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ARISTIDE IN HIS OWN WORDS

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President Clinton intends to invade Haiti to “restore democracy” in a country which has known no democracy in nearly 200 years of independence. Clinton Administration officials believe that Haitian democracy today is embodied in the person of Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide. While it is true that he was elected in 1990 as Haiti’s president, Aristide’s controversial career, which led to his ouster in 1991, raises serious questions about whether the United States should be betting the lives of Americans and its international credibility on him.

A Roman Catholic priest, Aristide was dismissed from the Church’s Salesian Order in 1988 for “incitement to hatred and violence...and profanation of the liturgy.”¹ Aristide turned to politics in the fall of 1990. He was elected in December of that year. Although elected democratically, Aristide governed quite un-democratically. He established a reputation, in the words of *New York Times* correspondent Howard French, as “an insular and menacing leader who saw his own raw popularity as a substitute for the give and take of politics.” The litany of anti-democratic actions he took to place in power members of his *Lavalas* movement—the loosely organized following he had developed as a parish priest—is long and has been well-documented.² He named Supreme Court justices, including the Chief Justice, without seeking the approval of the democratically elected Senate. He also replaced democratically elected mayors in key Haitian cities with *Lavalas* members. By the time of the coup on September 30, 1991, the *New York Times*’ correspondent in Haiti observed that “*Lavalas* [was] perceived as both gatekeeper and ideological rudder of the administration, guiding everything from personnel decisions to the Government’s increasingly disputatious relations in Parliament.”³

Americans have a right to know more about the man for whom young Americans may soon have to die. What follows is a collection of statements that Aristide has made over the course of his pro-

FYI#37 9/94

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- 1 Aristide quotes from his dismissal order in his book, *Jean-Bertrand Aristide: An Autobiography* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992), p. 105.
 - 2 The best pieces in English are Raymond Alcide Joseph, “Father Aristide and Other Myths,” *Forbes MediaCritic*, Spring 1994, and Christopher Caldwell, “Aristide Development,” *The American Spectator*, July 1994. Unless otherwise indicated, incidents occurring during Aristide’s brief tenure have been drawn from these two sources.
 - 3 Howard W. French, “Ex-Backers of Ousted Haitian Say He Alienated His Allies,” *The New York Times*, October 22, 1991, p. A11.

fessional life. They come from sermons, presidential speeches, and his two published autobiographies. As they will show, the true measure of Aristide is written in his own words.

IN HIS OWN WORDS: THE MUSINGS OF JEAN-BERTRAND ARISTIDE

Aristide on Democracy

“Revolution, not elections!”

1990 Campaign Slogan
Cited in *The Washington Post*
December 14, 1990, p. A1⁴

Aristide’s Anti-Americanism

“...[T]he U.S. Government has no right to stick its nose into Haitian elections....”

“...[T]he U.S. Government is responsible for the criminal acts of the... National Government Council—because the U.S. Government tolerates it, giving it money and weapons....”

“...[Y]our [the U.S.] government is responsible for this discouragingly miserable, holy mess and the inappropriate, schizophrenic policy from which we have never been able to free ourselves....”

“...[T]he [U.S.] government is blameworthy because it supports an Army which inspires fear and terror and which murders people both at night and in broad daylight....”

“...If your government is the cause of our death, the generations which will blossom on our corpses will not tolerate the U.S. imperialists’ coming to sunbathe in the Haitian sun in order to corrupt us....”

Open Letter to Peter Whaley
Second Secretary, U.S. Embassy
October 17, 1987
Cited in Foreign Broadcast Information Service-
LAT-87-203
October 21, 1987, pp. 2-3⁵

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- 4 The interview in which this comment is mentioned was conducted just four days before the Haitian presidential elections.
 - 5 Aristide was blaming the U.S. for its support of the provisional government (National Government Council) in the aftermath of Jean-Claude (“Baby Doc”) Duvalier’s departure from Haiti. This period was marked by exceptional turmoil, with one military leader after another assuming duties as the Haitian Head of State. Duvalier had fled after the Reagan Administration pressured him to leave and allow for a democratic transition. Haiti, along with the Philippines and Chile, was a target of President Reagan’s second-term policy of withdrawing U.S. support for dictators of the right.

“Now, what are the Americans’ aims regarding Haiti?... America for Americans; the Caribbean, the Antilles for Americans too. They want to continue the exploitation through the assembly industry....”

“A government installed without American help might have the force of the people and could thus possibly resist possible future U.S. pressures. Thus, a government that does not have the people’s support must be installed. There you have it. They [Americans] can thus obtain slaves who will work in their factories for a mere song. They [Americans] also have Haiti as an example of people who are... incapable of leading themselves. One catches a glimpse of a superiority complex in this North American policy....”

“They [the Americans] want to hold our guts always in their hands. Thus, we will be economically, politically, and culturally dependent. For our part, we reject this....”

“Thus, after Nicaragua, they [the Americans] want to put an end to Cuba’s policy. Thus their policy in the mid-term [is to] utterly spoil Castro’s policy....”

Interview with Nancy Roc
Radio Metropole, Port-au-Prince, April 3, 1990
Cited in FBIS-LAT-90-066, April 5, 1990, p. 21⁶

“Haiti had to prove it was ‘moving toward democracy.’ Only if we elected a government would the cold country to the north [the U.S.], and its allies—other former colonizers—send us more money and food. Of course, that money and that food corrupt our society: The money helps to maintain an armed force against the people; the food helps to ruin our national economy; and both money and food keep Haiti in a situation of dependence on the former colonizers.”

In the Parish of the Poor: Writings From Haiti,
1990, p. 47

“The evildoers have always used the Army against the people, as did the cold country to the north [the U.S.] when it occupied Haiti from 1915-1934. They set up the Haitian Army, they trained it to work against the people. I say this in order to force Haitian soldiers of my time to face up to this truth; I say this so that in the midst of the Army itself, the men will recognize that they, the sons of the people, are being positioned against themselves, who are the issue of the people’s womb.”

Ibid., p. 59

6 At the time of this interview, Aristide was not a political candidate. Nicaragua had just held free and fair elections in which the Castro-supported Sandinista government was soundly defeated by Violeta Chamorro, a clear victory for U.S. policy in Central America. Elections in Haiti, strongly supported by the Bush Administration, were to be held at the end of the same year.

“Let the truth of the Lord be a purgative that cleans out all the old ways of the bourgeoisie, all the old ways of the Army that flatters and does the bidding of the Americans. We are tired of hearing the bourgeois leaders whispering in our ears with their little voices saying, ‘Come on with us, come on,’ trying to make us their accomplices. This old corrupt class is bathed in corruption. It has endured for two centuries and should not last any longer. Enough.”

Ibid., p. 88

“The U.S. government, along with its lackeys among the Haitian elite, has already begun to conspire to infiltrate Macoutes into the Army, to buy off soldiers, to sow corruption, to plant divisions, and to multiply spies.”

Ibid., p. 97⁷

“...[T]he Americans claimed that an outbreak of swine fever required the slaughtering of all the pigs in Haiti. This was not true, but those animals played a major role in the rural economy. An alimentary equilibrium that was already precarious was thereby destroyed, and a peasantry was assassinated without appeal....”

“The elimination of the pigs amounted...to burning the savings book. Its purpose was to draw into the cities the abundant and cheap labor force necessary for the [American] assembly plants.”

Jean-Bertrand Aristide: An Autobiography, 1992, pp. 76-77

“Uncle Sam wanted elections that looked like elections—like Canada Dry: the smell, the taste, but not the reality. Namphy did better—or worse—than Reagan demanded.... They wanted a responsible democracy led by people whom they could control....”

Ibid., p. 87⁸

Aristide on Justice

“Look at their machetes. The blades are rusted, the handles dirty. The peasants let the knives hang at their sides except then they are working in the field. But don’t be fooled. A machete is useful in almost any situation. Those rusty blades are long and sharp. They remind me of Bolivar’s sword.”

In the Parish of the Poor, p. 15⁹

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- 7 “Macoutes” refers to the Ton-Ton Macoutes, the private security force established by long-time Haitian dictator Francois (“Papa Doc”) Duvalier. Aristide’s book *In the Parish of the Poor* is based in large part on sermons he gave while still a parish priest at St. Jean Bosco in the La Saline slum of Port-au-Prince.
- 8 General Henri Namphy was head of the provisional government after the Reagan Administration convinced “Baby-Doc” Duvalier to leave Haiti in 1986. Aristide’s autobiography was written after the September 1991 coup against him. In it, he provides examples such as the swine fever epidemic to prove that the U.S. had a mercantilistic relationship with Haiti, by which it required urban, light manufacturing rather than agricultural production. This is evidently an oblique reference to Reagan’s “Caribbean Basin Initiative,” which offered incentives for U.S. business to establish production facilities in poor countries of the region.

EDITOR'S NOTE: In the following passages, Aristide was speaking to supporters a week after a political opponent was sentenced to life in prison because of an attempted coup. "Pere lebrun" [Father Lebrun] is the name of a popular Haitian tire dealer. The reference is a euphemism for the practice of "necklacing," a widespread method of political assassination in Haiti. The victim is bound, his arms hacked off, a gasoline-filled tire placed around his neck and ignited.

"When the people heard: life in prison, the people forgot their little gas and little *pere lebrun*. Was *pere lebrun* used on that day? [The audience yells no.] If it had not gone well, would the people have used *pere lebrun*? [The audience yells yes.] Therefore, when through education one learns how to write *pere lebrun* and think *pere lebrun*, one does not use it when it is unnecessary. One learns how not to use it; where not to use it."

Address to Youth Rally
Radio Metropole, Port-au-Prince,
August 5, 1991
Cited in FBIS-LAT-91-153
August 8, 1991, p. 5

"The people had their little matches in their hands. They had gas nearby. Did they use it? [The audience yells no.] That means that the people respect [The audience yells the Constitution] Does the Constitution tell the people to forget little *pere lebrun*? [The audience yells no] ...The people are the law, meaning what they do is constitutional."

Ibid.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following statement came from Aristide's speech to Lavalas supporters at the National Palace after returning from a visit to the United States. Coup rumors were widespread. The references to "a nice tool; a nice instrument" were interpreted at the time as another reference to "pere lebrun," or assassination by necklacing. The coup which deposed Aristide took place three days later.

"I ask you to take this chance, because you will not have two or three more chances, only one. Otherwise, it will not be good for you [the bourgeoisie]..."
[applause].

"If I speak to you this way, it does not mean that I am unaware of my power to unleash public vindication...."

"If you catch someone who does not deserve to be where he is, do not fail to give him what he deserves. [The crowd cheers.] Do not fail to give him what he deserves...!" [He repeats phrase 2 more times.]

9 Aristide is writing about the Haitian peasants, whom he consistently held were being exploited by "imperialist" businesses from the U.S. and elsewhere. He is referring to their dormant defiance and alluding to the means they have to take control of their own futures, as had the Latin American revolutionary Simon Bolivar.

“What a nice tool! [Necklacing] What a nice instrument! [Loud cheers from crowd.] What a nice device! [The crowd cheers.] It is a pretty one. It is elegant, attractive, splendid, graceful, and dazzling. It smells good. Wherever you go, you feel like smelling it. [The crowd cheers.] It is provided for by the Constitution, which bans macoutes from the political scene....”

“Whatever happens to them is their problem...we will receive due respect—the type of respect I share with you—and fulfill common aspiration for justice. Words will thus cease to be just words and will instead be translated into action.”

Address at National Palace
Radio Nationale, Port-au Prince
September 27, 1991
Cited in FBIS-LAT-91-194
October 7, 1991, pp. 17-19

Aristide on the Catholic Church and its Teachings

“We are reflecting on Jesus’ situation....He said: Those who have food, take it. Those who have money, take it. Those who have no weapon must sell their garments and buy one. What does this mean to you, my friends...?”

“Further on they say to Jesus: Behold here two swords. That is like saying: Behold here two weapons.... That is verse 38. If they handed Jesus two weapons saying: Here are two weapons—in your opinion, did he throw the weapons away or did he take them?... He took them. He took them....”

“Therefore, you yourselves who are in the church, for example, you yourselves inside Haiti...Would it be a crime for us to have weapons at home...?”

Lecture in Cap-Haitien
Port-au-Prince Domestic Service
August 17, 1987
Cited in FBIS-LAT
August 19, 1987, p. B4¹⁰

“Ah, my little lamp. Its light of solidarity illuminates the darkest corners of all difficult questions. Just a man doing a job. Now I can see him more clearly. What is the paradigm for the pope in the secular world today? I ask myself. Why, it’s all too clear. Of course. All the shadows around him, the smoke and mirrors, fall away. Who is this man? He is the chief executive officer of a multinational corporation....”

10 These statements are excerpted from a lecture to the faithful by Aristide in Cap-Haitien. He is purportedly quoting from St. Luke’s Gospel, Chapter 22, Verses 35-38. The actual citation, from the Saint Joseph Edition of the New American Bible, reads: “When I sent you on a mission without purse or traveling bag or sandals, were you in need of anything? “Not a thing,” they replied. He said to them: “Now, however, the man who has a purse must carry it; the same with the traveling bag. And the man without a sword must sell his coat and buy one. It is written in Scripture, ‘He was counted among the wicked,’ and this, I tell you, must come to be fulfilled in me. All that has to do with me approaches its climax.” They said, “Lord, here are two swords!” He answers, “Enough.”

“His job is to ensure efficiency, continuity, and profit, while maintaining the status quo within the company....United Fruit never had this weapon, nor did Gulf + Western or the National City Bank. That weapon is belief, the long-established belief of the people—the final consumer—the word of the Church. The man in Rome and his colleagues are able to wrap company policy up in the proud yellow and white of the Church. They can pronounce and prettify efficiency actions using the beautiful words of the Bible. They can dress up their officers and parade them around the Church as men of God.”

In the Parish of the Poor, pp. 20-21

“The Catholic church cooperated totally with slavery and exploitation....The priests were the real colonialists. Their guilt and complicity extends into the twentieth century....The church suffers because of its past.”

An Autobiography, pp. 180-181

“...[T]he Vatican should stand in the front rank among those countries that have made every effort to retard our return to democratic processes.”

Ibid., p. 181

“[The Haitian presidency] really is like a priesthood. Like the pastor, I accompany the sheep. I share the people’s sufferings. Their claims are mine.”

Ibid., p. 183

Aristide on Economics

“Socialism in Haiti is not a new thing: its practice is rooted in the period of our first independence.”

An Autobiography, p. 135

“Europe owes us a debt....Sugar, coffee, and indigo enriched the merchants of Nantes or Rouen while the black people lived like beasts of burden....Once we had acquired our independence, we not only had to dress our wounds, but we were required to pay the old country, which simultaneously quarantined and exploited us. The colonial powers, including the United States, must make amends for the wrong inflicted on the colony or protectorate in those days. The debt experts, when they speak of our liabilities, need to add up the second column of their own accountability.”

Ibid., p. 143.

“Economic efficiency is not compatible with justice, except at the price of a permanent struggle against all the seeds of corruption....”

“The few large enterprises in the country were often found to be suffering from waste and mismanagement, and from a poor use of their resources; the most profitable had often been the prey or milk cows of social parasites who had little interest in development or reinvestment. Our move to put them in order did not always make the government highly popular. Stringency is sometimes a long term investment from those who want to escape from beggary: simplicity or clar-

ity of administration are also good for public enterprises that are too often putrefying as a result of speculation or the squandering of their resources.”

Ibid., p. 149

“The ecological tragedy in Haiti is the consequence of anarchy, of laissez-faire.”

Ibid., p. 151

“Economic liberalism, which democrats and technocrats have made a panacea, I find intolerable.”

Ibid., p. 178

“Wealth, financial superiority, and arrogance all end in making one certain that one possesses the truth, and they generally predispose people to use repression or to compromise with dictatorial regimes. The wealthy have often become what they are by virtue of exploiting others....”

“Above all, the international rules are made to prevent those who are under the table from some day taking their place at the common feast. They can be made to wait for centuries. They need to shake the table, even to overturn it with all the risks that action implies.”

Ibid., p. 179

Aristide on Karl Marx, Che Guevara, and Christopher Columbus

“I did not invent class struggle, no more than Karl Marx did....But who can avoid encountering class struggle in the heart of Port-au-Prince?”

An Autobiography, p. 106

“...I...welcome those ideas that rest on the values of beauty, dignity, respect, and love. Che Guevara, a bourgeois, a doctor, an internationalist, certainly incorporated some of those values, as did Allende. They were sincere men, like so many others; they made mistakes, just as I will do. Why should I deny it? I feel more affection and sympathy for them than I do for many others.”

Ibid., p. 126¹¹

“I see a big white man, a colonial; the man who, by ‘discovering’ America, stole it from those who were living there and exploited it...What comes to mind when I think of Christopher Columbus is the mutilation of many peoples and the beginning of a long chain of injustices...”

11 Ernesto “Che” Guevara was Fidel Castro’s closest confidant during the Cuban Revolution. His book, *Guerrilla Warfare*, became a primer for Latin American communist guerrilla movements in the 1960s and 1970s. He became a martyr for Latin American communism when he was killed by the Bolivian military while trying to incite a revolution in that country in 1967. Salvador Allende was the Marxist president of Chile who was killed in a military coup in 1973.

“But Christopher Columbus was only the first. The conquistadors...or the American occupiers at the beginning of the twentieth [century] yielded nothing at all to him in the realm of contempt and brutality...The year 1992 marks five hundred years of robbery and five hundred years of resistance”

Ibid., p. 180

“There is no question that there are common denominators between us and the makers of the French Revolution: 1789 is an essential reference point, as is 1793. The memory of the heroes of the rights of humanity should always be in our minds, as their texts are in our hands. Robespierre himself denounced the “patri-pockets.” From Saint Just to Abbe Gregoire, how much I owe to the makers of the French Revolution! Most of them had a global vision of human liberation.”

Ibid., p. 184¹²

Brad Hodge conducted research for this paper.

12 Robespierre and St. Just were responsible for the worst abuses of the “Great Terror” of the French Revolution. Hundreds of people, including the French King and Queen, were guillotined at the order of Robespierre. He, too, was guillotined in the backlash that followed.

