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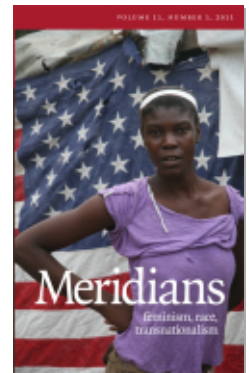
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## Ayiti: Reaching Higher Ground

Regine Romain

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## Ayiti: Reaching Higher Ground

“While I was abroad I felt the need to find out who I was and where my soul was. I chose to be a Haitian woman,” she wrote. “We’re a country in which three-fourths of the people can’t read and don’t eat properly. I’m an integral part of the situation. I am not in Canada in a black ghetto, or an extraterrestrial from outer space. I am a Haitian woman. I don’t mean to say that I am responsible for the problems. But still, as a Haitian woman, I must make an effort so that all together we can extricate ourselves from them.”

Myriam Merlet (1953–2010)

“The More People Dream”

*Walking on Fire: Haitian Women’s Stories of Survival and Resistance*,  
2001

Between light and shadows, I research and photograph in an ongoing visual project Haïti’s shifting yet distinct presence throughout the diaspora. A new generation, in which I am reflected, is shaped by our location in history, politics, and geography. Our hybrid language, customs, and traditions migrate with us, both conforming and resisting transcultural influences.

I am her storyteller, offering insight into the lives of Haïti’s extraordinary yet often marginalized and misrepresented people. I look into the black space, into the black face that is often overlooked. People of color are analogous to the black space in the negative of a photograph. We are often

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the backgrounds that allow the foreground to be seen. I share the remarkable stories of my people to dismantle this paradigm.

The multiple tragedies of January 12, 2010 in Haïti connected the Haitian diaspora into one large family in a way I have never seen or felt in my lifetime. Accordingly, when we watched the news coverage of members of our extended Haitian community being rescued after two weeks or a month under the rubble, we cheered and gave thanks as if it were our very own kin. Our tears and prayers were unified with those of the world, as we continued to anxiously await more good news from a country that has already endured so much hardship since its independence from French rule in 1804.

The aftermath of Haïti's horrific earthquake also brought an avalanche of stereotypical images that were dispersed throughout the global media, depicting Haitians as nameless, lost bodies, and disconnected from community. For example, on January 19, 2010, in the *New York Times*, under the headline "Silence and Submission," a photograph shows an unidentified woman prostrate on a slab of concrete with her hands outstretched for help. This image is typical of the way Haitian people and their lives are represented throughout media history.

However, in the hands of Haitian people the camera can provide a broader view of our own experiences and histories, often in contrast to accepted media depictions. As a member of the Haitian diaspora, I went to Haïti three weeks after the calamitous events of January 12th to offer assistance, resources, and to photograph a necessary historic counter-perspective. From my trip began a series entitled *Ayiti: Reaching Higher Ground*, which includes images such as "Sleeping Lion," "Holding Innocence," "Thank You for the Flag," "Mama Ginen," and others that highlight the dignity of Haitian people—my people—resilient in our faith and survival.

The "imagined" and the "real" are tightly woven into the fabric of photography. Historically, the images of Haïti throughout the world rarely show what was real in the lives of Haitian people; they continued to perpetuate what others imagined. Through the photography, research, documentation, and a series of interviews conducted in my ongoing visual project, new, "truer" images are shared, and old tales are birthed anew. The need remains for our own gaze to be seen; one that creates honest, dynamic, innovative portraits of Haitian people.



### 1. Holding Innocence

Photo Credit © Regine Romain, February 2010, Port-au-Prince, Haiti



## **2. We Can Feed the Country**

Photo Credit © Regine Romain, February 2010 Jacmel, Haiti



**3. Sleeping Lion - Papa Legba at the Gate**

Photo Credit © Regine Romain, February 2010, Aux Cayes, Haiti





#### **4. Pretty in Pink**

Photo Credit © Regine Romain, February 2010, Jacmel, Haiti.



### 5. Mama Ginen

Photo Credit © Regine Romain, February 2010, Port-au-Prince, Haiti





## 6. Rue des Miracles

Photo Credit © Regine Romain, February 2010, Port-au-Prince, Haiti



## **7. And Still We Rise**

Photo Credit © Regine Romain, February 2010, Delmas 54 (Kiskeya En Action Camp), Port-au-Prince, Haiti