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Review

This dictionary by Hall (Armstrong Atlantic State Univ.) is a concise, accessible reference book on Haiti beginning with Columbus's landfall on the island of Hispaniola in 1492 and ending with the election of Michel Martelly as president in 2011. The volume features over 400 alphabetically arranged, cross-referenced entries. A focus is on political leadership--a major concern, given the large number of Haitian presidents who were either killed or forced to resign after only brief periods in office. Hall's dictionary updates Roland Perusse's Historical Dictionary of Haiti (CH, Oct'77). And it is twice the size (295 pages versus Perusse's 124 pages), contains more entries, and offers a more extensive bibliography (16 pages versus Perusse's 8 pages). Like Perusse, Hall offers a useful chronology and a topical listing of books covering art, literature, education, public health, sports, entertainment, geography, archaeology, the Haitian diaspora, folklore, and economics. He also provides 18 Internet sources. Hall's dictionary is strongest for the 20th century. Treatment of religion and culture are not as thorough as treatment of politics. Nevertheless, this new dictionary constitutes the most extensive single-volume reference work available on Haiti. It will prove an excellent starting place for those who want to know more about Haitian history and culture. Summing Up: Highly recommended. (CHOICE)

I would recommend this one-volume dictionary for public, academic, and special libraries' country studies collections. (American Reference Books Annual)

About the Author

Michael R. Hall is professor of Latin American history at Armstrong Atlantic State University in Savannah, Georgia. He has also taught in the Dominican Republic and conducted extensive research there and in Haiti. He has written extensively on countries in the region including articles and a book.

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One of the world’s poorest nations, Haiti shares the island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic. Haiti proclaimed its independence from France on January 1, 1804 following the only successful slave revolt in the Americas. As a result of the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), Haiti became the first independent Latin American nation and the second independent nation in the Western Hemisphere, after the United States. Throughout its history it has suffered political violence, and in 2010 it suffered a devastating earthquake, which killed over 200,000 people and countless people lost homes and businesses.

The Historical Dictionary of Haiti covers the history of Haiti starting in 1492 with the initial discovery of the island Haiti shares with the Dominican Republic to the present day. The dictionary itself contains over 400 cross-referenced entries on crucial aspects of Haitian history, and it is the most extensive single-volume reference work on Haiti available. In addition to the dictionary, this book provides a chronology containing important dates and events and an informative bibliographical section organized by subject. This book is an excellent access point for students, researchers, and anyone wanting to know more about Haiti.

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Valuable Research Tool
By J.T. Morris
Done well, historical dictionaries are important tools for scholars, students, and others interested in a particular area of history. And Professor Hall's Historical Dictionary of Haiti does it right. The key is in the selection of entries. Michael Hall, a well-regarded Latin American historian with first-hand experience in Haiti and neighboring Dominican Republic, has selected for this dictionary a collection of A-Z content that covers the breadth of Haitian historiography. A front-to-back read of the book provides a useful foundation of survey-level knowledge of Haiti. In addition, individual entries capture the essence of each topic. For instance, the "Diaspora" entry concisely yet compellingly illustrates how tragic events and circumstances that too often have dominated Haitian history have compelled the migration of its people to other nations. Throughout the book, individual topics, events, and people viewed through the historian's lens are communicated in ways that most-appropriately place them within the larger context of Haitian history. Professor Hall's work would be a welcome addition to the library of anyone looking for a comprehensive and readable survey of Haitian history.

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I have worked in the non-profit emergency response and humanitarian field for over 25 years (including Haiti) and have shared this historical dictionary with colleagues and peers in other organizations. And they do not want to give it back ! It is an excellent refernce guide for all things Haitian, especially for those that are new to Haiti culture, history and politics. It is a must read and a great window into understanding Haiti and it's significant history, culture and people.

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