

The Haitian Migration and Discrimination in the United States between 1980-1990 and the War on Drugs

“Haitians were never attractive to the United States as credible migrants with potential to gain citizenship and they will never be.”¹

Slavery and involuntary servitude ended under the 13th Amendment except for those duly convicted and punished for a crime.² Slavery systematically locked African Americans out of wealth and citizenship that hindered equal representation in the United States. In the late twentieth century, African Americans and other peoples of color have continued to face discrimination; this included immigrants who crossed national borders to seek asylum. Racism is nestled within the fabric of the United States and woven into its institutions of power, crime bills, and economic subjugation. The government used crime as a tool to punish African Americans and other peoples of color, including but not limited to Asians, Mexicans, Haitians, and Cuban migrants and immigrants, and, therefore, reduced these groups to second-class citizenship.

From the reversal of the Civil Rights Act of 1875 and the creation of Black Codes at the birth of Jim Crow South, America’s war on blacks had far reaching consequences for centuries that continued to alienate black citizens and non-citizens based on race. Late 20th century policy from the Nixon administration blamed the drug epidemic on black Americans and became the catalyst for the drug war crisis. Following Nixon, the Cold War was coupled with Ronald Reagan’s war on drugs campaign during the Haitian and Cuban migrations between 1980 and 1990. Cuban asylum was predicated on communist ideals that allowed them to migrate more efficiently than Haitians. The term “political refugees” described Cuban migrants and the U.S. government

¹ Malissia Lennox, “Refugees, Racism, and Reparations: A Critique of the United States’ Haitian Immigration Policy,” *Stanford Law Review* 45, no. 3 (1993): p. 687, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229010>, 699.

² [Amendment] U.S. Const. amend. XIII. Sec. 1.

allowed them to seek asylum based on sponsorship by family members or friends who resided in the United States. The government considered Haitians economic migrants who sought to flee poverty rather than a communist regime. Historians have argued that the government's refusal to permit Haitians to seek asylum in the United States had its roots in U.S. anti-communist ideals, economics, and racism.

Historians have failed to detail what type of racism toward black people other than mass incarceration and skin color that gave way to the refoulement of Haitian refugees. Between Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton, the commonality of their administrations lies in what many historians label "a discrimination against boat people." Further, these four administrations were responsible for a mass media campaign that publicized African Americans as drug dealers, criminals, and violent people during and after the post-Cold War years. "Haitians were never attractive to the United States as credible migrants with potential to gain citizenship"³, due to the media campaign against African Americans and the government's war on drugs. Essentially, Haitian refugees, because of their skin color, were caught in a web of the Cold War and the war on drugs in the United States.

This essay will explore past arguments from authors and legal scholars who have written on the trials and tribulations of Cuban and Haitian refugees between 1980 and 1990. Furthermore, this study will explore the deterrence of Haitian and Cuban asylum seekers with an emphasis on the causes of U.S. discriminatory practices against Haitians refugees. It will also explore the historical roots of policies driven by early administrations that crafted legislation to deter both Haitians and Cubans, beginning with the policies of the Carter and Nixon administrations, in addition to the policies of the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton administrations that followed. The terms

³ Malissia Lennox, 699.

“migrants” and “refugees” will be used for historical purposes based on how Cubans and Haitians were treated under the 1980 Refugee Act and U.S. policies that viewed Haitians as economic refugees and the Cubans as political migrants seeking asylum.⁴ The discussion will compare circumstances and policies from both countries and highlight the international affairs between the United States, Cuba, and Haiti. Further, it will explore the Cold War dynamics and political and economic motivations that helped form immigration policy.

Past arguments from several authors are compiled to create a foundation for this research from a historical perspective to further explore the trends, patterns, debates, and gaps in Cuban-Haitian migration history. This research offers a comparative history, transnational history, geographical history, and legal history that discusses economics, politics, migrant detention experiences, the war on drugs, violence, and racism at the borders during Caribbean migration. Furthermore, it explores racism as a key dynamic and adds new research by exploring the connection between Haitian migrants and American race relations and the war on drugs. Moreover, these findings will explore how Cubans were treated as political refugees and had better chances of seeking asylum through access to sponsorships, financial stability, ideology, and opportunities for parole than Haitians due to U.S. anti-communism. The contradictions of U.S. policy towards Haitians who were perceived as economic migrants, even though studies have shown that Haitians suffered under brutal repression from dictators, will also be highlighted.

Written in 1981, Eulalia D. de Conde’s article “Haitian Refugees: A Dilemma for the United States,” argued that Haitian refugees are both political and economic refugees whom the U.S. government should legally accept, parole, and grant asylum in the United States. As Conde

⁴ Eulalia D. de Conde, “Haitian Refugees: A Dilemma for the United States.” *SAIS Review (1956-1989)*1, no. 2 (1981): 71–79. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45349094>.

notes, Jean Claude Duvalier, the dictator, and president for life of Haiti nicknamed Baby Doc, was known for his voodoo practices, brutal repression, and violence toward Haitian citizens during the mid-twentieth century. The author notes that the Haitian Refugee Project, an organization working for the Haitians, argued that calling them economic refugees serves as a rationalization to the policy of refoulement.⁵ Haitians continued to be discriminated against racially and economically as an excuse that justified forcible return. According to the Refugee Act of 1980, “No contracting State shall expel or return a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.”⁶ This loophole, however, reveals the dilemma the United States had created within immigration laws by specifically linking asylum to political persecution over an economic crisis despite the provisions of the Refugee Act.

To ignore the history of Haiti and what led to the poverty rate that exists there today, according to Loyd and Mountz, tends to erase how important and lucrative Haiti was prior to its independence. After the revolution of enslaved peoples in Haiti, the French government forced the country to pay reparations in the sum of \$30 million for loss of property for twenty years. Loyd and Mountz argue that the United States has a long political history of not only the exploitation of Haitian peoples and natural resources, but also for meddling in Haitian governance. The authors state that in the early twentieth century the United States began to increase its military presence to occupy Haiti to make it attractive to foreign investors: “During the occupation, hundreds of

⁵ Eulalia D. de Conde, 76.

⁶ Eulalia D. de Conde, 71.

thousands of Haitians were encouraged to work in U.S.-controlled sugar plantations and mills in the neighboring Dominican Republic and Cuba.”⁷

Norman L. Zucker and Naomi Flink Zucker note in *Desperate Crossings: Seeking Refuge in America* that although Haitian dictators were brutal and repressive under the auspices of a paramilitary force that had the power to arrest, imprison and torture its citizens, the United States continued to ignore the human rights crisis because Haiti helped condemn Cuban communism.⁸ Haitian officials were strategic in their efforts to vote to expel Cuba from the Organization of the Americas, and later sanctioned the communist state. These efforts by the Haitian government in turn enabled it to receive economic aid. The United States’ historical tendency of topography of power, which is the process of transformation and displacement, and the relationships between political, military, and economic powers was an incentive for U.S. policy to keep Haitians in Haiti. Globalization and trade under a dictatorship and the economic advantages the United States gained from countries that have low economic wages, turned a blind eye to brutal repression from the Haitian government. In the 1930s, unskilled Haitians under the U.S. occupation were encouraged to work in the sugar mills and plantations in Cuba and the Dominican Republic but ended after the massacre of Haitian migrants ordered by Dominican president Raphael Trujillo.⁹ In an article written by Gilbert Loescher and John Scanlan, “Human Rights, U.S. Foreign Policy, and Haitian

⁷ Jenna M. Loyd and Alison Mountz, *Boats, Borders, and Bases: Race, the Cold War, and the Rise of Migration Detention in the United States* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 43-44.

⁸ Norman L. Zucker and Naomi Flink Zucker, *Desperate Crossings: Seeking Refuge in America* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 35.

⁹ Gilbert Loescher and John Scanlan, “Human Rights, U.S. Foreign Policy, and Haitian Refugees,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 26, no. 3 (1984): pp. 313-356, <https://doi.org/10.2307/165673>, 314.

Refugees,” the authors argue that “shared anticommunist objectives have taken precedent over human rights concerns in Haiti dating back to the late 1950s.”¹⁰

As poverty rates began to rise in Haiti in tandem with the brutal regime Francois Duvalier, political repression, and torture in prisons, many Haitians began to flee and seek asylum in nearby areas, such as the United States, Bahamas, Canada, and Puerto Rico. According to Conde, in August of 1972, the Nixon administration received a request from Francois Duvalier for \$5 to \$10 million dollars in firearms. Arm sales initially were suspended by the Kennedy administration in protest of terrorism under Duvalier’s regime, however, Nixon resumed sales. Later Duvalier hired an American company to train his paramilitary group in combat and counterinsurgency tactics.¹¹ Though the U.S. acknowledged that economic resources are rarely contributed to Haitian citizens’ public health, education, or better agricultural employment opportunities, which were limited due to soil erosion, the United States continued to invest and provide economic aid to Haiti.¹² According to Conde, “U.S. investments in Haiti rose from \$18.5 million in 1972 to 60.5 million in 1975, with principal interests that reside in clothing, toys, sporting goods, office machine and parts, and electric power machinery.”¹³ The United States capitalized off countries under dictatorships with low wages, the absence of labor unions, and the illegality of strikes within foreign countries.

In Jenna M. Loyd and Allison Mountz’s book, *Boats, Borders, and Bases*, the authors discuss race, the Cold War, and the rise of migration detention in the United States. They posit that the “U.S. Cold War response to these Caribbean migrations established the legal and

¹⁰ Loescher, Scanlan, 315.

¹¹ Eulalia D. de Conde, 72-73.

¹² Loescher, Scanlan, 317.

¹³ Eulalia D. de Conde, 71.

institutional basis for today's migration-detention and border-deterrence regime."¹⁴ On August 5, 1980, the director of Cuban-Haitian Task Force wrote a memorandum that informed camp populations in Fort Chaffe, Arkansas, on the consolidation efforts underway for Cuban entrants.¹⁵ Though considered a prison camp, there was a stark difference as Cubans were given brochures about the camp, information on weather, education, and recreational activities upon arrival. Fort Chaffee in Arkansas was considered less hostile than other settlements for people who arrived from the Caribbean as so many of the efforts were directed towards proper assimilation. Though many Cubans faced extreme push back and violence from Immigration and Naturalization Services officials, but fortunately, their chances of seeking sponsorship and parole were much greater than refugees from Haiti. Haitians were essentially locked in prisons without access to legal aid, Creole translators, or sponsorships that could essentially aid in their parole.

A memo drafted to Senator Ted Kennedy from Eugene Eldenberg explained it well when he mentioned that "the refugee act set up means to select groups of refugees overseas for admission to the United States and grant asylum to aliens already present in the United States who can demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution if returned to their country of origin...the act was not drafted to handle a sudden influx of people who had neither overseas processing nor valid documentation...and because of asylum procedure is so lengthy, many arrivals will be left in an undetermined immigration."¹⁶ Scholars have argued that unskilled Haitian refugees who lacked education, financial stability, and literacy were shunned by U.S. government officials. Unfair treatment of Haitians based on race and economic status in the 1980s at the hands of the Immigration

¹⁴ Loyd and Mountz, 43-44.

¹⁵ Chris Holmes (Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, n.d.).

¹⁶ Ted Kennedy, "Intergovernmental Relations," Memorandum § (1980), pp 1.

and Naturalization Service included detention in remote locations without access to legal representation. This method stemmed from the federal deterrence doctrine crafted in the 1980s.¹⁷ Attorney Ira J. Kurzban in 1993 introduced a psychological approach that identified thwarted foreign policy factors from the U.S. government as additional reasons for discrimination as well. Claims of unfair treatment based on race and economic status toward Haitian migrants in the 1980s derived from the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

This method stems from the deterrence doctrine crafted in the 1980s which was a federal strategy in the Caribbean.¹⁸ While Kurzban recognized institutional racism and political and economic factors as reasons for refoulement of Haitians, the lawyer challenged scholars to dig deeper into the psychological effects of the legal challenges government officials have faced for over two decades in court litigations.¹⁹ In his article, “United States Policy Toward Haitian Refugees: Is It Only Institutionalized Racism? Haitian Detentions and Discrimination,” Kurzban states that the public thrashing of the U.S. in so many cases created the government’s psychological need to “get its way” constitutes policymaking regarding Haitian refugees. This argument is backed by several examples; for instance, in the 1981, the Florida case of *Louis v. Meissner* to stop the deportation of 90 Haitians the government utilized what Kurzban recognized as an illegal mass exclusion process which denied access to counsel by preventing attorneys from entering locked prison doors to inform Haitians of their rights.²⁰

¹⁷ Jenna M. Loyd and Alison Mountz, *Boats, Borders, and Bases: Race, the Cold War, and the Rise of Migration Detention in the United States* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 3.

¹⁸ Loyd and Mountz, 3.

¹⁹ Kurzban, Ira J. “United States Policy Toward Haitian Refugees: Is It Only Institutionalized Racism?” *In Defense of the Alien* 16 (1993): 130–34. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23140869>.

²⁰ Ira Kurzban, 130-134.

On October 5, 1984, the Reagan administration introduced the International Security and Development Act in which title VIII banned the Haitian government from receiving economic assistance, food, and development if they continued to participate in the illegal emigration to the United States and did not fix its human rights conditions.²¹ Economic support to Haiti was contingent on keeping Haitians on their soil. Why was it Haitians could not be used to promote a human rights agenda within U.S. foreign policy goals? As Kurzban states, the United States only stood behind refugees' communist and "terroristic Islamic" states. His argument lies in the notion that poverty, economic challenges, lack of political strength, and being black are all causations of Haitian discrimination.²²

With big business at the forefront, economic assistance from the Reagan administration was permitted to operate under private and voluntary organizations. In addition, this bill gave Congress the greenlight to urge the president to focus his attention on the possibility of Cubans participating in illicit drug trafficking and corruption across the borders. The Congressional records from October 5, 1984, also notes that assistance from the Royal Commission in investigating narcotics in the Bahamas where 60 percent of the population was Haitian immigrants.²³ Reagan thus began to launch his anti-drug media campaign on U.S. news outlets and addressed the nation from the White House alongside wife and First Lady. Nancy Reagan became the face of the Drug Awareness, Resistance and Education (D.A.R.E.) program that essentially pricked the hearts of American households and public-school systems.

²¹ Congress.gov. "H.R.6409 - 98th Congress (1983-1984): International Security and Development Cooperation Act of 1984." October 5, 1984. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/98th-congress/house-bill/6409>.

²² Ira Kurzman, 133.

²³ Loyd and Mountz, 35.

According to Loyd and Mountz, the war on drugs produced efforts to accelerate the criminalization and expulsion of noncitizens.²⁴ However, the template was laid during the Reagan administration. What was going on in America between 1980 and 1990 besides the Cold War? Not only did the United States government legislate policy towards the refoulement of Haitian refugees from an economic standpoint as a loophole to push the agenda for communist dictatorships in Cuba, but it also legislated policy and reshaped the landscape towards African Americans through media and crack cocaine policies in black communities. To add to this historiography, this essay argues that the Reagan administration's continuation of Nixon's war on drugs and the purposeful sensational media images surrounding the epidemic of crack cocaine—focused on black Americans in low-income communities—helped justify the blocking of poor black Haitian refugees and claimed they were economic refugees rather than political refugees. While Congressman Benjamin S. Rosenthal recognized Nixon's efforts to end the opium industry in Turkey—the catalyst to an executive order to introduce antidrug legislation, Jerry Finkelstein still regarded Nixon's drug war as punitive measures that resulted in severe consequences that jailed victims of drug abuse and treated them like hard criminals.²⁵

Seymour Halpern, another House representative at the time, spoke on Turkey's farms and poppy fields grown by landowners, hoed, and weeded by children as young as six years old.²⁶ On August 2, 1972, Halpern addressed the House and argued that “we can expect very little success in crop substitution and law enforcement policies in opium-producing nations, unless the farmers and local government officials in those countries are aware of devastating effects of heroin, not

²⁴ Loyd and Mountz, 133.

²⁶ Seymour Halpern “Participation of Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, And Usia Libraries Abroad in International Drug Control Efforts,” (House Congressional Records) August 2, 1972, 12310-12311.

just in the United States, but in all sections of the world.”²⁷ Jerry Finkelstein, businessman and political insider noted that the overall objective was to tackle this problem from the outset by creating committees as the nation did with the Manhattan Project and the space program to undertake what he described as the true crusade against drug abuse.²⁸ In an article introduced to the House on July 16, 1971 by Finkelstein titled, “Another ‘Manhattan Project’ To Solve Nation’s Drug Problem” he argued, the U.S. efforts to curtail the drug problem by implementing police methods to control the supply and use of drugs, and proposals to stymie drug trafficking by cutting its profitability had failed.²⁹ His article pushed back against police methods that targeted poor black neighborhoods in the wake of drug abuse in America. Instead of tackling the issue by establishing committee’s and legislation that could develop research to reduce drug abuse, the Nixon administration doubled down on the southern strategy and focused its attention on blacks as the problem.³⁰

According to Michelle Alexander in her book, *The New Jim Crow*, she argued, Republican efforts to rally racist anti-black constituents toward the end of the civil rights movement bolstered the ideals of the Nixon administration to maintain a racially polarized political party.³¹ Law and order hence became the central theme to ordinary working class conservative communities, and Democratic campaign strategists, such as George Wallace, essentially blamed low-income

²⁷ Seymour Halpern, 12310-12311.

²⁸ Jerry Finkelstein “We Need a Manhattan Project for Gun Control” (House Congressional Records, 1971) 25648-25649.

²⁹ Jerry Finkelstein, 25648-25649.

³⁰ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: New Press, 2012), 56.

³¹ Michelle Alexander, 56.

blacks—especially black males—for high crime rates and drug abuse in America.³² When President Reagan took office, he immediately denounced the Carter’s administration program for active stimulus solutions to the unemployment crisis. Reagan blamed the administration for continuing with John F. Kennedy’s fiscal policy, in which Republicans argued that the “go slow” approach essentially led to profound effects on poor economic situations in the late 1970s.³³ President Reagan’s presidential campaign in the media began to focus on how low-income urban communities took advantage of welfare programs with rhetoric that generalized the black community with the story of the welfare queen.

In 1976, Reagan challenged incumbent President Gerald Ford for presidency where his stomp speeches attacked Ford’s fiscal policy and public assistance program. Linda Taylor, an African American female known as the welfare queen took advantage of the food stamp program, however, Reagan’s speeches generalized black mothers in America. Playing to his constituents, it became a media frenzy instigated by Reagan who viewed poverty among African Americans as irresponsible citizens who participated in fraud and made poor economic decisions due to greed.³⁴ The association of poverty, crime, and drug use with the black race derived from U.S. politicians who scrutinized citizens of color in the United States and influenced a negative perception of Haitian migrants who sought asylum across borders. Concerned more about big business and tax rebate programs, the Reagan administration essentially downplayed the true causes of poverty such as, racial segregation and unequal educational opportunities that stemmed from the Jim Crow era.

³² Michelle Alexander, 58.

³³ John H. Wilhelm, “The Breakdown of Economic Policy in the 1970s,” (House Congressional Record, 1980), 7421-7425.

³⁴ Gillian Brockell, “She Was Stereotyped as ‘the Welfare Queen.’ The Truth Was More Disturbing, a New Book Says.,” *The Washington Post*, May 21, 2019.

The negative rhetoric of crack cocaine and violence that derived from top-down politics, began to flourish throughout the media and resulted in what Michelle Alexander notes, a mistaken belief that all drug dealers were black and brown.³⁵

George Bush administration doubled down on Reagan's agenda on high criminal activity, all of which characterized black males as a vicious problem. An article written by Andrew Cohen, a fellow at the Brennan Center for Justice, echoed the political competition between Republicans and Democrats "tough on crime" politics.³⁶ At the height of George Bush's 1988 campaign, a racist ad for Willie Horton, an African American man who raped a white woman and stabbed her partner became the thesis to Bush's brand on how he would be tough on crime. This ad ran in the media and played into "white fear and African American stereo-types."³⁷ Reagan, Bush, and Bill Clinton's policies toward crime in America, ultimately made any support for Haitian refugees in America unattractive to the fabric of the nation, and more importantly, unattractive to their constituents. Why this argument? Haitians were simply black. The face of crime during the 1980s and early 1990s was concentrated on African Americans in the news media, and it generalized all black males as "violent thugs." Alexander notes that "The Reagan administration hired staff to publicize the emergence of crack cocaine in 1985 as part of a strategic effort to build public and legislative support for the war. The media campaign was an extraordinary success."³⁸

³⁵ Michelle Alexander, 5.

³⁶ 140. "George H. W. Bush, Grace, and Gracelessness," Brennan Center for Justice, accessed March 21, 2022, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/george-h-w-bush-grace-and-gracelessness>.

³⁷ Doug Criss, "This Is the 30-Year-Old Willie Horton Ad Everybody Is Talking about Today | CNN Politics," CNN (Cable News Network, November 1, 2018), <https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/01/politics/willie-horton-ad-1988-explainer-trnd/index.html>, 1.

³⁸ Michelle Alexander, 6.

Malissia Lennox's author of *Refugees, Racism, and Reparations: A Critique of the United States' Haitian Immigration Policy*, noted the ongoing discrimination of the Bush Administration and the forcible repatriation of Haitian refugees implemented during his presidency—a formative that ordered Haitian “boat people” to return to Haiti at the command of the U.S. Coast Guard without a determination for political asylum. According to Lennox, the contradictions of Bill Clinton's presidential campaign when he promised to revoke Bush's mandate for exclusion of Haitian refugees shed light on how politicians dealt with Haitian migration in the late twentieth century.³⁹ Evidence has shown that brutal dictatorships in Haiti murdered political prisoners, induced starvation among its citizens, and persecuted religious organizations who fought for civil rights in their country. Haitians are both political and economic refugees but were never considered credible to gain citizenship due to hidden racial legislation in Reagan's war on drugs during the Cold War years. Crime and punishment bills for crack cocaine under George H.W. Bush and the Clinton administration created ongoing racial and discrimination practices toward black Americans and other peoples of color.

To regard Haitians migrants as economic refugees was an excuse beginning at the outset of the Mariel Boat lift in 1980 due to anti-communist objectives. However, Regan went a step further and allowed crack cocaine to be smuggled in low-income neighborhoods and ultimately devalued Haitian migrants as valuable prospects for citizenship. The Nixon administration years before blamed black neighborhoods for the heroin epidemic in 1972. This played to the constituents who wholeheartedly supported politicians who halted migrants from entering the United States unless they fled from a communist dictatorship. The U.S. has blamed Mexicans who crossed its border for soaking up public resources and jobs from Americans. Moreover, the U.S.

³⁹ Malissia Lennox, 688.

continued to invoke fear to the nation about African Americans as drug dealers during the crack era. Media campaigns that portrayed blacks as criminals was a ploy by presidential candidates who implemented political strategies for re-elections.

Structures of discrimination that were put in place do not simply go away; they are often recycled when needed. After the Civil War, the South was in financial turmoil. A new generation was born, and the lost rebel cause was eating at the hearts of white southerners. After the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was repealed by The United States Supreme Court, Jim Crow came alive and was pushed forward with great steam. By the twentieth century, African Americans were well into the continuance of southern violence, legal discrimination, and second-class citizenship. In 1915, D.W. Griffith produced the first full length visual in cinematography titled, *The Birth of a Nation*. This was one of the first media campaigns that set out to make African American men look like monsters and a threat to white women and society. The movie applauded the “heroic acts” of the Ku Klux Klan who saved the day by capturing a black man who had been accused of forcing himself on a white woman.

Southern horrors began to resurface in the Deep South as the Ku Klux Klan garnered support from politicians and residents moving across the Mason Dixie Line in the 1920s. By the mid-twentieth century, African Americans found themselves entrenched in the ghost of the antebellum past under white supremacy. After the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, one would have thought that white supremacy and racism would fall. Instead, it became further embedded in the power of institutions. This power structure is credited to the southern strategy that continued to reverse the Civil Rights Act agenda hidden in legislation that aimed at discrediting black Americans in the United States. How can a country ally with an independent black nation such as Haiti when it spent centuries oppressing its own black citizens?

While racism continued to plague the morality of the United States in a negative light, it was dressed completely different from the mid-twentieth century tactics that are often written about in African American history. Political consultant and strategist for the Republican party, Lee Atwater, was responsible for the Willie Horton ad and gave it to the George Bush campaign. It is not by happenstance that a slew of negative media campaigns began to plague American television. Atwater states in an interview on the southern strategy, “by 1954 you start out by saying nigger, nigger, nigger, by 1968, you can’t say nigger no more...now you say states’ rights and all of that stuff, and you getting so abstract now you’re talking about cutting taxes and all these things you’re talking about are totally economic things and the byproduct of the mayor’s, black get hurt worse than whites.”⁴⁰

Racial slurs, violence, and lynching became taboo and frowned upon. Instead, legislation and fear resurfaced in the abstract and pursued in media attacks. President Richard Nixon birthed the war on drugs in America, and twelve years of ongoing drug policies resulted in mass incarceration and often-targeted African Americans and other peoples of color. Detention centers plagued the United States as early as the nineteenth century—a tactic used to curtail immigration for those who were considered “undesirables.” Haitian peoples were often subjected to accelerated deportation, detention programs headed by the Immigration and Naturalization Services, and interdiction at sea by President Reagan in 1981.⁴¹ According to Lennox, Reagan entered into an agreement with Baby Doc to halt all Haitians from entering the United States in return for economic aid in the amount of \$11.5 million.⁴²

⁴⁰ Rick Perlstein, “Exclusive: Lee Atwater's Infamous 1981 Interview on the Southern Strategy,” *The Nation*, December 7, 2018, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/exclusive-lee-atwaters-infamous-1981-interview-southern-strategy/>.

⁴¹ Malissia Lennox, 703.

⁴² Malissia Lennox, 703.

By 1986, INS detention centers began to grow expeditiously throughout the United States. According to Carl Lindskoog, the Reagan administration spent \$17.5 million in this effort.⁴³ That same year on November 17th, the first national media reference of crack cocaine surfaced in the *New York Times* in an article written by Peter Kerr, who suggested the urban community is most affected by the drug (crack cocaine) without recognizing pure cocaine, which is more potent and expensive than crack and has existed since the 1970s in white affluent communities.⁴⁴ Often times, local residents urged for creation of INS detention facilities because it offered employment opportunities. Lindskoog notes that in Oakdale, Louisiana, many residents were eager for detention facilities as they were previously affected by the decline in lumber. The mayor boasted about the “recession proof industry that was coming into town.”⁴⁵ George H. W. Bush tough on crime legislation and Bill Clinton’s mass incarceration bill both derived from the Nixon and Reagan administration when the war on drugs began to take shape in America. Haitian refugees, because of their skin color were caught in a web of both the Cold War and the war on drugs in the United States because African Americans were associated with crime and crack cocaine.

⁴³ Carl Lindskoog, *Detain and Punish: Haitian Refugees and the Rise of the World's Largest Immigration Detention System* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2019), 79.

⁴⁴ Peter Kerr, ““Anatomy of the Drug Issue: How, After Years, It Erupted: Anatomy of an Issue: How, After Years, Drugs Touched a Nerve.” *New York Times* (1923-), Nov 17, 1986,” *The New York Times*, November 17, 1986, pp. B1-B6.

⁴⁵ Carl Lindskoog, 81.

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