



Hello, my name is Amy Graham and I am a freshman majoring in Music Education at Chadron State College. I am originally from a conservative little place called Valentine Nebraska, a small town about two hours east of Chadron. I am the middle child of three children in my family and am lucky to have two wonderful parents and grandparents. I decided to come to Chadron because of the hometown atmosphere and the wonderful music program. This topic that I have written about has really hit home for me because of my ties to a Sister Church in Haiti that my home Parish supports. When the earthquake hit, I was terrified for my fellow parishioners.

### Hero For Haiti

He recalls his home as a paradise, the beautiful mountains in the distance, the many birds flying above the lush tree lines, and the three scenic rivers that used to flow diligently by the lively village. He left the country for many years and didn't return until the mid 1980's. When he returned to his home village he was shocked at the sight of a desolate community. He said it was a deserted desert, no trees, no birds, no rain, and no neighbors.

Why have we not known about these happenings in Haiti? How could have we not known these imperative things? Who is responsible for us not knowing? The answer: We are. What have we not known? Well how about we start with what we

probably “do or did” know before the recent events in Haiti. While my background with the subject of Haiti is a little different than that of others, this is what I found in the short interviews I have conducted from mostly freshman and underclassmen.

These are the majority of results I have received. Common answers: “A small island”, “it’s located in the Caribbean”, “a third world country”, “I think I heard something about an earthquake at the beginning of the year, was that what the free concert ‘Be A Hero For Hatit’ was for?” While some of us do know the location of Haiti and the recent news, there are many things that most people have no idea about. While my experience with this small country is not a great one, I have been subjected to the poverty in Haiti and when the earthquake hit in January, that was one of my first thoughts. My home Parish in the small town of Valentine Nebraska has sponsored a “Sister Parish” in Haiti since I can remember. Various trips were taken down to Haiti by our parishioners to volunteer their time. We would receive letters and photographs in the mail from the parishioners in Haiti thanking us for our spiritual and financial help. This is about how hands on I had gotten with Haiti, but I still didn’t know a lot about the country and all that was happening there.

Although Haiti is a small almost forgotten about country, they have had their fair share of problems from poverty and violence, to corruption in politics, a constant downfall of their economy, along with high inflation rates, and to top it all off the tragedy of natural disaster after natural disaster. But these have not gone unseen by the United States, as we have been aiding Haiti since the mid 70’s. It has

only been that in the recent news that we as United States citizens have really started to uncover the little island.

In a charitable expression of generosity, nearly half of American households have donated money to help Haiti recover from the recent earthquake and in doing so many have become curious as to exactly what Haiti's past has been. In my own research, I found myself astonished at the information, statistics, and history I had found, especially that relating to the United States. The history that is shared between Haiti and the United States is related in a few close ways, first starting with the discovery of the Americas by the Spanish explorer Christopher Columbus. Because of Columbus's discovery both Haiti or "Hispaniola" as Columbus named it, and the United States had been influenced heavily by the Spanish, from this discovery it makes Haiti and the United States the two oldest nations in the Americas ("US History Encyclopedia: Relations with Haiti" 2006).

From the economic standpoint Haiti was well off during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries due to the popularity brought by the Spanish and the French. "A treaty between the Spanish and the French divided the island into French-controlled St. Domingue and Spanish Santo Domingo" ("The History of Haiti"). The French established large plantations that produced a great amount of Europe's coffee and sugar at the time. The downside to this was that labor done on these plantations was by slaves. Just like all instances we know involving slavery there was a revolt. "A slave rebellion was launched by the Jamaican-born Boukman leading to a protracted 13-year war of liberation against St. Domingue's colonists and later,

Napoleon's army which was also assisted by Spanish and British forces.” As this wartime went on Haiti became less and less popular in trade and producing, especially after the war for independence, which caused the downfall to most of the large-scale plantations. “Beginning in 1791, Haiti was the site of the hemisphere’s only successful slave rebellion” (“The History of Haiti” 2010). From there, the land was divided into small farms and toward the 20<sup>th</sup> century Haiti was long forgotten as a leading country in producing crops, and then known for being a poverty-stricken country.

The political history of Haiti is not only a mess it is a corrupted and degraded. From the time independence was gained up until the 2006 presidential elections Haiti has struggled to have a strong leader who would put the well being of the country first. But what Haiti got was a long slur of dictator like presidents, followed by the events of these presidents being over thrown by various rebel groups. According to Keffer, when the United Nations stepped in and began holding Haiti’s government together in 2004, they helped conduct one of the first official presidential elections Haitians have seen. But despite the United Nation’s efforts, there were still massive amounts of scandal and inopportune voting.

“After a week of increasingly obvious fraud and chicanery in the counting of the vote culminated in the discovery of tens of thousands of ballots smoldering in a dump outside Port-au-Prince, the Provisional Electoral Council (Conseil Électoral Provisoire, CEP) announced on February 15 an arrangement by which René Garcia Préval could be awarded the presidency.”

Not only did they completely ignore the abuse that took place, but they also went ahead and announced that René Garcia Préval would be awarded the position of presidency! While the decision did please the Haitian people, it was an unjust act. “The CEP’s decision appears to have been a reluctant one, but the alternative would have been to face increasingly large and vociferous demonstrations from an aroused electorate” (Keffer 2006).

4:53 P.M., January 12, 2010 Haiti was shaken by an earthquake of 7.0 magnitude. Its destruction was devastating, immediately destroying thousands of buildings, structures, homes, and all hope for the progress Haiti had made that last year. Thousands of people were buried under the fallen structures, and thousands stayed there. Some were eventually found and rescued and others, approximately 200,000, were found dead. As the morgues filled quickly rescue personal were forced to lay the bodies in the streets, creating mass graves. Tremors with magnitudes of 5.5 and 5.9 were felt the following days throughout the Haitian and Dominican Republic areas. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica “The earthquake was generated by the movement of the Caribbean tectonic plate eastward along the Enriquillo–Plantain Garden strike-slip fault system. Occurring at a depth of 8.1 miles (13 km), the temblor was fairly shallow, which increased the degree of shaking at the Earth's surface” (“Haiti Earthquake 2010”). The lack of sufficient building codes and safely reinforced structures, along with the intensity of the shallow-surfaced earthquake made for even more disaster. The important buildings such as the National Palace, the UN Headquarters, Parliamentary building,

and the National Penitentiary, that keep the country safe and running, were heavily damaged or destroyed (“Haiti Earthquake 2010”).

The United States government and other governments around the world have sent thousands of relief workers and have pledged around one billion dollars so far (Robertson 2010 ). But what is our money going to, is it only going toward the direct relief of the earthquake? In a few months Haiti will be forgotten again, just like the tsunami victims in India when in 2004 an enormous earthquake shook the Indian Ocean in creating a tidal wave of disaster. After a few months of aid to the disaster area people were still living in tents, still hungry, and still fighting for their lives! Not only did they need direct relief they needed long term help. Permanent homes, food, and jobs were needed still.

As an active part of our local Rotary club and the President of the Interact Club in 2008 and 2009 we donated two relief tents/boxes to these types of causes even though they are only designed to be lived in for a few weeks, the citizens of India were still living in these types of shelters for months after the tents were designed to withstand. Haitians need something more fundamental than just direct relief from the present situation; they need jobs that they can count on for years ahead, they need for their economy to be stable, and they need an adequate leader. All of these countries in this type of situation, are in need of long term help. Haiti is by far one of the most underdeveloped counties in the Western Hemisphere and one of the poorest in the world, and while they have been receiving aid from many countries over the last decades, it hasn't been made apparent to the people of the

countries, like the United States. What made us think that they only just now needed relief after the natural disasters? Ask yourself, did you know about our involvement in Haiti all of these years? They have been receiving a certain amount of aid, but did we know about it? Did we even really care? We hear in the news the fatality numbers increasing everyday, how the citizens are now homeless, and how the children are now without parents. What we have neglected to think about is, what if things were always like this. "Haiti has become the new buzz-word in humanitarian efforts, and yet the impoverished country has always needed help from anyone who could give it" (Ashford). The poor, the homeless, the orphans, and the dying children, all of these things were occurring before the earthquake.

Not only was the country weak in its economy, the politicians, leaders, and government were running the country into the ground, literally. Since the 1950's deforestation has been taking place in Haiti. In recent years, deforestation has increased due to many things, including the need for energy. So much of it was happening that almost ninety-eight percent of Haitian forests are now gone. This made for catastrophe when the 2008 hurricane season hit hard. Hurricanes Fay, Gustav, Hanna, and Ike all swept through the Caribbean with great force, and in their paths was Haiti, each taking with it a part of the island. "Due to the massive deforestation, which left the earth bare and exposed to the skies, each hurricane washed away essential land and soil on its way over the country"(Velasquez-Manoff 2010). Who allowed the excessive deforestation to happen? Now there's a question to answer. Most of it is brought about by Haiti's need for energy, but "The catastrophic state of the environment is closely related to deep-seated institutional,

political and governance problems”, says Bernice Robertson, Crisis Group’s Haiti Analyst. “Coherent national socio-economic development policies have been mostly absent, due to management and political limitations and the narrow interests of those holding economic power”(Robertson 2010). From deforestation, Haiti has lost over an estimated 6,000 hectares of soil each year to erosion, and a huge cause of the erosion are landslides. Not only do these landslides cause massive amounts of land to be washed away, but they have left immense amounts of destruction in their paths, including taking thousands of human lives (Blajchman 2009).

He recalls his home as a paradise, the beautiful mountains in the distance, the many birds flying above the lush tree lines, and the three scenic rivers that used to flow diligently by the lively village. He left the country for many years and didn’t return until the mid 1980’s. When he returned to his home village he was shocked at the sight of a desolate community. He said it was a deserted desert, no trees, no birds, no rain, and no neighbors. All of his neighbors and relatives, young and old either moved into Port-au-Prince or had died. And as for the rivers, all were almost desiccated. From this one man’s experience we can take a great deal of what exactly is going on in Haiti and from this we can see how much Haiti’s economy has been suffering (Blajchman 2009).

There is no doubt that Haiti is in need of long-term help as well as direct relief from the recent disasters. Not only the lives that are being lost, but the lives that are being lived in Haiti are horrendous. These people are suffering everyday while we go to school and work in fashionable clothes with full stomachs and money

in our pockets. We need more people to care about what is going on in Haiti, we need more people to volunteer their time, money, and knowledge to end this cycle of poverty. If more people cared, maybe more people would have a better chance at the one thing every person on this planet deserves. Life.

“It’s unfortunate that it took a natural disaster to bring this poverty stricken area to national attention. I also cannot believe that the earthquake was so long ago. It’s almost April already and it seems like it was just yesterday. It also surprises me that you don’t hear about it in the media anymore. For a month, that’s all you heard of and now it’s a thing of the past.” –Darren Burrows

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