

WYCLEF
JEAN

No
Haiti,
No Cry

By Marlon Regis

Photos by Marc Baptiste

The gift to connect comes from God. As part of the children of my father's church at a very young age, every Sunday my father would say, "You have to sing to the congregation." And I remember one Sunday I didn't have a song, so I went up to my dad and said, "Dad I don't got a song." He was like, "Make one up!" He said there was like someone out there that lost their job, or somebody out there that got cancer, or someone out there on welfare . . . so he said you gotta make up something to make them feel better. Yeah, he put it all on me, I was like 12. But I understood what he said and when I started to sing, people started smiling and shouting. It's almost like they got connected to something that they needed to hear. It just made me understand how important music was to the world.

—WYCLEF JEAN

It is with this God-given gift to connect that has enabled Wyclef Jean, Grammy Award-winning singer/musician/rapper/producer, to so convincingly move from musical genre to genre, displaying a magnificence that brings forth the ultimate entertainment. He may not be blessed with the dancing abilities of Usher or Baaba Maal, but he makes up with every other aspect of entertaining on stage. Playing alongside, recording with and producing for everyone from Carlos Santana to Celia Cruz and Youssou N'Dour, Wyclef is also no stranger to the reggae-dancehall arena, having worked with Bounty Killer, the Marleys, Buju Banton and many others. Whether he's responsible for boosting the pop careers of newcomers or already-established megastars including Whitney Houston, Bono, Michael Jackson, Stevie Wonder, Kenny Rogers, Mary J. Blige, Simply Red and Destiny's Child, Wyclef's multi-platinum productions outside of the countless hit songs he's written for himself and his once-unified Fugees ensemble, may have gained your attention at least at one particular time in your life.

Born Nelust Wyclef Jean Oct. 17, 1972 in Croix-de-Bouquets, Haiti, he and his family moved to Marlborough Projects in Brooklyn, NY in 1981 when Wyclef was only nine years old. His upbringing in the golden age of hip-hop shaped Wyclef's foresight into eventually forming the Fugees in 1987 with Pras (Prakazrel Michel) and Lauryn Hill, at first calling themselves the Tranzlator Crew. On Wyclef's latest musical project, probably one of the closest to his heart and Haitian heritage, the launch of his Sak Pasé record label and its debut lp, *Welcome to Haiti: Creole 101* released in 2004, commemorated Haiti's 200th anniversary of independence. Unlike his previous four solo hip-hop albums (*Wyclef Presents the Carnival*, *The Eclectic: 2 Sides II A Book*, *Masquerade* and *The Preacher's Son*), *Welcome to Haiti: Creole 101* focuses much more on Wyclef's interest in Haitian musical forms, as well as Caribbean and world music.

Wyclef's solo debut lp of 1997, *Wyclef Presents the Carnival*, a hip-hop album that sold millions, also teased listeners then with a couple of Haitian songs sung in his native Creole tongue. Seven years later, with the timing of the album's first single, "President" released in the wave of political fever leading up to the 2004 presidential elections in the U.S., Wyclef made the circuit performing this song as if he himself was running for office. He aroused thousands at the Democratic National Convention in New York, at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles, and for televised broadcasts on Comedy Central's popular "Dave Chappelle Show," where he first performed it, "The Tonight Show" on NBC and "Jimmy Kimmel Live" on ABC.

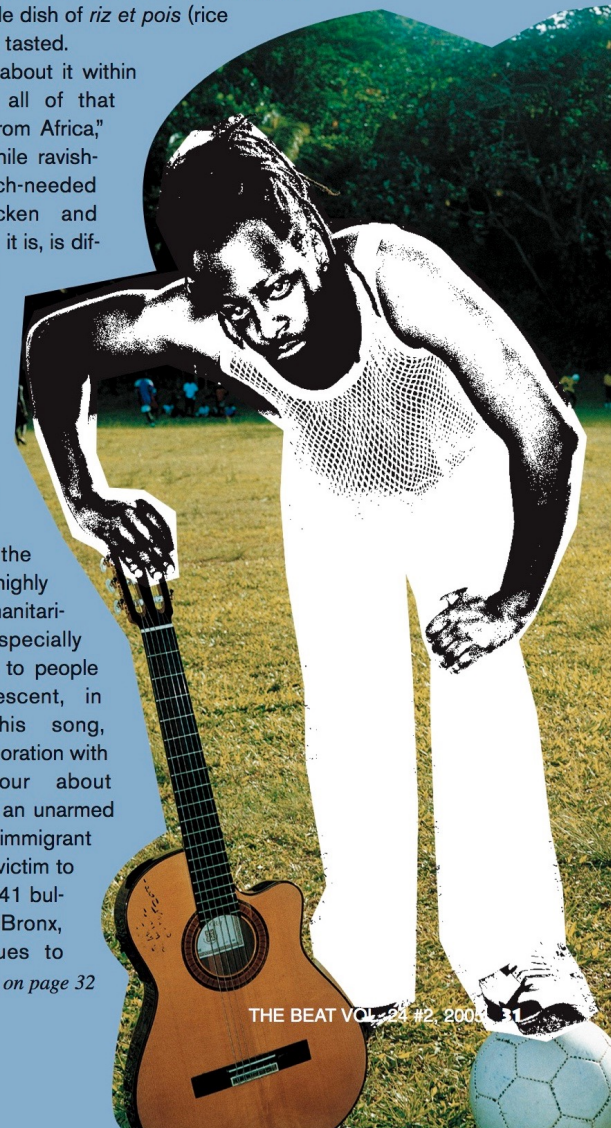
Used more as an easy bridge for his hip-hop fans and the American public to promote *Welcome to Haiti: Creole 101*, "President" is a far cry from the majority of the album—which with traditional Creole and French language set to the *konpa*, *zouk* and *rara* musical rhythms—is Wyclef's

ultimate dedication to his homeland, Haiti. This is very much a world beat album produced by Wyclef himself, and brother Jerry "Wonder" Duplessis, with a party atmosphere reminiscent of a tropical island, featuring guest appearances by the likes of Buju Banton, Admiral T, Foxy Brown, Sweet Mickey, T-Vice and many others from Haiti. "Bicentennial" pushes a calypso groove and konpa undertone, with lyrics touching on the Haitian experience at home and abroad. He even digs into the cumbia and reggaeton styles of Latin America, but it's back to the Motherland with "So Proud to Be African," as Wyclef's wider exploration of Afro-Caribbean music and its artists marinates into a memorable dish of *riz et pois* (rice and peas) once tasted.

"If you think about it within the simplicity, all of that music comes from Africa," Wyclef says while ravishing some much-needed Roscoe's chicken and waffles. "And all it is, is different tribes separated. When you put all the tribes together, you have a celebration. And that's what you have on the album."

Always at the forefront of a highly publicized humanitarian cause, especially when it comes to people of African descent, in 1999 with his song, "Diallo," a collaboration with Youssou N'Dour about Amadou Diallo, an unarmed West African immigrant who fell a fatal victim to NYPD officers' 41 bullets in the Bronx, Wyclef continues to

Continued on page 32



WYCLEF JEAN

Continued from page 32

carry the strong traditions of an African griot—singing and laying down history. And more recently, his inspiring song “Million Voices,” scored for the film *Hotel Rwanda*, was nominated in the “Best Original Song” category of this year’s Golden Globe awards. Like Liberian soccer star George Weah, who has committed his energies to helping repair his war-torn West African country, with Haiti on his mind, a new label, a new album and his Yelè Haiti Foundation, Wyclef is the driving force behind new-found help for Haiti’s youth to support education, health, environment and the rebuilding of his native land through the combination of music and community development. Upon touching down in Los Angeles from Haiti, ‘Clef, as he’s affectionately called, shared everything on his mind (except a single bite of his quickly devoured fried chicken).

Marlon Regis: Sak Pasé, your new label and its first release, *Welcome to Haiti: Creole 101*—has this always been a concrete plan for years, from the days of the Fugees?

Wyclef Jean: The concept of this album is some people want Wyclef, but they want him in Creole. Some people more like the world-beat style ‘cause of my native tongue. I’ll always do the music in Haitian sometimes, but then I’ll have an outlet where I can get it to the whole Caribbean and parts of Africa. So then I feel there needs to be another label so that the kids could know that world beat is actually a cool thing. Not just older people listen to world beat. So this is just my way of introducing a whole ‘nother thing to the fans of Wyclef.

Q: Outside of the Fugees, you’ve produced and worked with a cast of the music industry’s most dominant forces. What is it in you and your upbringing that’s so different from other American artists with Caribbean roots—and there are several—who have never focused on the roots of their heritage and background like you do, even introducing it into the mainstream?

A: My parents always said, “If you don’t know where you came from, you don’t know where you going.” You should always let people know where you really from, ‘cause there’s something special about where you from. So they put that in me since I was a kid.

Q: And you don’t think that was put in the head

*Toussaint was a mighty man, and to make matters worse he
was black Back, back in the days when black men knew
their place was in the back But this rebel still walk
through Napoleon, who thought that wasn’t very nice
And so today, my brothers in Haiti still pay the price.
—David Rudder, “Haiti”*

of many of these other artists with foreign backgrounds before as well? But with you for some reason it stuck and resonates with you so much today. There’s obviously something in you that...

A: I love Caribbean music, just generally. I probably know like what’s hitting in Martinique, what’s hitting France...I think that’s because they [the other artists] are more like hip-hop/reggae generated...For me, hip-hop, reggae, calypso, konpa, zouk, whatever is going on, I wanna know about it.

Q: You begin the album with an excerpt from *The Agronomist*—a biodocumentary on Haiti’s most-noted journalist-activist, Jean Dominique, directed by Jonathan Demme [*Philadelphia*, *The Silence of the Lambs*, *The Manchurian Candidate*]. Was Jean Dominique someone that played an influential role in your family’s life and your upbringing, or was this more romanticized as an intro to add color and authenticity to the lp?

A: No, uhmmm . . . what he said was important. My father once told me the same thing. “You ain’t English, French, you Haitian, so wherever you go . . .” he always said, “let them know you Haitian.” And it was more like just a sense of you feeling proud of where you come from. Everybody’s proud of where they come from. And I’m just proud that I’m a Haitian.

Q: And when you use the word “Creole”—is it really a broken form of French, Haitian-style? Somewhat like slang in the U.S. ghetto, or Jamaican patois, which is a broken form of English, and the same with other islands right? Is this Haitian Creole deep-rooted or tied to any particular African dialect or language?

A: I mean all Creole is tied to African dialect. It’s a combination of the slave language—wherever your slave master was—that’s the language. So it’s like, the Haitians come from a place called Benin Republic in Africa, right next to Nigeria. If you hear the natural Nigerian dialect, it’s very similar-sounding to Creole. But then the slaves end up in Haiti, which is being occupied by the French. So then they have to create. And that’s how Creole formed, our Creole. The fact is, wherever you go and wherever there was slaves, there would be Creole. Whether it’s Dutch, then there would be the mix of the African.

Q: Then, what in this album would you say, outside of the beautiful language of Creole, highlights other rich aspects of Haiti’s history and its people’s struggles?

A: There’s so many, man, I mean I think people should listen to the general sound of Haitian music, and they would be surprised. Like pick up the old stuff, I’m telling you, you’ll be surprised how Haitian music influenced a lot of other music. Haitian-bred music made transitions for a lot of other forms of music, the same way in America you constantly hear of other forms of music having its roots or bases in Chicago’s and New Orleans’ jazz and blues. As regards to this album, I would say a good format would be number two (“24 é Tan Pou Viv”) after the Intro. It’s so funny because I put hip-hop behind a cultural, traditional Haitian [song] like, [Sings] Now that’s a sample.

Q: As to Jamaica are reggae, ska and dancehall, or as to Trinidad & Tobago are calypso, soca and steelpan, as to Haiti are konpa, zouk and rara? Break it down for us as it pertains to the album...

A: Yeah, we have all those types of rhythms on the album, and of course we have Creole hip-hop! The konpa is the traditional, which comes from the *rasin*. Rara is rasin-rasin meaning root. The roots of the music is the basic drums, more of an acoustic, natural sound. Not electrical instruments at all. Everything is created within a drive of acoustic drums, the sound of the horn even is acoustic. Everything is created from wood. That’s the root. Then of course you have konpa, and from konpa you get zouk. And that’s where you have the big debate amongst the islands.

Q: You know I was just thinking of my growing up in the Caribbean, always hearing zouk and at a point it was very popular party music to dance to, and we always immediately tied it only to Martinique or Guadeloupe, not for once thinking of Haiti.

A: It’s actually Haiti where they’d get it from. All you have to do is go to the Benin Republic, the foundation of that konpa which was taken to Haiti. Martinique and Guadeloupe heard that and it was a lot of different rhythms, and they simplified it. [Zouk is] very simple to listen to. Because the konpa is heavier in the rhythms, and they was like, how could we simplify it?

And that's what they did: Kassav.

Q: So what would you say separates Haiti's music from the rest of the islands?

A: The traditional Haitian music you hear has a lot of roots and even if you wanna hear some good Afro-Cuban, before it was known as Afro-Cuban in like the 1940s, you should hear Haiti's music. You should hear musicians from Haiti, switching off rhythms. Haiti is the root for a lot of that stuff.

Q: Wow, that's eye opening to a youngster like me—probably even to older folks too. Why do you think this is so unknown on a large scale? It's like when it comes to anything outside of the misfortune associated with Haiti, everything else gets downplayed. . . .

A: It's so unknown 'cause Haiti was the first country to gain its independence, in the New World, which means or translates—all Europeans moved out. So that means they went to Martinique, Guadeloupe. They made these places their home. Everyone pulled out of Haiti, they were like, "OK,

you'll handle yourselves." In one sense, it was good, but in another sense it was bad. Haiti didn't get enough promotion, didn't get enough credit for anything.

Q: We're definitely moving away from the music, which I don't mind, because this is so synonymous with Haitian culture. You're beginning to sound like a Haitian "Champion of the poor" or "Voice of the Voiceless"—like Jean-Bertrand Aristide...

A: One thing . . . [Laughs] don't call me Jean-Bertrand Aristide...

Q: OK, but I mean more the title "voice of the voiceless" when it comes to your Haitian image and music. You think although you're a multi-millionaire able to have the same comforts the dictators of Haiti in the past enjoyed, how do you think this sits with the poor who supposedly follow your music and message—proud or skeptical?

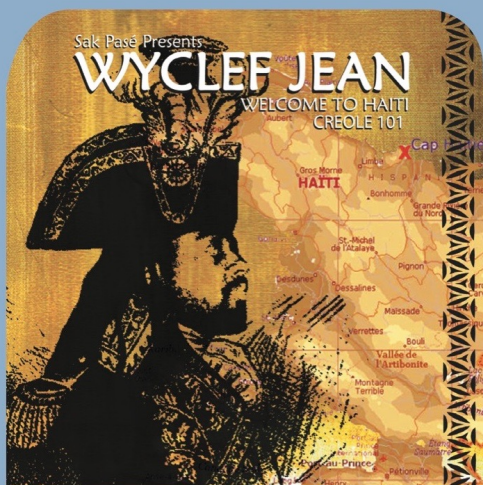
A: I think the problem they have with it is if you can't reach out and touch them, to give them a sense of inspiration. That's always the problem I think poor people have. I was born and came from a poor family, but I didn't hate rich people. I'm poor like here [points to his pockets], but in my mind, I was very rich. So I always thought of that when I was little. And I think the problem is when you separate yourself. I mean Wyclef has never separated himself from *anybody*. I'm just getting back from Haiti right now, and I went into the deepest...I was on a peace talk with the gangs, telling them you can't do this and that. The police was there, members of the United Nations were there. I was talking to gang members.

Q: When you speak of gang members, street gangs or organized political gangs?

A: It's just like you have Bloods and Crips, they all look up to me and they all wanna know how I made it and I talk to them. I think a voice is important, I think a voice is a great start. Just a start in conversation is great, but it takes much more of course.

Q: You're not a politician nor are you a historian, but let's continue to touch on Haiti, since this album and launch of this Sak Pasé label commemorated the 200th anniversary of

Continued on page 11



WELCOME
TO HAITI:
CREOLE 101

Welcome to Haiti: Creole 101 is Wyclef Jean's celebration of Haiti's 200th anniversary of independence from the French. It is a musical tribute not only to his homeland but a musical tour of the Caribbean islands mixing his own hip-hop style with Haitian flavors like *kompa* and *rara* but also with a good dose of zouk, ragga, r&b, soca and Latin music sung in French, Creole and English. And because of that, this record will probably not have the same commercial impact but for Jean, who has already reached stardom, that might not be so important. This is not an ordinary record and it should be considered as an expansion of the author's musical genius. The 200th anniversary of Haitian liberation is an event that Wyclef wanted to mark with something special: His music is dedicated to his people and their struggle for a better future.

Right from the start, we know we are in for something out of the ordinary. The introduction is all about "Haitian pride" with the voice of Jean Dominique, a well-known journalist who was murdered in front of his Port-au-Prince radio station in 2000. The music starts with "24 Hours to Live," a song asking what would you do if you had just 24 hours left in your life. "Party by the Sea" where Buju Banton and the Martino Brothers, from the Miami-based band T-Vice, join their efforts to give us one of the hits of this album, at least on the Haitian radio stations. Then it's Carnival time with "Festival / Fistibal" with samplings from the song "Rhythms of the Night." Wyclef pays tribute to another great Haitian musician, Ti Paris, in the song "Lè ou Marye," showing the virtues of marriage, reminiscent of Coupé Cloué, tasty, funny and with plenty of double

meanings. He gets excellent assistance from Fabrice Rouzier and Clément Belizaire, two musicians who revived the *twoubadou* Haitian music style.

One of Jean's favorite tools is to take a well-known classic and turn it upside down with his own approach: That's exactly what he does with Ritchie Valens' "La Bamba," and it works well. *Rara* music is not forgotten as "Marasa," with its wicked rhythm and a reminder that Boukman, the slave, started the uprising against the French at the end of the 18th century. Then how about "Haitian Mafia," where Jamaica's Foxy Brown teams up with Wyclef and sings in Creole. Boat people and their tragic destiny are presented in the song "Lavi New York" with a reminder of their harsh life and often-illegal status. "Fanm Keyol," sung with Admiral T, native of the French Antilles, tells us that he definitively prefers Caribbean girls. That's fine, Wyclef. We do not have a problem with that! And we finally have a song sung in English, "President." With black humor, the song says, "If I get elected as President on Friday, assassinated on Saturday, buried on Sunday, then I will go back to work on Monday."

Wyclef has created a very powerful album, with his refreshing brand of hip-hop mixed with his own roots and his experiences. He is a proud man and has every reason to be. Let's hope that in the future he will continue to entertain us with the same kind of emotions and passion. *Welcome to Haiti: Creole 101* is about in-your-face truth and pride and an excellent testament to Wyclef's genuine creativity.

[www.sakpaserecords.net]

—Jean-Pierre Petit

without, but they're a minor distraction. This is Central African pop music at its most dense and complex and the uninitiated may not be able to "find the one" or follow it in any way, let alone dance to it—no dumbing down here. Recommended, perhaps highly so. I have a feeling this disc may have hidden delights that will unfold as time goes on. [Fax: (301) 933-6298; preyamusica@eyango.com]

[Contact Sid via swhelan773@earthlink.net .]

DVD DILEMMA

Continued from page 41

out of ideas and are simply recycling their earlier successes. Koffi "Quadra Kora Man" Olomide is as guilty as anyone of rehashing his songs. I'm quick to recognize that **Koffi Olomide, *Monde Arabe*** (Sonima SMCD 1550) doesn't sound too different from his last couple of albums but unlike some of my friends and colleagues I am not prepared to be too condemnatory. Why should we expect someone who has been nominated four times for a Kora Award and who sells more albums than virtually anyone else from Africa to drastically change their formula? Yes, the songs are familiar but they are skillfully performed and produced to his customary high standard. *Monde Arabe* is another of Koffi's double cds with a generous two hours and 27 minutes of music. Maybe the lengthy duration is part of the problem: It is an album that tends to gently envelop the listener and during the course of two and a half hours gradually induce a mild intoxication. Or for those listeners who are fatigued by Koffi's style it will simply induce sleep.

There is the usual balance of love ballads adorned with electronic harpsichord and swirling synths, and the more uptempo animated dance sequences. Koffi's ballads can be incredibly predictable, verging on middle of the road, with either his wispy high vocal crooning or his lower register gravely muttering. Given the right environment and with the listener being in the right frame of mind these ballads are never substandard. His band, some of them curiously uncredited on the sleeve, are still in fine form with guitarists Felly Tyson, Fofu Collegien and Ramazani coming up with some tasteful, understated fill-in passages. Despite losing distinctive singer Lola Muana, who has quit the group, there are still some good voices in Quartier Latin, and his amateurs CNN, Bebe Kero and Apocalypse belt out the dance encouragement with great gusto.

Monde Arabe is nowhere near as interesting as the discs that represent the cream of Koffi. The early masterpieces from the time he was formulating his unique "tcha-tcho" style still stand out in the history of modern Congolese music. Albums like *Ngobila*, *Diva*, *Henriquet*, *Koweit Rive Gauche*, *Pas de Faux Pas* and *Noblesse Oblige*, and even the later recordings like *V12* and *Loi* are far more satisfactory and creative than *Monde Arabe*. Koffi once sang "Music is the

drug.... and we are the dealers." For many this new recording will represent an overdose of Koffi's drug but despite this there is still plenty of great music to be enjoyed in this album.

Contact Martin Sinnock at martin.sinnock@sandersonweatherall.com or mhs@weatherallnorth.co.uk or write to P.O. Box 406, Croydon CR9 1XR, England.

Check out www.africasounds.com where Martin Sinnock's extended articles can be found, as well as his regular column for *The Beat* dating back to 1996, with the addition of many photographs of Congolese artists he has taken. Visit www.TotallyRadio.com to hear his Internet radio broadcasts on *The Ashanti Show* "Viva la Musica" and "The Rough Guide Radio Show."

PANCHO QUINTO

Continued from page 47

Other new percussion ensembles that emerged in Cuba. Generous with his knowledge, Pancho Quinto taught thousands of Cubans and many foreigners who had sought him out from Germany, Spain, Mexico and other places.

In 1995, Robert Leaver and I invited Pancho to record his first solo record with his own dream team of percussionists and singers. This recording highlighted his percussion innovations and his fusion of many different styles and influences. In 1998, he toured the United States with his group, performing in New York, New Orleans and Lafayette, LA, and all over California. During the tour, he recorded a cd for us, *Rumba Without Borders* (Riverboat), that brought together John Santos, Omar Sosa and Octavio Rodriguez in a groundbreaking fusion of rhythms and musical styles from the African diaspora. His many recordings with Bunnett also highlight his virtuosity, innovation and the rhythmic concepts he introduced into Cuban music.

Pancho Quinto will be missed for his positive spirit, his generosity and his groundbreaking contributions to Cuban percussion. His work should stand with other musical pioneers such as Charlie Parker, Chano Pozo and Miles Davis who brought fresh musical concepts to the world.

—Greg Landau

WYCLEF JEAN

Continued from page 33

Haitian independence. How active are you in trying to break the "Westernized curse" that seemed to cast a dark spell of poverty, mishaps, bloodshed and chaos in your homeland?

A: Well I think to be aware of it, you got to be able to talk to everybody. I listen to everyone speak firsthand. I listen to everybody. I think everybody who is a real Haitian wants to see their country move forward. I think what we lack honestly, is these international countries need to step in and lend Haiti a hand. There's nothing wrong with international help, putting in schools, putting in hospitals, they have

money to do all that stuff.

Q: Why should they help, and why is it not happening you think?

A: Why it's not happening, I think one of the reasons is security—the safety of individuals. Haitian people are very political. They believe in if you promise them something, you better give it to them. But they're very friendly people as well. I think what is gonna take to change Haiti is an awareness of the international community, a full-fledged security force in Haiti working to secure the country while things progress. Because there's parts of Haiti, you won't believe—from all perspectives. There's places that would put Beverly Hills to shame, then there are the darkest, darkest places you can't believe that people live there. And I speak firsthand. I'm not a Haitian who publicizes Haiti from America.

Q: Ever since the Haitian revolution, race and class struggles have torn through the fabric of Haitian society and its stability. For you as an artist, what has been its effect on your music, and how has this affected your relationships in the music world?

A: The way I approach and climb up the ladder is, take someone like Toussaint L'Overture or Jean-Jacques Dessalines or people like that—they never gave up. There were times it seemed that they weren't gonna win the war, but they never gave up. The key to it is, and to some Haitian philosophy is: Little by little the bird gonna build the nest. So it's sort of like that's how you have to do it. If you go little by little . . . these are all the things I take into consideration when I wake up and how I work and how I move.

Q: And what if, in Haiti's case, little by little you're building, but outside factors—whether they're natural disasters or some sort of U.S. tariff—come in and pull apart the nest?

A: I think people are always gonna pull the nest apart. Kinda like the Don King philosophy—you could make some hundred million dollars, but you only get five million. That's a little, compared, but if you smart enough, you could turn that five million into 20.

Q: That's still sad though, Haiti seems to always be under siege—it makes me think of calypso star David Rudder's 1989 album title and Caribbean smash hit, "Haiti" where the chorus sings, "Haiti I'm sorry..." and sent a touching message of how the Caribbean and the rest of the world continues to turn its back on your small island nation...

A: Whoever is the first in anything gonna be shot, killed and buried. In Haiti's situation, we were the first [colony] to get independence. It was a joyful day, but today it's a sad day. It has potential to be a joyful day again. But it's gonna take international help. For Haiti to move forward also, light skin and dark skin must become one skin. As long as there's a separation of skin, there will always be great walls and barriers. Still today it's prevalent, so whoever becomes the president, whatever happens in Haiti in its current state, they need to make everyone work together, they need to kill that separation of light skin and dark skin immediately. That should be part of their speech every time they speak. That's real. ★