

OCTOBER 2010?

“We See From Where We Stand” - Haitian Proverb

I'm grateful to have the opportunity to know at least a bit more about each of you this evening. As we gather together every other week, I sit in awe and amazement at the level of scholarly expertise, the wealth of wisdom, and the depth of life experience represented in this room. And each time I leave wondering how in the heck I managed to be a part of this esteemed organization. As you heard from Marc's brief introduction, I do not have a PhD and I am not a professor with particular expertise in areas such as Political Science, Government, International Relations or Economics. However, I greatly admire the scholarly background and academic disciplines of so many of my fellow SPHEX members and I feel very humbled and yes, intimidated to be included among you.

(slide change to #2 proverb and brief explanation)

I stand before you today as a minister, not a professor, who humbly and gratefully accepts this opportunity to share from my experiences. I cannot claim any particular expertise or scholarly insight into the current situation of Haiti. I cannot claim to have a great deal of first-hand experience although I have visited the country five times. But I do have a real heart for Haiti and it is the only other place on the planet outside of the United States that I ever care to visit. The people of Haiti who I have been privileged to meet, to know, and ultimately to love, have simply captured my soul. Given the opportunity to share their story, however feebly and incompletely, I must say yes on their behalf and I will do my best to do justice to at least some of their story.

And speaking of justice, I first went to Haiti in the Fall of 1993 as part of “Cry for Justice” a delegation of peace activists and human rights advocates. At that time Haiti was experiencing an all too familiar scenario of political and social upheaval and unrest. Jean Bertrand Aristide, the democratically elected president at the time was in exile, the military leader General Raoul Cedras refusing to step down, even after he signed a U.N. agreement to do so and tensions were high. The Justice Minister and two of his aides had been assassinated and violence was on the rise. Because of the volatility of the situation, foreigners were feeling threatened. Even the United Nations and monitors from the Organization of American States had begun to flee the country

Average Haitians watched these visitors retreating, feeling once again abandoned and ignored. In an effort to maintain some sense of solidarity with those left behind, representatives of religious groups and social justice organizations sent delegations to Haiti to accompany them as best they could to try and monitor the situation on the ground in the absence of a more official international presence.

As a member of Pax Christi, an international Catholic peace organization, I felt called to participate in this mission. I knew that there were some risks in my choice to go there. What I didn't realize was that the Haitians who would welcome us were literally putting their own lives on the line simply by agreeing to meet with us and to share the stories of their own oppression and exploitation. I was only in Haiti for 2 weeks at that time but being there during a period of such uncertainty and chaos gave me at least a tiny glimpse into the reality of that country's complex and difficult history.

So to begin this afternoon, I'd like to offer at least the sketch of a timeline which will obviously be over simplified, given our time constraints this evening. And while there is no way to do justice to the many layers of Haiti's history, dating back to the arrival of Columbus in 1492, I'll try to at least give some sense of Haiti's pattern of both exploitation and resilience.

Like many of you here, I grew up celebrating Christopher Columbus as a great explorer and adventurer who sailed the ocean blue and "discovered" America. What I didn't learn in school and was devastated to learn later in life was that he and others like him destroyed entire populations of indigenous people, later replacing them with African slaves to do the dirty work of mining mineral riches, and working plantations, all the while exporting the resources and the wealth they represented out of the country to benefit foreigners far away.

Statistically, the scene on the ground looked something like this: *(slide change to #3 timeline)*

Soon after Columbus arrived in 1492, Spain took control of the island and forced the native people numbering around 400,000 to labor in mining and agriculture. By 1650, only 150 indigenous people from the Carib warrior tribe survived. Entire populations of other tribes, mostly Arawaks died as a result of horrendous working conditions, torture, and diseases such as small pox which had been brought over from Europe.

With the decimation of these people, none were left to mine the gold or work the sugar plantations. So Spain and later France enslaved and brought Africans over to maintain the European enterprise. In 1764, 20,000 Africans were reported on the island. Less than 30 yrs later, that number had swelled to half a million African slaves.

France had gained control of the island in 1697 as a result of the Ryswich treaty and Haiti became its most profitable colony. Among the products leaving Haiti were sugar, coffee, indigo, cocoa and cotton. The wealth represented by this trade far exceeded that of our own 13 colonies.

The white man's wealth came at great cost to the Africans who not only provided slave labor but were also denied access to basic rights and privileges such as education, commerce, arms, or the ability to meet and organize. Even the basic expectations of being able to marry or practice one's religion or have recourse to a trial were unattainable. The slaves' options were narrow indeed – attempt a revolt, escape to the mountains or commit suicide to be rid of the misery. It's hard not to see some parallels with the experience of our own native tribes and the slaves who followed after them in our own country. *(slide change #4 to next timeline)*

Eventually the rumblings of discontent and revolt among the slave population was galvanized, primarily under the leadership of Toussaint Louverture who had been a slave himself for 40 years. His recognized skills as a leader found him serving as a lieutenant General in the Spanish Army and later as the first four star black general in the French Army.

Loo vain tour

Loo vair four

Toussaint Louverture and General Jean Jacques Dessalines went on to command the rebellion that resulted in eventual independence from France in 1804. Sadly, Louverture was never able to savor the liberty he had helped his fellow Africans to gain as he was captured and deported to France where he later died a prisoner. It has been said that every Haitian schoolchild knows his last words by heart: 'In overthrowing me, you have cut down in San Domingo only the trunk of the tree of black liberty. It will spring up again by the roots for they are numerous and deep.'

So the good news – Haiti could boast of the first successful slave revolt and the only free black nation in the Americas. *(slide change #5 to next timeline)*

The bad news – there was no governmental structure, a once pristine and lush tropical paradise was now devastated, social structures were practically non-existent and the people suffered from psychic, emotional, and spiritual wounds, having been tortured and traumatized for hundreds of years.

With that historical backdrop it may come as no surprise that one of Dessalines' first orders as Haiti's new leader was to slaughter most of the white people who had not been able to escape. Some exceptions to his edict were priests, doctors, pharmacists, skilled workers, and other professionals. The majority former slave population wanted no reminder of their former masters' cruelty and oppression.

In the end Haiti became a nation primarily of 2 races - blacks and mulattos while the minority of white people had either fled or been killed. Haiti also became a refuge for slaves who had fled from other countries including their neighbors to the east from the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Cuba, and even the United States.

The success of one group of people became a huge threat to others, namely those places that still benefitted from the forced labor of slaves. For these countries, our own included, the example of Haiti was to be avoided at all costs and other nations did everything in their power to ensure that the success of Haiti's new found independence was not replicated. Haiti's sovereignty was thwarted at every turn. France required huge payments in order to recognize Haiti's liberation. The French king agreed to recognize Haiti's independence only if the new republic paid France an indemnity of 150 million francs and reduced its import and export taxes by half. Haiti had only one non-colonized neighbor, the slaveholding United States, which refused to recognize its independence until 1865. *(slide change to #6 next timeline)*

In 1822 a French educated Mulatto named Jean Pierre Boyer gained control of the entire island of Hispanola but he was eventually overthrown 20 years later and the Spanish speaking eastern portion of the island, now the Dominican Republic regained its independence. Meanwhile the western portion of Haiti began to experience a series of repressive and brutal leaders.

From 1843 to 1915, Haiti was ruled by 22 different dictators. *(slide change to #7 next timeline)*

Eventually the United States chose to intervene by taking control of Haiti's military operations and functioning as an occupying force from 1915 to 1934.

As one observer noted: "This controversial action, although reducing the disorders and establishing a degree of economic stability, so alienated responsible Haitians that little progress was made in the development of a capable governing body of Haitians."

Given that Washington was providing marching orders to the Haitian army and controlling public services such as sanitation and schooling, much suspicion and distrust surrounded their activities. Accusations of corruption abounded. Racist practices and policies seemed especially evident as Marines removed many high ranking black Haitians, replacing them with Mulatto leadership. Haiti, which is 95% black had minority Mulatto leadership holding the highest offices during and after the occupation. After the Marines left in 1934 some black Haitians were restored to political power but the majority of the Haitian National Guard remained in the control of the Mulatto minority.

Post-occupation Haiti has endured a checkered history of corrupt and brutal leaders. One notable exception was Daniel Figrole, described by one account as a "young, brilliant, and energetic professor from common origins who championed the common people - A description similarly given to that of Jean Bertrand Aristide some 40 years later. Unfortunately Figrole was removed from power by a coup d'etat and exiled for 30 years, again not so different from the story line of Aristide. *(slide change to #8 next timeline)*

Following the ouster of Figrole, the infamous Francois "Papa doc" Duvalier then ruled the country with an iron fist aided by his dreaded thugs known as the tontons macoutes who terrorized the people, roaming city and countryside, wielding machetes and practicing every kind of atrocity.

Papa Doc managed to maintain his rule for 14 years before naming his son Jean Claude "Baby doc" as his successor and president for life. While Haiti did receive a good deal of foreign aid and investment during the reign of Jean Claude, most assistance was funneled into the hands of a few and corruption abounded. One prime example of this corruption which proved the last straw for Haiti's poor occurred when Baby Doc's wife Michelle Bennett took \$1 million dollars from the government coffers and went on a shopping spree to Paris. Among her lavish purchases were several fur coats to give away as gifts. Anyone who has been anywhere in the Caribbean knows that you don't need a fur coat in a place like Haiti. So when Ms. Bennett returned to Haiti, she had special coolers installed in the Presidential Palace just to keep the furs in good shape. And this was revealed on national television as part of a show about a charity ball which was then broadcast to rural areas. You can just imagine the response from the poor, hungry, and homeless Haitians living in the countryside as they saw how their own "first family" was living.

Given such a level of corruption and the ruling class's disdain for the common people, Haitians took to the streets, not so unlike what we have seen in Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, Yemen, Iran and other nations who are now following suit. Ultimately Baby Doc and his wife were flown to France on a US plane as many here might recall from watching it on TV in 1986. And as of a month or so ago, Baby Doc has now returned to Haiti, where some former victims are hoping to hold him accountable for the atrocities committed under his watch.

Among the organizers of the movement for change in Haiti were Catholic priests and other religious leaders who preached and practiced a form of liberation theology which understood that the will of God was for ALL people to be free and self-determining and never to live under oppression or in servitude. Many cited scripture stories and religious traditions that understood God to have a preferential option for the poor. With such a spirituality, it should not have been a complete surprise when a Catholic priest such as Jean Bertrand Aristide became the candidate of the people, by the people, and for the people. With an enormous following known as the Lavalas party. Lavalas is a Haitian Kreyol word for cleansing rains which fall in Haiti as torrential downpours that literally clear out and clean out everything in their paths, leaving nothing behind. And so it was that Aristide's followers hoped for and dreamed of a day when the worst of the misery, poverty, corruption, and oppression, might be washed away in order to make way for a transformed political, social, and economic reality. *(slide change to #9 next timeline)*

On December 16, 1990 Aristide won the democratic election in a field of 11 other candidates with a landslide victory of 67% of the vote. Polling monitors and international observers remarked on the relative peaceful process surrounding this historical election. Aristide's sweet victory was short lived however when in 1991 General Raoul Cedras led the coup which overthrew the newly elected priest president who was then exiled to Venezuela and later to Washington, DC.

Cedras eventually relinquished power in part due to either political pressure or monetary reward from the United States, depending on who you talk to. Regardless, by the time Aristide was restored to the presidency and returned to Haiti in 1994, he only had one year left in his term according to the constitution and was therefore unable to fulfill many of his hoped for reforms. Rene Preval succeeded Aristide as President but the former priest was able to run for and win a second term in 2000. Once again he was removed from office in 2004. Like so many other events in Haiti the exact facts around his removal are sketchy at best. But as one deeply involved in the intricacies of Haitian life and culture, Dr. Paul Farmer wrote this about Aristide's departure from the country: "Did the US and France have a hand in Aristide's removal? Were he and his wife being held against their will? Most of Aristide's claims, initially disputed by US officials from Roger Noriega to Donald Rumsfeld, are now acknowledged to be true. His enemies' claims that Aristide met with officials in Antigua - Aristide said they were not allowed to move from their seats - were undermined by reports from Antigua itself. Noriega acknowledged during a House hearing that Aristide did not know of his destination until less than an hour before landing in the Central African Republic. Even Central African Republic officials acknowledge that no Haitian authorities were involved in the choice of destination."

An interim president Boniface Alexandre took over the reigns of leadership and Rene Preval resumed a second presidential term in 2006. *(slide change to #10 next timeline)*

As if all this political upheaval wasn't enough, we all recall the devastating earthquake which struck Haiti in January of 2010 destroying many parts of the country including the presidential palace, a visible reminder that the government of Haiti seemed once again in shambles. *(slide change to #11 and then #12 next timeline)*

(slide change to #13 next timeline) It seemed almost a cruel joke that in October of 2010 as the campaign for Haiti's next president and Parliament was just gearing up, a cholera epidemic claimed over

2500 lives and though elections were held in November, the provisional results were declared inconclusive and a run off election scheduled for January 16th was postponed due to controversy over who should appear on the ballot. In the meantime, Baby Doc Duvalier returned from exile and is now facing corruption and human rights abuse charges with the outcome of the election and the future of Duvalier still uncertain.

, *(slide change to #14 next timeline)*As the Haitian government continues to try and find it's bearing, the United Nations is still present in Haiti through it Mission for the Stabilization of Haiti, known as MINUSTAH or more commonly the Blue Helmets, a description of the headgear most peacekeepers wear. Their role is controversial at best and most Haitians view the outsiders as trying to impose control and power rather than to help provide stability and assistance.

With Brazil having the largest number of representatives in MINUSTAH, the perspective of Ricardo Seitenfus, Brazil's representative to the OAS is especially telling. In an interview on January 3, 2011, Seitenfus reflected on the UN presence in Haiti

“ The UN system currently in place to prevent disputes is inappropriate for Haiti. Haiti is not an international threat. We are not in the midst of a civil war. Haiti is not Iraq or Afghanistan...But it looks to me as if, on the international scene, Haiti is paying mainly for its proximity to the U.S. Haiti has long been an object of negative attention from the international system. It took the UN to coalesce this power and transform Haitians into prisoners of their own island. The anguish of the boat people goes a long way toward explaining international decisions regarding Haiti. One wants at all costs that Haitians stay at home.”

Disappointed and disillusioned by the response of the international community in Haiti, Seitenfus and others believe that a new approach to Haiti is required and that need was made especially evident in the aftermath of the earthquake and months later with the hurricane which targeted Haiti.

Again some statistics to bring the reality of the natural disasters which have plagued Haiti in the recent past: *(slide change to #15 next timeline)*

Over 200,000 people were killed in the January 2010 7 point magnitude earthquake

More than half a million of the survivors were displaced, many of them still living in tent cities and make-shift shelters.

25% of Haiti's civil servants were killed the quake so an already struggling government was left without a quarter of its human resources.

Hurricane Tomas arrived in November of 2010. Driving 85 mph winds battered Leogane, a seaside town west of Port-au-Prince that was already 90 percent destroyed in the Jan. 12 earthquake.

Given the bleak historical backdrop and current challenges, it might seem easy to give up on Haiti but there are always signs of hope, if one takes the time to look for them. But actually taking the time may

be the greatest challenge. As Ricardo Seitenfus observes: “The world press comes to Haiti and describes the chaos. And public opinion immediately responds that Haiti is one of the worst countries in the world. One must go to Haitian culture, one must go to the root. I think there are too many doctors by the bedside and the majority are economists. Whereas in Haiti, one needs anthropologists, sociologists, historians, political scientists, and even theologians. Haiti is too complex for people in a hurry. The aid workers are in a hurry. No one takes the time nor has the taste to attempt to understand what I would call the Haitian soul... If Haitians see us solely for the money we bring, it is we who introduced ourselves this way.”

Where to go from Here?

With relatively little lived experience in Haiti myself I’ve tried to turn to trusted sources with a proven track record and long term commitment to Haiti for their wisdom and insight. Two experts whose perspectives I deeply value and who I’ve had the privilege to hear in person are Dr. Paul Farmer, who I referenced earlier and Dr. Robert Maguire. (*slide change to #16 next timeline*) Dr. Paul Farmer is the co-founder of Partners in Health, and the inspiration for *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World* by Tracy Kidder which details Farmer's work in Haiti, Peru, and Russia, as well as his efforts to balance clinical and academic responsibilities with having a family of his own. The book narrates the interactions and conflicts Farmer faces as he attempts to secure healthcare for the poor in Haiti.

Dr. Farmer is a co-founder and Board Member of the Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti- He is also a member of the Advisory Board of Incentives for Global Health, an NGO focused on developing the Health Impact Fund.

Dr. Farmer was appointed as the Deputy UN Special Envoy for Haiti, by former US President Bill Clinton, UN Special Envoy for Haiti, on August 11, 2009 (*change slide to #17*)

When asked about a proper response to the cholera epidemic in Haiti, Dr. Farmer made the following points:

- Identify and treat everyone with symptoms. We can’t just wait for people to show up.

Partners in Health has been very successful in Haiti through the use of using local community health workers who visit patients where they live in order to help ensure compliance with treatment plans and follow up care.

- Treat the sick with antibiotics and make the oral cholera vaccine available. According to Farmer, there are potentially 2 million doses of the vaccine available. What is required is the will to ensure that Haiti receives their fair share.
- Remedy Haiti’s problem with “water security” and improve sanitation
- Make sure all efforts include a focus on Haiti’s overall health care system, esp. primary care
- Raise the bar on health care goals in Haiti.

“You don’t make one standard for poor countries, a different one for middle income countries and another one for affluent countries.”

(change slide to #18) Another expert committed to a brighter future for Haiti is Dr. Robert Maguire, chairman of the Haiti Working Group at the U.S. Institute of Peace and Associate Professor of International Affairs at the College of Arts and Sciences at Trinity Washington University. He has visited Haiti over 100 times and done in depth analysis of the country for over 30 years.

Just last spring Maguire spoke to a group of us involved in twinning partnerships with Haiti during our annual gathering for the Catholic Diocese of Richmond. Maguire outlined five ideas to help rebuild Haiti that are shared and supported by many other government officials, policy analysts, and non-governmental organizations. The recommendations under consideration for helping Haitians to rebuild their country are these: *(change slide to #19)*

- 1) **Welcoming Dislocated Persons: A de facto Decentralization** – One of the inadvertent benefits to come from people fleeing the capital after the earthquake is that there are now opportunities to support a larger number of smaller communities away from the urban nightmare. One idea would be to create “Welcome Centers” which would offer a kind of one stop shop for internally displaced refugees with services such as education, healthcare, food and shelter. The vision would include a plan of sustained support services over the long haul.

Since the earthquake Haiti has experienced a reverse migration, away from the cities, most notably Port au Prince and this provides a golden opportunity to focus attention and assistance away from the capital and back to rural and more agricultural areas which for too long have been sorely neglected. Welcome Centers could provide agricultural development assistance and employment opportunities to help provide some stability in several decentralized areas spread throughout the country.

In order to rebuild infrastructure at all levels, jobs could be provided for repairing and rebuilding schools, clinics and community centers, not to mention badly needed road and bridge work, hillside restoration and small farms.

- 2) **Support the Creation of a National Civic Service Corps** – Most of us here can recall some form of civil service programming in our own history whether it be the Works Progress Administration (WPA) or the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) I participated in a form of this work as a teenager working in the Big Horn National Forest near my own home. In Article 52-3 of the Haitian constitution citizen civic service is actually mandated so there is a great rationale for supporting such an idea.

As reported in the Los Angeles Times, this “new deal” kind of program in Haiti could help harness the energy and labor force of the unemployed, particularly Haiti’s youth in projects aimed to rebuild many aspects of the broken infrastructure both in the cities as well as in the rural areas. Dr. Maguire is quick to point out that such a program would need to be a “cash for work” initiative to reinvigorate local economies and increase the cash flow of the country. Some examples of projects already underway include rubble removal which is still going on over a year later.

In recognizing the value of a paid civic service program, the administrator of our own country's Works Progress Administration program Harry Hopkins wrote: "most people would rather work than take handouts. A paycheck from work didn't feel like charity, with the shame that it conferred. It was better if the work actually built something. Then workers could retain their old skills or develop new ones, and add improvements to the public infrastructure like roads and parks and playgrounds."

3) Strengthen Haitian state institutions through accompaniment, cooperation and partnership

Slowly but surely, and even before the earthquake, the government of Haiti was beginning to gain wider respect from within as well as from the international community. At a Donors Conference held in April of 2009 The Inter-American Development Bank hosted a gathering in Washington, D.C. Haitian Prime Minister Michèle Duvivier Pierre-Louis and IDB President Luis Alberto Moreno co-chaired the meeting, which brought together leaders from over 30 donor countries and multilateral organizations. The purpose of the Conference was to renew international partnerships with Haiti and to seek additional support for Haiti's priority reconstruction program.

Such partnerships with Haiti need to be strengthened in moving forward. Non-governmental organizations committed to ongoing development in Haiti must continually ask themselves, how can our work be aligned with the work of the government so that ultimately we might be able to work ourselves out of a job, or at least hand over the reins to Haiti as much as possible.

4) Get Money into the hands of Poor People I know personally that after the earthquake I was flooded with offers of material supplies to send down to the victims of that disaster. Everything from clothing to food to baby blankets was being offered with the very best of intentions. And yet when I communicated to those working most closely with the immediate relief work, their response was usually the same – "To be honest, the best thing you could give us right now is money to give to the people who are flooding our doors"

A little bit of money goes a long way in the hands of a very hard working Haitian who wants to make a contribution in rebuilding their own country. I know of no organization who does this better than Fonkoze. Anne Hastings, one of the directors of Fonkoze spoke at our Haiti Gathering a few years ago and described the work of Haiti's largest microfinance institution. As she reported and as can be found on their website: *(change slide to #20)*

Fonkoze is "Haiti's Alternative Bank for the Organized Poor." serving more than 45,000 women borrowers, most of whom live and work in the countryside of Haiti, and more than 200,000 savers. With its network of 41 branches covering every region of Haiti, it is also the only microfinance institution that is truly national in scope. Our comprehensive approach to poverty alleviation includes the following services:

1. Micro-credit, using a solidarity group methodology of lending
2. Small and medium sized business development loans to strengthen a business
3. A number of different savings products

4. Currency exchange services
5. Money transfer (remittance) services
6. Literacy, business skills, women's health, children's rights and environmental protection education for borrowers
7. Social impact monitoring
8. Life and credit microinsurance
9. In the U.S., a prepaid Visa® card
10. Housing rebuilding and repair for member-clients following the earthquake of January 2010

Moreover, Fonkoze is one of the few MFIs in Haiti that is truly grass-roots. Fonkoze was founded in 1994 by a Haitian Catholic priest who started the institution with little more than a vision: a vision to provide the means for all Haitians, even the poorest, to participate in the economic development of the country. His target group was women, because as he declared, "Women are the backbone of the Haitian economy and the doorway into the family unit."

5) Seek-out and Support Institutions, Businesses, and leaders who work toward Greater Inclusion, Less Inequality, and Enact Socially-Responsible Strategies for Investing in Haiti.

Advocacy on behalf of Haiti, especially legislative advocacy can be more important in the long run than any direct charity we may be tempted to provide. Keeping up with current legislation which affects the country and our governments relationship to it may be one of the most important ways we can help. Advocate for a U.S. policy framework for **long-term reconstruction and development** An example of current efforts to enact legislation would authorize appropriations in support of the sustainable recovery and long-term rebuilding of Haiti in a manner that encourages greater economic equality, embraces Haitian independence, self-reliance, democratic governance, and efficiency, and supports collaboration with the Haitian government and consultation with Haitian and international civil society.

Now that you've heard me describe some of the historical background and learned of possible solutions described by American experts who I trust and believe, let me digress from the script and speak from my heart. *(change slide to #21 and then #22)*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5AhapT5b9o>

Q & A *change slide to #23)*