

Activity Five: Haiti _____

SHIPWRECKED BETWEEN COUNTRIES

In a shrinking world characterized by large scale migrations, tourism, and telecommunications, the 'other' is no longer on the other side of the world.

—Marilyn Houlberg, "Haitian Studio Photography," p. 65.



The migration of people in and from the Caribbean is unique for a number of reasons. First, migration from the Caribbean goes to three distinct regions of the world: North America, South America, and Europe. Second, inter-island migration is important in following the flows. For example, Barbadians may first go to the Virgin Islands then to New York. Third, because of the size of these small island nations, remittances from family members living abroad are significant to their economies. Finally, the diversity of the people migrating is the greatest—both unskilled and professional workers make up the flows.¹

Ayiti, "land of mountains," is what the Taino Indians who originally inhabited the island called Haiti. The French called the island Saint Domingue during the colonial period that lasted 100 years. The island produced coffee, indigo, sugar, and cotton for France. A pattern of social classes that is present today can be traced back to this period of history—three main classes, the whites, who dominated and controlled the government and the economy; the *Affranchis*, who were free people of color and later became known as mulattos; and the African slaves. The tensions and conflicts that began in the colonial period between these groups continues to shape current political problems.

Migration has long been part of the history of Haiti. Haitians have migrated to other islands in the Caribbean such as Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and the Bahamas as well as to the United States. In the early 1900s, many Haitians went to Cuba to work in the sugar industry. The Dominican Republic was also a recipient of Haitian workers in the sugar industry, and despite tense relations between the two countries there is still a clandestine network of Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic. But the largest receiver has been the United States.

The first Haitians that migrated to the United States were those escaping the Revolution in 1804 in which African slaves overthrew the French rule of Haiti and established independence. Most of those migrants settled in the New Orleans area. Then during the occupation of Haiti by the United States from 1915 to 1934, many Haitians went to United States.

The next time in Haitian history that saw professionals leave the island for the United States was in the 1950s with the election as president of Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier. The Duvalier Family controlled Haiti

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from the late 1950s to 1986. During his reign of power he had help from the army, the Catholic Church, and Voodoo cults (Voodoo is a mixture of African religious elements and Christian elements). A group that began when he was in power was the *Tonton Macoutes* or bogey men, which were a paramilitary group that assisted Papa Doc in maintaining control of all opposition. Papa Doc died in 1971 and was replaced by his son, Jean Claude Duvalier, also known as "Baby Doc," who continued his father's policies until he fled to France in 1986. The opposition to the Duvaliers was not well organized, and the period following the fall of the Duvaliers saw a series of military coups and failed elections. And when the President-elect Jean Baptiste Aristide was forced into exile by a military coup, Haitians again started to leave the island. In 1990, Father Jean Bertrand Aristide was elected President. A coup in 1991 forced him out of the country.

The United Nations and the Organization of American States has been attempting to negotiate a settlement between Lt. Colonel Raoul Cédras, the leader of the military, and President Jean Bertrand Aristide. An embargo has been imposed on the island until the conflict is resolved. Also, because of the political turmoil on the island, many corporations have pulled out.

Why Haitians are fleeing their island demonstrates the potential complexity of migration. From the point of view of a receiving community, the United States, the questions are many. What should be done with the Haitians that have been detained at the Krome North Service Processing Center in Florida? How should the case of these Haitians be resolved? Are they political or economic refugees? How does the treatment of Haitians differ from other refugees?

Then there are international issues such as whether Haitian boats are being stopped in international waters or territorial waters. Other nations are dealing with this same issue. The debate about what to do with Haitian immigrants is still unresolved and serves to illustrate that the question why do people move is related not just to the sending community but also to the receiving community.

Outline of Activity

Students will look at paintings by a contemporary Haitian artist that depict the political life in Haiti. In addition, students will read a poem that describes the poverty in Haiti and expresses the author's sentiments about this poverty. Students will also analyze the messages in political cartoons. The students will construct a Haitian *tap taps* bus decorating it to illustrate the reasons people leave Haiti.

Extension Questions

1. How should nations deal with problems in other nations? Should they get involved, or should they simply ignore them? What should be the responsibility of one nation to another?
2. How would you compare the case of Haitians to the other cases that have been presented?
3. How would it feel to be caught and returned to the place you were trying to leave?

4. What obstacles have we seen that prevent people from leaving their communities? And what obstacles have we seen that prevent people from entering communities?

Related Issues

- Haitians in Guantanamo who are HIV positive or have AIDS.
- The international laws concerning political refugees and repatriation
- Haitians at the Krome North Processing Center
- Difference between being caught on international waters and in territorial waters of a country
- Haitians vs. Cubans

**Reference
Materials**

Haiti: Feeding the Spirit. New York: Aperture Foundation Inc., 1992.

Levine, Barry B. *The Caribbean Exodus*. New York: Praeger Press, 1987.

Stebich, Ute. *A Haitian Celebration: Art and Culture*. Milwaukee: Milwaukee Art Museum, 1992.

National Labor Committee. *Haiti After the Coup: Sweatshop or Real Development?* New York: National Labor Committee Education Fund in Support of the Worker & Human Rights in Central America, 1993.

Endnotes

¹Aaron Segal, "The Caribbean Exodus in a Global Context: Comparative Migration Experiences," in *The Caribbean Exodus*, ed. Barry B. Levine (New York: Praeger Press, 1987), 45.

SHIPWRECKED BETWEEN COUNTRIES ACTIVITY CARD

Haiti is one of the only French-speaking countries in the Caribbean. It is approximately 700 miles southeast of Florida. Haiti is also one of the poorest countries of the Western Hemisphere. Different groups in Haiti have been fighting for power and control of the government. In 1991 Jean Bertrand Aristide was elected president, but the military soon forced him out of the country.

Since 1991, the Coast Guard has rescued about 40,000 Haitians headed towards the United States. Haitians are leaving on small sailboats which are overcrowded and poorly made. Depending on the currents, it may take from a week to a month to make it to the United States. Many of the boats are found by the Coast Guard before they arrive in the United States. When the people are returned to Haiti, this is called repatriation. Some Haitians who have made it to the United States are being held at the Krome North Service Processing Center in Florida. Others were taken to the Guantanamo Naval Base on the island of Cuba. There is much debate about what to do with the Haitians who are headed to the United States.

Many Haitians are seeking political asylum because they feel their life is in danger. Such a person needs to apply for political asylum through a formal process. If their claim is valid then they are assigned a lawyer to help them fill out the applications and the other documents needed.

Look at the paintings and the political cartoon. Read the poem out loud with the group. Answer the following questions with the group:

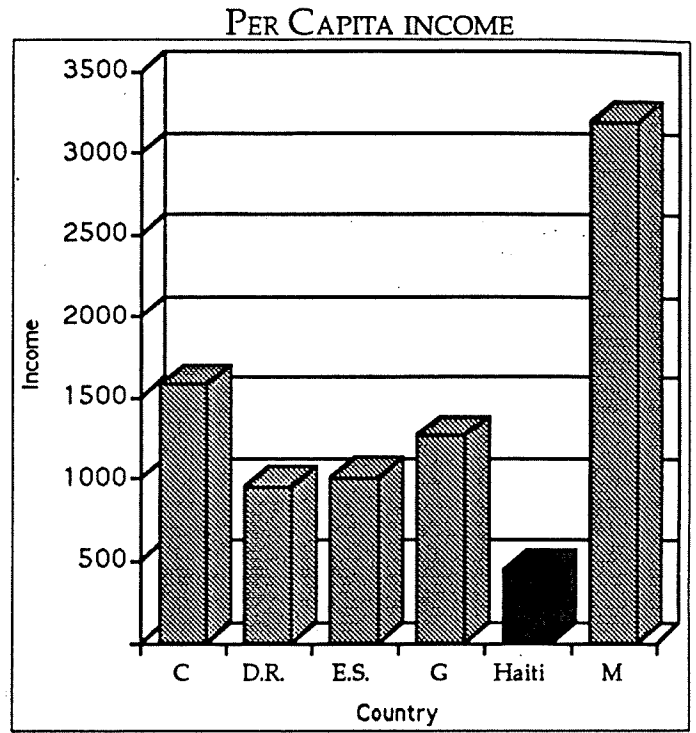
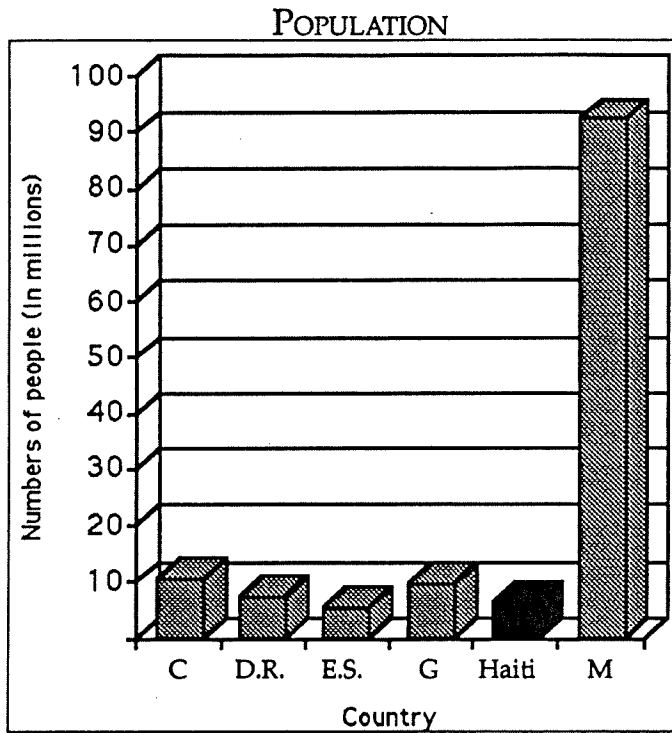
1. Who are the *Tontons Macoutes*? Describe what is happening in the paintings.
2. Describe the feeling you get when you read the poem. Who is the voice in the poem? What feelings is this voice expressing?
3. What is the message in the political cartoon? How might this message affect a person's decision to leave the country?
4. From the information you have in the Resource Cards, why would people leave Haiti?
5. How does migration change a community or country?

GROUP TASK

In Haiti, *tap-taps* are buses which are decorated with pictures, sayings, or designs that are important to the owner. Look at the picture of the *tap-taps* on Resource Card 4.

With your group, construct a *tap-tap* and decorate it. Include in the decorations the reasons people are leaving Haiti. Think about the paintings, the poem, and the cartoons you looked at and try to include some of this information on your *tap-tap*.

SHIPWRECKED BETWEEN COUNTRIES DATA AND MAP CARD

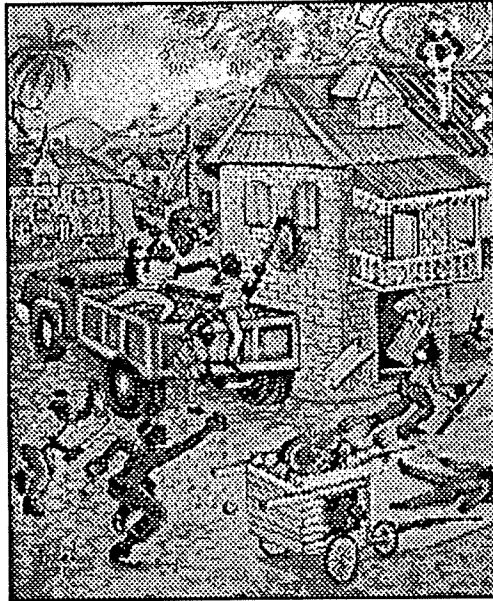


MAP OF HAITI

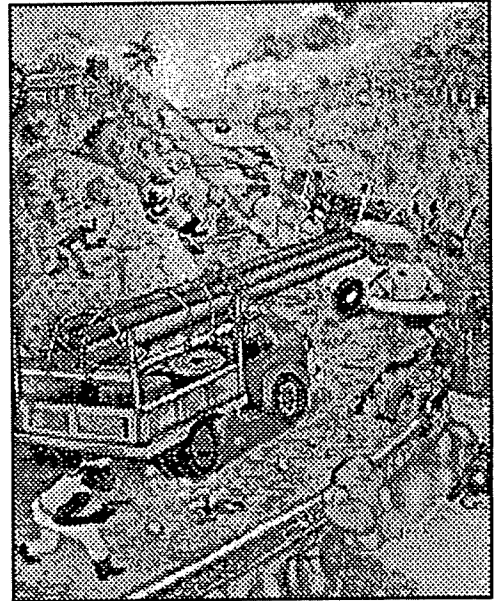


SHIPWRECKED BETWEEN COUNTRIES
RESOURCE CARD 1

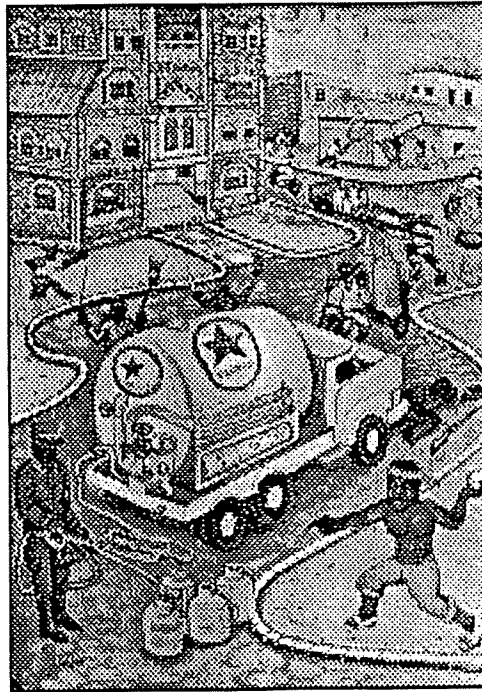
The *Tonton Macoutes*, which means the bogey men, are a special police force that were started by President Francois Duvalier in 1957. They are still in existence today. The paintings shown below are by Haitian artist Lionel St. Eloi.



Macoutes are Killed Outside their House



A Macoute Truck is Ambushed



Man with Rock Threatens Texaco Man

SHIPWRECKED BETWEEN COUNTRIES RESOURCE CARD 2

KODAK

Tourist, don't take my picture
Don't take my picture, tourist
I'm too ugly
Too dirty
Too meager and too thin
Don't take my picture, white
Mr. Eastman wouldn't approve
I'm too ugly, too thin
And your Kodak will break
I'm too dirty and too black
Your Kodak will burst
Don't take my portrait, tourist
Let me be, white
Don't photograph my donkey
Donkeys here carry too much
Donkeys here are too little
Donkeys here don't eat
Tourist, don't shoot my house
My house is a house of hay
Don't take a picture of my poor house
My house is a house of clay
Go shoot the National Palace
Shoot Bicentennial Avenue
But don't take a picture of my tree
Tourist, I'm barefoot
And my clothes are all torn
Isn't this what you see?
Tourist, look at my hair
Your Kodak's not used to its color
Tourist, don't take my picture
You won't understand my pose
You won't understand a thing
My affairs aren't yours, tourist
Gimme five cents
And be on your way

Felix Morisseau-Leroy
(Translated by Jeffrey Knapp)

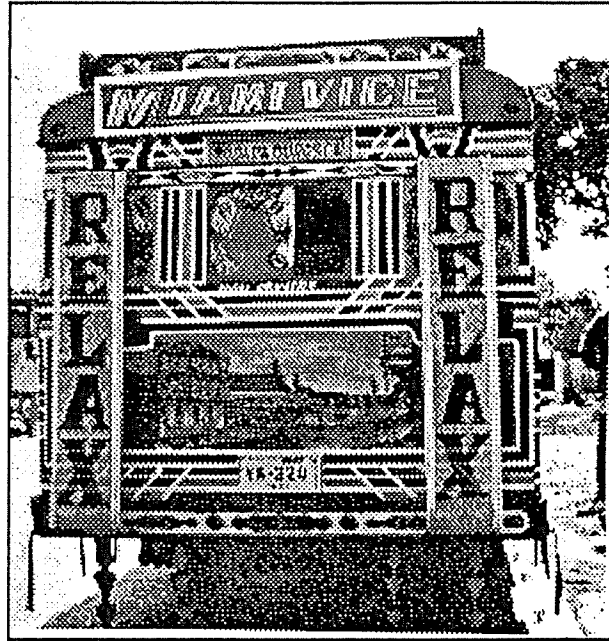
from *Haiti: Feeding the Spirit*, Aperture Foundation, 1992.

SHIPWRECKED BETWEEN COUNTRIES
RESOURCE CARD 3

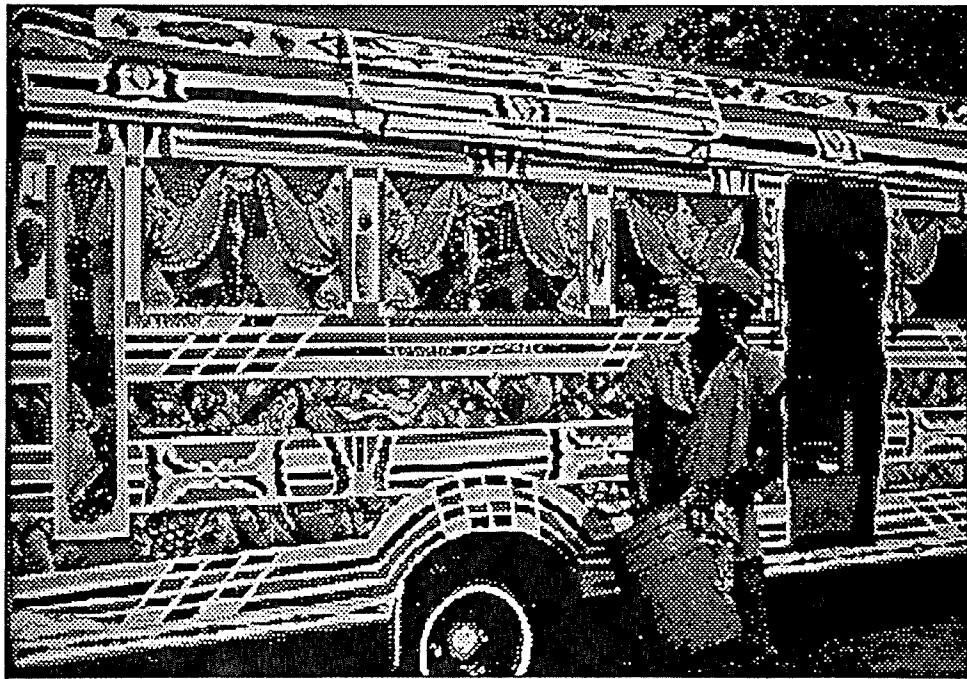


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SHIPWRECKED BETWEEN COUNTRIES
RESOURCE CARD 4



Tap-Tap painted with Miami Vice.



Tap-Tap painted with curtains.

© Copyright 1988 by *African Arts* from "Divine Horsepower" by Donald Consentino

SHIPWRECKED BETWEEN COUNTRIES
INDIVIDUAL REPORT

NAME _____

1. Why do you think the Haitians are leaving Haiti?

2. What obstacles do the Haitians face in leaving their country?