

## Haitian Migration in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The nation of Haiti is located next to the Dominican Republic on the island of Hispaniola. Haiti has a powerful history, as it was the first country in the region to win its independence from a European power, in this case, the French, and was the first Black republic in the entire world. This complex history of oppression and resistance persists today.

The United States is home to the largest Haitian migrant population in the world. That being said, emigration from Haiti to the United States is fairly recent. Major emigration began with the tumultuous Duvalier dictatorship and spiked in the face of the 2010 earthquake that devastated the island. Haitians have established robust communities in the United States, most prominently in major cities, such as Miami and New York.

Obtaining citizenship status is part of the Haitian immigrant experience in the United States. Around the time of the 2010 earthquake, the U.S. government gave certain Haitians temporary protected status (TPS). Today, “nearly all Haitians in the United States who obtain lawful permanent residence (LPR status, also known as getting a green card) do so through family reunification channels, either as immediate relatives of U.S. citizens or through other family-sponsored channels [and] compared to all immigrants, Haitians are more likely to be naturalized U.S. citizens, participate in the labor force, and work in service occupations, but have lower household incomes.” Moreover, Haitian immigrants struggle to move up the U.S. social ladder, which can be partially attributed to factors like racism and xenophobia.

President Trump has arguably worsened the daily lives of people from this group in the United States. During a meeting with a bipartisan group of senators at the White House, Trump infamously alluded to Haiti and African nations as “shithole countries” and specifically stated, “Why do we need more Haitians, take them out.” Anti-immigrant sentiment cannot be blamed on a single person, but the words and actions of such a powerful leader do have the power to influence or embolden the American public to be prejudiced against Haitians.

Haitians will continue to migrate, as more and more people become displaced as environmental refugees and are forced to become labor migrants who send remittances to the island. Media like the short film *What Happens to a Dream Deferred?* directed by filmmaker Emery Mondésir show us the dreams, struggles, and talents of Haitian migrants, which can help us not only to humanize this group of people, but also to reimagine how they fit into our country.

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Information gathered from “Haitian Immigrants in the United States” Migration Policy Institute (<https://migrationpolicy.org>); Carlos Ortiz Miranda’s “Haiti and the United States During the 1980s and 1990s: Refugees, Immigration, and Foreign Policy” in *The San Diego law review*, vol. 32, no. 3, June, 1995; Jeffrey S Kahn’s *Islands of Sovereignty: Haitian Migration and the Borders of Empire* (University of Chicago Press, 2019); Ali Vitali, Kasie Hunt and Frank Thorp V’s “Trump referred to Haiti and African nations as 'shithole' countries” in *NBC News*, Jan. 11, 2018; and Ana Patricia Rodríguez’s “Central American and Caribbean Immigrants” in *Encyclopedia of American Studies* (John Hopkins University Press, 2018).