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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Who Owns Haiti?: People, Power, and Sovereignty* by Robert Maguire and Scott Freeman

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Robert Maguire & Scott Freeman (eds.), *Who Owns Haiti?: People, Power, and Sovereignty*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2017. ix + 178 pp. (Cloth US\$ 79.95)

Who Owns Haiti? offers a critical analysis of the automatic dependence of the countries of the South on those of the North from whom they receive aid for development. The book also describes U.S. foreign policy toward Haiti and shows how the food aid on which Haiti depends is controlled by the United States. Consisting of a well-informed and assertive foreword by Amy Willentz and eleven chapters, it offers a blatant display of the unwelcome interference of Western transnational power plays in Haiti's fight for sovereignty.

The book is an academic reference that helps readers understand complex aspects of Haitian life, which makes it very relevant for scholars of Haitian studies. The multidisciplinary perspectives it reflects give clear insights on the constituents of Haitian history, economy, development, anthropology, political science, and sociology, using the input of contributions from both senior and emerging Haitianists.

The contributors offer an innovative analytical framework to understand how hegemonic Western countries have used racism at key moments of Haitian history and contributed to the prevention of the construction of a strategic and modern nation-state, thus hampering Haiti's sovereignty. *Who Owns Haiti?* also exposes the significant influence of several internal factors. In fact, it argues that Haiti's current messy international fate benefits from the collaboration of the Haitian oligarchy, whose total disconnection from the masses reversed their role in the protection of the country's sovereignty. Instead of intervening in the international influence on Haitian life, this oligarchy has facilitated the imbrication of a complex network of relationships with international actors. Indeed, the lack of a local consensus for a new social contract in Haiti was perpetuated even before and after the Duvalierism governments, both papadocracy and babydocracy.

Through the development of the chapters, the contributors describe how the erosion of Haitian sovereignty resulted directly from the control and input of international hegemonic countries. Robert Fatton offers an approach for the gradual abandonment of the labyrinth of foreign tutelage. However, many contributors also report the resistance of Haitian people, specifically local actors who joined forces to vehemently fight foreign infiltration and domination of Haitian life and communities. They point out that such resistance must be a long-term effort that will influence Haitian mentality through efficient use of cultural and political power, namely from religion and the State.

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Sovereignty requires a constant fight to embrace and maintain Haitian values, such as the concepts of kombitism and mutual respect (*Onè-Respè*); see in particular, Chelsey Kivland's essay, "Street Sovereignty: Power, Violence and Respect among Haitian Baz." I believe that the Haitian ruling class and other influential local actors have facilitated the international dismantling of Haitian sovereignty because of their deficit of coherence and partnership. They do not embrace one another as brothers and sisters from the same motherland, Ayiti. On the one hand, these authoritative figures have approached Haitian sovereignty without enough assiduity to rebuild the important social bond and constant search for togetherness of the Haitian people. On the other hand, international actors have demonstrated little or no respect for the Haitian people because of the induced atrophy of Haitian political leaders to contribute responsibly as valuable Haitian state agents in the design and implementation of local and foreign policies. Moreover, the international community must stop interfering in the internal political processes of the country in order to reorient them in favor of their own geopolitical and economic interests.

The book also stresses the importance of accurate communication and the location of its debates in terms of strategic planning of development. Following this analytical logic, it advocates the reevaluation of the use of Haitian Creole in national and international debates and negotiations to make democracy serve productively and beneficially the development of the Haitian people.

Who Owns Haiti? is not only a book that sketches a bleak picture of Haiti's structural trouble and the way transnational actors have been, historically, involved in denying the full enjoyment of sovereignty to the Haitian people. It also contains suggestions about the way Haiti can become truly independent by gradually extricating itself from the labyrinth of foreign tutelage. The ideas developed in the book might improve the country's economic and political conditions if there is a bureaucratic reform framework based on rational legal logic and contextualized by a culture of meritocracy. The right combination of a "State-for-the-Nation" and a prodemocratic civil society could help the Haitian people gradually regain their sovereignty and reduce the interference of international powers.

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