The "De Facto" Governors of Haiti: The Debate Over US Recognition of Haiti, 1804-1862

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Haiti declared independence from France in 1804, but it was not until 1862 that the United States officially recognized Haitian independence. Many scholars have studied why US politicians fought against Haitian recognition; this article examines why others fought for it.[1] US congressional debate records between 1806–62 illustrate three key motivations. First, politicians coveted privileged access to the Haitian market. They also aimed to use the island as a naval base to control European influence in the Caribbean. Finally, the US used recognition as a political tool. The history of the debate over Haitian recognition in the United States explains the origin of American policy towards Haiti in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. The terms by which the US extended recognition in 1862, cemented a relationship between the two countries that laid the foundation for Haiti's subsequent economic dependence on the United States. That dependence plays a key role in Haiti's contemporary political, economic, and humanitarian crisis.

Before Haiti

The western third of the island of Hispañiola, approxmately 700 miles southeast of Florida, is today the independent nation of Haiti (Figure 1). But in 1789 it was still the French colony, Saint-Domingue, with a population of over 570,000 people; 40,000 white, 30,000 free people of color, and half a million, or ninety percent, were enslaved.[2] The vast majority of the enslaved were forced to work under the cruel and brutal conditions of the island's lucrative sugar plantations, making Saint-Domingue France's richest overseas colony by far.[3] However, demographic pressures, the horrors of

1 Leslie M. Alexander, *Fear of a Black Republic: Haiti and the Birth of Black Internationalism in the United States*, 1st ed. (University of Illinois Press, 2023); Julia Gaffield, *Haitian Connections: Recognition After Revolution in the Atlantic World* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

2 David P. Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (University of Indiana Press, 2002), 5.

3 By the mid-eighteenth century, sugar had become the most valuable commodity on the world market. Of the 200,000 tons of sugar shipped from New World colonies to Europe in 1787, 62 percent was exported from the French Caribbean. See Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New*



Figure 1: Haiti shares the island of Hispañiola with the Dominican Republic. It lies 700 miles southeast of the coast of Florida. https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-greater-antilles-political-map-caribbean-cuba-jamaica-haiti-dominican-137828405.html, March 20, 2025.

slavery, and the beginning of revolutionary fervor in France, also turned the island into a social and political tinder box. On August 22, 1791, after two years of civil war between free people of color and whites, slaves in the north rose up in revolt, igniting the tinder that burned Saint Domingue and the slave regime to the ground. The Haitian Revolution, waged between 1791 and 1804, witnessed racial equality proclaimed in 1792, the abolition of slavery in the colony in 1793,and the eviction of the British (who had tried to support White plantation owners in an effort to weaken France) in 1798.[4]

The final two years of the conflict, 1802–04, turned decisively into a struggle for independence. The non-White population, that is free people of color and formerly enslaved Blacks, united under the leadership of former slave-turned-military commander Jean-

World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern 1492-1800 (Verso Books, 2010), 403. The connection between sugar production and slavery is seen acutely in Cuba, see Ada Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 20. For an overview of conditions on sugar plantations on Saint-Domingue and British Jamaica see Trevor Burnard and John D Garrigus, *The Plantation Machine: Atlantic Capitalism in French Saint-Domingue and British Jamaica*, 1st ed. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 42–48.

4 Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies,* 1–2, 19–20.

Jacques Dessalines. They succeeded in pushing the final remnants of Napoleon's expeditionary force off the island on November 18, 1803. A month and a half later, on January 1, 1804, Dessalines promulgated Haiti's declaration of independence. The nation of Haiti was born.[5]

1804–10: The "De Facto" Governors of Haiti

Dessalines courted Great Britain and the US early to establish political relationships. Both countries responded instead by outlawing Haitian merchants from arriving in their ports.[6] The US and Great Britain, however, still wanted to buy Haitian coffee, dyewoods, and mahogany.[7] While recognition was off the table, trade was not.

The US Congress first debated Haitian sovereignty in December 1805. George Logan, a Senator from Pennsylvania, brought to the floor a bill to restrict all trade between the United States and the island of St. Domingo.[8] The mercantile concerns cited in opposition to this bill turned into recurring arguments for proponents of recognition over the next fifty-seven years. Later, they became the chief driver of policy. The documentation of US Congressional proceedings evolved significantly over time. Until 1873, no official record existed, with the first systematic documentation beginning in 1834 when publishers Joseph Gales and William Seaton created the *Annals of Congress*, which retrospectively covered debates from 1789–1824 using newspaper reports. They followed this with *The Register of Debates*, the first contemporaneous record, covering 1824–1837. Francis Preston Blair and John Cook Rives then published *The Congressional Globe*, a daily newspaper-style record bound into

5 For historical overviews of the Haitian Revolution, its causes and consequences see Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004); Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies;* and Jeremy D. Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution* (John Wiley & Sons, 2011).

6 Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (Picador, 2012), 42.

7 John McGregor, *Commercial statistics. A digest of the productive resources, commercial legislation, customs tariffs, of all nations. Including all British commercial treaties with foreign states.,* Vol. 4. (Whittaker and Co., 1850), 12–15, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.hb35mk&view=&seq=33&q1=Hayti.

8 The term St. Domingo, the name of the Spanish side of the island, was used almost exclusively by politicians in the United States until the late 1820s when it was gradually replaced by the name Haiti. In the following pages, the terms St. Domingo and Haiti are used interchangeably depending on the language used by the speaker.

volumes after each session, documenting congressional activity from 1833–1873. Finally, in 1873, the *Congressional Record* became the first official publication directed by Congress itself, replacing all previous unofficial documentation efforts.[9] This essay relies on *The Annals, The Register of Debates, The Congressional Globe,* and the appendices published with each volume.

The initial opponents of the bill in the Senate, John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts, Samuel Mitchell of New York, Samuel Smith of Maryland, and James Hillhouse of Connecticut, argued to restrict all trade with the island in 1805. They claimed trade would breach US neutrality in favor of France over Haiti. France, who still held a small military presence there, maintained the official narrative that they controlled the colony, and the Revolution was nothing more than an armed rebellion.[10] The opposing Senators disagreed. In doing so, they were the earliest in the US Congress to argue that Haiti was independent. In response to Georgia Senator James Jackson, James Hillhouse logically stated, "It will be well remembered that the French Republic long ago liberated all the slaves in that island and declared them free."[11] The common argument for each of these Senators was that the United States had the right to trade with whomever it chose and that the Caribbean trade was important to the US economy. Prohibiting it would force the Haitian people to look elsewhere. They would turn to Great Britain to get their provisions instead of the US or France, making Great Britain the only one to profit from such a prohibition. Samuel Smith, citing a report from the Treasury Department, lamented, "Sir, it will take from the United States a revenue of at least two hundred thousand dollars per annum."[12]

By February 20, 1806, the House of Representatives read the bill for the third time. The debate took on a more passionate tenor. Samuel White of Delaware echoed James Hillhouse from two months prior by arguing that France had freed the slaves on the

9 Richard J. McKinney, "An Overview of the Congressional Record and its Predecessor Publications," *Law Library Lights* 45, no. 2 (2002): 1–3, https://www.llsdc.org/assets/sourcebook/cong-record.pdf.
10 Talleyrand to General Armstrong, Paris, August 13, 1805, in Appendix to Annals of Congress, 9th Cong., 1st sess., 1220. (1852). https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc30342/m1/607/.
11 Annals of Congress, 9th Cong., 1st sess., 36 (1852). https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc30342/m1/16/.
12 Annals of Congress, 9th Cong., 1st sess., 38–41. (1852). https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc30342/m1/19/.

island over ten years earlier while in the throes of its own national revolution. That freedom was reaffirmed by Napoleon as recently as November 1801. White then made the most serious argument for Haitian independence yet on the floor of Congress:

> When all rightful, civil, and legal authority was at an end, and the Revolutionary sabre alone gave law, the people of St. Domingo, as did the people of these States under other circumstances, declared themselves free and independent, determined to take their stand among the nations of the world, and now refuse allegiance to any foreign Power. They have organized a government for themselves; they are *de facto* the governors of the country, and in every respect act as an independent people.[13]

Among the racist diatribes that dominated the support for this bill, and later the opposition to US recognition of Haiti, this opinion was enlightened. But, to what end did Smith make this argument? He had explained himself just a few moments earlier:

> As a source of public revenue; as a means of increasing our national capital; and, though last, not least, as a nursery for our seamen, the importance of this commerce to the United States, is incalculable, and should be guarded with a jealous eye.[14]

Even a man like Samuel White, a Federalist, who argued that Haitians, like Americans, had fought and died for their independence, never explicitly argued for Haiti's official recognition.[15] White, like others, saw Haiti not as a sister republic, but as an economic and political opportunity. They coveted the Haitian market and Haitian waters. The system that created the French colony of Saint-Domingue and its slaves never took its predatory eye off the Caribbean nation.[16]

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13 Annals of Congress, 9th Cong., 1st sess., 122–125 (1852). https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc30342/m1/59/.
14 Annals of Congress, 9th Cong., 1st sess., 121 (1852), https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc30342/m1/59/.
15 Rayford Whittingham Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with Haiti, 1776–1891* (University of North Carolina Press, 1941), 178.
16 Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (University Press, 2009), 20–21, 28.



Figure 2: A map of the partition between the Kingdom of Haiti in the North and the Republic of Haiti in the South and West. Haitians Abroad Digital Archive, *Formation of the Kingdom of Haiti and the Republic of Haiti,* accessed February 16, 2025, https://haitiansabroad.org/s/DigitalArchive/item/1113.

Later in the nineteenth century, it again motivated calls for Haitian recognition in the United States. The *Act to suspend the commercial intercourse between the United States and certain parts of the island of St. Domingo* was passed in the House on February 26, 1806, renewed in 1807, and lasted until 1809. Despite opposition both ideological and technical, the Act passed in deference to France's claim of sovereignty and out of fear.[17]

1810–25: Haiti on the Back Burner

After this initial debate over Haiti, Congress fell silent on the issue of recognition as trade between the two countries slowed. This was in part due to the trade bill, but also because of Jean-Jacques Dessalines' assassination in the Spring of 1806 by a cadre of military officers led by Alexandre Pétion and Henry Christophe. After the assassination, the two leaders fought over control of the country, and on March 10, 1807, Haiti split into two (Figure 2). Pétion was inaugurated as the first President of the Republic of Haiti in the south

17 Annals of Congress, 9th Cong., 1st sess., 510–516 (1852). https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc30342/m1/255/; Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations,* 179.

and west provinces. Christophe crowned himself King Henry I in the northern province as the first monarch of the Kingdom of Haiti in 1811.[18]

Between 1809 and 1820, Haiti appeared only sporadically in the debate record. Congress addressed claims against King Henry's regime over confiscations of merchant vessels, and used Haiti as an example on both sides of a debate over the expansion of slavery.[19] In 1818, military commander Jean-Pierre Boyer succeeded Alexandre Pétion after the first president's death. Two years later, in August 1820, King Henry suffered a stroke. In response, jaded administrators, political foes, and members of the military began to organize in opposition. Surrounded by insurrectionists, Christophe committed suicide. Upon hearing the news, Boyer quickly amassed his army, marched on the North, and reunited Haiti.[20] Trade between the US and Haiti immediately surged. In 1819, exports to Haiti represented just 0.9 percent of total US exports for the year. In 1820, this number shot to 5.2 percent.[21] Boyer established a stable regime and expanded Haitian hegemony over the entire island after invading the eastern half in 1822.

The 1820s: Quasi-coloniality

In July of 1825, staring down the barrel of a French naval cannon, Haitians were forced to purchase their recognition from the same people whose yoke they had cast off through thirteen years of bloody revolution. This decree, signed by Charles X of France and Boyer, often referred to as the "indemnity," stipulated that Haiti pay 150 million Francs over five years as compensation for losses suffered by French colonists during the Revolution. In return, France "would grant full and absolute independence to the government of

18 Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*, 54–57.

19 For a discussion of claims made against Christophe for confiscation of US merchant vessels see Mary Treudley, "The United States and Santo Domingo 1789–1866 (Continued)," *The Journal of Race Development* 7, no. 2 (1916): 220–274, 220–21. Haiti, specifically fear of Haiti's influence over the enslaved population in the United States, was invoked by Senators Harrison Gray Otis of Massachusetts, and John Strobe Barbour of Virginia in a debate over the expansion of slavery into Maine and Missouri in 1820. For a record of their exchange see Annals of Congress, 16th Cong., 1st Sess., 254–55:329, (1855). https://digital.library.unt.edu ark:/67531/metadc30362/m1/125/.

20 Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*, 85–86.

21 Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations,* 194.

the current inhabitants of the French part of Saint-Domingue." Not able to pay, Haiti immediately took out a thirty million Franc loan from French-owned banks. This began a cycle that eventually buried the Haitian state in debt.[22] Paradoxically, in the eyes of the United States government, this deal for official recognition meant Haiti had given up its independence.

On March 14, 1826, congressmen cited Haiti's new favorable trade relationship with France, and France's conditional recognition, as justification for continued political isolation.[23] On this policy, Northern and Southern politicians agreed.[24] This new quasi-coloniality, as they argued it, was proof enough that Haitian independence was dead. John Quincy Adams, now president in 1826, stated plainly the United States' official position, "Hayti agrees to receive forever the produce of France at a rate of duty one half below that which is exacted, in the ports of Hayti, from all other nations. This is a restriction upon the freedom of its action, to which no sovereign power, really independent, would ever subscribe."[25]

At the same time, Northern merchants and media outlets made overtures for Haitian recognition. In newspapers across the country, including the Illinois' *Edwardsville Spectator*, the *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette,* and the *Connecticut Gazette* called for Haitian recognition. Many of them cited the value and efficiency of the trade if only the US extended its hand. In 1826, Andrew Armstrong, the American commercial agent in Haiti, wrote to Secretary of State Henry Clay, arguing that all the US needed to do was recognize Haiti and it would be afforded the same privileged access to Haitian heads of state granted to France in the indemnity deal.[26]

After this episode, Haiti was again relegated to brief mentions on the floor of the United States Congress, notably during debates over a colonial trade bill in 1827, a tariff bill in 1828, and duties on imports in 1833.[27] In 1838, James Buchanan then suddenly presented

22 Jean Métellus, "Haiti: Perspectives," in *A Haiti Anthology: Libète*, ed. Charles Arthur and Michael Dash (Markus Wiener, 1999; repr., 2009), 217.
23 Register of Debates, 19th Cong., 1st Sess., 1216, (1826), https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc30753/m1/612/.
24 Register of Debates, 19th Cong., 1st Sess., 1231, (1826), https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc30753/m1/620/.
25 Appendix to Register of Debates, 20th Cong., 2nd Sess., 47, (1826), https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc30754/m1/451/.
26 Alexander, *Fear of a Black Republic,* 78–79.
27 Register of Debates, 19th Cong., 2nd Sess., 423, (1829), https://

a petition "from certain citizens of the District of Columbia, praying that a diplomatic agent may be sent to Hayti, and commercial regulations entered into with that Republic."[28] This was the beginning of an outpouring of petitions presented between 1838 and 1844 calling for the diplomatic recognition of Haiti. These petitions were less concerned with recognizing Haiti than with using recognition petitions in an effort to skirt two "gag rules" that had been passed in the House.[29]

1838–1844: The Gag Fight

In 1831, abolitionists began a vigorous petitioning campaign, calling for the abolition of slavery in Washington D.C., rejecting the admission of any new slave state, and later, only after the first gag rule had been passed, Haiti's diplomatic recognition. Inundated with petitions, Southern politicians and their Northern allies passed a rule in the House in 1836 that stipulated any petition that dealt with the subject of abolition be automatically sent to committee. The committee was then instructed to report that Congress did not have the authority to interfere with the institution of slavery. The Pinckney gag, named for Henry Pinckney of South Carolina who proposed it, passed with the support of nearly every Democrat in the House, and effectively silenced any petition that sought to force a discussion of slavery onto the House of Representatives.

The American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS), founded by William Lloyd Garrison in 1833, issued a statement to the American people, saying that their fundamental right to petition the government was under attack. They then went about executing a massive, well-organized, petition campaign.[30] The first explicit calls for Haitian recognition on the congressional floor were part of that campaign.

In 1838, Charles G. Atherton of New Hampshire proposed an update to the rule. The Atherton Gag, or just the "gag rule," ex-

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digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc30739/m1/216/; Register of Debates, 20th Cong., 1st Sess., 2130, (1828), https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc30741/m1/331/; Register of Debates, 22nd Cong., 2nd Sess., 990, (1833), https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc30760/m1/499/.

28 Congressional Globe, 25th Cong., 2nd Sess., 457, (1838). https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc29274/m1/485/

29 Alexander, *Fear of a Black Republic*, 139.

30 Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (Yale University Press, 2016), 251–52.

panded on the Pinckney gag. While the original rule called for the tabling of all materials dealing with *abolition,* the Atherton gag expanded the scope by stipulating that any petition that touched on the topic of slavery, not just abolition, should be tabled.[31] William Lloyd Garrison wrote, "Thus is the gag once more applied, but in a far more heartless and tyrannical mode than has ever yet been exhibited."[32]

A cohort of Whig Representatives—John Quincy Adams, Leverett Saltonstall I, and George Grennell, all of Massachusetts, William Slade of Vermont, and Joshua Reed Giddings of Ohio—were the most prolific petitioners for Haitian recognition in the House during this period. It was, however, never their end goal. No one exemplified that better than John Quincy Adams, who always fought over the right to petition the government.[33]

Southern politicians also made this connection. On December 18, 1838, George Grennell, Leverett Saltonstall I, and Hugh S. Legaré, a Democrat from South Carolina, exchanged this economic argument together for Haitian recognition. Grennell began the day by addressing the House, "at some length in support of the right of petition—a right, he insisted, which had never been denied by the veriest despot on earth." He launched into a discussion of the economic boom the US would experience if Haitian commercial and political relations opened: "where we now labored under great disadvantages, owing to the inequality of duties between goods carried in American vessels and in those of other nations which had recognized the nationality of that Republic." Later in the day, Saltonstall rose to present a petition like others regarding Haiti. Legaré objected, and as reported in the debate record, "Went on to point out the distinction between a bona fide petition asking, as a commercial question, for the interchange of relations between the two countries, and those from the Abolitionists, got up for the purpose of subserving the ends and designs they had in view."[34] The use of Haitian recognition as a way to skirt the gag rule was lost on no one.

31 Scott R. Meinke," Slavery, Partisanship, and Procedure in the U.S. House: The Gag Rule, 1836–1845," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (2007): 33–57. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40263409

32 William Lloyd Garrison, "The Gag Resolutions," *The Liberator*, Voice of the Press, (Boston, Massachusetts), December 28, 1838, https://fair-use.org/the-liberator/1838/12/28/the-liberator-08-52.pdf.

33 George A. Lipsky, *John Quincy Adams: His Theories and Ideas* (Thomas Y. Crowell, 1950), 124.

34 Congressional Globe, 25th Cong., 3rd Sess., 44–45, (1839). https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc29275/m1/63/.

John Quincy Adams made it clear what he was fighting for in a speech on the House floor on January 22, 1840. During a debate on abolition petitions, he opened his speech by proposing an addition to the standing rules of the House. Any petition brought by any member should be received, and if objected to for any reason, the objecting member must put their argument in writing, and it should then be entered into the House Journal. Additionally, no petition could be rejected except through a majority vote by all members present. Adams defined the different classes of petitions, but the fifth class focused on Haiti's recognition.

With the first four classes of petitions Adams supposed there could be a constitutional argument made for each. Congress did not have the power to answer them, but regarding the recognition of Haiti, and official commercial relations with it, Adams said:

> "I do not believe that it is in the mind of any gentleman in this House to raise a constitutional question on that subject. It is indisputably in the power of Congress to act on such a prayer; and when such a memorial shall be brought up here, the whole subject of slavery and of the slave trade is as fully open for discussion as it could have been on a petition praying for the abolition of slavery…I say this in kindness to the South; if their object is to put down petitions of that character, I do in my conscience believe that the first thing they should do is to admit them to be presented."

Adams was making the case that with this gag rule, powers specifically delegated to Congress in the Constitution, like that of politically recognizing another country, were being stymied. He reassured the South that even if abolition in Washington D.C. were to be presented as a topic of debate, they could count on any resolution calling for such a measure to be defeated, saying, "If, out of the whole two hundred and forty votes, such a measure receives ten, I shall be much surprised." He later confessed that he was not prepared to vote for immediate abolition.[35] Grennell, Saltonstall, and Adams, three of the most prolific petitioners of this period, made it constantly clear that Haitian recognition was not their true agenda.

Though petitions praying for the recognition of Haiti continued to roll in, by 1844 the petitioning movement had slowed

35 Congressional Globe, 26th Cong., 1st Sess., 44–45, (1840). https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc29276/m1/1317/

considerably. On January 22, Giddings presented the last petition, "praying for the recognition of the black republic of Hayti."[36] Any reference to Haiti in the House of Representatives for the rest of 1844 had to do with commercial relations, and continued efforts to repeal the gag rule. On December 3, John Quincy Adams called for a vote, seconded by Giddings, on a resolution that would rescind the rule. The resolution passed 108 to 80.[37] The petitioners won their fight and Haitian recognition moved again to the bottom of the political agenda.

1850–1862: Recognition Cometh

The 1840s were a tumultuous decade for Haiti. In March of 1843, after 22 years of semi-autocratic rule, Jean-Pierre Boyer was overthrown. An interim government elected Riviére Hérard as president to replace Boyer. A little less than a year later, in February 1844, the Eastern half of the island erupted in revolt against stipulations in the new constitution. Though Hérard led troops over the mountains to suppress the revolt, he was unsuccessful. In May of 1844, the Dominican Republic declared its independence, though both countries continued to fight until 1856.[38] This conflict would inform much of the limited debate over Haiti in the US during the 1850s.

The economics of the US trade with Haiti dominated congressional debate in the early 1850s. In a speech confronting the slavery question after the transmission of California's new constitution, on May 14, 1850, Representative George W. Julian of Indiana, a noted abolitionist, argued that the rejection of Haiti was out of deference to slavery in the US. That deference impinged on the profit margins of Northern merchants.[39] In 1852, the first petition in eight years asking for Haiti's recognition was received in the House. A large group of Boston area merchants sent in the petition, and later echoed by Senator John Davis of Massachusetts in session. These merchants and shipowners wished to:

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36 Congressional Globe, 28th Cong., 1st Sess., 174, (1844). https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth2367/m1/198/

37 Congressional Globe, 28th Cong., 2nd Sess., 7, (1844). https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth2366/m1/23/

38 Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History,* 119–27.

39 Congressional Globe, 31st Cong., 1st Sess., 577, (1850). https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc30776/manifest/

> [R]epresent the magnitude of the commerce of the United States engaged in the trade with that country, and the importance of that trade; and they pray that this Government recognize it as an independent state, they deeming it essential to the interest of the commerce of the country that it should receive the protection which grows out of that consideration.[40]

Hamilton Fish of New York followed up with a second petition in July. These new petitions strictly focused on the economics of the relationship between the two countries. These are the same arguments that would be made in 1861 and 1862 on the eve of United States recognition.[41]

During the 1850s, US policy toward the Caribbean decisively shifted in favor of intervention. On January 6, 1853, California congressman Edward C. Marshall gave a speech on the House floor, arguing for the annexation of Cuba. To him, the honor of the United States and the principles of the Monroe Doctrine were at stake in the Caribbean. Marshall referred to the recent conflict between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. He sketched a brief history of the disputes between the two nations, and recent attempts by Haiti to reconquer the Dominican Republic. Marshall admonished the Fillmore administration for effectively doing nothing to assist the Dominicans when they asked for the United States' help in mediating the conflict. According to Marshall, Haiti's new leader Emperor Faustin Solouque I, had been offered an ultimatum: call off attempts to invade the eastern half of the island, or face "dangers." Marshall then made his point:

> The momentous importance of this island to the United States from a commercial point of view, and its still greater importance as a naval depot, has been strangely overlooked… its independence of Europe is of more moment to us than that of Cuba; and that the protection of the white republic, which embraces two thirds of its surface, against the negro empire which holds and ruins while it holds the other third, is at once our duty and our interest, and that

40 Congressional Globe, 32nd Cong., 1st Sess., 1736, (1852). https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc30781/m1/42/

41 Congressional Globe, 32nd Cong., 1st Sess., 1844, (1852). https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc30781/m1/150/

> such interference should be without the cooperation of any European Power.[42]

The Monroe Doctrine had meant that the United States would not tolerate European interference in the Americas, but now it meant that only the United States was allowed to interfere in the lives of the Caribbean states. This outlook became official US policy during the second half of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century.

Seth Webb, the US commercial agent in Port-au-Prince, echoed Marshall's commercial argument in a letter to Secretary of State William Seward dated April 4, 1861. He outlined the economic opportunities the United States had squandered in its refusal to recognize Haiti. In a famous line, Webb argued that recognition would immediately change public opinion in Haiti towards the United States, "and if followed up on our part by even only the ordinary civilities of official intercourse, would enable us to hold this island in the hollow of our hand."[43] Webb wrote another letter to Seward in December 1861 admonishing the Lincoln administration for not speedily recognizing Haiti. Webb argued that Great Britain and France had already sent new diplomats to the island under specific instructions to push American merchants out of the Haitian market.[44]

Fortunately for the cause of Haitian recognition, between December 1860 and March 1861, as Webb made his economic overtures to the Lincoln administration, Southern states began seceding from the union. Eight days after Webb sent his first letter, the South attacked Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861. With many of the most vocal opponents of Haitian recognition gone, supporters like Webb and Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner were emboldened. Moreover, for the first time, they could count on presidential support. On December 3, 1861, President Lincoln addressed Congress. Among a litany of recommendations, Lincoln said:

> If any good reason exists why we should persevere longer in withholding our recognition of the independence and

42 Appendix to Congressional Globe, 32nd Cong., 2nd Sess., 71–74, (1853). https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc30784/m1/83/
43 Seth Webb to William Seward, April 4, 1861, in Logan, *Diplomatic Relations*, 297.
44 Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations*, 297–302.

> sovereignty of Hayti and Liberia, I am unable to discern it… It does not admit of doubt that important commercial advantages might be secured by favorable treaties with them.[45]

Four months later, on April 22, 1862, Sumner asked the Senate to take up Bill No. 184 the following day, which authorized the President to appoint diplomatic representatives to both Haiti and Liberia.[46]

Sumner's speech on April 23 combined the two strongest and recurring arguments for recognition: the financial boon that awaited the US after recognition, and the check it would provide against European adventurism in the Caribbean. Sumner opened with a physical description of Haiti, enumerating all the products and agricultural goods produced on the island. The entire first half of his speech was dedicated to the economic relationship between the US and Haiti. Sumner even produced a table he had commissioned by the US Treasury Department. The table showed that Haiti was the twenty-first ranked importer of American goods out of seventy-three countries to which the United States had already sent official consuls. Sumner argued that economics should have proved enough motivation for recognition, but added, "If any additional motive were needed, it might be found in the political condition of the West Indian Islands, and the present movements in Mexico." In 1861, Spain regained its captaincy over the Dominican Republic. The increasing European presence in the Caribbean could be countered by recognizing Haitian independence.[47]

The following day, Sumner again brought Senate Bill 184 to the floor for consideration. After a brief debate over additional amendments, the bill passed 32–7.[48] Four days later, Massachusetts representative Daniel Gooch asked for the House to take up the bill, which it did, and referred it to the Committee on Foreign Affairs. On June 2, 1862, the bill finally reached the House floor. Gooch gave the first speech in support. He leaned into the mercantile argument, citing a letter written by Seth Webb from the previous November.

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45 Appendix to Congressional Globe, 37th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1, (1862). https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc30813/m1/563/

46 Congressional Globe, 37th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1755 (1862). https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc30811/m1/797/

47 Congressional Globe, 37th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1773–76, (1862). https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc30811/m1/815/

48 Congressional Globe, 37th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1814–1815 (1862). https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc30811/m1/856/

Gooch reminded the House that, "at no time should this government be indifferent to her commercial interests with even the smaller nations of the world, certainly not now." He predicted that in the next few years, Haiti would become one of the leading suppliers of cotton to the North and that Northern capital would develop Haiti into an important cotton producer on the global stage. Haiti was a workshop, and an attractive option for the expansion of Northern economic interests. The economic argument shifted into a scheme for colonizing free black people out of the US when Gooch admitted, "Hayti has the cotton lands, we have the laborers accustomed to its cultivation, and the world wants cotton. Certainly, this is a matter worthy of the attention of the Government."[49] United States policy toward Haiti coalesced around the goal of establishing a new economic dependency.

It took two days of debate on the House floor before Senate Bill 184 was voted upon. This time, with the slave powers removed from the decision-making process, the merchants finally won in the House. On June 3, the House passed S. No. 184, 86–37. On June 6, 1862, Abraham Lincoln signed the bill recognizing Haiti and Liberia. Fifty-eight years after independence, the United States finally recognized Haitian sovereignty.[50]

Conclusion

It is not difficult to understand why the United States took so long to recognize Haitian independence. The racist, slave-owning power bloc saw Haiti for what it was: a serious threat to the system of slavery upon which their economies were based. Not only that, by 1810 the population of enslaved people in the United States had eclipsed one million.[51] In simple terms, Southern politicians were afraid. Less understood is the story of the politicians who supported recognition. This is a critical oversight. From the earliest days of the debate in 1805, politicians stressed the commercial importance of Haiti. The United States was bound to French Saint-Domingue through a robust trade, both legal and illicit. This trade did not go

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49 Congressional Globe, 37th Cong., 2nd Sess., 2500, (1862). https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc30812/m1/581/

50 Congressional Globe, 37th Cong., 2nd Sess., 2536–38, (1862). https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc30812/m1/616/

51 U.S. Census Bureau; United States – Race and Hispanic Origin: 1790 to 1990, Table 1; written by Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, (September 13, 2002). https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/2002/demo/POP-twps0056.html#introduction

away after Haitian independence and as we have seen, by 1820 total exports from the US to Haiti had exploded to nearly 2.2 million dollars, or nearly 5.2 percent of all US exports. American commercial agents in Port-au-Prince and Cap-Haitien routinely petitioned the government for recognition, as did Northern politicians and merchants. It was at the intersection of trade and influence, when Northern states needed the Haitian market and Haitian-grown cotton, and when European influence was making a resurgence in the Caribbean, that the United States finally extended its political hand to Haiti.

The second half of the nineteenth century was not easy for Haiti. Between 1843 and 1889 twelve presidents and almost as many constitutions led the country. The biggest issue arising from the political instability was the opening it created for foreign meddling. Most often it took the form of "gunboat diplomacy." Between 1868 and 1915 the United States sent marine expeditions to the island on at least nineteen separate occasions. Over this same period, the United States' share of the Haitian market increased from thirty percent to sixty percent. This was not a time of isolation for Haiti; it was a time of intervention.[52]

In 1909, the National City Bank in New York purchased a majority stake in the Banque National, the French-owned national bank of Haiti, which meant they now had a vested interest in making sure Haiti continued to make its payments. The US government authorized a military operation on the island to guarantee Haiti's debt. In December 1914, United States Marines anchored their gunboat in the harbor of Port-au-Prince, disembarked, and went straight to the Haitian national bank. In broad daylight, the marines removed $500,000 worth of gold that belonged to the Haitian state, loaded it back on their boat, and sent it to New York.[53] A year later the United States invaded and occupied the country until 1934. By then, Haiti had been made almost completely dependent upon the United States economically.

The political landscape of Haiti during the second half of the twentieth century was dominated by François Duvalier and his legacy. The doctor turned dictator took control of the government in 1957, and with the blessing and support of the United States, set about reorganizing the state apparatus into a machine of brutal

52 Paul Farmer, *The Uses of Haiti* (Common Courage Press, 1994), 84–89.
53 Laurent Dubois describes this operation as "an international armed robbery." See Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History,* 167–75; 204–5.

political oppression. After his death in 1971 his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier, took over until his ouster in 1986 as a result of popular uprising. Both Duvaliers had violently crushed political rivals and brutally policed the peasantry. This repression was in part supported by the United States, thanks to the low seven percent tax rate levied on US mining and agricultural companies, and beginning in 1967, by Francois Duvalier's brutal anticommunist campaign. Between 1967 and 1969 Duvalier imprisoned hundreds of intellectuals and peasant leaders, many of whom had no connection with the communist party in Haiti, and in 1969, he forced the passage of the Anti-communist Act. This law made illegal any public or private, written or spoken, support of communist beliefs. With the election of Richard Nixon to the US presidency in 1969, the anti-communist policy of the Duvaliers won Jean-Claude Duvalier the blessing and full support of the United States government.[54] A little over one hundred years since recognition, what still mattered most to the United States was political influence, and cheap prices for its corporations.

The debates in the United States Congress between 1804 and 1862 over the recognition of Haiti explain the heart of American policy toward the fledgling nation. The arguments made in these debates for increasing the United States' economic dominance over the island formed the foundation of the United States policy *post*-recognition. That policy has kept Haiti almost entirely dependent on food imports. Dependency, corruption and Haiti's crippling debt also hampers domestic investment in the infrastructure needed to protect its citizens from natural disasters. The consequences of this were clear in 2010 when nearly 300,000 Haitians lost their lives during a 7.0 magnitude earthquake that toppled buildings, destroyed hospitals, and displaced millions.[55] The country has yet to recover from this disaster. The roots of Haiti's present woes lie in the attitudes of countries like the United States who cared not for the needs of their sister republic, but for the desires of its merchants. In the end, recognition was extended—but at what cost?

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54 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti, State Against Nation* (Monthly Review Press, 1990), 202–4.

55 R. Pallardy, "2010 Haiti earthquake," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, September 9, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/event/2010-Haiti-earthquake.