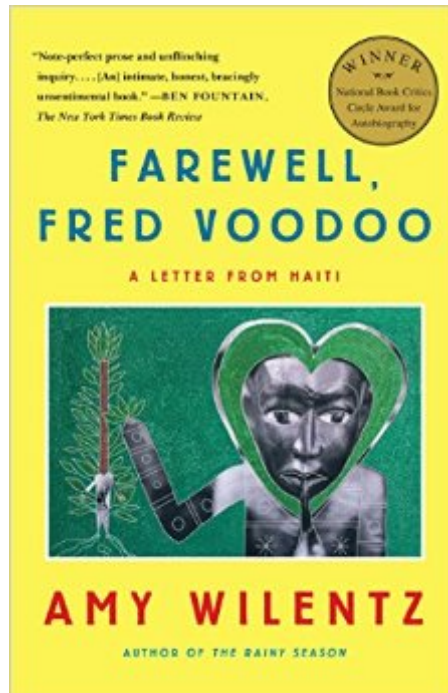


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# Farewell, Fred Voodoo: A Letter From Haiti



## Synopsis

Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for Autobiography, this is a brilliant writer's account of a long, painful, ecstatic and unreciprocated affair with a country that has long fascinated the world. A foreign correspondent on a simple story becomes, over time and in the pages of this book, a lover of Haiti, pursuing the heart of this beautiful and confounding land into its darkest corners and brightest clearings. Farewell, Fred Voodoo is a journey into the depths of the human soul as well as a vivid portrayal of the nation's extraordinary people and their uncanny resilience. Haiti has found in Amy Wilentz an author of astonishing wit, sympathy, and eloquence.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I am on the Board of a medical non-for profit in Haiti. We sponsor Haitian healthcare workers who provide mobile medical care in underserved areas. If you are interested in Haiti, this book is worth reading. Positives: Thought the book is very well written and does a better job than any other book of explaining the Haitian NGO dilemma. The book keeps you engaged throughout and is certainly very thought-provoking. Negatives: I wanted to scream out loud at the author at various times throughout the book. I feel she makes ethical decisions on what's right and what's wrong based on her own lens. For example, healthcare NGO workers right, journalists (except for her, wrong). Dr. Mark Hyman, wrong, Dr. Megan Coffey, right. Her commentary sometimes seems like a personal vendetta at times and is filled with contradictions. It almost becomes autobiographical at times. For example, at one point she says that she can't help that believe what she has done in Haiti is useless and then a page later, she says that "to lose all hope is nihilism". Finally, she seems to believe that

all people involved in Haiti are there to "be able to save themselves, setting the scene for the future rescue of humanity." Maybe her view of painting all white people in Haiti with the same paint brush is not too dissimilar from her bashing of all white people painting all Haitians with the same paint brush? You're probably wondering, if I have some many negative comments, why give the book four stars? The running commentary about the failure of NGOs, about right and wrong, about useful versus useless, etc. make you think. Without it, the book would probably be just another "well written book on Haiti." With it, the book is infuriatingly good.

An essential portrait of a place most people know only through headlines and horror stories and caricature. Amy Wilentz's book will make you feel the dust, the rain and the misery -- but most importantly, the humanity as it is distilled through her highly complex reactions to what she has seen. It is also a fascinating self portrait of an American writer. An indelible travel book that deserves its place alongside Joan Didion's *Salvador* and Bruce Chatwin's *In Patagonia*. Highly recommended!

Great insight and sympathy for the unending tragedy of Haiti and the effects of continuing exterior and interior "extractive" forces on a culture and individuals. Probably as close as one can get inside the mind and soul of people who sometimes seem so "other" to outsiders. Super writing. Quite vivid but a perhaps a little too cynical. I would have appreciated a little less of the leitmotif of "white guilt" or reproachful voyeurism that tends to run through the work. Apologies are not needed for trying to understand and relate to a people who deserve better than they have suffered.

The observations and musings of Amy Wilentz are wanderings in familiar settings altered by the earthquake two years ago. Her historical perspective, coupled with the objectivity of an investigative reporter, gives a very real sense of Haiti, Haitians, ex-patriots, and especially Americans. Those who are involved in Haiti should not only read this, but should study her messages. Their mission and goals might be modified for the better. I have profound regrets that she, like all expatriates, totally ignores the North and particularly the area including and surrounding Cap-Haitien. In many ways Cap-Haitien has been spared the distortions of massive NGO/expatriot activities and that has been beneficial. On the other hand, it has suffered from benign neglect. Perhaps it is fortunate that there have been no Bill Clintons, but it is unfortunate that there are no Sean Penns. I would wish that Ms Wilentz would spend more time in the North during her next visit. J. Michael Taylor, MD, MPH

This was recommended by a friend who has just published her first book. She said this book is one of her favorites and she displayed it when she was at a local book store. The author spent a lot of time in Haiti and the book reflects both her connection with the people she has met in Haiti and her concern for them.

I found the author's cynicism and "know it all about Haiti" tiring. By the end of the book, I came to the conclusion that the author is showing that both life and Haiti have passed her by, and that things were better for her back in the 80's/90's.

This is an extraordinarily well-informed book. For all of us who try to understand how to be helpful in Haiti, too often we forget a fundamental necessity to understand why we're motivated to do so. Enormous damage is done by acting out of ignorance of the "other" and, maybe more important, ignorance of ourselves. Read this book. Never again will you dare to think that you have the answers to someone else's problem.

Amy Wilentz' "The Rainy Season" was my go-to book for an inside view of Haiti for over twenty years - one that I read three times or more, and that put so many questions in my head as history watched Aristide come to power, then be disappeared, then become President again, then not. And then the earthquake came, with all of its seemingly Biblical import for this continuously unfolding story about the nation we have been taught from an early age carries the tag line "Poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere." And wouldn't you know, perhaps when we are most looking for the proper context to review all of the events from the fall of Baby Doc through its retreat from the world media "disaster" stage, Amy Wilentz comes forth with this miracle of a book, a very personal journey that also happens to bring an unblinking eye to this new (and yet same old) Haiti. It grabs you from the first page, and manages to put 250 of incredibly complex history (especially as a proxy state of the USA) into images and reams of connective tissue that allows the whole story to make sense. Along the way, you get inside the experiences of celebrities like Sean Penn and heroes like Dr. Megan Coffee, each of whom manages to find their way through the Byzantine Haitian cultural and political roadblocks to force real change. On the one hand caustic and jaded, and on the other generous and full of innocent surprise, Wilentz is peerless in capturing this nation in the throes of the ultimate disaster, the outside forces that flooded its borders with help, and how it is the ultimate crucible for assessing the reach and limitations of charitable aid. If you read it once, you will want to

read it again. And probably right away.

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