A Haiti Chronicle
The Undoing of a Latent Democracy, 1999-2001

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Cover photo by Daniel Kedar, Haiti: Reflections. www.kedar.net
Counselor for Public Affairs at the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince in 1999-2001, Daniel Whitman was haunted by the country’s people and landscapes, its nuanced language, and complex and rewarding friendships.

His friends included neighbors, art gallery owners, gas station attendants — but mostly Haiti’s intrepid journalists and broadcasters. Unlike others, Whitman believed that the three elections of 2000 could advance Haiti’s democracy and its development from the bottom rung as poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. He was wrong; they did not. Local supremacists killed, torched and rushed to fraud while foreigners forgave and even blessed the electoral debacles without posing the resistance even of meaningful public comment.

However, seeds also germinated to make Haiti one day fit for its inventive, humor-loving and too often betrayed people. The effort was kept alive largely by Haiti’s gritty journalists, going into hiding when necessary for their survival, but newly organized in October of 1999, into a tenacious and daring national federation. The nation-wide Haitian Press Federation advanced against all odds, and held eight regional meetings which changed political discourse forever in Haiti.

The country now enters a post-Aristide interlude. The failure of one regime does not guarantee success for the next. A Haiti Chronicle offers recent context for understanding Haiti’s current crisis, and opportunity.
Special thanks to Pearl, who stuck with this project—and with me—every bit of the way.
Disclaimer — The opinions expressed in this book are my own, and do not necessarily reflect that of the U.S. Government.

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The greatest honor I’ve received was the dedication of a library in my name on March 18, 2002, in Fort-Liberté, a city in Haiti’s Northeast Département which had never before had one. I learned of the event not from American officials who attended, but from a Haitian friend who called me in Washington shortly after the ceremony. Fort-Liberté has no workable phone lines, but Jean-Jean was able to reach me by cell phone from the satellite footprint of Cap-Haïtien, some 40 miles away.

Even if I’d known in advance, I couldn’t have attended, because of death threats relayed to me in person July 7, 2000 by the Aristide regime, and underscored on the night of March 6, 2001, with fizzled incendiary devices tossed over the outer wall toward my house in Upper Turgeot in Port-au-Prince. Haitians more versed than I in the language of threats and bombs say that the regime’s brief against me had to do with my having emboldened independent Haitian journalists through training, study tours, and local and national meetings in 1999-01 during my stint there as Public Affairs Counselor at the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince. Like other imponderables in Haiti, this will never be verified, nor will the extent of the regime’s intent really to harm me.

The “Daniel Whitman Library” was destroyed by pro-Aristide mobs on February 9, 2004, the building torched, its books burnt. But its existence even for a brief time would seem to demonstrate Haitian reverence for learning, and the energies which have self-started them on so many occasions during a history which would have neutralized a less steadfast people.

Preface
A Haiti Chronicle was completed December 31, 2002. Recent events call for a context-setting comment. Jean-Bertrand Aristide came; he liberated; he turned bad; he left on February 29, 2004. He received extraordinary amounts of aid – much of it personal – from foreign governments. When those governments asked that he behave better, he turned enfant terrible, offering them a vulnerable smile, waiting for their airplanes to leave his airport, then cracking down with ever greater severity on his own people. Often the victims of the killings, beatings, and destruction of property were taken totally at random.

Confusion, dissembling, and anarchic repression have existed alongside some of humans’ finest qualities throughout Haiti’s eventful history and rich culture. J-B Aristide raised the former to a head-splitting level. He played his role sublimely, but was ultimately repudiated by a majority of his population. If his eighteen-year performance was a sort of stage presentation, he was a memorable protagonist, with rare powers of persuasion.

The “logique” of events led to Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s ouster on February 29, 2004. The Congressional Black Caucus and others claim he was “abducted.” Indeed, questions remain to be answered: who were the “rebels” and how were they financed, equipped, and trained? Why were so few able to sweep away a seemingly unshakable regime so easily? Did the Opposition ever “represent” anyone or have any plan for bringing Haiti back to its feet? (Now a question for Interim Prime Minister Gérard Latortue!)

As the rebels closed in on Port-au-Prince in February of 2004, the U.S. government unilaterally proclaimed Aristide as the “free and fairly elected [sic] President of Haiti,” brushing aside prior statements to the contrary by the U.N., OAS, EU, and the previous White House, NSC and State Department. In response, Haitians dusted off their ingenious word plays for the world to note, saying “Colin pa we’l” [“Colin didn’t see it.”]
But the world noted nothing; it only erected higher barriers. “If you attempt to escape,” Washington said in effect, “We will capture you and send you to Guantánamo.” Haitians responded, “You always told us how Haitians must solve their own problems. Now we do so, only on our own terms, since yours have not worked.”

They proceeded, then, to greet the 200 or so “rebels” enthusiastically on their sweep from Cap-Haïtien to Port-au-Prince in February of 2004, seeing them as liberators all the way. Among the rebels themselves, some had unsavory pasts. The U.S. Government stated many times that it did not like or accept the rebels or their activities. On March 20, human rights groups and foreign governments reacted strongly against the new provisional Haitian government for appearing in public at Gonaïves with rebel leader Guy Philippe and calling him a “freedom fighter.”

But Haitians sensed no other option in a situation which was destroying them on many levels. They were even joyful that an option existed for them, other than starvation, lethal chaos, and their country once again picked clean by yet another kleptocracy.

Haiti’s friends overseas have committed errors and worse, in exacerbating an already painful and convulsive history. Some have “handled” Haiti with notable disregard for Haitians’ wishes and aspirations, even stiff-arming them from entering the dialogue about their own destiny.

During U.S. Congressional hearings in March, 2004, on the circumstances of Aristide’s February 29 departure, Haitian University rector Pierre-Marie Pacquiot was wheeled into the Chamber (his legs had been smashed by pro-Aristide gangs December 5, 2003.) He was introduced and displayed at the hearing, but he himself was accorded only four minutes of the five hour proceedings, his own opinions largely ignored.

In a broadcast later the same week, a prominent radio host in Washington D.C. irately turned away a Haitian caller and denied her air time to argue that President Aristide might have amassed personal wealth at
the expense of the Haitian people. “I never read any such thing!” the radio host emphasized in cutting her off.

Hence two principles seemed to guide U.S. Haiti watchers: (1) Of the many voices vying to be heard on the Haitian crisis, only Haitians themselves were removed from the equation; (2) If an opinion leader had not read about a given factor or claim, this was evidence enough to discredit the claim as false. Absence of evidence became evidence of absence.

Haitians have always needed outside help, and they need it particularly at the current juncture. Self-appointed friends have let them down repeatedly. Despite these failures, Haitians remain open even to foreigners who thought they could outsmart the simple island cane-cutters as they patronized them. Haitians of all stripes suckered the outsiders as good as they got and better, wherein the fascination and appeal of the tale.

The world may lose interest in Haiti’s situation, but the stakes are enormously high for Haitians. I hope this account will shed some light on how and why Haiti came to its present crisis and opportunity.

November 1, 2004
Dedication
The Boy by the Rue Dalencourt

This book notes the courageous, obstinate, beleaguered, and tolerant people of Haiti, who even while expecting the worst for themselves, endeavor to mete out their level best for countrymen and neighbors; who perform inexplicable acts of charity for strangers, while at the same time enduring unspeakable cruelties by a few of their compatriots.

There may well be other periods when Haiti could have righted itself and found a path to fulfillment as a nation in one of the world’s most fascinating and admirable cultures. I focus on 1999-2001 only because I was there at the time. I offer this account neither as history nor erudition, but as a chronicle of what I saw and heard while I was there.

A single fleeting vision, from March 2001: shuttling home from work after an exhausting day at the Public Affairs section of the U.S. Embassy, we five American co-workers were packed into a single vehicle under the rationale that concentrating us in fewer convoys might improve our mathematical chances of evading the bullets, kidnappings and highjackings rampant at the time. Our sputtering van mounted a hill caked thick with afternoon traffic. Our muscular Haitian driver plodded with thick-necked persistence as the impacted traffic offered miserly centimeters of open space ahead. We advanced along a tortuous by-road linking the thoroughfares of Canapé Vert and the Avenue John Brown.

As we rounded a bluff on the rue Dalencourt, I noticed a child squatting on the hill above us, weeping — not as a Western child might, as a ruse or technique to extract sympathy for momentary discomfort or hunger from those with money to give or compassion to offer. This
child, no more than eight or nine years old, showed the resignation of a human with precocious awareness of his ultimate demise and degradation, the end of the line. One might guess that the child could have been like any other, an orphan, and starving. Or at best, unjustly beaten and left on the hill for reasons disproportionate to his minor offense.

From inside our hermetically sealed Toyota Landrover we gazed at the child and he at us, though clearly, experience had showed him the futility of expecting rescue or even small gestures of compassion.

As I lifted a hand to respond, to grope for local currency in my pocket, to break the driver’s obstinate course through the maddening traffic, the moment passed before I could do anything to intervene. Nor would helping one child manage to help another, or another, and another.

The sight of the child and his undefined suffering is one I have tried to obliterate from my memory, but cannot.

This text is dedicated to the single Haitian child whose name I will never know, and also to bringing to light some aspects of the inefficacy of politicians and bureaucrats who left him in his predicament on that day of March, 2001.
Introduction

Why It Should Matter

Is Haiti of greater strategic or political importance or interest than Moldova, Malta or Myanmar? Perhaps not, since its pervading export is misery, despite a vast human potential. Might the unrelieved stress and daily anxiety of the Haitian rank higher on the pain scale than that of the Cambodian under Pol Pot or the refugee of Darfur? Again, likely not. But the human experience in its variegated forms, its conflictual nature, its anecdotal richness, will interest or catch the heart of some, evade others.

I argue for giving the Haitian land and its people a moment of attention and reflection as conundrum, brain-buster, heart breaker, imponderable, compelling, indomitable in its spirit and alluring in its raw courage. If you are intrigued by nobility and sophistication in the face of daunting obstacles, then you cannot be disinterested in Haiti, its people and its story. In these elements, no country surpasses Haiti.

Haitian Democracy

An oxymoron? Absolutely not, and this is the point of the story of my two years in the country.

“Civil society”? In a city with nameless streets and missing addresses where the ideal of a “census” becomes a joke, where perhaps two million humans live in despair, unexplained public violence erupts with the suddenness and ferocity of a tornado, and a thousand acts of kindness occur at every street corner at every hour. In two years there, I never saw rivalry for passage at the impossibly clogged street corners, nor road
rage, nor acts of rudeness (thievery and murder, yes). Haiti always awaited
democratic rule, despite distant condescending judgments to the con-
trary. And every Haitian understood the word “eleksyon” in its full sense:
a people able to have a say in their own destiny. They were ready as they
always have been for self-determination, civility in their bones.

One aspect of this account begins with an ardor of hope, and a Hai-
tian citizen finding a handsome yellow blouse to wear as she went out to
vote on May 21, 2000, the proudest day of her life.

The story ends in a sense three days later, after ballots were thrown
into the bay, boxes stuffed with pre-marked Lavalas votes — when the
same citizen shuffled along her daily tasks with no discernable change
in mood, merely stating the evident facts: “Haiti fini.”

And — if you want to skip to the end of the story — the Haitian will
not likely be persuaded again to vote, nor will she have occasion to don
the yellow blouse, the marker of a single day of dignity.

But with the bitterness, and an inspired history turned to evisceration,
came inspiration and comedic moments as well: acts of bravery and
generosity as well as a marriage of outside misperception and local de-
ception which in themselves merit a full reading, for their incongruitities.

The international community’s mishandling of Haiti gratuitously dis-
spirited the Western Hemisphere’s poorest and most harmless culture, its
large-spirited people packed into a tiny third of the island of Hispaniola,
whose natural beauty dazzled Christopher Columbus on his first voyage
to the Americas. Back at its beginning, it had been the most productive
piece of real estate in the world, supplying all of Europe’s coffee, cacao
and sugar in the eighteenth century. It continued to do so even after the
unshackling, in 1804, of the iniquitous slave trade herded into this tiny,
productive strip of land shaped like a lobster’s claw, the size of the state
of Maryland. Over the centuries, the nation was sufficiently ruined by
greed and by gluttonous tyrants of local production.

It was not necessary that outsiders raise Haitians’ expectations in addi-
tion, only to dash them in the end.

_Silence Is Consent_

The epitaph of recent foreign efforts in Haiti may one day read, “They meant well, but said little.” International players allowed Haiti’s government free rein to put its own political survival over that of the Haitian people, and to use any means to do so. Unintended effects of the accidental visitors — political leaders, journalists, missionaries, bureaucrats — visited harmful consequences upon a pragmatic folk who, if left on their own, might have worked things out for themselves.

The current political anomaly dates from January 11, 1999, when then President René Préval adjourned Parliament _sine die_, lacking national elections within the mandated time limits set by the constitution adopted by Haitians in a 1987 national plebiscite.

July 9, Préval promulgated an Electoral Law – in effect, Article 189 of the Haitian Constitution. The executive action created a Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) to stand in for the non-existent Permanent Electoral Council, which Article 192 of the Constitution had mandated as a product of a sitting Parliament.

In response, President Clinton sent a letter to U.S. Congress August 16, citing improvements in the Haitian electoral process. The letter met the requirements of Congress’s Dole Amendment, which called for executive certification in order to release U.S. electoral assistance funds. Lacking these, Haiti would be hard put to conduct elections at all.

Political effervescence took over tiny Haiti. The Haitian public, many times deceived, aspired to elections in any form. February 9, 2000, on the first day of registration, 900,000 applicants overwhelmed the CEP’s capacity to process them. Despite chaotic scenes country-wide from the unexpected turnout, there was no reported violence. By February 14, an astonishing three million voters had registered (about 70 percent of the eligible voting population), and over 27,000 candidates announced
their candidacies for local, regional, and national offices.

February 14, President Préval, who some thought might encourage the surge of democratic fervor, responded instead by stating that March 19 elections would be “difficult to hold.” Opposition figures denounced alleged ruling Lavalas party sabotage of the process, and also began dropping out of the race as anonymous death threats began to be carried out in fact. Attempts by U.S. top officials to mediate the crisis were unavailing.

By May 12, the body count of opposition candidates had risen to 15. Aristide’s and Préval’s Lavalas party called on opposition groups to “end the violence,” though the opposition alone had fallen as victims. Almost all opposition campaigns ceased, for fear and lack of funds.

When elections finally took place May 21, 2000, the vote was marked by widespread fraud favoring Lavalas candidates. The Canadian Broadcast Company filmed Haitian government vehicles assisting, as ballot boxes were dumped into the street on Lalue, and into the bay of Port-au-Prince. A U.S. Congressional Delegation declared victory early on the morning of May 22, citing “peaceful elections in Haiti,” then hastened to depart for Washington.

The scene darkened later the same day, as the Haitian government rounded up 50 losing opposition leaders, with former Senator Paul Denis tossed into a prison cell in Pétionville four meters by four meters, with 16 other prisoners, who all had to take turns standing and sitting, for lack of space.

On July 9, the date of the second round of elections, Lavalas Spokesman Yvon Neptune announced a fizzled turnout (corroborated by international observers) of “five to ten percent” in the late afternoon, but altered his own estimate an hour later to “67 percent.” July 12, Kofi Annan, the White House in Washington, the OAS and the EU all expressed relative degrees of dismay over the process, but assigned no blame to any group or individual. August 28 the new Parliament was inaugurated with fanfare. Kelly Bastien, former President of the Chamber of
Deputies, fled to Canada the same day.

Facing increasing public furor, Spokesman Neptune reiterated September 29 that the results of the May 21 elections were “not negotiable.” Journalists referring over the air to the newly seated Parliament members as “the May 21 Senators” began to receive anonymous, daily death threats by phone.

Disillusioned Haitian voters stayed home during the presidential elections of November 26, 2000. The opposition Convergence Démocratique boycotted the election entirely. So did the international community, which called them “flawed elections,” and cancelled sending official observers. No real opponents ran against Aristide, with six unknowns printed on the ballot as a fig leaf of choice.

Such as it was, the process gave Aristide a clear “victory.” But Haiti succumbed to increasing street violence, a deeper devaluation of the gourde, and lower expectations of the frequent visits from U.S. and OAS officials.

January 9, 2001, at a ceremony in the church of St. Jean Bosco, where Aristide had once narrowly escaped an attempt against his own life, Lavalas activist Paul Raymond read out a hit list of 100 Haitians marked for assassination by the Lavalas party. President Aristide issued no comment, despite pleas by civil society leaders for him to repudiate the public death threats made in his name. No outside government expressed any opinion.

June 21 Aristide called for “Zero Tolerance” on civil unrest, effectively giving carte blanche to Lavalas-linked gangs to capture and kill non-Lavalas individuals at will. The same day, gangs in the town of Cabaret seized three unarmed men, bound them in barbed wire, dragged them through the streets, and burned them alive. Lavalas activist Wilner Content stated that all opposition (“Convergence”) members deserved the same treatment.

No foreign government commented.
As the crisis deepened in 2003, the international community again was eloquent in its silence. While the Haitian regime and its street allies killed dozens every month and trashed houses and media broadcast facilities, condemnations from the outside were diluted or nonexistent.

Four months of massive, peaceful demonstrations in 2003 calling for President Aristide’s ouster brought no public response from the Haitian government, or any other.

Long ago, policy makers might have imposed “Zero Tolerance” for repression in Haiti and distanced themselves openly and unequivocally from Haitian government members and parties who promoted it. They could still say so clearly, and revoke visas held by Haitian officials who have espoused, organized, or tolerated the political violence of the past five years. Even now, no government has done so.

**What to do now? Who will lead?**

Such questions are fair ones but misdirected. One can seek to avert a train wreck. But once the wreck has occurred, one can only lament the dead, count and assist the wounded, reconsider whether to return the conductor to the switch. Then ask how the wreck happened and who allowed it.

Above all, ask Haitians for forgiveness for the silence which enabled the chaos. They might be gracious enough to grant it, but they would have every reason to refuse.

“*Pardonen pa vle di bliye:* to forgive is not to forget.”
Map courtesy Georges Fauriol, ed., Haitian Frustrations.
How it Happened
Part One

Getting Ready
May-July, 1999
Based in Pretoria, South Africa, in 1998 I briefly visited Washington, doing the State Department waltz called “Lining up the Next Assignment.” With the projected absorption in 2000 of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) into the Department of State (DOS) proper, we 800 USIA stalwarts had all received lessons on how to shed our modesty and dangle our virtues before the job-givers.

I went to see Linda Jewell, mentor and role model — one of the best in the business, and proof that decent and amusing people can succeed in a competitive world. She had became Director of USIA’s geographic area office of Latin America, and commanded a wide raj of striving USIAers hoping to land themselves decent postings.

I hadn’t seen Linda since before South Africa, and before Spain and Denmark.

“I want Cuba,” I said, when we got down to business. For goofy reasons, long since forgotten, I salivated over Cuba and (don’t ask) Romania as follow-ons to South Africa.

“Sorry,” Linda said with real compassion. “Things have changed and our Public Affairs Officer in Havana has extended by a year. The job’s not available. Actually, I have another place for you nearby, where I need a good officer with good French, like yours.”

I thought, “Guadeloupe?” No, that was a French département, not a country. “Martinique?” Likewise.

“No,” she explained. “I need you in Haiti. Give it some thought.”

I raised my hands defensively, as if approached by a stranger with un-
known intentions. “Actually, I’d rather not,” I said. “Have you got something else? Don’t forget, my Spanish is up after four years in Madrid.”

The next day I paid the obligatory visit to the personnel section in USIA to see what they might have on the master list. I hoped Linda hadn’t gotten to them first. One kindly officer, Gary, lifted my file and drew the bottom line. “You’re good. We like you. However — look at this: Copenhagen, Madrid, Pretoria. Let’s face it, these are dream posts and it’s your turn to serve in a hell hole. Now, do you want to choose it, or shall we do it for you?” He posited this with a twinkle in his eye.

I appreciated his frankness, and accepted the basic fairness of the “Fair Share” system, to distribute the difficult with the delightful, and maintain the needed incentive to keep people in the business.

I said ruefully, “Let me think about it,” and hastened back to South Africa.

A week later a phone call came from Gary, who had since talked with Linda Jewell: “So, you’ve given Haiti some thought, I understand.”

“You understand wrong,” I said. “I have thought — about ten seconds — and I’m flattered, and the answer is No.”

“Think more,” said Gary.

An e-mail appeared on my screen some days later from an unknown colleague in the personnel section, “So, we understand you’re considering Haiti.”

I only slowly came to realize I was headed for the dreaded moment in every foreign service career: the “Forced Assignment.” They were doing it gently and with style, but the endgame was becoming apparent. I resisted to the end. I imagined malaria, jungle fever, corpses piled through the streets, and Tontons Macoute in their terrifying one-way reflecting sunglasses, pursuing me in the dreams of my troubled tropical sleep. After the fifth phone call — this time from the kind and savvy Gary — I realized the noose was tight around my neck, and escape was not an option. “I relent,” I said. “Sign me up for Haiti.” I sensed relief at the other end of the line, 10,000 miles away.
I, too, was relieved in a way. As I began reading about the troubled little republic, I was reminded how it was like no other, produced from humanity’s only successful slave rebellion, colorful and enlivening in its bizarre and murderous history. André Breton and other European intellectuals of the thirties (Tanguy, Arp, Lam, Ernst, Braque…) had studied it during the spawning of something called “Surrealism,” at a time when Europe heaved with disgust for its own hyper-intellectual straitjackets that crushed their spontaneity and dehumanized their dusty approaches to life. From their cramped living quarters, small numbers of Europeans rose up against the claustrophobia of their secondary school training in “philo” — the philosophy courses that made them into conforming cogitators, but for the odd rebel.

Then the “discovery” of Africa and Martinique (home of Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire) and the more exotic Haiti had rescued them, I recalled, from the emasculation’s of Les Grandes Ecoles and the Collège de France in particular.

I began not only to accept my inescapable fate (Haiti) but even to welcome it. South Africa under Mandela — with its eleven official languages and its microcosm of kaleidoscopic diversity (Indian, Chinese, Lithuanian Jews, Zulus, Nkosi, and a zillion other races chattering in incomprehensible tongues) — was in a sense an extension of weary Europe, with its “Dutch Roman” laws and superhighways and tourist havens and cruel distinctions between rich and poor, forcing the poor to self-directed violence and thievery against the outsider.

I closed up shop in Pretoria during May of 1999, ready for a brief course in Haitian Creole back in Washington. I ran around K Street and Foggy Bottom, meeting anyone who claimed to know or care about little Haiti. I probably met and spoke with them all — Georges Fauriol, Jim Morrell, Robert Maguire, and others whose divergent political convictions began to seem like a reflections of Haiti’s own cramped spaces and incompatible factions.

My language training schedule left me free and clear each afternoon for five invigorating weeks, to go out and meet the experts.
Getting There

I had tough acts to follow: the hero Jeff Lite, who had saved a journalist’s life in 1987 by whisking him off under heavy gunfire in his 4-by-4 Jeep from a dead-ended alley; then national media star Stan Schrager, whose bellicose gaze so effectively seized camera attention during the late Coup period of 1993-94; then the agile and cowboy-booted Mary Ellen (“Meg”) Gilroy, whose Creole was flawless and who gave a hundred extemporaneous interviews from the driver’s seat of her car as she meandered through the city’s avenues, stopping to talk every time a radio journalist approached her with a microphone.

I had never been a Public Affairs Officer (“PAO”) before, but I came in with experience in assisting South Africa’s judiciary with a series of well-laid exchange programs. Misguided, I thought I might do the same in Haiti, even after hearing in Washington that there was no such being in Haiti as an uncorrupted judge.

I moved into Meg’s house in Musseau, July 20, 1999. The “ti kay,” or independent cottage in the back yard, became stock house for all the unneeded items I’d shipped, and where Meg had left behind spare tires for the Jeep I bought from her one sultry summer evening in Washington.

Soon enough I learned from more jaundiced Embassy colleagues the meaning and importance of “Lavalas,” the political party of Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Sometimes referred to as “Fanmi Lavalas,” “The Lavalas Family,” or simply, “FL.” The word derived from the Creole expression for “flash flood,” the un-opposable natural force which destroys everything in its path and brooks no resistance. FL meant power for the unendowed,
solidarity for the disenfranchised. Rewards for the loyal, annihilation for the opponent. Though benign on its face, there was something forbidding in its rhetoric, especially later, when political impasse moved FL spokesman Yvon Neptune to speak of “cleansing” and “disinfecting” the opposition as a precondition for negotiating with them.

I arrived with enough naïveté to believe that promised elections could actually occur on target within the four-to-five month deadline. Embassy colleagues leveled condescension when I said as much during Country Team meetings. I believed that — notwithstanding the dreary patterns of a subverted history — any troubled nation, like any individual, could flip-flop to a constructive state at unpredictable moments. My working example was Benin, which had turned overnight from dictatorship to a model democracy and quickly growing economy in 1989. Its President, Col. Ahmed Kérékou, had even graciously stepped down in 1991 after losing elections, fair and square, to Nicéphore Soglo in Benin’s first free presidential elections in thirty years.

If Benin, the original source of much of Haiti’s population and culture, could transform its gloomy history into something more promising, then why not Haiti as well, especially now that the hated Papa Docs, Baby Docs, and military regimes had been rooted out for good? My colleagues laughed at me but were reluctant to place their bets against me, since they knew as did I, that small, volatile countries often change overnight for ill or good, on the basis of four shots fired into the night, and a panicked crowd’s terror or sudden sense of might.

I took on the task of managing the Embassy’s Public Diplomacy Section (the former USIS) and stepped into the giant shoes of America’s “Pòt-Pawol” ("spokesman") in Haiti — the bearer of words, the public face of an Embassy respected, feared, and seen as a closed bastion of secret maneuverings surrounded by a protective ten-foot wall, and armed Marines, and gizmos to puncture the tires of any unwanted, intruding vehicle.

The office of the “Pòt-Pawol” was 100 meters down the street in a private office building at the “Rond-Point” (or roundabout) on the
Boulevard Harry Truman. With its broken down metal detectors and gentlemanly Haitian “guards” suffocating and sleeping in the cramped entry way to the downstairs, the Public Diplomacy (PD) section was in fact an open hand, offering easy access to any Haitian who had an agenda to take up with the Yankees. Madmen, party leaders, venerable intellectuals, and especially vigorous journalists passed through our portals dozens of times daily.

As PAO, my first two acts were to establish an “open door” policy over the protest of my local employees (“Even a lunatic may have five minutes with me”) and to insist that the embassy install ventilation for the guards in the suffocating entryway. Meg Gilroy had warned me that during the two yearly rainy seasons I could expect ankle-deep mud to ooze in from the squalid street into the ground floor of our building.

A lively commerce took place on the front steps of our building, where market women passed by with immense baskets of fruits and vegetables on their heads to sell to the employees within — and, more important, to provide us with the day’s gossip and rumors, almost always spot-on accurate and a good cross section of public opinion in a country where no scientific public opinion survey had even been conducted. Our office was as reliable a source as any of social, economic and political information, vastly closer to Haiti’s average citizen than anyone behind the huge walls and security fences of the Embassy.

From our offices on the second floor we witnessed anti-U.S. demonstrations as they formed, and community vigilante justice such as a crowd kicking a man to death for lifting a mango from a vendor’s booth. In due time, we viewed massacres meted out by the ruling party against defenseless political adversaries whose headquarters lay catty-corner from our offices. The wide circumference of our windows provided the most privileged view of the daily hum and guts of Port-au-Prince’s busy downtown.

We also saw kouris — the puzzling, terrifying mobs inspired by panic or blood lust, turning and weaving through the streets as if with a single
nervous system. They whisked by either in flight or attack, or sometimes plunder, sometimes in anonymity, sometimes with noble sounding names like “Organisations Populaires.” Their sheer collectivity brought shudders to anyone trained to think and act as individuals. Preceding by centuries the existence of “Fanmi Lavalas,” and available to the highest bidder, they formed Haiti’s devoted, harnessed energy. At times they engaged in even more compelling reactions of flight-in-fear when they collectively sensed a predator might be after them.

We saw it all from the second floor over the Rond-Point, the Boulevard Harry Truman in the one direction, its extension The Bicentennaine in the other, the transversal back alley, the Avenue Marie Jeanne (our official address), leading directly to the Parliament and rear entry of the Embassy down the road. Vaguely beyond, in front of us, lay the convoluted and overpopulated epicenter of the city, where the petits commerçants and rakish mechanics somehow made it through each arduous day to earn a single night’s meal.

The area was lethal, both day and night, when settlings of accounts would play out under our eyes as the quicker gangster cut down his rival with a sawed-off shotgun, or where plunderers surrounded a trapped vehicle, stripping it clean in seconds, like ant colonies their carrion.

The collectivity, I learned, was what empowered people in Haiti’s lawless culture. The same severe actions and willing self-sacrifice went to the community, in the same spirit which had enabled slaves in 1804 to rid themselves of Europe’s most elite armies by dint of massive attack and acceptance of huge casualties, casting aside one of the cruelest slave states in human history.

Though illiterate, the masses retained their sense of force even when they had nothing — “1’Union Fait la Force” (“In Union there is Strength”) was Lavalas’s resonant slogan. The chants in the streets “Aristide ou la Mort!” echoed eighteenth century precursors, “La Liberté ou la Mort!”

I knew my main task for some weeks was to listen and learn. Crackpots made their way past the guards and into my open-doored office.
They included the scion of a successful business family, who bent my ear those first few weeks for unknown motives. On paper on the coffee table in front of us, he sketched his vision of Haitian society, little orbs connected by straight and dotted lines to larger orbs, a confusion of politics, sheer might, genealogical connections, all of it with no center — a pre-Copernican universe. Setting the drawing aside, my visitor pointed at his own bald head in mock torment, saying, “The problem with the Haitian brain is that the right hemisphere — normally connected through the cortex to the left hemisphere — in Haiti lies unconnected in any way. This explains our lunacy, and our failed destiny as a nation.”

I kept the drawing, learning weeks later that my informant had used strong-armed tactics to suppress underpaid employees of the family business.

International journalists had all to learn and nothing to tell, except for those who actually lived in country. Reuters’ Jenny Baudry and Associated Press’s venerable Mike Norton, who after 14 tumultuous years knew everyone and everything, had seen American Ambassadors come and go. Agence France Presse’s Dominique Levanti, also a long-time resident, was at times a rich source of information and historical perspective.

At the time I was strictly in listening mode. I tried to give my American colleagues a fair hearing, while also striving to catch the tone and lingo of the visitors to my office — the journalists and opposition figures in terrified pursuit, the suave business leaders and seasoned intellectuals, local spies posing as friendly constabulary, and the never-ending stream of supplicants seeking visas, scholarships, exchange programs — any way possible to exit from their hell-on-earth, if only for the relief of a three-week International Visitors Program.

They sought not only relief, but also broadened horizons. I spoke with drivers, market women, ministers, would-be presidents, ambassadors, and beggars. One night under a bright moon I asked the Haitian guard (deployed by the Embassy on the 12-hour night shift to “protect” my house) what his idea of Heaven was.
He gazed with longing at the infinite sky above, and said, “Monsieur Whitman, Heaven is a trip to Miami, and two jobs: work in the day time, work at night. Work without even stopping. Monsieur Whitman, this would be Heaven.” He looked at me pleadingly as if to say, “for God’s sake, man, either fix this wretched country of ours, or if you can’t do that, then at least get me a visa out.”
Man Versus Pig

One month later: I am driving (being driven) from house to office, down Lamartinière and its dilapidated Victorian gingerbread houses through the stench and heat of what were once the “faubourgs,” or outlying districts, and now is the city center.

At the crossing of Avenue Martin Luther King the familiar leper ambulates, begging, through the slow-moving traffic, tottering on rubber stumps which have supplanted what once were feet. He is positioned at the same crossing every day.

The wall behind him, the side of a once elegant house, contains a display of automobile hub caps for sale, mounted up the three stories of the battered residence. The disks in the eclectic collection seem ready to fit any vehicle, and is, in itself, something of an artwork. In my months of commuting, I have never seen one of the items being sold, nor have I caught sight of the vendor.

Three to four cars ahead of me, a commotion is played out in the rear seat of a taxi — perhaps the drama of a life-and-death struggle between warring individuals or maybe a couple making love animatedly. From thirty meters back, I can see only the lively twitches of mammalian activity, the sort best unseen, but which draws the curiosity of even the most blasé traveler.

As we advance in the impacted traffic, my skillful driver benefits opportunistically from gaps in the procession of commuters, marked at the same time by the urban sounds of tinkerers’ metallic hammerings and car horns, and a certain solemnity in the slow advances of the battalion of Jeeps, four wheel drives, and the occasional sedan.
We gain on the taxi with the commotion in the rear seat, until I see the color of pink flesh, implying the rare Caucasian, and a vague sense of struggle.

Overtaking the taxi at last, the scene is suddenly deciphered: the taxi passenger, dwarfed by the immense pig he clutches on his lap, struggles to prevent the pig’s escape, clearly ripe for “harvest” in its monstrous immensity and every bit aware of its imminent fate, and intent on somehow escaping it.

Silently wishing the pig a painless and speedy dispatch, I focus on the Champs-de-Mars ahead and caserne or barracks so sullied through its sordid history by the blood of its defenders under siege and attack. In this place men and women were tortured in its sinister cellars and the hidden crannies of medieval chambers of sadism, their stories mainly implicit but known to all. Its walls are filled with pro-Lavalas graffiti reminding indifferent passers-by of the Coup period of 1991-93 and the bogeyman/strawman scenario of the loathed Baby Doc somehow staging a comeback.

In the swarming streets, sweating, half-human two-legged beasts of burden tethered to two-wheeled wooden carts, haul merchandise, huge chunks of ice, even coffins through the dense downtown traffic. The striving men, sinewy, soaked in sweat, lean forward at 45-degree angles under the wooden shafts that would have been yokes if the men had been oxen. They seem of another species, of unimaginable determination, performing the cruelest physical labor for unseen bosses, pulling their strange loads with a desultory ardor as if physically whipped on. (The life spans of these workers tended to be two to three years from the time of their employment, until their hearts simply exploded in their chests and they died instantaneously as their burst aortas hemorrhaged.)

I glimpse a cadaver in the street, unexpectedly high up the hill on the Avenue John Brown near the formerly posh and breezy suburbs of Musseau and Petionville. A good Samaritan has left a tree branch upright near the body in the middle of the heavily traveled street, to signify “caution.”
I remember cupping my hand to my mouth in horror and involuntarily saying something like “Mon Dieu.” My driver and companion and advisor, the Senior Maximé does not even glance at me, but gracefully swerves to avoid running over the body. Perhaps he thinks something like, “Whitman’s first cadaver. They all react like this at the beginning.” Maximé had driven nine, perhaps ten PAOs through barricades, angry mobs, every imaginable hazard. He was imperturbable until the day we hit a curb at the wrong angle and suffered a blown out tire on our office’s Jeep. “The first one ever, Monsieur Whitman,” he says, cursing the day. “I swear this is my first crevaison in 32 years of driving!”

Other scenes strike the newcomer:

The heat and stench of the Boulevard Harry Truman by water’s edge, the formerly elegant “Bicentenaire,” now dubbed “Gasoline Alley” by Embassy wags who noted the proliferation of mechanics tinkering each morning with hopeless-looking carcasses of cars, just under road signs indicating pictorially the prohibition to do so (image of mechanic-and-car, slashed through with the red line of “Thou shalt not…”)

The Boulevard Harry Truman had remained the U.S. Embassy site a decade after it turned from elegance to squalor, and was also the street where the “Public Diplomacy” Office was located (the former U.S. Information Service.) As the distance was only 100 yards from office to Embassy, I walked the gauntlet of the needy populace of the neighborhood. Some would bless, others curse me as I walked along the ancient sidewalk riddled with craters and one open sewage duct so deep that a person had been killed one day the year before, when falling into it.

When the shootings began in the area some months later, embassy employees insisted that I make the trek by Jeep and driver, which seemed somehow humiliating to me, though reasonable.

Some 10,000 tons of refuse were said to slip into the water of the bay each day, drawn by the rain and run-off with nowhere to go but to the sea, carrying what was left of the famous, previous Haitian topsoil with it, and creating mudslides which killed people every time it rained.
In all seasons, the heat and stench of the boulevard were overpowering. I dubbed it all “Scent of Jasmine” to my jaded colleagues at the Embassy. The expression caught on as the American code word for “unbearable,” among the well meaning folk working shoulder to shoulder through heartbreaking setbacks during my two years at post.

Immense heaps of garbage stacked up in the streets, some as high as small buildings, with the occasional howler of an entire discarded automobile carcass somehow lodged on top of the heap. Those garbage piles outside the center of the city were gathering places of many species picking through for the rare scraps of comestibles — goats, huge pigs, fowl, dogs all commingling in harmonious eagerness to keep body and animal-soul together, and likely making a better meal of it than the average starving Haitian.

The *kombits* — informal work gangs — of highly organized day laborers erecting buildings manually with lightening speed, passed bricks and materials from source-to-site with an incomparable efficiency.

The metal workers by the side of the road chiseled their fanciful artworks out of the scrap iron of discarded petrol cans, and often using sophisticated welding torches with, of course, no eye protection.

Gorgeous, pastel sunsets and the friendly industrious atmosphere of the city prevailed, despite all the people’s woes, things which began to show me why those who had previously served in Haiti had all said they’d “loved” it, though none was able to articulate why — except to say, “the people.”

And therein lay the drama, the draw, the appeal, apparent almost from the first day of that July 1999: something about the civility and earnestness of nearly everyone I met, the merchants, the drivers, the roadside mechanics, the jobless, and the needy whose pride forbade them to beg (but for the leper, the only understandable exception.) The way they extended their forearms in pantomime of the French handshake, offering the arm deferentially while withholding the hand itself, for concern of spreading the sweat and grease — and the impeccable cleanliness of
nearly everyone, even among the vast majority who had no source of running water at home but who bathed uncomplainingly in the open gutters of the streets, and somehow managed to have perfectly ironed shirts, perhaps from rotating wardrobes of 2-3 articles which received their constant and reverential care.

The optimism and productive energy was evident to anyone with eyes to see and ears to hear.

Haitians, abused by all regimes, reviled by all other countries, overcrowded, underfed, were fashioning or conserving their own social order despite abuses and entropy and hurricanes and devalued currency and lawlessness. Even after an entire national treasure had been dragged off to France by Jean-Claude Duvalier and his Lady Macbeth, Michelle Bennett, the people retained a tacit, non-naïve hope for a better future.

Flattened throughout history by one debasement and defeat after the other, they seemed always willing to right themselves, dust themselves off, and proceed.

Never daring to articulate their hopes from the sheer superstition of ruining their chances, they were forward-looking during that first season of my stay in their country: they believed that history and the United States of America might, for the first time, deliver to them all they asked of the world, the chance to hold elections and have a role in the formulation of their own future.

The hope in the air — in people’s erect posture, their cordiality to one another, the easy dialogues just beginning to appear on radio and TV among political opponents, in the exuberance of the bars and cafes — was as tangible as the heat, soot, and the gorgeous sunsets. As a newcomer, I had no baseline experience to know at the time that the special circumstance had no precedent in Haitian history.

No one knows deception and disappointment as Haitians do, but this time, it seemed, they might get a chance to pick their leaders without bloodshed.
Part Two
Listening
July-October, 1999
A pile of refuse delivered to the docks of Gonaïves by the city of Phila-
delphia got almost more attention than local political controversies. The
“Gonaïves Ash,” mainly commercial waste, dumped in Haiti 12 years
earlier with a local official’s pockets lined in recompense, had to be
“disinfected” because of the organic material that had crept in the refuse
over a 12-year period. The press and Haitian government had a field day
bashing the U.S. government for dumping “toxic waste” (which it was
not), but meanwhile getting a civics lesson in federalism, as we explained
that the junk had been left by a municipal authority, not the federal U.S.
government.

Like the Flying Dutchman, the waste, later disembarked for points not
etirely known, was “lost” partly in the Pacific Ocean in winter of 2002,
with the remainder making its way back to Philadelphia after a 15-year
odyssey and put to rest at least as a political issue in Haiti. Though I’d
never been to Gonaïves, as Embassy spokesman I tried to explain the
difference between municipal and federal governments in the U.S., and
— leaping into a technical area above my head but armed with EPA
studies — the distinction between “toxicity” and disinfecting a pile of
ash where anything might grow as in a dirty kitchen. I premiered in the
local press in August as “Daniel Withman [sic], Environmental Terror-
ist.”

The terrorist moniker did not remain for long, but I never shook the
name “Withman,” and eventually came to accept and even welcome it.
I was glad the well-intentioned immigration official on Ellis Island in
the first decade of the twentieth century had at least the good taste not
to give my now unknown paternal Russian grandfather the name “Whiteman,” which would have hung heavy like rotten meat in a country descended from unwilling African migrants.
“Mini-Civitas”

The world didn’t seem to care much after doing its duty and ridding Haiti both of Baby Doc in 1986 and Raoul Cédras in 1994, but Haiti’s own constitution went akilter in January of 1999 when President Préval dissolved Parliament sine die after enervating wrangling between the ruling Lavalas party and a splintered opposition. Talk of “Haiti fatigue” took over Washington as the dates of constitutionally mandated Parliamentary elections kept being moved back, and as Haitians began fatalistically to accept a one-party state, maybe preferable to the murderous regimes preceding it. “Elections” were on the lips of every Haitian, like “tooth fairy” or “Shangri-La” — elusive, evasive, but devoutly to be wished in any case.

No one doubted that the largest party would sweep into legislative power, but Haitians wanted the dignity at least of putting in Lavalas themselves, rather than having the state machinery decide for them. They were sick of their history, and wanted merely the chance to put their imprimatur on a structure already securely in place.

Cocaine flowed through the country from Colombia on its way to the U.S., and money laundering prospered in myriad forms — glitzy petrol stations, opulent new housing developments on the Route de Tabarre toward the airport. In one Shell station (“Corail”) on the Route des Frères, a Western Union office promiscuously hung its sign: “Remittances to Colombia limited to $1000 U.S. per person, per day.”

The Haitian peasant knew nothing of the use of the cherished white powder, but began to learn that somehow getting a single handful of it and selling it could put two children through school for a year. Eventu-
ally, people in the countryside learned better, and began intercepting boats and small planes — killing the crew and carting off the cargo, making lawless Haiti too high a risk even for the modern Caribbean pirates who were the Colombian drug lords working in tandem with local Haitian municipal officials. The nimble Colombians went elsewhere in search of more “secure” transit points for their trade: the DEA declared victory in noting reduced drug activity in Haiti.

Enough trafficking remained so that Haitians got themselves hooked on the five-Haitian-dollar toke of crack cocaine now openly offered in the market place and even in remote rural areas. (The real stuff, pure cocaine, remained a more rare commodity.) This built an incentive for cash in a cash-strapped population, and the need to steal and kill in order to maintain new habits. The drugs continued to flow in a well-organized network depending on mayors of small towns: maintaining this network would become key later in the 2000 elections, and possibly one explanation of why the ruling party could not afford to give up even a single village to the higher political evolution called “pluralism.” Hence the odd notion of a strong party “stealing” its own election.

With elections within view, we worked to realize former Cultural Affairs Officer Susan Crystal’s visionary idea of publishing and distributing French and Creole versions of “Street Law” — a manual developed by Georgetown University Law School for South African elections in 1994. One chapter, “Eleksyon-yo” (“Elections”) came out in bulk, with illustrations adapted to Haiti, and translated into the vernacular for wide distribution.

In late summer of 1999, a genuine election seemed possible. In haste, I invited 100 civic leaders to the former Holiday Inn on the Champs de Mars for a day of talks. Because of its decline in standards and frequent generator failures, the “Holiday Inn” chain had stripped it of its prestigious title, and it renamed itself “Le Plaza.”

I was curious to hear what was on people’s minds. I thought they, too, might want to hear one another as their sectors — academia, govern-
ment, police, media, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and church — were chronically isolated one from the other.

I arranged a day-and-lunch for 100 Haitians who seemed articulate on the subject of Haiti’s future as a democracy yet to be realized. Of the 100 invited, 80 attended — something of a record in the history of diplomatic gatherings. They came largely out of curiosity to catch a glimpse of the new American Pòt-Pawol and in many cases had emotional reunions with classmates whom they hadn’t seen in ten years of self-fearing Haitian history.

Knowing the audience would include skeptics, I spoke only of process and democratization. I received energetic applause when I challenged the notion of “democracy” as a “Western” concept. “Drop the word if you want,” I said. “What we’re talking about is merely people wanting to have a say over their own destiny.”

“But why, exactly, are we here?” A woman reasonably asked from the third row of the Salle Martin Luther King.

I proposed a partnership between the media and NGOs. The media needed material; NGOs needed a way to get a message out to the community. Everyone could benefit, particularly the community, and maybe even “democracy.” We called the meeting “Mini-Civitas,” referring to “CIVITAS” gatherings two years earlier in Prague, Buenos Aires, and Pretoria, where the now defunct USIA had staged regional gatherings of NGOs and government officials to brainstorm about democracy.

Panelists at the Plaza expressed skepticism, hope, aspiration, pragmatism, and a tentative spirit of “let’s give it a try” as they approached the possible November elections in a country where “election” was usually synonymous with “massacre.” One speaker even said, “We appreciate your efforts, Monsieur Whitman, but this is Haiti after all; only a fool could believe in fair elections in an orderly timetable.” The group applauded when I responded, “Well, one can give it a try, or give up in advance.”

After a plenary session we broke for a hotel lunch, joined by Deputy Chief of Mission Ken Duncan, Consul General Roger Daley, and AID
Director Phyllis Dichter Forbes. Surprise seemed to spread among those more versed in things Haitian, as no one could remember an equivalent gathering including the brains behind what one day might become a civil society.

In the afternoon we broke the group into six sub-groups, leaving them to talk among themselves, their chairs circled, in six areas of the large Salle Martin Luther King. The sub-groups were assigned themes — NGOs, media, academia — and each was scrambled so that no single group was dominated by a majority of those actually working in the sector assigned. At the end of the day we reconvened for an hour, as selected rapporteurs delivered their “findings” to the plenary group.

Exhilaration was tangible in the room. Previously fragmented energy and dedication seemed to galvanize. Stumbling accidentally over an incipient feature of massive proportions, we discovered that in an island culture filled with antipathies and paranoia, the catalyst had to be a disinterested but well-intentioned outsider. It seemed as if the group had merely been waiting to be “convoked.”

Antagonisms and rivalries that had previously divided them seemed to dissolve away before the realization that their common interests far exceeded any divisions. September 16 a nerve was touched: the group pressed for a follow-up session, which we scheduled for a month later, on October 12.

My guess is that any informers among the group reported might have reported back something like “No harm done; no one bad-mouthed the Party.”

Not bad-mouthing the Party became a working principle for the next two years. I came to learn its ways of infiltrating, intimidating, and decapitating anything or anyone who dared stand in its way.
Aristide’s Lavalas political block had originally been a “movement,” not a “party.” It took in opponents to the savagery of the Baby Docs (Jean-Claude Duvalier) and the military goons who had busted up the elections of 1987. The movement matured in the 1990 elections into a “party,” allied with others into a coalition called OPL, “L’Organisation du Peuple Lavalas.”

Later the OPL splintered and renamed itself the Organisation du Peuple en Lutte (Organization of the People’s Struggle.) This left Lavalas on its own, with all other Lilliputians left behind in a new and different OPL, which now opposed Lavalas itself. But the infighting within the OPL was considerable, and derived from generations of blood feuds and dueling rivalries. Not until the flawed elections later in May, 2000, did the Convergence Démocratique form, a united opposition for the first time in Haiti’s 200-year history.

Long before this drama played itself out — back in October, 1999 — with the outsider’s naïve energies I moved our team to “Mini-Civitas II,” the follow-up to the meeting held on September 16.

Something was beginning to change in the Haitian political comportment. Previously avowed enemies now sparred cordially over the air waves, embracing one another in public, and devising written political agendas for the first time. Lavalas was way ahead of the others after hiring American consultants to prepare their platform for them, but others boot-strapped themselves into creating presentable rationales for being admitted into a pluralistic system.

October 12 I arrived early at “Le Plaza” and joined some of the par-
participants for orange juice in the rear parlor of the hotel. One jaded intellectual — his arm draped over the back of his chair and his body language saying “I’m not really here, I just couldn’t come up with anything better to do this morning” — lifted his orange juice to me in mimicry of a toast. His eyes rolled with skepticism and boredom. Taking on the most formidable task first, I moved from my seat to engage him. Months later, after our friendship flourished, Ady Jean Gardy averred as how he had been present that morning only so as to “not be absent” on the off chance that something of importance should take place.

October 12, he was silent, unapproachable, almost resentful to be suckered into wasting four hours when he might have been back at his private journalism school preparing courses and lectures. Unknown only to me, Ady had trained all the best Haitian journalists, including those who later turned against him personally.

Over the orange juice, he told me of his background as an historian, and of his trip to Pittsburgh years before, where he had found a treasure trove in the Mellon library, including an original copy of Benjamin Franklin’s Philadelphia newspaper the day it had printed Haiti’s Declaration of Independence. Did I know that the Mellon family had historical connections to Haiti?

I was humbled by this man’s worldly knowledge, gained in part at IFAN, the university in Senegal where he had studied to become Haiti’s first formally recognized journalist.

That day, it happened that of Haiti’s various “sectors,” the media far surpassed all others in energy, expertise, prestige, courage, and prowess.

We had truncated the day’s program to only half the time spent September 16. After a brief, lackluster plenary session, we broke into working groups. Of the six, one took wings and was speeding to breakneck results. The same Ady Jean Gardy who had swilled his orange juice so disdainfully at 8:00 a.m. was now galvanizing his media group, the born pedagogue tilting at full speed and raising spirits like a charismatic preacher.
I called for a final plenary session, asking for rapporteurs to submit findings to the larger group. The weakest subgroup, the one assigned to academia, gave a macaronic presentation filled with Gallic formalities, but lacking in substance. Next, the NGO sector, through its spokesman, blathered vaguely of the role of NGOs in a developing civil society…

Then Ady rose to speak on behalf of the media group, and rattled out at machine-gun speed a plan, a definition, a rationale, and nine steps to a functional civil society aided by the media, taken from a sheet of flip-chart paper to which all his group had contributed.

The plenary burst into sustained applause, cheering, whistling, yelling approval. In the din, people struck classic poses, recalling the Oath of the Tennis Court from the French Revolution, so dramatically rendered in a painting by Eugène Delacroix.

Respecting the time owed to the other lackluster group yet to make their presentations, Ady took his seat but was nearly physically carried away by the exuberant crowd who saw — as I began to see — Haiti’s hopes largely in the media.

Forty-eight hours later Ady came to my office with three colleagues, one the spokesman of the Haitian National Police, another journalist, and a third, from an NGO: He handed me their newly written charter, with an expectant look as if to say, “You got us started, now you must join us in helping realize this dream.”

Thus was born COPAC, the “Comité de Presse Pour l’Action Civique” (“The Press Committee for Civic Action.”)
Part Three

The Golden Age
October, 1999-February, 2000
Haiti hung on hopes of a genuine election, which rested, in turn, on the sophistry of a semantic difference between “compléter” (to finish something already started) and “combler” (to fill an emptiness), with regard to two Senate seats contested in the elections of 1998. To outsiders, such nuances only seem frivolous; in fact they are not.

Haitians strove for legitimacy and a chance to work for the next day’s food, and a house or shed that might not be burned to the ground, residents inside, by domestic henchmen — themselves desperate to the point of committing cruelties for hire.

Social groups advance either individually, the one at the expense of the other in a zero-sum game, or collectively, through consensus and convention. Otherwise they tend to perish. Haiti wavered between the first two models above. The extinction option was not acceptable for people who, although illiterate, had maintained two to three centuries of willing sacrifice of the individual for the common weal of the group. Conventions are arrangements made by near consensus, allowing large social groupings to survive together and benefit by their numbers, and not degenerate to internecine destruction. Conventions in turn result in “The Game,” and “Rules of the Game,” which are dead serious for a society emerging from centuries of dysfunction.

In Haiti, “The Game” and its rules were taken up by most people as the only likely remedy to environmental catastrophe; the filth of cramped quarters and overcrowding; signs of starvation among a people who lived for centuries by subsistence farming now no longer feasible; and the lethal potential of those with the weapons and the money. The plentiful
supply of gangsters were always willing to break the rules for personal
gain, leaving them in total control of a land mass small enough so that
their murder and intimidation left them ultimately fouling their own
nest.

For a brief period — I call it Haiti’s Golden Age (July 1999 to Febru-
ary, 2000) — the consensus and The Game were accepted broadly by
various strata of society, and across the political spectrum. Only two
hitches stood in the way: the ultimate victims’ pessimism that The Game
could ever yield a genuine Rule of Law or even modest economic ad-
vancement; and the predators’ intent to ruin the whole thing even for
themselves and others, for the sheer fascination of ruin and destruction.

President Préval entered the breach, promulgating the Electoral of
Law July 16, 1999, laying out some of the rules for a parliamentary
election by the end of the same year, but leaving questions open such as
the “combler” (“fill”) vs. “compléter” (“finish”) distinction. The Law called
for an election “around late November or early December” for the en-
tire lower house of Parliament, and 17 or 19 seats, or one-third of the
Senate. In conventional parliamentary style, a multi-party run-off would
then be held within six weeks of the first round, with a new Parliament
seated by the second week of January, 2000. This would get Haiti off the
anomaly of having no Parliament at all, January 14, 1999, the day Presi-
dent Preval took absolute power for himself. Haiti would then rejoin
the community of nations and find its way into the embrace of the
Organization of American States (OAS), as the OAS had been holding
its affections in check for the time when Haitians would regain the
straight and narrow path of conventional democracy.

Presidential elections would then follow around May, 2000, when the
Préval five-year mandate would end. No one doubted that former Presi-
dent Aristide would regain his rightful place after being deposed by the
military in 1991, then reinstalled in 1994, with three years of his five-
year term stolen by a strong-armed and self-proclaimed military junta.

The Préval government engaged in stalling tactics for parliamentary
elections that might placate OAS demands for another democracy in the region, while simultaneously collapsing parliamentary and presidential elections together on the calendar. Haitians loved their past and future president, but were not enamored of his party, the Fanmi Lavalas. The coat-tail effect would be crucial to pulling off a Lavalas sweep of Parliament and what later became the ruthless extinction of a multi-party, pluralist system. Lavalas needed no less than 100 percent of the parliamentary seats for two reasons:

1. The amount of embezzling of the meager coffers of the Hemisphere’s poorest nation might have been put to the question if even a single non-Lavalas senator came in with parliamentary questions to the effect of “Where did the money go?”

2. In order to keep the Colombian drug trade at ease with Haiti as a transit point for shipments in the U.S., not even a single local official could be given up, lest the cocaine route fall to another party or country which might be reluctant to keep the channels clear and open, and thereby ruin it for the others.

I knew nothing of this in summer of 1999, and came with an American’s naïveté and basic belief in the good intentions of most of those involved.

After the hastily arranged “Mini-Civitas” conferences of 1999, and the stellar performance of the media section in the two sessions, it seemed that journalism training might be the best use of our “end of year” funds left by my predecessor in our modest public diplomacy coffers. I sent ten Haitian journalists, representing the nine provinces, on an International Visitors Program to the U.S. I also improvised some cheaper, shorter programs for media at Florida International University in Miami, which had a strong journalism faculty and an eagerness to work with Haitians.

As I gathered each outgoing group to distribute air tickets and visas, I would withhold the tickets teasingly and say to the expectant groups, “Only on the condition that you accept a pact with the Devil [me] and
agree to return to Haiti ready to share your gained knowledge with the citizens of your village.” I didn’t know much, but I did know that Haitians — not bewildered, imported foreign experts — could best explain to other Haitians how to adapt the principles of an independent media to the unique local circumstances.

I was a little taken aback when the lucky few selected for the end-of-year programs universally jumped for the deal. Inspired by the idea of holding their own training sessions for compatriots, they asked only when they might begin, and how and with whom. Meanwhile, COPAC (The Press Committee for Civic Action), created October 14, was cranking up to meet the challenge of getting our returning trainees into the countryside, to cities and villages never before visited by U.S. Embassy officials.

Some weeks later, our printed copies of “Eleksyon-yo” arrived from the printer, illustrated manuals on elections and how they might work in Haiti. Former Cultural Officer Susan Crystal’s inspiration two years earlier had yielded the pamphlets at the time most needed, after a lengthy gestation with the translators, editors, and printers, and an unexpected bill from the Street Law publishers in the U.S., who socked us for royalties as if Haiti were some vast commercial market for costly handbooks on civil society. We held our noses at the PD offices, paid, and readied the cartons for distribution.

November went by with our groups in the U.S. observing municipal elections in Northern Virginia and in San Francisco. In Haiti the politicos continued their debate on “combler”/”compléter.” The controversy was carried on with civility, cordiality, even a degree of bonhomie. In chats on the radio and television, opponents for political office sharing panel discussions and managed even to be boring, which may be a true democracy’s highest achievement.

Meanwhile we sent 14 women committed to political pluralism to Hillary Clinton’s “Vital Voices” conference in Trinidad in a phased process of drawing the untapped talents of women into Haiti’s political process. Four became candidates in the 2000 elections,
although they were ultimately denied victory through electoral fraud May 21, when the election finally occurred after four postponements.

President Préval graciously gave way on the “compléter” issue, putting up 19 senate seats to vote rather than 17, hence conceding that the two contested seats could be thrown back in the lake like undersized catch. Never mind that there was no Senate at the time anyway: Préval had dissolved the body in 1999 when the Senators’ terms ended, after the government had failed to arrange elections to replace them. Préval insisted he had never “dissolved Parliament,” but only terminated the body’s authority when the mandates ran out. This meant running the country by executive fiat for 28 months. As frustration mounted on all sides, so also did the philosophical resignation of both voters and rulers. Few questioned the motives of a man burdened with the formidable task of somehow keeping the rickety country scotch-taped together.
Harvest

As our late fall trainees began returning from the U.S., we began to gather a critical mass of journalists from each of Haiti’s nine provinces, eager to move ahead with the replication of their observations of U.S. 1999 elections. We moved in phases through Haiti’s neglected outer edges where people’s quiet rage grew as the central government took only their tax money and brought nothing in return. We visited towns of 20-50,000 (no reliable census had ever been conducted) with not a single paved street, and with previously installed electrical grids that functioned less than five percent of the time. Of the tiny minority of Haitian children in school, only ten percent could be accommodated by public institutions. Bridges collapsed and went unrepaired. In the north, a rainstorm removed half a village; when the minister of housing visited the area, he refused to make a three-mile detour to view the devastation.

Opulence meanwhile grew in tiny sectors of the squalid capital, as rulers insulated themselves from the filth and dangers of their own community with American-hired private guards, and fleets of Mercedes donated by the government of Taiwan.

I sensed the unspoken rage in the towns we visited. Groups of unexpected magnitude gathered to see our traveling road show.

The formula was simple: send a few motivated journalists to the U.S. for one, two, or three weeks, then let COPAC determine where the pockets of active press groups might be found outside the capital. Recruit three or four of the “alumni” of our programs to describe what they had seen in the U.S., and let the local audiences apply the principle to their own circumstances.

Our little team adopted rules of engagement:
1. Never refer to any specific political issue or individual, as we knew the crowds that gathered were infiltrated, and awaited any excuse to peg us as partisan, or purveyors of “outside interference,” which any defenseless country looks upon with well merited suspicion;

2. Maintain cordiality in the often heated or passionate locution that make up Haitian dialogue. “Ask the Mayor where is the bridge he promised a year early, but do so deferentially and amiably.” Press relentlessly for an answer non-threateningly, and allow the local leaders to place the noose over their own neck in offering excuses for their failure to contribute to the community;

3. Praise elected and appointed public figures for their courage in stepping up to the challenge of public service. In one instance, accosted by four youths who introduced themselves as the leaders of the local city council, I physically embraced all four, then asked which of the four was responsible for the impossible road connecting or hindering transport from his town to the next. One of them proudly stepped forward and gave his name. “Monsieur Marcel,” I said, pulling him into an even closer embrace in front of the others, “I hold you personally responsible for the miserable conditions of that road. Let’s see if there are improvements in six months.” The journalists reacted with hilarity and guffaws.

4. Introduce the English word “accountability.” Your function as journalists is to track the promises made by local politicians, maintain a timetable and then lie in wait on the date announced for the installation of a sewage system, or paved street, or school, and ask amiably for an explanation of why the work had not been completed or even initiated.

The audience caught on five minutes into my “accountability” spiel
in one forlorn town; an audience member stood up and interrupted me, saying, “That’s ‘accountability’? This is what we have wanted all our lives.” Thunderous applause from the 400 participants brought the whole session to a halt for ten minutes. We mentioned no political party, knowing that agents provocateurs sent to each of our venues might observe, report back, and sometimes disrupt. We knew we were being watched carefully.

The public sessions began in the southern city of Les Cayes, Saturday, December 18, a week before Christmas. Les Cayes, a once gracious French planned port city now overrun with filth and overpopulation, had the historical prestige of having given succor to Simón Bolívar at a time when things went badly for the latter in his liberation campaign of northern South America from Spanish rule in the 1830’s. Having won its freedom some 15 years earlier, Haiti allied with Bolívar for no quid pro quo other than the sense that supporting “freedom” could solidify the bold Haitian social experiment and strengthen it through alliances. At a desperate moment of Bolívar’s campaign, he received munitions and foodstocks from Les Cayes’ hospitable populace, and went on to victory in part thanks to their helping hand.

A malarial area of the country, Les Cayes had an erudite mayor who had benefited from a trip to Johannesburg, to meet other mayors of problematic cities worldwide. The mayor joined our little team of four — Ady Jean Gardy of COPAC; Paul Ignace Janvier of Telemax who had not yet gotten to travel to the U.S. but would later; and so did government TV anchorman Pierre Joel Jean, whose presence as a Lavalassian showed a credibly non-partisan group joined only by the desire to make journalism into a real profession.

Friday night the youthful mayor talked with us over a beer long into the night at the outdoor patio of our barely habitable hotel, the Cayenne, sweating alarmingly and, at times shivering. A year later he died of malaria.

We had no idea what would be in store during the workshop the next day, we only did our best to get the kinks out after a harrowing crossing
of the Route Nationale 2, “route” in name only where even the most courageous Jeep could reach barely ten kilometers per hour in the better stretches of the road. Our seasoned driver Maximé broke into a run at every juncture. He seemed moved by a higher spirit, saying little else than “Avec plaisir, avec plaisir,” as we turned to him for help and advice in navigation, book distribution, suggestions on how and when to get our little delegation across a perverse terrain December 17 in time to meet the public the next day.

We passed places of exotic names: Petit-Goaves, Fond-des-Nègres, Vieux-Bourg-d’Aquin, and Cavaillon. I didn’t yet know the places called “Sale Trou” (“Filthy Hole”) Eaux Puantes (“Stinking Waters”), or the two former duchies going back to the eighteenth century and still viable towns: Marmelade and Limonade, yielding titles like “The Duke of Marmelade,” and “The Prince of Limonade,” to the north.

On the morning of the eighteenth we breakfasted on bananas flayed on a plate, longing for toast or coffee but unable to extract any from a defiant hotel staff that hadn’t had guests or tourists for months, and saw us as intruders in the tranquility of their ruined former spa. We sat by a swimming pond of dark, brackish water, abandoned by tourists for over a decade.

I noted no cars or motorbikes at the hotel, and figured we had made the punishing crossing of the Route Nationale 2 in vain. My more sanguine Haitian teammates took everything in stride.

I lingered over my splayed banana before moving to the meeting room across the way. I feared a meager turnout, and was hoping to stall until people arrived possibly late so we could at least address a few who might form a critical mass for future activities.

My team was eager to get started, and waited for me only out of deference to the foreigner. Finally Ady Jean Gardy’s body language gave me to understand we should move from the breakfast area to the “events” area of the hotel. The scene was a large enclosure of sticks and bamboo matting, with an improvised ceiling of thatch work and a four-foot high wall, topped by open space from the walls to the vaulted ceilings. Held
up by wooden poles at architecturally strategic points, the whole circular structure was used mainly as a dance hall in earlier days when reliable electricity could provide amplified music from raucous Caribbean bands.

Approaching the venue from the hotel patio, I sensed no human presence at all, neither a bicycle outside nor the hum of conversation one generally gets at a large assemblage curious to see their first rara avis, a U.S. diplomat and team of journalists from the capital.

As I walked onto the dirt floor of the improvised structure, I was amazed to see four hundred townspeople seated in total silence, facing forward in a self imposed discipline as if attending an event of deep religious significance.

A sound system had been installed, run on a portable generator to avert the risk of the municipal system breaking down. Television cameras were aimed at the speakers’ table; a chalkboard had been deployed by the local COPAC chapter, which had made the logistical arrangements and gotten invitations out to produce the massive (for Les Cayes) audience.

The program had been announced for 9:00 a.m., but nearly all had arrived at 8:30 in competition for the best seats toward the front of the hall. In the rear four uniformed policemen stood ready to put down any shenanigans that might break out should the discussion descend to politics. Their pride was tangible, almost tactile, in seeing themselves as the protectors of a construction of a Haitian civil society.

The solemnity of the audience at Les Cayes had commenced some 30 minutes before we even entered the area. When we entered, the massive group did not rise or applaud, but only trained their eyes on us intensely. All had freshly ironed shirts that somehow held up through the day’s milky humidity.

They listened in a way a Westerner might take to be passive: their crafty articulations and questions coming hours later, showing that not a word of our presentation had escaped them.

After six intense hours of discussion on journalistic ethics, interview techniques (you need not be confrontational, but do gently nail the
public official who brings no added value to the citizens), anecdotes about elections observed in the U.S., as the sessions went seamlessly between French and Creole, were filmed in entirety, and broadcast repeatedly over the local TV station over the next 24 hours. Every bar and café and neighborhood hangout with electricity and a television set viewed the whole six hours over and over again, to the point where many of the people in Les Cayes could probably recite all of it from memory.

Laughter and animated intervention punctuated the proceedings.

The audience had traveled from places like Anse d’Hainault, Les Anglais, Port-à-Piment, Chantal, Port Salut, making their pilgrimages to Les Cayes via public buses called “tap-taps,” some on donkey, and some on makeshift sailboats in coastal areas where there were no roads.

News of the day traveled by word of mouth through the country. Other local press associations stepped forward to be the next venue, and the next, driven by a quest for prestige, an influx of new ideas, and most important, “désenclavement,” the process of breaking out of isolation and joining a larger entity of like-minded colleagues around the country. The meetings brought together people who knew of one another but had never met. Our PD office sought to reinforce the process by combining groups from the various provinces and sending them off on rudimentary training courses in Florida, where they could meet one another and sense their own local efforts reinforced by those of others.

The process spread quickly through the mountainous terrain to any village that had four journalists to knock together. They readied themselves for our arrival with something like religious preparation for a new order, chartering themselves sometimes in the days and weeks before we arrived, so as to be taken as seasoned practitioners in a profession of high prestige.

By the time the intimidation came some six to eight months later, it was too late: Haiti’s journalists were formed in battle ranks, prepared to endure hardship or threat or, as eventually came to pass, the assassinations. Thieves were “killed” or “murdered.” Journalists, like heads of
state, were “assassinated.” When the time came later, they exhibited the highest Haitian virtue of tenacity, flaunting the death threats, and “kembé fèm”— “hold tight, and stand up against those who would destroy you.”

In the magnitude of the human experience it was a fleck or semicolon, but for those involved, the process revealed the dignity and determination they had had within. With only slight prodding, and in an action vacuum, they took up the gauntlet of being the ones to try one more time for the viable civil society which nearly everyone wanted.
On the Road

_Télédjol_ (the grapevine) worked its wonders, and soon all nine provinces somehow knew of our event in Les Cayes of December 18. Requests poured in from the other regional centers seeking to host the U.S. Embassy-promoted traveling road show. Though each of the nine provinces had a local “press” association, not one was endowed with an office, or equipment of any sort, or the means to carry on activities. Competitors over the crowded Haitian radio waves with 210 stations for 8–9 million people, they met for mutual moral support in local bars, under “sausage” trees bearing a wiener-like, tropical inedible fruit, or in the evenings in town squares by candle light. None had a computer, a reliable telephone, a typewriter or a predictable source of electricity. What they did have was collegial cooperation, brazen courage against intimidation, and curiosity.

None of the nine-plus press associations had any formal or informal links with any other.

With COPAC’s guidance, we went in different configurations to Petit-Goave, then Jacmel, then Hinche, Mirebalais, St. Marc, Cap-Haitien, Port-de-Paix, gaining numbers and momentum as we went. Associations in Miragoane, Belle-Anse, Gonaïves, Fort-Liberté, Jean-Rabel, Jérémie, and Trou-du-Nord clamored for our presence, but we exhausted our funds and time; our meetings in Cap-Haitien drew participants from the border town of Ouanaminthe. In Port-de-Paix they came from Jean-Rabel and Mole St. Nicolas, from Bassin Bleu and Gros-Morne, arriving on donkey-back, broken-down tap-taps, in improvised creaky sailboats, and even on foot. Some of them took ten to twelve hours to cover sixty miles, sometimes in the dead of night to avoid highway robbers.
The almost charismatic nature of the gatherings brought sweats of apprehension, doubts that we could ever deliver on the expectations they came with.

Each seminar drew different constellations of speakers from a growing pool of quick-study trainers from my office’s programs in Florida and beyond.

One participant, Nicole Mérancier, hailed from Haiti’s dustiest and poorest region in the Central Plateau. She was a journalist, but also the creator of “l’Union des Femmes Écolières,” a collective of mothers of school children with some 100,000 members nation-wide. When her audience heard her lecture in Fort-Liberté, they took up a collection to finance a return trip to the U.S. for her so she could gather them together, and share more information with them.

In Cap-Haitien three competing press associations lay, the lion with the lamb, to bury the hatchet and listen to our day-long session.

_Agents provocateurs_ disrupted the proceedings with lengthy hostile questions, but later came up to us to apologize discreetly, saying they had been paid to throw us off course and felt that honor obliged them to do so, but expressed their personal support for our efforts.

The prestige of the series was such that rivalries developed over who might join the (unremunerated) panel of speakers. When COPAC founding member Guyler Delva called to complain he had not been included, I gave him a standing invitation to come along, noting that his month in prison in December 1999 for wife-beating took him out of circulation until he was released in January 2000.

The Pied Piper of the series was Ady Jean Gardy, the reticent intellectual and journalism trainer from our “Mini Civitas” meetings in September and October 1999. (Ady signed his newspaper articles “Adyjeangardy,” though in legal documents the name was split into three: Ady Jean Gardy.) Ady transformed from reluctant cynic to dynamic activist with the bit of seed money I was able to provide for sandwiches and drinks, and public “tap-tap” fares for the audiences. Each regional meeting cost some two hundred dollars, plus the overtime of embassy
driver Gérard Maximé, who traversed the rugged terrains and formidable non-roads up country with dogged determination and infallible reliability: he would sometimes depart a day before we did, so as to meet us at the airports of Port-de-Paix or Cap-Haitien, the embassy Jeep Cherokee shining and brilliantly clean after his killing twelve-hour treks through dust and mud.

The toothless and hardened Maximé became my touchstone of sanity, and my most acute critic in pursuing our PD programs. A man of few words, he would respond to my suggestions either with a wrinkled nose (indicating I was on the wrong track) or a laconic “C’est quand même intéressant,” his highest form of praise for a program concept.

Always preferring to remain in the background after 30 years of disappointments with U.S. Embassy training programs, he threw himself into sweat and grime of our up-country trips, often remembering — where we others forgot — to load the Cherokee with “Eleksyon-Yo” pamphlets for distribution, and toward the end of our programs joining us on the stage or location where our palaver originated, somehow swept up in the exhilaration of the event and wanting to shine in the limelight.

Months later, I broke an Embassy pattern by nominating him for an award not as driver, but as advisor, for services rendered in pursuit of journalistic and civic education training across the country. His younger brother, Antoine, also took his turn in the arduous country crossings, supplied only with filtered spring water and enough cash to buy gasoline along the way.

I made the obligatory visits to the local radio stations in dusty villages. Some were so cramped for space that only one person at a time could fit in the production studios, acoustically lined with egg cartons. The pro bono disk jockeys vied for listening audiences with jive and chatter, slapping on the cassette from their humble repertoires of 20–30 recordings, their total holdings. All passed the microphone to me for brief moments — “Et maintenant nous présentons Monsieur Daniel Withman [sic], Porte-Parole de l’Ambassade des Etats-Unis à Port-au-Prince…” then quickly re-
turned to their hyperactive programming of commentary, music and the occasional call-in from the single local telephone booth.

Some nearly wept as they showed me their meager installations, noting how the lack of reliable local electrical current kept them shut even broadcasting in the dark at times, during nights when the lone light bulb failed, but when a generator kept their 40-watt transmitter in operation. We gave them cassettes, but lacked the funds to give much more, other than the encouragement of our presence.

They often asked me on the air my opinion of Haitian journalism, and my reply into the microphone was always the same: “You are the best and only hope for a civil society in Haiti.” The comment sometimes brought them from the verge of tears to an evident pride.

The critical mass continued to develop, as journalists from the various regions met one another for the first time. Many knew others by name and reputation, but had never had a chance to meet their colleagues face-to-face. Some inscrutable passion for being the communication channel kept them going; many did not even know of the existence of others until our conferences, which brought them together. Only the ones in the capital earned modest, adequate wages — all the others kept their broadcasts going by love of the venture.

Outside Port-au-Prince, their only means of sustaining their mission were jobs on the side, or parents ploughing in enough money to buy the gasoline to keep the generators running. In the provinces, advertising revenue was unknown. With meager PD funds, we sent groups of ten at a time to the U.S. for training, never allowing a group to depart if any one of the nine départements was not represented in the group. In this way, they got to meet one another, then later gathered in Port-au-Prince in large, self-financed conventions to compare intractable problems and ingenious solutions to their daunting challenge of staying alive as broadcasters without benefit of government funding. The government meanwhile discreetly bought up shares and parts and holdings in previously independent networks such as Radio Ibo and others. However, most of the independent broadcasters preferred to go it alone.
COPAC Secretary-General Ady Jean Gardy always had an uncanny sense of where the next most effective venue could serve in our traveling road show. Trainer of virtually all of Haiti’s broadcasting “elite,” Ady was deified in the countryside, and had the appeal of a rock star.

He regaled our audiences with thigh-slappers as historic examples of “proof” and “source” in specific libel and slander cases brought against Haitian journalists of the past. Noting the triumph of a colleague of decades past, he told the story of the journalist who obtained photocopies of cancelled checks proving graft under the Baby Doc regime. “What are your sources?” the judge had asked, and the journalist had cited chapter and verse of Haitian law protecting journalists from revealing their sources. “Very well, then what is your proof?” the judge had asked; the journalist pulled out his photocopies of cancelled checks, acquitted of charges of slander to the clamor and applause of the courtroom observers, then counter-suing the plaintiff and demanding one gourde as compensation, plus a public apology over the radio.

As foil to the triumphalism of the case above, Ady cited the case of the journalist who had accused President Ertha Pascal-Trouillot in 1991 of being a lesbian. “What are your sources?” the judge had asked the accused journalist.

“I am not obliged to reveal my sources,” the journalist responded in the dead silence of the packed courtroom.

“And, what is your proof?”

“I have no proof; I made it up,” the journalist had said, to the guffaws of the gallery.

The judge’s gavel smacked the lectern, sentencing the journalist to “exile” and house arrest in Les Cayes, as if in Sophoclean Greece. “I thank your honor,” the journalist was quoted saying. “Really, what I have needed is time for myself, and the freedom to paint pictures.”

Ady’s anecdotes illustrated the distinctions between “proof” and “source,” empowering his audiences with new awareness of their rights and limits and duties as journalists.
Leaving 90 percent of the time for Haitians to speak to Haitians, I took the microphone only to explain “accountability,” noting that they could and should hold their elected officials’ feet to the fire for non-productivity, while at the same time praising them for their courage in being willing to take leadership positions. I encouraged cordial debate among political opponents so as to oblige sharpened platforms and to expose those who brought no plan to their campaign.

Confidence spread from the radio waves to the populace, and 29,490 candidates come forth from two dozen political parties to register for local, provincial and national office. Haiti was beginning to awaken from the gloom of decades of murderous Duvalier dictatorship, and an entrenched military regime that hung on from 1991 to 1994, when President Clinton’s troops came on shore to rid Haiti once and for all of the funny-hatted constabulary, holding a nation in check with credible threats of murder, torture, and suffocation of the mind. The often-betrayed public began to believe they might at last have a say in the shaping of their own destiny.
Jean Dominique was Haiti’s Walter Cronkite, and John Kennedy rolled into one. Gritty, flinty, no one’s man but his own, he nevertheless confessed to me when I first met him that President Préval paid him as a consultant. Twice an exile in New York under the Duvalier and Cédras regimes, he now had returned to Haiti for the long haul, bilious, searing in his criticisms of the peccadilloes of his Lavalas friends, but especially damning of nearly every act of the U.S. Government.

At 69, his gaunt face had a skeletal aspect, his clacking teeth adding morbidity to his tirades and single-minded sermons, some of which I was made to endure alone with him in the privacy of his airless office at Radio Haiti Inter on the Route de Delmas.

At our first meeting, he wagged his pedagogical finger at me to drive home two messages: (1) one day we will all miss René Préval, a basically decent man, undervalued and misunderstood; and (2) the U.S. should never be so foolish as to oppose the overwhelming force of “a charging horse” (Aristide).

Dominique was a man of intellectual gifts, and chronic rage directed every which way. One did not want to oppose him in any argument. The force of his reasoning, the vituperous delivery of his unbudgeable opinions, plus the veneration and fame he enjoyed in every Haitian household, made him a force of nature.

He carried arcane alchemistic theories of the redemption of his nation through (wish to guess?) agronomy. President Préval was an agronomist, he reminded me, as were many of Haiti’s cabinet members. Salvation was to be found in the land and its distribution.

What seemed rage directed at me, later appeared to be a proud man’s appeal for protection from the demonic forces he dared not name, but which clearly haunted him in the bold and final days of his life. He
rebuked me for my predecessors’ neglect of him, and his exclusion from U.S. Embassy events. Over the radio waves, he unleashed his most strident disgust for the United States of America and its “hapless” embassy in Port-au-Prince. I told him I could accept blame only for my own deficiencies, not those of my predecessors. This brought a satisfied smile to his fleshless mouth. (Later I learned that his claims were perfectly false, as he had been routinely included on embassy invitations lists, but chose to boycott them.)

Maybe something about the way I listened, maybe a lunge for a life raft in the swirling waters taking him down, moved him to invite me for a live interview on Haiti’s most prominent radio slot, “Face à l’Opinion.” Dominique had been the voice of Haiti, at home and abroad, for over thirty years.

Everyone told me I would be foolish to accept the dooming handshake of Don Giovanni’s Comandatore, which would mangle my ego before dragging me off to hell before a vast listening audience. The “Crocodile of Delmas,” Dominique made mince meat of any interview guest he did not like, using them as raw material for his increasingly strident invectives.

Recklessly perhaps, I took up the gauntlet and went on his program with him February 8, 2000. I found out soon enough that my advisors and well wishers had all been right in a way. Conversing with Dominique, especially as U.S. Spokesman, was gladiatorial. Some inner mechanism I can only describe as “retreat to his attacks,” and “admit human foibles, rather than score points” got me through the ordeal in the little studio off the Route de Delmas.

– Your role as press officer? he asked.
– Intermediary, I said (“plaque tournante”). But, human contact is my main task, superseding that of purveyor of information.

“Hmmmm” said Dominique, his first in what became an hour-long series of grunts of vague approval. As Grand Inquisitor, or as a don on a committee of doctoral examiners, Jean fired the questions, pressed in when he could for the kill, then gracefully retreated with each success–
ful parry on my side. Clearly his intention was to achieve dominance and superiority, but the emerging bonhomie ended up pleasing him as the unexpected outcome.

“You repair misunderstanding, if I understand,” he said.

“I do when I can,” I answered.

“Well here’s one for you,” he said. “Your Congressmen keep coming here to visit. Not only Congressmen, but First Lady Hillary Clinton, Steinberg [Donald, special coordinator of the Haiti working group at the State Department.] Sandy Berger, etc. Why all this sudden interest in Haiti? Are they mere visits or are they …?”

“What are you insinuating?” I interrupted. We both laughed.

In Gallic tautology, Dominique said, “I insinuate nothing, I only ask if there might be grounds to take this as an insinuation.”

“Haiti is important to us,” I answered. “You are our neighbor. If our neighbor is not at ease, it bodes badly for the neighborhood, and let’s admit, Haiti has unachieved goals.”

Another approving “hmmm” from Dominique.

“We’re trying to help, not take the place over,” I added.

Dominique picked up on my cue, and said, “Some suspect that you are trying to do just that: Take us over.” He added, to make his position more defensible, his second Gallic tautology: “I say that what you say is true. But, it’s so true, that the truth may be more than reality.”

I allowed him his absurdity: “One could say that.”

“And yet,” he continued, “Despite all the visits by Hillary and others, her husband has shown little interest or love of our country. John Conyers and all the others. While your compatriots don’t openly treat us as the ‘Morally Repugnant Elite’ (MRE) [a play on the U.S. military term ‘Meals Ready to Eat’] they do sometimes deal with us as if we had a missing chromosome [laugh].”

I gave Dominique credit for articulating Americans’ problem worldwide: people’s perceptions of our arrogance. “Like any reproach,” I said, “there are pros and cons to the answer.”

Dominique: “Hmmm” (a third time).
I advanced, “I think Haiti remains incomplete, unrealized. This is not to say Haitians don’t know how to make their own way. We don’t see Haiti as incapable of handling its own destiny. We seek only to help in the process, where possible.”

“Hmmm.”

Dominique went to different tacks, questioning the U.S. Government’s contract with a Canadian service in the issuing of the famous electoral cards. I bristled with annoyance, since the Haitian government had just spent a month whining about the U.S. Government doing an end run, and awarding the contract to a Canadian firm. The Government of Haiti falsely accused us of not consulting with them, when in fact a signed agreement existed between the Government of Haiti and the U.S. Government. The Haitian government’s grandstanding on this issue had been a bone of contention with the Embassy; I sought an opportunity to put the matter to rest:

“Certain members of your government say the U.S. spent the money by themselves. This is — how shall I put it — *not the case*. We have received written concurrence in this matter.” Furthermore: “Given that you have *no parliament*, to whom would we deliver the money if not to the consulting group [IFES] itself?” I used the term “no parliament” about four times in my response, to underscore the anomalous state of Haiti’s current government, in violation of its own constitution.

Dominique, piqued at my provocation, stuttered, “I take your answer under consideration, but with corrections to add…” Recovering his composure, he added, “In the past when you handed money over to our dictators, there were never strings attached.”

We both laughed with a mutual “*touché*.”

Piqued myself, I noted that in a country whose constitution requires a legislative branch, calling the structure “a government” does not stand up to scrutiny. To emphasize the point, I mentioned our own Congress’s Dole Amendment, which forbade us from handing money over to the Government of Haiti, lacking evidence that they conformed to their own constitution. Here, I said, were checks and balances properly at
work.

Flustered, Dominique groped for the Churchill quote, mangling it: “Yes, and democracy is the worst form of government, but it works.”

“Except for all the others’,”

Dominique glowered at me through the penumbra of the recording studio. “You certainly aren’t a Catholic, Monsieur Whitman, but you have the subtle reasoning of a Jesuit.”

We both laughed loudly to relieve the tension.

Jean then tried yet another tack, indulging in the prevailing Haitian paranoia over the role of computer-programs in U.S. Government assistance in establishing the voter lists for the coming elections, as if we would thereby somehow cook the results.

I gestured to all the electronic gadgets around us in the recording studio. “Might you have something against electronics, Monsieur Dominique?” I said, making him laugh again.

“Clearly not,” he said.

I turned the tables: “Can you explain to me this fear of electronic gadgets in your country? I honestly don’t follow it.”

Dominique was not used to having questions posed to him over the air. He faltered, harrumphed, changed the subject. I pursued: “Your own CEP [Provisional Electoral Council] has scrutinized the techniques involved, and has given its written approval for IFES [the International Fund for Election Systems] to move forward with them.”

Jean then vaguely referred to suspicions and misunderstandings.

He squinted at me with his flinty skepticism, asking what I thought of the unexpected registry turnout which had swept the country. We both knew that more voters meant more votes for Aristide’s Lavalas party.

“We rejoice!” I said, “We can only take pleasure in Haitians coming out in such large numbers to place a stake in their own future.”

Dominique tried leading me down the alley of the U.S. Government having a dog in the Haitian race coming up. He made almost irrational references to “Satan” and “Saints.”

I raised my right hand and said over the air, “I am raising my right
hand and looking you straight in the eyes, am I not, Monsieur Dominique?”

“Yes.”

“I vow we have neither a Satan nor a Saint in this race. We want only for Haitians to be able to express their preferences freely and without intimidation.”

Dominique was getting to like the judicial approach, and made me vow that I not only was unaware of my embassy having no favorite candidate, but also that I knew it did not have one.

“I so solemnly swear,” I said, right hand raised in a mock judicial gesture.

We broke for commercials, glaring at each other like boxers between rounds.

After the break, Dominique went into the U.S.’s bleak history in supporting dictator François Duvalier under four presidencies until he died in 1971, mid-way through Nixon’s single term. I saw only one way out: “Mea culpa.”

Though caught off balance, Dominique guffawed approval.

“Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa!” he echoed.

I said, “Since I wasn’t there at the time, I think I’ll plead ‘Mea minima culpa’.”

Dominique guffawed yet louder. I think he began to enjoy the interview, as I did. We joked about being “vieux jeu” [old fashioned] in our use of quaint Latin expressions — “old fashioned, but not old,” we agreed over the air.

Somehow the ice floes between us began to melt, and we allowed ourselves to enjoy the second half of the hour. Jean liked to poke fun at set phrases, and dropped some, including the U.S. as “God’s Country,” and “In God We Trust,” printed on the U.S. currency.

“In God We Trust,” I said, “Because we know we cannot trust ourselves.”

More guffaws.

“E pluribus unum,” Jean said, a bit out of context.
“Exactly,” I said. “I see you know the drill by heart.”

Dominique: “Let us explain to our listeners, ‘From diversity, one unity.’”

“Exactly,” I said. “This is one of the few concepts which I think can benefit any country.” I returned to underscore: “E pluribus Unum’ on one side of the coin, on the other side, for us there is no Satan.”

Dominique turned silly: “Even if the Iranians call you the ‘Great Satan?’”

“We may be Satan,” I quipped, “but we have no Satans!”

Dominique again burst into laughter. He then referred to my trips up-country to address journalists. He asked my opinion of them as a professional group.

“The media here represent perhaps the most active sector and the most committed in Haitian society to work towards a true democracy in your country. I admire them. I consider them my friends.”

“Bravo,” Dominique said sotto voce.

We then talked about the much-discussed discrepancies between our government in Washington, and the embassy in Port-au-Prince. “Of course we have different vantage points,” I said. “If that weren’t the case, then we would have no need for embassies overseas.”

We did a quick civics lesson on the complexities of foreign policy in a government with three branches. I cited the Goss Amendment by which our Congress obliged our Executive to remove troops from Haiti in December 1999.

Things were getting too friendly. Good journalist that Dominique was, he sought to reinsert a bit of controversy in a dialogue that had gotten unexpectedly smooth, and risked becoming boring to the audience. His formulaic way of doing so was to revert to the paranoia with which he was most at ease.

“Are you Americans not in fact an occupying force in Haiti, Monsieur Whitman, seeking to twist things to your advantage?”

He referred to a recent incident where U.S. troops on a humanitarian mission had overlapped in Cap-Haïtien with a group of Cuban doctors.

“Oooh! Los Gringos, aquí están!”
“Caramba!” I said, denying that the incident was anything other than a coincidence, and praising anyone — Cuban or otherwise — who could provide needed medical treatment to Haitians.

“But the 20,000 troops…” Jean stammered, recalling the U.S. intervention of 1994.

“Monsieur Dominique, can you tell me who asked us to send them?” I asked.

“President Aristide,” he whispered, realizing he’d painted himself into a corner.

“Sorry, I could not hear you,” I said, making him repeat himself.

“PRESIDENT ARISTIDE,” he repeated, annoyed at his own faulty tactics in raising the issue.

He turned to the discrepancy of opposing Cuba’s Castro for lack of democratic freedoms, when we’d shown compliance with non-democratic China. I said, there were principles one tried to stick to, but always realities to adapt to. We could not turn our back on a country with a billion people and a huge economy.

Dominique said, “A French philosopher once said, ‘Truth beyond the Pyrenees, error on this side.’”

“Talleyrand,” I supplied, guessing right, to Jean’s surprise.

Dominique drove on with an anecdote of a U.S. ambassador who had claimed no massacres in Haiti under the Cédras regime, when in fact there had been.

I said, “Sorry, but I can answer only for my own sins, not those of others.” Dominique said he was in possession of the ambassador’s cable, and would later dig it out and show it to me.

“I’d be most interested,” I said over the air. But I never got to see the cable.

As we neared the end of the hour, we got into a final exchange on the upcoming elections in Haiti. “Sometimes I think we all see them as some sort of huge monster,” I said. “The elections are indispensable to Haiti’s advancement, but it’s the day after that matters. There is no good alternative to having elections. But the elections themselves are only an
anecdote. What matters is what happens afterward.”

The interview brought adrenaline flow, the brisk interchange, my possible success in modifying Dominique’s innate paranoia, the sweat and survivalist devices — and not least, the sense of relief at the end of my hour on the air with Jean. If it were a wrestler’s match, I imagine I remained standing at the end, as he did too, with a resulting professional relationship and even mutual respect. I saw I’d been right to disregard everyone’s advice and subject myself to my ordeal with the Crocodile of the Route de Delmas, offering an open hand, conceding at moments. I felt I must, and managed to give as good as I got.

I knew that all members of the Haitian government establishment were listening, and that any gaffes on my part would last like Crazy Glue and stick with me forever. But, I think I committed none.

Jean had developed a virulent contempt for the United States even after two periods of exile there, and yet somehow clung to its highest ideals as a lost or forbidden paradise or form of protection. That we survived together through the hour, equaled each other in the number of “touché!” and taken turns at gaining the high ground resulted in a sort of uneasy kinship, even a friendship of sorts. This face-to-face contact in fact is why they still send diplomats overseas even in our age of fax, Internet and digital video conferencing.

There were different theories at the time as to why Jean chose to air the interview some twelve to fifteen times again, until he was gunned down six weeks later. Some said he did so as a form of seeking refuge — by association with the Embassy — from enemies circling around him and waiting for the chance to nail him. Others said he merely liked the tape and replayed it out of professional triumphalism — perhaps I’d committed gaffes after all, obscure to me but useful to him in demonstrating to his establishment that he was able to nail me. Perhaps it was nothing other than a gesture of friendship to me as his dueling partner with whom he’d had a pleasing match and friendly outcome. Maybe, alternatively, the chat by psychological projection de-Satanized and de-
mystified the U.S. Embassy to him, tormented as he was by internal
demons.

I never saw him alive again, but did view him on April 8 on a televi-
sion screen in the waiting room of Maïs Gaté airport in his open coffin,
in the first state funeral accorded any Haitian since the death of François
Duvalier in 1971.

In a country of oral tradition, rumors can be inaccurate, but they have
greater power, and tend to be more precise, than in other countries
where the printed text reigns.

On April 3, when Jean was gunned down with his luckless bodyguard
Jean-Claude Louissant in the tiny courtyard of Radio Haiti Inter, the
theories abounded, many of them plausible: Jean had deviated from
Lavalas party line by reporting an embarrassing murder case in Petit-
Goave April 1; summoned by J-B Aristide to Tabarre April 2 to be in-
ducted into the Aristide presidential electoral campaign, he was insolent
enough to say, “You know I am loyal to you personally, Sir, but I can
support you only if you rid yourself of the filth surrounding you, the
thugs and cocaine dealers.” The stories got out from Aristide’s Haitian
bodyguards at Tabarre, who after all had eyes and ears, and who had
families and friends to tell things to.

Years of sterile, inconclusive investigation went on, yielding nothing
to the date of this writing despite intense international pressure to get to
the root of his assassination. Three investigators resigned rather than pursue
the case, one fleeing to the U.S. under threats to his own life.

Summoned as a suspect, alleged kingpin Dany Toussaint refrained
three to four times to answer subpoenas, as he said he was not entitled by
the Haitian constitution to waive his own immunity as Chairman of the
Judiciary Committee of Parliament. Though he said he wished to clear
his name, he could not do so without first resigning his coveted govern-
ment positions, and chose not to do so.

Even on the day of Jean’s death, Radio Haiti Inter replayed our inter-
view together, and the day after as well. It seemed as if a voice from the
grave, clinging yet to the American Embassy in vain for protection against his real enemies. Deviating from the Party line, as a fellow traveler, had become far more dangerous than frontal opposition. Haitians talked, they theorized, they knew.

The Dominique case may never be resolved in a purely judicial sense, but all Haitians knew and know who killed him, and more or less why.
Part Four
Things Fall Apart
February-May, 2000
Back Tracking

Forces mobilized subtly against the unprecedented opening of Haiti’s spirit, and the chance that it might one day be allowed to select its own leadership.

The so-called “Egyptians” took control of key elements of the process from within the Provisional Electoral Council, which devised and ran the electoral process.

Lucien Pharaon (“Pharoah”) had exclusive access to the computer database with candidates, later to become the tallying point of the vote itself. His partner at the CEP went by the single nom de guerre: “Nasser.”

With no oversight by any impartial observer, Pharaon — whose salary was paid by the Lavalas Party — had the database to himself. Some were of the opinion that the “results” had already been pre-cooked and entered into the system, months before the elections actually took place.

Meanwhile President Préval, always under the tutelage and guidance of mentor Jean-Bertrand Aristide, stammered and delayed the election date, letting it slip first from November 28 to December 19, then to March 19, then to April, and finally under international pressure settling on May 21.

March 19, during our press training session in Petit-Goave, participants sat with black armbands in silent mourning for the lost elections. Well aware that the session was infiltrated by observers and informers, they kept guarded silence on political questions, but maintained the symbolic sign of mourning.

The stalling was effective in mobilizing unknown dark forces to assassinate 15 of the 29,540 candidates, issuing credible death threats to others, and extending the campaign period beyond what opposition par-
ties’ modest funds could support.

The message came through loud and clear March 18, when Marie-Laurence Lassègue was attacked and nearly murdered by motorcyclists at a rally in Cabaret, a town one hour north of Port-au-Prince. Lassègue, former press Secretary for the Lavalas Party, had stepped forth encouraged by Hillary Clinton to be candidate for Senator in the Western Province. Her slight deviation to the Lavalas-friendly PLB Party (“Parti Louvre Barrye”) [a reference to a voodoo incantation] defined her as a close Lavalas ally, but not an identical twin. Escaping her assassins by a hair’s breadth thanks to skillful maneuvering of her driver, Lassègue returned to Port-au-Prince and hid at home for the rest of the campaign period. Her cell phone rang a dozen times a day, each time transmitting to her the recorded sounds of machine-gun fire.

Word spread quickly that deviation from Aristide’s Lavalas party was not a path to longevity, as corpses appeared, all of them opposition candidates. Clearly, the individuals under a greatest threat were those who had once been fellow travelers, but who showed embryonic signs of independent thought and speech. The unredeemable opponents-from-the-start were largely left alone.

Fearing that the database of candidates might soon disappear or be “accidentally” deleted from the vast software at CEP headquarters on the Route de Delmas, my office acquired a floppy disk of the candidate list and published it for use by the press. Containing the names, parties, and places of origin of all registered candidates, it was the only public source of information both for the candidate list, plus the procedural rules as codified in the Electoral Law of July, 1999.

It also included verbatim the various presidential decrees (“arrêtés”) governing the conduct of the elections, given the anomaly of the absence of a Permanent Electoral Council as mandated in Haiti’s 1987 Constitution (adopted by Haiti’s voters.) The constitution had called for Parliament to name the Permanent Electoral Council, but in 1999 Haiti had no Parliament. Lacking a legislative branch, the President named
a Provisional Electoral Council (CEP). The CEP came out with nine appointed counselors, six of them Lavalas-affiliated. Long-time Aristide supporter, the venerable Léon Manus, 79 years old and universally revered, was named its President by René Préval.

The country began to unravel around February, 2000, as opposition parties’ coffers went depleted after Préval’s many delays in the electoral calendar, and as BEDs (Departmental Electoral Bureaus) and BECs (Communal Electoral Bureaus) succumbed to arson and assault by mobs of unknown affiliation. Voting materials were stolen from unlocked warehouses at night. Lavalas blamed reactionary military elements for the security breaches, while the fragmented opposition began with increasing unity to blame Lavalas itself for the incidents. Anonymous death threats to oppositionist leaders proliferated: in a macabre irony, as the country’s electrical grid broke down with increasing regularity, candidates were unable to charge their cell phones and receive their threatening messages.

The “Friends” of Haiti (U.S., Canada, France, Venezuela — and at times Mexico, Spain, and Chile) met often to tackle the conundrum, issuing blanket statements exhorting the government to “do its best” to pull off a clean election. Like a contestant at the Special Olympics, Haiti drew everyone’s good will and the wish that it could somehow triumph over its self-inflicted adversities.

Tasks were divvied up. The U.S. took the financing voter registration cards; to Canada fell the assignment of establishing the electoral polling places (“BV’s”), and so on. All well-intentioned outsiders ducked when hostile comments came from Lavalas activists in New York, Montreal, and Miami, accusing the international community of getting into the Haitian government’s knickers and subverting the process for their own predatory motives.

Canadian Ambassador Gilles Bernier issued almost daily statements to the Haitian press exuding optimism. As “dean” of the diplomatic corps, Papal Nuncio Monsignor Luigi Bonazzi — whose headquarters
had been trashed and whose Congolese secretary was beaten and hounded naked through the streets by Lavalas gangs in 1991 — joined Ambassador Bernier in issuing honeyed statements.

U.S. officials Anthony Lake, Donald Steinberg, Luigi Einaudi (formerly of the State Department, now of the OAS), and Arturo Valenzuela of the National Security Council, all commuted with predictable regularity, paying homage to the future President Aristide who had been restored by President Clinton in the 1994 intervention, and remained a Favorite Son of the Americans. President Préval, whenever confronted, threw up his hands in an “I can’t help it, I never chose to be here” attitude feigning helplessness. He steadily lost credibility with the international community who humored him, but knew him to be loyally carrying out orders telephoned to him daily from Aristide’s multi-million-dollar estate in the suburb of Tabarre.

In self-inflicted wounds, the Haitian government had shut down the nation’s main Internet provider, ACN, crippling most users of the Internet, including the Haitian government itself. Likewise, a rising crime wave went unchecked with police avoiding violent clashes either through cowardice or reluctance, or under orders to allow the chaos to spread. The economy, already the weakest in the hemisphere, went into free fall as the government intimidated importers of rice and failed to meet its payments on artificially subsidized gasoline prices. The national currency, the gourde — once pegged at five to the U.S. dollar — fell to below 20. (By late 2002, it slumped to 49 to the U.S. dollar.)

Club Med, which from the early 1980’s had built up a seasonal resort along the coast north of the capital and refurbished it in 1995, announced they would close up shop because of the impassible airport and coastal roads, and the government’s unwillingness even to try to improve the security of Maïs Gaté airport. Using cell phones, customs officials in the airport tipped off friends waiting outside for arriving passengers who seemed to be carrying cash, making them easy prey in the bedlam of heat, taxis, and predators just outside the airport entrance.
U.S. officials gave reprieves to Haiti for its airport security breaches, and the government’s inability to combat the cocaine trade — declaring Haiti “decertified, but with extenuating circumstances,” and absolving the country of trade penalties normally applied to decertified nations.

CODELs (Congressional Delegations) visited the country, bringing in Haiti’s traditional friends Senator Bob Graham (D-FL), Mike Dewine (R-OH), Rep. Connie Mack (R-FL), the always loyal Reps. John Conyers (D-MI), William Delahunt (D-MA), and ultimately less friendly faces such as Republican John Sensenbrenner (R-WI), and much later, an impatient Senator Christopher Dodd (D-CT).

Haiti equivocated between hope and despair, civic momentum and a self-fulfilling prophecy of doom. The campaign generally came to a halt around late February, when the opposition’s coffers lay empty after so many calendar delays, and the occasional murder and death threat or act of arson. Signals indicated that someone — the government or reactionaries or whoever — meant to subvert a process that the majority of Haitians longed for, in order to get them on the always latent, never realized, track of normality, democracy, and modest development.

A pungent air hung over the city as the early spring tropical heat arrived, and as dialogue ceased and the populace understood that someone was playing for keeps. They diminished their expectations, seeking only the privilege of saying “yes” to the inevitable.

Nightly, light weapons discharged shots in every neighborhood, intentions and targets unknown. Fear was successfully instilled.

Tableaux Vivants:

- A small mountain of refuse; perched on top, a rooster, two famished dogs, three nimble goats and a bloated pig coexist peacefully, making a fine meal of nature’s bounty.
- Entrepreneurial vigor in a sign at a funeral parlor: “Pompes funèbres et photocopies.”
- A bumper sticker: “There is no life west of Chesapeake Bay.”
– A storefront: “Foi en Christ Shop Auto Parts.”
– A ramshackle house leaning to one side, formally gingerbread, but now in dire need of repair. In front, a street hawker sells a dozen local grapefruits, “chadeks.” A pig feeds on items strewn over what was once a sidewalk. A sign on the door to the building: “Services Psychiatriques.”
Tin Ear

Compared to the guile of the poor and their dictators, the shortcomings of Western-style thinking occasionally yield great comedies such as the 1970’s French film _La Victoire en Chantant_ (“Black and White in Color”), depicting the outbreak of World War I in contiguous, sleepy German and French colonies in West Africa.

Beyond the chuckles over peacemakers in Haiti outfoxed so many times, lay the shattered hopes, the cadavers randomly deposited around the city as reminders of the real Authority, the plight of a largely innocent and well intended public. It ceased to be funny.

Discounting even the rumored payoffs and possible corruption never proven or revealed, the main factor in outsiders’ failure to “fix” Haiti seemed to be their tone deafness to Haitian discourse. Visitors tried to make “yes” mean “yes” and “no” mean “maybe” when engaged with Haitian street thugs posing as statesmen, who outmaneuvered them every time. The clever underdog is a favorite in many cultures, anthropomorphically rendered in the hare of West African folk takes or Reynard the Fox of medieval France. The Haitian equivalent is “Ti Malice,” who makes do with the sinewy tools of intellect and artful dodging in which even actual lying never comes into play. The doomsday machine of the Lie lurks only in the background as the ultimate deterrent.

Sometimes, in the third world generally, the formula goes thus: 1) Tone deaf outsider comes in parachute-style to “fix” the political and economic conundrums of a country slipping to ruin; 2) European diploma in hand, the local savant and dictator, bolstered by familiarity with both the do-gooders’ language and inflections as well as those of
“his” people, greets and outsmarts the outsider so as to retain his grip over his own people; 3) Victory of reason and breakthrough in dialogue is mutually declared, usually over a champagne toast in the Presidential Palace; 4) Visitors depart; 5) The sufferings of the illiterate and defenseless are then exponentially increased; 6) Sources (IMF, FAO, World Bank…) declare the country to be suffocating from random violence, “malnutrition” (read: “starvation”) and infrastructure torn apart; 7) Intellectual journals characterize the dictator as vulnerable to world price fluctuations for cacao and sugar, and victim of the violent legacy of his military predecessor.

Above, the macro. Below, the micro:

In Port-au-Prince, 1999-2001, some visitors had eight weeks of Creole language training and sported a minimal knowledge of the rich vehicle of Haitian dialogue. They would pick up the occasional catch phrase such as “Pa faut-mwen” (“it’s not my fault”) with body language to boot: the light brushing of the backs of the hands to indicate the shedding of responsibility and accountability.

Outsiders tended to speak publicly in conundrums (“We see hopeful signs but still note our concern…”), which Haitians understood rightly or wrongly as endorsement of the regime in place. Haitians, meanwhile, looked to Americans for the plain, flat language which might lead them to salvation. What we saw as nuance, they saw as equivocation and compliance with those highjacking their troubled isle, and getting away with it. For every “we see hopeful…,” a thousand hearts sank. Diplomats spoke with la langue de bois, defined in a recent issue of the Economist magazine as a “bland form of political evasion.”

Haitian power brokers were unsurpassed craftsmen of real equivocation in a culture where time exists in circular, not linear form. “Yes, elections, absolutely…” But after five postponements, systematic persecution of the broad opposition, the murdering of 15 of them, and the emptying of the opposition’s shallow coffers, once the elections finally came, they were a travesty. Manipulation, moreover, made a 97% sweep
out of what might well have been, without chicanery, a credible 80% victory.

American journalists cited Lavalas’s clear lead going into the election of 2000 as evidence that the ruling party would have no incentive to cheat, and therefore would not do so. Noting this train of thinking, I could only shrug in response and say, “It makes no sense to you or to me; it merely is.” Then the visiting journalist would roll over the page of his note pad, neither conceding nor contesting my point, and pass to the next question.

Some of the patronizers saw Haitians as merely a lesser version of themselves, something like the Italian Quattrocento rendition of the child on canvas: stunted adults, and just not up to the task of nation building.

The patronizers with some knowledge of the Creole language remained unaware of the faux amis (false cognates) known to every Haitian, but apparently ignored by the outsider.

“Jistis” ("Justice"), for example, became an occult invocation to murder. “Jistis” was later codified by Aristide’s version of “Zero Tolerance,” understood correctly by paid mobs as encouragement to seize regime opponents, bind them in barbed wire, drag them through the streets drawn by pick-up trucks, then burn them alive.

The term “loi electorale” — taken at face value by some observers — was known to every Haitian as the way to avoid having elections.

“Did you eat a cupcake?” The adult asks.

“No,” says the child petulantly [he thinks, but does not say; “I ate three, not one.”] Only the most foolish adult takes the “no” at face value. Thus, the child understands the adult’s language better than the adult himself. Even when Haitian leaders got caught in flagrante killing and stealing, they talked their way out with the “no-to-one-cupcake” gambit.

The outsiders’ condescension was disastrous for an impoverished country, held hostage by conniving and armed men and women, who were also adept at duping outsiders.
Take any week at random, for example March 26 to April 2, 2000:

- The “Organisations Populaires” (OPs) — the Tontons Macoutes reincarnated as day laborers at 100 gourdes per day by the Lavalas machinery — shut down the city for three days, leaving smoke columns rising in every quarter, with the stench of burning rubber. No Haitian missed the point: “We’re still in charge.” Only the outsiders somehow missed it.

- After a string of assassinations of opposition activists from the MPSN in Petit-Goave, the courthouse proceedings were disrupted by thugs, halting prosecutions. The fabled Lavalas-loyal, but eccentrically independent journalist, Jean Dominique, reported the incident on the radio two days before his still unsolved assassination on April 3.

- As the OPs ransacked and destroyed the rickety stands of the $5-a-day merchants at the Croix-des-Bossales, the only arrests were those of the few victims who had the impropriety to complain to the authorities. A handful of OP militants were briefly incarcerated by the police, then released within the hour.

- On the thirteenth anniversary celebration of the current Haitian Constitution, crowds attacked the offices of former Port-au-Prince Mayor and current regime critic Evans Paul.

- At noon the next day, Lavalas spokesman Yvon Neptune said on the radio “We support the objectives of the OP.” Three hours later, when the populace showed unexpected rage against the attacks and destruction, Neptune said on the radio, “We have nothing to do with them.” The “language” of the events of March 26–April 2, 2000, taken at random, was clear to any Haitian: “We hope to convince you first, but if that doesn’t work, we will destroy you.”

- Secretary of State Albright met Foreign Minister Fritz Longchamps March 29 in New Orleans to urge prompt elections. While Longchamps’ exact response is not known, the
wise crack in Port-au-Prince was “What is it about ‘Go to Hell’ you don’t understand?”

- Perhaps most indicative of all, the plodding diplomats in town for the week reported home that a date had been set for elections: April 9, after three postponements. In fact, the date was never established, never determined, never rejected. Haitian statements indicated that it was neither the agreed date, nor was it not the date. In fact eleven months passed before elections actually occurred. One senior Western diplomat, beginning to catch on when it was already too late, said at a working breakfast, “Their psychological superiority over us is obvious.”

When a polemic broke out in the late 1990’s over whether candidate Aristide had actually called for the “necklacing” (death by flaming tire over the neck of the victim) for political opponents, only Westerners quibbled over the exact meaning of the priest’s exhortation. In fact J-B Aristide said it pretty clearly on September 27, 1991, as recorded by local media and cited in the Associated Press: “Give them what they deserve! The instrument is in your hands! It smells good! Wherever you go, you want to inhale it.”

Haitians knew with absolute clarity the meaning of Aristide’s exact words, “Ba-yo sa-a yo merite,” “Give them what they deserve.” Only outsiders foundered over supposed ambiguities of a phrase known to every Haitian as a death sentence.

During the tense times of 2000, an “ethics code” was drafted, quickly signed by Lavalas and no other party: it called for nullifying the results at any electoral voting booth disrupted during the course of the day, though history showed clearly that disruptions were part of the nature of Haitian elections. Annoyed outsiders, ignorant of the code’s contents, assailed opposition groups for their intransigence in not signing it.

Because of massive embezzlement of government funds imputed to the Préval presidency, some said that Lavalas could not afford even a
single opposition leader in the new Parliament, for fear that the question might be asked from within the legislature branch of government, “Where’s the money?” Perhaps for this reason, Lavalas crushed every iota of opposition, postponing the election five times to assure no such question could ever be asked on the Senate floor.

In any case, minor disruptions occurred in the early weeks and months of 2000, as if by coincidence:

- Voter station (BEC) officials revolted for lack of pay (the funds were not available);
- A Lavalas activist received sole control over the Provisional Electoral Council computer system;
- The OPs staged weekly, sometime daily, rallies of indeterminate objectives, to demonstrate their power to disrupt. They were accompanied by police escort;
- Political assassinations and threats kept all opposition leaders silent, and indoors.
- The mute Haitian people, lacking words or clout, but fully conversant with the language of deeds, responded bravely and without appealing to any “higher authority,” such as a powerful outside nation;
- They grouped at the Presidential Palace to protest the destruction of their modest market stalls at the Croix-des-Bossales (a dozen of the victims were incarcerated without charges);
- They attended charismatic, syncretic Christian/Vodou ceremonies, lifting their passports to the heavens and praying for visas to leave the country;
- Surpassing all estimates, 3.2 million Haitians registered to vote when given the chance, overwhelming the bureaucracy’s capacity to handle them in such unpredicted numbers. Orderly and silent, they stood in disciplined lines while waiting for the workers to deliver more film for the overworked Polaroid cameras;
- Massive joy and street dancing erupted March 18 over the (in
the end false) rumor that gang leader and future Senator Dany Toussaint had been arrested and removed by U.S. DEA agents.

A proper response from outsiders, which would have produced pluralistic democratic change and a revived economy in due time, would have

1) Declared Haiti a dictatorship as of January 11, 1999, when scheduled elections were not held;
2) Declared publicly, “We understand why and how you have subverted your own elections”;
3) Stated unequivocally, “We will not accompany you in disenfranchising your own people”;
4) Revoked U.S. visas for members of the self-appointed regime and frozen their bank accounts in the U.S.
5) Suspended bilateral aid.

Of the five actions above, only the fifth was, in fact, temporarily implemented.

Instead, diplomats issued vague statements that left the regime easy access to its own cookie jar, when a single unequivocal statement might have set the record straight. But none came. Perhaps worse, tone-deaf outsiders bestowed on an inept regime the unmerited praise of faint damnation.
Nails in the Coffin

Jean Dominique’s death on April 3, 2000, was a turning point in the electoral debacle. Opposition leaders had shown sanity by halting their electoral campaigns after the death threats came — fifteen of which became reality — in February and March. With Jean’s disappearance, the populace got the message loud and clear: someone took the elections seriously enough to murder their opponents. One local wag argued that this signified full-fledged democratic values in Haiti — people esteemed democracy so highly that they were willing to kill for it.

Now four times postponed, the May 21 election date was finally set on April 9. Everyone agreed; a date that flagrantly violated of the Haitian constitution was better than no date at all.

The Golden Age of cordial debate, however, ground to a halt with Jean’s assassination April 3, followed on April 5 by a joint bipartisan letter from five U.S. Congressmen calling for OAS sanctions should the Haitian government stall any longer. The same day, State Department Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Peter Romero, issued the strongest comment yet, stating that President Préval had “walked away from” commitments made to the U.S. Government and the Haitian people.

The following day opposition leader Ferdinand Dorvil and business leader Guy André were murdered, and death threats sent Chamber of Commerce President Olivier Nadal into exile in Miami.

State-owned Télévision Nationale d’Haiti ran round-the-clock repetitions of a documentary on the overthrow of Chile’s Salvador Allende by President Nixon, sending subliminal messages that Haiti’s woes were inflicted by foreigners.
April 8 at Dominique’s state funeral at the soccer stadium, Organisations Populaires activists announced their intention of sacking KID ("Konvansyon Inite Democratik") opposition headquarters, and did so after proceeding on foot from the stadium to Evans Paul’s (former Port-au-Prince Mayor) modest offices in the Bois Verna. Police officers stationed in Darth Vader outfits stood passively aside as the fifteen activists set fire to the small building 30 meters from the street.

A video taken by one of the police officers, showing police cooperation with the arsonists, was (understatement) not aired on national television.

April 18, U.S. State Department Spokesman James Rubin rendered a mixed message of “alarm” and “encouragement” over the situation in Haiti. On the same day, prices of basic foodstuffs at markets in the capital jumped hiked by 30 percent. French Socialist leader Paul Cosignon issued a statement labeling Haiti as a “Narco-State,” following the lead of Jean-Luc Aganman who had published an earlier article in Paris-based Africa International titled, “the Tabarre ‘Cartel’,” tracing the growing cocaine traffic through Haiti directly to Jean Bertrand Aristide and his private mansion at Tabarre. The article, suppressed in Haiti, showed a photo of Aristide in the professionally warm embrace of a physically larger President Clinton, with a side bar noting that Haiti had sunk from 124th nation in the world in terms of poverty, to 159th in the period 1994–2000.

Haitians were accustomed to hardship and privation, but some still clung to the putative honor of having a voice May 21 in the selection of their nation’s leadership.

During the “nails in the coffin” phase of the campaign, former palace press Chief Marie Laurence Lassègue went public with her hair-raising accounts of the attempt against her life from a month before (March 18), when her last senatorial campaign rally was cancelled after six armed motorcyclists surrounded her car on its way to St. Marc. They demanded that she get out of the car so they could kill her alone, without involving the other passengers in car in the crossfire.
Lassègue gave credit for her survival to her highly skilled driver who evaded the would-be assassins by speeding off the road in James-Bond-type maneuver along dusty trails the two-wheelers were unable to negotiate.

The youthful Lassègue, who had earned First Lady Hillary Clinton’s personal friendship and respect for her bravery in presenting herself as a female candidate, was shaken enough by the March 18 incident that she gradually lost eyesight. After four medical treatments in Miami, she is now 90 percent blind.

The period was also marked by a moment of particular sadism, when on March 19, septuagenarian Léon Manus, a former Aristide supporter and current President of the Provisional Electoral Council walked under a hot sun to deliver a CEP letter (contents unknown) to President Préval at the Palace.

Made to wait hours under the wilting sun, 79-year-old Manus was never received by the President of the Republic, but was instead promised a written response to his appeal for some regularity to the electoral process. No answer ever came.

More opposition candidates were killed March 28, in Petit-Goave. In a peaceful March 29 demonstration commemorating the date of Haiti’s constitution, other opposition leaders were attacked in Port-au-Prince at Pont-Morin with sticks and petrol bombs by pro-Lavalas mobs chanting “Aristide ou la mort!”

Sunday, April 23, I switched on my television and watched an oddly friendly and cordial political debate, struck by the harmonious tone of opponents deferring to each other on topics over which they agreed to disagree. Only at the end of the broadcast did it come out that the whole thing was a rerun from two months before, during the “Golden Age” of January–early February, 2000.

Monday, the following day, a Haitian occurrence took place for which no word can be found in any language: Luc Eucher Joseph, the police inspector whose job was to pursue and indict corrupt police officials
was, well, “ousted” for lack of a more adequate term. He neither re-
signed nor was he dismissed, after getting good evidence against four-
teen senior police officials in corruption scams. He simply “went poof”
and was no longer there. No one knew if he had fled to exile, or was in
hiding, or whether he intended to challenge his own ouster and make a
comeback at some point. The only thing clear was that he was no longer
chief inspector for the national police. After 20 days of non-existence he
appeared in Switzerland, where he remains to this day.

Syndicated U.S. journalist Georgie Anne Geyer published an article
May 17, highlighting “politically sponsored street thugs,” the Haitian
economy, and a country that was “almost totally destroyed.” She de-
scribed President Préval and future President Aristide at the April 8
soccer stadium incident as “Roman proconsuls” encouraging the or-
chestrated anti-opposition violence of the same day.

Western observers — journalists, diplomats, do-gooders — seemed
baffled by the vitriol of the events of March and April, loath to attribute
them to M. Aristide, who would have triumphed anyway in free and fair
elections. Why the brutality? Putschist agents provocateurs? Unbridled
Lavalas fringe groups meaning well, but exceeding normal standards of
fair play?

Ambiguities came from Haitian leaders espousing, while simultane-
ously disavowing, the excesses of murder and arson. NSC Latin America
chief Arturo Valenzuela and State Department Special Haiti Coordinat-
or Donald Steinberg issued a joint statement: “It is time…” they said,
calling for elections but not saying when, or demarcating any limits of
U.S. Government tolerance.

As the scribe who took the dictation of their statement in Port-au-
Prince, I pointed out the weakness of the English words “it” and “is.” In
scolding me, the policy makers insisted that the statement would be seen
as a strong one by those in the policy business.

A trickle, then a stream of parachuted journalists came from the major
journals’ outposts in Miami and New York, observing events from their
comfortable rooms at the Montana Hotel, up the hill off the Avenue John Brown.

The Boston Globe’s John Donnelly went off more adventurously than the others, and did a full-page spread on young Haitians learning to play stringed instruments at the Sainte Trinite “Cathedral,” featuring a photo of an 11-year-old girl wistfully playing Bach on her donated viola in her doorway on a squalid alley of Carrefour, one of the world’s worst slums.

The article — published June 12 on page one — resulted in a chain of events leading to fund-raising in Boston to bring Deborah Tatgrin, the child in the June 12 photo in the Globe, to a children’s music camp a year later. The effort was mounted by New England Conservatory violin professor Gillian Rogell, trying but failing to banish the haunting photograph from her memory and soul. Though it took us eleven months even to locate Deborah, we finally managed to do so and got her and an older sister to Rogell’s training session in Boston the following year.

An accomplice in the non-political story, I commented in the Globe’s follow-up article a year later, “It’s wonderful that two deserving Haitian children got to benefit from the kindness of well-wishers, but what about the four million others?”
Rome Burning
(March 27-29)

Political tensions heightened as the real campaign ended, with increasing stridency on all sides and an embryonic confederacy forming for the first time in Haiti’s history among opposition groups, who rallied against the Lavalas majority. People got themselves killed, their houses burned.

Western journalists checking in with me would say, “It makes no sense for Lavalas to kill their opponents, when everyone knows Lavalas will sweep the upper and lower houses of Parliament and the municipal positions as well.”

Not contradicting them, I would say, “But Haiti has its own logic, and we outsiders will never understand it.”

Meanwhile Haitians registered en masse to vote. Of four million potential voters, over three million registered in half the time allotted for registration. Violence erupted in Anse d’Hainault in Grande-Anse and in Petit-Goave, but the country was determined to get their votes noted; they lined up with almost Teutonic order to have their Polaroid photos taken and receive the much coveted voter registration card. In many cases, the card was the first form of official ID many Haitians had ever received.

When I took Rep. John Conyers (D-MI) to one of the registration bureaus in Petionville, no Haitian in line was willing to speak with him. Cutting across a wide swath of socio-economic lines, the registrants had no interest in talking with foreigners or being identified as registrants: they merely wanted their cards, and were willing to wait for hours in line to receive them.
The system bent to accommodate the voters; when dysfunction appeared among the registration bureaus (BIs), the CEP extended the deadline to March 4.

The public was disgruntled with the many postponements of the elections, though many would vote for those responsible for the postponements. They wanted only the chance to have their vote counted.

Carnival came and went in early March, with the subtext of the songs composed for the occasion by one of the carnival bands:

Piye neg yo, piye neg yo
Nou mele, nou mele
souse blan-yo
Yo vende peyi-a sans papier
gad yon peyi
nou mele nou mele nou mele
La jenes dekourage
on sel espwa se vuayaje
Ki te mele moun sa yo

Ayiti peyi nou li ye
Ayiti pou Ayisyen
Nou nan ka
Pale nasyonal
nan ki sa nou tonbe la a
Taba nou mele
Site Soley nou mele
peyi nou menase
nou entrave
hospital general grev
Pòt-au-Prince grev
EDH grev, Téléco grev
simitye Pòt-au-Prince grev
gad yon peyi
nou mele…
Translation:

They’re pillaging us, they’re pillaging us
we’re in a mess, we’re in a mess,
suck the foreigners (“whites”) dry
they’ve sold the country down the river
what a country!
We’re in a mess, we’re in a mess,
the youth are discouraged
the only hope is to leave this place,
how’d we get in such a mess.

Haiti is our country
Haiti for the Haitians
we’re in a mess now
the National Palace
is what we’ve fallen to.
Tabarre [J-B Aristide’s residence]’s got us in a mess
Cite Soleil’s got us in a mess
our country is threatened
we’re stuck
the General Hospital is on strike
Port-au-Prince is on strike
EDH [the electricity company] is on strike
Teleco [the telephone company] is on strike
even the dead in the cemeteries are on strike
what a country
we’re in a mess, we’re in a mess…

The many postponements drew mild rebukes, with Rep. Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY) issuing public statements condemning the Haitian executive for the lack of progress to a definite election date, and calling for a halt of U.S. aid to Haiti if a Parliament were not seated by June 12.
Rumors abounded:
“Business leader Olivier Nadal has fled the country.”
“President Préval wants out, but is afraid that a higher authority won’t allow him to resign.”
“The U.S. will soon start revoking visas of members of the Haiti government.”
“The Haitian Executive knows its time is up, but prefers to bring the country down with them rather than allow elections which might diminish their absolute control.”

Basic foodstuffs became unavailable or out of price range for middle-income Haitians. The noise level increased as blame went increasingly to René Préval who had dissolved Parliament January 11, 1999 after his Prime Minister Rosny Smarth’s resignation in protest two years earlier in March, 1997. Intransigence rose to the surface from all sides. NSC Latin America adviser Arturo Valenzuela said a seated Parliament by June 12, was “indispensable.” But “derailment” became the watchword in Washington, Ottawa, Paris and Caracas.

Finally the boil was lanced March 27–29, when the *Organisations Populaires* (OPs) ground the capital’s activities to a halt, reducing the city to “flames and blood” as previously promised. The incidents began with tire-burnings March 27, in a successful operation to paralyze the capital. Of the many shortages of commodities in Haiti, inexplicably tires have never been one of them; Thugs-R-Us have them always at hand, ready for use and delivered in Haitian government Teleco trucks to strategic locations around the city.

By Tuesday, March 28, Port-au-Prince was engulfed in flames, with the occasional, random passerby cut down by bullets for daring to exist.

On the 28th, Légitime Athis and two other MPSN candidates were murdered in Petit-Goave.

Towards the end of the same day, I received a call from propagandist Pierre Joel Jean, whom I’d sent to the U.S. the previous November on a three-week study tour of the U.S. “Ça va?” he asked, summoning the
Haitian approach as if to say “Are we still friends?”

I had dined with Jean in Alexandria, Virginia, four months earlier, and had included him in the Johnny Appleseed missions of the Press Committee for Civic Action (COPAC) to remote corners of Haiti’s hinterlands to share his experiences. He had been eloquent, articulate in his presentations of ethics in journalism during our training sessions in Les Cayes and Petit-Goave. I knew he was a lapdog for the regime, but welcomed his collaboration as a professional journalist of vision and rigor and ardor. He had given masterful presentations to large audiences on the vitality of independent journalism.

Watching the city burn from my office window, I said, “Pierre, even in Stalinist USSR, if Moscow had been engulfed in flames, Soviet TV news Vremya would have reported it.”

Jean was the anchorman for Télénationale d’Haiti, the government channel. He had received a handsome package from the Lavalas Party for giving favorable coverage on the seven o’clock p.m. news hour — including an endowment for an elementary school he headed on the side.

“I don’t know what you’re saying,” he said, sputtering protest for my comments on the phone.

“But, Port-au-Prince is in flames, and your program only shows successful urban projects, while your capital lies in ruin,” I said.

“We have reported all the events of yesterday and today,” he lied.

I said, “Curious, but the television signal you are sending out reaches my house without any mention of the destruction.”

“It’s fully reported,” he protested. “I’ll send you a VHS tape as evidence.”

“Please do,” I said. “Until you do, I think you are a disgrace to the principles of independent reporting you yourself have espoused as a COPAC member in the provinces.”

“You will receive the VHS tomorrow,” he said; but none ever came.

A year later when the young and vigorous 30-year-old athletic Pierre Joel Jean was cut down for Party transgressions (he had
publicly opposed a law restricting freedom of expression), the cause of his death was announced as “anxiety” — which, in Creole, means, “We got him, and if you’re not careful, we’ll get you next.”
The Organisations Populaires, sent out to wreak havoc in Haiti’s rickety capital, were the cause and effect, the incarnation of the period. Collecting 100 Haitian gourds apiece per diem for civil destruction, they hailed from a long tradition of unopposable force dating back to the beginning of the French Revolution, on whose principles the black republic was founded in 1804.

Even their shibboleth, “Aristide ou la Mort!” showed unbroken patriotism to the principles of popular might with a (prenatal?) recollection of the “La Révolution ou la Mort!” of two centuries previous.

The mob: la foule, la turba, la canaille, les gueux, vox populi — the country of oral tradition fed on their nostalgia of liberation, now converted to might over right and rights trampled. The masses could take the streets in a matter of seconds, filling a tranquil scene with muscle, graffiti, hails of paving stones, bloodied victims who stood in their way or who were merely caught in the wrong place in confusing circumstances. The feral crowds dispersed as suddenly as they formed.

The OPs were put to the service of the consolidation of a power once noble, now destructive and self-serving. They took sections of the city like a force of nature, whence their masters’ name for them: “Lavalas,” the Flash Flood. The Creole word “kouri” meant panic, stampede, super ego displaced, “id” running amok through the city streets.

Like the offstage actors in classical theater or the chorus in Greek drama, the masses propping up rootless oligarchies and later destroying them, Coriolanus, Theseus, Andromacus… they raised and demolished regimes of shallow roots. Their bosses might have built bearable lives for the people, but chose not to do so and thus were wiped from the earth without trace.

Any regime among the possible repertoire could have resembled another: the genius of the OPs lay in destroying anyone’s chances, so as to leave contrived vestiges of nostalgia and sentiment for what might have
been. Their spirit emanated from their French forebears and could be articulated something like, “If the privileged will not share their privileges, then we will apply pyromania to remove anyone’s chance for betterment, including our own.”

The ability to articulate was not the OPs’ strong suit. They attacked the U.S. Embassy in confusion with the OAS, imagining the two to be interchangeable. They invented Malapropisms such as “entre la plume et le marteau” (“between the feather and the hammer,”) as opposed to, “between the anvil (enclume) and the hammer.” If they were to have a logo, it would be a burning tire, “boule caoutchou.”

They raised their fists, burned tires, bloodied those who stood in their way. Paid for eight hours of their services, they sometimes turned against their masters after the clock struck five: As day laborers, they took their own narrow literalism as a form of honor. To these raw masses and the untutored, spirit gave them “la fòs” — “force, power.” Misguided, pitiless, they destroyed Haiti’s hopes for generations. Without them the events in this chronicle would not exist to be recorded. As Yogi Berra might have put it, “They made these events necessary.”
Haitians understood the implications of the murders, attacks, arson, and undermining of the electoral process which were untraceable to any single source. They knew only that the game was for keeps, and was nevertheless the best chance they were going to get to have a hand in their country’s future.

They also knew that even in accepting poverty with dignity, they could better their lot incrementally if others left them alone to do so. They were well aware of their entrepreneurial gifts and energies, their skills as artists, craftsmen, and mechanics, and their abilities always to make something out of nothing so as to sustain lives of minimal material expectation. They sought only homes which might not be seized in the night, basic rights to sell farm produce in the open-air markets without police pilfering their items from in front of them. Running water, jobs, electricity — these were yet dreams only for hallucinations or paradise, and could come later.

A few days before the elections, Fulbright Scholar Shirley Jean, a New Yorker of Haitian background, offered her findings on food security in Haiti after a year of study in the country, documenting the failure of the three previous regimes to address the shortcomings in food production. Her talk was aired on five radio stations and broadcast without cuts on independent Télé Haiti.

In a separate initiative, Cultural Affairs Officer Ken Veal launched an ambitious project, with private backing from Texas philanthropists, to promote the use of solar ovens in a country depleted of fossil fuels and nearing the end of its supply even of wood for charcoal.
The Chamber of Commerce, absent its exiled President Olivier Nadal, hosted an afternoon demonstration showing how the rudimentary contraptions could cook food and even boil water with available sunlight. Veal’s endeavor came at no cost.

Simultaneously USAID introduced a costly, two-million dollar project under CARE tutelage on how to encourage the use of natural gas cookers, in a country devoid of any source of natural gas to the average Haitian. The media followed the misguided event dutifully, while Haitian observers wondered aloud if AID had taken leave of their senses.

The days immediately before the elections were calm, perhaps under directives of the mischief-makers, who knew that the Western press and diplomatic corps would intensify their scrutiny of the process. Some believed the rush for voter registration cards was a quest only for individual legitimacy, since the cards were the only documents many Haitians had as their way to certify their existence as citizens. No one was prepared for the immense voter participation, which actually took place May 21.

Congressman Ben Gilman (R-NY) published an open letter to former and future President Aristide May 19, calling on him to renounce publicly the many acts of violence made in his name over the previous weeks.

The letter received no response.

In anticipation of the Sunday parliamentary and municipal first round of elections, the parachutists arrived — journalists from AP, AFP, Reuters, the Washington Times, the L.A. Times, the Chicago Tribune, U.S. News, the Economist, the Miami Herald, Time, Libération, L’Express, National Public Radio, and the Boston Globe among the minority who made their presence known to us in the press center installed at the Montana Hotel for convenience in filing and getting up-to-date information.

Completely blindsided to Haiti’s unique circumstances and lacking the perspective of the current context, a number of them made pilgrimages to Mike Norton, AP’s 15-year-veteran in the country, closely connected to all the key players. Mike was generous with his information to
competitors in the curious way journalists have, of sharing with rivals when sequestered in extraordinary circumstances. He opined, smoked his pipe sagely on the balcony of his unelectrified tiny flat overlooking the city from the heights of Petionville, and helped them locate “minders” who, for a fee, could help them negotiate Port-au-Prince’s daunting traffic and puzzling jargon.

However, many were instructed by their editors back home to come up with something a bit different from the others, resulting in Norton’s laser-accuracy dropping from sight in their final, filed stories.

In his insights and oversights of the large context, and the microcosms within, Mike showed the highest standards of journalism, playing no favorites and vilifying no one in his own dispatches. While my respect and affection for Mike was and is profound, we both understood that during the elections an unspoken professional code meant independence from each other, as we worked for two organizations whose interests were not identical. We did, however, stay in close touch on the day of the election, comparing via cell phone what we observed from different corners of the city at the polling places.

Saturday the 20th came and went with a national ambivalence of fear, expectation, determination, dread, disenchantment, and above all, a wish to demonstrate to the gathered press and outside world that Haitians, well aware of the stigma against them, could have a normal country like others.

What happened on the morning of the 21st was a phenomenon no one had predicted: a voter turnout of immense magnitude, overwhelming the system’s meager abilities to accommodate the masses whose recent history in 1987 and 1990 equated “election” with “massacre.” Undaunted by their own recent history of electoral troubles, Haitians appeared in wave after wave, comparable to their forbears who had overcome Europe’s mightiest armies with their sheer numbers, two centuries earlier.

The polling places in Port-au-Prince, unprepared for the numbers, simply remained shut for the first four hours of the contest, cowering
perhaps in the little soda stands and private homes flying the blue flags of the temporarily designated voting stalls, maybe fearing that the crowds might overrun them and their inadequate supplies of ballots. Contrary to custom, Haitians formed silent and orderly lines even while sweltering under a cruel sun, and guarded a pervasive silence as if engaging in a consecration. Hundreds, thousands — by the end of the day, over three million — came to register their mark in what for many was the first opportunity ever, to perform as full citizens of a modern, if flawed, state.

But in Haiti, as the expression goes, “Analfabet pa bet” — “the illiterate ones are not fools” — and the same voters reverted to despondency two days later when it was clear to everyone that the elections had been flagrantly, needlessly rigged. As the evidence came pouring in — signs of missing ballots, stuffed ballot boxes, genuine ballots dumped in the street along Lalue and the Rue Pavé and into the bay, thugs invading polling places at the moment of the preliminary count under the watchful eyes of official observers of all parties in the contest, government trucks seizing marked ballots at sunset and disappeared with them — one domestic servant, her proud yellow blouse stashed away forever more, said only “Haïti fini.”

One polling place official in the provinces had clutched the real ballots to his body, managed to slip away as the thugs invaded his doorless voting stall. In a nameless act of civic heroism, he hid the ballots under his bed through the night until they could be legitimately counted the following day. Of 11,000 BV’s across the county — “voting bureaus” — very few were not defiled or robbed or disrupted in some way.

Everyone knew that Lavalas had “stolen the election which was already theirs.”

One Haitian commentator, quoted by Georgie Anne Geyer in her *Dallas Morning News* piece observed, “A climate of terror, comparable to the worst days of dictatorship, is developing in our country.”

At a press conference at the Montana Hotel early May 22, a tiny Congressional Delegation of Reps. John Conyers (D-MI) and William
Delahunt (D-MA) pronounced the event a success in that no deaths had occurred.

Asked by the Signal FM reporter about his name listed on the masthead of the Aristide Foundation, Conyers lost his composure for a few seconds, then allowed that his membership in the organization “could create the illusion of a conflict of interest.” He promised to quit, but never did.

Soon after the journalists and observers departed, the round-ups commenced, beginning with the arbitrary arrest of opposition candidate Paul Denis of Les Cayes, who was hauled to a tiny jail in Petionville far from his home, and thrown into a cell of four meters by four meters, with sixteen other prisoners. The sequestered souls in the sixteen-square-meter area had to take turns sitting and standing, as there wasn’t room for all sixteen to sit at the same time, let alone recline.

The country’s rulers had spoken; now it was merely a question of getting the imprimatur of the Provisional Electoral Council to legitimize the outcome.
Even as the U.S. CODEL gave its positive reading on May 22 and as the OAS began drafting its agonized analysis of the counting process, Haiti authorities rounded up ten more opposition leaders in Jacmel, apprehended national OPL leaders Gaston Thernelon and Hyppolite Milius, with “Espace” leader Jean Limondy (also the owner of a radio station in Petit-Goave).

A small aircraft flew over the city of Gonaïves, dropping leaflets naming specified opposition leaders and independent journalists, and threatening them with death.

A few hours after the Conyers briefing that my PD office arranged, we returned to our offices at the Rond-Point of the Boulevard Harry Truman.

A commotion built across the way, directly opposite my office window. My Haitian staff explained to me that the dozen dancing Haitians in the street were members of the tiny RPC party [“Rassemblement des Citoyens Patriotes”], housed in a small shack across the Rond-Point opposite our office. By dint of calculation or determination or wishful thinking, they were celebrating the “victory” of their candidate as Mayor of Port-au-Prince.

I observed as a Haitian police vehicle charged the small group of revelers, and tossed tear gas canisters into their midst… a fearless soul in the street with “perfect pitch” lifted the canister off the street and tossed it back at the police with flawless aim, getting it into the open passenger window of the police vehicle, which sped away in almost comical panic.

Then followed an eerie silence, the sort that only Haitians can understand as the calm before the storm of the terrifying kouris which over-
took our little corner of the city so many times in my two years there.

Within five minutes or so, a large crowd charged down the Avenue Jeanne Marie from the opposite direction, chanting “Aristide ou la mort!” and pelted the dozen revelers with lethally aimed rocks. Perhaps 500, they took the site and pummeled the few RPC personnel who hadn’t managed to escape from the silent attack. One was photographed by video sitting up and feeling the back of his head with his right hand to ascertain, under the copious blood, whether his cranium was left or not. He was Jean-Michel Holofen, later incorrectly reported in the media as being killed.

The little RPC headquarters, a rented two-room house, was trashed and looted, never to be occupied again.

A contingent of the attackers, bearing banners with the Lavalas slogan “Vle pa vle,” “Come what may ...” pursued and caught one of the RCP members slower on his feet than the others.

Observing the scene with me from my window and interpreting the confusing scene for me, my staff said fatalistically, without visible emotion, “Celui-là, on va le tuer,” “They’re going to kill that one.”

It was hard to see exactly what was going on through dust and confusion, the hail of rocks-turned-to-missiles, and lingering tear gas. They hauled away the indestructible “dead” Jean-Michel Holofen, who fooled fate and resurfaced ten days later to lure his own boss into a foiled ambush. Loyalties in Haiti can be total, but are sometimes staged with different ground rules than our own.

I later acquired a video taken from street level, yet more brutally graphic than the view from above — left at our office door anonymously by someone intrepid enough to have kept the camera going through the commotion. Again, even the precision of the English language falls short of providing a word to describe the happening: Massacre? Attack? Battle? Row? All and none of the above, it was not easily described until you had seen the video.

I shared the video with some U.S. television networks, but none felt their audience would be able to stomach it. They evidently considered it
too grisly even for reality TV. Thus the truth was withheld from Americans who otherwise might have been interested in the destruction in front of the U.S. embassy geographically closer to Washington than any other in the world, save the chancery in Ottawa. Not only were the ballots strewn in contempt in the streets (as visually aired in Canada on the CBC coverage of the election), and opposition leaders tossed into medieval dungeons, but now the few who refrained from joining the juggernaut were being cut down in the streets in full view of the U.S. Embassy.

The Mayor of Milot, a town in the north near Cap-Haïtien, issued a statement exhorting all non-Lavalas members to “commit suicide,” as well they might for the opportunities awaiting them in the new regime.

Naively American still, I was unable to see what was going on and remain silent. During the rocky commute to work May 26, I drafted a short statement in the tottering and bouncing van transporting a half dozen of us to work. The statement was slightly “tweaked” by embassy colleagues, then sent to the National Security Council in Washington for clearance and returned to us edited, the same day. After a mild bureaucratic cleansing it came out thus from the Public Affairs Bureau of the State Department in Washington:

The United States notes with increasing concern the climate of intimidation in the wake of the recent elections. Particularly troubling are reports of arrests of prominent opposition political leaders and the intimidation of journalists and political activists. We condemn the violence and call upon the Government of Haiti to use restraint and to take immediate measures to rectify these incidents. Those responsible for acts of violence and intimidation should be immediately identified and brought to justice. Finally, we urge all Haitians to use restraint as the electoral authorities continue the process of determining the electoral results.
I got the green light to go on eleven Haitian radio networks with my French version of the statement.

Fortunately for some of those detained, in the year 2000, Haiti was still in the twilight of its fear and caution of the U.S. Government (later not to be the case.) Quietly, opposition leader Paul Denis and six others were freed from prison the next day; Haitians assured me that their release was the direct result of our statement over the radio waves.

Meanwhile the OAS developed a tortuous rationale for blessing the elections themselves, while objecting to the single “irregularity” of the way majority voters were tallied. To bless the elections would have been a travesty, and would have damaged the OAS’s credibility. Still, to condemn them outright would lead to daunting scenarios of staging the whole costly opera yet again. Understandably, the OAS took a middle course to leave open various options while everyone caught their breath. They issued the following statement June 3:

The OAS Electoral Observation Mission notes that according to the provisions of the Electoral Law the methodology used to calculate the vote percentages for Senate candidates, which were released earlier this week, is not correct. These vote percentages serve as the basis for determining which Senate candidates would have been elected during the first round of voting. Article 64 of the Electoral Law establishes that, in order to be elected Senator in the first round of the polling, it is necessary to obtain an absolute majority of the valid votes (50% of the valid votes + 1 vote).

Following the provisions of this article, the Mission has analyzed the Provisional Electoral Council’s data and has concluded that, instead of using a method in accordance with the above-mentioned article, percentages were calculated on the basis of the sum of the votes for a limited number of candidates
who obtained the highest vote totals.

The Mission would like to emphasize that, according to the Electoral Law, the CEP is the sole institution authorized to officially proclaim the final election results.

*Organization of American States, Port-au-Prince, June 2, 2000.*

All the observer governments, including the U.S., jumped in to concur with the OAS and follow their lead, and to hide behind their watery shadow.

Little did anyone know that a diminutive, elderly man of French classical training and understated modesty, shoved aside as a Lavalas factotum and figurehead in the rubberstamp and unnoticed Provisional Electoral Council, was about to take the scene after Hamlettian equivocation and change the equation entirely.
Part Five
Léon Manus
A retired law professor, universally respected and known believer in the Jean Bertrand Aristide of 1990-1991, Leon Manus had been dusted off at age 79 and made President of the extra-legal—but-accepted-by-all-parties Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) in mid 1999. His job was to oversee the logistics of the elections with the help of international funds and expertise, then announce the results. Everyone knew Lavalas would make a strong showing on May 21, if not sweep the whole caboodle.

I met Manus for the first time on May 28, when he came to my house for dinner, and expressed dismay with the way things had gone since May 21. He was in the grand dilemma of his life, either to go along with the pre-cooked scenario and give up the honor he’d worked 79 years to earn, or to oppose a flawed process and get people hurt, likely himself.

Very ill at ease that evening in my house, he seemed dispirited and exhausted. At one point in the dinner, his dismay came out: “I don’t believe in these elections; they have no credibility.”

He had received death threats if he should fail to announce the results as cooked by the Palace, including a warning that the airport would be blocked if he tried to flee the country. The leadership had understood from his delays that he was not with the program.

A mutual friend told me that Manus had had mood swings, and when feeling fearless and immortal, had said, “My name is Manus, not Minus! They won’t make me say lies!”

A more ominous reality had taken him over on the evening of May 28, when he spelled out the various consequences if he chose to defy the ones with power. They could kill him, but far worse, they could get...
his wife, his children abroad, his extended family and friends.

He sought a way out of his dilemma. May 28, he asked me if the U.S. government might “nullify the elections,” relieving him of having to do so. A non-starter, I said. With the OAS more or less allowing the process to go forward, and lacking condemnation from the CEP itself, there was little the U.S. government could do by itself. Léon then looked up with a self-deprecating smile and said to me, “You see? We are all accomplices. We must lie in order to survive.”

Afflicted and not knowing where to turn, he realized that time was not on his side. Already sections of the city had broken out in riots with the familiar burning barricades, orchestrated by pro-government activists demanding that the election results be made official immediately. The city would only become more turbulent as Manus stalled, seeking a way out of his predicament. Woeful at the end of the evening, he said to me, “Please don’t think ill of me if I announce a Lavalas victory Monday or Tuesday evening. I have my wife and children to consider.”

The 2000 parliamentary and municipal elections kept Aristide comfortably in the background: the presidential race would be held separately, some months later. At stake was virtually every other elected office in the country, with Lavalas determined to prepare a comfortable cushion so Aristide could glide into a mono-party structure, averting impediments to his agenda for getting Haiti back on its feet after decades of trauma.

Contradictory rumors circulated in the capital — one, to the effect that Aristide would wash his hands of the whole mess and designate someone else to be president when the time came; another, that he would sweep in and soon amend the Constitution to allow himself repeated or perpetual terms in office. He had already surrounded himself with formidable personal security apparatus, drawing in some cases on the same resources and individuals who had been employed earlier by Jean-Claude Duvalier, “Baby Doc.” The core of his security team were American guns-for-hire.
Meanwhile things began to happen which set everyone on edge: boat people took to the seas as they had during the military regime six years earlier; on May 29 a boat with 110 asylum seekers was returned to the docks at Port-au-Prince.

Flash points appeared throughout the city from day to day; breaking earlier patterns, the burning barricades moved gradually away from the city center and up the hills of Pacot, Turgeau, Musseau, and even the previously inviolable Petionville. The mobs intimidated anyone who did not join them; when they spotted journalists from independent radio stations they punched them out and smashed their equipment.

Tension in the city mounted, and June 19 the Port-au-Prince airport was shut down as mobs surrounded the area and cut off access to and from the outside world. The embassy endured multiple visits from chanting demonstrators and graffiti artists, apparently misunderstanding the distinction between “OAS” and “USA.” In the middle of one fracas June 19, two American visitors to the embassy imprudently exited into the street and were roughed up by the mobs, but rescued by Haitian journalists who sped them off in their radio-owned cars.

During this turbulent period, journalism professor Steven Pasternack visited us from New Mexico, undaunted by the ruckus, as he had had previous experience training French-speaking journalists in Rwanda. While Steven was with us he drew committed small crowds of practicing journalists seeking to become yet more professional, understanding that an independent “press” (read: radio) would benefit their troubled country. An intrepid group of 22 crossed burning barricades to attend Pasternack’s training sessions in our meeting hall, and received symbolic certificates June 23.

The city, meanwhile, was in the hands of 400 paid political activists, deploying and redeploying nimbly, coordinating their movements with walkie-talkies and assisted by Haitian government trucks delivering stones and tires fresh for burning at predetermined choke points around the city.
Lavalas spokesman (later Prime Minister) Yvon Neptune spoke through the CEP silence and declared the May 21 elections as “a victory for peace over violence.” Opposition leader Micha Gaillard, son of an eminent historian, responded in public “bon appétit,” meaning something like, “Here’s your meal, now go and choke on it.”

A stream of panicked imminent losers in the elections approached the U.S. Embassy requesting “asylum,” but there was no precedent or mechanism for dealing with them.

One opposition party, the MDN (the Mouvement pour la Démocratie Nationale), issued a tract announcing “civil war” and dropped the leaflets around the city.

Rumors persisted that Prime Minister Alexis had fled the country after being severely beaten by Aristide’s bodyguards in the first days of June: Alexis had refused Aristide’s “order” to expel French Ambassador François Gaudeul from the country for Gaudeul’s outspoken condemnation of the electoral process.

Friday, June 16, at the height of the tensions, Léon Manus went into hiding, and was rumored to be trying to get out of the country. The story raced around the city and country, stirring a hornet’s nest of rage at the Palace, and intense curiosity among the public.

As the city was “shut down” by protesters that day, embassy employees had been directed to stay in their homes. As one marine said over the Embassy radio system, “If you’re not home now, get there.”

My phone at home rang off the hook as news spread of Manus’s escape. Every journalist in town wanted the scoop, “la primeur.” Was Manus hiding out at the U.S. Embassy? The German? The Canadian? Was he already out of the country?

People knew only that a motorcade had been sent from the Palace to fetch Manus at home, but Manus had been spirited away not fifteen minutes earlier in a car traced to the USAID Mission. Government-controlled Télé Éclair aired a video clip of the AID vehicle assisting in Manus’s escape.
I had two responses to each of the many dozens of journalists, the same for each: one, I truly didn’t know where Manus was (I didn’t); two, in the interest of keeping the old man alive a bit longer I appealed personally to every journalist covering the story to kindly “embargo” or delay the story for just 48 hours.

If I came later to admire Haitian journalists, it was partly because each of them respected and understood the need to embargo the story, and all of them did so despite the intense rivalries among them and the temptations to break the story. Decency prevailed over getting the scoop, and the Haitian media made no mention of Manus’s dramatic escape until it was too late to stop him. Monday, June 19, Haitian government-controlled TéléEclair broadcast a video made of the USAID car entering another embassy’s residence, and plastering Haitian USAID employee Gérard Philippeaux’s face on the screen (the driver of the car), as if he were some sort of felon.

Philippeaux, too, had to flee the country. He now resides in the U.S., unemployed and waiting for conditions to change so he can return to his native country. The Haitian employees at USAID were summoned to a meeting and told by an American official that Philippeaux was “on vacation,” but the Haitians knew better.

Two months later, in Boston under the uneasy leisure of exile, Manus told me over tea that Préval and Aristide had made a joint call to him shortly before his escape, pleading with him to put the matter to rest and just announce a Lavalas sweep.

Manus’s Haitian obstinacy prevailed: “Monsieur le President,” he had said after being tantalized with Ambassadorships, Ministries, Senatorial seats, “With all due respect, at my age I haven’t got the time left in my life to make up for errors of such magnitude.”
After weeks of warding off OAS criticism of the CEP’s calculations in an effort to defend the CEP’s honor, Manus finally came out with the full weight of his soul and intellect June 21 from exile, in a statement issued on the Internet and read in entirety over many Haitian radio stations.

The document is too important an historical legacy not to quote in its entirety:

Statement of Leon Manus
June 21, 2000

In March of 1999, after frequent and persistent requests by the President of the Republic, and after careful reflection, I accepted, along with other citizens of Haiti, to become a member of a final Provisional Electoral Council [CEP in French] assigned the task of organizing on a national scale free, honest and democratic elections for all elected offices in Haiti, except for eight Senatorial seats and the office of President.

Considering the critical situation in my country and presuming that my reputation as a citizen of honesty and integrity could make a difference in organizing this electoral process, I agreed
to come out of retirement, put myself in the service of my coun-
try and thus make my contribution to a mission that I consid-
ered and continue to consider an act of high patriotism. When
my colleagues on the CEP gave me the privilege of presiding
over this important institution, I determined to honor their es-
teeem and to not deceive the Haitian people.

Not belonging to any political party and beholden to no clan
or faction, I committed myself to the service of my country.

Difficulties appeared with the very first steps of the Council.
There were technical, administrative and financial problems as
well as inherent weaknesses in the very structure of the elec-
toral institution that prevented us from keeping to the initial
timetable. In fact, even if the CEP is an independent organiza-
tion, it must depend on the active cooperation of state author-
ity to be able to accomplish an important part of its mission,
budgetary management, access to government media, prepara-
tion of security measures for voters as well as candidates.

In reality, from early on the CEP had to confront a lack of
understanding among some, ill will among others, a lack of co-
operation from governmental authorities — some at the high-
est levels. The public authorities were even suspicious of for-
eign assistance sought by the Council. As a result, the CEP was
forced to operate in an environment mined with obstacles and
hostility. Calumnies and threats were in profusion, some blat-
tant, some more subtle, often orchestrated by and through state
media.

I endured all this with serenity and patriotism. My honor and
dignity were often put through difficult tests. I always believed
that if, through the actions of the CEP, my country could end up with solid and legitimate institutions, no price should be considered too high.

The 21st of May was a moment of great satisfaction for the CEP and the entire country. Contrary to predictions, events unfolded calmly, and despite delays and logistical problems linked to weight and lack of access for certain pieces of the electoral machinery, the most persistent critics and foreign nationals had to admit that the day and the vote on May 21 were a success.

Glory and Honor to the Haitian People!

However, beginning the next day, objections began to take shape, putting the CEP in the crossfire of those who claimed victory and those who were charging a vast fraud. From one side and the other, pressures became stronger. The truth, as is often the case in these situations, was somewhere in the middle. But high passions assigned the CEP to one camp or another, while the responsible thing to do was to respect to the letter the execution of the electoral law regarding the entire operation, including the count, the tabulation of votes, the management of complaints and the announcement of final results.

All the more because some of these challenges were presumably legitimate, particularly when it involved the active role of some elements of the police in acts of fraud, theft of ballot boxes and falsification of sworn statements in the glare of scrutiny during the night and the day following.

The publication of some partial results were exploited by one group or another in an attempt to discredit the CEP. Even
the OAS Mission found it necessary to issue a warning that was interpreted in various ways.

While we continue to maintain our concern about the way the OAS statement was made public, I must admit that some of the issues it raised helped us delve more deeply into some of the technical issues and to recalculate the percentage of votes in strict adherence to the stipulations of the electoral law. Thus, the definitive results for the senatorial candidates are that only five [Manus’s emphasis] were elected outright in the first round. The majority of those who had the largest vote in the initial count should participate in a second round. This is the result of the final tabulations according to the terms of the electoral law.

These are the results that as President of the CEP, I expected to make public, in accordance with the rules of the Haitian constitution, ethical principles and fairness that must be the compass of all public servants. By doing this, I would remain faithful to the commitment that I had made to honor and respect the will of the Haitian people.

As soon as my decision was reported to the Executive, the pressures began to grow to convert these partial results into definitive results. This would be in absolute disdain of all considerations of justice and of respect for the electoral law.

From that point, my security was put in grave danger because I would never accept the incorrect results that did not conform to the electoral law. From the highest levels of the State, I received clear warnings of the consequences if I refused to publish these false final results. In fact, some groups of individuals who claimed to belong to an influential political party threat-
ened to subject the capital and cities in the provinces to fire and blood and to burn and destroy everything in their way.

Confronted by an ultimatum to immediately proclaim results that I considered illegitimate and incorrect, I found myself incapable of committing such an act of treason to my country at such a decisive moment in its history. I understood that the conflict — opposing my legal and constitutional resistance to the arbitrary intransigence of Power and the fury orchestrated by certain so-called “popular” organizations — was inevitable.

Such a situation left me no choice but to distance myself from the country to avoid the worst and to slow this unraveling. Without regard to personal interest, I have thus decided to turn my back to this electoral saga without a stain on my honor, my dignity and my patriotism.

I continue to believe in the democracy that ends dictatorship and that brings to man liberty, justice, the spirit of sharing and dialogue, well being and development.

I know that certain vindictive and hired men will not accept that men of integrity are capable of living in dignity in this land of Haiti. They are always ready to stain the honor of honest people. Then and now I condemn them in view of national and international conscience.

My fellow citizens, I continue to believe in the redemption of our nation, despite the vicissitudes of its existence. No people can live indefinitely in ignorance, division, insecurity, misery and injustice.

***
A month later, Manus told me that a U.S. official in Washington had pressured him to maintain silence, with asylum as a reward if he should comply. The approach was made by a U.S. ambassador, he said, with a congressman present. Manus considered this blackmail on the part of the U.S. government.

His June 21 statement was his response to the approach made to him in Washington. He has since made his own arrangement with the Immigration and Naturalization Service to live legally with his wife and children in the U.S.
Part Six
The Lavalas Fist
June-November, 2000
“Hell Hath No Fury...”

The Haitian regime was not amused. They had staged an election to please the “international community,” only to be rebuked by the latter for not following a higher standard. They’d been outfoxed by somebody in the Manus escape, and they didn’t even know by whom.

The Préval government learned from the experience. There was little in it for them to try to placate Western governments just so as to get their hands on blocked IMF and IDB (InterAmerican Development Bank) loans. The Westerners, for their part, were beginning to see that the ones in control were disingenuous at best in promising to produce Jeffersonian democracy like performing circus animals.

Behavior modification was breaking down from both ends, and what there was, was a failure to communicate.

Shortly after Manus’s escape, the Haitian government — in apparent violation of international law — boarded all outgoing aircraft with armed constabulary, demanding to see the passports of all 70-year-old women before allowing the flights to take off. It seemed they were determined to get Manus’s wife, believing she’d temporarily been left behind, and hoping to snatch her as bait, booty, or tribute. She, too, slipped through their fingers and made it to the same United States that had sent 20,000 marines only six years earlier to reestablish democratic procedures in the third hungriest country in the world.

Haiti was exhausted — its people, its government, its opposition. Western foreign ministries pleaded for dialogue and reconciliation, but the killing had taken the circumstances past possible conciliation. Moreover,
the opposition smelled blood in Préval’s increasingly clumsy fury. Opposition parties took the unprecedented step of covering over their differences, forming a united front called the Democratic Convergence, a loose coalition of former rivals who saw common cause in opposing a regime now characterized in the western press as “narco-state” and “dictatorship.”

Never before in Haitian history had a fragmented opposition worked together. On June 22 they announced en bloc that, given the troubled elections of May 21 and the uneven playing field, they would drop out of the second round of elections now scheduled for July 9. This infuriated some Western diplomats who just wanted the whole ordeal over with; and delighted others. The word “intransigence” was heard more frequently than before.

Journalists trickled in, befuddled at how the champions of the anti-dictatorial restoration could now so closely resemble their despised predecessors. They made pilgrimages to my office for background briefings, squinting skeptically at me as if I had somehow made up the whole thing. Increasingly I only shrugged and said, “Go out and see for yourself.” They did so, but tended to write in their dispatches more about poverty’s face, than of its reasons or causes. Their 48-hour visits did not lend themselves to analysis. He walked, looked, smelled and sounded like a duck, but Aristide remained unblemished in their articles, the vulnerable one swept up by uncontrollable forces committing unspeakable acts in his name.

He never disavowed them.

Saturday, June 24, my phone rang at home at 7:10 in the morning. Journalists knew not to call me at early hours on weekends, but the frazzled voice at the other end was not that of a journalist, it was Philippe Markington, calling from jail. A strange and skulking young activist, I had never managed to get a “fix” on Markington, except to note that I disliked and distrusted him. Somehow he’d gotten my private home phone number, and had called many times for no particular reason, al-
ways asking if he might come for a visit. I never permitted him at my house, but said “Come in to the office on Monday.” And he always would, dressed like a pimp in black turtleneck and gold pendent, and afflicted with wandering eyes, perhaps those of a cocaine addict.

He had shown me his ID some weeks before, as a card-carrying member of the Aristide Foundation, and also of the Port Authority which was known as the holding pen of con artists, something like a mafia without a nerve center. At the time I had sought instructions from senior officials at the embassy, and was asked to welcome Markington’s overtures, as they made up the only contact the embassy had with anyone in the Aristide Foundation.

The vigorous young Markington had approached me with repeatedly crude advances, saying he had “urgent” communications to share with me, and vague speeches about his change of heart after attending Lavalas meetings at which hit lists were drawn up by committee, with assassination squads being sent out to perform the deeds. The way it was all presented to me seemed too rehearsed, and too interspersed with his many insistences on the phone that “We are the best of friends, aren’t we?”

Clearly the Markington process was some sort of set-up, but I was genuinely not intrigued. I maintained as cordial and aloof a relation with Markington as I did with the many other characters who camped at my office, which was, after all, the only section of the embassy accessible to the public. In keeping with my policy of giving any lunatic five minutes of my time, I did the same with Markington.

When he offered me copies of assassination hit lists I always declined, while reminding him that my office was a place for open dialogue; I offered him a public forum if he had something to say to the press, but declined to enter into the conspiratorial dialogue he seemed to seek. His insistence and the frequency of his calls awakened my suspicion, but I knew Haiti well enough to know I would never know what was behind it all.
On June 24 he called from his prison cell with a Haitian official by his side, affirming from his side our great friendship and noting he was in desperate straits, as a suspect in the Jean Dominique murder of April 3. It slowly became clear that the Haitian government was fishing for someone to blame the murder on, and was exploring their chances of being able to pin the whole matter on me, for example. It was too clear to be clear, because in Haiti nothing was ever entirely clear. I imagined only that it would make sense for the Préval regime to divert attention from the election debate to its own self-inflicted wounds of the Dominique affair, which had drawn sharp rebukes from governments and watchdog groups around the world. They were so furious at Manus’s escape and his June 21 statement that they might have been gratified to retaliate somehow against the U.S. government by building a murder case against its spokesman in Haiti.

The above was and is pure hypothesis and speculation, but no other scenario seemed to make any sense.

Markington told me on the phone that he needed $2000 urgently, and that the unofficial prosecutor of the case would come by to collect it at my office. I was dumb enough to receive the call at home in the first place — no doubt being taped — but clever enough to say, “I’m concerned about your well-being, but even if I had $2000 I certainly would not hand it over either to you or some self-appointed prosecutor.”

I had met the “prosecutor” Willy Lubin in a happier context once a year earlier, but his status as prosecutor in the sensitive case had never been made official, or announced in public, or even rumored to be in the works.

Two weeks later, on July 7, Lubin called me at home and said he had to see me “urgently.” He asked to pass by my house but I declined. I agreed, rather, to see him in a public place, and suggested the bar of the Montana Hotel. I would have taken more precaution if I had known the call was to lead my “interrogation.”

Like a badly trained actor, at the hotel bar Lubin showed a strange concoction of his own personal terror and some contrived stridency.
Perhaps thinking that Markington and I were indeed “working together” (we weren’t), he first probed, terrified, to find out whether I had seen his name on any of Markington’s hit lists.

I said that since I’d never seen a hit list, so I wouldn’t know.

He seemed to take this as a bluff, then got on with the business of the evening, which was to try to extort $2000 out of me “for the protection of your friend Markington.”

He confessed he had stood by Markington’s side during the June 24 phone call, in which Markington had asked me if I were his “friend.” Having no reason to say otherwise, I had naively said yes. I realized at the Montana that a case was being built against me, but I’d never seen savvy Haitians behave so clumsily. I still doubted the obvious: that, through me, the Palace was seeking to implicate the U.S. Embassy in the murder trial of the decade, and to hang it somehow on my friendly interview with Jean from February 8. It seemed too crude and obvious to be anything other than a vague fishing expedition.

As if under cross-examination and bright lights (we sat outdoors on a balcony balmy night overlooking the majestic bay below), I endured the prosecutor’s strident tone: “You are Markington’s friend, aren’t you?” Instead of answering, I asked him where Markington was, and, if in jail, under what charges.

He said, “It will cost you $2000 to find out.” He added spitefully, “You Americans don’t know the meaning of friendship.”

If that’s what you mean by ‘friend,’” I countered, “then no, I’m no ‘friend’ of Markington. I would, however, like to know if he’s under detention and if so, under what charges.”

At that point, the prosecutor hit his lowest point, conveying a clumsy death threat.

“You diplomats think you have all the privileges,” he provoked.

“Unfair as it is, yes we do,” I answered.

“Well you know, you may feel safe at the airport on the way out one day, and things can happen on the tarmac as you’re walking out to the plane.”
I was trying to give the prosecutor the benefit of the doubt, imagining that perhaps he was engaging in this dialogue under orders from elsewhere. He kept at the Markington question like a pit bull terrier. Finally I shrugged off the whole thing, tossed five gourds at him in lieu of the $2000, and left. I later learned that the prosecutor wrote up the five-gourde (25 cents U.S.) incident as “a down payment” of the money to be extorted, and as evidence of a tight professional relation between Markington and me.

Though I knew the Haitian judiciary was one of the weakest links in the country’s holistically weak structure, I had never imagined how crude it could be when put to the services of political ends.

In the early afternoon of Monday, June 26, I alerted a senior official at the embassy that the Haitian judiciary seemed to have us in its sights. The disgruntled official — the same one who had asked me earlier to continue my contacts with Markington — said, “Whitman you got yourself into this. Now let’s see you get yourself out of it.”

I put it out of my mind for a couple of days, until late Wednesday morning, June 28, when my staff at the office became edgy in a way I had never seen them. One employee was chosen by the others to come in and describe the situation to me: our office was sealed off with an armored car blocking the downstairs entrance. Four armed men were advancing to our offices upstairs with nothing blocking the way but an unplugged magnetometer and two local unarmed Embassy guards of gentlemanly and even elderly persuasion downstairs. I’d never seen the staff lose equanimity through all the kouris and riots and murders we had all viewed just outside our offices. Now they had the fear of death in their eyes. They believed these men — one in a police uniform, the three others not — had come to kill us all.

Trying to think quickly, I remembered that Haitians had never before attacked diplomatic installations. There could always be a first time, I realized, but somehow I intuited that this was not to be that time. As the
four thugs approached the door to my office, my Haitian colleagues withdrew, wanting both to protect me and also save their own hides if shooting should break out for some reason. Following the four armed men came Markington himself, looking like something that had just rolled out of the deepest dungeon of the Bastille — emaciated, scarcely able to walk, and showing evident signs of physical torture.

I was shaken, and asked the thug in uniform what was happening here in my office. Was this fifth man a prisoner? If so, what was he doing walking the streets with four armed guards? Quickly enough I understood that the guards’ task was to prevent Markington’s escape, not to threaten me or my office in any way. They were awkward, courteous, fearful, armed to the teeth. The one in uniform, himself terrified more than the plainclothesmen, and not knowing the right thing to do, stammered something about “Markington — prison — one hour permission — must see Monsieur Whitman — special orders from the Petionville magistrate…”

I couldn’t fully grasp what was happening, but I saw in the broken Markington, and in the guards’ own panic, how deeply fear had sunk into every echelon of Haitian society.

Markington begged the guards for a moment alone with me. I feared he would shackle himself to a desk as any sane person might have done under the circumstances, and demand political asylum. The armed guards were certain only of one thing: he was not to be allowed out of their sight at any time. The back-and-forth began to seem so juvenile to me that finally I said to the uniformed guard I just didn’t care: Markington could see me alone or with others, it didn’t matter to me. Even more terrified, after a brief consultation, the guards relinquished him into my office (foolish on my part, as this was later written up by the prosecutor as proof of conspiratorial relations between us.)

Markington, stammering from fear and almost too weak to sit in the chair opposite me, said he’d been tortured every day for two months, and had been told that his only hope of release was to denounce me as
a conspirator in the Dominique murder. “Poor devil,” I thought, remembering Markington’s robust swagger during his previous visits, contrasting now with his completely broken spirit and skeletal body on this inauspicious day. The whole scheme still seemed too far-fetched to take seriously, but the fear in the uniformed man’s eyes and Markington’s pitiful condition showed me otherwise.

One human being to another, I asked Markington where he was being kept. Images of Stalinist Russia came to mind, but as I had said to the prosecutor at the Montana hotel, unfair though it may be, that I was a visitor in Haiti with unmerited privileges, mainly the right to depart — a right coveted and denied to the majority of Haitians. More than concern for myself or my Embassy, I was moved by pity for the broken man in front of me, who I sensed would never be seen alive again.

Markington seemed moved in turn by my pity, and convinced of my inability to help him out of his plight. He withdrew with the four terrified thugs, was driven off in the armored vehicle, his fate unknown to the time of this writing.

Some months later, after an exhaustive study by the Inter-American Press Agency, the IAPA report confirmed my hunch that the Haitian government had had several irons in the fire to turn the Dominique case either into oblivion, or into an act of retribution against one foreign government or another. The “Whitman” trail was but one of several incubators in the Palace labs.

At the time of this writing, after the resignations of three frightened prosecutors, and the flight of one of them to permanent safety in the U.S., the case remains wide open, unlikely ever to be solved through legal means.

That strenuous Wednesday I lamented poor Dominique, poor Manus, the poor befuddled Markington, and above all poor Haiti.

After seeing we would not be killed after all, my staff returned to the more important tasks of issuing student visa requests and press summaries, and concocting exchange programs that might, one day, heal the country or at least some aspects of it.
Undaunted by sinister turns in Haiti, musicians Nick Morrison and Leslie Timmons — a clarinet/flute duo from the University of Utah — stayed the course for their annual trip under our auspices, to make and teach music to students and audiences in Léogane, Port-au-Prince and Jacmel. With their presence they showed that some sanity remained somewhere in the world, and was open to share itself in a climate now yielding to paranoia at every level of Haitian society.
The Hornet Dozes

If the government of Haiti had reservations about U.S. behavior, the reverse was also true. Talking with Haitian journalists in his office in Washington July 18, Haitian Special Coordinator Donald Steinberg went on the record:

It is very difficult for the U.S. government or any other government to trust the officials elected based on the results of the recent Haitian elections. Nor is the [U.S.] government ready to finance any other elections in Haiti without the presence of democratic institutions… We will not be able to fund not only assistance to the elections but any assistance to the government of Haiti.

*World News Connections, July 20, 2000*

Now that each side had exchanged spankings, Haiti dug in for the long haul. Run-off elections had been held July 9, rebuked in advance by the international community, which sent no observers, just a brief visit by Anthony Lake July 7, greeted by “The Welcoming Committee” staging anti-Lake demonstrations in the streets of Port-au-Prince..

The Haitian government claimed 67 percent voter turnout and a Lavalas sweep. Haitian radio stations all over the country, however, reported apathy and polling places empty the entire day. The radios were geared up for high content, low-tech coverage, connected mainly by cellular phones with reporters from the provinces phoning in their dispatches from abandoned streets all over the country. The regime addressed the discrepancy
fancifully, by positing “stealth voting” by wily citizens, somehow sneaking into the polling places without being seen.

On July 9, the date of the run-off elections, 16 polling stations were ransacked in Gonaïves as National Police managed to be elsewhere in the city. Eighty-four houses were burned in Aquin in a drug-related settling of scores, apparently to avenge the Aquin villagers’ cooperation with the police in busting a small drug ring in the area. The bottom line from the U.S. Executive came July 12, with President Clinton’s letter to the U.S. Congress certifying democratic progress in Haiti, thus qualifying it to receive U.S. assistance funds.

Reeker, Boucher, Annan, Jesse Helms, OAS’s Orlando Marville, the EU, all questioned the mechanisms and outcomes of the May 21 and July 9 elections, but no actions followed their words.

The *Economist* published its findings July 22 in an article titled, “Haiti: a vote for misrule,” which noted the absence of any parliament in Haiti over the previous 16 months, with the July 9 elections “ignored by most voters.”

The *New York Times* had agreed the day after the voting, in David Gonzalez’s by-liner noting “Few Haitians Turn Out for Runoff Elections.” CNN meanwhile ran a photo on its website of dispirited polling station workers in the village of Villard, lounging and trying to pass the idle hours as not even a single voter appeared.

Haitians staged public rituals, praying to a pantheon of gods and ancestors for a Republican victory in the U.S. in November, staking their meager hopes on any change, anywhere.

Challenged verbally but unchecked in fact, the Lavalas juggernaut plowed forward, rounding up more opposition leaders, and in one case kidnapping Espace leaders from their homes in Maïssade and incarcerating them in a dungeon 30 miles away in the more pro-Lavalas town of Hinche.

Lavalas opponents now hid in their homes or languished in prison. One was dragged onto the television station, and made to repent publicly for ever having stood opposite the ruling party. With beads of sweat
visible and a tentative smile, he begged for forgiveness on prime time. The U.S. gave a response of sorts three days after the run-off elections, announcing the likely cut-off of financial aid to Haitian police and courts. Prime Minister Alexis responded, “The aid has been very, very, very minimal, so it makes little difference… We will tighten our belts.”

Espace opposition leader Serge Gilles responded on the radio, “We cannot tighten our belts any tighter than they already are.”

In order to make things perfectly clear, at a Bastille Day celebration at the French Embassy July 14, Development Minister Anthony Dessources addressed the international community and said of the elections, “These decisions are without recourse.” He then lifted his flute of French champagne in a friendly toast to the gathering at the residence of French Ambassador François Gaudeul. Four days later, the Prime Minister spoke publicly of “the hypocrisy of the international community.”

After two weeks, the French government issued a travel warning July 21, discouraging their citizens from visiting Haiti. (The U.S. followed suit four months later with its own travel warning posted on the State Department website November 17.) The Japanese announced a cut-off of their aid to Haiti July 22, pending an improved electoral atmosphere.

The situation drew ephemeral interest from the international press. The Washington Post ran an editorial July 27 noting “a creeping Lavalas dictatorship” and citing Lavalas renegade Léon Manus as “a hero.”

(The following day, unknown assailants broke the unwritten code of “hands off foreign diplomats,” tossing a grenade over the fence of Canadian Ambassador Gilles Bernier’s residence, damaging his car.)

David Gonzalez’s by-liner in the July 30 New York Times noted an increase in the cocaine trade through Haiti, quoting an unnamed U.S. official, “I would suspect there are [Haitian] officials who are involved. We have some evidence of that. The question is how high it goes up.” White House drug “Czar” Barry McCaffrey was quoted in the article as saying U.S.–Haitian cooperation was “collapsing” in anti-drug policing. “The political will… isn’t there.”
Meanwhile U.S. Representative John Conyers, D-MI, defended the Lavalas regime, praising the May 21 and July 9 elections in *Haiti-Observateur* as structurally sound, leaving only a dispute over tabulation methods. The *Haiti-Observateur* article (July 19–26) noted Conyers’s personal interest in the dispute, as a board member of the Aristide Foundation.

In early August, the Mayor of Milot in the Cape intervened to halt a U.S. military humanitarian aid project, which would have built an orphanage in his town. *Le Monde* ran an article August 5 by Raoul Peck, Haiti’s former Minister of Culture, saying Haiti “…is now more troubled than under the Duvalier regime.” The following day, U.S. police trainers closed down their program in Haiti and left the country.

Showing that their allegiance was to money, not ideology, on August 8 a mob of OPs occupied the Ministry of the Interior, refusing to depart until they received payment for services rendered in the streets of Port-au-Prince during pro-government political rallies.

By mid-August, price surveys indicated 44–52 percent inflation in the already battered economy.

On August 22, government agents entered the news room of independent Télémax and took the entire news staff to their new digs at Télé Timoun, the Lavalas television station just cranking up. The regime sought to foil the already tendentious television Nationale Haiti, owned by the now one-party government.

The West sputtered, launching not deeds but words, as U.S. Permanent Representative to the OAS, Luis LaRedo, said September 5 in Washington, “The Haitian people deserve better than this.”

By September 11 it was clear that Lavalas was on its own; they took the “silence-is-consent” principle to heart, failing only to understand that policy makers in the major capitals had given up and moved to more compelling issues. Fearing an international boycott on the day of the inauguration of its 47th Parliament, the Haitian government avoided the possible embarrassment by simply not sending out invitations to the
September 11 ceremonies.

The Parliament went into session, created committees and commissions, established the procedures for being paid as delegates and senators, then within two days went into recess. They decided it was better for the country to go into contemplative mode, and for the legislators to collect their paychecks from home, rather than create controversy or laws in their workplaces at the Place d’Italie.

A week later, former Lavalas supporter Chavannes Jean-Baptiste mounted an anti-Lavalas rally in the Central Plateau city of Hinche, putting 10,000 people in the unpaved streets during a peaceful demonstration of discontent over the government in Port-au-Prince. Lavalas answered September 29, as Spokesman Yvon Neptune reiterated to the media that the elections were “not negotiable.”

Cocaine meanwhile became an almost regulated industry, with a kilo going for $24,000 in Miami, but only $2000 in Port-au-Prince through unofficial wage/price controls making the commodity accessible to the public. OAS Secretary General César Gaviria said August 19 that “President Aristide seems ready for a dialogue,” and “might make accommodations to international demands to legitimize the emboldened Haitian regime.”

The dialogue of the deaf was now fully underway.
Faced with the increasing gloom lowered over the populace by a single party’s tightened fist, our little unit in the Public Diplomacy section of the Embassy borrowed from the obstinacy of the surroundings. We carried on with more media training and art restoration, and a session by Regional English Language Officer Paula Curry who visited from Costa Rica and had 75 Haitian English teachers howling approval after her three-day seminar at the end of August. We continued press training in Haiti and U.S., always including representatives of each of Haiti’s nine provinces every time we sent a group abroad.

One unusually feisty traveler from Haiti’s desperately poor Central Plateau — Nicole Mérancier — returned home to Fort Liberté and took the initiative of gathering 50 colleagues and briefing them on her information gathered in Miami. In a province so poor that people ate sun-dried mud patties with artificial sweetener as food, the group rose in a single voice and demanded more briefings from their tour’s emissary to our Miami training courses — and took up a collection to send Nicole back to Florida for more information and future briefings.

A year and a half later, Fort Liberté created the first public library in its two hundred year existence, whimsically naming it “La Bibliothèque Daniel Withman [sic]” for reasons I cannot exactly fathom, but which I think was done in a spirit of service to the community, in the name of one now absent from the scene. When I received a cell phone call in March of 2002 at home in Washington from a Haitian who had been present for the inauguration, I said, “Libraries are supposed to be named after dead people.”
“Here we respect none of the rules,” Jean-Jean had said on the phone, his voice filled with mischief and hope.

Newspaper stories appeared in Haiti on the training programs we conducted, creating some rivalry among groups seeking credit for broadening horizons during Haiti’s bleak period following the presidential elections of November 26. Far from killing their spirit, the elections had seemed to firm the democratic resolve of Haitians.

The word “Lavalas” was never uttered at our seminars. The agenda stuck to the principles of credibility, accountability, ethics which the Haitian media grew to believe as their best hope in a disintegrating system and country. They rode a crest of local prestige, earning pittances at best, but holding to a prized objectivity on the air in 200 local sites where the audience came to rely on them for word from the outside. As the reporters distanced themselves from the political fracas, they gained an audience in a country starved for information in forms other than gossip.

“Why don’t they talk about us more in your sophisticated U.S. press?” They would ask me in the sessions.

“Do as we say, not as we do,” was all I could say in response.

In September we sent NGO representatives to Washington to learn management skills and acquire networking contacts. The NGOs were community cooperatives, one of them packaging the local version of peanut butter and using the proceeds to build a school in the village. September 23 in my house, a “Mutuelle” working group was formed of graduates of the training, determined to provide for their communities the means of development not forthcoming from the central government.

The regime meanwhile caught on to the power of the media, and went about acquiring controlling shares in all the networks but three — Signal FM, Radio Métropole and Vision 2000. Most of the others — Ibo, Guinen, Solidarite, Timoun, Kiskeya — fell like dominoes to the approaches of the regime.
My notes from the week of August 21–27 read, “No one murdered this week.”

By the end of the month, with the government’s inability to subsidize gasoline prices any longer, the price at the pump increased by 44–51 percent.

Kelly Bastien, the former President of the lower house of Parliament, fled to Canada for safety and longevity. Families with the means to do so began leaving the country.

On October 22, we sent off the largest delegation ever — eighteen journalists — to observe the early November elections in the U.S., and hone their skills for coverage of their own presidential elections three weeks later.

The State Department meanwhile highlighted the “intransigence” factor with its November 1 statement:

Despite our deep disappointment with the intransigence of the Haitian government, we will continue to pursue our interests in Haiti. We will not abandon the people of Haiti.

The words rang hollow to Haitians.
While the political dialogue became tangled in the fall of 2000, Haiti matured as a cocaine transit point, offering the ideal infrastructure for the rest stop mid-way between the production plants in Colombia and the eager markets of the U.S.

Quickly enough it became evident why a single political party needed no breaches in municipal governments, as some mayors in even the smallest towns rallied to establish the welcoming network in a competitive world vying for the narcotics business.

Things went wrong only occasionally: one mayor of a small coastal town got himself killed by his own deputy in a dispute over who got what share of the profits.

Colombians, their Haiti headquarters at El Rancho Hotel in Port-au-Prince, kept a watchful eye over the Haitian connection which served their interests until peasants in the north discovered the worth of the white powder and began to kill the “mules” arriving in tiny Cessnas and “go-fast” boats evading the radar of the DEA.

In his August 9 article in the Washington Times, Tom Carter quoted another nameless U.S. official: “Haiti is a narco-state, no different than Panama under [Manuel] Noriega, when the state powers, the banks and police were either acquiescing or actively participating in narco-trafficking.” In his article, Carter noted that with rich countries now turning a cold shoulder to Haiti for its dysfunctional democracy, the cocaine trade served as “a quasi-substitute for missing foreign aid.”

A key linchpin in the process seemed to be the evasive Dany Toussaint, who had been detained in Miami by U.S. authorities in 1997, but re-
leased for lack of evidence. Suspected and under subpoena for the Jean Dominique murder of April 3, Toussaint touched base from time to time with judicial authorities, but enjoyed immunity of the Senate installed September 11, as President of its Judiciary Committee.

Following the natural law of transit countries (Spain had been one in 1990), Haiti soon became a consumer nation as well: Colombians adapted the price of a toke to Haitians’ meager budgets, creating the (subsidized?) two-dollar dose so as to get the citizenry more personally involved in the growing web. The Place St.-Pierre in the heights of Petionville became the Washington Square of the new euphoria, offered to willing or not-so-willing pedestrians running the gauntlet of the picturesque, grassy knoll of Petionville’s former graciousness.

Meanwhile seven tons of cocaine passed each month through Haiti — middlemen duly compensated — on its way to market in Miami and points north. Unscientific but reliable figures from the DEA estimated that about ten percent of the shipments were interdicted either at sea, or found hidden in the hulls and even keels of freighters making it to Miami.

Haiti starved, but a sector of society replaced the middle class as individuals relatively at ease. The money laundering went into opulent houses on the Route des Frères, and Tabarre beyond. Gas stations and state-of-the-art commercial centers went up in a country where the average income was less than two U.S. dollars per day.

Former unstated limits were removed as diplomatic missions began to fall victim to an ambient violence in turf wars over the coveted white powder. A U.N. employee in a clearly marked U.N. vehicle was shot in the head August 8, and evacuated in critical condition to Miami, where he died August 9.

Joanne Mariner published an analysis of Haiti’s elections on the Human Rights Watch website, expressing skepticism in a 92% Lavalas victory: “Democracy is rarely a matter of winning everything. In Haiti, where democracy is still struggling to take hold, the effort made to
award everything to a single party — via blatantly unfair electoral manipulations — is a disturbing portent for the future.”

October 20, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chair Jesse Helms published an indictment in the *Miami Herald*: “U.S. has let Aristide’s cohorts literally get away with murder.” In his blunt style, Helms accused the Clinton administration of turning a blind eye to a concoction of democracy betrayed, a flagrant drug trade, targeted killings and an even more strong-armed government during caretaker René Préval’s waning days as president of Haiti. Titled “Clinton-Gore policy on Haiti has been a failure,” the Helms piece began by listing six assertions:

Constitutional Order: suspended
Government institutions: dysfunctional
Political murders: on the loose.
Law and order: disintegrating.
Elections: fraudulent.
Drug smuggling: rampant.

No one in the White House or State Department challenged any of Helms’s claims. One intervention, 20,000 troops, a billion dollars since 1994, and the U.S. had little to show for the effort.

The Haitian government meanwhile took potshots at the U.S., blaming the downward spiral on U.S. deportations of Haitians from U.S. prisons, which Justice Minister Le Blanc cited as the main source of civil unrest in Haiti.

As the final political ordeal of Haitian presidential elections approached, the State Department repeated on every occasion a declaration crafted on September 6:

Absent meaningful action to address serious electoral deficiencies, the United States will not support the November 26 presidential... elections.
As the presidential campaign came closer, cash-starved Haitians suffered a 50 percent inflation rate during the single month of September 15 to October 15.

Aristide paid four unknowns to run “against” him November 26 and give the ordeal the trappings of an election. Few ever knew even the names of the four opponents.

By mid November, terrorists struck Port-au-Prince in the form of a single red truck, loaded with heavily armed sharpshooters with free rein in the capital, wounding and killing randomly as they fired into crowds waiting at tap-tap transport stops throughout the city.

Although no hard evidence ever tied the red truck to any political movement, curiously the Haitian police arranged to be absent at every shooting incident.

Street thug Ronald Cadavre, self-appointed spokesman of the Organisations Populaires, blamed the violence on “the opposition” in a statement to the press November 17. He followed, November 21, with a warning that any “disruptions” in the electoral process scheduled for five days later would result in “smoke and blood.”

Haitians voters caught the unequivocal message: “vote for us or die.” Most chose, instead, to stay at home November 26.

René Civil, another street thug and self-appointed spokesman, announced November 26 that voter participation had been at “70 percent.”

The only fly in the ointment of power consolidation had been the plane crash of U.S. citizen Hugo Gonzales November 24, as he was distributing Lavalas leaflets for profit from a small aircraft over the capital. He had tried to land his rented Cessna upside-down, and found to his dismay that the aircraft had no landing gear on its roof.

The day after Aristide’s return as President-elect (with five to fifteen percent voter participation) the U.S. State Department issued a rebuke of sorts: “The responsibility for remedying electoral flaws still resides with the Haitian authorities.” The problem was, no one was listening.
any longer to the U.S. or any other foreign government. The endgame was over. As for the Haitians, their anxieties had given way to paralysis.

The debacle had a meaning not yet revealed, on January 26, though, the *Wall Street Journal* ran a story linking Haiti’s downward spiral to personal financial gain on the part of the Clinton team back in Washington.
Part Seven

“Dégringolade”
December, 2000-July, 2001
President J-B Aristide’s “Zero Tolerance” policy, as implemented on April 20, 2001. On April 23, President Aristide publicly thanked the killers, residents of Cité Soleil, for “keeping the peace.”
Down the tubes; kaput; the sucking sound of implosion; downward spiral; free fall. Other terms approximate but do not quite signify the thud of dégringolade, the term I heard most often locally in 1999-2001 to describe Haitians’ heightened awareness of their sorry state. When they thought they’d hit bottom, Haitians saw with Aeschylean awareness the bottom turn into relative heights, compared to where they knew they were bound for.

Dégringolade was an awareness of doom from a people of sharp sensitivity, devotion to their neighborhoods and communal solidarity, and investment in faith in a Salesian priest and a mighty nation to the north, holding the Haitians’ hands on the path to depths not yet seen.
December,

Bloody December

The year drew to a close with shots in the night in all sectors of the city, from mid November to the end of December. In incidents of unknown origins, ten pipe-bombings left three dead and fifteen wounded in the capital. On December 2, one passenger on an early morning bus from Mirebalais to Petit-Goave to deliver pineapples to his family lay victim, his legs blown off.

“Agents provocateurs” was a phrase often cited in the capital, but Haitians were too weary of the wanton violence to ask probing questions.

In apparent mafia-like turf shoot-outs, three to four bodies appeared each day on the Route des Frères and Canapé Vert.

December 6, President Clinton sent a letter to President-elect Aristide, noting, “as I prepare to leave office and you prepare to return, I believe we have an opportunity to set the basis for a strengthened relationship in the years to come.” With some exaggeration, the Haitian government announced a “letter of congratulations” from President Clinton to Aristide.

After I received clearance to go on fifteen radio stations to deny the “congratulations” content of President Clinton’s letter, I unwittingly became a local hero, embraced and kissed at gas stations by crowds ecstatic over someone “sticking it” to the regime.

Representatives Benjamin Gilman (R-NY) and Porter Goss (R-FL) issued a statement calling the November 26 elections in Haiti “a tragic day.”
The U.S. had its own suspenseful politics, and on December 13, the U.S Supreme Court ruled in favor of George W. Bush, breaking the “Deadlock of the Chads” in Florida and making him the forty-third president of the United States.

No one knew what this might mean for Haiti, but many there felt that a change to the north might benefit them. Tentative celebratory vibrations passed through the Haitian capital over the Republican victory in Washington, but the wizened Haitian public knew not to have unrealistic expectations.
As American colleagues left the city for Christmas break, the embassy reached down the hierarchical chain and plucked me (fifth in rank) to run the mission for four days as Chargé d’affaires ad interim between the two holidays.

“Nothing will happen,” I was assured as I took up the mantle of leadership.

Christmas was a time of sadness in Haiti, as families struggled even to eat, let alone exchange gifts. Crime traditionally soared as pilferage mounted so that fathers could provide their families meals and symbolic gifts in the nominally Catholic country.

At its best the hilly capital turned into a wonderland of flickering lanterns along the unlit by-ways of the city. Christmas entrepreneurs sold candle lit cut-outs of churches and gingerbread houses, their warm inner glow evoking the short-day coziness as the nights grew longer even in tropical Haiti (20 degrees latitude north of the equator, marked by subtle seasonal changes which cynics divided into “hot” and “hotter than hell.”)

The winter holiday season had a magical quality as the intense heat abated and cash-strapped Haitians remained hell-bent on making a festivity of it even in their penury.

I took the reins of the embassy at midnight on December 19, charged with keeping it out of trouble until its Deputy Chief of Mission returned December 27. My own Public Diplomacy office was at a seasonal standstill as local employees took their own pauses for rest and family, retreating to Belleville, Carrefour, Pacot, and Delmas.
The week began with a report issued by the World Food Programme noting that 61 percent of Haitians suffered from “malnutrition”; and with the assassination on December 20 of former Parliamentary deputy Ward Ténor.

Enamored of high-minded associations, a group of Haitians formed something called “The Federation of the Forces of Law, and the Forces of Morality and Citizenship” (the FDMC) at the Montana Hotel late December 20.

More significantly for me, I learned the same day that as Chargé I would be hosting President Clinton’s Haiti mediator, Anthony Lake, with protégé Donald Steinberg and Caryn Hollis, a staffer from the “HIRC” — the House International Relations Committee.

As George W. Bush was already President-elect in the U.S., the trip was to be Lake’s last chance to kick-start a political dialogue and try to leave a positive legacy for the Clinton administration. As a close friend of Jean-Bertrand Aristide and official godfather of his two children, Lake had a Washington agenda to pursue, independent of any initiatives the embassy might have in mind.

Though I knew I would not be involved in the talks themselves, I nevertheless proposed a brief breakfast at the Montana Hotel for the 22nd: protocol required executive-branch emissaries from the U.S. government at least to check in with the embassy Chief of Mission before going their own way.

Port-au-Prince got wind of the Lake visit, and mobilized by blocking four sectors of the city December 21, and burning tires all over the city. Confusion reigned over whether the provocateurs sought to mar the Lake visit because of his failure to crack down on the strong-armed tactics of the regime, or whether on the contrary they were blasting Lake as an outsider seeking to influence President-elect Aristide.

On the evening of December 21 I gave some thought to how I might best use my single hour with President Clinton’s emissary. I had no illusions that my notions would go anywhere, but I decided to give it
my best shot, as it would be my only opportunity ever to get a hearing by those who advised a U.S president on the thorny subject of Haiti.

The embassy staff dubbed the visit “The Three Wise Kings,” as the delegation of three arrived so close to the Christmas holiday.

December 22 the city was in spasm as tear gas spread over the downtown area, forcing the embassy to shut down.

Meanwhile on the heights overlooking the squalor and magnificent bay below, I took the delegation to a quick breakfast at the Montana Hotel.

I was ready with a proposal for breaking the political deadlock in Haiti. It went like this: Led by French Ambassador François Gaudeul, the friends of Haiti (U.S., France, Canada, Venezuela) had urged a single “dramatic gesture” by the Lavalas regime to usher in an Era of Good Feelings. The idea was for Lavalas to perform acts of magnanimity and offer a welcoming hand to the opposition. Let killings be bygones, the reasoning went, but produce gestures to remove the impasse of Haiti’s present circumstances.

Tony Lake was aware of the notion on the part of the Friends, though no one had come up with a formula for making it happen.

“You are about to spend the day with Mr. Aristide,” I said to Lake over cantaloupe and coffee at the Montana.

“I am. What do you propose?” He wanted to give any formula a fair hearing, since all previous ones had failed.

I suggested that Lake get Aristide to take an opposition leader into his cabinet, “not merely as Minister of Postage Stamps, but something meaningful, like Prime Minister.”

Lake, Steinberg and Hollis drilled me as if at a doctoral defense, testing the notion against how it might discredit the Lake mission and yield no results. I argued that since there were no results anyway to date, Aristide might feel beleaguered enough to extend a bold and magnanimous offer. Such a move could at least get the international community off his
back and open the way for frozen IMF and IADB loans to rebuild Haiti’s shattered infrastructure and destroyed economy. Haitian public resentment was growing against Aristide for failing to make any improvements in their country.

“Prime Minister!” one of the others said as if I were completely crazed. “Why would Aristide offer such a choice morsel to his enemies?”

“So as to disperse the stigma of having created Haiti’s ruin,” I said. Lake sat forward, showing some interest in my idea.

“This might just be the way out,” he shrugged, instructing the two others to back off and give my scenario a hearing. Lake carried gravitas after eight years of brokering deals in Somalia, the Balkans, and other trouble spots.

“But what makes you think the opposition would even want to accept a part of the stigma?” one asked.

“I don’t think; I know,” I said. “One of them has told me last week he would like to give it a try.”

“Who?” was the inevitable next question. I named the opposition leader I had most confidence in, as a man of moderation and technical ability to run a government.

“It’s true,” one of the others said, picking up on Lake’s cue of wanting to give the idea a chance. “[Mr. X] is the only one who has kept down the rhetoric, has never accused Aristide in public of murder, and who has a broad political base.”

I added, “If you can convince President Aristide he has no other good options, you could come out of this day with something achieved, and could return to Washington with a deal in your pocket.”

Lake pondered a few moments and said, “It’s worth a try.”

The short breakfast ended and the team went off for their eight-hour meeting at Aristide’s mansion in Tabarre. I was grateful for having at least a single opportunity to posit a plan I believed in.

I learned later that Lake had indeed made the proposal to Aristide
some three hours into the meeting, and that Aristide had had an assistant place a call to the opposition leader, asking if he would be willing to visit Tabarre the following week to discuss a pluralist cabinet. The call was placed December 26; the opposition leader took the bait, and said he would come at the president-elect’s convenience to discuss the notion openly. He welcomed a second call to fix the time of the meeting. Unfortunately, like so many sperm never reaching the egg, the idea was dropped and the second call never came. Either Aristide had made the first call only as a way of convincing Lake of his good intentions, or he had actually considered the formula as a way to redemption, only to give it up after further reflection.

The opportunity came and went with no result, and I returned to the background December 27, relinquishing Chief of Mission status upon the return of the real chargé.

On the 27th the Cite Soleil slums boiled over in gang warfare, with dozens of small family dwellings leveled and charred by the end of the day.

The day following, a new form of crackdown came from the authorities, who passed open death threats to independent Radio Caraïbe, resulting in the shutdown of its broadcasting.

Marauders invaded five health clinics December 29, their workers and patients fleeced of their valuables.

And just in case someone may have not been listening, another bomb went off in a crowded street, injuring shoppers stocking up for the New Year’s celebration.

The year 2000 ended in sadness, frustration, live gunfire shot into the air Middle Eastern style, but a wonderful fireworks display that could put July 4 in Washington to shame. The revelers would not have mere social breakdown and dire economic conditions spoil one of their few chances at fun, and at being Haitian.
The Eight Points

Lake had not left Port-au-Prince December 23 exactly empty-handed. In a letter to President Clinton leaked to the press within minutes of its signing, Aristide promised improvements in eight areas — resolving the May 21 elections impasse; creating a new provisional electoral council; addressing drug trafficking; improving the staffing of the national police and including opposition leaders in the cabinet. The White House seized the opportunity, and issued a statement of praise December 28, and by the way, recognizing Jean-Bertrand Aristide as President of Haiti.

None of the eight points was ever implemented, but the document allowed the Clinton Administration a graceful exit, and a creditable legacy to the regime it had backed for eight years. It also gave a moment of respite to the beleaguered President Aristide, who was receiving condemnations from the local and international press, the U.N., the OAS, and even the region’s mini OAS, CARICOM.

The term “May 21 Senator,” with its implicit questioning of the legitimacy of those elected during the contested May 21 elections, sent Lavalas ballistic; every use of the term on the radio brought down a hail of death threats. One of those targeted was former Lavalas supporter Lilliane Pierre Paul of Radio Kiskeya, whose name appeared on a hit list of those slated to die, and read aloud at the St. Jean Bosco Church, with media present, by party loyalist Paul Raymond on January 9.

Representatives Benjamin Gilman (R-NY) and Porter Goss (R-FL) issued a condemnation the next day, repudiating the threats and attributing to Mr. Aristide “thuggish acts made in his name.”

The regime turned yet more macabre as Aristide sent out Christmas
cards with an elaborate signature including a crossed “t” in his name, which depicted a sketch of a coffin. A month later he offered a single red rose to the opposition, an ironically oblique message some took to mean, “This is meant for your funeral.” The threats were both implicit and explicit, causing consternation in Washington and despair among Haitians, especially the one hundred individuals singled out for execution in Paul Raymond’s St. Jean Bosco speech of January 9.

The outgoing Clinton administration noted the “Eight Points” as signs of progress, even as Aristide divested the police of honest officers and installed former macoutes who were now in his employ.

The new U.S. Ambassador, Brian Dean Curran, arrived January 4 with his agenda full, and presented his credentials January 12, the same day as Parliament went into session.

The following day, Palace information activist Guyler Delva seized control of the long-dormant Association of Haitian Journalists (AJH), publicly shredding in his hands a copy of its charter at a group gathering, after some of those present questioned the legality of Delva’s self proclamation as the AJH president.

The Palace had apparently noted the challenge and danger of a truly independent press, now fully organized nationally under a decentralized structure, which stood as institutional impediment to any personality cult. The founding committee had created the Haitian Press Federation (FPH) to have a rotating presidency, giving the lead to each of the nine provinces in turn and prohibiting that any province succeed itself for two terms.

The government was alarmed to see the thriving of a loose confederation of some 2000 journalists country wide, “not to be bought,” while offering up its own AJH which by Delva’s own reckoning had at most one hundred members, all of them residing in the capital.

Shortly after Delva’s coup January 13 at the Hotel Caraïbe, he went into high gear, denouncing his own former teacher Ady Jean Gardy and calling for Ambassador Curran’s expulsion from the country, from microphones in Port-au-Prince, Miami and New York.
A couple of genuine candidates for the AJH leadership had withdrawn after receiving credible death threats by phone. Delva’s friend and colleague Pierre Joel Jean agreed to be the straw man at the last minute, resulting in triumphal photos of Jean embracing Delva after Delva’s “victory” as new president of the well funded but largely shunned AJH.

This did Jean no good in the long run. He died of an “anxiety attack” in late 2001, cut down in his prime, evidently punished for a brief lapse in his party loyalty when he spoke out against the creation of a law limiting press freedom. Jean had learned too well from his trip to the U.S. in October of 1999. He sought but failed to marry the principles of professional journalism with strict obedience to the Party; he maintained this schizophrenic embodiment of opposing agendas until it finished him off as an athletic, 30-something soccer player at his peak of physical form.

Delva’s imprisonment for wife beating in December of 1999 had drawn public support from only one man — Ady Jean Gardy, who published a letter in *Le Nouvelliste* by one journalist in defense of another. But now in early 2001, Delva turned against his earlier mentor after seizing the AJH as his platform for indictments against the independent press in Haiti. Delva’s polemics rose out of frail arguments and scant support amongst Haiti’s rank-and-file journalists, but benefited from financial support from a Palace determined to burnish its image. With Delva the camouflaged lead, they went about reining in the larger stations, or delivering death threats to the hold-outs, or a cocktail of both.

As the stakes grew higher and murder became a reality, the independent FPH only gained in strength, even drawing together rival local press associations who understood that an unleashed AJH would mean the end of free expression in Haiti. They could not recapture the lost Haitian topsoil, the embezzled millions, the dysfunctional electrical and telephone grid, or their dwindling daily bread. But they knew no one could force them to give up free expression and accuracy in news casting.

The death threats mounted against those who employed the term
“May 21 Senators,” but in response, the term only proliferated, much to the Palace’s annoyance.

They could and did pick off a journalist at a time, but the FPH knew 2000 professionals could not be eliminated all at once, so long as some solidarity of the 2000 remained intact. And it did.

Eventually in spring of 2001, even Delva himself had to go into hiding, as the Revolution proceeded to devour its children, every bone and organ of them.
December 27, 2000

Dear President Clinton:

Scram's greetings to you and to your family.

What a pleasure it was to see our good friend Tony Lake and Ambassador Steinberg last week. We spent a very productive two days working and preparing the attached document. I confirm my commitment to the points made therein, confident that they will help strengthen the ties between our two nations where democracy and peace will flourish.

As the new year rapidly approaches, we wish you all the best in your new endeavors.

Sincerely,

Jean-Bertrand Aristide

His Excellency William J. Clinton  
President of the United States of America  
The White House, Washington, D.C.
President-elect Aristide probed for:

1. Rapid rectification of the problems associated with the May 21 elections through run-offs for disputed Senate seats or by other credible means. This rectification is being facilitated by the work of the Lizard Commission.

2. Creation of a credible new provisional electoral council (CEP) in consultation with opposition figures to rectify the problems associated with the disputed Senate seats.

3. Enhance substantially cooperation to combat drug trafficking, including implementation of money laundering legislation and expansion of maritime cooperation, building on the October 1997 agreement, in order to allow access for U.S. Coast Guard anti-drug operations in Haitian waters. Strengthen efforts, in collaboration with the U.S. and Dominican Republic governments, to interdict trafficking across Haitian/DR border.

4. Nominate capable and respected officials for senior security positions, including within the HNP. Ensure that there is no interference in the professional work and conduct of the HNP by members of Parliament and others. Take steps to enhance the professionalism and independence of judicial system.

5. Strengthen democratic Institutions and protection of human rights through the establishment of a semi-permanent OAS commission to facilitate dialogue among Haitian political, civic, and business leaders and through international monitoring of the protection of human rights.

6. Seek to install a broad-based government including “technocrats” and members of the opposition.

7. Initiate new dialogue with international financial institutions concerning sound budgetary proposals and economic reforms to enhance free markets and promote private investment. Such measures will be aimed at reducing poverty and stimulation growth.

8. Negotiate agreement for repatriation of illegal migrants.
January 20, the day of George W. Bush’s inauguration, with little warning and no fanfare, trucks silently delivered the long-contested FRAPH documents from the U.S. Embassy to the Haitian Foreign Ministry and left them on the Ministry’s front steps. (The ‘Front pour l’Avancement et le Progrès Haitien’ had been the repressive paramilitary set up by the “Coup” regime of 1991.)

The documents, seized by the U.S. military September 19, 1994, as it unseated the Cédras dictatorship, contained references to some U.S. citizens who had been complicit in the chambers of horrors of the Cédras regime. The U.S. government had argued for five years that Haiti’s unworkable justice system was inadequate to deal with the evidence in the former military’s files — after all, in 2000 over 90 percent of those detained in Haiti’s jails languished for months, even years before even being arraigned or formally charged with any crime.

By the time the 60,000 pages of documents became worm-eaten and illegible, however, the U.S. acted to divest itself of a bone of contention which led to anti-U.S. demonstrations every September 19, the day U.S. forces stared down Cédras, reinstalled Aristide, but kept the documents for themselves. The manoeuvre drew little notice from the press. January 23 an announcement was issued from Washington, which went largely unnoticed.
More noteworthy was a *Wall Street Journal* article published January 26, addressing the mystery of President Clinton’s consistent support for a fraying dictatorship in little Haiti: the article documented links between a group called Fusion International, composed of Clinton loyalists Marvin Rosen, Thomas (Mack) McLarty, and Joseph P. Kennedy II, as the privately imbedded entity in Haiti’s publicly owned telephone company, and which received exclusive rights and profits on all overseas phone calls made from Haiti to points abroad. Aside from the cocaine trade, Fusion International was the most lucrative money-maker in Haiti.

The Haitian opposition demanded an investigation into the charges leveled in the *WSJ* article, implying a quid pro quo: Money from Haiti’s meager coffers to the Clinton group, in exchange for laissez-faire over a single-party regime in the Western Hemisphere’s poorest country.

But no investigation ever took place, and Fusion International continues drawing revenue to this day.

A hail of secondary indictments came from the U.S. press:

*WSJ*, 1/26: “Clinton’s Haiti Policy Deserves Prompt Scrutiny”

*WSJ*, 2/7: “Our Man in Haiti” ("...a case history on how U.S. fecklessness can make a bad situation significantly worse.")

*Foreign Report, Janes Information Group*, 2/1: “Trouble in Haiti” ("... Haiti goes down the drain... Most Haitians see only one solution to their plight: to emigrate, legally or illegally to the United States.")

*Human Rights Watch Report*, Feb: “Aristide’s Return to Power in Haiti” (“inadequate response to political violence... democracy in tatters ... review the results of the May elections...”)

Even before the *WSJ* exposé, the Aristide “election” November 26 (some said, his “selection”), mainstream U.S. and international media decried the process:

*Los Angeles Times*, 12/1: “Aristide is Not the Way for Haiti”

*The Economist*, 12/2: “Haiti’s embarrassing election.”
Miami Herald, 12/27: “Haiti’s Election was a Charade.”
Washington Post, 12/29: “Another chance for Haiti” (“Mr. Aristide evidently has realized that most of the world, including the incoming Bush Administration, is likely to write him off.”

The sole voice raised in Aristide’s favor was that of multimillionaire Fusion International entrepreneur Joseph P. Kennedy II, who on February 7 published his op/ed in the Boston Globe: “U.S should help Aristide rebuild Haiti.” The op/ed took at face value Aristide’s commitment to the December 23 “Eight Points” and soliciting financial aid to help him realize them.

The Haitian press on its part depicted the Lake/Steinberg visit as wholly pro-Aristide, noting in the December 27 Nouvelliste “The opposition in total disagreement with Lake and Steinberg,” while Le Matin the same day characterized the mission as “fruitless.”

February 7 Jean-Bertrand Aristide was inaugurated President of Haiti. Knowing the ceremony would be avoided by heads of state, Lavalas got the whole thing over with as quickly as possible. Howard French of the New York Times was quoted that day as saying Aristide was to “govern a community of nearly seven million [sic] people with the aid of fear and a tight circle of friends.”

When chided later for U.S. acquiescence in the debacle, Ambassador Curran teased his interlocutors at a public gathering in Cap-Haïtien: “The U.S. government did not honor the ceremony, but instead sent the lowest-ranking official possible: me.”
It was time for a breather. In my case this came in the form of visit from a high-level official from Washington, who stayed as a guest in my house and got the 48-hour whiplash version of seeing Haiti. He did not yet know the country, though he’d visited and known well most of the Latin countries to the south of the U.S. I’ll call him Al.

I was glad for the respite of a highly sentient newcomer from previous Foreign Service incarnations, curious and graciously absorptive of the sensory overload Haiti produces in all circumstances.

Al and I sat on the verandah into the evening, ice clinking in our tall glasses as we reflected over life’s unpredictable swings, the conundrum of Haiti, ever-changing nuances of the content and personalities of our profession — news from the capital, events and efforts at the farthest stretches of our modest world of embassy press and culture sections. “Public Diplomacy” had been at the front lines of our missions abroad, modest in its budget and its ability to scoop up the local lore and to serve not only as the voice, but also the eyes and ears of our embassies overseas. Those of us bitten by its bug (anthropological curiosity, lean programs to expand the collective consciousness, managerial strivings to assist our local employees as they steadfastly assisted us) meant to keep it that way. “PD” colleagues’ visits were always welcome.

Al and I went on tightly timed visits at community cooperatives, media offices, ramshackle university buildings, so he could get a sense of the programs that came out of the Washington budget for Latin America. Not only the 1996 Government Performance Reporting Act (GPRA), but also our consciences led us to frequent self examination, mindful
that “our” money came from the U.S. taxpayer, and wanting to believe that the modest funds were well used to advance U.S. and human interests overseas.

Even in Al’s short encounter in Haiti he produced a fine idea to put $5000 into Voice of America coverage of Haitian daily life — its rickety but vibrant commerce, its religion, family life, festivals, community endeavors — to vary the mainly political coverage on the VOA Creole service, the world’s most popular VOA feed in percentage of listenership.

Al met Haitian opinion leaders, independent media owners, and innovative village activists all trying to help nudge their country beyond poverty and political impasse. His presence drew to my residence some I’d never met myself, and also served as gathering point for people who knew and honored one another but never had occasion to gather. Any branch or aspect of the U.S. Embassy seemed to offer them a protective embrace in a now lethal city where going out in the evening had become a death-defying act.

At dinner on the second evening Ambassador Curran joined us, fresh and deep into his learning phase after arriving in early January. Now only a few weeks into this tour, the Ambassador already had a pretty thorough grasp of Haiti’s complexities, and of the individuals who stood out as leaders in their respective fields. He had done masses of preparatory homework, and came with probably the best knowledge of the French language that any emissary to Haiti had ever had.

Testing out the extra leaves of my new dining room table so it could seat 14, I placed the ambassador opposite myself towards the center of the table, with Al to my right so I could help him with introductions, peculiarities of the language, and the encouragement one needs when confronting new types of food taken from the local market.

After the toasts, and twenty minutes into the meal, Ambassador Curran very tactfully leaned toward me and in understated a parte English said, “Dan, have you noticed the table is collapsing?” He’d chosen a moment when the guests were talking at a sound level to override the impending crisis.
I glanced down in time to see one of the center leaves of the table beginning to succumb under weight of a flower display and the baked chopped corn dish next to it. Flushed with panic, I crossed my legs under the table and supported the collapsing weight with my right knee as the Ambassador followed suit from his side of the table. It took some stamina to keep the left ankle raised to keep the right knee up under the vulnerable area of looming social calamity, while moving the conversation along and getting the folks in the kitchen to refill the wine glasses as needed.

The collaboration went off like a circus act, the man spinning plates at the ends of sticks from the hand, chin, head, leg, and waist. Good sport and perceptive observer, the Ambassador joined me in saving the occasion. If any of the guests even noticed what was going on, they, too, were too tactful to seem to notice. One of them, seated next to Al because of her command of English, refused to use it and added another spinning plate to my circus act, that of trying to sum up the gist into English of a group conversation that had turned to deafening din, leaving Al a bit on the sidelines, where his presence was our reason for the gathering. The Haitians’ suppressed need to see one another took over from the original purpose of the event. We three Americans looked on with pleasure anyway, as we saw a massive need for collegial contact being met. Mission accomplished: we saw the group’s dynamic take its own shape, so we mainly just followed, as the ambassador and I did the ankle-and-knee pose to keep the table from collapsing. In fact I noted fewer elbows on the table than would usually be the case with eleven Haitians, so it could be that they caught on to our ruse and went along with it, struck especially by an Ambassador’s subtle assistance. In fact keeping that knee up for two hours took some endurance.

Experiment triumphant but not to be repeated: I never again tried to seat more than eight at the table. Larger groups (there were many) we handled as standing cocktail parties, with seats deployed around the room for groups of three to four.
The next day, Al’s quick visit ended with an anguished dash to the airport, where he was to go off for a glimpse at the next post down the line, Santo Domingo.

The rue Haile Selassie, the main thoroughfare to the airport, was rutted and cratered, non-negotiable by even the most courageous and solid Landrover.

The stalwart Maximé took the back alleys and unknown by-ways which would get us to our destination. With consummate skill he avoided holes and ruts whenever possible, he advanced at the pace he knew necessary to get our Washington visitor to the airfield on time. Never in thirty years had Maximé missed a deadline or botched an appointment or pick-up.

Al’s eyes grew wide with a newcomer’s amazement, puzzled that the route to the national airport could be so tortuous, while at the same time trusting Maximé in doing the necessary to get him to the airport.

After twenty arduous minutes testing the Jeep’s suspension system to the limit, Al broke the uneasy silence and said to me in the back seat, “Dan, I knew this place was not doing so well, but this is … really squalid.”

“I think you’ve got it right,” I said.

I thought back to previous trips to towns like Port-de-Paix in north, where the “airport” was a four-by-five meter cement shack. The “control tower” was a man in a blue T-shirt without microphone or earphones, gazing into the sky from a grassy slope, pointing up to an arriving two-engine plane and announcing its arrival in three languages: “Isit ap vini avion-an”; “Attention, l’avion s’approche,” “Attention, the airplane is landing.”

The landing strip doubled as goat crossing, drying patch for laundry stretched out under the sun, soccer fields, and rutted pedestrian shortcut from one end of the tightly packed community to the other.

The plane would pass over the landing strip a first time to warn off the soccer players, goats, and washer-women, then circle back for a second
approach before finally landing. We would disembark from the tiny Russian-built aircraft, ready to deploy for a journalists’ training session in the town’s lycée. Maximé would always be our first visual contact, leaning proudly on the freshly cleaned Jeep he had driven the day before along the world’s dustiest roads, so as to be at the airport in time to meet us as we landed.

My reverie broke as Al and I turned down an unpaved residential track, gouged out by rain and erosion. Maximé pressed on at six miles per hour, too fast for comfort, but at the speed necessary to get our VIP to his international flight on time.

Just as Al said “squalid,” a lengthy cadaver came into view, stretched across the rutted path. Maximé artfully manoeuvred the vehicle to avoid the deeper ruts, and also to swerve respectfully around the already mangled human corpse so as not to mash it more than it already was.

A few uncomfortable minutes passed, as Al grabbed the seat beneath him, battered by the rough crossing and taken aback by the gloom of a rotting corpse untouched, and as if unnoticed by busy pedestrians hustling through the crowded alleyway.

Curiosity got the better of him: “Dan, what was that?”

I wasn’t sure exactly how to answer, without making the question seem dumb: “Well,” I said. “That would appear to be a, well, you know, a dead guy.”

More uncomfortable minutes passed, with Al gripping the seat harder and searching for a context.

“Dead? You mean as in…heart attack?”

“Well actually,” I said, “You might have noticed the blood streaming out of the head along the street,” I said, trying not to belabor the obvious.

More uncomfortable minutes.

“…But who would do such a thing? And how? With a gun?”

I pointed out how the cadaver was missing a quarter of its head, so was likely the victim of a blow from a brick or rock. This threw Al even
more off balance. I felt sorry he would leave Haiti with a final image of horror and carnage, when beauty and courage lay beyond view.

More questions from Al: Who would do such a thing? And why? And how? And who has the responsibility to remove the victim for burial or cremation? How long would he rot in the street before being picked up?

I realized I had no good answers for Al’s inquisitive curiosity and shaken senses, nothing better than “It’s part of life in Haiti, I only wish more people knew about it.”

Exasperated, I leaned forward to Maximé who seldom intervened in visitors’ conversations, but closely followed them.

I asked him in French, “Maximé, can you explain to our visitor what we have just seen”? He did the funny thing with his mouth, as if chasing around a loose tooth with his tongue.

“Ehn bien, Monsieur Whitman,” he answered without hesitation, as if poised with his analysis. Answering in French, he boiled his thirty years of toil with impressionable Americans, mixing circumlocution with the pithy essence of the truth. Though I had known and respected Maximé for 18 months, I hadn’t known him quite as capable of abbreviated sociological interpretation as he showed in summoning his diagnosis of the dead man in the street: “What we have just seen, Monsieur Whitman, is a man who wanted to do something, but who unfortunately did not have time to finish.”
Al’s visit marked three-quarters of my Haiti tour completed. Eighteen mere months, but a quarter century in images never forgotten, killings growing ever closer to the people I’d befriended, and plaid-versus-striped discordance between what was and what was said.

January 19, four bombs exploded in Port-au-Prince, one of them blowing off the legs of a nine-year-old girl.

January 25, police battled angry crowds in front of the Rex Theater off the Camps-de-Mars. Two days later a meeting called the “Etats-Généraux” was held, an allusion to the first action in Paris in the 1780’s which had led to the French Revolution.

January 28, Jean Fritz Jean, the Prime Minister’s driver, off duty, was shot five times by unknown assailants on the rue Dalencourt.

Electricity prices increased by 50 percent February 1, wiping out small businesses, some 2000 of which filed for bankruptcy in the following months.

A week later, shooting broke out at night in front of the U.N. Mission, leaving one dead, one wounded, and one arrested. A new Prime Minister (Jean-Marie Chéréstal) was named February 9; gunfire battles broke out the following days in the streets near the embassy, policemen murdered.

Haiti seemed plunged into a death wish, tracing a centuries-old pattern. A resolute calm came from the patterns it best knew to go by, with a growing cold shoulder from a baffled outside world.

Jean-Bertrand Aristide was inaugurated President February 7, largely unnoticed by the outside world. He received a letter of congratulation
March 1 — and little else — from newly installed U.S. President George W. Bush. The letter, putting to rest the question of Aristide’s legitimacy, was published on page one of Le Matin for all to see.

The yearly carnival celebration February 26 to March 4 left the government coffers empty of the few million gourdes set aside for the yearly pageant, with Haitian police declaring victory when “only 130” were wounded during the celebration, and none killed.

In early February Haiti figured in at least 19 publications and news services, noting the 130 injured in Carnival celebrations and the political impasse in the country. The Miami Herald called on Aristide to “take the first step” in rescuing Haiti from calamity.

March 5 my office sent ten more Haitian broadcasters to Miami for training and encouragement, and brought back English language specialist Paula Curry to Port-au-Prince to conduct another animated workshop on the pedagogy of teaching English.

Also March 5, the day Jean Gerard Dubreil was named new police chief of Haiti’s rapidly shrinking police force, three petrol bombs were lobbed over the wall of my residence, causing little material damage but missing by a couple of meters the unprotected head of the night watchman seated near the entryway of my house. Had the gasoline-filled Pepsi bottles struck the watchman on the noggin, he would have been a goner. Of the three bombs, only two detonated. The third left the unexploded fuse — an eight-inch strip of cloth — lying in the courtyard. Some said the mischief was a message to the U.S. Embassy, a response to my earlier December 7 radio statements denying Haitian government claims of receiving a “congratulation” letter from President Clinton.

My inventive and playful cook retrieved the wick from the driveway — a cotton strip, still smelling of gasoline — and fashioned it into a papillon bow tie. She presented it to me with laughter the following evening at dinner. I framed the tribute with a legend below: “March 5, 2002.” It remains in my office today, an item of pride. The in-house joke was that the incident gave a whole new meaning to “[Molotov] cocktails on the verandah.”
Less trivially, Signal FM commentator Michael Soukard went into hiding the same day, after a cascade of death threats, pursued by armed bandits.

During the same week, the numbers of Haitian families immigrating to Canada tripled from the year before, as the struggling middle-class began to vote with their feet. New Prime Minister Jean-Marie Chéréstal appointed Joseph Philippe Antonio as Foreign Minister. The U.S. Government had nothing to say about Antonio’s alleged role in abducting U.S. Ambassador Knox in 1973, nor possibly in a dramatic heist of the Bank of Canada in Port-au-Prince.

In early March, the New York Times published an op/ed entitled “Can Aristide Govern in Haiti?” and answering the rhetorical question as a simple “No.”

At around the same time, Haiti police spokesman Siméon Jean Dady acknowledged at his Thursday new conference that crime levels in Haiti had noticeably risen since Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s inauguration February 7.

“Condolences” and “sympathies” poured in to me for the March 5 bombing of my house. I answered, “Condolences are for dead people. Thanks anyway.”

The Inter-American Press Association meanwhile published its study on the assassination of Jean Dominique, naming Senator Dany Toussaint as a prime suspect and referring in passing to the “Dan Whitman file” as a lame attempt to divert attention from the Haitian government itself as the perpetrator of the deed.

The IAPA was kind enough to share with me the Haitian government brief on the Dan Whitman connection.

Bloody conflicts continued, leaving 12 wounded in Petionville March 14; on March 15 most of Port-au-Prince was shut down by Lavalas activists erecting flaming barricades for no stated reason. The power-affirming movement gained in crescendo to March 19 when the Champ-de-Mars was blockaded, and March 20 when shadow government president Gérard Gourgue’s private school in Port-Morin was attacked by
police and helicopters, traumatizing the pupils caught inside the build-
ing.

Witnessed by dozens of Haitian and international observers and jour-
nalists, the incident was declared by Haitian government Spokesman Jonas Petit as “never having happened,” as the Haitian Senate voted unani-
mously March 22 for the immediate arrest of Gourgue on charges of “treason.”

The U.S. Embassy meanwhile cited a “yet more improved” security atmosphere, and in an apparent cost-saving measure, ended “Authorized Departure” for American dependents the same week.

March 20 Le Nouvelliste issued an appeal to no one in particular, citing “Fear and Anarchy” in the capital, “siege of Gérard Gourgue’s headquar-
ters,” — and the “headquarters of [opposition] OPL attacked.”

The appeal went unnoticed by foreign governments, though 200 Aristide supporters opened fire on OPL headquarters and Gourgue’s private school the same day, coordinated by a Haitian government heli-
copter plainly visible overhead.

Political violence in the provinces meanwhile left three dead and 16 injured.

The U.S. government response came in the form of a statement by State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher March 20: “We urge the Aristide government to respond quickly and professionally to pro-
tect all the people of Haiti.”

The Aristide government did respond, with further threats to retired law professor Gérard Gourgue, as Aristide Spokesman Neptune pressed for Gourge’s arrest for treason.

Shipwrecks of would-be émigrés left 50 dead the same week and Aristide cleaned up the Haitian National police, installing former Tonton Macoute Jean Leslie Lucien as its Secretary General, with Jean Gérard Dubreil its Head of Security.

Further crackdowns focused on independent Radio Signal FM, which was told by motorcyclists to “prepare for attack.” Radio Métropole
reporter Jean Max Blanc meanwhile was attacked in Petionville and robbed of his tape recorder; on March 21 the widow of historian Roger Gaillard was attacked by firebombs in her Petionville home.

A letter from former Black Caucus D.C. Delegate Walter Fauntroy to U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said, “If Jean-Bertrand Aristide refuses to change his behavior, his departure from power should be demanded … as was the case for Jean-Claude Duvalier.” The letter, leaked to the press on March 25, never received a public response.

The *Village Voice* and *Los Angeles Times* spoke of “impending civil war,” again without response.

March 30, French weekly *Le Point* called Aristide “A Papa Doc with a new face,” and a Haitian U.S. Embassy employee swallowed rat poison in a botched suicide attempt.

Corpses appeared in greater numbers, and OAS Deputy Secretary General Luigi Einaudi visited Haiti for the sixth time in eleven months, to no avail, stating in a superannuated seventeenth-century French construction, “Si ç'eût été à moi…” (“If it were up to me… [this all would have been fixed a long time ago.]”)

The Haitian radio and press roundly condemned Einaudi for disdain for the Haitian people, and ineffectual meddling in the country’s affairs.

We sent twelve more journalists to Florida April 7, for training and encouragement, and a sojourn away from Haiti’s political and economic scene.

Republican F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr. (R-WI), visited Haiti with Democratic Aristide supporter John Conyers (D-MI) April 10-12, but cut the visit short when no results came of their talks. Conyers was seen at the Miami airport embarrassed, drawing his neck and head down into his trench coat, when a Haitian journalist spotted him there.

Previous taboos were broken as U.S. businessman Marc Ashton was abducted April 5 for ransom twice on the same day, outsmarting the kidnappers a first time by feigning cardiac arrest and getting them out of the getaway car to fetch water for him, as he sped off using the keys left
in the ignition. Also U.S. citizen Edith Omega was beaten with a lead pipe in her home, the apparent victim of off-duty police moonlighting to augment their meager incomes.

Sad days descended on Haiti, a scenario already too well known. One gaily colored tap-tap donned the slogan, “Si je le fais bien, pourquoi je mérite de mourir?” — “If I do everything well, then why do I deserve to die?” Cries of help mounted to indifferent skies. Two thousand small businesses filed for bankruptcy. The Mayor of Port-de-Paix was kidnapped for ransom.

The U.S. government meanwhile replaced its travel advisory April 17 with a new species of “Public Announcement,” remaining on the record in warning travelers away, while at the same time noting a security climate had “improved to some degree.” The purpose of the Announcement never was evident, but had something to do with budgetary strains of maintaining Authorized Departure for dependents of U.S. Embassy staff.

In the middle of these troubling events, a flower bloomed, the inauguration of the Toussaint-King Center for Non-Violence in Pacot. On the auspicious Sunday of the ceremony, Ambassador Curran and Justice Minister Gary Lissade gave speeches lauding the efforts of the Center in its new Pacot offices.

An hour after the ceremony two of us drove down a back street on our way home, and saw a sort of holographic hallucination: the janitor of my PD office, dressed in his Sunday best, braved the noonday sun in walking from his home in super-violent Martissant to the ceremony which he understood to be an event of significance, even through the veil of his impaired mental powers. His sister, who had been hospitalized some months earlier after receiving a random bullet through the arm and lung, seemed to give him impetus for attending the event. While the janitor understood the Center might not achieve non-violence in his country, he walked unaccompanied through the blazing heat of the downtown area, giving up his Sunday in order to show solidarity for the only
non-political, non-violent event in the city that day.

Thoroughly lost in the back streets of Pacot, he advanced resolutely to a place he did not know. He would never have found the site of the event if the two of us had not chanced upon him, gotten out of the car to embrace him, and sent him on his way to catch the waning, final moments of a silent tribute to hope for a better Haiti.
In late March, 2001, in the absence of any action by any government to intercede in the Haitian crisis, remote Gabon issued a parliamentary resolution from Libreville, calling on Aristide and his opponents to find a way together out of political deadlock. The March 22 resolution called “on the [Provisional Electoral] Council and [European] Commission to resume genuine consultations with Haiti, where the economic situation is increasingly precarious.”

Jealousies and rivalries between two competing press clubs built in Cap-Haïtien, where Ambassador Curran gave a press briefing on April 12. One group, seeking to pre-empt the other, staged an anti-Curran demonstration outside the building where he spoke, with paid thugs warning people not to enter the hall (but not succeeding, as the hall filled with 200 journalists and others willing to defy the picket line outside and attend the event.)

One of the ringleaders confessed to me in an April 17 letter that he had played a role in the boycott, asking for forgiveness because he had “a family to feed” and was an employee of VOA. An active member of the Palace’s “Association of Haitian Journalists,” the culprit got a wrist tap from me, but enjoyed moral and financial support of the U.S. Embassy in 2002, after my 2001 departure.

A deepening rift developed between word and deed on everyone’s part, except that of the opposition which had only words at their disposal, and no chance to convert them to deeds without even a single ministerial or parliamentary post in the one-party Haiti State.
April 20–23 President Aristide attended a Western Hemispheric Summit in Quebec, after a brief controversy in Canada over whether he should be invited. In his departure speech at the Port-au-Prince airport he made curious allusions to the human brain being equal in weight to the skin of a dead human, stripped of bones and organs. He exhorted his followers to “keep the peace” during his three-day absence. After his supporters massacred thirty rivals from the little town of Bon Repos — burning some of the victims alive — Aristide returned from Quebec April 23 and publicly thanked them for doing so, and for having gotten the true meaning of his message from April 20.

The same week, the Lavalas Mayor of Hinche, Dongo Joseph, was arrested for physically beating a judge. Justice Minister Lissade struggled to keep Joseph in jail, but later buckled under pressure and allowed Joseph’s release a week later.

Other victims fell, a driver for “Food for the Poor” shot dead April 23, and 19 killed April 26, victims of vigilante “justice” which usually meant retribution against Lavalas opponents. Even insufficient ardor in support of the Party was sometimes enough to bring the torches and machetes of paid mobs.

No foreign government mentioned or condemned these killings, but at least fourteen news organizations did, including AP, Reuters, The Miami Herald and the New York Times.

Kidnappings proliferated, with a pickup May 7 of a journalist from Côte d’Ivoire, later released for the exact amount he happened to have in the bank, $400,000. The kidnappers had turned sophisticated, and calculated well the worth of their victims, with a sliding scale to exact from each the amount they were worth.

The next kidnapping victim was Internet Café entrepreneur Jonas Guillaume, who paid off his captors and fled the country some days later. Later in May a Catholic Relief Service worker was shot and killed.

On a separate track, and for reasons best known to itself, the regime
sought to discredit Ambassador Curran. They put AJH Secretary General Guy Delva to work in Port-au-Prince, Miami, and New York, denouncing Ambassador Curran and calling for his expulsion from the country. Delva did so on a couple dozen radio stations, and in written form which was publicized (as a paid advertisement) on page one of Le Matin. I went on fourteen radio stations in turn to make it clear that we honored the members of the AJH, and that “as soon as the AJH gets a leader worthy of its own members, the resumption of friendly cooperation from the U.S. Embassy will be immediate.”

May 18, Haiti’s “Flag Day,” President Aristide addressed the nation in a lengthy discourse from Arcahaie, in which he compared himself to Alexander the Great. All embassies found the atmosphere too charged to put in their traditional supporting presence. None attended the event.

It began to dawn on the Haitian government that the international cold shoulders had a deeper meaning than protocol snubs: $500 million in World Bank and InterAmerican Development Bank loans, held in reserve for four years until Haiti should get a viable government for itself, were stuck on technicalities. Once the Lavalas regime woke up to the fact that the money would never flow under present circumstances, they went ballistic after the winks and promising innuendoes over the previous four years. Whatever informal nods the Clinton administration may have made in private were now off the books under the new Bush presidency in Washington.

On the night of May 23 an empty, used coffin was dumped in front of the main gate of the U.S. Embassy for all to see.

Former military leader Prosper Avril was arrested at a book signing on May 27, and on May 30 Dany Toussaint took to the air waves to name me (read: “The U.S.”) as bagman in the Jean Dominique killing a year before.

The regime sputtered with rage. As negotiation after negotiation with
the opposition broke down and multiple OAS visits yielded no outcome, Lavalas spokesman and “Party Leader ad interim” Yvon Neptune let loose a burst of threats June 1, calling for the “cleansing” and “disinfecting” of the opposition as a pre-condition for further talks.

June 3, *Le Nouvelliste* published a public opinion survey, indicating a 2.2 percent approval rating for the Aristide-Chéréstal government.

The next day seven senators “resigned” to clear the way for negotiations, but in fact continued drawing their salaries from home, merely not attending parliamentary meetings. The U.S. Embassy hailed the move as a “positive gesture.”

In early June, shootouts in front of the U.S. Embassy claimed unknown numbers of dead; 30 were killed June 14 in Cité Soleil Carrefour-Feuilles, Delmas, and Pacot, believed to be victims of an assertion of power by the well-armed factions belonging to Dany Toussaint.

Two days later, June 16 yet another prosecutor in the Jean Dominique murder fled for his life to the U.S.

On June 21 President Aristide issued a “Zero Tolerance” speech, exhorting citizens to apply justice to any individual they did not like. The same day, a mob in Cabaret seized three unarmed men, bound them with barbed wire, dragged them through the streets before burning them alive.

Far from condemning the incident, Lavalas put out party loyalist Wilner Content to state that all members of the opposition deserved the same fate.

Nearing the end of my tour in Haiti, at the end of June a constellation of diplomats descended on Port-au-Prince to try to finesse the situation.

OAS Secretary General César Gaviria, his deputy Luigi Einaudi (the latter’s tenth visit), Senator Christopher Dodd (D-CT), NSC Latin American Chief Arturo Valenzuela, all landed in a worn-out Haiti to talk sense to both government and opposition. They came with the public endorsement of U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan.

Talks were held at the Montana hotel, in what seemed Haiti’s last
chance. Exhausted journalists milled around for 36 hours waiting for news of a possible breakthrough.

After arduous day-and-night negotiations under the watchful eye of the outsiders, the two sides come close to an agreement which would have gotten some concessions from each, and relief at last for the Haitian people.

Only the believers were proved wrong; within two hours of the outsiders’ departure July 1, the talks broke down and each side retreated, glowering, in its own corner.

I packed up my household effects and got ready for my Friday-the-thirteenth departure. I had misgivings. Though two hundred journalists and community leaders had gotten training, and a press federation was created of 2000 independent reporters in all parts of the country, Haiti was in a shambles.

At my departure ceremony a representative of the Haitian Press Federation stepped up to me and threw a ribbon around my neck, with a medallion naming me “Knight of the Order of the Journalists of the North.”

Some Haitians had gained courage, expertise, self-respect, and forward drive during the two-year period. None but the drug lords, however, got a full meal, a rule of law, any basic protection against bullets in the night, or a safe home to live in.

*Le Monde Diplomatique* wrote, “No tourists, no aid, no government: Haiti’s business is drugs.”

How did the whole sorry mess ever come into being?

It would be chilling to suppose that the *Wall Street Journal* might have gotten it right in its editorial of May 29, 2001. The presidential election of November 26, it said, was a “sham” with five percent voter participation (embassy observers figured 15 percent.) Worse yet for U.S. prestige, Aristide hired lobbyist Michael Barnes at $55,000 per month (1992–95) paid out of frozen Haitian bank assets, to promote his cause in the U.S. The jugular: Haiti’s long distance telephone connections to the U.S. — the third most lucrative trunk line in the world — had put real money
in the pockets of the exclusive holders of those rights, going to a company called “Fusion International,” the company exposed in the January 26 WSJ article. The Journal now named Clinton friend Marvin Rosen, reporting to a board of directors consisting of Joseph P. Kennedy II, Clinton’s White House Chief of Staff Thomas “Mack” McLarty, with John Sununu tossed in for good measure, and Joseph P. Wright, former director of the Office of Management and Budget under President Reagan.

The article noted that Kennedy denied having any connection to the matter, though his name still appears on Fusion International’s website. Notwithstanding Kennedy’s claims, he did publish under his own byline in the February 7 Boston Globe, “I was proud to bring more than $1 million in private investment from Fusion to Haiti.”

The Journal editorial of May 29 left an ominous insight: “We do wonder if this is the tip of yet another Clinton iceberg.”
The night of July twelfth, I sat in the remaining couch in an echo-ey study of my house of two years, now emptied by the movers. Gone were the many pounds of stuff that had made the place a home of sorts — the relics and booty of three postings, the photo book of South Africa, the plaque presented to me after a session I’d given at the Centre d’Etudes Diplomatiques in Port-au-Prince, the metal sculpture of birds departing from the flat surface of the gasoline can background, the hand made white and yellow wicker chair.

I checked my passport and ticket for the next day — American Airlines 1646 — and listened to the crickets and tree frogs in the vast garden I had never used, near the woods in the back of the house. At the edge of the garden, in the dark, loomed the empty pool I had never had time to fill with water, and which was now home to geckoes and their prey, the slower insects foolish enough to wander nearby.

The cook who slept in the house four days a week had refused to look at me the day before, as the movers finished up the removal of the cartons; nor had she faced me, I think in pain at the abandonment of yet another American from the house where ministers, journalists, businessmen, artists, other embassies’ officials had found conviviality and food and drink with her steadfast help.

As I sat on the couch of the now empty room, images formed on the emulsion of my two years of memories:

**The photo lost:** a man with a face of cracked brutality (victim and culprit, both?) as if the first to emerge from Cro-Magnon caves, marked by the dehumanizing costs of enervating physical labor.
Standing at the basin of the lowest point on the rue Montjoli, motionless, an immense plastic pot with its sumptuous bouquet of flowers balanced on his head. In his hand, a luxuriant bunch of unopened lilies, picked fresh for delivery to …??

Stepping over a sleeping leper blocking the entryway to my office Saturday, April 14, waking him with the clatter of my eleven keys to open the doors and padlocks on the way up to my third-floor office. The leper wakes up despite my efforts to respect his sleep. I give him 100 gourdes, about six dollars U.S. “Mesi blanc,” he says (“Thank you, Foreigner”) before slipping back to slumber.

The eleven-year-old at the office door, nowhere to go, nothing to do. Always with a smile.

Comratel, the journalism institute in Cap-Haïtien, with its library of lovingly stacked books, none less than fifteen years old. The narrow passageway to the sound studio behind, where the visitor had to turn sideways to order to step down the tight corridor.

A man slowly bleeds to death on the front steps of the General Hospital, shot and untreated after two days waiting for admittance.

A mad naked woman runs through the streets of Petit-Goave March 19, 2000, suffering the taunts and thrown gravel of teenagers. Black armbands of mourning for the lost elections.

The howls of approval in Hinche from journalists at an evening beer, as I suggest they establish contact with their colleagues by Internet. (Cries in the wilderness.)

The teasing antics of costumed youngsters in Jacmel in Carnival rehearsal, their disciplined silence except for the flapping of their papier mâché beaks and satinous, ribbed bat wings.

Port-au-Prince’s one working traffic light, at the corner of la rue John Brown and la rue Martin Luther King.
The *fou du village* in Pacot, saluting at attention in his loincloth, with the passing of every U.S. Embassy vehicle.

I drifted to sleep on the plane the next day, noting the defeat of the Haitian people and my own unworthy efforts to prevent it.
We end where we began, on a tuft above the rue Dalencourt, with our nameless Haitian boy crying disconsolately, and ourselves unable (unwilling?) to intercede or help.

“Stop the car!” we might say, but the muscular and stuff-necked Haitian driver forges on impervious, the only way he knows, as we ourselves would, over the smooth-planed route 66 west of Arlington, Virginia. Nor would a single intercession rescue a nation in dire need.

At the time of this writing, Luigi Einaudi has just completed his 27th unsuccessful mission for the OAS, trying to jumpstart a political dialogue. I can hear his condescension yet over the Haitian radio — “Sì c’èût été à moi…” (“If only left to me…”)

What remains goes burrowing into the soul in aural form: the shrieks of joy as the electrical grid unexpectedly brought light to a dark and teeming neighborhood; the strident demands for restitution by prostitutes at a beach on the north coast, their livelihood destroyed by a repaired fence keeping the tourists and ship crews in from contact with the locals; the horrifying, uniform moans of the kouris, driven by rage, elation, attack, retreat, panic; the roar of the crowd below the rond-point, kicking a man to death, then fleeing when they realized they had mistaken the identity of the victim, retreating in horror when they saw the dead man was not a thief after all.

As one remembers the nanoseconds of moments of stress, I now recall thinking as I observed the scene helplessly from above, “Victims and executioners, all the same: none had ever gotten to see an autumn in New England.”
What I learned from Haiti and its deathly embrace with the greater powers was individual innocence, collective guilt. The unchecked power of the single demonic individual and sycophantic clique over a gullible populace, unequipped to face evil with... even self defense.

This principle was evident to anyone with eyes to see and ears to hear, but there seemed none such driving policy from Washington, or Paris, or Ottawa.

After I returned to Washington in summer of 2001 people told me, “It takes twelve months to recover from the post-traumatic stress of Haiti.”

What, then, of the Haitians themselves? Cramped on their gorgeous, miserable island, at what point do they get to commence their twelve months of “recovery”?

Neither Republican nor Democrat lifted a finger to intercede, even to deliver the plain language that human demons understand and sometimes respect. The embassy, an entity of its own, carried on through the moral and ethical collapse, completing its daily tasks with energy and expertise and dedication, increasingly the accomplice in the growing fiasco all around it, and gradually losing the distinction between its own good efforts and the lies and destruction that rotted in the ambient air all around. Ultimately we were transformed at best to an ineffective holograph of Haiti itself.

I learned also the inexplicable strength of a people a thousand times defeated and betrayed, yet always willing to right themselves and give it one more try, to draw ranks when things mattered and when there was even the slightest chance of success — the sole, unappealing alternative to certain annihilation.

Memories crowd me of Manus’s flight; of young girls dressed in white at Easter time singing Christian hymns at a pitched scream while jogging by the side of a country road; of the more abstract nature of evil and its banality, its disguised and twisted logic; and the blunt instruments used by evil’s ineffectual foes to seek in vain a reversal of its destructive forces.
The country lay destroyed, the people cowed. One triumphant spring day in 2001 an entire class of girls in a private school were spirited through pure gall to the airport in their school uniforms, and boarded a single airplane to freedom.

We allowed the noble and well-meaning Manus to become undone, even as we created Him, Haiti’s leader, a goofy interventionism we meanwhile used elsewhere in the world at the same time.

I think back to a relaxed evening on a porch with an oppositionist and friend, relating to him my “Theory of the Palace.” In my two years I had come to see the Presidential Palace as the seat or cause of the evil dogging wretched Haiti. Many of its occupants had been killed, torn to bits by an enraged populace after betraying them and suffering an end like the other wily fool, also justly undone, Macbeth.

While telling my friend of my wish for him someday to become Haiti’s president, I also beseeched him — should the day ever come — either to raze the damn Palace or at least offer it up as a museum to the people, or move all the ministries inside, as Nelson Mandela had done with the Union Buildings dominating Pretoria’s skyline in South Africa.

My friend was struck by the thought, and — a genuine admirer of Mandela — promised to follow my formula should he ever get his chance at the presidency.

Meanwhile things grow worse in Haiti and its “Friends” have washed their hands of it. Crowds grow, filth overcomes everything, penury increases.

Not for lack of effort, I share the blame for our collective failure: I tried a hundred times to convince the parachuting international journalists that Haiti’s suffering had no journalistic sexy value in itself, whereas deceit, cruelty, betrayal and the unparalleled goodness of 95 percent of the people made a rousing story. No outsider even investigated this point of view. Meanwhile, the nameless child on the rue Dalencourt cries yet, without succor or relief in evidence yet.
If there is a purpose to the story as told, it is to arouse shame, which may be the starting point of doing a bad thing better, at least incrementally, until one day it may turn to good.
Epilogue
Painful as it is to note, condescending racism has been a factor in U.S. Haiti policy from the start. The attitude was cloaked in somewhat genteel terms in the Marine occupation of 1915–34, the Clinton “Intervasion” of 1994, and acquiescence to the flawed elections of May 21, June 9, and November 26, 2000. A more transparent view was articulated by William Jennings Bryan, “silver tongued” U.S. Secretary of State 1913–15, who said of Haiti, “A nation of niggers, speaking French!”

At a gathering in Washington November 19, 2002, to inaugurate the Haiti Democracy Project, U.S. Permanent Representative to the Organization of American States (OAS) Roger Noriega attributed “more than a tinge of racism” to the hands-off approach taken by the U.S. government to the three Haitian elections of 2000. Those sterile montages indeed failed to deliver to the Haitian people the minimal decency they deserved and did not receive — even as the international community allowed them to pass as “good enough for Haiti.”

Haiti’s tension and dysfunction at the time I left, in July, 2001, became open rebellion. By late 2002, the scene was marked by street fights, the occasional massacre, and grim determination once again by the Haitian people to better their lot by challenging their leadership.

The Haitian National Police, now thoroughly politicized, stands by while paid Aristide activists eat into the crowds of opposing unarmed citizens vastly outnumbering them, and shoots into the masses of advocates for change, to date killing three and wounding 20? 30? 40? 150? No one will ever know.

Again Haiti has entered a phase defying the current lexicon: strife,
massacre, civil unrest/war, upheaval — new terms must yet be devised to describe the nature of the crackdown and crackup of the Haitian body politic.

The Aristide support still left in America tends to be with the Black Caucus in the U.S. Congress, whose position was characterized in the November 19 Washington meeting by former U.S. Ambassador Timothy Carney as “the most astonishing nonsense.”

At the time of this writing, rumors are rampant, streets filled with disaffected youth, the Haitian currency has plummeted to Weimar-like insolvency, gas shortages bring long lines at the service stations, bankruptcies proliferate, and whoever can leave the country does so. It would be imprudent to try to predict even the short-term future. Only calamity is guaranteed.

Summer and autumn, 2001, more kidnappings, dead bodies found on the Route des Frères and Carrefour, more small businesses going belly-up and increased talk of “dégringolade” or downward spiral.

December 3, Brignol Lindor, a journalist from Petit-Goave who had been selected by my office to go to the U.S. six months before on one of our hastily arranged study groups, was torn limb from limb by an empowered mob (“Domi nan Bwa,” “Sleep-in-the-Woods”) shouting pro-Aristide slogans as they dismembered Lindor for the crime of objective reporting.

December 12, OAS Deputy Secretary General Luigi Einaudi completed his seventeenth unsuccessful peace mission to Port-au-Prince, and U.S. officials announced that “the United States will not support international lending and direct assistance” as long as the Haitian government fails to resolve the political crisis and coordinated killings in the country.

The shut door of $500 million in international loans, now off limits to the regime, removed the slender remains of its super-ego, and its wish to maintain appearances as a democratic state. The lost development money served as the red cape to a charging bull.
As an already impoverished populace faced real starvation with the trashed economy and free-fall of the local currency, a small armed contingent attacked the Presidential Palace December 17 and were easily repelled and killed, in a contrived, “botched” coup attempt.

The coup — called “le coup de théâtre” or “le montage” by skeptics who believed President Aristide had orchestrated the incident to make it seem he was threatened by reactionaries and right-wingers — was quickly dismantled with seven dead, but unleashed a chain reaction of lethal retribution against journalists and political leaders blamed for whipping up anti-Aristide sentiment. Unknown numbers took refuge in the Embassies of France and Canada, while others fled on tourist visas to Miami and New York after being beaten or threatened in a well organized anti-journalism dragnet.

Given the gravity of the December 17 events, the OAS established a Commission of Inquiry, yielding an exhaustive report of July 1, 2002. The findings cast more than doubt over the veracity of the Haitian government’s version of the incidents.

The report noted armed attacks on peaceful opposition meetings March 21, 2001 in Hinche and Les Cayes; May 21 in Les Cayes; November 18 in Marigot; November 29 in Saint-Marc; and December 15 in Cap-Haitien. In no cases did the Haitian police intervene to protect peaceful discussions, held in private, from the unprovoked attacks.

Tracing the December 17 attack minute-by-minute, the OAS report concluded that the action could only have been carried off with Haitian police assistance, hence with the help and under the directives of the Aristide government.

Quoting Lavalas spokesman Jonas Petit, the report noted that even the Haitian government never cited the opposition as instigators of the foiled attack, though street gang leaders René Civil and Paul Raymond did make such charges.

Opposition OPL headquarters and the home of its leader Gérard Pierre Charles were destroyed by fire later in the same day as the “attack” on
the Palace. Evans Paul’s KID [“Parti Konvansyon Inite Demokratik”] headquarters were burned down the same day for the third time (previously in 1991 and April 8, 2000.)

The OAS report noted that many witnesses identified Lavalas activists among those who destroyed opposition headquarters, and concludes that the speed of the reaction implied a Lavalas plan laid in place before December 17, including the systematic transport of paving stones to the residence of politician Suzy Castor, whose house was also trashed early in the morning of December 17, and riddled with gunfire.

Sporadic killings — judged by the OAS to have been meticulously planned — hit opposition centers all around the country, while the putative “coup” itself left no victims but the attackers.

The report concluded that “the objective of the attack on the National Place does not correspond with the objective of producing a coup d’état,” and that “the attack…could not have taken place without the complicity …of police officers…”

In other words, the December 17 coup was seen by the OAS as a self-inflicted wound to draw solidarity, and the many headquarters which individuals attacked “in response” received no protection in any form, though the attackers did.

Journalists meanwhile pondered the hacked body of martyred Brignol Lindor, and understood the dangers of objective reporting. Some of Haiti’s 220 radio stations stopped broadcasting altogether, others programmed music and dropped their news segments.

One witness stepped forth to identify Aristide supporters as those who had hacked Brindor with machetes. The witness was hounded by mobs, threatened, his children beaten.

Aristide meanwhile intensified his calls for “zero tolerance” (i.e., mob execution of non-Lavalas followers), and “Peace in the belly, peace in the head.” The regime meanwhile sought to scapegoat the evidently uninvolved, arresting, beating, and detaining businessman Antoine Saati for the December 17 “coup,” but soon releasing him for lack of even a shred of evidence.
December 21, the terrified prosecutor Claudy Gassant, returned from hiding to take up his previous role as examining magistrate in the Jean Dominique murder, was pulled off the road by Palace guards and taken to task for his failure to wrap up the case.

Palace plainclothes agents fanned across the country, threatening and silencing more opposition leaders and journalists.

To honor Haitian Independence Day, January 1, 2001, the diplomatic corps made the traditional trek from the Cathedral to the National Palace, where President Aristide kept them waiting for 90 minutes before making his appearance to address them. During the long wait, Lavalas crowds formed outside and blamed U.S. government for “economic terrorism” and the ruin of Haiti. Ambassador Brian Dean Curran walked out in protest.

Early in 2002, impoverished Haitians took to the seas, accustomed to the warning signs of hunger and political crackdown. They left in unquantifiable numbers, but approaching those of the “spike” years of 1993–94, under the worst period of the Cédras dictatorship.

By January 5, at least 40 journalists had fled the country. Many had to depart on minutes’ notice, forced to leave family and children behind, hoping to reunite with them later in Montreal, New York, Miami, or Paris.

U.S. Embassy spokesperson Judith Trunzo acknowledged January 7 the sudden increase in asylum-seekers, but noted in the Miami Herald, “There is little the Embassy can do…[It’s] a delicate balancing act.”

From his redoubt in New England in the U.S., Léon Manus expressed exasperation for the inaction of diplomats, noting the efforts of the OAS in an e-mailed New Years message, while questioning the tepid and inconclusive acts of OAS official Luigi Einaudi:

The price meted out by the Haitian state against all who oppose it exceeds all limits. What further proof does [Einaudi] look to? Yet higher piles of cadavers?
By January 18, the list of journalists persecuted and victimized reached 43, as documented by the Haitian Press Federation in a detailed statement — most threatened, 27 sent to involuntary exile, one dead.

Senator Mike DeWine (R-OH) and Congressman Porter Goss (R-FL), of the Senate and House intelligence committees, respectively, petitioned the State Department to pull the visas of Jean-Bertrand Aristide and other Haitian government officials backing or tolerating increasing human rights violations, but received no public answer to their January 18 letter addressed to Secretary of State Colin Powell.

Strange bedfellows, Palace information activist Guyler Delva and conservative Radio Vision 2000 manager Léopold Berlanger gave a joint press conference February 25 and denounced together the climate of intimidation and announced that both their lives were in danger.

A nervous and sweating Delva, possibly fearing that he would himself be one of the children devoured by the Lavalas “revolution,” challenged his friend and colleague Jonas Petit, Lavalas spokesman, who had publicly minimized the threats and beatings.

Meanwhile, suspected drug kingpin, Senator Dany Toussaint was pictured in the March 4 *Washington Post*, tied circumstantially to the Jean Dominique killing and named as one of two senators “credibly linked by a number of U.S. government agencies to narcotics trafficking.” The *Post* article claimed a Toussaint-CIA connection, and noted the rapid rise in Toussaint’s political popularity at home.

As Aristide supporters in the U.S. began to run for cover, the March 15 *Wall Street Journal* focused on a few of them, documenting lucrative lobbying budgets garnered by Hazel Ross-Robinson, wife of Randall Robinson, and Rep. Ron Dellums (D-CA), whose consulting firm reported $210,000 in fees paid by the Haitian government — chicken feed compared to the $50,000 a month paid to lobbyist Patton Boggs over many years, with Florida consultant Ira Kurzban preferring the penumbra of undeclared earnings.

Lamb thrown in the piranha-infected Haitian waters, Prime Minister
Chérestal was unseated in a mid-March government shake-up, with Lavalas Party Spokesman Yvon Neptune taking his place. Neptune’s beginning salvo as PM March 13 was to blame international meddlers for Haiti’s zero percent growth rate of 2001.

Seeking more scapegoats for a steadily declining situation, the regime went after former military dictator Prosper Avril April 15, re-arresting him on the same day as his release from ten months in prison. Fearing for his life, investigating judge Henri Kesner Noel fled to Miami, where he said he had been pressured by Haitian authorities to sign Avril’s arrest warrant, but “I didn’t write it,” he said from exile. Noel characterized the arrest as “purely political,” after fleeing with his mother, pregnant wife, and four children to the U.S.

May 7, Aristide loyalist Senator Pierre Sonçon Prince traveled to his native Les Cayes to try to mend fences with the opposition. Lavalas mobs attacked him and shot his bodyguard Bob Blemire in the eyes. No arrests were made, nor investigations undertaken.

Bereft of more pragmatic options, Haitians flocked en masse to their churches May 11, drawing 20,000 to an ecumenical conference to pray for Haiti’s salvation. The Lavalas party issued a statement through Deputy Rudy Hérivaux imputing the motives of the meeting to anti-government sentiment.

The following day, OAS Deputy Secretary General Luigi Einaudi arrived for an eighteenth unsuccessful visit, citing “progress” in his entry declaration at the airport. Einaudi’s companion, St. Lucian Foreign Minister Julian Hunte, declared at the end of the four-day visit, “I’m satisfied,” on behalf of CARICOM, but did not explain the source of his satisfaction.

May 27 journalists Darwin Saint Julien and Allan Deshommes were injured and illegally detained, arrested “for their own protection” [Haitian Justice Minister Jean-Baptiste Brown] after being severely beaten and incarcerated without charge in the dungeons of the National Penitentiary.
June 14 the *Wall Street Journal* published a story by Mary Anastasia O’Grady about an earlier attempt on the life of police investigator Mario Andresol, who had been reputed for his independence, and intrepid refusal to neglect trails leading criminal cases to the Presidential Palace. A copy of the O’Grady article, urging outsiders to put aside “the charade of ‘negotiations’ with Mr. Aristide,” was physically handed to Aristide June 15 at a meeting with all opposition leaders, the entire diplomatic corps, and Port-au-Prince Bishop Constant. Though visibly shaken, the president said nothing in response.

June 25, prosecutor Claudy Gassant said to Reporters Without Borders (RSF) that he “had nothing to do with” the Jean Dominique case, and that the Haitian government was using him to focus blame for the failure to make any indictments.

The dynasty of prosecutors had grown from Willy Lubin’s clandestine handling of it in the first months of the investigation, then the official assigning to Jean–Sénat Fleury, who resigned after receiving threats, then to Claudy Gassant in September 2000, an interregnum from January 3 to April 1 of 2002, then Gassant’s refusal on June 25 to have anything to do with the case.

July 5, OAS Assistant Secretary General Luigi Einaudi made yet another visit to Haiti, saying, “I believe there have been very positive signs in my absence.” As reported in AP the same day, “He declined to say what those positive signs were.” Einaudi left again empty-handed four days later, having concluded his 24th visit since the stalemate began.

*Pyramid Scam*

As if not adequately punished, Haiti’s struggling lower middle class was wiped out in July, 2002, with the collapse of a pyramid investment scam that ruined all but a few insider traders. Informal street cooperative bankers offered ten percent on small investments with the explicit encouragement of President Aristide. Some 185,000 investors lost everything by July 12 as the scheme swallowed up two billion gourdes, or about 80
million U.S. dollars. Similar to the Enron scandal taking shape at the same time in the U.S., but proportionately more damaging, the collapse eliminated an entire socioeconomic class.

Detailed later in a New York Times article of July 26, the scam was linked directly to President Aristide, with losses rising to about USD $200 million to Haitian investors of small amounts. One victim, Guernélia Jeudi, had sold her house for $16,000, then lost everything in the scam, including the means of paying medical bills for her five children.

July 14, President Aristide made preparations to visit Taiwan, rumored to purchase a four-million-dollar home there. Some Haitians, openly blaming their economic destruction on him, hoped he would travel on a one-way ticket.

The following days, Israel Jacky Cantave, reporter with independent Radio Caraibes, was abducted after receiving death threats for his investigative reporting of street gangsters working for the Lavalas party. Taken with him was his cousin Dunois Eric Cantave. After intense efforts by Paris-based Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Cantave was found bruised and naked — but alive — in a mud hole. In its July 16 broadside, RSF quoted the July 1 OAS report on the December 17 coup-or-montage, reminding readers of the OAS conclusion that “the attacks, threats, and intimidation [against journalists] were instigated with the concurrence of the government.” Again quoting the OAS reports, RSF stressed that “freedom of expression, a basis of democracy, has been seriously undermined.”

Even as Cantave was allowed to live, however, on the same day as his release, internationally respected human rights lawyer Jean Claude Bajeux suffered an attack on his residence by armed gangs shouting pro-Aristide slogans as they trashed his house and bound a house servant, taping her mouth and putting a gun to her head.

Enter the Cannibal Army

August 1st, an opera buffa complete with unrealistically contrived li-
bretto, brought the “Cannibal Army” into existence, with the release from a Gonaïves prison of Aristide sympathizer Amiot Métayer (a.k.a. “The Cuban”) as a stolen tractor knocked down the walls of the prison, allowing Métayer and 150 other criminals escape from confinement under a hail of bullets. The putsch also set fire to the Gonaïves courthouse and city hall.

Métayer had been arrested for attacking peaceful anti-government demonstrators in Gonaïves with his “Cannibal Army,” which later came to his defense and liberation, then took on a life of its own, growing in stature and influence over the following months. Upon his release, Métayer made public statements criticizing Aristide for corruption and violent repression, but later recanted and disavowed them as petulant outbursts against a steady and supportive father.

Many said that even Métayer’s rhetorical flip-flops were part of an elaborately planned operation calculated to gain support for the president. Upon his release he said, “I suffered for the cause of democracy, and Aristide ordered my arrest,” as well as, “The future of Haiti is a Haiti without Aristide…Aristide should resign.” In the inevitable speculation, the only element resembling fact was Métayer’s active participation in political repression in 2001, including his personal involvement in a death edict (never carried out) of Protestant opposition leader Luc Mésadieu.

August 5, the U.S. State Department was “deeply concerned by violence [in Gonaïves],” and identified Métayer as “a notorious criminal and gang leader.” State Department Deputy Spokesman Phil Reeker called on the government of Haiti to “re-arrest all prison escapees, including ‘Cubain’ Métayer.”

No such action was ever undertaken or attempted. Street gangs in Gonaïves who had earlier expressed their loyalty to Aristide called for his “departure,” but later realigned themselves with him. Some observers saw their changes as pragmatic responses to monetary encouragement, rather than intellectual inconsistency.
August 19 the *Miami Herald* reported that earlier Aristide supporters from outside, such as James Morrell of the Haiti Democracy Project in Washington, DC, now acknowledged, “Something has really changed in Haiti. The divine mandate is over.”

Haiti follower Steve Horblitt linked Aristide with his lamentable predecessors, saying, “The government of Haiti continues its long history of not being a provider of services but an extractor.”

Disillusionment set in across many borders. August 12, the National Conference of Haitian Protestant Bishops called for a closer look at claims “implicating Mr. Jean-Bertrand Aristide in cocaine trafficking,” and appealing for “cessation once and for all of this negotiation game and unfruitful runaround talks tending to extend the suffering of the Haitian people…”

The Civil Society Initiative, created by the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince in mid 2001, followed suit September 4, noting three courses of action in a letter addressed to the OAS:

\[
\text{Pack one’s bags and leave} \\
\text{Stick one’s head in the sand and wait to die.} \\
\text{Rise and respond to the situation.}
\]

The OAS in response advocated “dialogue” once again, as the only way out of Haiti’s political crisis and economic ruin.

Revisiting the murder of journalist Brignol Lindor of December 3, 2001, RSF issued a release September 10, 2002, and said, “The government of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide appeared to be covering up for the killers,” and urged international sanctions against Aristide, his Prime Minister Yvon Neptune, and Justice Minister Jean-Baptiste Brown. Five days later, a judge in Petit-Goave indicted ten members of the street gang “Domi nan Bwa” [Sleep-in-the-Woods’] in the murder of ten months earlier. But no arrests or convictions resulted.

As tension mounted, September 19, Haiti Press Network reporter
Rodson Josselin was beaten by police in the Martissant area of Port-au-Prince, his camera and film smashed, after he covered events in the area involving marauders intimidating and displacing the populace of one of the capital’s poorest and most defenseless neighborhoods (and which lacked the imprimatur of unequivocal support for Aristide.)

Ten days later, citing obstacles to his attempted reforms, Justice Minister Jean-Baptiste Brown resigned.

Stepping up the pressure on the regime, the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) called on Aristide to pursue the Lindor murder of 2001, noting lack of follow-up from Magistrate Fritzner Duclaire’s September 16 indictments; the widely distributed CPJ letter received no response. Instead, press intimidation escalated, forcing Radio Kiskeya and Caraïbes FM to shut down September 26, with an attack on Radio Ibo the following day. Aristide accused the opposition of mounting the attacks, which focused on media critical of Aristide.

October intensified Haiti’s woes, as rumors of a government action to seize U.S. dollars in Haitian bank accounts caused a run on the banks for cash they were unable to deliver to their clients. The Haitian gourde plummeted from 25 to the U.S. dollar, to 42.

October 17, David Barjon and Jean Lafouche of Evans Paul’s opposition KID party were arrested and beaten without apparent cause, and held without charge in the Petionville police station.

October 29, 200 Haitians disembarked from a rickety vessel near Miami, and managed to get as far as Miami’s Rickenbacker Causeway, begging for rides and shelter before being rounded up by U.S. authorities and — despite local protests from Haitians and others in Miami — repatriated.

A week later, the Wall Street Journal carried the story of Haiti watcher James Morrell being sacked March 19 from the Center for International Policy after 28 years as its research director, for having criticized Ron Dellums of the Congressional Black Caucus for working for “an arbitrary leader ruling by violence and fraud…”
Responding to the WSJ version of his firing, Morrell said it was “correct, except for the characterization of the Center for International Policy as ‘left-wing.’ Firing people who disagree with you has nothing to do with the ideals of the Left. Nor does aid and support for an arbitrary regime that uses violence against its political opponents.”

Preceding the commemoration of Haiti’s liberation from European powers at the Battle of Vertières, November 18, 1803, large anti-Aristide demonstrations were held first in Cap-Haïtien, then spreading to Gonaïves, Petit-Goave, and the capital itself, where students took over the office of the dean of the National University. Counter demonstrations were staged and supported by police with guns and whips, but were overwhelmed by the magnitude of the larger, anti-government groups now taking over the country.

The movement intensified as the December 3 marker of Brignol Lindor’s death approached. The regime’s response was to blame outsiders for Haiti’s plight. One resident of Cité Soleil, one of the world’s most frightful slums and an Aristide bastion, shouted to a crowd of onlookers at risk of his life, “I’m 41 years old and I’ve never worked a day in my life…How does this happen? This guy, he promised us so much; now we’re worse off than before.”

November 21 the Haitian police shot into the crowds in Petit-Goave, injuring ten — four of them teenage students.

The same day, former Black Caucus Aristide supporter Walter Fauntroy condemned the Aristide regime, cited its violence against opponents, and rebuked Haitians’ having “been denied their right to choose freely their elected leaders, and the opportunity to stop the imposed cycle of violence, drug trafficking, and government-sponsored corruption.”

November 23 pro-Lavalas street thugs shut down the capital with burning barricades and intimidation, in another show of force. Palace information activist Guyler Delva boasted, “No one has been hurt yet — the protesters are carrying guns, but they’re not using them.”

Haiti thus entered a phase of massive public opposition to its dubi-
ously elected president, unobserved by the international press, at the same time as oil-rich Venezuela traversed similar public opposition to Hugo Chavez under greater limelight.

The indicted but never prosecuted Amiot Métayer returned in force with his Cannibal Army to stamp out demonstrations in Gonaïves, with two demonstrators shot, three hospitalized with machete wounds. The “Cannibals,” shouting “Aristide for life!” shot into crowds in Petit-Goave as well, injuring six, as Radio Etincelle in Gonaïves was threatened, then attacked with Molotov cocktails November 24 even after it had prudently suspended its broadcasts November 21-22.

On November 26, the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince “deplored” the attacks and called for calm in Port-au-Prince, and the resumption of “dialogue,” again, to solve Haiti’s problems.

More attacks were organized by Métayer November 30-December 1, leaving two dead and many homes trashed in a Gonaïves slum.

The Lawyers’ Bar of Port-au-Prince, “deeply alarmed and outraged,” and “stupefied,” called for the Haitian government to observe its constitutional obligation to restrain violence against its own people.

The means to do so unraveled as trainees at the Police Training Academy, some chosen from Lavalas support groups, rebelled against their trainers’ directives for political impartiality, and demonstrated their power to act beyond the law. Thirteen were expelled but later reinstated.

December 2, with 70 percent of the work force unemployed, the Organization of Catholic Bishops issued an appeal for prayer, noting that civil authorities “no longer control the boat, and the waves rise furiously.” On the same day, the Committee to Protect Journalists noted that seven more journalists had been forced into hiding after receiving threats from the “Cannibal Army” November 21. They had hidden in the residence of the Archbishop of Gonaïves until November 28, when, fearing attack himself, the Archbishop asked them to leave. (By December, 2002, at least 86 Haitian journalists were known to be in hiding.) They fled to the capital.
December 3, the anniversary of Brignol Lindor’s death, 2000 anti-government demonstrators massed in Petit-Goave, the city of Lindor’s life and execution. Aristide backers attacked with whips and rocks, injuring 14. Likewise in Port-au-Prince, a dozen were injured.

The seven Gonaïves journalists meanwhile took refuge in the Haitian capital. According to the fugitives, instead of expressing concern or support for a free and independent press, the U.S. Embassy warned the seven against trying to flee to the U.S. The dismayed fugitives noted that the embassy — not they — had requested the meeting. Stung by the embassy’s rebuke, they returned to hiding and remain on the run.

More ominously, on December 13 an Embassy official seized computers in Cap-Haïtien which the embassy had donated July 10, 2001, for internet usage by independent journalists. Before a baffled press association, at reception arranged in her honor, the official warned that the computers must be immediately given back, otherwise she would arrange Haitian police intervention. Journalists present at the event noted that they had received the computers a year earlier through a bona fide U.S. government grant. They queried her about her action, seeking to know her reason for taking them back. Though she confiscated and kept the equipment, the baffled journalists were later relieved when she at least did not press charges against them.

What Did He Not Say, and When Did He Say it Again?

A breach — known in State Department parlance as a “kerfluffle” — broke December 4 when Luigi Einaudi was quoted by the Haitian Press Agency as blaming [opposition] “anti-government groups” for the impasse in Haiti, saying specifically, “These groups are afraid of elections, because if free and fair elections took place in the country, it is certain that the party in power would win.”

Realizing that the statement could impugn him as an impartial observer and honest broker, Einaudi went on the net to disavow the statement, saying he was misquoted, and that the Haitian Press Agency (AHP)
was issuing crude “disinformation” to discredit him. December 6, the AHP issued a counter-statement, saying they were in possession of the cassette, recorded by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, with the quote exactly as they had cited it. The following day, without denying the AHP’s claim, Einaudi posted a second statement on the web, blaming “extremists on both sides for violence.”

Political tensions meanwhile increased yet more, as incidents in Petit-Goave drew gunfire from police, wounding more high school students December 5. The Rectorate of the University of Haiti was occupied by anti-Lavalas students on the same day in Port-au-Prince.

The Episcopal Conference issued a statement reminiscent of the Catholic Bishops’ of December 2, comparing Haiti to a sinking ship, as the U.S. State Department December 5 tabled its reaction: “We deplore the violent demonstrations over the past two weeks, [and the] intimidation perpetrated by the pro-government Popular Organizations in Port-au-Prince and Gonaïves and Cap-Haïtien.”

December 6, Gérald Khawly, prominent businessman and brother of the mayor of Jacmel, was killed in a hail of bullets in Port-au-Prince in a further degeneration into violence and confusion.

Saturday, December 7, pro-Aristide thugs torched the party headquar- ters of opposition leader Hubert de Ronceray’s “Mobilisation pour le Développement National” — the MDN — while also whipping and stoning anti-government demonstrators.

With uniquely original logic in his December 7 statement, govern- ment spokesman Mario Dupuy blamed the incidents on the victims in the opposition, while acknowledging three dead and 150 injured in the attacks against anti-regime protesters.

The National Coalition for Haitians Rights (NCHR) decried the wounding of seven students by gunfire:

Wagner Chetty, 19
Joseph Point du Jour, 19
Wilbin Tataille, 13
Getro Chery, 20
Junior Milien, 20
Toussaint Cebien, 22
Berthony Thermilien, 23

The NCHR in its statement attributed the threats and shootings to a politicized Haitian police force, as well as the hounding of the Goanaïves journalists — now fugitives, and now nine rather than seven — out of their city:

Esdras Mondelus, Radio Etincelle
Henry Fleurimond, Radio Kiskaya
Jean Robert François, Radio Metropole
Frantz Renel Lebrun, Radio Ibo
Josué René, Signal FM
Renais Noel Jeune, Radio Etincelle
Eric Julien, Radio Caraibes
Jean Niton Guérino, Radio Etincelle
Gédéon Présandieu, Radio Etincelle.

Also December 7, unidentified gunmen opened fire on a car carrying Lavalas loyalist Senator Dany Toussaint in suburban Pélerin, but retreated when Toussaint’s bodyguards returned fire on the assailants.

Toussaint, possibly cut loose from Lavalas protection, lost his government-issued security detail on the same day as the shooting, while retaining his formidable unit of private bodyguards.

As the toll rose by December 10 to 350 wounded and three dead, Luigi Einaudi repeated the statement he had earlier disavowed, accusing opposition groups (the exclusive victims in the body count) of taking “advantage of the inaction of the government” and seeking to “bring down the government by mass protests.”

At the same time, Einaudi noted the failure of the Haitian government to establish an electoral council to manage the parliamentary elections required for 2003.
In the midst of the noise and clatter of civil strife, one contemplative voice came over the internet to friends in the U.S. in a pre-Christmas reflection: “I hate violence, but I am skeptical that there will ever be peace in the world. Le Coeur des humains est dur comme de la pierre [“the heart of humans is as hard as stone.”]

According to Lavalas supporters, December 7-8 President Aristide visited Cuba, where he received assurances by Fidel Castro of support against the anti-government protests in Haiti. The Caribbean regional organization, CARICOM, meanwhile voiced support of Aristide’s government through St. Kitts PM Douglas Denzil.

December 11, gunmen attacked a police station at Las Cahobas near the Dominican border, and killed four passers-by while freeing four inmates, seizing 12 rifles, and escaping over the border to the Dominican Republic — a possible follow-up to Aristide supporters driving a tractor into the Gonaïves prison August 2 and freeing 150 inmates and torching houses in the city.

December 15, Lawrence Pezzullo, former U.S. negotiator under the Clinton Administration and once an Aristide supporter, issued a statement advising Aristide that “The time for a gracious and noble exit is coming to a close,” noting violence and threats against his own people, while citing, “the economy is in a shambles, and political repression is rampant.”

December 18, the day after the anniversary of the coup/montage of December 17, 2001, the opposition coalition “Convergence Démocratique” simply called for Aristide’s resignation. Also on the 18th, a group of Haitians living in exile in Paris, Guadeloupe, Massachusetts, New York, and Florida, stated, “Y’en a marre” [Enough!] and appealed for an end to Haitian government corruption, incompetence, escalating prices, and “systematic repression.”

Two days later, armed men took over the village of Belladère and called for Aristide’s ouster, holding on to their redoubt until it was taken back by government forces a week later.
At the time of this writing, the outcome of an intractable crisis is uncertain, the only known constant is the rising misery of the Haitian people. The account must nevertheless end at some arbitrary point, and let it be at the unpromising close of 2002, the year New York-based Freedom Forum, in its widely followed annual publication *Freedom in the World*, demoted Haiti from a country “partly free” to “not free.” The Forum noted a life expectancy of 49 and gave its lowest score — 6 — on political rights and civil liberties, relegating Aristide’s Haiti to the same rating as Angola, Somalia, and Equatorial Guinea. Freedom House argued the demotion on page 277 of its annual report in terms of Aristide’s “zero tolerance” policy, leading to “a blank check for executions,” and citing “President Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s call for citizens to take the law into their own hands.”

The year ended with a renewal of calls for “zero tolerance” and a ban on political expression issued December 20; armed government partisans violently disrupted demonstrations December 22, opening gunfire in Cap-Haïtien and Port-au-Prince on demonstrators defying the ban.

Christmas day, marauders opened fire at the Petionville residence of Jean Dominique’s widow Michelle Montas, killing one of the property guards before retreating into the murky winter afternoon darkened by garbage fires.

New Year’s Eve, gasoline prices rose from 35 to 80 gourdes per liter, testing once again the elasticity of an already stressed people. Those who earned one dollar U.S. per day could no longer afford 50% of their daily income just for the transport to and from work. They might have turned against the motorcyclists and taxi operators raising their prices, yet they understood that the calamity was not of the transport workers’ making; hence the drivers had been ruined along with their clients.

A brief moment of pause takes us to a retrospective exchange conducted at the end of 2002, between two individuals best not named here.
[Disciple:] One is tempted to say, ‘We all were duped, we all found our way at different times. One cannot be faulted for catching on later than others. You are forgiven, now go and sin no more.’ But, better they should stew in their juices, if any.

[Master:] The problem is not with sin. I only hope others can forgive me my sins as easily as I can forgive them theirs… Let us suppose they are neither stupid nor venal. They were instructed to be followers, and, for want of other instructions, they were. Then, one day, he forgot to instruct them not to think and…they thought.

That is the best explanation I can offer at the moment.

Washington, December 31, 2002
Above: Léon Manus with the author’s mother, Cambridge, Massachusetts, August 5, 2000, after Manus’s dramatic escape from Port-au-Prince to the United States.

Right: Michael Norton, Associated Press
Voters line up on the Route de Delmas to vote, May 21, 2000.
Voters [not] jostling for position during the Presidential elections of November 26, 2000. Poll workers in Port-au-Prince exercised a form of crowd control as Lavalas Spokesman Yvon Neptune artfully explained the apparent lack of voter participation: Lavalas activists, fearing retribution from oppositionists, exercised “stealth” voting by sneaking into voting places, casting pro-Lavalas ballots, then escaping without being seen. During a press conference on the day of the election, Neptune stated that voting had exceeded 66 per cent, even if invisible to the naked eye.
This and following page: Journalism/civic action training conferences in Jacmel and Petit-Goave. In Jacmel, 658 teachers, civic leaders, police, local officials, journalists, and students join the Haitian Press Federation and the author for training and discussion, February 20, 2000.
Petit-Goave, March 19, 2000, 546 participants.
Training session in the author’s home, with Ady Jean Gardy (center/right) and Paul-Ignace Janvier. Both received systematic threats during and after the May 21, 2000, voting. A Lavalas gang severely beat Telemax reporter Janvier some months later, after he reported low voter turnout during the July 9 second-round parliamentary elections.
Hostile demonstrators advance on the U.S. Embassy, as seen from our Public Diplomacy offices 100 yards from the Chancery. June, 2000.
A fax from the Press Association of the Central Plateau, requesting 36 writing pads, 36 ballpoint pens, and 36 pamphlets with which they could proceed with plans for an internal September 4-8, 2000, training session in Hinche.

The author of the fax, Procède Wilcède, was severely beaten by a Lavalas gang in April, 2003, and died two months later, in June, 2003.
Daniel Whitman  
USIS Director  
US Embassy  
Fax: - 2238724  
- 2231641

Monsieur le Directeur,

I just learned on the radio this morning that two cocktail molotov were thrown inside your residence last monday.

Accept that I express, without strings attached, my indignation and condemnation of this stupid move. I am above all a modest scholar, not a politician, but this destructive intent is shocking!

In reality, although I do not have information about any terrorist group here, this action does not surprise me. It confirms my worst expectations. This is the expression of the bad will of many sectors in Haiti, sectors which should be thoroughly infiltrated. This action may be the beginning of other ones, more serious. I fear... As you know better than I, desperate populist sectors often produce these nihilistic initiatives.

Accept all my solidarity with your productive work as well as my most respectful regards.

Sincerely,

Claude Beauboeuf  
Economist/Radio Analyst

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March 6, 2001

M. Daniel Whitman
U.S. Embassy
Port-au-prince, Haiti
URGENT

Cher Monsieur Whitman,

Profondément peinés par les attaques à la bombe (artisanale) autour de votre maison ces derniers jours, nous vous transmettons urgemment notre sincère solidarité et attendons le moment de retourner tous en Haïti pour être à vos côtés avec les mêmes sentiments, au nom de notre amour de la liberté de la presse.

Adyienardy
Président de la Federation

Goudou Jean Numa (Radio Metropole),

Marie Villedor Jean (Radio Kiskeya),

Jean Legon Benonnet (Radio Ginèn),

Francky Destre (Radio Communautaire de Belle-Anse),

Carmen Javal Evans (Radio Communautaire de Marcabec, Port-Salut),

Mounicamuresse (Radio Rurale de Port-Margot),

Marie Cho Rosier (Radio-Télé de Port-de-Paix),

Peleode Wilcède (Radio Communautaire de Hinche),

Judith Jaboin (Radio Rurale de Lascabobas).
A legal lease of land, ceding a plot to Neliane Bernard purchased for 2500 Haitian dollars ($125 U.S.) on April 5, 1998.
A politely worded blackmail note received by a Western diplomat in his offices, notifying him that 13 threatening men awaited outside his offices, in need of 200 Haitian dollars to feed their families.

“…Hoping you are among us, please receive assurance of our full collaboration and our reiteration of our wishes of a state of grace for you.”
Addenda
Chronology

(Guide to Abbreviations)

AJH  “Association of Haitian Journalists,” tied to Palace information activist Guyler C. Delva

BEC  Community Voting Bureau

BED  Departmental Voting Bureau

(Haiti has nine “Départements”)

BV  Voting Bureau (poll)

CEP  Provisional Electoral Council

Chargé d’Affaires

Head of U.S. Embassy in the absence of an Ambassadorial appointment

Chargé d’Affaires, a.i. (ad interim)

An Embassy officer temporarily assuming the duties either of Chargé d’Affaires or Ambassador

CODEL  Congressional delegation

DCM  Deputy Chief of Mission

DOS  Department of State

FL  Fanmi Lavalas, the ruling party

FPH  “Fédération de Presse Haitienne” — independent network of journalists

FRAPH Documents

Vast archives seized by American troops from the Haitian military during the U.S. intervention September 19, 1994. A sore point with the current Haitian public and government, who want evidence to prosecute culprits under the Cédras military regime. Inspired protest demonstrations in front of the U.S. Embassy each September 19

GOH  Government of Haiti

HNP or PNH  Haitian National Police, Police Nationale d’Haiti

HWG  Haiti Working Group at Department of State, Washington
OP  Organisations Populaires, hired gangs, politically motivated
PAO  Public Affairs Officer, or Embassy Spokesperson (my position 1999-2001)
PaP  Port-au-Prince
PD  The Public Diplomacy Section of the U.S. Embassy (former USIS)
StaffDel  Congressional Staff Delegation
TNH  Télévision Nationale d’Haïti (government owned and operated)
USG  U.S. Government
USIA  U.S. Information Agency Washington Headquarters (until 10/01/99)
USIS  U.S. Information Services, the U.S. field offices overseas (until 10/01/99)
1999

Jul 16  Electoral law promulgated but not signed by President Préval calling for elections. First round “November 28, or December 5, or December 26” [sic] Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) differs with the President in calling for elections of all 19 Senate seats, disputing Lavalas claims that two of the 19 were rightfully theirs from the previous elections, contested parliamentary negotiations breakdown over the words “compléter” and “combler.” Haitian Constitution requires a seated Parliament by January 2000.

Jul 20  I arrive in Port-au-Prince (PaP) to assume duties as Public Affairs Officer. Within ten days I achieve notoriety by being accused of “lying” and “environmental terrorism” in the Haitian press.

Jul 30  Gonaïves Ash issue hits the Haitian press, accusing the city of Philadelphia of polluting the port of Gonaïves with chemical waste.

An EPA report, citing precedents in the Tennessee River Valley, equivocates over the toxicity of the trash deposited in Gonaïves (permission for which has lined the pockets of certain Haitian officials.)

August 2-4  David Greenlee (Haiti Working Group Special Coordinator in Washington) visits PaP. National strike announced for August 5.

Aug 6  Organisations Populaires (OPs) supporting Lavalas call for
a national strike and the expulsion of Ambassador Timothy Carney.

The strike fizzles, but a bus driver is shot by passengers, and an American citizen is killed in Cité Soleil, his motorcycle stolen.

**Aug 9-13** 33 Department Electoral Bureaus (BEDs) are established to set up voter registration mechanisms. Two—in Jacmel and St. Marc— are torched by arsonists.

**Aug 16** President Clinton passes a letter to the U.S. Congress certifying “improvements” in the Haitian electoral process, in accordance with the Dole amendment requiring certification as a condition for the release of U.S. electoral assistance funds.

**Aug 19** U.S. Embassy statement affirms U.S. support for Haitian election in accordance with the Haitian Constitution of 1987, noting delays in the process.

**Aug 20** CEP “caves” on the issue of November 28 elections, noting the date is unrealistic. Rumors support a December 19 date.

One of only three non-Lavalas members of the cabinet (Public Works) is fired and replaced by a Party loyalist. One thousand port employees are laid off, leading to rumors of a work stoppage.

Haitians begin to articulate fears of election violence.

**Aug 25** I am quoted on page one of La Nouvelliste acknowledging U.S. funding for voter registration cards. The project is seen as a sinister plot in some political circles, to bolster anti-Lavalas support in the countryside.

U.S. Embassy maintains “professional optimism” on the elections, though the CEP expresses skepticism that the schedule can be met by December.

**Aug 26** White House Spokesman Joe Lockhart announces the end of the U.S. military Support Group in PaP (date unspec-
fied) to the dismay of those who look to the Support Group as an element of psychological calm through the electoral period.

Aug 29  During a rainstorm, a bridge collapses on Route Nationale 1, blocking all transport to the northern half of the country.


    Haitian exile Ben Dupuy blasts U.S. plans from New York for “digitalized” [sic] voter registration cards, suspecting it as a Big Brother plot of vague, nefarious motives, accuses the U.S. government of “holding the election hostage.”

    Donor nations Canada and France offer election assistance funds, but withhold them conditional upon formalizing the election dates.

Aug 31  A PD (USIS) employee is held up at gunpoint in front of the City Hall.

September 7  CEP proposes election date for December 19, with run-off elections January 16. President Préval, who must sign the order, maintains silence. Préval is rumored to be engineering a Parliamentary-cum-Presidential election, which would favor Lavalas in a “coattail” manoeuvre bringing in larger members of weak Lavalas parliamentary candidates with the overwhelmingly popular Aristide as President.

Sept 10-12  CODEL Conyers visits Haiti, invites President Préval to September 18 annual Congressional Black Caucus dinner in Washington.

    A CBS team with Mike Wallace arrives in PaP to do “a retrospective of the five years following the September 1994 invention in Haiti.” Producer Walt Bogdanovich asks me to provide AID director Phyllis Forbes for a brief interview for “60 minutes.” No word from Préval on the
CEP proposal of September 7.

Sep 16 “Mini-Civitas” in PaP gather civil society leaders to discuss the coming elections.

Sep 30 The customary anti-U.S. demonstration is conducted to mark the Cédras coup of 1991 and demand the return of the “FRAPH” documents in U.S. custody.

October 1 “Les Noces,” a.k.a. Consolidation, dismantles the U.S. Information Agency and brings it into the Department of State.

President Préval decrees election for March 19, 2000, with a second round “three or four weeks later.” (Later fixed at April 30.) Elected deputies would take their seats by May 2000, with terms expiring in January 2004, so as to revert to the constitutionally mandated schedule after two years of having no Parliament at all.

Three anti-gang policemen are murdered; one U.S. Embassy guard, off duty, is shot and critically wounded.

Oct 8 Safety and Security Minister Bob Manuel (seen as a possible rival to Aristide in the 2000 elections) is peremptorily fired and goes into exile in Guatemala.

Two private guards of a major industrial firm are found decapitated; a cadaver appears on the front lawn of U.S. Peace Corps Director.

Radio Vision 2000 offices are struck by a drive-by shooting, leaving damaged windows. I visit the studio and go on the air to condemn the attack.

The Haitian government shuts down ACN, the main internet provider, over a legal technicality. All major internet users—including the Haitian government itself and the Presidential Palace—are cut off from internet access. Phone service is disrupted—to-non-existent in the capital.

Oct 12 PD conducts its second “Mini-Civitas” conference.
Oct 15 Robert Manuel’s likely successor as government Security Chief, Jean Lamy, is murdered. Investigator Mario Andresol is attacked but unhurt. Telephone service increasingly disrupted.

Oct 22 Haitian business community expresses dismay over the closure of Haiti’s largest internet provider, ACN. Vigilantes in the Carrefour area take six lives of alleged thieves; Police Director Pierre Denizé is attacked by mobs at the funeral service for Jean Lamy, and is “rescued” by J-B Aristide’s limousine.

Club Med, after a contentious meeting with Haiti officials, announces they will withdraw from Haiti due to the deteriorating security situation.

The GOH, faced with investment flight, 85% illiteracy, 40% of the population “malnourished,” the loss of 98% of its arable land, a dysfunctional police force, declares “the end of famine in Haiti” with a gastronomic food fair on the Champs de Mars.

Oct 22-24 Senator Connie Mack (R-FL) visits PaP on a fact-finding tour.

Oct 25 Marauders shoot at six American missionaries in the Artibonite, their driver saves them by driving them to safety with two punctured tires.

Oct 26 As a result of two Mini-Civitas” conferences, an NGO forms — Comité de Presse pour l’Action Civique (COPAC) — directed by journalism professor Adyjeangardy. Charter presented to me in my PD office.

November 14 “60 Minutes” instead of the 5-year retrospective it had declared as its story in Haiti, slams AID Director Phyllis Dichter Forbes and a single justice program — constituting two per cent of AID’s Haiti budget. Forbes’s responses to Mike Wallace during her 45-minute interview conducted
September 14 are edited down to short replies totaling perhaps 60 seconds in all.

Justice Minister Camille LeBlanc follows with a statement that U.S. developmental projects in the justice section have yielded “zero” results. (LeBlanc’s putative law degree in Paris is alleged never to have existed.)

Nov 15 NSC Latin America Advisor Arturo Valenzuela releases a statement in PaP calling for “peaceful elections,” but avoiding the question of dates and constitutionally mandated time limits.

December 1-2 Senator Bob Graham (D-FL) visits PaP.

Dec 4-6 Senator Michael DeWine (R-OH) travels to Haiti and visits an orphanage recently destroyed by fire. DeWine cautions the GOH in his PaP statement that factions in Washington exist to favor reducing aid to Haiti if elections are not properly conducted.

Dec 6 Ambassador Timothy Carney, rumored in Haiti to have tensions with the Washington Haiti team, announces his retirement for December 17.

Dec 12 After weeks of anonymous threats, arson falls the BED headquarters at Jérémie in Grande-Anse, taking with it a ravaged section of the historic city. The nearest fire truck, in Les Cayes, arrives after an eight-hour trek. Growing references to a “climate of insecurity” and organized efforts to subvert the elections. Rumors abound as to the source of the disturbances, none of them substantiated.

Dec 17 Two more prominent businessmen are murdered. The official spokesman of the CEP is imprisoned for embezzlement of CEP funds. Journalist Guyler C. Delva, confidante of President Préval and recipient of privileged press leaks from the Palace, is incarcerated for beating his wife, and with rumors of the latter achieving intimacy with the President
and being caught in flagrante.

Dec 19  PD launches a series of regional press training seminars in cooperation with COPAC, beginning in Les Cayes. Candidate registration is completed after the CEP grants a two-day extension for late arriving Lavalas candidates.

Ambassador Carney departs post. Before doing so, he gives an exclusive, taped out-brief to Rotchild François Jr. of Radio Métropole, in which he states on the air that no single party, alone, can lead Haiti into the 21st century.

Dec 31  Haitians celebrate the New Year with fireworks and live gunfire shot into the air.

2000


Jan 12  Two French tourists are murdered on their sailboat near Jacmel by thugs and out of uniform police seeking cash; destruction by attack and arson of a disco on the Île à Vache.

Jan 10-14  Violence breaks out at the Grande-Anse BED; registration files and materials destroyed by arson.

Jan 20  Rita Braver of CBS allegedly attacked by mobs in Cité Soleil.

Jan 23  More election offices burnt by arson.

Jan 27-30  StaffDel Robin Cleveland visits Haiti on exploratory fact-finding mission.

February 4  Voter registrations surpass all expectations at 900,000.
Feb 9  I am interviewed by delayed broadcast by media star Jean Dominque, a.k.a., “The Crocodile.” I vow on the air that we have neither favorites nor “Satans” in the upcoming elections. Radio Haiti Inter broadcasts the interview five times.

Minister LeBlanc says again that U.S. judicial programs yield “zero.” I contradict him the same day on the air.

Feb 12  Johnny Sambour, interior decorator for Jean Claude Duvalier, is hauled illegally off to prison at night with no formal charges. Sambour was found murdered and dismembered two years later in his Upper Kenskoff home.

Feb 14  27,000 candidates registered on the election rolls for national, regional and municipal posts.

An astonishing 3 million voters are registered, at 3000 registration sites. Préval, after 24 months of irregularities and no Parliament, states that March 19 elections will be “difficult to hold.”

PM Alexis publicly scolds Radio Métropole for its story on Claude Raymond’s death under detention.

Feb 20  I comment on radio asking why President Préval has not signed the Chapultepec Convention guaranteeing minimal rights for journalists.

Feb 25  Last-minute voter registration chaos moves the CEP to extend the deadline from February 25 to March 4. President Préval attacks his own police chief Pierre Denizé, characterizes Denizé as “lacking any competence for the job.”

The regime cites flaws in the electoral process and CEP, preparing later calls for postponement of the elections.

Mar 4-7  “Only 20” are killed and 100 injured country-wide in carnival celebrations which deplete the government coffers.

Mar 9-10  U.S. Emissaries Donald Steinberg and Anthony Lake, in
Haiti, fail to achieve a breakthrough to the political impasse.

Mar 10  President Préval repudiates the April 9 date set by CEP as a compromise between adhering to constitute requirements and postponing the elections \textit{sine die}.

  CEP President Léon Manus is rumored to consider resigning.

  USG posts a business advisory, counseling U.S. investors to avoid Haiti.

  Anthony Lake makes a statement “supporting the democratic process” but averting the question of naming a date for election.

  President Préval repudiates any date limit for elections.

Mar 11  Léon Manus states that election postponement beyond April 9 is unacceptable.

Mar 13  CEP announces a further extension in registration to March 15.

Mar 16  The Haitian gourde slips below the psychological barrier of 20 to the U.S. dollar.

Mar 18  Former Palace press liaison and current PLB candidate Marie Laurence Lassègue, (member of Vital Voices meetings in Washington and Trinidad) is attacked by armed motorcyclists near Cabaret, is saved by a skillful driver. Traumatized, she later gradually goes blind in one eye.

Mar 19  Peaceful demonstrations country-wide, black armbands in mourning for the squelched election date.

  Septuagenarian Léon Manus walks to the Palace to deliver a letter entreating the President to allow elections in Haiti. President Préval does not receive Manus, but promises a written response to the letter.

Mar 20  NSC Arturo Valenzuela and HWG Donald Steinberg arrive to seek a resolution to the political impasse.

Mar 21  Minister of Justice LeBlanc and police chief Dénizé sign a
notice firing airport police chief Patrick Dormévil for corruption and drug trafficking.

Rumors circulate that the USG will cancel visas of government leaders if a Parliament is not seated by June 12. Also, “President Préval wishes to resign, but a higher authority will not allow it.”

Businesses providing foodstuffs begin to go bankrupt.

Mar 27 U.S. Embassy urges a much tougher stance, with penalties to GOH leaders if a Parliament is not seated by June 12. [PD office has held “training” sessions for journalists and others in Jacmel, Les Cayes, Mirebalais, Cap-Haitien, Petit-Goave, St. Marc, Port-de-Paix, attracting an average of 500 participants at each.]

Mar 27-29 PaP is in flames, as Lavalas supporters rampage, killing six and destroying the open market at Croix-des-Bossales.

Mar 28 Two MPSN candidates are killed in Petit-Goave.

Mar 29 At a gathering of Foreign Ministers of the Western Hemisphere in New Orleans, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright discreetly cautions Haitian Foreign Minister Fritz Longchamp to hold early elections. He makes a public statement rejecting June 12 “or any other date” as a deadline for a seated Parliament.

“Espace” leaders hold a peaceful demonstration to mark Constitution Day; they are attacked by Lavalas mobs yelling “Aristide ou la mort.”

Disgusted peasants in the Central Plateau tear down the Haitian flag, hoist the Canada flag and declare themselves citizens of Canada.

Mar 30 An accused murderer, lured to the U.S. Consulate with Haitian police waiting, is killed by mobs at Carrefour while under police custody.

April 3 The country goes into tumult after the assassination of
leading journalist Jean Dominique, with his security guard Jean-Claude Louissant, early in the morning in the small courtyard of private, government-supported Radio Haiti Inter. Dominique has chosen to report on the March 28 assassinations in Petit-Goave. Curiously, his widow, Michelle Montas, who customarily accompanies Dominique to the radio in the morning, is absent on the day of the crime.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>Apr 4</td>
<td>The house of the BED director in Jérémie is torched. Aristide travels to Florida.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr 5</td>
<td>Five U.S. Congressmen call for invoking OAS Resolution 1080, the precursor of possible sanctions against Haiti. OPL Leader Ferdinand Dorvil and business leader Guy André are murdered; death threats go out anonymously to Chamber of Commerce president Olivier Nadal and the entire staff of Radio Vision 2000. In response to public revulsion at the assassination of Jean Dominique, state-owned Télévision Nationale d’Haiti runs incessantly a documentary on the overthrow of Salvador Allende by outside forces.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr 8</td>
<td>At Jean Dominique's funeral, Lavalas activists on the field of the soccer stadium gesture to Aristide and Préval in the bleachers, saying they will attack Espace headquarters and opposition leader Evans Paul unless their leaders direct them not to. Lacking any response, they advance on Espace headquarters and torch it with the full compliance of the Haitian police. The stadium scene is compared in French and U.S. press to “thumbs down” in gladiatorial contests in ancient Rome.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr 9</td>
<td>The April 9 electoral date is postponed to May 21.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr 17</td>
<td>Palace press employee Guy Delva stages a march for slain Jean Dominique; most radio stations boycott the event</td>
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because of their mistrust of Delva, and their suspicion that
the regime was, itself, to blame for the assassination.

Apr 18 State Department Spokesman James Rubin voices alarm
over the Haitian electoral situation.

Espace candidate Claudy Myrthil is abducted in
Martissant and thought dead — emerges May 1 showing
signs of torture.

30% rise in prices of foodstuffs in the local markets.
French Socialist Paul Cosignon calls Haiti a “narco-state”;
former Senator Yrvelt Chéry, from exile in Washington,
states that the drug trade now has a turnover of $600
million per year, as opposed to $200 under the military
regime. No one contradicts him.

Rumors abound of imminent coup, police revolt.

Future Senator Dany Toussaint stops making public
appearances at his shop “Dany King,” an emporium in
Petionville selling bullet-proof vests and other military gear.

Apr 23 TNH airs reruns of polite political debates taped in early
Mar.

Apr 24 After implicating 14 PNH officers in corruption scams,
Police Inspector Luc Eucher Joseph is “out.” Disappears,
awaiting safe passage out of the country.

May 3 PD publishes its election manual from pilfered floppy disks,
listing 29,490 candidates. The only public record of its type.

May 8, 12 The body count of dead opposition leaders rises to 15, as
Elam Sénat (Espace) and Brandfor Sanon (PLB) are
assassinated. Lavalas calls on opposition parties to “end the
violence,” even though they, alone, are victims. The opposi-
tion campaigns cease, for fear of death, and for lack of funds.

Bob Lecorps, the “usual suspect” in all murder cases, is
released from detention for the assassination of Jean
Dominique, lacking any evidence of his connection to the
case.
May 14  
After 10 days in hiding, Police Inspector Luc Eucher Joseph flees the country for Geneva, Switzerland.

May 17  
Georgie Anne Geyer publishes an article in the Dallas Morning News highlighting “politically sponsored street thugs, some with Cuban training,” and the Haitian economy at “rock bottom,” and a country “almost totally destroyed.” She describes Préval and Aristide of the April 8 stadium incident as “Roman Proconsuls” egging on the violence of the day which led to the destruction of former PaP Mayor Evans Paul’s Espace headquarters.

May 21  
First round election are held with observers Conyers (D-MI) and Delahunt (D-MA) and press coverage from AP, Reuters, the Washington Post, the Washington Times, Cox News Service, NPR, Boston Globe, Miami Herald, Chicago Tribune, Florida Sun-Sentinal, VOA, CBC. The day proceeds without violence but with gross ballot fraud, as recorded on video by CBC. Turnouts of 60-70%.

On the island of La Gonave, an opposition organizational meeting is broken up by police, and seven opposition candidates go into hiding.

May 22  
Reps. Conyers and Delahunt bless the May 21 elections at a press conference in PaP.

Several hundred Lavalas supporters attack RCP headquarters across the street from PD offices. Mayoral campaign worker Jean Michel Holefen is carried off in a police car, apparent victim of mob’s stonings. (Holefen resurfaces 10 days later to lure RCP leader Jean Yves Jason into an ambush. Jason survives after receiving a warning call from a friend.)

May 22-27  
The GOH rounds up and detains 50 opposition leaders. May 23, former Senator Paul Denis is tossed into a prison cell in Petionville 4 meters x 4 meters, with 16 other
prisoners, forced to take turns sitting and standing.

May 24 Martissant is blocked by flaming barricades.

May 25 OAS issues a statement casting doubt over the validity of the elections.

May 26 In an NSC-cleared statement, the U.S. Embassy “notes with increasing concern the climate of intimidation in the wake of recent elections.” HNP spokesman, Simeon Jean Dady approaches the U.S. Embassy, asking for “some time in the U.S.”

May 28 I dine with CEP President Léon Manus, who says, “I don’t believe in these elections, they have no credibility.” When asked if he will nullify them he says, “We are all accomplices. We do what we must, in order to survive…Please do not think ill of me if I announce a Lavalas victory Monday or Tuesday evening. I have my wife and children to consider.”

June 2 Reps Gilman (R-NY) and Goss (R-FL) declare the elections “tainted and fraudulent,” noting the murder of 15 opposition candidates.

Jun 5 OAS local representative Orlando Marville issues a detailed letter denouncing to the CEP its methodology in declaring a Lavalas sweep. Marville is vilified in PaP with graffiti “Marville=KK” (“caca”, “shit”) and “Marville=a white man in black skin.”

June 8 Emmanuel Charles quits the CEP in protest, later flees to France. Non-Lavalas members Irma Rateau and Debussy Damier follow suit. After a strong PD statement, eleven of 40-50 detained opposition leaders are released from prison, including Paul Denis.

Jun 9 BECs in Petit Goave and Miragoane are torched.

Jun 10 Palace press employee Guy Delva rallies journalists to silence opponents to the regime.
Jun 11 | Elections, earlier disrupted, are held in Grande-Anse.

Jun 12-18 | U.S. Embassy approached by hostile demonstrators equating it to the OAS and covering the outer walls with graffiti. Embassy car windows are broken by the mobs.

| U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan issues a statement of concern; Lavalas accuses Kofi Annan of “interference in internal Haitian affairs.” |

Jun 16 | PaP is shut down by OP (Lavalas) looting and demonstrations. 500 Haitians detained in U.S. prisons, having served their terms, are released and are repatriated to Haiti; the majority are taken off to Haitian prisons as they arrive in PaP.

Escamp and Corréga, Lavalas’s allied parties in Grand-Anse, denounce the June 11 election, citing massive fraud.

CEP President Léon Manus goes into hiding at an undisclosed location.

The OAS issues a critical report of the counting process following the May 21 election.

Jun 19 | Haitian radios report NSC Valenzuela, HWG Steinberg, and Chargé Duncan crossing burning barricades at Tabarre to deliver a letter of friendship from NSC Samuel Berger to J-B Aristide.

The airport and its access roads are shut down. 400 paid political activists shut down the city with barricades and flames, assisted by GOH Téléco trucks and police vehicles.

Jun 20 | USAID employee Gérard Philippeaux is cited on GOH owned Télé Eclair as the culprit in the disappearance of CEP President Manus.

Jun 21 | Léon Manus, from safe haven in the U.S., issues a dramatic statement noting threats “from the highest levels” in Haiti, and denouncing the elections.

Lavalas spokesman Yvon Neptune characterizes the
election as “a victory for peace over violence.”

Jun 23  Lavalas affiliates (OPs) call for official results by June 26 “or else…”

Rumors abound that PM Alexis has been physically beaten by J-B Aristide’s guards; Alexis disappears from view for 10 days.

Jun 28  Aristide Foundation official Philippe Markington is conducted to PD offices from detention in the Petionville jail. Evidently the victim of torture, Markington, a suspect in the Jean Dominique murder, says his jailors have told him his only chance for exit is to implicate me in the murder plot.

The InterAmerican Press Association (IAPA) investigates the case, and delivers to me a GOH document implicating me in the plot.

Jun 29  Clinton emissary Anthony Lake arrives PaP without any advance knowledge by the Embassy.

U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, led by Jesse Helms (R-NC), releases $22.5 million from previously “frozen” funds for agriculture, health, and education in Haiti.

July 3  “Bac” exams disrupted by hoodlums; hundreds of secondary school aspirants flee in panic.

Three new CEP members are named from Lavalas, to replace Manus, Rateau, and Charles.

A U.N. study puts Haiti at the bottom rung of economic indicators and sets life expectancy in Haiti at 53 years.

Jul 4  Michelle Montas, Jean Dominique’s widow, calls for justice in the assassination case of her husband.

Jul 5  A U.S. Congressional Resolution (126) notes “the absence of free and fair election in Haiti,” and “calls on the government of Haiti forthwith to end the manipulation of the electoral process.”
Marie Corélie Chéry, PaP municipal worker, asks U.S. Embassy for asylum. Her husband, Jean Wilner Lalane, suspect in the Jean Dominique investigation, has died in police custody.

**Jul 7**  
Clinton envoy Anthony Lake spends a day in PaP  
OPs stage a demonstration decrying foreign interference, facilitated by police vans and ambulances provided by the regime.  
PM Alexis joins the OPs (ending his 2-week silence) in warning off “foreign powers.”  
OAS announces it will refuse to send observers to the second round of elections, noting the “irregularities” of the first round.

**Jul 8**  
US citizen Carmelle Moïse is tortured by Haitian police in her house in PaP looking for drugs and cash. They apply a hot electric iron to her shoulder and back.

**Jul 9**  
Second Round of elections. Very low voter turnout after a series of pipe bombings, though official GOH sources cite “67%” turnout. All Haitian radio stations and foreign embassies estimate the turnout at 15% at most. Even Lavalas spokesman Yvon Neptune estimates “5-10%,” before getting his marching orders to augment the numbers later in the day.

**Jul 10**  
Lavalas declares itself the sole winner of run-off elections, and begins installing mayors and local councils in provincial cities.

**Jul 11**  
Kofi Annan expresses “regret” at the electoral debacle in Haiti. The White House notes, “We are deeply troubled…”

**Jul 12**  
The EU condemns the elections, supports the U.S. and OAS.

Espace activists are illegally arrested in their homes in Maïssade and incarcerated in Hinche.
Haitian business consortium CLED says of Lavalas, “They stole what was already theirs.”

U.S. police and justice program OPDAT and ICITAP are reviewed for possible extinction.

PM Alexis says in response, “the aid has been very, very, very, minimal, so it makes little difference… We will tighten our belts.”

Opposition leader Serge Gilles says, “We cannot tighten our belts any tighter.”

Jul 14 At Bastille Day at the French Embassy, Development Minister Anthony Dessources says of the election, “These decisions are without recourse.”

Jul 15 Demonstrations in Petit-Goave call for new elections.

Jul 21 Government of France issues a travel warning dissuading French citizens from traveling to Haiti; Japan suspends its aid to Port-au-Prince “because of the ambiguity of the future in Haiti”; HWG Steinberg arrives in PaP.

Jul 23 Arsonists torch the BEC in Dame Marie.


Carl Henry Amilcar, Secretary of the Artibonite BED, is wounded by three bullets but survives. 30 people shot in Anse d’Hainault, 14 houses torched.

Jul 26 Armed gunmen kill the bodyguard of Dr. Camille Cantave, candidate for deputy of Gonaïves.

U.S. missionary Terrence Snow is arrested on vague charges in Saint-Marc. Is released after U.S. Consul threatens to void Magistrate Cajuste’s U.S. visa.

Jul 27 Washington Post in its editorial “Disenchanted Island” cites CEP exiled president Léon Manus as a “hero.” The editorial cites “a creeping Lavalas dictatorship.”
Jul 28  Unknown assailants toss a grenade into the courtyard of Canadian Ambassador Gilles Bernier, damaging his car.

Jul 30  Run-off elections for Grande-Anse award 10 extra Parliamentary seats to Lavalas.

August 1  18 Haitians refugees involuntarily repatriated.

Aug 3  Mayor of Milot (Cap-Haitien) shuts down a U.S. military project to rebuild an orphanage.

Aug 5  Le Monde runs a piece by Raoul Peck, former Minister of Culture, saying Haiti “is now more troubled than under the Duvalier regime.”

Aug 6  U.S. police ICITAP trainers leave Haiti.

     An unnamed U.S. official calls Haiti “a narco-state, no different than Panama was under Noriega” in an article in the Washington Times. The article estimates seven tons of cocaine passing through Haiti each month, bound for the U.S., and links Aristide loyalist Dany Toussaint as the kingpin in the operation.

Aug 8  OPs occupy the Ministry of Interior.

Aug 9  A police officer is killed in Petionville.

Aug 11 I am summoned by Justice Minister Camille Le Blanc, as a suspect in the Jean Dominique assassination.

     President Préval announces the prolongation of CEP mandate, with presidential elections November 26.

Aug 17 President Préval announces GOH can no longer sustain petrol subsidies. Prices skyrocket by 44-52% by September 7.

Aug 19 OAS announces it will neither recognize nor not recognize the newly seated Parliament.

Aug 22 Regime poaches the entire news staff of independent TV Telemax, taking them over to Tele 13 (Timoun), the Party-owned channel.
Aug 28  The new Parliament is inaugurated with fanfare. Kelly Bastien, former president of the Chamber of Deputies, flees to Canada.

September 5  U.S. Permanent Representative to OAS Luis Lauredo addresses the OAS, citing “serious concerns” on the May 21 elections. “My Fellow Ambassador,” he concludes, “The Haitian people deserve better than this.”

Sept 10  Rains in Carrefour leave five dead.

Sept 11  Gas stations, staggering under petrol price hikes, announce they will close September 11-13 (coinciding with resumption of school).

    Haiti’s 47th Parliament takes its seats, shunned by the international community as having no legal basis. GOH finesse the event by failing to issue invitations to the diplomatic community. The group meets, establishes 30 committees, and goes immediately to recess.

Sept 20  Eminent Nouvelliste Journalist Carlo Désinor dies of natural causes.

    Middle class citizens able to purchase airplane tickets begin to flee the country.

    Washington Times runs a story saying $100 million has bought no justice in Haiti.

Sept 21  Einaudi/Linsky/Caryn Hollis visit PaP to seek a remedy for the political stalemate in Haiti, with no results.

    Chavanne Jean-Baptiste, former Aristide supporter, gathers 10,000 in Hinche to demonstrate against Aristide.

Sept 25  Amos Jeannot of Fond Kozé is killed.

Sept 29  Raboteau trial opens in Gonaives, looking into a massacre perpetrated during the Coup regime 1991-94.

    Party Spokesman Yvon Neptune reiterates that the results of the May 21 elections are not negotiable.

October 2  Lavalas activist Ronald Cadavre pulls a gun on a demon-
strator not supporting Aristide. The Delmas police com- 
missioner Guy Phillipe (later rebel leader of 2003-2004) 
disarms Cadavre, and is almost “necklaced” by a hostile 
crowd. Police, in disarray, vigorously protest to the Lavalas 
regime.

Oct 15 50% inflation in 30-day period. Rumors of coup.
Oct 20 Jesse Helms publishes an op/ed in the Miami Herald
“Clinton-Gore policy on Haiti has been a failure: U.S. has 
let Aristide’s cohorts literally get away with murder.”

New police chief Guy Philippe’s residence is sacked.
Philippe, in exile in DR, blames Lavalas Senators and 
reputed drug dealers Toussaint and Medard.

Radio Journalist Goudou Jean Numa, after repeated 
death threats, is removed by Radio Métropole for his own 
protection from the Parliament beat.

Oct 26 Former Venezuela President Carlos Andrés Perez offers to 
mediate. No Haitian wants him.
Oct 29-30 Flooding hits the northern section of the country.
November 1 U.S. State Department announces USG will not support 
presidential or legislative elections, “absent meaningful action 
to address serious electoral deficiencies.”

Nov 2 Political rally in Hinche leaves nine wounded, attacked by 
activists carrying photos of J-B Aristide.

Nov 3 U.S. TV journalists Connie Hicks and Michel Sidney are 
hit by rocks and bullets in Cité Soleil, and are evacuated to 
Miami.

U.S. citizen Roger Alteri is arrested on charges of 
assisting six Haitian police officers escape the country in an 
alleged foiled coup attempt.

Nov 5 Hitman Ronald Cadavre is hurt in an attack but survives.

Nov 10 Raboteau trial concludes, condemning Coup officials in 
absentia.
Drive by shootings rise in number.

Barricades are erected in Belleville, Martissant, and Fort National by poor urban dwellers for self-defense.

Nov 14 A single red pick-up truck, shooting randomly into crowds, kills three and injures seven.

Nov 15 Red pick-up continues shooting; confusion continues through the night.

Nov 16 Red Cross announces the danger level is too high for it to function in PaP after 6:00 p.m., places a curfew on its own workers.

Nov 17 U.S. State Department posts a travel warning asking U.S. citizens not to travel to Haiti.

Self-appointed Lavalas Spokesman René Civil says the source of violence is the Opposition.

Nov 18 One U.S. missionary killed, ten injured, in a bus accident in Léogane.

Nov 19 Opposition rally in St. Marc is broken up by Lavalas activists.

Nov 21 Shootings continue in the rue Capois and Pacot; Numbers of wounded unknown.

René Civil warns that any “disruptions” to the November 26 elections will lead to “smoke and blood.”

Nov 20-23 Ten pipe bombs leave three dead and fifteen wounded in terrorist acts.

U.N. personnel are put under curfew. A Lavalas leader in the Northern Province calls on non-Lavalas Haitians to “commit suicide.”

Nov 24 A Lavalas propaganda leaflet-distributing plane piloted by U.S. citizen Hugo Gonzales crashes as he attempts to land the plane upside-down.

Nov 26 Presidential elections are largely boycotted. René Civil puts voter participation at “70%” (sic).
PaP airport is closed. Independent Radio Galaxie shuts down after receiving threats.

Nov 27  DOS Spokesman Reeker says, “Responsibility for remedying electoral flaws still resides with the Haitian authorities.”

Nov 28  New York Times says, “Washington should make clear that a resumption of American aid depends on a return to the democratic ways that Mr. Aristide once symbolized.”

Radio Pipirit in Anse d’Hainault is torched, its owner killed.

Nov 29  Washington Times quotes an anonymous U.S. official as saying “The story of Haiti is we tried and we failed.”

UN Secretary General Annan recommends the shutting of the “MICAH” civil rights monitoring mission in Haiti.

December 2  Terrorist bomb in Mirebalais; one bus passenger’s legs are amputated.

Dec 6  A leaked letter from President Clinton to President Aristide is hailed as congratulatory by the Palace.

Dec 7  I go on all Haitian radios to contradict Lavalas claims that Aristide has received a “congratulations” letter from President Clinton. Tabarre is enraged.

Dec 8  Five OP leaders killed, after demanding “pay-off” for their work in the form of jobs.

Pia Alexis, wife of art critic Gérard Alexis, is shot at home by an intruder, through the left eye, neck and lung after Alexis declines to be Culture Minister under Aristide.

Dec 9  The Miami Herald quotes Senator Helms and Reps. Gilman and Goss as calling on the April 2001 Summit in Quebec to exclude future President Aristide, citing Aristide’s “ill-gotten gains” and a regime of “narco-traffickers, criminal and other anti-democratic elements…”

Dec 10  Reps Gilman (R-NY) and Goss (R-FL) issue a statement calling November 26 (presidential elections) “a tragic day.”
Dec 13  U.S. Supreme Court decides U.S. election in favor of George W. Bush — four Haitian radios communicate cautious optimism for a new U.S. policy toward Haiti.

Dec 18  Electrical “black-out” over PaP is almost total.

Dec 20  Ward Ténor, former Parliamentary Deputy, is killed. Parliament fails to gather a quorum, Yvon Neptune is publicly furious.

Dec 21  Lake/Steinberg arrive in PaP, greeted by burning tires throughout the city.

Dec 25  British Consul and guests are attacked by thieves in her residence during a Christmas reception.

Dec 26  Espace Leader Serge Gilles receives a single conciliatory call from Tabarre, but not a second.

Dec 27  Rival gangs in Cité Soleil kill two, injure unknown numbers in a shoot-out.

    President Aristide presents a letter to President Clinton, drafted by Anthony Lake, committing Haiti to “eight points” of democratic advancement.

    In an open letter to Colin Powell, Léon Manus writes from New Hampshire, appealing for the new Secretary of State to “do all you can to help Haitians organize free and fair … elections as soon as possible…”

Dec 28  Radio Caraïbes threatened, shuts down.

    White House issues a statement calling for “a new beginning for Haiti’s democratic future.”

    Anthony Lake issues a statement recognizing J-B Aristide as President of Haiti, and expressing confidence with Aristide’s promised compliance with the “Eight Points” leading Haiti to a civil society and rule of law.

Dec 29  Five medical clinics held up by gangsters; one hurt.
2001

January 3  A “Forum de Convergence” meets at the Montana hotel to seek to form an alternative or shadow government.

Jan 4  Brian Dean Curran arrives in PaP to assume duties as Ambassador after eight months in Washington awaiting confirmation.

Jan 8-18  With funds from USAID, a “civil society intuitive” is formed of parties and NGOs. Rep Gilman (R-NY) hails the move as a “welcome initiative.” Ambassador Curran says “Dialogue and compromise are the only solution to the crisis Haiti and Haitians currently face.”

Jan 9  At a ceremony in the church of St. Jean Bosco, Lavalas activist Paul Raymond calls by name for the assassination of 100 Haitian individuals not liked by Lavalas.

Jan 12  Parliament officially opens, shunned by the diplomatic community.

    “Gasoline” a street thug threatening PD employees outside our offices, is said to be killed.

    Ambassador Curran presents his credentials to President Aristide.

Jan 13  Palace information activist Guy Delva seizes control of the Association of Haitian journalists (AJH), goes on the air to support a state law to restrict press freedoms, and advocating that the state prosecute journalists who print “wrong” stories. Delva violates the AJH Charter in both leading the search committee for director, then assuming the job himself.

Jan 14  Four pipe bombs explode in PaP, injuring many and blowing off the legs of a nine-year-old girl.

Jan 15-20  Four Embassy employees are robbed at gunpoint in separate incidents.

Jan 18  Former PaP Mayor Evans Paul roughed up by unknown assailants.
Jan 20  The U.S. Embassy quietly returns the hotly contested FRAPH documents to the Foreign Ministry, removing a 10-year bone of contention. No comment from GOH.

Jan 26  The Wall Street Journal sketches secret links between Téleco, the Haitian publicly-owned company, and Fusion International, a private company given overseas telephone rights within Téleco to a private group formed as a joint venture between Joseph P. Kennedy II and J-B Aristide, and Clinton confidante Thomas (Mack) McCarty III, as posted on the company’s website. McCarty claims he “doesn’t know anything about Fusion and Haiti.” The article claims that during his exile in the U.S. 1991-92, Aristide received between $900,000 and $1.8 million per month from the USG. After accumulating crippling debt, Fusion changed its name. The entity still exists, however, now based in Miami, where it still siphons off funds from state-owned Téleco.

Jan 27  Random police round-ups are staged, including 20 passengers on a public bus, never seen again.

Jan 30  Jean Fritz Jean, driver of PM Alexis, is shot 5 times in a random attack.

Electricity charges increase by 55% for private customers, 150% for industrial users.

The GOH sets aside 15 million gourdes for Carnival celebrations.

February 2  Espace coalition calls for an investigation (never conducted) over the January 26 Wall Street Journal article, citing insider business links with close friends of Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Fights breakout in “Mechanics Alley” near the U.S. Embassy, leaving one dead.

Feb 6  Transport workers strike in PaP.
Feb 7  Inauguration of President Aristide. No delegation is sent from Washington; Ambassador Curran attends.

Wall Street Journal quotes Howard French of the New York Times as saying Aristide is “governing a community of nearly seven million people with the aid of fear and a tight circle of friends,” and concludes “Haiti in this period is a case history in how U.S. fecklessness can make a bad situation significantly worse.”

Joseph P. Kennedy II, with demonstrated business interests linking him to Aristide, publishes a pro-Aristide op/ed in the Boston Globe.

Human Rights Watch issues a report identifying the HNP as a politicized, pro-Aristide tool.

IAPA journalist Ana Arana conducts an investigation on my alleged role in the Jean Dominique murder, transfers to me a GOH file naming me as a suspected accomplice.

Feb 9  Aristide names Jean-Marie Chérétal as Prime Minister.

Feb 10  Gunfights break out and spread through the capital in the early morning hours.

In a macabre gesture, President Aristide offers a single rose to the opposition, meant to allude to their coffins soon to be occupied.

Feb 12-16  Frequent gas station hold-ups and murders on lower Delmas, and a policeman is killed.

Feb 15  Nov 26 presidential candidate Paul Arthur Fleurival and his family are arrested on unsubstantiated charges of possessing bomb ingredients in his residence.

New York-based Lavalas activist Ben Dupuy gives a lengthy press conference in PaP in support of Paul Raymond’s January 9 appeal for the assassination of 100 individuals not liked by Lavalas. He ridicules the notion that U.S President Bush will come to the aide of suppressed
opponents of the Lavalas regime.

Feb 18  Deadly gunfire erupts in Turgeau.

Feb 26-Mar 4 130 injured in Carnival celebrations.

The entire CEP resigns, and is replaced by Aristide with nine new members linked to Duvalierist and Macoute leaders, including Volvik Rémy Joseph, Domingo Téronien, and Yves Massillon.


March 1  U.S. President Bush’s “best wishes” letter to President Aristide is published in Le Matin.

The numbers of Haitians elite immigrating to Canada triples, from 102 families of four in 1999 to 310 families in 2000.

Mar 5  My residence is hit by three petrol bombs; two explode, causing slight damage.

Michel Soukar, Radio Signal FM commentator, goes into hiding after being pursued by armed individuals.

Mar 8  Police Commissioner Josué Pierre Louis interviews me on the March 5 incident at my residence, then announces incorrectly on Radio Métropole that “The U.S. Embassy has been attacked by grenades.”

Mar 9  At his weekly press conference, HNP spokesman Siméon Jean Dady acknowledges that crime levels in PaP have risen noticeably since President Aristide’s inauguration February 7.

1000 former Haitian military stage a non-violent demonstration calling for the end of the Lavalas regime and the restoration of the military.

Ana Arana of The InterAmerican Press Association (IAPA) issues her study of the Jean Dominique murder of
April 3, 2000, concluding that the murder was a result of “internecine conflict” and citing Danny Toussaint as the likely suspect.

Mar 14 Bloody confrontations leave 12 wounded in Petionville, with others in Cap-Haïtien, and others in the central sector of PaP.

DOS dismantles the Washington office of the Special Haiti Coordinator.

Mar 16 After street confrontations in Cap-Haïtien, the Mayor of Milot declares “PNG” (persona non grata) all non-Lavalas Haitians in the area.

Two shipwrecks, in Les Cayes and St.-Martin, leave 50 dead.

Ambassador Curran appeals for calm to the GOH and public.

Mar 18-19 Barricades and burning tires shut down PaP.

Gunfire breaks out in Delmas, John Brown, Lalue, and Martin Luther King.

Mar 18 PaP is shut down by burning barricades. The U.S. Government prepares to lift authorized departure April 17 for embassy dependents.

Mar 19 Four killed in shootings in PaP.

Three armed thugs on motorcycles warn independent Radio Signal FM to “prepare for attack.”

Mar 20 Magistrate Gérard Gourgue, who has offered himself as alternative to President Aristide, is attacked in his home. His school for young children is ransacked with no police intervention. Children traumatized. OPs demand Gourgue’s arrest for treason.

Political violence also leaves three dead and 16 injured in the provinces.

Aristide denounces Gourgue.
200 Aristide backers open fire on unarmed Convergence opposition headquarters in PaP at Pont-Morin. Photos show GOH Téleco trucks delivering assailants to the site, with a GOH helicopter coordinating the attack from overhead.

Neptune and Aristide call for Gourgue’s arrest.

Palace spokesman Jonas Petit issues a statement that the incident at Pont-Morin witnessed by dozens of Haitian and international media, “never took place.”

A man shouting “Down with Aristide” is shot dead in PaP.

In Hinche, two Lavalas mayors lead an attack on Convergence headquarters, leaving two shot and wounded.

DOS spokesman Richard Boucher says, “We urge the Aristide government to respond quickly and professionally to protect all the people of Haiti.”

Mar 21 Métropole reporter Jean Max Marc Blanc is attacked by a gang in Petionville, beaten, and his radio equipment stolen.

The widow of historian Roger Gaillard and mother of opposition leader Micha Gaillard, is attacked in her home with firebombs aimed at the gas tank of her car.

Mar 22 The Haitian Senate votes unanimously for Gérard Gourgue’s arrest. Minister of Justice Gary Lissade, a former student of Gourgue, is reluctant to pursue the case.

The Parliament in Gabon, Africa, “Calls upon President Aristide and the leaders of the opposition parties to find a political solution,” and notes the economic situation in Haiti “increasingly precarious.”

Mar 23 A U. S. citizen is murdered in her car in Petionville after coming out of a bank with cash in her purse.

The U. S. Embassy repeats its request that the DOS lift its travel warning for Americans visiting Haiti.
Mar 24  Rumors of Justice Minister Gary Lissade’s imminent resignation and departure from Haiti.

Mar 25  PaP under total electrical blackout.

In a leaked letter, DC Rep and Black Caucus leader Walter Fauntroy says to Secretary of State Colin Powell, “If Jean Bertrand Aristide refuses to change his behavior, his departure from power should be demanded by the international community as was the case for Jean-Claude Duvalier.” Fauntroy says, “I believe there can be no peaceful resolution on this situation, given the present leadership and its penchant for violence…” No public response from Colin Powell.

Mar 26-Apr 1 Village Voice and Los Angeles Times speak of “impending Civil War in Haiti.”

Mar 28  Convergence spokesman for the Northern Department, Steve Louis, is attacked in his house in Cap-Haitien by armed gangs.

U.S. Embassy braced for confrontations Mar 29, the anniversary of Haiti’s 1987 Constitution. Embassy country team is told the situation is “calm and getting calmer.”


Mar 30  A street vendor cited in the Los Angeles Times, Joycelyne Lindor, says “Do I have hope for the future? No. None at all. Only God can make things better for Haiti now.”

French Weekly Le Point calls Aristide “A Papa Doc with a new face.”

The entire CEP offers to resign “if it would help solve the political impasse in the country.”

Mar 31  U.S. citizen Alejandro Morales is shot and killed on a highway near the capital.
April 1-3 Luigi Einandi of OAS visits Haiti for the sixth time in 11 months, draws negative press from all media.

Apr 2 Beloved policeman “Boeuf,” defender of the poor, is killed and mourned.

After declining two offers of senior positions in the Aristide regime, Nirva Désinor is buried after her death by “anxiety attack.” Her body, very bloated at the time of her death at 4:00 a.m. Mar 30, indicates death by poisoning.

Chamber of Deputies unable to gather a quorum of 42 of the 73 members.

 Apr 3 Paris-based Reporters Without Borders adds its report to IAPA, calling for prosecution for the murder of Jean Dominique.

Apr 5 U.S. business leader at a Toyota dealership, Mark Ashton, is abducted twice in one day, and held for ransom.

Apr 6 Armed guard at Royal Market on Ave. Jean Paul II is murdered; shooting erupts at the airport the same afternoon.

A man is attacked and killed by a mob in front of PD offices.

Apr 10-12 CODEL Sensenbrenner/Conyers visits PAP but cuts their visit half a day early.

Apr 12 The Palace issues a statement noting that Walter Fountroy’s March 26 memo (see above) was made personally, and not on behalf of the entire Black Caucus.


Apr 15 Aristide fills the higher police echelons with personal friends, including Director Jean Nesly Lucien.

Abducted Mark Ashton flees the country.

U.S. citizen Edith Omega is beaten with a lead pipe in her home.

A sign on a Tap-Tap transport vehicle: “Si je le fais bien, pourquoi je mérite de mourir?” (“If I do
2000 firms have filed for bankruptcy in recent weeks.

Apr 17 DOS replaces its “Travel Advisory” with a “Public Announcement” noting the situation in Haiti to be “volatile” but stopping short of dissuading Americans from visiting the country and noting the security situation has “improved to some degree.” The announcement allows the Embassy to lift voluntary departure for its staff’s dependents.

Apr 20-23 Western Hemispheric Summit in Quebec. J-B Aristide in ambiguous language asks his supporters in Cité Soleil to “keep the peace” in his absence, later praises them after massacres kill and burn 19 in rival communities.

Apr 23 “Food for Peace” vehicle attacked; driver is killed, U.S. employee escapes.

AJH self-appointed Secretary General Delva smashes Ambassador Curran and me in public statements, for not supporting the AJH.

Apr 24 I give 14 radio interviews answering Delva’s charges, noting my open door on six occasions to AJH. I state, “As soon as the AJH has a General Secretary worthy of its own members, the resumption of our contacts will be immediate.”

Apr 27 Hinche Mayor Dongo Joseph, detained under orders from Justice Minister Lissade for physically beating a judge, is released from prison under Lissade’s protest.

Apr 28 Ambassador Curran’s secretary is highjacked and robbed on her way to the airport.

May 1 Internet Café entrepreneur Jonas Guillaume is kidnapped for ransom.

May 2 HNP arrests Gérard Dalvius, former military, without warrant or charges. Dalvius had led the April peaceful demonstration of 1000 former military calling for the restoration of a Haitian army. Dalvius is released after a few
hours for lack of charges.

May 9 Claudy Gassant, examining magistrate in the Jean Dominique investigation, fears for his own person safety, expresses wish to quit.

May 10 Justice Minister Lissade fires Claudy Gasssant.

May 11-13 Luigi Einaudi visits Haiti a sixteenth time, expresses guarded optimism.

May 14 Aristide announces “no negotiations” with the Opposition.

    International Red Cross vandalized by robbers, employees forced onto the floor and picked clean of valuables.

May 15 Two kidnapped in Petionville, and one in St. Marc.
    Ivorian “journalist” Abdullah Gegerounde is freed from kidnappers after paying $400,000 ransom.
    International Development Bank directs all its employees to leave the country for one week.

May 17 U.S. Consular sheet notifies American visitors and expats that “there are no ‘safe areas’ in Haiti.”

May 18 “Flag Day” — in a long discourse in Arcahaie, J-B
    Aristide compares himself to Alexander the Great. No ambassadors attend the event.

May 21 Anniversary of the flawed elections of 2000. Lavalas mobs assault a Convergence meeting in Les Cayes and shoot four.
    Convergence leaders Max Elibert and Fritz Jean in Aquin are forced into hiding.

May 23 At night, empty coffin is dumped in the street in front of the U.S. chancery. Lavalas publicly blames USG for starvation in Haiti.

May 25 Claudy Gassant, reinstated as magistrate in the Dominique case, arraigns Senator Dany Toussaint as suspect.

May 27 Coup leader Prosper Avril is arrested at a book signing.

May 29 Wall Street Journal runs an editorial linking Téléco’s “Fusion International” to Clinton associates, with the
proceeds moving to a numbered account in Panama. Fusion’s CEO is Marvin Rosen, associated with 1996 Clinton fund raising scandals. The editorial notes that the November 26 Presidential elections with 5% voting, was a “sham.”

May 30

Dany Toussaint names me on radio Caraïbes as the likely killer of Jean Dominique.

I receive from IAPA the GOH brief naming me as possible accomplice in the Dominique murder.

Leaflets from the “Movement National Pour la Démocratie” showing the ID cards of prison inmate Philippe Markington (the alleged trigger man) linking him to the Aristide Foundation.

A Catholic relief service worker is killed, and a driver shot, in a vehicle at the PaP airport.

June 1

Lavalas “Leader ad interim” Yvon Neptune calls for the “cleaning” (“nettoyage”) and “disinfection” of opposition leaders as precondition for negotiating with them.

Jun 3

Independent Nouvelliste publishes a survey indicating 2.2% approval for the Aristide-Cherestal regime, with 27.6% “adequate.”

Jun 4

Seven Senators “resign,” but continue drawing salary.

Ambassador Curran hails the resignations June 6 as a “positive gesture…to resolve the issues stemming from the elections of May 2000.”

Jun 6

Shootout in front of PD offices on the Blvd Harry Truman.

Jun 9


Jun 13

NYC-based Committee to Protect Journalists addresses a letter of concern to President Aristide over Roosevelt Benjamin’s circumstances, noting “a string of attacks against Haitian journalists during the past year.”
Claudy Gassant again threatens to quit, is called by Justice Minister Lissade “irresponsible” and “lacking in character.”

Jun 13-14 30 killed in Cité Soleil, Carrefour—Feuilles, Delmas and Pacot. Believed to be a demonstration of power by Dany Toussaint and mob turf war. Gangs burn houses with families inside.

Jun 16 Claudy Gassant flees to U.S.

Jun 17 OAS official Orlando Marville, formerly posted in Haiti, publishes an article in Barbados:

“Why should anyone believe that Aristide or, for that matter his spokesman [sic] Yvon Neptune, is any more serious now about a fair rerun of that part of the election? What about the other elements of the election clearly fraudulently won, like the Mairie de Petionville? Are we prepared to let that slide?

“There was indeed one man who questioned this. His name was Jean Dominique.”

Jun 18 Monde Diplomatique characterizes Haiti as a narco state, its epicenter the Rancho Hotel in Petionville.

Jun 18-19 Convergence and Lavalas meet to discuss Aristide’s commitment to create a credible CEP by June 25. The talks break down.

Jun 19 Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) scholar Georges Fauriol publishes a study on the Haiti Political impasse, calling it “a damaging game of attrition” and U.S. policy failure.

Jun 21 President Aristide announces a policy of “Zero Tolerance,” giving carte blanche to gangs to capture and kill activists they do not like.

The same day, gangs in Cabaret seize three unarmed men, bind them with barbed wire, drag them through the streets, and burn them alive. One observer reports overhear-
ing the gang members find the taste of the flesh “lacking in taste” (“ça manque du piment.”)

Lavalas activist and Member of Parliament Wilner Content, from Jacmel, announces that he considers all Convergence members deserve the same treatment.

Jun 24 Three more are killed near Petit-Goave under “Zero Tolerance.”


Jun 30 Senator Christopher Dodd (D-CT) arrives in PaP, “coincidently” with OAS Secretary General Gaviria and Deputy Luigi Einaudi. Dodd urges Opposition to bend to Lavalas dictates. Talks break down July 2.

Jul 13 I depart Haiti for Washington.
Contrasting Quotes —

“free and fair”? 
(in reverse chronological order)

2/18/04 – Colin Powell: “[Aristide] is, right now, the free and fairly elected President of Haiti.”

2/2/01 – State Department: “The government of Haiti has invited the United States...to send representatives to the February 7 Inauguration of President-Elect Aristide. In light of unresolved election issues, including flawed May 2000 legislative elections and a discredited electoral council, the U.S. Administration will not send an official delegation from Washington.”

3/26/01 – Walter Fauntroy, in a published note to Colin Powell: “[T]he situation in Haiti is deteriorating with escalating mob violence orchestrated by the installed leadership of Haiti, especially Mr. Aristide...there can be no peaceful resolution on this situation, given the present leadership and its penchant for violence and practices that will inevitably result in the continuing acute marginalization of Haiti and its people...I know the man [Aristide], and unless there is a check and balance brought into play very soon, we are headed for an abyss, sooner, rather than later...his practice has been to test the limits of both the Haitian body politic and the international community by breaking promises to abide by democratic principles, then retreating only when firm resistance is applied by the United States.”
12/28/00 — National Security Council, “We cannot provide support to the government of Haiti until the Secretary of State certifies that free and fair elections for parliament have taken place. She is still unable to do so at the present time.”

11/27/00 — Statement by Philip T. Reeker, Deputy Spokesman, State Department: “The United State did not send official observers to Haiti or provide electoral assistance [for the Presidential elections of November 26] because Haitian authorities have not addressed serious irregularities associated with the May 2000 legislative and local elections…Responsibility for remedying electoral flaws still resides with the Haitian authorities.”

9/21/00 and 11/1/00 — State Department, “…absent meaningful action to address serious irregularities in elections earlier this year and to restore the credibility of the electoral council, we will not support the November 26 elections, financially or through observation missions.”

9/5/00 — Luis Lauredo, U.S. Permanent Representative to the OAS, “I am here as a representative of the American people, and on these principles [free and fair elections] we will not compromise…[I]n the absence of meaningful change, the United State will not support the Presidential and legislative election of November 26, financially or through observation missions.”

8/11/00 — Kofi Annan (note to UNGA, quoted in the Miami Herald): “The decision of the electoral authorities, supported by the government and the ruling Fanmi Lavalas party to stand by the erroneous Senate results is cause for serious concern…In doing so, Haitian authorities flouted the views of [UN, OAS,
Francophone countries, and Haitian civil society.

8/9/00 — Human Rights Watch, “In Haiti, where democracy is still struggling to take hold, the effort made to award everything to a single party — via blatantly unfair electoral manipulations — is a disturbing portent for the future.”

7/24/00 — Haiti Special Coordinator, Ambassador Donald Steinberg, quoted in World News Connection: “It is very difficult for the U.S. Government or any other government to trust the officials that are elected based on the results of the recent Haitian elections. Nor is the government ready to finance any other elections in Haiti without the presence of democratic institutions.”

7/11/00 — White House communiqué: “We are deeply troubled that Haiti proceeded with run-off elections on Sunday despite the well-founded concerns of the Caribbean Community, the Organization of the American States and the United Nations…It is incumbent upon Haitian authorities to respect Haiti’s Constitution, its Electoral Law, and the will of its people… There is still time for the Haitian authorities to correct these mistakes and hold run-offs for the Senate seats in question.”

7/7/00 — OAS Press Release: “The final results for the senate elections as proclaimed by the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) are incorrect, and the [OAS Electoral Observation Mission] cannot consider them either accurate or fair.”
What, Whither, Why Haiti?
On Haitian Intransigence

My only earlier experience with things Haitian had been a car trip in 1982 with my friend Hoyt from the Dominican Republic (“DR”) side of the island. We drove across the suave and human-friendly DR side of the island from Hoyt’s apartment in Santo Domingo, reading aloud to each other from short stories of Henry James, while taking in the peaceful villages and appealing vegetation on the road to Santiago de la Cruz and Dajabón.

Shortly after crossing the latter, the landscape quickly turned lunar and we came to a quick halt at a road sign warning us we were about to enter Haiti near Ouanaminthe. Hoyt and I hadn’t seen a human being or building or vehicle in 40 miles; the border crossing, while unmanned, seemed like a foreboding space/time warp where no person would easily venture. We sat still in an attitude both reverential and fearful, something like space voyagers three galaxies away with a low fuel tank.

The Henry James ceased, and we sat in the rented car and turned off the engine.

My vocal and erudite friend pointed over to the far side of the border, stark and foreboding, and managed to utter the single word, “Haiti.”

We sat in continued silence and awe and some fear, scanning the void of the space before us, denuded of human habitation or vegetation. The very word “Haiti” conjured up dark images of savagery, cruel dictatorships, and unspeakable quasi-religious rites.

Like teenagers repelled but also drawn to foreboding and danger, we shared a long silence together, again like space travelers at the frontier of
a point of no return, entertaining terrifying notions such as “motor stall”
and “people approach from nowhere” and “jinx not for me,” and “escape
from here at all cost.”

At the same time, in our silence I believe we shared notions such as
“respect for their way of doing things,” “They are people, after all,” and
“Hath misery its limits?”

After our moment of dread, Hoyt started up the engine again and we
made a quick 180 degree turn back to the vastly more friendly “DR
side,” where we knew even mechanical failure would lead to friendly
encounters with poor and proud villagers whose good will and helpful-
ness we had seen in our voyage earlier the same day.

It was like reentering the Earth’s atmosphere after sighting and escap-
ing a black cosmic hole.

Fast forward to spring, 1999: I am now in Creole language training
in Rosslyn, Virginia, locked in gladiatorial embrace with Patrique, my
private language instructor and the first Haitian I have ever known.

The stiff-necked and likeable Patrique has — shall we say — unique
notions of linguistic pedagogy, and he plows through the *Ann Pale Kreyòl*
(University of Indiana) manual with me, the only text known written
for English speakers wanting to learn Haiti’s peculiar and expressive and
admirable, economical language.

I have only five weeks to piece together my usable French with Cre-
ole’s eccentricities, and somehow come out conversant in the troubled
island republic’s unique vernacular.

*A problem arises*: based maybe on previous experience with language-
deficient and heavy-tongued Americans, Patrique uses the experience
as an opportunity to display his erudition in sociology, linguistics, prin-
ciples of geopolitics, and sagely life experience, when what I urgently
need is simply some exposure to his native language. He steadfastly refuses
to employ it.

I ask him, “Please, Patrique, we have only five weeks together and
could you please speak to me in Creole.”

Patrique’s reaction is defensive and a bit belligerent “You cannot learn until you understand the difference between a verb and a noun.”

I answer, “I’ve learned four languages and taught two. You can be sure I understand what a noun is. Please instead of explaining in English principles of grammar, please speak to me in Creole.” Patrique misinterprets my request as a rebellion of some sort, and answers my charges yet more stridently in English. I sense the clock ticking with only five weeks to learn — mind you, not a dialect, but a language, even if linked etymologically with the French I’ve done a doctorate in, and taught on three continents previously.

The days go by and our differences in pedagogical approach become more bare and raw. One Wednesday I stage a walk-out (call me intransigent, as you will) while telling the institute director that I’ll return to my tutorial only when my instructor agrees to speak to me in the language he’s being paid to teach me.

Like Proust’s Marcel slipping off the curbstone, I am jolted with two passing thoughts, one mildly off-putting, the other a source of alarm:

1. Patrique is intransigent;
2. What if Patrique’s intransigence is a national cultural trait which goes beyond him as an individual and stands as an example of how people are in his country of origin?

Some months later I learned the evident answer to the conundrum: In his resistance to use his own native language in teaching it to me, Patrique was merely showing a way Haitians deal with the outrageous stresses and deficiencies of their daily lives’ challenges. Indeed, his intransigence was (one should never generalize, but how can one not?) a national trait, and here was my very first whiff of it.

Every vice has its corresponding virtue (reckless self-sacrifice/generosity; obstinacy/tenacity; crudeness/honesty; belligerence/self-affirma-
tion...) and the famous Haitian intransigence is no exception. Only through determination and solidarity and willing self-sacrifice was a nation of slaves able to liberate itself from under the cruel heels of European oppression; only through abdominal muscularity can any Haitian make it through a rough day’s existence with one meal on the table.

Haiti’s triumph and defeat, both, are incarnated in the Janus-like duality of intransigence and determination. The country would not even exist without the vice-and-virtue combination, but nor can it advance, they say, until they learn to cool both extremes of this vice-and-virtue duality.

On the week of July 1-5, 2002, a year after departing Haiti, I met two former colleagues separately, in the “Foggy Bottom,” the cafeteria in the State Department which serves as watering hole and point of encounter for colleagues spread across the globe but who find one another — with mixed results of joy, dread, indifference, irritation — to play “Who Was Where When” and compare notes on how life has gone since being reassigned from Jakarta to the Bureau of Environmental Affairs in the grey monolith at the corner of C and 23rd Streets, NW, Washington.

In both unrelated cases, I “caught up” with colleagues who had dealt with the Haiti dossier in 1999-2001, when I was in Haiti and they were dealing with Haiti from the safe distance of Foggy Bottom, USA.

The standard conversation includes friendly noises of “I hope you’re well and where are you off to next?” followed by a 45-second appraisal of the current situation in Haiti, before retreating to one’s office on the third floor with the mobile tray of sushi or Mexican enchiladas for lunch at one’s desk.

“Intransigence,” say my two colleagues on those separate occasions. Both of them have been inversely rewarded during Haiti’s undoing with promotions, honors, decorations. “Same old thing, and Haiti goes down the drain,” they say with philosophical shrugs. And though I know the following sentences by heart, I nevertheless perversely press each to articulate them: a blundering, corrupt presidency and an inept, intransigent
opposition, they say.

“What have they done to create constituency?” They ask.

I find the notion hurtful and erroneous; I commit the Foggy Bottom sin of saying so: “And if your opposition cronies were being murdered and if you had received 15 death threats by phone, and if you were pursued by murderous gangs through the streets, wielding firearms and vowing to kill you?”

My interlocutors stare blankly at me, not knowing what to make of me.

I press on: “You’ve talked to Marie Laurence Lassègue, perhaps? After she was surrounded in her car by six motorcyclists drawing weapons and vowing to kill her?”

My interlocutors look at me with vague astonishment: I have challenged and violated the tacit and firm belief held in the State Department about Haiti from the start: “Same old thing: ineffectual leadership, intransigent opposition.”

Vexed beyond self control, I say, “Is it intransigence to stay in your house when your colleagues are being killed, when the regime has all the firearms and when the death threats come by phone and graffiti, both?”

“But what have they done to develop a constituency?” my interlocutors say.

“One man has had his turn to ruin the country,” I answer. “Now someone else should have a chance to ruin it in some new innovative way.”

Seeing the dead end of our dialogue, we wish one another well and depart for different floors in the Department.

Flashback fourteen months to May, 2001, when Ambassador Brian Dean Curran is addressing the Chamber of Commerce in Cap-Haïtien, alluding to the close historical connections between Haiti and the U.S. success in its own War of Independence. He mentions also the doubling
of the land surface of the U.S. from President Jefferson’s Louisiana Purchase, due in part to Napoleon’s loss of Haiti after the latter’s slave revolt and Napoleon’s sudden inability to resupply the French colony of the Mississippi basin.

The Ambassador’s powerful text is aired live on local TV and radio. All goes well to the receptive audience until he lays the written text aside and concludes his remarks with a single word, repeated three times, accompanied by the emphasis of his fist pounding the lectern: “What the country needs,” he ad lib, “is dialogue, diaLOGUE, DIALOGUE!”

A Haitian journalist asks the Ambassador at a press conference the following day: “Monsieur l’Ambassadeur, you speak of ‘dialogue,’ but what do you advocate in the case of a dialogue of the deaf?”
A Note on Vodou

Very funny: “I love that voodoo… that you do… so well… the Night of the Zombies, the poison potions that litter our frivolous stereotypes of the beliefs motivating the only successful slave rebellion in human history.

Haiti, they say, is 80% Catholic and 100% vodou.

Vodou (vodou, voodoo, voudun — ) can be traced to the animism and ancestor worship of Benin’s Ouidah, the Papacy and Vatican of the movement which as recently as the year 2000 attracted a visit by the fumbling and rarely sober President Préval in his quest to regain lost strengths (sexual? intellectual?) and waning political powers.

Only Haitian anthropology professor Henri Coulanges made sense of it all when explaining it to a group in Western terms: the story of Faust. Like a previous president of Haiti, “known” to Haitian to possess vodou powers, the terms of the Faustian contract ran out, and the people needed no cue to prey on him and tear him limb from limb, for the sin of loss of power, for no reason than that the unfortunate regent’s mortgage ran out.

No Westerner has understood Vodou, or ever will. Many collect its intriguing symbols as art curios, and relate its deities with coy cultural interpretations to the Catholicism superimposed (and easily adapted) by a cruel oppressor, the French, three centuries ago.

Vodou is animist, syncretic, unique, related, hopeful, pessimistic, all of the above. It is a group of two hundred lost souls lifting their passports to God in a ceremony intended to bring from above some form of relief from their untenable daily lives, mutely whimpering “U.S. visa” as they
raise their passports to the sky, having not a clue where such a blessing might come from if not from the unbreachable indifference and “guilty until proven innocent” codified rule governing the U.S. Consulate downtown. The consular code, assuming an applicant will fail to return to his/her home country unless able to prove the contrary, is a rare aspect of American law which runs counter to the “innocent until proved guilty” principle of the U.S. criminal code.

Of course, Haitians are not all misery, all the time — at least someone must advance in making money off a tiny car mechanic’s garage, and sometimes one’s enemy twists his ankle or goes impotent, so with these signs of effectiveness, Haitians will give Erzulie — or Ste. Marie — another chance, and another, since as poker players, they have few decent alternatives to just staying in the game.

Indeed, a Haitian faced with starvation, penury, unrestrained violence, random property seizures, disease, unemployment at home — with abundant labor opportunities, a supportive diaspora and rule of law in the U.S., would have to have a twisted mind indeed, not to run for it at the first opportunity.

And yet the Haitian loves Haiti as the Russians loves Russia — forced at times to flee for their lives, but languishing in nostalgia should they ever succeed.

Vodou puts a pattern — if not a rationale — to the anarchy which is a Haitian life. The genius of Joseph Campbell, Maya Deren, and the late Cheryl Ito notwithstanding, I intuit that Vodou is not unlike the pragmatic dealings human beings employ towards any or all unknown and ominous aspects impending on their troubled lives: if Erzulie cannot cure your goiter and no medicine is available, you might as well turn to the Virgin Mary with the same promises of recompense should Mary deliver the goods. Haitians are poker players with a perpetually losing hand, but inexhaustible supplies of betting chips; hence they have little to lose in staking their “all” on a remedy to their prevailing despair. This remedy they sometimes call Vodou, sometimes charismatic Christianity,
as circumstances seem to indicate at any given time.

Hence the ceremonies — call it Vodou, Catholicism, Yoga, syncretic McDonaldism, as you will — with a thousand Haitians lifting their passports to the sky and incanting an African derivative prayer for the heaven-sent miracle of a visa to the Land of Life Possible: the U.S.

_Poteau-mitan_, slain goats, _houngan_, _mambo_, and _vévé_. . . , intriguing and finely wrought sand paintings evoking an underworld of spirits, ancestors, supernatural forces pro and con — one would have to be a fool not to jump in with the ardor of belief and purity of intentions of the _mambo_ or priestess, with-life enhancing expectations defying grinding patterns of defeat evident in every aspect of Haitian life.

Once blessed by a kindly and wise Vodou practitioner at the dining table of my own house, I was startled as he spat an undefined substance (_clairin_ or unrefined rum, I later learned) all over my face and white shirt.

I grew to know and respect him as a man of tumultuous good will and benevolent intentions — practitioner of the healing “right hand” of Vodou, as emphatically distinguished by the black magic weaponry of the malevolent “left hand.” _Houngans_ and _mambos_ specialize generally in the one or the other, while some seem to master both.

Contradicting the prose above (since Haitian existence is in itself a contradiction), I opine that conditional on one’s belief in the process to begin with — one is subject, or not, to voodoo’s evident power to heal, to maim, to influence outcomes of life’s bifurcations. Many a Westerner has irrefutable evidence or anecdotes of its curious effects, like the tale told to me in 2002 by a State Department colleague of an _houngan_ priest unexpectedly dying in the skeptical colleague’s house in the early 1980’s. The colleague, at a loss as to how to deal with a cadaver in the house, went to Embassy employees who cautioned him to have first the _houngan_ blessed by another practitioner before relegating him to embalmment or burial. Through the voice of the practitioner, my rational colleague heard the voice of the deceased saying, “Do not be concerned, I am well
and in a happy state, and will soon reappear as a white powder.”

To complete the anecdote (every Westerner who has lived in Haiti has one) he noted that during the lengthy ceremony, the deceased’s beloved dog, forgotten in the bathroom, emerged, covered with a white powder which he excitedly shook off like rainwater after being released from the anxiety of confinement during the ceremony.

“How is one to explain…?” Westerners are fond of saying. It is true, it is not true; it is understated, it is exaggerated. It is as much a part of every Haitian’s life — regardless of social stratum — as is a trip to the mall for suburban Americans.

Seeking to understand or control would be an act of arrogance not unlike the empty rituals performed by our benighted practitioners of geopolitics.

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**A short glossary for those who really need to know**

*Agwe:* The *loa* of passage to the underworld, via water.

*wanga:* Magic charm with both malevolent and sexually empowering powers.

*asson:* Sacred rattle used in ceremonies.

*Erzulie:* The female generic spirit, sometimes interchangeable nationally with the Virgin Mary incarnation of feminine grace and beauty. Symbolized in *vénès* as a coiled serpent.

*Ghede:* Most important of the *loas*, the one symbolizing death (but also resurrection). Ghede has a predilection for obscenity and jokes about sex, seen as defiance of and demystifying death.

*Guinen:* Derived of course from “Guinea,” the place of origin, the idealized past; (syn: “paradise”).
hounfor: “Temple” of Vodou priest.
houngan: Male priest.
Legba: The loa granting access to the underworld, or unseen worlds. The traditional invocation “Papa Legba, ouvri barrie pou nous passer” (“open the way for us to pass”) was taken/borrowed by the Lavalas splinter party “Louvrri Barrie.”
loa: Deity or spirit (controversy over a possible derivation from the French “loi”) (cf. “saint”).
loup garou: Werewolf.
mambo: Female priest.
peristile: Rectangular structure (roof only, no walls) where ceremonies are performed.
poteau mitan: The “navel” of the peristile, a vertical pole implying connection with the underworld and the ancestors there residing.
The Left Hand: Black magic, the power to inflict pain or misfortune.
The Right Hand: The healing, positive side of voodoo.
vévé: Ritual flour drawing on the ground.
zombie: (Harvard graduate Wade Davis claims to have seen and studied them in The Serpent and the Rainbow.) “The Walking dead” or “soulless body,” anyone’s best guess is that these mindless semi-human hulks are unfortunates at the receiving end of a family or personal feud, and unwitting recipients of a sophisticated poison inducing a rare narcosis (perhaps catalepsis) resembling death. The hapless individual is buried, then later “awakes” (most of its brain functions shot) and performs whatever slave labor its master requires.
A Short Comment on Haitian Art

As a person more aurally than visually oriented, I know my obligation to cite Haitian visual art as the most inventive of the Western Hemisphere.

Inspired by nostalgia, blood lust, Ovidian metamorphosis of creatures-into-other-creatures, brooding spirits gazing out from sumptuous vegetation and trees known themselves to have their own animus and anima per vodou/animist tradition, the startling tableaux cannot help but stop the observer in her tracks, stunned by the authenticity of imagination and direct shortcut to a fertile and febrile subconsciousness.

All Americans sought to acquire samples of the indigenous genius — I made the exception of admiring but never buying. I was rebuked by my compatriots, but remained steadfast in my belief that images cannot be purchased, nor can one human “provide images” for another.

One evening a neighbor in Musseau showed me the prophetic canvas of a Haitian artist he’d acquired — a self portrait of the artist as retreating holographic figure, involuntarily evading the seeking arms of his children grasping for him vainly and mournfully to retain him from passage to an unknown nether world — the canvas fatefully executed the day before a freak accident took the artist’s life.

Though stunning, this was not a work I would want genteelly framed in my kitchen pantry or — God forbid — bedroom.

During the Coup period and U.S. accompanying embargo, one Haitian of Middle Eastern descent made millions smuggling Haitians objects out of Haiti to a neighboring country where devouring Americans paid four to five times their “normal” value because of the added premium of their having evaded the embargo.
Foreign tourists went beserk over the objects after learning of André Breton’s and French Surrealists’ reverential respect for the Haitian images delving so facilely into the human subconsciousness without the layers of sophistication/literacy/psychoanalysis to inhibit their access to the demons and diaphanous beauties inhabiting the human eye during, say, sleep or narcosis.

The fecund images fetched a pretty penny in their day.

Then during and after the general downfall, the clientele simply upped and disappeared.

In spring of 2001, I paid a business visit to one of the galleries on the Rue La Marre (“Y’en a marre,” as disenchanted expats called it — “I’m fed up.”) Seated one afternoon in fraternal misery were the owners of the gallery together with an owner of a rival gallery down the way. None had experienced any turnover in months. They knew me to be admirer but not a buyer.

They looked at me beseechingly, as if to say, “Can’t you help restore this dead industry?”

Months later the apple of one of the gallery owner’s eye — his nineteen-year-old daughter — was killed in an traffic accident by an overloaded truck careening murderously down a mountain road. Already stationed back in Washington at the time, all I could do was send condolences to the older sister of the deceased — the only e-mail address I still retained. The nation, its art, its downward spiral, had turned one family of expatriate believers to embittered bearers of unremitting pain, resentment, disillusionment, and dashed hopes for a country and its astounding aesthetics, yet to be restored.
The Rich Creole Language

In the beginning was the Word. Derived of course from French but not mutually intelligible, Haitian Creole is roughly equivalent to what South Africans call “kombuis duits” — the Dutch learned in the kitchen by slaves and servants, passed on to white children in simplified and Africanized form by their caretakers.

Approaching Creole from outside of Haiti, one sees it first as impenetrable written arcana, something that looks on the page like Serbo-Croatian or Mongolian.

But despite three official attempts to regularize its orthography, it was never meant to be a written language, nor will it ever. The pudgy, impressively corrupt and mentally challenged dictator Baby Doc gave an innocent shot at making it his country’s sole official language in the late 1960’s, shouted down by international watchdog organizations as “isolationist!” and yet all he really was trying to do was codify an already existing reality: all Haitians speak Creole in its full richness, only a few speak French well, and everyone mixes the two languages indiscriminately in a single sentence.

At first glance, the French speaker sees Creole text as a thick, impeding veil, then (unveiled experience) as one sounds out each word, the whole exercise starts with a giggle and ends with frequent guffaws as the vocalized words step out of the fog in their naïve transparency.

Hence, “bïwo” becomes “bureau” “lari” becomes “la rue” “mwen” becomes “moi” and “Pòt-Pawol” becomes “Porte-Parole,” or spokesman.

From the first basic greetings, the language reveals Haitians’ somber
views of life and expectations of misfortune, almost to the point of the self-fulfilling curse:

Hence, “ça va” or “n’ap boule?” receives the standard answer. “Pa pi mal” (“no worse [than before]”) or n’ap kembe (“Well at least we’re still standing”).

Through their rich language, Haitians traverse shared misfortune to meet one another in recognizable commonality:

“Nou le, me nou la” (“We may be ugly, but we’re here.”)

Though 80% illiterate, Haitians are as alert and adept as people anywhere, and well aware of it, as they are of the injustice of their crushing circumstances. Their language does not isolate them from the ironies and nuances of others, but on the contrary, tumbles with its own rich vocabulary of self deprecation: “analfabet pa bet” — “illiterates are no dummies.”

Warned that the “upper classes” would be offended at being addressed in “peasant” Creole — and that conversely, peasants would be put off at being addressed in the language of the oppressor (something like high tea with white gloves in equatorial Kenya) — I found from the start that all such rules were false, and that the Haitian of any social rank is simply delighted to be noticed or addressed at all in any manner, by the outsider.

Creole is structurally as simple as a language can be and has no pretense, only flawless utility. Its complete and absolute ability to express any concept fully and in complex, nuanced phrases, is evidence of the perversity of northern Europeans, and their need to create cases, conjugations, agreement in adjectives, and other superfluities. These come perhaps from Europeans’ boredom during their long winters in their yurt-like structures which must have instilled cabin fever, Big Time, in earlier centuries. Or perhaps their wish to baffle or disable the outsider. Creole by contrast is inclusive and hospitable.

No Haitian is ever confused by the word, “nou” — which can mean “we” or “you,” depending on context. Nor do Haitians further trivialize
their already difficult daily lives with self-inflicted grammar — “go” becomes simply
    m’prale
    ou prale
    li prale
    nou prale
    yo prale

Even the “li” can be “he” “she” or “it,” but never in the history of Haitian experience has this caused any confusion or misunderstanding. “Li li li pou li” can be “He reads it to her,” or vice versa, no one ever goes astray as a result.

Lovely endless sentences result which seem comical to the outsider but which fulfill the requirements of transferal of meaning — hence, “Papa pap-m, papa pa-ou” — “He’s not my father, he’s yours.” Articles and possessives, when truly necessary, are attached to the ends of nouns — as in Scandinavian, the world’s only other linguistically sane culture.

Hence,

- liv-mwen (my book)
- liv-la (the book)
- zegliz-nou (our church)
- zwazo-li (his bird)
- fann-nan (the woman)

And yes, nasals matter.

The slave traders who taught uprooted Africans in this kitchen language were, themselves, illiterate French. Predominantly Normands, who in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries used expressions already archaic in their own day, such as “chimère” for gangster or rapscallion (originally, “monster.”)

Haitian Creole is rich in expressions for thief, thievery, and intimidation on the streets

- chimê
- zinglindo
The pejorative “kongo” comes from Africans of West African descent, largely Muslim when first brought into servitude, and their condescension to the religiously and culturally “inferior” Central Africans of the time.

The mutual skepticism persists to this day; any Haitian can point to any other as of Western or Central African descent, much as Hutus and Tutsis can see characteristics evident only to them, and to no one else.

The joy of Creole, however, like the “Joy of Yiddish,” lies in its lugubrious proverbs, “Pawol Granmoun,” or “words of grownups.”

They reveal ironies of unsurpassed self awareness, and the centuries of finding distance from suffering through self deprecating humor. Their make-up appears unique and original to the island.

Ki mange bouji-a, dwe pou pou mech-la. (“He who eats the candle must be prepared to poo-poo the wick.”)

Si travay-a te si bon tan kou yo di, rich-yo ta nou pran sa-a gen longtemps (“If work were all as good as they say, the rich would have taken it from us long ago.”)

Creole’s multitudes of “Pawol Granmoun” or “proverbs” tend clearly to the fatalistic and hence reveal as any nation’s proverbs the wisdom and peculiar experiential flavor of the generations.

Hence:

Vle pa vle, anteman-an pou katrè (Like it or not, the funeral must take place at four.”)

At the same time, the language is marked by extreme economy, and reflects the quick adaption of slaves who had to get the gist of the master’s dialect for sheer survival.

Hence:

guovant (“big belly”) for “pregnant”
or

mounisit (“people here”) for “local” as opposed to “foreigners”
The Westerner can “learn” Creole as Ambassador Alvin Adams did in the 1970’s (known as “Bourik Chaje” to generations of Haitians because of an entrance briefing he gave at the airport when first arriving in the country.) He said, “Bourik chaje pa kempe,” literally, “The loaded donkey cannot stand still,” which all Haitians knew in 1990 context to mean, “The forward progress of democracy is irreversible.”

The Haitian government was not amused, and considered denying him credentials, though they relented after five days.

What the Westerner will never understand, however, is the frequent omission of the word “not,” as when President Aristide exhorted his followers in Cite Soleil to “Keep the peace” upon his airport exit to a Hemispheric Summit in Quebec in 2001, and later he thanked them on his return for doing, so, after they had massacred 24 innocents from a rival neighboring area known for its resistance to the Aristide juggernaut.

Haitians have always been as nimble in their linguistic pirouettes as Westerners have been square and uncomprehending in picking up the nuances of this practical, utilitarian, and supremely expressive language. Even as (pardon the possible appearance of condescension) teenagers who know how to say things in order to mislead the adults and, in the end, get what they want and need.

One cannot address the Creole language without noting “marronage,” a process highly developed in cultures of survivalist corruption and deception, but characterized so aptly by that single word in Creole.

“Marrón” an archaic Spanish word for “wild horse,” was the moniker proudly adopted by escaped slaves in the eighteenth century who fled to Haiti’s highlands to escape the indescribable cruelties of slavery under the French-Spanish-English overlords who fought amongst themselves for possession and control of their Africa chattel.

The proud marron (also “chestnut”” in French) did have to descend from the hills from time to time for basic provisions and foodstuffs, and
escaped persecution and re-enslavement through sheer deceit and conceit, posing as Freedmen or enfranchised, racially ambiguous citizens who could pass for something other than what they were.

The word evolved over the centuries to mean “deceitful” or “hypocritical” or “two-faced,” which in Haiti is the art form and term of respect for the survivor, something along the line of what Graham Greene was after in calling Haitians “comedians.”

The close alliance between artful dodging, lying, survivalism, mimesis, developed to unparalleled heights in Haitian culture — hence their ease in taking Western diplomats and do-gooders for the suckers they are.

As with all involuntarily adopted art forms, the talent brings with it pride/shame, and all the ambivalence incarnated in the third World love-hate relationships with their past or current European straight thinkers.

Only fools say what they mean; the talented know how to cross their fingers behind their backs when making flat statements, or better yet — pronounce phrases with the ambiguities which allow them later to slip out of their noose through plausible deniability.

Educated Haitians, when explaining the cause of their plight under their deceitful leaders capable of pulling around tone-deaf Western negotiators by the nose: “c’est le marronage.” This they say with philosophical Gallic shrugs and healthy doses of self loathing. All are capable, only the worst take marronage into their soul as their pure essence. The others recognize it as the cunning and virtue which sets their nation free, and which now in its perverted form shackles them once again, and destroys their chances for normalcy.

Double-edged sword, the talent liberates and leads to ruination, both.

In 45th Parliament Deputy Mac-Ferl Morquette’s 1991 book Les Nouveaux Marrons, he develops the notion to the “Nth” degree, noting it as the flagrancy of pure deceit. He quotes Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s 1990 statement on democracy as the ultimate marronage: words to be taken by Haitians with full understanding, but by Westerners with ratiocinations known to be absurd by the sufferers in a situation of misery:
“I have always accepted that the Constitution implied elections, but I have also considered elections as incapable of providing a solution for our country, diseased to its very core. As November 29, 2000, [the eve of Aristide’s electoral triumph] approached, I respected the position of those who wanted to go out and vote, but as for myself, I never took out any voting card to participate because I first couldn’t see sullying my hands in such an unseemly manner —”

[My translation, p. 73]

Thus spake the champion of Democracy and the savior of the defenseless, in an erudite French with rich overtures of the Creole Haitian marronage which comes in the end to mean to the lame-brained Westerner, still the enemy after these many centuries, as something like, “See if you can catch me at it. Bet you can’t!”
As this text is based on personal experience rather than academic research, an exhaustive bibliography would be beside the point.

Nevertheless, the following readings are an inseparable part of the inductive experience which brought meaning of the evasive Haitian experience to me.

With the possible exception of the Fertile Crescent of the Middle East and perhaps the sceptered isle of England — perfidious Albion — I doubt if any corner or our crowded globe can have engendered equal amounts of prose, poets, fiction, and historiography per 100,000 inhabitants. Though a small minority of Haitians are literate in any language, the few who are have produced masses of compelling prose. They explicate and penetrate the Haitian experiences in the freeze-framing of one of the world’s most compelling and inexplicable cultures.

Follows, then, a truncated version of the readings that mattered in bringing me to a modicum of understanding of an impenetrable culture, endlessly rewarding, sad, invigorating, and lofty to those few outsiders who have made genuine efforts to understand and accept it.

The following is more than a mere list, but an experiential account of the subjects and authors which gave me a map — if not reliable grid — to Haiti’s enigmas.


I was not one of the few lucky ones to get any hands on a copy of the book, launched at a signing ceremony May 26, 2001, at the Cassagne Restaurant in Petionville. The signing was disrupted by Aristide’s con-
stabulary, who summarily arrested Avril on charges of treason and hauled him off to jail without warrant. He was released a year later, and immediately re-arrested before reaching the street from his jail cell.


The moving autobiography of a Haitian restavek or slave, “given” from one branch of an impoverished family to another for domestic manual labor. Many degrees of slavery yet exist in Haiti. Cadet’s rarely fortunate case depicts the story of one of the few who was sent to school and later escaped servitude during a family outing to the U.S. Cadet is frank about the permanent psychological scars he suffered at the losing end of one of Haiti’s dirty little secrets. Those who have lived in Haiti know that his account is typical, believable, and resonant with an entire sector of Haitian Society. Read it and weep.


An admirable three-part series describing in gruesome and vivid detail the earlier dégringolade of 1987, an election with gangrenous results after the expulsion of the inept and hapless Jean-Claude Duvalier (Baby Doc) in 1986. The title is taken from the often cited Creole proverb “Dèyè mòn, gen mòn,” literally, “Beyond the Mountains, yet more mountains.” Beyond the meta translation of this rich proverb, the multiple meanings:

— Beyond every triumph, another crushing challenge lies ahead;
— Don’t believe the mountain at face value, for there is another one behind it;
— Difficulties upon difficulties;
— No solution without yet another problem in store;
to the facts, and as
— Believe nothing; all is deceit.

As with the inspired work of historian CLR James, I know of no other journalistic account on any topic as complete, as loyal to the facts, and as articulate and masterful, as Danner’s formidable opus on the events of 1987 in Haiti.


Deified by some of its readers for reasons I’ve never understood. Right. Zombies exist, as victims of internecine feuds resulting in a poison inducing narcosis, and leaving a corpse on minimal life signs to be dug up a week after the brain has suffered permanent damage, while the body can be induced to perform manual labor. Right. If you have nothing good to say… and here I stop.


The late Maya Deren, 1960’s Russian immigrant to the U.S., took on Haiti and its Vodou culture in the 1970s and made a series of documentary films seeking to penetrate the phenomenon of “possession,” whereby the vodou practitioner is overcome during ceremony by inexplicable, orgasmic religious experience. The process is known in Creole as being “chevauché,” or “ridden,” as a horse would be when under bit and rein — whence the title of Deren’s book.

The photo of Deren on the back cover of the book, taken from the film *Meshes of the Afternoon*, is among the most beautiful photographic images of a woman ever taken.

The genealogy goes somewhat thus: Deren married Japanese musician and composer Teiji Ito, who after Deren’s death married their mutual friend Cheryl (maiden name unknown, but Jewish) from New York whom I met in Madrid at a documentary film festival in 1990 as “Cheryl
Ito.” Just before my departure for Haiti in summer 1991, I did the pilgrimage to Greenwich Village to see Cheryl again. In the dim penumbra of her 4th floor walk-up, I felt the richness and oppression of the thousands of photos and objects Cheryl had conserved of Deren, whom Cheryl adored, as she did the Japanese husband they serially shared.

Already wracked by cancer and striving to keep her weight above 80 pounds, Ito negotiated the steps down to the street below her walk-up, stuffed with potions, dolls, macabre and skeletal objects, photos and the work — Deren’s unpublished research — she was seeking to bring to publication with Ito’s friend and neighbor Joseph Campbell.

Ito had expressed in letters to me an ardent wish that my assignment in Haiti would lead me to discoveries of the pungent culture she had made into her life through the work of Deren and Ito, in collaboration with the incomparable ethnologist Joseph Campbell. Campbell’s introduction to Deren’s 1970 book reminds us of the Creole proverb, “When the ethnologists arrive, the gods depart.”

That brutally hot day in New York without benefit of air conditioning, Ito and I drank a light malted cola in a neighborhood hangout, and the skeletal Ito asked if I would take her dancing one evening so she could meet and snare a man.

I agreed in principle, but never saw her alive again.

— One can never ever drive from one’s memory the searing images of Michael Finkel’s New York Times Sunday magazine cover piece, “America, or Death,” (June 18, 2000) in which he recounts his passage with 44 Haitians, in an unsuccessful crossing of perilous waters in their 23-foot boat. U.S. coast guardsmen “rescued” the 44 — plus journalist and photographer Chris Anderson — minutes before it sank in the Caribbean, attempting but never achieving landfall in Florida. The 44 Haitians were “repatriated.” One said, “Some people get to America and some people die. Me, I’ll take either one. I’m just not taking Haiti anymore.”

To read the text or see the photos of this equally remarkable piece is to
live forever with its images of reckless wagering, dashed hopes, fear, and lofty aspiration.


The title speaks for itself. Despite the flawed credentials of the author as a sycophantic sidekick of military dictator Raoul Cédras, and the egotistical ravings imbedded in the narrative, the text does nevertheless stand intact as an indictment of what the Clinton-Gore apparatus did to the hopes of the Haitian people.

Includes facsimile, handwritten documents dated November 3, 1991, from Canadian neurosurgeon Michel-Ange Montplaisir, affirming the psychopathic nature of his patient Jean-Bertrand Aristide, whom he diagnoses as “Bipolar…psychotic, manic depressive,” and affirms his prescription of lithium in an attempt to disarm his destructive tendencies. Though self-serving, Garrison’s account contains too many internal consistencies to be easily refutable.


A supercilious but engaging account written from a Puck-like attitude from *Midsummer Night’s Dream*: “Lord, what fools these mortals be.” The observations of a casual observer, one small but clear notch above the tone-deaf miscreants who parachuted into Haiti during the same period only to pull them through the slime of their own self-imposed misperceptions and foolish hopes.

Gold expresses some affection and understanding for Haitians and their plight, and deserves modest credit for his achievement in doing so — though his sneering contempt does rise to the surface inevitably on occasion.


A work of no great consequence in the panoply of world literature,
but a frequent reference point for the Haitian intelligentsia and the outsider who seeks to explicate Haitians’ capacity for two-facedness. “Comedians” in the French sense — not the “ha—ha” of the clown, but the gift and talent of dissembling painstakingly built over the centuries by necessity for the well intentioned lying which Haitians had to adapt for their very survival. Petit Pierre, the cunning Haitian leading and misleading the first person in the novel, taken from the flesh-and-bones Haitian Aubelin Jolicoeur, whom all Americans meet and who introduces himself as “Jolicoeur, intimate friend of Graham Greene and model for his character Petit Pierre in The Comedians.”

Reputed to have worked on the side for every sort of unsavory security and intelligence organization in existence in Haiti’s complex constellation of dissembling and deceit, Jolicoeur was an aging and sad individual when I knew him from 1999—2001, who once told me in my office that he would prefer to perish than to witness the self destruction his country seemed embarked upon.

Once the beneficiary of the noble Latin tradition of local deification of cultural regimes in the form of free rent and an unconditionally open door at the Oloffson (Greene’s model for the “Trianon” in his novel), Jolicoeur fell upon hard times around the year 2000 when the Oloffson’s seemingly endless hospitality came to an end and he went into banishment and exile — smoking jacket and monocle and ivory handled walking sticks included — to a downtrodden refuge near the Champ-de-Mars in the city’s squalid axis.

I knew Jolicoeur as a man of extreme sensibility and afflicted nostalgia for the days of a dictatorship which allowed him an honored place as a man of culture — writer, poet, commentator, thinker, and progenitor of unknown numbers of Haitian infants by serial wives and lovers.

He published rhapsodic accounts in Le Nouvelliste of social events at my house, and was dear to me in his sadness and distress in the crumbling world around him, and reminder of that which sets human beings definitely apart from other animal forms: in the ability to regret and mourn,
and to dread the inevitable — not merely death, but the decay and gloom of all which surrounded him and all of us enamored of his troubled isle.


While not peculiar to Haiti, the work describes President Clinton’s meaty fist smashing testeronically on the table after the humiliation of the *Harlan County* incident on October 11, 1993 — not because of an error in judgment or a frustrated will to help the Haitian people, but because of a matter of sheer wounded male pride. “I’m never going to wimp out like I did in Haiti again,” Halberstam quotes Clinton on p. 273, the unnamed source presumably George Stephanopoulos, who had lived through the Clinton rage during the ship incident characterized by Halberstam as “one of the most embarrassing moments in recent American history.”


Sounding like a vaudeville act, the three Heinls were in fact Colonel Robert Debs Heinl, U.S. Embassy military expelled, to his everlasting credit, by the dictator François Duvalier; and his work furthered by his wife Nancy Gordon Heinl, with a revised and expanded version by son Michael Heinl.

Criticized for its accent on the violent aspect of Haitian history from 1492-1995, the work could hardly have been otherwise. To have described Haiti during this period without violence would be like omitting mention of the Vatican in the history of Rome.

On page 204 of the book appears a photo of a forlorn looking Head of State, Nissage-Saget, with Heinl’s simple accompanying legend: “…Haiti’s only nineteenth century ruler to leave office alive and at the end of his constitutional term.”

Other hapless Haitian rulers were deposed, torn limb from limb by enraged mobs — the lucky ones were merely sent to benevolent exile,
usually to Venezuela, the Dominican Republic or Mexico.

The Heinl, Heinl, and Heinl book makes clear that one major requirement for leadership of Haiti is a resolute death wish.


Now out of print, an account of the indescribable courage and resolute solidarity of the Haitian people at the time of their successful revolt against illiterate French overlords. The latter, for amusement, inserted sticks of dynamite in the anuses of their slaves to see the effects of detonation — and the slaves’ awareness in successful battle against 50,000 of Napoleon’s elite soldiers that failure meant more indescribable torment and cruelty, with nothing to lose in assaulting heavily armed French troops and, in the end, annihilating them all.

With apologies to C.V. Wedgewood and her inspiring accounts of the reluctant revolt of the Dutch under William the Silent against equally sadistic Spanish Catholic, the James book must surely be one of the more engaging bits of historiography ever written on any subject. The eloquence of rage with 200 years hindsight, on the eve of the breakout of World War II (published in 1939). (note: J-B Aristide referred to the authors as “MLR James [sic]” in his 10/28/93 address to the U.N. General Assembly, but this was a lesser mistake than some of those to follow…)


A deeply affecting, non-political profile of Massachusetts MD and MacArthur grant winner Paul Farmer. No one who has experienced the text and photos of this remarkable piece can ever forget it. Tuberculosis specialist, Farmer commutes frenetically between his clinic “Zanmi Lasante” (Friends in Health) in Haiti’s Central Plateau, and to Grozny, Baku and Moscow, where the epidemic is at a level of cruelty perhaps even greater in magnitude than the one in Haiti, and where TB perhaps dwarfs HIV/AIDS as cause of suffering (no reliable figures on either
It must be mentioned that Dr. Farmer accepted an advisory position on the Aristide Foundation, along with a Who’s Who of the highest paid Aristide lobbysists in the U.S. Joining the organization is not a matter requiring judgment, but it does clearly indicate a personal and advocacy relationship between Dr. Farmer and Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

That Haiti can nevertheless inspire the remarkable Kidder article, and the Danner series cited above, should be demonstration enough of the little republic’s ability to inspire journalism at its highest level — and to evoke stories which transcend mere suffering, due to Haiti’s indefinable appeal and compelling draw for anyone open to hear or tell stories of formidable power to reader and teller alike.

— And other, lesser works, such as Aristide’s own ghost-written work on development theory, and a more useful tome edited by CSIS expert Georges Fauriol in 1995 entitled Haitian Frustrations: Dilemmas for U.S. Policy.


A primer for English speakers seeking to speak Haitian Creole. No such work exists for any other living language, including real-life dialogues such as an account of the funeral of a young girl murdered by a jealous boyfriend. In an “advanced” chapter, includes the true-to-life odyssey of a father vainly trying to find transport to attend his daughter’s funeral.

My Creole tutor in Washington, D.C. expressed resentment of the dialogue, because of its northern colloquialisms he considered evidence of a linguistics mafia dominated by arrogant northerners from “O Kap,” the northern extremity of a country the size of the state of Maryland.
A paeon to Jean-Bertrand Aristide, sycophantic fiction masquerading as fact. Challenged in conversation by a colleague on her facts on a key massacre choreographed by the diminutive priest, Wilentz responded, “But the real version would not have fit aesthetically with the rest of the story.”

A gifted communicator, Wilentz later wrote a piece in the 6/5/00 *New York Times* Sunday magazine, depicting Aristide as a helpless victim of uncontrollable forces, and hence a failure at bringing his nation to any modicum of normalcy. The article was ingeniously crafted with a one—two punch: first impression, a leader who had failed his people ignominiously (and thereby erecting a simulacrum of open-mindedness by one of Aristide’s most conspicuous and articulate admirers); second impression, literally the day after reading the article, a subliminal image of a saintly individual who tried his all and was outdone by superior powers of evil. In appearing to be open-minded enough to identify her hero as a failure, Wilentz establishes the credibility of a genuine critic, but the residual effect left of human vulnerability artfully wins the reader back to a twisted sort of compassion for the good intentions of a man who left his country, through an iron grip, in every form of catastrophe — fear, hunger, random and not-so-random violence — all for personal gain achieved through a conniver’s ability to dupe and deceive. “Now, there, there, you’ve given it a good shot, just try a little harder!” One wants to say under the savvy of Wilentz’s powerful rhetoric. Wilentz speaks under Aristide’s spell like the cobra entranced by the snake charmer’s skills.

I stress, the list above is not exhaustive or academic, merely an inseparable part of my personal experience in putting Haiti *sous la loupe* — under the spyglass.
Whitman holds a PhD in French (Brown University), and served for the U.S. State Department in Denmark, Spain, South Africa, and Haiti. In Washington he was Cultural Coordinator in the Africa Bureau, and Program and Coordination Officer for the European Bureau.


His books are *Kaidara,* a presentation and study of a 1000-year-old African folk epic; *Madrid Inside Out,* a guide to residence for foreigners in Spain; and *One Step Up,* a manual for buyers of stringed instruments.