Jean Bertrand Aristide: Is it Politics as Usual in Haiti?

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Abstract
The country of Haiti has had a vicious, tumultuous and revolutionary political history that has included a slave led revolution for freedom and subsequently two hundred years of political instability that can be measured by the thirty-two regime changes by political coup d'etat. In the 1980's a novel form of government was introduced to Haiti through the influential support of its northern neighbor the United States, as well as the United Nations. The new democracy that was created through a new constitution in the 1980’s would in turn lead to the presidential election of 1990 and subsequently the populace would elect a new leader, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. He was elected on a party platform of revolutionizing the political, social, and economic composition of Haiti. Aristide was elected with the support of the innumerable peasants and impoverished workers of Haiti to institute these changes for them. Unfortunately for Aristide and the impoverished peoples of Haiti, he was unable to complete these changes because of his deficiencies in political diplomacy, his lack of sensitivity to the fundamental socio-economic problems, and due to influential factors outside of his control. Aristide’s legacy ought to be one of prestige and dignity as the first freely elected Haitian president. Instead he will be seen as a grandiose visionary who dreamed beyond the clouds, instead of keeping his feet, eyes and ears on the ground.

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Jean Bertrand Aristide: Is it Politics as Usual in Haiti?

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Abstract

The country of Haiti has had a vicious, tumultuous and revolutionary political history that has included a slave led revolution for freedom and subsequently two hundred years of political instability that can be measured by the thirty-two regime changes by political coup d'état. In the 1980’s a novel form of government was introduced to Haiti through the influential support of its northern neighbor the United States, as well as the United Nations. The new democracy that was created through a new constitution in the 1980’s would in turn lead to the presidential election of 1990 and subsequently the populace would elect a new leader, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. He was elected on a party platform of revolutionizing the political, social, and economic composition of Haiti. Aristide was elected with the support of the innumerable peasants and impoverished workers of Haiti to institute these changes for them. Unfortunately for Aristide and the impoverished peoples of Haiti, he was unable to complete these changes because of his deficiencies in political diplomacy, his lack of sensitivity to the fundamental socio-economic problems, and due to influential factors outside of his control. Aristide’s legacy ought to be one of prestige and dignity as the first freely elected Haitian president. Instead he will be seen as a grandiose visionary who dreamed beyond the clouds, instead of keeping his feet, eyes and ears on the ground.
Table of Contents

1. The Fight for Independence ................................................................. 1
2. Independence to Occupation .............................................................. 8
3. Autocracy to Democracy .................................................................. 12
4. Aristide as a Symbol of Democracy .................................................... 17
5. Is it Politics as Usual in Haiti? ............................................................. 27
1. The Fight for Independence

The island of Haiti has gone from a prosperous indigenous economy, to a profitable slave plantation economy and finally to an economy subservient to the whims of its northern neighbor, the United States. The United States has always maintained control over its surrounding neighbors but the country of Haiti is unique. Haiti was the second country in the Americas to declare its independence from colonial rule, but was not formally recognized by the U.S. for fifty years after that declaration. The control of Haiti by the U.S. has come in many manifestations but the largest and most basic control mechanism has been long-term economic control.

The process of transformation from a prosperous indigenous economy to a slave economy began in December 1492 with the arrival of Christopher Columbus who was the first European to land on the island shores of the island of Hispaniola. This would ultimately lead to the development of the first European colony in the Americas. The natives welcomed Columbus with open arms and openly supported his European cause; unfortunately they were quickly exterminated by disease, slavery, and slaughter at the hands of a more formidable and modernized European army. As an indication of the overwhelming catastrophe that had struck the natives Paul Farmer writes “Estimates of their number at the close of the fifteenth century reach as high as eight million, but by 1510, only 50,000 natives remained on the island, and less than thirty years later the native population could be counted in the hundreds.” ¹ Needless to say the local economy was decimated by the European onslaught and would forever be changed.

The introduction of plantation farming to the island of Hispaniola would drastically change its economic future forever. The successful production on a plantation

farm requires immense amounts of manpower, and as the natives were soon destroyed, the logical European alternative was the establishment of Hispaniola as an African slave plantation. The slave trafficking began in 1517, and by 1540, 30,000 African slaves had been brought to Hispaniola. The forced immigration of African slaves by the Europeans made economic sense to them because they needed farmers and laborers that could withstand harsh working conditions, threat from disease, and would not try to escape. Despite this heavy importation of slaves, under Spanish control the sugar plantations failed to earn significant amounts of money and soon the island became a haven for unruly explorers and despots. The conditions for the slave populations, which were never ideal, would only worsen as their value decreased as the value of sugar decreased.

In the late seventeen hundreds one-third of the island was ceded to the European country of France, which believed that it could make money there by increasing the amount of slaves and increasing the volume of the plantations. Rather quickly the success of the sugar plantations on the western shores of the island helped to establish the newly named Haiti as a regular stop for merchant ships and it soon became part of the fabled triangular trade route for North America. This French colony would quickly become one of Frances’ most successful colonies and one of its wealthiest. This was to be the high water mark for economic success of sugar plantations. Unfortunately with this success came hardships as the slaves were the ultimate victims and by examining merchant records it is easy to see that while the French continued to import more new slaves, the general slave population never increased in size.

The triumph of the plantation system led to the establishment of a class structure or social order in Haiti that has had long-lasting effects to this day. The social order went
as follows the plantation owners were on top, followed by the political officials from
France, third in line were the poor whites, then came mulattos and freed slaves (of which
there were few), and at the bottom were the slaves. The breakdown resembles a pyramid
in its truest form with the population at the top being very few and the slave population at
the bottom representative of the vast population. Inconveniently for the slave owners,
this discrepancy in economic power and wealth would cause them to face an increase in
slave revolts and conflicts throughout the second half of the eighteenth century.

In early 1791, the first stages of an unrestrained slave revolt were being waged in
the countryside of Haiti, and although it would take a total of twelve years of continuous
fighting, the slaves would win their freedom. The population of the island was divided
dramatically along race lines. The estimates are 500,000 slaves, 40,000 whites, and 30,000
free people of color.² These numbers are not inconsistent with other well established
sugar plantation colonies in the Caribbean except for a couple of irregularities. First, the
white population was also divided into different class roles, with the minority being the
elites and the majority being poor white farmers, and secondly the colony had the ability
to exist on its own. There were a plethora of opportunities for farmers in the colony to
exist on subsistence farming, creating an opportunity for an independent existence.

There are two other factors that may have influenced the slaves of Haiti to fight
for freedom and independence from colonial rule: the American and the French
Revolution. The American Revolution laid the foundation for independence in the
Americas, but it was more of an influence economically for Haiti. The French came to
the aid of the colonists during the revolution and immediately created a network of trade
between Haiti and the colonists. Interestingly the French government, like the British

government, began a policy of heavy taxation of products that were imported or exported from Haiti in order to raise government revenue. This heavy handed approach caused many of the Haitians to create a bond with their American counterparts, a fundamental "us against them" approach to existence. It also needs to be mentioned that a regiment of free Haitian Africans was sent to Georgia to help fight alongside the Americans during their revolution. They would later return to Haiti schooled with a new understanding of revolutionary warfare.

The French Revolution also had an enormous impact on the ever increasing tensions between the slaves and their owners on the Haitian plantations. The instability of the French government combined with the increasing desire for personal independence caused many slaves to reevaluate their positions in society. The transgression towards war was mainly led by the elite among the slaves these were the free light-skinned revolutionaries who had fought alongside the Americans and wanted independence for Haiti. In the spring of 1793 war was officially declared as the slaves were taking advantage of the precarious position that the French government was in. The government of France had very little money, troops, or time to fight a war in Haiti because they were facing their own internal revolution, and a possible invasion of their own soil by a foreign country.

The vulnerability of the French colony could be felt throughout the Caribbean and as a result the British and the Spanish armies in the area responded to put down the slave revolt and to regain control over the island. The white and the free black plantation owners were happy with the idea of other European countries attempting to gain control as long as their societal roles were preserved. However the British and the Spanish were
met with increased resistance and a growing, empowered slave population that viewed their situation as one of nothing to lose and everything to gain.

In this chaos emerged a leader by the name of Toussaint Louverture who would lead the slave revolt to eventual independence. Louverture had been a slave for most of his life, until the age of thirty, but he had also been a free black man who owned slaves of his own. Louverture’s influence on the revolution is immeasurable. He quickly came to power and was very successful in gathering in several key victories. After his victories he presented his philosophy of class restructuring which was the basic declaration of the cause for the French revolution.

In 1804 the new sovereign nation of Haiti became only the second independent country in the Americas, subsequent only to the United States. The most recent country was also the first independent country ruled and controlled by people of African descent. This would prove to have far greater repercussions than the winning of the revolution itself. In 1804 the country was free from colonial rule; however it was not free from a deep-seated class structure that was still in place from early plantation days. The people with the power and the money were the new elite in Haiti and this class was primarily made up of light-skinned free slaves.

The slaves had suffered incredible casualties from the bloody revolution.

“Contemporary British estimates suggest that, of the more than half million blacks and mulattos in Saint-Domingue (which would become the Domicain Republic) in 1792, only 341,933 survived the revolution. Of these, a mere 170,000 were judged capable of field labor.”³ This would prove to be a striking blow to the previously successful labor-intensive plantations that existed before the revolution. The country of Haiti was now not

only a physical island, it was also a philosophical island as well, because in 1804 the surrounding areas of land were heavily involved in various modes of slavery, and they did not take kindly to the idea of an island run by former slaves. They were not interested in trading with Haiti. Therefore it became increasingly evident that the economy would need to change, and that the only opportunities for survival were limited to subsistence farming or a return to forced plantation farming.

2. Independence to Occupation

Although the economic and political climate in Haiti suggested that it would be beneficial for the inhabitants to engage in subsistence farming and gradually build into another more productive economy, the class system left by the years of slavery did not. The slave years had instilled a belief that the lighter ones skin the more economic and political rights one should have. There was still a fault line between those with land and those without. The ones without land tended to want to engage in subsistence farming, where as those with land wanted to further develop a plantation economy that would continue to feed their personal wealth.

Haiti was a pariah in the global economy and it had very little luck establishing the trade networks that were needed to supply the populace with their needs. A boycott was directed by the United States, undoubtedly out of fear of a possible slave rebellion in the U.S., and the boycott was supported by all of the European powers. The United States refused to recognize the independent country of Haiti until 1862, at which time it was necessary for the U.S. to do so for northern economic reasons.
In 1824 France recognized the country of Haiti and actually developed a one-sided trade agreement that the Haitian presidential leader Boyer agreed to. These agreements led to France establishing economic control over Haiti. This was accomplished by placing charges on crucial imported goods from France while also charging a fee of 150 million Francs for the opportunity to trade with France. The renewed need for Haiti to rely on French benevolence would prove to be disastrous for the peasants of Haiti, because the elite needed more goods to sell to make money and therefore pressed harder to make the peasants earn this money for them. The peasants were thrown into a new form of slavery that forced them to work on large plantations controlled by Haitian elites who used their profits to pay down the debt to France while making living conditions more inhospitable for the peasants.

France was not alone in this one-sided trade. For instance the British also developed one-sided trade agreements with Haiti. In the early nineteenth century Haiti was one of Britain’s third largest trade partners, because of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, but this did not prove economically beneficial for the Haitians. Britain would often show up unannounced in Haiti with ships full of armed military men just to reinforce the idea of their own superiority which proved to be very effective. Thus the independent island of Haiti was forced into servitude to the European powers of the day by economic, political, and military measures.

In the United States political resistance to the recognition of Haiti did not stop U.S. citizens from trading with Haiti or the U.S. government restricting what other countries could trade in Haiti. The U.S. unquestionably wanted a piece of the action. The U.S. was laying down the foundations for the Monroe Doctrine when it used its
relationship with Haiti to create a precedent for U.S. domination in the early 19th century. The U.S. only accepted the sovereignty of Haiti in 1862, during the early stages of the U.S. Civil War, because of the need created by the secession of the Southern states for the Northern states to obtain cotton. Haiti was producing and exporting small amounts of cotton at the time. Therefore even its infancy Haiti was not an economically independent nation and it was by no means a capitalist economy like the one enjoyed by the citizens of the U.S.

In the late 1800’s the U.S. became interested in Haiti once again because the island has strategically important harbor that is called Mole. Mole offered the U.S. a protective harbor from which it could operate its navy in order to ensure the fast removal of Spain and other European countries from the area. However Haitian leaders realized the potential of the harbor as well and tried to leverage it as a way to gain some ground in their unfavorable trade situation. The leaders were unsuccessful as the need for the harbor diminished when the U.S. defeated the Spanish at the end of the nineteenth century.

However the U.S. did need coffee and Haiti was proving to be a very reliable supplier of coffee. Soon it would become Haiti’s number one cash crop. The turn of the nineteenth century into the twentieth century saw an increase in US and Haitian trade: “…the United States increased its share of the Haitian market from 30 to about 60 percent.”4 This increase came on the heels of the U.S. asserting its authority on the global market and basically eliminating foreign competition in Haiti. Once again this was favorable for the U.S. but not for the Haitians. In 1872 a German war boat was sent

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4 Farmer, 75.
to the country of Haiti to demand the repayment of a debt. The U.S. backed away from its controlling manner of the Americas and allowed the Germans to enter and demand their money. The precedent was furthermore established that when Haiti owed other countries money, for example France, Germany, and England, the U.S. would have a say in the terms of repayment.

The philosophy of the Monroe Doctrine became more widespread with the building of the Panama Canal and the need to ensure that the water routes to and from Panama remained free from foreign invasion. This meant that the U.S. needed to make sure that Haiti was free from imperial powers. Once more this was dictated by force by the U.S., economically and militarily. Haitians needed the U.S. commodities because the U.S. had eliminated the potential of European countries coming into the area. The U.S. invaded Haiti in 1915 and remained in political control of the country until 1934, all with the pretense of protecting the Haitians from themselves and European invaders. Interestingly it can be argued that this political instability was actually caused by the U.S. and its unfavorable trade practices that reinforced the need for plantation farming rather than subsistence farming.

In 1934 the U.S. removed the last of its troops from the island of Haiti, because of its own internal problems, not because they believed that they were done in Haiti. Unfortunately what should have been a remarkable day for Haitians only became more traumatic by the realization that the country of Haiti had no economic means with which to survive. The land that had been used for growing coffee had become decimated and more or less inadequate; the peasant class had soared in numbers, as the elite became richer. A new twist was presented to the country of Haiti which was the introduction of
the new country of the Dominican Republic, and with it came an ongoing border dispute that continues today as various leaders create imaginary lines in the sand.

3. Autocracy to Democracy

The years after the occupation of Haiti by U.S. military troops have been referred to as the second independence of Haiti, because it is in this period of time that the Haitians were most free from outside occupation. Unfortunately just as in the early 1800’s the country of Haiti was economically poor. The once vibrant agricultural industry was in rapid decline so too was the internal infrastructure of the island: “In 1934 one could drive to Jacmel in less than two hours; in 1957 it took nine hours by jeep in good weather.”5 Not only were the roads in decay, but the hospitals were also in ruins. Patients lay dying without the proper medical care, while doctors tried to help but without medicines and equipment they were useless. The U.S. was instrumental in forcing the economy to be centralized in Port-au-Prince. This forced peasants in the surrounding countryside to make transactions only in those areas in which they were susceptible to control. In this dreadful environment there was an assortment of rulers in Haiti from 1934-1957, but none of them were able to establish long term power over the country. The vacuum of leadership was filled in 1957 by a merciless dictator named François (Papa Doc) Duvalier who would lead with an iron fist until 1971.

Papa Doc came from a privileged background. He attended the best schools and graduated as a doctor. He married at a young age and had a family of four children, of which only one was a son. He was considered an intellect and had never been part of the

military. He was considered by many in the U.S. a safe choice to be the leader of Haiti. Interestingly the U.S. did not seem to be particularly concerned that Papa Doc was fond of his African roots and went to great lengths to glorify them while at the same time tried to ignore or lay to rest the historical French influence on the Island of Haiti. Papa Doc was outwardly a Christian man, but he also had strong ties with Voodoo culture. The one thing that he was brilliant at was uniting the country of Haiti under one standard and on his inauguration day he stated that “I have no enemies except the enemies of the Nation.” He would use this proclamation to justify countless murders and imprisonments throughout his reign as ruler.

Papa Doc quickly took control over all aspects of the Haitian economy in 1957 by first taking over $500 million in foreign aid, and taxes and depositing it in his own personal accounts. Second he established complete control over the military. Papa Doc then took over the centralized economy and started to increase taxes on all products. For example, coffee was the largest export and was taxed heavily. This took money out of the farmer’s pocket. Peasants were then trapped in a predatory market where in order to survive, they needed to make more, which only led to them being taxed more. While agriculture was in disarray there were some success stories in light industry for instance as an example of the relationship between Papa Doc and the U.S., all baseballs that were sold in the U.S. in the 1970’s were hand sewn in Haiti, and there was even the beginning of a promising tourism industry.

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Papa Doc was also able to establish control over the populace of Haiti through religious means, and particularly by using his connections with various Voodoo religious leaders or Macoutes as they are referred to. These religious leaders were in every village and township and the peasants viewed them not only as religious leaders but they were also considered as political leaders. It was clever of Papa Doc to unite them all under his plan for ruling the countryside. He helped keep them powerful by providing military and political retaliations to local challenges of their control and they helped to keep him in power by providing him with the means for local domination. This system would prove to be very effective for many years as Papa Doc would remain in power for longer than most other Haitian leaders had. It would also establish a model for subsequent rulers of the country of Haiti.

Papa Doc was replaced by his son 19 year old son Jean Claude (Baby Doc) Duvalier who he made dictator for life. But Baby Doc only ended up ruling from 1971-1986. As soon as he took power he attempted to increase support from the U.S. and implemented several changes that would help to placate the U.S. For instance he released some political prisoners, made a number of cuts in the military, ordered his police to be less brutal, and unchained a number of economic sanctions. He also made the military more professional by creating and implementing a military academy which began to graduate new soldiers in 1973. To add to his military reform he also began to gradually modernize the equipment that the military was using.

Baby Doc was not as an effective leader as his father had been and he struggled to maintain order between the people, the police, and the military. His economic reforms did very little to help the peasants, and arguably his policies of forced farming led to the
rapid degeneration of the surrounding countryside. The policies of forced farming included an agricultural policy of coffee growing until the soil was rendered infertile. Unfortunately the country side could not take this type of ecological punishment, and many of the lands that were used to farm were left infertile leaving many of the working poor without a livelihood. In response Baby Doc attempted to use this recently available labor force in light industrial factories, just like his father, but it only uncovered the fact that the majority of the country was undereducated and lacked the necessary skills to work in the factories.

In early 1984 physical violence began to spread throughout various areas in Haiti in response to populace’s belief that a regime change was necessary. The regime used the police for protection because many of the military leaders refused to quash the rebels, for that they would then be on the wrong side of the regime transformation. By early 1986 Baby-Doc had very few options left, and early in the morning of January 12th, several of his generals held him and his wife at gunpoint and asked him to step down as dictator. The country was collapsing all around Baby Doc in 1986, so he fled Haiti to live out the rest of his life in France with complete immunity from the global community.

The government left in place by Baby-Doc was meant to be an interim military junta, which was to be controlled by several of his top generals. The regime change was complete and various people who had supported Baby-Doc were now threatened, and in some cases were killed, by angry mobs. However violent it was in Haiti, Baby Doc was sheltered from this because he was a continent away enjoying the money that he had embezzled and the political asylum that France was willing to give him. To this day Baby Doc insists that he should be the leader of Haiti and has announced to the world
that he is willing to be put back in charge. The people of Haiti were left with a period of unrest until the democratically elected Jean-Bertrand Aristide came to power in December of 1990.

4. Aristide as a Symbol of Democracy

Aristide was born a peasant in a small village called Port-Salut on July 15, 1953, shortly after which his father died and he and the rest of his family moved to the capital city of Haiti. Aristide was considered a privileged peasant because he owned land and this secured him a higher societal ranking than that of a landless peasant. Often times it is problematic to conclude that if you own land and you live in a rural village you must be a peasant, but Aristide’s land was infertile because of historically unfavorable farming practices that left the land without the basic nutrients to grow a piece of grass. Although Aristide left Port Salut at a young age his grandfather remained in the village and every summer he would return and visit. His grandfather insisted that his grandson treat all people with the same respect including the poorest of the villagers, and he often times insisted that Aristide spend extended amounts of time in other people’s houses. These experiences would help to shape the future leader by providing him with a foundation of understanding for all of the people of Haiti.

Aristide has always insisted that he has not lived a privileged life although he was part of the small percentage of Haitians to attend any type of formalized school. It was a Catholic school that split time between religious teachings and academic pursuits. The students were instructed in French and were required to converse and write only in French, and not in their local language of Creole. Immediately upon completion of such
a program Aristide would be among the minority of Haiti’s elite that could conduct politics and business within the capital city of Port-au-Prince. This intense religious education has come through in Aristide as a man. He often states that he likes to use the bible when making important decisions: “I return to it always in response to a thought, or a search, and I am engulfed by it.”

After completing his instruction Aristide spent six years traveling throughout the Caribbean and abroad. But he claimed to remain one with Haiti, never changing the time on his watch in order to always be one with the country of his birth. In 1983 Pope John Paul II visited Haiti and declared “Things must Change,” in response to the overwhelming poverty and social injustice that he was witnessing. This caused a bit of confusion in Aristide because if things were to truly change it would mean agrarian reform, which is a least a socialist idea, and might even be a move towards communism. But if things were not to change so progressively how could anything change. This would be the path that Aristide would choose for his future political career. It rested on his gaining the support of the peasants in response to his support for their needs as a whole.

In order to implement the changes needed to oust Baby Doc, Aristide and many others began to use the local churches as conduits for social change. Much like how Papa-Doc had used the local head of Voodoo to keep himself in power, Aristide and others were now using the Catholic Church to bring about positive social change. The process was time consuming and at the time Aristide could not have possibly known that he was in effect creating a political base of support for himself, but he was doing so in

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every village he went into. In September of 1985 he was named as the Master of Studies at the National School for Arts and Crafts in Port-au-Prince in the parish of St. Jean Bosco. This would prove to be the perfect stage for Aristide to, reluctantly at first, lead a massive revolt against the leadership of Baby-Doc. Unfortunately, many parishioners were beaten and mortally wounded before the fight was over, and the win meant little more than the removal of one military dictator and the replacement with another.

In this interim period between Baby-Doc and himself as leader, Aristide had time to reflect on what he considered to be the path of change that the Haitian people truly needed. It was obvious to the outsider that the path to change would have to come from land reforms. Unfortunately land reform would damage the Catholic Church the most as it had become a major land holder in Haiti. Aristide began to proclaim the needs of his people over the needs of the Church. Although he always considered himself a good catholic, he would always lean towards socialism and land reform, rather than maintaining the existing status structures. His message of change came with the message of non-violence and he was at times compared to Martin Luther King and Gandhi, to which he replied that he would never reach their levels of suffering.

In time Aristide would become the spokesperson for the Lavalas party. "Lavalas" means united against the Mafia. The mafia is exactly what the Lavalas party felt that they were up against which is an organized crime syndicate. Aristide would also be the anti-Macoute candidate in the new democratic election process that would happen on the heels of a newly established constitution in 1990. Upon entering the political fray, the opposition immediately began to refer to Aristide as a communist and his rival garnered monetary support from the U.S. based on these allegations. Despite months of verbal
and physical attempts to disparage him, on December 16, 1990 Aristide was elected to
the office of the presidency of Haiti. The vote was undisputed, with a large percent of the
eligible voters placing a vote and election officials from various countries on hand to
ensure that the elections were not wrought with fraud. After his election Aristide was
required to give up his status as a minister of the Catholic Church because religious
leaders felt that he could not be a political as well as a religious head, which he
reluctantly decided was correct.

Aristide was elected to the office of president on three major party platforms. The
first was that he would create a new tax revenue system that would tax the people with
money and land to pay for social programs for those without those advantages. These
programs included a guaranteed publicly funded education program for all Haitians,
money reinvested back into the economy to help to stimulate economic growth, and, in
due course, a program that was aimed at paying back foreign debt.

The second platform was the reformation of the tyrannically controlled military
that had been controlled the country. This became the main focus of his social platform.
The first step in this process was the gradual elimination of the central military. The
second step was to reform the local police departments to help secure the country. The
last step was to eliminate all forms of human rights abuses caused by the military or the
police.

The third platform was the revitalization of light industrial businesses and
companies, which became part of Aristide’s economic platform. The first step in this
process was a clear education program. The second step was the decentralization of the
central government’s social programs. The last step was the courtship of foreign money
by providing a secure economic environment. The monies that would be gained through
these various programs would than be used to operate state run businesses that would
theoretically provide jobs for the peasants.

Aristide right away began to make changes to the political and economic structure
of Haiti in accordance to his party platform, and he for example did not attempt to control
all commodities trading from his office. This allowed for more competition among
importers and exporters which in turn led to work and lower prices on some goods for
Haitian peasants. He also began to fulfill his social platform by recreating the military
structure and he struggled to create police substations or districts to take the place of the
centralized military. This decentralization of the Haitian military would be a major
sticking point in his two presidencies, because in effect he was violating the Haitian
constitution by eliminating the military.

Next Aristide began to seek help from outside of Haiti to help build up the Haitian
economy. First he sought help from the U.S. government, and tried without succeeding
to have the U.S. to invest in the Haitian economy through business investments. Which
the U.S. stayed away from because they wanted the money to be used on a free market
and Aristide wanted to use the money to construct state run businesses. Without the U.S.
help Aristide was put into the position of seeking help from the UN, and the World Bank
because his country and presidency were slowly falling apart economically. The
previous regimes had borrowed large amounts of money throughout the world and those
financiers were now in search of compensation of those funds.

The political platform that Aristide had run for president on most vocally was on
the one hand the easiest to gain support for from the people to get elected would on the
other hand prove to be his most trying. The country that Aristide inherited had a complex
tax structure that would have provided the funds needed to run the country.

Unfortunately those laws had historically not been enforced or acknowledge by the
people with money. Aristide saw the future of Haiti as one of a decentralized
government with satellite government organizations throughout the country that would be
able to enforce the tax codes. He would also use these satellite sites to help with
governmental security, tax collection, and economic stability. He continued to see the
decentralization of the Haitian government as a means to end the endless migration of
landless peasants into major cities, which did not have the resources to support their
specific needs. However the desires or speculations of Aristide would inconveniently be
dashed in instantaneous moment.

Aristide was ousted from office on September 30, 1991, which ironically was just
days after he had appeared for the first time in United Nations in New York City.

Fortunately for Aristide he was not physically harmed unfortunately many of his friends
were not as lucky "Several of my friends have been beaten. Physically, they are holding
up. They have come out of the war alive"\textsuperscript{10}. He was removed from office by General
Cedras who six months earlier he had put in charge of the military under the guise of a
united family of politics and military for the Haitian family. Aristide chooses General
Cedras based on their past history together where the General had actually worked to help
Aristide get elected. The newly created constitution had put into place the position and
Aristide needed Cedras it is highly doubtful that he could have predicted that he would
turn against him. The final success of the General came after a succession of more than
nine assassination attempts on Aristide while he was president.

\textsuperscript{10} Jean-Bertrand Aristide. \textit{Dignity}. (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1996) 47
After retreating to New York City Aristide began to respond to the world, and point the finger at the various military powers of the world for standing by and allowing a democratically elected leader to be forcibly removed from office. Aristide was immediately put on the defensive as multiple levels of a smear campaign were begun against him. The News in the U.S. picked up on the news bandwagon and spread unsubstantiated rumors about Aristide. The accusations included a process of killing political enemies by putting them in rubber tires and starting the tires on fire and allowing the people to suffer a slow painful death. In response Aristide has always preached non-violence and insisted that his supporters remain true to his words. These stories and accusations have in no way have been proven true by any credible source, but they continue to surface in any exposes of Aristides presidencies.

Aristide organized a fight for his country in the courts of the U.S. and the United Nations. He admits readily that he had to learn diplomacy much like he had to learn to be the president, and that neither of these positions comes without mistakes being made. Luckily for Aristide had been a professor of Psychology and he used his knowledge to gain an edge during negotiations. For instance he writes that “a knife cannot scratch its own handle”; one cannot act alone, and that you need to learn to rely on others to be successful. Aristide worked hard to gain the support of his fellow Latin American countries in order to increase his own credibility in the world courts, and he was very good at gaining their support and he used that support to jockey for position.

The country of Haiti was at a crossroads in the mind of ousted President Aristide who was the officially elected leader, but had been living in the United States for the past two years. In order to secure back his presidency Aristide had to make concessions to the

\[11\] “Aristide 1993” 100.
people who had removed him from office. Aristide had to move away from his aggressive political and social platform programs and had to instead attempt to fulfill his economic platform without the support of the other two. For instance according to the Washington accord of February 23,1992 Aristide agreed to political amnesty for the military personal involved in his removal, a prime minister that was acceptable to the rebel government, and basically no choice on when he would return to power.

Unfortunately Aristide had to make these concessions without a platform to state his case to the people of Haiti, and this proved to be damaging for his perceived political purity. Ultimately his back was against the preverbal brick wall, because he was elected as president because of his multiple platforms, but now he was being held accountable to only those reforms he realistically had a chance to make.

Although Aristide had agreed to the accords he was not reinstated to power until February of 1993 when the newly elected President of the United States William Clinton was sworn into power. Aristide had hoped that Clinton would be a friend to the democratic movement of Haiti, unfortunately it did not start out that way as Clinton maintained the same policies as the former president Bush had. Ever the politition Aristide took this time to expand upon his goals once he was returned to power and they included all of his original platform goals including his political, social, and economic platforms which also included the decentralization of all governmental social resources in the country, the taxation of those with money, and the commitment to free education for all Haitian citizens. He believed that “A healthy economy encourages enterprise, greater production, and exchange. It is and will be the regeneration of our social fabric”\textsuperscript{12}.

Therefore the goals of the country should be to increase economic investments, educate

\textsuperscript{12} “Aristide 1993”, 116.
the people, and to remove the barriers that prevent those that are poor from progressing socially in the society.

Once again Aristide had a plan for how he believed this could be worked out. First his goal was to reformat the social platform by insisting that the military should be downsized, but not until there were jobs in place to employ them. Second the key word should be security meaning that the people should feel secure to live, to do business, and secure in the permanence of their government. Third it is necessary to reform the police force, because it should be more of a protection for the people and rather than a military unit bent on maintaining their own status quo. It was not until the spring of 1994 that Aristide would be returned to power as the democratically elected president of Haiti and his term in office ended in 1995 and he was given the liberty by the U.S. and the UN to pursue his economic goals but they did not give him permission to pursue his other political and social agendas. However against their guidance Aristide did began to implement changes in the police force and in doing so he granted an untrained police force more authority than they implicitly knew how to use. Before the end of his first term in office Aristide would be faced with many problems that have not been rectified including an increase in illiteracy, poverty, and reports of police brutality. The affect was that while Aristide attempted to make changes to appease his constituents, he failed to gain the support of the U.S. and the UN as they withdrew their support for his economic programs which in the long run caused his other programs to fail as well.

The next five years remained virtually incident free as another president Rene Preval was elected in an election in which Aristide could not run for office in accordance to the Washington Accords. The only changes that are made under Prevel are that the
privatization of Haitian controlled business begins to slowly take place which is appealing to the U.S. and the UN. The peaceful nature of the country during those five years could be argued was a direct result of United Nations presence in the country and there peaceful influence. Unfortunately as the privatization process gathered momentum outside of Haiti the workers of Haiti became alarmed at the possibilities of losing their jobs and as a result they began to have worker strikers. The outspoken leader of this political turmoil would once again be Aristide as he attempted to destabilize the presidency of Preval. Interestingly the US military turned over control of Haiti from themseveles to the UN after Aristide stepped down as president.

Although Aristide was not president his influence was wide felt and he was once again considered the voice of the people. He was working with the Preval government and the workers to come to a compromise over their lost jobs due to privatization. It is generally accepted in the global community that he was pulling the strings of the president that was in office, and when it was election time the Lavis Party decided to run Aristide as their next candidate. The only opposition to Aristide decided to boycott the election rather than to lose by a wide margin, so in effect Aristide was reelected, but it was in an election in which he was basically was the only candidate. This would prove to be a blessing as well as a disguised curse for Aristide as he interpreted his election results as a mandate by the people to resume his political social and economic agenda. In 2000 the UN moved out and Aristide was reelected to his second term in office. At some point the platforms that Aristide continues to run on must be challenged by the populace as being unrealistic and even unattainable.
In the beginning of his second term in office it was obvious that Aristide was a different politician from the one who needed the U.S. to help him regain his country. He immediately began to change some of the brass tacks that he had agreed too during the Washington Accords. He explicitly challenged the size of the military and candidly courted help from countries around him that the U.S. did not value such as Cuba, and Venezuela. Unfortunately for Aristide while completing his attempted downsizing of the military he was guilty of committing many of the same crime he had accused them of. For instance several of the militaries top leaders were killed in what can only be described as with military precision, and he also began to use more regularly the police force as a tool to stymie opposition through marshal law. Aristide openly challenged the World Bank, and other organizations that had loaned Haiti money and were now requiring huge debt repayments. He even went so far as to present the idea of reparations to be paid for by France for the time period that the Island was a slave plantation.

Aristide has been accused of changing his elected path of governance, because of his rapidly changing strategies for dealing with his political, social, and economic platforms. I would offer that he did not ever change his message, but I believe in order to maintain his presidency he needed to make changes in his own mode for political change.

This caused considerable animosity in the world and the U.S. and the rest of the world responded with a verbal challenge to the election results and demanded proof of positive election results for Aristide. He was able to provide the necessary proof. U.S. and the UN began to further distance themselves from Aristide except for the fact that the U.S. was providing the personal security force for Aristide through a private corporation.
In the spring of 2003 Aristide and Haiti had once again been overrun by a rebel military force. The force was outfitted with modern U.S. weapons as well as modern All Terrain Vehicles that records showed to have been recently delivered to the Dominican Republic. Aristide was seeking protection from the UN and the U.S. but before they could commit any troops Aristide was tricked into boarding a U.S. military plane and left the country. He has once again sought refuge in the U.S. in order to be physically close to his country as well as petition for his return which less and less likely as in December 2005 there is to be a presidential election in Haiti. Unfortunately for Aristide he is not even on the ballot, but more importantly for the people of Haiti maybe now they can truly move beyond a leader of smoke and mirrors and elect one that can implement true change.

5. Is it Politics as Usual in Haiti?

Throughout its history the country of Haiti has continuously had to struggle in its battle for sovereignty, and this battle has been mostly waged form an economic battlefield. The peasants of Haiti are the ones that are suffering from a lack economic stability which has resulted in political instability and a consequential predatory economy that allows the rich to get richer while the impoverished become poorer. Beguilingly the economy today is eerily similar to the one created by French slaveholders at the end of the 18th century where precious few were enjoying economic success while vast amounts of peasants were doomed to live in the same way as their ancestors of two-hundred years ago.

The citizens of Haiti have been deceived into expecting a lot from a little with their relatively young and fragile democracy. Jean-Bertrand Aristide has been
unreservedly elected twice to be president of the country solely on his empty promises that have been made to the multitudes of peasants throughout the country. He has run on a platform that promised political, economic, and social changes for the peasants and for the country as a whole. Unfortunately the country of Haiti which was expecting to bask in the glow of a rising revolution in light industry, economic reforms, and a restructured military has been sold a lemon.

Aristide was elected as a populist president in a country that needed a proficient autonomous leader. Throughout his history Aristide has been able to appeal to the masses through his emotional religious sermons that promised salvation after a life of dedication. He used that ability to get elected, but that ability had nothing to do with the reality of Haitian problems, which include a 200 year battle over a social class system, a nonexistent public education system, and an overzealous military.

He wanted to change the social class system through a taxation process that would inevitably lead to a progression of land reform, and social mobility for some of the countries poorest members. He underestimated the power of those with land and money and their abilities to control their wealth through political and forceful means. Perhaps if he had become partners with those people with wealth and power he would have been able to implement the changes he wanted. For example he could have presented a case for a unified Haiti that needed all Haitians to work together instead of his head to head strategy of direct confrontation with those he opposed. Instead he alienated the people he needed most to make the changes he desired most and eighty percent of the population is living below the poverty

The guaranteed public education system that Aristide foretold would never come to fruition in his reign. Despite his promises and speeches the literacy rate remains at a pathetic 52.6 percent, which when compared to neighboring countries such as the Dominican Republic which is an 84.7 percent literacy rate should be awkward for Aristide. Instead Aristide responds with his standard charismatic hyperbole that he will make the changes necessary for the system to change, but these are just empty promises of a powerless former president.

During Aristides presidency he has been somewhat successful in one of his platforms which were the destabilization of the Haitian Army, Navy, and the Air force except that this goes against the Haitian constitution which allows and provides for the necessity of the Haitian military. The standing down of the Haitian military costs the country around 26 million dollars a year for a non-existent military protection unit. The removal of the standing military has not caused the people of Haiti to feel safe, because without the military the police force has become the strong-arm of the law, and they basically answer directly to Aristide. In effect Aristide was creating a personal military that answered only to him by bypassing the Haitian military provided for by the Haitian constitution which put military leadership on par with presidential leadership as a form of checks and balances.

Jean-Bertrand Aristide was elected on political platforms that would appeal to the masses of people that surrounded him while approaching political power, but somewhere in that struggle he lost his way as a democratic leader that he was elected to be. He was successful in his past occupations because he was able to demand total control, which

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14 Ibid., pp. 2.
15 Ibid., pp. 2.
were by essence autocracies rather than democratic leadership positions. In a truly democratic country the leader would work to create unity and community rather than animosity and dissent this would be the dawning of a new political rather than government as regular which Aristide represents. The future for Haiti is optimistic because the now has the opportunity to elect a leader that can create real change through a legitimate democratic process.
**Haitian Historical Timeline**

1492 - Christopher Columbus lands and names the island Hispaniola, or Little Spain.

1496 - Spanish establish first European settlement in western hemisphere at Santo Domingo, now capital of Dominican Republic.

1697 - Spain cedes western part of Hispaniola to France, and this becomes Haiti, or Land of Mountains.

1801 - A former black slave who became a guerrilla leader, Toussaint Louverture, conquers Haiti, abolishing slavery and proclaiming himself governor-general of an autonomous government over all Hispaniola.

1804 - Haiti becomes independent; former slave Jean-Jacques Dessalines declares himself emperor.

1915 - US invades Haiti following black-mulatto friction, which it thought endangered its property and investments in the country.

1934 - US withdraws troops from Haiti, but maintains fiscal control until 1947.

1956 - Voodoo physician Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier seizes power in military coup and is elected president a year later.

1964 - Duvalier declares himself president-for-life and establishes a dictatorship with the help of the Tontons Macoute militia.

1971 - Duvalier dies and is succeeded by his 19-year-old son, Jean-Claude, or "Baby Doc," who also declares himself president-for-life.

1986 - Baby Doc flees Haiti in the wake of mounting popular discontent and is replaced by Lieutenant-General Henri Namphy as head of a governing council.

1990 - Jean-Bertrand Aristide elected president.


1993 - UN imposes sanctions after the Haitian military regime rejected an accord facilitating Aristide's return.

1994 - Haitian military regime relinquishes power in the face of an imminent US invasion; US forces land in Haiti peacefully to oversee a transition to civilian government; Aristide returns.
1995 - UN peacekeepers begin to replace US troops; Aristide supporters win parliamentary elections; Rene Preval elected in December to replace Aristide as president.

1996 - Preval sworn in as president.

1997-99 - Serious political deadlock; new government named.

1999 - Preval declares that parliament's term has expired and begins ruling by decree following a series of disagreements with deputies.

2000 November - Aristide elected president for a second non-consecutive term, amid allegations of irregularities.

2001 July - Presidential spokesman accuses former army officers of trying to overthrow the government after armed men attack three locations, killing four police officers.

2001 December - 30 armed men try to seize the National Palace in an apparent coup attempt; 12 people are killed in the raid, which the government blames on former army members.

2002 July - Haiti is approved as a full member of the Caribbean Community (Caricom) trade bloc.

2004 January-February - Celebrations marking 200 years of independence are marred by violent uprising against President Aristide. Rebels seize towns and cities; dozens are killed. Mr Aristide is forced into exile; an interim government takes over.

2004 June - First UN peacekeepers arrive, to take over security duties from US-led force and to help flood survivors.

2004 July - International donors pledge more than $1 billion in aid.

late 2004 - Rising levels of deadly political and gang violence in the capital; armed gangs loyal to former President Aristide are said to be responsible for many killings.
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