

THE WILLIAM G. DEMAS LECTURE
TOBAGO
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**RE-ENGINEERING
CARIBBEAN CULTURAL
ENTERPRISES/INSTITUTIONS:
AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE**

by Professor Rex Nettleford

INTRODUCTION

I am, of course, deeply honoured to have been invited to give this William Demas Lecture. First of all the man in whose honour these lectures are delivered was a polymath of a Caribbean man whose interest reached out from the precise if narrow field of Economics into the unruly, wayward, even chaotic products of the arts of the imagination the value of which he was sensitive enough to recognize. It is amazing how economists tend to journey into this world of the arts of the imagination giving it full recognition in the development of our human resource, which is arguably our greatest asset. Maynard Keynes, the great 20thC English economist belonged to a set of arts devotees at Cambridge and later married a Russian ballerina. Sir Arthur Lewis, the first President of the CDB and a former Vice Chancellor of the UWI had no doubts about the arts of the imagination constituting the one undoubted area of this region's uniqueness; and in his own inimitable style advised, or rather instructed, Ministers of Education to introduce programmes of the Creative Arts in our

schools. Sir Alister McIntyre, also an Economist and a would-be CDB President himself as well as a former Vice Chancellor of the UWI was a great advocate of the use of the humanities and the arts as more than catalyst in the preparation of Caribbean skills needed to shape the region into modernity and a necessary humanity. And the present President of the Bank Professor Compton Bourne, a former Pro Vice Chancellor and Campus Principal of the UWI, who invited me here tonight was fully conscious of the asset the products of the creative imagination have been to Caribbean development. And quite apart from displaying a personal commitment, actually did a seminal study on the role and place of cultural industries - their value in economic terms and the tremendous potential they have in the development scenario of the region. So when he assumed duties in the CDB, I was happy for many reasons - not least among them, the fact that a sensitive soul would be in a position to embrace culture and with the intellectual grasp of the centrality of Caribbean cultural phenomena which go beyond a little bit of painting, a little bit of craft designed for tourists, a little bit of music and a little bit of dance usually regarded as items of minstrelsy rather than as elements of serious communication and self-definition.

Were the CDB to take seriously some if not all of this on board it would be in very good company. The Ford Foundation a few

years ago introduced into its operations a forward-looking Division of Media, the Arts and Culture as part of its mission to humanize development assistance – a vision which I had long found to be a fillip to the work done by the Canada-based International Development Research Centre of which I was a founding governor thirty years before. The Inter-American Development Bank itself has only recently decided to establish an Inter-American Culture and Development Foundation with a commitment to provide half a million US dollars per year for two years and in-kind services valued at approximately \$175,000 (US) during the Start-Up period. Envisaged in the IDB Culture Foundation's plan of action are (a) a Resource Mobilisation Programme (b) a Technical Assistance Programme and (c) a Cultural Industries and Enterprise Development Programme.

What a suggestive model for the CDB! But it should so serve, with the CDB fully informed by the existential realities of the region it serves – a region that has survived in no small measure by a culture-and-development strategy involving a wide range of stakeholders from all levels of Caribbean society, thus giving to many features of our development a certain authenticity and pedigree that deserves much more attention in macro-planning despite the fact that its effectiveness is largely at the micro-level. William Demas a man concerned about

small states would have understood this: in fact I know that he understood this as did his predecessor and his successors, both the current one and the one immediately before him, Sir Neville Nicholls, who had no difficulty understanding this being a Barbadian who read Classics!

So I have decided to share with you a matter I have been thinking about over these past two or three years. It is the need to re-engineer our Caribbean cultural enterprises and institutions with a view to designing an agenda for the future. The thoughts emanating from the challenge should, I think, be a fitting tribute to the man in whose name this lecture has been organized.

Caribbean cultural enterprises are many and varied but they have existed time out of mind as source of energy for the survival strategies that Caribbean forebears crafted and honed throughout that long history of slavery and colonialism. That the populations dragged from what is now referred to as the developing world to plant sugar, whether as chattels or as indentured labourers, learnt to live by their wits (and one should add, wit) if not always by hard work, is now impatient of debate. It is a paradox of life that out of evil cometh good – sometimes, if not all the time. And the history of the Caribbean people is the expression of that paradox in praxis.

Like human beings everywhere and anywhere (and this is one of the reasons why it has been so nonsensical to leave the descendants of slaves and indentured servants out of the human race), the people of the Caribbean have transformed liabilities into assets and have long eked out of suffering and severance modalities of survival through the exercise of the creative intellect and the creative imagination -- collectively and individually.

In this sense that process of “**becoming**” itself constitutes a cultural enterprise which should be jealously guarded, painstakingly sustained and made to be an integral part of shaping the kind of society for which we have struggled to have emerge ever since 1838 when full freedom, otherwise known as Emancipation, was achieved.

Without an understanding of this fundamental challenge, leaders of thought and action in building civil society as well as of movements to protect the products that come from the exercise of such intellect and imagination, will not be able to re-engineer what has been bequeathed the Caribbean by the past half a millennium’s experience of history and contemporary realities.

That process has been essentially *cultural* and goes beyond the artistic manifestations, which form but one category of the cultural enterprise for which the Caribbean has come to be known.

I speak of *process* rather than *product*: they are by no means mutually exclusive since the one is the function of the other. But it is because of the powerlessness of the slave and colonial experience bequeathed to the vast majority of Caribbean people that the Caribbean cultural enterprise(s) take the form they have. Caribbean peoples are even now still dependent on codes of ethics, institutional frameworks and operational mechanisms which have not been necessarily crafted in their total interest. The cultural alternatives have markedly been strongest and most powerful when rooted in the innate structures devised to protect the region's psychic space and that of the people who tenant it.

The real languages we speak, for example, are therefore defiantly independent of the master's tongues making the region into a living laboratory of Creole tongues (and by "**creole**" I mean *native-born* and *native-bred*) which constitute an enterprise all of their own. From Jamaica Talk through St Lucia's kewyol to Curacao's papiamentu and Suriname's srnan tonga, the region continues to face the threat of one of the most

fundamental aspects of its cultural heritage being obliterated from consciousness in preference to Standard This or Standard That. The debate that ensues around this is admittedly skewed. For no people can ever be forced to abandon their creativity in their effort to find the appropriate means of communicating to and among themselves, especially when such communication proves to be beyond the reach of the oppressor. The Rastafarians of Jamaica understand this well to this day as did their forebears in all other parts of the region.

Re-engineering such an 'institution', which these languages constitute, means *inter alia* allowing them the legitimacy they deserve and having them stand beside the Standard impositions as the valid forms of expression that they are. A Louise Bennett and her quite phenomenal *oeuvre* should indeed be taught in schools, as should the poetry of her dub poet descendants and the output from the *contes* or storytelling tradition to be found all over the region. The beauty of kweyol should be appreciated by the young alongside French and English as it is in a place like the Seychelles; and the educational system (which is the enterprise comprising the educational institutions), should get back to teaching English not as the Mother tongue which it really never has been, not even for the White Creoles of the region, but as *another* language for appropriate use in the process of "code-

switching” of which the least educated among us are capable. The danger in the debate turns on advocates defying commonsense and forgetting that the textured, diverse region that is the Caribbean, is in need of textured (creole) diverse and varied means of communication.

In any case, globalisation - that new and fashionable designation for old obscenities - requires multi-lingualism among the tenants of Planet Earth whose encounters are frequent - if not physically then via Internet and e-mail, cable television or CNN. The Commonwealth Caribbean may be regarded as particularly blessed since part of its heritage is the English language (George Lamming the West Indian man of letters never fails to remind North Americans that the first place English was spoken in the Americas was in his native Barbados) - that very English language which has become the language of international discourse, technology, commerce and the like. But despite that seemingly unassailable dominance, we must re-engineer the language enterprise and all other institutions of the Caribbean which gate-keep educational policy and practice with due respect for, and continuing use of, what Caribbean people have created out of their intellects and imagination over the past half a millennium.

As with language, so with religion. Christian orthodoxy has long ceased to have a hold of the Caribbean spirit though the King James Version of the Bible is to be found in most homes and in all hotel rooms in our tourist-infested isles. Yet our people have always found their way to their Creator via means independent of such 'institutions' as Anglicanism, Roman Catholicism, Methodism and the like. From santeria in Cuba through vodun in Haiti, pukumina in Jamaica and zion revivalism all over, to shango in Trinidad and candomble in North-east Brazil which is "Caribbean" in a deeply cultural sense, the people's religious enterprise and corresponding institutions have played an important role in the development of Caribbean consciousness. What do we do with these syncretisms as the social anthropologists describe them? Castro has found that any attempt to replace santeria with Marxism-Leninism is to no avail. Santeria is again strong in revolutionary Cuba. The Haitians have never made any pretence about voodoo being a point of power in the operational dynamics of Haitian life and houngans who preside over the hounfours have long been a political force in that country even if its patron saint is a defrocked Roman Catholic priest.

In the Commonwealth Caribbean from Jamaica to Guyana, old-time obeah has gone hand in hand with Bible-grinding zealotry

in the orthodox mould. And even within the complex of Christian Orthodoxy, evangelical and Pentecostal variations on the theme have taken a hold of people all over the region with ladies and gentlemen of quality even now searching for a new spirituality wherever they can find it – whether under canvas tents or in carpeted hotel ballrooms. Ecumenism which was always embraced by the commonfolk has now got to be engineered into the official national religious ethos of the region.

Jamaica, however, continues to have a problem. With its over 90 percent of hopelessly black citizens, Jamaica still found it easier to give official recognition to the Mormons who up until recently insisted that they had a vision from God about the natural inferiority of people of African ancestry, while the homegrown Rastafarians are denied it. The economic potential of the hardworking Mormons no doubt influenced that decision. The island's new Public Defender has recently come out pledging to re-engineer this cultural enterprise of self-doubt and Eurocentric bias to bring the Rastafarians into the loop. I doubt he will be successful in his lifetime. That controversial Rasta Sacrament of a natural weed is, after all, on the Dangerous Drugs list and would clearly cause problems for the civil authority. Re-engineering is not that easy, therefore, despite the advocacy in all quarters for a review of the attitudes

of officialdom to the Weed. Not even a famous cricketer who swore by the efficacy of the tea brewed from this weed in improving his eyesight for batting and bringing victory to West Indian cricket is likely to help at this time.

Then on top of all this, the Christians of all denominations will have to come to terms with the fact that Rome is not the sole repository of religious wisdom. There are other gods who are no less valid than the fellow who walked the Sea of Galilee and was himself never a Christian. The Hindus and the Muslims are Caribbean citizens too, lest we forget.

The East Indian populations of Guyana and Trinidad are challenging the entire region to come to its senses by extending the principle of ecumenism beyond the plurality of the Christian fold. Any re-engineering of the religious enterprise will therefore require the greatest reserves of tolerance, mutual respect and mutual trust (in terms of the worship of the region's separate gods) and a deep commitment to the heterogeneous principle of social and cultural/political organisation which is a Third Millennium challenge for the entire Planet and not just the Caribbean. It is not enough to declare religious freedom, one must practise it.

Basdeo Panday, the former Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago with political savvy acknowledged the legitimacy not only of the Spiritual Baptists but also of the Orisha community. He naturally expected, in return, similar respect for the religious expressions of the East Indian segment of Trinidad society. Such cultural negotiation is a form of re-engineering towards a civilised (and civil) society in which every single human being finds place and purpose and is never threatened with that sense of non-personhood which has been the fate of forebears and of the entire region for most of its history. The sense of place and purpose relates deeply to that sense of self too often determined by the place of origin of one's forebears, the degree of melanin in one's skin, the persistent denigration of things African, the marginalisation of the Hindu or Muslim East Indian in a strongly Euro- Christian ethos and all the historical factors which had hordes of humanity relegated to the base of a cultural hierarchy that gave ascriptive status to race, ethnicity and class. Such obscenities have to be re-engineered out of the Caribbean cultural ethos if a sane economically productive future is to be secured. Why should people produce if they are marginalized? The Muslim mosque, the Hindu temple, the Jewish Synagogue, the Christian chapel, or Kirk cathedral, the Orisha shrine, or the Rastafarian groundings spot - each creed, each race must find an equal place indeed!

Happily, the kinship enterprise has changed its profile -- at least in the Anglophone Caribbean as far as certain cultural values are concerned. The institution of the family has changed. One *can* be a bastard (by which I mean an illegitimate child) and not suffer from it as of yore. Walking around with a *Declaration of Identity* to prove that one exists, if one is not the offspring of parents who have had the benefit of confetti, is no longer necessary in order to have transactions legalised - thanks to the Jamaica Status of Children's Act of 1976 and its replication in almost all of the Commonwealth Caribbean countries. That piece of cultural re-engineering has had serious implications for the one cultural enterprise the Caribbean has long boasted about - its human resource. Only now this resource is less bound by discriminatory obstacles that once served to de-personalise the individual, albeit in freedom and later political independence. Such re-engineering must become an agent of empowerment hopefully for even more creative work which was once fueled by the need to resist oppression, psychic and otherwise.

Nowhere is this resistance more evident than in the artistic manifestations in which the region abounds. Against the background of Independence, globalisation and all other post-Emancipation developments, cultural enterprises in the realm of artistic output are admittedly in need of some re-

engineering. If it is true that the Caribbean countries have used some of these achievements as basis for their national and cultural identity, there is still need for more strategic positioning in the shaping of a truly Caribbean civil society and a polity that regards the citizen as more than voter and consumer, though undoubtedly this is what each of us too often is to governments and the private sector respectively.

The products of our creative imagination must therefore be made to matter in a fundamental sense and not exclusively as acts of minstrelsy to entertain our betters including visiting potentates. To what extent should the educational system – a prime agency of socialization – be made to incorporate both the product and process of the exercise?

That most powerful of cultural institutions, the school curriculum at all levels of the educational system, should be a priority in any re-engineering exercise. From kindergarten through primary school to university there should be, as part of the normal course of preparation, the opportunity given to the student for creative expression in activity sessions in infant school to the creation of poems, songs, participation in theatre in primary school and all of this deepened and heightened at the secondary level right up to university and other tertiary level institutions where the cultural foundations of Caribbean

society, along with that of all human societies, become mandatory pursuits to inform all other branches of study.

The introduction in the UWI, a major Caribbean cultural institution, of Foundation courses and a Cultural Studies Initiative with emphasis on research into the indices of culture impacting on Caribbean life and development, is a form of re-engineering seeking to prepare the region's 21st century citizen to cope with the chaos, contradictions and complexity of a rapidly changing social and world order. A university, as a cultural institution, will in time be universally affected. Already there are signs that tertiary institutions throughout the region are seized of their responsibility to grapple with the challenge of harmonising technological thought and spiritual feeling. The establishment of specialist schools for the arts in Jamaica, Guyana and Barbados is complemented by innovative programme in the UWI's Centres for the Creative Arts (at Mona, St. Augustine and soon at Cave Hill). The conscious development of these is part of the re-engineering process with an eye to providing opportunities for new career outlets - in graphic arts, book illustration, jewel-craft, textile designing, theatre, dance, music composition and recording etc.

In this way the most important cultural institution - the human person -- is being re-engineered into a fuller grasp of

appropriate world-views and a meaningful sense of self. Without this basic effort, all other forms of institutional re-engineering are worthless. For it is from the intellect and imagination drawing on and interacting with one's experience and existential reality that will come the knowledge-base for the knowledge-economy which is an already clear feature of modern life. This has been the case in the past (for that is what forebears did); it is not likely to be that much different for the future.

Caribbean Festival Arts rooted in the past constitute a prime set of cultural enterprises which have long invited re-engineering. Pre-Lenten *Carnival* (better known as Trinidad Carnival), *Masquerade* (to be found throughout the Leewards and Belize, though much less so in nowadays Jamaica where jonkonu once flourished but transformed into Goombay in the Bahamas), and *Hosay* (in Trinidad and Jamaica) all invite re-engineering. By their very nature they must remain *voluntary* efforts but with strategic State support. The tension in such a relationship however needs to be creative rather than disintegrative; and therefore requires appropriate institutional frameworks. Success at this is a sure sign of civil society. These festival arts can and do act as bait to attract visitors and the foreign exchange they bring to ailing economies – ailing since traditional exports like banana, sugar and bauxite are doing

none too well on the world market. The danger is that the Caribbean could re-engineer these festival arts and create new ones into acts of a kind of prostitution, the likelihood of which a great Caribbean artist like Nobel laureate Derek Walcott fears and abhors. I join with him in thinking that any re-engineering being done must be done in the interest of Caribbean people themselves as the new Crop Over Festival in Barbados and the jazz festivals (of St Lucia, Jamaica and Barbados itself) seemingly have done. Create for one's own purposes and have one's guests (tourists) come in and enjoy it with the region's citizens rather than be tempted into touristic culture, airport art, mass manufacture of curios which are themselves copies of copies made in Taiwan.

So while Tourism offers an excellent challenge to re-engineer the arts around to profit and popularity of the region as a tourist destination, re-engineering the arts (whether by way of festivals or in individual performing events) should not depend on what Walcott again refers to as that **"rictus of a smile."**

Neither Calypso nor reggae/dancehall, which as key elements in that cultural enterprise called the *music industry* commands arguably millions of dollars in returns (with far too little coming back to the Caribbean), has depended on being mere "curios" for tourists to make the worldwide impact they have.

The Mighty Sparrow and grandmaster Kitchener, with David Rudder, Gabby of Barbados and Arrow of Montserrat in their wake, have been superstars at home before they were abroad. Fame and international recognition have admittedly attended their efforts. But re-engineering the music creation (as against music *production*) enterprise suggests itself. The production of the music for retail outlets must naturally be taken into consideration. And this is where Caribbean governments come in. Legislation, regulatory and facilitative, can help. The tremendous entrepreneurial skills brought by a Chris Blackwell to the creativity of a Bob Marley or a Jimmy Cliff, functioned superbly well from the metropole. But they need to find place and opportunity for expression in the region itself. Some may well argue that in the newly globalised world, locale is secondary. The technology has, after all, defeated the tyranny of distance and one's intellectual/artistic property, once created, can be processed anywhere for distribution, except that the globalised world is still divided into discrete nations and discrete jurisdictions, some more powerful than others; and the few powerful ones are likely to call the shots all the time, as of yore, to the continuing disadvantage of the many less powerful. The more things change the more they indeed remain the same. Any idea of transforming outposts in the developing world into locales for production may, indeed, bring some revenue to the national coffers of such host countries but cheap labour is what

may also be required to go with it. So the master recording may be cheaply done in a studio in Montserrat, Jamaica, Trinidad or St Lucia but then taken away to the metropole for reproduction and distribution back to us at exorbitant prices. Remember those aluminium pots and pans processed from our bauxite?

I should not forget the culinary arts which have produced in commercial quantities for the region's diaspora in the North Atlantic such gastronomic delicacies as the Jamaican patty and the Jamaica jerk sauce giving us jerk this, jerk that and jerk the other. We can add to this Trinidad's angostura bitters and, again, Jamaica picka peppa sauce - all fine examples of entrepreneurial ingenuity and genuine creativity. The export potential of spices from Grenada is yet to be fully exploited for the niche markets of the world - markets which are no strangers to our ginger, Red Stripe and our rum which kept the British royal Navy afloat for centuries.

The question is, are these culture products being fully exploited? Would the CDB help plans for their greater development? The cinema industry is another item ripe for investment, not only for the natural beauty of the region's land and sea-scapes but for the artistic talent that abounds among the people. But in all this, WTO protocols are likely to remain

supreme, covering rules, engagement in trade and services with not much promise for the likes of us breaking the traditional hegemonic hold of the powerful.

Re-engineering the institutional arrangements in this continuing lopsided metropole-periphery structure is something of which many in the region are all too conscious.

I am therefore seized of the growing importance among Caribbean planners to get cultural industries into their development plans; and the efforts since 2000 to buy into institutional arrangements that will give the region a place on the agenda of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) are to be encouraged. I am aware of the Copyright Organisation (COTT) in Trinidad, BAMCI in Barbados, Hewanorra Copyright Society in St Lucia, JACAP in Jamaica (Jamaica Association of Composers, Authors and Publishers) and the vibrant efforts being pursued towards similar ends in Grenada. In Jamaica IPC (Intellectual Property Service Centre) was launched only in April 2000 before the establishment of the Jamaica Performers Administration Society (JAPAS).

For the agenda of the future, re-engineering of cultural enterprises and institutions in the region must follow through with a regional copyright collection system and find a way of

activating the already stated vision of clusters surrounding stronger and more capable locales to maximise the positive effects of such a system through regional co-operation. TRIPS, the Trade Related aspects of Intellectual property Rights has, *inter alia*, a praiseworthy objective of harmonising the legislations of all Caribbean signatories to WIPO and other such Conventions as Paris, Berne, Rome and WTO. Caribbean countries from the Bahamas through Cuba and Haiti to Guyana need to identify with this and get their governments to give the kind of support that will guarantee to the region prospects of equity which the globalised world, without a level playing field, does not afford. A reciprocal arrangement between copyright collection societies worldwide provides for the Caribbean collection societies a welcome facility to collect for all their international counterparts in their territories. Regional societies with the assistance of the Performing Rights Society (PRS) which has operated in this region for over 60 years and the WIPO have established the Caribbean Copyright Link (CCL) as a regional blanket organisation to provide what are known as "*backroom services*" for regional societies.

In support of all this is the need to amass relevant data relating to the impact of cultural industries on GDP in the Caribbean, country by country, as many countries of Asia have had done in a 1996 study. Its author, Shahid Alikan, lists the core of the

cultural industry as **“book publishing and related industries; newspapers, periodicals...advertising, radio and television broadcasting, sound recordings, music and audiovisual works, motion pictures and films, computer software and data processing industry.”** Most of such industries, says the author, deal with the creation of new copyright material, and one might add an excellent gift to a new branch of Caribbean law practice.

Much of this is of course predicated on access to and mastery over information technology. Re-engineering will therefore demand having in place an IT infrastructure that can support the new structure(s). The Jamaica Intellectual Property Office (JIPO) only recently replaced the old Jamaica Copyright Unit as a part of its re-engineering initiative in an effort to pull its cultural institutions into the 21st century, clearly an imperative on the agenda of all Caribbean countries with a mind to develop a coherent cultural policy.

With all this, I would, however, want to stress that all such initiatives must be in the service of the primary task of unlocking the creative potential of the inhabitants of the region. If re-engineering is merely to keep up with the Joneses in the acquisition of hardware which the region itself has not created, then the plot for human development would by no means be

advanced. And for future Caribbean society to be worth its salt it must shape itself into a society that can facilitate to its optimum the exercise of its people's creative intellect and creative imagination, the fruits of which will be the only reason for our existence and our endurance in the recorded history of human civilisation.

But we in the Caribbean need to remember that emancipation from the enduring obscenities of the past half-a-millennium depends primarily on the people of the Caribbean themselves. None but ourselves can indeed free our minds of that lingering self-doubt, that lack of self-confidence and that paralysis of will consequent on such afflictions.

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