

## Handouts for Activity 2: Postcards from Haiti

### Postcard: Prehistory - 1492

Create a “postcard” that represents historical events in Haiti before 1492. It may include the following highlights:

- The land we now know as Haiti is populated by the Taino tribe, which also inhabited other islands in the Caribbean.
- They call the island “Haiti”, which means “high, mountainous ground.”
- The Taino are skilled in agriculture and hunting, but are also seafarers and fishermen.
- Archeological evidence is all we have left of Taino life in Haiti. Evidence suggest they were peaceful. They lived in communal villages ruled by chiefs who could be men or women.
- Some of the art that still exists includes cave paintings and gold jewelry, worn by both sexes.
- Another tribe, the Caribs, also inhabited the island. The Caribs were aggressive and often attacked the Taino.
- Most of what we know about the Taino comes from the records of the Spaniards, who invaded the island in 1492.

### Postcard: 1492–1804

Create a “postcard” that represents historical events in Haiti from 1492 - 1804. It may include the following highlights:

- Christopher Columbus arrives, establishes a settlement for Spain, and names the island “Hispañola.”
- Two generations of murder, enslavement, hard work mining gold and spices virtually eradicate the Taino people
- The Treaty of Ryswick in 1697 gives French western third of the island, which they name “Saint Domingue.” The French set up large plantations to farm sugar cane. Indentured servants are imported to work for three years and earn freedom, but it is not enough labor. France sends orphans, criminals and prostitutes, but there is still not enough labor, partly because most die quickly from the heat, hard labor and disease.
- In 1700, Saint Domingue starts importing African slaves, who die isles quickly and are succeeded by an endless supply in Africa. The island nation becomes rich and is known as “the pearl of the Caribbean.”
- France enacts legislation, Code Noir, dictating the lawful treatment of black slaves. It includes laws that say a white man must marry and free any black woman he rapes, that slaves can purchase their freedom, that slaves are entitled to three days of rest every week, and that families cannot be separated on the auction block. Most planters ignore the laws, but not all. Over time, a class of free blacks is created.
- Poor whites are disgruntled with the number of free blacks whose conditions are on par – or better – than theirs. More restrictive, racist laws are written.
- First documented slave revolt in 1791-92 is unsuccessful.
- France is weakened by the French Revolution (1789-99) and France’s war with Spain and Great Britain.
- Toussaint Louverture, an ex-slave, serves in the Spanish army against France. Spain is defeated, but Toussaint and other black leaders (including Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Georges Biassou) marshal thousands of ex-slaves to revolt. They control Saint Domingue and, for a short time, the entire island of Hispañola. Napoleon tries to retake control of Saint Domingue, but his forces are defeated. In 1804, Haiti officially claims independence. The first and only successful slave revolt has created a new nation, renamed The Republic of Haiti (from a Taino word).

### **Postcard: 1804-1905**

Create a “postcard” that represents historical events in Haiti from 1804 - 1905. It may include the following highlights:

- Independence is declared, but the nation pays a steep price: Half of Haiti’s population died during the war and Toussaint was captured by the French. He dies in jail in France in 1803. Dessalines — who declared himself emperor in 1804 — is betrayed and executed by his own men in 1806.
- Though slavery no longer exists, divisions are born: between a mulatto class (previously free blacks, owned property, spoke French, connections abroad, mostly lighter-skinned) and blacks (90% of population, ex-slaves, generally darker-skinned); and between the north and south.
- Much of the country’s resources are spent on the military because of fear of France’s return or an attack from Spain, the U.S., or Great Britain. Plantations are deserted. Infrastructure is not maintained because the whites who built it were dead or had left the country. Resources are also spent on invasions of the Dominican Republic.
- In 1825, France recognizes Haiti’s independence, but demands 150 million francs in repayment.
- Haiti has many rulers. Some become the victims of military coups. Some steal the country’s riches and leave. New rulers borrow money at rising rates.
- Political and economic instability reign.

### **Postcard: 1905 to 1986**

Create a “postcard” that represents historical events in Haiti from 1905 – 1986. It may include the following highlights:

- In 1915, the U.S. invades Haiti. The excuse is that the latest presidential murder has created instability, but WW1 had started and Haiti is an optimal place to locate U.S. troops in the Caribbean. Woodrow Wilson declares martial law and sends in all white American troops. Haiti’s black army is disbanded. A treaty is created to support a Haitian president and senate, but Americans control the money and land. Though improvements in infrastructure are made, cultural insensitivity leads to much mismanagement and societal resentment. Guerilla warfare ensues.
- Roosevelt pulls out troops in 1934. Leaves no one to manage infrastructure.
- Artistic renaissance from 1920s–1940s leads to black cultural movement or “negritude.” Helps inspire black power movement in the U.S. in later decades.
- Francois Duvalier, known as Papa Doc, establishes a dictatorship when he declared himself President for Life, 1957-1971. Many Haitians – especially business owners and the middle class — leave the country. Duvalier’s many crimes include selling Haitian workers to the Dominican Republic, tolerating a child sex trade, and creating a rural militia, commonly called “tonton macoutes” (Kreyol: “boogeyman”). The militia is above the law. They receive no pay, but are allowed to confiscate farms and profit from extortion and other crimes. It is estimated that Papa Doc is responsible for the death of 30,000 Haitians.
- After his death in 1971, he is succeeded by his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier, nicknamed, “Baby Doc”, who rules until he is overthrown in 1986. Few substantial changes occur during his rule. The country continues its slide towards incredible poverty while Duvalier and his cronies lived in luxury.

### **Postcard: 1986 to present**

- Over population and agricultural mismanagement leads to many Haitians leaving farms for the cities, but the cities do not have enough jobs. This leads to the start of the Haitian diaspora throughout the world, especially the U.S. and Canada.
- Jean-Bertrand Aristide, an ex-priest defrocked for preaching liberation theology, is elected president in 1988, in a peaceful election organized by the outgoing female president, Ertha Pascal-Trouillot.
- Aristide is popular. He tries for modest gains, such as every Haitian eating one square meal a day. He cuts government salaries, including his own. However, he is ousted by a coup in 1991. The international community asks for him to be exiled instead of assassinated, so he is exiled to the U.S.
- From 1991-1993, the country experiences mass instability again. Crime is prevalent. Many Haitians flee the country again, in boats, across the water to the U.S. Their request for sanctuary is often refused: in 1992, only 54 Haitians are legally admitted to the U.S. — compared to 3720 Cubans. The prevalence of AIDS in Haiti is one suspected rationale for the U.S.'s curb on Haitian emigration. The U.S. and United Nations impose an embargo to try to exert control. Back in Haiti, thousands die from violence and hunger.
- In 1993-94, the U.S. invades for a second time to reinstate Aristide, who serves out the rest of his 5-year term. Rene Preval is president from 1996-2001. Aristide is president, 2001-2004. Preval is president, 2006-2010. Both men find themselves unable to implement the promised reforms.
- From 2004-2010, a series of tropical storms harm Haiti more than other Caribbean nations because of poorly constructed buildings and massive deforestation.
- In 2010, a 7.0 earthquake brought the country its greatest devastation yet: thousands dead, millions left homeless and living in tents. Much of the country's crippled infrastructure collapses.