

# BITTER CANE

CANNE AMÈRE




A film by

**Ben Dupuy & Kim Ives**

INDIECOLLECT

A Program of the Laboratory for Icon & Idiom, Inc.



IndieCollect's new 4K restoration  
was sourced from the  
original 16mm camera negative  
& mono magnetic tracks.



BITTER CANE / CANNE AMÈRE is timeless.

By exposing Haiti's socio-economic realities in the late 20th century, this award-winning documentary explains Haiti's trials in the early 21st century. Filmed clandestinely under the dictatorship of Jean-Claude ("Baby Doc") Duvalier, BITTER CANE details the exploitation and foreign domination of the Haitian people.

From peasant coffee farms in the rugged tropical mountains to steamy U.S.-leased sweatshops in the teeming capital, the film takes the viewer on a journey through Haitian history, and leads to a deeper grasp of the country's political economy.

Shot on 16mm film, it was produced by Haiti Films, a collective of Haitian and North American filmmakers, who worked in close collaboration with the Haitian Liberation Movement, an underground revolutionary organization.

Released in 1983, BITTER CANE won first prize at the Antwerp International Film Festival and awards at the Chicago, London & Florence film festivals.

After the fall of Duvalier's regime in 1986, students and popular organizations projected the film on movie screens, walls, and bed-sheets in Haiti's countryside and cities to raise political consciousness and understanding of the difficult anti-imperialist struggle that lay ahead.



***"Two days ago, Matt, Kyle, and I were heading to Au Borgne in our beaten-up rental jeep to film coffee production there among the farmers who provide beans to Ernst Bennett, Michele Duvalier's father."***

***However, when we arrived in the late afternoon at the mountain pass of Pilboro, a blinding torrential downpour, with nonstop thunder and lightening, forced us off the road."***

**Entries from director Kim Ives  
1981 production diary...**

**"In Haiti, they always say: 'Li pa two lwen' (it's not too far.) When you hear that, expect at least another two hours of travel time.**

**That makes sense, because everything starts to come alive, to a cacaphony of roosters, at dawn. They gave us some spaghetti with herring for breakfast and some strong, fresh ground coffee."**

**"We thought we could wait it out, but it just continued on and on, so after an hour or so we inched our way off the main road into the village of Plaisance, looking for shelter from the storm. We were told the only place we could crash was at a church dormitory in the next town down the road: Pilate."**



**"The factories were brutal today. Inside they feel like a sauna. It's hard to imagine working in there for ten hours daily as many of the workers do."**

**"Both Kyle and I got sick as dogs three days ago. We drank copious amounts of water from the cooler in a stairwell, thinking it was treated."**



***"Another grueling day in the sugar cane fields.  
I think we got a great shot of the train carrying  
cane to the plant as well as the workers loading it.***

***The suspense of seeing the dailies is killing me."***

***"The biggest problem is the heat in the vast,  
treeless fields.***

***We're hoping it doesn't bake the film somehow."***



# BITTER CANE: a color documentary about

Haiti. The very word calls to mind images of hunger-swollen children and gun-toting soldiers. Once she was the Western Hemisphere's richest colony, and later became a cesspool of freedom with the only successful slave revolution in history. Today, Haiti is the hemisphere's poorest and most dictatorial nation with 90% illiteracy and bloody torture chambers, 50% birth mortality and midnight "disappearances," 40-year life expectancy and public machine-gunnings.

But the drama doesn't end there. Over the past two decades, millions of Haitians have fled their country for other shores. The most recent refugees have caused a world-wide sensation. Packed shoulder-to-shoulder in the leaky carcasses of old fishing boats, with no food, no water, and no instruments, they cross 600 miles of churning Caribbean sea to reach Florida, a journey which has boggled the minds of navigators, physicians, and politicians alike.

The waves of exodus from Haiti have now established sizable populations in cities around the globe: from Miami to Montreal, Caracas to Paris, New York to Brazzaville. It is from these exile communities that discontent is voiced. The Haitian flag for them is not the Duvalierist red beside black that now flies over Haiti, but the traditional red under blue. This flag can be seen unfurled several times a year amidst the honking cabs and screeching buses of New York City streets, as hundreds of Haitian de-

## their struggle for liberation.

monstrators protest their country's government and status quo.

### THE FILM

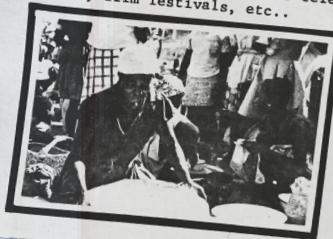
It is this scenario that the film *Bitter Cane* will capture. Under the direction of Haiti Films, a team of Haitians and Americans has been formed to carry out the project. Filming will take them to the sugar plantations of the Dominican Republic where Haitian migrant cane-cutters are bought, sold, and worked like slaves; to the Port-au-Prince "transformation" industries where workers assemble baseballs, clothes, radios, and toys all designed for the U.S. and where the wage is \$1.60 a day; to the streets of Flatbush in Brooklyn where the Haitian immigrant community faces the problems of racism, unemployment, and cultural isolation; to Miami, Florida where Haitian "boat-people" are engaged in a fierce legal and political battle to win the right to asylum in the U.S.. The main focus of the film, however, will be on the Haitian peasantry, which makes up 80% of the entire population and which lives in the Haitian countryside. Here, in settings which are sometimes lush and green, sometimes arid and dry, we will see how the peasant lives, works, survives, and dies. It is in this footage that we will find many of the roots to the problems of Haitian society... as well as their solutions.

What makes this film unprecedented is not only the scope of its

examination, but also the fact that it is being filmed primarily inside Haiti. Given the intense repression that exists there, this is a very difficult task, but it will provide a truly authentic view of the life and needs of the Haitian people, as well as a rare chance for them to speak.

### HAITI FILMS

Haiti Films has produced several other materials on Haiti, all in collaboration with the Mouvement Haïtien de Libération (MHL), a party based clandestinely in Haiti. These include *Haïti Enchaînée/Haïti Enchained* (45 min., color, Super 8, English/Creole), and *Haïti: Le Mail- lon Faible/The Weak Link* (40 min., color, 35 mm slideshow, sync-pulsed soundtrack, English/French/Creole). Due to the tremendous response from Haitian, North American, and European audiences to these productions, the need has been seen for a 16mm film which can be more widely and easily distributed and used. This film will also allow greater access and exposure of the Haitian national liberation struggle to television, film festivals, etc..



# Fleeing Baby Doc's Haiti

by Allan Ebert-Miner

*Bitter Cane*, produced by Haiti Films, Inc., Distributed by Cinema Guild, 1407 Broadway, Suite 802, New York, NY 10019. Home rental, \$100; purchase, \$1100; video rental, \$60.

Haiti has the distinction of being the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and the fourth poorest in the world. Since 1957 the greedy father and son duo of "Papa Doc" and "Baby Doc" Duvalier have ruled by force—an ironic legacy for a country that was the second in the Western Hemisphere to gain independence, which was won in a successful 1804 slave revolt.

In 1983, urban workers in the capital of Port-au-Prince earn about \$3.00 a day; peasants average \$1.60 a year. Haiti has no freedom of the press, and no rights to form political parties or trade unions. Torture, murder, and arbitrary arrests are daily occurrences. Yet the U.S. has pumped millions of dollars into Haiti to keep it aloft.

In recent years, an ever-increasing number of Haitians have preferred to risk their lives in risky sea-faring craft to get to the U.S. than to endure the deprivation of their homeland. Altogether, nearly 500,000 have fled.

*Bitter Cane* documents this development. Produced by Haiti Films, Inc., a new, New York-based cooperative, the film is a meticulously researched investigation of the conditions leading to the Haitian refugee crisis, and combines rare archival footage with the work experience of Haitian filmmakers, particularly those in the sugar cane industry.

*Bitter Cane*'s film crew made three trips inside Haiti beginning in March 1981. The crew used aliases and fictitious titles to gain access to American assembly plants and coffee and sugar plantations. On one of these visits, they entered a clearing in the midst of thick sugar cane rows and talked to a worker for the Haitian-American Sugar Company.

Every month the worker goes to the "big shop" in town to borrow money. "Big shop," he doesn't have enough to feed his wife and six children. His iron straw hat is pulled down over his ears. His arms fly in the air as he speaks. He's sad-looking, missing some teeth, frustrated, and tired. One has to keep him from a journey to the Florida shores.

The cameras also walk us through the Rawlings baseball factory. Rawlings makes all of the balls used by the National and American leagues in the U.S. in Haiti. Haitian women stand as statues stitching horrid spheres for less than \$3.00 a day.

With a history of "political stability" and low wages, says an American executive, Haiti was the prime choice for his company's factory.

The 75-minute documentary includes an extensive profile of the Kellwood Company, a Fortune 500 company that imports fabric to Haiti and then uses all of the profits for Sean. "Seanway" shops are not a new phenomenon, but vividly portraying them on film without getting bland or pedantic is refreshing.

Mack Galt, a white middle-aged executive with Kellwood, reveals that the company did some research before moving to Haiti. Kellwood, he says, looked into Haiti, Central America, and Caribbean countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala, and Jamaica, but found the political and social conditions in those countries not conducive to long-term investment. With a history of "political stability," says Galt, and low wages, Haiti was the prime choice.

*Bitter Cane* only has to flash a truckload of Duvalier's dreaded security force, as they make their way through a neighborhood, to get a glimpse of the Kellwood factory in Haiti.

In the United States, the *Bitter Cane* crew tracked down workers in Spencer, West Virginia, headquarters of the Kellwood Company. The workers interviewed and hundreds of others had been

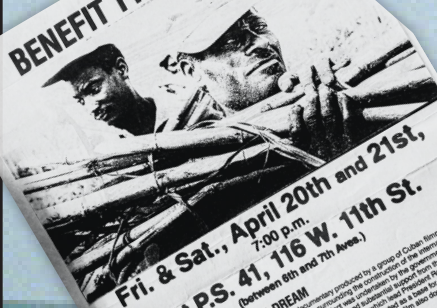
laid off prior to the company's move to Haiti. Their anger is apparent. They attribute what appears to be a consensus among many unemployed workers, that the U.S. has no business propping up governments that oppress their own people and then provide tax holidays to American firms.

Back in Haiti, the slums are the worst in the hemisphere. A mother can't find enough cardboard to patch her six roof. When it rains her children are left to sleep in the open. Young women recall how she had to sleep in a man's arms to get the roof over her head. It wasn't the first time she had to do it. She is the only one. She is lucky.

Not the last: someone you have to sleep with the boss and he fires you anyway. Many Haitians are no alternative but to flee. They pay their life's savings to an unknown miser who gets them into a risky vessel bound for the U.S. If they arrive safely they're incarcerated. Some get picked up by U.S. Coast Guard cutters. Others are too lucky: On October 26, 1982, a boatload of drowned Haitians washed ashore on the Florida coastline after their tiny vessel hit a reef and tore apart.

In the Alderson, West Virginia detention center once Haitian women summed up the situation: "All our suffering stems from what the U.S. is doing in Haiti." The approach of *Bitter Cane* is not neutral. The filmmakers set out to document Haiti's crisis with a good idea of where they would find its roots. They do a superb job of objectivity, but instead of striving to get close to the truth, they make no claims of objectivity, but instead strive to get close to the truth. They do a superb job of objectivity, but instead of striving to get close to the truth, they make no claims of objectivity, but instead strive to get close to the truth. They do a superb job of objectivity, but instead of striving to get close to the truth, they make no claims of objectivity, but instead strive to get close to the truth.

# BENEFIT FILM SERIES



Fri. & Sat., April 20th and 21st, 7:00 p.m.  
At P.S. 41, 116 W. 11th St.  
(between 6th and 7th Ave.)

TAKING OFF FROM A DREAM  
(Granada)

BITTER CANE  
(Haiti)

In this strong examination of the plight of the Haitian people under the Duvalier regime, the film shows how the Haitian people have been oppressed and how they are struggling for liberation. The film is a powerful statement on the need for social justice and human rights. Admission \$5.00. Sponsored by WBAI and the Film Fund. All proceeds to benefit WBAI and the Film Fund.

# HAITI: Bitter Cane



a film in progress

# Bitter Cane

An Award-Winning Documentary on Haiti



Also Showing:  
Puerto Rico: Paradise Invaded  
Retratos  
Friday Feb. 3  
TLH 107  
7:00 p.m.  
FREE

Sponsored by  
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The raw 6K scan reveals the softness, color fading & image defects inherent to the 16mm camera negative.



The color grading process begins with an initial luminance correction to balance brightness levels followed by white balance corrections to adjust natural reflection of the colors like the muted shade of brown of the jeep. A saturation adjustment is made to amplify the subject's bold attire on a particularly neutral, cloudy day.



After the color & contrast was balanced, a deflicker pass was utilized to eliminate color breathing due to fading of the negative.

Next, noise reduction produces a cleaner image while preserving the grain structure.

Lastly, some artifact and dust removal is the final polish to eliminate the larger defects you see in the top panel in addition to smaller imperfections or unwanted particles.



To learn more about the ongoing struggles of the Haitian people  
Visit <https://haitiliberte.com>



IndieCollect team members, Patrick Merentie (left) and Eva Yuma (center) with the Bitter Cane team. Cinematographer, Kyle Kibbe, and producer, DeeDee Halleck, flank Eva. Director, Kim Ives, at right.

## Special Thanks

Marie Lascu  
Archivist, Crowing Rooster Arts

**JOIN OUR CAMPAIGN TO SAVE INDIE FILMS**



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