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S P E C T A T O R SPECTRUM

Haiti invasion illegal, predictable

By **ALYSHIA CLAWSON**

The day following the invasion of United States troops in Haiti, reporters from *The New York Times* interviewed some Columbia students on the steps of Low Library. When asked what they thought about the invasion, these students said "I don't care," and "It doesn't matter to me." Now, we've heard people call us apathetic before, as a generation, but this is ridiculous. Not only should the invasion of Haiti matter to us, it should outrage us. The type of foreign policy in which President Clinton is engaging is a holdover from

the days of big-stick imperialism, which many relegate to a shadowy, less-enlightened past. So that no one can any longer claim ignorance about Haiti, here is a brief history of the U.S. role in this small Caribbean nation

A few weeks ago, an editorial in *The New York Times* stated that Haiti had never had a

democracy. This is the type of historical forgetfulness that lets our government get away with irresponsible, paternalistic, and downright illegitimate operations not only in Haiti but throughout the Caribbean, Latin America, and the world. We, the public, fail to notice a pattern. Haiti has, in fact, had a democracy. It was achieved through a revolution by which slaves rebelled and established the first black democracy in this hemisphere, with charismatic leader Toussaint L'Overture as president. The idea of slaves not simply rebelling, but attempting to establish a democratic, sovereign state was so distasteful to the United States that it sabotaged the state, calling an embargo (sound familiar?) to bring it down. Haiti, the nation now maligned in our media as a violent-by-nature, chaotic, undemocratic, backwater country incapable of ruling itself is a condition created and perpetuated by the United States government. C.L.R. James' "The Black Jacobins," which chronicles this process, should be required reading in Contemporary Civilization classes.

The history of U.S. relations with Haiti during this century is equally dismal, but let's jump ahead to the coup in 1991. Aristide, Haiti's overwhelmingly popular, democratically-elected president, was overthrown by rightist military leaders who initiated one of the bloodiest regimes in this hemisphere. While the U.S. role in the coup remains sketchy at best, it is certain that the promotion of democracy touted in the last few weeks by Clinton in support of the restoration of Aristide is an extremely recent development. In fact, President

Bush expended a great deal of energy portraying Aristide as a "looney," (yes, that is a quote). Mysteriously, there were press leaks stating that Aristide had sought psychiatric help for manic depression in Montreal, but in reality no psychiatrist or mental health worker in Montreal had any record of having treated him. Further, in an attempt to say that one human rights abuse is the same as another, there were reports linking Aristide to the "necklacing" of opponents; this tactic has been linked by some to an effort by the military, perhaps with CIA complicity, to discredit Aristide.

When Haitians started flooding onto Florida's shores to escape the human rights abuses of the military regime, the State Department and Immigration and Naturalization Service did backflips to convince us that they were all economic refugees and that human rights were improving. This factor is probably one of the most significant in the invasion. Florida is a vote-rich state. Growing xenophobia has caused immigrants and refugees to be scapegoated for taking jobs and exploiting social services, and bigots see those fleeing from the military regime as black carriers of AIDS. One of the most fundamental aspects of the United States—that it is founded on diversity, "the melting pot" of immigrants from all over the world—is a rallying point for hatred and exclusionism. Unfortunately, this hatred is so prevalent that even a Democrat like Bill Clinton, who

promised in his campaign to reverse the Reagan-Bush policy on Haitian refugees, has been sucked into duplicating that policy. Because there is so much fear in the United States now of the "swarms" and "hordes" of Haitians imagined to be "teeming" on Florida shores, Clinton has justified a military invasion to avoid having to deal with

refugees. Meanwhile, he has been cutting much needed post-war, reconstruction funds to Nicaragua and El Salvador to pay for this invasion while trying to convince these countries, which certainly have their share of problems, to take refugees we ourselves refuse to take.

Is this invasion, which really has nothing to do with the restoration of democracy at all, legitimate? Let's look at the invasion itself. After hemming and hawing, desperately trying to rally popular support, Clinton sent in U.S. troops, supposedly to simply facilitate the agreement between President Carter and illegitimate ruler General Raul Cedras. Why, then, did U.S. troops stand by while soldiers beat pro-Aristide civilians? Why is the government being so generous to the military rulers he had wanted to overthrow, to the extent that Carter asked Cedras to teach his Sunday school class? Why did Clinton insist on the necessity of invasion when Aristide himself, the supposed beneficiary, said in newspapers—curiously Latin American, not U.S. papers—that he did not want to be reinstated through an invasion. (Then, the U.S. Congress complained that he did not say "Thank You.")

It seems that in allowing his popular base of support to be suppressed and returning him to a nation where his enemies have not been held accountable for their overthrow of his democratic government, the U.S. did not want Aristide to be restored to power after all. He has been restored to his position as President, but without the leaders who would be his advisors and support, he will

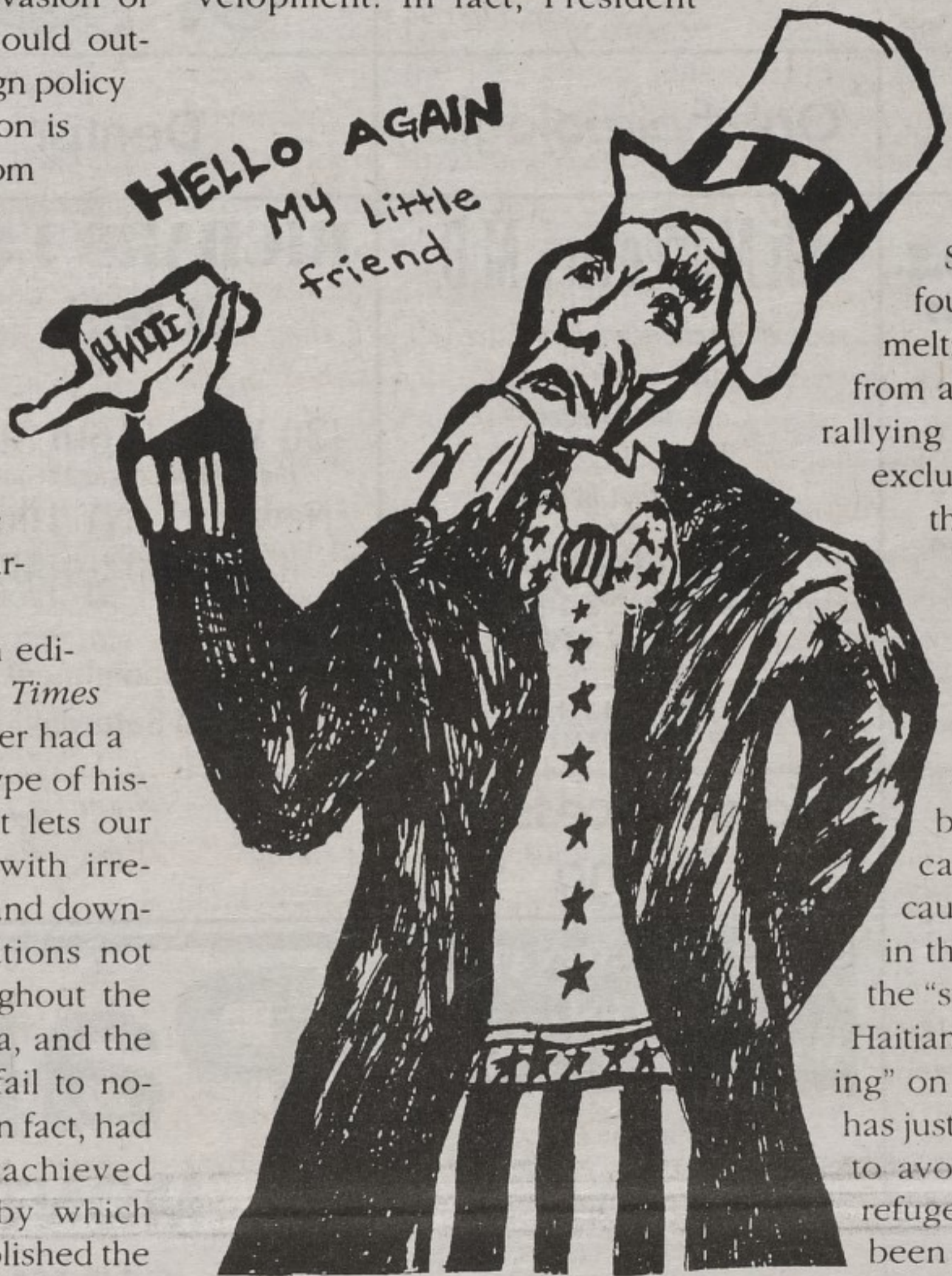
fall. Surely then the U.S. will have something to do with the new "democratic elections" when a candidate more agreeable to the U.S. and less nationalistic will be backed by our government. The manipulation and ulterior motives with which the U.S. has bullied and coerced Haiti, among other nations, as if it were all a game of chess (in which the pawns are human beings) is something we should all be aware of, if not outraged over.

Alyshia Clawson, CC '95, is a member of the Columbia Student Solidarity Network

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