

FATAL ASSISTANCE

a film by **RAOUL PECK**
(Haiti) 100 mins.

**AfroPoP X**
the ultimate cultural exchange

DISCUSSION GUIDE
SEASON 10

HOST: NICHOLAS L. ASHE stars as Micah West in the critically acclaimed OWN series *Queen Sugar*, directed by Ava DuVernay and executive-produced by Oprah Winfrey. Earlier he played Viola Davis's son in the courtroom drama *Custody*. Ashe made his acting debut at age 10 in the role of Young Simba in the national tour of *The Lion King*. Ashe is also a talented vocalist, pianist and composer. In 2015, he created a scholarship for young artists in his hometown of Freeport, Long Island. Ashe collaborated with Cierra Glaude on a short film titled *Last Looks*, which had its world premiere at the 2017 Urbanworld Film Festival.



AfroPoP: The Ultimate Cultural Exchange is a US-based public television show featuring independent documentaries and short films about life, art, and culture from the contemporary African Diaspora. The African Diaspora includes Africa, the Caribbean, Canada, South America, Europe, the US, and anywhere people of African descent have made a significant contribution to the culture.

The films are always carefully selected to portray a more balanced view of Africa than you'll get on the nightly news and to provide fuel for what must be a global conversation on the present day realities and contemporary lifestyles of Africans, both on the continent and in the Diaspora.

USING THIS GUIDE

BACKGROUND

The first section of the guide provides

- A synopsis of the film and information on the filmmaker, along with a list of central characters and topics
- Background on the film's key issues, focused on brief historical, cultural, and political context

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

The second part of this guide provides questions crafted to be springboards for dialogue, inviting audience members to engage with the issues raised in the film and with one another.

The prompts are designed to meet the needs of a wide range of audiences and circumstances, so you'll want to choose those that best meet your particular needs. You may want to dive directly into an issue-based prompt, or you can gauge the interests of the audience by starting with a general question. There's no reason to cover them all or to use them in order (except for the "wrap-up" questions, which are intended to help people synthesize information at the end of a discussion). Typically you'll only need one or two questions to get things going; let the audience take it from there, using their interests to guide the path of the discussion.

Recommended for: high school, college, and adult audiences

RESOURCES

The final section the guide lists related resources. You can use them to prepare for leading a discussion or recommend them to audience members seeking additional information.



AFROPOP: THE ULTIMATE CULTURAL EXCHANGE

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BACKGROUND

Film Synopsis

In 2010 Haiti was ground zero for a massive earthquake that flattened much of the nation's capital, killing tens of thousands, leaving more than a million people homeless, and confronting the small nation with the task of restoring normalcy with limited resources. In *Fatal Assistance*, Haitian-born filmmaker Raoul Peck takes us on a two-year journey inside the challenging, contradictory and colossal rebuilding efforts in post-disaster Haiti. Using footage of ongoing projects, along with interviews of the officials and NGO workers responsible for implementation and the Haitians they are supposedly helping, the film dives headlong into the complexity of the reconstruction process and the failed practices of disaster relief, humanitarian aid, and economic development initiatives. Ultimately, the film reveals an uncomfortable reality for developed nations and a tragedy for those in need: a country can receive billions in foreign aid and be worse off for the effort.



Topics: disaster relief, economic development, foreign aid, Haiti, housing, human rights, humanitarian aid, government corruption, NGOs/aid organizations,

Selected People Featured in the Film

Joséus Nader - Engineer, Ministry of Public Works, MTPTC
René Préval – President of Haiti
Jean-Max Bellerive – Prime Minister of Haiti and Co-chair of the IHRC
Gabriel Verret - Executive Director, IHRC
Priscilla Phelps – Housing Advisor, IHRC
Michel Martelly, President of Haiti, controversially “installed” by Western powers



The Filmmaker

Raoul Peck was born in 1953 in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. He is a director and writer, best known for *Lumumba* (2000), and *I Am Not Your Negro*, a documentary on American author James Baldwin that was nominated for a Best Documentary Academy Award in 2017. He has also produced films for HBO and served as a juror for some of the world's most prestigious film festivals, including Berlin and Cannes.

In 1996-1997, Peck served in the Haitian government as the Minister of Culture. In 2001, Human Rights Watch awarded him with the Irene Diamond Lifetime Achievement Award. He currently heads the French state film school La Femis. His latest feature, *The Young Karl Marx*, was released in France in 2017, and will open in the United States in February 2018.



CONTEXT

Interim Haiti Recovery Commission

The IHRC was announced at a conference of international donors convened at the United Nations on March 31, 2010 and was formally approved by Haitian lawmakers the following month. Its first meeting took place in June, 2010. The Commission's official mission was to oversee the implementation of Haiti's Action Plan for National Recovery and Development, including providing accountability and transparency to ensure that international assistance supported the priorities of the Haitian people.

The Commission was Co-chaired by Haitian Prime Minister, Jean Max Bellerive, and former U.S. President, Bill Clinton. Members of the Commission's governing board included representatives from:

- The Haitian government, parliament and judiciary;
- Selected donors: Brazil, Canada, CARICOM, the European Union, France, Inter-American Development Bank, Norway, Spain, United States, Venezuela and the World Bank; and
- Haitian labor unions and the private sector.
- In addition, representatives from the Diaspora, Haitian and international civil society organizations, and the Organization of American States were present as non-voting members.

Aid Pledges

Argentina - \$17.8 million
Australia - \$12.4 million
Belgium - \$8.9 million
Brazil - \$100 million
Canada - \$256 million
China - \$1.6 million
France - \$200 million
Germany - \$54.8 million
Japan - \$100 million
Nigeria - \$5 million
Qatar - \$20 million
Russia - \$8 million
South Korea - \$10 million
Spain - \$307 million
Switzerland - \$40 million
Thailand - \$2.5 million
USA - \$914 million
Venezuela - \$930 million
International Monetary Fund - \$147 million
World Bank - \$227 million

Damage Estimates

- 230,000 killed
- 300 000 injured
- 1.5 million homeless
- 355,000 houses to inspect for basic safety, with estimates that 25% of them will need to be repaired and 20% of them will be beyond repair and will need to be demolished
- an estimated 24 million tons of debris needs to be cleared from Port-au-Prince roads and land (this compares with 1 million tons after the 9/11 attacks brought down the towers in NYC)

Sources: United Nations Lessons From Haiti (www.lessonsfromhaiti.org); Fatal Assistance

Haiti

Despite its rich cultural traditions, Haiti is the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. Located in the Caribbean, just southeast of Cuba, it occupies approximately one-third of the island that it shares with the Dominican Republic. Its total population of just under 10 million people is 95% Black and mostly Roman Catholic (approx. 80%), though about half also practice voodoo. Haitians generally speak Creole, though French is also an official language. About half of the population is illiterate.

Haiti's indigenous Taino-Arawak population was mostly annihilated by Spanish settlers after Columbus' arrival on the island in 1492. When French settlers also arrived, the Spanish kept control of the eastern lands (now the Dominican Republic) but ceded the territory that is now Haiti to France. The French colony quickly became wealthy, but at the expense of the land and slaves imported from Africa.

By the late eighteenth century, the French had enslaved an estimated half a million people. In the early part of the nineteenth century, those slaves revolted. In 1804, that revolt succeeded and declared independence, making Haiti the first post-colonial Black-led nation in the world.

Since its independence Haiti has struggled to overcome its colonial legacy to establish democracy and a healthy economy. Internal civil wars and corruption, exacerbated by interference from the outside (including U.S. military and economic interventions), have created chronic instability and poverty. Democratically elected leaders have been assassinated or undermined by superpowers, and military dictators have been propped up only to be rejected (often violently) by the people.

This was the case with Jean-Claude Duvalier (Baby Doc), who succeeded his father as Haiti's president, wielding dictatorial power from 1971 to 1986. When he returned (as we see in the film), he was arrested with the intention of trying him for human rights violations, corruption, and embezzlement. However, he died in October 2014, before a trial could take place.

The earthquake that set in motion the events documented in the film took place in 2010. The massive 7.0 magnitude quake rocked Port-au-Prince, the nation's capital. Estimates are that over 300,000 people were killed and some 1.5 million left homeless. The nation still struggles to recover.



A group of people, including men, women, and children, are walking in a line across a dusty, open landscape. They are wearing various casual clothing, and some are carrying items. The background is a bright, hazy sky.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

General

If you were going to tell a friend about this film, what would you say?

In a word, what's your initial reaction to this film? How did it make you feel?

Summarize the main message(s) of this film in a single sentence or tweet. How does your summary compare to what others in the room wrote? What do you think accounts for the similarities or differences?

Describe a moment in the film that you found particularly moving. What was it about that scene that was especially compelling?

Reviewing Core Content

What's the meaning of the film's title?

What is the difference between disaster relief and reconstruction funding? What's the difference between humanitarian aid and economic development assistance?

What did you learn from the film about the ways that donor nations, aid organizations, or corporations make money from relief efforts? According to the film, how are those profits protected by keeping the Haitian government out of the decision making process?





Big Picture Questions

The film questions why, “despite billions of dollars poured into this small Caribbean island, life is still an unbearable burden.” Why do you think the money invested didn’t produce the promised outcome of a new and better Haiti (or, as the film asks, “How could there be no better story to tell?”)?

Engineer Joséus Nader observes, “Foreign aid changed the whole dynamic of the country.” How would you describe the dynamic created by the aid? In what ways was the new dynamic beneficial and in what ways was it harmful?

The film describes aid as “A paternalistic monster, which destroys everything in its path.” How do you distinguish between “paternalism” and “support”?

Examining General Aid Practices

Healthy development is gradual and takes time, but aid agencies want to show immediate results. Why? What pressures do organizations face that compel them to finish projects quickly? How does that pressure influence the nature of the projects they undertake?

In the early days following the quake, celebrities arrive to contribute to recovery efforts. What are the benefits and drawbacks of having celebrities involved?

Laura Graham, Chief of Staff for Pres. Clinton admits that although clearing debris is a major need, “donors don’t really find debris to be sexy enough...It’s not something that necessarily can show results. If donors...build schools, there is a picture of the school with kids in it. If donors build houses, there is family living in the house...” If you could create a marketing campaign, how would you make clearing debris as “sexy” as building a school?

Young, foreign staffers often assume that they or their organizations know what to do better than the locals. How could efforts like the IHRC blend the expertise of foreign aid staffers who bring experience in disaster recovery with the expertise of locals who know their community’s needs and resources?

Haiti: A Case Study in Failed Practice

Adviser to the Prime Minister, Joël Boutroue, laments the fact that Haiti is cast as “dangerous place: “It seems that Haiti always stands accused. ‘Prove to us that you are not corrupt.’” Joséus Nader adds, “Since we are a bunch of corrupt people, they send people to manage the money they give us. And while managing the money, they take 40% back home.”

- How do the legacies of colonialism and racism contribute to the perception of Haitians as inherently corrupt, incapable, or irresponsible?
- In your view, who should decide where/how foreign aid dollars are spent?
- What should aid organizations do when they have evidence that a government is corrupt?

President René Préval wishes foreign agencies would stop providing food and water from abroad because “If you take a bottle of water and airlifted it to Haiti, it will cost 50 times more than if made in Haiti. The people who produce water in Haiti are already struggling to sell, why not buy their water instead?” However, his people need the food, water, and medicine, so he thanks the foreign agencies instead of confronting them. How does Haiti’s poverty create the need for foreign aid? How do aid practices contribute to Haiti’s ongoing poverty? What practices could disrupt this cycle that keeps Haiti reliant on other nations?

Noting that Haiti hosts tens of thousands of UN peacekeeping forces, relies on foreign aid for 80% of available development funds, and has a private sector where 70% of companies are international rather than local, Prime Minister Bellerive says, “the line between intrusion, support and aid is very thin.” Where would you draw the line? What criteria would you use to make your determination? Where would you cap the percentages in order to prevent perpetual dependence on foreign aid?



IHRC Executive Director, Gabriel Verret, complains that even though everyone agrees that clearing debris is a major priority for rebuilding efforts, and that the removal will cost at least \$500 million, donors have allotted just \$35 million. How does the chronic underfunding of priorities undermine Haiti’s ability to function as a strong, independent nation?

Priscilla Phelps observes that simply constructing housing is not enough to meet the need. She explains that they “need to rehouse well more than a million people... in one of the poorest country in the world, in a way that improves livelihoods [and] that doesn’t create huge social inequities and makes people safer.” What would that sort of initiative look like? How would it differ from what we see in the film?

If you were chairing the IHRC and you received reports of these problems, what actions would you take (or recommend) to address them?

- having to re-do work, e.g., cleaning a sewer and having rain wash debris back in because no one was assigned to remove the debris that was taken from the sewer and piled alongside
- duplication of effort, e.g., four organizations cleaning the same canal
- staff turnover, with new people certain that they know how to succeed where others failed, but without knowing what’s already been done (lack of institutional memory)
- hundreds (and perhaps thousands) of separate aid groups, too many for the handful of responsible Haitian officials to reasonably be expected to coordinate
- poor communication, e.g., Haitians not involved in hiring decisions or provided with progress reports, not informed of meetings in timely way

Prime Minister Bellerive notes that donors “prefer to give to UNICEF, Doctors Without Borders, the WHO [World Health Organization] rather than to Haiti’s Department of Public Health.” As a result, “we had to fight for 3 or 4 months with an agency that had the money and was trying to build and rebuild a hospital less than 330 yards from another hospital from Public Health. While six miles away, there’s no health facility.” He wonders why they make this choice. What do you think? Why would donors rather give to an international organization than a department of the Haitian government? Why would those organizations choose to ignore Haitian priorities (e.g., building a hospital near an existing facility rather than where none exists)?

Oxfam Québec Director, Philippe Mathieu, says, “Many of the assessment reports of the first six months were clear. One should have given more access to local players, take into account their culture, their ongoing efforts, as well as the existing solidarity between Haitians. We did not sufficiently take this into account.” What was it in the “culture” of the aid organizations that prevented them from working more closely with locals?

Priscilla Phelps asks, “How do we overcome the reticence of the international community to channel the money directly to the neighborhoods? That’s one of the thing I’m trying to figure out right now. How can we do that?” How would you answer her?

As the film points out, the obligation of humanitarian aid is to alleviate suffering. So how do you account for the colossal failure at the golf course, where dreams of a community planned for a few thousand became a slum of over 200,000 and structures were built without sanitation or electricity or even the capacity to keep out rain?

The film begins with a Haitian man recounting what it was like in the days after the earthquake just to deal with the corpses. Is it reasonable to expect people who are recovering from trauma and consumed with daily survival, to also stand up to NGOs? If Haitians can’t demand change for themselves, who can (and how can they do so without being paternalistic or completely taking away power from those who need help)?

What did you learn from the film about the significance of transparent, valid elections and the impact of political stability on the efficacy of aid efforts? Do you think that those who have provided millions in aid (either governments or NGOs) should have a say in Haiti’s elections?

Imagining the Future

The film defines a disaster, explaining that “disaster is not necessarily the event itself, but the inability of the community to respond to it.” Based on what you see in the film, what is helping and what is hindering Haiti from being better prepared to deal with the next disaster?

The Haiti recycling center provides Haitians with jobs while it provides a vital service for clean up efforts. What other sorts of businesses could replicate the recycle center’s success?

The film ponders, “Every few decades the rich promise everything to the poor. The dream of the eradication of poverty, disease, death, remains a perpetual fantasy. The agendas are as ambitious as the impact is insignificant. It’s a while now since the poor have believed in them. Sixty years of world development policy. Sometimes you must know when to stop. Especially, when to stop pretending.” In your view, should wealthy nations stop investing in development aid? Why or why not? What do you think would happen if development aid ended?

The film asks, “If all the monies committed to reconstruction had been divided up among the affected families, what would the outcome have been?” How would you answer that question?

Have you ever donated money for disaster response? Did anything in the film make you reconsider your donation decisions?



Filmmaking Choices

What major questions was the filmmaker trying to answer and how do you know? What were the filmmaker's answers? Did you agree with those answers? Why or Why not?

How does the film compare to other media images you've seen of Haiti?

What emotions did the film evoke? What filmmaking techniques contributed to that reaction?

Why were the sources interviewed by the filmmaker especially credible on the topic of earthquake recovery efforts? Was there anyone else you would have liked to hear from? What insights do you think they would have added?

Was there anything about the construction of the film that you found to be particularly notable or memorable?

If you could ask the filmmaker one question, what would you want to know?



Wrap-Up

Complete this sentence: I think Haiti's recovery story is important because...

Is there one thing you learned from this film that you wish everybody knew? What do you think would change if everyone knew it?

Fill in the blanks: One thing I learned from this screening is

Now that I know, I will

RESOURCES

Fatal Assistance

<http://velvet-film.com/?lang=en>

<https://www.facebook.com/FatalAssistance>

@FatalAssistance

AfroPop: The Ultimate Cultural Exchange

www.facebook.com/AfroPoPTV

www.blackpublicmedia.org

@BlackPublicMedia

www.worldchannel.org/programs/afropop

@WORLDchannel

United Nations Office of the Secretary General's Special Advisor

www.lessonsfromhaiti.org/lessons-from-haiti/interim-haiti-recovery-commission/

This UN site includes statistics on what was done in and for Haiti after the 2010 earthquake. It also describes the establishment of the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission (IHRC), provides profiles of donors, and summarizes the dollar amounts pledged, paid, and disbursed.

Action Plan for National Recovery and Development of Haiti

<http://www.haitireconstructionfund.org/sites/haitireconstructionfund.org/files/Haiti%20Action%20Plan.pdf>

The plan put forward by the IHRC's Haiti Reconstruction Fund

Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti

www.ijdh.org

A partnership of Haitian and US human rights advocates, that supports the Haitian people in their grassroots struggle for a just system of law, a society without violence, social justice, and a democratic government; site includes links to recommended readings, information on earthquake recovery efforts, and more

Center for Economic and Policy Research

<http://cepr.net/blogs/haiti-relief-and-reconstruction-watch/>

With posts going back to 2010 and continuing to present day, this blog provides a helpful record of what has – and hasn't – been done to help Haiti recover from disasters.

"Haiti: The Slow Road to Reconstruction - Two Years After the Earthquake"

www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/haiti-reconstruction-two-years-after-earthquake-100112-en.pdf

An Oxfam report recognizing the amount of humanitarian aid but critiquing the lack of progress on reconstruction by the IHRC

USAID

www.usaid.gov/haiti

Official U.S. government assessments of aid work in Haiti, including required annual reports to Congress about the status of post-earthquake relief efforts



SEASON 10

TEN DAYS IN AFRICA
BETWEEN TWO SHORES
BLACK PANTHER WOMAN
FATAL ASSISTANCE
AFROPOP SHORTS

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