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Connecting the Local and the Global: Lessons Learned from the Bush Administration's Treatment of a Haitian Tree Shaker, President Jean-Bertrand Aristide

Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney*

The following Essay was originally presented as a speech at a symposium held on March 6, 2004, at the University of California at Berkeley, School of Law (Boalt Hall). Congresswoman McKinney asserts that the alleged involvement of the Bush Administration in the ouster of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide of Haiti on February 6, 2004,¹ while following a historical pattern of American interventionist policy in Haiti, is contrary to true American values and the values of African Americans in particular. McKinney makes a plea for all African Americans to become informed about American foreign policy and hold their leaders accountable in effectuating a more humane foreign policy that is inextricably linked to the well-being of African-American communities right here at home.

Nowhere do we see the impotence of black leaders and black people played out before our eyes and those of the world as we now see in the case of Haiti.² Few in the black community advocated for the investigation into the

* Fourth Congressional District Representative from Georgia. Congresswoman McKinney became Georgia's first African-American congresswoman in 1992. She served in the House of Representatives from 1992 until 2002. During this time, Congresswoman McKinney was a member of the Congressional Black Caucus. Her colleagues in the 103d Congress elected her secretary of the freshman class, and she was the first freshman representative to head the Women's Caucus Task Force on Children, Youth and Families. She participated on the powerful and prestigious Armed Services Committee and was also a key member of the International Relations Committee, serving as Ranking Member on its International Operations and Human Rights Subcommittee. In 2004, Congresswoman McKinney was re-elected to the House of Representatives.

1. For more information on the events surrounding this incident, see *infra* notes 14-29 and accompanying text. See also Barbara Lee, *Preempting Democracy: The Bush Administration vs. the World*, 7 AFR.-AM. L. & POL'Y REP. 29 (2005).

2. See *supra* note 1.

U.S. involvement in the Haitian incident. This apathy is especially disturbing considering the Bush Administration's hostility towards progressive black leaders. In fact, the current administration has used black faces to promote policies that have devastated the black community in the United States and abroad.

Black leaders and black people have not always been this impotent—as evidenced by the involvement of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) in response to the 1991 coup d'état in Haiti. By examining the connection between this history and current domestic problems in black America, we can understand the need to support the Tree Shakers of the black community.

In the past, the CBC played an instrumental role in supporting Aristide's popularly elected government in Haiti. You will recall that the United States and Haiti were in this position before, when in September 1991, General Raul Cedras stole power in a coup³ against the democratically elected priest, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. In response, the CBC alongside Haitian Americans in Florida, New York, and elsewhere worked non-stop to restore Father Aristide to power.⁴

It is important to note that the CBC's involvement in Aristide's reinstatement transpired within the context of the largest expansion of the CBC since Reconstruction.⁵ The Republican Justice Department had just overseen the forced drawing, by southern legislatures, of districts that would allow rural Blacks to finally elect candidates of their choice. Black voters, with a massive turnout, had voted George W. Bush's father, George H.W. Bush, out of the White House and elected Bill Clinton instead. Thus, the stage was set for a massive shift in U.S. policy toward Haiti, leaving the Republican antipathy for Aristide behind.

This shift so infuriated at least one small group in white America that, in the Florida redistricting lawsuit against Congresswoman Corrine Brown's district, *Johnson v. Mortham*,⁶ the plaintiffs wrote that the increased strength of the CBC had actually changed U.S. policy toward Haiti, and for that reason, among others, the size of the CBC had grown too large.⁷

3. See PAUL FARMER, *THE USES OF HAITI* 182 (1994).

4. See, e.g., Merle English, *Thousands to Rally*, *NEWSDAY* (New York), Sept. 29, 1992, at 7; Mitch Gelman, *City's Haitians Hope; Long for a Quick 'End to the Suffering'*, *NEWSDAY* (New York), Sept. 19, 1994, at A05; William Reed, *Congressional Black Caucus Presses For Aristide's Return To Haiti*, *NEW YORK VOICE INC.* (Harlem), at <http://static.highbeam.com/n/newyorkvoiceincharlemusa/april131994/congressionalblackcaucuspressesforaristidesreturn/> (last visited Mar. 12, 2005).

5. Ronald Smothers, *Black Caucus in Congress Gains in Diversity and Experience*, *N.Y. TIMES*, Nov. 10, 1992, at A17.

6. 915 F. Supp. 1529 (N.D. Fla. 1995). See also *Johnson v. Smith*, No. TCA 94-40025-WS, 1994 WL 907596 (N.D. Fla. July 18, 1994) (holding that a preliminary injunction enjoining Florida's use of a congressional redistricting plan would be disruptive and against public interest).

7. See Kevin Cooper & Kevin Merida, *New Suit Galvanizes Black Lawmakers*, *WASH.*

The Florida plaintiffs' brief points to the effectiveness of the larger, stronger, younger CBC that entered Washington with an agenda grounded in the needs of black people. The fear described by the writers of the brief also illustrates what is possible when black America has authentic leaders, well-placed in politics.

Eventually, as a result of the strength of black leaders at that time, General Cedras was escorted out of Port-au-Prince,⁸ thereby forcing the leaders of Front pour l'Avancement et le Progres Haitien (FRAPH),⁹ the CIA-inspired Tontons Macoutes¹⁰ replacement, to flee to the United States, the Dominican Republic, and other places.

With most of his term spent out of office, Aristide triumphantly returned to office on October 15, 1994. Upon the expiration of his term, Aristide left office in 1996, and was succeeded by Rene Preval. Aristide remained out of office until November 2000, when he was re-elected. President Aristide was serving the fourth year of his second term when the 2004 coup d'état occurred.

There are a number of disturbing facts surrounding this most recent coup d'état, particularly the apparent involvement of the United States. At the time of the coup, the Steele Foundation, a private security corporation, was charged with providing presidential security.¹¹ The Steele Foundation, headquartered in the Bay Area, is reportedly very close to the Pentagon with its former leader coming directly from the Pentagon's Office of Intelligence. Interestingly, this organization maintains an office in Miami,¹² the home of the headquarters of the U.S. Special Operations Command,¹³ which may have been involved in training the rebels who ousted Aristide.¹⁴

POST, Jan. 28, 1994, at A7 (noting how the CBC viewed several lawsuits filed by Republican-friendly organizations after the 2000 census in an effort to overturn congressional redistricting plans on the basis of alleged race discrimination as an attempt to counter its enhanced influence in Congress as a result of the new "majority-minority" districts).

8. Richard E. Hull, *Economic Sanctions Against Haiti (1991-1994)*, in IMPOSING INTERNATIONAL SANCTIONS: LEGAL ASPECTS AND ENFORCEMENT BY THE MILITARY 71 (1997).

9. Haitian Information Bureau, *The Birth of FRAPH*, in THE HAITI FILES: DECODING THE CRISIS 47 (James Ridgeway ed., 1994).

10. A Tonton Macoute is a member of a private army of death squads in Haiti. The Tontons Macoutes were initially organized by François Duvalier, president of Haiti 1957-71, and continued to terrorize the population under his successor J C Duvalier. It is alleged that the organization continued to operate after Duvalier's exile to France. Jean-Pierre Benoit & Lewis A. Kornhauser, *Unsafe Haven*, 59 U. CHI. L. REV. 1421, 1444-46 (1992).

11. See Peter W. Singer, *Warriors for Hire in Iraq*, at <http://www.brookings.edu/views/articles/fellows/singer20040415.htm> (Apr. 15, 2004).

12. Steele Foundation, at <http://www.steelefoundation.com/aboutus/locations/locations.php> (last visited Mar. 12, 2005).

13. United States Special Operation Command, at <http://www.socom.mil/> (last visited Mar. 12, 2005).

14. There has been much speculation about American military and right-wing support for Haitian rebels using the Dominican Republic as an intermediary. See 150 CONG. REC. H809, H814 (daily ed. Mar. 3, 2004) (Congressman Gregory Meek discussing how there were legitimate questions surrounding the nature and purpose of U.S. arms sales to the Dominican Republic and

At the time of Aristide's "capture," he was supposedly protected by a Pentagon-sanctioned security team that just happened to fail to secure him. Moreover, some of the Dominican troops and Spanish- and English-speaking paramilitaries trained by the United States during the 2003 Operation Jaded Task, in the Dominican Republic, were fighting alongside Haitian rebels in the north and on the southern coast of Haiti.¹⁵

Haiti's lawyer, Ira Kurzban, charged that the U.S. government was directly involved in the coup and that the coup leaders were armed, trained, and employed by the intelligence services of the United States.¹⁶ Aristide's caretaker, an eye witness, told French radio that "the American army came to take him away at two in the morning. The Americans forced him out with weapons."¹⁷ Having spoken directly with President Aristide, Congresswoman Maxine Waters reported that Aristide was surrounded by the military.¹⁸ "It's like he's in jail. He says he was kidnapped,"¹⁹ Waters said. Randall Robinson also spoke to President Aristide.²⁰ Mr. Robinson said that Aristide emphatically denied that he had resigned.²¹ Reverend Jesse Jackson got Aristide on the phone with an Associated Press reporter and Aristide, himself, said that he was forced to leave.²² He said, "They came at night. There were

the apparent positive identification of some of those arms in Haiti in connection with rebel forces). See also Interview by Amy Goodman with Jean-Bertrand Aristide, *Aristide Talks With Democracy Now! About the Leaders of the Coup and U.S. Funding of the Opposition in Haiti*, transcript at <http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=04/03/17/1545228&mode=thread&tid=25> (Mar. 17, 2004) (alleging that the International Republican Institute, a Republican-party-affiliated NGO, trained Haitian rebels for combat as well as in rhetorical techniques designed to depict them as pro-democracy freedom fighters rather than rebels). But see Michele Wucker, *Haiti Has Company in Crisis*, WASH. POST, Mar. 7, 2004, at B1 (noting how the Dominican government has vehemently denied President Aristide's allegations of its collaboration with Haitian rebels).

15. See Bryan Bender, *Aristide Backers Blame US for Ouster*, BOSTON.COM, Mar. 2, 2004, at http://www.boston.com/news/world/articles/2004/03/01/aristide_backers_blame_us_for_ouster?mode=pf (indicating that a U.S. military official claimed that Operation Jaded Task was a routine joint anti-terrorism exercise with the Dominican Republic military. However, the foreign minister of the Dominican Republic publicly denounced this particular U.S. military activity. In addition, the U.S. official admitted that military officials could not account for all of the 20,000 M-16s supplied to the Dominican military, ostensibly for border patrols) (last visited Mar. 12, 2005).

16. Amy Goodman and Jeremy Scahill, *Haiti's Lawyer: US Is Arming Anti-Aristide Paramilitaries, Calls For UN Peacekeepers*, Democracy Now, at <http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=04/02/25/1613200> (Feb. 25, 2004).

17. Peter Slevin, *U.S. Assembles Peacekeeping Coalition in Haiti; Aristide Says American Troops Ousted Him Against His Will*, WASH. POST, Mar. 2, 2004, at A12.

18. Interview by Amy Goodman with Rep. Maxine Waters, *Rep. Maxine Waters: Aristide Says 'I was Kidnapped,'* transcript at <http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=04/03/04/1554227&mode=thread&tid=25> (Mar. 1, 2004).

19. *Id.*

20. Interview by Amy Goodman with Randall Robinson, *Randall Robinson: Aristide Says 'Tell the World It Is a Coup,'* transcript at <http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=04/03/01/1929215&mode=thread&tid=25> (Mar. 1, 2004).

21. *Id.*

22. *Aristide: "U.S. Forced me to Leave,"* Scotsman.com, at <http://news.scotsman.com/>

too many, I couldn't count them."²³ He said that agents told him that if he didn't leave they would start shooting and killing.²⁴ Aristide is quoted as describing these agents who threatened him as "white American, white military."²⁵

Donald Rumsfeld, United States Secretary of Defense, said that the idea of an abduction was totally inconsistent with everything he heard or saw.²⁶ The White House dismissed allegations that Aristide had been kidnapped by U.S. forces eager to force him to resign and flee into exile.²⁷ Secretary of State Colin Powell said flatly that Aristide was not kidnapped.²⁸ Secretary Powell said, "We did not force him onto the airplane."²⁹

Now, I do not know about you, but it is clear to me by now that I cannot believe Donald Rumsfeld. I cannot believe the White House. And I cannot believe Colin Powell. But even more than that, notice Powell's use of the word, "we." And therein lies the essence of our predicament.

Should I read Powell's "we" narrowly, thereby concluding that his "we" refers solely to the U.S. government? Or is Powell's "we" meant to be read broadly—a "we" that encompasses not only the U.S. government but also U.S. citizens in general, and black citizens in particular?

Based on how the Bush Administration treated President Aristide and further, based on prior U.S. policies toward Haiti, the world's first black republic, it seems obvious to me that this administration is hostile toward progressive and popularly elected black leaders. What is worse is that former Secretary Colin Powell and former National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice³⁰ have provided black faces for policies that have devastated the global community and our black American community.

We cannot let what happened to Haiti's leader continue to happen in the United States. Progressive America and the global community need a strong, vibrant, and activist black community. We must remember that when the American government was orchestrating internal dissention within the African-

latest.cfm?id=2597051 (Mar. 2, 2004).

23. Slevin, *supra* note 17.

24. Scotsman.com, *supra* note 22.

25. Slevin, *supra* note 17.

26. See *Ramsey Clark On Haiti: "A Clear Demonstration of U.S. Regime Change By Armed Aggression,"* Democracy Now, at <http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=04/03/02/1616208&mode=thread&tid=25> (Mar. 2, 2004).

27. *Government Scoffs at Claim U.S. Kidnapped Aristide*, Newsmax.com, at <http://www.newsmax.com/archives/articles/2004/3/1/152632.shtml> (Mar. 1, 2004).

28. Charles Wolfson, *Haiti After Aristide*, CBSNews.com, at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/03/04/opinion/diplomatic/main604036.shtml> (Mar. 4, 2004).

29. *Id.*

30. See CNN.com, at <http://cnnstudentnews.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2002/black.history/stories/13rice/> (last visited Mar. 12, 2005) (stating that Condoleezza Rice was the first African-American National Security Advisor).

American community in the 1960s, at the height of the Civil Rights struggle, it was also conducting campaigns of assassination and right-wing rebellion throughout Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America.

Black leaders around the world were, and are, targeted by the U.S. government for advocating policies of radical reform in pursuit of social and economic justice—the same goals Martin and Malcolm were espousing at the times of their demise. If comparable acts of violence against our communities, domestic and international, result from a single motive—racial oppression in the service of economic imperialism—how can we hope to form effective agendas of empowerment unless we also strive to comprehend that our comparable maladies must be addressed through a global response?

A recent report in the *New York Times* found that 50% of the black male adults in New York City are unemployed.³¹ According to the “State of the Dream,” 2004 report, if current rates of progress remain the same, it will take eight years for America to close the black-white gap in high school graduation.³² It will take seventy-three years to close the college graduation gap;³³ 190 years to close the imprisonment gap;³⁴ 581 years to close the per capita income gap;³⁵ and 1,664 years to close the home ownership gap.³⁶ Clearly, progress on important quality of life indices is not being made quickly enough.

But we will not see that portrayed on UPN, FOX, CNN, or the WB. Increasingly, prominent leaders tell us that we do not need a movement anymore and that agitators who concentrate on these facts are passé.

To them I only ask one question: What becomes of a community that rewards those who pick the fruit up, but fails to protect those who shake it down?

Tree Shakers are all over the globe trying to uplift their communities. Only through our active and informed participation in the political process here will we be able to stop the powers that produce pernicious policies. Only through our participation in the political process will we be able to protect members of the global community, like Haiti, like Venezuela,³⁷ from the narrow interests of powerful people acting in our name who do not care one

31. Janny Scott, *Nearly Half of Black Men Found Jobless*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 28, 2004, at B1.

32. United for a Fair Economy, *THE STATE OF THE DREAM 2004: ENDURING DISPARITIES IN BLACK AND WHITE* 17 (2004), available at http://www.faireconomy.org/press/2004/StateoftheDream2004_pr.html.

33. *Id.* at 18.

34. *Id.* at 20.

35. *Id.* at 6.

36. *Id.* at 14.

37. See Energy Information Administration, at <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/venez.html> (last visited Mar. 12, 2005); see also Global Exchange, at <http://www.globalexchange.org/tours/venezuela> (last visited Mar. 12, 2005).

whit about the values that we hold dear.

The African-American community's disempowerment is the developing world's disempowerment. When we are convinced that our afflictions are disconnected from those subject to the same injustices on a global scale, we play into a strategy of deception being executed by international plutocrats who always connive in terms of a global paradigm.

Black America, vibrant with authentic leaders, in active partnership with all progressives, can change what is happening here at home and the policies being implemented abroad. And so, I end with a plea and a charge for us as a people to stand up, speak truth to power, don't cower, and say to those who control this awful machine: "It's time for you to stop, right now!"

COMMENT

