A Mercalli scale measures the intensity of energy dispatched from far below the earth’s lithosphere. The waves that burst from this energy are seismic ruptures that occur most commonly along geological faults on the planet’s crust. The scale’s namesake, Giuseppe Mercalli, was a nineteenth and early twentieth century volcanologist and Catholic priest at a time when mutually exclusive vocations were more favourably regarded. His drift to seismology was motivated by a preoccupation with the human effect of large-scale natural disasters in closely-knit populations. The scale was a breakthrough. It was later modified in a different time, in a different place, and by different people: U.S. scientists Frank Neumann and Harry Wood, himself a seismology convert after bearing witness to the collapse of San Francisco in 1906. Neumann and Wood’s Modified Mercalli Intensity Scale [MMI] has been in effective use since 1931 and is still relied upon today by scientists and building engineers alike. It is not to be confused with the magnitude scale developed by another American, Charles Richter. The MMI records other matters: the rate of intensity of a rupture. It is closely connected to the PGA—peak ground acceleration—and together they capture the speed of a tremor, its spread, and the extent of its destruction.

There are twelve measures on the modified Mercalli scale. They range from “not felt” (Level 1) to “damage nearly total” (Level 12). In the dense fault zone of the Caribbean there have been two massive disasters that reached high levels on the Mercalli scale. In the last century the Kingston earthquake of 1907 registered a 9 (violent). In Port-au-Prince and its environs in 2010 the calamity reached a 10 (intense). The power of these disturbances is an outcome of their shared residence on the Enriquillo-Plantain Garden fault, which stretches like a rubber band attached on one end to eastern Jamaica and crooking all the way just passed the Haitian-Dominican Republic border. On this spot lies history. Geologists marvel at its activity; the complexity of its course and its depth and the immensity of its impact. Kingston measured 6.5 on the Richter scale (a rating retroactively arrived at) and Port-au-Prince and nearby Léogâne, 7.5 (Parris and Ahmad, 71).

There is more to this fault than numbers. The histories that emanate from its wrath no seismograph can measure. For the scale of loss of human lives and futures and the expansive physical destruction permanently transform the places who suffer it. That these events happen in places long subjected to trauma intensified the effect. Jamaica and Haiti, two Caribbean islands built on the brutal horror of human exploitation, enslavement, and staggering death tolls, victims of a range of earlier earthquakes and hurricanes and storms, all robbers of possibilities, would be forever altered by the disasters caused by the Enriquillo-Plantain Garden’s violent bursts. The remarkable similarity of outcomes is balanced by temporal distance. And in this distance are distinct differences in the process of remembering, recording and forgetting the brute consequences of nature’s force.

Whether these disasters are absorbed into the national story or not, whether they become embalmed in public monuments, their edges softened with time, they exist as irreducible moments in the lenses of history, unshakable and everlasting in the individual mind and the eye of the close chronicler. They call us to attend to them freshly to see how they fit with our concept of Caribbean history and not as remote, maudlin blips in a longer story overlaid by political and imperial histories. Together 1907 and 2010 are milestones in Caribbean history. Treated in this way, they are more than a radiograph of tectonic activity; they offer up clear examples not only of the social effect of extreme natural disasters in the region, but the progress of History itself and how we engage with it. This essay presents both earthquakes in a
joint narrative that reflects on their shared origin and sometimes frightening similarities and the notable differences in reaction, response, and memory, which are a factor of time—the century that separates 1907 and 2010.

I. The Tragedy of January 14

Followers of Alexander Bedward, an early twentieth century religious leader with a significant presence in Kingston, believed their beloved leader knew of impending doom in the city long before it happened on the afternoon of January 14, 1907. Bedward was said to have predicted the event just hours before at a gathering at the Hope River in St. Andrew parish. He stated, they later claimed, that “a loaded gun was pointed at Kingston” that would soon release its ammunition. The boast was one of many that had become part of Bedward’s lore. It also became something that Bedwardites could hold on to as they joined a country of 800,000 people awed in disbelief at what occurred in Kingston that fateful Monday afternoon in January. The story of the Kingston earthquake is rarely told outside of Jamaica and it is little-known in Haiti. For this reason, its narrative deserves mention here and is best told by those who survived it. Their recollections have been carefully stored in the Jamaican archives. Giving them space allows us a glimpse of the emotional costs of the catastrophe.

Amanda Forester was one of those surviving voices. A young woman at the time of the earthquake she described it this way: “The people died like rice, they had to dig trenches to bury them, the wall close and plenty die headless some lost their hands and some their feet. Some buried alive. It was horrible. There was nowhere to live.”

The experience of Florence Watson, who lived with her family in a two-story brick and plaster house called “The Willows” on Victoria Avenue, provides graphic illustration of the impact of the quake. Florence, in old age, insisted on writing down in detail her memories of that afternoon. It was the rocking of the house that first startled her. When the bricks in the walls were loosed and the shaking continued for what must have felt like an eternity, it became obvious that the city was in the clutches of a tremendous tremor. Another commentator could only describe the effect of the shaking of the buildings as being “like a dog shaking a rat.” The shaking lasted for thirty seconds. The stillness that preceded was, for those who experienced it, strange and distant. Florence was thrown from her room and miraculously made it to the yard before the entire house came crashing down. Florence’s grandmother narrowly escaped death when, minutes before the quake, she got up from her chair to lie down in the bed in her room; the section with the bed was the only part of the house that did not collapse. Other members of her family were not as fortunate. Her parents were trapped under collapsed beams, bleeding and terribly bruised. Her father was shaving at the time of the earthquake and ended up with a large slash across his throat. Her younger brother was crushed under the avalanche of bricks. As they began to set up a makeshift camp in their front yard, they were startled by screams by crowds warning of a tidal wave coming from Kingston Harbour. Policemen visited the Watson house urging them to leave and move to the Race Course, a roundabout at the northern end of the city. Drays roamed the neighbourhoods to pick up the injured and weak, such as Florence Watson’s parents, who were unable to make the trek to the top of Kingston.

Survivors like Florence Watson were stunned by what they found when they moved throughout the city. The busy thoroughfares of Port Royal, Harbour Street, and Water Lane, had become unrecognizable, reduced to mountains of rubble. Paranoia and panic of those who ran out into the streets, was matched by the cries of the hundreds left under the rubble. Herman Lange remembered the trauma and chaos in the first moments after the quake:

I was buried under the debris like others in the office—why I was not killed is a mystery. During the first night after the earthquake I roamed the lanes of lower Kingston looking for victims. Actually it was more like crawling over piles and piles of debris, ruins everywhere. At the Daily Gleaner office stood a piece of masonry head and shoulder above everything and on it stood three women wringing their hands, shouting for help, how they got their I cannot imagine. Along Harbour Street many bodies of men and women were covered with a thick layer of dust.

Scenes such as this one were matched with incidents of frightening spectacle. Louise Plummer was traumatized by the event. Just a few years earlier, when she was six, her family house was destroyed by the 1903 hurricane. After relocating to East Street, their new house was taken by the earthquake, and she sustained burns from a kitchen fire. A tramcar conveying passengers along Harbour Street was thrown and all the passengers electrocuted when the wires crossed.

The earthquake had left its mark across the east and north of Jamaica. In Ocho Rios and as far west as St. James, there were reports of the violent shaking of buildings. The situation was worse in the east where the towns of Port Antonio and Buff Bay reported the collapse of buildings and a few deaths as a result. At Port Royal, the site of Jamaica’s last violent earthquake in 1692, several houses were damaged. The tidal wave that followed placed several buildings under water.

But it was in the populous capital that the tragic outcome of the earthquake was most deeply felt. At the Race Course (modern-day National Heroes Park) a large tent camp was rapidly set up within hours of the disaster. A Relief Committee

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1 Eustace Brown, Jamaica Memories, 7/12/71, Jamaica Archives.
2 Amanda Forester, Jamaica Memories, 7/12/98, Jamaica Archives.
3 The Daily Telegraph 22 January 1907.
4 Florence Watson, Jamaica Memories 7/12/182, Jamaica Archives.
5 Herman Lange, Jamaican Memories 7/12/145, Jamaica Archives.
6 Mrs. S.F. Isaac Henry, Jamaica Memories, Jamaica Archives.
was organized to distribute tents to the survivors. Tents were also provided by a circus, which had recently been set up at the Race Course. The roar of the lions near the camp dwellers—who were falsely believed to have released from their cages by the earthquake—added to the general feeling of pandemonium and fear that the end of the world had arrived. Those who were unable to get tents, fashioned their own abodes out of improvised sheets. The scene was tragic indeed; women and children huddled under sheets in the night. People from all classes were encamped on the Race Course, and some of the survivors would note how the disaster removed, albeit temporarily, the physical separation of the city’s classes. In the days afterwards, Jamaicans organized relief drives throughout the city. Wolmer’s Girls school was turned into a food depot, and the Myrtle Bank Hotel, the largest hotel in the city at the time, was completely wrecked, but became a “charnel house.”

In the wake of the disaster Kingstonians turned to spirituality to help them cope with the catastrophe. At the Race Course various denominations, such as the Seventh Day Adventists, quickly set up church tents where they conducted services throughout the night. For many the vigils and religious ceremonies at the site made it near impossible to sleep the first few nights after the quake. Bedwardites dressed in white beat drums and tambourines throughout the night, while others improvised hymns. Over fifty years later, one of the tent dwellers could still recall with precision one popular refrain: “My sins are taken away—my sins are taken away/Sing Glory to HIM name for HIM coming back again. My sins are taken away—Praise the Lord.” Although Bedward, who baptized thousands of survivors in the Hope River after the quake, was one of the most popular men, prophets came in all sizes. A young boy, Llewlyn Fitzgerald James, known at the time as Little Prophet, developed a reputation for himself by traveling to various neighbourhoods with his parents, delivering sermons.

We have passed through a terrible ordeal, have faced death in its most horrible forms, have seen mangled bodies lying by, hundreds on the ground, and in the silent darkness of the night have time and again felt the earth rock and tremble beneath our feet. Everything has conspired to test the strength of our endurance. A premium has been put on despair.

As the reality of the catastrophe set in a variety of responses were offered as to why the destruction was so widespread and shocking. A Daily Gleaner article claimed it was a result of Kingstonians’ disregard for construction practices appropriate for a country such as Jamaica:

Long immunity from serious seismic disturbances seem [sic] to have bred an unjustifiable sense of security. The Port Royal disaster has been forgotten, or remembered merely like the Flood, as an incident in a former dispensation and the old Babel instinct now so rampant in the United States and unhappily asserting itself in London, together with the demands of luxury on the one hand and of economy on the other have led to the erection of lofty buildings with heavy roofs supported by rigid iron pillars or massive brick walls unsuitable to a country liable to earth tremors of severity.

The article was titled, “A Tale of Two Tragedies” and compared the situation in 1692 with that of 1907. While recognizing the inherent problems of building construction, this assessment was steeped in the class-based bias that defined social relations in the era. The earthquake was called a “wholesale catharsis” that had the benefit of clearing Kingston of the “clotted masses of tropical slums” in the lower part of the city.

The distribution of relief supplies and the daunting question of how the rebuilding of the city would be organized loomed large over discussions in the aftermath of the quake. The responsibility of administration of these issues fell on the Governor, Sir James Alexander Sweetenham, who had supreme powers in the colony. In the first days after the disaster, Governor Sweetenham was regarded with great admiration for his physical presence in the city, rescuing the wounded in the rubble. His wife, Lady Sweetenham, worked at one of the first relief centers set up in Kingston, handing out supplies to victims. Public regard for the Governor fast dissipated when he stubbornly incited a diplomatic row with the United States. Without permission, U.S. Marines landed in Kingston from Guantanamo three days after the earthquake. Sweetenham was affronted by the actions of the Americans who claimed they were protecting the U.S. Consulate and bringing doctors and relief supplies. Given the heavy presence of U.S. warships in the Caribbean, and the dominance of U.S. influence in nearby Cuba and Haiti, Sweetenham likely feared that the United States might use the opportunity to occupy Jamaica. U.S. Admiral Davis was promptly asked to leave Jamaica taking with him desperately needed supplies and medical assistance. Public opinion in Jamaica and the United States was unforgiving. Sweetenham was roundly criticized for his action in the local press. Sweetenham had also under-emphasized the extent of the inherent problems of building construction, this assessment was steeped in the class-based bias that defined social relations in the era. The earthquake was called a “wholesale catharsis” that had the benefit of clearing Kingston of the “clotted masses of tropical slums” in the lower part of the city.

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1 Daily Telegraph, 22 Jan 1907.
2 The Daily Gleaner, 18 January 1907.
3 Herman Lange, Jamaica Memories 7/12/145, Jamaica Archives.
4 Amanda Forester, Jamaican Memories 7/12/98, Jamaica Archives.
5 The Daily Gleaner, 11 February 1907.
6 The Daily Gleaner, 12 February 1907.
7 Ibid. For more on poor living conditions in Kingston at the time, see Moore and Johnson, Squalid Kingston: 1890–1920: How the Poor Lived, Moved and Had their Being (Kingston: Social History Project, 2000).
The experience of the photograph is the real power of the photograph. They queue in orderly fashion, observing the ruin and immediately become a shocking memory they were forced to accept as permanent.

But there is a larger aspect to this story. For unexpected tragedies of such scale and consequence are absorbed by the nation as a whole. There was immediately a desire to document the disaster. Its recorders aimed to capture an elemental aspect of what disaster looks like in a poor Caribbean country. Prior to the 1907 quake there were few visual records of earthquakes or violent storms. Sketches of thrown buildings juxtaposed with testimonials, and before and after drafts and maps, are found in records of nineteenth century disasters—fires, earthquakes, storms and hurricanes. The full picture, nonetheless, relied heavily on the imagination of those receiving the stories. The wider availability of photographic equipment in the industrial age meant that photography was closer at hand in Kingston in 1907. Indeed, that earthquake, along with the 1902 destruction of Saint-Pierre in Martinique by the volcanic eruption of Mont Pelée, was one of the earliest Caribbean disasters so extensively captured visually. Several photographers in the island and those from outside who rushed by boat to Kingston days after news about the quake spread, sought to capture the earthquake on film. Their efforts have created a large repository of photographic evidence of its extent; a repository that continues to grow; just a few years ago a stash of previously unseen photographs surfaced and were deposited to the National Library of Jamaica. These images stand out as visual narratives, illustrations of the tale, from which much can be discerned.

To discuss the important role of the photographic record of 1907, I will focus specifically on the images of one business, Taylor and Mathieson, a New York based firm with a Kingston office. The proprietors referred to themselves “photographic artists”, a term no doubt chosen to reflect their attention to the aesthetics of their trade. The earthquake destroyed much of their Kingston office but fortunately not their equipment. In the hours immediately following the shock and through much of the following days they visited various sites around the city to provide a social document of the ruin and public (Aarons, 20–21).

It was taken in the early morning the day after the earthquake and shows King Street, a major road in the city. There is much to be learned from it. The desolation is the most obvious and stark aspect. A note on the accompanying card in the archives indicates it was taken shortly before 8:00 a.m. No doubt the photographers were there much earlier as they search for their shot. The framing is considered and carefully set up with some labour especially when we consider the technology of the time so as to present the street entire. Buildings are destroyed; nothing is intact. On the left there is no building at all. This is a symbol of the unevenness of the disaster. Yet the most observable feature of the photograph is not the ruinate but the people in the image. Those in the foreground float in like mirages, the camera capturing their movement in holographic form. The sway of the skirts, the half-turns of the bodies, the blur of the legs. This seems intentional. Photographic experiments with capturing movement began in the mid-nineteenth century with attempts to document horses in motion. Taylor and Mathieson’s photographs evoke something of the lack of stasis of the moment. Whether or not this was their purpose cannot be fully known. However, we do see a sort of counter-narrative here, one that refuses to reflect a world standing still, forced to halt its progress. The people in the frame also appear like ghostly spirits hovering over the scene. And it is here that we wonder whether the view presented is not intended to blur the lines between survival and death. But the people we see ARE unmistakably alive!

It is this insistence of life that is the real power of the photograph. They queue in orderly fashion, observing the disaster but not breaking from the fold. Certainly there are dead bodies under that rubble. It would take months of working with primitive tools to find all the corpses buried there. Without communication—cable lines were ruptured immediately—people had to wait a week to find out if their friends and relatives made it out alive and this was done only after reporters travelled the length of the city’s hospitals, care facilities and charnel houses producing an incomplete

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16 Daily Gleaner, 11 February 1907.
list of names of living and dead that was published in the city’s papers almost three weeks later. Equally certain, at the moment this scene was etched unto the photographer’s plate there is more loss to come. The fires that consumed part of the city for days after the 14th would take many more lives. Taylor and Mathieson capture the dark blooms in the distance of the image. People under the rubble who were alive and were not saved or taken by fire would succumb to trauma and starvation and die. And just as certain there were significant aftershocks still being registered on Kingston’s surface when the photograph was taken. At the centre of the photograph is the carcass of a tramcar, its busted wires a vine of complication overhead. Then when eyes are drawn to it we understand the sombreness of the mood more clearly. The bodies that would have been in that tram, people who not a day earlier were heading home after work and school, were all electrocuted. We know this because later some who wrote down their memories of the great quake mentioned seeing this carnage and the shock of the view of the charred remains. The people in this photo are paying their last respects.

The camera is then moved and relocated to record the scene from another angle. And here we see the artistry of the photograph’s creators and their purpose. The burnt tram is foregrounded and the blur of the people more exaggerated. It is as if they exist around but not in the scene. No one is clearly rendered. The sharpness is focused on the sight of a powerful machine reduced to a hulking wreckage (See Figure 2).
There is almost as much to be said about what is not in the photographs as what is in it. Like every single photograph, postcard, lantern slide, and print image tucked into dozens of bursting folders in the National Library of Jamaica’s collection of 1907 images, none of these Taylor and Mathieson series features one dead body. The presence of the dead is felt in the photographs, suggested and insinuated, but unseen. In this late Victorian age it was perhaps a form of propriety not to offer such an exposé. A search through these images further reveals the fascination with what has been demolished. What remained, the parts unaffected, those do not feature. Those were, to be sure, few. But they seem to have little relevance in this visual tale and, as with the testimonies, the vastness of the medium of photography limits our view of the full scope of what occurred.

While photographs record evidence of the weight of a tragedy, their preponderance can numb as well as shock. In her influential *On Photography*, Susan Sontag addressed this feature of visual evidence: “Once one has seen such images, one has started down the road of seeing more and more. Images transfix. Images anesthetize. An event known through photographs certainly becomes more real than it would have been if one had never seen the photographs. But after repeated exposure to images it also becomes less real.” (Sontag, 20) The photographs of the earthquake of 1907 recall the horror for Jamaicans and peculiarly, with each succeeding generation, the historical details in the images freeze the experience in a distant time even for those who occupy the same space the victims once lived in (See Figures 3 and 4).

**Figure 3:** 45 Hanover Street, Kingston after 1907 earthquake. Photograph by Taylor and Mathieson, 1907. Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica.

**Figure 4:** Kingston Post Office and court house after the 1907 earthquake. Photograph by Taylor and Mathieson, 1907. Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica.
The photographs, the testimonies, the editorials all have a sense of urgency to them: to fix an image of the disaster before Jamaican life became adjusted to a new reality. The uncertainty of this reality dominates the collective view of the time even as there is acknowledgement that moving on requires releasing the trauma’s hold. To live in the future means to rethink one’s relationship with the past. An editorial written in the *Daily Gleaner* in late February gives a sharp reflection on this point; one that tells us in the present something about how contemporaries struggled to come to terms with what happened.

When the last earthquake shock of this series shall have occurred, and the normal life of the community begins its wonted course once more, we shall find it difficult to realise what we have passed through, difficult to recall our emotions of to-day. The past will be like a dream, like something shadowy and unreal; something of which we have read; a nightmare of the imagination. We shall know that it has been real, we shall probably take some precautions to prevent another sacrifice of lives should another such catastrophe occur; but we shall be haunted by fear of imminent death and wear on our faces the signs of anxiety and fear. We shall be happy and confident and as hopeful as before, making plans for the future and refusing to believe really that in an instant those plans may be turned to nought and we ourselves reduced to dust.¹⁷ (See Figure 5).

**II. The Tragedy of January 12**

The stories that shape our understanding of the Port-au-Prince earthquake of 2010 come from a more reachable past (See Figure 6). These memories reside with a generation with the greatest access to global communication in history. The images are given to us as a result of this access though the fatefulness of the calamity is obscured by the complicated turns that have followed.

¹⁷ *Daily Gleaner*, 23 February 1907.

**Figure 5:** Cracks in the Ground Made by the Earthquake, Kingston 1907. Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica.
In 2010 Haiti was everywhere, less a country than a cause. Its proud heritage of revolution was reduced to prelude for a narrative of a poor, barren, and according to a surprising number of western do-gooders, cursed land. For them 2010 was cosmic absolution of old digressions akin to a view uttered after 1907 that Kingston had a chance to rid itself of its blighted and squalid denizens and recast itself in a purer imperial vision. Such was the language of the zealots who tried to make sense of Haiti after January 12.

Friends, foes, capitalists and digital carpetbaggers all drew on the same source in their appeals for Haiti's salvation: the stories of extreme human suffering. The numbers were staggering and rose each passing day in the media telling—more than a quarter million souls. Haitians at home and abroad were brought out by the half hour to relive their private pain in front of foreign cameras as profuse on the ground as the soldiers. To quote Brazilian singer Caetano Veloso, “Haiti is here, Haiti is not here.”

If the sound-bites and translations were missed, other stories were in the papers, on internet radio, YouTube, global broadcasts of live rescues, guided most often by the unseen hands of others. Haiti would not be forgotten. That was what was promised. But stories, as with all tragedies, carry emotional power and bring us to confront loss in the face of our good fortune. This was true in 1907 and it was why as far away as St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands, stories of what happened in Kingston made the front pages in gripping detail.

It is even more so in the case of Haiti in 2010 when the force of history had commanded the entire world to take notice. The stories had remarkable effect. One only need be mentioned. It is one that I heard myself. In February, three weeks after the earthquake I made the first of several visits to Haiti as part of a coordinated university effort to assist Haiti. On that visit I met a woman I shall call Grace. She was an administrative assistant to a man who ran a local patrimonial agency. I met them both downtown Port-au-Prince. With a colleague from Florida the meeting was arranged to discuss possible assistance for Haitian libraries affected by the earthquake. Grace was present at the meeting, sitting across the table from me, staring and offering no words. Her shiny hair struck me as remarkably well coiffed under the circumstances. She wore a black and white floral dress and a half-smile, her eyes not allowing her to release their gaze on me. After the meeting she came to me and introduced herself. Unsolicited she proceeded to tell me her story—the only memory of the great tragedy that she would carry. She had brought her children home from school when the quake struck. They were in the living room. Both were under ten years. The house crumbled on them. It took a day for her neighbours to pull Grace out. It took another to find the bodies of her children, her son’s backpack still draped by its straps over his shoulders. At the end of this story she pushed back her hair to the midpoint of her skull. Beneath the shiny hair I had earlier admired was a deep wound that ran halfway across her scalp. It was caused by a collapsed wall. The wig hid the scar but the scar was a permanent mark of her loss. She came to the meeting to escape the possessing trauma that she told me had her on the brink of insanity. Her story now was not of the immensity of what had occurred. It was about what that beast had taken.

I heard many more stories like Grace’s first-hand on that trip and the others which followed, and each impacted me in ways that I was not prepared for. Even now I recall them with difficulty unable to find complete safety in academic objectivity or, as in my research in Jamaica, through the filter of archival voices more than a century old.

The melancholy of Port-au-Prince in 2010 forced many to turn to religion for understanding. As many Jamaicans dressed in white in the days following January 14 and went to Bedward to be dipped in the healing stream, to be absolved, purified, and protected, so too in Haiti did popular soothsayers draw the attention of the living. One such

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18 Caetano Veloso, “Haiti,” Tropicália 2, CD Elektra/Nonesuch 79339.
19 My recollections of this episode are drawn partially from memory and partially from notes taken during my visits.
person was a Haitian woman living in the United States whose name I am unable to recollect. She had visited a few months before, an evangelical who warned that a great disaster would soon befall Port-au-Prince. In February she returned and drew a massive crowd dressed in white to the Champs-de-Mars to hear her. I saw this gathering on my visit. Her transfixed audience was searching her words—defiant and more loudly delivered now that she believed her powers proven—for answers on the way forward. None were offered. Not by her or the scores of others who promised deliverance.

What they were left with is a new mode of survival. It is again the power of images that give us now, with the distance of time, a reminder of the scale of loss and the enormous weight that these survivors had to carry. But photographs also give us other messages. They reveal how through the course of time the perception of the subject and photographer changes. In the blatant and subtle indicators of framing, editing, scope, angle of view, and arrangement exist tomes.

One of the most upsetting was of a group of photographers competing to get the best angle they can of fifteen year old Fabienne Cherisma, killed by a stray bullet fired as a warning against looters. In Port-au-Prince, I saw similar groups gathered around broken communities, snapping their cameras from the safe border of the main road.

Global audiences since 1907 have become what Lilie Chouliaraki has called, “cosmopolitan spectators.” (Chouliaraki, 2019). It is not enough to know of human suffering; there is now an expectation to see evidence of that suffering. The photography that circulated through global news media was satisfying this expectation as much as sensationalizing the event. For the vast numbers of churches, telethons, schools, radio stations, and social media drives to function, in their quest to assist, the visual evidence was essential. “The demand for global intervention,” writes Sharon Silvinski, “has come to be understood as inextricably linked to spectators’ exposure to visual evidence of distant suffering and violence.” (Silvinski, 112) The paradox was that the very medium used in the campaign for Haitian human rights also exploited Haitian humanity.

Haitian photographers did their best to document the human suffering and the shock of the event in ways that were less invasive and more reflective. Daniel Morel, whose images became most widely circulated, was one of the earliest photographers on the scene. By his account, he ran into the city’s dusk with his camera in an attempt to catch with his extended eye what his mind was desperately trying to process. Considering his images together one gets the sense of a conscious attempt to counter the inexplicable by focusing not on nature’s destruction but the responses of the survivors. They are, in the main, photographs of survivors not of the dead: a group of grown men in tears, a woman with a bloodied face, mouth open with her arms outstretched to the photographer in a cry for the camera to hold the pose so that her disbelief registers, and most moving, wounded survivors caked in dust and faces staring in stony silence. Morel, like Taylor and Mathieson in Jamaica, was searching for humanity, unbroken flesh and bone amid grand chaos.

Technology transformed photography dramatically in the century between 1907 and 2010. A camera exists in telephones and other compact forms allowing anyone with easy access to a device to become an on-the-spot “photographic artist.” This functionality served a personal purpose when I visited Haiti. I travelled with a point and shoot camera to document what was hard for me to fathom. The sheer scale of loss was so overwhelming it seemed necessary to capture some imperfect record of it for future study. My motives for taking these photographs were both professional and personal. I was conducting a needs assessment for my university, the University of the West Indies, with the intention using some of these images to gain possible donor support in Jamaica to finance proposed assistance projects. But my own relationship with Haiti and people there who were close to me, had bearing on the decisions I made when taking these images. Not far from mind surely was a sensitivity to build a visual counter-narrative to the macabre images that were all over the news. Not for anyone really other than myself. I held the images close. I judiciously chose to reveal only a bloodied face, mouth open with her arms outstretched to the photographer in a cry for the camera to hold the pose so that her disbelief registers, and most moving, wounded survivors caked in dust and faces staring in stony silence.

The photographs, then, were not only an act of creating a remembrance of what was, or tribute to what was forced to be in the ruinscape, but a way of coming to terms with colossal change. As difficult as it is to share them without a sense of exploitation, they bear indication of how it was I wanted to remember what I had experienced. As with the photographs from Kingston, many of the places captured in the lens have since been rebuilt; others have not. And even when birthed anew the ruins of the buildings and their former shape are dissolved in the mind’s eye, yet eerily preserved in the photograph (See Figures 7–14).

Figure 7: Government building, Port-au-Prince, February 2010. Photograph, ©Matthew J. Smith.

Figure 8: Rue du Centre, Port-au-Prince, February 2010. Photograph, ©Matthew J. Smith.

Figure 9: Records Office, Port-au-Prince, February 2010. Photograph, ©Matthew J. Smith.
Figure 10: L’église du sacre coeur, Port-au-Prince, February 2010. Photograph, ©Matthew J. Smith.

Figure 11: Rue du Centre, Port-au-Prince, February 2010. Photograph, ©Matthew J. Smith.
In the years since the quake there has been a tendency for academics to link the colossal change of the Haitian Revolution and independence in 1804 to a completely different type of change in 2010 through global responses to the event. Yet the two are unrelated. This is so because natural disaster produces a different sort of reaction than revolutionary victory. There is no attachment to it that seems positive and if such is attempted it is not so much for the sufferers as those who claim to offer aid. A social memory lasts in the collective mind because it is reinforced by the actions of the state. At some point the state forgets. The event that is to be remembered goes through a process of forgetting; it is dis-membered, stripped of its arteries and its scope narrowed in historical time.
The Jamaican state and the Haitian state keep the memory of 1907 and 2010 alive with memorials. The two come just a few years after each event. The two are also located in very similar places: the May Pen Cemetery in Western Kingston where hundreds were buried, nameless into the earth and in Titanyen outside of Port-au-Prince where Haitians did the same. They are official memories. But they do not reflect the popular memory. That exists forever or as long as people choose to keep the memory alive.

In Jamaica in 1955, on the 300th anniversary of British colonialism in the island, the *Daily Gleaner* ran an essay competition. They asked Jamaicans to write on the memories they had of the country over the past half-century. The response was tremendous and all the letters were donated to the Jamaica Archives. There, in Spanish Town, when one reads through this trove it is unmistakably clear that no other event dominated popular memory than 1907. Not two World Wars, not self-government, not even the stirring of resistance against British colonialism. And yet the first, second and third winners had no reference whatever to the earthquake. The essays chosen by the editorial staff were not of tragedy. Not of loss. No surviving testimony of phenomenal survival. The winning essays were celebrations of an old-fashioned, carefree way of life which some sensed was already disappearing at mid-century.

Social tragedy on the scale of an earthquake is always shared most intensely by the generations who experienced it. The memory is carried by them as long as they are alive and then it is passed on and becomes something else. How those who inherit it choose to retain is, consciously or unconsciously, is up to them. Jamaican writer H.G. DeLisser’s haunting comment on 1907 written in 1910, a century before the Haiti earthquake, allows us to consider how those ragged subterranean fault lines that tie the places of the Caribbean together, factor into daily life.

It may be that you leave King Street and saunter along Harbour Street, once the chief business thoroughfare of Jamaica, now largely a mass of bare ruins, a monument to the work of earthquake and fire...to the dweller of this city this sight no longer awakens deep emotions, does not startle or send the blood coursing quickly to the heart. It is to him all commonplace. The sad significance of it has ceased to appeal to his imagination; yet no stranger can look upon those shattered walls rising one after another along the length of the street, or upon those grass and flower-covered mounds between them and not remember that hundreds of men perished here one bright, sun-lit day in January when this city was making plans for the future and rejoicing in the fullness of life...the present generation will pass away and perhaps another and another before a like calamity recurs. Meanwhile the silent open spaces speak of that day of desolation, and the people go about and think of what they shall do this year and the next. Only the stranger looks upon these walls and mounds and remembers. (DeLisser, 87)

This could have been a description of Port-au-Prince in 2010. I close this discussion of two tragedies and their memories with two final images. The first comes from Haiti. Travel writer, Joshua Jelly-Schapiro in his *Island People*, an insightful tour of the modern Caribbean, writes about a tribute to 2010 he attended in 2014 in Jacmel in the south of Haiti. There he saw young boys and girls pushing wheelbarrows with other young boys in a pantomime of the dead being carried away out of the rubble. It was homage and entertainment (Jelly-Schapiro, 271).

The second image is from my own experience. On a visit to downtown Kingston where I went to examine the collection of earthquake photographs, there were three youth pushing a wheelbarrow. It was packed with bricks they had mined from derelict building foundations on arterial streets in the city. They inquired if I wanted to buy them. I declined. These bricks had only commercial value for them the boys. But they were more than that remnants of the greatest disaster that city had ever known. In both wheelbarrows were memories passed down, translated, and remembered, in their own way, by the people who must carry them (Figure 15).

![Figure 15: History on sale, East Street, Kingston, 2018. Photograph, ©Matthew J. Smith.](image)
Competing Interests
The author has no competing interests to declare.

References
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