

# Word 'anthrax' new to Haitians, effect not

By Ives Marie Chanel

PORT-AU-PRINCE (IPS)—Growing U.S. concern about bio-terrorism has introduced the word "anthrax" to daily discourse here, but Haitians have long lived with the ravages of the disease known here as the dreaded malady "le charbon."

Commenting on the different reactions of Americans and Haitians to the disease, a well-know radio journalist in Haiti remarked, "The Americans have mobilized for just seven cases out of a population of 300 million. On the other hand, in just one area of our country with nearly three million people, we have 15 times more cases each year and it seems to pass unnoticed."

People here have never seemed particularly concerned about catching anthrax. But oddly, some now worry about traveling to the U.S. as fear of bio-terrorism is changing perceptions.

The case of a young professional, who asked to be identified only as "Bruner" illustrates the change. Bruner has an airline ticket to travel to Florida.

Alarmed by bio-terrorism reports and the news of anthrax outbreaks in the state, he has asked his doctor to prescribe antibiotics for him as if it was a new disease existing only in the U.S. Bio-terrorism is working, wreaking its damages on the psyche.

He seems to be completely unaware of the fact that in metropolitan Port-au-Prince where he lives, 100 people each year come down with the disease, according to figures provided by the Haitian Ministry of Agriculture.

"The problem has become a psychological one. I prescribed an antibiotic known as Cetraxal," the physician who treated Bruner recounted, although he warned against using the medication without a firm diagnosis.

Certain Haitians have begun to follow the issue more closely, after an NBC broadcast, which was later picked up by Haitian radio stations. The broadcast said the most virulent of anthrax spores were produced by sophisticated laboratories located in Iowa and Texas in the U.S., and here in Haiti.

Many are doubtful about

the existence of such labs here. "The anthrax bacteria can be preserved. The spores can be prepared in a laboratory but here we don't have the means to preserve them. The manipulation of this bacterium is very dangerous.

"You have to have a way to protect people who would be handling it. We are not even able to do certain analyses of the disease here," declared Jacques Blaise, the director of the department of animal products at the Haitian Ministry of Agriculture.

The malady has taken on considerable proportions here. In 1986, anthrax was limited to the south and north of the country. Today, health authorities say all regions of the country are affected.

There are no exact figures on the number of humans and livestock killed each year by anthrax, a disease some experts here say is endemic.

Each year, hundreds of heads of livestock die, with serious economic consequences for the farming community.

During the last quarter of the year 2000, an anthrax epidemic broke out on Tortoise

Island in the northwest of the country. Three people died and 21 others received treatment in that outbreak. At least 60 animals also died.

There was a vaccination campaign in the area last January. At the time, the weekly newspaper Haiti Progress harshly criticized the Haitian Ministry of Health, which had minimized the importance of the epidemic.

"Anthrax is easily treated. A person stricken with the disease need only go to a dispensary or clinic in order to be treated with antibiotics," declared Michaelle Amedee Gedeon.

In the northwest of the country, six people and 30 animals were killed by the disease several years earlier.

The eradication of the disease would require a massive animal vaccination program each year.

Haitian authorities do not seem to give that much importance to the evolution of the disease.

Haitian post office workers this week asked the Ministry of Health to provide  
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## Jackson

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when his much-hyped 30th anniversary concerts, held in September at Madison Square Garden, are aired as a two-hour, CBS prime-time special Tuesday.

Calderone said it's critical for Jackson to keep a high profile since more top-sellers - including Creed and Kid Rock - will debut discs in the next few weeks.

"He's gotta continue this," Calderone said. "The people that he's competing against on the chart ... all these guys are out there all the time, and they're not hiding, and that's the way you maintain the sales story."

So far, Calderone said, Jackson hasn't done that. His only major interview has been with TV Guide, to promote the CBS special. And his few public outings have not been well received; the Madison Square Garden concerts were skewered by critics as bloated and tacky, while his performance at last month's United We Stand concert in Washington was marred by technical glitches.

More importantly, audiences gave a lukewarm response to his first single, "You Rock My World." After debuting high, it quickly fell out of the top 10 and now hovers in the bottom half of Billboard's Top 100 singles chart.

The video, however, has received heavy airplay on the three major music television channels: VH1, MTV and BET. Jackson was VH1's artist of the month in October.

"Certainly speaking for the VH1 audience, it's been received in a great way," said Rick Krim, an executive vice president at the network. "Every time we put something on with Michael Jackson, our ratings go up."

Another new single, "Butterflies," is already moving up the charts.

Whether it will be enough to sustain Jackson's latest comeback is another question.

"I think what Michael really needs is an undeniable smash single," Light said. "I just don't hear a single on this record that's big like that."

## GPA

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statistics didn't "break down" the information. The university, she said, had opined that minorities "as a whole" wouldn't be hurt, without investigating the potential effects on specific minority groups.

Harter now talks in terms of "keeping an open mind" about the issue.

UNLV Associate Dean of Liberal Arts, Dr. Ranier Spencer, also an African-American, has taken a firm position in support of the proposal. Arguments against raising the GPA, he says, represent an effort to keep the university's entrance requirements artificially, and unacceptably, low.

Many who support raising the GPA bristle at what they say is the implication by opponents that minority students, for some reason, can't make the grade, and Spencer says he knows such people in the university community - administrators and faculty, including African-Americans. So far, they've been timid about "coming out," so to speak, in support of a higher requirement, but he hopes that's about to change.

Spencer has supported raising the standard "since August of 1997, when I came here," he said. "I love this place, I'm its biggest fan, but I've always been disappointed by its low entrance requirements, because it's a major university." He's concerned, he says, that minority students unable to meet the higher GPA requirement may not, in fact, be ready for college.

"If we let unprepared students in, we're setting them up for failure," he said, highlighting what he says is the real issue: retention. Whether black students survive once they're in college, he says, is at least as important as getting them admitted.

"I'm on a UNLV taskforce whose mission is, in part, to increase minority retention," Spencer explained. "I suspect that many of those who drop out weren't adequately prepared for university work."

Ironically, Spencer and Howard agree that retention of black students is the primary issue. They are worlds apart, however, on the importance of GPA to improving it - Spencer predicting that students meeting the higher criterion would likely be more capable of staying in school, Howard saying fewer would be admitted, leaving fewer to retain.

"Increasing the GPA wouldn't do anything to improve the poor records that UNLV and UNR have in retaining minority

students," said Howard. "The proponents claim it could reduce university dropouts, and that's untrue." That objective, she says, can be achieved "if administrators and faculty would address the issue of retention."

Howard says other important factors help determine a student's chance for success in college and should be considered in addition to the high school GPA. "I believe it should stay where it is," she said. "If it's increased, you're using it as the main measurement, and I don't think it should be. It closes the options, and I don't think our students should be shut out."

"I'm the director of the Afro-American Studies Program at UNLV, so I'm all for the advancement of black students," said Spencer, seeking to dispel any notion that he wants to limit opportunities for them. Nevertheless, he is adamant about minority students being prepared for academic life at the university level.

Spencer believes realism should be brought to bear when considering their applications, and that, when appropriate, alternatives less demanding than the university should be recommended.

"We've become a culture where we're afraid to tell people that they need to do more work," he said. "There's nothing wrong with community college. Some people go there because they still need help with the basic skills."

Spencer also noted that the university does make exceptions. Through "alternative admission," he said, students may manage "to demonstrate by other means that they're ready for university work. Six percent of our students," Spencer said, were admitted despite having grade-point-averages below the currently required 2.5, adding, "We haven't done a good enough job of publicizing the fact that we have alternative admission."

He insists that those seeking explanations for poor retention among black university students won't find them in the GPA requirement, but rather in the quality of their preparation before applying to college.

"People shouldn't be looking at us for the reason, they should be looking somewhere else," said Spencer. "I'm a supporter of the school district, but I think they could do a better job with black students."

For his part, Clark County School District (CCSD) Superintendent Carlos Garcia opposes raising the GPA.

"There's nothing wrong with being average," said Garcia.

"I want to be more inclusive, and give people the opportunity to succeed or fail. I, personally, feel that the GPA is high enough."

A recent public relations blitz of success stories that chronicle the way many minority students thrived in college despite inadequate high school GPAs persuaded the regents to slow down, and the vote on the issue was delayed. Chairwoman Thalia Dondero is proceeding cautiously and seems inclined to vote against the proposal. She has emphasized that the university is "public," and said she wants "more students to go, not less."

Meanwhile, the Board of Regents is scheduled to meet early next month, at UNLV, and may decide then whether to raise the GPA requirement for admission to the University of Nevada. "Most of my constituents are against it," said Howard, "and most of the black faculty members at UNLV are against it." She revealed that she is organizing "a community forum for people who are for, or opposed to increasing the GPA standard."

In a memo sent on Monday to the Board of Regents, the presidents of UNR and UNLV, and to presidents at the campuses of the Community College of Southern Nevada, Howard extended an invitation to attend the forum, which is scheduled for 6 p.m. on Thursday, Nov. 15, at the West Las Vegas Arts Center. The site is next door to the West Las Vegas Library, 947 West Lake Mead Blvd.

"I'm putting together a panel of elected officials, members of the Board of Regents, members of the (CCSD) Board of Trustees, and some faculty and administrators from UNLV," said Howard. "I want to extend a special invitation to those who support the proposal."

Another opportunity for public input, she said, follows less than two weeks later.

"The Board of Regents is hosting a public debate on this issue," explained Howard, "and that will be held on Nov. 27 at 6:30 p.m., at the UNLV Foundation Building, near Harmon and Maryland Parkway, off Cottage Grove."

"I'll be at the second one," said Spencer, "the other one, I'm not going to attend unless I'm invited."

According to Howard, Spencer can mark the first one on his calendar as well.

"Yes," said Howard, "he has been invited, not only to attend the event, but to serve on the panel as well."