

In place of the two-story concrete walls that his neighbors lower on the road had erected to ensure the privacy of the small feudal states within, Sousoumé had only a slatted wooden gate and a fence variously composed of cactus, barbed wire, bamboo, and a few cunning arrangements of thorny dry brush that seemed to have fallen by accident where they lay but were in fact impossible to penetrate. The fence was just good enough to keep people and animals from wandering into the compound, but it did nothing to interrupt the view. Above us, the nearest peaks of Morne du Cap were mostly bare; a thin verdure covered the earth that still clung to the rock, but trees were few, and in many places the rock was exposed, quarried into open mouths from which erosion gullies drooled. A huge truck lumbered down the road, hauling rock to the plain for construction. When it had passed, all was quiet except for the occasional clink of picks on the ledges above, where men exploited individual claims in the mine of stones. Behind us, the sun was sinking through a Tjepolo sky toward the great *mapou* of Bwa Kay-man, where in 1791 the ceremony that started the first explosion of the Haitian Revolution had been held. Although wounded by the drought and under persistent attack from the Protestants, the enormous, ancient tree hung on.

In Vodou, the *mapou* is a sacred tree, understood to be attractive to spirits. Sousoumé had planted a couple of *mapou* saplings in his compound, and now their yellow-green, spade-shaped leaves turned in the wind, and all the garden seemed to take a great inhalation. I let myself go out into the movement of the leaves and felt something like the building of a trance. Informed First Workers would have recognized it as the first phase of hypnosis, whereas Haitians might see in it the nearness of a spirit. I had come, a long time ago, to prefer the Haitian version. In the First World, I was stuck with the resources of my own psyche; in Haiti, a spirit might volunteer to walk with me as a guide.

For fifteen years I had been writing a series of novels about Toussaint Louverture, the first national leader of the Haitian Revolution, which began with the overthrow of slavery in 1791. A Vodouisant would say that Toussaint's spirit was quite new, invisibly present, breathing in the wind that moved the leaves of Sousoumé's young trees, exhaled from the pool of souls of the innumerable Haitian dead, that great reservoir of spirit energy: *Les Morts et les Mystères*. Here in the north of Haiti, time seemed to collapse; the

MADISON SMART BELL

Mine of Stones

from *Harpur's Magazine*

SOUSOUMÉ (as I will call him) had slowly been planting trees on his flat patch of land at Morne Rouge since he acquired it from the previous owner, who'd stripped this acre of all but one of its trees for charcoal, then turned it into a manioc field. The place was set high enough in the hills to be cool, if one could find a little shade, and almost always there was some movement of the air.

Last summer we sat together at an outdoor table under the sole surviving mango tree, drinking bottles of beer that I had imported from a gas station on La Route Nationale 1, Haiti's most passable thoroughfare, itself about a mile down a road that more resembled a ravine but that could be traversed with a four-wheel-drive vehicle and sufficient will to arrive. Sousoumé was a carpenter, woodworker, and maker of drums; he'd retreated here from the nearby coastal town of Cap-Haïtien when the tourist trade there dried up in the late nineties. From where we sat we could see the young trees — bananas, coconut palms, *lwa blan*, pineapple, sweet orange — he'd arranged, along with cotton, aloe, and hibiscus, around the one-room wattle-and-daub house that served him as a workshop. With water, what was left of the land remained astonishingly fertile, and although it was now the dry season (indeed, in Haiti nowadays, thanks to deforestation and the attendant climate change, it is almost always the dry season), Sousoumé had kept the trees alive by hauling water from a nearby spring. In ten years' time there'd be an acre of paradise here, if he could manage to keep it going. If every landowner in the country could plant and nourish as many trees, a decade would realize the dream of a flowering, flourishing Haiti: *Haïti Fleuri*.

Clinton administration sent the U.S. military to restore the elected government in 1994, it looked like a purely idealistic democratization project. But anyone who took a longer, closer look would be likely to notice that the idealistic right hand of American influence was being countered by less visible movements of the far less well-intentioned left hand. In the last decade of the twentieth century, Haiti might have done a better job of harvesting the flowers of democracy without our interference or help.

The legitimate president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was a Salesian priest and liberation theologian who came to political prominence in the late eighties, mainly through a series of broadcasts on Radio Soleil whose populist rhetoric irritated the increasingly shaky government. Those were years of unusual instability in Haiti, following the collapse of the dictatorship begun when "Papa Doc" Duvalier took the presidency in 1957 and ended when his son, Jean-Claude, abdicated in 1986. In the ensuing confusion, the Haitian hard right kept asserting its authority via a rapidly shifting series of juntas, and political violence escalated with events like the massacre of landless peasants near Jean Rabel on the Northwest Peninsula in 1987, the slaughter of voters in a Port-au-Prince polling station later the same year, and in 1988 an attempt to assassinate Aristide himself as he celebrated mass in the church of Saint Jean Bosco in the capital.

The Saint Jean Bosco massacre was actually the third attempt on Aristide's life, and his escape looked almost miraculous; indeed, these brushes with martyrdom gave the young priest a mystical aura in the eyes of the Haitian people. He won widespread grassroots support through a network of small churches called *Ti Legliz*. In 1990, late in the campaign, he yielded to popular pressure and became a candidate for president. The rallying cry, *Nou sé Lavalas* ("We are the Flood"), made Lavalas the name of the movement that swept Aristide into the presidential palace.

In the United States, the Bush I regime took a dim view of these developments. Liberation theology requires its subscribers to work for the betterment, even the empowerment, of the poor. Inspected through the lens of the lingering cold war mentality of the American right, Lavalas populism looked a lot like socialism — and in a country cheek by jowl with Cuba. From the start, Aristide's program was to move the mass of the Haitian people from misery to a

two hundred years that had passed since the death of Toussaint were summoned into the present by the spiraling leaves. It was the ninth year in which I had traveled to Haiti, and each time, it seemed, the effect grew stronger.

For years I had been trying to complete a transit of the old Cordon de l'Ouest, across the mountain range that divides the north of Haiti, where Soussonné had planted his trees, from Port-au-Prince and the rest of the country. During the revolution, a string of posts along that range had been the root of Toussaint's power, allowing him to make an isolated fortress of Cap-Haïtien and the entire northern region, from Fort Liberté to Môle Saint Nicolas. Napoleon's best soldiers had broken themselves on those rocks. Two hundred years later the terrain remained forbidding. From the interior, I had covered the range as far as the town of Dondon, and from the coast as far as Marmelade, but thus far the passage between those towns had been impassable to me. I dreamed of the rain forests that had been there in Toussaint's time, and I wanted very much to see what might be up there now.

I always wanted to do this or that when I came to Haiti, but I had learned that completely different things might ensue; it was necessary to accept those transformations, for a too stubborn insistence on one's own program — *èt bèf*, as Haitian Kreyol succinctly has it, "bull head" — can be almost suicidal here. Better to yield up my own will and let the spirits lead. That was the main thing Haiti had taught me, and it was also a point that most of American officialdom seemed to miss.

In Haitian Vodou, it is said that most priests of the religion "work with both hands." The right hand is for grace and healing and harmony, for giving rather than seizing; work of the right hand is done less by the individual will of the operator than by the spirit that spontaneously moves him. The left hand is sinister and operates for power and money and gain, using the forces of spirits trapped in objects, enslaved to do magical work for their purchasers. One can guess which gets employed more often, and at a higher price. This pattern repeats itself across the whole course of American involvement here.

Haiti has neither oil nor anything else of glaringly obvious economic or strategic interest to the United States, so when the

dignified poverty and to do so in a manner promoting national self-sufficiency — a goal incongruent with the practical implementation of Bush's "New World Order." Bush administration officials in Haiti conducted polls to convince themselves that Aristide could not win the presidency and were appalled when in fact he did. Most Haitians believed that the American officials there, if they had not actually instigated the coup that catapulted Aristide into exile in 1991, had known it was coming and done nothing to stop it.

Even as the Clinton administration embargoed Haiti and fulminated about the *defaktos*, as the military junta was most often called, the CIA was sending payments to one of its collaborators: Emmanuel "Toto" Constanant. During the *defaktos* period, Constant was chief of the "Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti" (FRAPH), a paramilitary adjunct of the Haitian army responsible for the main menu of terroristic atrocities, including the massacre of Aristide supporters in the Raboteau area of the coastal town of Gonaives in 1994. Although Constant has been convicted in absentia of complicity in the Raboteau killings and is entitled to a new trial if he should be returned to Haiti, he lives peacefully in Brooklyn nowadays, apparently immune to extradition.

When U.S. forces headed for Haiti in September 1994, Jimmy Carter was in Port-au-Prince, working for a peaceful resolution up to the eleventh hour and fifty-ninth minute; the story was that the *defaktos* did not start cooperating with Carter until one of them was notified by a call from Washington that the American planes had taken off. The result, vastly confusing to our boys in the military as well as to the Haitian people who had lived under systematic state terror since Aristide went into exile, was that the "invasion" morphed into an "intervention" while the planes were still in the air. Journalists on the Haiti beat invented the hybrid "intervention" to denote it. Originally advised that FRAPH was the enemy, the soldiers were told as they deployed across Haiti that FRAPH should now be treated as a loyal opposition party. Toto Constant made a fleeting public appearance to that end (in the company of a spokesman for the American embassy), though soon afterward he departed for the United States. This transformation permitted most of the death squad members to vanish somewhere up-country, weapons in hand.

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Ground travel in Haiti is hindered by the catastrophic disrepair of the road system — on a bad day it can take up to eight hours to drive the hundred-odd miles from Port-au Prince to Cap-Haïtien — and by a perennial state of life-threatening hazard, which makes a lot of people afraid to drive. Banditry, reduced to a nocturnal activity when the U.S. military arrived in Haiti in 1994, had leaked back into the daylight hours by 2000; for remnants of the *defaktos* period paramilitary and for the masses of soldiers dismissed when Aristide abolished the Haitian army soon after his return, the gun had turned into the meal ticket. Politically motivated roadblocks were another impediment; in turbulent times, demonstrators might raise barricades from chunks of old masonry and derelict car parts and, invariably, burning tires to shut down traffic within and between the principal towns and freeze anyone's effort to accomplish anything. For these reasons, after my first few visits, I began riding a small plane from Fort Lauderdale directly to Cap-Haïtien, avoiding the road back and forth from the capital.

The presidential election scheduled for the fall of 2000 was preceded by parliamentary elections that took place in May. As a rule, I prefer to arrive in Haiti just after elections, when tension and turbulence usually give way to calm, so that spring I took the direct flight to Cap-Haïtien, and for double insurance I booked my return for a Sunday; road-blocking demonstrations seldom occur on the weekends in Haiti, when there is little traffic to interrupt. The day before I was scheduled to depart, however, I was driving into Cap from Bréda Plantation, on the plain outside the city gate, and found La Route Nationale 1 closed by burning tires and barricades. Since there was a \$2,000 deductible on my car-rental insurance specifically in case of "*mouvements de foule*," I pulled the 4 × 4 into a bootleg turn and went off-road, cutting across a wedge of the plain to the only other road into town, La Route Nationale 3. The tires were already burning high when I reached the point of entry into the slum of La Fossette, but the demonstrators had not yet dragged the barricade across the intersection, so I hit the gas and ran it. Ten minutes later I was safely back in the quiet colonial part of town where I stayed, though, less fortunately, on the wrong side of the barricades from the airport whence I was supposed to depart the next morning.

As luck would have it, all the other occupants of my small hotel

rejoinder from Lavalas sympathizers was that Aristide absolutely needed an overwhelming majority in parliament to break the deadlock that had paralyzed almost all legislation since 1995, that the outcome of the questioned elections was obvious anyway (in fact, neither side much disputed this point), and that Lavalas had grown wary of foreign advisers (by which they meant us) rerunning elections over and over on whatever pretext until they got a result they liked.

Regardless of motive, the cost was high. Whatever international aid had been seeping through was now completely shut off, pending resolution of the disputed elections. Even strictly humanitarian aid was blocked, and as Paul Farmer, the doctor renowned for his human-rights activism, pointed out in the press and in e-mail and to anyone who might listen, the result was a brutal punishment of the poorest of the poor, now denied funds that might have provided them with basic health care and water-purification systems. Still worse, anti-Aristide propagandists managed to spread the taint of the May elections to the presidential election in November — though in fact there were no such irregularities in the November elections. The opposition, now somewhat queasily clustered under the umbrella of Convergence Démocratique, proclaimed its own president, Gerard Gourgues, who despite his credibility as a human-rights activist made a call for the restoration of the Haitian army on the day of Aristide's inauguration. No one seemed to take the Convergence shadow government too seriously, but there was a plausible coup attempt by a small commando force that attacked the Presidential Palace on the night of December 17, 2000. Aristide's detractors claimed that the coup was a hoax perpetrated by Fanmi Lavalas itself, in order to justify retaliation against the opposition. Although there were violent, ostensibly popular counter-demonstrations following the foiled coup (Convergence headquarters were burned), that conspiracy theory seemed about as likely as the one holding that the Bush administration was responsible for the events of September 11. Certainly the Bush administration had gotten more headway for its initiatives out of that catastrophe than Aristide ever got out of the coup attempt.

I went to Haiti for the first time in the summer of 1995, soon after the American "intervention" and Aristide's return to the Presidential Palace. It was popular at that time to refer to Aristide's arrival in

were Organization of American States election observers, who had come in from their posts around the north of Haiti for R&R. Before, they had always kept to themselves, but now they were interested in talking to me, since I had actually seen what was happening. For their part, they were suddenly willing to tell me why. During a night of slightly anxious drinking, the head of their team sketched the math for me on a paper napkin. In several multi-candidate elections the candidates of Fanmi Lavalas, Aristide's party, had come through with a plurality of between 40 and 50 percent, while the other candidates, six or seven of them, split the difference more or less evenly. The trouble was that the Haitian constitution required a majority, not a plurality, to decide a winner. To save the bother of a runoff, the supervisors had simply dropped the bottom four candidates from all these elections and recalculated the remainder as if it were 100 percent of the vote. Then the whistles began to blow.

The people now blockading Cap-Haïtien were involved in an ostensibly popular outcry demanding that the election results be affirmed in favor of the Fanmi Lavalas candidates without delay or equivocation. But the OAS people I was talking to believed that the whole thing had been instigated by a relatively small, professionally organized group that had done the same thing around Port-au-Prince a few days before. And they were serious. During the night, we could see flames shooting into the sky along the road from La Fosse to the airport gate. Moreover, the OAS team learned through their satellite phones that the demonstrators had welded the bridge shut at Limbé on the coast and felled trees across the crossroads of Dondon in the mountains — thus sealing off the whole north of Haiti from the rest of the country, just like Toussaint used to do.

In the event, I made my way to the airport by departing at dawn, supposing correctly that the people manning the barricades would be inattentive at that hour. But the repercussions of the jiggered election went on and on. Why had the Lavalas people done it? It seemed clear enough that their candidates would have won the runoff elections the constitution required, and by manipulating the results they had put a powerful tool into the hands of their indefatigable enemies, who now could claim that Aristide and Lavalas were out to establish a one-party, winner-take-all system, tantamount to a dictatorship and likely to evolve into one. The

power as "The Second Revolution," fulfilling the forestalled promise of the first. In an oral-history culture like Haiti's, the most important events seem to have taken place in the time of one's grandparents, and the spirit of Toussaint Louverture appeared to be present like a wise elder at Aristide's shoulder — there to complete the mission of liberation that had been frustrated back in 1802, when Toussaint was betrayed by Napoleon's generals and deported to die in a prison in France.

But Haiti's problems with the outside world had their origins in the revolution that Toussaint had helped to begin. When Haiti declared independence from France in 1804, it instantly became a pariah state. The United States and the surviving colonial powers were still running slave systems all over the Western Hemisphere, so the Haitian example was anathema to them. For the next hundred years, the country was drastically unstable, its government changing hands by violence more often than not. Most of the population had reverted to African village ways, living without much need for government services and comfortably out of the government's reach. The *lakout*, or extended family compound, was the basic social unit, within which members of the group cooperated to supply their material needs and to serve their ancestral spirits. The people en masse would emerge from their *lakouts* in the jungled hills to support or oppose the overthrow of the current government and then, once the matter was settled, disappear back into them.

In the early years of his rule, Papa Doc Duvalier put an end to this relatively cheerful anarchy by installing a system of state terror inspired by his admiring study of Adolf Hitler. Having observed that changes of government in Haiti occurred most often through military coup, Duvalier created a nationwide paramilitary organization; modeled on Hitler's Brown Shirts, the "Tonton Macoutes," as the people soon christened them, checked and balanced the army through a relationship of mutual paranoia. This strategy was so successful that President-for-Life Duvalier became the first Haitian head of state since the revolution to die in office of natural causes. His heir, Jean-Claude, was not so fortunate, though he did manage to hang on to power for a couple of years longer than his father had done. There followed a period of distinctly less cheerful and much bloodier anarchy, until the 1990 election of Aristide.

In 1995 the wind of reform was everywhere; the regeneration of

Haiti felt like a tremendous thing of which to be part. Like many foreign visitors there, I yielded to the country's dreamlike enchantment. Every year I returned once or twice, and in the midst of my revolutionary research I got involved in some small-scale reforestation projects and efforts to revive tourism in the north. I helped a couple of Port-au-Prince writers get their books published in France and (pending the return of the tourists) bought paintings from a Cap-Haitien artists' cooperative and tried to market them in the States. But *Haiti Fleuri* did not materialize.

The Haitian constitution under which Aristide was first elected permits no president to succeed himself — Haiti wants no more presidents for life. In 1994 he returned to office with only a few months remaining on his term, most of which had been spent in exile, though he had just enough time to abolish the army and, with the help of U.S. and UN advisers and trainers, establish the Haitian National Police as the first civilian, human-rights-respecting law-enforcement body the country had ever known. Then René Préal — a member of the Lavalas movement so close to Aristide that graffiti around Port-au-Prince at the time of his election read *Préal — Aristide pou 5 ans ankò* ("Préal = Aristide for five more years") — won the presidency in 1995 and found himself in an essentially impossible situation. Parliament was deadlocked to the point that no legislation could be passed, while much of the aid money needed to build a working society was contingent on the passage of laws to implement then-fashionable IMF and World Bank "structural adjustment" policies. The paralyzed government and the blockage of the international-aid pipeline kept most of the promised reforms from occurring. The lot of the average Haitian got worse instead of better, as the local currency collapsed vis-à-vis the U.S. dollar, in which imported foodstuffs were priced. The mood of the populace, discouraged by the spiraling cost of living — *la vie chère* — grew increasingly dark.

Préal, originally trained as an agronomist, had some notable successes with land reform, especially in the still-fertile Artibonite region, but the general feeling was that the country had gone into a holding pattern, awaiting Aristide's inevitable reelection to the presidency, which could legally take place in the year 2000. Because of the numinosity of the date, the prospect of his return got draped in millenarian expectations, even by me.

I hadn't passed through Port-au-Prince since 1999, and before I headed up north, I wanted to find out how things felt in the capital since Aristide's reelection. A domestic flight to Cap-Haïtien would spare me the difficulties and dangers of the road when it was time to go north. My Port-au-Prince base was the Hotel Olofson, a rambling, tropical gingerbread fantasy, reputed to be the model for the gothic structures of Charles Adams's cartoons, and more certainly the original of the "Hotel Trianon" in Graham Greene's *The Comedians*.

In the old days, Greene is said to have done his Haitian reporting by sitting beside the Olofson pool, and probably that could still be done, because everyone showed up here, and they all liked to talk. Word was that 2003 had been a bad year, a year of no evident progress. Insecurity and impunity were flourishing. The murder of Jean Dominique, the founder of Radio Haïti Inter, slain in the station compound in April 2000, remained unsolved, and some believed that the state was protecting the assassin. No one in the Haitian press had a higher stature — Dominique's long career of gadfly commentary had won him the name of the "conscience of Haitian journalism" — so his assassin's impunity seemed especially ominous for the freedom of speech so recently restored.

The international crew that hung around the Olofson was glibly inclined to agree that the Haitian National Police was a good idea gone wrong for a number of reasons: The U.S. and UN support staff had been terminated too soon; the training period had been too brief and on-the-job experience was very thin; since the HNP was now the only legitimate armed force in the country, the behind-the-scenes struggle to control it was ferocious; the force was too easily infiltrated by former army men and death squad members, and perhaps also by the American CIA. Worse, the HNP was outgunned from the start. In 1997, I could still have bought an assault rifle on the street for about \$20 U.S., and in 2003, I sometimes wished I had done it, for the price had gone up to about \$3,000. One of the rumors going around was that HNP officers were themselves importing weapons for resale, so as to supplement their often unpaid salaries. The rank and file of the army had been in the same shape: poorly paid and often obliged to furnish their own uniforms and equipment. Once the army was disbanded, the common soldiers began to starve, and those who did not sell their

weapons early had little disincentive, in an economy featuring near-total unemployment even before they were dumped into it, to resort to entrepreneurial crime (hitherto almost unknown in Haïti) or to sell their services on an alarmingly open market. Under similar circumstances, the HNP was vulnerable to corruption. An honest officer had no hope of promotion in the system that obtained. I had been stopped on the road and meticulously searched on several occasions, and although the officers were civil and professional every time, I was always told afterward that if they had found the drugs they were looking for, they would have kept them to sell for themselves.

Street violence and intimidation had become endemic, perpetrated by gangs known under the general rubric of the Chimè, in support of Fanné Lavalas, though not necessarily with Aristide's blessing. Even Aristide's detractors did not claim that he controlled the Chimè completely — or could — for although the Chimè served political purposes, they did not much resemble the organized paramilitary wings of the Duvalier or *defakto* regimes. Insubstantial as their name implied, the Chimè came and went as occasions demanded; they weren't any kind of a standing force.

The old and new dragons of the Haitian far right had not been idle; there was a lot of spooky activity on the Central Plateau involving old army types who were supposed to be training for another coup attempt in the mountains across the Dominican border. Persistent rumor had it that these efforts were sponsored and encouraged by the International Republican Institute, an organization affiliated with the U.S. Republican Party and commonly associated with Jesse Helms. The IRI acronym is, with a strange suitability, pronounced in Haïti to rhyme with "eerie." Perhaps those theories were paranoid, but a few weeks before I arrived, attackers dressed in army fatigues had sabotaged the renovation of the hydroelectric plant at Peligre Dam, just before it was supposed to have put thousands more kilowatts online to Port-au-Prince. Paul Farmer felt ripples of the assault at Zanné Lasauté, the hospital he runs not far from Peligre; five of his Haïtian colleagues were held hostage for several hours by the saboteurs, who later made off with an ambulance, and one of the two Peligre security guards killed in the attack had been Farmer's patient. More recently still, saboteurs had demolished road-building equipment intended to restore the ru-

waited to be passed along to the next level, were each progressively more air-conditioned, and I think these pauses were for the benefit of one's health — so that the frostiness of the inner sanctum would not be too great a shock to the system.

Voltaire was a self-contained man, with a quiet catlike poise; his voice was light and his manner had the charged calm of someone who has recognized at some point in the past that raving and screaming are useless. A staunch Aristide loyalist who had shared the president's exile in Washington and played some role in the government ever since, he undoubtedly had also shared many of Aristide's frustrations, both in and out of the country. Now he ran the bureau that dealt with what is informally known as the Tenth Department: the millions of diaspora Haitians, most of whom live in Canada or the United States. That is a very significant group, if only because of their remittances; Voltaire estimated that \$800 million came back to Haiti every year from the diaspora, while the annual value of exports was only \$250 million. With the aid embargo almost total, the Tenth Department had become Haiti's most viable resource.

The problem, as it appeared to me, was that the diaspora money reinforced the feudal practices that had consituted Haiti's political system, *faute de mieux*, since independence in 1804: Those who could pay built walled compounds, installed generators, and purchased 4 × 4 vehicles that could navigate the ruined or non-existent roads, thus compensating (at least for those within their walls) for the state's inability to provide basic security and services. (Richard Morse — host, proprietor, and resident rock star of the Hotel Oloffson, who had been a Lavalas hero during the *defacto* period — cast a jaundiced eye on the unrest beyond the hotel's cinder-block frontier, muttering, "If you don't permit democratic means of opposition, then you should prepare for alternative forms of opposition." In the months following the murder of Jean Dominique, his remarks had been more openly pointed, but lately something seemed to have restrained him — perhaps the killings of other journalists — and his comments had grown more opaque. As early as 1997, Morse had said that he was trying to build a separate state inside the hotel compound. It was what everybody had to do, at some level, to survive.)

Another vicissitude of the endless economic crisis, Voltaire told

ined road between Saint Marc and Gonaives: more than \$500,000 of damage. Of course you could always find someone to tell you that the sabotage was really carried out by the party in power, to create an excuse for its failure to restore the country's infrastructure.

Tim Pershing, an occasional regular at the Hotel Oloffson, was not buying that story. Although he had also not signed on to the extreme opposite version, which held that U.S. right-wingers were out-and-out running a neocontra operation in the hills on the frontier, he did suspect that they were doing a decent amount of winking and nudging. Destabilization efforts were easy, after all, especially in the provinces, where the police were spread extremely thin.

Pershing would not say whether he was really a relative of the famous general, though he did sport the same lush handlebar moustache. He was working the opposite side of the street from IRI, teaching a version of high school civics to grass-roots organizations on the Lavalas end of the spectrum, on behalf of something called the National Democratic Institution, which was a reverse image of the IRI. Oddly, both organizations were being funded by the National Endowment for Democracy — itself a tentacle of USAID. That IRI and NDI persistently worked against each other only confused matters more, and not only for their Haitian advisees; Pershing told me that he found the exportation of American partisan politics to Haiti to be downright bizarre.

I was tempted to see IRI and NDI in Vodouisant terms: as the sinister left and beneficent right hand, respectively, of American foreign policy. From a Haitian perspective, it was hard not to notice that both hands extended from the same organism. Leslie Voltaire saw no difference between NDI and IRI; to him they were fingers of the very same hand, groping for Aristide's overthrow. I called on Voltaire, unannounced and unexpected, at the Ministry of Haitians Living Abroad, in downtown Port-au-Prince, not much thinking he'd receive me, but it happened that he had read and liked my Haitian novels, so maybe it was the spirit of Toussaint Louverture that got me in the door. Outside it was sweltering, the noon sun high, the street breathless with gasoline fumes fixed in the dense humidity. The two anterooms of Voltaire's ministry, where I briefly

me, was brain drain; the intellectual and political classes were pouring out of the country and, increasingly, skilled laborers were, too. This exodus was a severe impediment to the development of democracy on the American plan; Haiti was capable of creating the kind of middle class that is democracy's breeding ground, but it was not capable of keeping it in the country. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of people were abandoning the exhausted countryside to flood the city slums, where, since there was next to no legal work for them, many would drift into the shadowy arms of the *Chimè*.

Entrepreneurial criminality, familiar and tolerated in most big cities of the United States, was a new and frightening thing in Haiti. Many were feeling nostalgic for the stability that Duvalier's totalitarian state had furnished, including two men I knew whose fathers had been assassinated by the regime. One of them, a Cap-Haïtien restaurateur, had told me in tones of real regret, "Life was more sure for me under Duvalier" — the Duvaliers had kept Haiti safe for tourists, if not for its own people. In June 2002, when a European friend and I were strolling along the Cap-Haïtien waterfront by night, a burly Haitian man walking alone sized us up and suddenly shouted, "Vive Duvalier!" It would have been unthinkable even one year before, but that night no one objected or even paid much attention. Meanwhile, Jean-Claude Duvalier was broke in France and looking for work and explaining to anyone who would listen that his only profession was politics.

When Aristide was first elected, Lavalas really did sweep all before it, and when he was restored in 1995, there was more than enough euphoria to go around. In 1996 and 1997, I thought I understood what was going on — it had seemed easier then to find a side and take it — but in 2003, I didn't even think I had a right to an opinion. There seemed to be no solid foundation on which an opinion could be based. The more I talked to people in Port-au-Prince, the cloudier things got, until it seemed that the most obvious fact was always embraced by its dark, contradictory inversion. Up north, in the region of Cap-Haïtien, it was another world, which often seemed to me a simpler one.

Sometimes I spent a night in Sousonné's compound near Bwa Kayman. He gave me use of the little house: one bare room under

the tin roof, a mat, a mosquito net, and a candle. When I risked an excursion outdoors at night, the stars above were brightly fixed, the bamboo whispered in the ravine, and I felt that the new trees around the house were growing. In this atmosphere, certain fundamentals recovered their truth. Haiti still owned remarkably fertile soil and an amazingly vital culture. If trees were watered, they would take hold, and if the trees came back, so would the rain. With trees to hold the land in place, *lavaldas* — the seasonal floods — would nourish the earth instead of stripping it off the bare rock. If one had a clear intention and the patience to let it happen, beneficent spirits would surely come to inhabit Sousonné's young *mapois*, there where they quickened, silvered by the starlight. *Haiti Fleuri* was still possible.

Also, staying at Sousonné's place gave me a solid head start toward that hard-to-reach stretch of the Cordon de l'Ouest: the new road connecting Marmelade and Dondon. At dawn, he and I pushed my rented 4 × 4 to start it and began the passage across the plain toward La Route Nationale 3, which would take us up to Dondon. At the car rental I'd had the choice of a truck with good tires or one that you could start with the key, and the tires were plainly more important. In 1995, Route 3 had offered a passable stretch of pavement as far as Fort Liberté, but now, once past the airport, no vestige of that remained; instead we zigzagged over washboards and potholes so deep they would send our heads smacking against the roof of the cabin. At Dondon we forded the Bouyaha River, thanks to four-wheel drive, and found the new road that crossed the dizzying mountain peaks toward Marmelade.

In places numinous as this, Sousonné was wont to say that the air was full of spirits, and I did feel that I was inhaling something extraordinary as we climbed. We were running the backbone of Toussaint Louverture's ancient power. These mountains, heavily forested in the days of the revolution, had been ideal for guerrilla tactics, and so long as Toussaint controlled them he had access to a seaport at Gonaïves and to the Spanish side of the island via the Central Plateau. He could also seal off the Northern Department from the rest of the country, a tactic still useful to some in the twenty-first century.

Toussaint did not live to see the result of his struggle: the emergence of Haiti as an independent black state, founded by slaves

required me to keep the truck in first-gear four-wheel drive for the whole transit, thanking the spirits for every micron of rubber on the tires. The engine had just barely enough juice to clear the steepest crests. But certainly it was better than no road at all. The surrounding vistas were silent and vast; although all the peaks and most of the valleys were heartbreakingly bare, these mountains beyond mountains retained an unearthly beauty. I had flown over other ranges on the plane from Port-au-Prince and seen how the shallows of the bay south of Cap-Haïtien were brown with earth eroded from the wasted hills. Here, deeper into the interior, it really was no better; there were no trees left to burn for charcoal, and the people had abandoned a landscape that could no longer nurture them. There was next to no sign of human habitation, though we did pass a couple of gangs of men with hoes.

The environmental crisis in Haiti was at the bottom of everything else; if it was not reversed extremely soon, these mountains would be desert, and the rest of the country would feel the shock. On the Northwest Peninsula, according to reports, it had already happened; there the people had already eaten all their dogs. A rumor ran around the Oloffson of an American plan to evacuate the Northwest Peninsula entirely and ship the remaining inhabitants down to the cities, a scheme that would have the merit of providing the U.S. military with a clear field of fire from Môle Saint Nicolas, whose deep-water harbor controlled the Windward Passage between Haiti and the eastern tip of Cuba, all the way to Port de Paix.

We struggled on through the vacant landscape, now and then slipping on the shoals of loose rock. Apart from the engine and the sound of the wheels, we moved through a whistling high-altitude quiet, until on the outskirts of Marmelade the bustle of human life recommenced. Cautiously I nosed the truck through a street market until we reached the central square, where Toussaint had bid farewell to his troops two hundred years before. I had arranged this point as a meeting place with a friend from Port-au-Prince, but we saw no sign of him; once again I reminded myself of the fragility of all expectations in Haiti. The square was small but pretty, decorated with red-blooming flamboyant trees and iron benches that looked brand-new. I was just taking in how much better maintained the area looked than the last time I had been there when a man came out of a neighboring house whose resemblance to the former

who had broken their own chains and driven off their masters. After his deportation to France, the torch he'd carried was passed to Jean-Jacques Dessalines, a man of more ferocious spirit, whose watchword was *Koupe tèt, boulé kay* — "Cut off heads and burn down houses." Papa Doc Duvalier had systematically associated himself and his regime with the spirit of Dessalines, as he deployed Desalinian tactics on his own people: ruthless application of overwhelming force. Aristide seemed more attracted to the spirit of Toussaint, who had a real distaste for useless bloodshed, political and diplomatic skills to match or surpass his remarkable military talent, a delicately evolved sense of Haiti's relationship with the surrounding colonial powers, a devout Catholicism able to coexist with the Vodou he also practiced, and a social vision, based on harmonious cooperation among the races, a good two hundred years ahead of his time. Perhaps it was those similarities that encouraged Haitians to regard Aristide's rise to power as a Second Revolution that would complete the process begun two centuries before and finally set them altogether free.

In Haiti the influence of a forebear can be more tangible than elsewhere; the spirits of Dessalines and Toussaint were part of the community of ancestral souls available to mount the heads of the living. It had long seemed plausible to me that the spirit of Toussaint Louverture walked with Aristide, at least for part of the road he had taken, but why then was there such frustration now? It was likely that Toussaint himself had served more than one spirit, for he had some extremely ruthless capacities alongside his more benevolent traits; among other things, the Haitian notion of leadership for life was first proposed in Toussaint's constitution of 1801. In the end, though, Toussaint was undone by foreign powers, and Aristide also had suffered plenty of vexation from outside interference; maybe he too was destined to be a "Precursor," Toussaint's title in the pantheon of Haitian heroes; it was Dessalines who got to be called "Liberator." Either way, Toussaint's spirit would somehow persist: A Haitian spirit may abandon one *serviteur* and move on to another, if it feels it has not been well served.

The road from Dondon to Marmelade was, as Sousonné had predicted, "a little rocky," or, to be more precise, it was a rock slide that

mine hut on remnants of a two-hundred-year-old foundation. Adjacent grew a couple of dozen knee-high coffee trees, carefully shaded by a burlap arbor until the covering trees could grow. Here was a man who had been furnished a motive.

The coffee produced here is of sufficiently high quality to elude, Prével hoped, the current coffee crisis, in which prices have collapsed due to stockpiling by big corporations like Nestlé. The plantation bought coffee from 4-500 small growers self-organized into groups of fifteen each, acquiring their beans on a fair-trade basis at between eighteen and twenty-one Haitian gourdes per pound, as opposed to the traditional eight. The force of this incentive was palpable — enough projects like this one, and the Haitian hinterlands might again become viable for the population. Most promising of all, the goal of the Taiwanese grant had been to render the project autonomous at the end of five years. This kind of self-sufficiency was what Lavalas had always striven for, and it was also what globalization, on the American plan, wanted least, though Prével did not want to talk about that.

Toussaint Louverture had certainly ridden these roads in his era, Prével told us, and I again felt the curious foreshortening of time in Haiti, where all past events are held just on the edge of living memory, not much further back than yesterday. The new coffee and bamboo plantation sprang from the colonial ruins like a green shoot from the trunk of a severed tree. Perhaps the spirit of Toussaint walked with Prével. Toward the end of his rule, as legend had it, the people had addressed him as Papa Toussaint, and Prével's comportment with the people he met had that same feeling of kinship. It was not a baby-kissing exercise. Prével had rooted himself in the whole community of Marmelade as in a vastly extended family. Indeed he seemed to have successfully extended the cooperative principles of the traditional *lakou* to embrace the whole town and the region around it.

Due to insecurity and the fact that our headlights were not working, it was advisable to get off the road before dark, though I was sorry to leave Marmelade. As I unlocked the door to the truck, a woman slipped up to me and displayed the suppurating wound on her arm. "Mèti," she said, in a piteous tone. "Master."

By that I was genuinely appalled. "*Se pa mèt ou mwen ye,*" I told her. "I'm not your master." Prével had told us he never gave money,

president, René Prével, seemed an odd coincidence, until it was borne in on us that it really was Prével.

I had forgotten that Prével is a native of Marmelade and hadn't known that he'd retired there from the presidency. Despite the unexpectedness of the encounter, he immediately took us in hand, offered to feed us and give us a bed and show us everything. With the ravaged peaks of the mountains between Dondon and Marmelade fresh in my mind, I asked him if he thought there was still hope for reforestation. Prével told a parable about an acquaintance of his who had returned to Marmelade after years of absence; she was horrified at the clear-cut hills and thought the peasant charcoal manufacturers should all be flung into prison. Prével asked her what she cooked with at home and got the expected answer. Haitian peasants cannot afford to use charcoal themselves; to them it is a cash crop, and almost all of it is sent down to the towns and cities. It was a matter of demand rather than supply. Haitian peasants are neither stupid nor improvident; they know the value of the trees on the land, Prével said, but they also know the value of their children. The production of charcoal, with its ruinous consequences, was a last resort to pay educational expenses or simply to keep the children alive. For reforestation ever to succeed, the peasant would have to be able to find a living in the trees.

Prével drove us (effortlessly and expertly, over complications in the road that would have given me far more serious pause) up to Habitation Baucher, an old colonial coffee plantation alongside the ruins of which a new coffee and bamboo operation had recently been started with seed money of a million dollars annually for five years from the Taiwanese government. The operation had the air of success. Fast-growing bamboo is excellent for soil conservation and is becoming increasingly popular as a construction material in Haiti; most of the buildings in the coffee plant involved bamboo in their construction, and there was also a furniture factory attached. The coffee operation was still more promising; coffee trees need shade to prosper, which means that shade trees also must be protected and encouraged, and everywhere the bushes with their brilliant red berries stood in the shadow of mango, almond, and orange trees. When Prével took us outside the compound of the new plant to give us a tour of the colonial ruins of Habitation Baucher, he greeted a little old man who had built his

and we had seen for ourselves what he offered in its place: services, education, jobs, grain after grain of hope for the future; when we arrived he had been giving a math lesson to a local schoolboy about ten years old. I knew he was right, but I could not help myself. I gave her a dollar, though I couldn't look her in the eye.

The moon was full when we returned from Marmelade; moonlight and a measure of rum moved Soussonné to philosophize a little. "The problem that we have in Haiti," he told me, "is that mortality and morality are poorly controlled. There are too many births and not enough deaths. It is the poorest people who have the most children, and since these children cannot be educated, they become Chimé." He was describing, though in the abstract, the conditions that surrounded him here. Soussonné sent his own children down the road to school, at the price of the sort of sacrifices Préval had described, and at the same time he fed as many of the less fortunate children in the zone as he could afford and taught the boys martial arts. Without him, those children spent their time scavenging for food or work (both very difficult to obtain) and amused themselves by killing songbirds on the wing with stones (at which their skill was remarkable). In time, if fortune smiled, Soussonné hoped to start a real school for them here, but he had no help other than his own thin resources; there was no outside aid.

One word usually means many things in Haiti, and Soussonné's use of the word "Chimé" carried me toward a deeper meaning. Before that term was coined, Haitian delinquent youths were called *malévé* ("ill brought up") or, still more tellingly, *sans-maman* ("the motherless ones"). They were people who'd somehow reached adulthood without the nurture of the traditional *lakou* — communities that the combined forces of poverty and globalization had been shattering here for the last few decades. That was what made them so dangerous. The Chimé were indeed chiméras; ill fortune left them as unrealized shadows. With better luck they might have been human beings, but they weren't. These were the people Ariside had originally been out to salvage; "*Tout moun se moun*" was his earliest motto ("Every man is a man").

In the beginning, Ariside had seemed to intend to build a *lakou* as large as the country. Something had thwarted the project, and the Second Revolution had gone into a kind of suspended anima-

tion, like the first. And yet René Préval had shown us that it was possible, after all, to build a *lakou* at least as large as Marmelade. What it took was patience, a clear and undivided intention, and a modicum of material aid with no globalization strings attached. *Haiti fleurit* was still possible.

"It should have been easy here," Tim Pershing had said, looking over his shoulder in the direction of Iraq. "Here you had a democratically elected government and a sympathetic population. And you didn't really have an armed opposition willing to confront the U.S." In 2003, just one year from the Bicentennial of Haitian Independence, when the fruits of the Second Revolution were expected to ripen, it no longer looked easy. Far from the spirit of Toussaint L'Ouverture, more and more people were muttering Dessalines's slogan, *Kouppé tèl, bonafè kay*. Another aphorism making the rounds was *Zombi gen tèl sel, li pa vle relié*, applied to the centuries-old Haitian addiction to power: "Once the zombie tastes the salt, he does not want to stop."

If Haiti can fairly be blamed for a few pernicious political habits, these are matched, if not overshadowed, by the American genius for getting it wrong — for example, the notorious USAID program to exterminate the Haitian pigs in the wholly erroneous belief that they were infected with swine fever and somehow capable of communicating the disease to pigs in the United States. The *kochou bèzo* is a black-haired, long-eared razorback capable of prospering on what it can scavenge. It glows with a historical numinosity, since one such pig was sacrificed to the spirits of the thousands of slaves who had died in French Saint Domingue during the legendary Vodou ceremony that launched the Revolution at Bwa Kayman in 1791. The pigs were what the average Haitian *pyévan* had in place of a bank account; their annual sale paid school fees for his children. USAID had a replacement program, but because the State-side emigrant hogs required a standard of living higher than that of the average Haitian human being, it was ludicrously unsuccessful. In the course of this debacle, innumerable Haitian hearts and minds went permanently AWOL. Fifteen years later, an Italian veterinary volunteer I ran into in one of the upmarket Cap-Haïtien hotels said with frustrated bewilderment, "I don't understand what's wrong with these people — they don't want to show me their pigs!"

Even on the nongovernmental end of the U.S. aid spectrum, pig-headedness is abundant. Haiti's Institut de Sauvegarde du Patrimoine National (ISPAN) had a well-thought-through plan to turn the area surrounding Bwa Kayman into a national park, and they had the skill and the experience to do it, but no resources; their hope for money had vanished into the aid embargo. What they are getting instead is an evangelical missionary project from a Stateside organization called Men for Missions International, whose intention is to extirpate the Devil from Haiti within fifty years. ISPAN regional director Eddy Lubin showed me a page of their publication winningly entitled "Recon Report"; the plan was as military as the title suggested. First they would soften up the mentality of the population by giving away thousands of solar-powered radios locked to the frequency of the evangelical station, 4VEH. Then they would mount crusades to destroy all the traditional Vodouisant communities in the country: Souvenance, Soukri, Nan Kanpèch. The brochures are illustrated with photos of the target sites, including the ancient *mapou* of Bwa Kayman, which, since it is inhabited by Satan, would presumably have to be uprooted.

Next morning, the clink of mattocks resumed in the treeless hills above Sousonné's compound, and here and there smoke rose from charcoal makers' fires, though I could not quite figure out where they'd found wood to burn. At dawn I climbed the shaly slope to one of the mines of stones. The heat had not yet risen, but I was sweat-drenched halfway through the climb and had to stop three times for breath before I reached the summit. Below, the spring from which most people in this zone hauled their water was shaded by substantial trees. Before the last stage of desperation, Haitians will not cut trees around a spring, and this one was also a sacred source, the *repousa* of a spirit.

When I reached the height, the view was panoramic; to the north I could see across the whole Northern Plain to the smoky haze above the sea, and westward, beyond the lowlands of Bwa Kayman, the Baie d'Acul glittered in the morning light. There one of Coumbus's first three ships had sunk, and his men had used the timbers to build their first New World settlement.

At my back, a lone miner was exploiting his claim. His tools were a pick, a sledgehammer, and three pieces of blunt iron that looked

like broken mower blades. In the twenty minutes I stayed there, he managed to dislodge a handful of gray gravel. On a good day, he told me, he might earn as much as 200 gourdes by selling rock to the men on the trucks that arrived below — the equivalent, at the currently vicious exchange rate, of about five U.S. dollars, but he did not expect this to be a good day, because one of his feet was hurt. In fact, this sum was substantially higher than the minimum wage paid for light assembly by the foreign textile factories near the Port-au-Prince airport — a mere 66 gourdes, though there was talk that the state meant to raise it to 120.

I needed another twenty minutes to crawl back down the rock-slide. One false step would start a little avalanche. Every rainfall rips the tear still deeper into the mountainside. I had thought that there was nothing worse than charcoal, but the mine of stones was definitely worse. It was the end of desperation. From somewhere below came the tap of a drum, resonant in the morning calm; it might have been Sousonné trying his handiwork. A voice sang in the back of my mind:

*Figye, mapou yo
Yo tout fin peri-o . . .
Pa gen lòtè anko
Pou bay yo rafé.*

It came from the chant by the traditional group Wawa, and it had all the force of an old Vodou song.

The figs and the *mapou*
Have just finished dying . . .
No place left any more
For the spirits to stay.