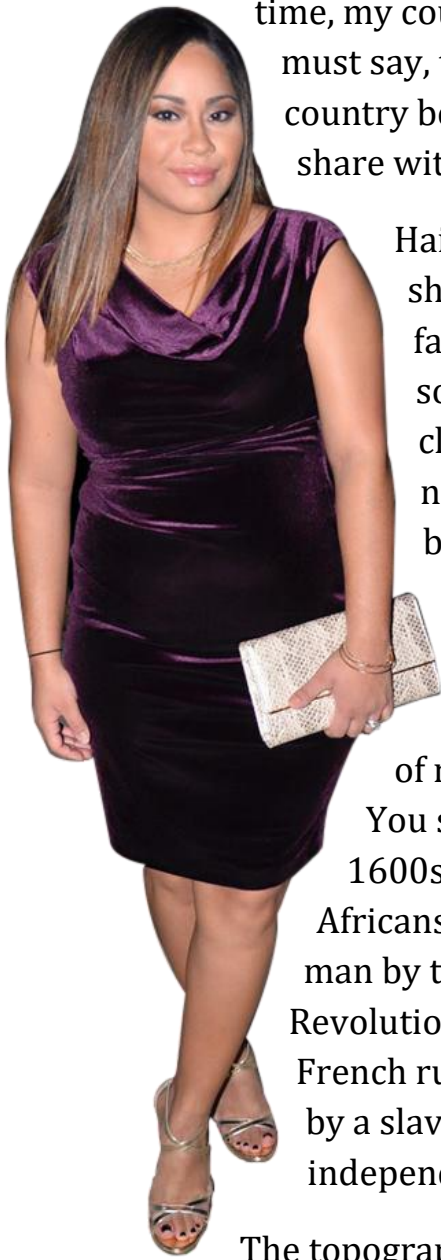


Catheline

“Have you ever heard of Garcelle Beauvais, also known as Fancy on the Jamie Foxx Show? How about Wyclef Jean? Ok, I am sure that you’ve heard of Jason Derulo. What do you think they all have in common? Yup, they are all of Haitian descent. Alo! I am Catheline Jean Claude and I am a proud Haitian! You have probably heard about my country after the devastating 7.0 magnitude earthquake that occurred on January 12, 2010. However, there is more to us than what was portrayed in the media. You see, at one point in time, my country was one of the wealthiest. Now? Not so much. I must say, there are many things you must know about my country before assuming the worst about my culture. Let me share with you my cultural heritage.



Haiti is located on the island of Hispaniola. It actually shares the island with the Dominican Republic. If you are familiar with North America, we are about 600 miles southeast of Florida. If you love living in a tropical climate, you will love my country. It usually stays warm nearly every day. When you get too warm, we have beautiful beaches to cool you off.

Now, how exactly did we all come about? Well, our ancestors came from Africa. Ninety five percent of Haitians are of African descent, while five percent are of mixed European descent. They are known as mulattos. You see, Spain ruled the whole island in the 1500s. In the 1600s, however, France took over Haiti and brought over Africans to work on the plantations. Finally, in the late 1700s, a man by the name of Touissant Louverture led the Haitian Revolution, resulting in independence for the Haitians from French rule. In 1804, we became the first black nation founded by a slave revolt. Our success led to a domino effect for independence in Latin America.

The topography of Haiti makes traveling around the country quite

difficult. We have many rocky roads, tall hills, wide valleys, narrow trails, and super tall mountains. So, get ready for a bumpy ride. We use **tap-taps** to transport people from place to place.

Most Haitians are Catholic. Although there are some who practice **Vodou**, not all of us do, which is a common stereotype. The Vodou religion teaches its followers to seek spirits for physical and spiritual healing. Through different ceremonies and rituals, its followers seek advice from those spirits.

When I meet people who do not know much about my culture, they always assume that I speak Haitian. Haitian is the name given to people from Haiti, while Haitian Creole is the language that is spoken by the majority. We speak two main languages in my country: French and Haitian Creole. However, the elites tend to speak more French and some English than Haitian Creole.

Have you ever heard that all Haitians eat cats and dogs? Not true! We eat foods similar to that of other cultures. I could be biased, but my country has the best cuisine in the whole wide world! Haitian cuisine is just yummy! We tend to consume a lot of rice, beans, and meat. One treat that we love in particular is **bananes pesées**, or fried plantain. To make, you just cut green plantains into quarter inch slices and fry them in vegetable oil. Add a little salt for additional flavor and voila: pure goodness.

It is fun being Haitian! Most of us love **compas** as well as Haitian folklore and storytelling. Have you ever heard of **Cric Crac**? You have to research it! Boy, do we love soccer. We call it foubòl and love to play it in the World Cup every four years. Oh, have you ever played the American game called Jacks? Well, it is similar to our game called **Osselets**.

Art is another aspect of our culture that is admired! As a matter of fact, Hector Hyppolite is coined the Father of Haitian Art. His painting was discovered in the 1940s by an American visitor. Historians have concluded that he used chicken feathers and his fingers to create his paintings. Interesting, huh?

Now, let me share with you the socioeconomic and complexion issue in Haiti. My mom stays at home because my dad makes a lot of money working with a company. He drives a fancy car, too. My house is huge and includes a backyard

and swimming pool. My whole family is light-skinned, which is the minority in Haiti. Those with a light complexion are generally treated better than those with a darker complexion. We often talk about moving to France to continue my education after high school, a commonality for the wealthy. I want to be a lawyer. Overall, those who obtain an education strive to become a lawyer, doctor, or engineer. My friend, Natalie, is not wealthy. Therefore, an opportunity for an education is highly unlikely. Unfortunately, this is the reality for the majority of Haitians in the country. As a result, many Haitians move to America, particularly New York or Florida, for a better life and opportunities for their family.

Enough about that. If you visit Haiti one day, you have to visit the capital city, Port-au-Prince. Although it is no longer the same after the earthquake, it is the home of the National Museum, the University of Haiti, and many other notable places. Depending on when you visit, you may enjoy one or more of our holidays. January 1st is not only New Year's Day, but also our Independence Day! Don't be surprised if you are greeted with a big bowl of **soup joumou** on that day. It is customary to indulge oneself with this particular soup as slaves were not allowed to consume it before acquiring independence. The next day we celebrate Ancestors' Day. This day is in honor of the people who fought for our freedom from France. Some Haitians also celebrate **Mardi Gras** for three days in February. May 1st is our Labor Day and December 5th is Columbus' Day, which honors his discovery of Hispaniola in 1492. Finally, the 25th of that month is Christmas. I have read that Americans who celebrate Christmas leave cookies for Santa. Well, in Haiti, we leave straws in our shoe for **Papa Noel**, our Santa.

When you visit, you may also hear certain phrases spoken among the Haitians. The most popular is Wa p konn jòj. This phrase translates to, "You will know George." However, it simply means, "Just wait and see." For instance, if you are ever told that you will never accomplish anything in life, feel free to use this saying.

There are many things that I love about my culture and there are some things that I can do without. I really love my culture. I really wish people would try to

learn about my people instead of assuming certain things about us. Like any other culture, most of us are really great people! I am Catheline Jean Claude and I accept my heritage. Do you accept me?"