

Advocacy Paper on Stigmatization and Discrimination Against Haitian Immigrants: A Call for Justice and Fairness

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Empowering Communities
for Health Equity and Social Justice

Introduction

Haitian immigrants have long been the target of discriminatory rhetoric and harmful stereotypes, fueling xenophobia and jeopardizing their safety and dignity. A recent, baseless rumor circulating among certain political figures and other public personalities suggests that Haitian immigrants are eating pets. This false narrative, alongside other longstanding myths, aims to dehumanize Haitian immigrants, exacerbate fear, and incite hostility against them. Such tactics are not only dangerous but also rooted in racial prejudice, perpetuating discrimination, and systemic racism against the Haitian community.

This advocacy paper seeks to debunk these damaging falsehoods with facts, data, and testimonies, while advocating for the rights, dignity, and equal treatment of Haitian immigrants. Additionally, we will examine other recurring false narratives that have historically stigmatized Haitians, including claims that they are carriers of diseases like HIV/AIDS, and dismantle them with evidence-based rebuttals.

Debunking the False Narrative of Haitians Eating Pets

One of the latest false claims against Haitian immigrants is the suggestion that they are eating pets in U.S. communities. This rumor, propagated by political figures and online sources, is not only completely unsubstantiated but dangerous, as it fuels fear and animosity against Haitian immigrants, portraying them as a threat to the safety and well-being of others.

*No **credible reports** or evidence support the assertion that Haitian immigrants engage in such behavior. Such claims mirror a broader historical trend of using fear-based tactics to dehumanize marginalized groups. Similar xenophobic rumors have been directed at other immigrant communities in the past, aimed at creating division and sowing distrust.*

*The [Springfield Mayor Rob Rue](#) and local law enforcement agencies where the rumor emerged have **publicly refuted** this narrative, stating that there is no evidence to support*

these allegations. As [Professor Karen Musalo](#), an expert on human rights and asylum, notes, these kinds of unfounded rumors are often used to "incite moral panic and push restrictive policies against immigrants." Additionally, this is not a surprise since in 2023, the [Georgetown Immigration Law Journal](#) explained how the Trump administration used elements of such speculative fiction to enforce harmful U.S. immigration policies.

Moreover, Haitians' traditional daily diets do not include pets. Pets such as dogs and cats, which are predominant in the U.S., are seen as companions in Haitian culture rather than food sources, contrary to the baseless claims made by mainstream media. While some ill-intentioned persons are trying to undermine Haitian culture, we humbly appreciate the global acclaim of Haitian cuisine, renowned for its exceptional quality. Recently, Haitian soup, specifically soup joumou, was honored by [UNESCO](#) as a world heritage, celebrating its cultural and historical significance. This recognition underscores the richness and value of Haitian culinary traditions.

The False Association of Haitian Immigrants with HIV/AIDS

Another persistent myth is the false association of Haitian immigrants with HIV/AIDS. This harmful stereotype gained traction in the 1980s during the early days of the HIV/AIDS epidemic when Haitians were unjustly labeled as part of the "4H Club"—Haitians, Homosexuals, Hemophiliacs, and Heroin users—groups incorrectly thought to be the primary carriers of HIV.

Former President Donald Trump's statement in 2017 that Haitian immigrants "all have AIDS" reignited this discriminatory narrative. However, this claim is **scientifically and statistically incorrect**. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), Haiti has made significant strides in combating HIV, with the **prevalence of HIV in Haiti standing at approximately 1.7%**—a notable decrease thanks to national and international health initiatives. In contrast, associating Haitians broadly with disease perpetuates stigma and fuels discrimination.

*This false narrative has deep roots in **structural racism** and xenophobia, targeting Haitians based on their race and nationality. The stigma has led to the exclusion of Haitian immigrants from vital resources and services, exacerbating health disparities and economic inequality.*

Other False Claims Against Haitian Immigrants:

1. Haitian Immigrants as "Criminals" and "Burden" on Society

Another common claim used to denigrate Haitian immigrants is that they are inherently criminal or a drain on U.S. resources. Public figures like JD Vance and media outlets have occasionally perpetuated this narrative. Yet, [data](#) proves otherwise. Haitian immigrants, like many other immigrant groups, contribute substantially to the U.S. economy.

Despite many socioeconomic discrepancies underlined by the [Migration Policy Institute](#), including earning lower incomes—\$65,000 in 2022 for Haitian immigrant households compared to \$75,000 for native-born and other immigrant families—Haitian immigrants contribute billions annually to the U.S. economy. In 2017, the [Center for American Progress](#) indicated that Haitian TPS holders in Florida contributed \$1.2 billion annually to the state's economy. This figure does not account for contributions from Haitian TPS holders in other states or those with different immigration statuses.

2. Unfair Targeting of Haitians in Immigration Policies

Despite the existence of similar migration patterns among other groups, Haitian immigrants face disproportionately higher levels of discrimination and xenophobia. Under programs such as the [Humanitarian Parole Program](#), immigrants from Haiti, Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua have been admitted to the U.S.. Still, only Haitian immigrants face this specific level of scrutiny and discrimination. As of January 2024, over 144,000 Haitians entered the U.S. under this program, yet the media and specific political figures often single them out, ignoring the 92,000 Venezuelans, 75,000 Cubans, and 64,000 Nicaraguans who migrated under the same conditions.

The Impact of Discrimination on Haitian Immigrants

*The false narratives against Haitian immigrants have devastating social and economic consequences. Stigmatization limits access to housing, jobs, and education, and increases vulnerability to poverty and homelessness. **Housing discrimination** is particularly acute, with landlords refusing to rent to Haitian immigrants based on myths about disease or criminality. This, in turn, exacerbates **economic instability** and perpetuates cycles of poverty among Haitian families.*

*In addition, Haitian children face heightened risks of **bullying** and social exclusion in schools, stemming from these damaging stereotypes. This bullying can lead to long-term mental health challenges, including **anxiety, depression, and trauma**.*

*Systemic racism in healthcare is another serious issue. Haitian immigrants often experience discrimination in medical settings, resulting in unequal treatment and lack of access to essential care. The stigmatization surrounding HIV/AIDS discourages many Haitians from seeking medical help for fear of being unfairly labeled. These barriers contribute to poorer health outcomes and deepen the **health disparities** faced by Haitian communities.*

The Contributions of Haitian Immigrants:

*Despite their challenges, Haitian immigrants have made immense contributions to U.S. society, excelling in critical sectors like healthcare, construction, education, government, and business. The 1.1 million Haitian immigrants in the U.S. bring cultural diversity, innovation, and resilience to their communities. Figures like [Markenzy Lapointe](#), the U.S. attorney **leading the investigation into the recent shooting attempt on former President Donald Trump**, and [Congresswoman Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick](#), a vocal advocate for Haitian immigrants, exemplify the leadership and influence of the Haitian-American community.*

*Moreover, the Haitian community has a rich history of contributing to the fight for justice and equity. As the **first Black republic**, Haiti's revolution against colonial rule inspired freedom fighters worldwide. It directly supported movements for slavery abolition and independence across the Americas. Today, Haitian-Americans remain vital to the social, cultural, and economic fabric of the nation, underscoring the importance of creating safe*

and equitable environments for every community to thrive. Addressing the root causes of migration from Haiti, including neo-colonialism and imperialism, is equally crucial to ensuring sustainable peace and development worldwide while facilitating respect, long-term success, and integration for all immigrants.

Testimonies from the Haitian Community

The voices of Haitian immigrants themselves illustrate the emotional toll of these attacks. **Rose**, a Haitian immigrant living in New Jersey, explains: “Every time I hear those comments, it feels like a stab to the heart. We come here to work, to build a better life, but we are constantly seen as less-than because of lies.”

Jefferson, who fled gang violence in Haiti, similarly expresses the strain of dealing with these false claims: “I lost everything in Haiti because of the violence. Coming here, I thought I’d find peace, but now I have to fight against these lies about who we are.”

Antonio, who also escaped gang terrors in Port-au-Prince and arrived in the U.S. a couple of months ago under parole, shares his sense of disillusionment: “The Statue of Liberty once symbolized hope and freedom to me, but now it feels like a distant ideal as I confront these persistent and false portrayals of our community.”

These testimonies underscore the human cost of dehumanizing rhetoric and highlight the need for advocacy to protect the dignity and rights of Haitian immigrants.

Conclusion: A Call for Fairness

It is time to confront and dismantle the harmful and unfounded narratives about Haitian immigrants. The myths surrounding disease, criminality, and even eating pets are rooted in racism and xenophobia. Public figures like former President Donald Trump and JD Vance must be held accountable for spreading misinformation that fosters division and hate.

Haitian immigrants deserve fairness, dignity, and respect. Their significant contributions to U.S. society enrich our cultural and economic landscape. We must advocate for justice and work to dismantle systemic racism to ensure that all immigrants are treated with the humanity they deserve. By challenging these false narratives and promoting truth, we can build a more just and equitable society for everyone.

Specific Channels for Initiating Change

To address discrimination and counteract harmful myths about Haitian immigrants, consider the following actions:

1. Promoting Accurate Information:

- **Media Literacy:** Launch educational campaigns on verifying information and identifying credible sources. Collaborate with schools and media outlets.
- **Fact-Checking Partnerships:** Partner with organizations like Snopes or FactCheck.org to debunk myths and share accurate information through media channels.
- **Support Investigative Journalism:** Fund reports that address and refute misinformation about Haitian communities.

2. Increasing Visibility of Haitian Communities:

- **Community Media:** Support Haitian-led media that provide positive and accurate portrayals of Haitian culture.
- **Cultural Events:** Organize events that highlight Haitian contributions and foster cultural appreciation.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Use media to share the success stories and positive impacts of Haitian immigrants.

3. Including Haitian Voices in Government:

- **Encourage Political Participation:** Promote voter registration and support Haitian candidates. Provide training and resources for political engagement.
- **Establish Advisory Boards:** Advocate for boards with Haitian representatives in local and state governments.
- **Support Policy Advocacy:** Work with advocacy groups to push for fair policies and protections for Haitian immigrants.

Implementing these strategies will help challenge misinformation, promote fairness, and ensure Haitian immigrants are valued and respected.

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