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## Humanitarian Aid in Haiti: Friend or Foe?

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EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

Humanitarian Aid in Haiti: Friend or Foe?

Honors Thesis  
Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
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By  
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## ABSTRACT

### Humanitarian Aid in Haiti: Friend or Foe?

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Humanitarian aid to Haiti has both positive and negative effects on a country that is already in a state of turmoil. Considering the aspects of education, economics, and the political climate in Haiti, and after conducting both academic research and primary source interviews from those affected firsthand by these issues, I concluded that outside aid and volunteerism to Haiti, and other third-world countries like it, is ultimately ineffective. Donations coming into Haiti are doing more harm than good because the amount of goods being gathered and shipped to Haiti combined with the instability and corruption of the government in that area is detrimental to the economic progression of the nation. As a country struggling with an internal economy, the constant influx of goods keeps local vendors and business owners from starting up their own industries, constantly forcing money to circulate out of the country. As a nation, Haiti has faced many hardships, including natural disasters, and the response from other countries is not always positive. The current and most pressing issues they face today are a lack of education and the abundance of political corruption that is keeping the country in a perpetual cycle of poverty. Outside countries that simply provide donations and resources to Haiti usually serve to enable this cycle when the most effective strategy is to empower the people of Haiti to help themselves.

Keywords and phrases: Haiti, Political Corruption, Humanitarian Aid, Volunteerism, Missionary, Preventing Internal Economic Circulation, Lack of Education, Poverty, Limited Healthcare

Haiti is a nation that has a torrid history of natural disasters, poverty, and political corruption. Unfortunately, other countries that habitually attempt to bring outside aid into Haiti often have negative effects on the internal economy and overall perception of Haiti as a nation whose people are unable to raise themselves up from the ashes. Around the globe, there are many third-world countries facing similar issues. In my thesis, *Humanitarian Aid in Haiti: Friend or Foe?* I chose to focus on the political, economic, and educational factors in Haiti that cause aid and philanthropic efforts to the country, no matter how well-intentioned, fall short of actually helping the nation to progress and heal itself.

As a student at Eastern Kentucky University, I have tirelessly studied journalism and the importance of storytelling over the course of my collegiate career. I have learned, more than anything, that the best way to enact change is by telling stories from an insightful perspective and bringing issues to light in the best way possible. Spreading knowledge about the difficulties people have had to endure in other parts of the world has the power to move people to action, or at the very least give a voice to a group of people that desperately need one. If those with the power to bring aid or enact change, even in the smallest sense, can be educated on issues happening around the world, these stories can inspire a better understanding of how to approach

them. In my thesis, I wanted to incorporate my own storytelling skills in this way to make an impact.

Throughout my life, I have gone on many mission trips to places in need, in the U.S. and around the globe, and I have grown up around several friends and family members that have done likewise. These experiences have given me a unique perspective on the world of missions and volunteerism that isn't always positive. Though not all mission trips fall into this category, and most do their best to come to the aid of the area in need, I have definitely noticed that many aid efforts are misaligned to what would benefit the area the most. In the creative portion of my thesis, I wrote an article telling the story of one of my friends who traveled to Haiti on a mission trip and felt as though her time and labor were not being put to good use in the ministry. She said that instead of being submersed in the culture and getting to know the people of that community and what work they think needed to be done in the area, her group simply spent time cleaning up around the church and visiting Haitian orphanages to no real avail. My article goes on to reference the story of another missionary in Haiti who agreed there needed to be changes made in the way their ministry approaches offering support to the country. As an official in this particular ministry, he said they are moving away from only bringing money and goods into the country, which ultimately enables many Haitians to rely solely on foreign aid and perpetuates the cycle of poverty, and that the ministry is focusing more on discovering what they can do to empower the people of Haiti to make changes internally.

Conversely, on one of my own mission trips to Mexico, I felt this organization was already set up in a fashion similar to what the missionary had discussed in my article. We were part of a rotating team of missionaries who came in to complete the various stages of specific

projects in the area that the people in Mexico needed the organization to do. I helped set the foundation for a building that was already under construction at a local youth center and was part of a team that put the finishing touches on a house in the community for a family that had literally been living under a tarp. We also were discouraged from shopping at stores for souvenirs and instead, the organization set up excursions to local markets and vendors that would be using the profits to support their families. My friend travelled to Nicaragua and had a very similar experience. During my trip, the organization talked to us about how they have experienced the negative impacts of simply dumping resources into a country that is not necessarily equipped to properly utilize them. They made it clear that on this trip, we would be providing volunteer labor towards projects that would actually benefit the community and working closely with the people that would be affected by it directly.

In my research, I also came across a scholarly source that reinforces the stance that while some service trips and relief efforts to Haiti can be damaging, many bring positivity to the country and those who have the chance to experience it. Bennett and Eberts' scholarly article, "The Experiences of Short-Term Humanitarian Aid Workers in Haiti" focuses on the effect of relief groups and service teams, their experiences in Haiti, and the ultimate outcome of their service trip. This source focuses on a particular service group that travelled to Haiti after the 2010 earthquake and summarizes their trip as a humanitarian effort that not only affected the lives of the Haitians that they came to serve, but also changed the volunteers' lives for the better. The study utilizes the history of Haiti and its need for aid as well as a detailed description of how the group operated while in Haiti and what kind of impact their work held. This study depicts the benefits of humanitarian service through the eyes of volunteers who came to Haiti, and though it

may be short-sighted regarding some of the more prevalent issues the country is facing, the article shows that not all aspects of outside aid are inherently negative.

Unfortunately, I did not get the chance to visit Haiti for myself as I had originally planned. I was signed up through a local church to go on a mission trip to Haiti in order to form my own opinion on how my work efforts on this trip positively and negatively impacted the people we came to serve. I wanted to use my photography skills as a journalist to create a photo-essay of the people and experiences I encountered during my time there in order to present a strong visual representation that outside aid is not always affecting the country in the best way. Due to poor planning through the church I was travelling with and the current political instability of nation, I had to cancel my trip and reformat my thesis in a different, but hopefully equally-impactful way.

I came up with the idea to put the writing and media layout skills I have learned in school and on the job to good use with a magazine layout, detailing my findings on the impacts of foreign aid to Haiti. Primarily with this magazine, though I used some academic sources, I wanted to write articles from the perspective of people who have lived in and visited Haiti or have loved ones who have greatly been impacted by the issues I was discussing. Essentially, I sought out to voice the opinions of people who know firsthand what it is like to be affected by the aid going into Haiti and to give them a simple and visually-interesting platform tell their story in their own words.

Unlike the creative portion of my project, I intend to approach this paper from more of an academic standpoint, using the scholarly articles and resources I have gathered in my research over the past year. I aim to dissect the interrelated aspects of Haiti's current economic issues

perpetuated by the outside aid flowing into the country, the ineffective healthcare and educational resources across the nation, the current volatile political climate, and the country's unstable history with politics and natural disaster that shaped the nation as it is today.

The history of Haiti has not been a simple one. The country has had to face a series of natural disasters including ten major hurricanes and other tropical storms since 1998 alone. The most devastating catastrophes to hit Haiti was the earthquake in 2010 and Hurricane Matthew in 2016. Because of these unfortunate events, Haiti has been the recipient of a large amount of outside aid from other countries that, due to issues in the Haitian government, has not been kind to the country's internal economy.

The initial response from other countries after the crises in Haiti, particularly the massive earthquake in 2010, was a slow process. Many Haitians waited for months in devastation before outside aid was able to make an impact on their situation and when aid did make its way into the country, it was often misused. In his analysis of the aid response time, Lubold discusses the American government's efforts to provide relief to Haiti in relation to other countries. "Pentagon defends response time of Haiti aid efforts" explains how the U.S. government felt they responded to Haiti as promptly as they possibly could, considering the political red tape and specific procedures they had to go through before sending help to another nation. In this article, Defense Secretary, Robert Gates, commented that though providing aid was the American military's top priority, given the circumstances, he thought the government responded as comprehensively and quickly as they could. The source goes on to mention that aid from China and other foreign powers was able to arrive more quickly than help from the United States. Regardless of these factors, the country of Haiti had to remain in a state of emergency until help arrived.

Politics and economics in Haiti have been closely tied throughout history. In her book, “Haiti: Hope for a Fragile State,” Shamsie discusses the nation’s past after Haiti’s liberation from France in 1804. At that time, the economy was based primarily on agriculture exports fueled by slave labor. As a new and independent nation, the leaders of the Republic of Haiti wanted to reform the country and freed the population of the country that had been enslaved. This left the economy in Haiti with an egregious disparity between the amount of goods they needed to produce and export, and a sudden lack of a consistent labor force. To combat this, the new Haitian government imposed a social hierarchy in which those in power reaped the benefits of the lower working class. The once-again enslaved Haitians revolted in favor of agrarian egalitarianism, a system in which each person could independently own and subsist off of their own land. The plantation hierarchy ended up collapsing after the workers refused to comply and a peasantry system emerged where the majority of the nation’s population survived off of their own earnings. Unfortunately, with tensions high after the recent revolution, this new isolated economic system prevented Haiti from forming a sustainable national economy.

Brown’s “The Tragedy of Haiti: A Reason for Major Cultural Change,” speaks more to the volatile history in this country. This scholarly peer-reviewed article is centered around the idea that Haiti has undergone many unfortunate political and cultural undertakings that have left the country in a rough state. The article compiles information about the cultural factors and history of Haiti as well as the author’s own firsthand account of when she had previously traveled to the country. At the end of the article, Brown comes to the conclusion that Haiti is still in a fragile state, that poverty and public health issues still dominate the country, and that anyone who travels to the country as she had will be long-term affected from the experience. Brown

draws the information in her article from a variety of historical sources that outline political and cultural issues that Haiti has faced in the past.

Similarly, Prou's, "Haiti's Condemnation: History and Culture at the Crossroads," is comparable in that it goes over the limitations of the Haitian culture however, this scholarly article focuses more on the social structure and class divisions in the area through a series of historical accounts and expert analyses. In this source, Prou mainly argues that Haiti is stuck in a social cycle of repeating past mistakes and that the culture is continually condemned to remain divided. In the end, Prou left his readers with the question of whether Haiti is doomed to enter another dark age as outlined in one of the books the author talked about in the article, or if the country can overcome its divisions and become prosperous like another source he draws on claims.

Haiti's explosive history has led to the current political unrest facing the nation. According to the 2019 World report, in recent history Haitian presidents and political leaders have rarely stayed in office their entire terms. Poor education and illiteracy throughout the country has continually led to the election of unqualified leadership that, more often than not, exploit their role in government for their own personal gain and to get their families out of the country. Gang violence has increased in recent years as well as violent crimes against women, and politically-charged riots have become a common occurrence. The prison system in Haiti is overcrowded and government officials have been accused of countless human rights violations, including the prevalence of child domestic labor. Information mining is a big issue in this country, preventing the spread of knowledge and information to an already widely uneducated

public. A government in this much disarray is hardly equipped to effectively disperse the overwhelming influx of outside aid that Haiti often receives.

Adelman's "Haiti: Testing the Limits of Government Aid and Philanthropy" primarily argues that the corruption of the Haitian government has been prohibiting a lot of much-needed government aid to go to the people and that organizations that are in power over the donations and aid that come into the country often fail to distribute the funds to the places where it would do the most good. Essentially, Adelman uncovered that there is a lack of accountability among officials and organizations who control the majority of the aid and relief efforts in Haiti. This case study uses comparisons between the Haitian government and that of other, more developed nations to conclude that the government in Haiti and its subsequent policies regarding how to deal with the financial aid coming into the country have glaring underlying issues.

Similarly, Regan's, "Follow the Money: Student Journalists Track Haiti's Earthquake Aid," focuses on where all of the money sent to Haiti actually ends up. In her article, Regan utilizes the journalists and resources at her disposal in a case study to find out just how much aid money was being wasted. Ultimately, Regan found that relief funds were not being properly managed or utilized by the powers in Haiti. With her scholarly essay, she sought to build up the work journalists do by making an impact on the people and giving the Haitian laypeople more information on the workings of their own government as well as give insight to donors as to how their donations are actually being used. In this essay, Regan draws on her own work as a journalist as well as the work of others in her field who have come to the same conclusion.

Along with the rampant political issues in Haiti, there is also a blatant need for better healthcare policies across the country. Access to healthcare and information relating to it is hard

to come by for most Haitians due to governmental information mining, and the pervasiveness of poverty in the nation keeps many from being able to receive the care they need. Illnesses, many of them preventable, are at large in Haiti and epidemics of diseases like AIDS are only spurred on by these complications.

In Benoît's, "The Politics of Vodou: Aids, Access to Health Care and the Use of Culture in Haiti," he discusses political issues in that area and how it related to healthcare and, ultimately, the AIDS epidemic in this country. This scholarly article primarily argues in a series of well-researched studies, that some voodoo-centered culture and political ineptitude of the powers in charge in Haiti keep healthcare information from being readily assimilated into the general populace and that the extreme poverty in the area only furthers the spread of these kind of diseases. Benoît concludes the article with the outcome that medical anthropology and better communication of healthcare practices among the Haitians is probably the main contributor to eradicating AIDS and promoting better health nation-wide. This source utilizes a variety of well-researched information on the topic of healthcare in Haiti in order to analyze where there are lapses in healthcare and why as well as to illustrate what needs to be done to remedy the situation.

"Implementing the National Incident Management System as a Framework for Travel Medicine in Haiti" by Ortega et al, mainly discusses medical missions to Haiti and the best medical practices and healthcare initiatives to implement in the country. This source is a compilation of case studies that primarily argue that implementing medical care in Haiti is a very difficult and uncertain process, but the framework the authors discuss for conducting this healthcare initiative can be helpful for those trying to bring medical care to Haiti. Essentially,

this article details the restraining governmental policies that prevent the average Haitian from seeking appropriate healthcare and suggestions on how the nation can best utilize outside aid to help combat poverty and governmental negligence.

Along with problematic healthcare, Haiti is facing multiple issues with its educational system. Low literacy and poor education along with limited access to important public information in Haiti has posed many problems economically and governmentally. Haitians who earn a degree within the country often can't use it if they move to another country and many times have to go back to school. People often try to send their family members to study outside of the country and, without hopeful prospects of a life in Haiti, many who leave choose to live outside of the country permanently. With educated people continually leaving the country, Haiti's education rates are plummeting.

In Lehman's article, "Life and Literacy in Haiti: A Conversation with Jocelyn Trouillot," she interviews Jocelyn Trouillot, the founder of AYIBBY, the Haitian branch of the International Board on Books for Young People. Trouillot answered questions in her interview about the low literacy rates in Haiti and talked about how the dropout rate in the country is dangerously high. As part of her explanation, she suggests that, in addition to the limited educational resources provided by the country, Haitian students may be struggling with low literacy because of the nation's language divide. Since Haiti was originally a French colony and French is the official language of the nation, students must read, write, and study in French. However, most people in Haiti speak Creole, and children grow up speaking one language in the home and another at school. She suggests that this obstacle could be an underlying problem in essential language development and literacy retention in the country.

In another academic source, “Educating Haiti,” Poulin actually examines the relevancy and effectiveness of outside educational aid to Haiti. This article examines the prevalence of privatized schools in the nation. In fact, she said they made up 70 percent of the country’s educational system. The author delved into how the Canadian International Developmental Agency has provided funds towards the education of children around the globe and spoke on their efforts to provide Haitians with educational opportunities without governmental intervention.

Extreme poverty and wealth disparity across the country is one of the most pervasive and detrimental issues Haiti is facing. In “Characterization of Inequality and Poverty in the Republic of Haiti,” Jadotte expresses that as of the year 2000, Haiti has become one of the poorest nations in the world. This article reveals how the limited wealth in the country is not distributed equally to the people and how there is a huge disparity between the upper- and lower-class Haitians. In Haiti, the middle class is virtually non-existent and all of the money in the country is held by a small percentage of people in power while the masses are struggling to support themselves and their families on a minimum income juxtaposed with a high cost of living.

“Haiti: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper,” a report published by the International Western Monetary Fund Western Hemisphere Department, details national guidelines implemented by the Haitian government in 2014 to reform the country while repairing areas devastated by the 2010 earthquake. The academic paper provides a statement given by the Republic of Haiti’s Prime Minister at the time, Laurent Salvador Lamothe, in which he stated his intention to rebuild and develop the nation’s economy. This plan included a reform of local industries to increase farming, manufacturing, and the potential for tourism in Haiti as well as the

creation businesses through foreign investment. He went on to discuss developing the nation's natural resources and land as well as instigating a reform across the country to promote social cohesion and national strength as well as a governmental reform to help them be more attentive to the needs of the Haitian public. Following Lamothe's strategy, he predicted Haiti would be on the rise as a developing country by the year 2030. Unfortunately, five years later and with Lamothe out of office, the plan will unfortunately not be fulfilled in this time period, however, he had the right idea. Lamothe saw the value in accepting foreign aid and investments because he recognized the necessity of forming a strong internal economy through relations with other countries. He also planned for primary growth within the country because, as Prime Minister, Lamothe knew the best thing for his people was to improve Haiti from within.

To that avail, Garland's "The Visual Rhetoric of 'Voluntourists' and Aid Workers in Post-Earthquake Haiti," is a scholarly article that sheds light on the economic state of this impoverished nation. This article mainly talks about how volunteerism brings tourists to Haiti who are willing to provide aid to the nation, how that volunteer work both positively and negatively affects the people in Haiti, how the mass influx of tourists into Haiti have portrayed the country primarily through social media, and the overall impact of a tourism-based economy in Haiti. Although, he does acknowledge that tourism could be an effective boost to the struggling economy, Garland ultimately concludes that, though the volunteers mean well, the representations of Haiti as needy and impoverished have had more of a negative impact on the country and is more exploitative than helpful.

In this paper, I have examined several economic, governmental, and historical factors that have contributed to the detriment of Haiti and how outside aid to the country has had unintended

negative consequences. However, I think it is important to note that even though the country has had an unimaginably difficult past, it does not mean that they cannot have hope for a brighter future. Haiti has faced many obstacles and divisions over its history, and I believe, with proper help, effective strategies, and time, they can pave the road to recovery.

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