

Testimony for the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee on the Western Hemisphere to be presented on Wednesday, March 10, 2004 by Michael Heintz, co-author of *Written in Blood, The Story of the Haitian People, 1492-1995*.

Just what our relationship with Haiti should be has bedeviled the United States since its own infancy in the family of nations. John Adams aided Toussaint Louverture in his fight for Haiti's independence by using the U.S. Navy to sink French shipping or to blockade ports in Haiti. Even two centuries ago, Adams' motivation was not entirely altruistic; New England merchants coveted the voluminous commerce of France's richest colony and saw in the disturbances in Haiti a chance for profit. A change of administration from the Massachusetts Adams to Virginian (and slave-owner) Thomas Jefferson brought a radical change in U.S. policy, informed by the perceptions of our own interest of the U.S. administration then in power.

Haiti did not receive U.S. diplomatic recognition until our own Civil War, when the absence of Southern slave-owners from Congress permitted Abraham Lincoln to officially acknowledge Haiti's independence. Our efforts to isolate Haiti during the first half century of its existence, coupled with France's ruinous indemnity from the young republic, threatened to strangle Haiti in the cradle.

Woodrow Wilson ordered in Marines in 1915, only to see America's actions in Haiti become an issue in the 1920 Presidential campaign. Haiti, and our relationship with it featured in our Presidential elections of 1992, 1996 and 2000 and bids fair to do so again in 2004.

Haiti comes to the forefront of our national consciousness only when it erupts in one of the paroxysms of violence which have marked its history, or when our own needs have somehow involved Haiti. U.S. warships and troops intervened to protect American lives and interests dozens of times in Haiti in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The advent of World War I in Europe and our desire to secure the approaches to the Panama Canal against German influence finally persuaded us to begin what turned out to be a nineteen year occupation. World War II saw us appropriate 5% of Haiti's arable crop land in what became a failed effort to cultivate rubber substitutes to replace sources being lost as the Japanese advanced throughout Southeast Asia.

In efforts to protect our domestic agricultural base against swine fever, the United States in the nineteen-seventies presided, like Herod, over the slaughter of all the pigs it could catch in the country, thus destroying one of the principal means of saving in the largely non-cash rural economy. The appearance of HIV in Haiti in the early nineteen-eighties and the beginning of a tide of economic and political refugees across the Florida straits has since then forced us to engage with Haiti's government(s) on an ongoing basis whether we wished to or not.

Our decision to intervene in nineteen-ninety four, in concert with a number of other countries, was as much a domestic political calculus as it was a reaction to events taking place in Haiti.

Now, nearly ten years after our last time on the ground, American troops have again landed. Haiti, entering its third century of nationhood, is once more faced with the dispiriting facts of its seeming inability to get its house in order without outside help and that geography is destiny: it and the United States are, by their proximity, fated to ongoing cohabitation.

This committee, in its invitation to me, asked me to ponder three questions:

- I. Is this moment an opportunity for a paradigm shift in Haitian-American relations?
- II. *Can* Haiti be “turned around?”
- III. What kind of help does Haiti need?

I. The answer to the first question is a cautious “yes.” The current situation is an opportunity to change the nature of our engagement with Haiti, but whether all the parties will, or can, avail themselves of it is very much an open question. For the good of both countries, the cycle of paying attention to Haiti only when a crisis is brewing, or when American economic or geopolitical interests are perceived as being at stake, can and must be broken. Haiti and its problems are problems for the hemisphere. Failure on the part of those interested in Haiti (with the U.S., France and Canada in the lead) to frame and implement short, medium and long-term policies to Haiti will lead to growing dangers in the Western hemisphere from disease (AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, polio), ever worsening environmental degradation, violence, unchecked drug trafficking and overwhelming refugee outflows. The United States, for its part, has to evolve towards Haiti a consistent long-term policy which will bring to bear our treasure and influence in ways which will benefit both Haiti and the United States. Our relationships need not be a zero sum game. We can advocate policies that protect the interests of the United States and its citizens without acting to the detriment of Haiti and its people.

However, to frame and implement such policies, bi-partisanship is required, beginning in a Presidential election year. Even within the current administration, the Defense Department’s view of what the role of troops on the ground should be (“We’re not cops.”) is at variance with the wishes of some in the State Department. As previously noted, Haiti policy has often become a political football in the U.S. Indeed, given the rancorous nature of today’s debate in the U.S. over the circumstances surrounding President Aristide’s departure, one wonders whether it will be easier for Haitians to agree on Haiti’s policy to the U.S., than it will be for the U.S. to agree on policy for Haiti.

It will also be difficult for sharply disagreeing parties in Haiti to evolve some sort of consensus position vis-à-vis the U.S. This in a country where there is little tradition of consensus building. Without credible partners in Haiti to engage with – partners who can legitimately claim to represent a broad cross-section of Haitian society – all of our good intentions (and many Haitians will be a long time wondering whether or not the

intentions of the United States to Haiti this time are good) will be for naught. Fortunately, there has emerged over the last eighteen years a robust broadcast media as well as numerous Civil Society organizations, such as members of the group of 184, which can facilitate dialogue on rebuilding Haiti both within the country, and with its international partners.

The good will that characterized Haitian reception of foreign troops in 1994 is more muted and less widespread in 2004. The foreign community has a narrow window of opportunity to convince many in Haiti's urban masses (now 40% of the country's 8 million people) that its intentions are benign. If tangible benefits can be delivered quickly across a broad spectrum of society, those sitting on the sidelines may be won over.

Concurrently, the United States must dodge at all costs the trap of being seen to support those with records of human rights violations and corruption. If it does not, those predisposed to doubt the intentions of the international community will be given the perfect rationale for placing blame for Haiti's current situation (of which there is more than enough to go around) exclusively on foreign shoulders.

II. Woodrow Wilson said of Mexico: "I will teach the Latin Americans to elect good men." Much of this governessy attitude towards Haiti still prevails in the international community. Indeed, even the framing of the question, "Can Haiti be turned around" suggests that Haiti is some sort of barge that can be towed hither or yon with little reference to those most effected – the Haitians.

Haitians of all classes must have a sense of ownership of the process of rebuilding their country and its institutions. It does no good to build roads (or more accurately to rebuild the same roads every twenty years) without a functioning, paid, honest road and bridge maintenance program. Training judges overseas is useless if their salaries are not timely paid, they have no equipment, and the Minister of Justice is partisan. Producing elaborate state budgets is of little use if the business class spends all its time dodging taxes.

Haiti represents poverty on a scale hard for Americans to grasp. Average life expectancy is 52. Infant mortality is nearly 80 for every thousand births. Haiti needs massive, long-term aid delivered on all fronts at the same time. The economy needs to grow and transform, but that will not happen without political stability. For that, a government accepted by all the society as legitimate and fairly elected is required. Elections that are transparent, free of violence and fair must be held sooner rather than later. To accomplish this, a professional, honest and effective police force as well as a judiciary free of political influence. These urgent needs are all inter-related and need to be addressed simultaneously.

A serious evaluation of foreign and Haitian aid organizations must be undertaken promptly to see which programs work and which do not. NGO's have been well-established in different parts of the country for some years (before the current disruptions some 600,000 people are already receiving what food they get from these organizations) and will be the most effective means of injecting sustenance into a country whose

government structures are for the most part nonexistent or incompetent. For these same reasons, micro credit programs should be expanded. The new Haitian government and the international community should keep or revive those programs of the Aristide government which have worked. Efforts to increase literacy in Creole by radio programs seem to have borne fruit, though an accurate survey of their effectiveness is needed. A program which increased the number of physicians in the country by 25% by allowing Cuban doctors to fan out to remote parts of the country that had rarely seen physicians is another example of a successful Aristide initiative.

Key to everything will be security, and funds must be (perhaps kept in a specially earmarked account) ensured for prompt payment of salaries to judges, teachers, and police. Foreign troops will be required in Haiti long enough to train and mentor (as has been done with the Haitian Coast Guard for nearly ten years) police and to instill an ethos of independence, honesty and professionalism. Ten years (if not more) will be required for this. Also, the question of how to disarm a heavily-armed society is of crucial importance. Emergency job creation for the unemployed urban masses will go far to lower the temperature while longer term solutions are implemented.

In this process the Haitian government will have to be held to far stricter standards of accountability than heretofore. One of the major reasons for the failure of aid provided after 1994, was the failure of the Aristide and Preval governments to comply with their agreements with the international community in areas such as privatization of inefficient state monopolies, or the construction of a strong and unpoliticized police force and judiciary.

III. Aid to Haiti must perforce fall into three categories: short, medium and long term. All programs undertaken by the foreign communities should be coordinated to avoid the reoccurrence of competition among donor countries that characterized the period following the death of François Duvalier.

Also, while Haiti's needs are great, its absorptive capacity is limited. Donor nations need not equate quality or efficacy of aid programs with amounts funded, particularly at the outset of this process. What follows is a short (and by no means exhaustive) list of things that need to be addressed:

A. Short term:

1. Secure the country so interrupted feeding programs can be resumed. Reducing the weapons in circulation will also reassure the man on the street.
2. Get emergency generating capacity in to assure stable electricity supply in the major cities, particularly Port-au-Prince. Several barges from Hydro Quebec anchored in Port-au-Prince harbor supplying current to Port-au-Prince's poor would buy time for other reforms.
3. Reopen the airport at Cap Haitien. The terminal was badly damaged in the recent fighting and the control tower stripped of communications gear.

4. Public works programs that get cash into the economy. Substantial leeway should be given to local commanders on the spot to fund small projects with minimal paperwork as has been the case in some parts of Iraq. Road building can put tens of thousands to work. In many cases the plans used in the nineteen-seventies to rebuild roads such as Cap-Port-au-Prince then are still available. RN3 from Port-au-Prince to Hinche and then to the Cap is another candidate for immediate attention. Asphaltting the Cap-Ouanaminthe highway would begin to bring in badly needed tourist dollars from the Dominican Republic to the North of Haiti.
5. Back salary payments should be made immediately to police, judges, teachers and other public sector employees.
6. Freeze payments on all of Haiti's international debt. Nearly all of it is unrecoverable and the projects on which it was spent are largely gone. Ultimate forgiveness of this debt should depend on Haiti meeting its obligations negotiated with the foreign community in return for aid.
7. Most new aid should be structured as grants rather than loans.
8. Return the 60 peace corps volunteers evacuated and double or triple their number if uses can be found.

B. Medium Term:

“Nation building” is not a popular term in the current administration, but this is what needs to be undertaken in Haiti. The medium term needs have long been apparent:

1. Potable water programs, (this is key to health – without it, many health dollars are wasted).
2. Harbor dredging and rebuilding in provincial ports. Only by reviving the moribund economies of the provinces will the flight to major urban centers diminish. Port projects at St. Louis du Sud (started and then abandoned) and Dame Marie bear examination. Haiti's functioning ports have some of the highest costs per ton in the hemisphere.
3. Funding of AIDS treatment and prevention on the lines developed by Paul Farmer in the Plateau Central (a model which has won international recognition). Nationwide campaigns against malaria and tuberculosis
4. Preferential U.S. tariffs for products made in Haitian assembly plants. Haitians are hard workers, and the estimates have been that each such job created in Port-au-Prince (and elsewhere in the country) directly or indirectly feeds ten others.
5. Reforestation. Only 5% of Haiti's original forest cover is left. This has severely aggravated water shortages and contributed to the erosion of what little topsoil is left. Any aggressive campaign in this regard will have to look at ways of weaning Haitians from charcoal as their primary cooking medium. Tree planting efforts in the nineteen seventies suffered when trees were planted with great fanfare, but little follow-up care was given. A good example of efforts at reforestation can be found between Dondon and Marmelade.

6. Rural electrification and irrigation. Given Haiti's dependence on imported fossil fuels, it would seem a good candidate for solar power. This would help with irrigation which would begin the long trek towards reversing Haiti's dependence on the outside world (it is now the third most dependent country in the world for food imports) to feed itself.

7. Regularization of land titles. This, together with the fostering of a strong judiciary will empower the 60% of Haitians who are farmers. 8. Decentralize from Port-au-Prince as much as possible.

9 Look at ways to encourage Haiti's diaspora (on whose remittances it depends for much of its foreign exchange) to invest their talents and money in the motherland. Haitians have often looked on their compatriots returning from abroad as so many chickens to be plucked.

C. Long term:

Addressing all of the above issues will be so much writing on water if the foreign community does not enable Haitians to effect a sea change in the culture that has brought them to this point. Writing in 1929, after fourteen years of American occupation, the British Minister observed the failure of American aid programs "with their batteries of experts in Buicks and promises of prosperity on the Illinois model..." This has been the fate of most foreign aid to Haiti. This may be one of the last opportunities for Haiti and the international community to get it right.