

haiti olidarity

The newsletter of Haiti Action Committee.

NOU PA P OBEY!
WE DO NOT OBEY!

haiti solidarity

The newsletter of Haiti Action Committee.

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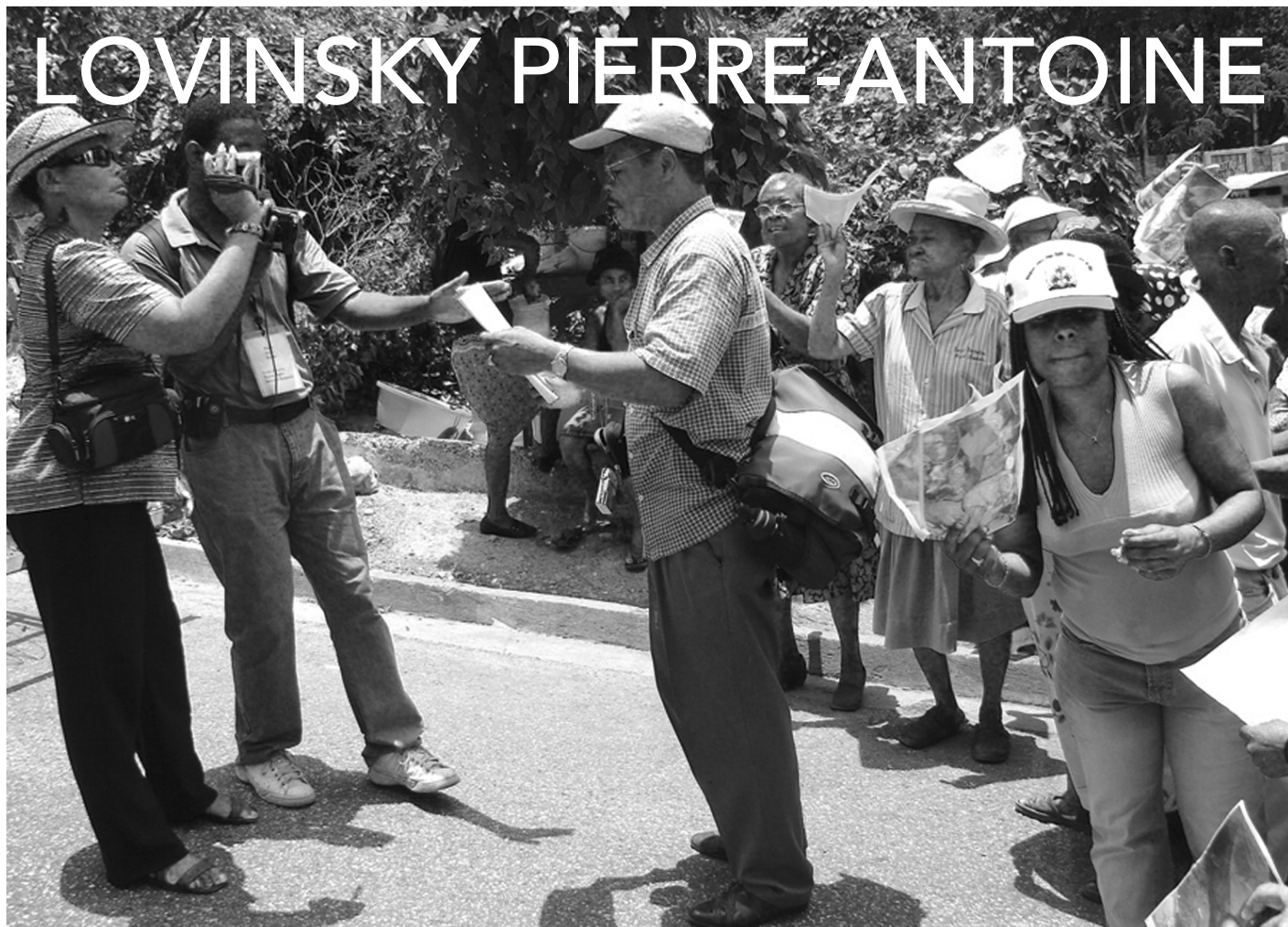
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LOVINSKY PIERRE-ANTOINE



THIS AUGUST 12 MARKS TEN YEARS SINCE THE KIDNAPPING AND DISAPPEARING OF HAITIAN REVOLUTIONARY LOVINSKY PIERRE-ANTOINE.

We dedicate this issue of Haiti Solidarity to this remarkable, powerful brother—father, husband, friend, psychologist, human rights activist, *Lavalas* leader. He loved his people, and they love him. Not a year has gone by that Lovinsky hasn't been sorely missed.

On July 28, 2007, just three years into the 2004 coup and the 92-year anniversary of the first US occupation of Haiti of 1915-1934, a crowd of protestors and witnesses watched Lovinsky lead a demonstration in front of UN headquarters in Port-au-Prince. We listened to his speech, in which he made the connection between the current occupation and the first US occupation. Lovinsky invoked the Haitian revolutionaries, like Charlemagne Péralte, who fought to end the 1915 invasion, and he said that that legacy of revolutionary struggle lives on in the people today. He said the people would always fight to uproot neo-colonialism and exploitation—they would always fight for their freedom. Two weeks after this speech, Lovinsky was kidnapped.

Like the drawing of the hibiscus flower on the front cover, Haiti's grassroots, pro-democracy movement will continue to blossom and grow, despite the best efforts of the US and Haitian elite to strangle the life out of it.

Lovinsky, and all of those who have fought, suffered, and died in the struggle—in Haiti and elsewhere—leave us a legacy. To honor that legacy, we too must struggle to build a new society in which humanity, justice, empathy, and love are the prevailing values. Little by little, we must have faith, like Lovinsky, that we will make progress. But we must help each other. We must follow the example of our Haitian brothers and sisters who say, "*Nou pap obeyi!*" We do not obey! We resist! We believe in the power of collective struggle. Little by little, together, we will make a difference.

editorial: haiti in crisis what next after the stolen election?

by Robert Roth

Addressing an overflow audience in Oakland in late April, Dr. Maryse Narcisse, presidential candidate of *Fanmi Lavalas*, the party of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, spoke about the necessity of reforming the justice system, investing in education and health, and the decisive role of women in the fight for democracy. Reflecting on the devastation wrought by both the 2010 earthquake and Hurricane Matthew, she focused on the growing threats posed by climate change to the island nation and the need for a vigorous environmental campaign to meet that threat. She emphasized that the *Lavalas* movement “places human beings at the center.”

Dr. Narcisse spoke in the wake of the selection of Haiti’s new president, Jovenel Moïse, a right-wing businessmen and protégé of former president Michel Martelly, who took office via an electoral process so replete with fraud and voter suppression that opposition forces called it an “electoral coup.” She denounced the stolen elections and the corrupt electoral commission that validated the outcome. But she reiterated that the deteriorating economic and social conditions in Haiti would be the catalyst for renewed protest in the days and months ahead. “There is no choice,” she stated, “but for the people to resist. And *Lavalas* will be there to support them.”

We can see the truth of this throughout Haiti. Market women—the very heart of Haiti’s economy and the foundation of so many Haitian families’ ability to survive—have been targeted by police trying to move them off the streets of Port-au-Prince, where they have been selling their goods for generations. When the women organized themselves and refused to move, police burned down their stalls.

From July 10 through July 12, 2017, during three days of peaceful protest for an increase in the minimum wage, Haitian police attacked the workers from the industrial park in Port-au-Prince with tear gas, batons, and cannons shooting a liquid skin irritant. They beat a woman who had recently returned to work from giving birth. A few days later, a young book vendor was shot to death in Pétionville, on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince, by a police officer in front of horrified witnesses, who tried to prevent the police from quickly removing the body and covering up the crime. They were attacked with batons and tear gas.

There has been a 35 cents increase in the price of gasoline—which was already higher than what we pay here in the United States. The government has also announced plans to reduce government subsidies for oil and gas, which will send the price even higher. The rise in the cost of transportation combined with a hike in the price of food has made already untenable living conditions even worse for the vast majority of Haitians.

Former President Michel Martelly came to power in 2011

touting his plan to build new schools and make education free for all. Instead, investment in public education has remained stagnant while tuition for private schooling has skyrocketed. Teachers have been on strike for months, demanding that they be paid after not receiving their salaries for up to two years. This despite the fact the Haitian government adds a surcharge to every international phone call and money transfer, supposedly to fund education. Students have also protested, both in support of their teachers and to denounce the failure of the government to invest in their education. They too have been met with violent repression, exemplified by a recent incident when the rector of the National University of Haiti used his SUV to run over a student protester, landing the student in the hospital in critical condition. A video captured the gruesome sequence. No charges have been filed in the case.

The Haitian government has a solution for the crisis in education—more prisons. There are now more than 10,000 Haitians locked up in prison, the majority of whom have never been charged or sentenced. Prisoners are frequently beaten, receive no health care, and live in overcrowded cells, where epidemics spread rapidly. When United Nations soldiers from Nepal introduced cholera to Haiti in 2010, the disease swept through Haiti’s prisons, killing hundreds. At the recent opening of a new prison in Haiti’s central plateau, the head of Haiti’s national police, Michel-Ange Gedeon, boasted about the increase in prison construction, saying: “In every society, whenever schools fail in their mission, prisons are built in a cascade to try to right the ship. If offenders are to be neutralized, then prisons are needed to contain them.” This is Haiti’s version of mass incarceration, so well known to black and brown communities here in the US.

Now there are new political prisoners—many of them associated with the *Lavalas* movement—who were arrested during the sustained wave of protests over the stolen elections. As living conditions worsen and protests sharpen, the prisons will fill even more.

All of this, added to the impact of Hurricane Matthew (the biggest storm to hit Haiti in 50 years) has led more Haitians to flee the country. In early July, the Coast Guard intercepted and sent back to Haiti 107 Haitians in a small, dangerously overcrowded boat south of the Bahamas. There are over 4,000 Haitians right now in Tijuana, living in refugee camps. Recruited by occupying forces of Brazil to work in the Rio Olympics, they were pushed out after the Games ended. Hoping for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) in the US, which has been granted to Haitians since the 2010 earthquake, they instead have been deported or placed in detention camps if they cross the border. When



Haitian President Moïse traveled to the US and met with Vice President Mike Pence in June, he refused to meet with Haitians worried about the changes in their TPS status, telling them to “calm down.” In their joint communiqué, Pence and Moïse did not mention the migration crisis but did pledge to jointly pursue “an economic reform agenda to attract investment and generate growth.” Moïse’s handshake with Pence symbolized just how much of a compliant partner his regime is with the US Government as it seeks even more control over Haiti’s economy and future.

The United Nations Military Occupation Forces (MINUSTAH), which has functioned as a colonial overseer since the 2004 coup, is set to scale down its operation, but will remain in Haiti under its new acronym MINUJUSTH (United Nations Mission For Justice Support). MINUJUSTH will consist of 1,185 police officers and will continue to train and support the Haitian National Police—the same police who beat, tear-gassed, and shot pro-democracy protesters during the last electoral cycle.

Lieutenant General César Lopes Loureiro, the head of the Brazilian forces that have been in command of MINUSTAH since the beginning of the occupation, recently issued a glowing report on the accomplishments of MINUSTAH. But he was silent about UN responsibility for the cholera outbreak, and he failed to mention the numerous cases of rape and other sexual assaults by UN soldiers. The UN has still not compensated the victims of the cholera epidemic, and it has given impunity to the many soldiers charged with raping Haitians during the long occupation. And there was not one word about the killings by UN soldiers of people in pro-*Lavalas* neighborhoods like Cité Soleil and Bel Air, or in the Port-au-Prince prison. Whether the UN calls its operations MINUSTAH or MINJUSTH, the continued presence of its forces, even in the guise of a reframed mission, is a clear assault on Haiti’s sovereignty.

What now looms on the horizon is the resurrection of the Haitian military. This has been a key goal of rightwing Haitian forces since President Aristide got rid of the army in

1995. Jovenel Moïse has stated that he wants the army in place within two years. The beginnings of that new army have been in the works for years, training at military bases in Ecuador.

In a statement to the Miami Herald, the president of the Haitian Senate, Yuri Latortue, who was a central organizer of the 2004 coup, said, “In Haiti we are used to having an army.” Referring to the US occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934, which created the modern Haitian army, Latortue went on to say, “The Americans understood that if we have the police but not an army, we will not get anywhere.”

When Haitian activists speak of the Haitian Army, there is a chill in the air. Before Aristide disbanded it, 40% of Haiti’s budget went to the military. In a country with fewer than two doctors per 10,000 people, there was one soldier per 1,000 people. The Army has long been Haiti’s central institution of repression and the main organizer of coups against elected officials, helping to enforce the Duvalier dictatorships and those that followed before the rise of *Lavalas*. It was the Haitian Army that overthrew Aristide in 1991 and initiated a reign of terror that took over 5,000 lives before Aristide returned in 1994.

The goal of the 2004 coup, like the 1991 coup that preceded it, was not only to topple the Aristide government, but also to rid the country of the powerful grassroots movement that has activated, energized, and given voice to Haiti’s poor. That goal has not been accomplished. A stolen election cannot hide this reality.

Throughout her campaign, Dr. Narcisse, often accompanied by former President Aristide, was greeted by tens of thousands of supporters in the poorest communities of Haiti. A vibrant *Lavalas* presence was evident across the country. In the face of decades of COINTELPRO-style counterinsurgency, including imprisonment, the killing and exile of thousands, and attempts to buy off activists and encourage internal strife, *Lavalas* once again showed its significant base among Haiti’s majority population. In or out of government, this strength will serve as a bulwark against the harsh austerity program already being put into place by Moïse and his US sponsors.

At the end of her speech in Oakland, Dr. Narcisse highlighted the grassroots work of the Aristide Foundation for Democracy. In the midst of the cholera epidemic, mobile health clinics from the Foundation treated patients who had nowhere else to go. After the devastation caused by Hurricane Matthew, President Aristide and *Lavalas* activists went to Les Cayes, Jeremie, and other hard-hit areas to provide medical support, food, and clothing. On Haitian Mother’s Day, hundreds of women filled the Foundation to get medical care for themselves and their children. Other clinics took place in mid-July, including on President Aristide’s birthday on July 15. And the University of the Aristide Foundation (UNIFA) continues to grow, providing higher education for over 1,200 students, most of whom could never afford other universities in Haiti.

This is a movement that is not going away. As *Lavalas* digs in for the long haul, those in solidarity with Haiti have to do so as well. ❁

HAITI 2017

From Demonstration Election to Electoral Coup

By Charlie Hinton

This article was written in April 2017. The repression described below continues throughout the country.

On January 3, Haiti's Electoral Council (CEP) sealed the steal by confirming Jovenel Moïse as president of Haiti. A massive police presence resembling martial law suppressed street protests—attacking demonstrators who had been in the streets daily since the November 20 election—with a stinging blue foam added to water cannons. A potent new tear gas burned and stung the skin. A tear gas attack on a poor neighborhood at 1:00 AM last November 29 suffocated three infants to death.

In 2017 Haiti finds itself with a “president” who would never have won an honest election. A tiny number of ruling families backed by the United States, Canada, and France, operating through a United Nations military occupation, has imposed an imperial ruler on an unwilling population through a process they called an “election.” Everyone in Haiti knows this, but in the United States, we don't. International media reported the Moïse “victory” as a matter of legitimate fact, based on phony numbers released by the CEP. They either neglected or minimized the almost daily massive protests and provided zero background or context, thus becoming willing participants in the fraud, and giving “fake news” a whole new dimension.

The only reason the November 20 election even took place is because massive daily street demonstrations protesting two fraudulent elections in 2015 forced a new election in 2016. The demonstrations also forced the hated Hillary Clinton-imposed president,

Michel Martelly, to leave office on schedule on February 7, 2016, despite various maneuvers to attempt to extend his term.

The *Fanmi Lavalas* Party, founded by former President Aristide and long recognized as representing Haiti's poor majority, organized a Dignity Caravan that toured the entire country throughout the campaign with their candidate, Dr. Maryse Narcisse, often accompanied by President Aristide, attracting huge enthusiastic crowds everywhere they went. Nevertheless questionable polls announced the leading candidate to be Jovenel Moïse of Martelly's PHTK Party. Clearly Haiti's majority poor, who turned out by the thousands at Lavalas campaign rallies and demonstrations, were not consulted in the polling.

Léopold Berlangier, a longtime Washington agent, was selected to become head of the CEP to oversee the elections. He is a former director of the USAID-funded Radio Vision 2000, and a frequent recipient of grants from the National Endowment for Democracy (founded to impose governments chosen by the US on the people of other countries). The CEP then appointed sweatshop entrepreneur Andy Apaid, a leader of the movement to overthrow Aristide in 2004, as a counselor to the Vote Tabulation Center. The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) supervised the election and transported the ballots (the UN having militarily occupied Haiti since 2004).

Election day arrived, and it became obvious that a massive coordinated

campaign of voter suppression and fraud had taken place. Voters needed an official voter ID card, but many people never received them, so they couldn't vote. The number of voting stations was significantly reduced, especially in rural areas, so people had to travel for miles with limited public transportation to try to vote. When they arrived, their names weren't on the lists outside the polling places. Or if they were, their names weren't on the lists inside the station. Other people were told to vote in cities far away. A countrywide electrical power outage one hour after the polls closed caused two hours of darkness as ballots were being transported and counted. Nevertheless, enough people had managed to vote that ballots were later found uncounted and discarded.

The CEP announced that not only had Jovenel Moïse—the clone of Martelly who had been forced to leave office by massive street demonstrations—won an absolute majority of the vote (55%), but he had finished first in Fanmi Lavalas Party strongholds, including the very neighborhoods where many of the demonstrators lived. The international media promoted this fraud, reporting the announced election results as “official,” not even mentioning that the vote isn't official until losing parties are given the chance to appeal the results.

The parties that were reported to have finished second, third, and fourth in the vote did appeal the results. An electoral commission/court (BCEN) appointed by the CEP was designated to verify the results, with participation of the three contesting parties in the



process. Senator Yvon Feuile, a top *Fanmi Lavalas* expert on electoral documents and a member of the *Fanmi Lavalas* verification team, reported on *Radio Timoun* that first, the verifiers—including the three contesting political parties—were allowed only five minutes, far too little time, to review each of the several sets of documents from each polling station.

He went on to report the fraud was so grossly blatant and massive that in one small sample being verified, 85% of the votes for Jovenel Moïse were disqualified. In other samples, verifiers found numbers changed or added. By the third day of verification, CEP officials violated the electoral law Article 187 by changing the procedures so that the contesting parties could no longer participate in the verification but had to stand behind and merely watch.

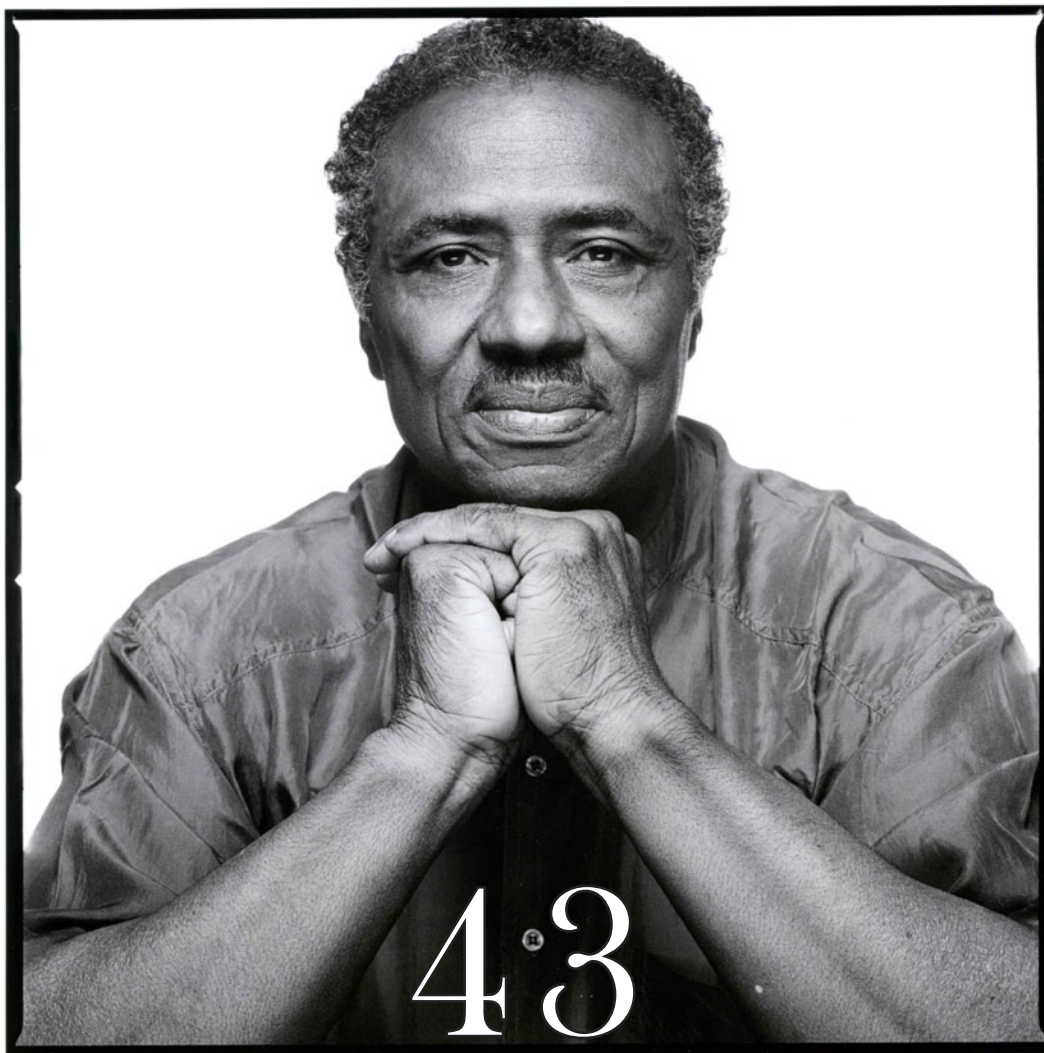
The three contesting parties and most observers left the room at this point, leaving three-quarters of the election tally sheets not processed as required. It became clear that the CEP had no interest in true verification—their mission was to legitimize a preordained electoral coup d'état. On January 3, the CEP announced that Moïse had won the election.

To add to the charges of fraud, Haiti's Central Financial Intelligence Unit (UCREF) issued a report saying Jovenel Moïse may have "manipulated funds that have nothing to do with his businesses" (also known as money laundering) in his fourteen bank accounts. Investigators are looking into allegations that he received more than \$1 million in loans that were quickly approved before he had even filled out all the paperwork. They also seek

information about his ownership of 45 vehicles and his bank transactions, including frequent large daily cash deposits that exceeded the amount that needs to be declared to authorities, and checks written for large sums made out to cash with no named payee. Moïse appeared before a judge for four hours on January 25 and denied the charges.

Furthermore, the CEP allowed known criminals, death squad leaders, and drug dealers to run for parliament. The United States called for the arrest of 2004 coup leader and narco trafficker Guy Phillippe on January 5, then had him extradited to the US after he was "elected" to the Haitian Senate. In 2005, the DEA filed a sealed indictment charging Philippe with conspiracy to import cocaine and money laundering, but did not move to have him arrested

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43 YEARS and STILL IN

By Herman Bell

Herman Bell has been a political prisoner in the United States for 43 years. Like many other political prisoners, including Jalil Muntaqim, Roberty “Seth” Hayes, Janine Africa, Mumia Abu-Jamal, and Mutulu Shakur, Herman was an active member of the Black Liberation Movement. Sentenced to 25 years to life, he has been denied parole seven times. This is despite the fact that he has used his time in prison in remarkable fashion. He has earned two advanced degrees, he has created programs to connect rural farmers with urban communities in need of healthy food, and he has been a mentor to generations of younger prisoners. He has done his time with dignity and compassion for others. Yet each time he goes before the board, it ignores his numerous letters of support, his strong family ties and base in the community, his age (he will be 70 next February), and the obvious injustice of keeping him in prison.

The entombing of political prisoners is an attack on all of our movements. It has to end. These men and women are invaluable resources and mentors to all of us. We urge you to read Herman’s beautiful writing and to support him and other political prisoners.

For more information, visit www.freehermanbell.org.

Free them all!

I've lived in this cell longer than I've lived on the streets. Its metal locker where I keep my food from the mice, the toilet and face bowl, the bed, the floor, the cell bars and metal clothes rack all have come to know some part of me. I want to talk about me today.

Through and beyond the iron-framed windows before me, I see blue sky and the free world where I yearn to rejoin my family and community, wherein with just a single click, serrated metal handcuffs produce extreme pain, and rattling gate keys may at any moment echo chain-like rushing down prison corridors, often resulting in broken bones, bruised bodies, and affronted dignity. Prison is a dangerous place. And in a courtroom, whose words bear more weight—the prisoner's or the prison guard's? Here, you may live or you may die; a prisoner awakens, a prison guard leaves home for work, both may never do so again. At the edge of some distant tomorrow, I may walk free out the front gate. I am 69-years-old, and my youthful and optimistic heart and good intentions have not gone unchallenged.

I remember back-in-the-day when I was a small boy in my old neighborhood in Brooklyn. The neighborhood boys and I used to hang out at the local grocery store on Saturday morning, helping mothers carry their groceries so that we could earn movie money. I recall helping one mother lug her bags up tall flights of stairs to her apartment, and when she got them all in she smiled, thanked me, and closed the door in my face. For her, that was perfectly fine—after all, my face is black.

Throughout the ensuing years, I have occasionally wondered about that. Racial abuse, stereotyping and bigotry are deeply rooted in u.s. society. Even as an adolescent, I've felt like a stranger in my own country, and I've not been given reason to feel much different today. I've often been made to feel invisible, uncomfortable, out of place. A black face, especially a male black face, automatically prompts suspicion.

While blacks and Native Americans in particular have long been excluded in u.s. society, they are inextricably linked to its origins and know too well its violence and bigotry. No amount of native blood could quench the white settler's thirst for native land, and the African whose slave labor largely built north america fared no better. Wealth generated from this enforced labor profoundly transformed the u.s. and sowed the seeds of the modern world. Slave owners drove their slaves from dawn to dusk into the tobacco and cotton fields, the mines, the rice paddies, the woods, sawmills and brick kilns. This backbreaking labor, therefore, is what bind u.s. blacks to this land, and in a way, I believe, Native Americans can understand. Not forgetting what the Buffalo Soldiers were ordered to do to them out West.

Yet despite this, slavery's legacy endures. It prevails not

only in the u.s. constitution as regards u.s. prisons, providing for "involuntary servitude," where a disproportionate number of African-Americans now find themselves on "modern plantations," but also in u.s. institutions and culture. The ravages of slavery transformed the African into a nameless, stateless being, bereft of tongue and cultural memory and of some means to cut through the agony of his desolation and despair. This bode ill for his descendants. I am one of them.

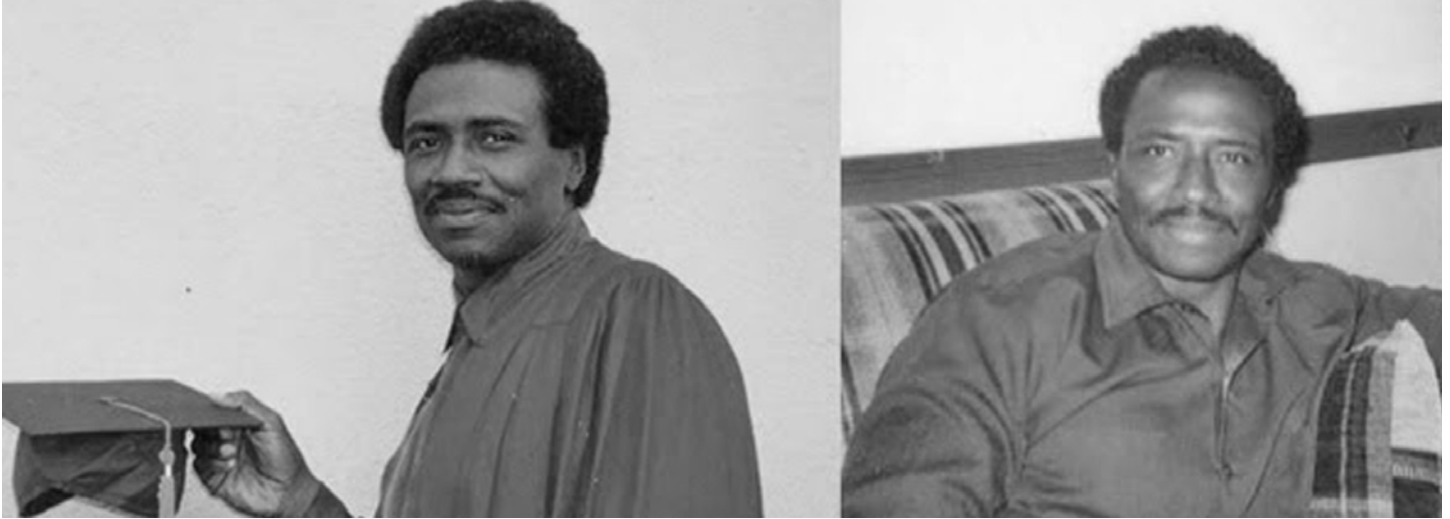
As a young man, my thinking changed when I discovered my people in history. Their significant contribution to the advance of human civilization amazed me. This and their historic struggle to reclaim their rightful place under the sun affected me profoundly. It changed the course of my life as well as that of many young people of my generation cognizant of this history. Accordingly, we became advocates in the long-denied and unrecognized black struggle for social justice in the u.s. The white power structure felt threatened by this advocacy, by its assertiveness and growing confidence. Rather than with reason and fair treatment as its response, it chose a stick disguised as law enforcement. Unfortunately, violence ensued and some of us went underground, some of us were subsequently murdered, imprisoned, or both. As time passed, a few among us were released and have gone home. But I and those left are still in after over 43 years.

Imprisonment exacts an incalculable toll on the body and mind and is the closest descent into Hell as one can imagine. The warders aim to impress that every part of your being belongs to them. If not now, then soon or soon enough, that time is on their side. Whether you do or don't know how to hate, they will teach you. If God does not exist, in here, you may wish that he or somebody like him did exist to intercede and comfort you. For you will presently discover that you and you alone are all there is in here. Enduring prison is one thing, surviving it is another.

The alchemy of a prison sentence transforms a person into an "alien" or social outcast, which exempts him from the rights, privileges, and tender mercies that are commonly accorded to the non-sentenced person. He is inventory on a shelf, color-coded, numbered, thrown in a cell and counted several times a day. His mail is delivered with neither a smile nor eye contact. He's a blank face to be treated with studied aloofness.

All sentenced prisoners have experienced this. Though our black faces abound inordinately in here, each prisoner is viewed up close as he steps inside the prison. And while the government seems never to run out of money for guns, bombs, and planes, prisons seem never to run out of cells to put somebody in. Like shaking hands with the Devil, I found coming to terms with being in a cell to be quite the experience. It bears a distinct quality with which one has to reconcile. When

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Herman Bell

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less confining than it actually is. Yet its distinct mind-squeezing quality applies especially when you brood, do nothing, indulge in self-pity, and see the space as having no possibilities.

Visualize a cell wall with a poster of an old tree-lined street, a bustling flower garden, a towering bridge and cityscape lighting up the night—those are portals through which I can be elsewhere whenever my mind falls upon them. And when they are packed away for a cell move, the cell reverts to its dead, steely, cavernous state, echoing what it hears, and maybe could use a little paint.

Emerging from the cell heading down the tier and stairway out into the corridor towards the mess hall, an interview room, or an assigned program area—regardless what jail I happen to be in—it’s “just another day at Flat Rock.” This contrived routine often leaves me feeling like a mouse running a maze. Often enough, I’ve had to remind myself that in this maze, I can become lost to family and friends and the outside world, that as I navigate this space of endless tomorrows, continuous close contact with them is imperative. Their presence in my life is what keeps me grounded, keeps my mind and hope alive.

I’ve been in a lot of prisons. The older ones where I’ve been held most—Clinton, Attica, Comstock—their worn-down stone steps stand out, and if they could speak, I’ve often wondered what would they say about the men who trod on them, about what they dreamed, their life’s ambition, what went wrong. One can but assume that their crimes were mostly economic ones. If poverty generates obesity in that people eat what they can afford, the same may be said of certain crimes, because the vast majority of people in prison are poor and marginally educated. Poverty, ignorance, and desperation are no strangers to crime. It’s not uncommon for people in dire circumstances to commit illegal acts that they might otherwise refrain from committing. When all else fails, people will desperately resort to doing whatever

you’re engaged in constructive activity in the cell, it seems

it takes, including crime, to support themselves and their families. For taking a crust of bread, the police will pursue a poor man to the ends of the earth and turn a blind eye to a rich man’s theft of millions. In the aftermath of the 2008 financial ruin of countless u.s. citizens, none of the Wall Street bankers and traders rushed for the exit doors. Rich people, educated people, seldom go to prison or go to prison for very long. And as the “race card” plays out, whites in general who do land in here get better job assignments than do people who look like me.

The box (solitary confinement) is another nasty lil spot to avoid in here if you can. Rich people are seldom found in these places, because they are so good at escaping. I’ve been in the box more than a time or two, though less so lately. It’s a cheerless, unpleasant place, and it smells bad. It brims with the sins and crimes committed against helpless men that can never be atoned for. In this world I live in, you have to make the best of what’s before you. Laughter, for example, is “on the house,” and no laughter is quite like the laughter you encounter in prison, often because we have little else. Sometimes, when we’re feeling up to it and “on the down low,” we talk so bad about a guard’s momma, his fat kids, his big-nose wife with one eye, til if he knew, we’d never make it out the box alive.

One time I was in the box, they gave me a blanket that covered only half my body. The guards were amused. I was pissed! But after several days, they gave me a full one, just to keep me quiet. Each time in the box, its cold, gray, cheerless atmosphere packs me down inside myself, affording no relief except what I create for myself. So I would save my dry breakfast cereal and seek a trade with the guys. The haggling excited some—how many tiny boxes of cereal to trade for a piece of fruit, a chicken leg, or for something else? Others never saved and therefore had nothing to trade. From a sheet of writing paper, I would create a chessboard, write numbers on the squares, and fashion chess pieces with sliced bread. Push-ups and sit-ups, jogging in place, and taking naps were a fixed part of my daily routine.

During the night and early morning, I would sometimes

lie awake, feeling the silence and its peace wash over me. Throughout the day, one can write but so long with a pen the length of my middle finger, read but so much “piss-poor” material that’s almost like not reading at all, do but so many exercises. And my naps had to be sparing, otherwise my nights would be restless. Our rations were meager, and our hunger the day long.

Indeed, a routine in the box is imperative—making a way out of no way—and is as basic and urgent as a desperate gasp for air around something lodged in your throat. Some days I feel my blood racing to the stout beat of my heart; my thoughts refuse to be still. I want to shut down, but there’s no off-switch. My years in the box were long, hurtful, mentally exhausting, and they may put me there again. What happens to men confined this way, for decades, often without feeling or seeing sunlight and devoid of meaningful human contact? When retribution becomes torment, prison conditions often teach men to hate. I ponder this in general population as I walk lockstep down prison corridors with other men.

As these years trickled by, photos of family and friends show that they have aged. My own face, hair, declining agility, show that I, too, have aged. A new world is out there now. It’s as though I’ve hibernated these past 40-plus years. So much has changed; so much to learn anew. The guards and prisoners I see now were not even born when I started this sentence. I was brave and brash back then. I was bold and presumed to know more about life and people than I had a right to. My aging journey has taught me that youth and ignorance often pave a thorny path. It’s just as thorny as the one laid out for those who fight for social justice and what they believe is right.

Forty-three years in prison? Someone may wonder, do I ask myself, “What am I doing here?” Or ask, “What’s this prolonged imprisonment all about?” Save the occasional visit and phone call, my children, and now my grandchildren, have spent only a bit of time with me. Holding everything together while I’m away, my wife has suffered throughout all this. Family pressure, prolonged separation, all too often break up families. Thus, new relationships may form, and the prisoner may find himself even further removed from his family than he was before. A harsh penalty on top of his sentence. He himself may sometimes wonder: “Does anyone care?” His children, his grandchildren might sometimes ask, as do mine, “Why you, Dad; why you, Grampa?” Or wonder to themselves, “Why couldn’t someone else take his place?” Questions born of love and earnest desire to have me home, not out of selfishness.

I serve an indefinite prison sentence and hope to survive it, but the parole board or you, my supporters, will decide my fate. Sensitive to both political pressure and “special interest groups,” the board’s decisions are widely regarded

as arbitrary and capricious. Because I’m a political prisoner, the parole board is far more predisposed to releasing an apolitical (or social) prisoner on parole than it is to releasing me. Otherwise, I would have been home years ago.

It maintains that its decisions are impartially made after an interview. Myself and others are persuaded that their decision is made prior to the parole interview. Before commencing the interview, board commissioners rifle through their papers, which I think is mostly theater. But it’s the only time you get to size them up; and they in turn take a quick peek at you. Though now most interviews are done by teleconference, seldom in person. They talk to you and you to them on video screen. A panel of three usually conduct the interview, though sometimes two does it. They are ex-prosecutors, state investigators, and retired police. They will interpret and even twist every explanation of insight and expression of remorse offered by a prisoner. They ignore favorable psychological evaluations, rob prisoners of hope, promote despair, discourage personal growth, and strip us of incentives. They are well practiced in manipulating human emotions. They open with pummeling questions about your offense, rake up your “criminal history,” pick and pause over reports on your prison activity. They then make you wait five to six days before sending you their decision, which almost always is a denial.

“If the envelope bearing your decision is thick,” guys used to say, “you’ve been denied, and if it’s thin, you’ve made it.” And there are those who say theirs were “thin” and they were still denied parole. Obviously, size doesn’t matter. You simply know when you know! As the guard callously opened the envelope from my last board appearance, “the appeal form” fell out before I could read the decision. I had only waited 40 years for it. Still, I read it, looking for some sign of hope. Accordingly, guys are reluctant to open a parole board decision. Having complied with all the rules and satisfied all structural requirements, how would you feel having to tell your mother, wife, and children that you’ve failed them!? You smother your disappointment and wish that you could shield them from that feeling, too.

The thought of spending the rest of my days in prison is despairing. I’ve not begun to think that yet and hope I never shall. Nowadays, people my age say, “Due to terminal illness or incapacitation, write a will and tell how you wish your remains disposed of.” Talk like that makes me nervous. Before and during these 43 years in prison, I’ve lived according to my beliefs, fought for my self-respect, my community, and for social justice; along the way I’ve helped people where I could and have striven to make myself a better human being. I’ve kept faith with the belief that we humans are responsible for each other and for the welfare of all. So what to make of these long years in prison, I cannot say. I’m still here. ✱

UNIFA

The University of Aristide Foundation

A Message from the Friends of UNIFA

“Right now, in the moment that Haiti is living, the university is essential. Haiti vitally needs a safe space where young people can come together, think country, and contract a future under very difficult circumstances. A place where they can learn from and interact with national and international professionals. An institution that will address national issues and seek viable solutions to national problems. Dreams of working, prospering, and changing Haiti....”

— Mildred Aristide, Former First Lady of Haiti —

Based in Tabarre, Haiti, the University of the Aristide Foundation (UNIFA) is a high quality, multidiscipline, accredited university taught by Haitian and international professors prominent in their fields. UNIFA is a member of the Institute of International Education.

As of academic year 2016-2017, UNIFA has seven disciplines: Schools of Medicine, Law, Nursing, Physical Therapy, Dentistry, Engineering, and Continuing Education.

UNIFA’s Physical Therapy degree program is the first of its kind in Haiti. This school answers the acute need for physical therapists in Haiti, a need that became particularly clear after the 2010 earthquake when many people suffered devastating injuries that require intensive rehabilitative treatment.

UNIFA is building its own teaching hospital/medical center to enable its numerous health-related students to gain necessary practical experience as well as to provide meaningful health care to the surrounding communities who are unable to access medical care. Planning and fundraising for construction are now underway. The teaching hospital will provide dozens of much needed slots for clinical training for UNIFA’s students.

What makes UNIFA unique and important to the future of Haiti, setting it apart from other universities in Haiti, is its determination to teach with an emphasis on the value of human rights and dignity, in order to build a new and just Haiti.

UNIFA’s core issues and focuses include quality education, global health, human rights and citizen engagement, gender and income equality, women and girls empowerment, youth development, and disaster response and recovery.



UNIFA’S MISSION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Emphasize human rights and dignity through use of human rights-based education and practices to build a new and just Haiti.
- Break down long tradition in Haiti of exclusion of the poor majority from access to higher education.
- Increase number of doctors practicing in rural areas. Recruit students from all ten departments of Haiti.
- Commit to equal gender representation.
- Open medical and legal professions to all. Prepare doctors and lawyers to serve the poorest of the poor.
- Provide a university for critical thinking about Haiti.
- Provide space for students to return as teachers, giving back to same system that nurtured and trained them.

Please consider donating to UNIFA by visiting
www.friendsofunifa.org

Haiti 2017

(continued from page 7)

for more than ten years.

Youri Latortue, the leader of the Haitian Senate, whom the US Embassy described in a secret cable released by Wikileaks as possibly “the most brazenly corrupt of leading Haitian politicians,” has been accused of involvement in drug trafficking, kidnapping, and other illegal activities. These are just two of many examples of the types of candidate the CEP has allowed to run for office and govern Haiti.

Fanmi Lavalas has issued a communiqué rejecting the fraudulent electoral results and calling on the people to mobilize against this massively orchestrated fraud. Street demonstrations continue daily, guided by the slogan “*Nou Pap Obey!*” (We will not obey!), as US/UN-trained and supervised Haitian police brutally attack demonstrators with stinging tear gas, blue foam water cannons, bullets, batons, and rifle butts. Two small demonstrations by Moïse supporters, however, proceeded without any repression.

Meanwhile, Moïse has announced his administration will build more prisons and support a law to limit press freedom, which particularly threatens independent community media, including *Radio Timoun* and *Tele Timoun*, the radio and television stations housed at the Aristide Foundation for Democracy.

On February 7, Jovenel Moïse became Haiti’s president despite the fraud and corruption. Few people attended the inauguration, and videos showed the march route virtually empty of spectators. Meanwhile, police and UN troops viciously prevented demonstrations in front of the National Palace.

On February 8, *Fanmi Lavalas* held a press conference. Their presidential candidate, Dr. Narcisse, said, “The Haitian people did not accomplish

February 7, 1986 [the overthrow of the dictator Jean-Claude ‘Baby Doc’ Duvalier] to end up in this situation today....The political organization *Fanmi Lavalas*...rejects this electoral coup d’état that resulted from an organized plot by the Provisional Electoral Council. Despite the present hardships, Haiti will triumph! We have in us this collective energy of a people determined to confront economic and sociopolitical challenges. We must have a state of laws, not a state where justice is trampled underfoot! We the citizenry, victims of institutionalized injustice, strongly demand that the grievances of the people must be addressed....The dirty money that financed the coup d’état cannot buy the majority that has dignity.”

On March 20, uniformed police officers fired on a vehicle carrying Aristide and Dr. Narcisse, resulting in a number of wounded, as tens of thousands of demonstrators marched beside them to protect them. No Haitian governmental or international official has denounced this assassination attempt as of this writing. The process of re-imposing and consolidating a renewed Duvalierist dictatorship marches forward, under the US/UN occupation that began with the 2004 coup d’état.

In their 1984 book, *Demonstration Elections*, Edward Herman and Frank Brodhead describe the template through which the United States Government uses elections as a tool of control. Their purpose is to create the illusion of democracy and “demonstrate” to the outside world, especially the US public, that the people voting really support the puppet governments the elections are being held to legitimize. In the case of Haiti in 2017, the demonstration election has become an electoral coup, with no shred or even pretense of democracy. Yet Haitians fight on.

Haitians provide an example and need our massive solidarity. They’re in the streets daily, often at the risk of life

and limb, often wet and hungry. They hold true to the vision of their 1804 revolution that defeated Napoleon’s army and abolished chattel slavery, and they refuse to give up. We could learn from their example.

We need to change our entire media narrative about Haiti. Poor? Haitians have been made poor. Haiti is rich. Its natural resources include oil, bauxite, copper, calcium carbonate, gold, silver, marble, and hydropower. According to some government sources, Haiti is poised to make over \$20 billion mining minerals such as gold, copper, and silver, but international forces steal all of it. Haiti is not poor. Haiti is exploited.

Haiti is also rich in human engagement with participatory democracy. Haitians may be denied schooling, but they know their history a lot better than we know ours. They know the kind of society they want to live in, and they work hard to create it.

Corrupt governments? Yes, the Haitian elite and their international collaborators have forced dictators and corrupt governments on Haiti. The only times Haitians were allowed free and fair votes, they elected leaders who tried to feed Haitians instead of international capital, and twice President Aristide was overthrown by coups.

Out of control mob violence in the streets? No, that’s media-speak for organized resistance—people risking their lives to demand justice, democracy, and a fair economy, and to fulfill the promises of their revolution of 1804, which brought forth the first and only nation ever created by the formerly enslaved overthrowing their slaveholders. How else can Haitians end 213 years of enslavement by another name and bring forth the society they have fought for continuously, against the power of the “international community,” from eighteenth century until today?

It’s time to look at Haiti in a new way. ❄

HOW THE UNITED HAITI'S DOMESTI

BY LESLIE MULLIN

“We are all living under a system so corrupt that to ask for a plate of rice and beans every day for every man, woman, and child is to preach revolution.”

– Jean Bertrand Aristide, *Dignity* –

The basic right to eat is at the very heart of Haiti’s struggle for democracy. Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the radical voice of Haiti’s poor, aptly characterized slavery when he wrote, “The role of slaves was to harvest coconuts, and the role of colonists was to eat the coconuts.”¹ To Aristide, those who have food and those who don’t marks the vast chasm separating Haiti’s wealthy elite from millions of impoverished citizens:

“The rich of my country, a tiny percentage of our population, sit at a vast table covered in white damask and overflowing with good food, while the rest of my countrymen and countrywomen are crowded under that table, hunched over in the dirt and starving. It is a violent situation, and one day the people under that table will rise up in righteousness, and knock the table of privilege over, and take what rightfully belongs to them.”²

It’s no wonder that Haiti’s most popular party, *Fanmi Lavalas*, chose the image of Haitian people seated around a dining table as its emblem, signifying the overthrow of privilege and the right of every Haitian to share the nation’s wealth. This is not mere symbolism. In its 1990 program, the *Lavalas* party recognized the right to eat as one of three basic principles, along with the right to work and the right of the impoverished masses to demand what is owed them.³ In a very concrete way, Aristide, Haiti’s first democratically elected president, illustrated this commitment on the day of his February 7, 1991 inauguration, when he invited several hundred street children to join him for breakfast in the Palace garden.

Haiti’s hunger crisis is no accident—it is the direct result of US economic policies imposed on rural Haiti beginning

in the 1980s. The story of how the US undermined Haiti’s domestic rice industry explains why a nation of farmers can no longer feed itself.

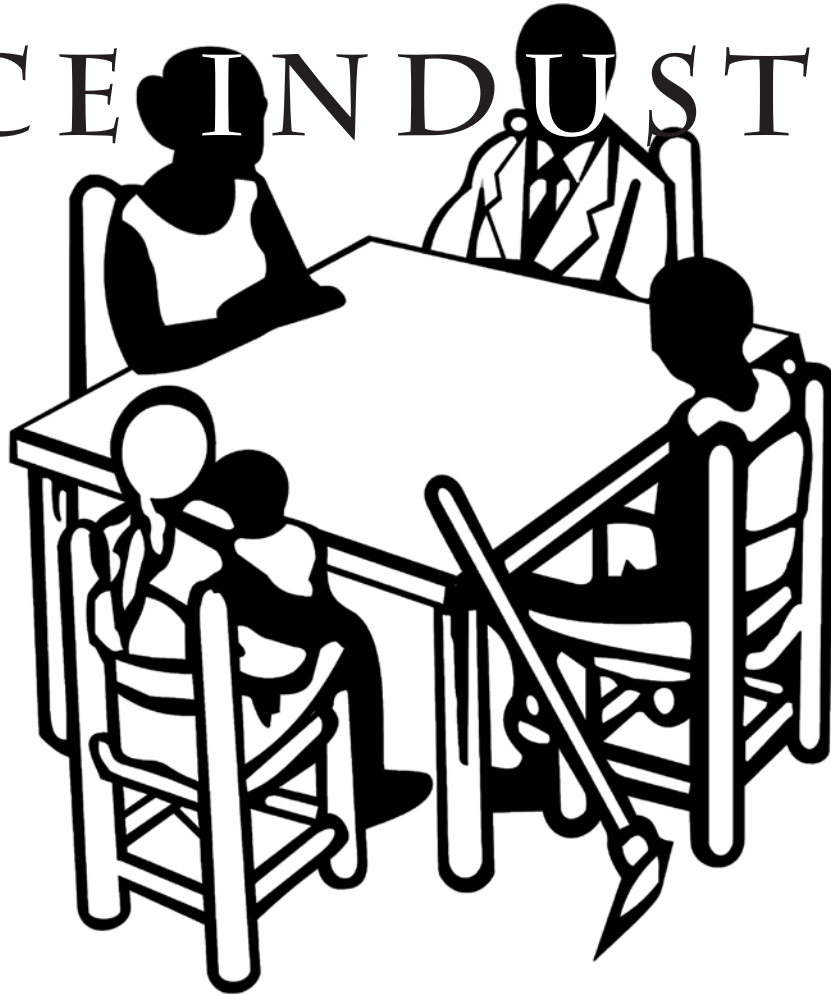
THE STORY OF RICE

The story of Haitian rice begins in Africa, where rice has sustained African peoples for centuries. Rice was so basic to the West African diet that it was an essential provision on slave ships, accompanying captive Africans to Brazil, the Caribbean, and the southern United States.⁴ Today, testament to 10 million souls kidnapped from their homeland, every region touched by the African diaspora has its own unique version of rice and beans.⁵

Rice cultivation in the United States is deeply rooted in slavery. *Black Rice* author Judith Carney writes, “Few Americans identify slavery with the cultivation of rice, yet rice was a major plantation crop during the first three centuries of settlement in the Americas...By the middle of the eighteenth century, rice plantations in South Carolina and the black slaves who worked them had created one of the most profitable economies in the world.”⁶ European settlers knew nothing about the complexities of growing, harvesting, and threshing rice. But enslaved Africans did.

A basic staple of the Haitian diet, rice has been cultivated in Haiti since its 1804 independence. Until the 1980s, Haitian farmers produced most of the rice consumed in Haiti. Under the US-backed dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier and the brutal military regimes that followed, domestic rice cultivation began to plummet. In the space of a few decades, Haiti became the world’s fourth largest market for American rice. By 2004, the value of US rice exports to Haiti amounted to \$80 billion. How this colossal tragedy came about is a story of foreign intervention, government corruption, and corporate greed backed by ruthless repression.

STATES CRIPPLED C RICE INDUSTRY



1984: GROWTH OF US FOOD AID UNDERCUTS HAITIAN FARMERS

Food aid played a key role in undermining Haiti's domestic rice production. President Aristide observed,

“What good does it do the peasant when the pastor feeds his children? For one night, he is grateful to the pastor, because that night he does not have to hear the whimpers of his children, starving. But the same free foreign rice the pastor feeds the peasant's children is being sold on the market for less than the farmer's own produce. The very food that the pastor feeds the peasant's children is keeping the peasant in poverty, unable himself to feed his children.”⁷

Ronald Reagan's 1984 Caribbean Basin Initiative prompted a major increase in US food aid to Haiti. In 1984, Haiti received \$11 million in food aid; from 1985 to 1988, Haiti received \$54 million in food aid.⁸ The Caribbean Basin Initiative called for integrating Haiti into the global market

by redirecting 30% of Haiti's domestic food production towards export crops, a plan that USAID experts systematically carried out. The United States fully recognized that this would lead to widespread hunger in rural Haiti, as peasant land was converted to grow food for foreigners. Food aid was supposed to compensate rural Haitians for this attack on their livelihood.⁹ Food aid benefits the big American companies who grow and transport it, but wrecks local economies. As cheap American food undersold Haitian farmers' produce, domestic agriculture became even less sustainable. In effect, food aid created a dependence on foreign imports.

How was the United States able to impose its will on rural Haiti? At the time, Jean-Claude Duvalier, the son of Haiti's infamous dictator, Francois Duvalier, ruled Haiti. Like his father, the younger Duvalier held onto power by controlling Haiti's repressive security forces. He received millions in US aid intended to maintain US influence in the Caribbean as a bulwark against Cuba. The Reagan administration conditioned US aid on Duvalier's support for the plan to restruc-

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Haiti Rice

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ture Haiti's economy. Thus began the most massive foreign intervention in Haiti since the 1915-1934 American occupation.

1986: THE GAME IS RIGGED – MIAMI RICE INVADES HAITI

“‘We cannot sell our rice,’ said Emanuel Georges, manning the barricade at L’Estere. ‘The rice is coming in from Miami, and now we cannot live.’”¹⁰

In February 1986, a popular uprising forced Baby-Doc Duvalier out of power. After he fled Haiti, raiding the treasury as he left, a military junta headed by General Henri Namphy took power. Predictably, the United States aligned with the junta and intensified measures to restructure Haiti's economy. In 1987, Namphy received IMF loans valued at \$24.6 million in exchange for agreeing to slash rice tariffs from 150 to 50%,¹¹ the lowest in the Caribbean.¹² He opened all of Haiti's ports to commercial activity¹³ and agreed to stop what little support the government had offered Haitian farmers. Meanwhile, Haiti's military elite saw an opportunity to make a profit smuggling American rice.

In the United States, the passage of the 1985 Farm Bill significantly boosted subsidies to American rice growers. By 1987, 40% of American rice growers' profits came from the government.¹⁴ Heavily subsidized American rice could sell at prices far below the market value of Haitian rice. Haitian farmers never stood a chance against this unfair competition.

In Haiti, imported American rice is called “Miami rice” because it is shipped from Miami in sacks stamped “Miami, FLA.” By December 1987, Haiti's rice production had shrunk to 75% of Haitian needs.¹⁵ Outraged Haitian peasants barricaded highways and ports for three months to protest the cheap American rice that had begun to flood Haitian markets. They attacked truckloads of Miami rice with machetes, picks and clubs, dumping rice onto the earth.

The late Father Gerard Jean-Juste, a Haitian priest and human rights advocate, later recalled this era: “In the 1980s, imported rice poured into Haiti, below the cost of what our farmers could produce it. Farmers lost their businesses. People from the countryside started losing their jobs and moving to the cities. After a few years of cheap imported rice, local production went way down.”¹⁶

1990: DEMOCRACY BRINGS HOPE

By 1990, the year Fr. Jean Bertrand Aristide was elected President in Haiti's first democratic election, US rice imports outpaced domestic production.¹⁷ Aristide was the candidate of Haiti's popular movement *Lavalas*. He won with 67% of the vote. His February 1991 inauguration marked a victory for Haiti's poor majority after decades of Duvalier family dicta-

torships and military rule, signaling participation of the poor in a new social order. The new administration began to implement programs in adult literacy, health care, and land redistribution; lobbied for a minimum wage hike; and proposed new roads and infrastructure. Aristide enforced taxes on the wealthy, and dissolved the rural section chief infrastructure that empowered the paramilitary force known as *Tonton Macoute*. He closed Fort Dimanche, the dreaded Duvalier-era torture center.¹⁸ The Aristide government met with a large coalition of farmers' associations and unions and proposed buying all Haitian-grown rice in order to stabilize the price, limiting rice imports during periods between harvests.

1992: AMERICAN RICE, INC. PROFITS FROM HAITI'S BLOODY COUP

Just seven months after his inauguration, President Aristide and the democratic government were overthrown in a bloody military coup led by General Raoul Cedras. Trained in the United States and funded by the CIA, Cedras commanded the Haitian Army. His regime unleashed the collective violence of Haiti's repressive forces against its own people. From 1991 to 1994, nearly five thousand *Lavalas* activists and supporters of the constitutional government were massacred; many others were savagely tortured and imprisoned. Rape as a political weapon was widespread. Three hundred thousand Haitians were driven into hiding, while tens of thousands fled the country.

Around the world and in the United States, there was a massive outcry demanding the restoration of democracy and the return of President Aristide. Aside from the Vatican, few governments recognized the illegal Cedras regime, widely condemned for its sweeping human-rights abuses. This did not stop American Rice, Inc. from collaborating with the ruthless military regime to turn a profit. In September 1992, barely a year after the coup, American Rice, Inc. negotiated a nine-year contract with the illegal Haitian government, importing American rice under its newly formed Rice Corporation of Haiti.¹⁹

American Rice, Inc. is a subsidiary of Erly Industries, a powerful international agribusiness. The company holds an almost monopolistic position in Haiti's rice market.²⁰ In the 1980s, American Rice, Inc. imported rice under its brand Comet Rice, which constituted much of the Miami rice that ravaged Haitian rice production at the time.²¹

In the 1990s, American Rice, Inc. supplemented its profits in “legal” rice imports by smuggling rice to avoid paying import taxes. Lawrence Theriot, the Washington lobbyist for American Rice, Inc., was a former director of Reagan's Caribbean Basin Initiative. He had powerful friends in Washington, DC like Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jesse Helms (R-NC). In March 2000, the Haitian government fined American Rice, Inc. \$1.4 million for



Rice field in Haiti.

evading Haiti's customs duties. Jesse Helms retaliated by withholding \$30 million in US aid and denying high-ranking Haitian officials visas to enter the United States. The US Securities and Exchange Commission later found Theriot and two other American Rice, Inc. executives guilty of corrupt foreign practices for smuggling rice into Haiti.

BILL CLINTON'S CROCODILE TEARS

“The dilemma is, I believe, the classic dilemma of the poor; a choice between death and death. Either we enter a global economic system, in which we know we cannot survive, or, we refuse, and face death by slow starvation. With choices like these the urgency of finding a third way is clear. We must find some room to maneuver, some open space simply to survive.”

– Jean-Bertrand Aristide, *Eyes of the Heart* –

Bill Clinton's 1992 election took place during Haiti's repressive Cedras regime, when President Aristide lived in exile in the United States. After Haiti's 2010 earthquake, Clinton famously apologized for forcing Haiti to lower its rice tariffs during his administration. He acknowledged that he helped big Arkansas agro-businesses reap profits at the expense of Haiti's rice farmers. But Clinton left a lot out of the story.

Clinton posed as mediator between the coup leaders and President Aristide to negotiate the return of Haiti's democratically elected government. He took advantage of this role to use the threat of continued repression as a bargaining chip. While the US stalled, demanding more and more economic concessions—displaying not-so-covert support for Haiti's military regime—the junta continued murdering supporters of the constitutional government.

Within this coerced context, Aristide resisted the US neoliberal plan. He insisted that discussions demanded by the financial institutions for the proposed sales of state-owned enterprises include benefits for the poor—opportunities for co-ownership, funding for health and education, reparations to the victims of the coup.²² Aristide would later refuse to move forward with privatization, and instead disbanded the Haitian military over strong US objections, raised the minimum wage, and brought paramilitary leaders charged with extra-judicial killings to justice.²³

By the time President Aristide returned to Haiti, the collapse of the country's rice production was a *fait accompli*, victim of a long and deliberate US campaign waged against Haitian farmers in collusion with successive Haitian dictators and military regimes. Imported Miami rice constituted 80% of Haiti's domestic consumption. Rice smuggling was common, enabled by the corrupt Cedras regime, which accepted bribes instead of enforcing tariffs.²⁴

Nothing changed after Clinton's apology either. Haiti's 2010 earthquake became yet another business opportunity for foreign corporations to overrun Haiti's economy, while food aid, callously tossed off trucks to desperate Haitians, meant more revenue for US corporations. Nor should we let Clinton off the hook for forcibly repatriating thousands of Haitian “boat people” fleeing tyranny under the junta, and intercepting 12,000 other refugees who were illegally imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay.

DEMOCRACY AND REPARATIONS

There are two opposing visions of Haiti's future: one projected by *Fanmi Lavalas* benefits the poor majority; the other imposed by the United States and wealthy foreign nations enriches international corporations and the Haitian elite. What is clear is that Haiti's people must prevail over foreign profits and the wealthy elite. This means real democracy and respect for Haitian sovereignty. ❖

“Democracy asks us to put the needs and rights of people at the center of our endeavors. This means investing in people. Investing in people means first of all food, clean water, education, and health care. These are basic human rights. It is the challenge of any real democracy to guarantee them.”

– Jean Bertrand Aristide, *Eyes of the Heart* –

ENDNOTES

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Warm California Welcome for Dr. Maryse Narcisse

by Dave Welsh, Cristian Padilla, and the Chiapas Support Committee



Photo: Malaika Kambon

From left: Phavia Kujichagulia, Thomas McKennie, Dr. Maryse Narcisse, Anne and Jim McWilliams, Val Serrant

Five hundred people packed an Oakland church on April 23, 2017 to welcome Dr. Maryse Narcisse, presidential candidate of *Fanmi Lavalas*, the party of Haiti's first democratically elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The Oakland event, a benefit for the Haiti Emergency Relief Fund, featured music by the Vukani Mawethu choir, and the revolutionary words of poet/musician Phavia Kujichagulia and drummer Val Serrant.

The week-long speaking tour of California, organized by Haiti Action Committee, also took her to Scripps College in Los Angeles County, the UCLA School of Public Health, the National Lawyers Guild annual dinner in San Francisco, and a number of community visits.

"The US, UN, and other so-called 'Friends of Haiti' brought about the electoral coup d'état," said Dr. Narcisse in Oakland. "The election of 2015 was thrown out because

of widespread election fraud. Then the rerun in 2016 was stolen again.

"But *nou pap obeyi* [we will not obey]—this is a slogan our people believe in, because Haitians, who overthrew French colonialism and slavery in 1804, will never accept foreign domination."

A longtime *Lavalas* militant, as well as a medical doctor, Maryse Narcisse has been in the streets with the people day after day, as they faced police bullets, tear gas, water hoses and clubs. "When you give voice to the demands and grievances of the people," she said, "you win their hearts."

She pointed out that "Haiti is an unequal country, where 1% of the population own 45% of the wealth, and most live in abject poverty, with high unemployment. The economy is at a standstill. The price of food and fuel keeps going up. There is poisoned water, flooding, and deforestation. Over

200,000 children cannot go to school, because most primary schools are private.

The small rightwing Haitian elite controls the government, she said, and there are signs of a return to the methods of the Duvalier dictatorship, which ruled Haiti from 1957 to 1986. “But in 1986 the people rose up and overthrew Baby Doc Duvalier,” Dr. Narcisse said. “As in those times, today we are reorganizing, holding large mass meetings, educating, and mobilizing our people—because the people want to resist, and they will never give up.

“There is constant meddling by the US and the United Nations occupation force, creating instability,” Dr. Narcisse continued. “They don’t want us to have our own strong government serving our people. These self-appointed ‘Friends of Haiti’ want to hold onto the power so they can serve international interests. That is why they intervene and steal our elections.”

Her party takes its name from *Lavalas*, which means “flood” or “cleansing torrent” in Haitian Kreyol. And there is a saying in the movement: “Alone we are weak. United we are strong. All together we are *Lavalas!*”

After her Oakland presentation, Dr. Narcisse traveled to southern California to speak at Scripps College. Over three hundred people, ranging from community organizers, students, and college faculty poured into Balch Auditorium to hear Dr. Narcisse speak on Haiti’s grassroots movement. The event, primarily organized by the transnational collective Chiapas Support Committee, drew college students and faculty, as well as community organizers from across Los Angeles County. Dozens of organizations, departments, and individual faculty cosponsored the event.

“The story of Haiti has been all along a struggle for democracy, freedom, and social justice,” said Dr. Narcisse, emphasizing the centuries-long revolutionary character of the Haitian people, which continues today amidst rampant elite corruption, succeeding after two US-backed coup d’états against democratically elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Indigenous elder Kim Marcus, from the Serrano Cahuilla Nation, opened the space with a ceremonial prayer acknowledging the First Nation peoples indigenous to the San Bernardino Valley. Pierre Labossiere of the Haiti Action Committee followed, highlighting the Haitian people’s centuries-long struggle. “We cannot be free unless everybody else is free from slavery,” affirmed Labossiere, citing the Haitian people’s revolutionary commitment to overthrow colonial empire in the Caribbean and beyond. The Haitian people’s timeless message continues to reinforce the necessity of unity and solidarity among oppressed nations today.

Dr. Narcisse was introduced by wellknown activist Margaret Prescod, radio host with Pacifica Radio’s “Sojourner Truth” and a leading member of Global Women’s



“Haiti will never accept the electoral coup d’état.”

Strike. Prescod and Global Women’s Strike have long accompanied the Haitian struggle to build international solidarity to support Haiti’s grassroots movement.

“It is clear that the Haitian people haven’t abandoned the struggle,” said Dr. Narcisse, referring to the Haitian people’s commitment to continue protesting the US/UN-sponsored electoral fraud, which placed Jovenel Moïse as president earlier this year. Now, more than ever, she said, “We are fighting for dignity, democracy, freedom, and the respect of our rights; [we are] resisting.”

Dr. Narcisse’s presentation resonated with the public, majority young black and brown organizers, progressive staff and faculty, as well as other community members. Her words came at a critical moment, particularly for student organizers who work on issues of international solidarity, institutional racism, Indigenous and Native Studies, support for undocumented students, and increasing financial aid for black and other working class students of color.

The next day, Dr. Narcisse made a presentation at the UCLA School of Public Health Marion Davis Children’s Health Center on the “Impact of Poverty on Women and Child Health,” which included information about grassroots community organizing for health in Haiti. Later Dr. Narcisse met with community leaders and organizers at a reception hosted by Margaret Prescod, and organized by Women of Color in the Global Women’s Strike, at the Afiba Center in South Central Los Angeles. The expressions of love and solidarity throughout the tour moved Dr. Narcisse deeply and inspired her, as she inspired all who met and heard her. ✨

An Alpha Betic Construction & Corruption

by Shanga Labossiere

I'm 1500 miles from my mother and father's motherland,
3000 miles from the land where my mother and
father joined hands.

Sometimes I feel as if Mother Nature wants no
relation.

Sometimes is now as
Hurricane Matthew is approaching Haiti,
News coverage flooding the airwaves—

You know, for the news
they always share the same old story:
Haiti and the phrase
"poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere"
always go together,
as if mutual exclusivity is a myth.

Always this degradation and defamation saved
for the first black nation that performed the eradication of
plantations.

Poorest nation in the west,
yeah, that's us right?

It's funny,

they always say our story goes straight from abolition to zero,
but that alphabet is a lie;

when I learned the alphabet,

you couldn't get from A to Z

without going from B to Y.

Like...

Abolition: an astounding achievement,
an act of alliance assembling to annihilate
an abundance of agony. But, after actualization,



Belligerent, battered, bruised and beaten
Colonists—now with a conjured coalition of
controlling and capitalistic countries—couldn't
conceptualize such a crushing
Defeat. So defeated and dumbfounded they
damned us to debt, declaring demands of
deposits,
Enormous, an excessive economic and
environmental excavation... essentially
France and friends forced us to fork over
funds, to finance their recognition of our
freedom, a fearsome figure that fated our
future:
Generations on generations generating,
gathering this grand and gross amount of
gems, gold and gourdes to give to greedy
Hands. Hands that have been habitually
holding Haiti hostage, a harrowing hinderance
of hope helping to
Instill ignorance of our independence. They
infiltrated imposing an infection of instability
on our image, insinuating that our half of the
island is
Jammed, jumbled and jacked up as they jack
our jewels;
Keep kickin our kin down as they make a
killing and commit killings of
Livelihoods and lives of loved ones: life lost,
life lost, life lost. See the
Masses and movements marching moving
mountains of mourning. That monetary
Number? That noose around the neck of
the nation was never going nowhere, oh no
because
Other oppressive options were ordered. Now,
let's obliterate the opacity they try to obstruct
us with. For instance, the elections:
the Polls are problematic. The pleas of the
people are pushed to the side and a president
with half-pint popularity is picked and placed
into power. Our point of view is profitless to
them; they police the populace as if we are
pests. They want us to
Quit. Quit the queue of queries and questions.

Quit our quest for a decent quality of life,
deeming us unqualified in order to quench
their qualms.

They want us to quit
quit,
quit

but we quickly quiet that.

They Ravage and ruin us but we always
resist; we can readily repeat and renew the
revolution.

Resurgences of
Slavery get shattered and we silence slander
to shape and structure our own sanctuaries
of serenity.

We will Toil for the tranquility that has been
taken from us, transcending, transforming, and
turning the tables. Our tenacity is
Untouched and undamaged by united efforts
of undermining
our Vertical ventures.

Witness that
we are worthy,
we will never wear out,
no writing off our brilliance,
no withholding our light.

They always say our story goes straight from
abolition to zero,
but that alphabet is a lie;
when I learned the alphabet,
you couldn't get from A to Z
without going from B to Y.

Their Xenophobic account of history has
glossed over their extraction, extortion, and
exploitation of our exceptionality. We will
not—

we will never
be exorcised of our excellence.

And this is whY,
unlike their alphabet,
we will never reach
Zero.

Resisting the Lynching of Haitian Liberty!

By Malaika Kambon

This article was originally published in January 2017.

It should be obvious by now that the US/UN, EU, OAS, and various hired paramilitary police have engineered a second fraudulent election in as many years in Haiti.

This latest attempt to kill Haiti's freedom by aborting her dreams of democracy via the electoral process was designed to prevent landslide victories by Fanmi Lavalas, reminiscent of the presidential victories of Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The US and UN do not want to see this.

But people have turned out in force, as protests continue against the blatant sabotage of the November 20, 2016 elections, where Dr. Maryse Narcisse and Fanmi Lavalas again sought to reclaim Haiti's freedom, only to be met—again—by a US elite intent upon electoral sabotage.

But the fraudulent elections have ignited the country. Daily protests have been held for over a month. For the thirty-fifth consecutive day, tens of thousands are in the streets, who see in the candidacy of Dr. Narcisse the fruition of their dreams: freedom, dignity, and sovereignty via a political party of the people that knows what it wants to achieve.

The international press is busily trying to shore up the fraudulent “win” of PHTK (or “bald head party”) candidate Jovenel Moïse. But even in an electoral process that was blatantly manipulated, Moïse, “the banana man,” controls nothing in Haiti but his mouth, and that not very well.

And the US Government, reminiscent of the cryptic simplicity of Langston Hughes' poem, “Christ in Alabama,” taunts and tries to snatch Haitian freedom with its entrenched racism.

But Haiti is rising up, and she is fighting back! With the swiftness of a Muhammad Ali strike, Haiti reminds us that we have not ever been n***s, and that we always define our tree of liberty, and our “place” is being free.

Haitian grassroots people are battling the attempted electoral coup d'état, and are now into thirty-five consecutive days of peaceful yet forceful demonstrations against the

fraud. This has got the resident oligarchies so worried that they have escalated their military and political attacks.

Corrupt judges and the PHTK party of Michel Martelly are trying to force international observers and parties contesting the fraudulent November 20 elections to quit the fraud probe. Attacks by militarized police against peaceful demonstrators are growing in number and strength. The entire electoral process is broken, worse than in the US.

On December 24, 2016 at about 2:00 PM Haitian time, in an escalating show of force, militarized police armed to the teeth shot indiscriminately into a crowd of thousands. Many demonstrators were wounded on Martin Luther King Avenue, in the city of Port-au-Prince.

Members of Fanmi Lavalas were especially targeted. A sitting member of parliament had his car shot up by police. According to witnesses a policeman took his automatic weapon and smashed out the back window of the car owned by a Fanmi Lavalas candidate for the Senate. A journalist from Radio Timoun, the people's radio station, was also injured by police gunfire and was taken to the hospital. The people announced that demonstrations would continue on December 25, 2016, day 34. They will not stop.

Fascism sends its Seasons Greetings full of repression, from UN-occupied Haiti.

A critical question people should be asking themselves is why do a bunch of fascist, billionaire whites, their international quislings, and the internal puppet leadership of Haiti want so badly to maintain an apartheid regime and the occupation and ownership of a sovereign African country they describe as “the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere”?

Recall that Haiti was forced to pay the blood-sucking World Bank and its IMF vampire sibling more than a million dollars per week to satisfy debts incurred by the 29-year Papa Doc and Baby Doc Duvalier family regimes and other Duvalierist tyrants who succeeded them. The most recent

example of this is the highway robbery of the treasury by Hillary Clinton's puppet, Michel Martelly.

Round and round and round they go, with the World Bank lying and saying it is eradicating poverty, while Haitians eat mud cookies in order to repay a debt caused by white theft and to be considered deserving of "help" from blood-sucking multilateral financial institutions.

Such thieves include the Clinton Foundation, which claimed magnanimity in their dealings with Haiti, as billions of dollars of earthquake relief money under their control remain unaccounted for.

The people of Haiti are left even more impoverished.

This continual interference in Haiti's democratic process keeps happening because:

1. Haiti overthrew chattel enslavement of African people over 200 years ago by slapping down the combined military might of France, England, and Spain, thus establishing its independence, and turning the myth of white supremacy on its head. "We are the first black independent country in the world," asserts its first democratically elected president, Jean Bertrand Aristide.

2. Even though the same "civilized" Euro-American and Canadian regimes instigated two coups d'état against the government of Jean Bertrand Aristide, the people haven't ever stopped resisting tyranny.

3. Haitian resistance keeps getting stronger, despite the US-UN occupation. In collusion with the US government, in 2004 the United Nations brought its un-peacekeeping, cholera-spreading, brutal force of 10,000 MINUSTAH troops into Haiti. Along with the reconstituted Haitian Army headed by drug runners wanted by the DEA, these combined forces exist to "keep the natives in their place." This is with the full support of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the European Union (EU).

4. President Jean-Bertrand Aristide fought for and continues to fight for Haitian dignity, sovereignty, and independence. When he was in office, he refused to be a sellout president and kept all of the Haitian assets for the Haitian people. In 2003, he demanded that over \$22 billion dollars in money extorted from Haiti by nineteenth century France be restored. Haiti was originally forced to pay this money, starting in 1826, to former slave owning French plantation owners.

5. Doctors Jean-Bertrand Aristide and Maryse Narcisse both defy the evil of entrenched tyranny. Dr. Maryse Narcisse, the 2016 Fanmi Lavalas presidential candidate is in the streets daily with the people fighting for Haiti's independence.

6. President Aristide fought for fair trade for Haiti, in defiance of the Clinton regime's policies that collapsed Haiti's economy.

7. Haiti's geographic location boasts huge oil, gold, and other reserves of wealth. She is also strategically located in

relationship to Cuba.

8. President Aristide attacked and threatened the hegemony and corruption of Haiti's 1% ruling elite by enforcing labor and taxation legislation laws.

The US attitude toward Haiti has always been one of keeping Africans "in their place," as described by white supremacy.

United States nineteenth century government didn't want a free African state dismantling its brutal slave economy. So enslaver US president Thomas Jefferson gave Napoleon \$40,000 to re-enslave Haiti. He also put the word out that an African person was only worth three-fifths of a white person. Napoleon got his butt kicked, Jefferson lost a lot of money but acquired the Louisiana Purchase for a song, and Haiti was free.

Fast-forward to 1915 and US president Woodrow Wilson of Birth of a Nation-reinstitute-the-KKK-filmmaking fame. His Secretary of State, William Byron Jennings "disapproved" of "N***rs, speaking French!" in Haiti. Wilson sent in the Marines to occupy and rob Haiti from 1915 to 1934.

Fast-forward again to 2004.

Haitians kept deciding that their "place" was to be free, so the International Republican Institute, Colin Powell (another lying Sec of State), the CIA, and USAID kidnapped President Aristide and his family by transporting them as "cargo" to the Central African Republic in a US plane designed for the program of "extraordinary rendition."

Well, that didn't work either because Congresswoman Maxine Waters, Trans-Africa founder Randall Robinson, and others snatched them back from the brink of captivity and they went into exile, first in Jamaica then in South Africa, until the power of the Haitian people brought them back home to Haiti in 2011.

Hurricanes, earthquakes, odious Euro-US debt designed to kill people by the dollar, Duvalier Papa and Baby Doc, the US Government and the US puppets' thefts of Haitian resources, DEA drug runners, entrenched racism, foreign domination, onerous rapes, predawn UN and paramilitary attacks, strip mining, cholera, odious rapacious Secretaries of State from William Byron Jennings to Hillary Rodham Clinton, terrorist Tonton Macoutes, starvation, murders, kidnappings, and disappearances of children, freedom fighters, and prodemocracy activists Lovinsky Pierre-Antoine, Father Gérard Jean-Juste, to name but two, mud cookies for food....

In spite of all of these horrible things and more, the African people of Haiti keep fighting to be free. Haitian resistance to entrenched US interference in her government has not ceased for over 200 years. It will not stop. It is about to be 2017, right now.

The Haitian Revolution, from 1791 to 1804....It is happening again. The people of Haiti will be free. ✨

OSCAR LÓPEZ RIVERA IS FREE!

By Judith Mirkinson

The din was overwhelming. When Oscar López Rivera walked into the hall in Berkeley California on May 31, it was a moment of pure joy—one we don't get to experience politically very often. Over 700 people applauded, cheered, and cried. We were welcoming one of our political prisoners home to our community!

On January 17, 2017, President Obama granted Oscar López-Rivera's petition for clemency: he was to be released, without conditions, on May 17, four months hence (the same conditions that were given to Chelsea Manning). Shortly thereafter Oscar was moved to house arrest to live with his daughter in Puerto Rico.

Make no mistake: these commutations did not come out of the goodness of Obama's heart. It was the result of long decades of work and organizing. It meant mobilizing across an extremely broad spectrum of the population and involved all sectors of Puerto Rican society. It also meant organizing and building a broad solidarity movement. It sometimes involved working through great disappointments, but the campaign had at its core a tenacity of purpose to get Oscar out of prison.

This broad approach was carried into the planning for the celebrations. In the San Francisco Bay Area this meant building a large coalition of organizations that ranged from Veterans for Peace, to the Arab Organizing and Resource Center, to the Haiti Action Committee, to the National Lawyers Guild. It involved Puerto Ricans who had worked since the seventies and younger activists who started in the nineties, as well as many others. It meant that over 50 organizations gave money to help put on the program and gave of their members to do security and other tasks. A couple of weeks before the program we had to move to a much bigger venue and yet we had no problem getting the word out everywhere. Everyone wanted to be involved and everyone wanted to help.

There is a long history of national and international struggle around Puerto Rican political prisoners that we can all learn from. In 1979, after a concerted campaign, President Carter commuted the sentences of four Puerto Rican Nationalists: Lolita Lebrón, Irvin Flores, Rafael Cancel Miranda, and Oscar Collazo. In 1980, 1981, and 1985, fifteen Puerto Ricans identified as members of the Puerto Rican clandestine movement FALN (*Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional*) were arrested in Chicago. They were charged with seditious conspiracy to overthrow the US government. In 1999, President Clinton pardoned eleven of those who remained in prison. Oscar López Rivera refused because it would have meant leaving his co-defendant Carlos Torres inside. Carlos was granted parole in 2010. Oscar went before the board in

2011, but despite a big campaign and support from Nobel Laureates, all Puerto Rican members of Congress, the UN Decolonization Committee, and others, he was denied.

Prior to his parole hearing in 2011, the right wing, led by pundit and political consultant Dick Morris, organized tens of thousands of people to bombard the board to deny his parole. FBI agents and members of victims' families of bombings that Oscar had never been charged with, let alone convicted of, were allowed to attend the hearings and denounce Oscar. Therefore, it wasn't that much of a surprise when he was denied parole and told to come back in 2021!

So the organizing continued. Sixty thousand letters were sent to President Obama. An online petition delivered over 100,000 signatures in less than 30 days. The mayor of San Juan, the Archbishop of Puerto Rico, and even the statehood gubernatorial candidate called for his release. Not since the struggle to get the US Navy out of Vieques had the people been so united in one cause.

Oscar also had support internationally (see Haiti Solidarity No. 7). Latin American leaders like Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela and Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua called Oscar the "Mandela of Latin America" and demanded his release. Cultural figures such as Arundhati Roy, Ruben Blades, and Lin-Manuel Miranda joined the effort. Organizations from all over the world signed onto the campaign.

Oscar's release came in the midst of one of the deepest fiscal crises in Puerto Rican history. Puerto Rico is still the largest colonial possession of the US and one of the last



Oscar López and Rasma Odeh, Palestinian community activist and former political prisoner.

outright colonies in the world. The island is under a federal receivership plan called PROMESA (Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act), due to a combination of fiscal mismanagement, privatization, and the consistent looting and bankrupting of Puerto Rico by Wall Street. PROMESA is austerity on steroids. Forty-six percent of Puerto Ricans live under the poverty line, with over 11% unemployment. Over 150 schools have been closed. Pensions have been cut. There's talk of privatizing the electric, transit and water companies. The minimum wage has been cut to \$4.25 per hour for young workers. In effect, Puerto Rico's colonial status has been reaffirmed. Puerto Rico's own government has little if any say in the economic (and therefore political) policies of the island. As a result, this May 1

saw the largest demonstration in years, and student strikes (an almost constant in the last years) got larger as well.

May 17 arrived: More than 10,000 people celebrated and greeted Oscar in Puerto Rico. The next day he flew to his other home in Chicago and was greeted there by 6,000 people. He was scheduled to be the grand marshal of the Puerto Rican Day parades in New York and Chicago.

But the backlash was already beginning. In New York, the Media Research Center, a right-wing conservative group in Washington, DC close to Breitbart News and Trump, started ferociously organizing a campaign against the Puerto Rican Day parade, denouncing Oscar as a murderer and a terrorist. They called for a boycott of the parade. Despite the

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Oscar López Rivera
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fact that the parade had called for his release for years (and even had him as a grand marshal in absentia last year) major donors such as Goya Foods and JetBlue pulled out, as did corporate media sponsors. Articles vilifying Oscar and calling him a terrorist appeared not only in rags like the NY Post, but in the NY Times and on news shows that ran the gamut from MSNBC to Fox News. Politicians (who always march in parades), such as Governor Cuomo and Police Commissioner James O'Neill, refused to march. Mayor De Blasio (who is up for reelection) didn't know what to do.

At the same moment, there was voting in Puerto Rico on yet another referendum to resolve the status question: Statehood? Independence? Or what exists today—commonwealth? The statehood party was using the controversy over the parade to bolster its base. But in a place where 70 to 80% of the people usually turn out for referendums, only 23% voted. The rest of the population, instead of boycotting a parade, boycotted the election.

Oscar was much more concerned with putting the spotlight on decolonization than on himself. He decided to withdraw from the position of grand marshal. On June 1, 2017 he wrote an op-ed piece in the Daily News:

“This parade is happening at a time when Puerto Rico is facing a political and economic crisis that is impacting everyone on the island. Unfortunately, the narrative around the parade is not celebration and concern for the situation on the island but rather misinformation about who I am and what I stand for.

“We must shift the focus. We cannot let people who are unfamiliar with Puerto Rican history define the narrative and experiences of our community.”

Despite the fact that it was a blazing hot day and that police were swarming everywhere and that those who supported Oscar had been called “terrorist supporters,” the people marched and watched—more than one million. Wearing a black and white Puerto Rican flag t-shirt, symbolizing colonialism, Oscar rode on a beautiful float along with Melissa Mark Viverito, the City Council president. He was followed by a diverse and unified contingent including Sekou Odinga and other black former political prisoners and activists, Palestinian and solidarity organizers, prison activists, Puerto Rican independentistas, anti-war groups and many more. As the contingent passed by spectators, it was met with cheers and signs supporting Oscar.

Oscar went on to lead the parade in Chicago, testify

Haiti Rice
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¹⁷ Georges, Josiane. “Trade and the Disappearance of Haitian Rice.” Ted Case Studies Number 725, June 2004. <http://archive.is/20130830194250/www1.american.edu/TED/haitirice.htm>

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²⁰ Georges, Josiane. Ted Case Studies.

²¹ Corbett, Bob. “Washington Office on Haiti: Special Issue Report. Rice Corporation of Haiti.” November 1, 1995.

²² Aristide, Jean-Bertrand. *Eyes of the Heart*, pp. 31-32.

²³ Haiti Action Committee, “Myths About Haiti.” October 2001.

²⁴ Sprague, p. 77.



Photo: Charlie Billups

before the Decolonization Committee of the UN, and tour the Northeast. In each place he was met with love and support. Next on the agenda? A visit to Nicaragua and later in the fall, Cuba.

One of the most memorable moments since Oscar's release came in Chicago when Oscar greeted Rasmea Odeh, the former Palestinian political prisoner and a victim of Israeli torture who is being deported this month. And wherever Oscar spoke, he emphasized the need for a stronger movement to confront racism, to build against colonialism, and to free the remaining political prisoners. He's set up a foundation to help see these things happen.

"The US government categorically denies it has political prisoners in its gulags. It uses this to hoodwink its own citizens to believe that it doesn't criminalize dissenters or opponents of its wars and other imperialistic practices. It does this to perpetuate the lie that it is the ultimate defender of freedom, justice, democracy, and human rights in the world. And it uses this at times to further criminalize the political prisoners and/or our families and to disconnect us from our families, communities, supporters, and the just and noble causes we served and try to continue serving."

— Oscar López Rivera —

Statement to the American Studies Association conference, Puerto Rico, October 29, 2012

Since returning home to Puerto Rico, Oscar has taken up the current struggles on the island. In July he joined the protests against toxic coal ash dumping in Penuelas, Puerto Rico, and he is meeting with students, labor organizers, and activists.

As Oscar took the stage in Berkeley, the cheers started again, and they went on for a while. There were people that had worked in solidarity with Puerto Rico for decades and others who hadn't even been born when Oscar was first arrested. But everyone knew. This was a great victory, something to savor.

But it was also something to think about as we contemplate both a rising right wing and a rising resistance movement. When we still have dozens of political prisoners, like Leonard Peltier (who was refused clemency) and Mumia Abu-Jamal. Like Herman Bell and Jalil Muntaqim, Sundiata Acoli and Deborah Africa. How do we build real unity and sustained campaigns? How do we honor and commit ourselves to the freedom of all those who were part of our movements? How are we going to continue our solidarity internationally for real sovereignty for Haiti, Syria, Palestine, and Puerto Rico? ✱

"The only thing I know is to fight. My commitment does not stop until my last breath has been taken."

— Oscar López Rivera —

Oscar López Rivera is FREE!

*After more than 35 years as a political prisoner,
Oscar López Rivera is free!*

*“My spirit, dignity and my
honor are much less damaged
today than the day I went to
prison. I wake up every
morning and try to fill my
small heart with love and hope,
and love for my country, and
for justice and liberty.”*

~ Oscar López Rivera ~

