

The Puppet, the Dictator, and the President: Haiti Today and Tomorrow

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“Duvalier has been allowed to roam Haiti’s streets, even dining at the finest restaurants with the likes of Sean Penn.”

Lost amidst the heart-wrenching stories and photographs of the “poor Haitians” living in squalor and misery circulating on the second anniversary of the 12 January 2010 earthquake, another set of images appeared. Few people noticed these other images – they received little attention in the mainstream media – but they offer an insight into the prospects for Haiti’s reconstruction and, indeed, into the prospects for Haiti’s political and economic future.

The [images](#) [4] were taken during the official commemoration ceremonies at the hillside of [Titanyen](#) [5] [pdf], north of Port-au-Prince, where former dictators Jean Claude Duvalier and his father, Francois Duvalier, discarded the bodies of their political opponents. After the earthquake, it became the gravesite of thousands of unidentified earthquake victims. During the ceremonies, local delegates and international diplomats paid their respects to the Haitians that lost their lives and pledged to help those who lived. But the most striking [image](#) [6] that emerged during the ceremonies was that of an immoral triumvirate. Rubbing shoulders on stage, shaking hands and exchanging pleasantries were Haitian President Michel Martelly, former US President and UN Special Envoy, Bill Clinton, and Jean Claude Duvalier. To understand the future of Haiti, we have to shift our focus from the “poor Haitians” who dominate Haiti coverage and understand the significance of these three figures to the shaping of US imperial designs on Haiti.

“President Martelly is the face – and backbone – of a resurgent Duvalierism.”

“Baby Doc” Duvalier returned to Haiti after twenty-five years in exile on 16 January 2010. His arrival was supposedly a surprise, though it is becoming clear that he was given the go-ahead by France and the United States. The Obama administration’s relative silence around the return of Duvalier needs to be contrasted with the noise it made while it [forcefully](#) [7] tried to [prevent](#) [8] the return of Jean Bertrand Aristide, Haiti’s first democratically elected President. The contrast smacks of duplicity. Let’s remember that under Duvalier (and his father, Francois) nearly [50,000](#) [9] Haitians were killed, disappeared, and tortured by the reviled [tonton macoutes](#) [10], his private army. At the same time, Duvalier [embezzled](#) [11]

hundreds of millions of dollars, most of which sponsored an exiled life of [grandeur](#) [12]. Despite the calls for his arrest and prosecution by Haitian survivors, lawyers, and international human rights organizations, Duvalier has been allowed to roam Haiti's streets, even dining at the finest restaurants with the likes of Sean Penn.

What does Duvalier symbolize? For Haiti's elite, he represents a form of totalitarian nostalgia. There is a cultish aura that surrounds Duvalier, a reminder of the era of "[macoutized bourgeoisie](#) [13]," as journalist Kim Ives has referred to it, when there was an alliance between the elite and the paramilitary forces of terror. But Duvalierism was also good for US politics and economics. In the 1960s, they needed Francois ("Papa Doc") Duvalier to offset the rise of revolutionary communist Cuba. Under Jean Claude ("Baby Doc"), they were able to open up the Haitian markets and resources to US businesses, expand sweatshops, and lay the basis for the coming neoliberal economic policies.

"Duvalierism was good for US politics and economics."

This is where the US-selected President Martelly and "Papa" Bill Clinton come in. As we've pointed out [here](#) [14] on *Black Agenda Report*, right-wing candidate Martelly was handpicked by the Obama administration to become Haiti's president in a forced election marred by irregularities and low voter turn out. More importantly, he is the face - and backbone - of a resurgent Duvalierism. His Duvalier affinities are well known as is his [animus](#) [15] towards former President Aristide. He has historic ties with Duvalier loyalists, has called for "[amnesty](#) [16]" for Duvalier, and is now in the process of reestablishing the Haitian army. Moreover, his erratic and belligerent interactions with his constituency and political colleagues - and, in particular, his threats against Haitian journalists - are early indications of his repressive tendencies.

But he is a good puppet. As Ezili Danto of the Haitian Lawyers Leadership Network reminds us: "Martelly is merely a tool to be used by those 'more schooled in the patterns of privilege and domination' than any self-serving Haiti politician could ever dream to be. Martelly is the valve that releases accumulated surface pressure while reinforcing the 'violent Haitian' narrative. Brilliant US/Euro move. A no brainer." In the meantime, he will open up Haiti to permanent US occupation and economic exploitation while terrorizing Haitians who fight back. As the U.S. attempts to consolidate its military presence in the Western hemisphere, control of Haiti is important. For many, this is one of the reasons explaining Haiti's currently military occupation by the UN-led criminal force, MINUSTAH, the largest UN military force in a country that is not at war. It is also the reason for the massive new US embassy in Haiti, the fourth largest US embassy in the world.

"Clinton practically dictates Haitian policy."

And then there's Bill Clinton. Clinton provides the "[kind](#) [17]" face of US control of Haiti. With his push to turn Haiti into a Western tourist paradise while Haitians become cheap [sweatshop labor](#) [18] for making Western goods, Clinton is the arbiter of a new phase of neoliberalism. Clinton practically dictates Haitian policy. In fact, in one of the more absurd and nepotistic twists of Haiti's political history, Haiti's Prime Minister, Gary Conille, is Clinton's former [chief of staff](#) [19]. Conille also has a long [family](#) [19] history with the Duvaliers: his father was a minister to Baby Doc. As @dominique_e recently said on twitter, everything is set to "kill Haiti with neoliberalism."

Last week, Glen Ford [remarked](#) [20] that in the US media, “Haiti is most often spoken of as a tragedy – when it is actually the scene of horrific crimes, mainly perpetrated by the United States over the span of two centuries.” With the puppet, the dictator, and the president on the scene, it is hard to imagine a more sinister cohort guiding Haiti down the path of US exploitation.

Notes

[1] <http://blackagendareport.com/category/us-politics/democrats>

[2] <http://blackagendareport.com/category/americas/haiti>

[3]

http://blackagendareport.com/sites/www.blackagendareport.com/files/the_puppet_n_the_president.jpg

[4]

<https://skydrive.live.com/?cid=5ce418166cc3a360&Bsrc=Photomail&Bpub=SDX.Photos&id=5CE418166CC3A360!205>

[5] <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR36/007/2011/en>

[6]

<http://www.lenouvelliste.com/images/nouvelliste/2012-01-13/lapremieredamerecevantlessalut.jpg>

[7] <http://www.thegrio.com/news/us-urges-aristide-to-delay-return-to-haiti.php>

[8]

<http://www.ezilidanto.com/zili/2011/03/obama-fears-lavalas-returns-duvalierists-refuses-aristide/>

[9] <http://thepublicarchive.com/?p=2816>

[10] <http://www.coha.org/tonton-macoutes/>

[11]

http://www.soros.org/initiatives/justice/articles_publications/publications/duvalier-factsheet-20111213

[12]

<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/2011/0119/How-strong-are-charges-against-Haiti-s-Jean-Claude-Duvalier-Very-say-experts/%28page%29/2>

[13]

<http://www.haiti-liberte.com/archives/volume4-27/A%20Class%20Analysis%20of%20Baby%20Doc.asp>

[14]

<http://blackagendareport.com/content/fools-and-sycophants-haiti's-presidential-selection>

[15]

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2011/mar/22/haiti-jean-bertrand-aristide>

[16] <http://www.haiti-liberte.com/archives/volume4-40/As%20Inauguration%20Near.asp>

[17] <http://www.uruknet.info/?p=79976>

[18] <https://nacla.org/node/6781>

[19] <http://www.haiti-liberte.com/archives/volume5-7/The%20Neo-Liberal.asp>

[20] <http://blackagendareport.com/content/haiti-raped-us-2004-and-still-bleeding>

[21] <mailto:BAR1804@gmail.com>

[22]

http://www.addtoany.com/share_save?linkurl=http%3A%2F%2Fblackagenda.com%2Fcontent%2Fpuppet-dictator-and-president-haiti-today-and-tomorrow&linkname=The%20Puppet%2C%20the%20Dictator%2C%20and%20the%20President%3A%20Haiti%20Today%20and%20Tomorrow

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