation officials help account for the repressive government imposed on Haiti. The United States intervened ostensibly to restore law and order. But the study demonstrates that, subsequently, the United States systematically sought to "legalize" its occupation by imposing a new constitution by illegal means, while responding to reports of continuing German intrigues and denigrating the Haitian capacity for self-government. By the close of World War I, the framework for dictatorship had been completed, artfully camouflaged as constitutional government.

PREFACE

This report explains why the United States established a military dictatorship in Haiti during the early years of what turned out to be the longest, most repressive military occupation in American history, 1915-1934.

In a sense, this report is a case-study of good intention gone bizarrely awry, of the complete perversion in Haiti of the Wilson Administration's self-proclaimed, progressive idealism. That a dictatorship was imposed on Haiti, following the American military intervention in 1915, is indisputably documented in a number of scholarly accounts. The focus here, therefore, is less on details of how the dictatorship was put in place, than on what motivated American officials to impose such a form of government.

Evidence "proving" the motivation for a given action or policy can never be definitive in day-to-day life, much less in history. What should be the best available evidence--contemporaneous testimony of participants--may be only self-serving rationalizations, the familiar human failing of doing one thing while saying something else. With the limitations that necessarily apply whenever the

question is why and not simply what, this study concludes that United States policy in Haiti grew out of the mind-set, the war psychosis, that prevailed among American officials in the midst of World War I. In short, policies in Haiti reflected something more than simply an extension of the familiar Roosevelt Corollary for policing the Caribbean, the traditional view of most standard accounts.

Specifically, this study concludes that the Germanophobia of Wilson administration officials, coupled with their racial views and ignorance of Haiti, account for their harsh policies--policies that were contrary to the constitutional traditions of the United States, and that often became a blatant exercise in rank hypocrisy. In this context, traditional concerns for hemisphere security, particularly for the Panama Canal (which opened in the same month that war began in Europe) assumed new urgency, but do not explain in themselves the extreme course of events in Haiti.

Determined to protect against German influences in such a strategically important country, and denigrating the ability of even the best-educated black people to govern themselves, the Wilson administration established a military dictatorship camouflaged as constitutional government. The close of World War I in November 1918, ended all possible concerns of German influences in Haiti, real or imagined.

But by that time, the dictatorship was firmly in place and continued until the early 1930s when President Hoover, and later President Roosevelt, moved to end the occupation. Haiti was, therefore, another casualty of World War I.

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The tender regard of Augustus for a free constitution which he had destroyed can only be explained by an intensive consideration of the character of that subtle tyrant . . . [he assumed] the mask of hypocrisy which he never afterward laid aside . . . he framed the artful system of Imperial authority . . . to deceive the people by an image of civil liberty . . . sensible that mankind is governed by names . . . that the Senate and the people would submit to slavery, provided they were respectfully assured that they still enjoyed their ancient freedom.

Edward Gibbon, The History of the
Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire

Have the English text rule.

Robert Lansing, United States Secretary of State, to French-speaking Haitian officials, on the new American-inspired Haitian constitution.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE GERMANS, CRUDE BLUNDERERS WITH PALPABLE BRIBES

Haiti blisters under tropical sun on the western third of Hispaniola Island, the remainder consisting of its long-term enemy, the Dominican Republic. Once the "Pearl of the Antilles," the richest colony in the French Empire, Haiti is now far and away the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere with an estimated life-span of fifty-odd years and per capita income of \$380. The crowding, stench, squalor and poverty of its capital, Port-au-Prince, is matched only by the worst sections of Cairo and Calcutta, or the notorious favelas of Rio.¹

Haiti won its independence in 1804 after a bitter thirteen-year war devastated the country and destroyed a sixty-thousand man French army under Napoleon's brother-in-law, Marshal Victor Emmanuel Leclerc. Giving up his dream

¹Statistical data for Haiti are notoriously undependable, based largely on projections. These estimates are provided by the United Nations; see United Nations, Secretariat, Department of Economic Affairs, World Population Prospects (New York: United Nations, 1991); and World Tables 1989-1990 (Washington, D.C.: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 1989).

of using Haiti as the staging ground to assert effective control over all the lands east of the Mississippi, Napoleon staggered James Monroe, who sought only the Floridas and New Orleans, by offering the entire region spanning two thousand miles to the Pacific Ocean. Thus the ferocity of the Haitian guerrilla fighters, along with yellow fever, probably deserve more credit for the Louisiana Purchase than either Monroe or Thomas Jefferson.²

Largely ignored by the United States in its early history, except for covert military aid against the French during President Adams' undeclared war, Haiti came into the sharper focus of American officials after President Grant's abortive attempt to annex the Dominican Republic. What attracted attention was the strategic potential of Mole St. Nicholas, a deep-water, fully-protected harbor on Haiti's northwest coast, with its command of the vital seaway, the one-hundred-mile-wide Windward Passage between Haiti and

²For a dramatic account of the Haitian Revolution, based on seldom-used French archives but with intrusive Marxist overtones, see C. L. R. James, The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution (London, 1938; revised 2nd ed., New York: Vintage Books, 1963; reprint, London: Allison and Busby, 1980). For an authoritative account of the Louisiana Purchase, based on French and Spanish archives, see Henry Adams, History of the United States 9 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1889-91; reprint, New York: The Library of America, 1986), 237-367. For the best recent one-volume Haitian history (in English), see Robert Debs Heinl, Jr., and Nancy Gordon Heinl, Written in Blood: The Story of the Haitian People, 1492-1971 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978).

Cuba. Attempts to acquire Mole floundered in the 1890s and its importance receded after the Spanish America War yielded Guantanamo Bay in Cuba opposite Mole.³

But the United States had long viewed political instability in Haiti with unease. This turned to outright alarm when the Panama Canal was built and opened and Europe lurched into World War I. As the United States sought stability along the Canal's strategic approaches, Haiti, with its geographic command of the vital Windward Passage, sank into political chaos, bizarre even by the standards of its own turbulent, bloody past: eight presidents between 1908 and 1915, four in one twelve-month period known as the time of the présidences éphémères.⁴ This political instability worsened just as the Wilson administration was attempting to bring order to the unruly republics of Latin American by ending revolutions and imposing democracy "by force if necessary."⁵

³For the classic account of early United States-Haiti relations, see Rayford W. Logan, Diplomatic Relations of the United States With Haiti, 1776-1891 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941).

⁴Heinl and Heinl, Written in Blood, 373. For the only detailed history of the period immediately preceding the intervention, see Brenda Gail Plummer, Haiti and the Great Powers, 1902-1915 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1988). Plummer argues the rapid turn-over of Haitian presidents was a form of ritualized succession.

⁵Dana G. Munro, Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean, 1900-1921 (Princeton: Princeton University

Furthermore, the United States feared that the continuing political instability in Haiti was an open invitation to foreign intervention, or still worse, the establishment of a foreign naval station in Mole. From 1913 on, the United States seemed determined to acquire Mole itself or to prevent it from falling under foreign control.⁶ Negotiations, however, were no easy matter. In July, 1914, President Wilson told a press conference he had

Press, 1964): 371. Munro's scholarly account is, in part, based on his service in the Division of Latin American Affairs during the occupation and as Minister to Haiti in 1930. He is generally supportive of American policies. For a recent review of the vast literature of American Caribbean policy but with misleading insights, see Louis J. Perez, Jr., "Historiographical Essay: Intervention, Hegemony, and Dependency: The United States in the circum-Caribbean, 1898-1980," Pacific Historical Review 51 (May 1982): 165-194. For the antecedents of Wilsonian policy applied to Cuba as a prototype for evolving United States concepts, see Perez, "Dollar Diplomacy, Preventive Intervention, and the Platt Amendment in Cuba, 1909-1912," Journal of Inter-American Economic Affairs 38 (Autumn 1984): 22-44. For an early but still useful discussion of Caribbean policy formulation, revisionist for its time, see Selig Adler, "Bryan and Wilsonian Caribbean Penetration," Hispanic American Historical Review 20 Spring (May 1940): 198-226. The standard case for an economic basis of American "imperialism" is Walter LaFeber, The New Empire, An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963). For an analysis of the contemporaneous press reaction to the intervention, see John W. Blessingame, "The Press and American Intervention in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, 1904-1920," Caribbean Studies 9 (July 1969): 27-43.

⁶Bryan to Wilson, June 14, 1913, Arthur S. Link, ed., The Papers of Woodrow Wilson, vols. 27-37 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978-1981) 27:518-520; Ibid., 32:28.

been unable to keep up with the rapidly-moving events in Haiti, unable "to get the audience [in Haiti] to sit still long enough to hear us." So rapid was the turnover of Haitian presidents that President Wilson had trouble distinguishing one from the other, complaining "one had two names and we were counting him twice."⁷

Just a little over a year later Woodrow Wilson won the undivided attention of his Haitian audience. On July 27, 1915 the United States was presented an irresistible opportunity to intervene for the unassailable reason of humanitarian concern. That day 167 unarmed political hostages were massacred in their jail cells. In retaliation the next day, a street mob in Port-au-Prince hacked to death President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam, who had ordered the executions, after dragging him from asylum in the French Legation. United States Marines landed that afternoon--beginning what proved to be the harshest, longest military occupation in United States history. At its start the intervention seemed fairly routine for the day: land the marines and attempt to restore some kind of order, perhaps with some form of customs control.⁸

⁷Ibid., 30:244, July 2, 1915; Ibid., 29:292, February 8, 1914.

⁸For a first-hand account of these events, see Robert B. Davis, Jr., Memorandum, January 12, 1916, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States,

But in only three weeks United States policy in Haiti took a radical turn away from earlier Caribbean interventions and assumed the dictatorial tone that marked the occupation for most of the next nineteen years. Clearly the United States acted on the assumption of the new Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, who smugly reported to President Wilson two weeks after the intervention that in Haiti they were in a position "to arrange matters very much as we please."⁹ With Wilson's approval, Lansing made the unprecedented demand that Haiti accept "forthwith" and "without modification" a new treaty that no political leader in Haiti had even seen before, stripping Haiti of all but a fig-leaf of sovereignty. The treaty established the United States as the supreme authority with veto power over even the most minuscule details of Haiti government life. Even Lansing, himself the author of the treaty, admitted his methods were "highhanded" and an "invasion of Haytian [sic] independence" with demands far harsher than anything discussed earlier with Haiti or imposed on any other country

1916 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1925): 311-320.

⁹Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Haiti, 1910-1929, National Archives, Washington, D.C., Record Group 59, Decimal Files (hereafter, SDDF), Lansing to Wilson, August 9, 1915, 838.00/1275c.

following an intervention.¹⁰

Within three months Haiti ratified the treaty after a bruising political battle that embittered Haitian politicians of all persuasions. Ratification came only after the local navy commander, Rear Admiral William B. Caperton, under the direct orders of Washington officials, held an extraordinary meeting of Haitian leaders where he threatened to occupy the entire island, impose direct military government and possibly court martial Senators in opposition.¹¹

These heavy-handed tactics generated a massive political firestorm to the great embarrassment of occupying officials--and their leaders in Washington. In response the United States repressed all forms of representative government in Haiti, ruled by martial law, suspended freedom of the press, jailed dissidents without trial and aborted the Haitian constitution while imposing one of its own creation completely counter to Haiti's constitutional history. Except for one brief period in 1917, the Haitian Chamber of Deputies and Senate did not meet from the spring of 1916 until the closing years of the occupation in the

¹⁰Wilson Papers, 34:121-122, August 7, 1915.

¹¹Foreign Relations, 1915, 458, Navy Secretary Josephus Daniels to Admiral Caperton, November 10, 1915; SDDF, 838.00/1370.

early 1930s. The United States ruled through an American-approved, self-perpetuating president who was elected by a Council of State whose members the president appointed and removed at his pleasure. As Navy Secretary Josephus Daniels correctly put it (privately), the Haitian president, "was a nice old fellow who got \$25,000 a year for doing nothing. The Occupation is the government."¹²

Why the occupation of Haiti turned out to be the ultimate perversion of the reforming, progressive idealism of the Wilson administration is not easily explained. Granting that, in American history, rhetorical ideals are seldom matched by the reality of accomplishments, Haiti stands a case apart of good intentions gone completely awry. Among historians, the conventional wisdom is that the Haitian intervention reflected aggressive policies the United States was following in the Caribbean and Central America as it sought political stability in the region.¹³

¹²The details of this complex tale are documented in a series of telegraphic messages and reports between American officials in Port-au-Prince and Washington over the next two years. For highlights, see SDDF 838.00/1370, 1388, 1393, 1432, 1433, 1439, 1444, 1445, 1452, 1459, 1463, 1464, 1468, 1471 and 1482. For Daniels' remarks, see E. David Cronon, ed., The Cabinet Diaries of Josephus Daniels, 1913-1921 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968): 553.

¹³For two standard accounts, see Munro, Dollar Diplomacy; and David F. Healy, Drive to Hegemony: The United States in the Caribbean, 1898-1917 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976); for a harsher, revisionist view of American intentions, see Hans Schmidt, The United States

This traditional construct on stability in the region helps explain the decision to intervene itself but fails to explain why the intervention in Haiti quickly turned into an outright military dictatorship. In viewing the Haitian experience only within the confining, one-dimensional framework of the Wilson administration's Latin American policies, historians often ignore or underemphasize another vital dimension of its policy-making, one that sheds new light on why the intervention took place and why it became so repressive: the almost paranoiac mind-set of top policy-makers in Washington, including Wilson himself, who at times seemed in the controlling grip of full-scale Germanophobia. Their deep anxiety over German influences at home and abroad, coupled with remarkable ignorance of Haiti and strong prejudice against blacks, explain the extreme policies imposed on Haiti.

Compelling documentary evidence demonstrates the deep

Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1971); for the most recent examination of the occupation's impact on subsequent Haitian history, see Michel-Rolph Trouillet, Haiti: State Against Nation, The Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990). The American occupation was a source of major controversy while it was occurring. For contrasting views see Charles E. Chapman, "The Development of Intervention in Haiti," Hispanic American Historical Review 7 (August 1927): 299-319, in support with explicit racial prejudices; and strongly against, Paul Douglas, "The American Occupation of Haiti," Political Science Quarterly 42 (June 1927): 228-258; Ibid., Part II (September 1927): 368-396.

concerns of Wilson administration officials, including most importantly, the president himself, over the scope and national security threat posed by Germany's penetration of the Western Hemisphere. They believed malign German influences were at work in, for example, Mexico, Colombia, Costa Rica--most certainly in Haiti--and even in the United States itself. Given these fears, American officials accepted at face value what now appear to be highly improbable reports and rumors: Germany was preparing to invade the Panama Canal, had saboteurs aboard all United States battleships, was cooperating with France in Haiti with designs on Mole early in World War I, and was financing a massive propaganda and spying operation in the United States.¹⁴

The equally widespread and perhaps far more effective British propaganda activities seem not to have bothered Wilson officials. This may be because the large segments of the public and almost the entire Wilson Cabinet had a strong anti-German bias. While President Wilson preached the

¹⁴Robert Lansing, Confidential Diary, July 11, 1915, Lansing Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., quoted in Rayford W. Logan, Haiti and the Dominican Republic (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965): 125-126; United States Minister in Columbia to Wilson, February, 2, 1916, Foreign Relations, The Lansing Papers (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1940) 2:514-516; Edward M. House to Wilson, August 2, 1915, Wilson Papers, 34:62-65; Bryan to Wilson, March 27, 1915, Ibid., 32:440; Lansing Papers, 2:520; House to Wilson, Wilson Papers, 34:62-63.

virtues of strict neutrality, he practiced what has been more accurately called a "pro-Ally" policy of non-neutrality. The result was a tendency to view German initiatives with alarm and hostility while ignoring or rationalizing away those of the Allies.¹⁵

This background of generalized Germanophobia adds new significance to seldom-cited references in State Department papers on America's growing concern with Germany's influence in Haiti in the year or so before the intervention and for two years afterward as the occupation, step-by-step, assumed its final, repressive form. In the later period concerns ranged from fears that Germany was stirring up Haitian opposition to the American occupation to making preparations for a military invasion of the island.¹⁶

¹⁵Thomas A. Bailey finds that the entire Wilson Cabinet except for Bryan, "had definite pro-Ally leanings" and that some officials undermined President Wilson's efforts to achieve greater balance in dealing with Britain and Germany. See Bailey, A Diplomatic History of the American People, 10th ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1980) 566-575. The noted Wilson scholar, Arthur S. Link, reaches the same conclusion, arguing that during Wilson's peace initiatives of 1916-1917, "all or some of the President's intimate advisors were working undercover to defeat his aims." See Link, Wilson the Diplomatist: A Look at His Major Foreign Policies, 2nd ed., (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1957), 121. For another discussion, see John W. Coogan, "Wilson's Unneutrality and its Costs," in Major Problems in American Foreign Policy, Volume II: Since 1914, Documents and Essays, 3rd ed., ed., Thomas G. Patterson (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1989), 63-71.

¹⁶For example, see SDDF 838.00/1393 for reports of German influence on Haitian agitators and 838.00/1452 for

Aside from the fear of German influence, another factor that helped to shape the political contours of the Haitian occupation was the racial prejudice of top American officials in Haiti and Washington, including again, President Wilson personally. It is hardly surprising these prejudicial views were commonplace within the administration of the first president since Reconstruction to impose racial segregation in Federal government offices, often over the vigorous protest of black leaders.¹⁷

When officials applied their racial views to an overwhelmingly black society, they easily proved to their own satisfaction what they already believed: that blacks were biologically incapable of self-government. This racial prejudice permeates the official documents of the period. One particularly telling example, written by an American military commander almost two years after the occupation

invasion fears.

¹⁷The betrayal black leaders felt over the imposition of segregation, which they saw as President Wilson's failure to live up to campaign promises to blacks, is documented in numerous references in the Wilson Papers. For typical comment see, Wilson Papers, 28:221-223. For a carefully-documented treatment of racism in the Wilson Administration and black reaction, see Kathleen L. Wolgemuth, "Woodrow Wilson and Federal Segregation," Journal of Black History 44 (April 1959): 158-173). More recent scholarship includes Brenda Gail Plummer, "The Afro-American Response to the Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934," Phylon 43 (Summer 1982): 125-143; and Leon D. Pamphile, "The NAACP and the American Occupation of Haiti," Phylon 47 (Spring 1986): 91-102.

began, ridiculed well-educated Haitians, blaming them exclusively for all the failings of the occupation which Americans, of course, controlled. In the fifteen-page, single-spaced letter, the Marine Commander made no effort to conceal his contempt for Haitian leaders, calling them of "low mentality and ignorant beyond description . . . the best of elections is a farce." Even with those leaders who had been educated in Europe, there "is an absolute savage under the skin." They can "revert in a few minutes to the mental state of a savage in the heart of Africa." They are "vain, loving praise, excitable, changeable beyond belief, illogical, and double-faced . . . selfish and self-serving This is the type we have to deal with in Haiti."¹⁸ Undoubtedly the writer was expressing his real feeling since the letter was written privately to a State Department official, bypassing both the Secretary of Navy and Secretary of State. The sentiments are typical of the period.

That a form of Germanophobia was rampant within the Wilson administration well before the mid-1915 intervention in Haiti is, of course, commonly acknowledged by historians, but often only in passing or to suggest these fears were grossly exaggerated. Only historian Rayford W. Logan suggests Germanophobia was a major influence on policies in

¹⁸Private letter, May 17, 1917, SDDF, 838.00/1458.

Haiti but his evidence is limited and he does not explore the subject in detail. His case for the racial prejudice of top American officials is better documented but that situation is generally acknowledged by most historians.¹⁹ The great Wilson scholar, Arthur S. Link, completely discounts Wilsonian fears of German influence in Haiti, perhaps because critical State Department documents were still classified when he wrote. He was seemingly more dependent on news reports, based on rumors of German influence, than the documents themselves, in his masterful five-volume biography, Wilson.²⁰

Aspects of German influence, of course, have been well

¹⁹Logan, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Virtually all historians who have written on the intervention and the American occupation document the racial prejudice of Americans. Among those with the strongest views are Elizabeth Abbott, Haiti, the Duvaliers and Their Legacy (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1989): 37; and Schmidt, The United States Occupation, 7.

²⁰See Arthur S. Link, Wilson, 5 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947-1965) 3:530-549 for his detailed and carefully-documented discussion of Haiti. In footnote 138, p. 535, Link argues that Lansing's testimony before a Senate Committee in 1922 about fears of German influence in Haiti, particularly the possibility of direct military intervention, "was considerably overdrawn . . . grossly exaggerated if not altogether false." In this discussion Link understandably makes no references to documents declassified in 1965, five years after volume three was published, and the same year as the fifth and final volume. His discussion does, however, document self-serving reports of an American businessman who seemed to have been the source of many rumors but who was taken at face-value by President Wilson and Secretary Bryan.

documented. These include the Wilson administration perception of and reaction to what it regarded as Germany's massive, well-financed propaganda campaign in the United States, the political pressure tactics of German-Americans and other ethnic groups, and the Administration's resulting, well-known distrust of "hyphenated Americans." But few historians have analyzed how these concerns with their implicit anti-German bias helped to shape the political contours of the Haitian occupation. Most often these concerns are dismissed as ill-founded or wildly exaggerated, as indeed some were. This approach is used to underscore the gullibility, ignorance of Latin American affairs and downright naivete of William Jennings Bryan as Secretary of State--an easy mark.

Yet this approach misses the larger point. The real issue is not whether concerns of Bryan, and later Lansing, as well as other officials, over German influences were based on fact or fancy. The real issue is what impact, if any, these concerns had on decision-making at the time. In this case perception is reality. But historians more often discount the reality of a German menace in Haiti rather than analyze how the perception influenced policy there, or how the Wilson administration's fears of German influence in Haiti were fully consistent with its more generalized fears of German influence at home and abroad.

The Wilson administration's perception of pervasive German influences had a direct impact on a wide range of foreign and domestic policies--and at the highest levels of government. As a direct consequence of these concerns, for example, President Wilson revived long-stalled negotiations to acquire the Danish West Indies to keep them from falling under German control and thereby "giving them the great harbor of St. Thomas as a base of operations." Early in 1916, as the United States suspended representative government in Haiti, Wilson applied new pressure to win Senate approval of the controversial Colombia treaty after being told that otherwise, "Colombia will not oppose, if indeed it does not assist, the landing of German troops on its soil for an attack on the Panama Canal." This report cautioned that Germany planned to take over the Panama Canal when the war in Europe ended. The report said that Germany was then making "preparations in this country [Colombia] to test the strength of our support for the Monroe Doctrine" by seeking a naval refueling station in the Caribbean and covertly using a banana concession to establish a major base in Colombia. Instead of questioning how Germany would break the British blockade to storm ashore in Colombia, Wilson found the report to be of a "great deal of interest" with Senate action needed to combat "the activity of German

influences."²¹ The following year, President Wilson agreed with a suggestion from Lansing that the United States pressure Panama to declare war on Germany, but Panama acted on its own initiative.²²

In May 1917, Lansing warned President Wilson that the "German element" in Costa Rica "is stirring up feeling . . . and is financing a revolutionary movement." He suggested that it would be "unwise to aid by action or inaction the restoration of a pro-German government even if it is morally and legally entitled to be restored." Lansing seemed to be saying that no German-leaning government would get American support even when it was "morally and legally" entitled to take power. Elsewhere in Latin America, Lansing had long been concerned with Germany's possible role in the undeclared border war between the United States and Mexico long before the Zimmermann telegram seemed to provide authentication of German schemes in that country. Subsequently, Lansing warned Wilson of "German intrigues in Mexico, the flocking of thousands of Germans to that

²¹Lansing Papers, 2:501, 503, 589; Ibid., 515, 514, 516.

²²Lansing Papers, 1:632. For a discussion of United States relations with Panama, its single most important strategic concern in the Hemisphere during this period, see George W. Baker, Jr., "The Wilson Administration and Panama, 1913-1921," Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs 8 (August 1969): 779-793.

country, probable German intrigues in Central America, and also in certain countries of South America."²³

But President Wilson's concerns over German influence was by no means restricted to his Latin American neighbors. Days after intervening in Haiti, Wilson wrote privately that the United States itself was "honeycombed with intrigue and infested with German spies." This was in response to a private warning from a confidential adviser that Germany had saboteurs aboard all American battleships and in the event of war, "the Germans have marked for destruction lighthouses, tunnels and important bridges" in the United States. That Wilson took these reports seriously is hardly surprising given the vitriolic language he used to castigate domestic dissidents in his State of the Union message six months earlier. He criticized citizens "who have poured the poison of disloyalty into the very arteries of the national life" in calling for new laws so that these "creatures of

²³Lansing Papers, 2:520, 14. For the text of the Zimmermann telegram, see Foreign Relations, 1917, Supplement 1: 147. For a discussion of United States concerns over German influences in Mexico with extensive bibliographical references, see Charles H. Harris III and Louis R. Sadler, "The Plan of San Diego and the Mexican-United States War Crisis of 1916: A Reexamination," Hispanic American Historical Review 58 (Fall 1978): 382-408. For useful background on State and Navy Departments concerns over earlier German efforts to penetrate naval markets in the Western Hemisphere, see Seward W. Livermore, "Battleship Diplomacy in South America," Journal of Modern History 16 (March 1944): 31-48.

passion, disloyalty and anarchy" can be "crushed out."²⁴

That Wilson believed what he said is underscored by the fact that days after reading the report of domestic saboteurs he authorized a highly unusual move aimed at discrediting German propaganda in the United States. This was the "leak" to the New York World of newly-seized secret documents detailing the extent of German efforts in the United States. The disclosure, an adviser wrote, "will strengthen your hands enormously . . . and make it nearly impossible to continue the propaganda." Later known as the Albert Affair, which Wilson referred to privately in a love letter as "a Secret Service matter," the resulting publicity, where no source was named, had the desired effect of stirring "up an enormous amount of anti-German feeling in the United States."²⁵

With his handling of the Albert Affair, of course, Wilson was revealing his anti-German bias by responding to German propaganda while ignoring that of the British. By 1915 the rather heavy-handed and obvious German propaganda was a fact of life everywhere, as numerous scholars have documented. German-Americans contributed to the German war

²⁴Wilson Papers, 34:79; Ibid., 63; Foreign Relations, 1915, XX-XXI.

²⁵Wilson Papers, 34:158-159, 74 and footnote 5, 159 and footnote 1.

relief fund, bought German war bonds, formed the Literary Defense Fund which churned out one million pieces of German propaganda, and raised funds for Germany by buying everything from the Kaiser's picture and souvenir spoons to Iron Cross watches. At the same time, the officially-financed German Information Office in New York "produced a veritable flood that deluged almost every channel of communications."²⁶

Germans were also even more directly involved in American politics, as Wilson's advisers reported in some detail in the two weeks following the Haitian invasion. German-Americans mounted a powerful political lobbying effort aimed at imposing an arms embargo, which Wilson opposed as a danger to his policy of pro-Ally "neutrality." Under the Wilson theory, the sale of arms to the Allies and loans to finance them were "neutral" acts even though the British blockade prevented the Central Powers from taking advantage of either. The scope and potential political impact of German activities and the anti-German bias of Administration officials were underscored in early August by Wilson's private secretary Joseph Patrick Tumulty. He wrote

²⁶Link, Wilson, 3:21-31. This paragraph draws on Link's detailed discussion of German and English propaganda activities. Link suggested British propaganda was more effective than German. This is also the view of Bailey. See Bailey, Diplomatic History, 566-567.

that the German-American Alliance, claiming two million members, had demanded an arms embargo and had been sharply critical of Administration policies at its recent public meeting in San Francisco. Tumulty called this "proof of a propaganda which is growing in intensity every day . . . intolerable to all Americans not of the hyphen class." Tumulty also told Wilson that Rep. Frank Buckman (D., Ill.) was president of the newly-organized Labors' National Peace Council, a group "with generous German money behind it," and that Buckman was seeking a meeting with the president to press his case for an arms embargo. The meeting was never held and Buckman was subsequently indicted, but not convicted, for his pro-German activities.²⁷

In the same week that Wilson authorized the newspaper leak to discredit German propaganda, he also learned of still another German initiative with profound domestic political implications. This initiative was an offer by Germany to buy massive amounts of American cotton at premium prices. The move, which infuriated Wilson, was correctly seen as an effort to pry open the British blockade by winning political support from Southerners whose cotton market had collapsed with the closing of the Continental market. Wilson's reaction to this German initiative was

²⁷Wilson Papers, 34:4 and footnote 1.

hardly even-handed. He was indignant, finding the offer "amazing" and fuming what "crude blunderers they are . . . offering us a palpable bribe." He was even more forthcoming about his feelings toward Germany in a love letter to his fiancée, Edith B. Galt. Following his improbable habit of mixing wild professions of love ("unutterable happiness," "unutterable longing," "delight unspeakable" and "lighthearted joyfulness") with disclosures on confidential policy matters, Wilson confided that the German offer was "additional proof how insincere and impossible" the Germans were.²⁸

While studying what he considered this latest German outrage, Wilson received three other reports with equally ominous implications. After telling Wilson about saboteurs aboard American warships, Edward M. House, a Wilson confidant and seemingly a one-man State Department whom Wilson sometimes addressed as "Dearest Friend," passed on to the president alarming news. House cited reports that if war came, "the enemy" would attempt to occupy the Northeastern United States "as soon as possible" and therefore, "all chance for further resistance would be at an end."²⁹ Along with the two warnings from House and the

²⁸Ibid., 142, 88, 89.

²⁹Ibid., 122.

letter from Tumulty, there were equally disturbing reports from Lansing, who in June had succeeded Bryan as Secretary of State. First, Lansing warned that "meetings are being held under various auspices looking to the imposition of an embargo on [the sale of] arms and ammunition . . . propaganda is being circulated in various parts of the country and . . . may prove very embarrassing." Next Lansing passed on a telegram from Berlin marked, "STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL to be deciphered by a thoroughly confidential person." This appears to be a report from a secret agent, identified only as "a man," of his private meeting with Kaiser William. He described the Emperor as furious with the United States and with Wilson personally for pro-British policies, declaring "there is no international law," holding England responsible for the war and angry that his "brave men" were being killed by "black and yellow men."³⁰

If the Wilson administration were seriously concerned with the German menace in mid-1915 when the Haitian intervention took place, this concern, as might be expected, only intensified as relations with Germany worsened and the United States eventually entered the war. A flavoring of the period, drawn from items discussed at various Cabinet meetings, helps demonstrate the Administration's mind-set at

³⁰Ibid., 59, 78.

the time officials set final policies in Haiti. In 1917, President Wilson asked his Cabinet if German language newspapers should be "excluded," presumably meaning banned, or "compelled to print in parallel columns" an English translation.³¹

In subsequent sessions, the Cabinet approvingly heard reports that merchants in Aspinwall, Iowa had been forced to close by an indignant public when the merchants refused to support a war bond rally; learned that a young American had been banned from duty as a navy recruiter and placed under suspicion by Naval Intelligence only because he had a German surname; heard that various state officials were considering a ban on teaching the German language in public schools because "it is the medium through which treason is preached"; and refused to recognize the right of a new German-American organization to make contributions to the American Red Cross. Certainly none of these examples involve major policies, much less matters of national security. Yet that such issues could be routinely discussed at the highest level of government--and routinely reported with neither surprise nor censure--says much about the state of mind of Wilson administration officials as they decided

³¹Cabinet Diaries, 192.

the fate of Haiti.³²

This backdrop of Germanophobia became the distorting prism through which the Administration viewed developments in Haiti before intervening, and afterward, helped to shape the policies imposed there. The end of World War I, of course, meant the end of the German menace. But by then racial prejudice was the controlling factor in the American occupation of Haiti. As an American admiral put it at the time, "It would be fatal to turn over the government [of Haiti] to the negroes, as fatal or worse than to turn the South over to the negroes after the [Civil] war."³³ In the United States, the seventy-nine lynchings and the racial riots in twenty-two cities and towns the following year--the Red Scare in the Red Summer of 1919--hardly contributed to a moderation of racial views. In Haiti, a bloody uprising of peasants the previous year was suppressed only after months of guerrilla warfare. Rather than raising questions about racial policies in both countries, these upheavals seem only to have confirmed the convictions of those already prejudiced against blacks. Navy Secretary Daniels, for example, dismissed the significance of the racial riots in

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., 591.

Houston, involving black soldiers, by noting privately, "A Negro in uniform wants the whole sidewalk." ³⁴

³⁴Ibid., 195. The literature on racial disturbances is vast. For a useful summary, see William M. Tuttle, Jr., "'Red Summer': 1919," American History Illustrated 6 (July 1971): 32-41. For the issues involved as perceived by an articulate black, see Stanley B. Norvell and William M. Tuttle, Jr., eds., "Views of A Negro During 'The Red Summer' of 1919--A Document," Journal of Negro History 51 (July 1966): 209-218. Two studies cited earlier are relevant: Plummer, "The Afro-American Response"; and Pamphile, "The NAACP and the American Occupation."

CHAPTER 2

PRELUDE TO INTERVENTION, 1914-1915

Wilson administration officials who felt besieged by German propaganda at home and threatened by German penetration elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere found ample evidence in mid-1914 that Germany was planning at least a clandestine, perhaps even a military, take-over of Haiti. This posed a potentially serious strategic threat to the newly opened Panama Canal since it would have provided Germany the site for a naval base at Mole St. Nicholas, Haiti's deep-water port flanking the Windward Passage.¹

¹See, for example, Robert Lansing, Confidential Diary, July 11, 1915, Papers of Robert Lansing, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., quoted in Rayford W. Logan, Haiti and the Dominican Republic (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965): 125-126; Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, The Lansing Papers (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1939-1940) 2:514-516; Edward M. House to President Wilson, August 2, 1915, Arthur S. Link, ed., The Papers of Woodrow Wilson, vols. 27-37 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978-1981) 34:62-65; Bryan to Wilson, March 27, 1915, Ibid., 32:440; Lansing Papers, 2:520; House to Wilson, Wilson Papers, 34:62-63. German activities are based on several State Department reports: see Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Haiti, 1910-1929, National Archives, Washington, D.C., Record Group 59, Decimal Files (hereafter, SDDF): 838.00/917; 838.00/929; 838.00; 838.00/928; 838.00/943; and 838.00/977.

That fears of German incursions help account for the American invasion of Haiti in 1915 and, more importantly, helped to shape the harsh military dictatorship that followed, runs counter to the conventional wisdom of most historians. But standard accounts totally ignore or discount to the point of ridicule State Department papers, declassified in 1965, which demonstrate that American officials from early 1914 on were barraged with reports of widespread, threatening German influences in Haiti. To the extent this evidence is considered at all by most scholars, it is largely set aside as the self-serving product of American business interests determined to bring about intervention as a means of protecting their investments in the troubled Black Republic.²

²Most historians make fleeting references to German influences and decry those of American business interests. Few historians, however, have examined in detail the period immediately preceding and following the American intervention. Arthur S. Link does so in Wilson, but he was writing before State Department papers used in this report were declassified. His only mention of possible German incursions in 1914 is documented with a footnote reference to a rumor reported by the New York Times, May 14, 1914. See Link, Wilson, 5 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947-1965) 3:521, footnote 89. Surprisingly, the one historian to treat this period in great detail, David F. Healy, writing long after relevant States Department documents became public, makes no reference to them. As to German plans to establish a coaling station at Mole in 1914, he refers only to a page in Wilson which has Link's footnote on the New York Times. See Healy, Gunboat Diplomacy in the Wilson Era: The U.S. Navy in Haiti, 1915-1916 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976) 33, endnote 20. The most comprehensive coverage of the period is by Robert and

By discrediting the source of these reports, as historians traditionally do, they fail to analyze how the reports were perceived at the time. The point is not how accurate the reports were. The point is how much the reports influenced the formulation of American policy in Haiti. Looked at this way, the evidence is overwhelming that the reports were taken fully at face-value by American officials as important determinants of policy.

Nor is this surprising given the Germanophobic mindset of officials from President Wilson on down. After all, reports of German influences in Haiti were fully consistent with what the Wilson administration knew--or thought it knew--about German activities throughout the Caribbean, indeed, even in the United States itself. If Germany was actively intervening in the American political process with a massive propaganda drive and conspiring to sabotage its war-making capabilities, as officials were convinced, rightly or not, it did not stretch credulity to believe

Nancy Heinl, in their lucid, sweeping one-volume history of Haiti. They detail events leading to intervention, including German and French economic penetration. They report German attempts to acquire a coaling station in 1914 but since they do not use conventional citations, their sources are unclear. See Robert Debs Heinl, Jr., and Nancy Gordon Heinl, Written in Blood: The Story of the Haitian People, 1492-1971 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978) 351-401.

Germany was maneuvering to acquire a naval base at Mole aside vital sea lanes to the Panama Canal.³

Furthermore, the reports of German activities in Haiti came against the disturbing backdrop of growing political turmoil in Haiti. This political instability in itself may have justified American military intervention under the activist Wilsonian policies of the day. Given the anti-German bias of most ranking American officials, the reports of German activities made even more urgent the need to intervene. This intervention would end the incipient German threat to the Panama Canal while allowing Wilsonian do-gooders to teach the fractious Haitians the virtues of American-style constitutional government under benign but firm American control. That at least is the gist of official documents of the period, however misguided and hypocritical American intentions were.⁴

As the presidential turn-over in Haiti escalated sharply in the year or so before American intervention, a

³For a detailed discussion of the attitude of American officials toward Germany see above, pp.14-24 with citations.

⁴For a typical report of political instability early in 1914 see SDDF, 838.00/917 March 25, 1914; for the hypocrisy implicit in the American position, see Ibid., 838.00/1157b and 1002. These documents show that while the Wilson Plan, with its calls for constitutional government, was being telegraphed to Haiti, the Hancock steamed toward Port-au-Prince with eight hundred marines aboard under orders to "take charge of Port-au-Prince" and defend the American-favored government which had seized power by military means.

period correctly known for présidences éphémères,⁵ Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan dangled the dubious prize of full diplomatic relations before successive governments in exchange for United States control of customs and firm assurances that Mole would not be leased or sold to a third country. The wily Haitian politicians always outmaneuvered Bryan, winning recognition but never granting concessions of any kind.⁶

In the midst of this impasse the first disturbing reports of German influences surfaced within the State Department's professional staff. In late March 1914, the Division of Latin American Affairs made a strong case to Bryan for early unilateral action by the United States. Citing German demands and influences, the report was filled with the misleading information and appeals to racial stereotyping that came to color United States dealings with Haiti.⁷

At a time when foreign control in the Western Hemisphere was unthinkable, the report said both Germany and France were demanding equal partnership in any United States administration of Haiti's customs, although the Haiti

⁵Heinl and Heinl, Written in Blood, 373.

⁶SDDF, 838.00/821; 838.00/858; 838.00/864.

⁷Ibid., 838.00/917, March 25, 1914.

government was refusing partnership to all three. In addition, the report misleadingly portrayed a country "naturally so rich" that it could retire all foreign debt within two years of ending its on-going series of revolutions. Further, the report stated that with ninety percent of the public illiterate, the people did not care who was president or who administered the government and--particularly good news for Bryan--there was "no interest whatever in respect to local or foreign control of custom houses." These were matters of concern only to "a very small political faction" who benefitted personally from controlling the government, and in turn, customs revenues.⁸

In an obvious appeal to Wilsonian reforming instincts, the report claimed corrupt politicians were misleading a gullible public by spreading rumors that foreign control of customs "would mean slavery for them." Confident that America's benign intent would quickly become obvious, the report predicted that within ninety days of an American takeover the people would learn the errors of their ways and conclude that "representations of their politicians were false." On a more cautionary note, the report said Germans controlled seventy percent of the business in Haiti with "no American commercial houses there" at all. The report

⁸Ibid.

strongly recommended the "removal of custom houses from the management of politicians" as a means of restoring political and fiscal stability in Haiti.⁹

Interestingly, the State Department report seemed to be based on one of the same date with the handwritten notation that it was "handed to the Division of Latin American Affairs" with the request that its author's name be withheld and supplied verbally only "if requested." At this point the American-owned National Bank of Haiti was cutting off loans to the Haitian government, its only source of financing since the bank was both depositor for customs receipts and paying agent. But the report said large loans were being advanced by German merchants on terms ruinous enough "to bankrupt any nation."¹⁰

The following month came further reports from American businessmen in Haiti of German influences there. They reported the demands by the German Minister "to have germany [sic] counted in case of foreign control." The reports said "this aggressiveness on the part of the German Minister is due to instructions from Berlin in response to his question asked whether Germany should demand participation" in customs control. The report went on to say that "the

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

situation here is liable at any moment to become more acute because of possible German influence than at any time previously."¹¹

The report recommended immediate United States action to seize custom houses since the German Minister "is very active and is leaving no stone unturned to increase German influence and has already informed the Government that if the customs are to be controlled by another nation that Germany must be consulted." The report said there was a "considerable element" of Haitians in favor of American control "especially among the most progressive ones." Further the report said resistance would be minimal since there was no "group of personnel in the country strong enough to create any disturbance should the U.S. act." This report confirmed the earlier one that large local currency loans had been "subscribed by the German merchants."¹²

If these reports suggested Haiti was ripe for a generous dose of Bryan's Big Brother restorative medicine, two other reports to Bryan in mid-May were far more ominous. They spelled out the German menace there in compelling detail. Raising the sensitive issue of national security for the first time, the reports pictured Haiti as posing a

¹¹SDDF, 838.00/929, April 8, 1914.

¹²Ibid.

potential threat to America's great naval bastion at Guantanamo Bay by allowing Germany to establish its own naval facility at Mole on the opposite side of the Windward Passage. These concerns were based almost entirely on allegations of a pervasive German influence and the willingness of Haitian authorities to conspire secretly with Germany against the United States. These rarely-cited memos, dated May 13 and 14, 1914, are the most persuasive documentary evidence of malign German activities in Haiti as perceived by American administration officials at the time. Both reports were sent to Secretary Bryan.¹³

The first unsigned report said Germans in Haiti were taking over "complete control of the financial and commercial affairs" by making the government a \$400,000 loan at thirty-five percent interest. With the Haitian government "in financial extremities" the "Germans are seizing upon the situation" to make loans that "will secure to Germans an almost complete control of the financial and administrative affairs of the island." The report noted that German subjects already "monopolize" eighty percent of Haiti's business including docks, electrical utilities and local transportation. The new loans, according to the

¹³SDDF, 838.00, May 13, and May 14, 1914. These documents, among others, were declassified in 1965. Subsequently, they have been ignored or overlooked by historians of the period. See footnote 2 above.

report, would require "control of a portion of custom houses" and "the right to establish a general trading store or post at Mole St. Nicholas." The latter would be a German naval refueling station "in the guise of a general common store" as the French "have recently and quietly" done in Port-au-Prince.¹⁴

Establishing a base in Mole, the report continued, was "once almost carried out" by one former Haitian president "and the firm of Keitel & Co., German merchant bankers." German merchants, the report said, were "frequently and openly" discussing the idea, including a way to avoid American "interference." The plan was for the "depot at Mole" to "carry a large stock of coal which could be stored in hulks and barges in the harbor."¹⁵

Backing up its claim that Germans were attempting an economic takeover in Haiti as a prelude to establishing a German naval base in Mole, the report said agents representing Hamburg banks were attempting to acquire the American-owned Haitian National Railroad, giving Germans "a complete monopoly" from Port-au-Prince in the south to Cape Haitien in the north--the two largest cities in Haiti with Mole in between. Officials of the National Railroad were

¹⁴SDDF, 838.00, May 13, 1914.

¹⁵Ibid.

"not unwilling" to cooperate with the United States government provided it seized the custom houses whose revenues "will far exceed" those required to service foreign debt.¹⁶

"No administration which has existed or which may exist in Haiti has had or can have the strength to administer custom offices honestly" for that "promptly brings on a revolution," the report said. Further, this report also downplayed potential resistance to United States action, noting that people "would welcome stable and honest government . . . an end to the tyranny and robbery of the multitudes of generals . . . whose rule . . . is as absolute as that of any monarch." These developments in Haiti, the memo went on, raised "serious international difficulties" unless an "outside power immediately takes charge of the financial affairs of Haiti." With the United States in charge the report held out a glowing future for Haiti: American Southern planters willing to invest one million dollars in cotton production in Haiti and the United States Fruit Company establishing vast banana plantations "giving employment to thousands of people."¹⁷

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

The references to the railroad and bank as well as to the establishment of cotton and banana plantations under more stable conditions strongly suggest the memo was written by Bryan confidant Roger L. Farnham, something of a notorious figure in this period of Haitian history. Farnham's business interests might well have indicated to Bryan that Farnham was decidedly less than a disinterested observer. As vice president of City National Bank of New York, a major shareholder of the National Bank of Haiti, and president of the Haiti National Railroad, Farnham stood to gain personally with America in charge of Haiti's finances. Bonds of the railroad were guaranteed by the Haitian government. The government was the largest customer of the bank for which it acted as depository and paying agent, something like an official central bank but totally beyond government control. The correspondence of the period clearly indicates Bryan was fully aware of Farnham's business interests in Haiti. Even so, and however improbably, Farnham had the full confidence of Bryan and later of President Wilson.¹⁸

In passing on this memo to the Secretary, the Division of Latin America Affairs had ample opportunity to discount Farnham's report as self-serving. Instead the division

¹⁸For example, see SDDF, 838.00, July 2, 1914; Bryan to Wilson, March 17, 1915, Wilson Papers, 28:440.

accepted the report fully at face value and drew ominous implications for the United States strategic position in the West Indies. The second report was initialed by the division's head, Boaz W. Wolf, a Bryan appointee and former businessman with no diplomatic experience, and more significantly, a personal friend of Farnham. To explain how the division could be so knowledgeable about a country fifteen hundred miles away that its two top officials had never visited, the division referred to the previous day's memo, dated May 13, which it rather cryptically said "came to the Department through sources upon which it feels that it might depend."¹⁹

The second memo, initialed by Wolf, reported that the Haitian government was in a "precarious position" and that the current crisis was "being taken advantage of by the German Minister to Haiti . . . one of the most clever and well-trained diplomats in the German service." He was "doing his utmost to further the spread of German influence, looking to German commercial control of the island." This would be accomplished by a loan to the Haitian government "having for security control of the custom houses by Germans." But, apparently to avoid United States objections, the loan "would probably not be put through

¹⁹SDDF, 838.00, May 14, 1914.

directly by the German government, or by putting German officials in the custom houses, but through German merchants putting their clerks in the custom houses to supervise and control the business."²⁰

Going beyond the previous day's anonymous memo, but again not citing sources of any kind, the report said that two weeks earlier "information was received by the State Department . . . to the effect that the Haitian Government was considering granting to Germans a concession embracing the right to establish a coaling station at Mole St. Nicholas." The Haitian government denied making such a concession. Unimpressed with this denial, the memo raised the specter that had haunted American Caribbean policy for two decades--a foreign military base in the region in direct violation of the Monroe Doctrine. The memo correctly pointed out that if Germany acquired a "foothold" in Mole:

our present naval base at Guantanamo would be rendered ineffective. . . . Should the German interest become so strong that it would result in German control over the customs and possibly certain strategic points on the Windward Passage, where coaling stations might be established, the strategic position of the United States in that part of the West Indies would be seriously hampered, if not rendered much less effective.²¹

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

The recommended action to prevent all this was United States control of Haiti's "finances and administration of customs." Drawing on the racial stereotypes implicit in the earlier memo--an apathetic public and a government led by corrupt politicians--the memo made an American take-over seem easy indeed. It said the "ignorant negro population of the country is very emotional and easily swayed by the politicians." But once the population was shown that "foreigners are not all slave traders and have not as their only wish the enslaving of the people of Haiti and the robbing of them of their land, they would undoubtedly approve" an American-administered stable government. Further, the memo said, "political agitators" would be quickly routed by "the strong hand of the United States" and would be quashed "in a few months time."²²

Only a week later still another report, from an entirely different source, reached Bryan about German influences in Haiti. This was a five-page handwritten letter from Trebennier St. Juste, a prominent Haitian politician then in exile in Jamaica but anxious to assume the presidency of Haiti with United States support. He warned that German elements in Haiti were seeking "to strengthen their influence . . . making their financial and

²²Ibid.

political control over the country complete." St. Juste wrote that, "Germany has already gained a predominant influence in Haiti which is in fact the only foreign influence in the country . . . certainly of an alarming character both for Haiti and perhaps the United States in the near future in view of the opening of the Panama Canal."²³

He said efforts by Germany to get joint administration of Haiti customs "is merely sophistical as Germany aims at quite a different view, because the German bankers being the largest shareholders of Haytian [sic] banks would easily buy out the interests of their co-foreign claimants and then become sole controllers of the customs resources." St. Juste included a lengthy press clipping of an interview with a former American consul in Jamaica. He called for the "obliteration of the present corrupt and barbarous government of Haiti" and United States intervention to suppress revolutions "hatched by a new group of malcontents who, as is always unfortunately the case, will find German bankers to assist them."²⁴

St. Juste wrote to Bryan again in June, informing him that he was returning to Haiti as the head of the National

²³SDDF, 838.00/928, May 21, 1914.

²⁴Ibid.

Progressive Party, "strongly opposed to German influence in any shape or form" since "that German influence has been primarily the cause of recent internecine strife." He also said the German Cruiser Strassburg was prepared to sail for Port-au-Prince, "having been urgently requested by the German Minister to impress the populace" with its support for the present government since the "German element" recognized the "paramount importance of having a president whose temporary success has been due to their financial help and whose policy will naturally be to reciprocate."²⁵

It is impossible to determine how much subsequent United States policy in Haiti was influenced by these reports of German influences there, or by continuing political instability. Perhaps it was a combination of the two factors. But clearly United States policy toward Haiti became decidedly more aggressive from the summer of 1914 on. Earlier in the year, Bryan seemed to be operating on his own and was almost diffident in making rather informal demands. For example, in February, he suggested the American Minister in Haiti "make intimations" of requirements for recognizing the new Zamor government.²⁶ By summer, President Wilson was involved personally and the demands had hardened into

²⁵SDDF, 838.00/943, June 16, 1914.

²⁶SDDF, 838.00/858, February 26, 1914.

treaty requirements backed by a massive show of force. Only a month after the two major reports in May, which had posed the German threat in harshest terms, and the two warnings by Juste, came calls for United States warships, and in July the first request to land marines--both from the United States Minister in Haiti, A. Bailly-Blanchard.²⁷ In July alone there are eight separate discussions in the State Department papers of using force. So widespread were rumors of American intervention that on July 15 the German Minister formally inquired if, in fact, United States marines had landed.²⁸ These discussions of using force, in part, grew out of President Zamor's suggestion that he would make concessions sought by Bryan provided he were confronted by a face-saving overwhelming American force. By this time Zamor was engaged in a bitter civil war with Davilmar Theodor, who succeeded him in November.²⁹

On July 14, the German Minister in Haiti, confirming earlier reports, vigorously and formally demanded that Germany share in any administration of Haitian custom houses.³⁰ Such German participation would have been

²⁷Ibid., 838.00/941; 838.00/958.

²⁸Ibid., 838.00/947, 958, 960, 960/2; 964, 971, 973, 951.

²⁹Ibid., 838.00/960c.

³⁰Ibid., 838.51/354.

directly counter to the Wilson administration's concept of the Monroe Doctrine which ruled out European fiscal and economic control in the Western Hemisphere.³¹

This protest by Germany lent new weight to a report three weeks earlier by Farnham that German merchants were negotiating to make a \$500,000 loan to the Zamor government at thirty-five percent interest. Farnham said his bank would continue its financial strangle-hold on the Zamor government, refusing it loans, since there was "nothing in sight to provide for the repayments." In one of his most astonishing reports, Farnham said that the French and German shareholders of his bank (controlling 50 per cent), have "recommended to their governments that they should take over and administer the customs and have also requested that they intervene to insure order in Port-au-Prince." This report was simply passed on to Bryan without written comment and there is nothing in the record to show his reaction.³²

Such an act, of course, would have been in direct violation of the Monroe Doctrine and completely unacceptable to the United States. At first glance it may seem highly improbable that Germany or France would antagonize the United States by violating its well-know interpretation of

³¹For Bryan's formulation of this policy as it applied to Haiti, see Wilson Papers, 32:372-373.

³²SDDF, 838.00, June 25, 1914.

the Monroe Doctrine with a military intervention in far-away Haiti. But this was two months before the war in Europe, and Germany and France had long cooperated in Haiti against American interests.³³ Further, the single German cruiser at Port-au-Prince was fully sufficient to carry out a military take-over. Any coastal city of the region at the time was at the mercy of whatever great power trained big guns on it--as the United States well knew from long experience, or so the American navy thought, in expressing concern. In late July the navy reported that because of the presence of the German cruiser and the "prominent activities of the German Minister", the navy "deemed it unwise" to "take away one U.S. warship from that city before another arrives."³⁴

Confirming that Farnham was not alone in worrying about German intentions in Haiti, American officials on the spot in Port-au-Prince, were objecting to Germany providing asylum for revolutionary leaders. One report said the German Legation, "persist in arbitrarily harboring for an indefinite period political refugees who are known to be

³³For a discussion of this convoluted history, see Heinl and Heinl, Written in Blood, 351-357.

³⁴Ibid., 838.00/964.

leaders and instigators of the disturbances" sweeping the country.³⁵

It is difficult to establish with any precision what influence Farnham was having on policy formulation at this point. Certainly his reports were accepted as authentic by the professional staff of the State Department. His high standing with Secretary Bryan may be the best measure of Farnham's credibility and, by inference, of his reports: documentary evidence makes clear that Bryan placed the highest possible confidence in Farnham. This appearance of confidence is underscored by the fact that Farnham--not the American Minister--became Bryan's point man in attempting to force the Zamor government to accept a new treaty that had been personally edited and approved by President Wilson. Had Bryan doubted the veracity of Farnham's report of a German or French take-over of Haiti, it seems totally improbable that only a week later Farnham would have been in Cape Haitien--personally commissioned by Bryan and with United States warships at his disposal--negotiating with Zamor officials on behalf of the United States. He reported that for the moment the Zamor government had evaded his financial squeeze with a loan from "some German merchants here." At that point, the United States was offering Zamor

³⁵Ibid., 838.00/977.

military backing in exchange for customs control and assurances on Mole. Not surprisingly given Farnham's central role, the convention America wanted to impose is known in State Department papers as the "Farnham Plan." Despite his personal involvement, the president tried to distance himself in public from the turmoil in Haiti, discounting rumors of a German loan, denying negotiations were underway, but finding the situation "just bristling with interrogation points." ³⁶

If the situation in Haiti seemed murky, with the United States prepared to support a government that had come to power through revolution as a means of ending further revolutions, matters took an alarming turn in August. Bryan received startling news, this time not from his subordinates in the State Department, or even from his trusted adviser, Farnham, but from the Haitian government. If the May reports strongly suggested a German threat in the Caribbean requiring firm United States countermeasures, the news in August from the government of Haiti itself may have alarmed Bryan even more. The government had "passed as urgent" a new law providing for a bold new plan to "participate in the economic results" of the newly opened Panama Canal by taking advantage of "the geographic position of the Mole St.

³⁶Ibid., 838.00/970; 838.00/948; Foreign Relations, 1914, 347-350; Wilson Papers, 30:241, 244, 209, 296.

Nicholas, the excellence of the port of which is indisputable [sic]." ³⁷

This ambitious plan envisioned nothing less than reconstructing Mole into a major Caribbean shipping center, or as the law put it, "fitting up the port and town of Mole." This was to include new pier, water and sewer services, telegraph lines, ship repair facilities and "restaurants, hotels, theaters, etc. to assure the comfort of travellers." What might have seemed on the face of it a commendable, if grandiose, move for developing economic self-sufficiency by an impoverished country--bootstrapping, it would later be called--had a decidedly disturbing aspect. This venture in economic development would be carried out with the assistance of "contractors and capitalists"--no nationality specified. The Haitian originator of the scheme a year earlier had suggested only Americans would invest, but the law itself carried no such restriction. In fact, it specifically repealed "all laws and provisions of laws" regarding Mole. ³⁸

This opening of Mole to foreign development and, therefore foreign control, must have alarmed Bryan. He immediately sought reassurances as to his earlier informal

³⁷SDDF, 838.15/2.

³⁸Ibid.

understanding that Mole would never fall under foreign domination, except by the United States. The response from Haiti was hardly reassuring. The Haitian government simply denied any knowledge of such agreement, blandly asking if it had been made "in writing or verbally." Bryan's response to this brazen threat of foreign domination of the strategically important Mole was in the best traditions of the dollar diplomacy he once abhorred. Seemingly without prior approval from President Wilson, Bryan proposed a long term lease of Mole by the United States "if the Haitian government needs money."³⁹

Bryan's move came after the American Minister warned that the law was so broadly drawn that it might "in the future seriously affect both the Government and private interest of the United States." Noting that "Haiti's present financial condition is probably the most acute in the history of the Republic," a long-term lease of Mole "might be secured" with immediate cash payments to tide the government over. The Minister, if not Bryan, obviously saw the law as a ploy to get American funds as a means of overcoming Farnham's refusal to make loans.⁴⁰

³⁹Ibid., 838.15; 838.15/1; 838.15/2.7

⁴⁰Ibid., 838.15/2.

That he was being blackmailed seemed not to bother Bryan, provided he could get assurances on Mole, for the fate of Mole had long been of great personal interest to Bryan, as Haiti officials may have fully realized. Controlling Mole had been the central focus of his many diplomatic initiatives, and would have left Haiti hardly more than an noisy appendage to United States Caribbean policy. Further he seemed to believe that he had personally "discovered" Mole's importance the previous year when he had proposed acquiring it along with a twenty-mile strip of surrounding land. The idea was for the United States to use the harbor or to prevent any other country from doing so.⁴¹

Like his efforts the previous year, the new initiative to lease Mole was unsuccessful. In November 1914, the navy determined there was "no necessity for Naval purposes" for either leasing or owning Mole. But the navy was clearly uncomfortable with plans for developing Mole. After denigrating Haitian plans as economically unfeasible and criticizing Mole for its size and location, particularly compared to the excellent naval facilities already available at Guantanamo and Panama, the navy covered its bets.

⁴¹For Bryan's initiatives on Mole see, for example, SDDF, 838.00/858, February 26, 1914; 838.00/1022, November 12, 1914; and 838.51/379a, December 12, 1914. For his 1913 proposal to acquire Mole, see Bryan to Wilson, June 14, 1913, June 20, and Wilson to Bryan, June 23, 1913, Wilson Papers, 27:518-520.

Underscoring Mole's on-going strategic significance, the navy raised "serious objections" to any European concessions in Mole "whose tenure might mask the intentions of the European government to have a [naval] station in the West Indies under its control." It even objected to Haiti going ahead with the development "with moneys obtained from a European loan," though it doubted such a loan would be forthcoming.⁴²

In October 1914, while the future of Mole was still an open issue and with the civil war between Zamor and Theodore continuing, Bryan learned why Haiti had eluded all his many efforts to win concessions. The Division of Latin American Affairs blamed this failure squarely on German influences. Portraying conditions in Haiti as "very serious," and more recently "absolutely acute" and that "American property and life are in jeopardy," the report said Bryan's efforts to negotiate a treaty were "frustrated by opposition from German influences," particularly the German Ambassador to Haiti who "displayed and took a very independent" position. The report said the United States feared that "complications might arise regarding German interests in Haiti" and explained that only the start of World War I in August had avoided a crisis earlier. The report warned that the most

⁴²SDDF, 838.15/3, November 6, 1914.

important reason for pressing ahead with a treaty was to "avoid in the future complications with European powers."⁴³

What may have been only a show of force in the summer of 1914 had turned into the real thing by the fall. The names of American warships in Haitian waters reads like a Naval Honor Roll: the USS Washington, Hancock, Nashville, Machias, Wheeling, Georgia and New Jersey. Moreover, some carried contingents of marines ready to land and force the issue. By that time the United States approach to Haiti had assumed the ugly, heavy-handed methods that would characterize the occupation the following year. For example, in October, with negotiations stalled and the fate of Mole still undecided, Lansing (in Bryan's absence) sought President Wilson's approval to sharply increase America's military presence in the area "as evidence of the earnest intention of this Government to settle the unsatisfactory state of affairs which exist" in Haiti. Ever the realists with a sense of Realpolitik that might have made Bismarck blush, Lansing said there was an "urgent need" of increased military forces "when a renewal of negotiations seems possible." Wilson quickly agreed and ordered two more warships to Haiti.⁴⁴ As a result the USS Hancock steamed

⁴³Ibid., 838.00, October 23, 1914.

⁴⁴Ibid., 838.00/1002; and 838.00/1078a.

toward Haiti with eight hundred marines aboard under orders to achieve the Wilson administration's own version of constitutional government, to "take charge of Port-au-Prince" and buttress the failing Zamor government. At the same time, the Wilson Plan with its call for constitutional government was being telegraphed to Haiti.⁴⁵

Before the marines arrived, Zamor had fled and his successful opponent, Theodore, had been elected president. This was done, not as set forth in the Wilson Plan, by United States supervised elections, but as prescribed by the Haitian constitution, by vote of the National Assembly, composed of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. That Haitian presidents were indirectly elected seems to have been a conceptual set-back for the Wilson Plan with few subsequent references to it in State Department documents.⁴⁶

At the same time the American Consul in Cape Haiti portrayed a society on the verge of chaos. His report said that with civil war again raging, the country was in "an intolerable situation." He reported "business stagnation, suffering, pillaging, burnings and assassinations" with most "substantial people" favoring United States intervention.

⁴⁵Ibid., 838.00/1157b; and 838.00/1002.

⁴⁶Ibid., 838.00/1157b.

This was also the substance of a departmental situation report submitted at the same time, claiming politicians of all persuasions in Haiti favored an American takeover but feared to say so because "all [are] afraid of the wrath and vengeance of the people." These "ignorant classes" were "afraid of losing independence and restoration of slavery," issues kept alive by "agitators who prefer to perpetuate revolution and graft and by foreigners" who oppose the growth of United States influence. All this may have lent new weight to a Farnham report at about the same time that diplomacy was no longer enough, that American citizens and businesses now needed "armed protection." Without immediate United States action, he warned that European powers would intervene in Haiti.⁴⁷

This continuing instability in Haiti and the inability of the United States to take decisive action led President Wilson to appoint two separate commissions to visit Haiti in the spring of 1915 in unsuccessful efforts to restore stability by imposing United States control. But the continuing fear of German influence, particularly over Mole, heightened the Wilson administration's growing concern over developments in Haiti. For example, in early January, Bryan called Wilson's attention to press reports that "Mole St.

⁴⁷Ibid., 838.00/1075, 1085, 1077.

Nicholas is being used by Germans as a base of supplies" and suggested that if this were the case, "the United States should seek control of Mole for the duration of the war."⁴⁸

In March in still another revolution, Vilbrun Guillaume Sam succeeded Theodore as president. Late that month Bryan consulted at length with Farnham in Washington. That Bryan would be meeting with Farnham at this critical time is a measure of the high credibility Farnham continued to enjoy. There can be no doubt from the record that his reports, even the most improbable, were taken at face value not only by Bryan but by Wilson. Indeed President Wilson seemed delighted that Bryan would be meeting with Farnham, writing the Secretary, "I hope that you will go into the Haitian situation very fully with him and find out all he knows."⁴⁹

What he found out was plenty, much of it subject to ridicule by later historians. But so seriously were Farnham's disclosures taken that in reporting to Wilson, Bryan, whose usual correspondence with the president is marked by courtesy bordering on the obsequious, cautioned Wilson that Farnham did not want portions of their conversations put in writing, even to the President of the

⁴⁸Wilson Papers, 32:28, January 7, 1915.

⁴⁹Wilson Papers, 32:438.

United States. Because of this Bryan wrote, "I had better have a few minutes with you to go over the situation."⁵⁰

After the meeting with Farnham, Bryan made the report that has become infamous among scholars of Haiti--that France and Germany "seem to be in sympathetic cooperation" in Haiti with "some indications that their plans include taking advantage of Mole St. Nicholas."⁵¹ Historians have correctly questioned why two countries at war would cooperate in using the same seaport in Haiti and for what purpose. Bryan's report, therefore, may be worth a closer examination than it is usually accorded in scholarly literature. Here is what he wrote:

The British Ambassador has asked what we had decided to do in the matter of recognition and why recognition was delayed. It seems that the German and French Ministers acted simultaneously--if not together--and there seems to be some sympathetic cooperation between the French and German interests in Haiti. There are some indications that their plans include taking advantage of Mole St. Nicholas."⁵²

Aside from the remarkable idea of "taking advantage" of Mole, there is little new here. In evaluating this statement it is important to recall, first, that France and Germany (and England, even Italy) usually recognized a new

⁵⁰Ibid., 440, March 27, 1915.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.

Haitian government before the United States did so; only the United States was seeking control of Haiti in exchange for recognition. Second, Germany and France long had cooperated in resisting inroads by Americans in Haiti--only direct pressure from the United States led French and German investors to allow Americans earlier in the decade to acquire a fifty per cent interest in Farnham's National Bank of Haiti. In a sense French and German cooperation was long-standing. Third, Mole was--and still is today--virtually cut off from the remainder of Haiti. In 1915, no one in Port-au-Prince, much less Washington, could possibly have known what actually was taking place there without visiting the harbor. In those days, of course, there was no aerial surveillance. Even telegraph communications between the two major cities of Port-au-Prince and Cape Haiti were sometimes interrupted.⁵³

However naive it seems in retrospect that France and Germany could have been planning to use Mole, historians have ignored or overlooked documentary evidence that the threat, at least of German incursions, was taken seriously at the time by the United States Navy. The evidence is in a detailed, day-by-day account of naval activities in Haitian

⁵³For French and German resistance to American interests in the earlier period, see Heinl and Heinl, Written in Blood, 353-357.

waters for March 1915. This report shows that on March 1-- almost a month before Farnham's visit in Washington when concerns over Mole were expressed--the navy sent the USS Wheeling steaming into Mole harbor specifically to investigate "rumors that the German cruiser Karlsruhe [?] had been there and made this place a rendezvous."⁵⁴

After questioning the harbor master and visiting other officials, the navy concluded the rumor was false, that only a British warship had recently visited the location, but without docking. The visit itself by a United States warship and the careful questioning of officials at Mole, reported in great detail, strongly suggest the navy had been no more willing than Bryan or Wilson to dismiss out of hand rumors of German activity there. Apparently the navy correctly believed that a foreign navy could have been using Mole with no one in Haiti aware of it. This is particularly true given the reports of the previous May that Germany wanted to establish a navy resupply base there concealed in civilian barges. But the navy's report for March, including the Wheeling's visit, did not reach the State Department

⁵⁴SDDF, 838.00/1153, March 27, 1915. Spelling of the German ship can not be determined from the record. The Karlsruhe is identified as the German cruiser at Port-au-Prince in the summer of 1914; see Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the Second Session of the Sixty-Seventh Congress (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922), 62, Part 6:6487.

until March 27. This may have been too late to ease concerns over Farnham's reports made about the same time.⁵⁵

Perhaps with the full benefit of hindsight the reports on Mole can be seen as only another self-serving invention of Farnham in his on-going effort to trigger American intervention. But clearly this is not how the reports were viewed at the time. Like the navy, Wilson took these reports at face value and acted accordingly. President Wilson told Bryan that the matter "has a most sinister appearance. The more we go into it the more unpleasant and unpropitious it looks."⁵⁶

Moreover, Wilson also seems to have taken at face value two other questionable reports from Farnham. The first was that the French were making a one million dollar loan to Haiti. This would have allowed the Theodore government to avoid the financial pressure applied by Farnham with his bank's refusal to make loans. While President Wilson found it "singular" that a loan "can be had

⁵⁵Ibid. In Haiti even today most coastal settlements are inaccessible except for Port-au-Prince, Cape Haitian, and Jacmel, which are connected by (usually) reasonably good roads. Before the new highways fifteen years ago, the thirty-mile trip from Port-au-Prince to Jacmel was a five to seven hour adventure by jeep including river fordings and hair-pin turns on mountain trails. Mole is approximately three times the distance from Port-au-Prince with no linkage to the single road north to Cape Haitian. These observations are based on the writer's personal experiences.

⁵⁶Wilson Papers, 32:458, March 31, 1915.

out of France at this time" he said whatever form the loan took it would have "the backing of the French government." The second report was more ominous, threatening American withdrawal from the bank and railway leaving France and Germany in total control of Haiti. In response Wilson said that, "American interests should stay [in Haiti] and that we should sustain and assist them in every legitimate way."⁵⁷

Shortly after Farnham's visit, the first presidential commission visited Haiti. Again the United States offered recognition in exchange for concessions and again got nowhere. President Sam's flat refusal even to begin negotiations before recognition led to the abrupt end of the first presidential commission which left Port-au-Prince only days after arriving. By this time, however, the Sam government had already been recognized by Germany and Italy with the French Minister recommending recognition.⁵⁸

This failure of the first commission led Bryan to make what turned out to be his final major analysis of the Haitian situation for the president. Foreign influences and the future of Mole figured prominently in this report. For the first time, Bryan concluded that domination of Haiti by foreign financial interests constituted a violation of the

⁵⁷Ibid., 440, footnote 1; 458, 438.

⁵⁸SDDF, 838.00/1116, 1138, 1140, 1145.

Monroe Doctrine. He wrote that Haiti "presents a number of embarrassments," with foreign capitalists having "a controlling interest in the politics of Haiti" and American business "discriminated against." He explained that the "French Minister is the advisor of the President" and that "German merchants have eighty-five percent of the local business." The result was, he wrote, that the Haiti government "is under French or German influence." He concluded that, "we have as much reason to object to the control of a Latin-American Government by foreign financiers as by a foreign government."⁵⁹

As to Mole, Bryan said he assumed the president had not changed his mind and that Mole "should not be permitted to pass into the hands of other foreign governments or capitalists," an apparent reference to the August proposal for Mole's development. Bryan seemed undecided on the use of force but said this may not be necessary "with a good size ship there ready to enforce" United States demands."⁶⁰

Wilson had no such hesitation. "The time to act is now," he wrote. The United States should make certain demands as to the price of recognition "backed by the intimation that we will not take No for answer." His first

⁵⁹Wilson Papers, 32:471-473.

⁶⁰Ibid.

priority was "control of Mole Saint Nicholas, or at the least, the exclusion there of foreign control." Next Wilson suggested appointment of an American "advisor" to determine conditions upon which the United States would support the government, thereby preventing further revolutions, and to keep an eye on the management of customs "with the greatest of vigilance."⁶¹

To carry out this assignment President Wilson appointed Paul Fuller, Jr., son of his special agent in Mexico. Fuller's instructions on Mole included the restriction that "no rights of any kind concerning the use of Mole St. Nicholas will be granted to any foreign government, or to the nationals of any foreign government." The United States would be willing to lease Mole but "will not insist upon such lease if objectionable to Haiti." But the instructions went on, saying "it can not consent to the lease or use of such harbor by any third power, or to the nationals of the third power." The Haitians readily agreed to these provisions on Mole. Initially Fuller made such progress that the United States granted the Sam government recognition.⁶²

⁶¹Ibid., 473.

⁶²Ibid., 33:275-277.

President Wilson himself was "a little suspicious" of Haiti's intentions but agreed the United States could not very easily sign a treaty with a government that it did not recognize. Again, however, Bryan was outwitted. By mid-June Fuller was back in Washington with no agreement. The breaking point was the Haitian insistence that its government would determine when American forces had to be withdrawn from Haiti when and if they had intervened to suppress future revolutions. Fuller objected on grounds this would mean United States armed forces would be placed "in the position of lackeys to any foreign government" or would leave "ourselves in the humiliating position of holding our army and navy at the beck and call of any administration that happened to find itself in power" in Haiti. For their part, Haitian officials pointed to the "great sensitiveness amongst the people which the government was forced to take into account and that they would be afraid to sign a convention leaving it with the United States to determine how long foreign troops should remain on Haitian soil."⁶³

That was how matters stood as Bryan resigned in mid-June in protest over Wilson's diplomatic correspondence with Germany. Early in July, Wilson wondered to Bryan's

⁶³Ibid., 33:467, footnote 1; SDDF, 838.00/1197.

successor, Robert Lansing, "what ought to be done in Haiti, and how it ought to be done." President Wilson sought Lansing's opinion.⁶⁴

He quickly learned--if he did not suspect already--that Lansing's approach would be far more demanding and far less conciliatory than Bryan's. In his final briefing memo to Lansing, Bryan still hoped for a conciliatory approach in Haiti, calling United States demands "very mild and moderate." This was not how Lansing saw things at all. For Lansing was sharply critical of Fuller's report--not because Fuller aborted negotiations when on the verge of success--but because he thought Fuller's report "does not go far enough" in its demands on Haiti. Lansing said Fuller would have obligated the United States to protect Haiti, but left Haiti free to follow policies of its own choosing. The following month Lansing had the opportunity to apply his own harsher methods. While he wrote President Wilson in mid-June, criticizing Fuller's report, another revolutionary force marched toward Port-au-Prince preparing to overthrow the barely four-month old presidency of Guillaume Sam.⁶⁵

⁶⁴SDDF, 838.00/1196, July 2, 1915, Wilson to Lansing.

⁶⁵For the text of Bryan's briefing paper for Lansing, written shortly after his resignation, see Paolo E. Coletta, ed., "Bryan Briefs Lansing," Pacific Historical Review 27 (November, 1958): 383-396. Commentary on Haiti, p. 391. For Lansing's commentary on the Fuller Report, see SDDF, 838.00/1197, June 14, 1915.

CHAPTER 3

GETTING THE TREATY SIGNED:

"THE ESSENCE OF THE WHOLE MATTER"

1915

Perhaps Woodrow Wilson was a workaholic who simply did not vacation well. That may explain why in early August 1915, escaping the oppressive heat of Washington at Harlakenden, his summer retreat in the cool hills of Cornish, New Hampshire, the President felt "restless as a caged tiger," had trouble sleeping, lacked time to answer personal mail, and on August 5 suffered one his "rare but awful" headaches. Or perhaps Wilson was experiencing what is now called executive burn-out. For in early August, he faced crises that may have tested even his disciplined intellect and strong work ethic: reports of widespread and politically effective German propaganda in the United States, troubles in winning Latin American support for his Mexican policy, events in Haiti (where American marines had seized control only two weeks earlier), and continued diplomatic fallout from his stern warnings to Germany after

the Lusitania sinking.¹

Of the urgent policy issues on his action agenda, Wilson privately identified Haiti as "the critical matter" but he clearly had no idea what to do there beyond holding Port-au-Prince. He sought "some key" to the many complications in Haiti that "we have not mastered" and called the Haitian situation "a pretty mess."²

To say the least. On July 27, after a street-mob killed President Guillaume Sam, a peasant army entered Port-au-Prince intending to install its own leader as the fifth president of Haiti in only fifteen months. This political chaos appalled officials of the Wilson administration as they sought stability along strategic approaches to the newly-opened Panama Canal. For two frustrating years the United States had unsuccessfully sought control over Haiti to end its recurring revolutions. The murder of President Sam, after he ordered the machete massacre of 167 unarmed political hostages, including a former President, was the

¹Arthur S. Link, ed., The Papers of Woodrow Wilson, vols. 27-37 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978-1981) 34:101, 107. Possibly more distracting is that President Wilson was in love. Having buried his wife of twenty-nine years less than a year earlier, he was by mid-1915 caught up in a consuming passion. In only two days earlier that month, he wrote eight love letters--totalling approximately five-thousand words--to his fiancée, Edith B. Galt. See Ibid., 74, 78, 79, 89, 90.

²Ibid., 34:89.

last straw. United States Marines landed unopposed with only two casualties, probably self-inflicted from nervous friendly fire, and easily took control of the capital.³

Surprisingly, for all the time American leaders in Washington had maneuvered to impose their will on Haiti, they seemed strangely unprepared when the Marines gave them that opportunity. On August 3, Secretary of State Robert Lansing wrote Wilson that he was not sure "what we ought to do or what we can legally do." The next day Wilson, agreeing, expressed fear that "we have not the legal authority to do what we apparently ought to do."⁴

This hand-wringing over legal niceties is deceptive, however--as though both men felt obligated to pay homage to the legalities before getting down to business and ignoring them completely. Neither Wilson nor Lansing was a virgin in using force to impose his will on Latin American neighbors. And Lansing, in the best traditions of the resourceful Wall Street lawyer he once was, quickly concocted a novel legal rationale fully sufficient to support the cause of his

³For a vivid, first-hand account of these events, see Robert B. Davis, Jr., Memorandum, January 12, 1916, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1916 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1925): 311-320.

⁴Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Haiti, 1910-1929, National Archives, Washington, D.C., Record Group 59, Decimal Files (hereafter, SDDF): 838.00/1275b; Wilson Papers, 34:69-70; Ibid., 78-79.

client, however cynical and deceptive it proved in practice. Lacking a provocation by Haiti as the basis for action, Lansing made the convenient determination that for humanitarian reasons the United States had to seize Haiti custom houses, the government's only source of revenue. This was, of course, by happenstance or otherwise, precisely what Washington had been attempting to do since early 1914. This control was required, Lansing argued, not only to cut off financing for further revolutions, but also to provide funds for the "humane duty of furnishing means to relieve the famine conditions" in Port-au-Prince. On the face of it, this was commendably compassionate--although not a cent ever went for that purpose.⁵

The prospect of giving away food, however, even to prevent starvation, alarmed Lansing's fellow Cabinet member, Navy Secretary Josephus Daniels. He admitted that food was scarce in Haiti and there was "suffering among the poor." Yet reflecting the Southern, prejudicial racial views that permeated official thinking on Haiti, he warned President Wilson that it is "very dangerous to begin to supply provisions because many Haitians are like the negroes [sic] in the South after the [Civil] war and would quit work entirely, deserting plantations if our Government undertakes

⁵SDDF, 838.00/1275B.

to feed them." Daniels had no need for concern. For one thing, there were no big plantations in Haiti from which Negroes could desert. For another, Lansing was far less interested in feeding the people than in the power that came with controlling governmental revenue. Lansing used this power of the purse to force Haitian ratification of a new treaty. He arrogantly demanded that the treaty, drafted by the United States, be approved "forthwith" and "without modification" even though it had never been seen by anyone in Haiti and was a drastic departure from earlier proposals by former Secretary William Jennings Bryan.⁶

Further, Lansing ordered the marines to seize custom houses well before he submitted the proposed treaty to Haiti, even though customs control was the single most contentious provision of the new treaty and the issue upon which all previous American efforts to gain control in Haiti had floundered. These heavy-handed tactics infuriated Haitian politicians, even those who initially had strongly favored the American occupation. In protest, the new Haitian President, Sudre Dartiguenave, specifically chosen by United States authorities for his cooperative,

⁶Daniels to Wilson, August 2, 1915, Wilson Papers, 34:61; SDDF, 838.00/1301. For the text of guidelines for the new treaty, see Foreign Relations, 1915: 431-433, August 12, 1915. For contrast with the earlier proposal, see Foreign Relations, 1914, 347-350.

pro-American views, threatened to resign along with his entire Cabinet.⁷

Haitians were not alone in protesting Lansing's tactics. Surprisingly, the American military commander, Rear Admiral William B. Caperton, vigorously objected to Lansing's policies. He warned that the seizures of custom houses were "violently opposed," were "extremely undesirable," and that Washington "is entirely unaware of the situation in Haiti." Caperton said that Lansing's demands would require him to occupy the entire seacoast of Haiti, "which is extensive," and for which he lacked the necessary military force. Underscoring the point made by Haitians, Caperton reminded Washington that the take-over order came precisely when "a treaty [was] under negotiation in Port-au-Prince covering this custom control matter." Showing more diplomatic skills than the head of the State Department, he argued that "chances for successfully negotiating the treaty will be increased if we, for the moment, cease seizing the custom houses and conduct no further military operations." Overruled by Washington, Caperton demanded heavy marine and navy reinforcements to maintain public order. He also planned to make the seizures in secret to prevent public disturbances. The arrival of

⁷SDDF, 838.00/1302.

more navy warships and the scene of two thousand marines streaming ashore in an already militarily prostrate Haiti itself provoked further public outrage. Caperton told Washington that while he could "accomplish anything we desire by force," he recommended a more conciliatory course. He said a "due respect for the sensibilities of the Haitians and a friendly attitude in our operations at this time will do a great deal toward accomplishing what we wish now, and will lay the foundation for good relations between the two governments in the future." He closed with the pointed reminder that "we are not at war with Haiti."⁸

While taking over custom houses was the centerpiece of the proposed treaty, Lansing ordered Caperton to implement two other provisions, again well in advance of opening negotiations. One of these provisions was particularly controversial: Lansing ordered Caperton, as a first priority, to use customs revenues to establish an American-controlled para-military constabulary. This was to replace the Haitian Army, which given the country's revolutionary roots, had long been the repository of national pride and power, and was the ultimate guarantor of its hard-won independence. Much less controversial was the plan to institute a public works program to relieve unemployment and

⁸Ibid., 838.00/1301, 1302.

to use any remaining revenues to cover government expense. As a smoke screen to cover this unilateral usurpation of power, Lansing ordered Caperton to have "President Dartiguenave solicit the above actions."⁹

Lansing brushed aside Caperton's objections and sound advice. At the same time, he dismissed out of hand a formal note of protest by the Haitian government, saying that he was "loath to believe" the Haitian Minister in Washington actually represented the views of the Haitian government. Instead, Lansing asked Dartiguenave, his hand-picked President, to publicly repudiate his Minister in Washington. Faced with the vigorous opposition by even what had been the strongest Haitian supporters of American action, Lansing made plans to rule by direct United States military fiat under a puppet Haitian president. Through an intermediary, who had the confidence of Dartiguenave, Lansing secretly passed word to Dartiguenave, reassuring him that the United States will "maintain you in authority" provided "you will stand firm with the United States." This would be done, Dartiguenave was told, even if his entire Cabinet and all

⁹Ibid. For a discussion of the pre-intervention role of the Haitian army, see Brenda Gail Plummer, Haiti and the Great Powers, 1902-1915 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1988). For a discussion of the changed, post-intervention role of the army, see Michel-Rolph Trouillet, Haiti: State Against Nation, the Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990).

members of the National Assembly (the Chamber of Deputies and Senate) resigned, provided that he agree to ". . . accept the guidance and wishes of the United States."¹⁰

Lansing's intransigence touched off a major rebellion in Port-au-Prince and in other cities where marines were taking over the custom houses. Caperton reported there was "fairly strong agitation to incite hostility toward the American occupation." At the same time an anonymous proclamation circulated in the streets of Port-au-Prince calling for efforts to "drive out the invaders." Finding that the Haitian "government was unable to control" the situation, Admiral Caperton declared martial law on September 3. This order remained in effect until the closing days of the occupation nineteen years later. The American occupation never recovered from Lansing's blundering determination to get the treaty signed.¹¹

Even President Wilson, while supporting Lansing, was secretly sympathetic to Haiti as protests mounted over Lansing's blatant pressure tactics. When the three most influential members of the Haitian Cabinet resigned in protest, including the Foreign Minister, Wilson expressed

¹⁰SDDF, 838.00/1273, 1274. This file is marked "confidential."

¹¹Ibid., 838.00/1273, 1272, 1273, 1288.

his "sneaking sympathy" for them in a letter to his fiancée Edith Galt and "wondered whether to blame them." Calling members of the Haitian National Assembly, who had to ratify the treaty, "these poor chaps," Wilson said they were "between the devil and the deep sea. They dare not offend us, and yet if they yielded to us their enemies would make a great case against them in any subsequent elections." Wilson managed to overcome his compassionate scruples in continuing to support Lansing. As he told Edith Galt, "Control of customs is the essence of the whole matter."¹²

Why Lansing adopted such an aggressive approach that predictably reversed sentiment in Haiti from open cooperation with the American occupation in the first days to open rebellion requiring martial law in the space of a single month is, at first glance, almost impossible to explain. Lansing squandered the initial goodwill generated by the restoration of law and order after the bloody murders of the political hostages. The Haitian leaders, shocked by the blood-letting, actively welcomed the marines and assisted them in peace-keeping efforts. Moreover, in the first days of the occupation, Haitian leaders made clear they were ready to make any concessions demanded by the United States, provided only that they "beg to avoid as far

¹²Wilson Papers, 34:437, 78-79; quoted in Link, Wilson 3: footnote 144, p. 538.

as possible humiliation" of the Haitians.¹³ Lansing rode rough-shod over Haitian sensibilities, completely ignoring vigorous protests from Americans on the scene in day-to-day personal contact with Haitian leaders. In doing so, Lansing generated bitterness and political opposition that would haunt the occupation for the next two decades. Nor is it at all clear why Lansing insisted on treaty terms so sweeping that they embroiled the United States in the most intimate details of Haitian government life, from veto power over every gourde of government spending to appointment of highway engineers. Had any president of the United States, including the popular Woodrow Wilson, ever attempted to exercise similar powers at home, there would surely have been grounds for impeachment.¹⁴

While the documentary evidence does not explicitly explain why Lansing acted as he did, it does provide two persuasive indicators. First, more than any official of the Wilson administration, Lansing saw Germany as a clear and present danger to Western Hemispheric security and Haiti as a prime target easily susceptible to German influence and

¹³SDDF, 838.00/1243.

¹⁴SDDF, 838.00/1242. The outline of the proposed treaty is in 838.00/1301, dated August 14, 1915.

intrigue.¹⁵ Second, he remained always the uncompromising "realist," unmoved by the progressive platitudes of his Cabinet colleagues. This was in contrast to his humanitarian, well-intentioned predecessor, William Jennings Bryan, who uncritically accepted the pious idealism of Wilsonian rhetoric. For Lansing, power and power alone was the prime consideration in international relations, not sentiment, morality, or ideals.¹⁶

Applying his alarmist views of Germany and his pragmatic use of power to Haiti, Lansing may have seen Haiti as more than just another troublesome "banana republic" to be policed into some semblance of order. Instead he seems to have regarded Haiti as a major strategic threat in the

¹⁵According to Daniel Smith, Lansing saw war with Germany over the submarine issue inevitable as early as February 1915. Given the American tilt to the Allies, particularly toward England, Lansing believed American neutrality "was really valueless to Germany." See Daniel M. Smith, "Robert Lansing and American Neutrality: 1914-1917," University of California Publications in American History 59 (1958): 1-241.

¹⁶Lansing's views are set forth in a number of documents. For example, see Robert Lansing, Confidential Diary, July 11, 1915, Papers of Robert Lansing, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., quoted in Rayford W. Logan, Haiti and the Dominican Republic (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965): 125-126; Lansing Diary, July 28, 1915, quoted in Arthur S. Link, Wilson, 5 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947-1975) 3:46-47. For Lansing's views of the Monroe Doctrine, in which power considerations predominate, see Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, The Lansing Papers (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939-1940) 2:466-470, November 24, 1915).

middle of World War I, to be dealt with entirely as the United States saw fit, unrestrained by any notion of morality, good-faith, fair-play, or even the ordinary conventions of international law.

In rationalizing the use of power, Lansing wrote chillingly that "the test of guiltlessness in perpetrating an act inhuman under usual conditions, is the necessity of that act to the protection of national safety." During a war, he wrote, if national safety is "menaced," no nation "will permit or should be expected to permit obligations of justice, morality, humanity, or honor to interfere with acts which it considers necessary for its self-preservation." With these amoral views of power it is not surprising that Lansing, alone among top presidential advisors, took exception to Wilson's effort to change the Monroe Doctrine into something like a mutual alliance based on "equality and mutual respects," as outlined six months earlier in his State of the Union Message.¹⁷

The idea of the unruly republics of Latin America ever standing as co-equal partners with the Colossus of the North may be another instance of Wilsonian idealism overwhelming common sense. At least Lansing thought so. In a sharply

¹⁷Wilson Papers, 34:69-70; Lansing diary, quoted in Link, Wilson, 3:46-47, italics in original; Foreign Relations, 1915: XX-XXI.

worded critique bristling with the rhetoric of Realpolitik, Lansing wrote that "as long as the United States is the dominant power, the Monroe Doctrine will prevail" and "the equality of the American republics and, in a measure, their independence, are legal rather than actual." Any international attorney worth his high-priced retainer could quickly justify any act of government within the Lansing's lawyerly distinction between actual independence and its legal fiction. By extension, the latter could be violated with impunity, for instance in Haiti; the former could lead to war, as it nearly had the year before with Mexico.¹⁸

While Lansing's sense of Realpolitik was breath-taking in scope and chilling in its implications, at least for a democracy, his belief in the German menace was no less comprehensive and startling. Many historians, including the noted Wilson biographer, Arthur S. Link, have labeled as self-serving Lansing's later rationale for intervening in Haiti--made before a Senate Committee in 1922--in which he placed an emphasis on the German menace. This criticism may be fair in that few officials, particularly in justifying policies of the past, are hardly likely to understate their case before a hostile legislative hearing. But the views that Lansing set forth in his confidential personal diary

¹⁸Lansing Papers 2:461-462.

only two weeks before marines went ashore near Port-au-Prince cannot fairly be discounted as a self-serving retrospective rationalization. It is true, of course, that some prominent leaders, most notably Thomas Jefferson, reworked private papers long after they were written to cast themselves in the best possible light for future historians. Lansing, however, had little public prominence before becoming Secretary and may have gotten the job because Wilson confidante Edward M. House described him to Wilson "as a man without any ideas of his own." If Lansing wrote the diary to secure his place in history, he would have been disappointed at the results. For one, the diary suggests he was in the firm control of full-scale Germanophobia. For another, to this day, his diary has never been published, not even in microfilm, and is available only in the original at the Library of Congress. Thus, the views expressed in the diary may be taken at face value and should figure more prominently in explaining his policies in Haiti than is usually the case in most historical accounts.¹⁹

While Lansing was singular among Wilson advisers for his pragmatic concepts of international power, he was by no

¹⁹For Link's evaluation of Lansing's position before the Senate Committee, see Wilson, 3: footnote 138, p. 535. For the best analysis of Lansing's diaries, as they apply to Haitian policy, see Logan, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, 125-126 with an extended quotation from the diary.

means alone in fearing German influences. Many of his Cabinet colleagues, including President Wilson himself, shared these concerns. But in commentary on the subject the others usually pointed to specific events or political developments to authenticate their fears. Lansing alone seemingly believed in a full-blown, comprehensive German conspiracy. In a lengthy diary entry made July 11, 1915, Lansing wrote that Germany's objective was aimed at nothing short of preventing the United States from entering the European war "if repetition of such outrages as the Lusitania sinking should require us to act." Germany planned to block the United States war option, he believed, by stirring up troubles throughout Latin American. This would force the United States into a series of military interventions that would divert its attention and military resources from the European war. In addition, Lansing suggested, German intentions "may go further and have in mind the possibility of a future war with this Republic in case the Allies should be defeated." He sought a comprehensive program, including acquisition of the Danish West Indies, for "the prevention by all means in our power of German influence becoming dominant" in any nation bordering the Caribbean or threatening the Panama Canal. Lansing also believed that Germany was "utterly hostile" to

democratic governments and intent on "world domination."²⁰

Given Lansing's alarmist views of Germany's intentions in the Western Hemisphere, it is hardly surprising that he perceived dangerous German influences at work in Haiti. As Solicitor before his recent promotion, Lansing knew State Department files bulged with detailed reports of German activities in Haiti from the spring of 1914 on. Some originated with Roger L. Farnham, an American businessman representing extensive investments in Haiti. He was taken at face-value by Wilson and Bryan, as were his reports on a possible take-over of Haiti by Germany.²¹

Lansing professed to be more skeptical of Farnham than Bryan had been, explaining that Farnham had shown "arrogance in treating with" Haitians--a strange charge coming from Lansing--and that Farnham's views "must be received with caution." Despite these reservations, Farnham was one of the first government outsiders Lansing met with after the intervention. Following that meeting, in one of his first letters to Wilson about Haiti (in which he invented his "humanitarian" rationale for seizing custom houses), Lansing

²⁰Lansing Diary, quoted in Logan, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, 125-126.

²¹For the most alarming reports of German influences in Haiti and a possible take-over of Mole by Germany, see SDDF 838.00, May 13, 14, 1914. From internal evidence the first report seems to have been written by Farnham.

seemed fully as alarmed about German influences in Haiti as Bryan had ever been. He explained to Wilson that the German element in Haiti was hostile to pacification efforts by the United States since they had profited from financing revolutions with loans "carrying rates of interest as high as fifty per cent." Repeating a charge made in earlier reports, he said Germans in Haiti were responsible for blocking Bryan's many efforts to get a treaty with that country "by slandering our Minister and by spreading false reports as to the intentions of the United States."²²

Moreover, given the distinction Lansing made between countries that enjoyed "actual" independence and those with only the legal fiction of independence, it was clear into which category Haiti fell. With the marines ashore and in full control, there was little doubt that Haiti's independence was entirely fictional, whatever its status may have been in theory. Lansing acted accordingly. It is this combination of Lansing's alarmist views of Germany and his pragmatic view of international power that helps explain his harsh policies in Haiti. In exercising raw power, with no regard for Haitian sensibilities or status as an "independent" country, Lansing, of course, was vigorously opposed by the American military commander in Port-au-

²²Wilson Papers, 34:69-70, August 3, 1915.

Prince. If it seems strange that Lansing disregarded the conciliatory approach advocated by Admiral Caperton, it becomes more understandable given the attitudes and recommendations of his professional staff in Washington.²³

Within days of the invasion, the staff of the Division of Latin American Affairs submitted three detailed reports to Lansing on conditions in Haiti, and proposals for United States policy in that country. The reports were filled with misleading information and colored by the racial prejudices typical of the day. For example, one took a decidedly condescending view of Haiti, arguing that the situation there resulted from the "failure of an inferior people" to maintain a French civilization. This failed to note that the Haitian revolution had been precisely aimed at ending certain benefits of French civilization such as slavery. The report also said Haiti had failed to win "international respect and confidence," ignoring the fact that as the first black republic, Haiti had long been an international pariah, its successful slave revolt a threat to the political and social stability of slave-holding states. This report also

²³For the most comprehensive, most alarming reports of German influences in Haiti the previous year, see SDDF, 838.00, May 13, May 14, 1914. For reports of such influences in the spring of 1915, see Wilson Papers, 32:471-473; Ibid., 440; and SDDF, 838.00/1153, dated March 27, 1915, reporting the results of a visit by a Naval warship to Mole to check rumors that a German battle cruiser was using the harbor there.

said that in Haiti there was a "lack of public opinion . . . no sense of public responsibility . . . political incompetence . . . [and] growing demoralization generally."²⁴

Admiral Caperton's subsequent call for reinforcements and imposition of martial law suggested an acute public awareness of and opposition to the loss of Haitian sovereignty. In a remarkable conclusion, the report said Haitian independence was "due solely to external causes." This surely would have been news to Christophe, Dessalines, L'Ouverture and other leaders of Haiti's bloody, fourteen-year war of independence.²⁵

Another report a few days later, also from the Division of Latin American Affairs, took an equally prejudicial view of Haiti in total disregard of its history, even the most recent. The report said it was "understood perfectly well that the Haitian people care little about who rules them." If Bryan had learned anything in his repeated, abortive attempts to gain control, it was that Haitians had a fierce determination to preserve their sacrosanct

²⁴SDDF 838.00/1391. The memo is filed under the date of May 23, 1916. However, compelling internal evidence, for instance, reference to two marines killed days before in the invasion, indicate the report was written shortly after the intervention.

²⁵Ibid.

independence. Only six months earlier, the Haitian Foreign Minister was nearly assassinated on the floor of the Senate when members armed with "canes, knives, and even revolvers, surged toward him." This was after he told the Senate that "Haiti needs a foreign master." He was accused of "endeavoring to sell the country to the United States" and resigned the next day.²⁶

More accurately the report attributed the recent "chaotic disturbances" to a "few agitators and politicians" who hope to "profit financially." Expressing frustrations that for all its shortcomings Haiti had successfully resisted all of Bryan's many efforts to take control there, the report said the United States had already "temporized" far too long with Haiti--in fact, since the days of President Grant. Given the opportunity to remedy this situation with the marines ashore and in control, the report recommended bold action: an immediate take-over of customs with explanations that "may come later" to a pro-American government. This report piously said that the "excellent work done by Americans and the good faith shown by them will justify the act" of unilaterally seizing customs.²⁷

²⁶Ibid., 838.00/1426, August 5, 1915; the attack on the Foreign Minister was made December 4, 1915. For colorful accounts, see Ibid., 838.00/1040-1045.

²⁷SDDF 838.00/1426.

The argument for quick action with explanations to follow received powerful support the following day in a legal brief from the State Department's Solicitor. Providing a post-facto legal justification for the intervention itself on the familiar grounds of protecting life and property, the brief candidly acknowledged that the real objective was to leave "financial control [of Haiti] in the hands of the United States government." With this objective in mind, the brief correctly suggested, but without providing a shred of legal rationale, that it was more feasible "to take over customs now and treat with authorities we may recognize" in the future. In other words, to achieve by force what Bryan had long failed to achieve in treaty negotiations, even in advance of opening new negotiations. This was, of course, precisely the course followed in Haiti by Lansing.²⁸

These reports may have strengthened Lansing's belief that in Haiti he was dealing with an ignorant, passive public that would not resist a United States take-over. This may have been why he told President Wilson that in Haiti, America could "arrange matters very much as we please."²⁹ Even before receiving the departmental reports

²⁸Ibid., August 6, 1915.

²⁹Ibid., 838.00/1275B, August 9, 1915.

denigrating Haiti, the Secretary reported to Wilson that of two million Haitians, only fifty thousand could read or write French. The great masses, he wrote, were "clay in the hands of politicians" who were "seeking to loot the people." Lansing failed to note or perhaps did not know that Creole, not French, was and still is the language of all but a tiny fraction of the Haitian people. He learned shortly that a lack of familiarity with French had little to do with the military prowess of Haitian peasants.³⁰

Two other reports demeaning the Haitian Army may have strengthened Lansing's belief that Haiti would be an easy take-over target. One was a letter to Wilson from John F. Fort, whom Wilson had succeeded as governor and who had headed a presidential commission to Haiti four months earlier. Fort seemed surprisingly well informed on Haitian affairs for having spent little more than a week there, where he felt the only safe place was aboard a United States warship. Fort portrayed the Haitian Army as "a conglomerate lot of poor, ignorant, half-clothed men and boys" forced to serve and tied together to prevent desertions. To disarm this force he suggested paying one dollar for each rifle

³⁰In the fall of 1915, rebellion broke out in the mountains near Cape Haitian on the northern coast, the traditional area of revolution. The suppression of this rebellion caused Navy Secretary Josephus Daniels to ban all further offensive operations of the marines--without his prior, personal approval. See SDDF 838.00/1370.

turned in. This was a policy later followed with some success by Admiral Caperton before opposition to Lansing's treaty demands led to a peasant rebellion later that year. A contemporary American visitor to Haiti expressed much the same opinion of the Haitian Army in a letter to the State Department two weeks before the intervention. He described the Haitian soldiers as "boys of 15 years to men of 25 . . . barefooted, some had caps, others straw hats, uniforms of blue cottonade, but all had guns and bayonets." He called them an "armed, untrained rabble . . . constantly gambling, fighting, etc."³¹

It may be understandable if these and other reports led Lansing to underestimate the resistance his policies would generate in Haiti. But they also provided him a far more compelling, strategic reason for decisive action: the German menace. In recommending an "act now, explain later" approach, his staff reminded Lansing that only a week before the war started in Europe Germany had demanded equal participation if the United States should administer Haitian customs. Only the start of World War I had avoided this clear threat to the Monroe Doctrine, his staff argued. The intervention by the United States, particularly given the government's view that Haitians were passive by nature,

³¹Ibid., 838.00/1138, March 11, 1915; 1276, July 30, 1915; and 1208, July 19, 1915.

provided the opportunity to overcome this long-standing concern over German influences in Haiti.³²

The need for quick action to overcome continuing German intrigues in Haiti was given new urgency in an August 11 telephone report to the State Department from Farnham, made after his initial meeting with Lansing. In his call, Farnham returned to the familiar issue of German influence but with a startling new twist that suggested a conspiracy against the United States between Germans in Haiti and German bankers in New York. Further, Farnham linked all this to a highly sensitive, controversial issue of immediate personal concern to Wilson and Lansing: United States relations with Mexico. At that point, Lansing was actively negotiating with the ABC Powers (Argentina, Brazil, and Chile) on the Wilson administration's long-standing refusal to recognize the government of Mexico. Only the year before, the United States had seized the port of Veracruz, in part to block German arms shipments to the Mexican government Wilson opposed.³³ In his telephone report, Farnham seemed to link these complex dealings with the current situation in Haiti. He said that German bankers

³²Ibid., 838.00/1426.

³³For a brief discussion of Wilson's Mexican policy, see Thomas A. Bailey, A Diplomatic History of the American People, 10 ed., (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1980), 555-562.

in New York City were cabling German merchants in Haiti asking them "to spread the rumor that the United States is so occupied with Mexico that it will soon withdraw from Haiti." That idea could have further stiffened resistance to United States demands. As might be expected from his earlier reports, Farnham also said that the "German contingent in Haiti is averse to any intervention by the United States . . . and a good deal of cabling is going on between New York offices and Haitian [merchant] houses." Unlike some of his reports on Germany activity, which Farnham often made on his own authority, he attempted to authenticate this one by attributing it to his bank's representative in Haiti, a Dane, "who had lived on the island for a number of years and who it appears is intimate with the German merchants of Haiti."³⁴

Farnham's report seems to be the first to raise the fear of German interference with the American occupation. But the possibility of German interference became a dominating concern of American officials in Haiti beginning the following spring. That concern, along with efforts to rewrite the Haitian constitution in order to legalize the treaty that Lansing forced Haiti to accept, were the major

³⁴SDDF 838.00/1427, August 11, 1915.

themes of the first three years of the occupation.³⁵

Given Lansing's control of Haiti's finances and the American military presence, Haitian approval of Lansing's treaty was inevitable. Certain of United States support even if he ruled without a Cabinet or a National Assembly, President Dartiguenave and his Cabinet approved the treaty on September 16, 1915, but only after three members resigned in protest. The Cabinet approval came, however, only after Admiral Caperton made clear that the alternative was an outright military government by the United States. Even so, President Dartiguenave signed on only after insisting on a purely cosmetic, but to him important, face-saving concession by Lansing. The so-called "treaty officials," the most powerful officials of the new Haitian government (all of whom would be American), would be "appointed" by Dartiguenave, but would be "nominated" by President Wilson. Originally Lansing had insisted that these new officials be appointed directly by Wilson, completely bypassing Dartiguenave. This may have been a victory of shadow over substance but it was Dartiguenave's price for serving as the

³⁵Reference to German activities begins in the spring of 1916; for example, see SDDF 838.00/1393, May 23, 1916. "Reform" of the Haitian constitution to comply with the treaty began at the same time. Admiral Caperton agreed to the dissolution of the National Assembly even though he believed the move was unconstitutional; see *ibid.*, 838.1387, April 11, 1916.

American puppet president. These treaty officials controlled the only levers of real governmental power: finance (including customs revenues and all governmental expenditures), public works, and the military, which under the plan would disband the Haitian Army and replace it with a new American-organized, American-officered constabulary. Further, the Cabinet approved the treaty only after Admiral Caperton, with State Department approval, promised that the United States would make what was for Haiti a massive loan of \$1.5 million and initiate an equally massive public works program to provide employment for thousands of starving Haitians. The Haitian officials and Admiral Caperton regarded these pledges of economic assistance as official commitments of the United States government. The State Department saw the pledges differently, as mere expressions of possible policy intentions. This interpretation forced Admiral Caperton to renege on his firm assurances of assistance. The sense of betrayal felt by Haitian officials was a major cause of bitterness in the initial period of the occupation.³⁶

Dartiguenave's final capitulation on September 16, 1915, when he signed the treaty may have been read as an encouraging sign of progress in Washington. But it was only

³⁶Ibid.

the beginning of the long, acrimonious process of winning ratification of the treaty by the National Assembly as required by the Haitian constitution, if it was to have the force of law. The Chamber of Deputies approved the treaty on October 6, 1915 and the Senate did so on November 11, 1915. The process of winning approval, though, exhausted whatever goodwill the intervention had initially generated. Further, the tactics used to get votes in favor of ratification put virtually all Haitian politicians in outraged opposition to the occupation. For example, in approving the treaty the Chamber attached an interpretive commentary that effectively aborted United States control of customs and gave the Haitian government veto power of appointment of treaty officials. The State Department rather high-handedly chose to accept the vote and ignore the commentary. The Senate was even more troublesome. On November 5, a Senate committee refused to consider any further the American-written treaty and demanded that the entire process of negotiations be reopened.³⁷

This move by the Senate to roll-back three months of torturous work to win ratification seemed to have exhausted Admiral Caperton's patience. A few days later he sought

³⁷SDDF 838.00/1370. This report from Admiral Caperton is dated December 8, 1915 but covers events from November 7 to November 19.

State Department approval to dissolve the National Assembly and order new elections for a constituent assembly. His plan was to have this new assembly approve the treaty while rewriting the Haitian constitution to accommodate the treaty demands. Given the climate of widespread political opposition to the whole idea of the treaty, Admiral Caperton may have been demonstrating his political naiveté. He was overruled by Washington officials. On November 10, Navy Secretary Daniels ordered Admiral Caperton to hold a meeting of the Cabinet and Senate leaders and warn them that without ratification the United States would install its own military government, assure the "complete pacification" of the republic, and that "those officials in opposition can expect such treatment as their conduct merits." Caperton was instructed to raise the issue of bribery for the first time--strongly implying that those against the treaty were guilty of that crime--and to warn that those "who accept or give bribes will be vigorously prosecuted." Daniels told Caperton that he should make all this "sufficiently clear to remove all opposition and to insure immediate ratification." Faced with the prospect of court martial and the loss of what little political leverage it then had, the Haiti Senate the following day, perhaps to the surprise of no one, ratified the treaty. Caperton telegraphed Daniels, "Instructions carried out . . . treaty ratified." Rather

optimistically, he reported "great relief and general rejoicing." President Dartiguenave was considerably more restrained. In a proclamation he defended his actions, correctly pointing out that refusing to ratify would have resulted in "the destruction of our national independence."³⁸

This back-handed endorsement by Lansing's Man in Haiti and the quarrelsome stubbornness demonstrated by the National Assembly had ominous implications for the future. Lansing had his treaty, but the treaty seemed to have no support in Haiti. Within a week, Admiral Caperton was moving to suppress a peasant rebellion in the north. Within two weeks, he warned that without the \$1.5 million loan, the government's "prestige will be lost . . . and serious conditions will result." Admiral Caperton had first raised the possibility of dissolving the National Assembly and rewriting the constitution as a means of winning ratification. He would return to the idea as a means of governing Haiti.³⁹

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

CHAPTER 4
CONSTITUTIONAL CAMOUFLAGE:
"HAVE THE ENGLISH TEXT RULE"
1916-1918

Over dinner of oysters flown in daily from France, thick American steaks, and French wine at the fashionable La Lanterne in the posh suburb of Petionville, where bougainvillea-covered mansions with protective parapets topped by broken glass sprawl in the cool hills high above the squalor of Port-au-Prince, a Haitian mulatto lady recalled the American occupation as "the golden age." Almost in wonder she talked of clean streets, plentiful jobs, weekly dress balls for American officers and the Haitian elite, "maids for every family," and most important, "no fear, no fear of government. The Americans were in charge." Later outside the restaurant and only in whispers she explained her recent ten-year self-imposed exile in Miami: government thugs dumped the broken and mutilated body of one son on her doorstep, arrested a relative without reason, and tortured him for three days before releasing him barely alive. "This was not Haiti, not the Haiti where I

grew up, the Haiti I loved," she said.¹

Perhaps her recollections of a golden age under American control was as far removed from the reality of that time as the Lanterne dinner was from the starvation diet of most Haitians today. Or she could have been contrasting the relative stability of the earlier period with the mindless, often random violence of the Duvaliers' brutal twenty-seven year dictatorship that lasted from the late 1950s to the mid-1980s. For the American occupation, at least in its early years, judging by the historical record, was nothing like a golden age--not for the occupying authorities, and certainly not for politically-aware Haitians who opposed them. During the early years of the occupation, American officials seemed obsessed with two overwhelming concerns, both far-fetched in retrospect: first, fears that German residents would spark a rebellion or that Germany would invade and crush the American garrison--this in the midst of World War I; and second, a compulsive need to "legalize" the occupation by amending the Haitian constitution to validate the treaty the American Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, had forced on the country. Within a year of intervention,

¹Informal interview conducted by the author, July 15, 1970. The woman is dead but the relative is a businessman in Port-au-Prince. He has long avoided any comment on governmental affairs. The family involved chooses to remain anonymous.

all forms of representative government had been repressed. Haiti was left governed by two successive puppet presidents under American control until the early 1930s when President Roosevelt ended the occupation as part of his "good neighbor" policy toward Latin America.²

The fear of Germany and the need to justify the occupation only in part explain why well-educated, presumably well-meaning Americans, steeped in their own country's constitutional tradition, imposed such a constitutionally perverse regime in Haiti. Equally important was the rabid racism that permeated the thinking of occupying officials. Their strong racist views led to an almost paranoid distrust of Haitians, the execration of the best-educated Haitian leaders and condescending contempt for

²Reports of German activities are commonplace in official papers from the spring of 1916 on, though seldom mentioned in standard accounts. For example, see Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Haiti, 1910-1929, National Archives, Washington, D.C., Record Group 59, Decimal Files, hereafter, SDDF, 838.00/1393, 1402, 1403, 1439, 1445, 1449, 1453, and 1514. For a summary of American thinking on a non-elected Council of State, giving the Haitian president dictatorial power under American control, see, Ibid., 838.00/1482, September 8, 1917. For an account of the closing days of the occupation by historian Dana G. Munro, Minister of Haiti in 1930, after a decade in the Division of Latin American Affairs, see Munro, "The American Withdrawal from Haiti, 1929-1934," Hispanic American Historical Review 49 (February 1969): 1-25. Munro said his instructions included the provision that the interests of Haiti must yield to those of the United States.

the idea that Haitians had any capacity for self-government.³

The possibility of amending the Haitian constitution was first proposed in the fall of 1915 as a means of winning ratification of Lansing's controversial treaty demands just three months after the American invasion. The fears of German influences in the United States, as well as the perceived threat of German incursions throughout Latin American, form part of the backdrop to the intervention itself. But these fears first surfaced as a dominating concern of occupation officials in the spring of 1916--just as constitutional "reform" began in earnest with the American-inspired dissolution of the National Assembly, composed of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. Except for a brief period the following year, the Assembly did not meet again until the early 1930s. That long interval is known as the time of the "double dictatorship" with Haiti under the control of the American military commander and the Haitian president.⁴

³For the most virulent, extensive formulation of these ideas from the American military commander who negotiated and helped draft the new Haitian constitution, see SDDF, 838.00/1458, May 17, 1917. His sentiments are typical of occupation officials.

⁴For the initial report of German intrigues, with extensive documentation, see Ibid., 838.00/1403. For developments surrounding dissolution of the Assembly in 1916, see 838.032/19, 20; for dissolution in 1917, see

Several factors explain the political crises that developed in early 1916 leading to the suppression of the National Assembly, which amounted to the effective end of representative government. Haitian political leaders continued to resent the treaty they had been forced to accept in November 1915. The result was a loss of confidence by Haitian politicians in the American-sponsored president, Sudre Dartiguenave, who had strongly supported ratification of the treaty at grave risk to his credibility. Further, the United States infuriated Dartiguenave and his opponents by refusing to deliver the massive bribe promised in exchange for ratification--\$1.5 million of economic aid. Both Admiral William B. Caperton, the senior military commander, and President Dartiguenave were convinced the United States government had made a solemn commitment and was, therefore, guilty of breaking its word. The State Department disagreed. Departmental officials evaded a final decision using one excuse after another, always offering the tantalizing bait but never supplying the money. The failure to make the loan was common knowledge in Port-au-Prince, further eroding the credibility of both Caperton and

838.00/1467; for the American rationalization of the final governmental structure, see 838.00/1482. This latter document notes that neither changing the Haitian constitution nor imposing martial law were provided for by the Haitian-American treaty.

Dartiguenave, and creating a sense of betrayal among Haitian politicians. To no avail, Caperton warned that without the loan, the government's "prestige will be lost and serious conditions will result."⁵

Complicating matters even more, Caperton and other occupation officials became locked in a bitter territorial dispute with the Dartiguenave government over control of public works projects, public utilities, telephone and telegraph services. With the arrogance that marked its dealings with Haiti from the beginning, the State Department simply brushed aside the Haitian objections, saying it was "at a loss to understand the error into which the government of Haiti has fallen" in thinking it, not the Americans, should control public works. As though relations between the occupation and the government were not already strained to the breaking point, the State Department in early January 1916, handed Dartiguenave the ultimate insult: Caperton was ordered to pay all government salaries, including the military, the Minister of War and the presidential guard, directly out of custom revenues, rather than through the government. The president understandably objected to the procedure as an "implied insult." He went public in local newspapers on a related issue, denouncing debt repayments

⁵Ibid., 838.1172, 1176, 1387, 1173.

made by the occupation without the consent of the government. This hostile, combative atmosphere was hardly conducive to reasoned negotiations, but it was precisely at this time, at American insistence, that discussions began over amending the Haitian constitution to accommodate the treaty. Certain provisions of the treaty were clearly unconstitutional, including disbanding the army, organizing an American-controlled constabulary, and granting extraordinary powers to the key treaty officials.⁶

It seems the height of either arrogance or ignorance to have asked politicians--most of whom had violently opposed the treaty and who were forced to accept it almost at bayonet-point--to rewrite the constitution in order to legalize the treaty, especially considering the promised \$1.5 million bribe had never been paid. Given the atmosphere in the spring of 1916, constitutional reform, however much it may have been needed in political theory, became a political impossibility. With the government at an impasse, Dartiguenave, with the prior permission of American officials, issued a decree dissolving the National Assembly, while announcing the Chamber of Deputies would later reconvene as a Constituent Assembly to rewrite the constitution. To bypass the legislative function of the

⁶Ibid., 838.15/30; 838.00/1376, 1387.

National Assembly, he revived the Council of State, whose members he appointed and removed at his pleasure. This was a device seldom used in Haitian history, and apparently unconstitutional at the time.⁷

There was only one difficulty, but a major one, with Dartiguenave's efforts to streamline the government into one-man rule: the Chamber and Senate proved to be remarkably uncooperative. They disregarded the presidential decree and refused to be dissolved, despite Admiral Caperton's best efforts to enforce the decree. After finding themselves locked out of their chambers, which were guarded by American marines, members met in rented rooms and even in the street, to the acute embarrassment of Caperton and Dartiguenave.⁸

Further, the members of the National Assembly went public with their protest. They denounced the lockout as "an attempt upon the national sovereignty." Worse, the leaders sent President Wilson a telegram protesting the "unconstitutional decree of dissolution" and asking the United States Senate to intervene in reestablishing constitutional government. This brought a brief, acid response from Lansing citing "the impossibility of acceding"

⁷Ibid.

⁸SDDF, 838.032/19, 20.

to their demands. If the last remnants of constitutional government in Haiti had been reduced to crude farce, Admiral Caperton struggled to put on it the best possible face. Under the constitution, new elections were scheduled for early January 1917, and he publicly promised that they would be "the first free popular elections ever held in Haiti."⁹

In private, however, he had grave reservations, agreeing with the protestors that the decree of dissolution was unconstitutional, or as he put it, "the contention of the opposition is apparently correct." He also agreed that constitutional changes should be considered when the new National Assembly was scheduled to convene in April 1917, after the January election. None of this solved his immediate problem--a rump session of the National Assembly determined to embarrass President Dartiguenave and the occupation. Given Lansing's earlier pledge to Dartiguenave, Admiral Caperton believed he had no choice other than to back the president against the National Assembly given "my orders to support the government of Haiti." With Caperton's firm support of the dissolution, organized opposition by the suppressed National Assembly ended for the time. Perhaps to his immense relief, Caperton sailed for the Dominican Republic. There, possibly learning from its mistake in

⁹Ibid., 838.032/23; 838.00/1388.

Haiti, the United States made no effort to establish a civilian, "constitutional" government; Caperton supervised the imposition of a United States military government.¹⁰

The major unfinished business Caperton left behind in Haiti was rewriting the constitution, but since that could not begin until the National Assembly reconvened in the spring of 1917, an interlude of peaceful coexistence might have been expected between the Dartiguenave government and the occupation. That no such peaceful interlude occurred had much to do with the character of Caperton's replacement. With Caperton's departure in April 1916, in the midst of the political impasse, the tenor of the occupation changed radically--and for the worse. Admiral Caperton had helped to bring about the impasse, if only by following orders of the State Department; on a personal level, though, he was known as a courtly gentleman of the old school, always respectful of Haiti's leaders and their sensibilities, while carefully concealing his strong racist views. At one point he came close to risking his naval career in opposing Lansing's harsh treatment of Haiti.¹¹

¹⁰Ibid., 838.00/1387, 1388.

¹¹For a discussion of the contrasts between Caperton and his successor, based in part on unpublished naval documents, see David Healy, Gunboat Diplomacy in the Wilson Era: The U.S. Navy in Haiti, 1915-1916 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 209, 217-219.

In a sense, Caperton's good intentions toward Haiti could never be questioned. The opposite was true of his successor: his bad intentions could never be in doubt, least of all by the evidence of his own testimony. Marine Colonel Littleton W.I. Waller was a decorated veteran of a dozen colonial skirmishes. He was brutally frank, domineering, contemptuous of Haitians, opinionated, and already notorious for his court martial after ordering the execution of war prisoners in the Philippines. Living up to his reputation as a "butcher," Waller used methods so violent in repressing a peasant rebellion the previous fall that Navy Secretary Josephus Daniels intervened personally to stop the slaughter of Haitians, ordering an end to all offensive operations that didn't have his personal approval.¹²

¹²Characterizations of Waller are based on an analysis of his reports to the State Department, in particular, a lengthy one made privately, which includes details of his interaction with Haitian leaders (see SDDF, 838.00/1403). His career in the Philippines is covered in several secondary sources; for example, see Healy, Gunboat Diplomacy. For a harshly critical view of Waller and the marines in Haiti in a revisionist account, see Hans Schmidt, The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1971). Waller and other marine officers are praised in Robert Debs Heinl, Jr., and Nancy Gorden Heinl, Written in Blood: The Story of the Haitian People, 1492-1971 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978). Colonel Heinl helped train the Haitian army in the early years of François Duvalier. For Secretary Daniels' reaction to Waller's campaign against peasant rebels, noting the large number of Haitian dead with virtually no marine casualties, see SDDF, 838.00/1370. Both Waller and Caperton resented the order.

Furthermore, Waller seemed utterly disgusted with Haitians, particularly the often extremely well-educated elite who made up the political leadership. "They are real niggers and make no mistake," he wrote at the time. "There are some very fine looking, well-educated polished men here but they are real nigs beneath the surface. What the people of Norfolk and Portsmouth would say if they saw me bowing and scraping to these coons--I do not know." Waller's views of Haitians were shared by other American officials. For instance, his successor, Colonel Eli K. Cole, believed that even the best-educated Haitian was "an absolute savage under the skin." These racist views were also common among State Department officials. When an American editor visited the Department seeking "uplift" work for black soldiers as officers in the Haitian Constabulary, officials said "Haitians prefer to be guided by white rather than colored officers." Skeptical, the editor said he was not inclined to give "full faith" to the Department's argument and if that were the view of the navy, he "certainly would not give it full credence." The widespread, condescending view of blacks led to the belief that they were biologically incapable of self-government. These prejudicial views accounted for much of the bitter hostility that developed

between occupation officials and Haitian leaders.¹³

Yet for all Waller's lack of tact and diplomacy--in a job that clearly required generous dosages of both--he was a shrewd political operator, at least in advancing his own career. He ingratiated himself with State Department officials with self-serving, personal reports outside the military chain of command, often taking the occasion to denigrate his nominal superior, Admiral Caperton.¹⁴

If a single document in the State Department files can fairly be said to reveal the attitudes of American officials that made dictatorship seem to them the only alternative to chaos in Haiti, it is Waller's private report of May 26, 1916, to Jordan H. Stabler, an official of the Latin American Affairs Division. Bulky with attachments, partly handwritten, the report seems clearly intended to portray a heroic American Proconsul decisively grappling with high

¹³Waller, quoted in Healy, Gunboat Diplomacy, 256. For Cole's view, see SDDF, 838.00/1458, and for an account of the editor's meeting, see *Ibid.*, 838.00/1364. For a strongly prejudicial, contemporaneous view of blacks in Haiti, with no documentation, see Charles E. Chapman, "The Development of Intervention in Haiti," Hispanic American Historical Review 7 (August 1927): 299-319. Based almost entirely on a brief visit to Haiti, the paper may accurately reflect views of occupation officials whom Chapman visited and praised. For another contemporaneous account, see Clarence K. Streit, "Haiti Intervention in Operation," Foreign Affairs 61 (July 1928): 615-632.

¹⁴For an example of Waller's private reports, see 838.00/1403.

affairs of state.¹⁵

Instead what emerges in stunning detail is a self-portrait of the archetypical Ugly America. Waller in his own words is revealed as a self-aggrandizing blunderer, grasping for powers far beyond anything granted by the treaty: forcing changes in the Haitian Cabinet; insisting "two rascally ministers" leave the Council of State; bullying the local Bar Association (which had threatened to disbar attorneys serving on the Council); vetoing proposed changes in the Haitian constitution; asserting (and gaining) control over almost the entire governmental apparatus; jealously guarding his own precincts of power against other American officials ("keep their hands off"); and planning a power grab to cripple "the most powerful man in Haiti," the Minister of Interior, who "will have his wings cut and be shorn of much of his power."¹⁶

Even more damaging to Waller's relations with Haitian leaders than his blatant exercise of raw power beyond treaty bounds was his crude denigration of political leaders ("sucking like leaches and bleeding the people"). He made these comments in public and before an audience where the leaders' credibility mattered most--with their own soldiers.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

The men he denounced were, of course, the very same political leaders that Waller had to work with every day. Revealing an insensitivity that strains belief, Waller sent President Dartiguenave a copy of his letter to Haitian troops and found the president's response "interesting in a way."¹⁷

Perhaps for good reason Waller did not send the State Department a copy of the response. In his letter to the newly-organized, American-led Constabulary ("Gendarmes," he called them), the only military force left in Haiti, he castigated

loafing politicians who gain their living by sucking like leeches and bleeding the people and the Government. Nothing then is more natural than opposition and agitation by the politicians, who see their opportunities for graft and corrupt practices disappearing before the ever strengthening rays of the searchlight of good government¹⁸

Waller wrote glowing reports of recent government reforms aimed at "people who work and gain their living by the sweat of their brow" in contrast to scheming politicians who "keep their own precious skins out of danger." If this was an attempt to split political leaders from the soldiers who were sworn to uphold their authority, not only the audacity but timing was astonishing. Waller praised the

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

"strengthening rays" of governmental reform, referring to the termination of representative government by President Dartiguenave's decree dissolving the National Assembly.¹⁹

Even Admiral Caperton believed the decree unconstitutional, agreeing with the opposition whom Waller denounced. As the January elections clearly demonstrated, this opposition group constituted the vast majority of the political leadership. Thus the United States ended up supporting an unpopular minority government detested by most politically-aware Haitians. Within three months even Waller joined the opposition in denouncing the Dartiguenave government that the State Department was determined he support. He said that the government had "failed in all its solemn promises . . . [was] insincere, unstable and most unpopular . . . detested by the people . . . [and] can be supported only by the armed forces of the United States."²⁰

The dilemma facing the United States became apparent after the January elections. The results confirmed that the United States was supporting a president who had no support from the people, not to mention the American military officials who were charged with keeping Dartiguenave in power. With no alternative to Dartiguenave, if they were to

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., and 838.00/1405.

get the constitutional "reform" needed to legitimize the occupation, American officials had "a wolf by the ears," as Thomas Jefferson once described slavery: dangerous to hold, even more dangerous to let go.²¹

Waller's second in command, Colonel Eli K. Cole, was frank in assessing this American dilemma: "At the bottom of their hearts practically all [Haitians] are equally opposed to the United States--the Executive, the Legislature, the Judicial." He called this situation "well nigh intolerable." Under these circumstances Cole found that President Dartiguenave "has not the confidence of the country . . . men of proper standing it appears do not care to serve with him or under him." Cole attributed the President's lack of support to his strong pro-American stand. At a later point, Cole said that the only "redeeming feature" of President Dartiguenave had been that "he was about the only politician in Haiti . . . willing to accept office and further American demands" but that he had turned out to be a "consummate politician" who was using his office "to hinder our work." A head count of the new National Assembly confirmed Cole's worst fears: as many as twenty-six of the thirty-six new Deputies opposed President

²¹Ibid., 838.00/1435.

Dartiguenave and the American occupation.²²

Cole's solution was simplicity itself: "There should be plenty of white troops in Haiti to back up their white officers," a reference to the fact that white Americans held all the officer-commissions in the otherwise all-black Constabulary. For his part, Secretary Lansing used more sophisticated language but his solution was no less dependent on force. On the eve of elections in early 1917, as it became clear there would be a strong anti-American, anti-Dartiguenave majority in the new National Assembly, Lansing set forth United States policy in a telegram to American officials in Port-au-Prince. He said that any opposition to President Dartiguenave should be considered "the beginnings of . . . a revolution and discord of a political character."²³

Lansing did not explain how elections could have other than a "political character" nor why political opposition in itself constituted a "revolution." But he was explicit in what should be done if Dartiguenave suffered a political setback and his Cabinet was forced to resign: he was simply to appoint a new Cabinet. The implications were fairly clear: for practical purposes, the American occupation was

²²Ibid., 838.00/1458, 1459, 1458, 1435.

²³Ibid., 838.00/1438, and 1432a.

to ignore the election returns. However cynical Lansing's instructions might appear, they were fully consistent with his views of Realpolitik and his distinction between countries that had real independence and those with only its legal fiction. These instructions were also consistent with the original pledge Lansing made to Dartiguenave in exchange for his approval of the treaty, that the United States would support him even if the Cabinet and entire National Assembly resigned in protest.²⁴

Given a president without public support and a newly elected National Assembly in strong opposition, the United States plans for constitutional reform--supposedly the first priority of the new Assembly--seemed all but certain to encounter vigorous opposition, if not outright defeat. Before the newly-elected National Assembly could hold its first meeting in April, to begin work on the controversial "reforms" demanded by the United States, events in the outside world overshadowed developments in Haiti. The four months from the Haitian elections in January to the April Assembly session constituted, to that point, far and away the most traumatic period in modern American history--with a

²⁴Ibid., 838.00/1458. For Lansing's policy instructions, see 838.00/1432a, January 6, 1917. For a discussion of Lansing's views, with citations, see above, pp. 76-80. For his pledge to Dartiguenave, see above, pp. 73-74.

dramatic impact in what had been the relatively slow moving events in Haiti.

On January 31, 1917, only weeks after election returns in Haiti confirmed the strong anti-Americans leanings of the new National Assembly, Germany announced unrestricted submarine warfare and a week later President Wilson went before Congress to announce the end of diplomatic relations with Germany. On March 1, newspapers throughout the country published the sensational Zimmermann telegram, which disclosed a bizarre scheme by Germany that Mexico would receive ample financial support and "would gain back by conquest" Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona if it joined forces with Germany, should America enter the war. Following the public outcry over recent American deaths in border clashes with Mexico, the stationing of fifty thousand national guard troops on the border and General John J. Pershing's retaliatory, four-hundred-mile punitive expedition into Mexico, the disclosure electrified the country, bringing war hysteria in the United States to a fever pitch. For a time it seemed that America's newest enemy in Europe was combining with its troublesome old adversary to the south to threaten the long southern border. On April 4, just before the new anti-American Assembly met in Haiti and after submarines sank four American merchant vessels, President Wilson asked Congress to recognize that a state of war

existed between Germany and the United States²⁵.

The Zimmermann telegram was only the latest evidence to confirm the worst Germanophobic concerns of the Wilson administration: long-standing fears of wide-ranging, dangerous German intrigues throughout the Western Hemisphere. In the notorious Albert and Dumba Affairs, documented evidence was published confirming German sabotage activities in the United States, while two German diplomats were expelled for their involvement in subversive plots. News of these developments created a public sensation. What the public did not know is that the Wilson administration believed that it had secret evidence of other disturbing German plots involving Mexico, and even worse, the possible takeover of Haiti by Germany. Two years earlier, for example, the administration learned that Mexican dissidents were arranging German financing for a military expedition into northern Mexico, and in late 1916, that Germany was attempting to negotiate with Mexico rights to a submarine base in that country. Moreover, the Wilson administration for nearly three years had viewed with alarm reports that

²⁵For a brief account of events in early 1917, see Thomas A. Bailey, A Diplomatic History of the American People, 10th ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1980) 590-593. For the text of the Zimmermann telegram, see Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1917 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1931) Supplement, 1: 147.

Germany might be planning to gain control of Haiti, in part to establish a naval base at Mole St. Nicholas, Haiti's deep-water port on the eastern flank of the Windward Passage, where it could threatened the newly-opened Panama Canal. For his part, Secretary Lansing believed that Germany was planning to stir up troubles throughout Latin America, forcing the United States into a series of military interventions that would block it from participation in the European war.²⁶

²⁶The three states named in the Zimmermann telegram formed part of the territory won from Mexico in the mid-nineteenth-century war, a development that had long poisoned relations between the two countries. For a dry account of that conflict focusing on its military aspects, see John S.D. Eisenhower, So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848 (New York: Random House Inc., 1989; reprint, New York: Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1990). For a popular, wide-ranging, but only cryptically documented, older account of America's long-standing conflicts with Mexico, the Wilson administration's reaction to the telegram, and background on why it carried such force (including the Pershing expedition and German intrigues), see Paul Horgan, The Great River: The Rio-Grande in North American History, 2 vols. (New York: Rinehart, 1954; reprint, Austin: Texas Monthly Press, Inc., 1984), 2:912-939. For a carefully documented account of German intrigue in Mexico, see Charles H. Harris III and Louis R. Sadler, "The Plan of San Diego and the Mexican-United States War Crises of 1916: A Reexamination," Hispanic American Historical Review 58 (Fall 1978): 382-408. In 1914, the United States had seized Veracruz, in part to block German arms shipments to a Mexican government not recognized by President Wilson. See Bailey, Diplomatic History, 554-561. For earlier concerns over German efforts to penetrate naval markets in the Western Hemisphere, see Seward W. Livermore, "Battleship Diplomacy in South America," Journal of Modern History 16 (March 1944): 31-48. For a discussion of the Germanophobia of the Wilson administration, see above, pp. 9-10, 14-24;

These Germanophobic concerns help explain why America intervened in Haiti and why Lansing demanded such total control over the Haitian government under the treaty he forced the country to accept. But the achievement of that objective, in particular having in Haiti regiments of combat-ready American marines, logically should have eliminated once and for all any conceivable idea of a German threat in Haiti, real or imagined. Yet the Haitian crown did not rest easily on the American head. If, as Thomas Bailey put it, a "witch-hunting hysteria" against Germans swept the United States, much the same happened in Haiti. American officials in Haiti, beginning in the spring of 1916, seem to have been obsessed with the dangers of a pervasive, ill-defined, German menace. Starting with reports that German diplomats were masterminding rebellions and protecting leaders, the reports continued almost to the close of World War I with reports that German agents in Mexico were organizing a full-scale rebellion in Haiti. Had writers of the reports known of Lansing's then-secret diary entry in July 1915, the reports could hardly have been better calculated to appeal to the concerns he noted, that Germany was plotting to block American participation in the

for reports of German activities in Haiti, see above, pp. 34-44.

war by stirring up troubles throughout Latin America.²⁷

Most reports went far beyond the alarms sounded by Roger Farnham before the intervention, an American investor in Haiti who often supplied Bryan with information suggesting a possible German takeover of Haiti. Reports in the later period all originated with American military officials in Haiti. They were based on captured documents, reports of secret agents, surveillance of suspects, rumors circulating in Port-au-Prince, and American officials themselves who at times secretly denounced each other for pro-German sympathies. However improbable the reports may now appear, they were sometimes taken seriously enough in Washington to engage the personal attention of Lansing.

In retrospect, documents of the period read like an Ian Fleming "007" novel. There were reports from "secret agent 100" (a Haitian employee of the occupation forces posing as an anti-American, German sympathizer), captured documents that reportedly exposed the activities of "General 6060" offering bribes of \$5,000 to the leader of a coup attempt, threats by Americans that Germans would be punished by death under martial law for stirring up rebellions, rumors of bombings and killings to embarrass the occupation,

²⁷Bailey, Diplomatic History, 583; Lansing diary, quoted in Logan, Haiti and the Dominican Republic (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 125-126. SDDF, 838.00/1403, May 26, 1916 and 1514, May 7, 1918.

possible assassination attempts on American officials, and claims by a Marine commander that the American occupation was "at the mercy of armed [German] raiders" which could land a military force and "destroy" the American garrison.²⁸

In February 1917, after the United States broke diplomatic relations with Germany, American officials in Port-au-Prince detected a coolness in Haitian officials that they determined was "due to German intrigue." The Americans said that Germans were spreading rumors that in the event of war the American government itself would be overthrown by 500,000 "armed Germans ready to start a revolution in the United States," and that submarine warfare "would result in a German victory in the near future." At about the same time, riots swept Port-au-Prince after rumors that in the event of war, America would draft Haitian males from fifteen to fifty-five years old. Opposition to the war in local newspapers was, American officials believed, "inspired by German sources." A year later, Lansing asked for an investigation of rumors that German agents in Mexico were planning a "general rebellion" in Haiti led by a Haitian exile who aspired to the presidency. Other officials often asked for additional information to these reports and the

²⁸Ibid., 838.00/1453, 1402, 1447, 1458, and 1452.

more alarming sections are underlined.²⁹

One result was a headcount of German residents with many placed under strict surveillance, as were the Dominican and German legations. So extreme did this witch-hunt hysteria become that plainclothes detectives were used to spy on Germans in, of all places, the remote little idyllic Isle La Tortue. This tiny, wilderness island off the north coast, approachable only by boat or private plane, is notable only for its powder-white beaches and its history as a pirate haven in early Colonial times.

The preoccupation with a German menace by American officials in Haiti, justified or not, and the Germanophobia of senior officials in Washington, may help explain the next steps taken in Haiti by the United States. Having declared war, after agonizing three years to avoid that step, the United States demanded that Haiti do the same--and immediately. What the United States expected such a totally meaningless gesture to accomplish is not even hinted at in the official documents. Haiti could add nothing to the Allied war effort--it had no army, and Colonel Waller had sold its entire Navy for a paltry \$14,100 simply to save on maintenance.³⁰

²⁹Ibid., 838.00/1439, 838.00/1439, 1452, 1514.

³⁰SDDF, 838.00/1449, 1403.

Haiti did occupy a strategically important position, but American marines already controlled the island. The United States successfully prodded other client states, such as the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Panama, into declaring war, and wanted Haiti to do the same. But trying to force Haiti to declare war proved to be a serious mistake, ending whatever slim chance there had been for constitutional reform within the framework of representative government. The demand resulted in the total alienation of Haitian politicians of all persuasions. The pressure to obtain a declaration of war only widened the gulf between what the United States wanted in Haiti and what the vast majority of its political leaders were willing to concede. As the decibel level of acrimonious debate rose, the chances of constitutional reform declined precipitously. The National Assembly may well have sealed its fate in mid-May by voting unanimously against a declaration of war.³¹

This stunning defeat made American officials all the more determined to gain total control in Haiti, leaving completely aside all the niceties of constitutional sanction. In a lengthy report to the State Department, General Cole frankly admitted the utter failure of the occupation to achieve governmental reform. He recommended

³¹Ibid., 838.00/1458

the complete dismemberment of the existing system of government. In its place, he suggested establishing a direct "military government, giving Americans the power" to carry out nothing less than the total reformation of Haitian society, government, and the economy. This was an ambitious undertaking, even for a hard-charging marine general, matching in audacity Napoleon's plans for reordering Haiti. Anticipating opposition, if not revolution, Cole called for the stationing of white troops in all population centers and a massive reinforcement of American troops in Haiti.³²

Interestingly, instead of blaming themselves for making demands that no Haitian politician could agree to without committing political suicide, including the declaration of war, American officials placed the blame for the political impasse entirely on Haitians, often in the most rabidly racial terms. The National Assembly vote drew forth newly-promoted General Cole's most impassioned denunciation of the typical Haitian politician as an "absolute savage under the skin," totally incapable of self-government, with even the best-educated reverting in a few minutes "to the mental state of a savage in the heart of Africa . . . illogical and double-faced . . . selfish and

³²Ibid.

self seeking."³³

In discussing various options for a new governing system, Cole was strongly opposed to the system actually adopted a short time later, the Haitian president ruling with a Council of State. Cole said such an arrangement was "absolutely wanting" and would result in "still worse conditions" and a "greater danger of armed opposition" than any option except "actual annexation." Significantly, what Cole feared most was a coup leading to the election of a president "in exact accordance with the terms of the Haitian constitution," meaning, presumably, that such a president would have to abrogate the unconstitutional treaty.³⁴

The following month, President Dartiguenave was able to overcome Cole's objection to a Council of State by pledging that no member would be named by him "without the express sanction of the representative of the United States government," in other words, Cole himself. It was at this same meeting that President Dartiguenave sought "the complete support of the United States" and its permission to dissolve the National Assembly. One perhaps disingenuous suggestion by President Dartiguenave was rejected out of hand by Cole. This was to submit to ratification by

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

plebiscite the two conflicting drafts of the constitutions, one favored by the Americans, the other by Haitian political leaders. Given the political climate of the day, it seems all but certain which version would have been approved. Cole saw the move as a "dangerous precedent" since the "ignorance of the vast majority of the voting population" would have left the choice to chance, or to "political manipulation."³⁵

At this point Cole was so desperate to get votes in favor of constitutional reform that by his own admission he not only sanctioned but actively encouraged President Dartiguenave to bribe members of the National Assembly, explaining to the President that "two could play" the bribery game. Dartiguenave declined, not because of any moral scruples, but simply because he lacked funds. In these discussions, President Dartiguenave provided a novel explanation for the problems he was having with the National Assembly. These difficulties, he argued, were entirely the fault of Americans for forcing him to hold honest election, thus depriving him of a legislature he could rely on. Instead he was left with a Legislature where "base majorities" held absolute power. Unable to offer bribes and, therefore, control the National Assembly, Dartiguenave

³⁵Ibid., 838.00/1467.

nevertheless promised to use his "utmost endeavor" in order "to force through changes" sought by the United States. If it seems highly irregular for an American general to be discussing the advantages of bribery and disadvantages of honest elections, Cole apparently missed the point--he faithfully reported these conversations in detail to the State Department. Nor does the record show that anyone in the State Department took exception to Cole's conduct.³⁶

General Cole was tireless in attempting to win American-style constitutional reform. In a two-hour session with the leader of the Chamber of Deputies, Cole warned against continuing to oppose the changes sought by America, that nothing was being accomplished. He correctly said, "The results could be disastrous to Haiti." He said the Haitians were failing to demonstrate "practical ability in self-government."³⁷

He was only particularly correct. Much was being accomplished by the National Assembly, but none of it what the United States intended. Whether what the Assembly was doing was "practical," given the overwhelming military power of the United States, was at least arguable. For after meeting in secret session, with the doors locked, the

³⁶Ibid., and 838.00/1465

³⁷Ibid., 838.00/1459.

National Assembly met in public session and was rushing to complete work on a new, thoroughly anti-American constitution.³⁸ If the first breakdown of constitutional government in 1916 resulted in a crude farce--a lockout of the National Assembly with United States Marines standing guard to prevent the elected Assembly from meeting--the final breakdown in 1917, if anything, was even more bizarre. This involved no less a personage than Marine General Smedley D. Butler, banana war veteran extraordinaire who had terrorized the peasants of Nicaragua after going to China and winning a Congressional Medal of Honor for exploits in the Boxer Rebellion. At the time, Butler commanded the American-controlled Haitian Constabulary.³⁹

Learning that the National Assembly was racing to complete the new anti-American constitution before it could be disbanded, Butler, on June 19, 1917, forced a most reluctant Dartiguenave to sign a decree of dissolution. After placing armed guards around the National Assembly, Butler marched onto the Chamber floor and handed the decree to the Speaker, who refused to receive it, much less read it. Butler then read the decree himself and ordered the

³⁸Ibid., 838.00/1467.

³⁹For biographical background on Butler, see Schmidt, United States Occupation.

Assembly cleared of its members and their guests.⁴⁰

Following Butler's action, which Cole reported in compelling and approving detail to the State Department, the United States was left with a government that could not make the slightest pretense to legitimacy under its own constitution. Apparently none of this bothered Secretary Lansing in the slightest. Still determined to get the constitutional change that would legitimize the treaty he had forced Haiti to accept, Lansing suggested that Admiral H.S. Knapp go to Haiti and report "the best method of putting into effect the proposed constitution." Admiral Knapp had replaced Admiral Caperton as the top official in both Haiti and the Dominican Republic.⁴¹

Having disbanded one National Assembly in 1916 in favor of new elections as well as the National Assembly that resulted from those elections, the United States clearly needed an entirely new approach to constitutional reform, even if that approach itself was unconstitutional. The method eventually settled on was ingenious, if disingenuous: a plebiscite, a device never before used in Haitian history and having no sanction whatever in its constitution, as Admiral Knapp himself readily acknowledged. A plebiscite

⁴⁰SDDF, 838.00/1467.

⁴¹Ibid., 838.00/1464, 1475.

had another, more serious practical drawback: the illiteracy and "ignorance of the vast majority of the voting population," as Lansing had described Haitians in 1915, had to be overcome somehow, qualifying them to judge complex issues of constitutional reform. This was, of course, far more than was asked of the American people during the ratification process for their new constitution in 1789 when voters were only asked to elect delegates to ratification conventions.⁴²

Knapp's report did not endorse the idea of a plebiscite with any enthusiasm. After studying the situation in Haiti, he reported that a plebiscite "does not meet the present constitutional requirements of Haiti." He was apologetic for presenting what he called this "strictly legal" argument.⁴³

He went on to present what ultimately became the only legal rationale on record justifying the plebiscite. It had something of a charming Jeffersonian ring with its emphasis on popular sovereignty, and might have appealed to the Philadelphia radicals of the 1780s with its call for direct

⁴²Ibid., 838.00/1482, and 1275B. Under the Haitian constitution of that time, the Chamber of Deputies was popularly elected by voting districts. The Chamber, in turn, elected the Senate. The two bodies meeting as the National Assembly elected the president and only the National Assembly was authorized to change the constitution.

⁴³Ibid., 838.00/1482.

democracy. But Knapp's assumptions were as foreign to the Haitian experience as polar bears to cane fields. Even the most patriotic, least cynical Haitian might have been astonished to learn that all political power "came originally from the people." Everyone knew to the contrary, that power came only from the barrel of a gun, as the entire history of Haiti demonstrated. This conviction was only reinforced by the American occupation.⁴⁴

Haitians might have been more surprised to learn from Knapp's analysis that constitutional change was "desired by the people," in a great ground-swell of public opinion, but that this change could not be obtained under the prescribed

⁴⁴Ibid. Conclusions about the role of power in the politics of Haiti are drawn from a number of sources. Typically a transfer of presidential power occurred when a peasant army in the north marched south, seized Port-au-Prince and, thus intimidated, the National Assembly elected its leader the new president. In the only detailed analysis of this phenomena in the period preceding the occupation, Brenda Gail Plummer argues unconvincingly that the rapid turn-over of Haitian presidents was a form of ritualized, relatively non-violent succession. See Plummer, Haiti and the Great Powers, 1902-1915 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1988). For a discussion of the impact on subsequent history of the American occupation, particularly the growing role of the army as the final repository of power, see Michel-Rolph Trouillet, Haiti: State Against Nation, The Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990). Just before the intervention the American Minister in Haiti reported that elections as known in America simply did not exist, "being simply a continuation of the military system by which the country is governed" with "few voters who vote many times . . . mostly soldiers under orders" with no public participation. See SDDF 838.00/1122, February 22, 1915.

methods; therefore, it was required that the proposals be submitted "to the people as a whole." The difficulty was that for two consecutive years the representatives elected by the people had refused to make the constitutional changes demanded: not those demanded by the Haitian people, but by the United States. Complicating matters further, Knapp pointed out that the Haitian-American treaty "has no provision looking to any change in the Constitution" nor did the treaty even mention the martial law that Haiti had been under since September 1915.⁴⁵

Leaving aside his legal theories, Knapp quickly got back to power politics in outlining the only two conditions required to make constitutional change in Haiti, neither of which involved any decisions by those most directly affected, the Haitian people: first, the United States must decide if a "popular vote will be satisfactory" method, meaning in practice that Secretary Lansing must approve; and second, that the United States must satisfy itself as to "the proposed draft" before submitting it to plebiscite, again meaning that the Secretary pass judgment on the appropriateness of the new constitution. What Knapp clearly favored was the kind of direct, uncomplicated military government he presided over in the Dominican Republic which

⁴⁵SDDF, 838.00/1482.

had "tremendous advantages." That system did have the virtue of simplicity, even honesty, since it avoided the hypocrisy of pretending to a legitimacy that in the end rested on military force. Knapp was overruled by the State Department.⁴⁶

As Knapp grappled with legal aspects of constitutional reform, and with the troublesome National Assembly out of the way, the new Council of State quickly met one urgent United States demand by declaring war on Germany. In a curious example of circular reasoning, this action by the appointed Council of State, after the elected National Assembly refused to declare war, was used the following year by Wilson administration officials to "prove" that the Council of State had the legislative authority to elect a president, even though the constitution expressly stated that only the National Assembly had that authority. This finding proved crucial in subsequent history. It was the basis for having the Council of State elect Dartiguenave's successor in 1922 and for his re-election in 1927.⁴⁷

Writing a new constitution, however, proved a good deal more difficult than declaring war, in part because Secretary Lansing had very strong ideas of what was best for

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷SDDF, 838.001/D25/8.

Haiti and no hesitation in expressing himself in the strongest dictatorial terms. Initially, Admiral Knapp estimated that the entire process of writing the constitution and having it approved by plebiscite would take only two months, three at the most. The process took nearly a full year. What the Admiral may have seriously underestimated was Secretary Lansing's direct, personal involvement in the entire process. He repeatedly reviewed every article of the constitution, making changes along the way, specifying the color of the ballots to be used, and furiously arguing with French-speaking Haitian officials over the precise meaning of specific French words. In exasperation, after the Haitians said they would use an "errata" notation to disown Lansing's use of French, the Secretary ordered, "have the English text rule." Then he ordered, "Discuss and arrange for the adoption of the Constitution at an early date."⁴⁸

Just before the plebiscite was held, Lansing seemed to have second thoughts about the legality of what he had ordered done in Haiti. He rather defensively suggested that a recent plebiscite in Uruguay set the precedent for holding one in Haiti, neglecting to mention that in Haiti the constitution clearly specified that amendments could be made

⁴⁸Ibid., and 838.00/41, 838.01/43, 44.

legally only by the National Assembly. To overcome the problems of illiteracy, which prevented all but a tiny minority from reading the constitution, much less understanding it, Lansing again borrowed from the Uruguayan experience: using colored ballots. He suggested using the national colors, blue and red, for positive votes, with negative ballots "to be made in some somber hue."⁴⁹ Thus, any Haitian patriot worth his L'Ouverture heritage could be expected to vote the national colors, while disloyal dissents would vote the "somber hue." This use of colored ballots had the additional advantage of intimidation by allowing the poll watchers--General Butler's American-controlled Haitian Constabulary--to know who was voting which way.

Even so, Butler took additional precautions to make sure the Constabulary fully understood what exactly was expected to be the outcome of the election, perhaps taking his cue from Lansing's unequivocal order to "arrange for the adoption" of the constitution. In a letter to his troops, Butler specified that "a large as well as an affirmative vote is desired." Although this was truthful, what he said next was a bold-faced lie. To overcome any suspicions that America might have had something to do with drafting the

⁴⁹Ibid., 838.011/42G.

constitution, Butler said it had been "written by the Haitian government" after the "failure of the last National Assembly to accomplish anything at all." He blamed this failure on the "old military and political caste to which Haiti owes so much misery and humiliation." Carrying more weight than any of these arguments, perhaps, was his promise of celebrations for the troops and workers--and the order to arrest any opponents.⁵⁰

With the American-controlled troops supervising the elections and with people using the colored ballots suggested by Lansing, the United States got a decisively positive vote, but not the large turnout that had been hoped for. The lopsided vote was 69,337 in favor, only 335 against. A few days later, Colonel John H. Russell, who had replaced General Cole, provided a surprisingly sober and candid analysis of the election. Stating flatly that no influence had been used "to obtain an affirmative vote," he did say, with irony or humor uncertain, that "all government employees voted at least once." He added that the vote "from the intelligent class was small" and those opposed "practically did not vote" at all.⁵¹

In an often-quoted passage, Colonel Russell explained

⁵⁰Ibid., 838.001/48.

⁵¹Ibid., 838.011/64.

that many people had no idea "what they were voting for." One man questioned thought he was voting for the election of a Pope, and another for the Haitian president. Russell said that "no enthusiasm whatever was displayed on the streets of Port-au-Prince," that most voting had been done by "countrymen and the half-clothed ignorant classes." He said the problem was that "only a very small proportion of the population of Haiti has the intelligence to understand the provisions of the Constitution or to even read."⁵²

What is notable about his report is not only his candor, but that he ruled Haiti for the next twelve years as the United States High Commissioner on the basis of an election that he himself found to be farcical. Furthermore, even the best-educated Haitian may not have understood the implications of a "transitional" provision in the new constitution. This provision allowed the Haitian president to specify the even-numbered year when new elections would be held. This allowed for the continual rule of the "double dictatorship" until 1929, when uprisings forced the United States to press for elections. In the long road from the intervention in 1915 to the plebiscite in 1918, the United States had moved from perhaps a necessary effort to restore law and order to a complete subversion of constitutional

⁵²Ibid.

government. And as Gibbon said of Augustus, this was done by seizing tyrannical powers while carefully maintaining the outward forms of constitutionality.

CHAPTER 5

EPILOGUE: THE AMERICAN LEGACY

The end of General John Russell's long reign in Haiti, and the beginning of the end of the occupation itself, came in 1929. His call for massive American military reinforcements to put down nationwide strikes resulted in President Hoover's appointment of a Presidential Commission. General Russell subsequently resigned and was replaced by Dana G. Munro, who later became the distinguished Princeton historian. The final end of the occupation in 1934 came, of course, long after Woodrow Wilson and Robert Lansing left office. America, disillusioned with World War I and its results, was turning in upon itself, disengaging from the world, determined to pursue neutrality.

But Lansing, as the major architect of the occupation, deserves whatever blame or credit goes with establishing, by the summer of 1918, the framework that governed Haiti for the next twelve years. Only minor adjustments were later made in Lansing's framework. In imposing a harsh treaty on Haiti in the months immediately following the intervention, Lansing seemed to have believed that Germany posed a clear

and present danger to America's hemispheric security in the midst of World War I. He may well have been mistaken but he was almost certainly sincere. What is less easy to explain is why Lansing insisted on carrying forward his absurd, farcical constitutional "reform." Obviously there was no way the United States could have transplanted its long tradition of constitutional government onto the bleak, violence-prone Haitian experience. But the cynicism and duplicity that marked the American effort, known to Lansing and guided by him at critical points, made a complete mockery of democratic government under generally-accepted constitutional norms.

Further, there is no evidence whatever that during that critical formative period to mid-1918, that either Lansing or any of his associates made the slightest effort to nurture self-government in any form. On the contrary, their brutal suppression of two elected National Assemblies, were long strides in precisely the opposite direction--toward dictatorship, however artfully camouflaged.

Nor does available evidence support the conventional wisdom of most historians that Lansing was simply too busy to worry excessively about Haiti, that he was so preoccupied with the war in Europe that he could not follow events in Haiti in any detail. Any Secretary of State, in the midst of war, who found time to argue over the precise meaning of

two French words, to specify the exact color of voting ballots, to review in detail and many times over every single article of the Haitian constitution, was involved in the process and intimately so.

There is, of course, no clear-cut, easy explanation for why the occupation of Haiti had results almost the exact reverse of what might have been expected, given the self-proclaimed reforming, idealistic intentions of the Wilson administration. One scholar recently suggested the difficulties in Haiti were the result of it being a "side-show" to the main event, the war in Europe.¹ That is true so far as it applies to President Wilson himself. A careful examination of the entire collection of the papers of Woodrow Wilson, not only the standard, less-inclusive Link edition, demonstrated that beyond the period of the intervention, President Wilson was not personally involved.²

In attempting to justify United States policy during the pre-World War I period, Wilson's biographer, Arthur Link, suggests that Lansing substituted "strategy and power"

¹Dr. Robin Brooks, Professor of History, San Jose State University, commentary on this paper, spring 1991.

²The Papers of Woodrow Wilson, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Microfilm Collection, 1187, State University of New York, Graduate Center, New York, New York; Arthus S. Link, ed., The Papers of Woodrow Wilson, vols. 27-37 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978-1981).

for policy. Forgetting how impossibly difficult it is to separate the three elements--strategy, power, and policy--Link also suggests that the failings of United States Caribbean policy reflected President Wilson's "lack of interest and energy." Perhaps so. But certainly the President's lack of either was not immediately obvious in other initiatives. Link was closer to reality in suggesting that President Wilson wished to "teach good government," or so he said, "even though the effort might require a partial or total denial of the sovereignty of the recipients of such assistance." This is simply a longer way of making Dana Munro's point, that the Wilson administration was determined to impose democracy, "by force if necessary."³

Even granting Link's notion and forgetting that the violation of a nation's sovereignty might raise questions about good intentions, Link himself wonders if what happened in the Caribbean region really reflected "the efforts of good men to be good neighbors." It is hard to find evidence of good men with good intentions operating in Haiti, with the single exception of Admiral Caperton. It is hard to find the good intentions of Lansing in his high-handed refusal to negotiate over the treaty and his dictatorial

³Link, Wilson, 3:498, 45. Dana G. Munro, Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean, 1900-1921 (Princeton University Press, 1964), 371.

attitude in developing the new constitution. It is equally hard to identify the good intentions in the racial bigotry of Waller, Cole, and Russell--the men who implemented Lansing's policy dictates.⁴

The responsibility, therefore, for what happened in Haiti comes back to Wilson's Secretary of State, Robert Lansing. His conduct, or misconduct, may be explained by his firm belief that might makes right, that any act can be justified in terms of national security in time of war. The domestic record of the Wilson administration suggests this reasoning applied at home. Clearly this concept of amoral power applied in Haiti.⁵

What the Haitians learned well, under the governmental structure that Lansing created and under American tutelage, is one of most enduring legacies of the occupation: how to cloak dictatorship under the guise of constitutionality, and the importance of emphasizing shadow over substance in affairs of government. Another legacy of the occupation, a lesson reinforced by Haiti's entire history, is that government power necessarily grows out of the barrel of gun, not from common consent on constitutional principals.

Drawing on this legacy years after the occupation, the

⁴Link, Wilson, 3:549.

⁵For Lansing's views, see above, pp. 76-86.

notorious François Duvalier, one of the most brutal leaders in Haitian history, claimed, like Hitler before him, the authority of constitutional election in his 1956 victory, and used a plebiscite to legitimize his title of "President for Life." He later insured the "legitimate" succession of his son by having his hand-picked National Assembly make the appropriate constitutional change.

Not until seventy-six years after American marines landed near Port-au-Prince did Haiti carry out what appeared to be democratic elections. Ironically, these elections were conducted under supervision of United Nations observers, all unarmed soldiers of "neutral" nations--not a single American soldier, much less a marine, in sight. This seemingly successful election suggested the possibility of real governmental reform, after years of coups and counter-coups following Jean-Claude Duvalier's forced departure in 1983--appropriately, considering the past, aboard an American air force jet.

But the hope for real change was short-lived. Shortly after the election, the crackle of rifle fire in downtown Port-au-Prince on January 7, 1991, and later that night, the surging, strangely silent mobs armed with sticks, stones and machetes, the eerie, almost unworldly sound of thousands of bare feet shuffling by, as though some great beast were slithering along the darkened streets, the bodies of

"enemies" burning in stacks of tires at intersections, and the terse reports from a nearby American Embassy short-wave radio, all confirmed that still another coup attempt was underway. This was drawing on the most profound legacy of the American occupation, that whatever its outward constitutional form, the ultimate authority of government rests on military power. Americans, of course, did not infect Haitian politics with violence. But Americans did teach the lesson of making unconstitutional government respectable.

That coup attempt in January, as it turned out, was entirely unlike any that had preceded it. A newly politically-aware public opposed the attempt and supported the government, in a manner perhaps peculiar to Haitians. Infuriated that former Duvalier-supporters were attempting to steal their recent election and reestablish dictatorship, the massive street mobs took direct action--murdering scores of suspected Duvalier supporters, wrecking their homes, destroying their offices, burning their cars and jeeps, leaving sections of downtown Port-au-Prince in smoldering ruins. Bolstered by this support, the Haiti Army, after tense hours of uneasy delay stretching until almost noon the next day, finally stormed the Palace, arresting the conspirators and freeing the president, who had been held prisoner throughout the night.

But having the Army and the people on the same side was an experience utterly novel in modern Haiti history. Admiral Knapp, who had sounded so incredibly naive in 1917, with his wishful Jeffersonism, may be proved right at long last, that in Haiti, governmental power and legitimacy does ultimately originate with the people. Perhaps, if the accord between the army and the people endures, Haiti may be taking the first step toward overcoming the bitter legacy of its long American occupation. Perhaps.⁶ But the most recent army coup, which in late September 1991 forced from office Haiti's only democratically elected president, can hardly be considered encouraging.

⁶The account is based on personal observations by the author. United Nations observers may have played a key role by reassuring Haitians, particularly those in regional towns beyond Port-au-Prince, that the results of their elections would not be set aside by an unconstitutional seizure of power. How the observers could possibly have delivered on that promise if the army had sided with the conspirators is not clear.

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