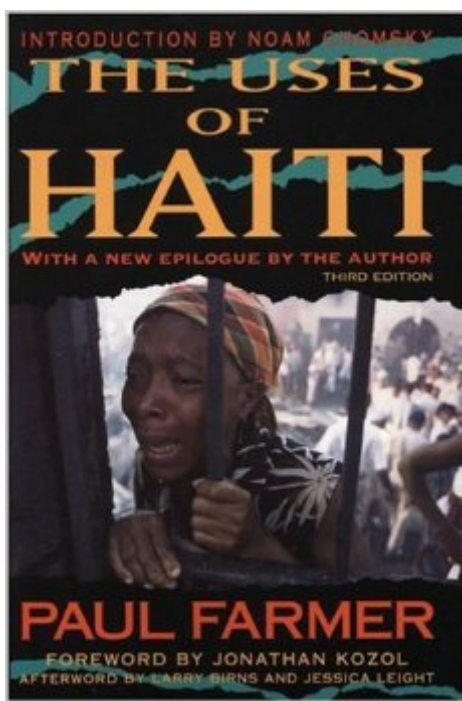


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The Uses Of Haiti



Synopsis

The Uses of Haiti tells the truth about uncomfortable matters—uncomfortable, that is, for the structures of power and the doctrinal framework that protects them from scrutiny. It tells the truth about what has been happening in Haiti, and the US role in its bitter fate. —Noam Chomsky, from the introduction

In this third edition of the classic *The Uses of Haiti*, Paul Farmer looks at what has happened to the health of the poor in Haiti since the coup. Winner of a McArthur Genius Award, Paul Farmer is a physician and anthropologist who has worked for 25 years in Haiti, where he serves as medical director of a hospital serving the rural poor. He is the subject of the Tracy Kidder biography, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is not an easy book for an American to read. Page after page confronts us with the links between U.S. policies and the horrible suffering of poor Haitians, which continues to this day. It exposes the lies we have told ourselves to justify this treatment—demonizing Haitians who seek a more just international order (from the leaders of the Haitian revolution through the opposition to the U.S. occupation to the current pro-democracy movement), distorting or misrepresenting facts about Haiti, and so on. But a reader who disables his or her defense mechanisms will find a coherent explanation for Haiti's current misery, and clear directives for how we can help end it. But the book says almost as much about America as it does about Haiti: how we justify doing things abroad that we would never tolerate at home, with the willing collaboration of the press we trust to keep

government honest. Uses of Haiti is a combination of emotion and academic rigor, which is unsettling to most readers used to one or the other. But the emotion (a normal and human response to 20 years of treating Haiti's sick), and rigor (the author is an MD and a PhD in anthropology) complement each other, if the coexistence is sometimes awkward.

It is very hard to view the world with anything but pure cynicism after reading the book. Even the title suggests it. Reading about the history and the current troubles of this tiny nation, which has so much in common with the United States, is both depressing and maddening. This book is a very important read for anyone who is interested in US foreign policy or Latin America. As Farmer says, Haiti is usually not thought of as part of Latin America (indeed, it's usually not thought of at all) but it should be. Like all of Farmer's books, it is extremely well written: it is a fairly quick read that is chock full of information, but it is never overly technical. Someone who is not familiar with the subject or the region (like me, before I read this book) would have no problem reading it. In fact, I suggest that you keep 2 or 3 copies on you at all times. That way when someone makes an ignorant comment about Voodoo (no matter how multi-cultural and intelligent they're trying to sound) you can hand them a copy and tell them to learn a bit more about Haiti. EDIT - There seems to be something of a smear campaign going on against this book. The book was originally published in 1994, and this edition came out in 2003. Therefore, the current happenings in Haiti are not mentioned in the book. One reviewer mentioned that Farmer is so rich because Aristide is lining his pockets. This reviewer is overlooking the fact that Farmer is one of the head doctors at one of the largest hospitals in the US (a post that pays a pretty penny), and teaches at Harvard (ditto), and does frequent speaking tours, is a published author, and much more. Farmer is also quite open about the fact that he lives in a tiny apartment in a very bleak area of Boston, and puts his tremendous earnings right back into Partners in Health.

Dr. Paul Farmer has had incredible amounts of experience, close to 20 years, living and working for the poor people of Haiti. The key word here is poor, because regardless of what detractors like a fellow reviewer on this page might say, the plight of the poor people of Haiti has forever been slighted and undermined by subtle but draconian US policies. What Dr. Farmer exposes in Uses of Haiti, is the true nature of the war being waged against the poor of Haiti (and similar situations occur worldwide), and he uses meticulously researched details that are not very well known to the general public. I would rather take the word of a medical anthropologist who for close to two decades has been treating the poor people of rural Haiti for free over the word of someone who claims to have

"been there" and endorses the right of a military junta to overthrow a popularly elected president. Uses of Haiti is a riveting read from top to bottom and comes from someone 99.9% of people would agree has his heart in the right place i.e. alleviating the plight of the Haitian poor.

I read Dr. Farmer's first book "Aids and Accusation" after it was given to me by his sister Jennifer. The book really opened my eyes to the modern Haitian condition and how the origin of AIDS has been "pinned" on this tiny nation. "The Uses of Haiti" tells the truth about the U.S. policy towards Haiti, its upperhanded subversion of democracy for a people it considers less-than-human; a policy that, unfortunately, is not restricted to just Haiti. I only wish that Dr. Farmer's work could be exposed to a larger audience.

There is no doubt that Paul Farmer's account of the US policy towards Haiti is biased. Certainly his close relationship with Aristide goes unmentioned but has a huge influence on his analysis of Aristide's election, overthrow, and re-instatement -- and this is unfortunate. As someone who has spent time in Haiti, though, I do not believe that his criticisms of the US were too biased or unfounded in any way. To experience Haiti is to experience how the evils of colonialism, slavery, US imperialism, and the 'development machine' can cause deep and lasting suffering; as a physician, Paul Farmer confronts this suffering each day, and as an anthropologist, he can analyze how this suffering have affected the Haitian people as a whole. His anger sometimes makes his writing unweildy and tough to follow, but the education this book provides is well worth the effort (and well worth the nuisance of reading the information about Aristide with a grain of salt). Because this book tells us much about the US that we have not learned, and would rather not believe, this book is hard to read -- but for those same reasons, it is essential that one takes the time to do so.

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