

# When Hillary Chose the President

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## WHY YOU SHOULD CARE

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Because we'd all like to move forward together.

*In this special election series, OZY has been looking at Hillary Clinton — including her past, a key player from her inner circle, potentially game-changing domestic policies and the global issues that could disrupt her push for the Oval Office. In this final installment, we consider what her record in Haiti tells us.*

The crowd adored her. After she'd ended her stump speech, a brave little boy stood up to ask what we'd call her husband when she won. "First Dude," the candidate said, laughing, and everyone joined in the laughter, except for the little boy, who did not understand the joke. Then came a fully grown man who prefaced his question with a few compliments for the candidate. He got carried away in a stream of praise and nearly forgot what he meant to ask.

Midday sunshine spilled through tall windows as Hillary Clinton worked the elementary school gym in my Iowa hometown this past January. Her face illuminated by sunlight and camera flashes, she conveyed competence, strength, determination, eagerness to serve.

Above all, Clinton promised to fight on our behalf: “If you give me the chance,” she said, “I will work my heart out for you, and I will continue to learn from you and make sure that we move forward together.”

A couple of hours later, on the other side of town, in the basement of a stuffy, dark Masonic lodge, her rival, Bernie Sanders, spoke in a different dialect, one crafted to convey solidarity. He relied more on first-person plurals — “we” and “us” — than the Clintonesque “I” and “you.” Sanders described a “government that works for all of us” and “belongs to all of us.” His effort was “a campaign of the people, by the people and for the people.”

It didn’t matter that there was no Q&A after he spoke. Throughout, the boisterous crowd had supplied its own commentary, cheers, whoops and sarcastic jokes about Goldman Sachs and corrupt elites. Though they wished mightily for him to win, no one fawned over Senator Sanders the way they did over the former secretary of state. She had sworn to be a thoughtful and benevolent general. He had promised to be on the frontlines with the people.

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I think of that Iowa afternoon in the context of another January, another Hillary, another place: Haiti. I lived there for four years that coincided with a period I’d call Peak Clinton. As a U.N. special envoy to Haiti, Bill came down often, doing things like touring mango-processing plants and health clinics. When Hillary became secretary of state, in 2009, she, too, made Haiti a priority. The very next year, an earthquake leveled the Haitian capital, killed too many to count and displaced hundreds of thousands of people. For a moment, the international spotlight shone on Haiti.

One January day a year later, Secretary Clinton flew down to Port-au-Prince to spend a few hours with the Haitian president. Her goal: to persuade him to amend the results of the first-round election for his successor. Billions of aid dollars were on the line, and the U.S. was ready to cry fraud on the first round, and I imagine she did more sweet-talking than strong-arming. Clinton got her way. A few months later, Michel Martelly was inaugurated president of Haiti.

And what to say about Michel Martelly? *O mon dieu!* Before politics, he was a popular and utterly ribald singer who went by Sweet Micky. Sweet Micky launched his musical career playing for elites and paramilitaries, and he dealt partly in the dulcet rhythms of Haitian merengue and partly in shock: Onstage he shouted obscenities, feigned lasciviousness, wore tube dresses and high heels or a diaper. He mooned the audience, pretended to masturbate a giant phallus. Anything to titillate or shock the crowd.

[Reader: He was the Haitian Donald Trump. And Hillary Clinton paved the way for him into office — in a country she was ostensibly trying to help. Please pause on that irony for a second, but just a second; it’s actually incidental to the story.]

Now, even by the standards of Haitian presidents — and the standard is low — Martelly was a disgrace. Once in office, he tried to resurrect the Haitian army, best known for its tendency to abuse human rights. His presidency saw the reemergence of political violence, from suspicious shootings and frightening protests to death threats for human rights activists. The economy suffered, and the political process did too: Haiti did not see a single legitimate election — not for mayors, parliamentarians, senators or the president — during Martelly’s regime. The first round of the election for Martelly’s replacement broke down amid mass fraud and more protests in the streets, and last month, Martelly finally resigned. Today, Haiti has an unelected interim president.

Today, many Haitians are surveying the detritus of their democracy — and smarting. As the *New York Times* reported last week, some Haitians and Haitian Americans blame the Clintons for a litany of woes that extends from one end of the country to the other. Putting a buffoon in charge of the country. Steering earthquake reconstruction funds to projects, like luxury hotels and subsidies for garment manufacturers, that seemed to benefit the wealthy more than the poor. While the best investigative reporting on the Clintons’ role in Haiti hasn’t turned up anything illegal, the bounds of legality test credulity and common sense. Just this month, a *Washington Post* editor demanding that Clinton account for “how her State Department’s role in undemocratic regime changes has contributed to violence and political instability” there.

Part of me is surprised it took so long. Benghazi, Schmenghazi: Clinton’s record in Haiti is murkier than anything that went down in that bunker.

Of course, it’d be folly not to admit that the Clintons did a lot for Haiti. They raised the profile of a dirt-poor country with just 10 million people and barely any geopolitical significance. They staked their time and reputations, and for a season, they even turned its recovery into a cause célèbre. Hillary Clinton’s advisers, who declined to comment for this article, have previously pointed out that the U.S. committed billions of dollars to the recovery effort and made strides with regard to shelter and police training. And it would be uncharitable not to explain this: When it comes to Haiti, hardly any foreigner comes back with their goals met, their principles intact, their hands clean. Secretary Clinton was no exception.

And yet, Clinton’s leadership style, as I saw it displayed in Haiti, troubled me. She had so many good intentions, but her intentions were to do things *for* the Haitian people, not with them. She worked hard to deliver — maybe she even worked her heart out — but her deliverables were not informed by the people she aimed to help. Though she exercised power in their name, the struggle of the Haitian people was not her struggle; she did not aim at the solidarity of “we” and “us.”

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But, you may say — and rightly.

But beneficiaries of foreign aid are not citizens in a democracy. But one shouldn't extrapolate from Clinton's dealings with foreign countries to predict her behavior toward her fellow citizens. But Haiti, but chaos and catastrophe, but poorest country in the Western hemisphere, but hard choices, but in the long run we all die.

But.

“Dad, Mom,” the email began. Chelsea Clinton wrote it in February 2010 to sound an alarm about post-quake Haiti. After a four-day tour, she was “profoundly disturbed” at the relief efforts. “The incompetence is mind-numbing,” she wrote — and then apologized to her parents for venting. Throughout the email, which was made public last August, you get a visceral sense of Chelsea's frustration, dismay and anger at the international-aid apparatus — the very apparatus that her parents sat atop of, though they did not say it explicitly. And from her note, written in haste, you can see very clearly that solidarity is not rocket science.

Chelsea described how Haitians in the displaced-persons camps were organizing themselves and building “fairly nuanced settlement governance structures” to define their needs and articulate them to the big agencies. “They wanted to help themselves, and they wanted reliability and accountability” from their international partners.

But something was broken. Aid workers seemed out of touch, or arrogant, or anachronistic and tended to dither over or dismiss utterly reasonable requests: flashlights, tents, T-shirts for a security team. There were no feedback loops that would allow beneficiaries of aid to say whether they wanted it, whether it worked, what might be better. Meetings meant to create accountability in the aid system lasted so long that no one could get any work done.

There was, in effect, no solidarity between the humanitarians and their victims. There was “you” and there was “me,” but there was never any “us,” and none of us moved forward together.

## **Pooja Bhatia**

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