

**“The Plantation is Everywhere”: African American Solidarity with Haitian  
Refugees, 1978-1995**

*By*

**Naiya Edwards**

**A Thesis Submitted to**

**The Faculty of**

**SUNY Old Westbury in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts**

**December 2023**

**Thesis directed by**

**Llana Barber**

**Associate Professor of American Studies**

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the thesis option  
for the degree of Master's in Liberal Studies

“The Plantation is Everywhere’: African American Solidarity with  
Haitian Refugees, 1978-1995.”  
by Naiya Edwards

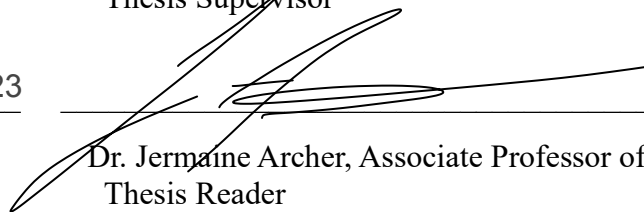
Date: 12/11/23



---

Dr. Llana Barber, Associate Professor of American Studies,  
Thesis Supervisor

Date: 12/11/23



---

Dr. Jermaine Archer, Associate Professor of American Studies,  
Thesis Reader

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

---

Dr. Carol Quirke, Professor of American Studies,  
MALS Graduate Director



**Abstract.** From 1978 to 1995, tens of thousands of Haitians fled to the United States to escape the brutal dictatorships of François and Jean-Claude Duvalier, and the violence that ensued after the overthrow of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Hoping for safety and refuge, most Haitian refugees were instead punished and barred from receiving asylum and entrance by the American government. Many African Americans critiqued the mistreatment of the Haitian refugees as anti-Black and demonstrated solidarity in an array of ways. Drawing from a series of Black newspapers from this era, I present this history of solidarity, arguing that African Americans were motivated to stand with the thousands of Black Haitians because of their own dealings with anti-Blackness in the United States.

## **Table of Contents:**

Introduction.....	5-14
Otherside of the Water.....	15-25
“It’s a Black Thing”: African American thoughts on Haitian Refugees Mistreatment.....	26-37
Symbols of Solidarity.....	38-43
Bibliography.....	44-49

*“Haiti is Black, and we have not yet forgiven Haiti for being Black... after Haiti had shaken off the fetters of bondage, and long after her freedom and independence had been recognized by all other civilized nations, we continued to refuse to acknowledge the fact... and treated her outside the sisterhood of nations.”<sup>1</sup>*

*-Frederick Douglass, 1893*

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter James Hudson, “Frederick Douglass and American Empire in Haiti.” *Boston Review*, December 9, 2021, <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/frederick-douglass-and-american-empire-in-haiti/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CHaiti%20is%20black%2C%E2%80%9D%20Douglass,Almighty%20for%20making%20her%20black.%E2%80%9D>.

## Introduction

As a response to the bloody reign of François and Jean-Claude Duvalier and the brutal overthrow of Haiti's first democratically-elected President, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, tens of thousands of Haitians filled into overcrowded makeshift boats and attempted to travel to Florida. Hoping to find refuge and shelter within the confines of the United States, the influx of Haitian refugees<sup>2</sup> was instead met with extreme systemic policies that discriminated against and excluded them. Indefinitely stuck and forced into detention centers, detained Haitian refugees managed to organize, advocate, and resist their mistreatment in a multitude of ways. Their desperate pleas for awareness and help garnered attention from several groups and organizations, including African Americans, who demonstrated their solidarity in an array of methods, including condemning this mistreatment through the Black Press, claiming that anti-Black racism lay at the core.

As tens of thousands of hopeful Haitian asylum seekers sailed their way into the belly of the beast of the American empire, their hope quickly dissipated as they were met with extreme methods of deterrence from America. Seeking refuge, these Black Haitians instead found that, as Afro-pessimist scholars argue, the plantation and its legacy of white supremacy, hyper surveillance, control, and restriction of Black people's movement was still thriving. African Americans, since their forced arrival in 1619, had their own unique experiences dealing with and resisting United States plantations.<sup>3</sup> Motivated by their own endurance of anti-Blackness, many African Americans advocated for and stood in solidarity with the Haitian refugees.

---

<sup>2</sup> Although the overwhelming number of Haitians that came to the United States did not fall under the scope of refugee by American standards, I am intentionally making a political choice to refer to them as such.

<sup>3</sup> Jesse McCarthy, "On Afropessimism" *Los Angeles Review of Books*, July 20, 2020, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/on-afropessimism/>.

In 1981, the Reagan Administration announced its plan to implement an interdiction policy, which gave the United States Coast Guard the ability and power to intercept any vessel they believed was carrying undocumented Haitian immigrants, question those aboard, and return those they determined lacked sufficient claims to asylum. Once on board, if there was any indication that a person qualified for asylum, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) officers were to conduct individual interviews to determine whether or not that person should be permitted to the United States to pursue the claim. If the interviewee was found to have a legitimate fear of persecution, they were removed and transported to the United States to apply for asylum. If the INS officers determined one did not have a valid claim, they were then returned by the Coast Guard back to Haiti. Before and during interdiction, Haitian refugees also had to contend with being indefinitely detained in detention facilities. These detention centers were often significantly overcrowded and overrun with deplorable conditions, were rife with violence, and were a breeding ground for resistance. Detained Haitian refugees, both individually and collectively, engaged in resistance methods that ranged from suicides to hunger strikes and riots. These resistance methods were just as much of a wake-up call to the outside world as they were about reclaiming agency.

As the detained Haitians advocated and resisted their mistreatment, some outside groups and individuals felt moved by their struggle and therefore took on the fight as if it were their own. Historical and powerful African American organizations like the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and activists like Randall Robinson and Reverend Jesse Jackson exhibited their solidarity with the Haitian refugees by employing various methods that often mirrored how detained Haitians resisted, such as political action to mass protests and individual hunger strikes. Not shying away

from voicing their thoughts and opinions press to cement their stance, stand shoulder to shoulder with their Haitian siblings, and call out the United States government for its disparate treatment against the Haitians that many agreed was rooted in anti-Blackness.

This history of African Americans standing in solidarity with Haitian refugees is significant, as it disrupts the longstanding notion that African Americans have traditionally sided with white Americans when it comes to the issue of immigration. This act of solidarity not only demonstrates African Americans' unwillingness to engage in harmful nativist rhetoric and behavior against the tens of thousands of Haitian refugees but lays out a much larger picture of how African Americans felt about anti-Blackness in the United States only a few short years removed from the Civil Rights Movement. This solidarity between African Americans and Haitian refugees, bridged together by the unfortunate realization that anti-Blackness affects them all, speaks volumes to the possibility of ending the constant "diaspora wars." These "diaspora wars" can be loosely defined as cross-cultural arguments among different ethnicities of African people where discontent is expressed and ultimately serves no purpose but to cause more division within the larger Black community. This thesis explores African American thoughts and perspectives regarding the plight of Haitian refugees in the late twentieth century and details both the reasons for and methods of solidarity.

By examining over fifty-plus articles, editorials, and letters published within African American-owned newspapers from 1978 to 1995, I present the history of African American solidarity and advocacy for Haitian refugees, including a detailed layout of African American opinions on the mistreatment that the Haitian refugees were receiving. From the African American-owned newspapers curated as the basis of the primary sources, sufficient material was found to answer key research questions such as: what were the perspectives, thoughts, and



opinions of African Americans regarding the treatment of Haitian refugees? To what extent were African Americans engaged in solidarity with the Haitian refugees? What solidarity tactics did African Americans employ? Why did African Americans feel compelled to advocate for and stand in solidarity with the incoming Haitian refugees? Lastly, how did the anti-Blackness that the Haitian refugees were experiencing influence or impact how African Americans viewed their own status within the country only a few years after the Civil Rights Movement?

Much has been written about the United States government's treatment toward the inrush of Haitian immigrants to Florida, especially comparing the uniquely dreadful treatment Haitians received to that of the Cuban immigrants, who were generally welcomed and accepted into the American fabric by the state.<sup>4</sup> Scholarship on advocacy for Haitian refugees focuses mostly on the legal channels that lawyers representing their Haitian clients undertook as a measure of trying to repeal this treatment.<sup>5</sup> Relatively little has been written, however, explaining and showcasing African Americans' understanding of, solidarity with, and advocacy for detained Haitian refugees.

In the early 1980s, social scientists and legal scholars detailed the many push factors that caused tens of thousands of Haitians to flee Haiti and into the arms of the United States, as well as the United States' response to this stream of migration. For example, Thomas D. Boswell's "In the Eyes of the Storm: The Context of Haitian Migration to Miami, Florida" and Claire P. Gutekurnt's "Interdiction of Haitian Migrants on the High Seas: A Legal and Policy Analysis"

---

<sup>4</sup> Jana K. Lipman, "The Fish trusts the Water, and It is in the Water that it is Cooked: The Caribbean Origins of the Krome Detention Center" *Radical History Review* 1 (2013); Evelyn Cartwright, "The Plight of Haitian Refugees in South Florida" *Journal of Haitian Studies*, 12 no. 2 (October 2006); Christopher Mitchell, "U.S. Policy toward Boat People, 1972-93" *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 534 (1994); Loescher and Scanlan, "Human Rights, U.S. Foreign Policy and Haitian Refugees" *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 26, no. 3 (1984).

<sup>5</sup> Brandt Goldstein, *Storming the Court: How a Band of Law Students Fought the President- and Won*, (New York, Scribner, 2006).

provided both historical background and legal policy analysis that not only contributed greater context as to why so many were escaping Haiti but the United States response.<sup>6</sup> Gutekunst explains in great detail how the interdiction policy exploited the ambiguity of the definition of a refugee within domestic and international law asserting that admission into a country is a right rather than a privilege. This alteration of the definition of a refugee left the Haitian immigrants who were coming to the United States in a vulnerable position, as it gave the United States the justification of not having to treat the Haitian immigrants as refugees and therefore picking who they allow in.<sup>7</sup>

Recently, there has been an increase in scholarship committed to highlighting another side of resistance from the Haitian refugees that goes beyond the legal system and focuses on the detention centers as the nucleus of resistance movements.<sup>8</sup> Carl Linsdkoog's, *Detain and Punish: Haitian Refugees and the Rise of the Largest Immigration Detention Center* draws from and further expands both Boswell's and Gutekunst's earlier points. Linsdkoog argues that to tell the full and accurate story of immigration detention in the United States, Haitian immigrants' experiences must be at the focal point of the story. To substantiate and support his argument, Linsdkoog builds on Gutekunst's previous work of legal analysis that specifically documents either changed or new laws/policies enacted to ensure Haitian deterrence. While Gutekunst focuses on interdiction and Linsdkoog on the rise/use of detention centers as weapons of deterrence, Linsdkoog also makes it a point to showcase the strategies of resistance that took

---

<sup>6</sup> Thomas D. Boswell, "In the Eyes of the Storm: The Context of Haitian Migration to Miami, Florida" *Southeastern Geographer* 23, no.2 (November 1983): 57-77; Claire P.Gutekunst, "Interdiction of Haitian Migrants on the High Seas: A Legal and Policy Analysis" *Yale Journal of International Law* 151 no. 10 (1984): 1-34.

<sup>7</sup> Gutekunst, "Interdiction of Migrants on the High Seas," 151.

<sup>8</sup> Carl Linsdkoog, *Detain and Punish: Haitian Refugees and the Rise of the Largest Immigration Detention Center* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2018); Kristina Shull, *Detention Empire: Reagan's War on Immigrants and the Seeds of Resistance* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press Chapel Hill, 2022); A. Naomi Paik, *Rightlessness: Testimony and Redress in U.S. Prison Camps since World War Two* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, 2016).

place within the walls of the various detention centers. Kristina Shull is another scholar who has specifically focused on the different ways that the detained Haitian refugees resisted their unequal treatment. Shull's 2022 book, *Detention Empire: Reagan's War on Immigrants and the Seeds of Resistance* examines the causes for and the types of resistance methods utilized by the detainees. By incorporating first-person and eye-witness accounts coupled with several newspaper articles, Shull lays out the deplorable/inhumane conditions that were common inside the detention centers and the actions, either individual or collective, that arose as a response to combat this unequal treatment.

Scholars Elizabeth McCormick and Jana K. Lipman have also written extensively about the importance of detention centers as they were sites entrenched in violence, meant to store/hoard thousands of refugees as a tool of deterrence, and echoed the larger conversation of how the United States responded to Haitian immigration.<sup>9</sup> Jana K. Lipman's article, "The Fish Trusts the Water, and it is in the Water that it Is Cooked: The Caribbean Origins of the Krome Detention Center" focuses on the infamous Krome Detention Center located in Miami. Lipman not only highlights the horrific conditions that the refugees were forced to live in, but analyzes the vastly different treatment that the Haitians received compared to Cuban immigrants. In McCormick's article, "HIV-Infected Haitian Refugees: An Argument Against Exclusion," McCormick brings in official CDC statements that falsely claimed Haitians as being one of the four groups with a high risk of both contracting and transmitting AIDS during the mid-1980s. By bringing in and providing this background information, McCormick issues greater clarity of the

---

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth McCormick, "HIV-Infected Haitian Refugees: An Argument Against Exclusion" *Georgetown Immigration Law Review* 7, no. 1 (1993); Lipman, "The Caribbean Origins of the Krome Detention Center," 118; Jana Evans Braziel, "Haiti, Guantánamo, and the 'One Indispensable Nation: U.S. Imperialism, Apparent States' and Postcolonial Problematics of Sovereignty" *Cultural Critique* 1, no. 64 (September 2006).

ignorance surrounding AIDS during the late twentieth century which resulted in HIV-positive Haitians being forced to stay in separate/isolated detention centers due to fear of transmission.<sup>10</sup>

The recognition of the exceedingly different treatment between Haitian and Cuban immigrants such as the welcoming and assimilation of Cuban refugees was a concern raised frequently by both Haitian asylum seekers and their advocates, which has then been echoed and analyzed deeply by several scholars.<sup>11</sup> In Evelyn Cartwright's "The Plight of Haitian Refugees in South Florida" article, she expands on this idea perpetuated by the American government that those fleeing from communist or left countries were legitimate refugees as opposed to citizens escaping democratic nations or nations close to the United States. This contrast between refugees and economic migrants, especially regarding Haitians and Cubans, has been explored and written about thoroughly by scholars like Christopher Mitchell in "U.S. Policy toward Boat People, 1972-93" and Loescher and Scanlan in "Human Rights, U.S. Foreign Policy and Haitian Refugees." Continuing to dissect the distinction the U.S. applied to Haitian and Cuban immigrants between refugees and economic migrants, Cartwright includes first-person narratives from Haitian asylum applicants. They shared in great detail the levels of violence and persecution that they fled in Haiti and would be awaiting them if repatriated. These first-person testimonies dispel the myth that the American government broadly asserted accusing Haitian refugees of being solely economic migrants infiltrating the United States out of economic pursuit rather than safety and desperation.

---

<sup>10</sup> For additional information on HIV-positive Haitian refugees being deliberately separated in detention centers, see Karma R. Chavez, "ACT UP, Haitian Migrants, and Alternative Memories of HIV/AIDS" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98, no. 1 (February 2012); Rebecca Kidder, "Administrative Discretion Gone Awry: The Reintroduction of the Public Charge for Exclusion for HIV-Positive Haitian Refugees and Asylees" *The Yale Law Journal* 106, no. 2 (1996)

<sup>11</sup> Cartwright, "The Plight of Haitian Refugees" 114; Mitchell, "U.S. Policy toward Boat People," 74; Loescher and Scanlan, "Human Rights, U.S. Foreign Policy and Haitian Refugees" *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 26, no. 3 (1984).

While the experiences of Haitian asylum seekers in the late twentieth century have been increasingly well documented, scholarship on African American perspectives toward these refugees is shockingly understudied. The research dealing with African American attitudes and thoughts concerning immigration tend to either focus on African American relationships with non-Black immigrants (Asian, Latinx, European), center on the early twentieth century, or completely leave out African American thoughts and perspectives.<sup>12</sup> Scholars Jeff Diamond and Niambi Michele Carter both touch on this in their respective works, “African American Attitudes Toward United States Immigration Policy” and *American While Black: African-Americans, Immigration, and the Limits of Citizenship*, and attempt to fill in the gap of missing scholarly work.<sup>13</sup> Seeking to uncover African American attitudes regarding the major waves of non-Black immigration and the various restrictionist policies that ensued, Diamond found that African Americans did not engage in or perpetuate harmful nativist behavior, but were still wary of immigration because racism paired with their weak socio-economic status allowed them to be continuously overlooked and dismissed, especially in the economic sector. Carter echoes a similar sentiment in her writing by contending that African Americans respond to the “immigration problem” by critiquing white supremacy that operates by excluding Black people through the exploitation of other ethnic groups rather than simply being anti-immigrant. Unlike Diamond, Carter incorporates data from surveys conducted to substantiate her claim as well as make it more relevant today. Both Diamond and Carter use immigration as a lens to not only demonstrate African American thoughts about immigration but also as a way of examining how

---

<sup>12</sup> Violet Showers Johnson, “When Blackness Stings: African and Afro-Caribbean Immigrants, Race, and Racism in Late Twentieth Century” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 36, no. 1 (2016)

<sup>13</sup> Jeff Diamond, “African American Attitudes Toward United States Immigration Policy” *The International Migration Review* 32, no. 2 (Summer 1998); Niambi Michele Carter, *American While Black: African-Americans, Immigration, and the Limits of Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

African Americans saw themselves within both the racial hierarchy and political landscape of America.

Although scholars like Diamond and Carter have worked to close the gap of missing research and scholarship regarding African American thoughts and perspectives on immigration, both of their respective works are limited as they deal with non-Black immigrants. Monika Gosin's 2019 book, *The Racial Politics of Division: Interethnic Struggles for Legitimacy in Multicultural Miami*,<sup>14</sup> centers both African Americans and Afro-Cubans within the landscape of late twentieth century Miami. Attempting to deconstruct antagonistic discourses perpetuated in Miami media that pitted African Americans against white and Black Cubans, Gosin brings in editorials from the local African American and Cuban press that negate this narrative. In the midst of re-shaping and adding nuance to this conflict, Gosin also ties in the discriminatory treatment felt by the tens of thousands of Haitians entering Florida, including the multilayered perspectives from Black Floridians, who often critiqued America's unequal acceptance of the Cubans versus the Haitians. Coming to similar points as Diamond and Carter, Gosin argues that dominant race-making ideologies from the white establishment that determined worthy citizenship and belonging shaped inter-minority conflict.

My thesis will detail African Americans' outside of Florida's opinions and perspectives on both the arrival of Haitian refugees and the anti-Black reaction they received from the American government, a detailed explanation of why many African Americans felt compelled to stand in solidarity with Haitian refugees, and their solidarity methods. Using the Black press to tell this history adds much-needed nuance to not only the field of immigration history but overall

---

<sup>14</sup> Monika Gosin, *The Racial Politics of Division: Interethnic Struggles For Legitimacy In Multicultural Miami*, (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2019).

African American Studies as well and allows the story of the Haitian refugees' experience from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s to be told in a greater and more complex way.

The first chapter focuses on the waves of Haitian migration to the United States as a consequence of the Duvalier regimes and the violent overthrow of democratically elected President Aristide. The second half of the chapter details the specific type of response and methods the American government unleashed on the Haitian boat people as a means of deterrence. The second chapter recalls the various critiques African Americans had for both the American government and presidents regarding the discrimination against Haitian refugees. Through the lens of the Black press, I outline the reasons why many African Americans felt obligated to fight for and with the Haitian refugees. The third and final chapter centers around the solidarity methods chosen by African Americans which demonstrated their unwavering commitment to aiding their Haitian siblings as well as an analysis of how these tactics changed over time.

In my thesis, I do not focus on Haitian immigration to the United States outside of the defined mid-1970s to the late 1990s. This period of twenty-odd years is when the chunk of Haitian immigration to the United States occurred and where African American solidarity with Haitian refugees is therefore most noticeable. The potential limits of using African American-owned newspapers/editorials to detail African-American views about the Haitian refugees and their treatment is that African Americans, similar to any other group, are not a monolith, and therefore not every African American will harbor the same beliefs. Using African-American-owned newspapers is a relatively small sample size of African American opinions that would likely have some class bias, as some people didn't read the newspaper or utilized different outlets to express their opinions.

This thesis represents an effort to understand the reasons why African Americans chose to stand in solidarity with the mistreated Haitians and counteract the longstanding notion that African Americans mirrored nativist sentiments similar to white Americans. Even though there has been recent scholarship dedicated to addressing African American attitudes and perspectives toward immigration, the scholarship is still severely limited as it mainly focuses on African American perspectives and relationships with non-Black immigrants. By intentionally centering African American thoughts and opinions regarding a Black immigrant group like the Haitian refugees, I am filling in a gap within scholarship that neglects both the African American and Black immigrant perspective and experience within African American and immigration history. Telling this overlooked history of African American understanding, empathy, and solidarity with Haitian refugees against anti-Black discriminatory policies can serve as a shining example of what true solidarity looks like, as well as a template for how to move forward.



## Chapter 1

Haitian-American novelist and short-story writer, Edwidge Danticat, recalled the popular Haitian Creole phrase *lòt bò dlo* (the other side of the water) and detailed its meaning while serving as a guest on a 2020 podcast series.<sup>15</sup> For Haitians, this phrase represents those who have traveled and crossed the physical waters en route to another country. Like Danticat's family, tens of thousands of Haitians crowded onto unstable vessels, many ventured out on the journey alone, and others accompanied by families, sailed into the belly of the American empire. Running away from the insurmountable violence that engulfed the country, these Haitian asylum seekers were hopeful that they would be embraced by America's welcoming hands. Unfortunately, the overwhelming majority of these asylum-seekers were barred from entry, as the United States refused to recognize a large number of Haitians as refugees, and devised extreme strategies to exclude them from entering the country.

Contrary to popular belief, Haitian migration to the United States did not begin in the late twentieth century, as some Haitians migrated in 1809, shortly after they successfully broke free from their chains, overthrew their masters, and established the first free Black republic in the West.<sup>16</sup> Within the context of mass Haitian migration to the United States during the late twentieth century, tens of thousands of Haitians were fleeing the corrupt Duvalier regimes and the violence that ensued after the Aristide coup. Rising to power through the 1957 election in Haiti, President François "Papa Doc" Duvalier swiftly changed his political stance from one that promoted Negritude (a form of Black Nationalism) which emphasized the color issue- a general

---

<sup>15</sup> Ellie Happel, "Reflections, with Edwidge Danticat," interview by Ellie Happel, *The Other Side of the Water: Immigration and the Promise of Racial Justice*, RES Media, September 22, 2020, audio, 1:20, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-other-side-of-the-water-immigration/id1531173625>.

<sup>16</sup> Malissa Lennox, "Refugees, Racism, and Reparations: A Critique of the United States' Haitian Immigration Policy" *Stanford Law Review* 45, no. 3 (Feb 1993): 691, <https://www-jstor-org.sunyoldwestbury.idm.oclc.org/stable/1229006>.

coincidence between color and class since colonial times,<sup>17</sup> to one that sustained itself on self-promoting propaganda and the silence of all opposition. Wary of being ousted in a military coup, a fate that overcame his predecessor, Colonel Paul Magloire, President Duvalier established a secret police force called the Milice Volontaire de la Sécurité Nationale (national security volunteer militia), popularly known as the Tonton Macoutes, to protect his status and position. This secret police force went after all potential threats to Duvalier's rule, which included intellectuals, the church, trade unions, the United States embassy, and even critics within his party.<sup>18</sup> Duvalier's use of violence and terror to consolidate his power coupled with declaring himself president for life in 1964, sent key political rivals and other members of the Haitian elite into exile.<sup>19</sup> President François Duvalier's grip on the country remained tightly fastened, up until his death, which allowed him the opportunity to pass down the powers of the presidency to his teenage son.

Nineteen-year-old Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier was handed and assumed the role of Haiti's next president after the death of his father in 1971. Even though he promised a more liberal society, Baby Doc's fifteen-year-long rule mirrored that of his fathers, as popular discontent festered and arose as a result of drastic cuts in agricultural production, food shortages, and droughts that swept the country.<sup>20</sup> The reorientation of Haiti's economy at the hands of Jean-Claude Duvalier resulted in the mass displacement of Haitian peasants and overall increased misery among Haiti's working class and poor.<sup>21</sup> While both father and son caused rampant instability throughout the island, larger numbers of poor Haitians left under Baby Doc's rule, by

---

<sup>17</sup> David Nicholls, "Haiti: The Rise and Fall of Duvalierism" *Third World Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (1986): 1239-1240, <https://www-jstor-org.sunyoldwestbury.idm.oclc.org/stable/3991713>.

<sup>18</sup> Nicholls, "Haiti," 1240.

<sup>19</sup> Lindskoog, *Detain and Punish*, 17.

<sup>20</sup> Lindskoog, *Detain and Punish*, 14-15.

<sup>21</sup> Lindskoog, *Detain and Punish*, 14-15.

taking to the high seas in rickety boats.<sup>22</sup> Earning the title “boat people,” approximately 50,000 Haitians attempted to gain asylum in the United States by 1980 alone,<sup>23</sup> in which they were met with insidious blockades from the place they were begging for shelter.

As Llana Barber termed it, the construction of the nativist state<sup>24</sup> is built upon efforts to manage human mobility across national borders, to police those thought of as foreign within the nation, and to use the threat of unformidable borders and undesirable others to consolidate political power.<sup>25</sup> As tens of thousands of poor and Black Haitians washed up on Florida’s shores, the United States adamantly refused to recognize and grant Haitians asylum and devised extreme tactics to deny them access to entering the country. These extreme tactics included accelerated deportation, detention, and interdiction, which served to bring about the blanket denial and deterrence of Haitian asylum seekers.<sup>26</sup> In 1978 the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) engaged in an accelerated deportation program known as the “Haitian Program” to speed up the process and denial of thousands of Haitian asylum cases. Serving as a metaphorical conveyor belt intended to quickly move the Haitian asylum seekers from point A to point B, the INS drastically cut the time of asylum interviews from over an hour to just fifteen minutes<sup>27</sup> and pressured immigration judges to exponentially increase their caseloads from just one case per day to fifty-five.<sup>28</sup> In the reduced allotted time, the Haitian asylum seekers had to quickly make their case for receiving asylum, which was often difficult with the shortened time and lack of help from translators. In addition to cutting the asylum interview time and increasing

---

<sup>22</sup> Lindskoog, *Detain and Punish*, 15.

<sup>23</sup> Lennox, “Refugees, Racism and Reparations,” 700.

<sup>24</sup> Llana Barber, “Anti-Black Racism and the Nativist State” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 42, no. 4 (Summer 2023): 6, <https://doi.org/10.5406/19364695.42.4.01>.

<sup>25</sup> Barber, “Anti-Black Racism,” 6.

<sup>26</sup> Lennox, “Refugees, Racism, and Reparations,” 700.

<sup>27</sup> Lennox, “Refugees, Racism, and Reparations,” 700.

<sup>28</sup> Lennox, “Refugees, Racism, and Reparations,” 700.

immigration judges' caseloads, the INS also scheduled simultaneous hearings involving the same attorneys,<sup>29</sup> which aided in disorienting the attorneys and weakening the Haitian asylum seekers' fight for entrance into the country. The Haitian asylum seekers faced many obstacles trying to gain asylum, as they had to rush to document their harrowing stories in English with no help, barely saw their attorneys, and had their cases seen the same day with fifty-plus other cases just to be handed a pre-made form presenting the denial of their asylum applications.<sup>30</sup>

The Haitian Program received much criticism from the Haitian asylum seekers and their allies. In May of 1979, Haitian asylum seekers collectively mobilized and filed a class action lawsuit against the attorney general and the United States.<sup>31</sup> In the landmark *Haitian Refugee Center v. Civiletti* case, the plaintiffs argued that the Haitian Program violated their constitutional rights by unfairly and illegally prejudging Haitian applications for asylum as well as ignoring evidence of Haitians' legitimate fear of persecution. After presenting substantial first-hand evidence of the Haitian asylum seekers' well-founded fear of being repatriated, Judge King issued his decision on July 2, 1980, in which he sided with the Haitian plaintiffs, stating that how the "INS treated more than 4,000 Haitian plaintiffs violated the Constitution, the immigration statutes, international agreements, INS regulations, and INS operating procedures."<sup>32</sup> In a surprising move, Judge King also highlighted anti-Blackness to be at the crux of the INS' motivation by comparing the different reactions between the large number of Cubans and Haitians, declaring that "the plaintiffs are part of the first substantial flight of black refugees from a repressive regime to this country. All of the plaintiffs are black."<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Lindskoog, *Detain and Punish*, 27.

<sup>30</sup> Lindskoog, *Detain and Punish*, 27.

<sup>31</sup> Lindskoog, *Detain and Punish*, 29.

<sup>32</sup> *Haitian Refugee Center v. Civiletti*, 503 F. Supp. 442 (S.D. Fla. 1980), July 2, 1980, <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/503/442/1467096/>.

<sup>33</sup> *Haitian Refugee Center v. Civiletti*, emphasis in the original.

Judge King agreed and echoed arguments of anti-Blackness raised by Haitian asylum seekers who were arriving at the same time as thousands of Cuban refugees, who received and noticed a completely different reaction. Attempting to explain away this imbalance in treatment, the United States classified the Cubans as political refugees<sup>34</sup> and the Haitians as economic migrants.<sup>35</sup> Christopher Mitchell, who was one of the first to document this discrepancy in treatment, points out that after the Cold War, asylum adjudications were affected by the United States' foreign policy interests.<sup>36</sup> The thousands of Cubans who fled after Fidel Castro established the first communist state in the Western Hemisphere in 1959,<sup>37</sup> were often both white/lighter-skinned and elite landowners who disagreed with Castro's socialist methods, and eventually, their relatives joined them during the second wave of migration.<sup>38</sup> Eager to make a mockery of both Castro and communism and by extension, prop up themselves and democracy, the United States welcomed the flood of Cubans into the fold of American society.<sup>39</sup> Portraying those fleeing Cuba as voting with their feet, Monika Gosin observed that this reward came with unparalleled aid such as automatic legal status with a fast track to citizenship, occupational training, scholarships for higher education, low-interest loans, English-language classes, and hundreds of millions in dollars in aid to establish businesses.<sup>40</sup> While the United States was

---

<sup>34</sup> A person outside of his or her country of nationality who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of nationality because of persecution or well-founded fear persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

<https://www.dhs.gov/ohss/topics/immigration/refugees-asylees->

AFR#:~:text=A%20refugee%20is%20a%20person,social%20group%2C%20or%20political%20opinio

<sup>35</sup> A person who leaves their country of origin purely for economic reasons that are not in any way related to the refugee definition, in order to seek material improvements in their livelihood. [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary/glossary/economic-](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary/glossary/economic-migrant_en#:~:text=Definition(s),material%20improvements%20in%20their%20livelihood.)

migrant\_en#:~:text=Definition(s),material%20improvements%20in%20their%20livelihood.

<sup>36</sup> Mitchell, "U.S. Policy," 72.

<sup>37</sup> Gosin, *The Racial Politics of Division*, 39.

<sup>38</sup> Gosin, *The Racial Politics of Division*, 40.

<sup>39</sup> Barber, "Anti-Black Racism," 33.

<sup>40</sup> Gosin, *The Racial Politics of Division*, 41.

actively helping the large numbers of mainly white/lighter-skinned Cubans positively transition and assimilate to life in America, tens of thousands of Black Haitians were being punished with extreme methods of deterrence.<sup>41</sup>

Refusing to comply with the judge's orders and reform the discriminatory Haitian Program, the Reagan administration developed a plan to side-step the landmark ruling. As Lindskoog notes, Judge King's ruling in *Haitian Refugee Center v. Civiletti* applied only to Haitians in the jurisdiction of the southern district of Florida, and if Haitians seeking asylum could be processed outside that district, they would not enjoy the protection afforded by Judge King's ruling.<sup>42</sup> As a result, the Reagan administration began to forcefully detain Haitian asylum seekers in prison-like facilities throughout the United States and its territories like Florida, New York, Texas, West Virginia, Kentucky, Puerto Rico, and eventually Guantánamo Bay. By keeping Haitian asylum seekers in detention centers beyond United States domestic boundaries, the Reagan administration pushed the refugees into the legal realm of liminality, removed them from networks of support, and beyond the influence of the constitution and courts.<sup>43</sup>

Part of a network of incarceration, these detention centers were overrun with filth, abuse, and oppression, as the refugees were often deprived of the most basic services like adequate healthcare, and food, and in the process were stripped of their humanity. State Department spokesman, Larry Mahoney, spoke to these dreadful conditions at Krome when he first visited the facility in 1980, "I saw women sleeping under blankets so soiled and threadbare I mistook them for contents of vacuum cleaner bags; guards so indifferent to the suffering that they

---

<sup>41</sup> Although there is a great number of Afro-Cubans, those coming to the United States during this period after the Cuban revolution were rarely Afro-Cuban. This welcoming behavior from the United States changed in 1980 with the Mariel Exodus. For more on Afro-Cuban immigrants/immigration, see Gosin, *The Racial Politics of Division*.

<sup>42</sup> Lindskoog, *Detain and Punish*, 31.

<sup>43</sup> Barber, "Anti-Black Racism", 34.

snickered at the helpless; sanitary facilities so squalid that they turned your stomach. Above all, there was the crippling boredom. The people just slept and ate, ate and slept.”<sup>44</sup> As Mahoney recalled the high levels of filth and dehumanization entrenching every square foot of Krome, Haitian refugees also told the world of the conditions they were forced to endure. In an open letter addressed to the public in 1981, those detained at Fort Allen, Puerto Rico detailed the horrors of their conditions and pleaded for their freedom, “For the last few months, we have been imprisoned without knowing what outcome our fates would have. One day around 4 p.m. we were all gathered at the sound of whistles. We spent a day and night awaiting our fate, after having been tagged with a plastic ID bracelet.”<sup>45</sup> Starting the letter, the detained Haitians detailed how in the dark they were about their cases and how they had no knowledge of what was to become of their future. Similar to Mahoney, the detained Haitians spoke to the monotony of their daily routine claiming that their “days are always the same.”<sup>46</sup> Concluding the letter, the detained Haitians shed insight into the conditions of the detention center claiming that that they “sometimes are hungry and cannot eat”<sup>47</sup> because of the less-than-edible conditions of the food apportioned to them.

To further deter and exclude Haitian refugees from reaching and applying for asylum, the United States found another additional solution in interdiction. Coming to an agreement with President Jean-Claude Duvalier on the basis and terms<sup>48</sup>, Ronald Reagan announced the Interdiction policy in September 1981, which allowed the United States Coast Guard to intercept and board Haitian and unflagged vessels to determine if passengers were unauthorized migrants

---

<sup>44</sup> Lindskoog, *Detain and Punish*, 43.

<sup>45</sup> “Haitians: We’ll Kill Ourselves” *New York Times*, Nov. 29, 1981, <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/11/29/opinion/haitians-we-ll-kill-ourselves.html>.

<sup>46</sup> “Haitians, “We’ll Kill Ourselves.”

<sup>47</sup> “Haitians, “We’ll Kill Ourselves.”

<sup>48</sup> Paik, *Rightlessness*, 94.

bound for the United States and repatriated them back to their country of origin.<sup>49</sup> To cover their tracks and comply with international law, the Coast Guard was required to ensure that they were not returning anyone back to Haiti with a legitimate fear of persecution, but in practice, this was not followed through as the interviews conducted by the Coast Guard were painfully insufficient and incomplete.<sup>50</sup> Just nine years after the enactment of the interdiction policy, a 1990 report showed that 21,461 Haitians were intercepted, but only six of them were brought to the United States and allowed to apply for asylum.<sup>51</sup>

In 1991, popular priest and staunch champion of the poor, Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide won the first democratic election in a landslide, earning 67.5% of the Haitian people's vote.<sup>52</sup> Although Haiti's poor viewed Aristide's victory as thrilling and emblematic of long overdue change needed for the island, many of Haiti's elite regarded Aristide and this win with contempt and fear,<sup>53</sup> and less than a year later, Aristide was ousted in a staged military coup d'état that drove him off the island.<sup>54</sup> Understanding that the real source of power came from the people and his supporters, the military and paramilitary forces viciously went after those who supported Aristide, hunting them down, terrorizing, and even murdering thousands.<sup>55</sup> As the violence continued to swell to new heights, the number of those who attempted to reach the United States skyrocketed,<sup>56</sup> and in just seven short months after the coup, more than 34,000 Haitians were stopped and picked up by the Coast Guard.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Barber, "Anti-Black Racism," 36.

<sup>50</sup> Barber, "Anti-Black Racism," 36.

<sup>51</sup> Barber, "Anti-Black Racism," 36.

<sup>52</sup> Lindskoog, *Detain and Punish*, 100.

<sup>53</sup> Lindskoog, *Detain and Punish*, 100.

<sup>54</sup> Lindskoog, *Detain and Punish*, 100.

<sup>55</sup> Barber, "Anti-Black Racism," 36.

<sup>56</sup> Barber, "Anti-Black Racism," 36.

<sup>57</sup> Barber, "Anti-Black Racism," 36.



The Interdiction Policy continued under President Clinton, who first expressed his dissent and disdain for interdiction while running for President, and quickly altered his stance once he secured the role as the forty-second president of the United States.<sup>58</sup> Teaming up with the Bush administration, Clinton and his administration put into place Operation Able Manner in January of 1993.<sup>59</sup> The Operation made trying to flee the insurmountable violence in Haiti virtually impossible, as United States ships and aircraft encircled Haiti, trapping the thousands of Haitians who intended to leave.<sup>60</sup> As Barber noted, this act of extending the United States military didn't just prevent Haitians from coming in but served to ensure that Haitians couldn't get out.<sup>61</sup>

In addition to weaponizing the United States Coast Guards against the battered influx of Aristide supporters, the United States concurrently began warehousing Haitian refugees at Guantánamo Bay. Exploiting the physical location of Guantánamo, the Bush administration argued that because Guantanamo was positioned between the juridical limits of Cuba and the United States, the government was free to use the space however it wanted- this time as a camp unrestrained by United States, Cuban, or international law.<sup>62</sup> By December of 1991, the camp stationed at Guantanamo held thousands of Haitians.

Just as the state was targeting Haitian migration, AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) erupted as both a public health and social crisis.<sup>63</sup> With American patients first exhibiting AIDS symptoms in 1978 and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) falsely identifying Haitians as one of the four groups at risk for contracting and transmitting the disease in 1982,<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Barber, "Anti-Black Racism," 37.

<sup>59</sup> Barber, "Anti-Black Racism," 37.

<sup>60</sup> Barber, "Anti-Black Racism," 37.

<sup>61</sup> Barber, "Anti-Black Racism," 37.

<sup>62</sup> Paik, *Rightlessness*, 96.

<sup>63</sup> Paik, *Rightlessness*, 100.

<sup>64</sup> McCormick, "HIV-Infected Haitian Refugees," 153.

Paik has demonstrated that the state's punitive xenophobia and fear of AIDS carriers intersected when the 1987 bill that prohibited the entry of HIV-positive migrants was passed. Reminiscent of slave auctions where enslaved people were lined up, had every inch of their bodies inspected, and checked for visible illnesses to determine their monetary worth, the Haitian refugees were put through multiple examinations that established their qualifications for asylum. As these invasive medical exams showed, some Haitian refugees were HIV-positive, and therefore exempt from entering the country regardless of whether they met the criteria for political asylum. While Guantánamo Bay held numerous camps for all detained Haitians, those who were HIV-positive and their families were segregated into their own camp, named Camp Bulkley.<sup>65</sup>

What began as a transient midway point to hold refugees as long as their asylum cases were being determined became an enduring operation.<sup>66</sup> Receiving inconsistent information about their cases and whether or not they would be released into the country, the refugees were completely left in the dark regarding their situation. Similar to other detention centers scattered across the country, the conditions were filthy as they were often polluted with human waste, stagnant dirty water, and overflowing garbage cans.<sup>67</sup> The dehumanizing treatment from the government and the camp guards coupled with the horrible conditions led the refugees to understand that their captors saw them as less than human, as prisoners who, because of their minimal status, either did not deserve dignified treatment or were able to survive under inhumane conditions.<sup>68</sup>

Descending from a long line of ancestors who were resilient and were successful in overthrowing their captors, the detained Haitians did not succumb to the subservient position the

---

<sup>65</sup> Paik, *Rightlessness*, 102.

<sup>66</sup> Paik, *Rightlessness*, 104.

<sup>67</sup> Paik, *Rightlessness*, 106.

<sup>68</sup> Paik, *Rightlessness*, 106.

United States intended for them and resisted any way they could. As Carl Lindskoog noted, Haitian resistance began the very moment when United States officials began jailing Haitian asylum seekers in the 1970s,<sup>69</sup> and remained as long as the Haitian asylees' were held captive. Fighting to gain their liberation and to have their voices heard, the detained Haitians' campaign of resistance was multilayered and complex.

When highlighting Haitian resistance to this unequal and inhumane treatment, scholars have argued that it was the use of the legal system that the government and the opponents of the detention regime waged the most important battles over the legality and constitutionality of the detention policy.<sup>70</sup> One side of Haitian resistance that has been given less attention is the more radical methods that detained Haitians engaged in suicides, hunger strikes, and physically rioting against their captors. These drastic resistance methods exemplify the desperation that many of the detained Haitians felt as they believed this was the only way to get their message across. One example of this is the death of 27-year-old Turenne Deville in the spring of 1974 inside a Miami-Dade County jail. Hours before his scheduled deportation, Turenne Deville hanged himself inside the detention facility,<sup>71</sup> as he chose death by his own hand in the United States over dying back home in Haiti. Even though Deville's decision to end his life was an example of reclaiming his agency and being the master of his own fate, it was also an example of what was to become of the thousands of other detained Haitians who faced the horrors of deportation. Aside from individual acts of suicide like Deville's, detained Haitians understood that putting their bodies on the line was the only way to get their concerns heard. Paik makes mention of group suicide at Camp Bulkley noting that within the camp's boundaries, suicide was no longer an individual act

---

<sup>69</sup> Lindskoog, *Detain and Punish*, 4.

<sup>70</sup> Lindskoog, *Detain and Punish*, 73.

<sup>71</sup> Lindskoog, *Detain and Punish*, 20.

of despair when it so clearly emanated from urgent, shared conditions of being imprisoned with no rights.<sup>72</sup>

Detained Haitians continued to put their bodies on the line in ways besides suicide as they often engaged in hunger strikes. While stationed at Guantanamo, the captive Haitians organized a mass hunger strike in January 1993. Deciding to reject all provisions of the camp- its food, shelter, and medical care, the hunger strike soon grew to encompass most men, women, and children.<sup>73</sup> Citing their reasons for the hunger strike, the detained Haitians were frustrated with their long and what seemed like indefinite stay within this limbo and agreed that they “could not live here anymore.”<sup>74</sup>

Tens of thousands of Haitian refugees were once hopeful that the brutality they were fleeing was behind them and that the ideals of American society would be awaiting them upon reaching the American shores. Unfortunately, these Haitian refugees soon realized that through the weaponization of accelerated deportation, detention, and interdiction they would be systematically barred from achieving refuge, have their movements controlled, their families separated, and they would be broken down physically and spiritually.<sup>75</sup> The methods which the United States utilized to try and deter Haitian migration were eerily similar to the anti-Black ways in which American plantations were run during times of chattel slavery. African Americans, who had their own long history of wrestling with and trying to break free of the plantation, documented the unfortunate similarities between the two Black ethnic groups and fought alongside their Haitian siblings.

---

<sup>72</sup> Paik, *Rightlessness*, 133.

<sup>73</sup> Paik, *Rightlessness*, 137.

<sup>74</sup> Paik, *Rightlessness*, 136.

<sup>75</sup> Gutekunst, “Interdiction of Haitian Migrants,” 158.

## Chapter 2

While the detained Haitian refugees put their bodies on the line to resist their mistreatment and shed light on their plight, various groups and activists on the outside heard and paid attention to their desperate pleas for help. African Americans, who had a unique relationship with the United States, recognized an all too familiar strain of anti-Blackness weaponized against them from the American government embedded amidst the treatment the Haitian refugees were receiving and chose to voice and demonstrate their concerns.

Before and after the bloody birth and creation of the United States of America in 1776, African Americans routinely condemned America's hypocrisy in propping itself up to be the *land of the free* while simultaneously engaging in racism, particularly anti-Blackness. Invoking traditional American images like the Statue of Liberty and lyrics such as "Give me your tired, your poor. Your huddled masses yearning to be free," African Americans remained unyielding in their critique, highlighting the disconnect between these democratic symbols and American behavior. No strangers to bearing the brunt of systemic anti-Blackness at the hands of the American government, African Americans recognized similar mistreatment directed toward the thousands of Haitian refugees, which prompted many to share their thoughts and participate in various methods of solidarity which ranged from individual to collective coalitional campaigns.

From its inception in 1971, the Congressional Black Caucus has been committed to using the full force of constitutional power, statutory authority, and financial resources of the Federal government to ensure that African Americans and other marginalized groups have an equal opportunity to achieve the American Dream. Working to fulfill its promises, specific Congressional Black Caucus members like George W. Crockett, John Conyers, Harold

Washington, Robert Kastenmeir, Don Edwards, and Pat Schroeder went on record in 1981 calling the Reagan Administration's handling of the Haitian refugee situation racially biased.<sup>76</sup> The members cited and mentioned the alarmingly high numbers of pending Haitian asylum cases, and argued that this was especially unique because no other nationality or race of refugees/asylees had suffered such systemic and long-term detention in United States history.<sup>77</sup> The Congressional Black Caucus, an organization that prides itself on maneuvering and working within the overarching governmental structure, stood strong on its critique of the racist treatment of Haitian refugees.

Within the same year, African American politician and co-founder of the Congressional Black Caucus, Shirley Chisholm echoed similar sentiments raised and argued by her fellow Congressional Black Caucus representatives. In a 1981 editorial piece published by the *Chicago Metro News* titled, "Haitians Jailed, Cubans Welcomed," Congresswoman Chisholm was quoted extensively condemning the double standard within the American immigration policy. Chisholm maintained that the Haitian refugees committed no crime but simply leaving their homeland due to legitimate fear of persecution and seeking freedom in America.<sup>78</sup> Chisholm made her disbelief clear and accused the United States of racist, double standards; she argued that refugees from Poland, the Soviet Union, or other European countries would never be humiliated in a fashion akin to the treatment of the Haitian refugees.<sup>79</sup> African Americans like Congresswoman Chisholm and other Congressional Black Caucus members who illuminated the racial double standard between Black and white refugees were able to recognize this imbalance in treatment

---

<sup>76</sup> "Black Caucus Members opposes Reagan's Haitian Policies," *Chicago Metro News* (Chicago, IL.), May 29, 1982, ProQuest.

<sup>77</sup> "Black Caucus Members opposes Reagan's Haitian Policies."

<sup>78</sup> "Haitians Jailed, Cubans Welcomed," *Chicago Metro News* (Chicago, IL), Aug. 1, 1981, ProQuest.

<sup>79</sup> "Haitians Jailed, Cubans Welcomed."

due to their own experiences of having the United States prioritize white people and their interests over those of Black citizens. Evidenced by sentiments and feelings shared by Shirley Chisholm, African Americans understood that within the Black-white binary, anti-Blackness and white supremacy rendered them at the bottom of the racial hierarchy, which they regularly critiqued, but in the dynamic between Black and non-Black people of color, African Americans were also critical of the prioritization of non-Black peoples over them.<sup>80</sup>

A decade after Shirley Chisholm and others representing the Congressional Black Caucus criticized the racial double standard of Black and white refugee groups perpetuated by the United States government, African Americans remained highly critical of this double standard, which they argued included both white and non-Black people of color. Seasoned social and political activist, Dr. Ron Daniels addressed the disparity in treatment between Black immigrants attempting to arrive in the United States and non-Black immigrants of color. In a 1991 commentary piece for the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, Daniels spoke directly of the anti-Blackness within the immigration system that aided in the stratified treatment between Black and non-Black immigrants of color by pointing out how the United States had openly taken in and admitted thousands of boat people from Vietnam and Cambodia after the Vietnam War, as well as hundreds of thousands of refugees from Cuba with little question or apprehension.<sup>81</sup> Daniels also juxtaposed the welcoming of tens of thousands of non-Black immigrants of color with the restrictive immigration quotas that he argued plagued Black immigrants the hardest.<sup>82</sup> The admittance of large numbers of non-Black people of color into the fabric of American society has long been a spot of contention for African Americans decades before the Haitian refugees

---

<sup>80</sup> Carter, *American While Black*, 25.

<sup>81</sup> Ron Daniels, "Haitian Refugees to the U.S. Face a Double Standard," *Los Angeles Sentinel* (Los Angeles, CA.), Dec. 5, 1991, ProQuest.

<sup>82</sup> Daniels, "Haitian Refugees to the U.S. Face a Double Standard."

situation. As the 13th Amendment ended chattel slavery in the American South in 1863, African Americans were now legally required to be compensated for their work, but as Jeff Diamond observed, African Americans found themselves stuck within the economic margins as white American employers exploited cheap immigrant labor.<sup>83</sup> African Americans, who were used to being discarded and overlooked even against other people of color, recognized and called out restrictive anti-Haitian immigration policies entrenched in anti-Blackness for plaguing Black immigrants the hardest and victimizing the Haitian people.<sup>84</sup>

In a 1993 commentary piece written for the *Michigan Chronicle*, former Michigan representative and Black Power icon, Ed Vaughn utilized the Black Press to ask his implicitly Black audience whether or not they should be surprised by American presidents abandoning Black people and their cause. Calling out President Clinton directly, Vaughn was critical of Clinton for flipping his stance concerning the plight of the Haitian refugees once he reached the presidency and once again rebuffing the hopes and desires of Black people.<sup>85</sup> In the same year, notable Civil Rights icon, Reverend Jesse Jackson gave a forty-five-minute sermon in which he too highlighted Clinton's hypocrisy. Jackson mentioned how Clinton once condemned his predecessor's stance and treatment of the Haitian refugees, even labeling the repatriation policy a moral disgrace that violated international law,<sup>86</sup> and completely reversed his position and followed in his predecessor's anti-Black footsteps. As Vaughn notes, Clinton's behavior was not abnormal, even going so far as to label it the "American way."<sup>87</sup> The responses from both Black

---

<sup>83</sup> For more information on the stratification of Black people within the economic margins see, Diamonds, "African American Attitudes," Carter, *American While Black*, and Gosin, *The Racial Politics*.

<sup>84</sup> Daniels, "Haitian Refugees to the U.S. Face a Double Standard."

<sup>85</sup> Ed Vaughn, "African Americans, led by Haitian Americans, must free Haiti 'by any means necessary,'" *Michigan Chronicle* (Detroit, MI.), Feb. 3, 1993, ProQuest.

<sup>86</sup> Norris West, "Jackson pleads for change in policy on Haiti: He reminds Clinton of prior sympathy," *The Sun* (Baltimore, MD.), Mar. 1, 1993, ProQuest.

<sup>87</sup> Daniels, "Haitian Refugees to the U.S. Face a Double Standard."



Power and Civil Rights icons, Ed Vaughn and Reverend Jesse Jackson are not only indicative of African Americans holding their elected officials accountable for the promises they made to help the Haitian refugees but of how often the American establishment disregarded the wants and hopes of their Black constituents.

Understanding how the United States attempted to cover its anti-Black footprints through propaganda, African Americans adamantly rejected and pushed back against the “economic migrant” label falsely placed upon the Haitian refugees. African Americans like Dr. Ron Daniels emphasized the decades-long American support and involvement with Haitian dictators like the Duvaliers. Breaking down the propaganda value in accepting those fleeing from what the United States coined the “communist menace,”<sup>88</sup> Daniels explained that because Haiti’s former president-for-life gave lip service to democratic principles,<sup>89</sup> the United States saw no propaganda value in the fight against communism by welcoming in boatloads of Haitians fleeing from a staunch ally and opponent of communism. Geopolitics and anti-Blackness were both weaponized against the Haitian refugees and aided in the refusal to see them as the perfect or ideal refugees. African Americans, who themselves struggled with not fitting the mold of the ideal victim, decided to focus on dispelling the economic migrant label and humanize the Haitian refugees in the process. Even though the American government hoped that accelerated deportation coupled with forced detention and interdiction would serve as a form of deterrence, thousands continued to risk their lives by taking to the high seas and sailing to the United States yearning to be free.<sup>90</sup> Choosing to share details of the intense physical and emotional voyages of refugees and how numerous boats filled with Haitian passengers, ranging in all ages, submitted

---

<sup>88</sup> Daniels, “Haitian Refugees to the U.S. Face a Double Standard.”

<sup>89</sup> Daniels, “Haitian Refugees to the U.S. Face a Double Standard.”

<sup>90</sup> Daniels, “Haitian Refugees to the U.S. Face a Double Standard.”

to the waves and drowned, African Americans painted a picture of the type of violence Haitians were determined to leave behind,<sup>91</sup> which served to dispel the notion that those that were coming were motivated by economic reasons.

Aside from noticing the anti-Black mistreatment directed at the Haitian refugees from the United States, African Americans also criticized mainstream media's silence when it came to reporting the plight of the Haitian refugees. In a 1991 commentary piece written by Chicago journalist Nathaniel Clay, Clay pointed out the unequal coverage of Black and white foreign issues and asserted that mainstream media oversaturated their coverage of anything resembling a crisis in white nations while virtually ignoring actual life and death struggles in the Third World.<sup>92</sup> Whether it was starving Haitian children or thousands of Haitian-Americans and African Americans marching on the nation's capital to protest the racist mistreatment of the Haitian refugees,<sup>93</sup> mainstream media didn't print a word he argued. Answering questions from his Black readers who pondered why Black people were still worrying about specific Black issues being covered by mainstream media, Clay spoke to the power media has in persuading and informing its viewers by invoking racist tropes/examples like Amos n' Andy and the detrimental harm it caused the African American community. Working as a journalist and having a clear understanding of just how mainstream media was also weaponized against African Americans, Clay urged Black people to be critical of mainstream media's sins of omission and commission when it came to the Haitian refugee cause.<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>91</sup> Gaou Guinou Balewa, "Black Refugees Unwelcomed!," *Black New Ark* (Newark, NJ.), Nov. 1, 1973, ProQuest

<sup>92</sup> Nathaniel Clay, "White Media saturates news about Poland," *Chicago Metro News* (Chicago, IL.), Jan. 2, 1982, ProQuest.

<sup>93</sup> Clay, "White Media saturates news about Poland."

<sup>94</sup> Clay, "White Media saturates news about Poland."

There's a common thought that when you're the oppressed group, you know more about the oppressor than they know about themselves. African Americans, who have had a front-row seat to America's specific brand of anti-Blackness for four hundred years, could easily recognize the similar insidious tactics utilized against the Haitian refugees because of their own experiences. In addition to being vocal about their criticism of racist immigration policies, African Americans were equally vocal about the reasons why they supported the Haitian refugees, often citing shared racial trauma and racial pride.

Within the spirit of Pan-Africanism,<sup>95</sup> Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm argued that African Americans and Haitians are essentially one people. While on her fact-finding mission to Haiti in 1981, Chisholm alluded to the TransAtlantic Slave Trade, which uprooted twelve million Africans, and said that the slave ships stopping at different ports<sup>96</sup> was the only difference between the two ethnic groups.<sup>97</sup> To strengthen her argument of close familial ties between the two, Chisholm used words like "cousin" and "sisters and brothers"<sup>98</sup> when discussing the bond between African Americans and Haitians. Similar to Chisholm, many African Americans noted the familial relationship between segments of the African Diaspora and even argued that African Americans needed to assume the role of "big brother" with the Haitians to help aid their less fortunate brothers and sisters.<sup>99</sup> As evidenced by words like "big brother" used by some African Americans to describe their relationship with the Haitian refugees, it is clear that there were remnants of a problematic hierarchy between the two Black ethnic groups. This patronizing

---

<sup>95</sup> Pan-Africanism is a general term for various movements in Africa that have as their common goal the unity of Africans and the elimination of colonialism and white supremacy from the continent.

<https://research.dom.edu/AfricanAmericanStudies/panafricanism>

<sup>96</sup> "Chisholm begins fact-finding mission," *Chicago Metro News* (Chicago, IL.), Jul. 16, 1993, ProQuest.

<sup>97</sup> "Chisholm begins fact-finding mission in Haiti."

<sup>98</sup> "Chisholm begins fact-finding mission in Haiti."

<sup>99</sup> Nathaniel Clay, "Black Americans Have a Duty to Aid Haitians," *Chicago Metro News* (Chicago, IL.), November 14, 1981, ProQuest.

mindset was no doubt largely formulated from African Americans' citizenship, which they viewed gave them a superior position, even amongst other Black people.

Haitians also jumped into the conversation of African Americans and Haitians being one people, voicing their agreement with African Americans via the Black Press. In a 1994 opinion piece for *Essence* magazine, Haitian-American author, Edwidge Danticat, reminded *Essence's* audience of the long relationship between African Americans and Haitians. Danticat begins the piece by echoing sentiments made by African American Reverend Jesse Jackson and applauding him for being aware that he is only one boat stop away from being Haitian.<sup>100</sup> If his grandparents, like many African Americans, had been unloaded in the Caribbean as opposed to North America, the Haitian tragedy would have been theirs too.<sup>101</sup> In addition to this hypothetical, Danticat demonstrated that African Americans and Haitians are literal family by reminding many that after the Haitian revolution, many enslaved people in the United States fled their plantations and began free lives in the first Black republic and blended into the fabric of the country.<sup>102</sup> Similar to Shirley Chisholm and other African Americans, Edwidge Danticat, and other Haitian-Americans explained the horrors of the Haitian situation as an African American catastrophe.<sup>103</sup> Prominent African American magazines like *Essence* choosing to highlight and publish Danticat and other Haitian-American thoughts is emblematic of African Americans allyship.

In a well-thought-out commentary piece published in 1982, Frank Harris III attempted to garner greater African American support for the Haitian refugee cause by explaining that Dred Scott lived among the thousands of Haitian refugees who had come to the American shores

---

<sup>100</sup> Edwidge Danticat, "Let my people stay," *Essence*, Jul. 1994, ProQuest.

<sup>101</sup> Danticat, "Let my people stay."

<sup>102</sup> Danticat, "Let my people stay."

<sup>103</sup> Danticat, "Let my people stay."

seeking asylum.<sup>104</sup> Providing background information to his audience on the history and significance of Dred Scott, Harris described him as an enslaved Black man who fled the repressive system of chattel slavery in the South for sanctuary in the North.<sup>105</sup> In 1847, Scott sued for both his and his wife's freedom on the basis that they were free because of their long-term residence in a free state where slavery was prohibited. After an eleven-year-long legal battle, the Supreme Court ruled in a 7-2 majority on the side of Scott's former enslaver, stating that people of African descent were not citizens of the United States and therefore, could not expect any protections from the Federal government or the courts.<sup>106</sup> Harris compared this forced restriction of Black movement in the United States through the weaponization of the Supreme Court decision about the Interdiction Program inflicted upon the Haitian refugees. Drawing parallels to the forced return of Dred Scott to the horrors of the South and the halting and repatriation of Haitian boats bound for the United States, Harris emphasized the shared trauma between the two groups. He highlighted that there has never been an era of open borders for all Black people within the United States.

In addition to explaining the shared trauma of the past, African Americans also spoke to the shared current issues between them and the Haitian refugees. In a commentary piece, African American activist, author, and journalist Benjamin Chavis Jr. compared the use of state-sanctioned violence against the incoming Haitian refugees to the high levels of police brutality inflicted upon the African American community. Chavis compared the 1991 vicious beating of Rodney King by Los Angeles police officers to the unjust beatings of Haitians at sea by persons

---

<sup>104</sup> Frank Harris, "Dred Scott and the Haitian refugees: Sacrificial lambs in the name of freedom," *New York Amsterdam News* (New York, NY), Jul. 31, 1982, ProQuest.

<sup>105</sup> Harris, "Dred Scott and the Haitian refugees: Sacrificial lambs in the name of freedom."

<sup>106</sup> Harris, "Dred Scott and the Haitian refugees: Sacrificial lambs in the name of freedom."

in uniforms with guns and nightsticks.<sup>107</sup> The physical brutality of both the restriction of movement and physical abuse by the American government plainly laid out by Harris and Chavis were attempts made to demonstrate the reasons why African Americans needed to support and stand in solidarity with their Haitian siblings.

Although many African Americans easily recognized the similarities in their treatment and struggles with the Haitian refugees and therefore supported their fight for liberation, some African Americans still questioned why they needed to concern themselves with the struggles of another group – struggles that they felt did not directly affect them. Similar to any other group of people, the African American community has always been divided when it came to racial and political matters, and this continued with the Haitian refugee crisis. In a 1994 opinion piece, professor James E. Alsbrook begged the question to his readers, should African Americans support the Haitian refugee cause? Although Alsbrook made his personal stance clear and supported the Haitian refugees' right to asylum and protection within the United States, he demonstrated and portrayed in great detail the points raised by some African Americans who disagreed. Many who opposed the right to asylum argued that if let into the country, Haitian refugees would be a hindrance to the advancement and progress of African Americans.<sup>108</sup> Only a generation or two removed from the Civil Rights Era, it was common for African Americans to look at America's stance on immigration as a proxy for where the country might've stood regarding their rights.<sup>109</sup> Citing high illiteracy rates and cultural practices that they deemed backward, some African Americans worried that the Haitian refugees' presence would reinforce

---

<sup>107</sup> Benjamin Chavis, "The 'Rescued' Haitians Share the Treatment of Rodney King," *Philadelphia Tribune* (Philadelphia, PA.), Jun. 26, 1992, ProQuest.

<sup>108</sup> James Alsbrook, "Should Pro-Black Activist Risk Life to Help Haitians?," *Los Angeles Sentinel* (Los Angeles, CA.), May 5, 1994, ProQuest.

<sup>109</sup> Carter, *American While Black: African-Americans, Immigration, and the Limits of Citizenship*, 4.

negative stereotypes of African Americans and increase racial conflict and prejudice.<sup>110</sup>

Perpetuating anti-Black talking points that have been historically hurled against them as an attempt to distance themselves from the Haitian refugees some African Americans engaged in respectability politics.<sup>111</sup> Unfortunately, these sentiments show that it was easier for some African Americans to be critical of immigrants and express less than flattering attitudes toward them rather than to mount opposition to white institutions.

These harsh opinions harbored by some African Americans did not go over well with the larger African American community. Many African American allies called out the smaller subsection of African Americans who either overlooked or opposed the Haitian refugee cause for only caring and paying attention to domestic issues that affected them directly and urged those to expand their circle of concern.<sup>112</sup> By the early 1990s, African Americans also called out popular African Americans for their non-support as the Haitian refugee crisis continued to persist. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas had been regularly criticized by the African American community for his political alliances and was once again called out for continuing to follow George Bush's approach.<sup>113</sup> Having numerous chances to do the right thing and show racial solidarity, Thomas continuously sided with his colleagues in upholding the administration's racist policy against the Haitian refugees.<sup>114</sup> Rightfully upset with Thomas and the rest of the court's decision, the attorney at the Center for the Constitutional Rights who represented

---

<sup>110</sup> Alsbrook, "Should Pro-Black Activist Risk Life to Help Haitians?"

<sup>111</sup> A set of beliefs holding that conformity to prescribed mainstream standards of appearance and behavior will protect a person who is part of a marginalized group, especially a Black person from prejudice or systemic injustices. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/respectability-politics>

<sup>112</sup> Von Lipsey, "It is Time For Black Americans To Expand Concerns," *Philadelphia Tribune* (Philadelphia, PA.), Oct. 18, 1994, ProQuest.

<sup>113</sup> Zamgba Browne, "Clarence Thomas votes to uphold racist Haitian policy," *New York Amsterdam News* (New York, NY.), Aug. 18, 1992, ProQuest.

<sup>114</sup> Browne, "Clarence Thomas votes to uphold racist Haitian policy."

countless of Haitian refugees, Michael Ratner, accused Clarence Thomas of being as inhumane as the rest of the white Americans on the bench.<sup>115</sup>

African Americans listed and explained the countless reasons why more African Americans needed to fight alongside the Haitian refugees, emphasizing exactly how racist and anti-Black policies like interdiction and detention were, and explaining that these blatant acts of racism should fill all Black people with revulsion.<sup>116</sup> African Americans also made it a point to mention that the Haitian refugee plight is not only a Black or race issue but a humanitarian issue as well. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in particular, emphasized the idea that the problems of the Haitian refugees were a problem, for all, regardless of race. The director of the organization at the time, Dr. Benjamin Hooks, was quoted saying that an injustice denied to any person of color is a justice denied to all.<sup>117</sup> Monumental African American groups and organizations like the NAACP birthed out of the Jim Crow and Civil Rights Era, had spent numerous decades struggling to ensure that African Americans were fully protected and properly treated under American law. This long fight to ensure that African Americans received and reaped the full benefits of citizenship under American law was not solely an attempt at improving the lives of all African Americans, but it was also an attempt of trying to hold the United States accountable to live up to its self-proclaimed ideals. For this exact reason, Dr. Benjamin Hooks and other African Americans frequently spoke about the hypocritical behavior that the United States exhibited regarding forbidding the entry of Haitian refugees and how American law clearly stated that people seeking refuge in the United States are to be given hearings to determine their claims for political asylum, not immediately repatriated

---

<sup>115</sup> Browne, "Clarence Thomas votes to uphold racist Haitian policy."

<sup>116</sup> Nathaniel Clay, "Black Americans Have A Duty to Aid Haitians"

<sup>117</sup> Nathaniel Clay, "Black Americans Have A Duty to Aid Haitians."



back to their home country without due process. Many African Americans understood and noted that attempting to hold America's feet to the fire of accountability may come across as moralistic, idealistic, and even naive but they firmly wanted and called on this country to live up to its tradition of supporting refugees, regardless of race.<sup>118</sup>

After bearing the brunt of America's anti-Black racism for centuries, African Americans were able to recognize the uncanny similarities between their mistreatment and within the tactics America utilized to malign and discriminate against the tens of thousands of Black Haitians. Using the powers of the Black press, African Americans criticized these discriminatory policies, documented their many reasons for supporting the Haitian refugees, and even invoked hurtful historic memories of African American oppression that mirrored anti-Haitian treatment as an effort to garner larger African American support.

---

<sup>118</sup> Balewa, "Black Refugees Unwelcomed."

## Chapter 3

As many African Americans remained unwavering in calling out the American government for its treatment against Haitian refugees, their display of solidarity did not begin and end with words. The Black press offered an in-depth coverage of a timeline of African American solidarity action using an array of tactics that were often inspired by detained Haitians' own resistance methods.

In the fight to champion Haitian refugees' right to receive asylum from the United States, African American allies employed various support tactics that ended up becoming more radical as the issue grew more dire. In 1981, Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm journeyed to the other side of the water to be a part of a fact-finding mission in Haiti. Arriving on the island to answer the country's cries for help and better understand the situation that was causing thousands to flee,<sup>119</sup> Chisholm and other members of the Congressional Black Caucus were concerned with obtaining an on-site evaluation of the situation to more effectively carry out their legislative mission and overall provide better leadership in Congress.<sup>120</sup> Working directly with the people, getting a chance to observe first-hand the social and economic conditions,<sup>121</sup> the Congressional Black Caucus better armed themselves with information to not only help the Haitians who remained in Haiti but also assist the ones that were incarcerated in prisons and detention centers in the United States.

Congressman Walter E. Fauntroy, another co-founder of the Congressional Black Caucus, even proposed for the Congressional Black Caucus to politically put their foot down

---

<sup>119</sup> "Chisholm begins Haitian fact-finding mission."

<sup>120</sup> "Chisholm begins Haitian fact-finding mission."

<sup>121</sup> "Chisholm begins Haitian fact-finding mission"

regarding support for the Haitian refugees which entailed withdrawing support of human rights initiatives by Congressional colleagues who did not support the Caucus' human rights program.<sup>122</sup> Congressman Fauntroy also commissioned and released a General Accounting Office report (GAO) in 1981 that accused the government of failing to refute the evidence of discrimination in the detention policies that affected the Haitian refugees.<sup>123</sup> Within this report, Fauntroy found that Haitian nationals were disproportionately affected by the stricter detention policies, not only in the number of those detained but the length of detention as well.<sup>124</sup> Staying on the topic of detention, the study also stated that these correctional institutions and facilities were unstable for long-term care, citing the severely crowded conditions and lack of basic amenities and services.<sup>125</sup> Fauntroy's advocating for the Congressional Black Caucus to withhold political support and create independent studies shows the divergence in African American methods of support from attempting to work within the overarching system to prioritizing independent action.

Individuals and smaller African American organizations were also heavily involved in showing their support for the Haitian refugees in whatever way they could. The American-African Foundation (AARF) sponsored several relief missions aimed at aiding the influx of Haitian refugees coming into Miami, Florida.<sup>126</sup> In 1980, the American-African Foundation released frequent advertisements within Black publications like the *Atlanta Daily World*, in which they directly asked individuals in the Atlanta area to donate tangible items like food,

---

<sup>122</sup> "Haitian refugee policy ideologically and racially biased," *Chicago Metro News* (Chicago, IL.), Oct. 24, 1981, ProQuest

<sup>123</sup> "GAO report accuses government of discrimination against Haitian refugees" *Chicago Metro News* (Chicago, IL.), Jul. 16, 1983, ProQuest.

<sup>124</sup> "GAO report accuses government of discrimination against Haitian refugees."

<sup>125</sup> "GAO report accuses government of discrimination against Haitian refugees."

<sup>126</sup> "AARF To Aid Haitian Refugees," *Afro-American* (Atlanta, GA), Jun. 29, 1980, ProQuest.

clothing, and shoes.<sup>127</sup> From Atlanta, the foundation then drove the donations to the Haitian Refugee Center in Miami and directly gave to those in need. Aside from donations like food and clothes, African Americans even offered to donate land to the Haitian refugees. Floyd D. McKissick, the developer of Soul City, North Carolina, a Black enclave created in 1969 meant to serve as a community where African Americans could escape racial discrimination and determine their own political and economic desires, wrote directly to President Carter in 1980 suggesting the use of Soul City and other Southern farmlands owned by African Americans for the Haitian refugees.<sup>128</sup> Creating Soul City out of a necessity for African Americans a decade prior, McKissick understood the importance of Black people having a haven outside of the evils of white supremacy, which McKissick related to the mistreatment that the Haitian refugees were experiencing.<sup>129</sup>

As the Haitian refugee situation persisted and grew increasingly more alarming, African Americans' solidarity methods grew louder and more dramatic. Continuing in the tradition of organized demonstrations, African Americans once again called on this popular action to demonstrate their support of the Haitian refugees, organizing protests and marches. Acclaimed Civil Rights leader, Benjamin Hooks of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Randall Robinson, director of the country's preeminent African American foreign policy lobby,<sup>130</sup> managed to gather thousands of supporters from across the country and demonstrated their solidarity in a mass protest in front of the White House. Hooks and Robinson planned the protest in 1992 to showcase support and demand a change in legislation that would protect Haitian refugees, as well as express their disgust for the interdiction program in

---

<sup>127</sup> "AARF To Aid Haitian Refugees."

<sup>128</sup> "Soul City use urged for Haitian refugees," *Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD.), May 10, 1980, ProQuest.

<sup>129</sup> "Soul City use urged for Haitian refugees."

<sup>130</sup> "NAACP and TransAfrica Plan White House Protest," *Oakland Post* (Oakland, Calif.), Sep. 9, 1992, Proquest.

particular, which they deemed blatantly racist.<sup>131</sup> Notable African American political figures, entertainers, and community activists like tennis champion Arthur Ashe and congressional representatives Eleanor Holmes Norton, Kweisi Mfume, and Major Owens<sup>132</sup> were some of the bigger names that joined and participated in this grand demonstration of allyship. Local chapters of the NAACP, like the Pittsburgh chapter, also announced that they would support the national chapter by physically joining the march and adding to the overall number of man-power, after making it clear that they could not stomach any more of the mistreatment the Haitian refugees were facing from the Bush administration.<sup>133</sup> This display of African Americans taking to the streets to voice their concerns and demand better treatment for the Haitian refugees is not only indicative of the severity of the plight but also African Americans' commitment to fight against anti-Blackness and support the Haitian refugees.

Inspired by the hunger strikes utilized by desperate, detained Haitians, some African Americans also engaged in hunger strikes as a way of drawing attention to the cause and forcing the United States' hand. After visiting and witnessing the severity of the conditions in which HIV-positive Haitians were made to endure at Guantánamo Bay, influential activist and Reverend Jesse Jackson decided to participate in a hunger strike of his own in 1993. A week after beginning the strike, Jackson reported to *Gatehouse Media* that he was considering expanding the number of people involved if the HIV and immigration policy that banned both infected and non-infected Haitian refugees from entering the country wasn't reversed.<sup>134</sup> A year later, activist, lawyer, and executive director of TransAfrica, Randall Robinson also engaged in a

---

<sup>131</sup> "NAACP and TransAfrica Plan White House Protest."

<sup>132</sup> "NAACP and TransAfrica Plan White House Protest."

<sup>133</sup> Anthony Carlisle, "Pittsburgh NAACP Joins in Haitian Protest March," *Real Times Inc.* (Pittsburgh, PA.), Aug. 19, 1992, Proquest.

<sup>134</sup> "Jesse Jackson Threatens to Strike," *GateHouse Media* (Austin, TX.), Feb. 16, 1993, ProQuest.

hunger strike of his own with the overall backing and support of the Congressional Black Caucus.<sup>135</sup> Robinson, who was no stranger to physically putting his body on the line in the name of advocating for an important cause,<sup>136</sup> made it clear that he was prepared to starve himself to death for the liberation of the Haitian refugees.<sup>137</sup>

At the seasoned age of 82, renowned activist, dancer, and choreographer, Katherine Dunham also sacrificed and risked her own life to protest the inhumane and immoral treatment of the Haitian refugees.<sup>138</sup> *The New Pittsburgh Courier* profiled Dunham in 1992 while she was hospitalized and closely monitored during her hunger strike. Dunham, who had lived in Haiti on and off for well over fifty years, felt especially affected by the mistreatment of the Haitian refugees and was willing to risk death to wake up the nation and force it to confront the ongoing tragedy of her Haitian brothers and sisters.<sup>139</sup> African Americans like Reverend Jesse Jackson, Randall Robinson, and Katherine Dunham, who intentionally chose to mirror the hunger strike tactics of detained Haitians indicate how the Haitian refugee crisis grew dire and also clearly show African Americans' unfaltering support in solidarity with Haitian refugees.

---

<sup>135</sup> James Wright, "Robinson prepared to die for Haitian refugees," *Afro-American Red Star* (Washington, D.C.), Apr. 16, 1994, ProQuest.

<sup>136</sup> Randall Robinson engaged in a hunger strike years before protest against apartheid- South Africa.

<sup>137</sup> "Robinson prepared to die for Haitian cause."

<sup>138</sup> Benjamin Chavis, "Helping Haitians: The Inspiration of a Katherine Dunham," *New Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh, PA), Mar. 21, 1992, ProQuest.

<sup>139</sup> Chavis, "Helping Haitians: The Inspiration of a Katherine Dunham."

## Conclusion

Tens of thousands of Haitians managed to escape the evils of Duvalierism and the turbulence of the Aristide coup by piling onto makeshift boats and sailing to the United States. From 1978 to 1995, the United States implemented strict and extreme immigration policies to exclude and prevent these asylum seekers from entering the country. With anti-Black policies barring thousands and displacing them into unfit detention centers and nameless Haitian bodies piling atop the ancient bones of those who jumped from the slave ships during the Middle Passage, the descendants of Frederick Douglass supported and fought with the descendants of Dessalines.

By examining the Black press from 1978 to 1995 that centered around African American perspectives and actions, it is clear that the motivating factor for their support of the Haitian refugees is their shared Blackness and racial trauma. From their complicated history with America's anti-Black racism, African Americans were able to identify the racist elements within deterrence policies like Interdiction and forced detention. With a clear understanding that they were both stuck on the same plantation, resisting the trappings of white supremacy and anti-Blackness, African Americans chose to stand shoulder to shoulder in solidarity with their Black siblings who arrived from the other side of the water.

## Bibliography

- “AARF To Aid Haitian Refugees.” *Atlanta Daily World*, Jun. 29, 1980.
- Alsbrook, James. “Should Pro-Black Activist Risk Life to Help Haitians?” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, May 5, 1994.
- Balewa, Guinou Gaou. “Black Refugees Unwelcomed!” *Black New Ark*, Nov. 1, 1973.
- Barber, Llana. “Anti-Black Racism and the Nativist State” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 42, no. 4 (Summer 2023): 5-40. <https://scholarlypublishingcollective.org/uip/jaeh/article-abstract/42/4/5/376253/Anti-Black-Racism-and-the-Nativist-State?redirectedFrom=fulltext>.
- Boswell, Thomas A. “In the Eyes of the Storm: The Context of Haitian Migration to Miami, Florida.” *Southeastern Geographer* 23, no. 2 (November 1983): 57-77.
- Braziel Evans, Jana. “Haiti, Guantánamo, and the ‘One Indispensable Nation’: U.S. Imperialism, ‘Apparent States’ and Postcolonial Problematis of Sovereignty.” *Cultural Critique* 1, no. 64 (September 2006): 127-160.
- Browne, Zamgba. “Clarence Thomas votes to uphold racist Haitian policy.” *New York Amsterdam News*, Aug. 18, 1992.
- Carlisle, Anthony. “Pittsburgh NAACP Joins in Haitian Protest March.” *Real Times Inc.* Aug. 19, 1992.
- Carter, Michele Niambi, *American While Black: African Americans, Immigration, and the Limits of Citizenship*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.
- Cartwright, Evelyn. “The Plight of Haitian Refugees in South Florida.” *Journal of Haitian Studies* 12, no. 2 (October 2006): 112-124.



Chavez, Karma R. "ACT UP, Haitian Migrants and Alternative Memories of HIV/AIDS."

*Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98, no.1 (February 2012): 63-68.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233171527\\_ACT\\_UP\\_haitian\\_migrants\\_and\\_alternative\\_memories\\_of\\_HIVAIDS](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233171527_ACT_UP_haitian_migrants_and_alternative_memories_of_HIVAIDS).

Chavis, Benjamin. "Helping Haitians: The Inspiration of A Katherine Dunham." *New Pittsburgh Courier*, Mar. 21, 1992.

Chavis, Benjamin. "The 'Rescued' Haitians Share the Treatment of Rodney King." *Philadelphia Tribune*, Jun. 26, 1992.

"Chisholm begins fact-finding mission." *Chicago Metro News*, Jul. 16, 1993.

Clay, Nathaniel. "Black Americans Have a Duty to Aid Haitians." *Chicago Metro News*, Nov. 14, 1981.

Clay, Nathaniel. "White Media Saturates news about Poland." *Chicago Metro News*, Jan. 2, 1982.

Daniels, Ron. "Haitian Refugees to the U.S. Face a Double Standard." *Los Angeles Sentinel*, Dec. 5, 1991.

Danticat, Edwidge. "Let my people stay." *Essence*, Jul. 1994.

Diamond, Jeff. "African-American Attitudes toward United States Immigration Policy." *The International Migration Review* 32, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 451-470.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1525/sop.2001.44.4.485?icid=int.sj-abstract.citing-articles.291>.

"GAO Report Accuses Government of Discrimination Against Haitian Refugees." *Chicago Metro News*, Jul. 16, 1983.

Goldstein, Brandt, *Storm the Court: How a Band of Law Students Fought the President- and Won*. New York: Scriber, 2005.

Gosin, Monika. "The Mariel Boatlift, Haitian Migration, and the Revelations of the Black Refugees." *Anthium* 17, no. 2 (December 2021):

<https://anthurium.miami.edu/articles/10.33596/anth.457>

Gosin, Monika. *The Racial Politics of Division: Interethnic Struggles For Legitimacy In Multicultural Miami*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2019.

Gutekunst, Claire P. "Interdiction of Haitian Migrants on the High Seas: A Legal and Policy Analysis." *Yale Journal of International Law* 10, no. 151 (1984): 1-34.

[https://openyls.law.yale.edu/bitstream/handle/20.500.13051/6120/13\\_10YaleJIntlL151\\_1984\\_1985\\_.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y](https://openyls.law.yale.edu/bitstream/handle/20.500.13051/6120/13_10YaleJIntlL151_1984_1985_.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y).

"Haitian Refugee Policy Ideologically and Racially Biased." *Chicago Metro News*, Oct. 24, 1981.

Harris, Frank. "Dred Scott and the Haitian refugees: Sacrificial lambs in the name of freedom." *New York Amsterdam News*, Jul. 31, 1982.

Happel, Ellie. "Reflections, with Edwidge Danticat." Interview by Ellie Happel, *The Other Side of the Water: Immigration and the Promise of Racial Justice*, RES Media, September 22, 2020.

Audio, 30:00. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-other-side-of-the-water-immigration/id1531173625>.

"Jesse Jackson Threatens to Strike." *Gate House Media*, Feb. 16, 1993.

Johnson Showers, Violet. "When Blackness Stings: African and Afro-Caribbean Immigrants, Race, and Racism in Late Twentieth Century." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 36, no. 1 (Fall 2016): 31-62.

Lennox, Malissa. "Refugees, Racism, and Reparations: A Critique of the United States' Haitian Immigration Policy" *Stanford Law Review* 45, no. 3 (1993): 687-724.

Lewis, Anthony R. "Language, Culture, and Power: Haiti under the Duvaliers" *Caribbean Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (2004): 42-51.

Lindskoog, Carl. *Detain and Punish: Haitian Refugees and the Rise of the World's Largest Immigration Detention Center*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, University of Florida Press, 2018.

Lipman, Jana K. "The Fish Trusts the Water, and it is in the Water that it is Cooked: The Caribbean Origins of the Krome Detention Center." *Radical History Review* 1, (2013): 115-141.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273088256\\_The\\_Fish\\_Trusts\\_the\\_Water\\_and\\_It\\_Is\\_in\\_the\\_Water\\_That\\_It\\_Is\\_Cooked\\_The\\_Caribbean\\_Origins\\_of\\_the\\_Krome\\_Detention\\_Center](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273088256_The_Fish_Trusts_the_Water_and_It_Is_in_the_Water_That_It_Is_Cooked_The_Caribbean_Origins_of_the_Krome_Detention_Center).

Lipsey, Von. "It Is Time for Black Americans To Expand Concerns." *Philadelphia Tribune*, Oct. 18, 1994.

Loescher, Gilbert and John Scanlan. "Human Rights, U.S. Foreign Policy and Haitian Refugees." *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 26, no. 3 (August 1984) 1-45.

McCarthy, Jessie. "On Afropessimism" *Los Angeles Review of Books*, July 20, 2020.  
<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/on-afropessimism/>.

McCormick, Elizabeth. "HIV-Infected Haitian Refugees: An Argument Against Exclusion." *Georgetown Immigration Law Review* 7, no. 1 (1993): 149-171.

Mitchell, Christopher. "U.S. Policy toward Haitian Boat People, 1972-93." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 534 (1994): 69-80.

"NAACP And TransAfrica Plan White House Protest." *Oakland Post*, Sep. 9, 1992

Nicholls, David. "Haiti: The Rise and Fall of Duvalierism" *Third World Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (1986): 1239-1252.

Paik Naomi, K. *Rightlessness: Testimony and Redress in U.S. Prison Camps Since World War Two*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press Chapel Hill, 2016.

Shull, Kristina. *Detention Empire: Reagan's War on Immigrants and the Seeds of Resistance*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press Chapel Hill, 2022.

"Soul City use urged for Haitian refugees." *Afro- American*, May 10, 1980.

Vaughn, Ed. "African Americans, led by Haitian Americans must free Haiti 'by any means necessary.'" *Michigan Chronicle*, Feb. 3, 1993.

West, Norris. "Jackson pleads for change in policy on Haiti: He reminds Clinton of prior sympathy." *The Sun*, Mar. 1, 1993.

Wright, James. "Robinson prepared to die for Haitian refugees." *Afro American Red Star*, Apr. 16, 1994.