



## Haitian-Americans United, Inc. (H.A.U.)

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H.A.U. OPEN LETTER TO REVEREND EUGENE RIVERS,  
by an Ad Hoc Committee called by the Haitian Americans United, Inc. (HAU)

Dear Reverend Rivers:

An Ad Hoc committee of Haitian Americans called by the Haitian Americans United, Inc. (HAU), has met and decided to accept your apology for the insensitive and thoughtless remarks you made about Haitian and other immigrant youths on May 13, 2003 on WGBH-TV. While your apology did not adequately address the deeper concerns of the Haitian American community, we feel that it may at least open a dialogue to help you to understand our community better. Such understanding is especially important to us whenever we deal with leaders purporting to effect changes in our community. We strongly believe that no real change in a community can come from anyone who does not take the time to know about the core values of the community.

Your words deeply offended members of the Haitian American community.

When you referred to Haitian youths as **“Toussaint, Pierre, .... whatever your name is ... ,“** we know that you must not have known that TOUSSAINT is not a common first name for Haitians. The only common reference of TOUSSAINT as a first name comes from TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE. He is a National Haitian Hero credited for his vision in the battles that led to the creation of Haiti as the First Black Independent Nation in the world in 1804. Toussaint Louverture’s knowledge of military strategy and war planning has often been compared to that of Napoleon Bonaparte. As we owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Martin Luther King for his life long struggle for Civil Rights in America, we also stand on the shoulders of Toussaint Louverture.

Your suggestion that an effective way to deal with Haitian youths might be to tell them that we’ll **“lock you monkey butt up, .. and deport you,“** was even more astonishing, and insensitive. This statement was in and of itself a welcoming invitation to stereotype and to abuse the same youths you claim you want to help. The term **“Monkey-butt,“** is offensive to anyone of African ancestry. There is absolutely no excuse for its use in reference to Haitian, African American, or Jamaican people... In addition, the **deportation** of Haitian or any other immigrant youths will not eradicate gang violence or any other crime. Deportation devastates families and destroys lives of very decent people. Immigrant children are no different from any others living in their own neighborhood. Your exaggerated focus on them is dangerous and deeply troubling to Haitian parents. While these parents may welcome the collaboration of local leaders in reducing crime in their communities, they resent your disrespectful approach.

The frustration you feel in trying to reach or work with immigrant leaders is not unusual. It takes a level of trust that you apparently have ignored thus far. We predict that your efforts will continue to be fruitless, if you continue to ignore the basic principles involved in working with people of different backgrounds.

Some people feel that the goal of your interview on the WGBH program was solely to define a crucial community need for the benefit of your funders. We reserve judgment on this issue. However we feel that while you may have generated some interest by your comments, you have also raised serious questions on your ability to achieve any of your stated goals. We believe that any measurable success with your outreach program in communities such as ours can only come with a deep understanding and respect for our culture and tradition.

Our communities are becoming more and more diverse. This diversity brings with it the need for the search of new solutions to old problems. It will take concerted efforts on the part of everyone in a community to rid it of violence.

The Haitian American community is rich in culture and history. Its members are very hard working and proud parents. We invite you to learn some of that history, and maybe then we can work together on possible resolutions of our common problems.

Respectfully,

Kerby Roberson  
For the Ad Hoc Committee