

Beyond the Mountain: Joining Hands with the People of Haiti

Workshop 4: Haiti and the United States

Total time: two hours

Theme: resiliency

Objectives

- Explore in greater depth the history between the United States and Haiti.
- Witness the work of an eye-to-eye partnership that focuses on recovery from trauma.
- Hear the unique perspectives of members of the Haitian diaspora living in the United States.



Opening (5 minutes)

Materials needed

- Optional: chalice, candle, and lighter

Description

If you chose, light a chalice. Read or seek a volunteer to read the poem “Quaking Conversation” from Handout 1 as the opening reading.

Tell participants that today’s workshop will focus on the relationship between the United States and Haiti.

Activity 1: A Short History Lesson (25 minutes)

Summary

We will learn some of the history between Haiti and the United States.

Objective

Explore in greater depth the history between the United States and Haiti.

Materials needed

- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Curriculum section entitled “Leader Resource 1: Quotes”

Preparation

Draw a line vertically down the middle of a sheet of newsprint. On one side of the newsprint, write the quotes from “Leader Resource 1: Quotes.” On the other side, write the attributions. Do not line them up. Participants will be asked to match the quote to its speaker.

Description

Part 1: Ask participants to match the quote with the speaker. Discuss similarities and differences among the quotes. What do they say about U.S.-Haiti relations?

Part 2: Play a game of true or false. Read the following statements. Participants should say whether they believe each statement is true or false. Have participants work in teams and keep score to make the game more fun.

1. When attempting to gain independence, Haiti received help from the United States. [True. The United States backed the fighters of the revolution because they wanted to keep France out of Haiti out of fear that Napoleon would attack Louisiana.]
2. The United States recognized Haiti when they declared their free republic in 1804. [False. The United States did not recognize them until 1862, 58 years later. Primarily, this was due to our country’s fear that slaves here would be inspired by Haiti and rebel. However, most (but not all) Haitian leaders were disinterested in ridding the Western hemisphere of slavery.]
3. Haitian soldiers fought for American independence at the Siege of Savannah, Georgia, in 1779. [True. There is a monument that honors the contributions of this Haitian regiment, which was composed of over 500 free black men.]
4. In 1914, President Woodrow Wilson took control of the Haitian

National Bank by sending in marines, who removed \$500,000 of its reserves for “safekeeping” in New York. [True. One year later, Wilson ordered an invasion of Haiti to protect U.S. interests after the Haitian president was assassinated.]

5. The United States established a naval base in Haiti in 1915. [False. The idea was considered throughout our shared history, but never acted upon.]

6. The United States withdrew military presence from Haiti in 1934 as part of President Franklin Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor policy, which stressed cooperation and trade over military force to maintain stability in the Americas. [True.]

7. The United States invaded Haiti again in 1994, under President Clinton. [True. A last-minute deal brokered by former President Jimmy Carter allowed the troops to go ashore unopposed by the Haitian military and police.]

8. Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s presidency was opposed by Washington. [True or false. Officially, he was supported by the United States, especially during his first term. In 2004, when Aristide left the country under duress, the United States airlifted him and his family to safety in the United States. Yet, others believe the CIA was heavily involved in the coup that disrupted his first term and created the need for him to leave the country. As often is the case in matters of international diplomacy, it is hard for the public to know which “truth” to believe.]

9. Approximately 420,000 Haitians live legally in the United States with another 30,000–125,000 here undocumented. [True. One in every eight Haitians lives outside of Haiti. This is the Haitian diaspora.]

10. Members of the Haitian diaspora hold dual citizenship. [False. The Haitian constitution forbids dual citizenships.]

11. President Obama sits on the board of directors of the Interim Haitian Reconstruction Commission, which was established in 2010. [False. President Clinton sits on the board. He has publicly stated that economic policies put into place during his administration were damaging to the Haitian economy and need to be rectified.]

Participants might remember other highlights in Haiti-U.S. relations. Share these and any comments on the statements above.

Go around the room, popcorn style, and let participants share one or two words that summarize the message they take away concerning the relationship between our two countries. Additional discussion questions might include the following:

- How do you think our relationship with Haiti is affected by class and race?
- How do you think this tenuous relationship affects the work of UUSC?
- What do you think we, as Americans, can do to improve this relationship?



Activity 2: Pig Switch (30 minutes)

Summary

We will examine an incident from the recent history of U.S.-Haiti relations and its economic impact.

Objectives

Analyze the economic impact of our country's actions upon Haiti and other struggling nations.

Materials needed

- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Optional: card stock, markers, string or yarn, hole punch

Preparation

Label one sheet of newsprint "Haiti" and another "United States." Optional: create signs to hang around the actors' necks. These could be as simple as card stock with two holes punched on the sides and string or yarn strung through them.

Description

Say that sometimes it is difficult to determine if our country's actions are designed to help Haiti or help the U.S. economy.

After the earthquake, estimates show that one out of every two households in the United States donated to relief and recovery efforts in Haiti. There is no doubt that the American people want to support our Haitian neighbors. (usaid.gov/ht/faq.html)

Yet there is great controversy over aid: How much does it help? Does it really reach those who need it? What strings are attached? Is direct aid better than supporting the country's infrastructure with manufacturing jobs and teaching skills?

UUSC avoids many of the inefficiencies of giving aid. As part of UUSC's eye-to-eye partnerships, aid is given to groups that give direct services. It does not go through government agents or other middle people. UUSC responds to what the affected people say they need, which eliminates wasteful giving.

Let's look at one specific example of how the United States impacted the Haitian economy.

Ask for volunteers to illustrate. You will read a narrative and they should act it out in pantomime. Recruit the following actors: pigs (they can be both Creole and American, since they do not appear at the same time), a Haitian pig farmer, an American pig farmer, a Haitian soldier, a Haitian consumer, and a representative of the Haitian Pig Eradication Program (HPEP). If needed, double parts. Instruct actors to listen to the narrative and pantomime actions when they hear their roles mentioned. Assign one side of your "stage" as "Haiti" and another side as the "United States." Label with newsprint.

Narrative

The story starts in Haiti. What is commonly called the "Creole pig" was introduced to Haiti in the 1500s by the Spanish. Many Haitian farmers raise pigs. They are small and well adjusted to the climate, do not eat much, and will eat almost anything. They can easily be raised on small farms without much expense. They are crucial to

the livelihood of most Haitian farmers (Haiti is 80 percent rural). Pigs brought down farming costs by aerating the soil; they kept sanitation levels high by eating household waste; they produced nitrogen-rich fertilizer. In times of crisis, they could be sold for \$100 — as much as a peasant might make in a year — to pay for medical bills, a funeral, or maybe a wedding. In times of hunger, they could be eaten.

In the 1980s, swine flu strikes. There are cases in Haiti, which is only about 700 miles from the United States. U.S. officials are afraid that swine flu will travel here, so they convince the Haitian government to start a program to eradicate the Creole pig and replace them with pigs from the United States.

The Haitian military is given orders: all the Creole pigs are to be killed. If farmers balk, soldiers say, "It's your pig or you. You decide." Farmers are promised compensation for their losses, but most never receive a dime.

A representative from the pig repopulation program (called henceforth the HPEP) approaches the U.S. pig farmer and purchases pigs for Haiti. The U.S. farmer is happy to receive the additional income.

The HPEP rep brings the pigs to Haiti and gives the American pigs to Haitian pig farmers. They are told that the new pigs will produce more meat so they can sell them for more profit. The new pigs are also resistant to swine flu, but Haitian farmers do not receive information on how to prevent swine flu in the first place.

The new pigs are bigger. They take up more space. They do not do well in the heat. The HPEP rep tells Haitian farmers that they must build concrete houses to keep the pigs cool.

The bigger pigs eat more — a lot more! — and are pickier eaters. The prefer food that must be bought from the HPEP rep, which the HPEP rep purchases from the U.S. farmer, who is happy to receive the additional income.

Some Haitian farmers purchase the food. They are not happy about the additional expense. Others devote more land use to grow the crops the pigs like, in addition to setting aside more land for concrete pig houses and bigger pigs. The pigs do produce more meat, but they cost more to raise — about \$100 a year, more than most farmers make annually. Farmers are not making more profit; they are not making a profit at all.

Additionally, now that there is more pork on the market, the price drops. Haitian consumers will not pay as much for pork or pigs. More supply means less demand. So farmers are actually making less money with the new pigs.

The U.S. farmer made a profit from the pig switch. The HPEP is kept staffed and in business from the pig switch. The Haitian farmer's situation is made worse by the pig switch. Many Haitian farmers leave the countryside and head to Port-au-Prince to take jobs. Unemployment in the city skyrockets. [End of narrative.]

Ask the actors to remain standing. Tell participants that this narrative is one way of looking at the Creole pig switch. There is another. Ask the actors to act out another narrative.

Narrative

The story starts in Haiti. What is commonly called the “Creole pig” was introduced to Haiti in the 1500s by the Spanish. Many Haitian farmers raise pigs. They can easily be raised on small farms without much expense because the pigs are small, do not produce much meat, and give birth to small litters.

In the 1980s, swine flu strikes. The flu is highly contagious and causes respiratory distress, and humans can catch it from pigs. With the flu becoming rampant in Haiti — only about 700 miles from the United States — U.S. officials are afraid that disease will travel here and cripple the U.S. pork industry. Other neighboring countries have the same fear. Various segments of governments in the Dominican Republic, Canada, the United States, and Haiti combined forces to create the Haitian Pig Eradication Program.

All the Creole pigs are killed. Farmers are promised compensation for their losses. The HPEP successfully clears Haiti of swine flu within three years. A representative from HPEP approaches the U.S. pig farmer and purchases pigs for Haiti. The U.S. farmer is happy to receive the additional income.

The HPEP rep brings the pigs to Haiti and gives the American pigs to Haitian pig farmers. They are told the new pigs will produce more meat because they have a more efficient digestive system. The HPEP can sell Haitian farmers pig food from the United States that will produce the best results. The U.S. farmers who produce the feed are happy to receive the additional income.

The U.S. pigs will also produce bigger litters and are resistant to swine flu; these are superior pigs. Haitian farmers are taught how to take care of the pigs, including how to build better houses for pigs.

The program comes under great criticism. Haitian farmers are unhappy and do not support the program. Dishonesty and inefficiency on the part of officials in Haiti and nongovernmental organizations contracted to implement the program causes parts of the program, such as compensating for loss and education on swine flu, to not be fulfilled as promised. Rumors abound. Hostilities grow. The history of distrust between Haiti and the United States and the failure of previous programs lead to pessimism and lack of support that undermine the program. Short-term vision is also to blame: though the program causes immediate hardship, in the long term, if supported, it would lead to a healthier agricultural economy. [End of narrative.]

Acknowledge that the Haitian Pig Eradication Program is highly controversial and that both narratives contain some truth.

Take comments. Process with the following questions:

- Do you think the investors foresaw the outcome for Haitian farmers — both in the short and long term?
- Both narratives are simplifications. There are other factors that come into play. For example, some Haitian farmers, left destitute after the pig switch, took to making quick cash by cutting down trees to sell for charcoal. This has increased deforestation in Haiti, which results in soil erosion, fewer crops, and polluted freshwater streams, the source for drinking water. This affects the health of the citizens. Also, some people believe that the United States wishes to drive more

farmers into the cities, where they can be hired at low wages to fill American clothing-manufacturing positions. The same North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that has adversely affected the Mexican economy is affecting Haiti negatively, to the benefit of our own country. It encourages American businesses to build manufacturing industries in Haiti, but the jobs produced in Haiti are not raising the standard of living. The jobs attract people to the city, away from the farm, and increase food instability.

- Another factor that breeds distrust is the way U.S. companies often introduce U.S. crops into Haiti — as feed, seeds, or direct aid — thereby increasing profits for American farmers who are already subsidized by the American government to grow (or overgrow) the crops. Rice is a staple of the Haitian diet. When relief agencies send free rice to Haiti, Haitian farmers cannot sell the rice they have grown. If more and more rice farmers have to leave their farms because they can no longer support their families, where will the Haitian consumer get rice when the aid stops? How does this connect to food-sovereignty issues discussed in Workshop 2?
- After this has happened with various products (rice, pigs, etc.) over many decades, how would you feel if you were a Haitian farmer about receiving advice and products from the United States?
- The narratives also did not address factors such as loans. Haiti’s economy is crippled by the cost of repaying loans to the international community. However, the economy has also suffered hugely from dishonest officials who steal millions of dollars out of the treasury before escaping to other countries. Can the blame for Haiti’s economic crisis be laid squarely on either the international community or Haiti itself?
- Do you think Haiti is the only place where such economic catastrophes happen? Do similar programs exist here in the United States?

End the activity by stating that better solutions must be sought to secure Haiti’s future and establish a trusting relationship.





Activity 3: Spotlight on Partners – Trauma Resource Institute (25 minutes)

Summary

We will learn about the work of the Trauma Resource Institute. We will also discuss how care of our bodies is a spiritual act and create a body prayer to remind us to pay attention to our bodies.

Objectives

- Witness the work of an eye-to-eye partnership that focuses on recovery from trauma.
- Acknowledge that our bodies are holy and learn a technique to connect our physical and spiritual selves.

Materials needed

- A computer with access to the Internet, projector, speakers, and screen or the UUSC's *Beyond the Mountain* DVD.

Description

Part 1: Life in Haiti can be precarious and stressful every day and all the more so during a natural disaster such as the earthquake. UUSC partners in eye-to-eye relationship with grassroots organizations whose missions are to assist Haitians in creating a better quality of life. This includes being safe with a life free from violence, the goal of the Commission of Women Victims for Victims (KOFIVIV). It means earning a livelihood with help from groups like the Papaye Peasant Movement (MPP). And the Association for the Promotion of Integral Family Healthcare (APROSIFA) provides holistic health care to a community. Only when the people of Haiti can fill their basic needs can issues such as trust be tackled.

The partner we spotlight today is concerned with the emotional and psychological well-being of trauma survivors. Unlike the partners we have seen in previous workshops, this partner, the Trauma Resource Institute, is based in the United States, but its mission takes its particular approach to healing all over the world.

Go to the video "Trauma Resource Institute," available online as part of the Haiti Curriculum: *Beyond the Mountain* playlist at [youtube.com/uusc4all](https://www.youtube.com/uusc4all) or on UUSC's *Beyond the Mountain* DVD.

Watch the video. Say, in your own words: "The Trauma Resource Institute (TRI) promotes healing in communities of people who suffer from traumatic stress reactions following catastrophic events. They train first responders, community leaders, and health professionals in body-based trauma-response techniques designed to help people control their physical reactions to trauma and build their resiliency. TRI made several trips to Haiti in 2010 and 2011. Their goal is to train 100 Haitians in trauma-resiliency techniques. Of those, 60 will be trained as trainers. The American trainers of TRI strive to build trusting relationships with Haitians by empowering them with knowledge to increase their emotional and psychological well-being."

Process with the group the following questions:

- Did the video introduce any new ideas to you or make you think about the needs of Haitian earthquake survivors in a different way? How so?
- How is TRI working to help Haitians meet their needs and recover from the effects of the earthquake? Why is this as important as physical safety, housing, and a secure food supply?
- What inspired you about the work of TRI?
- TRI strives for an approach that is culturally sensitive. Did you witness that in the video? Please describe what you saw or heard.

Part 2: Ask participants, "What is spiritual about the work of TRI? What in our UU principles, values, and beliefs supports the work of TRI in Haiti?"

Say, "Most religions hold values and beliefs about our bodies. Many religions teach us that our bodies are temples. Some religions focus so much on the spirit that the body may be seen simply as a vessel and not as important. What does our UU faith have to say about our bodies? What can you point to in our congregations that illustrate our beliefs about the importance of our bodies? [If participants do not say it first, share that many congregations lead Our Whole Lives workshops to teach all ages that are bodies are holy and worthy of respect and attention. Many congregations hold workshops on yoga and meditation.]

"TRI trainers talk about responses to trauma, being 'stuck on high' or 'stuck on low.' Has anything like that ever happened to you? [Take responses.] What are some ways your body responds to stress? What are some ways you help your body release stress and return to normal body rhythms? [Take responses.]"

Say that some common ways are meditation, yoga, running or jogging, sleeping, and massage. Invite participants to consider another method: body prayer. Ask if anyone has ever participated in a body prayer. Ask if anyone knows a body prayer they would like to teach the group.

If not, invite the group to create a body prayer. Your prayer might include several poses, including a pose to connect to the source of your spirituality; a pose to release stress and negative thoughts; a pose to receive answers, inspiration, energy, or strength; a pose in gratitude for gifts of the spirit; and a pose to send the same gifts out into the world.

Alternately, use one of the body prayers from Life Journey Church or Westside Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Seattle, Wash. An Internet search will produce others you might like to use.

End the activity by acknowledging that not only does the body prayer hold the potential to release stress, but it is a way to connect our physical selves to our spirit. Invite participants to teach the body prayer the group created to other people in their lives.

Activity 4: Diaspora (30 minutes)

Summary

We will hear the experiences of a member of the Haitian diaspora.

Objective

View Haiti-U.S. relations through another perspective.

Preparation

Invite a member of the Haitian diaspora to speak to the group about their experiences in Haiti and the United States as well as what their diaspora experience has been. Show them the poem with which participants will engage. Enlist their help at least two weeks ahead of time and check in periodically for any questions they may have about the workshop. Ask them to prepare to talk for no more than 10 minutes; to utilize visual aids, such as photos, videos, or items from Haiti; and to leave room for questions. Also, invite the guest to share with participants what they can do to help support Haiti through members of the diaspora in your community.

Description

Remind participants that about 420,000 Haitians live in the United States legally, according to census figures. Estimates of the number of undocumented Haitians in the country vary wildly, from 30,000 to 125,000.

Ask for a volunteer to define “diaspora.” If needed, use the definition from dictionary.com: “any group that has dispersed outside its traditional homeland.” Members of the Haitian diaspora reside mostly in the United States, but are also strongly represented in Canada and the Dominican Republic. It should be remembered that the experience of one Haitian diaspora person may or may not reflect overall demographic trends.

Today you have a visitor who is a member of the Haitian diaspora. Welcome your guest. Listen to the presentation. Help facilitate questions if needed. Thank the visitor for their time. Ask participants for any comments.

Closing (5 minutes)

Materials

- Optional: chalice, candle, and candle snuffer

Description

If applicable, extinguish the chalice. Share the following closing reading by Cornel West, an African American philosopher, author, and activist: “We need a moral prophetic minority of all colors who muster the courage to question the powers that be, the courage to be impatient with evil and patient with people, and

the courage to fight for social justice. In many instances we will be stepping out on nothing, hoping to land on something.”

Alternate activities

Viewpoints

Ask participants to read the poem in “Handout 1: Quaking Conversation” and circle words or phrases that they find especially meaningful, rich, or striking. After five minutes, read the poem aloud or seek a volunteer to read it. Say that the author, Lenelle Moïse, identifies as a member of the Haitian diaspora.

Ask for a volunteer to define “diaspora.” If needed, use the definition from dictionary.com: “any group that has dispersed outside its traditional homeland.” Members of the Haitian diaspora reside primarily in the United States, but are also strongly represented in Canada and the Dominican Republic. It should be remembered that the experience of one Haitian diaspora person may or may not reflect overall demographic trends.

Ask for comments about what the author may be feeling, as a member of the Haitian diaspora. How does this poem connect to what you have been discussing concerning Haiti-U.S. relations?

Break the group into teams of three or four. Ask teams to take the words or phrases circled previously and any information received from the guest speaker and create a short, one-stanza poem in response to “Quaking Conversation.” The poem does not need to use all the words circled, and additional words may be added. It should be from the team’s point of view and express feelings about Haiti-U.S. relations, the earthquake, or efforts to rebuild Haiti.

Choose Haiti

Read “Entrepreneur Manufactures a Haitian Recovery,” an article by Sean Gregory from *Time* magazine online about the manufacturing company Blanket America. Then visit their website at blanketamerica.com.

Movie

Watch and discuss *The End of Poverty?*, a documentary film that examines global poverty.

Other Nations Helping to Rebuild

Read and discuss the following article from the *New York Times*: “A Symbol of Hope for Haiti, a Landmark Again Stands Tall,” by Pooja Bhatia. What do participants think of O’Brien’s actions?

Children’s activity (60 minutes)

Summary

Children will learn some of the causes and effects of Haitian diaspora from one person’s point of view.

Objectives

- Hear the story of one’s person’s journey from Haiti to the United States.
- Connect the story of a Haitian immigrant with their families’ stories of making a home in the United States.

Materials

- Snacks
- Assorted art materials for making a thank-you card

Preparation

Invite a guest speaker to talk to the children, preferably someone who has emigrated from Haiti in their lifetime. Perhaps seek out someone with experience with children — a teacher, social worker, or parent, for example. Enlist their help at least two weeks ahead of time and check in periodically for any questions they may have about the workshop. Ask the guest to talk in an age-appropriate way about what they love about Haiti, what they love about their life in the United States, why they live in this country, and what it is like to be a member of the Haitian diaspora. Ask them to prepare to talk for no more than 30 minutes; to utilize visual aids, such as photos, videos or items from Haiti; and to leave time for questions.

Let parents know the topic of today's workshop. Suggest they talk to their children in the week before the workshop about their family's origins. Invite them to send one or two items, such as photos or mementos, for children to share as they talk about their families' stories.

Ask the guest speaker for suggestions of snacks that reflect Haitian culture. Some possible snacks include mangoes, coconut, guava, and limes (or juices made from these fruits). Other suggestions that would take more preparation include a fruit salad, fried plantains or one of the recipes from the website [Food by Country: foodbycountry.com/Germany-to-Japan/Haiti](http://foodbycountry.com/Germany-to-Japan/Haiti).

Description

Let children know that you have a guest today who will talk about Haiti. Let them know when it is appropriate to ask questions (during the guest's talk or afterwards?). Discuss appropriate behavior, such as listening politely, with open minds and hearts.

Welcome and hear from the guest. Invite children to share with the group any information they know about their families' ancestry, countries of origin, and any familial stories about immigration, slavery, native ancestry, or other ways their families came to this country.

Serve Haitian snacks. After the guest leaves, have participants make and sign a thank-you note to mail to the guest.

Want to know more?

- Read more about the science behind the work of TRI on their website at Traumaresourceinstitute.com.
- There is a great deal of discussion on the topic of Haiti's economic relationships with the United States and other nations. Read "Food imports hurt struggling Haitian farmers," an MSNBC report, and "Whether Pigs Have Wings: African Swine Fever Eradication and Pig Repopulation in Haiti," a paper that deems pig eradication as a necessary action that could be beneficial to Haiti.
- Read *Butterfly's Way: Voices from the Haitian Diaspora*, a collection of writings from the Haitian diaspora in the United States edited by Edwidge Danticat.



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Leader Resource 1: Quotes

"The stakes are very high for us in Haiti. We have many important interests there. Perhaps the most important to me is our interest in the promotion of democracy in this hemisphere."
—Warren Christopher, U.S. Secretary of State, 1994, during Operation Uphold Democracy, when a U.S.-led force returned Haiti's popularly elected President Jean-Bertrande Aristide to power after a coup had unseated him.

"Haiti is a public nuisance at our door."
—Alvey A. Adee, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State, 1886–1924

"I've made it clear to each of these leaders that Haiti must be a top priority for their departments and agencies right now. This is one of those moments that calls out for American leadership. For the sake of our citizens who are in Haiti, for the sake of the Haitian people who have suffered so much, and for the sake of our common humanity, we stand in solidarity with our neighbors to the south, knowing that but for the grace of God, there we go."

—President Barack Obama, 2010

"Haiti is caught in a deal with the devil, and the devil is us."
—Maggie Koerth-Baker, an editor of the blog *Boing Boing*

Handout 1: Quaking Conversation

Quaking Conversation
by Lenelle Moïse

I want to talk about Haiti.
How the earth had to break
the island's spine to wake
the world up to her screaming.

How this post-earthquake crisis
is not natural
or supernatural.
I want to talk about disasters.

How men make them
with embargoes, exploitation,
stigma, sabotage, scalding
debt & cold shoulders.

Talk centuries
of political corruption
so commonplace
it's lukewarm, tap.

Talk January 1, 1804
& how it shed Life.
Talk 1937
& how it bled Death.

Talk 1964. 1986. 1991. 2004. 2008.
How history is the word
that makes today
uneven, possible.

Talk New Orleans,
Palestine, Sri Lanka,
the Bronx & other points
of connection.

Talk resilience & miracles.
How Haitian elders sing in time
to their grumbling bellies
& stubborn hearts.

How after weeks under the rubble
a baby is pulled out
awake, dehydrated, adorable, telling
stories with old soul eyes.

How many more are still
buried, breathing, praying & waiting?
Intact despite the veil of fear & dust
coating their bruised faces?

I want to talk about our irreversible dead.
The artists, the activists, the spiritual leaders,
the family members, the friends, the merchants,
the outcasts, the cons.

All of them, my newest ancestors.
All of them, hovering now,
watching our collective response,
keeping score, making bets.

I want to talk about money.
How one man's recession might be
another man's unachievable reality.
How unfair that is.

How I see a Haitian woman's face
every time I look down at a hot meal,
slip into my bed, take a sip of water
& show mercy to a mirror.

How if my parents had made different
decisions three decades ago,
it could have been my arm
sticking out of a mass grave.

I want to talk about gratitude.
I want to talk about compassion.
I want to talk about respect.
How even the desperate deserve it.

How Haitians sometimes greet each other
with the two words, "Honor"
& "Respect."
How we all should follow suit.

Try every time you hear the word "Victim,"
you think "Honor."
Try every time you hear the tag "John Doe,"
you shout "Respect!"

Because my people have names.
Because my people have nerve.
Because my people are
your people in disguise.

I want to talk about Haiti.
I always talk about Haiti.
My mouth quaking with her love,
complexity, honor & respect.

Come sit, come stand, come
cry with me. Talk.
There's much to say.
Walk. Much more to do.

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