

Talking about race and Haiti

Though these two pieces about education, one about the terrible way the US is destroying any possibilities for a real system of public education in Haiti, the other reasons the author is NOT talking about race, do not make this connection, they point to the fact that education in the US has to be seen in the context of international policy, and in particular US imperialism, in which racism is profoundly embedded. This connection is not a new one, but it's one worth repeating. As Jesse Hagopian notes in his piece on Haiti "Haiti and New Orleans have an inextricably linked history, including the 10,000 refugees that left Saint-Domingue (present-day Haiti) and arrived in New Orleans in 1809, doubling the population of the city. They brought with them the Creole culture and voodoo religion, elements of which persist in the bayou to this day."

What events in Haiti drive home is that we have to talk about race, although it is very hard to do so. And I think one of the reasons we are having trouble having that discussion is the complexity of feelings about our having an African American president. His victory was an electrifying moment in US history, for everyone who cares about racism. Yet, Obama has been able to escape responsibility for the increased pauperization of millions of people in the US, especially people of color, because many of his supporters have been profoundly disheartened by the fact of an African American man being the person who, in the end, has agreed to policies that are so harmful to the vast majority of Americans. We're not going to be able to set education on a better course unless we do talk about race, in the US and in US foreign policy. Teachers in Swazi and in Congo are courageously resisting policies endorsed by the US government through the World Bank and IMF. Their struggles are invisible to most US teachers. And that invisibility cannot be explained without talking about race.

