“Papa Doc” and “Baby Doc” Duvalier

The Indictment:
You are charged with the mistreatment and murder of hundreds of thousands of Haitians

From 1957 to 1986, you ruled Haiti with an iron fist. Under your regime, Haiti was marked by extreme poverty and wealth, as it still is today. Per capita income was only $377 in 1985, while the Duvalier family fortune was estimated to be more than $500 million, most of it obtained through corruption.

Through an elaborate network of Swiss bank accounts and lavish properties you stole desperately needed money from the Haitian people. In 1988, Aristide’s former lawyer, Ira Kurzban, won a landmark suit when a U.S. District Court in Miami found that Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier had “misappropriated more than $504 million from public monies.”

Haitians, of course, are still waiting for their payback—but that was only the beginning of their losses. While dictator of Haiti you incurred about $844 million in debt to the IMF and the World Bank, which Haitians have been forced to pay back for decades. In debt service alone, Haitians have paid out tens of millions every year. These debts have crippled the Haitian economy for years and have largely contributed to the mass poverty that exists in Haiti. Although neither of you were in Haiti during the earthquake, your legacy of poverty and debt greatly exacerbated the toll of the earthquake.
The French Government

The Indictment:
You are charged with the mistreatment and murder of hundreds of thousands of Haitians

When Haitians won their independence in 1804 from you, their colonizers, they would have had every right to claim reparations from the powers that had profited from three centuries of stolen labor. You, however, were convinced that it was Haitians who had stolen the property of slave owners by refusing to work for free. So in 1825, with a flotilla of warships stationed off the Haitian coast threatening to re-enslave the former colony, King Charles X came to collect: 90 million gold francs—10 times Haiti’s annual revenue at the time. With no way to refuse, and no way to pay, the young nation was shackled to a debt that would take 122 years to pay off.

In 2003, Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, facing a crippling economic embargo, announced that Haiti would sue you, the French government, over that long-ago heist. “Our argument,” Aristide’s former lawyer Ira Kurzban said, “was that the contract was an invalid agreement because it was based on the threat of re-enslavement at a time when the international community regarded slavery as an evil.” You sent a mediator to Port-au-Prince to keep the case out of court and while trial preparations were under way, Aristide was toppled from power. The lawsuit disappeared, but for many Haitians the reparations claim lives on.

This callous debt has shackled the Haitian people for years and has exacerbated the destruction caused by the earthquake.
Haitians

The Indictment:
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Although you are the victims of this crime, you are also guilty of committing it. After a valiant struggle to win independence, you handed over the reins of the government to one tyrant after another. You allowed the Duvalier regime to stay in power until the mid-1980s and failed to adequately fight back against multiple U.S. incursions into your country.

In fact, the United States would never have involved itself in Haiti if you had been able to create a stable democratic government.

We can blame all kinds of outside influences, but ultimately it was you, the Haitian people, who went to work for U.S. corporations, who moved from the countryside into the cities where most of the devastation occurred.

When you elected Aristide as the first democratically elected president of Haiti, you hoped for change. But when a coup overthrew Aristide just eight months after he was sworn in, where were you? How could a few hundred armed rebels take over your government? Couldn’t you have done more to defend it?

In addition, if you had organized your own society to build stronger infrastructure the damage would not have been so great. For example, an earthquake of similar force hit Southern California in 1994 but only 72 people were killed.

You should have seen what was happening. Instead, you accepted a cycle of poverty that has now exacerbated the toll of the earthquake. It is you who is responsible for the earthquake’s devastation.
Capitalism: System of Profit

The Indictment:
You are charged with the mistreatment and murder of hundreds of thousands of Haitians

This gets complicated. You are not a person or a government, but a system. We like to blame crimes on people or their representatives. But in this case, the real criminal is not human.

True, the French and U.S. governments have put their country’s business interests in front of the Haitian people’s livelihood. But what made them act the way they did? The real blame lies with a system that values property over people.

Obviously, no one person, group, or government can be blamed for the tragedy in Haiti. It’s a much larger process that at its root is economic. Capitalism is an economic system where the sole aim is to make a profit. The nature of capitalism is to grow, to expand. Capitalists in one country will naturally try to make a profit in other countries.

In the case of Haiti, capitalists came into Haiti to exploit cheap labor and are now returning to profit from reconstruction. There are no evil people who are consciously trying to murder and mistreat Haitians. What made Haiti so poor, and the earthquake so devastating, was simply the natural workings of the capitalist economic system that looks all around the world in order to ask, “How can a profit be made here?”

As a final test to see who is guilty for exacerbation of the toll the earthquake took in Haiti, ask yourself these questions:

- Would the U.S. government have been so involved in Haitian affairs if U.S. corporations weren’t forced to compete for profit? Would other corporations and governments act any different if put in the same position?
- Could the Duvalier regime have imposed a society of such unequal wealth distribution in Haiti without a world where wealth is even more unevenly distributed?

You know the answer: Individuals and their representatives aren’t to blame, it’s the system that’s rotten to the core.
The United States Government

The Indictment:
You are charged with the mistreatment and murder of hundreds of thousands of Haitians

Although the Haitian Revolution, like the American Revolution, stemmed from concepts of liberty and equality, you, the U.S. government, refused to recognize Haiti until 1862, after the slaveholding states seceded from the union.

In 1915, your marines invaded Haiti to protect U.S. business interests. You imposed martial law and rewrote the constitution to benefit foreign companies. In 1934 the United States left Haiti, leaving behind a U.S.-trained military force that involved itself in politics and held virtual veto power over election results.

Most U.S. presidents supported the brutal Duvalier dictatorships with massive amounts of aid, despite their horrific human rights records.

When Haiti elected Aristide president, he declared the second independence of Haiti, inferring that Haiti would become independent of your imperial domination. But you quickly responded by orchestrating a coup d’état eight months later. And when Aristide was elected for the second time, in 2004, you immediately pushed him out of office.

You opposed Aristide’s government because it was looking to build the national self-sufficiency of Haiti. You wanted the nine principal state publicly owned industries privatized, to be sold to U.S. and foreign investors.

So the natural catastrophe was preceded by more than 100 years of political and economic catastrophes orchestrated from Washington that exacerbated the devastation of the earthquake.