

Anti-Haitianism: A Hemispheric Rejection Of Revolutionary Blackness



*Bertin M. Louis, Jr. -
Photo: University of
Kentucky*

11-13-2024 ~ From the United States to the Dominican Republic to the Bahamas, the collective scapegoating and mass deportation of Haitians for political gain lays bare a particular kind of anti-Blackness.

[This piece is part of a series analyzing anti-Haitianism with a hemispheric approach. [Read the first article in the series.](#)]

On September 25, 2024, Democratic representative Steven Horsford introduced [House Resolution 1500](#) on the floor of Congress. The intent of the resolution was to censure Republican Congressman Glen Clay Higgins of Louisiana over a social media post that amplified [false claims](#) made by former president Donald Trump and his running mate JD Vance that Haitian immigrants were eating pets in Springfield, Ohio. In a post on X responding to an Associated Press article about Haitians in Springfield [filing charges against Trump and Vance](#), Higgins wrote: “Lol. These Haitians are wild. Eating pets, vudu, nastiest country in the western hemisphere, cults, slapstick gangsters... but damned if they don’t feel all sophisticated now, filing charges against our President and VP.”

He continued: “All these thugs better get their mind right and their ass out of our country before January 20th.” Higgins later deleted the tweet but the damage was done. Condemnations flooded in, followed by the resolution to censure the congressman.

Such comments and lies reflect the worst white supremacist stereotypes about Haiti and Haitians. Broadly, [anti-Haitianism](#) consists of actions, beliefs, outcomes, policies, political strategies, and practices that reify the negative connotations associated with Blackness and Haitian identity. Trump and [Vance](#) both used the [admittedly](#) false [anti-Haitian rumor](#) as a form of anti-Black, anti-immigrant fear mongering to garner political support.

Examples of such strategies abound. In September 2021, for instance, U.S. Border Patrol agents [appeared to whip Haitians in Del Rio, Texas](#) amid a crackdown at the border that resulted in the [largest mass expulsion](#) of asylum seekers in recent U.S. history. Between January 2021 and February 2022, the United States expelled or deported over [20,000 Haitians](#). During the same period, more than 5,000 Haitians were deported from other countries, about half of them from the Bahamas.

Anti-Haitianism, of course, is not limited to the United States. It is a [regional and hemispheric phenomenon](#). Within scholarly and informed circles, the best known example of this form of political domination, marginalization, [racism](#), and anti-Blackness is in the Dominican Republic. In his study of race and politics, Ernesto Sagás analyzes how Dominican political elites use race and [antihaitianismo](#) to “construct national myths and then use these myths to stymie challenges to their hegemony.”

As Sagás explores, the national myth undergirding Dominican statehood was that the Dominican Republic was the most Spanish colony in the so-called New World. After Haiti’s occupation of Santo Domingo from 1822 to 1844—which liberated enslaved people, guaranteed Haitian freedom and independence, and [culminated](#) in Dominican independence—the Dominican Republic solidified its distance from Blackness and Haitian identity. Antihaitianismo then developed as an ideology based on anti-Black prejudices, stereotypes, and myths about Haitians and people of Haitian descent. Antihaitianismo, Sagás writes, scapegoats Haitians for problems within Dominican society and considers Haitians to be culturally and racially inferior Black sub-humans.

Antihaitianismo was violently on display in Dominican society in the 1937 [genocidal massacre of tens of thousands of Haitians](#) at the orders of Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo. More recently, in 2013, the country's highest court issued a ruling, locally known simply as *la sentencia*, that not only upheld a constitutional amendment that abolished birthright citizenship but also retroactively stripped the citizenship of more than 200,000 Black Dominicans of Haitian descent, rendering them stateless. Beginning in 2015, tens of thousands were forced out of the country. Now, Dominican President Luis Abinader has [announced plans](#) for a new round of mass deportations.

"A Certain Kind of Black"

In my book project, *Anti-Haitianism in Paradise: Marginalization, Stigma, and Anti-Blackness in the Bahamas*, part of the "Black Lives and Liberation" series from [Vanderbilt University Press](#), I build on Sagás's work and use anti-Haitianism to articulate the unique form of oppression Haiti and people of Haitian descent experience. In other words, I am wresting the idea and reality of anti-Haitianism in the Dominican Republic, applying it to varying social contexts, and broadening the theory to explain what anthropologist Gina Athena Ulysse—in reference to the racist treatment and degradation of Haitians in other parts of the world—refers to as ["the rejection of a certain kind of Black."](#)

The Bahamas, a small, predominantly Black Caribbean archipelago nation, has a history of anti-Haitian actions. Haitians have migrated to the Bahamas since the era of the Haitian Revolution (1791-1803). Yet on November 9, 2019, members of a Bahamian nationalist group called [Operation Sovereign Bahamas](#) protested outside a gymnasium housing hundreds of victims of Hurricane Dorian. The [devastating Category 5 hurricane](#) hovered over Grand Bahama for 24 hours starting on September 1, 2019, flooded much of the island, and mostly submerged the Abaco Islands, rendering these areas uninhabitable. Haitians who had been living in informal settlements in Abaco were displaced.

Two months later, the Operation Sovereign Bahamas demonstrators called on the Bahamian government to evict the displaced people taking shelter at the gymnasium. "The Bahamas is for Bahamians," the group's founder, Adrian Francis said, according to Bahamian news service [Eyewitness News Bahamas](#). Other members of the group held Bahamian flags and shouted at evacuees, presumably of Haitian descent, "Go home!" "Repatriation!," and "We want you out of our country!" This scene came after the same civic group had held a well-

attended [town hall meeting](#) on October 4, 2019 in New Providence, Bahamas titled "[Eradicating Illegal Immigrants in the Bahamas, Shanty Towns Down.](#)"

Cyclical White Supremacy

Anti-Haitianism operates as an ideology rooted in anti-Blackness, nationalism, political domination, and marginalization. We can also see anti-Haitianism expressed as a set of practices. But what is the relationship between antihaitianismo in the Dominican Republic and anti-Haitianism in the Bahamas? As in the United States, political elites in both nations use anti-Haitianism as a strategy, suggesting that both African-descended nations are structurally anti-Haitian. When Black Dominicans of Haitian descent were forced to leave the Dominican Republic in 2015 due to [la sentencia](#), it was partly done by the party in power as a move to garner political capital.

Another dimension of anti-Haitianism is that these nations express and exert their sovereignty through anti-Blackness. In the wake of Hurricane Dorian, the Bahamas repatriated 228 Haitian migrants, 153 of whom had lived in hurricane-ravaged Abaco. Many Haitian residents of Abaco lived in informal settlements, locally called shanty towns, and had unexpired work permits that granted them legal status in the country.

When majority Black nations assert their sovereignty through anti-Haitianism, they extend the spirit of white supremacy and anti-Blackness, traditions previously exerted on the ancestors of Bahamians and Dominicans through slavery. These cycles also expose the *cyclical* nature of white supremacy and the *durability* of anti-Blackness.

Anti-Haitianism in Hemispheric Perspective

Reflecting its hemispheric dimensions, anti-Haitianism has also developed into an important type of anti-Blackness informing other types of Blackness within nations in North America, the Caribbean, and South America. Regine O. Jackson's 2011 [Geographies of the Haitian Diaspora](#) discusses how Haitian migrants and their progeny have served in the past and present as repugnant cultural "others" in relation to the citizens of Jamaica, Guadeloupe, and Cuba.

In Haiti, in the wake of the 2010 earthquake, a United Nations-introduced cholera outbreak [claimed nearly 10,000 lives](#) and adversely affected more than 820,000 people. The United Nations remains unaccountable and unpunished for this

human rights [catastrophe](#). In addition, much earthquake aid did *not go to Haitians* but to donors' own civilian and military entities, UN agencies, international NGOs, and private contractors, suggesting that humanitarian aid can be wielded as an anti-Haitian weapon.

And in Brazil, scholars [Denise Cogo and Terezinha Silva](#) have observed the racist treatment of Haitians who were encouraged to migrate the country in the post-earthquake period to work as laborers ahead of the 2016 Olympics. The adverse experiences of Haitians in Brazil—home to the [largest Black population](#) in the Americas—expose the linkages between labor extraction, anti-Blackness, and anti-Haitianism.

Anti-Haitianism also serves other purposes within these examples, such as identity construction. The peoples of the Bahamas, Brazil, the Dominican Republic and other countries construct their identities as superior in relation to Haitian identities, producing anti-Haitian outcomes. The fact that Haitians have still not been compensated by the United Nations for cholera-related illness and death, and that the people who caused the epidemic have not been punished through Haitian or international law, reflects how Haitian lives are not only considered expendable but also unworthy of justice.

While we must consider differences in the local histories, socioeconomic conditions, and political situations of the Bahamas, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and elsewhere, a clear anti-Haitian pattern emerges in the wake of the 2010 earthquake. This pattern, on display in the news and scholarly publications, includes [alienation, death, expulsion](#), elimination, humiliation, marginalization, and stigmatization. Also, while these majority Black nations are subject to anti-Blackness, all these countries promote a unique form of anti-Blackness that specifically adversely affects Haitians. This should remind us that all that is Black is not the same type of Black, reflecting hierarchical and differentiated Blackness.

Anti-Haitianism is, in other words, an expression of a rejection of the Blackest of the Black—a revolutionary Blackness that demands freedom, equality, and dignity, but remains collectively punished and stigmatized.

By Bertin M. Louis, Jr.

Author Bio: Bertin M. Louis, Jr., PhD is [Associate Professor](#) of Anthropology and African American & Africana Studies (AAAS) at the University of Kentucky. He is

the winner of the [2023 Sam Dubal Memorial Award](#) for Anti-Colonialism and Racial Justice in Anthropology from the American Anthropological Association and the winner of the 2023-2024 [Wenner-Gren Fellowship](#) in Anthropology and Black Experiences (administered by the [School for Advanced Research](#)). Louis is also the co-editor of [Conditionally Accepted: Navigating Higher Education from the Margins](#) (University of Texas Press, 2024).

Credit Line: The following article is syndicated in partnership with the [North American Congress on Latin America \(NACLA\)](#).

Source: Independent Media Institute