



Photo: Marco Dormino/The United Nations

## Leaving Port-au-Prince

Pamela Sneed

1

Seeing those dust covered ashen faces from  
Haiti's earthquake today  
reminds me strangely of the victims on 9/11  
coming over the bridge from Manhattan  
covered in soot, some traces of fresh blood  
walking like zombies into downtown Brooklyn  
shell shocked  
all of us like night of the living dead  
I refused to believe anything had happened  
walked to work at the University  
an hour after the towers exploded  
It was only after when my students spoke  
with terror so palpable  
many of them Muslim from Pakistan who had  
family members rounded up detained  
others who'd actually known and lost someone  
I realized I couldn't ignore it anymore

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No one talked about the soot from the towers  
that gathered on mine & others windowsills for months after  
the smell of fire that stayed in the air  
not realizing we were breathing in flesh  
Yes, those dust covered ashen faces in Haiti today  
remind me of 2005 being in Ghana  
watching television and seeing flood waters of Katrina  
trap a woman in a stairwell  
the horror on her face just moments before  
she was gushed away  
Those dust covered ashen faces remind me  
of many things Ghana, Hurricane Katrina, America's economic downturn  
and how victims so often are Black & poor  
how in every crisis we, Black people are hit hardest  
no one bothering to hear the screams until it's too late  
I get angry knowing those levees could have been fixed beforehand  
knowing these "natural disasters" become convenient, thinly veiled plots  
for governments to take our lands  
knowing that Haiti in poverty has paid a high price for her revolution  
standing up to white power  
and there is no neat ending  
nor startling dénouement  
only a prayer to and for Haiti's spirit, strength,  
recovery.

## 2

I know leaving Port-au-Prince  
is the best thing to do  
get away from the rubble, ruins, rotting flesh, aftershocks,  
barren, desperate cries for food, shortages of water, medicine  
and more I could not know  
but every time I hear reporters talking gleefully  
of camps, relocation, tent cities  
I start to worry  
get some sensory recognition of what those words have meant  
the Black citizens of New Orleans huddled in a Louisiana superdome  
abandoned, evacuated and left to die there  
after promises of help  
I know there's good will involved

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it's the only thing left to do  
Wyclef says Port-au-Prince is a morgue  
it must be evacuated  
but every time I hear of camps and relocation  
it triggers another kind of memory  
those trains and cattle cars to nowhere  
imminent extermination  
what is true I know  
is that a lot of those people will never see  
their homes again/  
trees that have taken root outside  
with large bulbous roots  
veins pumping through the ground  
carrying blood.

## 3

I know that when you're rebuilding every cement block,  
every piece of wood  
weighs a ton  
everything is attached to a memory of something gone...  
I know that when you're rebuilding every rain drop  
has meaning  
every wind holds a sign  
When news of Haiti's earthquake first broke  
I tried to look past the reporters on the tarmac  
beneath the gore and glee in their eyes  
to see the real story  
I tried to peer past their goodwill and good intentions  
as they stoked fears of Black rebellion  
Haitian unrest  
until I think they realized how racist it was  
Diane Sawyer, the Blonde Blue mutation of Barbara Walters  
her face widened from plastic surgery and botox  
asking Black passerbys, "Do you think there will be violence?"  
All I know is that Haiti needs us now more than ever  
now that the cameras have stopped  
real shock sets in  
a pack of frayed wires ready to explode  
now is when they need shoulders to cry on

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to reach loved ones long forgotten  
to hear voices of cheer, of strength.  
now is when they will need more than dollars  
but our compassion &  
and attention too.

## 4

We sent troops to Haiti to protect our interests  
but the interests aren't people  
it's land  
turning it into another tourist destination  
a new-fangled American colony  
I still remember reading stories of Haiti under France  
slaves shipped from Africa to Haiti's Sugar plantations  
worked so hard  
had life spans of only 4-6 years  
but the story that blew my mind  
was during the time of Toussaint L'Overture  
where slave holders had a practice of packing a slaves asshole  
full of gun powder  
then setting it off by putting live flames to it---  
In our new fangled modern colony because of  
class discrepancies between tourists and Haitians  
Haiti's poorer women and girls will become sex workers  
part of the new sex trade as what's happened in Zimbabwe, Ghana,  
all over Africa  
Even in Poland, a white country in Europe  
there's an uprising of a brand new culture called "Mall Girls,"  
underage teens who exchange sex with older men for a skirt,  
pocketbook, designer label  
One of the older girls counsels the younger and says "Don't be fooled,  
there's no love, only business, an exchange of services,"  
And so as the story goes- we sent troops to Haiti  
after the earthquake to protect our interests  
but the interests aren't people  
in one of the over-crowded interim camps called tent cities  
that make asbestos laden Fema trailers after Katrina  
look like luxury  
women and girls live in terror

# EMISFÉRICA

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a young girl is repeatedly raped  
sees her attackers daily and  
has no one to tell  
says troops drive down only one road  
never leave their cars  
the peace-keepers sent so infighting, diseases, hunger  
don't spoil our plans  
of taking-over.

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**Pamela Sneed** is a New York based poet, performer, writer, and actress. She has been featured in the New York Times Magazine, The New Yorker, The Village Voice, The Source, Time Out, Bomb, Next, MetroSource, Blue,VIBE, HX, Karl Lagerfeld's "Off The Record," on the cover of New York Magazine, and in the PBS documentary "Black Artists Changing America." She is the author of "Imagine Being More Afraid of Freedom Than Slavery," published by Henry Holt in April 1998 and KONG & other works published by Vintage Entity Press 2008/9. She is a professor of Speech and Theater at Long Island University and received her M.F.A. in New Media Art & performance from LIU in 2008. She is the author of the forthcoming manuscripts, "Right to Return," "America Ain't Ready," and a novel, *Motherland or Chitlin Chimichanga*.