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Hunger in Haiti made in the U.S.

The United States under enslaver president Thomas Jefferson imposed a blockade of Haiti in 1806, which lasted until 1862. This was the first of a multitude of sanctions the U.S. has imposed on Haiti, which have hindered, distorted and delayed its economic development. Haiti's historic lack of economic independence and development is the root cause of the current hunger crisis in Haiti, where according to the United Nations World Food Program: "A record 4.9 million people are projected to be in acute hunger (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification 3 and above) in Haiti — that's nearly half the country, including 1.8 million people in 'emergency' phase (IPC4)."

A woman from Cité Soleil, a Port-au-Prince neighborhood of 100,000 people considered the poorest neighborhood in Haiti, told the World Food Program what being in phase IPC4 meant to her personally. At an emergency food distribution in Cité Soleil, she told WFP staff, "Look at my belly; I haven't eaten for two days."

Haiti, according to the WFP, depends on imports for half the food and 80% of the rice it consumes, making food prices in Haiti highly impacted by worldwide inflation. A series of natural disasters over the past two decades — severe storms, floods, landslides, drought, the devastating earthquake that rocked the country in 2010, the category 4 Hurricane Matthew and an earthquake which devastated the country's southern regions in August 2021 — have added to Haiti's misery.

But long before these natural disasters, the U.S. made two major interventions that set back Haiti's economic development.

Decline of pigs and the pork industry

In 1981 there was an outbreak of swine fever in the Dominican Republic, which quickly spread to Haiti which shares the island of Hispaniola with the DR.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture and the International Development Bank came up with a plan that required Haitian farmers to kill every pig in the country. Haitian farmers got replacement pigs that were not suited to be grown under local conditions — for example, they required pens that were much better than the farmers had. So the pigs died, and Haiti's pork industry collapsed when the Creole pig became extinct, another major deleterious impact on Haiti's economic development.

Rice – domestic crop replaced by imports

Prior to the 1980s, Haiti produced so much rice, a crop that is an integral part of its African heritage, it could feed its own population while having enough left over to export. Under the rule of the Duvaliers, father François and son Jean-Claude, in 1984, the U.S. Agency for International Development pushed a plan to lower the custom duties on rice imports, so U.S.-based firms could compete.

They pushed for food aid to end hunger in Haiti, but this aid flooded Haitian markets, driving Haitian peasants into bankruptcy. However the food aid program was very profitable for the U.S. firms, which produced and transported rice in particular.

Through all the turmoil that followed the political upheaval, referred to as “dechoukaj” by Haitians, which removed Jean-Claude Duvalier, U.S. rice producers from Miami managed to strengthen their hold in Haiti, which then became their fourth largest market. By 2004, rice exports to Haiti amounted to \$80 million.

How the U.S. used its political and economic hold on Haiti to keep it from producing the rice it needs certainly impacted Haiti's economy.

Workers response

It is difficult to organize unions in a country where only 23% of the workers have a steady job. ([statista.com](https://www.statista.com)) Holding mass demonstrations that bring out tens of thousands of protesters into the streets has also become increasingly harder, given the political turmoil growing ever more deadly.

The Taiwanese-owned textile company Everest Apparel Haïti S.A., which is located in the new industrial park Bill and Hilary Clinton sponsored in northeast Haiti near the Dominican border, has been attacking the three unions which have organized in their plants.



Everest Apparel Haïti S.A.

The unions have responded with calls for two go-slow strikes March 23 and March 28, with notice given to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (Ministère des Affaires Sociales et du Travail-MAST) to make these slowdowns legal.

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