

Center for Justice and Accountability

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

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Campaign and Advocacy

Lexiuste Cajuste is a Haitian activist and father of eight children. In the early 1990s, he was persecuted by the Haitian government for his work as a labor union activist and for his outspoken support for ousted president Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Lexiuste was born in 1947 in Fort Jacques, Haiti. One of five children, he studied psychology and sex education in Port-au-Prince before becoming an elementary school teacher of French grammar. In 1979, Lexiuste decided to supplement his teaching income by becoming a taxi driver. It was his experience as a taxi driver that inspired Lexiuste to become involved in union organizing and political activism.

During the Duvalier era, Port-au-Prince taxi drivers were targets of police abuse and extortion. Despite their numbers, their lack of formal organization rendered them unable to protect themselves against the corrupt police. When Duvalier (Baby Doc) left office in 1986, Lexiuste co-founded a taxi drivers union and became its general secretary. In his new position, he sought limits on police power, and the union became Haiti's first to advocate for the separation of the military and police. According to Lexiuste, the military and the police were interchangeable. They just put some blue clothes on the military and call[ed] them police, but they [were] not police, he said. His taxi-drivers union then merged with the much larger Centrale Generale des Travailleurs (General Confederation of Workers, or CGT), whose 25,000 members included taxi drivers, government employees, textile workers, factory employees, and farm workers. In 1990, Jean-Bertrand Aristide was elected president in Haiti's first free election. That same year, Lexiuste became general secretary of CGT and began working with Aristide on increasing the minimum wage.

In 1991, Aristide was overthrown in a violent coup d'état led by the High Command of the army and supported by many of the country's economic elite. Shortly before the coup, Aristide had proposed the wage increase but was deposed before it could be signed into law. For the next two years, Lexiuste worked tirelessly to organize marches and demonstrations to promote the return of the elected president and democracy to Haiti. By this time, Lexiuste had become a public figure, giving interviews and holding press conferences in support of union objectives and the ousted president.

In April of 1993, Lexiuste planned a major strike of CGT's 25,000 members in order to pressure the coup's military leaders to leave office. On April 23, 1993, Lexiuste and three colleagues went to several radio stations in Port-au-Prince to announce the strike. When they arrived at Radio Carabes, military police were waiting outside. Although one of his companions fled, Lexiuste complied with the officers' order to follow them to the police station. Once inside, the officers pummeled him with fists and brass knuckles until he lost consciousness.

Lexiuste awoke three days later in another cell with no toilet, no food, and only seawater to drink. He suffered major injuries from his abuse and spent one month in the hospital. While detained, the U.S. Embassy in Haiti sent three separate delegations to offer him and his entire family asylum, but Lexiuste refused. He did not want to abandon the country that he had struggled so hard to improve. The situation in Haiti, however, had only worsened and it was no longer safe for himself or his family. Eventually, Aristide invited him to Washington and convinced him to stay. In December 1993, Lexiuste applied for asylum, which he received.

Since arriving in the United States, Lexiuste has maintained his commitment to the Haitian community. He spent the first nine years in Queens, New York where he again held two jobs. During the day, he worked for a nonprofit organization that specialized in helping Haitian refugees with HIV/AIDS find treatment, while at night he worked in maintenance at Mt. Sinai Hospital.

Lexiuste currently lives in Jacksonville, Florida with his wife and children, where, he says, the Haitian community in Jacksonville is small but growing. Although his past injuries limit his ability to work, Lexiuste continues to be an advocate for Haitians in need. He recently established the Hope Center, an organization that helps Haitian refugees transition into living in the United States. The Hope Center provides services such as basic computer skills necessary for job applications and translation for immigration cases. He is also employed as a nursing assistant at St. Luke's Hospital.

In 2003, Lexiuste brought his activism into U.S. courts. With the help of CJA, Lexiuste and co-plaintiffs filed a civil suit against Carl Dorlien, a member of Haiti's High Command in the military regime. During the time of Lexiuste's detainment, Dorlien served as Chief of Personnel for the military, a position that made him responsible for military justice and discipline. During his tenure, marked by widespread violence against civilians, no soldiers were disciplined. On the contrary, Dorlien transferred the offending soldiers to hot spots where violence against civilians continued unchecked. As it was the High Command that gave the order to begin his torture, Lexiuste holds the former colonel more responsible than all the soldiers who did the actual beatings.

In addition to personal reparation, Lexiuste sees his case as an important step toward justice for the Haitian people. While the case took place in the United States, Lexiuste argued that the win was a judgment against the Haitian military for all the Haitian people because American justice is a model for all countries.

Marie Jeanne Jean was a resident of the Raboteau neighborhood of the coastal city of Gonaves at the time of the Raboteau massacre, in which she lost her husband and the father of her two young children, Vladimyr and Michelda Pierre. Her husband, Michel Pierre, was

gunned down by Haitian military officers as he fled in his boat from a raid on their seaside neighborhood.



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***"We will never catch all the torturers—but we will always catch some,
and none of them will ever know who is next."***