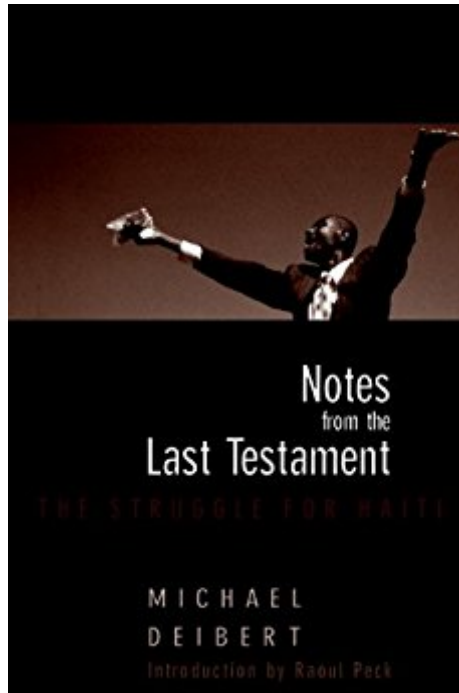




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Notes From The Last Testament: The Struggle For Haiti



Synopsis

Notes from the Last Testament, by veteran reporter Michael Deibert, is a riveting narrative account of the events leading up to and including the overthrow of Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. A fearless correspondent and a meticulous researcher, Deibert traces the rupturing of the social-democratic coalition that originally brought Aristide to power and that had been the fruit of years of opposition to the dictatorships and military juntas. From chaotic scenes of frenzied mayhem on the streets of the bidonvilles of Port-au-Prince with their armed gangs and burning intersections to heated debates in the halls of power, these dramatic events throw into stark relief the obstacles facing the world's nascent democracies, the trend of first world military intervention in third world affairs, and the dual legacies of slavery and colonialism. In a remarkable and deeply humane synthesis of on-the-ground perspectives and exhaustive research, Deibert sets vivid personal testimonies alongside an analysis of the country's rich history that reaches back to Haiti's first days as a colony, to the time of the rebellion led by the former slave Toussaint Louverture, and extends to the present, ultimately exploring how Aristide, once a beacon of populism and democratic aspirations, came to embody brutality and misrule in the tradition of his predecessors. Along the way, Deibert introduces us to the real heroes of the Haitian people's struggle for a just and independent society free from violence and corruption.

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Customer Reviews

Michael Deibert is an old school reporter, watching, listening, pounding the street. You might not agree with his every interpretation but when he hands you a fact you can be confident that a fact is just what it is. He's also deeply, passionately engaged with Haiti and Haitians, mad as hell and not inclined to take it any more. This book is crucial for understanding how politics go bad in Haiti, using the particular example of the decline and fall of Aristide's second Presidency.

So often in Haiti the truth is hard to find. So many commentators and authors write from other countries never having experienced the things they write about. Many others like have close relationships with those in power and do not remain objective. This book excels because of its authors being objective and writing what he experienced first hand during this time. No other memoir of these times is as honest in its assessment. Whenever raw truth of a situation is published many will be angry as you see here. Do not hesitate on buying this book if you are interested in Haiti. You will not be disappointed.

I,too, have lived in Haiti and now live in the Dominican Republic. And, yes, have read - no- devoured this book.I was confused why none of the NGO's or Haitians that I have met here or in Haiti shared the standard line on theÃfâ Â "coup against Aristide" but were really grateful that he was gone. After reading this fast paced and detailed account of the dismal failure of Aristide, I understand why. What I do not understand is how the "cult of Aristide" continues -- except from people on his payroll. And I wonder where that money comes from? Eh? IF you are interested in Haiti, read this book!!

Deibert exemplifies the kind of journalist who works tirelessly to end human suffering in whatever form it manifests. His book attempts to chronicle this suffering, contextualize it, and debunk the myth of Aristide's grandeur to show how corruption, malevolence and neglect have become institutionalized in a country that needs peace and progress more than any other in the Western Hemisphere. In Notes From the Last Testament he creates a comprehensive historical account of incidents that he bore witness to, and illuminates the various political perspectives that clash against each other in the struggle for change. From large scale protests to personal observations, Deibert

writes with passion, empathy and accuracy to reveal the inequities that keep the majority of Haitians oppressed. It is a must read for anyone trying to understand the complexities of Haiti in its contemporary state.

It is a disappointing book overall. Deibert tells only half of the story. He gives the impression that Aristide was no more popular when pushed out of office and that everybody in Haiti was happy to see him out. While many intellectuals and members of the elite who hated Aristide were indeed happy to see him go, the reality is that if there were elections held in 2004, Aristide would have been elected again by a wide majority. Besides, Michael Deibert does not refer to the massacres against Aristide supporters in Citei Soleil perpetrated by the HNP or the UN forces after February 2004, the hundreds of political prisoners or the massive crowds that gathered to support Aristide on February 7 and before that. Very little is said about the constant obstacles put on Aristide's path by the opposition and the international community since Aristide came to public life in Haiti. This coming from an experienced journalist is rather disappointing.

Haitian Professor Robert Fatton and Michelle Montas - Jean Dominique's widow (two experts that Michael Deibert admires and refers to often) said the following about Aristide during and after the coup:

Montas quote #1- January 5, 2004 Miami Herald "I did an interview recently and was asked if I thought President [Jean-Bertrand] Aristide was a dictator, and I said, 'No.' And after the interview came out, some people in the opposition were angry with me," she said. "But to say Aristide is a dictator is to say he has control over what is happening in Haiti. He doesn't have the tools to be a dictator. Chaos rules Haiti. And that scares me very much."

Montas quote #2- January 5, 2004 Miami Herald "There can be something worse than Aristide." "Who we haven't heard from is the peasantry, which has always been very loyal to Aristide," Montas said. If the poor in the country were to abandon Aristide, then nothing would be able to keep Aristide in power. For now, though, their loyalty appears intact. They legitimately fear a return to the Duvalier-style dictatorship they lived under for so long and are leery of the motives of opposition leaders, such as Andy Apaid. Haiti may well be on the verge of a civil war, but the best course for Haiti would be for all sides to work toward fair elections.

Fatton quote # 1- March 8, 2004 Counterpunch magazine: "In spite of all of that, I'm convinced that Aristide is still the most popular individual in Haiti. And that tells you something about the opposition. If you had elections--so-called 'free and fair' elections--I'm sure that he would win, in spite of all the corruption and all of the problems that he has, because the opposition, even though they used to support Aristide, have essentially merged with very conservative business groups. I think those are the groups that will ultimately take over now". "What is clear to me is that Aristide would never have been toppled had it

not been for the armed insurgents. I don't think that the civil opposition, although it became larger and broader in its appeal, was in any way capable of forcing Aristide out of power. It's only when you had the armed insurgents that you have the opportunity for the so-called "civil society" to force the issue."What were the real benefits of the coup? This would be an interesting question to ask to Mr. Deibert and others who share his views. What we know for sure today is that hundreds of innocent haitians died as a result of it. What is so great about that?People who want to understand Haiti's last 20 years of complex history should read the works of Doctor Paul Farmer (who has lived and worked in Haiti for more than 30 years) or the recent book of brilliant Haitian American historian Hyppolite Pierre.I am afraid that Deibert has been completely tainted by many elements of a community that I call the francofou/artistic/reactionnary crowd. People who are usually progressive when they live in Canada, Paris and New-York and become reactionary again when they visit Daddy and Mommy in their fortified villas on the hills of Petionville.I don't blame him . I almost fell for these "attractive folks" when I first visited Haiti. They all collide with reporters in the charming hotels of POP. Most are very talented in what they do and highly connected in the West. There are just morally completely wrong.

This book is I think a naked partisan polemic of little investigative or journalistic value. This man will wind up somewhere else justified the beating down of impoverished people.

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