Alex Dupuy, a leading Haitianist, offers in this book a compilation of important essays on the history of the country from its revolutionary beginnings to today’s period of recurring natural disasters and social crisis. Consisting of six chapters, three of which had already been published, it analyzes the complexities of the Haitian Revolution of 1804, and shows how this “epochal event” resulted in both the emancipation and the eventual powerlessness of the slaves. Dupuy argues convincingly that the Revolution was full of contradictions. It was the most radical democratic moment of its time, abolishing racial slavery and proclaiming the equality of men and women, but it confronted the harsh realities of a white supremacist world system, which contributed to and exacerbated the nation’s acute class divisions and authoritarian tendencies. As he puts it, the “extraordinary achievement by the revolutionary slaves proved to be a Pyrrhic victory for the laboring classes who soon became subordinated to, and exploited by a new dominant class, and ... it also led to the stalemate of the new Haitian ruling class and Haiti’s continued underdevelopment and subordination to foreign capital” (p. 52).

Dupuy bases his understanding of Haiti’s political economy on a rigorous and sophisticated analysis of class formation, interests, and power. While he takes seriously the impact of race and color on both domestic and international social stratification, he sees class as the decisive agent of history. In his eyes, race—“skin color” (p. 75)—has been “fetishized”; it is often depicted as “determinative of relations between human beings rather than being explained by the social relations of exploitation and exclusion that produced it as an ideology” (p. 13). This fetishization of race is rooted in the global expansion of capitalism. In fact, Dupuy contends that it “is a purely ideological construct developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to justify the enslavement of Africans in the European colonies of the Americas” (p. 75). And yet, race took on a life of its own, becoming the “color line” along which people acquired their identity, divided, mobilized, and fought. This was especially true of the Haitian Revolution when slaves revolted against their French colonial white masters to obtain their freedom.

The Haitian Revolution was, however, much more than a racial confrontation and a quest for independence. The starkest color line prevented neither opportunistic interracial alliances nor class differences within and beyond race. In the late colonial period, Mulattoes and free Blacks represented an inter-
mediary group seeking privileges by associating with Whites; it was only when the latter rejected these overtures that the former fully joined the revolutionary struggle. In fact, Toussaint Louverture, the great strategist of the Revolution, embodied the tensions and contradictions intersecting race and class (pp. 35–50). Born a slave, he became a free man, and then a slave owner who ultimately turned against slavery to symbolize the struggle for emancipation and freedom. And yet he was prepared to remain within the French Empire as long as he had complete autonomy to rule and establish the dominion of a black propertied class of planters (p. 49). Louverture’s aspirations never materialized; French officers captured him and sent him into imprisonment and death to France at Fort de Joux. Unlike Louverture, however, his fellow revolutionaries rejected any compromise with French imperialism. Led by Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Alexandre Pétion, and Henri Christophe, they declared the independence of Haiti in 1804 after defeating Napoleon’s army.

In spite of their radical and revolutionary break with France, the founding fathers of the first black independent republic had their own class project. In fact, Dupuy convincingly argues that Dessalines, Christophe, and Pétion, like Louverture, had “transformed themselves into a new ruling class opposed to the interests of the former slaves” (p. 35). This class project entailed not only the capture of the state to monopolize its prebends, but also control of the means of coercion to seek to reimpose the plantation economy. Thus from the early days of independence there was a rupture between a predatory state and the rural majority. This chasm was not merely the consequence of the class project of the founding fathers; it was also the product of the world economy and its racist structures. The aspirations for freedom, equality, and universal democratic rights crystallized in a profoundly constraining and hostile environment. They were overwhelmed by the harsh realities of unproductive capitalism and the international threats of aggression and sanctions. Thus, from its very inception, Haiti faced the mutually reinforcing realities of underdevelopment and dependence.

Dupuy shows how this historical inheritance has continued to plague the country. He argues convincingly that in the era of globalization new forms of subordination to international organizations such as the United Nations or the World Bank as well as the major powers, particularly the United States, have contributed to Haiti’s loss of sovereignty and persisting political crisis (pp. 93–113). He offers a trenchant critique of the neoliberal model of development imposed on Haiti by foreign donors; in his view, it has severely undermined the process of democratization and popular mobilization that contributed to the fall of the Duvalier regime and the ascendancy of the Lavalas movement. According to Dupuy, neoliberal policies have promoted export zones for gar-