

2019
223rd Annual Oration

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ORATION: Hope For Haiti – Healing One Patient at a Time

Good Evening, it is truly an honor and a privilege to be here this evening and give the 223 annual WDMS Oration. I would like to acknowledge my colleagues who went on this trip to Haiti with me, especially, Dr. Nandana Kansra, who organized the trip.

No one receives an honor such as this in a vacuum. I would like to thank my colleagues at St. Vincent Hospital, Reliant Medical Group, U Mass, especially those that teach the Healer's Art course and all the volunteers at St. Anne's Free Medical Program and of course my colleagues at the Worcester District Medical Society for their support. And a special thanks to Martha Wright and Melissa Boucher for all their help making this evening special.

In his inaugural address President Kennedy said, "If a free society cannot save the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich."

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and the third poorest in the world. Let's take a look at some statistics:

Key Statistics

	Haiti	US
Total population	9.7 million	310 million
Percent population below the poverty line	80%	12%
Unemployment rate	80%	9.6%
Life expectancy	62.17 yrs	78.24 yrs
Infant mortality rate (deaths per 1,000 live births)	54.02%	6.14%
Primary school enrollment	50%	92
Percentage of population with access to Adequate sanitation (a simple pit latrine)	10%	100%

The island has a uniquely tragic history. Natural disasters, poverty, racial discord and political unrest has plagued the small country throughout history. Today Haiti is a nation in disarray,

unsafe, economically desperate without much clear hope of improvement in the near future. In order to understand Haiti today, you have to know the history.

The island of Hispaniola was discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1492. At that time the island was inhabited by the Arawak Indians. Twenty-five years later the Spanish virtually annihilated the Arawak society as a result of brutal labor practices and disease. The Spanish sailors carried Eurasian infectious diseases. The natives lacked immunity to these new diseases and died in great numbers in epidemics. The first recorded smallpox epidemic in the Americas erupted on Hispaniola in 1507. By 1520, nearly all the original inhabitants were dead and the Spanish imported African slaves in large numbers.

In the early 17th century the French had established a presence in Hispaniola and in 1697 Spain ceded the Western one third of the island to France which later became Haiti. The French colony became one of the wealthiest in the Caribbean based on forestry and sugar-cane, coffee, cotton and indigo and tobacco industry but only through continued heavy importation of African slaves and considerable environmental degradation.

In 1791 a slave rebellion was launched under Jamaican-born Boukman and Haiti's half million slaves revolted. The French achieved some victories but most of them died from Yellow Fever. The revolt lasted until 1804 when Napoleon's army was defeated and slavery was abolished, making Haiti the only nation in the world established as a result of a successful slave revolt.

Fearful of the slaves' revolution, US President Thomas Jefferson refused to recognize the new republic, as did most European nations some countries imposed economic blockades. With limited economic partners and limited international recognition, Haiti plunged into a crippling poverty.

Finally, in 1862 the US granted Haiti diplomatic recognition. In the first decade of the 20th Century Haiti experienced great political instability and was heavily in debt to France, Germany and the United States. Fearing possible foreign intervention President Woodrow Wilson sent U.S. Marines into Haiti just after the outbreak of World War 1 in December of 1914. This began the 20-year occupation of the island by U.S. forces. The occupation greatly improved some of Haiti's infrastructure and centralized power in Port-au-Prince. Roads and bridges were built, many irrigation canals were rehabilitated, hospitals, schools and public buildings were built and drinking water was brought to the main cities. Due to peasant resistance, the US was forced to leave Haiti in 1934.

After a period of Disorder, in September 1957, Dr. Francois Duvalier was elected President. Known as "Papa Doc" because of his paternalistic concern for the poor and sick. He remained in power by enlisting an organization known as *Tontons Macoutes* (Bogeymen) which maintained order by terrorizing the populace and political opponents. Following his death, Francois's 19-year-old son, Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" succeeded him as President for Life until he was ousted in 1986. It is estimated that 40,000 – 60,000 Haitians were killed during the father and son regime. They stole hundreds of millions. Baby doc's wedding cost \$2 million in 1980.

Since the Duvalier Dynasty Haiti entered into a very difficult period which is still ongoing. It is a period of a struggle for control of the country, frequent change in leadership that has resulted in a great deal of political and social instability. This is a struggle between the old Duvalierist trying to keep change coming to the country and the populist, most who are associated with the former President Aristide, looking for reforms. A new force has entered the fray which is not quite in the Duvalierist's camp but opposed to the populist reforms. These are the drug lords and younger army officers.

Since 2004 Haiti has been plagued by storms, mudslides and the devastating earthquake in 2010 that left 300,000 people dead. The country had not yet recovered from earthquake when a massive cholera outbreak was triggered when cholera-infected waste from a United Nations peacekeeping station contaminated the country's main river. October 2016 Hurricane Matthew brought deadly winds and rain that left Haiti with a large amount of damage with a death toll of approximately 3,000.

In July, three days of riots followed a gas price hike revealing how close the nation is to exploding.

August 14, 2018, a Haitian filmmaker in Montreal tweeted a photo of himself blindfolded with a piece of cardboard stating "Where is the Petrocarbide money?"

November 18, 2018 thousand of Haitians took to the streets of Port-au-Prince in a display of public protest that alleges that Haiti's government misappropriated 2 billion dollars from a Venezuela oil company earmarked for reconstruction after the earthquake. At least 60 people were killed by corrupt police officers and armed gangs close to the ruling party, just days before the protest. In addition, several people were killed by an out of control government care that lost a wheel and plowed into a crowd, further inflaming tensions.

"The idea that some lives matter less is at the root of what is wrong with medicine." This is a quote from Paul Farmer, an Infectious Disease physician who has spent most of his professional life in Haiti.

The problems in Haiti can be divided into three areas, social, environmental and Healthcare.

Social Problems: The social problems have intensified since 2004 when President Aristide fled into exile. The country has been plagued by violence and lawlessness. The chaos has hampered basic services and preventive humanitarian assistance from reaching the vulnerable. Haiti faces immense challenges in providing basic levels of nutrition, education and medical support to its population of 10.3 million people. Infrastructure remains inadequate. There is a lack of skilled personnel.

After the 2010 earthquake, foreign donors pledged more than \$10 billion dollars in aid but less than 1% went to the people.

Government revenues remain low. Overseas donations are falling and foreign doctors are pulling out as the world's attention turns to new crises such as the Islamic State militant group

and Ebola. It will be almost impossible for Haiti's government to make up the huge deficit of oversea support with the economy being so weak and political stability being fragile as best.

Corrupt government, violent crimes and civil unrest, gangs, lack of resources for police work and education are all still problems. Children are working as messengers, spies and even soldiers for armed gangs. One of the slums in Port au Prince has been named the most dangerous place on earth. In November 2018 the US State Department issued a level 3 travel advisory for Haiti.

Environmental issues: in Haiti include severe deforestation, over-population, lack of sanitation, natural disasters and food insecurity. A major reason for these environmental issues is that there is not sufficient protection or management of the country's natural resources. Haiti is already experiencing decreased average rainfall, increased average temperature, sea level rise, and depleted coral reefs that will likely lead to the intensification of drought conditions.

Lack of sanitation: Lack of sanitation and sewerage treatment has led to an inadequate supply of safe drinking water. Local drainage systems consist primarily of open channels dug along the roads placing the population at risk for water-borne diseases. Only 46% of the population have access to safe water and 55% have access to "improved sanitation", which consists of a latrine.

Deforestation: Today, 97% of the forests have been cleared for fuel or other use leaving only 3% of the land with any forest cover. Deforestation has led to soil erosion, decreasing agricultural yields and resulting in deadly landslides. The two major reasons for deforestation is that wood is burned as charcoal for energy and the land is needed for agricultural production, which is the base of the Haitian economy. 67% of the land is used for agricultural purposes

Food insecurity: Following the hurricanes of 2012, 70% of residents reported suffering from moderate or severe hunger, and more than two thirds of farmers reported having their crops destroyed and/or losing farm equipment. Haiti depends on small rural farms for their food supply and struggles to transport enough food from the countryside to the village markets and urban centers.

Over population: The increasing population also contributes to the degradation of the environment. The UN estimates an annual 3.9% increase in the population in the urban areas. Low-income individuals are largely concentrated in the cities, especially Port-au-Prince and are subject to poor environmental quality and reduced quality of life. In rural areas, over-population leads to over-cultivation of the land and leads to soil erosion, as nutrients are quickly depleted from the soil.

Natural Disasters: As a small Caribbean island, Haiti is often victim to intense natural disasters such as hurricanes, tropical storms and earthquakes. Flooding and landslides often occur with the tropical storms. The intensity of Atlantic hurricanes has increased substantially since 1980 resulting in loss of life, loss of livestock, destruction of agriculture, soil erosion, a spike in water-borne diseases and decreased food security.

In Haiti, the inability to evacuate leads to a much larger loss of life than a country with good public infrastructure and paved roads would experience in the same situation.

Healthcare:

HIV/AIDS: Haiti has the highest incidence of HIV/AIDS outside of Africa. According to the United Nations there are 7,900 new cases each year and 20 people die every day of AIDS. HIV prevalence is 5.6 % in the 15-49 age range and as high as 14.1% in women who are have a broken union, especially widows.

Tuberculosis: The incidence of TB is more than 10 times as high as the rest of Latin America.

Malaria: At least 30,000 cases are diagnosed per year.

Maternal/Child health: Only 25% of births are attended by a skilled health professional. Life time risk of death for a pregnant woman is 1 in 93. Infant mortality rate is 55 deaths per 1000 live births, compared to 6 per 1,000 live births in other countries.

Malnutrition: Half the population lives on less than \$2.50. Consequently, malnutrition is a significant problem. Half of all Haitian children are undersized as a result of malnutrition.

Poor compliance with immunizations: WHO estimates that only 43% of the children age 12-23 months receives the recommended immunizations and only 22% of children under age 5 are completely immunized.

Mental Health: Voodoo is still practiced, especially among the lower class. Mental health problems are often seen as a result of a spell or hex transmitted by an enemy or a failure to please the spirits.

Cholera: An epidemic started in 2011 in the camp of a UN peacekeeping mission from Nepal contaminated Haiti's main river. This is one of the world's worst outbreaks with 353,033 suspected cases and thousands of deaths.

HOPE FOR HAITI

HIV/AIDS

The number of patients enrolled in treatment hit a record high in 2013. (CDC) Testing for HIV has significantly increased for the general population and in pregnant women. (CDC)

Voluntary counselling and testing have kept mother to child transmission of HIV to under 10%. (UNICEF)

Cholera

Cholera has declined 42% and the number of deaths has halved. (CDC).

Immunizations

UNICEF reports that immunization coverage has improved significantly. Haiti has been free of polio and measles since 2001.

Education

UNICEF has a back to school initiative and encouraged 19,000 children and 350 teachers to return to school.

Nutrition:

Extreme food security is down by 60% but still affects 600,000 people.

Campaign for Change:

More than half the population is under 24 and with social media they are becoming more active in the political future. Thousands of demonstrators took over the streets in the capital city, Port au Prince this month demanding the resignation of President Jovenel Moise who is being blamed for Haiti's economic crisis. Violence has erupted on the small island and has plunged the Western Hemisphere's poorest nation into political chaos.

The struggle for power has not ended. These latest riots are the manifestation of a campaign for change. But for now, it is the possibility of change that has brought a modicum of hope for Haiti.