

## Summary of Interview with Ati Max Beauvoir conducted by Valerio Saint-Louis

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Ati Max Beauvoir discusses the process by which he was elected as the chief representative of Haitian Vodou. The election was conducted across all of the different Vodou societies in Haiti. Ati Beauvoir and other Vodou leaders founded the *Konfederasyon Nasyonal Vodouwizan Ayisyen* (KNVA) or the National Confederation of Haitian Vodouists headed by Beauvoir and represented by a twenty-one-member council tasked with tending to the interests of Vodou.

Beauvoir asserts that Vodou is a religion equal to any other world religion. He criticizes the popular conception that requires a delineation of the parameters of a religion. He believes that the popular rejection of Vodou's legitimacy as a religion is the result of the monetary gain of those who are against Vodou. The dependency of many Haitian Protestant and Catholic religious leaders to US-based financial support is an example of this economic bias. He goes on to say that Haitian Vodou is an oral tradition; Vodou's lack of a holy book has no bearing on its validity as a religion. Beauvoir defines religion not as a body of beliefs with a holy book and a messiah, but rather as a belief system that recognizes a supreme, all-powerful, omniscient force. He defines religion as having a relationship with a supreme being. He argues that Haitians, like all people, have a right to present their religion, philosophy, and identity as it best suits them.

Ati Beauvoir identifies the prevailing attitudes about Vodou as fundamentally racist and colorist. This attitude, according to Ati Beauvoir, is an effect of the hegemony of the colonial period and the white presence and influence in Haiti following the Haitian revolution. There is a long-held erroneous belief—rooted in racism—that black original thought, language, culture, practice, and life-ways are inherently inferior to that of whites. He believes that the stratification of Haiti will only be resolved when Haitians claim their history and heritage. He also believes in understanding and respecting the religions of others, an ideology that is consistent with his concept of what constitutes a religion.

Ati Beauvoir, in keeping with Haitian ideology and Vodou teachings, believes in equality. He views religion as an individual choice and a means by which one can live morally and ethically. The interview also touches upon the healing practices of Vodou, the accusations made against Vodou, and the books *Lapriyè Ginen* (*The Ginen Prayer*) and *Le Grand Recueil Sacré* (*The Great Sacred Collection*), Ati Beauvoir's masterpieces in which he collects a massive corpus of songs and prayers that form the foundation of Vodou's sacred literature.

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