

# L'OUVERTURE

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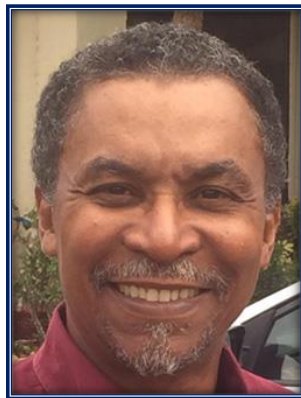
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## GREETINGS FROM OUR EDITOR, DR. JEAN-CLAUDE DUTÈS



Dear Readers,

I am relieved and excited to rejoin you today, especially at the dawn of a new year. It feels like it has been quite a bit of time, nearly a year since I had the pleasure of reaching out to you in this space. It has been a momentous time for LCS. Two of our Board members, including our chairperson, have resigned from their board positions. We gratefully offer our thanks to Mr. Michelet (Mike) Moise, our former Chairperson, and Ms. Cozy Clergé Joseph, two founding members, for their contributions to bringing LCS into existence and wish them continued success in their future endeavors.

In this issue, you will find fewer articles than usual. There is an article on autism spectrum disorder, a condition that is growing in our era and for which the best treatment is early detection. We hope you will find the information in the article helpful. Dr. Guylaine Richard offers us another gem in a piece about power, that I think many will find thought provoking. To continue our retrospective look into the experiences of our youth, Ms. Astrid Nicolas takes us back to her neighborhood in Queens, New York. As you read her story, I am sure you will find yourself back to your own early years in the United States no matter where you entered it or where you spent your adolescence. Happy reading!

### KANAL LA PAP KAMPE

Going against the ruling political class, with scarce resources, while being actively undermined by those in power, the people of Wanament broke with the past, pulverizing the passivity and apathy of recent times to defy a willfully neglectful government to find the resources to build the freedom affirming "Kanal." This tells me that the old thinking, the can-do spirit of Toussaint, Dessalines, and Christophe, that the terror of the American invasion of 1915 almost completely eradicated, could be re-



emerging into our consciousness. I have no illusions, however. As the adage goes "The bird builds its nest little by little," and it took thirteen years to reach independence, so momentous change is not for tomorrow, but I see smoke. To break the mold that is constraining and limiting our thinking, let us get into the habit of seeking advice from our ancestors by asking: what would Toussaint do; what would Dessalines do; what would Christophe do? Had they waited for the approval of the French masters to fight for freedom, we would still be in chains today. Less we forget, we need to remind ourselves that they built an army, with what they had at hand, and took what they did not have from their former masters. Turning weaknesses into strengths was their expertise; let us rely on their bravery to launch us forward!

### THANKS, BUT NO THANKS UNITED NATIONS

We do not need a second 1915 invasion in black faces. I am unequivocally against and deplore any "military, police or civil intervention" in Haiti from whatever country or international organization. Past interventions have sapped our morality, impoverished our country, deflated our self-esteem, and pushed and contributed to the disintegration of our society. The international community did not support the war on slavery in 1791, did not support Haiti as a fledging nation, and with their neoliberal economic policies has relegated us to being only laborers, consumers, and entertainers, with no regards for our wishes, needs or aspirations. For how much longer will we sell our soul and swallow our pride for a United States entry visa? We must find ourselves again and return to the ideas that gave us our liberty and the freedom to choose our course, no matter the cost. What would Toussaint, Dessalines and Christophe do?

Happy Independence Day!

Happy hero's day!

And may the spirit of our ancestors be the torch that guides us to the new dawn!

Finally, on behalf of the L'Ouverture Cultural Society, INC, I wish you continued good health and the wisdom to make 2024 a happy, prosperous, and successful year.

Editor,

Jean-Claude Dutès, Ph.D.



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## ON THE SPECTRUM

(Part 1)



By Jean-Claude Dutès, Ph.D.

A man in his thirties is driven to and from work by his father to a local supermarket where he works as a bagger and cart retriever. Leaving his house walking to and from his father's car, he avoids any interactions with his neighbors, running to and from the car. He acts in an excessively shy manner, keeping his gaze towards the floor and avoiding making eye contact in instances where he accidentally runs into another person. Yet, he works diligently at his job, which requires minimal social interactions. He spends most of his free time on his computer and was very skilled in using and repairing them.

A family friend approached me thirty years ago with concerns about her daughter's behavior who was ten years old. She described a child who was easily agitated with a propensity for head banging, long fits of crying and near total dependence for self-

care. She described her speech as garbled, explaining that she tended to grunt and groan. The mother recalled an uneventful pregnancy and birth but significant slowing in all developmental areas as compared to her older sister. She reported that she does not smile when she sees her and reacts indifferently to both familiar and unfamiliar people in her entourage. At that time, the mother was facing uncertainty as to her diagnosis. She indicated that the pediatrician thought that she had an intellectual disability but also that she could be afflicted with another disorder.

A father approached me after receiving a note from the assistant school principal requesting a meeting to discuss his fifteen-year-old son's inappropriate behavior. He was perplexed as his son has always been a good student and has never had any behavior problems at school, but he has had





difficulties making and keeping friends. His school mates seem to stay away from him, and he has not been invited to sleep-overs or birthday parties by his neighbors. His mother thinks that he has a narrow range of interests, tends to hyperfocus on mechanical objects or computer games and thought that he would become a great mechanical engineer as an adult. She is concerned that he bores his peers, does not notice cues in his interactions with others and usually misses the joke. She is worried that other kids may take advantage of him and goad him into doing “stupid” things.



The vignettes above describe behaviors and traits common in persons who have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. This diagnostic label refers to a constellation of disorders that were previously known under various designations. Many children who were given diagnoses such as Pervasive Development Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified, Asperger's Syndrome, and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder before 2013, would be given this new designation. Because of this, there is a wide variety of symptom presentation among those afflicted. Since these disorders, however, share a core set of symptoms, they were grouped into one category.

## DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA

According to the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-5, the manual used to classify and categorize mental, emotional, and behavioral experiences into disorder, autism spectrum disorder, or ASD, is characterized by the following core symptoms:

1. persistent difficulties communicating, both verbally and non-verbally, and interacting with others across different settings.
2. restricted repetitive pattern of behaviors, interests, or activities.

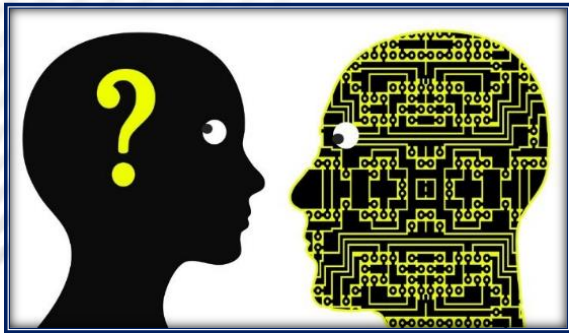
In addition, the symptoms must be present early in the developmental period, or in infancy or childhood, though they may not become manifest until later in life when social demands exceed the individual's limited capacities. Furthermore, symptoms must interfere with the person's ability to perform socially, academically, or other key areas of life.

## MORE ABOUT THE CORE SYMPTOMS

Dr. Prithvi Perepa in his book “Autism, ethnicity and culture” further expands the core symptoms into four areas. According to his formulation, which is consistent with that of the DSM-5, the four areas pertain to social communication, social interaction, sensory processing, and flexibility. Below we will briefly summarize and describe critical features in each of these areas.



## Social Communication



Many children who are later diagnosed with ASD tend to present with significant lags in speech development or the absence of speech altogether. But the problem does not relate only to speech and language. Many, with speech therapy, can learn to speak and to use language to express basic needs and wishes, but they tend to do so in a literal manner, failing to consider emotionally laden aspects such as intonation, gestures, and the interactions between words and non-verbal actions. Children with delayed but normal speech development produce other ways to compensate using non-verbal means to communicate with parents and or family members, while affected children do not. When speech is present and less affected, many tend to repeat what they hear, echolalia, without any understanding of what they are saying. Some develop speech at a normal rate only to lose it later. Some never do, relying on vocalizations such as grunts and groans.

The issue is about being able to communicate effectively across different situations. Being able to understand not just the words, but also the implied, non-stated messages that are often conveyed in our interactions. When words and sentences are taken literally, effective communication in which there is mutual understanding can decrease significantly, as there is more room for

misunderstanding between parties. Dr. Perepa succinctly summarizes this problem with the observation that "autism is one of the few conditions where structural aspects of language (such as vocabulary and grammar) can develop without necessarily understanding the subtleties of language."

## Social Interaction



An enduring and salient feature of ASD pertains to difficulties in social interaction. Research studies indicate that from early on children later diagnosed with ASD showed little or no interest in caregiver's attention, did not seem to enjoy or to seek interaction with them and did not enjoy being cuddled. Infants and babies with this condition tended to seek attention from parents only when they needed their assistance for something, like to get a toy. Contrary to most toddlers who tend to engage and seem to enjoy using the toy in playing with parents, affected children preferred to play alone. In interactions with others, they tend to avoid eye contact, miss, or misunderstand emotional tones, with great difficulty apprehending and communicating messages not specifically related to an immediate need.

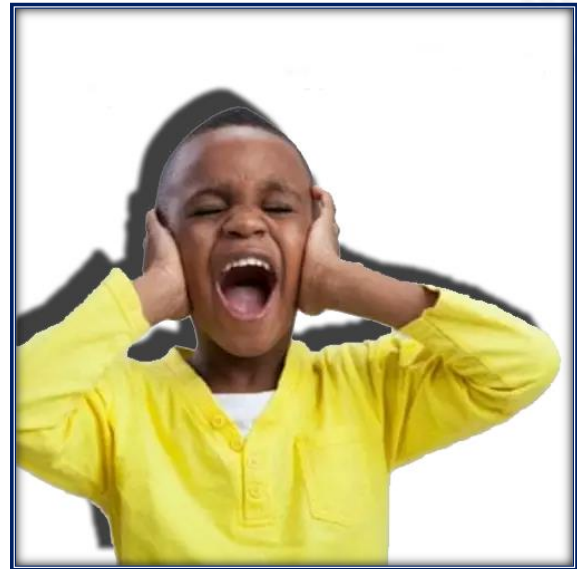


There are differences within affected persons, however. Dr. Perepa observes that differences range from individuals who prefer not to interact with others to those who would like to interact but make social gaffes, which can contribute to anxious feelings and avoidance. Of the ways of dealing with this problem many seek emotional safety by associating with people who are younger than they are or preferring the company of adults, who can be more appreciative of their style and thus more indulgent and kinder. Others, according to Dr. Perepa, choose to interact with familiar people or when interactions are initiated by others. These interactional styles cover the entire life cycle, with behaviors such as unusual eye contact, not engaging in joint play or spontaneous sharing of interests, and limited or unusual expressions of emotions, observed as early as 18 months (about 1 and a half years) of age. Temper outbursts beyond infancy and childhood are often a significant challenge for parents.

### Flexibility

Flexibility or the ability to change thinking and behaviors in response to either internal or environmental exigencies is an attribute that is either absent or affected in persons with autism. They adhere to certain routines, seeming to hyper-focus on them at the expense of what is happening in their environment, with great difficulty shifting attention as needed. Because of this, their ability to engage in successful problem-solving is deficient. Dr. Perepa and others taking a neuropsychological approach suggest that such difficulties reflect impairments in executive functioning, particularly in executive attention.

### Sensory Processing



Many common sensory responses in persons with autism fall within a low or high range. In the low range, their behaviors suggest that sensory responses are muted, diminished, or lessened while in the high range they appear amplified or heightened. In their paper on "Sensory considerations for individuals with autism in physical activity and recreation programs," Ms. Sheila Swann-Guerrero and Ms. Martha Rubio-Cajigas state that "individuals with autism may have hypo-active (under-responsive) or hyperactive (over-reactive) responses to any of the senses," explaining that sensory integration, the process in which the brain organizes and interprets information is often impaired. Under the hypo-active category, they include behaviors such as: no reaction to loud or sudden noise; not paying attention to people, environment, or things; not becoming dizzy with excessive spinning; and being unaware of painful stimuli resulting in bruises and bumps. Classified as indicative of hyperactive were behaviors or characteristics such as: excessive behavior or movement; distress with certain sounds; sensitivity to light or textures; aversion to certain smells and





tastes; and irrational fears of heights, movements, or environments.

Along the same line of thinking, Dr. Perepa, summarizing current clinical thinking, states that common behavior patterns such as rocking, head banging, flapping, covering of ears, and refractory responses to touch are thought to reflect underlying sensory processing difficulties. These behaviors however, while also present in the general population, are more common and persistent in people diagnosed with ASD and are thought of as attempts by the brain to compensate for either under or over stimulation. The affected person, being unable to control the amount of incoming information from the senses, engages in behaviors to either lower or increase the level of stimulation to a desired intensity.

### PREVALENCE: HOW COMMON IS ASD?

Autism spectrum disorder is more frequently diagnosed lately than it used to be. The CDC (2023) recently reports that 1 out of 36 eight-year-old children in the US have been diagnosed with the disorder, while in 2018, it was 1 out 44. In adults the prevalence is estimated to be around 1 in 160. The World Health Organization (2023) reports that 1 out of every 100 children have the disorder and that it affects all ethnic groups, with highest incidence in Qatar and the lowest in France.

There are recent indications that its prevalence is rising in minority populations in this country, with higher incidence being reported in ethnic groups relative to whites, who used to be the group with the most diagnosed members. Of interest, Dr. Perepa, indicates that in research conducted in England autism appeared linked to immigration. Children of Afro Caribbean

mothers were diagnosed more often with autism than those born to White English non-immigrant mothers. He reports that the findings of a study involving white immigrant mothers from other parts of Europe also reveal that children of immigrant mothers were found to have higher rate of autism than white native mothers. Children of Afro Caribbean mothers were diagnosed more often with autism than those born to White English non-immigrant mothers. He reports that the findings of a study involving white immigrant mothers from other parts of Europe also reveal that children of immigrant mothers were found to have higher rate of autism than white native mothers.

In the US, it was a different story. Up until recently, European Americans from middle to upper middle-class backgrounds were more likely to be diagnosed with autism. In a recent paper, the CDC (2023) reported that more African American children were diagnosed with the disorder than White children. This could be related to several factors, including increased awareness of the disorder among parents and health care professionals, greater diagnostic clarification associated with the aggregation of several disorders under the spectrum and that there was little research that took race or ethnicity into consideration in the US. Consistent across culture is that the disorder is more often diagnosed in boys than girls. One out of every four boys have the disorder, while for girls, it is 1 out of every three, according to the CDC (2023). The World health Organization (2023) indicate that for every 10,000 Haitians, 83.7 are likely to have the disorder.

*(To be continued)*





## The true meaning of POWER



By Guylaine L. Richard, MD, MPH

People **Of Will**, Expect **Respect** and fight for it.

People **Of Wonder**, Explore **Roads**, new or old.

People **Of Wisdom**, Envision **Results** to attain well-being.

People **Of Worth**, Exercise **Resiliency** built through resistance.

Too many nations, too many leaders are looking for power where it does not exist. They have no will to make the world a better place. They are not wondering about empathy, too blinded by their arrogance, incompetence, or greed. They lack wisdom to make decisions for the whole, securing the most for the least. Some must question their

worthiness to the advancement of humanity since they often are cowards and led by their emotional distress.

The previous paragraph summarizes the way I look at many leaders of our world today and most importantly at what is happening nowadays in a small but mighty country called: Haiti.

Let me tell you why. Haiti is the first black nation that unleashed a true fight for equity and consequently what is known as "white rage." Haiti is the first black republic that defeated the strongest army in the world at the times led by the French. Haiti is the first country that despite many past and present injustices imposed by many colonizing countries, still resists, demonstrating resiliency in the hope of a better future. So,





help me understand why Haiti is so feared, envied, or hated? Many countries have and are still trying with their feet on its neck to deprive this country of fresh air. Currently an arrogant neighboring leader is looking at keeping a small stream of water to reach land that could feed an entire region. This country has no steady light system but the sun and the stars in its sky. Why?

Oh, I know why! Haiti is too beautiful and too diverse to not be envied by the ones who do not have her many attributes: spiritually, mentally, and physically to name a few. Haiti is too free to not be hated by the ones who are slaves of materials things that she takes

for granted. Haiti is too rich to be bothered by greedy men and women who look at earthy resources as the only things that ensure their salvation. Haiti is too blessed to be ungrateful like the ones she helped on so many occasions. Haiti is too loved to not be despised by the ones who do not know the meaning of this word. Haiti therefore is too powerful to not be in the spotlight.

Let me end with this quote and tell those who think that they are powerful:

“Never underestimate the power of a small group of committed people to change the world. In fact, it is the only thing that ever has.” – Margaret Mead





## Coming to America: I remember Elmhurst



Old Elmhurst, Queens New York  
Source: [oldelmhurst.blogspot.com](http://oldelmhurst.blogspot.com)

By Astrid Nicolas

I recall the day my mother returned alone to Jacmel after having gone to Port au Prince with my father. At the early age of seven I tried to understand her explanation that he had left for the United States of America and had not been able to say a proper goodbye as his trip was kept a secret. In the early 1960's, people were disappearing under the Duvalier regime but, as a child, I was not privy and did not understand the details of living under a dictatorship regime. After approximately one year, he and a few members of my mother's family had settled in Queens, New York, and my father was able to send for us.

After a year of cohabitation with other family members in Corona, Queens, my father held a steady job at the French Embassy and was able

to rent a 2-bedroom apartment in Elmhurst, Queens so that we immediately had a home when we entered the U.S.

My 2 younger sisters and I were excited at the upcoming travels to "peyi blan". We had identical embroidered dresses made especially for us by "the number one embroiderer in Jacmel," Cocquitte Cadet. As it was our first time flying on an airplane, it was an unforgettable and frightening experience. My stomach felt unsettled, and I experienced motion sickness. When we arrived at JFK my father was there to meet us. I will never forget looking at him and asking him why he did not become white as he was in "peyi blan." He laughed at my comment and explained that we were a minority in a predominantly white country.





Adjusting to a new life and different culture was initially difficult. Children can be resilient, and we transitioned quickly. My mother now left incredibly early to take the train from Queens into Manhattan where she took care of a family's home and children. We had to learn to cook, clean, and do laundry for ourselves as there was no longer a "bònn" to help us.



Since we arrived in the month of July, we had a few months to prepare for school at PS 89. Learning a new language and adjusting to different nationalities was critical and initially challenging so my father and mother decided that I would redo the third grade instead of going into the fourth based on my birth date. I relied heavily on a French/English dictionary, and after a few years, started to enter spelling bee contests, sometimes winning. My parents transferred us to St. Bartholomew's Catholic school after 2 years of public school. I must say that the nuns paid more attention to us than the public-school teachers, which caused us to excel educationally. Reading became so important that my sisters and I would walk 3 miles to and from the Queens Public Library on Saturdays to take out 4-5 books to read during the week after we completed our homework. We were not allowed to watch television during the school week, so reading became our pastime. When I entered Newton High School, I was mostly placed in Honor classes as I wanted to, and worked hard, to be a good student.

Socially, life was a bit easier as I had most of my cousins within 1-2 blocks of Elbertson Street. We were all remarkably close; Stanley and Nedje Lamarque; Ralph, Myrtha, Yvrose and Yanick Cadet; Stephane and Rudy Gibosse; Suzel Duroseau; Evelyn, Gina and Chrislaine Cadet. Being surrounded by family helped us transition into a foreign land and maintain our culture. We walked everywhere: to Corona, Junction Blvd., Queens Blvd. to the library and mall, 82nd Street and Roosevelt. During summer vacations, we would all walk to Flushing Meadow Park to go swimming in the public pool as well as have picnics on the grass. We were so fascinated by the gigantic globe and the immensity of it all. Summers were also spent in front of our building jumping rope, playing hoola-hoop, hopscotch, and Simon says. I cannot forget our weekly jaunts to White Castle for hamburgers and fries.

Music and television were my entertainment. "I Love Lucy," "Partridge Family," "Bewitched," "Jackson 5," "Soul Train," and "American Bandstand" all helped me to assimilate into the American culture. Do not get me wrong; we all managed to also keep our Haitian heritage.



In Elmhurst, Queens, I found a group of like-minded Haitians also fleeing the Duvalier regime, and we formed a tight-knit community of Haitian ex-patriates. We listened to Haitian music, as well as American, and attended a Haitian church, singing every Sunday in the Haitian youth choir led by Madame Lemoine. The weekly Haitian mass at the St. Bart's chapel helped me to





develop friendships with other Haitians along Lamont Avenue and in Jackson Heights.

Music like R&B and rock and roll was either played on the radio or on the record player. I also listened to Haitian Kompa and French songs by Charles Aznavour, Mireille Mathieu, Dalida, and Edith Piaf. After we turned 16-17, we were allowed to go out on special occasions to Club Camaraderie and dance to Shleu-Shleu, or Malibu to dance to Tabou Combo, as well as to Chateau Royale. We were always chaperoned by some family member, either my mother or an aunt. Eventually the chosen ones to accompany us were either Stanley or Ralph, my male cousins who were not much older than we were.

After moving away when I went to college, I gradually lost contact with the Haitian community, but never lost my identity. Over time, I realized that, although I strongly identify with the country of my birth, I did not know enough about its history. Lately, my interest in discovering my roots has deepened, especially following the recent events at Wanament. The L'Ouverture Cultural Society has helped me to appreciate the importance of the past as it can impact our future. On a path to reconnect with my culture, I am eagerly searching for ways to make a positive difference in my beloved country's future.



Wanament - 2023

