

# Our nasty little racist war in Haiti

**ANNETTE** Auguste was at home with her grandson when her front door exploded. The US Marines who came for her never knocked. Instead, they used explosives to blow the front door off of her home, then charging in, they killed her two dogs. They handcuffed her five-year-old grandson at gunpoint and kept him cuffed for five hours. The Marines are holding Auguste without legal authority or charges, accusing her of conspiring with "local Muslims" in a plan to attack US forces.

Does this sound like another faceless Iraqi woman about to disappear into the "rape rooms" of the world's most notorious penal system? Think again. Auguste's murdered dogs were named Ram Ram and Party Cool. Auguste herself is a folksinger, Voudun Priestess and former Brooklyn resident. Her kinfolk in all-American neighborhoods like Flatbush and Canarsie are raising hell about the mistreatment of their aunt and mother. No, this isn't Iraq. It's one of the more or less invisible battlefronts in the Bush Wars.

Annette Auguste is Haitian. And no, she's not an al Qaida operative. The "local Muslims" she was supposedly running with would be rather hard to find, with Muslims not even registering a demographic blip in this Caribbean nation where, according to the CIA, the most popular religious practice is "Voodoo," or more accurately, Voudun.

Auguste's real crime is that she was a member of deposed Haitian President Jean Bertrand Aristide's Lavalas Party, which was removed from power in a February coup despite, according the most recent US Government commissioned Gallop poll, still enjoying the overwhelming support of the Haitian people.

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Or Picture this: On May 18th – Flag Day – upwards of 30,000 Haitian patriots marched, demanding that occupying American forces leave their country. Haitian police, operating in tandem with US Marines, opened fire on the peaceful demonstration, killing up to eight unarmed demonstrators. Again, this is not Iraq – it's Haiti. The May 18th killings were witnessed and chronicled by Kevin Pina, the Associate Editor of the San Francisco Bay Area's preeminent African American newspaper, The Bay View. Pina luridly describes the death of one of the Flag Day victims, Titus Simton, writing, "It was I who filmed his last breath as he lie bleeding from a single shot to the head. The only weapon he had in his hands lay beside him, a bloodied Sony Walkman he was listening to as he marched peaceably demanding the return of his president."

It's important to put Titus Simton's name into print. And the name of Daniel Lescouflet, shot dead by police on the same day in front of the St. Jean Bosco Catholic Church, where Haiti's deposed president served as a priest before entering politics. It's important that their names be in print so that they don't simply disappear without a trace, as thousands of Haitians now seem to be doing.

### **Shipments to Hell**

The horrors of this new post-coup Haiti can hold their own against the horrors now emanating from all quarters of Iraq and Afghanistan. Take shipping containers. Before George W. Bush was appointed to the US presidency, they were simply innocuous parts of our industrial landscape, piled high by the sides of the New Jersey Turnpike or snaking their way through Buffalo piggybacked on railcars. Now, they're reminders of the barbaric horrors people in far flung hells suffer in our name.

Revelations from Afghanistan were chronicled in the new documentary film recently screened by the European Parliament. "Afghan Massacre: Convoy of Death," documents the deaths of up to 3,000 suspected Taliban fighters. They perished in shipping containers where they were riddled with bullets and literally left out in the sun to stew to death in their own juices. Back in our hemisphere, in Haiti, over 100 members of the Lavalas Party were rounded up by newly reconstituted death squads, forced into a shipping container, and dropped into the sea.

In Afghanistan and Iraq, the local people associate this terror with the name the US has given it – "democracy." In Haiti, however, the people know what democracy really is. They tasted it, and they aren't quite ready to roll over and let it die.

### **It started with Columbus**

A quick gloss of Haitian history is in order. The European conquest of the hemisphere

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began on the shores of the island of Hispaniola, now home to the Dominican Republic and Haiti. As a French colony, Haiti eventually supplied most of Europe's tropical produce at a devastating cost both to the Haitian environment and to its enslaved African population. In 1791, Haiti's slaves rose up against Napoleonic France. Under the leadership of a Voudun priest, Toussaint l'Ouverture, Haiti finally defeated Napoleon's navy and won its independence in 1803. Haiti was the modern world's first independent Black nation, the first Latin American nation to win independence, and the only nation to date created by a slave revolt.

Haiti's independence also marked the beginning of the end of the transatlantic slave trade. For slave nations such as the US, the Haitian revolution was a wake-up call. Suddenly there was a new potential down-side to importing massive numbers of African slaves to be overseen by a smaller number of white masters. By politically undermining the transatlantic slave trade, the Haitians also undermined the foundation of Europe's growing economy. Needless to say, a newly independent Haiti was politically isolated and friendless in the world community. Yet, the Haitians persevered.

In 1825 the French threatened to re-conquer Haiti and again enslave it's population unless Haiti paid reparations to the French for the property that they "stole" during the revolution, with the vast majority of that property being their own formerly enslaved bodies. The French also, in a forbearer to the Bush-Clinton-Bush era of neo-liberal economics, demanded Haiti reduce its import and export tariffs. Under threat of invasion, Haiti agreed to all of France's demands, thrusting themselves into a crippling quagmire of endless debt and institutional poverty that exists to this day.

### **Never sue France**

Let's fast forward. Haiti's elected president, Jean Bertrand Aristide recently launched a lawsuit against France, attempting to recover this money. Adjusted for inflation, it now adds up to \$21 billion. On January 1st of this year, while celebrating the Haitian bicentennial, President Aristide boldly proclaimed to a jubilant crowd that this money, rightfully the property of the Haitian people, would lift the hemisphere's poorest country out of the poverty it has known since 1825. Aristide was removed from office the following month by a violent coup. France and Canada immediately joined the US in sending troops to Haiti to prop up the new coup-born government. Haiti's new US-installed Prime Minister, who along with many of his cabinet ministers hails from Boca Raton, Florida, dropped the lawsuit against France as one of his first acts in office.

This was Haiti's 33rd coup. The preceding 32 coups were carried out by Haiti's army, which was created not by Haiti, but by the US Congress during, during the United States'

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1915-1934 occupation of that country. The army's last coup was in 1990, when they overthrew President Aristide for the first time, nine months after he won a landslide election. US Government documents recently released under the Freedom of Information Act show that the Bush I-era CIA, in the aftermath of the 1990 coup, created a paramilitary organization, FRAPH, responsible for killing up to 5,000 supporters of Haiti's elected government.

### **A president actually elected in 2000**

The Clinton administration returned a subdued Aristide to office in 1994 to finish his term which ended in 1995. Aristide again ran for the presidency in 2002, this time garnering over 90% of the vote in an election monitored by international observers that was, by all indications, much cleaner than the 2000 US presidential election. Upon returning to office, Aristide abolished the coup-prone Haitian military, which in its history never fought a non-Haitian enemy.

It was the undemocratic 2000 American election that ultimately proved fatal to Haiti's democracy. Upon seizing the US White House, George W. Bush immediately set out to undo the "damage" done by Bill Clinton, who undid papa Bush's removal of Aristide. If not for his command over the world's most powerful mischief-making apparatus, the younger Bush's anti-Aristide rants would have been written off as tantrums – just as his "Saddam tried to kill my pappy" rhetoric initially was. But this wasn't to be the case.

George W. Bush, enjoying a mass media-orchestrated political invincibility in the wake of the 9-11 attacks, set out actualizing an empire-building fantasy while hunting down surviving enemies from the first Bush administration. Haiti and Iraq were quickly in his crosshairs. Evidence now shows that by 1992, the US began covertly resurrecting FRAPH, arming and training exiled members of Haiti's disbanded death squads and military forces. According to an investigation conducted by John Jay College Criminal Justice professor Luis Barrios, as many as 20,000 American M-16 assault rifles, ostensibly destined for the Dominican military, were diverted to this force, which was being trained by 200 US Special Forces soldiers.

The foot soldiers of this coup trained in the Dominican Republic (DR), dressed in the uniforms of the Dominican National Police. This gave the US Government an argument of plausible deniability – where they could argue that they were training Haitian expatriates who were temporarily employed as Dominican Police officers. This became a political crisis in the DR when a convicted Haitian terrorist and mass murderer, Louis Jodel Chamblain, appeared on a TV newscast dressed as a DR cop.

Haiti's post coup "Prime Minister," Boca Raton's Gerard Latour, recently hailed

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Chamblain, the former second in command of FRAPH, as a "freedom fighter." This Orwellian choice of language isn't an accident. The Reagan administration formerly referred to Nicaragua's Contra terrorists, who assassinated elected officials and blew up schools, buses, electric generators, and health care clinics, also as "freedom fighters." Hence it should come as no surprise that the real person running Haiti, the Bush administration's point man for that tortured country, is Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Roger Noriega. Noriega, a former assistant to Contra War booster Jesse Helms, was instrumental in selling the Contra War to the American people during the Reagan years, heavily pushing the "freedom fighter" misnomer.

As the coup forces swept across Haiti, they burned police stations and unlocked the nation's jails, allowing other so-called freedom fighters, along with common criminals, to join their forces. One prisoner-turned-"rebel"-leader is former Haitian General Prosper Avril, who led the Presidential guard under Haiti's notorious Duvalier family dictatorship before ultimately seizing control of the country in a 1988 coup, where he suspended 37 articles of the Haitian constitution. The US Government later found him guilty of "torture and cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment." In this era of Donald Rumsfeld's gulags, Avril's ascendancy from prisoner to statesman shouldn't shock us.

The leader of the coup forces, and the man who currently claims to lead Haiti's new army, is Guy Philippe, a former Haitian police officer trained in Ecuador by US forces. According to the UN, Phillippe was subsequently responsible for the summary execution of suspected criminals. The US Embassy implicated Phillippe as being part of a drug smuggling ring. The Aristide government accused him of being behind terrorist attacks and of executing Haitian government officials in 2001.

There's no shortage of thugs in the new US-backed government now terrorizing Haiti. And it's no mystery how these thugs came to power. That's why the organization of Caribbean nations (CARICOM) has refused to recognize Latour's regime. CARICOM has been joined by a host of African countries and the US Congressional Black Caucus in calling for a UN investigation into Haiti's "regime change," terming it a US-orchestrated coup.

### **George W's world - \$1.60 per day**

It's no accident that the loudest condemnation of this coup is coming from some of the world's most prominent Black statespersons. The coup is an outright racist attack against the world's most heroic Black nation as it tries to exercise political self-determination. This is what Noam Chomsky, referring to Sandinista-ruled Nicaragua in the 1970s, called "the threat of a good example." Haitians, through the ballot box, rebelled against their

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neocolonial status. They rebelled against a racist world economy that locked them into the role of producers instead of consumers. Under Aristide, they wanted to complete what they began in 1803 – joining the world community as equals. If Haiti, as the hemisphere's poorest nation, was successful in escaping from their international debt and seizing control of their own destiny, it could prove to be as devastating to the global sweatshop economy as Haiti's first revolution was to the slave trade. And this just plain can't happen in George W's world.

Hence, it should come as no surprise that the new government also, as one of its first acts in office, cut Haiti's minimum wage by 50%, from about \$3.60 for a 12 hour day, down to \$1.60. This is a big perk for Haitian-American Andre Apaid, owner of numerous Haitian garment manufacturing plants making cheap wares for American companies such as Disney, owner of the ABC network. ABC joined the US corporate media in selling this American citizen as a legitimate leader of Haiti's "civil resistance" to the popular Aristide Government.

If you're still confused about the coup in Haiti, just take a trip to the mall and visit the Disney Store. Read the garment labels and see where things are made. Juxtapose Disney CEO Michael Eisner's compensation package, which reached a half a billion dollars per year at the zenith of Eisner's reign in 1996, with the measly seven or eight hundred dollars Disney sweatshop workers earned the same year in Haiti, working longer hours under far more grueling conditions.

### **Pompous French and spineless Canadians**

The Haiti coup also gave the otherwise self-righteous French an opportunity to bond with their American allies in the wake of a family feud over Iraq. With US corporate interests allied with French governmental interests in Haiti, a French-American posse coalesced. Likewise, Canada donned its hood and spinelessly joined in the lynching. By sending a few hundred troops to Haiti, Canada pledged loyalty to their ever more violent American neighbor while showing their own separatist Quebecois population that they're also cool with the French. Fuck Haiti. It's just not about them.

Recently, The Quixote Center, a Christian social justice center located in Maryland, organized a "Haiti Observation Mission" comprised of US and Canadian citizens, visiting post-coup Haiti in April. Interviewing eye witnesses, morgue workers, and members of families of Haiti's newly disappeared, they estimated that there were at least 1,000 political murders during the month of March. They also estimated that US forces, condemned as being "trigger happy" by their French colleagues, killed upwards of 40 Haitians during the same period. A delegation from the US based National Lawyers Guild

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(NLG) found unmarked mass graves on the outskirts of Haiti's capitol, Port au Prince. They also filmed an area where pigs were eating partially burned human bodies.

The NLG also reported that US, French and Canadian forces were regularly terrorizing entire neighborhoods in Port au Prince. More specifically, they're terrorizing the Haitian capitol's poorest neighborhoods, where Haiti's former ruling Lavalas party was the strongest. Despite the overwhelming popularity of the democratically elected Lavalas party, the new US imposed government is Lavalas-free, with Lavalas members now being hunted down and murdered by coup forces operating under impunity in US-occupied Port au Prince.

This isn't just a tragic day for Haiti. It's a tragic day for democracy. And it's an especially tragic day for the pan-African diaspora. That's why Black political leaders and prominent figures from around the world have stepped forward in outrage, loudly raising their voices to make sure that this latest assault against the world's first free Black republic doesn't go unnoticed.