

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 112

“The Banana Wars II”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

The early twentieth century saw political and economic instability in the nations of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. With war fears rising, the United States becoming increasingly interventionist in Central American affairs, and with the completion of the Panama Canal, the US became deeply involved in the affairs of both nations, culminating in military occupations of both countries by 1916.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 112. The Banana Wars, part two.

In our first Banana Wars episode, we talked about Central America, and we’ve previously looked at Cuba and at least gave Puerto Rico a shout-out. Today I want to begin by focusing on the large island that lies between Cuba and Puerto Rico. I was taught in school to call that island “Hispaniola,” which I gather is the most common name for it in the English-speaking world. I didn’t know until I researched this episode that the reason for the prevalence of that name in English is that the US government recommended that usage back when *it* was running the island—but I’m already getting ahead of myself.

Christopher Columbus ran his flagship aground on Hispaniola during his famous first voyage to the New World. After trying and failing twice to establish European settlements on the island, he finally succeeded on his third attempt. This settlement was called Santo Domingo, and it lay on the southeastern shore of the island. Today, Santo Domingo is the capital of the Dominican Republic and the oldest continually occupied European city in the New World.

The name of the settlement became the name of the island, Santo Domingo in Spanish, or Saint Domingue in French. The name Haiti is derived from a Native American name for a region of the island. Columbus called it *La Isla Española*, the Spanish Island. European mapmakers then Latinized this name into *Insula Hispaniola*, which is the origin of the name I was taught in school.

In the early days of Spanish rule, they mostly grew sugar cane on the island and everyone became very rich. Everyone except the natives, of course, who were literally worked to death by Columbus and his brothers and sons when they were running the place. The Columbus family's rule was so harsh that they were eventually arrested, imprisoned, and transported back to Spain in chains, while control of the colony was taken away from them. Funny, that's another little historical detail I was never taught in school. All I got about Columbus was:

*In fourteen hundred and ninety-two
Columbus sailed the ocean blue.*

But I gotta say, when your rule is so harsh that the *Spanish* are offended by your brutality, dude, seriously, something is just *wrong* with you. Maybe we ought to add a couple more lines to that poem:

*By fifteen hundred, so many had died
Columbus got busted for genocide.*

Anyway, by this time the native population of the island had been reduced by more than ninety percent, and the Spanish colonists were in serious danger of having to do the agricultural labor themselves. Fortunately, there were still plenty of people living in Africa, so, problem solved! Which accounts for the fact that in our day, the population of Haiti is more than 90% black and the population of the Dominican Republic is more than 80% black or mixed race.

As the Spanish secured control of the nearby mainlands and better money-making opportunities beckoned, Santo Domingo became a neglected and shrinking colony. Large parts of the island were all but abandoned by the Spanish, particularly the northwest of the island and the nearby smaller island of Tortuga, which became a favorite hangout of English, French, and Dutch pirates. The Spanish would occasionally send in troops to clear out this riffraff, but they kept coming back. The French were particularly aggressive in settling there, and finally in 1697, as part of a larger peace deal ending the latest European war, Spain formally ceded the eastern third of Hispaniola to the French, and these ceded lands became the French colony of Saint-Domingue.

Over the next century, the French mostly grew sugar cane in Saint-Domingue and everyone became very rich. Everyone except the slaves, of course. Do you sense a pattern developing here? Anyway, the island saw a series of dramatic changes once the French Revolution got going back in France, and Mike Duncan did an awesome job of telling this story in his *Revolutions* podcast, which is good because this is another thing they never taught me about in school and is

beyond the scope of *this* podcast in any case, but if you want to know more, the *Revolutions* podcast is definitely the place to go.

[Music builds]

You would think that the Haitian Revolution, which was sparked by the high principles enunciated in the French Revolution, which was the biggest slave revolt in history, with the possible exception of Spartacus', and was the only successful one, a revolt which created just the second independent republic in the Western Hemisphere after the United States would never be forgotten. You would think that the revolution that proved that the principles of liberty, equality, and independence issue not just from the lips and quill pens of whites of European descent, but from blacks of African descent as well, the revolution that refuted forever the racial slander that black people were only fit to be slaves and were incapable of self-government would be remembered forever as the—

[sound effect: record scratch. Music ends.]

Yeah, you would be wrong. The Haitian Revolution was studiously ignored outside of Haiti, as was the newly independent country itself. France could not reconquer Haiti, but it could refuse to recognize the Haitian government and embargo trade with Haiti. Most of Europe followed suit, as did the United States, where the sight of black slaves rising up against white slaveholders was taken not so much as an inspiration as a warning.

France did eventually recognize Haiti, only after the Haitian government agreed to pay a huge indemnity that saddled the struggling nation with a tremendous debt load. As for the US, it wouldn't recognize Haiti until the Civil War made concerns about a slave revolt in the US moot. Which reminds me, Haiti and the United States have something else in common besides being the first two Western Hemisphere nations to break away from European control. They are also the only two nations in the world that had to resort to full-blown war in order to end slavery.

Meanwhile, the eastern two-thirds of the island was seized by the French during the wars of the French Revolution, then seized by the British and returned to the Spanish. Then in 1821, with a revolution breaking out against Spanish rule across the Western Hemisphere, Spanish Hispaniola revolted and became the Republic of Spanish Haiti. Spanish Haiti wanted to be annexed by Simón Bolívar's Gran Colombia; instead, it got annexed by Haiti. This period of unification is not remembered fondly in the Dominican Republic. The Haitian government discouraged Spanish language and culture and taxes were onerous because of the need to service that heavy debt load. In 1844, the eastern part of the island revolted and formed the independent Dominican Republic. That was the new nation's official name, although in the United States, they were still calling it Santo Domingo for the rest of the 19th century and into the early twentieth, and that's the name you'll see when you look at sources from that period.

The Dominican Republic maintained its independence into the twentieth century, seemingly despite itself. The nation was chronically in debt and at various times explored the possibility of annexation by France, Spain and the United States, although not much came of any of those discussions. During the final two decades of the nineteenth century, the government of the Dominican Republic was ruled over by a strongman named Ulises Heureaux. His rule granted the country a welcome period of stability, though Heureaux paid for that stability with a combination of borrowed money and hastily printed Dominican pesos until he could borrow no more and the pesos became worthless and he was overthrown and killed. That was in 1899.

Heureaux left the country a national debt equal to several years' worth of government revenue. Instability returned—by early 1905, the country had been through five presidents in six years—and the debt wasn't getting paid. In a story that should be quite familiar to you by now, gunboats from the creditor nations—France, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands—showed up at Santo Domingo and demanded satisfaction. This was during the Roosevelt Administration in the United States, and Roosevelt had articulated his “Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine,” episode 24, and put that policy into effect to deal with the budding Dominican debt crisis. That meant the US would guarantee Dominican debts and collect them itself. The US government went ahead and took control of Dominican customs houses and collected the nation's tariffs. It also eliminated the peso and replacing it with the US dollar as the unit of currency. Under American management, 55% of the revenue collected at the customs houses went to debt servicing, the remainder to the Dominican government.

By 1907, this had reduced the Dominican debt by half. At that time, the remaining national debt, about US\$20 million, was refinanced by the National City Bank of New York, which was now the Dominican Republic's only foreign creditor. By the way, that's the bank we know in our day as Citibank.

On the Haitian side of the island, the rule was political instability. After the revolution, the former slave colony rejected anything that looked remotely like the huge sugar and coffee plantations that had enriched the old French overlords. The land was divided into small plots. White Europeans were driven from the country or killed, and the Haitian constitution included a clause banning ownership of Haitian land by foreigners. Over the course of the nineteenth century, rural black Haitians worked on small family plots, largely isolated by the country's dearth of roads and railroads. The elites who ruled the country were more commonly from the mixed-race minority and lived in the cities. They ran the government, embezzled from the government, and fought over the spoils. Foreign merchants who lived in Haiti would take Haitian wives in order to get around that constitutional provision against foreigners owning land, and the mixed-race elite grew larger and wealthier.

To the rural people, the government and who controlled it at the moment hardly made any difference. What made a difference to them were the *cacos*, rural fighters who were part soldier, part bandit. The name is supposedly taken from the cry of a native bird. They were as much a

government in the rural regions of the country as the government was; they recruited from the rural blacks, extorted money from the rural blacks, and occasionally revolted against the government in Port-au-Prince and installed a new President, who would then show his gratitude by paying off the *cacos* out of the national treasury. When the current President either got tired of paying the *cacos* or ran out of money, they would look around for a new would-be President and the cycle would begin again.

But as in the Dominican Republic, governments would borrow foreign money to pay off their supporters and stay in power. Haiti's foreign debt grew, and its government revenues dwindled as larger and larger shares of revenue went to debt servicing, and revolts became more and more frequent. Sometimes foreigners with interests in Haiti funded the revolts directly. US Navy ships began visiting Haitian waters more and more frequently, as a warning to Haitians to respect US interests during these revolts.

Once the Panama Canal project got going, the American government began paying much closer attention to Haitian affairs. A surprising number of those foreign merchants who married native Haitians turned out to be Germans. Now, the Kaiser was known to dream of a German naval base in the Caribbean, something the US government was determined to prevent, especially once the canal project got going. And while there is no evidence of any grand German conspiracy to turn Haiti into a protectorate or a naval base, the Americans were worried there just might be one, just as they were worried about German kibitzing in Mexico.

Meanwhile, the office of the Haitian Presidency turned over with alarming regularity. The year 1914 actually saw two revolts. Oreste Zamor took power in February, funded by loans from those wealthy mixed-race elites, but was opposed by US business interests. The US Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan, intervened at this point. Bryan famously demonstrated his understanding of the nation of Haiti by once remarking, "Dear me, think of it. Persons of African ancestry speaking French." Except he didn't say "persons of African ancestry."

Bryan pressed Zamor to agree to a plan to get Haitian finances in order, including granting the US control of its tariff collections, as had already been done in the Dominican Republic next door. Zamor didn't feel he could agree to this. His rule was unpopular and many Haitians were refusing to recognize him as president as it was, and he couldn't afford to be seen capitulating to the Americans. In the north of the country, a military officer named Joseph Davilmar Théodore was already organizing the *cacos* of the north in a bid to oust Zamor, which was how it usually went in Haiti.

By October, Zamor's position had deteriorated enough to spur him to ask for US support to keep him in power. A unit of marines was dispatched to Haiti from the American naval base at Guantánamo Bay in Cuba, but by the time the transport ship reached Port-au-Prince, it was too late. Théodore was now in charge.

So the American transport turned around, but by the time it got back to Cuba, Théodore was already in trouble. It seemed Zamor had left him with an empty treasury, and here was Théodore with a gang of increasingly cranky and impatient armed *cacos* and nothing to pay them with. Théodore borrowed a leaf from recent Dominican history and just had the government print millions of paper *gourdes*, the Haitian currency, and handed them out to the *cacos*. The *cacos* promptly tried to spend this money, and the merchants of Port-au-Prince promptly refused to accept it, because they understood full well what it was worth, which was nothing. The merchants were armed with a better understanding of economics, but the *cacos* were armed with guns and machetes, so they won most of the arguments.

Still, the *cacos* returned to the north of Haiti understandably disgruntled by how Théodore had swindled them. No sooner had they arrived back home when the military commander in the north, a black career officer named General Jean Vilbrun Guillaume Sam, began collecting *caco* supporters for his own bid for the Presidency.

And so Théodore realized he needed to get his hands on some cash and in a hurry. The United States government also realized Théodore needed to get his hands on some cash and in a hurry. And where would you expect him to go if you know he needs money? Well, to the bank, of course. There was only one bank in Haiti at the time, the National Bank of the Republic of Haiti, the nation's central bank, although it was jointly owned by a French bank and by National City Bank of New York. Hey, there's that name again. The Haitian bank was established in 1910, encouraged by the Taft Administration, and you know, they didn't call it Dollar Diplomacy for nothing.

Anyway, the [National City] Bank of New York saw its Haitian assets threatened and pressed the US government to do something about it. And so on December 17, 1914, a US gunboat arrived at Port-au-Prince and a detachment of US Marines marched to the National Bank, seized the bank's gold reserves, loaded them onto the gunboat, and shipped the gold to the vaults of National City Bank in New York. The Haitian ambassador in Washington protested to William Jennings Bryan that the action was "a flagrant violation of the sovereignty and independence of Haiti." And so it was.

That French bank had sold out its stake in the Haitian bank at the beginning of the Great War, which gave National City Bank complete control of the institution. National City Bank was a large financial institution looking to expand and diversify its business, but it was running up against all that anti-trust sentiment in the US. The obvious solution was to diversify overseas, to places where US anti-trust law doesn't go.

[music: "The Marines' Hymn"]

The confiscation of the Haitian gold reserves only made life that much easier for General Sam. A month later, still in the north, he marched a thousand *cacos* unopposed into Cap-Haïtien. Cap-Haïtien, or Le Cap, as it is often known for short, is the largest city in northern Haiti, and

traditionally the staging area for would-be Presidents to gather their forces before marching south on the capital. There General Sam declared himself President. With no money and no support, Théodore was a sitting duck.

Meanwhile, in Washington, Woodrow Wilson and his administration decided they had enough of all this. It was unacceptable to the US government to have monthly revolutions and counter-revolutions going on in Haiti. He dispatched a US naval force, commanded by Admiral William Caperton to the scene.

Meanwhile, in Cap-Haïtien, there was a US consul named Lemuel Livingston. He was an African-American with extensive connections in Haiti and was knowledgeable about the political situation there. Livingston couldn't help but notice that General Sam kept his *caco* army in good order. There was none of the random looting and banditry that was also traditional when a rebel army marched into Le Cap. He cabled Washington to suggest that maybe General Sam was someone the Americans could work with.

And so Admiral Caperton debarked from his flagship on January 25, 1915 at Le Cap for a face-to-face meeting with General Sam. Caperton later described his arrival at the house that served as Sam's headquarters. It was guarded on the outside by a ragtag collection of *caco* fighters. Once inside the elegant home, however, Caperton encountered a very different ambience. An older black gentleman dressed in a butler's uniform escorted the Admiral through the house and up to a second-floor sitting room, where he took the admiral's hat and gloves and advised him that the General would see him in a few moments. The butler retired, and a few moments later the same older gentleman re-appeared, this time in a Haitian military dress uniform, complete with sword. It was General Sam.

Caperton tactfully refrained from mentioning anything about the little one-man play the General had just put on, and the two men got down to business. General Sam agreed to restrain his *cacos* from the usual looting and burning as they marched south to take Port-au-Prince, and Admiral Caperton agreed to provide the Haitian revolutionaries with an American naval escort.

And so, as Sam and his army moved south, every time they reached a Haitian port town, they found Admiral Caperton waiting for them to remind the General of his promise. Théodore got word they were coming, but without funds, he only had one option left. That was to draft young men and boys and send them into battle against the *cacos* armed with sticks and clubs. You can probably imagine how enthusiastic these young men and boys were about this proposition, and if you can't, here's a clue: Théodore's officers bound them together with ropes so they couldn't run away.

These enthusiastic volunteers were about as effective a fighting force as you'd expect them to be. General Sam marched on the capital, Port-au-Prince was surrounded, the water supply cut off, and a couple of days later, on February 22, the now ex-President Théodore peacefully surrendered control and left the country.

The Sam presidency got off to a good start. Somehow, there was gold available to pay the *cacos* who had brought him to power. I'm going to take a wild stab in the dark and suggest that gold came from the National City Bank of New York, as a down payment for Sam's good behavior.

But this new calm would not last. It took only a month before a member of mixed-race elite named Rosalvo Bobo was organizing the *cacos* in the north for yet another revolution, and raising up Sam's collaboration with the Americans as his chief grievance. By May, Bobo's army had captured Le Cap, and unlike Sam's genteel occupation, Bobo's forces went on a rampage, looting the town. The French cruiser *Descartes* put ashore her marines to help protect the foreign consulates, a job soon taken over by the Americans.

Meanwhile, General Sam had burned through his cash advance and his Citibank credit cards were maxed out, so he resorted to the last refuge of a broke Haitian President, press-ganging young men and boys off the streets of Port-au-Prince, tying them together with ropes, and sending them north to defend his government. But where he was different from most of his predecessors was in his unwillingness to go gently into that good night of exile. Instead, he took hostages, rounding up about 200 members of the mixed-race elite who were believed to be Bobo supporters or their relatives and locking them up in prison. Now this marked a significant departure from politics as usual in Haiti. Normally, revolutions come and Presidents go, but while the elites might be pulling the strings from offstage, they are never themselves put at risk.

The US government offered Sam its support, subject to the approval of a treaty in which Haiti would make a long list of concessions to the US. Haiti must agree not to grant naval bases to any power other than the US, it must turn over control of its customs houses and treasury to Americans, submit to American arbitration of its debts with other nations, and agree to permit American military intervention into Haiti as needed to maintain order. In other words, to turn Haiti into an American protectorate.

Sam angrily rejected these American demands, probably knowing full well what the alternative was. Early in the morning of July 27, a mob surrounded and attacked the Presidential Palace. Sam himself managed to escape to the French Embassy as the streets of Port-au-Prince filled with anti-government mobs. A provisional government was organized. One of the mobs marched to the prison to free Sam's prisoner-hostages, only to discover that the loyalist police chief had ordered them killed. The number of deaths is usually given as 167, although I'm not sure anyone can say for sure. Another angry mob, including vengeful relatives of the victims, attacked the French Embassy, forcing their way inside and dragging President Sam out into the street, where he was beaten and torn to pieces.

Admiral Caperton ordered his Marines to take control of the capital to prevent further violence, and reinforcements from the US were quickly dispatched. As the *cacos* entered the capital, the Americans paid them 10 Haitian *gourdes* apiece, which would be about US\$50 in today's money, to disband and go home, which they happily agreed to, defusing the immediate situation,

but of course, in *caco* tradition, as soon as they arrived home, they re-armed and prepared for the next round of fighting.

I should mention here that under the Haitian constitution, presidents were not popularly elected. They were theoretically chosen by the Haitian legislature. In practice, that meant the legislature simply ratified the presidency of whichever military strongman had just marched an army into the capital, as we have seen. So as far as Rosalvo Bobo was concerned, the presidency was now his for the claiming. He was firmly in control of Le Cap and his *cacos*, including those fighters who had just returned from Port-au-Prince, were ready to march south and clinch the deal.

But times were changing. With US marines in control of the capital—sort of—no one wanted to see another *caco* army marching south, so the Americans sent a Navy ship to Le Cap and persuaded Bobo to ride with them to the capital. An American officer asked him if he would be a candidate for the presidency. Bobo exploded. “The Haitian presidency is already mine; the election is a mere formality.”

The Americans immediately cast about for an alternative, and hit upon the 63-year old mixed-race President of the Haitian Senate, Philippe Dartiguenave as a more acceptable alternative. (I sure hope I’m pronouncing that correctly.) The Americans met with both men at their embassy in the capital and asked each of them, whether there were any other Haitians as qualified as they to be President. “Of course,” said Dartiguenave. “No!” said Bobo. They asked each one if they would support the presidency of the other for the good of the nation. Of course, said Dartiguenave. “If I am not elected, it will be because the presidency has been stolen from me,” said Bobo.

A summary of this interview was sent to the Navy Department. The Secretary of the Navy was out of town at the time, so the decision fell to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He chose Dartiguenave. And so, on August 12, 1915, the Haitian Chamber of Deputies met in a building swarming with Americans, in a chamber lined with US Marines at parade rest. The vote was 94-3 in favor of the American-backed candidate.

Dartiguenave was presented with the very same treaty proposal that Sam had rejected. The treaty was hugely unpopular among Haitians, but with some finagling by Dartiguenave, it was ratified. Haiti would be under US occupation for the next 19 years as effectively a US protectorate.

[music: “Bullets and Bayonets”]

The Americans had everything set up just the way they wanted it in Port-au-Prince, but the north of the country was another matter. Bobo was still claiming the Presidency, and the thousands of *caco* fighters who controlled the north, including Le Cap, still agreed with him. The Americans tried a second time to buy *caco* compliance, paying off fighters to disarm and leave Le Cap, and again, they took the money and ran, and then re-armed themselves. The rural north of the country

was now a hotbed of anti-American insurgency, leading into what would soon be called the First Caco War.

The US Marines fighting the *cacos* in Haiti were under the command of the now-Colonel Littleton Waller. I told you to remember that name all the way back in episode 11, when he was involved in the Boxer Uprising in China. He had previously fought in the Spanish-American War and would afterward fight in the Philippine-American War, where he would testify against his commander in the aftermath of the Samar Massacre and be court-martialled and acquitted, episode 21. We ran into him again in episode 43, when he was back in Cuba, during the US intervention there, and although I neglected to mention him by name, he was also part of the American occupation of Vera Cruz in 1914, episode 94. Afterward, he was sent to Haiti, where he was now in command of the fight against the *cacos*. With him was Major Smedley Butler, whom I mentioned in episode 97 as being in command of the Marines who intervened in Nicaragua. In fact, Butler has been serving under Waller for some time now, including at the Veracruz occupation. Butler was awarded a Medal of Honor for his conduct during the street fighting in that city. Now he was in Haiti, a field commander in the war against the *cacos*, during which conflict he would play his part in drama and in farce and win a second Medal of Honor.

First, the farce. One of Butler's first combat actions in Haiti involved relieving the *caco* siege of Gonaives. Butler led a Marine unit that was transported to Gonaives by sea and cleared the *cacos* from the vicinity. Afterward, the Marines retired to the town, had their dinner and went to sleep after sundown. This being August in Haiti, it was quite warm and most of the Marines chose to sleep in little or no clothing. Major Butler and his officers were just having their own supper when he received an urgent telephone call from one of his outposts that the *cacos*, having been driven out of the town, were now trying to destroy the rail line into Gonaives. Butler ordered his bugler to sound "To Arms," which means the Marines are to take arms and come without delay. And so they did, leaping to their feet, pausing only long enough to grab their rifles and ammunition belts before charging down the street to the rail line, and then up the line to attack the *cacos*. The best-dressed among them were in their underpants.

Butler called it "the funniest fight I ever saw," as the Marines charged a very surprised band of *cacos* while whooping and screeching like wild animals. I can't help but think that from the point of view of the black Haitian *cacos*, who thought they were in for nothing more than a quiet night of vandalism, it must have seemed like the zombie apocalypse was at hand as a band of pale, wild, naked figures appeared in the moonlit fog and set upon them.

Over the next three months, the Marines pressed forward into the mountainous northeast of Haiti. The Marines were excellent sharpshooters, the *cacos* not so much, and *caco* morale gradually fell. They were not accustomed to fighting people better armed than they were; boys and men tied together with ropes were more their speed, I suppose. By November, only one *caco* stronghold remained, and it was here that Smedley Butler would have his moment of drama. A

group of about fifty *cacos* was holed up in Fort Rivière, on a mountaintop about twenty miles south of Le Cap.

The fort had been built by the French back in the 18th century, but it was still a formidable position in the twentieth. Butler's superiors judged that taking the fort would require an entire regiment, about 2300 Marines, plus artillery support. Butler piped up and said he could take the place with one hundred handpicked Marines. They gave him the chance, and it was almost a disaster. Butler posted a machine gun squad to rake the ramparts of the fort, in order to force the *caco* fighters to keep their heads down, and Butler and his Marines charged the walls.

Unfortunately, they then got pinned against them. The *cacos* on the walls above them couldn't shoot down the wall effectively because of the incoming machine gun fire, but they could still fire outward, making a retreat very dangerous, and up against the wall it seemed there was nowhere else to go. Butler had intended to take the detachment he personally commanded through an old gate, but when they got close, they discovered the *cacos* had barricaded it with boulders. But some scouting around revealed that the *cacos* had been using a four-foot wide drain to crawl in and out of the fort. The Marines' scouting also revealed there was a *caco* fighter in the drain ready to shoot at any sight of an American. Butler and his sergeant nodded to each other, and the sergeant dove into the drain. Butler meant to follow, but his aide, a private, pushed him aside and went in himself. Then Butler went in after the both of them.

The Haitian fighter inside the drain had just enough time to get off one shot, which, miraculously, missed all three of the approaching Marines. They were on him before he got off a second shot. Butler's unit followed into the drain and into the middle of the fort and began firing on some very surprised *cacos*, killing them all in a matter of minutes at a cost of one wounded American. Butler and the other two Marines who entered the drain would be awarded Medals of Honor for this action, making Smedley Butler one of a small number of members of the US armed forces to receive two Medals of Honor in two different conflicts.

The Americans ordered all Haitian armed forces dissolved and replaced them with a Gendarmerie, or national police force, initially consisting of Haitians commanded by American officers. Smedley Butler was named the first overall commander of the Gendarmerie.

The Americans set about improving the neglected infrastructure on Haiti, which barely had any roads or railroads. Most controversially, Butler unearthed a little-known, seldom used Haitian law of *corvée*, or civil conscription, which allowed the government to compel Haitian men to work on building or maintaining roads for a limited period of three weeks.

To the Americans, this didn't sound so bad. In fact, in the United States at the time, there were many rural places where the local governments taxed residents to raise money to maintain the local roads under laws that allowed these residents the option to contribute their labor rather than their money. The *corvée* didn't sound that much different to them.

But it was a little more complicated for the Haitians. For one thing, hardly any rural Haitian had any money whatsoever, meaning the alternative of paying tax was not really an alternative at all. And there were many abuses. *Corvée* laborers could be found improving the private property of Haitian elites as often as building public roads. Men who completed their three weeks of labor were given a certificate to prove it and sent home, but often found themselves reconstituted before they even got there. They would show their certificates to the gendarmes, and the gendarmes would promptly tear up the certificates and send the men back to work.

Meanwhile, over in the Dominican Republic, the elected President, Juan Isidro Jimenes, was overthrown by his war minister, Desiderio Arias, in May of 1916. The US government already had substantial military forces right next door in Haiti, and they chose to move in immediately. Only, when the Marines caught up to the deposed President, he refused American assistance on the grounds that it would fatally discredit him and his government to be restored to power by American arms. He asked instead that the Americans visit Arias and politely ask him to return control of the government to its elected President. They did, he wouldn't, and the Americans told Jimenes they were going in to seize the capital, Santo Domingo, by force, with or without Jimenes's permission. Jimenes replied, "I can never consent to attacking my own people," and then resigned the presidency.

The Americans took control of the country anyway, but unlike in Haiti, they were unable to find anyone willing to serve as the Dominican face of an American administration, and so the US military took direct control of the country, and would rule it under martial law for eight years, until 1924.

As in Haiti, the Americans disbanded the local military—they replaced it with a National Guard—and set about building roads. There was already substantial sugar cane production in the Dominican Republic, and sugar prices were quite high because of the Great War, and so the sugar plantations did very well. Plantations to grow sugar, roads and railroads to take it to the ports, docks to ship it overseas, and everything owned by Americans. The classic banana republic economy.

Haiti, though, was different, because the Haitian constitution banned foreigners from owning land in the country, a key provision that for many Haitians was the essence of the revolution. Haiti didn't have large plantations; these had been broken up after the Revolution. Big American business interests wanted to buy up Haitian land, for plantations, for railroads, for docks, you know, the usual, but that pesky constitutional provision got in the way of American-style corporate integration of Haitian agriculture.

In 1917, the US supervised legislative elections, which went okay, and shortly afterward handed the new legislature a new constitution for them to enact. This new constitution was drawn up by the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, or so he would later claim. He may have been bragging. Critically, this new constitution would eliminate the prohibition on

foreign ownership of Haitian land. The legislature refused to touch it, so the Americans pressed President Dartiguenave to prorogue the parliament, which he reluctantly did. There's a story that Dartiguenave locked himself in a bathroom to avoid Smedley Butler when he arrived with the paperwork for the President to sign. This story might well be a fiction, but probably there's truth to it, at least in terms of the President's level of enthusiasm.

Since the parliament wouldn't approve the new constitution, it was put before the voters in a referendum. The new constitution won the referendum by a 94% margin, 97-3. The question of how many Haitians fully understood and approved of what was going on, versus voting to keep the guys with the guns happy is certainly a question open to debate.

The combination of the *corvée*, which remember is white Americans and mixed-race Haitians forcing black Haitians to do hard labor, combined with the abolition of the ban on foreigners owning property had to have felt like the Revolution was being unmade. Resentments built until there was a Second Caco War in 1918 against the US occupation. That would also fail, and the Americans would remain in Haiti until 1934.

In 1917, US Marines would return to Cuba to put down yet another insurgency. They would remain until 1922. Also in 1917, the United States purchased the Danish West Indies from Denmark, again on the rationale that this was to keep them from becoming a German naval base. The US now possessed outright or held bases and rights of military intervention across the Greater Antilles—from Cuba through Hispaniola to Puerto Rico and what are now called the Virgin Islands of the United States. With this comes control over the main approaches to the Panama Canal from the Atlantic Ocean. Only Jamaica lies outside of US control, and it's controlled by the United Kingdom, now an American ally. Similarly, the Lesser Antilles are now controlled by the British or the French or the Dutch, all allies, or at least nations the US is comfortable with. Germany, and every other foreign power, is now locked out of America's back yard.

Defenders of these American interventions point to the more stable governments and the better developed economies and infrastructure the US left behind. But the economic development introduced American-style trusts, where one business controls the plantation, the railroad, the port, and the ships. It did not introduce American-style checks on the excesses of the business trusts, things like anti-trust laws or child labor laws or minimum wage and workers' compensation laws, the legal mechanisms being developed back home to protect American workers. The Haitians and the Dominicans would be exposed to a naked capitalism that operated along the same principles as the ones the Athenians laid before the Melians: The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.

The Americans also left behind better trained military and police forces and more roads. This brought law and order into the rural regions of Hispaniola, but it also allowed for more

centralized and autocratic rule than these two countries had known before, which will have consequences for their political development in the twentieth century.

We'll have to stop there for today. Thanks to all of you for listening. I'd also like to thank Diego for making a donation and thanks to Tom for becoming a patron of the podcast. If you have a few bucks to spare, I invite you to go to the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal button for a one-time contribution or the Patreon button to become a patron. And there are other ways to be part of our community. Post a comment at the website, tweet at us, or join the Facebook page. I would be happy to hear from all of you.

Last Friday, I was interviewed on the Chicago radio show "Stocks and Jocks." You can listen to or download the show at the "Stocks and Jocks" website, and I've posted a link at our website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com.

I have a correction to make. Back in episode 109, I said that Constantinople had only fallen once in its history. I was thinking of course of the Ottoman capture of that city in 1453, but that is not the only time, as a listener wrote in to point out. The city had previously fallen to Crusaders in 1204, and perhaps a third time, depending on how you count the capture of the city in 1261.

Point taken, and I hope you'll join me next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we turn our attention back to East Africa, for the next chapter of the story there. Specifically, naval warfare in East Africa, where the most important fighting is going on not in the ocean, strangely enough, but in the African Great Lakes. Simpson's Circus, next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. In 1920, a play would be produced, written by the American playwright Eugene O'Neill. It was called *The Emperor Jones* and it tells the story of an African-American fugitive named Brutus Jones who flees to a Caribbean island and rules it as its emperor. The play is clearly commenting on the US occupation of Haiti, and O'Neill would later say that the title character was inspired by Guillame Sam.

[music: Closing Theme]