

My visit to Haiti in January 2012 made painfully immediate the conditions under which Haitians struggle. Even prior to the earthquake, 55% of Haitian households survived on the equivalent of 44 U.S. cents a day. Only 35% of students are able to complete primary school and only 4% graduate from secondary school. More than one in twenty people are HIV-positive, and nearly 1 in 5 children die before their 6<sup>th</sup> birthday. Such statistics only begin to convey the reality for much of Haiti today. Almost three years after the earthquake, nearly 400,000 Haitians braved Hurricane Sandy under tents and tarps.

What is very important for Americans to understand is that America has played a dominant role in shaping the current state of Haiti. The U.S. invaded and occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934, training a brutal military force designed to suppress Haiti's domestic population. The U.S. killed between 15,000 and 30,000 Haitians during its occupation and in building up the military, provided a force that has terrorized the country since. Haitian soldiers, serving elite interests, were essentially immune from the rule of law. They have also regularly overthrown governments, as Haiti has seen over 30 coups in its history.

America embraced the dictatorship of Francois Duvalier during most of his 14-year rule. Sociologist Alex Dupuy estimated that perhaps 50,000 people were killed during this reign of terror. America even more enthusiastically supported Duvalier's son, Jean-Francois, who ruled for an additional 15 years. He kept taxes low and imposed starvation wages for workers, creating an inviting investment climate for U.S. companies.

In 1986, Jean-Francois was ousted. Following four years of turmoil that saw 11 different presidents and a populist movement in the face of military repression, Haiti held its first ever free and fair elections in 1990. One candidate, the populist priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide, won decisively with 67% of the vote with 80% of the electorate voting. He was overthrown in a CIA-backed coup seven months later.

In 2000, Aristide ran for president again, this time elected by over 90% of the vote. The second coup took longer to orchestrate but in 2004, the US kidnapped Aristide and flew him to South Africa.

The current international troop presence in Haiti, the arrival of which was orchestrated by the U.S. in the aftermath of the 2004 coup, has presided over eight years of human rights abuses. Two years ago, the U.S.-funded troops inadvertently yet carelessly introduced cholera to the country, which has killed 8,100 and infected 660,000. Efforts are underway to demand accountability and reparations for this act of criminal negligence.

Despite the countless obstacles Haitians face, the short amount of time that I spent in Haiti made clear the resilience of the Haitian people is the country's greatest asset. I hope my music will lead to greater understanding and awareness of Haiti

among the American people and ultimately play some small role in inspiring thoughtful action to turn the tide of the relationship between the two countries.