

# For Haiti, a want of concern for troubled nation

DONNA BRITT



Why don't we care more about Haiti?

Americans love freedom. Shouldn't we care deeply about its survival in the teacup-size country whose greatest general, Toussaint L'Ouverture, helped Haiti's citizenry defeat Napoleon's



Aristide

60,000-man army in 1791, in what some historians describe as history's only successful slave revolt? I'm asking partly out of guilt. In the early 1990s, I had the chance to dine with Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haiti's recently ousted president. Yet I wasn't as frantic with worry as I should have been as armed insurgents approached his capital two weeks ago.

Today, human beings who once were required to care primarily about people in their own families and communities are hourly informed of disasters natural and man-made thousands of miles away. We ingest endless reports of bombings, wars, murders and deadly accidents.

We've become sympathy skinflints, meting out a little concern here, a tiny bit there for those who seem blameless for the awfulness that has befallen them.

But Haiti? For weeks, I didn't know what to think about Aristide. At a dinner with journalists during his Washington exile, he'd radiated intelligence and an enveloping gentleness. His sweetness seemed more appropriate to the priest he once was than to the displaced national leader he had become.

Aristide displayed no bluster or hauteur. Over and over, he expressed concern for his countrymen, who were being murdered by a military dictatorship that the Clinton administration finally deposed in 1994. Aristide was soon restored to the office to which 67 percent of his countrymen had elected him — and I felt the country was in good hands.

But last week, as rebels encroached, news reports kept describing Aristide's "corruption." How he was "the wrong leader" for Haiti. Had I been blind?

God knows, leading Haiti would challenge a saint. The Western Hemisphere's poorest nation, Haiti endures infant and maternal mortality rates more than 10 times those of its closest neighbors; epidemic disease remains a major killer.

Harvard Medical School professor Paul Farmer, 44, cares. The author of the 1994 book "The Uses of Haiti" cares enough to have established five medical facilities in the nation. This week, he's returning to Haiti despite the unrest and having twice been held at gunpoint while his ambulances were stolen, he said, "by the thugs who are now running things."

Farmer asked me a caring question: "What could be a deeper wrong than the last 200 years of U.S. policy toward Haiti?"

Americans would care more, he continued, if they understood the U.S. contribution to Haiti's woes. "No one wants to believe that our government would block water to the thirsty and food to the hungry. I didn't."

"But we did and we are." In fact, the same U.S. government that gave aid to Haiti during the brutal regimes of Francois Duvalier and his son Jean-Claude blocked money that would have fed children, provided clean water to malaria-threatened citizens and built hospitals and roads.

On Aug. 7, 2002, Pulitzer Prize winner Tracy Kidder wrote in this newspaper: "The United States is actively impeding the flow of foreign aid to Haiti's government, a total of approximately \$500 million, a sum roughly equal to the country's annual budget. We are even blocking, illegally, a series of already-approved loans from the Inter-American Development Bank totaling \$140 million."

Why would the United States undermine a neighboring democracy that poses no threat to it? A democracy whose first "remarkable" constitution, Farmer said, stated that "any slave from anywhere in world who came to Haiti would be declared free."

Farmer paused. "Skip ahead 180 years and you find 30 coups, a brutal family dictatorship and, finally, a democracy movement that promises poor people the right to enough to eat, to an education, to a dry place to sleep."

The American most famous for caring about Haiti is Randall Robinson, the former TransAfrica chief who staged a 28-day hunger strike that embarrassed then-President Clinton into stopping the repatriation of Haitian political refugees.

Everyone who cares about democracy should care about Haiti, at least enough to insist on learning what really happened there and why.

Anyone who loves this nation knows that too many people, in places far more troubling than tiny Haiti, believe what Robinson told me he's begun to believe:

DONNA BRITT is a Washington Post columnist.

## POSTSCRIPTS



FILE PHOTO

Charlotte Bobcats owner Bob Johnson (right) defends Viacom-owned MTV and Black Entertainment Television's programming of steamy and explicit music videos.

## Bobcats owner should be ashamed for BET videos

By Don Reid

SPECIAL TO THE POST

Religious broadcasters from around the nation, meeting in Charlotte last month, called for the government to impose penalties on networks, producers and actors that participate in shows like the Janet Jackson Super Bowl half-time debacle. Such entertainment is shameful and indecent, they said.



Reid

Immediately, there arose the bogus arguments of censorship and you can't legislate morality, etc. Speaking for the teenagers,

Katie Henderson, a junior at Myers Park High, said that they are just not given enough credit for their wisdom and understanding of what's going on.

Then Katie goes on to say that "it's more common to see girls making out on the weekend as a tactic to get guys because Britney and Madonna did it!" Somehow I believe Katie's statement proves the religious broadcasters to be correct.

Girls making out with girls is shameful, Katie! And yes, the public does have a stake in this broadcast issue. After all the citizens own the airways for both radio and television and the FCC was established to control broadcasting rights and content. Go down the streets of Charlotte in the nude and you will be arrested. Citizens, locally and nationally, have the right to establish codes of conduct. The censorship defense is baloney and all laws, directly or indirectly, legislate morality.

It was discouraging to see our very own Bobcats owner, Bob Johnson, jump into the fray, defending BET and MTV. He says that by his definition there is nothing indecent or shameful on these channels, that most of the hoopla has to do with the generation gap. These words, from a man who completely controls the new arena, should be fair warning to the people of Charlotte.

I suggest that all Charlotte's citizens go to the BET channel and see for yourself the culture that Mr. Bobcat defends. I can just see it now: our new arena will be named the BET Arena with BET/MTV type shows booked into the arena and broadcast live on Mr. Johnson's new network! Charlotte will rue the day it brought Mr. Bobcat to town!

• Despite the fact that our airfares are among the highest in the country, there is no denying that US Airways has contributed greatly to the economic growth of Charlotte.

Still the question remains, should US Airways receive billions of dollars in subsidy from the federal government to prevent its going out of business? Why should your tax dollars or mine be given to US Airways or for that matter to any company that fails to compete in the marketplace. What incentive is there for the management, union and employees to operate efficiently when government is there to rescue them if they fail?

Now, because of a favorable bankruptcy law, US Airways says it does not owe its

Charlotte-Mecklenburg property taxes of \$7.1 million.

Emerging from bankruptcy, US Airways sent a letter to the tax office stating its intention to drop the city and county from its list of creditors. It's up to the tax office then, to contest this action, through the bankruptcy court. The tax office says it never received the letter, therefore never contested the action. The result: the bankruptcy judge removed Charlotte-Mecklenburg from the creditor list. Compare this to the requirements from a regular citizen. You are responsible for paying your property taxes whether or not you receive a tax notice, plus all the interest and penalties resulting from late payment.

A fact you may not have noticed: Of the approximately 24 million passengers who pass through our airport, only 16 percent originate locally! That's why Charlotte is a weak hub but that doesn't stop some folks from demanding light rail to the airport!

• "Remember Pearl Harbor" was the war cry in 1941, largely forgotten today.

Heck, we can't even remember 9/11! A recent poll showed that 36 percent of Americans picked jobs and the economy as their top priority, while only 14 percent picked terrorism. What an indictment of American's value system. The Washington Times reports that Islamic terrorists are infiltrating into the U.S., joining sleeper cells and submerging themselves in Muslim communities throughout the U.S.

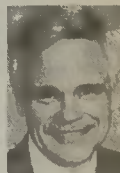
How long will it be before these terrorists begin new attacks on the U.S. and how would U.S. citizens react to suicide bombings in Times Square or Trade and Tryon? Worse still, how would you like John Edwards or John Kerry to be in charge when it happens? If attacks should occur, the same liberals who criticize Bush for invading Iraq, who squeal about profiling and condemn the Patriot Act, will be the first demanding more government action and control.

• I have not yet seen Mel Gibson's movie "The Passion of the Christ," but you don't need to be a theologian to understand all the turmoil.

When Jesus Christ came to earth 2,000 years ago claiming to be Messiah, Son of God, HE threatened and challenged the military rulers, secularists and religious leaders of the time they killed him. HE arose from the dead and has been challenging folks ever since, including me! In recent years, the media, the secularists and other religious leaders, have criticized and vilified Christians, practically driving them underground with their superior religion of tolerance, diversity and multiculturalism. The mainline churches have succumbed to this new religion, yet still wonder why their membership has been declining since the early 1960s! Right here in Charlotte a group of pastors, rabbis and other religious leaders, meet periodically to practice this false "I'm OK — you're OK" philosophy, and condemn those who don't understand their tolerant world.

DON REID is a former member of Charlotte City Council and founding member of Citizens for Effective Government.

D.G. MARTIN



## Gas prices one piece of puzzle

Why has the price of gasoline gone so high so fast?

This question was of the top of my list last week when I attended the conference on "creating a sustainable energy future" sponsored by Duke University's Nicholas School of the Environment and Earth Sciences.

I got a simple answer to that question from an informal conversation with an expert. I will share it with you at the end of this column.

But the conference itself was directed at our energy challenges in the long run. The conference organizers summarized our situation as follows:

"We depend on hydrocarbons for more than 85 percent of our energy needs. While hydrocarbon use has led to enormous benefits to human civilization, we now recognize that supplies of this critical resource are ultimately finite, and its use has impacted human health and the environment. As supplies of natural gas, petroleum, and coal become more expensive, as environmental degradation increases, and as the possibility of regulatory limits on carbon emissions looms larger, we will be forced to transition into a new era of energy use."

"In order to move toward a sustainable global society, we must address both the finite supply of hydrocarbons and the repercussions of their use. Today's leaders have a closing window of opportunity in which to direct our transition to a sustainable energy future."

The conference brought together representatives of power companies, futurists, conservationists, think tanks, academics, and coal, oil and natural gas producers.

These folks had to face some hard facts:

• 85 percent of our energy needs are met by nonrenewable sources like oil, gas, and coal.

• The United States, with about 5 percent of the world's population, uses about 25 percent of the world's energy resources.

• Currently, coal is the source of 50 percent of the electric energy produced in the U.S. (It is 60 percent in North Carolina.)

• Much of the rest of the world consumes relatively little energy now. But the aspirations of those peoples for a better life (like what they see on American television programs) will lead to an incredible increase in energy demand.

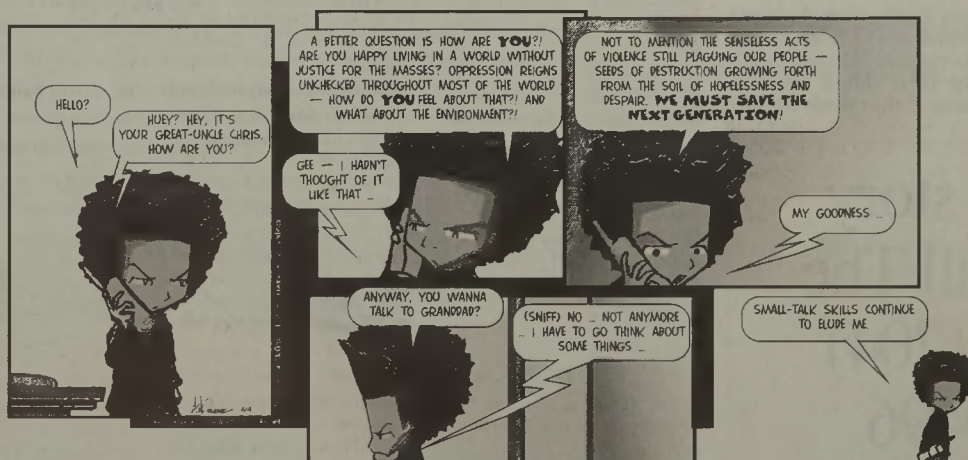
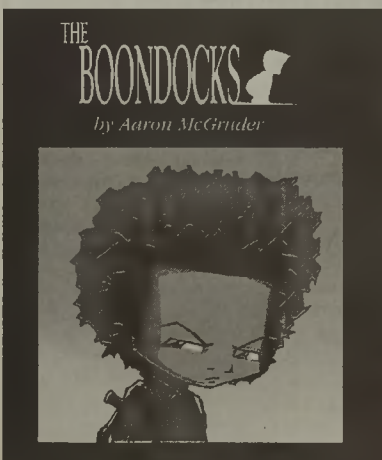
D.G. MARTIN hosts "North Carolina Bookwatch," which will return to the air later in the spring on UNC-TV.

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SMALL-TALK SKILLS CONTINUE TO BLUDE ME.