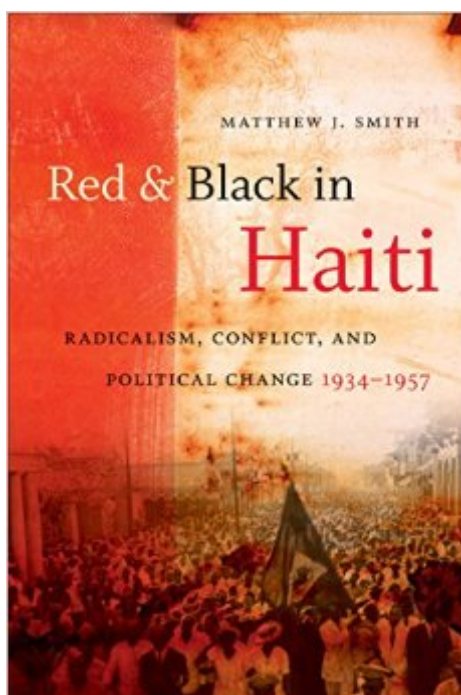


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Red And Black In Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict, And Political Change, 1934-1957



Synopsis

In 1934 the republic of Haiti celebrated its 130th anniversary as an independent nation. In that year, too, another sort of Haitian independence occurred, as the United States ended nearly two decades of occupation. In the first comprehensive political history of postoccupation Haiti, Matthew Smith argues that the period from 1934 until the rise of dictator Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier to the presidency in 1957 constituted modern Haiti's greatest moment of political promise. Smith emphasizes the key role that radical groups, particularly Marxists and black nationalists, played in shaping contemporary Haitian history. These movements transformed Haiti's political culture, widened political discourse, and presented several ideological alternatives for the nation's future. They were doomed, however, by a combination of intense internal rivalries, pressures from both state authorities and the traditional elite class, and the harsh climate of U.S. anticommunism. Ultimately, the political activism of the era failed to set Haiti firmly on the path to a strong independent future.

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Customer Reviews

The majority of historical studies of Haiti in the years leading up to the 2004 Bicentennial focused on the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804). Part of what makes Matthew J. Smith's "Red and Black in Haiti" so important is that it opens a window on the complexity of an era closer to our own time and offers large and small lessons relevant to our chaotic world of revolution and nation building. Smith's book is particularly focused on what might be called "a brief and shining moment" between the end of the U.S. Marine Occupation (1915-1934) and the onset of the Duvalier Era with the election of Francois

Duvalier as President of Haiti in 1957. Those decades of struggle for a "New Haiti," led by members of the tireless and talented Occupation Generation, echo today in ongoing debates about "reconstruction" and "refoundation" of Haiti's nationhood. In the mid-twentieth century, divisions occurred along color lines ("authentic" black Haitians vs. light-skinned elites) and solidarity was often sacrificed to a splintering of political positions (Communism vs. the Urban Labor movement, pro-U.S. pragmatists vs. those determined to keep U.S. interests out of Haiti, at any cost). As Smith untangles the threads and illuminates charismatic personalities---from Jacques Roumain and Daniel Fignole to Presidents Lescot, Estime, and Magloire---we begin to see a vacuum forming at the center. Francois Duvalier and his family would fill that vacuum for nearly 30 years, leaving a "kill tally" estimated at 30,000-40,000 people. The exodus of so many into what is now a powerful Haitian Diaspora is yet another measure of Duvalier's impact.

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