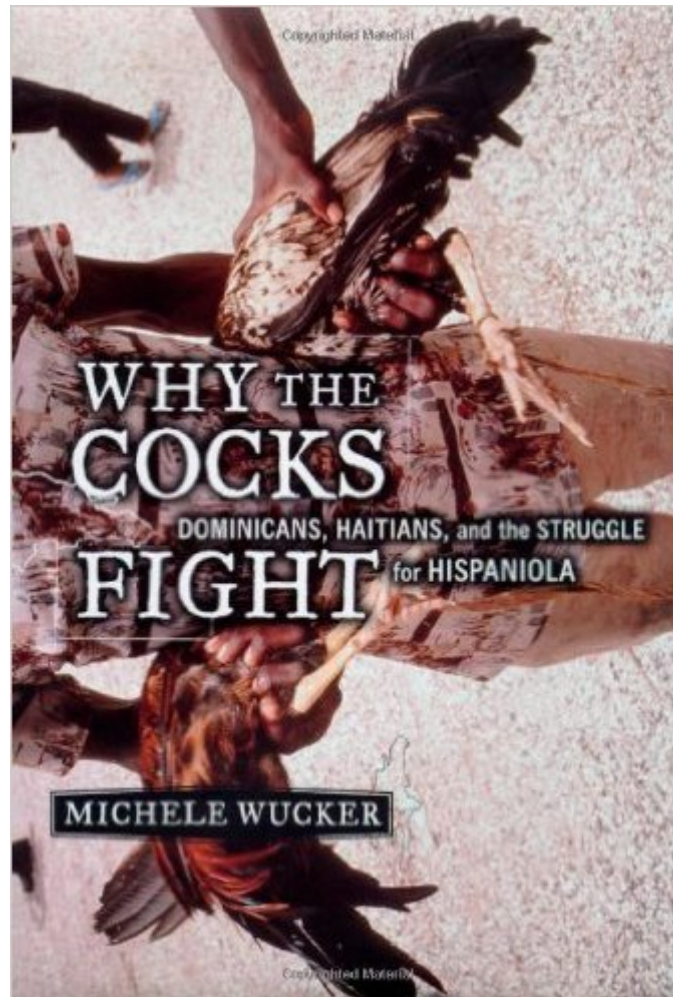


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Why The Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, And The Struggle For Hispaniola



Synopsis

Like two roosters in a fighting arena, Haiti and the Dominican Republic are encircled by barriers of geography and poverty. They co-inhabit the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, but their histories are as deeply divided as their cultures: one French-speaking and black, one Spanish-speaking and mulatto. Yet, despite their antagonism, the two countries share a national symbol in the rooster--and a fundamental activity and favorite sport in the cockfight. In this book, Michele Wucker asks: "If the symbols that dominate a culture accurately express a nation's character, what kind of a country draws so heavily on images of cockfighting and roosters, birds bred to be aggressive? What does it mean when not one but two countries that are neighbors choose these symbols? Why do the cocks fight, and why do humans watch and glorify them?" Wucker studies the cockfight ritual in considerable detail, focusing as much on the customs and histories of these two nations as on their contemporary lifestyles and politics. Her well-cited and comprehensive volume also explores the relations of each nation toward the United States, which twice invaded both Haiti (in 1915 and 1994) and the Dominican Republic (in 1916 and 1965) during the twentieth century. Just as the owners of gamecocks contrive battles between their birds as a way of playing out human conflicts, Wucker argues, Haitian and Dominican leaders often stir up nationalist disputes and exaggerate their cultural and racial differences as a way of deflecting other kinds of turmoil. Thus *Why the Cocks Fight* highlights the factors in Caribbean history that still affect Hispaniola today, including the often contradictory policies of the U.S.

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Customer Reviews

After having a co-worker recommend this book and after reading the reviews, I will be honest, I did not know what to expect. Now 3/4 into the book I don't know if I can stomach the rest. The reason for this is the unfair and untrue generalization of the Dominican people. In one instance Michele Wucker uses the term "Duvalier and the Dominicans" as if every Dominican had a share of government decision. Throughout the book Michele Wucker uses very sympathetic language when referring to the Haitian people. She speaks of them with fascination, carefully justifying their economic difficulties as having to do with or being somehow related to conflicts with their neighboring country. Then she turns her attention towards Dominicans with such disdain as if they were holding a public lynching every afternoon. The constant badgering of Dominicans becomes sickening since it is extremely misguided. The truth is that there is a lot of ignorance, especially geared towards Haitians. And black Dominicans, as myself, feel the need for someone to start employing certain strategies to educate the Dominican people in this matter. But it is also true that the ignorance held by Dominicans has never been equaled to that of the U.S. or many other parts of the world. Dominicans are very loving people and their conflict with the Haitian people has nothing to do with color and more so with competition for jobs and resources. First, most Dominicans are of color. And most Dominicans aren't leading a stable economic life. A visit to this country would quickly dispel THAT belief as it is immediately apparent that the Dominican Republic is by definition a 3rd world country lacking the means to sustain its population. This is also due to the very corrupt governmental representatives leading the country.

The evergoing conflict between the Dominican Republic and Haiti has never been a subject that has captured the international community's attention, due to their third-world status and their political instability. Unlike the only other Caribbean island to be shared by two foreign powers (St. Martin/St. Maarten), Hispaniola's history has always been linked to the topic of race and culture. As a student of Latin American & Caribbean politics and culture, I discovered many hidden truths I never knew when I was living in the cultural melting pot known as New York City. This book gave me even a greater understanding of two communities that are so close in proximity, yet so far apart in everything else. Ms. Wucker definitely has done extensive research and has delved into the complexity of racial politics on this island. Her research is not biased (as one reviewer feels it is) but rich in truth. As an author myself, I have written a book that will be published in the near future on the political legacy a famous Dominican politician has left his country, and Ms. Wucker's research coincides with the same exact research I did. Although the author is not Haitian or Dominican, it

shouldn't matter because she has done a magnificent job. I always said "it sometimes takes an outsider to understand and resolve the problems of a place he/she has never lived in." Ms. Wucker's work validates this saying. Whether you are in Miami's Little Haiti or in New York City's Washington Heights neighborhoods, or even in some faraway place that is not directly affected by either Dominican or Haitian immigration or politics, this should be a must read for all. By reading this book, you might have understand what U.S.

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