Proud Of Our Blood

April 1, 2000 By Barbara Sanon

In Haiti, san sal (“dirty blood”) is a mortal insult: It means your bad deeds are the inevitable result of your bad blood. But in 1990, when the FDA recommended a policy of banning blood donations from people of Haitian and sub-Saharan African origin, it proclaimed that all Haitians had san sal. The majority of U.S. cases in certain poor, urban areas were heterosexual, the agency’s reasoning went, and a population so large was impossible to screen. So Haitians—a “risk group”—need not apply.

But with post-Duvalier coups d’etat, greengrocer boycotts in New York City and the U.S. rejection of thousands of Haitian political refugees, many Haitian Americans already had enough on a cracking plate. The ban only compounded their “boat people” image with that of “AIDS carriers.” When a Stonybrook College blood drive refused the donations of several Haitian students, they formed HEAR (Haitian Enforcement Against Racism) and, together with the Haitian Coalition on AIDS, Haitian church groups, radio stations and newspapers, they organized a vast march against the blood ban from Brooklyn to New York’s City Hall.

Turnout for the April 20, 1990, protest was astounding: More than 50,000 Haitian Americans marched, from grandmothers in their Sunday best to kids in their Proud of My Haitian Blood t-shirts. Factory workers and medical doctors came in van loads from DC, Boston and beyond. By evening, an FDA committee had advised against the ban.

The event, which many still refer to as “the March” or simply “April 20,” was a defining moment for Haitians, rekindling a tradition of resistance that dates back to their bloody overthrow of French slave owners in 1804. Those of us there that day will never forget how our fyète ayisyen (Haitian pride) shook the Brooklyn Bridge, cleansing our reputation and keeping our blood intact—if still boiling

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/4-20-90-Proud-Of-Our-Blood-10471-6971