
‘The Future of Haiti Is Very, Very Bright’

Here is the toast by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Haitian President Elie Lescot, Oct. 14, 1943, at the White House:

This is a particularly happy evening for me, because it carries me back more than a quarter of a century. The

President of Haiti is a very old personal friend of mine, and a good friend of most of the people who are here at the table tonight.

I said it carries me back a quarter of a century, because I had something to do with what I hope eventually will be recognized as having been of help to the Republic of Haiti. It goes back to when I myself sent marines to Haiti through a period of great unrest in that Republic. We made a promise then that some day Haiti would be independent, with its own Government, its own Republic.

It was a curious circumstance that many years later, in 1934, I came back to make a decision: I felt that the time had come for the complete independence of the Republic of Haiti; I felt that they could go their own way, with their own independent Government, and their own sovereignty.

I am very proud of what has happened during the last ten years. There were some “doubting Thomases,” as President Lescot knows. There were some people who said “No,” it was too early. But I promised his predecessor in July of 1934 that the marines would be out by the end of August, and they were. And since that time, one of the experiments of my life has been permanently successful, because in the last ten years of the Republic of Haiti not a single American has been there with a gun. Haiti has made good in every way. I regard the Nation’s advance in prosperity and in friendship during those ten years as something that ought to be written up in the history books.

I keep talking, not just when the President comes here to visit me, but on many other occasions, about the development of Haiti. Those of you who have been there know it is one of the most beautiful countries in the world. It has everything. It has everything above the ground, and everything under the ground. I was talking to the President about one section of Haiti that I never personally visited, although I saw it from the top of some mountains, a section in about the middle of the Republic that is so high that you find there the most beautiful groves and forests of pine trees, a country where in January or February you find ice in the streams, and not very far away you get down to a place where you can grow everything that grows. It is an amazing place. I strongly recommend that whenever you get a chance, if you haven’t been there, that you go to Haiti.

I think it was a certain Queen of England who said that after her death “Calais” would be found written on her heart. When I die, I think that “Haiti” is going to be

written on my heart, because for all these years I have had the most intense interest in the Republic of Haiti, and the development of its people in a way that will never mean exploitation by any other Nation. They ought to develop for themselves, and they have every opportunity in the world to do so. Under President Lescot and his predecessor, very great strides have been made. It is becoming a self-contained country, with divergent resources of all sorts of things. We have been talking about economics already, and the fact that Haiti has insufficient industries. And yet there are dozens of articles down there which they can grow and produce the raw materials for, and manufacture themselves. It is not against our interest, because there are a great many things that we can make that they can’t make, and there are lots of things that they can make that we can’t make. That forms the basis of trade. . . .

In that way, and through the diversification of their crops, and the diversification of their industries, the future of Haiti is very, very bright.

We have to remember, as we sometimes forget it in this country, that Haiti is a great deal more than just another island in the West Indies. Most of the islands in the West Indies have relatively small populations. The Haitian part of the Island of Santo Domingo contains nearly three million people—over two hundred people per square mile. Because of this density of population, they don’t even raise enough food to sustain the entire population.

One of the things that we want to help them on, in order to be self-sustaining, is the growing of more of their own food supplies. It will help them. And it will help us, for it may teach us some day to make Puerto Rico self-sustaining. We have two million people in Puerto Rico, and almost everything they eat is bought on the outside. The money to buy their own food doesn’t go into their pockets, it goes into the pockets of China, and Mexico, and the United States.

And so, in this new civilization that we are coming to, of mutual aid and in a cooperative management between all the Nations of the world, I think that not only can Haiti learn a lot from us, but we can learn a lot from Haiti.

It is a wonderful thing that during all these years we have had such good friends down there in the government of Haiti—none more than my old friend, President Lescot, who used to be with us in Washington, and who has come back, and who we hope will come back many, many times again.