

Courtesy: Boston Haitian Reporter

### **Happy January 1<sup>st</sup> 2004 to my/our Children...**

By Charlot Lucien

On January 1<sup>st</sup> 2004, the day marking 200 years of Haiti's independence, I will invite my two Haitian-American children, my daughter 8 and my son 5, and my nephews and nieces into my office. I will lean some paintings of Toussaint Louverture, Jean Jacques Dessalines, Alexandre Pétion against the walls and spread on the little round table various books, illustrations and brochures with beautiful images of our Haitian heroes and Haiti's landscapes and monuments.

Right in the middle of the table, there will be a huge bowl of steaming squash soup from Mamy Annette, filled vegetables, beef and pork, and various treats once forbidden to their great-great-great grand fathers and mothers, due to their status as slaves.

Then, slowly turning the pages, I will answer their questions about a few super heroes they have never seen on TV: Toussaint Louverture riding his giant silver horse through the wind and defeating French, British and Spanish troops; Dessalines defeating thousands of bad guys with a few hundred men in 1802; Capois la Mort rising from below his dead horse after two bullets failed to kill him in November 1803; Christophe fighting alongside American troops in Savannah in 1776, then building the tallest fortress in the Caribbean; Pétion sending troops to South America to free black slaves.

As I turn the pages, I will make sure that they memorize names, that they pronounce "Loo-ver-tur", "Dayss-sa-leen", "Maaree-Jaan", "Pay-teeon", correctly, bribing them with some incentive (toys, books, movies, brown Barbies) if necessary.

Their right to know and be proud of their ancestors' achievements won't be held hostage or swayed by any politically motivated quarter or arguments –whatever sound they may- or by the bad choices of a government, political leaders and their supporters.

On January 1st regardless of who is in power, God or the Devil, civilian or military regime, around the once forbidden bowl of soup, memories and victories of our Haitian super heroes and heroines will be evoked. Nobody will be expected to praise current leaders on either side of the political fence. As a matter of fact, they may be ignored. And yes, maybe some might even ride the celebrations, but they won't be able to claim mine as theirs. Given the choice between letting them ride it and denying my children this opportunity to be proud of their History, I choose the first option. Maybe the very evocation of the exploits of the ancestors will shame those responsible for the country's current plight, who knows.

So, on January 1st, my children will proudly eat their soup and I will get them to proudly repeat the names of their heroic ancestors. With the hope that they would take their stories to their little classmates.

My curious daughter –I know her well now- may ask: why aren't some Haitians celebrating? I will point out to her that all Haitians are still enjoying the traditional January 1st squash soup -a celebration in itself; that, in addition, while I will respect others' choice to claim collective responsibility and reflect on this day, I want to make sure that as father, daughter and son, we enjoy this special time together while we are alive and well. By 2104, we will all be dead, and the good guys and the bad guys in this Haiti 2003 horror flick will all but be forgotten.

Happy January 1st 2004, and Happy New Year 2004 to all who will be at the very least sharing the squash soup with their families, in memory of glorious African warriors who led the first successful black revolution, built the first black republic, conquered at the tip of their weapons the right to eat whatever they wanted, and by the same token paved the way to freedom for several nations and several generations after them.

Charlot Lucien,

December 31, 2003