



## **OFFICIAL PRESS STATEMENT Evanston/North Shore Branch of the NAACP**

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Haiti and the Border-

The Evanston/North Shore Branch of the NAACP condemns actions occurring on the border in Del Rio, Texas aimed at over 12,000 Haitian immigrants seeking a better life for themselves and their families. In recent days, glaring and horrific images have gripped the nation and world. Seeing men on horseback chasing down Black Haitians is nothing less than a throwback to slave owners and overseers chasing Black Americans during slavery. Such pictures are deliberate, shameful and wanton efforts intended to frighten and humiliate vulnerable human beings. The current border situation involving Haitians is both un-American, unethical and morally indefensible. In a short period of time, our nation has turned away from *Give us your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door.* Yet, the reality is that these words are not applicable to certain refugees. In January, 2018 Donald Trump said, “Haiti? Why do we want people from Haiti here? Africa? Why do we want people from Africa here? Why do we want these people from all these shithole countries here? We should have more people from places like Norway.” This framework for considering immigration is not new.

Thirty years ago, the United States coined Haitians “boat people” as more than 50,000 arrived in Florida seeking a better life. Many Haitians lost their lives battling the high seas, while the U.S. Coast Guard also intercepted boats, returning the occupants to Haiti. An accurate view of history shows that United States foreign policy supported dictatorial regimes in Haiti, including the infamous Francois Duvalier and his son, Jean- Claude. Furthermore, an accurate reading of history is even more telling. When slaves on the island of Haiti fought against French troops and Napoleon, winning their independence in a sweeping victory, racism reared its vicious presence. For thirteen years, Haitians engaged in a revolution to end the tyranny of slavery. Toussaint Louverture and Dessalines were primary Haitian leaders. It is a crime against humanity that these names are not lauded among freedom fighters across the centuries.

Make no mistake about it. Haitian victory was a defining moment in the history of the world when former slaves, defeated slave owners and colonialists. January 1, 1804 should be a day celebrated throughout the world for every country and group that prizes freedom. Not only did Haitians win their independence (with an estimated 200,000 Haitians killed in battle) but they successfully defended their freedom against white Europeans. The Haitian Revolution was more than just a small victory, on a small island by a small group of people. It was the largest successful slave uprising in the previous two thousand years. The victory not only challenged long-held European beliefs about white superiority and black inferiority, it literally crushed those beliefs. Historians will suggest the French were weakened because of their war with Britain that began in May of 1803. These same historians will also suggest it was the British supplying Haitians with arms that turned the tide in their favor.

The tragedy is that after the Haitian victory, European (white) countries and the United States either refused to deal with the

new Haitian government, or did so nefariously. The French forced Haiti to pay 150 million gold francs for reparations to French ex-slaveholders, as a condition for recognizing their autonomy. Reduced to 60 million francs, the debt was not paid off until 1947. The atrocity of this reparations program is as large and sinful a crime as any in modern history. What about reparations the French themselves owed, for stealing Africans from their native land and forcing them into slavery? In short, the world owes the Haitian people. We owe them gratitude for the heroism of their ancestors. We owe them applause for fighting and dying for the same freedom we have preached about since 1776. We owe them untold resources for our belligerence, betrayal and theft of their country's resources.

What we do not owe them, is the awful and outlandish mistreatment they are experiencing now, at the hands of our United States of America. And somebody, ought to say something.

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