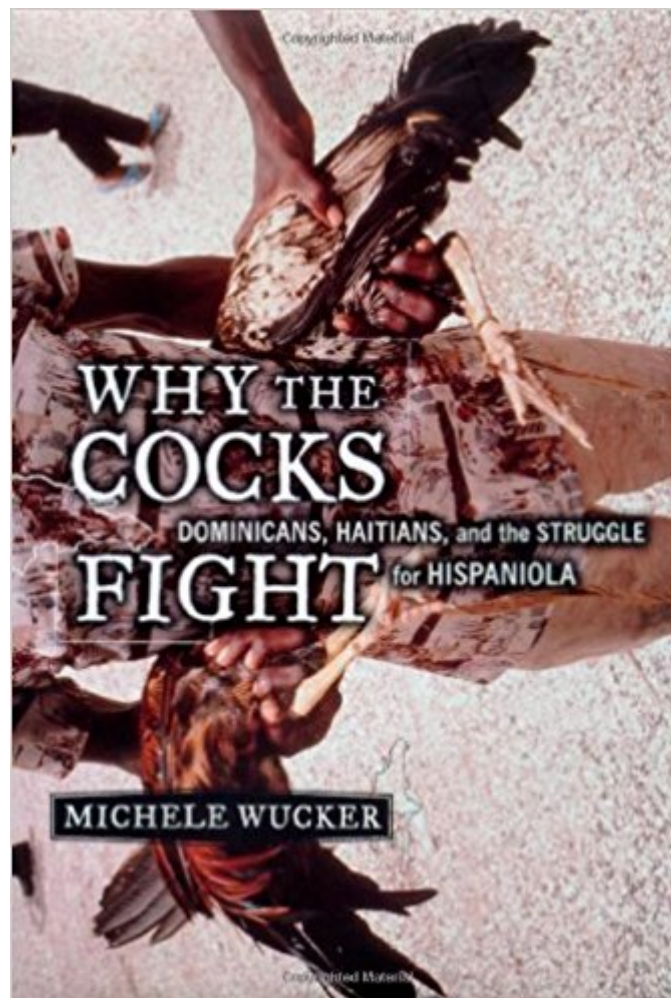




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# Why The Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, And The Struggle For Hispaniola



## 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

The Caribbean island of Hispaniola is home to historic, ongoing strife between two countries deeply divided by race, language, and history yet forced constantly into confrontation by their shared geography. In her first book, American journalist Michele Wucker reports from both Haiti and the Dominican Republic on the complex relations between these two cultures and sheds light on the sources of their struggles both in their island home and in the United States. This book is charged from the start with the violence and posturing of blood sport, as Wucker observes her first Haitian cockfight: "The air cracks with the impact of stiffened feathers as each bird tries to push the other to the ground. Around the ring, the Haitian men shout to one another and wave dirty wads of gourdes in the air, seeking bets.... Soon, the feathers of both cocks are slick with blood." Popular in both countries, these fights become a totemic image for the author, who finds in them, as in the many clashes between Hispaniola's two cultures, "both division and community, opposite sides of the same coin." This is a fine historical primer, buoyed along by Wucker's graceful, observant prose style. --Maria Dolan --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The U.S. has sent troops to Haiti and the Dominican Republic four times in this century, twice to each country. In the last 20 years, reports Wucker, one-eighth of the population of the island of Hispaniola has emigrated to the U.S. Wucker, a freelance journalist, delves much deeper than mere numbers and chronology, supplementing her knowledge of the island's history with a great sense of the fabric of everyday life in the two countries. While each chapter is discrete enough to stand alone, cumulatively they create a passionate mural of the often bloody relationship between wary neighbors. Among the critical issues and events Wucker addresses are the role of geography as a barrier, European settlement, slave revolts, the role of the sugar industry and the experience of Dominican and Haitian immigrants in the U.S. Wucker's treatment of Dominican racism toward Haitians is particularly good, capturing the nuance and ambivalence at work when two peoples who are not nearly as different as they would sometimes like to believe are stuck together on a small piece of land with limited resources. Throughout the book, Wucker uses the metaphor of cockfighting, presenting the countries as two roosters forced (sometimes by the U.S.) to battle in a small, enclosed ring. If she relies a bit too heavily on this trope, Wucker more than makes up for the minor indulgence with her insightful treatment of many cultural issues, particularly the politicized nature of language, to which she brings an understanding of Creole, Spanish and French. Clear prose and vivid scenes of life at street level make Wucker's first book a marvelous immersion experience in the clash and conciliation of cultures on a small, embattled island next door. (Jan.)

FYI: Why the Cocks Fight makes good companion reading to Edwidge Danticat's novel, *The Farming of Bones* (Forecasts, June 8.) Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

East vs West---Or a real life Westside story. The author did a superb job enhancing the two countries history as well as explaining how one country relied on the other for goods and services....Her background warrants why she writes so well on such a niche subject, a minuscule island with two countries. Michele used the strength of the Cock, to represent the many. She enhances the metaphor of cockfights to allow us the reader to see how societies still love to show power over another, a Machiavellian style still alive today. The ring, is the battle field. Like the Romans, the cocks wage war against another civilization. She also brings to the top the city of New York--How three countries forge into one. A terrific book, on a topic I was very unfamiliar with.

Excellent! Well written account of the "original sin" (slavery) and its consequences on those two countries with two cultures/two histories (Spanish and French/African) bound together by geography - one island. Unfortunately, these two peoples are bound in a never ending struggle to change the unchangeable - geography. I wonder if Bartolome de las Casas, the Spanish Catholic Priest who brought in the Africans to the Hispaniola as slaves to "save" the original inhabitants, the Tainos, anticipated the mess he created.

Interesting book about the history of race religions between Haiti / dr

This book is several years old now, but is still the best history of the Dominican - Haitian divide.

A moderately useful study on the under-studied relationship between the two nations that inhabit Hispanola in the Caribbean. I was not overly impressed with the organization or lack thereof within this book. It's clear that the author is passionate about the topic, but much of that personal sentiment seeps into the text, making it less academic and more of a personal testament posing as academic study. It seems clear that the author is on the side of the Haitians, and the Haitian masses at that. But I feel that the understanding of the roots of the conflict, as well as more recent attempts to intermediate between the nations, has been largely overlooked. Not a horrible place to start, and a helpful source to begin understanding this dynamic.

Great read and great insight. The history of the island of Hispaniola is incredibly complex. I appreciate the writer's non-biased approach to the story. Definitely recommend.

The book arrived ahead of schedule and with only minimal signs of wear, including occasional highlighter marks. It was an excellent value!

Very informative and clearly written

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