The majority of Haitians today have a vision of a democratic society that Haiti’s military backed government does not share. This vision, and Haitians’ determination to make it a reality, is Haiti’s hope for the future.

In this section you will find excerpts from interviews with six teenagers and adults who live in Haiti and two Haitians in the United States. In most cases we have not used their last names for their protection.

The Haitian people’s strength and courage has enabled them to keep on under adverse conditions. Strategies for economic survival vary. The vast majority of Haitians, like Anit (p. 28), live by farming the land. Although Anit’s plot of land is small, and her living conditions barely minimal, land ownership is her security for the future.

Others are not so lucky. Many peasants who have lost their land, or who cannot live on what they are paid for their crops, have had to move to the towns to seek work. Fifi (p. 29) earns $15 a month as a domestic servant in Port-au-Prince, cleaning the houses of well-off families. Her own family of seven lives in a one-room house without running water. Yet for many families in the city slums, conditions are much worse.

Beatrice (p. 25) has never known poverty, although her family is not rich. She has the opportunity most Haitians lack, to study and go to college. But her awareness of how those around her are suffering has led Beatrice to ask questions, and finally to commit herself to the struggle for change in Haiti.

The following section includes Anit’s, Fifi’s and Beatrice’s stories, as well as the personal testimonies of street children, a political organizer, a community organizer in Boston and a Haitian-American first grade teacher.

Below is some current data on Haiti. Numbers and statistics can’t give us a complete picture of Haitian daily life. However, when used in conjunction with real life stories, these figures give us a background for understanding the conditions within which the majority of Haitians live and work.

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### Conditions of Life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>(1992)</td>
<td>6.8 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under 18</td>
<td>(1990)</td>
<td>3.0 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under 5</td>
<td>(1990)</td>
<td>1.0 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in Rural Areas (1992)</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Living Conditions (1992)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With sanitation services</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With safe drinking water</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poverty Level (1980-90)</th>
<th>Population below absolute poverty level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban: 65%</td>
<td>Rural: 80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Life Expectancy (1992) | 56 years |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infant Mortality Rate (1992)</th>
<th>87/1000 live births (under one year)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(U.S. infant average mortality rate: 9.8/1000 in 1989, District of Columbia 22.9/1000)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Child Deaths (1992) | before age 5 | 133/1000 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Malnourishment (1988)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pre-school children</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mild</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>serious</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illiteracy Rate (1990)</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(other sources indicate 60-75%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School Enrollment (1991)</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of gr. 1 enrollment reaching final grade of primary school (1988)</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beatrice: High School Student

I grew up in the "ti bourgeoisie" class, and for us life isn't really privileged. We don't suffer from lack of food or shelter, but we don't have extra each month to do many things. In Haiti, there is a big difference between the "ti bourgeoisie" and the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie are the ones with the big homes and fancy cars. They can afford to eat in restaurants and travel. We don't have a car or even running water in the house.

So when I became involved in the struggle to liberate Haiti, I was not rebelling against my class. Instead, I was trying to improve the situation for those even less fortunate than me. It is more a concept of redistribution, because the wealthy here have everything and the poor have absolutely nothing.

I've always been called a rebel at home or in school. I remember once I was chosen by the school to be the flagbearer in the annual flag-day parade. I refused, saying that I'll never set foot in the National Palace yard. The principal told me that it was the least I could do, to pay back the government for giving me a free education. I had to do it, but when I got to the grounds of the Palace yard, I gave the flag to someone else.

In 1986, I decided to drop out of school for a while. This was the time that everyone was looking for a way to change things in Haiti. People were willing to stop what they were doing and get involved in liberating the country. We finally had freedom to organize, freedom for the press. We

This is a page from Lesson Five of Goute Sel, the Mission Alpha Literacy Manual used by Beatrice. Many literacy workers who used this book were attacked by the military. The Bishops eventually withdrew their support for the literacy program, claiming its teachings were too radical. Dechouke means to uproot and refers to the uprooting of corrupt and repressive forces.
wanted to take advantage of this new opening.

That's why, along with other young people of mixed economic background, we founded a group called Solidarity with Youth (SAJ) at St. Jean Bosco Church. We formed this group to help. Now we have local branches in Les Cayes, Verette, Jacmel and other places in the country.

We work towards social justice—to make Haiti a place where everyone can find food, health care, good education, and a decent place to live. We want to put an end to the old order of things where only a small group of people own everything.

*Beatrice and other members of her group worked with a church sponsored adult literacy program called Mission Alpha.*

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**We want to put an end to the old order of things where only a small group of people own everything.**

I dedicated my body and soul to this program. So I can't find words to explain how hurt I felt when the Bishops stopped it. I felt that some light I had inside which was motivating me had died. My only hope was that the people who benefited from the program would pressure the government to continue it.

Before Jean-Claude Duvalier left the country, when we founded the group in St. Jean Bosco Church, I felt pressure from my family, mostly my mother. She was scared for me, scared that I would be killed by some trigger-happy Tonton Macoute. My mother used to tell me that what she spent for my education was a waste, and then burst into tears.

Now things are a little better. She sees things differently than she did a couple years ago.

Before, when I went out with my friends, I thought dressing up and looking sharp was really important. I had to wear a different outfit each time I went out. When I dressed up, I felt like somebody. Now, I can go two or three months without new clothes, and I still feel like a person.

There are so many people who don't have food, who have to go without the absolute basic necessities. Where I used to spend money on material things like clothes, today I spend what little extra I have differently—like buying pencils and paper, that can aid people to gain literacy.

For each of us it's an individual fight that we can only win by working together. My hope is that the people will finally organize themselves, forget their minor differences and work together to win the fight.

*Beatrice was interviewed by Kathie Klarreich in Port-au-Prince in 1989.*
Children are hardest hit by the poverty in Haiti. Thousands migrate to the capital, Port-au-Prince, in search of work. Large numbers of children become domestic servants in the city and others, such as Fatil and Ayiti, are sold into slavery to cut sugar cane in the neighboring Dominican Republic.

**FATIL, age 18**

Life in Haiti is good for the wealthy and sorrowful for the poor. What the poor people are going through is comparable to being born a slave. Where else do you find thousands of kids sleeping in the streets, knowing they will wake up in the morning without a gourde [20 cents] to buy food? When we try and work in the streets cleaning cars, the wealthy people only look down on us.

One day, a friend of ours came to see us, a guy named Jean Marc. He promised to take us to the capital of the Dominican Republic, Santo Domingo, where he thought we could find work. We accepted because we knew there was nothing positive here for us, and we trusted him. I called Eril and Ayiti, and we went along with him.

When we got to the border, we were told to get out of the car and continue on foot. We climbed a mountain and ended up at a military station in Jimani where we had to give our names and sit and wait. Jean Marc went for some water and never came back. We never saw him again.

Then we were told we weren’t going to Santo Domingo, but to a batey [worker camp] to cut cane. We said we couldn’t do that because we didn’t know how. At that point we were told we had each been sold for 75 gourdes to cut cane, and if we refused we would be thrown in jail. We had to agree.

We got to the batey and found out exactly what it was: heavy work. The leaves of the cane stalks cut us like blades. They told us if we returned to our country they would beat us, arrest us and throw us in jail.

**AYITI, age 12**

They gave us rice, oil, bouillion cubes, and a bit of dried fish. For work, they gave us a machete and something to sharpen it with. We had a mattress of dried grass woven together, and an empty gallon can to keep water in.

We started work every morning at 6 am, and stayed out in the hot fields until noon. Then we went back from 1 pm until 6 pm. Afterwards we washed, cooked, and collapsed on our straw mattresses.

I was smaller than the other guys, too small to do the work. I cooked for Eril and Fatil, and when they came back from cutting cane we ate together.

One day we decided we had had enough. So one by one we washed our clothes. When they were nice and clean, we put them on and escaped.

When we got to Santo Domingo, we were lost. Someone we met convinced us to stay in the Dominican Republic and work at his construction site. After a little while, I decided to leave. I wasn’t making any money, and Fatil and Eril had to support me. So I said goodbye to my friends, and without even one gourde in my pocket, I found my way to the bus station. I waited for the right time to sneak on the bus. I didn’t make it, though. The driver saw me and kicked me out. I went behind a restaurant and fell asleep.

Two Haitian men woke me up and asked what I was doing. I explained I’d been sold to cut cane and was trying to find my way back to Haiti. They had a brother who was a truck driver, and they said I could ride on the top of his big truck.

At one of the check points, the police made me get down. They said they would arrest me because I didn’t have any papers, and they would throw me back in a batey. But I was lucky. Three other Haitians said I could hide in their big truck, and I crawled in and escaped from the station.

The officials at the border demanded to see my passport. Of course I didn’t have one. I explained I’d been forced to enter the country without one, and if they didn’t let me go, I’d cross the mountain in front of us on foot. I was fortunate. Someone who spoke Creole said I could cross the border without a passport, and he gave me five gourdes. I was so happy. I made it all the way back.

Interviews by Kathie Klarreich in Port-au-Prince in 1989.

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**Taste of Salt: A Story Of Modern Haiti**

by Frances Temple

To learn more about the life of youth in Haiti, read this novel written for grades 5-9. Recommended by School Library Journal. $4. See p. 46.
Anit: Farming in a Small Village

Nestled in the hills above the town of Miragoane sits the tiny hamlet of Paillant. Most people walk the two hours back and forth to buy their goods.

Anit has lived in Paillant all of her 60-some years. You follow the small dirt road, passing Anit’s sister’s house, and stop just before reaching her brother’s house.

Anit’s property is defined by a neatly constructed fence of tree trunks bound together with twigs. You follow a narrow path that is swept every morning, and enter the lakou, a yard with mango, orange and avocado trees.

The house is multicolored, in typical Haitian style. The faded red and blue exterior is accented by neatly potted plants on the porch. Inside, there’s a small room with two large beds, and another room that serves as both dining and living room. A small TV plays silently.

When they can, my children visit me. But life in Haiti is difficult. From Port-au-Prince to Miragoane, transportation costs 10 gourdes [$2]. Then another three gourdes from Miragoane to Paillant plus back again. My kids just don’t have that kind of money.

Anit is lucky. She inherited land with her house, and it has provided her and her family an income to survive. She paid for all her children to go to school through the hard work she invested in her crops. Public school fees can cost anywhere from $5 to $75 a month, plus the additional cost of uniforms and materials.

The main crop in Anit’s garden is corn, and she also grows beans and peas. Even though they are high in the mountains, it’s too hot to plant other cash crops, such as onions, carrots and potatoes.

This year, my corn is dying because of the drought. In a good year, I can harvest 50 mamit [cans] at 10 gourdes per mamit.

In a bad year, I may only harvest 10.

When she needed cash, Anit used to be able to sell her black Haitian pigs for up to $150 each. But several years ago, U.S. government agencies organized the slaughter of all Haitian pigs because of a swine fever epidemic. In spite of the Haitian government’s promise to reimburse the peasants, Anit never received a dime for her four pigs they killed.

She did, however, hide one of her pigs, and hopes that this one will produce piglets. Anit also has chickens which lay eggs. She has a goat, but is waiting to fatten him up before she eats or sells him.

Anit is up at five every morning. She starts with household chores, helped by a young girl and boy who work for her in exchange for room and board. Anit’s kitchen is a small grass hut beside the red and blue house, a common arrangement for rural Haitian households. Water is carried from a well ten minutes away.

The family normally eats corn, rice or millet, with the occasional addition of beef or goat meat which she buys wrapped up in leaves, from a neighbor.

When times are rough, like now, we eat soup made from water, some kind of leafy greens, a banana, and dumplings made from flour and water. We wash the pots and pans with water and scrub them with oranges and leaves to get them clean.

But I am never discouraged. I wake up every morning and pray. I ask for strength and endurance. I’m Catholic and go to church every Sunday, but I believe in vodou too. If someone gets sick, I go to the herbal doctor first, because the regular doctor charges $5 just for a consultation, and then you have to have cash to buy medicine. They don’t give credit.

I’m waiting for times to get better. We don’t have anything left to lose now, so what can we do? I am lucky, I’ve led a good life, and I have nine healthy children and more than ten healthy grandchildren. And I still have my land. Not everyone in Haiti can say that.

Prepared by Kathie Klareich from interviews conducted in Port-au-Prince in 1988.
Fifi: Raising a Family in the City

Fifi moved from the southern town of Jeremie when she was thirteen. With barely enough money to feed themselves, the family could not afford to send Fifi to school. As a result, she never learned to read or write.

Although rural life was hard, life in Port-au-Prince is anything but easy for Fifi. She, her husband Jean-Paul and their five children live in a one-room house.

The house has electricity, but Fifi has to walk to a public tap to get water. There is one bed, a chair and a television, but no table, fan or radio. They pay $150 in rent every six months, plus $3 per month for electricity.

Fifi’s husband used to do masonry, repairing and cleaning for an apartment building, earning $60 a month. But he has recently been fired. Now he earns only small amounts washing cars, and the family depends on Fifi’s income.

I am responsible for taking care of my whole family. And all I am earning is $15 a month. I wash Mr. Pierre’s clothes once a week, and in the mornings I clean his house. I used to have more jobs doing the same thing for other people, at $30 per job. But those people have moved away, and here I am, stuck with almost nothing.

Sometimes I make peanut butter to get a little extra money on the side. There are times when I don’t even have enough money to buy the peanuts. Usually I buy two mamits[cans], which costs about $2.80 and is enough to make two jars. I have to pay someone 20 cents to roast the nuts, and at least another 20 cents to use their grinder. If I’m lucky, though, I can sell the peanut butter for $2 per jar.

We eat mostly rice, beans and corn. A mamit of rice costs about $3, beans $4, and corn $1.30. One mamit lasts about three days. A gallon of cooking oil is $4 or $5, and then we spend about $10 a month on charcoal for a cooking fire. Plus there are the daily things we need to put in the food, like spices, salt, garlic and bouillon cubes. Occasionally I buy a chicken in the market for $3 or $4 but we don’t splurge like that very often.

Fifi is not sure if she will be able to continue to send her children to school.

It’s not just school fees. There are uniforms which cost $7 and right now they each have only one; even if it is dirty, they have to wear it. Then there are supplies—notebooks cost 40 cents each, erasers and sharpeners 30 cents, pens 20 cents, and pencils 10 cents.

Plus I have to pack them lunch. That’s at least another $20 a month. If I don’t have money to give them for lunch that day, I won’t let them go to school. I refuse to have them beg.

Prepared by Kathie Klarreich based on interviews conducted in Port-au-Prince in 1989.
For over a hundred years, Haitians have endured some of the most brutal human rights abuses in the Western Hemisphere. Some of the worst cases of abuse have been recorded within the last several decades. The Duvaliers (1957-1986) executed and exiled thousands of people. Their own police force, the Tontons Macoutes, carried out the genocide against any organized opposition.

Haiti’s human rights record improved dramatically under President Aristide. However, after the coup in 1991, the de facto government immediately launched a campaign of violent repression. Reported human rights violations include torture and short-term arbitrary arrests without warning accompanied by severe beatings.

The military and police forces have systematically targeted President Aristide supporters, especially in the rural areas. Among the most severely repressed are the women’s groups, peasant development groups, trade unions, church groups and youth movements. An estimated 200,000 people are in hiding.

Those who have attempted to flee the country, have faced the additional risk of detention at Guantánamo, or being returned to Haiti by the U.S. Coast Guard. Attorney Catherine Cassidy participated in the March 1992 Pax Christi USA team researching human rights violations in Haiti since the coup. While there, she interviewed Pierre, a Haitian repatriated from Guantánamo, now in hiding in Port-au-Prince.

My brother, Paul was with me on Guantánamo. I was interviewed on December 19 and 27. My impression of Guantánamo was one of disorganization. People did not have control. I told the woman interviewer what had happened to me. She spoke Creole but not very well. The Immigration promised to call me and said my interview was good. When I was called, it was to return to Haiti.

On February 3, 1992, the Coast Guard took me and many others to Port-au-Prince. I was very afraid because there were soldiers around and they took our pictures and fingerprints. At the port, a TV crew from World Monitor TV Boston asked me how I felt. I did not feel comfortable talking to them with the military around. I was afraid of them but they said I could trust them so I let them take me to my house. They filmed me and my family in my home and outside with their cameras. Many people came around because of the TV crew and van. I got very nervous. The TV journalists gave me a letter with their phone number and left.

Shortly after, two soldiers came and asked me where I had been. I said in Cap Haitian. They said I was lying and that they would be back. I left because I knew I could not sleep in my house anymore. I called the TV journalists and they took me to their hotel. That night the military came to my home. They beat my mother, sister and niece because they were Lavalas. They asked for me but could not find me.

Since then my family has left the house. My brother Paul who was also later returned to Haiti has disappeared. He met with my mother in hiding but has not been heard from since. I am afraid he could be dead because he would have contacted my mother by now.

Haitian Voices

—Lily Cérat: Haitian-American Teacher—

Haitians abroad have played a dynamic role in Haiti's political, economic and cultural life. Here we learn about the experiences of one Haitian immigrant in New York, home of the largest population of Haitians outside Haiti.

Marie Lily Cérat is a mother, a first grade teacher at P.S. 189, and an activist in Brooklyn's Haitian community. She spoke to NECA about why she came to the United States, about what being Haitian means to her, and about her dream of freedom and democracy for her homeland.

Why did you leave Haiti?

Both political and economic motives were entangled in our departure. My father came in 1968 during Papa Doc's dictatorship when men his age were persecuted and killed for trying to better their future. My mother came in 1978. Three years later, when I was 19, I too came to New York.

How is life in New York compared to Haiti?

In New York you live indoors spiritually, you are afraid of the next person, afraid of your neighbors. At first, I was very homesick. It was meeting old friends among our large, closely knit Haitian community that kept me going.

We all complain about the winter. The first winter is very harsh, but every time it comes you feel terrible.

I discovered prejudice in New York. I was fired from my first job at an Arby's restaurant when they found out I was from Haiti.

What impact do Haitian immigrants to the United States have on Haiti?

Haiti relies greatly on the diaspora in New York, Miami, Montreal and also in Europe. One reason is economic. The money that we send back to our families is the backbone of the economy. But politically we have also helped. During both Duvalier dictatorships many of our journalists and activists from the opposition relocated and continued their work from here. So people in our community are informed.

The protest marches we have held, especially since the coup d'état against Aristide, have played an important role in pressuring U.S. politicians.

Have you noticed any changes in the Haitian immigrant community since you've come here?

The political views and the life of the immigrant community have expanded since Aristide first came on the scene. Aristide has always spoken Creole. All Haitians speak and understand Creole. [Only 10% speak French.] Since the coup the politicians are using the old tactics to marginalize the people. They are using French in the Parliament and to address the nation.

Aristide raised people's consciousness both here and in Haiti. The people cannot be put off in a corner by the politicians. They want a leader who speaks their language, who communicates.

In your school, what do you teach children about the people of Haiti?

I teach them that we are a determined people, we are proud and honest. I know that other people have these characteristics too, but we are strong like trees and we are self-assured. We are intelligent even when we are illiterate. Despite the odds against us in Haiti and in New York we have tremendous intuitive gifts for survival. As a child I never knew my mother was illiterate because her other senses gave her the information the written words couldn't. And I know, I really know, that eventually Haiti will be for Haitians and Haiti will be free.
Marie Yolette Val is the director of the League of Haitian Families in Cambridge.

I am the only child of my mother who was a seamstress. I did all kinds of work around the house. I used to wash clothes, do laundry, clean the house. My mother wouldn’t let me do that on weekdays, but on Saturdays I always had something to do in the house. It made me feel as though I was somebody.

We did the clothes by hand, with soap. And there was a funny way to do it. I liked to rub the clothes and make a funny noise when you press it to get the water off. It was fun. In Cap-Haitien, where I was born, there was running water in one building in the neighborhood, but not in our house.

Then I moved with my father in Port-au-Prince, and my mother stayed in the north in Cap-Haitien. In Haiti, the economy was getting worse and worse in the rural areas. It was getting harder to get jobs and to educate the children living in a small town. My father was a teacher and a school principal; and then he opened a produce store.

I loved school. That was one thing I always liked. I don’t know why, but I really stuck to it. When I couldn’t go to school, I would cry. I think I liked not so much the teachers, but what I was learning. I liked to learn new things. My favorite subject was language.

I learned embroidery. In Haiti, every Friday, all schools have embroidery class for the girls. The boys have something else. You start in the first grade and learn it all through elementary school. They show you a pattern and give you a needle and thread and a piece of fabric. They always have some older students come and help. I loved it.

I started doing embroidery on my own. People came for sheets, tablecloths, hand towels and pillow cases. And dresses, too. I would get five dollars for a sheet. I spent my money for things like barrettes for my hair and all kinds of stuff. I bought things that my mother wouldn’t think about or I wouldn’t ask my mother for.

So in Haiti, you learn embroidery in school. But the problem is that not everyone got to go to school. A lot of the people who go to school don’t spend more than two years. In the rural areas, most of the people don’t go to school. It’s only lately that they have built more schools in the countryside.

When I finished college, I taught for about two years [before I began] to train teachers. I was experimenting with new curriculum for schools. We were doing a lot of research on psychology and language to reform the school system.

That is what I was working on before I came here. I didn’t plan to come here at the time I came; it was sort of premature...

I was getting some threats. I was [also] working on a radio station and I was getting anonymous phone calls. This guy from the government used to come to our radio show every Saturday. He would be sitting there saying, “The government is good. The government is working for the advancement of the country. There is a lot of progress.”

But the truth is that the country was regressing from the time that government came into power. So the person who was on the controls and I put him on “audio.” Do you know what that means? There’s a system in a radio station where someone might be speaking on the microphone but you don’t send it over the air. He had a headphone on and heard it as though his voice was being broadcast. We sent music out and kept his voice in. And I think they found out that we weren’t putting him on.

At certain points my parents were very scared for me. I think they were right because I came here in February of 1980 and in November 1980 there were plenty of people from the radio station who had died or were in prison. One of my collaborators from the radio station is in prison there. He and I were on a job for about three months.

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