

New York World
May 24, 1898

Hayti and San Domingo Favor the United States

PORTO PLATA, SAN DOMINGO, May 15.—Opinion and the direction of sympathy in the island of Hayti might at this time be of particular interest, since Hayti's proximity to both Cuba and Porto Rico has rendered a singular experience of the Spaniard and his ways.

The *World's* dispatch boat, the *Three Friends*, was in Cape Haytien yesterday. Cape Haytien is the northern port of the republic of Hayti. It is situated at the side of a wide and deep roadstead, while splendid green mountains rise directly from its suburbs. It has the miscellaneous quality of all seaport towns. Among its population are negroes from every part of the West Indies. It is, in fact, a kind of eddy which has caught driftwood from every imaginable quarter of this vast collection of islands. Most of the people speak English, French and Spanish.

Everybody was found to be talking of nothing else but the war between America and Spain. The French cable company was issuing daily bulletins; very absurd, usually in detail and quite pro-Spanish, which were eagerly consumed by the people.

When inquiries were made as to their sympathies they were not backward in declaring their position. It was found that in the little but decidedly influential colony of foreign merchants the French and the Germans were all openly rooting for Spain. They liked Spain, they said; they did not like the United States, and, anyhow, they were certain that the Spanish squadron would surely down Admiral Sampson's ships.

There was one venerable Frenchman, perhaps the doyen of the corps of foreign merchants, who positively refused to believe even then that Dewey had been victorious at Manila. We gently offered him such familiar information as we possessed, but he shook his old gray head in derision and scorn.

"All lies!" he said. "All lies by this—what you call? damn telegraph."

It was another matter with the handful of Englishmen. They were completely American in feeling. One could not distinguish between them and the born Americans. As an addition, there was the captain of a Nova Scotian bark, who had nothing on his ship from a foretopsail to a drink that was not the property of any American that chose to ask for it.

The natives, drooning about the dirty, sun-smitten streets, would have no basis of information upon which to form an opinion if it were not for the comings, goings, all the changes which take place amid a semi-maritime population. Thus have they been brought into direct relations with the Spaniard. They hate him. A negro merchant said to me:

"The history of Spain is the history of cruelty."

This same merchant has many friends in Havana, and recently when a rumor was current there that the American fleet was off Cape Haytien, bound eastward, his friends cabled him for information. He answered deceptively. He explained yesterday that really it was not any of his business, but he could not bring himself to do anything which might even indirectly be of service to any part of the Spanish cause.

This is largely representative of the feeling of the people, but there is also a party who will look without satisfaction upon a complete success of the American arms. They say: "If Cuba and Porto Rico go it will probably be our turn after a while, eh?" They feel that the signal for the expansion of the giant republic is also a signal of certain danger to their integrity as an independent nation. This sentiment seemingly inspires the Haytien army, as much as that weirdly absurd institution can be inspired by anything. The negro soldiers think chiefly of bread, bananas and rum, but they have somehow had it gimleted into their skulls that the Americans menace their country. Yesterday one of *The World* correspondents casually was examining the gun-rack in the town's guard-room. The weapons were old Remingtons of 1865, and the correspondent was interested in them mainly as antiques. He did not notice the glowering soldiers, and turned presently to ask how many men formed the garrison of Cape Haytien. The soldier to whom this question was addressed stared angrily at the correspondent, spat on the ground and, throwing his arm out in a defiant gesture, said: "Plenty! Plenty!" The correspondent was then able to perceive that he had been taken for an American committee of investigation.

Here at Porto Plata, in the sister republic of San Domingo, one finds the same condition of feeling, with a higher exponent of intelligence. San Domingo is always the mental superior of Hayti. Porto Plata has been largely under Spanish influence, but little of it now remains beyond the language. As the *Three Friends* steamed in to her anchorage this morning a crowd of people gathered on the green headland that shields the little cove and cheered the famous tug as if she were really the Campania. Flags and handkerchiefs fluttered from every fist. There is a considerable Cuban colony here, and only the requirements of journalism prevent us from being feted tonight by an enthusiastic populace, with a band and a dinner and all other modern excitements.

As in Cape Haytien, the group of French and German merchants is pro-Spanish. Moreover, the British Consul has a Spanish wife, and this fact seems to prevent him from getting facts into any kind of perspective. But the natives are for us. They see in the destiny of the United States a destiny for themselves. They want to be let alone, but they want to follow the great republic in the making of a western world which will one day outshine the old civilization of the East. The citizen of San Domingo is a good deal of a man. He has not too much of the jealousy and suspicion that corrodes and perverts the Haytien; he is able to grasp modernity and apply it. He has distinctive ideas about sewage. There is not a town in a Spanish colony so clean, bright, cheering in every way, as this Porto Plata. And, mark you, as soon as a tropical town becomes clean its intelligence can be rated as of superior excellence.

In short, then, we find the French and Germans invariably against us; the English and the natives almost invariably with us, and the more clean and modern the people the more they favor us.

(Source: *The Collected Works of Stephen Crane*, University of Virginia Press, 1973)