



Brief History Haiti

When Christopher Columbus first landed in Hispaniola (now Haiti and the Dominican Republic) in 1492, the country was lush with fruits and tropical rainforests. Columbus claimed the island for Spain. The Spaniards exploited the island predominantly for its gold.

At the time of the first European arrivals the island was inhabited by the Taíno Indians. Shortly after arrival, however, many of the Indians died, due to ill-treatment, malnutrition, and a drastic drop in the birth-rate. Diseases brought to the island by the Europeans further decimated the Indian population.

After the Laws of Burgos (1512–1513) the Spanish began importing enslaved Africans for labour. In 1697 Spain handed the western part of Hispaniola over to France, that gave it the name of Saint-Domingue. It became the richest French colony and it became known as "*La Perle des Antilles*" or "*the Pearl of the Caribbean*".

After a slave revolt in 1791 the population turned against French reign during the Haitian revolution, which was led by Toussaint Louverture. In 1804 the rebel slaves declared the independence of Haiti, making it the first colony to gain independence. The pride of the people was immense. The French, however, demanded financial compensation for the loss of their colony. Many consider this the start of a downfall of the economic and social situation of the country. Consecutive governments failed to develop the country. From 1957 to 1986, the Duvalier family reigned the country as true dictators and many Haitians fled the country.

Aside the deteriorating political stability the country was confronted with various natural disasters. The country further spiralled down into poverty. After the reign of the Duvalier's came to an end the situation did not improve. Taking into consideration the political and social mismanagement, the complete clear cutting of the forests and the fact that it is located in the so-called hurricane belt makes Haiti very susceptible to influences from nature and hence the poorest country of Latin-America and the Western Hemisphere.

The last catastrophe was the flooding of 2008 where approximately 800 people died. This is of course not comparable to the proportion of the current earthquake.