



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Haiti covers 10,714 square miles (27,750 square kilometers) of the island of Hispaniola, which it shares with the Dominican Republic. Haiti is about three times the size of Cyprus but is slightly smaller than the U.S. state of Maryland. It is comprised of two peninsulas split by the Gulf of Gonâve. The mountainous, nearly barren island of Gonâve, which belongs to Haiti, rests in the center of the gulf.

Haiti's portion of Hispaniola is significantly more mountainous than the rest of the island, with successive mountain chains running east to west on both peninsulas. The northern Massif du Nord is part of the island's backbone, which Dominicans call the Cordillera Central. The southern peninsula boasts the Massif de la Hotte and Massif de la Selle. The highest peak, Pic la Selle, is located in the Massif de la Selle and rises to 8,793 feet (2,680 meters). The mountains are punctuated by hills and valleys, where most people live and work. The four main plains include the Central, Northern, Artibonite, and Plaine du Cul-de-Sac (where the capital, Port-au-Prince, is located). Haiti is crossed by several large rivers, the longest of which is the Artibonite. Most of the tree cover that existed prior to European colonization has been removed due to farming and production of charcoal fuel for cooking.

Haiti's climate is warm and only mildly humid. Frost, snow, and ice do not form anywhere—even at the highest elevations. The average temperature in the mountains is 66°F (19°C), while at Port-au-Prince it is 81°F (27°C). Spring and

autumn are rainy, whereas December through February and June through August are dry. July is the driest summer month. The hurricane season lasts from June to October.

History

The island of Hispaniola was originally inhabited by the Taíno and Arawak peoples. After Christopher Columbus arrived in 1492 and opened Spanish colonization on Hispaniola, the indigenous peoples were enslaved. Within a few decades, a million natives died from starvation, European diseases such as smallpox and measles, and hard labor in Spanish gold mines. In a belated effort to save the remaining Indians and to help their sugar plantations prosper, the Spanish settlers began importing African slaves by 1517. By 1560, few Indians remained. The 2,000 Spanish settlers controlled the island and some 30,000 African slaves. In 1697, Spain ceded the western third of Hispaniola to France, which soon enjoyed the coffee, sugar, and cotton riches of its new colony, Saint Domingue. France was given the entire island by 1795, although it did not fully control the eastern half.

The Haitian Slave Revolt began in 1791. Though slaves were granted their freedom by 1793, leaders such as Toussaint L'Ouverture (a freed slave) continued to fight European powers for control of the island. L'Ouverture was eventually captured and subsequently died in a French prison, but his successor Jean-Jacques Dessalines gained victory over the French in 1803. Haiti declared its independence on 1 January 1804. French settlers who were not killed left the island. Dessalines became the emperor.

When Dessalines was killed in 1806, political chaos and

rivalries led to a split: Henri Christophe eventually became King Henry I of northern Haiti, and Alexandre Petion ruled southern Haiti in a more republican style of government. Christophe committed suicide in 1820. In 1822, north and south were reunited under President Jean-Pierre Boyer, who finally established governance over the Dominican Republic; this era still perpetuates tensions between the two neighbors. France recognized Haitian independence in 1825 after Boyer agreed to pay roughly 100 million francs in reparation to former slaveholders over the next century, a sum that crippled Haiti's already weak economy. In 1844, the Dominican Republic declared its independence from Haiti, and Boyer was overthrown. Power changed hands repeatedly until the 20th century, which found Haiti near anarchy. Under the United States' Monroe Doctrine, which essentially sought to maintain U.S. dominance in the Western Hemisphere, U.S. troops invaded and occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934.

The following years did not bring stability to Haiti, as people revolted against the government and elites who controlled it. In 1957, François Duvalier, known as Papa Doc, won presidential elections despite charges of fraud. He killed his opponents and ruled with impunity, terrorizing the populace with his *Tontons Macoutes*, the secret police. Before he died in 1971, Duvalier designated his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier, "Baby Doc," as his successor. Riots in 1985 forced Jean-Claude Duvalier to flee Haiti in 1986.

A succession of military-led governments ruled Haiti until 1990, when Jean-Bertrand Aristide became the nation's first democratically elected president. Glee over his election was followed by impatience for reform and violence between Aristide's supporters and opponents. After just eight months, the military—led by General Raoul Cédras—led a coup d'état against Aristide, who subsequently made his way to the United States and set up a government in exile. His supporters in Haiti either went into hiding or were killed. The military dictatorship became increasingly brutal, and the international community decided to intervene with an embargo, though its effect was diminished by smuggling through the neighboring Dominican Republic.

In September 1994, about 20,000 U.S. soldiers landed in Haiti to facilitate the removal from power of the Haitian military junta. A few weeks later, Aristide returned from exile to rule for nearly a decade. However, he was overthrown again in 2004. Though UN peacekeepers have been in the country since 2004 and a democratically elected government came to power in 2006, Haiti continues to struggle with violent clashes between government and opposition groups. High food prices sparked anti-government demonstrations in April 2008 that led to parliament's dismissal of the prime minister. Later that year, hurricanes and tropical storms left hundreds dead and thousands homeless. In 2009, more than one billion dollars of Haiti's foreign debt was canceled.

The country's challenges continued in 2010, when a powerful earthquake struck Port-au-Prince, killing up to 300,000 people and destroying much of Haiti's infrastructure. International donors pledged billions of dollars to reconstruction, but the damage incurred from the earthquake remains an obstacle to Haitians as they try to return to their normal lives. In early 2012, the Haitian government

announced it was partnering with the private sector to improve infrastructure, house those displaced by the earthquake, and fight disease. However, reconstruction efforts are hampered by government instability and insufficient aid. Haiti suffered fatalities and damages in 2012 from Tropical Storm Isaac (August) and Hurricane Sandy (October). Protests (some of them violent) in response to poor living conditions occur frequently in Haiti.

THE PEOPLE

Population

Haiti's population of 9.8 million is currently decreasing at about 0.79 percent. The country has a high birthrate, but emigration and poor health keep overall growth rates down. The majority of the population lives in poverty. Up to 300,000 people were killed in January 2010, when an earthquake struck the Port-au-Prince region. Most Haitians are descendants of African slaves who came to the island beginning in the 16th century. A small proportion of Haiti's people (5 percent) are of mixed heritage or white.

A large number of Haitians live in Florida, New York, and Montréal, and there are Haitian communities in other parts of Canada and the United States as well. Haitians have been living and working in the Dominican Republic since its foundation in 1844. Throughout the 1900s, the majority of the Haitians who traveled to the Dominican side of the island worked in the agricultural industry, specifically with sugarcane. As sugarcane profits began to decline, increasing numbers of Haitians began to migrate to urban areas in the Dominican Republic; the government there has passed new laws in an attempt to regulate immigration and has carried out mass deportations of Haitian immigrants.

Language

According to the 1987 constitution, the official languages of Haiti are Haitian Creole (Kreyòl) and French. Kreyòl is the language of daily conversation. French is used in government and business. Only educated adults or secondary school students speak French, though with varying levels of fluency and accuracy. Knowledge of French has become a sign of social class in Haiti; those who speak French may shun those who do not. Kreyòl is a unique mixture of French, Taino, English, Spanish, and various African languages. It is similar to creole spoken on some other Caribbean islands, such as Guadeloupe and Martinique. Kreyòl is traditionally an oral language, though it had a written form as early as the 19th century. Use of written Kreyòl began to spread after the 1940s with the introduction of adult literacy programs. Because of the popularity of U.S. American television and films and because many Haitians have relatives in the United States, English is used more often than in the past.

Religion

The majority (80 percent) of Haitians are Catholic. While some people regularly participate in religious services, others only draw upon their Catholic identity in the case of marriages, funerals, or other rites of passage. Protestants

claim 16 percent of the population. The largest denominations are Baptist, Pentecostal, and Seventh-day Adventist.

Perhaps as important as organized religion is *Vodou* (voodoo), which is practiced to some degree by a majority of Haitians. It was given legal status equal to other religions in 2003. While official Catholicism opposes its practice, Vodou includes the worship of Catholic saints and other Catholic rituals. Vodou ceremonies and rituals, held in temples, usually are performed at night. Adherents believe that during the temple ceremonies, a Vodou god inhabits the body of a believer. Not all Vodou adherents practice the religion openly. Still, certain Vodou temples are the focus of annual pilgrimages.

General Attitudes

Haitians are warm, friendly, and generous. Their tradition for hospitality is clear in how they treat guests or go out of their way to help strangers find an address or something else they need. Haitians are proud of their culture and history. The stories of past Haitian heroes are not forgotten by today's youth. Some claim this is because the present offers no heroes, but others believe the past gives hope for the future.

Everyday life is hard for most people, so parents strive to send their children to school, though it is very expensive, trusting that an education will give the next generation a better life. No matter what society's conditions, Haitians celebrate life with joy, laughter, and dancing.

There is an extremely large income gap in Haiti. Rural and middle-class urban people have different perspectives on life, as their cultural practices and attitudes vary significantly. Urban elites consider themselves to be more European or cosmopolitan than people from the countryside. People living in rural areas value their traditions and slower pace of life.

Haitians' attitudes toward other countries usually vary according to social class. Haitians from lower classes often claim a historical connection to Africa, while upper-class Haitians may feel closer to France, Canada, or the United States. Haitians often migrate to other nations, including the Bahamas, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Jamaica, Mexico, the United States, Canada, and France, with a few going to countries in Central and South America.

Feelings toward Haiti's closest neighbor, the Dominican Republic, vary according to occupation, class, and geography. Haitians from the upper classes may have business ties in the Dominican Republic, and those from the lower classes may take short-term trips to the Dominican Republic to buy and sell wares. Haitians living on the border often have friendly social and economic interactions with Dominicans. A growing number of Haitian students study at Dominican universities. After the earthquake in 2010, the Dominican government, as well as Dominican businesses and private citizens, contributed goods and money to reconstruction efforts in Haiti.

Personal Appearance

Whenever possible, people pay great attention to their public appearance. Urban Haitians prefer to wear Western-style clothing. Women may wear pants or colorful skirts. Some wear a headdress to match their outfits. Young people like to

wear shorts. They also follow the latest North American fashion trends. Sandals are the most popular footwear. Government officials and businessmen wear suits and ties. Rural men wear T-shirts and shorts or pants when working. Rural women wear dresses and head scarves, but they rarely wear pants. Almost all Haitian women enjoy jewelry (though it is often unaffordable) and brightly colored clothing. Men may wear gold jewelry as a status symbol.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

Personal greetings are very important to Haitians. When entering a room or joining a group, a person is expected to physically greet each individual. Haitians usually shake hands when meeting a new acquaintance. Everyone else, from relatives to friends and casual acquaintances, receives a kiss on each cheek. The most common verbal greeting is *Bonjou, kouman ou ye?* (Good day, how are you?). The response usually is *M pa pi mal, e ou menm?* (I am not worse, and yourself?). Haitians address superiors or persons of status by title (*Monsieur, Madame, Doctor*, etc.) and last name. Friends use first names or nicknames, which are usually related to a person's name, to address each other. An older person might be called "aunt" or "uncle" even if not related to the speaker.

Gestures

Haitians are an animated people who enjoy impromptu gatherings wherever they may be—at the market, in the street, or at the movie theater. At such gatherings, people engage in loud conversation and laughter. Hand gestures usually accompany discussion or storytelling. If one is too busy to talk, one will greet a passerby by nodding the head up. To get someone's attention, Haitians often say "psst." Clicking the tongue, called a *chipe*, is a sign of protest or disgust and considered impolite.

Visiting

Visiting is a national pastime. Friends, neighbors, and relatives are welcome in the home at any time of day until about 8 p.m. It is not necessary to call ahead. Visitors arriving during a meal may be asked to wait in another room until the family finishes eating. Close friends might be invited to share the meal, and they may accept or decline. It is also acceptable for guests to decline refreshments. Hosts typically offer fruit juice or soda.

In addition to impromptu visits, Haitians enjoy inviting friends over for an evening of socializing or for dinner. When a visit ends, hosts accompany guests to the door. Rather than leaving, however, Haitians frequently extend their visit for a while by standing and talking with their hosts. Special occasions also call for visits. Guests take gifts to hosts celebrating a communion, baptism, graduation, or wedding—occasions for which many organize elaborate parties.

Eating

Haitians eat three meals a day if they can afford it. People in

rural areas may eat *cassave* (bread made from manioc) and coffee for breakfast, and they may not eat again until evening. The family gathers at the table for the main meal, which is usually at midday in cities. However, economic pressures and varied school and work schedules mean that families are increasingly eating at staggered times or separately. Diners take their portions from serving dishes on the table. If guests are present, they are given first opportunity to serve themselves. When no guests are present, family members often wait for the mother to begin eating before they eat. Usually, only the upper classes go to formal, enclosed restaurants on a regular basis. There are, however, a large number of small eateries where workers can go for a noontime meal, in case they do not have the opportunity to eat at home. Sunday dinner traditionally is reserved as a family meal.

LIFESTYLE

Family

Urban families might have three or four children, while rural families have ten or more. The basic unit of society is the extended family. Grandparents may act as parents in place of an absent or working mother or father. Relatives may also fill the role of godparent, which entails responsibility for a child if a parent dies. Children from cities may be sent to live with relatives in the countryside during summer vacations, and children from the countryside may be sent to live with relatives in cities to attend school. Adult children are expected to remain with their parents until marriage, and occasionally, married children live with one spouse's parents until they can afford a home of their own. Married couples usually live close to their families. This is especially true in the countryside, where the traditional *lakou* form of housing (a common courtyard surrounded by a family compound of small sleeping rooms) is prevalent.

In urban areas, the father, if present in the home, is head of the household and responsible for earning an income. Mothers are responsible for cooking, cleaning, and teaching their children religion and morality. Middle-class urban families may have a servant to cook and do other chores. Rural men work their fields, while women sell produce in the market and care for the household and children. Though men may earn the money and make decisions, it is often the women who manage the household's money. Single-mother households are very common, as men typically have children by more than one woman. In such households, mothers often rely on older children to help earn income and to care for younger children.

In most families, a child's main concerns are succeeding in school and completing household chores. In wealthier families, children may be responsible only for keeping their rooms clean; in poorer families, chores include cooking, laundry, and cleaning. Some families can afford to send only one child, usually the oldest, to school. Educated children are expected to better the social and financial status of the family, providing for parents or less fortunate siblings later in life. Other children are expected to help more around the house or

with the family business, which could simply mean being a street vendor. In wealthy families, parents establish goals for their children to become doctors, lawyers, or entrepreneurs who will expand the family business. After retirement, parents often move in with one of their married children.

Domestic violence against women is fairly common, and some of Haiti's laws tend to discriminate against women. For example, wives who murder their unfaithful husbands face harsher punishment than husbands who murder their unfaithful wives. A growing number of women from all social classes hold jobs, own their own businesses, and participate in government, though less than 5 percent of national legislative seats are held by women.

Housing

Houses are built with whatever materials are available. In Port-au-Prince, cement buildings are common. In older, established neighborhoods of the capital, brightly painted two-storey wood and brick houses are prevalent. Middle-class families may have land dotted with tropical fruit trees, corn, or sugarcane. Primitive cinderblock houses are found in newer parts of the city. These houses often consist of just one nine-square-foot room with packed-earth flooring and a corrugated tin roof. Houses are built on top of each other, and winding narrow footpaths snake down to the local market. A small minority of Haitians has access to electricity; access to running water is even less common.

Outside of the capital, the traditional *lakou* form of housing survives. The *lakou* is a compound built around a courtyard where the family eats, cooks, braids girls' hair, and takes bucket baths. Surrounding this courtyard is a ring of small sleeping rooms made of mud and rock, wood logs, banana leaves, or cement.

During the earthquakes of 2010, over a million Haitians lost their homes. Most of these were cinderblock structures with insufficient flexibility and internal support. Hundreds of thousands of people still lack permanent housing. However, many old buildings in the so-called gingerbread style of housing (Victorian-era architecture with high ceilings, porches, narrow windows, and triangular roofs) suffered almost no damage, given the flexibility of wooden structures.

Dating and Marriage

Although young Haitians socialize in groups, they do not usually begin dating until their late teens. Teenagers are increasingly entering into sexual relationships. Young people often develop friendships that later turn romantic with the children of their parents' friends. Others form such relationships with classmates or acquaintances. Group activities usually include participating in study groups, watching soccer games, celebrating birthdays, and attending school fairs.

Once adulthood is attained and education is completed, a young Haitian's focus is generally on marriage. Men usually initiate dates. When dating, the man will visit the woman at her home to become familiar with her parents and family members. Couples also go out to dance clubs, to movies, or to other social events. Once a couple has been dating for a few years, a proposal is expected. A man traditionally asked a

woman's father for permission to marry her, but where there is little relationship between the woman and her biological father, a man may ask the mother or the mother's husband. Today, asking permission is less common, especially in urban areas. Most parents do not greatly influence dating or marriage, but they expect their children to choose spouses from respectable families with a social status similar to their own. The minimum legal age for marriage is 15 for women and 18 for men. Early marriage is more common in rural areas than in urban areas.

In rural areas, a couple will not officially marry until they can afford a big wedding. Weddings are usually paid for by the groom or his family, but the bride's family may also contribute money. Couples often live together and have children as if married until they save enough money for the wedding and wedding reception. Typically, urban couples have a church wedding followed by an evening reception where rice, beans, meat, salads, cake, champagne, and soft drinks are served. Receptions are usually held in private homes, where guests eat, dance, and socialize until late in the evening.

Formal polygamy does not exist, but married men usually have many girlfriends and children out of wedlock. This is often attributed to the desire for a son to continue the family line. Women are expected to remain faithful to their husbands and are chastised if they are not. In rural areas, a man's partners acknowledge each other and may even cohabit.

Divorce is rare but separation is common, especially after a couple's children are raised and have families of their own. Usually, children live with their mother after separation, but they may also move in with grandparents or other relatives.

Life Cycle

Celebrations of births are joyful, but Haitians are careful not to be seen as boastful in a country where so many children die before the age of five. Motherhood is extremely valued. Women do not usually announce pregnancies until they begin to look pregnant out of a belief that doing so could bring bad luck on the baby. The gender of the child is not commonly announced before birth. Due to a preference for traditional practices, most births take place without formal medical assistance. Once the baby is born, the maternal grandmother traditionally comes to care for the baby and mother.

Names are given just after the baby is born, though consideration may be given to a name prior to birth. Deciding on a name is an important event. It is common for children to be named after respected family elders or ancestors. Firstborn sons are usually named after their fathers. Children carry their father's surname unless the father is unknown or denies paternity. In rural areas, a child's name reflects the circumstances of his or her birth. For example, a couple who has had difficulty becoming pregnant may name the child *Jesula* (Jesus is here), *Dieula* (God is here), or *Dieufel* (God created him) to show their gratitude. Children who survive their first years are given a nickname that everyone outside of official institutions will call them by.

Baptism and First Communion are significant rituals. Children dress in nice clothes, and family, friends, and neighbors gather to celebrate with a large meal, including

some meat if the family can afford it. Because people often live with their parents into their adult years, young people are not seen as adults until they have children of their own.

Because of Haiti's low life expectancy, elders—especially those who reach the age of 50 or above—are revered. When a person dies, family and friends gather to reminisce and provide emotional support to the deceased's immediate family members. Given the respect for ancestors in Haitian culture, even poor families make an effort to have a proper funeral. A viewing of the body is followed by a religious ceremony. Funeral processions in rural areas include a single car and mourners dressed in black led by a marching band. Urban funeral processions consist of cars and fewer pedestrians. Burial is traditional, although cremation is becoming more common. Traditional cemeteries contain brightly colored aboveground tombs. Food and other offerings—such as *kleren* (an alcoholic drink made from cane juice)—are often placed on the tombs. People sometimes pour *kleren* and rum onto the ground as offerings to ancestors. Families of the deceased have masses in their honor on the anniversary of their passing.

Diet

Most Haitians eat rice and beans every day, although a main meal, when affordable, usually also includes meat, salad, and a vegetable. Rice and corn are staple grains. Spicy foods are most popular. *Piman zwazo* (small, hot pimentos) and garlic are often added to dishes. Meat is marinated in sauces with ingredients such as sour orange juice, lemon juice, and hot peppers. Pork is the most commonly eaten meat, but Haitians also eat goat, chicken, guinea pig, and seafood (fish, shrimp, conch, and crab). Eggplant, yams, sweet potatoes, and a variety of fruits round out the diet. For breakfast, one might eat the traditional urban fare of coffee, herring with plantains and avocados, corn with codfish, or liver with plantains. A lighter breakfast consists of jam on buttered bread and coffee. A favorite daytime snack might be bread and butter or pastries. Meat-filled pastries are also popular snacks. Haiti is especially known for its fresh-pressed juices made from passion fruit, oranges, *chadèk* (grapefruit), cherries, papaya, *zikak* (a small, pulpy fruit), and other fruits.

Recreation

Most Haitians have access to radios, and people generally listen to music and news throughout the day. A growing number of middle-class families are able to afford televisions in their homes. Few people own DVD players, but they can watch videos at television stores. Haitian music videos are favored.

The most popular sport is soccer. Streets are empty if an important regional or world match is being televised. Children—both boys and girls—begin to play soccer at an early age. Leagues are organized throughout the country. Adult soccer stars are extremely popular among people of all ages. Many Haitians of all classes cheer for soccer teams, with a special affinity for Brazil's and Argentina's teams due to their repeated successes in the World Cup.

Children like to play games like patty-cake, marbles, *oscelet* (jacks generally made of cow or goat bones), jump

rope, and various versions of *lago* (tag). Children often invent their own games as well. In rural areas, the tradition of *tirer conte* (storytelling) continues. Children gather around an adult who begins the storytelling with the greeting *Krik*, to which the audience responds *Krak*. Popular stories include tales of Booki and Timalice (famous Haitian fable characters), stories of old times, and *lougawou* (ghost) stories. Young adults in urban areas spend their time with friends at fairs, *bals* (concerts), parties, or nightclubs.

Important events such as baptism, communion, graduation, and weddings provide families and friends the opportunity to get together and enjoy each other's company. These events include much *banbach* (partying and having a good time), catching up with old friends, joke telling, drinking, eating, political discussion, and dancing. Haitians enjoy dancing and will often dance whenever they hear a catchy tune.

Men enjoy cockfights, usually held on Sunday afternoons. They also spend hours playing dominoes and card games such as *kasino*, a complex game involving counting. Recreation for lower-class women often occurs in the form of jokes and storytelling while washing clothes, gathering water, or selling at the market.

Vacations are a luxury enjoyed by wealthy families. Though vacationers usually visit foreign countries, there is a growing interest in visiting other areas of Haiti.

The Arts

Music and dancing are integral to everyday life. For over one hundred years, Haitians have composed and performed classical music. Older still is the traditional music of the Haitian peasantry and lower classes. These include music performed in Vodou ceremonies, music played before Lent (called *rara*), and other music associated with a particular rhythm (*merengue*, etc). Contemporary music in Haiti includes *rap Kreyòl* (Haitian hip-hop), *rasin* (traditional music fused with rock, jazz, or reggae), *chanson française* (traditional French songs), or *konpa* (dance music). Urban residents enjoy a variety of North American music.

Haitian artists and sculptors are known for their unique images and striking colors. One popular art form is sculpture made from cut, pounded, and painted scrap metal. *Tap-taps*, brightly painted pickup trucks fitted with benches and covered tops, are both a means of transportation and traveling art. Many artists choose Haitian history or daily life for their subjects. Nature is also an important theme. Painted screens, papier-mâché art, wood carvings, basketwork, pottery, and painted wooden boxes are prominent crafts.

Oral literature is abundant and includes songs, proverbs, and riddles. Storytellers carefully craft their performance, acting out the story with their voices. There is also a vibrant tradition of Haitian literature, mostly written in French, although *Kreyòl* is now commonly used as well.

Holidays

Haiti's national holidays include New Year's, which is also Independence Day; National Heroes Day (2 Jan.); Constitution Day (29 Mar.); Labor and Agriculture Day (1 May); Easter; Flag Day (18 May); Fête Dieu, which marks the institution of the sacrament, or communion (first

Thursday in June); All Saints' Day (1 Nov.); Day of the Dead, or Fêt Gede (2 Nov.); Battle of Vertiers Day (18 Nov.); and Christmas. Freedom from the Duvalier dictatorship is celebrated on 7 February. Haiti also celebrates Catholic holidays, such as *Kanaval* (Carnival), held before Catholic Lent; Good Friday (the Friday before Easter); Ascension Thursday, celebrated 40 days after Easter; and the Feast of the Assumption (15 Aug.).

On 1 January, Haitian people traditionally visit their parents and friends to wish them well in the new year. Almost every household eats *joumon*, a soup made from a squash broth with carrots, potatoes, cabbage, pasta, and meat, which is traditionally understood to be the food of the French colonists who were driven out of Haiti.

Haitians celebrate several patriotic holidays. *Jour du Drapeau* (Flag Day) is commemorated with a parade held in front of the palace; students from various schools participate. Dessalines Day (17 Oct.) honors the assassination of Jean-Jacques Dessaline, the man who led Haitians out of slavery and became the nation's first president. Battle of Vertiers Day, celebrated on 18 November, is the anniversary of one of the most important battles in Haiti's fight for freedom.

Kanaval (the Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday before Ash Wednesday) is a festive time of dancing and parades. People prepare for the holiday for weeks in advance, beginning just after New Year's. On the holiday itself, people awaiting the main parade dance to music they play on their own portable stereos. The parade includes dancers dressed in traditional clothing, *raras* (musical bands on foot), *chaloska* (people dressed as monsters), and *chars* (floats from which popular music groups entertain the crowd). The partying continues all night and into the early-morning hours for two or three days. Stores are open only in the morning on these days.

Rara, another holiday closely linked to Lent, contains a mixture of African and Haitian voodoo traditions. It is usually celebrated in rural areas but occurs also in Port-au-Prince. Every Sunday during Lent, and occasionally on weeknights, a number of *rara* bands take to the streets, playing music on Haitian-made instruments and collecting people into a crowd, who follows them as they go. The instruments include the *banbou* (a bamboo pipe), *tambou* (a hand drum with a wooden base, topped with leather), *lanbi* (a conch shell horn), and *graj* (a grater that is rubbed with a metal stick).

Fêt Gede (2 Nov.) honors the dead, who are highly venerated in Haitian culture. On this day, offerings such as coffee and *kleren* (an alcoholic beverage made from sugarcane) may be brought to the *Bawon Samdi* (the first man buried in a cemetery) or *Gran Brijit* (the first woman buried in a cemetery). Each village or town has a holiday for the local patron saint, celebrated with a morning mass, daytime festival, and evening ball. Some of these festivals are very large, such as the Fête de Notre Dame.

SOCIETY

Government

The Republic of Haiti is divided into 10 departments

(provinces), but the central government has most control over political affairs. The president (currently Michel Martelly) is head of state, and the prime minister (currently Laurent Lamothe) is head of government. Haiti has a bicameral parliament, with a 30-seat Senate and a 99-seat Chamber of Deputies. The voting age is 18.

Economy

Haiti's economy is based on agriculture, which employs about two-thirds of the workforce. Large farms are rare, so production quantities are small. The most important cash crops include coffee, cacao, and sugar. However, little is actually exported, and international aid is necessary to develop future agricultural potential. Around 80 percent of all Haitians live in poverty. Real wages have not risen in a generation. Industrial activity is minimal, geared mostly for domestic needs (cement, sugar refining, etc.). A few industries make toys and clothing for export. The economy experienced a severe setback when the 2010 earthquake struck Port-au-Prince. Corruption, high unemployment, political instability, and inefficient state enterprises are additional barriers to development. The government is pressured to privatize some state companies, but the process is slow and unpopular. Haiti's currency is the *gourde* (HTG).

Transportation and Communications

For short distances, most Haitians travel by foot. In cities, they may also ride buses, taxis, or colorful *tap-taps*, which travel fixed routes but not on a fixed schedule. Intercity transportation is made by bus, boat, or plane. Few people own private cars.

Most people use cell phones; landlines are increasingly hard to find. About 10 percent of the population uses the internet. The postal system is generally reliable but not protected against theft. In the past, people often posted messages on certain radio stations or sent a written message via truck drivers, who would drop the messages at a store on their way where recipients could retrieve them. Haiti has two daily newspapers, about two hundred radio stations, and several television stations.

Education

Haiti's school system is patterned after the French model, with kindergarten, six years of primary school, and seven years of secondary school. It is common for students from poorer families to end their education after primary school and begin working. Children usually enter primary school at age six, and at the completion of their last year, they take a national exam called *Examen de Certificat*. Passing the exam allows students to move on to secondary school, while failing means they must repeat the last year of primary school until they pass the exam.

Students also must pass exams at the end of the third, sixth, and seventh years of secondary school. However, the education system often does not adequately prepare students to pass these difficult exams. In some schools, known as *lekòl bòlèt*, or lottery schools, students are said to have as much chance of graduating as they do of winning the lottery. In general, schools lack qualified teachers and necessary

materials, and the school year is often interrupted by political unrest. In Port-au-Prince especially, daily schooling is sometimes interrupted by street demonstrations focused on elections. Because these events can be violent, parents tend to keep children home whenever a protest is announced or anticipated.

Education is highly valued but unaffordable to most. Only a small fraction of schools are public, with private institutions making up roughly 80 percent of all schools. Private schools include Catholic schools, *écoles nationales* (national schools, which are funded by foreign countries), and international schools. Most urban dwellers send their children to private schools, even though tuition can be a burden. Even in public schools, parents are responsible for enrollment fees, books, uniforms, and school supplies.

School curriculum consists of math, grammar, history, and geography classes. Courses such as literature and foreign languages, and occasionally extracurricular activities such as sewing, are introduced at later levels. Learning by memorization is common. Students in higher levels of primary school and secondary school spend their afternoons studying and completing homework assignments. Most only study until sunset because of numerous power outages and the prohibitive expense of generators. Parents are generally involved in their children's study habits; involvement decreases as students age. Cheating may result in expulsion, possible rejection from other schools, and severe reprimands at home.

Students who complete secondary school may pursue higher education at a university or other institution. Wealthier students are more likely to attend universities in foreign countries, while middle-class ones usually attend universities in Haiti. The country's main university is the State University of Haiti. The majority of less-wealthy students often search for employment immediately after secondary school. A growing number of vocational schools, which have no entrance exams and are less expensive than universities, provide career-specific skills to students who can afford tuition.

Health

Many Haitians live in one-room houses with outhouses and no running water. The earthquake of 2010 destroyed many buildings and forced many Haitians to live in tents. Such living conditions foster the spread of diseases such as malaria, typhoid, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS. In 2010, a mass outbreak of cholera afflicted the country, killing more than seven thousand people in a year and a half. These diseases, combined with malnutrition and the lack of health care, lead to numerous deaths—life expectancy rates are low and infant mortality rates are high. Hospitals provide minimal assistance to new mothers and infants, and a large number of women give birth at home without medical assistance. Infants do not usually receive vaccinations; most children receive vaccinations in school.

Haiti's national health system is unable to meet the needs of most people due to the lack of funds, staff, modern equipment, and sometimes even basic supplies. The majority of hospitals are concentrated in the capital. A small number of

clinics and hospitals service rural areas but are not accessible to everyone they are intended to serve. There is no reliable ambulance system in Haiti. Sick people must be able to afford both the trip to receive the treatment and the care itself, which is often lacking in quality.

There is no public health care in Haiti; most have to pay their medical expenses out of pocket, if they can afford to do so. Since the 2010 earthquake, there has been a visible presence of foreign medical aid; however, aid organizations can often only treat the most urgent cases.

Traditional beliefs strongly influence the way that many Haitians view their health, especially in poor and rural areas. When confronted with a condition, some might try plant- or food-based remedies or traditional remedies prepared by a family member or friend. If money is available, one might try to purchase products at a pharmacy to relieve symptoms. Illnesses are often characterized as “sent” sicknesses, magically placed on a person by a traditional religious practitioner. If an illness is understood to be mysterious in origin, one may visit a *doktè fèy* (a healer who mainly relies on herbal remedies), an *oungan* (a male Vodou priest), or a *manbo* (a female Vodou priest). Payments are usually made in cash, but some patients exchange cattle or land for services. Usually there is at least one such traditional healer in each area.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

Embassy of the Republic of Haiti, 2311 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20008; phone (202) 332-4090; web site www.haiti.org.

POPULATION & AREA	
Population	9,801,664 (rank=88)
Area, sq. mi.	10,714 (rank=146)
Area, sq. km.	27,750
DEVELOPMENT DATA	
Human Dev. Index* rank	158 of 182 countries
Gender inequality rank	123 of 155 countries
Adult literacy rate	55% (male); 51% (female)
Life expectancy	61 (male); 63 (female)

*UN Development Programme, Human Development Report 2011 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

CultureGrams™

ProQuest
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106 USA
Toll Free: 1.800.521.3042
Fax: 1.800.864.0019
www.culturegrams.com

© 2012 ProQuest LLC and Brigham Young University. It is against the law to copy, reprint, store, or transmit any part of this publication in any form by any means without strict written permission from ProQuest.

(proves) but the current government has most control over political affairs. The president (currently Michel Martelly) is head of state, and the prime minister (currently Laurent Lamoignon) is head of government. Haiti has a bicameral parliament with a 50-seat Senate and a 71-seat Chamber of Deputies. The voting age is 18.

Economy
Haiti's economy is based on agriculture, which employs about two-thirds of the workforce. Large farms are rare, so most workers own small plots. The most important cash crops include coffee, cacao, and sugar. However, Haiti is actually a net importer of food. About 50 percent of all Haitians live in poverty. Real wages have not risen in a generation. Industrial activity is minimal, geared mostly to domestic needs (cement, sugar, refined oil). A few industries make toys and clothing for export. The 2010 earthquake experienced a severe setback when the 2010 earthquake struck. Post-earthquake reconstruction has encountered an additional barrier to development. The government is pressed to privatize some state companies, but the process is slow and unpopular. Haiti's currency is the gourde (HTG).

Transportation and Communications
For short distances, most Haitians travel by foot. In cities, they may also ride buses, taxis, or colorado (a type of taxi that travels fixed routes but not on a fixed schedule). International transportation is made by sea, port or plane. Few people own private cars.
Most people use cell phones. Landlines are increasingly hard to find. About 10 percent of the population uses the internet. The postal system is generally reliable but not protected against theft. In the past, people often posted messages on certain radio stations or sent a written message via mail, which would drop the message at a stop on their way where recipients could retrieve them. Haiti has two daily newspapers, about two national radio stations, and several television stations.

Education
Haiti's school system is patterned after the French model, with kindergarten, six years of primary school, and seven years of secondary school. It is common for students to leave primary school to find their education after primary school and begin working. Children usually start primary school at age six, and at the completion of their first year, they take a national exam called *Examen de Certificat*. Passing the exam allows students to move on to secondary school, while failing means they must repeat the last year of primary school until they pass the exam.
Students also must pass exams at the end of the third, sixth, and seventh years of secondary school. However, the education system often does not adequately prepare students to pass these difficult exams. In some schools, known as *lycées* or *lycées scolaires*, students are said to have as much chance of graduating as they do of winning the lottery. In general, schools lack qualified teachers and necessary