

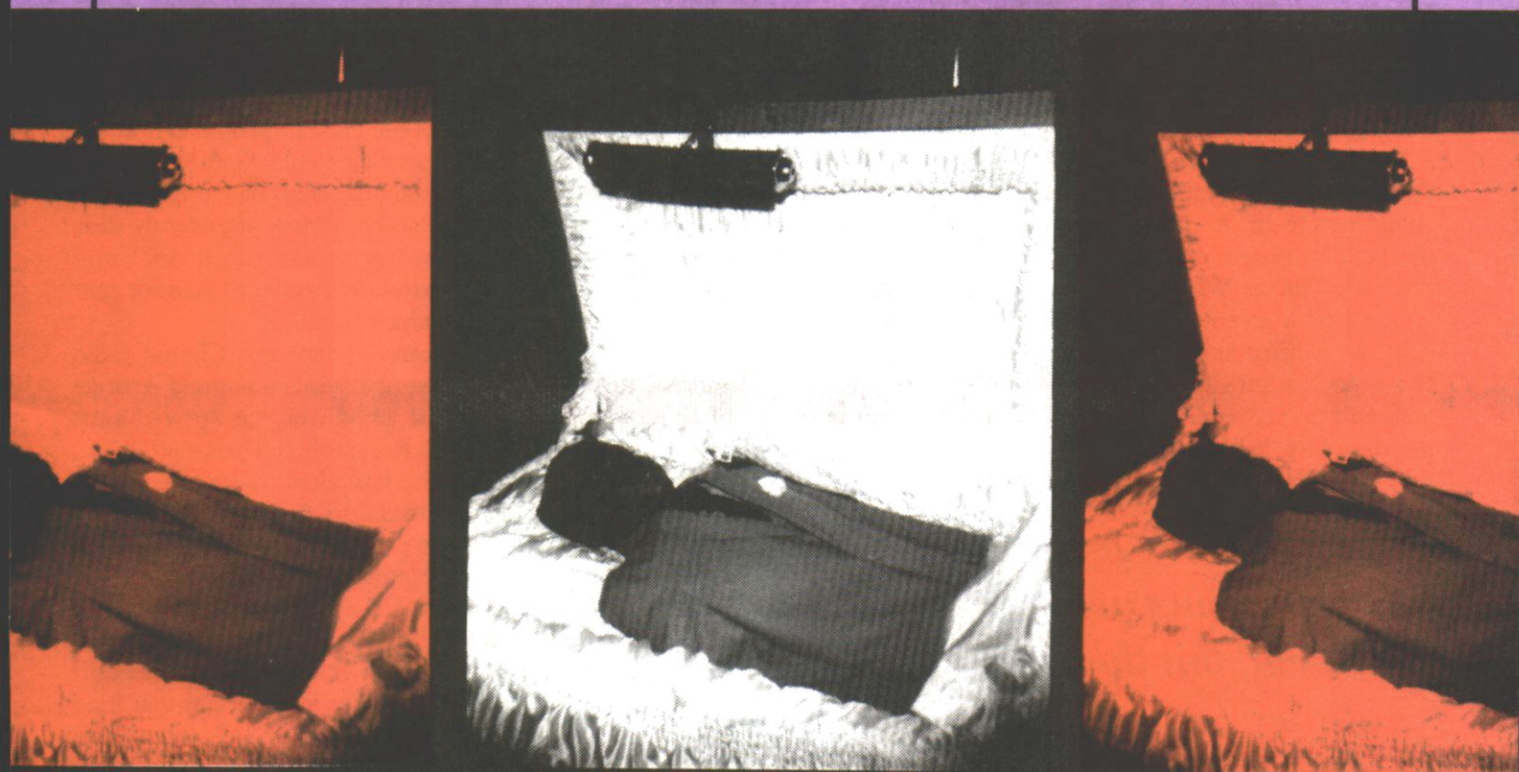
TOP STORY: THE WORLD BANK'S UNHAPPY BIRTHDAY

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How the media misfires in its
coverage of urban crime

By Salim Muwakkil
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EDITORIAL

AN AMBIGUOUS FIRST STEP IN HAITI

The restoration of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to office is one of those rarest of occurrences: a Washington foreign policy move that conforms to officially enunciated principles. Rhetorically, there was little choice. After all, Aristide was elected in 1990 with 70 percent of the vote in Haiti's first democratic election. And he was overthrown by a bloodthirsty military—acting at the behest of the island's tiny ruling class—that routinely slaughtered supporters of the ousted president.

As the self-proclaimed defender of democracy throughout the world, Washington had at least to give lip service to rescuing it in Haiti. And lip service was all that Aristide and the Haitian people received from George Bush during his final years in the White House. In 1992 Bill Clinton campaigned on a promise to return Aristide to power, but in office he waffled and began begging Gen. Raoul Cédras to share power with his victim. This only encouraged the Haitian military to destroy Aristide's base of popular support by conspicuously hacking down its leaders.

Finally, the attacks became too bald and the refugees too numerous. But even then it took the Congressional Black Caucus, a group of wealthy Hollywood liberals and a hunger strike by human rights advocate Randall Robinson to make Clinton change direction. First he went to the U.N. and pushed through a stringent trade embargo. Then, when that didn't work, he began threatening an invasion.

Aristide is returning as president, but the military leaders responsible for three years of terror remain perilously close to power.

Cédras, however, had become convinced that Clinton would never carry out the threat. A handful of his thugs had already

scared off a U.S. Navy ship carrying human rights observers to Port-au-Prince. And opposition to Aristide by the media, the CIA and Republican leaders and conservative Democrats in Congress appeared certain to keep Clinton from acting. Even at the last minute, when ex-president Jimmy Carter, Sen. Sam Nunn (D-GA) and former Pentagon chief of staff Gen. Colin Powell came to negotiate his resignation, Cédras refused to give in until he was convinced that the invading force was on its way.

So now we have an agreement that Cédras and his closest associates will step down on October 15. But does this guarantee that the Haitian military and police will be stripped of

their power and that Aristide will be allowed to exercise the full authority of his office? The vast majority of Haitian refugees in this country do not think so, and neither do we. Nor is there anything in the history of U.S.-Haitian relations, or in the policies of the Clinton administration, to give assurances that democracy will be restored along with Aristide.

Aristide himself will certainly try to neutralize the forces that the country's elite and their American corporate compatriots have used to subdue the Haitian people. But at the time of this writing it appears that Cédras and his cohorts will remain in Haiti under the protection of the American-led occupation force, and it has been made abundantly clear that the business, military and political forces that Clinton consistently bends to are extremely hostile to Aristide and the popular democracy for which he stands.

In delivering the Republican response to a Clinton radio address, Rep. Bob Livingston of Louisiana accused Aristide of being a fanatical "radical leftist who has spewed anti-American venom for years." Rep. Robert Torricelli (D-NJ), the hawk from whom Clinton has taken his lead on Cuban policy, denounced attempts to restore Aristide. And the CIA is sticking by its anti-Aristide propaganda—and by its assets among the top ranks of the Haitian military.

On the *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*, Carter praised Cédras as a principled man of honor. And he implied that Cédras and the other assassins who normally run Haiti under U.S. sufferance would be kept in the country at least until 1996, when a new president will be elected and American troops are scheduled to be withdrawn.

In short, the struggle for democracy in Haiti is not over. An ambiguous first step has been taken, which is to the good if it is not the last step. The next step must be the removal from Haiti of those responsible for the events of the past three years, or they must be placed on trial and imprisoned. Beyond that, Aristide must be allowed to exercise his constitutional powers unimpeded by U.S. efforts to control and exploit Haiti. Only then will we be able to say that democracy has been restored.

Note to readers: Joel Bleifuss is on paternity leave.