

Black History Month at Tuskegee University

Leadership and Transformational Connections: African Americans and the
Diasporas. February 24, 2022

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I want to thank the Organizing Committee for inviting me to speak at Tuskegee University Black History Month 2022. It is certainly an honor for me to participate at this event. I see it also as a tribute to all Haitians, being the first one of my community to receive such an invitation.

The perception

For many of you, when you hear about Haiti, the same descriptions ring in your ears:

- Failed State
- Poorest country in the Western hemisphere
- Most corrupt country
- Most unstable country
- Most this, most that and the list goes on.

Many of you probably might think: “This is a lost country, a nation without purpose, a shame to our race”.

To activists from certain West Indian colonies showing desire for independence, they are answered:

“Look at Haiti, next door. Is this what you dream of becoming?”

Some Haitians abroad, embarrassed by the condition of Haiti today, prefer to call themselves Jamaicans or West Indians.

Our first peasants landing on the coasts of Florida from the 80s presented themselves as French people, even though they did not know a single word of this language.

Who is this mother vis-à-vis whom sons and daughters find it difficult to assume their filiation?

Yes, Haiti today is the poorest country in the Western hemisphere.

Today, whatever the indicator considered, the news is not good. Maybe, we are the only nation, not subject to war, to have experienced this growing descent into poverty.

Some examples to illustrate:

- From 1960 to 2020 the GDP per capita (in USD constant 2010) passed from 1,512 USD to 1,168 USD, i.e. a total aggregate change of minus 21.4%.
- 25% of Haitians are living with less than 1 US/day.
- Half the population is suffering from food insecurity.
- 85% of young people aged 15-24 are illiterate.
- Child mortality rate: 31.4 per 1,000
- Half of the population has no access to drinking water.
- Only 36% of Haitians have access to energy. (11% in rural areas)
- More than 65% of Haitians don't have access to sanitary facilities.
- Access to housing (with sustainable materials): 60% (41 % in rural areas);

In addition to these limitations, Haiti is among the countries with the greatest inequity in the Hemisphere with a Gini coefficient of 61. The richest 20 percent of its population holds 65 percent of its total wealth, while the poorest 20 percent holds hardly 1 percent.

The last three decades have been particularly trying with a combination of disasters of all kinds, natural and man-made: more than 20 hurricanes and devastating inundations, seven coups d'état, a cholera epidemic introduced by UN soldiers and which caused more than 10,000 deaths, two major earthquakes (more than 250,000 deaths), Covid-19, and during the last 3 years mass assassinations, not to mention regular and massive deportations by the USA of

There is a problem here.

To complicate things, the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse on July 21, 2021 has created an exceptional situation where there is no constitutional provision to provide for his replacement. The three branches of power (Executive, Legislative, and Judiciary) are totally dysfunctional. The current Prime Minister chosen by the International Community has no

legitimacy to take the major decisions that could get the country out of this impasse. Only a real political dialogue, unfortunately absent from the culture of our elites, would make it possible to resolve this exceptional crisis.

Our police are infested with gangsters at the highest level, which explains why they are unable to cope with the many who control almost half of the territory. The last two elections had low turnout and were influenced by the international community.

Finally, more than twenty thousand migrants trying to escape a life of hell, have been deported back from the US to Haiti. This is quite as many as deportations ordered by the last three US Presidents – combined.

The Dream

Who are these sons and daughters who are ashamed of such a beautiful mother?

Beautiful mother, you say?

Yes. Beautiful mother.

This is the paradox that I am introducing here to you today, the paradox of what I call the **Haitian condition**.

The Haitian condition is a part of the human condition. But it is singularity of the human condition, caught in the paradox of two contradictory forces, one of which is carried by the impetus of a breath to the birth of the new nation, announcing a new project of humanity breaking with the dominant world order in the West, and the other, marked by the chronic deterioration of its current situation.

Let's examine these two forces in action.

Haiti was born against the tide of the world order. A world order based on colonialism and slavery and which largely explains the accumulation of wealth that makes the glory of the West today.

When you hear the news from Haiti, you probably think: "This is a lost country, a nation without purpose, à shame to our race." It was not always like that. Two centuries ago when Haiti proclaimed its independence after defeating three European armies: the Spanish, the British and the French, she was the pride of our kind, the strongest argument against racism and the example to follow.

After 300 years of servitude, a mass of slaves decides to conceive their existence in another relation to life: Freedom or death!

Fighting in turn against the English, the Spaniards they end up defeating the largest army in Europe, the Napoleon army, and found the first nation of slaves in all human history.

It was the end signal of slavery as the dominant mode of wealth creation in the western world. Even if the pronouncement of this judgment had to wait almost 30 years for England (28 August 1833), 44 years for France (27 April 1848) and more than 60 years for the United States (31 June 1865).

When I hear that there were three great revolutions in the world: the French revolution in 1789, the American Revolution in 1777 and the Haitian revolution in 1804, I tell myself that these historians do not see that the only real rupture in the world order with regard to human rights is in the Haitian revolution and in the Haitian revolution only.

How can a revolution based on popular consent against slavery end up today with a situation where most of the population is still in another type of slavery?

Having created this new situation of *fait accompli*, Haitians are looking to other nations to help them in their fight for freedom.

In 1815, we found Haiti alongside South-America in their struggle against Spanish Colonialism.

Simon Bolivar came to Haiti looking for support to fight against Spanish colonialism... Alexandre Petion gave vital assistance (money, weapons and ammunitions, soldiers) to Simon Bolivar that enabled him to re-launch his campaign for South-American Independence.

Petion demanded as payment that the planter-aristocrats declare slavery in his homeland abolished, which he did on his return to South America...

In 1808, you find Haiti alongside the DR in their struggle against Spanish Colonialism.

Haiti was alongside Mexico in 1818 in its struggle against Spanish Colonialism.

Haiti was with the Greeks struggling against Turkish Occupation in 1821

We were with the Belgians in their fight for Independence in 1830.

Shall we remember that in 1773, about 1500 Mulattoes and freed blacks led by Count Charles Henri d'Estaing went to the US (Savannah GA) to fight for the independence of this country?

Among the volunteers was the young Henri Christophe who became one of Haiti's Independence heroes.

So the Haitian condition is the difficult-to-admit mix between the perspective of a new project of humanity based on full freedom, in law and in fact, and the current nightmare.

How The Dream Was Stolen

The Soviet Union had one iron curtain,

Haiti has three : a curtain of lies, a curtain of hatred and a curtain of indifference. For two centuries, the Haitian people have been resisting their two enemies: the former colonialists renamed “international community” and the repugnant elite. They are both as powerful as cruel.

The International Community

Those who have made slavery the socio economic system of the continent were not going to accept that without reacting: Little by little, their propaganda machine, with the help of our repugnant elite, transformed Haiti from a beacon of light to an object of shame.

Today, most Haitians, and more and more observers outside Haiti, begin to understand that today's nightmare has its roots, not only in our internal contradictions, but also in the complex relationship that the country has always had with what we call the international community.

Let's start with the status of Haiti as a nation recognized on the international scene. The United States waited almost 60 years before recognizing Haiti's independence despite the excellent trade between the two countries during this period.

On April 17, 1825 an ordinance of Charles X, King of France, demanded the payment of an indemnity of 150 million francs in exchange for the recognition of Haiti's independence. This is the equivalent of 10 years of tax revenue (21 billion US today). Haiti would take almost 150 years to extinguish this debt.

Haiti also experienced three American occupations (1915, 1994, 2004). Each time, right after the American troops left, the situation became worse than before.

From 1993 to the present day Haiti has experienced six peacekeeping missions, with a mandate to improve stability and strengthen democratic institutions. Today, despite the tens of billions that these missions have cost, the result is a real disaster.

It is often repeated that Haiti is the most economically assisted in the region. This is true if we look at the amounts that have been and still are being mobilized within the framework of this cooperation. It is less so if we look closely at how this money has been used.

First, this aid is not always relevant, that is to say, it does not address the real causes that could help Haiti get out of the cycle of poverty. Then, most of the resources mobilized in this cooperation will not reach the Haitians and will be largely consumed in the Washington belt-way study firms and in those thousands of international NGOs whose action has no impact on development.

That's why I like to repeat that this aid is more about Haiti than for Haiti. Resources are not designed to be spent in Haiti, nor for Haiti, but about Haiti. We have to get out of this cycle of illusions and falsehoods.

The Corrupt Elite

This situation in Haiti is not only the consequence of a long practice of poor public governance. It is also the result of a class of irresponsible elites disconnected from Haitian reality, who consider that Haiti is the factory that should bring in only money, not a place to live, because this elite spends its weekends in Florida, seeks medical care in Florida, sends her kids to school in Florida. A rentier economy has developed where the economic elite needs the Government as a cash cow, to the exclusion of the rest of the population, in particular the poor and peasants.

Today, daily life in Haiti is dominated by this small economic elite and a few hundred politicians, all disconnected from the rest of society. The chaos that Haitians live under the influence of gangs, facing a state paralyzed by corruption and which no longer provides any service to citizens, this chaos is the result of this plot between politicians and this small economic elite.

Still, is there any hope!

Haiti's situation is difficult today and does not seem to allow any hope. But the story is not over.

We must say to ourselves that the nation, which created this "fait accompli" of a planet without legally, recognized slaves, this nation that created the dream of a possible new humanity of citizens of full freedom, cannot end like this, in the decline.



This address to you, brothers and sisters, is to lift the curtain of indifference so you can see our real face and understand and support our struggle to regain our lost sovereignty and to ensure that this hidden diamond that is Haiti can shine in the face of the whole world.

Thank you for your attention.