## NOTES

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE FIRST ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

Eleven selected presentations from the first annual Haitian studies Association conference held at Tufts University on June 17, 1989 have been edited for distribution to members and the wider community. The *Proceedings* were assembled by Alix Cantave and VeVe Clark and will be made available for a nominal fee from the Haitian Studies Association, P.O. Box 1451, West Somerville, Mass. 02144. The Volume includes presentations from the four following panels:

- "Telling the Haitian Story"
- "Dialogues/Resources on Haiti Collected Worldwide"
- "A Research Agenda for Haiti"
- "Research to Dissemination/Performance"

**HAITIAN STUDIES RESEARCH GROUP AT TUFTS UNIVERSITY**

In 1992, Tufts University is planning a city-wide conference in association with a number of regional institutions to commemorate the Quincentennial of the Columbus Expeditions, tentatively titled "Boston Explores Christopher Columbus." The Haitian Studies Association has proposed a series of panels and activities to coincide with the Quincentennial. "Haiti—Two Hundred Years Later" commemorates the 1991 Bicentennial of the

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## Haitian Educational Policies, Suggestions for Change, and Political Implications

By Marc Prou

The social stratification and monopolization of power by an elite minority in Haitian society has remained stable since the Haitian revolution in 1804, largely in part because of the linguistic stratification of the country. After the Revolution, French was adopted as the official language even though only a small bilingual minority was able to read, write and/or speak French, while the majority of the Haitian population was monolingual kreyol speaking. Today the linguistic situation in Haiti continues to be characterized by diglossia with bilingualism and semi-bilingualism with Haitian Kreyol as the native language of all Haitians and French as the official language possessed only by a bilingual, educated, elite minority and used almost exclusively in all formal public activities, in government and administrative offices, official speeches and radio broadcasts. In effect, this situation insures the exclusion of the majority of monolingual Kreyol speakers from participation in official, public, and social activities requiring French and provides a secure means through which the educated elite minority can insure the maintenance of its privileged status and retain social, political, and economic power over the majority. To understand how this has been accomplished on such a massive scale, we must look at the beginning of the exclusion process in Haitian society - the Haitian educational system.

The educational system of Haiti reflects and perpetuates the social, economic and political structure of the nation. It has provided all advantages to a small minority of students which has succeeded in acquiring an education. It is a system that has focussed the interest of the educated outside of Haiti.

In addition to the fact that the majority (75-85%) of the Haitian population is monolingual kreyol speaking, this majority is also illiterate, and resides in Haiti's rural areas. In spite of these realities, French remains the vehicle of instruction in the schools, adequate written materials have yet to be developed in kreyol, and the best and majority of schools are located in Haiti’s urban centers. Some statistics from George Clark’s article, *The Winds of change in Haitian Education* (by the way, the title is misleading), will help to highlight the gravity of inadequacy and inequality in the Haitian school system:

In 1966-67 there were 1,802,000 children (of school age) of whom only 300,113 (16.7%) were in school...There were in 1967, only 786 (bacalaureate) graduates in all of Haiti, (398 in 1966)...Many of the rural schools...has a student-teacher ratio as high as 80 to 1 and even with this deplorable ratio, only little more than 11% of the children were attending school.
Remember, our constitution guarantees a "free education to be provided to all people of the country". Thus, even though primary school education is compulsory in Haiti the lie is dropped on that one because there are by no means enough schools or teachers to accommodate the entire school-age population. Today only one-fourth of school-age youth attends school, and most of this percentage is made up of part of the middle class and the elite from urban areas. This high rate of illiteracy and lack of adequate teachers and facilities, especially in Haiti's rural areas, represents an enormous obstacle to national development; however, little of significance has been done to eradicate this situation.

Aside from the problem of inadequate teachers and facilities, the fact is that any significant improvement in Haiti's educational system must involve a fundamental change in the means of instruction in the classrooms throughout Haiti. In spite of the country's linguistic reality, and even with the officialization of kreyol by the 1987 constitution, the main vehicle of instruction in all Haitian schools continues to be French. This means that the majority of Haitians who speak only Kreyol must learn to read and write in a language that they are unfamiliar with and, thus, often fail. Numerous studies conducted all over the world including the extensive report of the UNESCO committee on education have shown that all students should begin their formal education in their native language because learning to read and write in a second language without first acquiring native language literacy will overload the cognitive system and impede the learning process. Besides the discrepancy between Haiti's policy of using French as the language of instruction and theories of literacy acquisition, another failure of the system...

The Haitian Studies Association (HSA) is an independent organization that seeks to promote scientific research on Haiti and Haitians, identify and catalogue contemporary publications on the subject, collect and disseminate scientific information, formalize Haitian Studies as an academic subject, and establish a network of experts competent to address Haitian issues from multi-disciplinary perspectives. HSA is not associated with any public or private institutions in or outside of Haiti.

Membership in the association is open to all persons interested in advancing its goals and objectives, regardless of ideological persuasion, ethnic origin, occupation, residency, or academic discipline. HSA is headed by a Steering Committee which is responsible for setting the organization's policies and orientation.

The Association was formally established in 1989 by a group of scholars, educators, professionals, and community residents. It is incorporated as a not-for-profit charitable and educational organization pursuant to the General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

HSA sponsors an annual conference, publishes conference papers and a quarterly newsletter (first edition, June 1990), and will initiate other activities to further Haitian Studies.

HSA welcomes articles, announces and commentaries. Articles must be limited to three double-spaced typed pages. Please address articles and other correspondences to: Haitian Studies Association, P.O. Box 1451, West Somerville, MA 02144. For more information, you can also contact Alix Cantave by calling (617) 625-6600 x2500 during office hours or (617) 734-7822 on off hours.
this group will be made available during the third and fourth annual Haitian Studies Association conferences.

SPECIAL ISSUES OF CALLALOO ON CONTEMPORARY HAITIAN LITERATURE & CULTURE

Charles H. Rowell, the editor of Callaloo (University of Virginia) is in the process of preparing several (perhaps two or three) issues of the journal for a bilingual (French/English; Creole/English) review of contemporary writing and critical analysis of Haitian literature, culture and visual arts devoted to writers, artists, and scholars residing in Haiti and its diaspora. These special issues are co-edited by Rowell, Maximilian Laroché, Yanick Lahens, J.J. Dominique. For many years, Callaloo has published new works by Francophone Caribbean authors including poems and short stories, and in its Winter 1989 issue (12:1) featured interviews with Aime Césaire, Maryse Condé and Xavier Orville. The list of contributors to the forthcoming issues on Haiti is staggering, and should all of the proposed selections be included would certainly represent a new wave in Afro-American/Caribbean cross-cultural communication. One issue on Creative Haitian Writings will include works by and interviews with: René Bélance, Gérard Etienne, Jean Brière, Jean-Claude Fignolé, Georges Castera, Mona Guérin, Marie Thérèse Colimon, Félix Morisseau-Leroy, and René Dépestre, among others.

A comprehensive Critique of Art, History and Culture will include writings on Architecture & Art History, Creole Language and Its Usage, History, Literary Criticism, Music, and Vodoun.

is its educational materials which include French language geography, history, literature and culture and little of direct relevancy to Haitian life and culture.

In the past few years, an attempt has been made to provide education in Kreyol in the early primary years as a transition to eventual education in French. Though an improvement, this policy does not deal with the problem of the irrelevancy of French language and culture to the immediate realities of the Haitian majority. That is to say that French culture should be excluded from education or that I advocate the “functional literacy” policies of UNESCO which, in my opinion, prepares people for menial positions and oppressed status in not be taught exclusively and that Haiti has a wealth of historical, cultural, and literary traditions which are as worthy of being taught as any other and are certainly of more relevance to the Haitian people than those of France.

There, the first step toward improving Haiti’s educational system and eradicating a growing rate of illiteracy must involve a commitment on the part of the government and the private sector to providing educational access by replacing French as the language of instruction with Kreyol and French subjects with Haitian in the content areas. In effect, this would result in recognizing Kreyol as the official language of the country and providing increased access to the country’s resources for the majority and is thus, opposed by the ruling minority. Some of the arguments of the resisting forces include 1) that Kreyol does not have a substantial body of literature or even enough written materials for educational purposes, 2) Kreyol, unlike French, is not an international language and would linguistically and, thus, socially, economically and politically isolate Haiti from the rest of the world, and 3) that learning French is a means for social mobility.

In regard to the first argument that Kreyol materials have not been developed in untruth. Indeed, there is a scarcity of Kreyol materials, precisely because of the continual emphasis on French as the language of education; therefore, if this emphasis changes, materials in Kreyol will inevitably be developed. Kreyol as a phonetic language is easily transferred to written expression and an orthography has already been accepted by IPN (Institut Pédagogique National). In addition, educators and linguists in Haiti and the U.S. are beginning to prepare Kreyol materials for literacy programs in New York, Miami and Boston and Haitian writers are beginning to write more extensively in Kreyol. In regard to the fear of linguistic isolation, there is no reason why French (or English) or Spanish cannot be taught as a second language, or third language since bilingualism and/or multilingualism being preferred over monolingualism in an over-growing international world. Again, studies have shown that learning literacy in a native language advances the acquisition of a second language, and thus education in Kreyol would aid the acquisition of French, or English, or Spanish. As the French language has not so far proven significantly advantageous for Haiti’s internal development or its international relations, limiting its use to a second language status rather than an official language will not realistically have the devastating effect so feared. What exists now is a more devastating isolation - that of the majority of people within their own country. Finally, in regard to the argument often used by Haitian parents in the U.S. that French is the language of social mobility, it should be apparent that this association is a result of the status French has had thus far in authentic official status, and represent the authentic language of education.
Because French and Kreyol are mutually unintelligible, the former being associated with the elite, political and economic power, formal education, social mobility, French culture and civilization and the latter with the powerless masses, the poor peasantry, illiteracy and the African-influenced culture and religion of the Haitian majority, and only the small elite has access to both languages. Any discussion in favor of replacing French with Kreyol as the educational and official language of Haiti has enormous implications for the social, economic and political structure of the country as a whole. Such a change would empower the Haitian majority as it has never been since the early days of the revolution. This, in fact, is at the root of the elite minority’s opposition to giving Kreyol the official status that it should have had directly following the 1804 Revolution. However, until a solution to the linguistic stratification of Haiti becomes a national commitment, Haiti will remain internally divided, unable to develop democratic institutions, and blocked in its centuries old quest for national identity and unity. In fact, until this is accomplished, Haiti will not yet have become independently Haitian.

Finally, it is essential to recognize that any new vision in the educational system of Haiti will entail a new way of thinking that will reflect clearly a non-neutrality. The question at this time is the following: Should we be proud of an educational system which has reached so few and which has succeeded in sacrificing three-quarters of its victims?

References


COMMENTS

The Bicentennial of the Beginning of the Haitian Revolution

An important milestone in the history of this hemisphere approaches. The year 1991 marks the two hundredth anniversary of the single, most successful revolution against slavery in world history, the Haitian Revolution. We need to tell how significant a turning point was made by that event, not only for Haitians but for the struggles against oppression everywhere.

Think for a minute. We witnessed in 1989 a world-wide celebration of the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution (which failed to extend its embrace to the revolution of African slaves in Haiti). In 1992 we will see possibly larger demonstration to honor the Quincentennial of the Columbian expeditions, Columbus’ “discovery” of the “Americas”. Is there not another, “hidden history” that demands exclamation between these two moments of definitive self-congratulation?

It is extremely important that this occasion not pass in silence and obscurity. Time yet remains for organization of conferences, forums, panels, special journal issues and anthologies, exhibitions, concerts, carnivals and celebrations around this theme, not only for commemoration, but also for retrospective examination of the history of two centuries of struggle for Haiti’s destiny and Black self-consciousness.

Our hope is that world-wide efforts, large and small, will gather around this pungent moment, and that the Haitian Studies Association will lead the way. Of course, the pursuit of liberation and its celebration is everyone’s opportunity and responsibility. For the sake of communications, we are willing to receive notice of planned activities to pass on to committees or institutions once they become mobilized.
NOTES

Curriculum includes nine credit hours in Haitian Creole, fifteen in Haitian culture and literature and six from African Studies, Latin American Studies, Anthropology, Economics, or History.

HAITIAN CREOLE SUMMER INSTITUTE IN BOSTON

Creole as a Foreign Language
3-Week Program
July 9-27: Beginners, Intermediates & Advanced
Tuition: $375
Room and Board: $240

Beginners Intensive: 5-Week Program
June 25—July 27
Tuition, Room and Board: $1000

For Application, write to:
Rev. Angelo Fazio
Kè Kontre Community
45 Stanton Street
Dorchester, MA 02124

MEMBERS ON THE MOVE

Robert I. Rotberg, member of HSA Steering Committee and academic vice president for arts, sciences and technology at Tufts University, has been named president of Lafayette College in Easton, PA.

HAITIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name

Mailing Address

Affiliation

Discipline

Interest(s) in Haiti

☐ Enclosed is my check/money order in the amount of $20
☐ I am enclosing $ ______ as a contribution to HSA
☐ Please send me more information

Please return to:

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