



THE DISAPPEARING ISLAND: HAITI, HISTORY, AND THE HEMISPHERE

The Fifth Jagan Lecture and the Third Michael Baptista Lecture
Presented at York University on March 20, 2004

By

J. Michael Dash

(Professor of Francophone Literature and
Director of Africana Studies, New York University)

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Abstract

In this lecture, J. Michael Dash explores Haiti's symbolic destiny, in an effort to "free" Haiti from being relegated symbolically to the margins of world history. He argues for an understanding of the Haitian Revolution as both a foundational moment in modern universalist thought and a point of origin for postcolonial Caribbean societies, one which privileges global interaction and transcends ethnocentric models of nation, race, and identity. In the spirited question period, also captured here, the circumstances of former President Aristide's recent departure from office, the complexities of internal Haitian politics, and the regional and international context are debated.

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THE DISAPPEARING ISLAND: HAITI, HISTORY, AND THE HEMISPHERE

Once we presumed to found ourselves for good
Between its blue hills and those sandless shores
Where we spent our desperate night in prayer
and vigil,

Once we had gathered driftwood, made a hearth
And hung our cauldron like a firmament,
The island broke beneath us like a wave.

The land sustaining us seemed to hold firm
Only when we embraced it *in extremis*.
All I believe that happened there was vision.

(Seamus Heaney, "The Disappearing Island.")

You might well be asking yourselves what an Irish poet's enigmatic evocation of sustaining island space as "hold(ing) firm / Only when embraced... in extremis" has to do with a talk on Haiti. The answer could either be banal - "found(ing) ourselves for good" could refer to grounding identity on the space between the characteristic island monuments "hill and sea", a mystical root-ness which could sustain meaning only when embraced in desperation or nostalgia.

I would like to think, though, that Heaney's poem encourages us to think beyond the island as a matrix for individual or collective identities. In this regard, "The Disappearing Island" perhaps has a special meaning for the Caribbean in that the poem suggests that there is a new connection to island space which is not related to ground, territory, and origin but to a vision of what the foundational notion of island identity denies - that is our Caribbean involvement in a world of expanding networks of global connection. The island disappears then as ground of belonging, the symbolic terra firma of identity politics, to be reconstituted

as enigmatic space, constantly challenging isolation and closure.

It is with the latter image in mind that I would like to us to rethink the meaning and the legacy of that event which C.L.R. James described as the moment when "West Indians first became aware of them selves as a people" - the Haitian revolution.

James still remains one of our best guides to this revolution, as he was acutely aware that between 1791 and 1804 a revolutionary ideal had entered the New World, that the Caribbean had become one of those explosive borders of enlightened modernity. As James vividly reminds us in *Black Jacobins*, the Haitian revolution would take the French Revolution further than was ever intended to its radical conclusion. "Reaction triumphed" in Paris, as James points out, but in St. Domingue...

[The slaves] had heard of the revolution and had construed it in their own image: the white slaves in France had risen, and killed their masters, and were now enjoying the fruits of the earth. It was gravely inaccurate in fact, but they had caught *the spirit of the thing*. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.

Despite James' view that these first "West Indians", who were not the original inhabitants of the region but the revolting slaves of St. Domingue, had "caught the spirit of the thing", that the Haitian revolution was a nodal point in a global interactive history, we continue to see it as unique or exceptional, a moment in a simple, heroic foundational narrative for Caribbean anti-colonial resistance. "All that happened there was vision" all right, but one that was lost to the rest of the region that either fed on dreams of apocalyptic beginnings or the solidarity of racial suffering that make the cosmopoli-

tan, universalist contours of the Caribbean past ideologically inaccessible.

I would like to think that it is because it so challenged the prejudices of its time, because it was such an unthinkable phenomenon, that the Haitian Revolution has either been conspicuously consigned to the margins of modern history or simplified and romanticized as an inspiring narrative of black slave resistance.

Haiti was the second nation to break away from its European colonizer but Haitians in the nineteenth century were acutely aware that unlike the US, they were in the process of forging a new identity, that their revolution was about the total transformation of the social and economic order established through plantation slavery.

When these first West Indians, to use James' formulation, turned their ploughshares into swords they did not choose a restorationist model, a return to cultural roots, but these *New World Africans* envisaged a world both shaped by the realities of Atlantic trade as well as hemispheric identity. Would Haiti's first leader, Jean Jacques Dessalines, not both declare himself emperor in the manner of his erstwhile enemy Napoleon, and also change the name of France's richest colony from Saint Domingue to the Taino name Haiti? In declaring on January 1, 1804 "I have avenged America," Dessalines firmly located a postcolonial Haiti within in New World reality that harked back to Hispaniola's original pre-Columbian inhabitants. In anticipating Fanon's idea of revolutionary consciousness by a century-and-a-half, Dessalines called citizens of the new state "Haitians" and declared everyone to be black, including the Polish contingent that revolted against the French to fight with his forces.

Because it so challenged the prejudices of its time, the Haitian Revolution has been conspicuously consigned to the margins of modern history.

Yet, if Saint Domingue was a colony based on black plantation slavery it was because the indigenous population was no longer there. An unbreakable bond had been established with Europe and the West that brought the horrors of human exploitation as well as the heritage of radical Enlightenment thought. The Haitian revolution then becomes, above all else, the first and most dramatic emergence of the ideal of human rights – beyond race, nation or gender – in the modern world.

The French Revolution was about social justice. The American Revolution sought an end to colonial rule. Neither seriously considered putting an end to human slavery. While we tend to emphasize the victory of 1804 and the defeat of Europe's most powerful army at the time, we must not forget

that in the early years of the revolution, before Napoleon's rise to power in France, the slaves fought for freedom in alliance with

French revolutionary authority, thereby defeating the colonists in Saint Domingue who were resisting revolutionary change.

For a while, the racist culture of plantation slavery was reversed as ex-slaves and republicans were allied in the same struggle. Did Toussaint Louverture, in a letter to his ally General Laveaux in 1795, not describe his defeat of colonists and royalist forces thus?

My victory has been most complete and if the celebrated Dessources is lucky enough to re-enter St. Marc it will be without cannon, without baggage, in short without drum nor trumpet. He has lost everything, even honor, if vile royalists are capable of having any. He will remember this republican lesson which I have taught him.

Of course, the rise of Napoleon would change all this. After the imprisonment of Toussaint in 1803, the project of transforming colonial Saint Domingue and defeating the power of the plantocracy turned into a war of national independence. The Bicentenary celebration focuses invariably on the last year of the revolution, the declaration of independence, and almost effaces the revolutionary transformation of colonial Saint Domingue prior to Napoleon's desire to crush black revolt in the Caribbean. The possibility of a postcolonial trans-Atlantic relationship between Republican France and a non-European culture taking shape at the end of the 18th century lost out to a racial settling of scores as Desalines set out to give as good as he got. Ironically, the French state would ultimately make itself the trustee of universal values in the service of colonial expansion elsewhere and banish Haiti to the margins of history.

It is not surprising that Haiti's symbolic presence in the Caribbean imagination has never been understood in terms of radical universalism. Rather, the "island disappears" under images of racial revenge, mysterious singularity, and heroic uniqueness.

For instance, Martinique's Aime Cesaire, in his *Notebook of a return to the native land*, written almost at the same time as James' *Black Jacobins*, reduced the impact of the Haitian revolution to the exiled and isolated figure of Toussaint Louverture imprisoned in the snow-bound fort du Joux in the Jura mountains:

What is mine
 A man alone imprisoned in whiteness
 A man alone who defies the white screams of white death

(Toussaint, Toussaint Louverture)
 A man alone who fascinates the white hawk of white death
 A man alone in the infertile sea of white sand

Inevitably, the poet then asks the predictable question: whether this incarnation of black exile and humiliation will ever be avenged – "Will the splendor of this blood ever explode?"

The racial configuration of Haiti's revolutionary past is the stock in trade of Caribbean writing. Even the most daring creative writers in the region, such as Alejo Carpentier and Kamau Brathwaite, fall back on images of upright negritude and mystical religious rites when evoking Haiti.

Invoking the nightmare of history, others see the Haitian revolution in terms of a fatal hubris, the sigh of history over megalomaniac black ruins. Derek Walcott tells us "There was only one noble ruin in the archipelago: Christophe's massive Citadelle at La Ferriere. It was a monument to egomania, more than a strategic castle; an effort to reach God's height." In the vision of V.S. Naipaul, Walcott's compensatory fantasy prepares the way for black savagery and Caribbean's history-less past. The choice seems to be between reductionist triumphalism on one hand, and reductionist skepticism on the other, when it comes to Haiti.

If nothing else, the Haitian war of independence was fought in the name of a universalist ideal that supersedes the French state's appropriation of Jacobin republicanism; the latter eventually ostracized Haiti and justified France's 'mission civilisatrice' in the name of universal French values.

The trajectory taken by French universalism in the French Overseas Departments projected the French as trustees of revolutionary universalism and emphasized their generosity in offering universal rights to its grateful subjects in the Eastern Caribbean. The idea of the French as the sole guarantors of universal values, and Victor Schoelcher as their ultimate embodiment, led almost inexorably to departmentalization, as the latter provided the equality and fraternity which did not immediately follow emancipation in 1848. It is precisely this false universalism, or France's ethnocentric appropriation of the universal, that Frantz Fanon, a revolutionary universalist if ever there was one, unmasks as the mirage of French colonization in *Black Skin White Masks*.

The Haitian Revolution was an emancipatory project in a globalized colonial world where freely circulating ideas could take root in the most unexpected places.

However, as James' *Black Jacobins* constantly reminds us, revolutionary universalism in St. Domingue was not linked to cultural and historical difference, but made for a radical application of universal human rights. There could be no more French universalism than there could be Haitian universalism. Susan Buck-Morss, in her recent article "Hegel and Haiti," picks up where James left off by asserting that:

the black Jacobins of Saint Domingue surpassed the metropole in actively realizing the Enlightenment goal of human liberty, seeming to give proof that the French Revolution was not simply a European phenomenon but world-historical in its implications. If we have become accustomed to different narratives, ones that place colonial events on the margins of European history, we have been seriously misled. Events in Saint-Domingue were central to contemporary attempts to make sense out of the reality of the French Revolution

and its aftermath... The Haitian Revolution was the crucible, the trial by fire for the ideals of the French Enlightenment.

If "colonial events" were to be displaced from "the margins of European history," as she recommends, then the Haitian Revolution becomes an emancipatory project within a globalized colonial world where ideas were circulating freely and could take root in the most unexpected places. The liberatory possibilities of the enlightenment were not meant to be applied in Caribbean

plantation society. Global interaction in a modernizing world meant, however, that the periphery could now become the site of a concrete, radical application - the "trial by fire" - of ideas from

the center; that a local European revolution could be "world-historical" in its implications.

I would like to say that the Haitian Revolution was therefore both a foundational moment in modern universalist thought and a point of origin for postcolonial Caribbean societies, one which privileged global interaction and transcended ethnocentric models of nation, race and identity.

To this extent, Michel Rolph Trouillot is right to label it "the most radical political revolution of that age," as it symbolized the possibility of understanding human rights beyond race, territory, and gender as well as the unpredictable nature of globalizing modernity that made the colonial system totally untenable.

Eugene Genovese, in locating the Haitian Revolution as a "Turning Point" in anti-slavery revolt, put it: "thus the revolutionary

ideology that emerged in the 1790s fed both sides of the Atlantic. It Africanized France in ways that that helped send the colonialist Girondists to a well-deserved fate; it Europeanized Saint Domingue in ways that pointed to the rise of a modern black state.”

For this reason, one needs to revisit Haitian thought in the already postcolonial nineteenth century to see how a revolutionary universalism was applied to the defetishizing of colonial categories of race and nation.

Haiti’s singularity or uniqueness was invariably eschewed by her early thinkers and often recognized in the nineteenth century as a direct or indirect product of a discourse that sought to ostracize the revolution. In his dismantling of the idea of Haitian exceptionalism, Michel-Rolph Trouillot reminds us that

Before the twentieth century; Haitian writers rarely if ever promoted singularity in their studies of Haitian reality. In fact, quite the opposite, especially for the early part of the nineteenth century. Indeed, Haitian intellectuals rightly saw the theories of Haitian exceptionalism that were spreading in Europe and North America as implicitly – and often explicitly – racist... these writers did not think that Haiti escaped the paradigms of their times.

In this way, Trouillot compellingly argues that the Caribbean’s first revolutionary modern state comes into being calling into questioning the rhetoric of racial and national difference and cultural authenticity. Indeed, the model for liberation that was pervasive, according to Trouillot, foregrounded the universal and the transnational as the most revolutionary means of

making modernity fulfill its emancipatory ideals in the new Haitian state.

Certainly, the most important champion of Haiti’s modernist internationalism in the nineteenth century is the Haitian essayist Antenor Firmin. No other intellectual seemed so able to follow through on the revolutionary universalism of Haiti’s war of independence.

Firmin arguably wished to harness the utopian, emancipatory possibilities that had been released in 1804 by the unpredictable global interconnectedness of modern European expansion. His *monumental De l’egalite des races humaines* (1885), was written in reaction against a theory of biological difference and racial perfectibility that had been put forward by one of the founding fathers of European racism, Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau. In reaction against Gobineau’s narrow concept of racial and national determination of human capacity, one that was assessed along a single hierarchical scale, Firmin invoked a non-essentializing universalism and rejected the belief that cultural difference can be explained by any innate, genetic qualities.

Firmin was acutely aware of what a theory of racial difference would mean for Haiti and the extent to which Haiti’s survival depended on a militant internationalist, anti-colonial politics. As he put it in his conclusion: “... human beings everywhere are endowed with the same qualities and defects, without distinctions based on color or anatomical shape... It is a fact that an invisible chain links all members of humanity in a common circle.”

It is a radical universalist position that leads Firmin to a profound skepticism regarding the question of grounded difference and nationalist identity politics in Haiti. In one of his more startling assertions, he praises the nineteenth century Haitian poet Paul

Lochard because it would be impossible to notice “the strong dose of African blood that flows in his veins.” and he approvingly comments that that “there is nothing, absolutely nothing to distinguish him from a French poet of the purest French stock.”

For Firmin, it is easy enough for the Haitian poet to perform his blackness for a foreign market, as “easy success” could be found “among foreign readers by pandering to their love of the exotic, imitating in his verse the sound of the *bamboula* and evoking the charms of the frisky Creole woman.” What is, therefore, reactionary for Firmin is a nostalgia for fixed and unchanging racial and national stereotypes.

Acutely aware as he was of the world-historical nature of the Haitian experiment, Firmin felt that a new hybridizing modernity was rendering the idea of absolute racial difference obsolete. The acceleration and proliferation of cultural and racial intermixing put the modern Haitian state in the vanguard of global modernity.

In his last work, *The Letters from St. Thomas* (1910), Firmin, in exile on the island of St. Thomas, was no longer writing back to Gobineau and contesting a theory of racial determinism. He was directing his attention to the politics of territorial self-sufficiency and the rhetoric of grounded difference that had become prevalent in Haitian political practice.

Exile in St. Thomas takes Firmin temporarily away from the violent factional politics that were pushing Haiti toward chaos, and the very landscape offers a kind of liberation to the exile’s imagination, allowing him to “discover, from almost every side, a vast majestic horizon, awakening the idea of the

infinite, which is like a liberation for the human soul.”

The tiny island’s topography and its arid isolation seem to offer here the possibility of transcending the specific and the relative for broad internationalist vistas. The main thrust of these letters is, therefore, not surprisingly to persuade his fellow Haitians to transcend exclusionary notions of identity and boldly enter a modernizing global space. In making the difficult case for increasing foreign investment in Haiti and against an intensifying xenophobic reflex, Firmin chides his compatriots.

Ought we to forget, with the interweaving of interests that create modern civilization, no people desirous of progress and social well-being should shut itself off behind a wall of China. Do you think that the Haitian people... can reasonably do without both the material and intellectual capital that the advanced foreigner would alone be able to provide for the development of this land of Haiti of which we are rightly proud but whose admirable fertility is not sufficient to procure happiness for us?

As these letters also show, Firmin is the first Haitian intellectual to make the case for national survival by resisting hemispherically Haiti in terms of a regional “Antillean Confederation”. Such prescience was as unpalatable at the time to Haitian nationalists, as much as to U.S. policymakers who viewed Firmin’s activities with suspicion. Firmin’s dream of Haiti as a privileged site to contest an identity politics based on race and nation would be thwarted as, within five years of his death, the U.S. occupied Haiti in the

The acceleration and proliferation of cultural and racial intermixing put the Haitian state in the vanguard of global modernity.

name of the West's universal values and its civilizing mission.

Firmin's efforts to conceive of and apply a more supple and hybridizing universalism in the face of the eurocentric racial theorizing of Gobineau, and later the imperialist re-mapping of the Caribbean by the U.S., may have failed as a politics but left behind a crucial legacy for Haitian thought that may well be its distinguishing feature.

For instance, one only has to look at the impact of two, not unrelated within Haiti, systems of universalist thought in the twentieth century to see how the de-fetishizing of race and place had found ready application in the movements of Marxism and Surrealism in the post Occupation period. The militant cosmopolitanism of the period that followed the American Occupation, which ended in 1934, has been invariably clouded by the reductive nationalist mystifications of the indigenist and Africanist movements in the thirties and forties. Both of these anti-American ideologies championed race and nation and dismissed earlier writers and intellectuals as insufficiently Haitian because of their cultural alienation or *'bovarysme collectif'*.

Nevertheless, the role of Marxist thought, for instance, in Haiti from the mid Thirties onwards indicates the extent to which a defensive nationalism, a narrow celebration of Haitian *'terroir'*, became contextualized in a global modernity and militant internationalism.

Jacques Roumain's posthumously published novel, *Masters of the Dew*, has invariably been hailed as the masterpiece of Haitian indigenism. It might be more useful to see it as an imaginative site where the contradictions of

revolutionary internationalism and cultural nationalism are played out.

On one hand, the author clearly intended to project the Haitian peasant condition as part of a global mass movement against U.S. imperialism. It is not hard to see the main protagonist, Manuel, as ideologically internationalized by his cane-cutting experience in Cuba, nor to be aware that Roumain wished to see in the *coumbite* as a modern-day *'bois caïman'* ceremony where the transfer from sacred to secular is made and masses mobilized using an ancient rite. Roumain's protagonist is a product of a hybridized transnational space created by U.S. imperialism, one that allows a 20th century Haitian worker to "catch the spirit of the thing" as

his predecessors did a century or more earlier. No doubt, in Roumain's imagination the French Revolution's impact on plantation slavery in Saint

Domingue could find a parallel in the twentieth century in the Russian Revolution's impact on communities of uprooted, migrant workers in the northern Caribbean.

The Haitian Revolution and radical Haitian thought in general may thus be characterized as an effort to exorcize the colonial past. Yet, Haiti's tragedy is that the colonial is never that easily effaced.

Haiti's story is as much about the unthinkable - of illiterate captive Africans taking hold of the ideals of the Enlightenment and boldly entering modern history - as it is about a terrible and prolonged experiment in neo-colonialism.

Now, two hundred years after the most radical revolution in the age of revolutions, Haiti stands as the poorest country in the western hemisphere, invariably described as the only 'failed state' in the Americas. As if

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to further efface Haiti's revolutionary past, the international media have taken to referring to Haiti as "France's former colony".

Sadly, the legacy of the past is as much the eruption into modernity as one of the world's longest experiments in neo-colonialism. Haiti's dependency was sealed by the massive indemnity of 150 million francs that was paid to France in 1825 in exchange for recognition. This indemnity was paid to plantation owners from Saint Domingue by a Haitian elite anxious to open Haitian ports to trade with France. Unable to pay this indemnity, the Haitian state borrowed the money from French banks and would spend the next century trying to pay back this debt until it was taken over by the U.S. during their Occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934, thereby fixing Haiti's neocolonial status in an American sphere of influence.

Neocolonialism also suited the Haitian elites as they secured local control of the country as importers and exporters living off the ever-dwindling resources of the nation. The elites formed the state that lived off the peasantry who formed the nation. The idea of the nation from which the elites drew their legitimacy had nothing to do with the majority of Haitians who were never consulted or included in any institutionalized way. The state neglected the peasantry and the peasantry had no leverage against the state.

Now, after the end of Duvalierism - one of the most vicious manifestations of the Haitian state and eighteen years of civil strife and political machinations - we are no closer to bridging the gap between Haitian elites and the Haitian masses. Ruling classes everywhere jealously guard their own privileges; nowhere more so than in Haiti, where the

interests of the nation and those of the elite are seen as deeply incompatible.

In a tellingly entitled recent book called *Haiti: the Predatory Republic*, Robert Fatton paints a convincing picture of what he calls a political culture dominated by "*la politique du vent* generating a class of '*grands mangeurs*' scrambling to advance its private interests."

The Francophile urban elite has come a long way since 1804. They have been largely replaced by a new entrepreneurial elite, recently arrived but notoriously insatiable in their desire to consume the scarce resources of an impoverished society. One cannot therefore help feeling that all of the Haitian opposition's and private sector's talk of election irregularities and President Aristide's corruption seems to be about ultimately having access to power.

Likewise, Lavalas' unrestrained wielding of state power and Aristide's attempt to mobilize the masses behind a patrimonial leader, the demagogic sound-bites, all smack of the same winner-take-all mentality. In the meantime, we have armed murderers and narco-traffickers who have entered the country, describing themselves as the inheritors the revolutionary army of 1804. As we have seen, there is no possibility of negotiation and compromise in such a winner-take-all situation. The dust, not to mention blood and ashes, of Haiti's never-ending transition to democracy will not settle any time soon. Darker days lie ahead as Haiti seems to be openly flirting with anarchy.

There are various ways of celebrating Haiti's revolutionary past. You could cynically exploit it the way Jean-Bertrand Aristide does by comparing his 'kidnapping' and exile to that of Toussaint Louverture and by actually mimicking Toussaint's words when he was

Sadly, the legacy of the past is as much the eruption into modernity as one of the world's longest experiments in neo-colonialism.

captured. Remember the first words uttered by Aristide when he arrived in Bangui: “They have cut down the tree of peace but it will grow again.” Two hundred years earlier, Toussaint said almost the same words when he was seized by Leclerc’s troops. Toussaint must be turning in his grave at this instance of Haitian history repeating itself as tragic farce. Jean Bertrand Louverture – I think not.

We could also, somehow, try to look beyond the present, back to the ideals of those who were called by C.L.R. James “The First West Indians”.

Haiti is the Caribbean’s place of memory and origin and Toussaint arguably the only regional hero. Napoleon’s imprisonment of Toussaint in the cold, darkness, and damp of the Fort de Joux was meant to bury and efface all that Haitian revolutionary universalism stood for. But this fatal imprisonment only demonstrates, ironically, the distance between the pretension to Enlightenment ideals and the post-revolutionary practice of the French state. Toussaint’s imprisonment, exile, and death also were a foretaste of the fate that lay in store for Napoleon himself.

I would like to conclude with an image of Toussaint that we find in that very unusual play by the Martiniquan writer Edouard Glissant, *Monsieur Toussaint*. The play is set in the Jura mountains, the revolutionary Caribbean in Europe.

Contrary to Napoleon’s expectation’s, Toussaint’s cell is not the space of exile and imprisonment. It is not a static nor confining space, but stages the events of the Haitian revolution and puts Toussaint in constant dialogue with all its major figures, living and dead. In response to the invitation by the dead Mackandal and Boukman to

return to Africa, Toussaint declares “I will cross the seas in the other direction.”

In this play, Toussaint’s de-territorialized cell becomes an island in the Caribbean archipelago connecting the Caribbean’s Atlantic and hemispheric beginnings, a prophetic vision of its revolutionary past.

“Embraced *in extremis*,” this island should not be quarantined or allowed to disappear. Perhaps the Haitian revolution

should not be tied to any country called “Haiti” or simply contained in the date 1804, but indeed should be seen as “world-historical” in its implications.

Thank you.

QUESTION PERIOD ¹

Considering your statements regarding the linkage of the Haitian and the French revolutions, looking at it not as a singularity but a universal statement: bringing it forward, then, to the present time – how do you perceive the current situation in Haiti ² and what it says about international institutions and the dialogue between the United Nations and the US?

The problem we all have with Haiti is the idea that somehow Haiti is some kind of strange, unusual, or exceptional country that is not part of a modern internationalist system. Therefore, Haiti is really dealt with in some of the most disgraceful ways that one

¹ This section was annotated by Jennifer Costanza, who also contributed to Appendix A: Further Reading, below.

² In February 2004, political instability in Haiti erupted in a wave of armed rebellions, climaxing with the departure of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide on February 29, 2004. Following the President’s exile, U.S. and international troops entered the country to stabilize the increasingly violent situation.

can imagine. I am not only talking about the US here. I would hate to track for you the way CARICOM got involved in Haiti. That is not by any means a pretty picture.

You are right in pointing to the fact that, when one deals with the Haitian situation – especially keeping in mind the argument which I tried to make - one should always see it as part of an international or global reality; and what is played out in Haiti is always played out more dramatically there than elsewhere. If the Haitian population is as it is today – if it has so exploded; if Haitians are workers in the canefields of the Dominican Republic and are scattered left and right, and dying on small boats trying to get to the US - that, to me, is your worst-case scenario for all small countries in today's reality, and no one should feel somehow immune from that particular fate.

To answer your question more precisely, then, events in Haiti should always be part of some kind of international action spearheaded from the region. CARICOM,³ for that is the organization we [in the Caribbean] have, should always consider its members the frontline states on Haiti – and I am using that term very deliberately, in the same way you could have frontline states on the problem of South Africa.

What is taking place in Haiti today – and I entirely agree with Fatton's analysis - is a flirtation with anarchy; a kind of Darwinian survival of the fittest between, on the one hand, what are called the Haitian elite, and, on the other hand, the people. Don't forget that those who comprise the Haitian elite at present for the most part no longer even have French names. These are Middle East-

³ The Caribbean Community (CARICOM), is a multilateral organization to which most Caribbean countries belong. CARICOM sought to play a leadership role in brokering a peaceful settlement to the political crisis in Haiti.

ern businessmen and the like who have come into the country and formed part of a local oligarchy. They have names like "Apaid," "Baker," "Mevs," et cetera.

I hope I have answered your question; the idea is that Haiti should not be treated as some sort of pariah state.

Where is the outrage in the world? It is ridiculous that in modern times, we can watch a country that is enormously symbolic for the region, that brought freedom to this part of the world, be ostracized by French, American and other forces, and be destroyed and humiliated on its bi-centennial - regardless of what one thinks of Aristide and the problems with his government. I'd like to hear more voices condemning these current developments, which represent an act against the symbol of racial liberation; to hear such condemnation is especially important to those of us struggling for a strong identity for African peoples in the Caribbean and elsewhere.

I wonder if we have not trapped ourselves – certainly in the Caribbean and elsewhere – because we play the nation game and the sovereignty game as well. One of the most paralyzing dimensions of CARICOM surely is [its adherence to the principle] that you do not get involved in a sovereign state's affairs. You keep hearing about sovereignty and you wonder sometimes who talks about these things. Who is "the nation"?

When the Haitian opposition meets Patrick Manning and Patterson⁴ and so on, and tell them that the only thing they will settle for is the departure of Aristide, and they say they are talking for the Haitian nation, there is no way that Paterson and the others can contest this because they, too, are part of this system of small national blocs, all of whom "know best" what is going on.

⁴ Patrick Manning is the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. P.J. Patterson is Prime Minister of Jamaica.

So we have caught ourselves in a discourse that does not allow for cosmopolitanism; it does not allow for internationalist action. It, in fact, makes almost nonsense of the idea of Toussaint dealing with a monarchist general by giving him a republican lesson. Could somehow that idea come back? Could it somehow return today, in terms of dealing with the reality of a place like Haiti?

I would like to react to something else in your statement; something that has struck me from the very beginning.

Jean-Jacques Dessalines: an illiterate, and quite likely more of an African captive than a slave - because remember Haiti was doing so well [as a revenue-generating colony of France] that in the 5 years before the outbreak of the revolution in 1791, huge numbers of Africans were brought into the country; that means they were not quite converted into slaves and were still very much reacting as captives. Why should he not name Haiti “New Senegal”? Why did he not call it “New Guinea”? Why didn’t he do that? Why did he call it Haiti? Why did he start a project that was about creating something totally new?

That is one of the reasons I invoked Fanon, because Fanon seemed to be onto something, even if it is very idealistic. That is, he felt that he, Fanon - a non-Islamic, non-Arabic-speaking West Indian - could be an Algerian; he could fight Algeria’s war of independence. It was a matter more of consciousness and will than it was about identity politics.

And it seemed that Dessalines had something like that in mind. He had in mind something like the idea that we would create this new people who are called Haitians, who hark back to the Taino past in Haiti even though the Tainos are no longer

there,⁵ and who would create themselves in terms of a modern idea of what a revolutionary identity could bring about. I think there is something noble and glorious in that project that is being lost when the Trinidadian and Jamaicans talk with the Haitian elite; it is all so broken-up and fragmented, and disappointing.

Even if Aristide is not L’Ouverture, does he deserve the fate that he has suffered?

Nobody deserves that fate; it’s as simple as that.

To make your point even stronger, when you think of the fact that Toto Constant, the leader of FRAPH,⁶ is

living happily in New Jersey; and when you think that Raoul Cédras and General Biambly,⁷ who overthrew Aristide and killed thousands of people between 1991-94, are living happily in Panama City; and when you think that Baby Doc⁸ – well, I don’t know

⁵ Taíno Indians, a subgroup of the Arawakan Indians (a group of American Indians in northeastern South America), inhabited the Greater Antilles (comprising Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola [Haiti and the Dominican Republic], and Puerto Rico) in the Caribbean Sea at the time when Christopher Columbus’ arrived to the New World.

⁶ Emmanuel “Toto” Constant was a paid CIA informant and received financial and strategic aid from the U.S. in 1993-94, to form the *Front pour l’Avancement et Progrès Haïtien* (FRAPH). FRAPH was a paramilitary force that terrorized the Haitian people and systematically murdered grassroots democratic leaders in Haiti. Constant now lives free in the U.S.

⁷ Generals Raoul Cédras and Philippe Biambly led the 1991 *coup d’état* that removed then-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide from office. Cédras then presided over a three-year military dictatorship in which thousands of Haitians were tortured, raped and murdered.

⁸ Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier was President of Haiti from 1971 to 1986, when popular protests and

if he is still living there – was comfortably settled in the Cote D’Azure: why is Aristide in Bangui?⁹

Indeed, I was more than happy that the Jamaican government said to Aristide “Come to Jamaica and meet with your family,”¹⁰ because [his exile] is a humiliation, and it seems to me quite deliberate. I’m not going to get involved in the debate around the “kidnapping” and so on,¹¹ because, as you can sense from my own attitude to Aristide, Aristide is very slippery and is not someone I would go out of my way to defend; I think he missed his historic moment to do something – to rise to the occasion in Haiti – and he didn’t do it.

But if he found himself in Bangui, it was because – as, in fact, one French reporter said: “*personne ne voulez de lui*” - he annoyed the Americans and the French, so that’s what you get. If he had somehow done all that he did, or was supposed to have done, and had *not* annoyed the French and the Americans, he would be either elsewhere [in a more graceful exile] or he would still be in power. This has to do with the way Haiti is dealt with, and with

I think Aristide missed his historic moment to do something – to rise to the occasion in Haiti.

how the rest of the Caribbean didn’t see something like this coming. When Guy Phillippe and Chamblain entered the country and started taking one police station after another,¹² CARICOM sat on its hands, saying: “We have an accord; why don’t we put the accord into practise?” At that point, they should have been screaming bloody murder.

You said that nobody wants Aristide, but most of the Haitian people do still want him. The ruling elite do not want him in Haiti – that is why he is not there. You talked earlier about the “winner-take-all” mentality, and I think the world missed a good opportunity to make it right again. We are going to be here again in 5 years, in 10 years, doing the same thing because the

Haitian people are the descendents of Toussaint L’Ouverture – they will not be tamed.

If Aristide had agreed to the sharing of power, for the first time, we would not have fallen into the winner-take-all mentality, and the world community would have come in and forced us to work together.

My question to you is - you said Haiti is going into anarchy; but, the almighty Marines are there, the

a withdrawal of support from the U.S. led him to resign. He led the second half of the 29-year Duvalier family dictatorship, one of the most brutal periods in Haitian history.

⁹ Upon his departure from Haiti on February 29, 2004, Aristide found temporary asylum in Bangui, Central African Republic. The U.S. government made this arrangement for Aristide.

¹⁰ After a brief stay in Bangui, Aristide and his wife, Mildred, traveled to Jamaica to reunite with their children, who had been staying with family in the U.S. while the political crisis in Haiti played out. At the time of writing, Aristide and his family continue to take refuge in Jamaica while awaiting an offer for permanent asylum.

¹¹ Aristide has claimed that he did not resign from the presidency, but was forced to leave (was kidnapped) by the United States. See Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s “Statement to the World.” (Bibliographic information in Appendix A: Further Reading).

¹² Guy Phillippe and Louis Jodel Chamblain were two of the main leaders of the “rebel” paramilitary force that gradually captured cities and towns in the north of Haiti, eventually leading to Aristide’s “resignation.” Chamblain was deputy leader of the FRAPH and has been convicted of multiple human rights atrocities. Phillippe is a former member of the Haitian Army, and former police chief both of Cap-Haitien and the Port-au-Prince suburb Delmas. He is suspected of presiding over numerous human rights abuses while holding these positions. He received military training from U.S. Special Forces in Ecuador, and is accused of plotting a (failed) *coup d’état* in December 2001. He is recognized as the principal leader of the “rebellion” and is also suspected to be involved in drug trafficking.

Canadian army is there.¹³ Why do you think they are there?

I am not even sure what they are doing there. They claim that one of the things they are doing is disarming the population; at last count, they had collected 4 guns. They are supposed to be maintaining law and order, and they make no patrols in the country.

When I was asked to comment on the series of events that led to Aristide's departure, I said: "I cannot comment on what is going on here because I do not see the big picture." I know that somebody must have a plan – somebody had better have a plan, because this is looking like chaos. I begin to think that nobody has plan.

I think they have a plan but they are not going to reveal it.

I worked long enough in Haiti to worry about conspiracy theories. Some of them are very convincing and they keep coming up all the time. I don't know, but quite often there is no big plan.

One side of this has to do with making Haiti part of the international order – rekindling what happened after 1791. But the other side of it is more modest and the way one should go.

I think it was in 1989, on one of the missions to Haiti, a representative from the St. Lucian government came along with us, and he was totally hopeless – like a lot of these political appointees, but he said one thing I remembered: "Why don't we teach Haitians to grow bananas?"

I thought this was stupid – I mean, Haiti has barely enough topsoil to grow anything. Af-

¹³ The United States and Canada have sent troops to Haiti in an effort to quell violence and stabilize the country.

ter looking at him for a while, I asked him: "What do you mean by that?" And here he showed himself to be actually brilliant. He said: "Do you know how democracy actually works in St. Lucia? It's bananas that make it work – the banana farmers form the basis for the municipal elections, the political parties, et cetera." So bananas become, symbolically, the way you build from the ground up. That is what you need to do in Haiti: symbolically, get Haitians to grow bananas.¹⁴

We hear a great deal about the rebels who consist of human rights abusers, thugs, and criminals, yet there is also reference to an "anti-Aristide" elite, composed of some one percent of the population. I have heard from other sources that there is also a highly mobilized civil society, especially involving University students and professors, who have been opposed to Aristide since the elections of 2000. Can you describe of what the opposition consists? Is it wider than the 1% elite and the thugs?

This is speculation on my part.

Yes, you do have Guy Phillippe and that group, who've been armed and have spanking new uniforms (people ask "who gave them all that stuff?"), and that's one part of the story.

Then you have, in Haiti's political fallout from 2000, a range of political groups. On one hand, there is the private sector or the business class of Haiti; these are the people I was talking about earlier, people like Andy Apaid¹⁵ – who seems suddenly to have disappeared, but who was once a spokesman for this group. This was really the opposi-

¹⁴ See "Why Can't Haiti be a Banana Democracy?" by J. Michael Dash, published Sunday, February 22, 2004 in the *Jamaican Gleaner*.

¹⁵ André "Andy" Apaid is a Haitian-American businessman and was the ostensible leader of the anti-Aristide political opposition coalition, Group of 184.

tion to Aristide. Apparently [Apaid] came to prominence in opposing the raising of the minimum wage by Aristide. So you have that group of businessmen who, Aristide knows well, may have directly or indirectly sponsored the first coup against him and who may somehow be involved in what's going on right now. They certainly have not condemned the violence that has taken place in the North of the country.

As well as that, there are different alliances such as the *Convergence Democratique* that is composed of a couple of major parties that have never been able to have a national impact. This group became disaffected after the election, when they did not get the piece of the pie that they felt was their due. For the longest time, Haitians did not take them seriously because they are too small to be taken seriously; certainly, though, with Aristide's failures and the passage of time, they grew in importance.

You also have the people who have been, for all kinds of reasons, marginalized by Aristide, though they would have originally been a part of the *Lavalas* platform; Aristide formed the *Fanmi Lavalas*¹⁶ and then broke from the *Lavalas* platform. You have the OPL¹⁷ people who have been shut out as well by Aristide, and you have some very interesting people in that group as well.

I've never fully understood the university movement and its orientation, but certainly the beating of the University rector did not

¹⁶ *Lavalas* (officially the Lavalas Political Platform) is the name of the broad-based coalition that brought Aristide to power in 1990. In 1996 the coalition broke, and Aristide formed his own party, *Fanmi Lavalas* (Lavalas Family).

¹⁷ The OPL, which had been the dominant group in the *Lavalas* coalition, became an independent political party in 1996. Originally the *Organisation Politique Lavalas* (Lavalas Political Organization), after splitting with *Lavalas* it was renamed *Organisation de Peuple en Lutte* (Organization of People in Struggle).

help things and Aristide, at that point, created this huge opposition against him among university students.

What you have, then, is this alliance based very much in Port-au-Prince, which is broadly anti-Aristide, and which contains the private sector, the *Convergence Democratique*, the Group of 184, disaffected [former members of] *Lavalas* – it is a whole spectrum of people who have been either literally kept out of business by Aristide, or kept out of politics by Aristide, as Aristide basically ran a system of unrestrained, no checks-and-balances use of state power.

We have seen this elsewhere in the Caribbean without as dramatic an outcome as you have in Haiti. What you had in Haiti was essentially an illiberal democracy which eventually found that its own support would only come from the armed faithful, increasingly, so that the level of conflict between the group opposed to him and Aristide would simply grow in intensity. Now what we have to see is how these groups will work among themselves, because there is enormous conflict in there as well.

You mention that there may be no plan at now for Haiti. What do you think the current plan should be? I know it is a big question... [Laughter]

It goes back to an earlier question. Suppose I was the biggest imperialist in the Western hemisphere: I just don't see a point for doing what was just done in Haiti. I just don't get it. I can't see who is going to benefit from it. If it is just [motivated by] a narrow, "we don't like Aristide; let's get him out of there" [attitude], well that's stupid, because what you have done is open a sort of Pandora's Box.

I'm all for a kind of enlightened imperialism if you are going to have it; you try to get all your ducks lined up properly before you

make your move. Big countries like to get what they want out of what is going on, but you don't create a state of such anarchy. You may well have boat people by the hundreds on the seas again. You never know what is going to happen.

In the current situation, I hardly know what to tell you as far as setting Haiti straight is concerned.

Let's go back to 1990.¹⁸ Most people who were there then are nostalgic for that time, because they saw the Haitian people [in a moment of optimism]; there was such goodwill and energy. All those slums of which you see pictures: there is real energy and creativity in there.

One of the things that is probably hard to understand in North America is how with all that misery in Haiti - because you do not even have poverty there; I agree with Aristide when he said that what they have there is misery and they are trying to move up to poverty - in all of that, there is so much creativity. I mean, I walk around in Harlem and see people sitting there doing pretty much nothing; when you walk through Haiti, nobody is sitting around. People are always doing things - whether it is one orange they are trying to sell, or one tire they are trying to recycle to make sandals, people are always doing things.

In a sort of stupidly romantic way, I would say that the enormous human resources of the Haitian people are there waiting to be

¹⁸ In 1990, the Organization of American States (OAS) observed the first free and fair democratic elections in Haitian history. Aristide won 67% of the popular vote. Many Haitians believed that their country would finally see peace, justice, and socio-economic progress.

tapped. I have been going to Haiti since 1971, and I would say that the Haitian people are becoming more and more smart and aware of the world around them. I remember the first time I saw a transistor radio in the Haitian countryside, and the first times that people began to talk about politics in the way that they talk about them now. The real hope is that into this whole situation that Fatton describes of *politique du ventre*, must now be equated the whole Haitian population which cannot be tamed in the way that Duvalier¹⁹ tamed it for 29 years.

COMMENT: In the context of "what can be done in Haiti's current circumstances", I want to highlight the contribution to Haiti being made by Cuba. Cuba has helped to decrease infant mortality rates by sending doctors to Haiti. The 362 Cuban doctors in Haiti are serving approximately 75 percent of the population, not just in the capital city, and without charging the high fees of the few Haitian doctors in the capital. Canada, despite initial promises, has not sent doctors to Haiti to assist with this project. Cuba has established a medical school in Haiti in addition to giving scholarships to Haitian students for study in Cuba. Canada did not join in this effort, though it so readily joined the US in its present coup in Haiti. One of the first things the US did in its intervention now in Haiti, was occupy and close the Cuban medical school.

All those slums in Port-au-Prince: there is real energy and creativity in there.

¹⁹ Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier led Haiti from 1957 until his death in 1971, when his son Jean-Claude assumed power until 1986. The Duvalier regime maintained a tight hold on power due in part to the nation-wide security force, developed by Francois Duvalier, which included individuals from nearly all classes of society. The security force, officially the *Volontaires pour Sécurité Nationale*, was popularly known as the *Tontons Macoute*.

I completely agree with you that Haiti's symbolic significance must be perceived on the transnational stage. However, to take up from the chorus of David Rudder's song [performed earlier in the program]: symbolic to whom? And symbolic how, in the context of the region?

The answer to that has more to do with the region than just with Haiti. The Caribbean profoundly does not understand what it is. It does not understand how it is poised in terms of global culture. While we have absolutely brilliant writers, who every now and then absolutely stun us with these revelations as to what we could possibly be, [in the Caribbean we are not generally aware of our profound connection] to an Atlantic or hemispheric culture.

If you manage to see the Caribbean in this way, immediately Haiti becomes important. Not only important, it becomes a key part of the understanding that I was talking about earlier: if, as C.L.R. James could say, "they understood the thing," the thing that they understood and what we refuse to understand. Because we behave, really, as former colonies. We still behave that way.

I am not only talking about linguistically, but about our very notion of how we perform on a global scale. We are always looking over our shoulders to see how we should shrewdly shift in one direction or another, with absolutely no sense of the larger destiny of the Caribbean. We keep seeing our size was a limitation when our size is our strength.

If you were in the middle of a continental mass, you could stay unchanged for the rest of your life – in the middle of Ohio, or wherever; but if you are living on a tiny island, I don't care how illiterate you are, you

are constantly going to be buffeted by the world outside and transformed imaginatively and in other ways far more rapidly than someone who is in the middle of a huge continent.

The Caribbean doesn't understand what it is; doesn't perform on the world stage as it should. Therefore, Haiti becomes this anomaly, this bizarre phenomenon that you can't quite take hold of.

Can you clarify something regarding your view of the globality of the Haitian Revolution, as representing something beyond its territory – a de-territorialized Revolution. How do you reconcile the tension between this transnational, universal meaning, and the fact that Haiti is confronting very real and immediate political problems with real complex internal dynamics? This vision of yours: what of its rootedness in Haiti?

The Caribbean profoundly does not understand what it is, how it is poised in terms of global culture.

On a simple level: when you think of democracy, do you think of contemporary Greece: the country today called "Greece"?

No, you think of something with a larger, universal significance that we all aspire to – the values of democracy, et cetera - [the origins of which we associate with ancient Greece,] not with the actual country of contemporary Greece.

I am suggesting that, on one hand, this is where we should place Haiti. It may sound incredibly overwhelming that Haiti and [ancient] Greece could be held at the same level, but consider this:

At the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, we have the beginning of modernity. That is, we have the beginning of ideas that circulate globally and that circulate in a finite world; the world has been made finite because of colonization – the world has shrunk. When ideas circulate

in that way, centre and periphery can be turned upside down. [Thus, global ideas] find themselves expressed in their fullest in a plantation in the Caribbean and not in Paris.

This is a point that James is making: the thing is failing in Paris: brutality has come back; Napoleon has come back; the Restoration [is effected], et cetera. And then you have, for a short while, this incredible, most radical manifestation of the idea of human rights in Haiti. (Of course, that, in turn, begins to transform into a response to Napoleon, a drive for national independence, and so on.)

On that level, Haiti is everywhere. Haiti is important to the French and they don't even know it. The French - they say it all the time; it is like their slogan - makes a claim to "French universalism." Of course, this is an oxymoron: you cannot have *French* universalism; universalism does not belong to the French. But the French use this concept as a way of occupying a space in the world.

The lie to this fabled [French] universalism is Haiti. The fact that Haiti has been so ostracized by the French has to do with the fact that the French will not recognize the limitations of their own revolution, and the extent to which that revolution eventually produced elsewhere something that was even more glorious than the French Revolution itself. It is important to them to keep Haiti out of the picture.

From this point of view, the question of its symbolic destiny is extremely important. There are other ways of dealing with the country itself, but in terms of the work that I do, I would love to "free" Haiti symbolically from being tied to the margins of

world history, which is where it has been consigned up until recently.

The current helplessness that we see in Haiti seems to me to be symptomatic of the general condition of the Third World. Haiti, for me, is the poster-child for global exploitation and repression, but perhaps it also points to an answer to these problems. With Haiti, a legal case for reparations could readily be argued, and such a case could serve as an example for a larger drive to correct past injustices against the Third World.

The case for reparations²⁰ is a case that has to be made. It is unfortunate that the case was made by Aristide; in fact, it should probably not be made by Haitians at all. The case for reparations to Haiti probably should be made more generally in some kind of international forum. In this case we know all the details: the amount of money; why it was done; and that it was given back to the very planters who had been thrown out of Haiti. The effects on the country, of course, are very obvious. It is a case that needs to be made and the French have to answer it in a very serious way.

Aristide was the legitimate representative of the Haitian people so he had every right to make the case for

the return of this money.

It is not that Aristide did not have the right to make this claim, in his capacity as the head of state. But we all know that, at that point, the French were going to say "If we give him millions, what is he going to do

²⁰ Haiti was forced to pay France an indemnity of 60 million francs in order to gain formal recognition of its independence. Now many Haitians want France to pay back this sum. Over the past year (2003), Aristide was particularly vocal on the topic of reparations.

with it?” because his record begins to stink at that point. The key idea is that this is not a France-Aristide issue; this should be an issue that transcends Aristide and the French.

*How was Aristide's ability to govern the country in a more democratic and reasonable fashion undermined by the systematic murder, during the period of military rule while Aristide was in exile, of leaders of the popular civil society organizations that supported him?*²¹

This is something worth investigating. I was on the Human Rights mission after Aristide's return, and one thing that struck me, and that I mentioned toward the end of the lecture, is that the dust in Haiti refuses to settle.

What should have been done, as was done in South Africa, was some sort of truth and recognition process. That needed seriously to be put in place. Instead, what you have now is a kind of brutal “settling of scores” that will continue for a long time to come. What should have happened is some just and visibly equitable system for dealing with the question of who died and who killed. That was never done. A number of plans were made but never put in place.

You have not only many who died, but many who saw it happen and who felt it must never be allowed to happen again. Many Aristide supporters clearly distrusted profoundly the oligarchy: those with money who were in favour of and worked alongside the de facto military regimes after 1991. As soon as [these Aristide supporters] could get arms, they armed themselves and did so no doubt with the approval of Aristide.

²¹ As noted above, FRAPH paramilitary death squads systematically terrorized and murdered Haiti's organic civil society leaders during the latter half of Aristide's first, temporary exile in 1993-94.

What you call the *chimères* in Haiti are really the OP - the *organizacions populares* - who armed themselves.

But to what extent was Aristide denied capable cadres of a democratic kind who had been engaged in political organization, because those people had simply been eliminated?

Aristide is also self-destructive, to be honest. In the creation of *Fanmi Lavalas*, he denied himself access to a lot of people who could have helped him; he denied himself people like Chavannes Jean-Baptiste of the *Mouvman Peyizan Papay*;²² he denied himself the intellectuals on the Left and the OPL as well. In his own – however you see it, as self-serving or paranoid – carving up of the *Lavalas* platform, he basically boxed himself into a corner and denied himself that kind of capacity and legitimacy, ultimately, that he could have had.

Can it be claimed that the CARICOM states are themselves so corrupt – and they would probably do no better than Aristide - that it limited their ability to react to the Haitian situation? Also, who is making the weapons that are being used in the insurrection in Haiti?

Regarding the question of weapons: It was feared that when Aristide disbanded the army, the weapons were hidden or buried with the intention of being recuperated later. When I was in Haiti, I asked a UN person involved in the collection of weapons: “Are you searching for these hidden weapons?” He said he did not think that there were many weapons to begin with, but he felt that it was pointless to look for

²² *Mouvman Peyizan Papay* (MPP), in English the Peasant Movement of Papaye, is the oldest peasant organization in Haiti and played a leading role in organizing popular forces to back Aristide in the 1990 Presidential election.

weapons because the easiest things in the world to get is weapons; you can get them in a blink of an eye – and not just guns, but things like rocket launchers and so on.

The weapons being used in Haiti could have come from any number of places, but certainly these groups were being armed. The question is, who was involved? Certainly it was not Aristide who armed them.

In terms of corruption: Aristide has been demonized. He is nowhere as corrupt as some people are trying to make out. Aristide was wrong for Haiti and the best that could have happened to him was that there could have been an internationally-enforced power sharing arrangement that would have paralyzed him and paved the way for new elections. Aristide was functionally out of it from the time the demonstrations became very intense.

Let's not exaggerate Aristide and his failures; but let's not, at the same time, minimize the achievements elsewhere.

The thing about the Caribbean is that you have a lot of small states there that function very well. There was a piece recently in the New York Times about Guadeloup that is so annoying it isn't funny. Frank Creel, the reporter, has gone to Guadeloup and remarks upon how wonderfully modernized it is, compared to the colonial backwaters that are the islands around it. He is talking about St. Lucia and Barbados and places like that that have a functioning dollar; these are great stories about how places run, and I keep saying - to go back to my banana thing – why can't we make Haiti grow bananas, as in St. Lucia? Try to make things work in that sort of way. Of course there is corruption [in the Caribbean], but there is corruption everywhere – just think of Enron, and so on. Nobody has a monopoly on corruption.

Concerning the election of May 2000,²³ why did the international community block funds to Haiti simply because 8 senators disagreed with the electoral process, in which 30,000 Haitians participated?

It is true that the elections previous to those in 2000 probably had more irregularities. Why they insisted on the problem of tabulation for 8 senatorial seats [in 2000 no doubt was politically motivated.]

It seemed to me to be a small thing, but [Aristide should not have been intransigent about it.] Why not run [the election] again? When Aristide did choose to run another election, parliament was seated and the opposition said they would not participate.

There is an expression in Jamaica that states: "When your hand is in the tiger's mouth, you withdraw it slowly." Aristide didn't see what was happening. It's the small things like that that you have to watch. If you do the wrong thing, and you know the guys are out for you – I mean, surely he knew at that point that he had begun to annoy people in Washington; surely he knew at that point that the opposition would form alliances with the Republican party, et cetera. We are not naïve and he shouldn't be naïve. At that point, a small concession like that – you say "OK, I'll run it again," and you actually do it, and you at least keep the appearances absolutely right, otherwise the thing is going to snowball out of control. But I think Aristide was, in his own way, quite arrogant, and he seriously underestimated how much damage that opposition could do.

²³ For a thorough explanation of the issues surrounding the May 2000 legislative elections, please see Alex Dupuy, "Who is Afraid of Democracy in Haiti? A Critical Reflection." (Bibliography entry in Appendix A: For Further Reading).

APPENDIX A: FURTHER READING

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