

Haiti's 'Natural Disasters' Were Man-Made

by Carlos Wesley and Cynthia Rush

“...The little community of Haiti, anchored in the Caribbean Sea, has had her mission in the world, and a mission which the world had much need to learn. She has taught the world the danger of slavery and the value of liberty. In this respect, she has been the greatest of all our modern teachers. . . .

“Until Haiti struck for freedom, the conscience of the Christian world slept profoundly over slavery. It was scarcely troubled even by a dream of this crime against justice and liberty. . . .

“In the face of the fact that Haiti still lives, after being boycotted by all the Christian world, . . . in the face of the fact that she has attached herself to the car of the world's civilization, I will not, I cannot believe that her star is to go out in darkness, but I will rather believe that whatever may happen, of peace or war, Haiti will remain in the firmament of nations, and, like the star of the north, will shine on and shine on forever.”

These words, spoken by the great abolitionist leader and former slave Frederick Douglass, on Jan. 2, 1893, as he inaugurated the Haiti Pavillion at the Chicago World's Fair, were from a speech in which he graphically described the horrors that Haiti had endured, starting well before it declared its independence on Jan. 1, 1804. But Douglass was also confident that Haiti could become a prosperous nation, and a valued U.S. ally, if given the chance by the developed world, and protected from the slaveholders, the “sharks, pirates and Shylocks,” which the British Empire, often in league with France, Spain, and, at times during her history, the United States, frequently deployed against her.

“But the future of Haiti, what is it to be?” Douglass asked. “Will it be civilization or barbarism?”

No Man-Made Disaster

In October 1989, the U.S. city of San Francisco and its surroundings were slammed by an earthquake measuring 6.9 on the Richter scale. The quake left 63 dead,

more than 3,000 wounded, and as many as 12,000 homeless.

Compare this with what happened in Haiti Jan. 12, 2010, when an earthquake of similar magnitude (7.0) hit that Caribbean island-nation: an estimated 300,000 dead; the destruction of virtually every building in the capital city of Port-au-Prince, and, in large parts of the country; and some 2 million people left homeless, without shelter, food, or medical care.

Clearly, what caused the destruction of Haiti was not the earthquake, but the lack of earthquake-proof buildings and houses, and other solidly built sanitation, health, energy, and transportation infrastructure, designed, above all, to protect precious human life.

Today, 117 years after Douglass posed his question, the same two options face this devastated nation. One, is to remain the victim of the fascist free-trade and globalization policies of the British Empire and the Inter-Alpha banking group it controls, which have reduced Haiti to its current status as the most desperately poor nation in the Western Hemisphere, afflicted with diseases that should have been eradicated long ago.

Haiti today has the highest rate of infant, children under five years of age, and maternal mortality, in the Western Hemisphere. Diarrhea, respiratory infections, malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV-AIDS, are the leading causes of death, according to UNICEF, which estimates that 5.6% of the population, aged 15-49, live with HIV/AIDS, including 19,000 children. Anti-retroviral drugs are available only in small quantities.

According to the Pan American Health Organization's (PAHO) 2007 *Health in the Americas* report, 47% of the population, largely in rural areas, lack access to basic healthcare.

The only sane option is that proposed by Lyndon LaRouche, who has advanced the republican tradition of those European and American humanists who founded the United States as “a beacon of hope and

temple of liberty” in the New World for those who sought to escape Europe’s oppressive oligarchies.

On Jan. 31, LaRouche told an international webcast that the U.S. government should sign a treaty with Haiti which, while fully respecting its sovereignty, would rebuild its economy in a manner that would allow it to go forward as a viable nation. “This is a small nation of people which has been subjected to a terrible history, which has been promised and betrayed, promised and betrayed. Never delivered.”

Rebuilding Haiti would take a quarter century, at least, said LaRouche. “Many things have to be changed, but the most important thing is the prevailing attitude called fix-it, or patch-it.” The U.S. should tell the Haitians, “Okay, you’re a small country. We can absorb the burden. We are going to work with you to make sure that you come out of this successfully, as a country that can maintain itself, and survive,” he said.

Days earlier, LaRouche had said that the U.S. “has a moral responsibility to respond to this crisis.” Further, such assistance would give the United States the added benefit of developing “an improved capacity to address other crises, both abroad,” as well as at home, in cases like that of Hurricane Katrina. Such an aid program would also give useful jobs to many U.S. youth, who “could function as a complementary labor force to be trained for emergency situations, and could be the basis for a new Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC),” similar to the one established by Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the 1930s.

A Historical Account

Whether LaRouche’s proposal becomes reality will depend, *as has been the case historically*, on whether the United States government and Presidency remain true to the founding republican principles enshrined in the U.S. Constitution. When those principles have been violated or abandoned, as they are today under the Obama Administration, Haiti has suffered needlessly.

This island-nation, first known as Saint-Domingue, has been the victim of the British Empire’s bestial policies virtually from the moment it won its independence on Jan. 1, 1804—the first country in the Americas to do



President Franklin Roosevelt (right) meets with Haitian President Sténio Vincent in Cap-Haïtien, 1934. FDR was the first U.S. President to visit Haiti; his Good Neighbor Policy helped to put that nation on the road to prosperity.

so, after the United States—and proclaimed itself the first modern republic ruled by blacks. This was achieved after the only successful slave rebellion in all of history was carried out under the leadership of Toussaint L’Ouverture; and the three great powers in the region—Spain, England, and Napoleon’s France—were dealt humiliating military defeats.

The British Empire never forgave Haiti for this accomplishment, or for its decisive support for the American Revolution. Citizens of Saint-Domingue, of all races and classes, fought on the side of the American patriots throughout the Revolution, most prominently at the 1779 battle of Savannah, Ga., and through the decisive 1781 Battle at Yorktown. Saint-Domingue’s alliance with the most outstanding of the U.S. Founding Fathers, especially its first Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton, also stuck in London’s craw.

It was Haiti’s own war of independence that made it possible for the United States to make the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, which doubled its size in a single stroke. Moreover, Haiti’s material support for South America’s independence movement allowed the Liberator Simón Bolívar to return to fight for the independence of *Gran Colombia*—present-day Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela—after suffering two previous defeats.

Hamilton, who was born in the West Indies and abhorred slavery, had a hand in setting U.S. policy to-

wards the Caribbean, from the very founding of the American Republic. He was instrumental in naming nearly every U.S. consul to Saint-Domingue, starting with the first one, Sylvanus Bourne, appointed soon after the U.S. adopted its own Constitution in 1789.

At the request of John Adams's Secretary of State Timothy Pickering, Hamilton drafted a "Constitutional plan" for Haiti, dated Feb. 21, 1799, which, by 1801, became the core of the Constitution proclaimed by Toussaint, establishing Saint-Domingue as an independent nation in all but name—the first nation, in modern history, outside of Africa, governed by blacks.

By that time, U.S. collaboration with Toussaint had gone far beyond trade, much to Britain's horror. The fledgling U.S. Navy was now deploying "Ships of War," to help Toussaint to consolidate his power, which was continuously challenged by the British and the French throughout this period.

Named Governor-for-Life in 1801, Toussaint proceeded to implement policies that increased production, aided by the tax program that Hamilton designed for his government, and raised the living standards of the work force of emancipated slaves, paying them fair wages, banning corporal punishment, and limiting the work day to nine hours. Within 18 months, despite constant threats and interference from London-centered financier interests, Toussaint's administration succeeded in restoring sugar production to pre-Revolution levels, and built key infrastructure—roads, schools, bridges, and irrigation systems—despite the ravages of a decade of nearly uninterrupted warfare.

An Unending Battle

With Thomas Jefferson's 1801 entry into the Presidency, and under successive Presidents, relations with Saint-Domingue went downhill. Jefferson made known that once the warring nations of Britain and France made peace, the U.S. would act in concert with them "to confine the [Negro] pest to the island." Jefferson also let Napoleon's Foreign Minister Talleyrand, know that the U.S. was willing to furnish the French army and navy with everything they needed if they decided to reconquer Saint-Domingue.

Jefferson and his successors refused to recognize Haiti's independence, and, in the years that followed, it was punished with blockades and quarantines, not only by the imperial powers, but by the ungrateful South American countries and by the United States itself.

It was not until Abraham Lincoln became President



Toussaint L'Ouverture led the only successful slave rebellion in history; his administration succeeded in restoring sugar production to pre-Revolution levels, and built key infrastructure, despite the ravages of a decade of nearly uninterrupted warfare.

in 1861 that the U.S. policy toward Haiti improved. "If any good reason exists why we should persevere longer in withholding our recognition of the sovereignty and independence of Haiti . . . I am unable to discern it," Lincoln said on Dec. 3, 1861. In 1863, he officially recognized Haiti and Liberia as independent and sovereign, and signed a treaty "of amity and commerce" in 1865.

In 1889, President Benjamin Harrison named Frederick Douglass to be Minister Resident and U.S. Consul to Haiti, which post he held until 1891. Never glossing over the complexities of the local situation, he wrote extensively about this small country's struggles and determination to survive as a sovereign republic, against daunting odds.

"You and I," he told his audience at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, referenced above, "have reason to respect Haiti for her services to the cause of liberty and

human equality throughout the world, and for the noble qualities she exhibited in all the trying conditions of her early history.”

At the end of the 19th Century, Haiti was a country which, if not prospering, at least was self-sufficient in key areas of the economy, and enjoyed the respect of the concert of nations.

Unfortunately, the negative side of U.S.-Haitian relations resurfaced under racist President Woodrow Wilson, the man who brought the Ku Klux Klan right into the White House with him. In 1915, Wilson ordered the invasion of Haiti on behalf of Wall Street and City of London interests, seizing control of customs and launching an, at times, brutal occupation that lasted until 1934. It was during the occupation that hordes of anthropologists and ethnologists arrived to brainwash Haitians into believing that voodoo and witchcraft were their true religion.

But that was not the only problem the Haitians faced. In the Dominican Republic, which shares the island of Hispanola with Haiti, another dictator ruled—Rafael Trujillo. Installed under a U.S. occupation, Trujillo carried out “ethnic cleansing” in 1937, along the border between the two countries, massacring tens of thousands of Haitians.

FDR: ‘We Can Learn a Lot from Haiti’

The U.S. occupation ended in 1934, shortly after Franklin Roosevelt became President. Roosevelt, who was the first U.S. President to ever visit Haiti, helped Haiti retake the path toward prosperity through his Good Neighbor policy, which stood in stark contrast to the British Empire’s colonial doctrine of free trade.

In an Oct. 14, 1943 toast to Haitian President Elie Lescot, Roosevelt underscored that, “in this new civilization that we are coming to, of mutual aid and in a cooperative management between all the Nations of the world, I think that not only can Haiti learn a lot from us, but we can learn a lot from Haiti.” Roosevelt particularly emphasized the importance of helping Haiti produce more food.

Two years earlier, the U.S. government helped set up SHADA, the Société Hatiano-Americaine de Developpement Agricole, which used a \$5 million credit line from the Export-Import Bank to pursue “the development and exploitation of all agricultural and other resources of, and within, the Republic of Haiti. . . . Experimentation is to be undertaken to improve existing crops and to cultivate new ones.”

These policies set Haiti on the road to food self-suf-

ficiency. Eventually it not only produced enough to feed its own people, but also exported products such as coffee, cacao, meat, sugar, fruits, and vegetables.

“The future of Haiti is very, very bright,” Roosevelt told his Haitian counterpart on that October evening in 1943.

But upon Roosevelt’s death in April of 1945, things worsened once again. With the support of certain factions inside the U.S., François Duvalier, a medical doctor recruited by those same anthropologists and ethnologists and sent to the U.S. for training, imposed a fierce dictatorship in 1957, and as “Papa Doc,” ruled as the High Priest of Voodoo. At his death in 1971, his son Jean-Claude Duvalier, “Baby Doc,” succeeded him, at the age of 19.

Despite immense political turbulence and violence associated with the two Duvalier regimes, both of which played upon popular superstition associated with Voodoo, to keep the population in a state of backwardness, Haiti continued to be self-sufficient up through the 1980s, at least in rice production, the main staple in the national diet. In 1985, Haitian farmers produced more than 150,000 tons of rice, which met the population’s consumption needs.

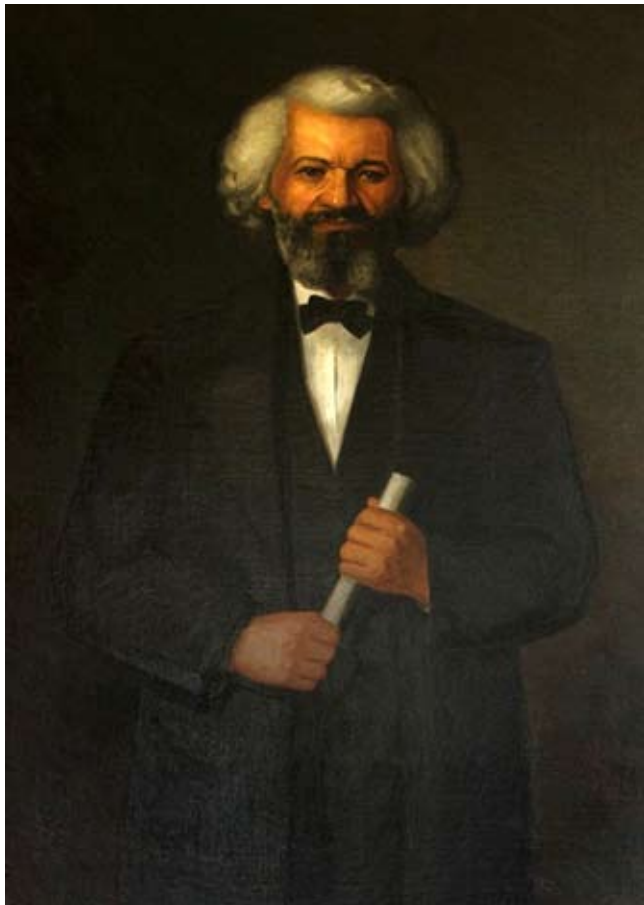
‘Shine On and Shine On Forever?’

But with the fall of Baby Doc in February of 1986, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and its “structural adjustment” program (SAP) arrived, to impose murderous austerity conditionalities—trade liberalization, privatization, deregulation, wage reduction, and elimination of social services, among other things—further reducing the living standards of a population, 70% of which already lived below the poverty line.

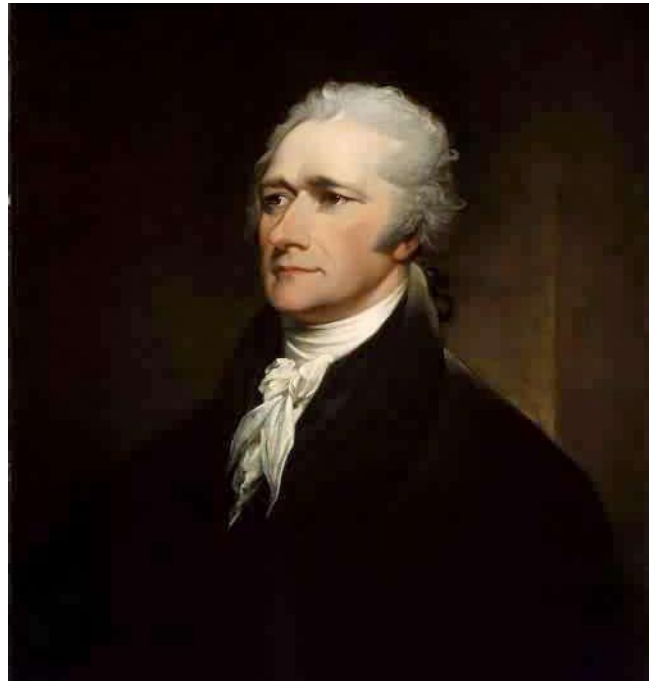
In 1991, the former priest and modern-day Jacobin, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, became President, but was overthrown in September of that year in a military coup, brought on largely by his own lunacy. This served as the pretext for then-President George H.W. Bush to impose an international embargo against the Haitian people, which, in combination with the military junta’s economic depredations, brought destructive consequences—severe supply shortages, economic displacement, and large price increases that slammed Haiti’s poor.

Employment declined by 80% during the three years of the embargo—1991-93—forcing the poor to eat even the seeds and bushes of certain exotic plants slated for export, just to avoid starving to death.

The embargo ended when the U.S. once again in-



NPS



Painting by John Trumbull (1806)

Haiti's U.S. allies: The abolitionist leader and former slave Frederick Douglass (left) believed that Haiti could become a prosperous nation, and a valued U.S. ally, if protected from the "sharks, pirates and Shylocks," of the British Empire. And, Alexander Hamilton's (above) 'Constitutional plan' for Haiti, became the core of the Constitution proclaimed by Toussaint, in 1801, establishing Saint-Domingue as the first modern republic governed by blacks.

vaded Haiti in 1994, this time without firing a shot, under President Bill Clinton. The U.S. and its allies brought Aristide back *on the condition that Haiti accept more austerity!* The demand was to privatize everything: electricity, water, the airport, the ports, and even education. Within days of his return, Aristide removed fuel subsidies, terminated discretionary budgetary accounts, and cancelled all public-sector wage contracts.

In contrast to the optimistic future that FDR envisioned for Haiti, in a collaborative relationship with the U.S., the IMF's deadly SAPs, imposed repeatedly beginning in the mid-1980s and extending into the current decade, helped transform this poor nation into one giant sweatshop, in which in-bond assembly plants—the infamous *maquiladoras* known to Mexico and Central America—became the nation's largest employers. Agriculture was based, not on the production of food for domestic consumption, but on cash crops *for export*, including Winter vegetables and fruits.

By 1985, Haiti was ninth in the world in the assem-

bly of goods for U.S. consumption. It attained the dubious distinction of being the world's largest producer of baseballs, and among the top three in the assembly of such products as stuffed toys, dolls, and apparel.

When the 1994 SAP lowered tariffs on rice imports from 35% to 3%, making Haiti—insanely—the “most open economy” of all the Caribbean nations, cheap rice flooded the country, driving local traders, producers, millers, and others into bankruptcy, forcing their displacement into urban slums or out of the country.

The indignities have never stopped. When Aristide mobilized his Jacobin Lavalas movement against new demands for more brutal austerity, President George W. Bush arranged to have him overthrown, again, in 2004. While the U.S. Coast Guard has maintained a blockade for years to prevent Haitians from fleeing to U.S. refuge, USAID has spent millions to promote Haitian Creole, a language spoken *nowhere else in the world*, which ensures Haiti's isolation.

Shamefully, U.S. warships carry out Jefferson's mandate to “confine the pest to the island.”