

OUR CARIBBEAN CIVILISATION AND ITS  
POLITICAL PROSPECTS

*by*

Dr. The Honourable Ralph E. Gonsalves  
*Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines*



*-Inaugural Lecture in the Distinguished Lecture Series*

*Sponsored by CARICOM*

*to*

*Commemorate Its Thirtieth Anniversary,*

*Held at Port-of-Spain, Trinidad,*

*February 12, 2003*

*Office of the Prime Minister  
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*[Formal Greetings]*

**PREFACE**

I am most pleased to have been asked by CARICOM's Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Edwin Carrington, to deliver the inaugural lecture in the Distinguished Lecture Series to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of CARICOM. I take the Secretary-General's invitation as a tribute to St. Vincent and the Grenadines which has always been in the vanguard of regionalism since the 1930's under a long line of committed regionalists: George Augustus Mc Intosh, Ebenezer Theodore Joshua, Robert Milton Cato and James Fitz-Allen Mitchell. I take, too, this invitation to address you as a personal honour, a recognition of my many years of unwavering toil in, and for, the regional vineyard. I am the region's newest Prime Minister save and except the Prime Minister of the Bahamas - I have been in office for less than two years—and in that sense I am among the least of the apostles. But I have been in this business for a long, long time. I mark

the date of my baptism in politics on October 16, 1968, almost thirty-five years ago, when as a student leader at U.W.I. in Jamaica I led a massive demonstration into Kingston to protest the then Government's ban on the late Dr. Walter Rodney, a Guyanese national, from returning to his teaching post at the University. We were beaten and teargassed by the Jamaican Police and Army. Among the persons in that march and protest whom I led, or misled, that day was a young Trinidad student by the name of Patrick Manning who is now the distinguished Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. I believe that was the first and last time Patrick was beaten and teargassed by the security forces of any country. But it was not my last. I wear each of such beatings and teargassings as invisible badges of honour in defence and promotion of democracy, peace, justice and regional unity.

I shall point out, not out of vanity or immodesty, but in acknowledgement of my longevity so far in this regional integration movement, that when sometime in the early 1980's, the esteemed Caribbean scholar, the late Dr. Patrick Emmanuel, published his study entitled Seven Approaches to Regional Integration, one of the approaches which he analysed was that

which is contained in a paper which Swinburne Lestrade and I co-authored in 1971 and later published in Caribbean Quarterly in 1972 entitled "The Political Aspects of Integration in the Windward and Leeward Islands". I was then a 25-year old graduate student.

So, though I am the seemed newest boy on the Prime Ministerial block, I have been an old boy on the blocks in Laventille, Trench Town, Paul's Avenue, Colonarie, Roseau, Mona, St. Augustine and Cave Hill.

### INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS A CIVILISATION?

Cuba's revolutionary patriot and national hero, José Martí, wrote aptly and movingly in his celebrated essay of 1891 entitled "Our America" in the following terms:

*"The prideful villager thinks his hometown contains the whole world; as long as he can stay on as mayor or humiliate the rival who stole his sweetheart or watch his nest egg accumulating in its strong box he believes the universe to be in good order, unaware of the giants in seven-league boots*

*who can crush him underfoot or the battling comets in the heavens that go through the air devouring the sleeping worlds. Whatever is left in sleepy hometown in our America must awaken. These are not times for going to bed in a sleeping cap, but rather like Juan de Castellano's men, without our weapons for a pillow, weapons of the mind, which vanquish all others. Trenches of ideas are worth more than trenches of stone.*

*"A cloud of ideas is a thing no armoured prow can smash through. A vital idea set ablaze before the world at the right moment can, like the mystic banner of the last judgment, stop a fleet of battleships.-----"*

*"-----We can no longer be a nation of fluttering leaves, spending our lives in the air, our treetop crowned in flowers, humming or creaking by the caprices of sunlight or thrashed and fuelled by tempests. The trees must form ranks to block the seven-leagues giant. It is the hour of reckoning and of marching in unison-----"*

Almost ninety years after José Martí penned those immortal words, the late Prime Minister of Barbados, one of that country's national heroes, Errol Walton Barrow, in a magnificent and

incisive speech at the Miami Conference on the Caribbean, November 1986, affirmed, "in the hour of reckoning" the blazing idea of *"Our Caribbean civilisation"*, thus:

*"It is dehumanising and false to view the Caribbean as potential American problems. We are peoples with an identity and a culture and a history—the Parliament of Barbados will be 350 years old in 1989. We don't need lessons in democracy from anyone. However, severe the economic difficulties facing the Caribbean, we are viable functioning societies with the intellectual and institutional resources to understand and grapple with our problems. Collectively, we have the resource potential necessary for our continued development and, of course, we have a heritage of exquisite natural beauty entrusted to us. The Caribbean is, after all, a civilisation."*

Barrow's affirmation, which I embrace fully, does not meet with universal approval right here in the Caribbean. Some well-meaning persons, intellectuals among them, side-step the idea of *"Our Caribbean civilisation"* and speak tentatively of a lukewarm notion, *"Forward to a Caribbean civilisation"* as if it is yet to

exist. Some others, cynical about anything authentically Caribbean, parrot the typologies of civilisations established by supposedly authoritative European and American scholars and assert that they find no category called "*a Caribbean civilisation*". Such persons seek to pigeon-hole the Caribbean as being part and parcel of "Western civilisation" without fully appreciating that although "Western civilisation" has contributed significantly to the moulding of "*Our Caribbean civilisation*", we are so different and distinct as to constitute a civilisation sui generis.

It should be pointed out that many of the typologies of civilisations canvassed in some of the major texts refer to dominant civilisations which have tended to be coterminous with empires, historically. But a civilization need not possess, nor be in quest of, imperium to be acknowledged as such an entity. Indeed, many discerning writers in this field make that point in one way or another. For example, Felipe Fernández-Armesto, a long-standing professor of Modern History at Oxford University, in his celebrated volume, Civilizations, identifies a range of civilisations shaped by the sea, including what he calls "small-island civilizations" and "seaboard civilizations".



The concept of "a civilisation" is not easy to define or elucidate. Kenneth Clarke, a witty and astute English observer of civilisations, wrote a book entitled Civilisation and he chose not to define "civilisation" but rather "civilised man". He suggests that:

*"A civilised man-----must feel that he belongs somewhere in space and time; that he consciously looks forward and looks back. And for this purpose it is a great convenience to be able to read and write."*

In this sense, therefore, the people of a civilisation must occupy or own their seascape and/or landscape with a sense of permanence which goes beyond mere energy and will.

The best exposition on this subject which I have read is contained in a fascinating book written by the Mexican Nobel Laureate for Literature, Octavio Paz, under the title The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings. Paz had this to say:

*"Civilisation is a society's style, its way of living and dying. It embraces the erotic and the culinary arts; dancing and burial; courtesy and curses; work and leisure; rituals and*

*festivals; punishments and rewards; dealings with the dead and with the ghosts who people our dreams; attitudes toward women and children, old people and strangers, enemies and allies; eternity and the present; the here and now and the beyond. A civilisation is not only a system of values but a world of forms and codes of behaviour, rules and exceptions. It is society's visible side — institutions, monuments, work, things — but it is especially its submerged, invisible side: beliefs, desires, fears, repressions, dreams."*

Of relevance to our discourse this evening is the application by Paz of his notion of "civilisation" in his comparative analysis of Mexico and the United States of America:

*"Of course, the differences between Mexico and the United States are not imaginary projections but objective realities. Some are quantitative, and can be explained by the social, economic, and historical development of the two countries. The more permanent ones, though also a result of history, are not easily definable or measurable. I have pointed out that they belong to the realm of civilisation, that fluid zone*

*of imprecise contours in which are fused and confused ideas and beliefs, institutions and technologies, styles and morals fashions and churches, the material culture and the evasive reality which we rather inaccurately call "the genie des peuples". The reality to which we give the name civilisation does not allow of easy definition. It is each society's vision of the world and also its feeling about time; there are nations that are hurrying toward the future, and others whose eyes are fixed on the past".*

## THE EVOLUTION OF OUR CARIBBEAN CIVILISATION

We in this Caribbean — Anglophone, Francophone, Hispanic and Dutch — occupy a particular geographic space which has often been more influential in determining our beings than our history, which admittedly has itself had a profound effect on shaping who we are as individuals, communities, nation-states, and a civilisation. We know that the possibilities contained in both our geography and history jostle, in their manifold connections and contradictions, with their limitations.

Our region's evolution from a culturally plural social arrangement to a relatively integrated Creole society composed almost entirely of migrant peoples from three continents — Africa, Europe and Asia — has made us a unique "small island and seaboard civilisation" within a particular Caribbean seascape and landscape, and with a non-white, creolised majority of peoples. The pre-Columbian heritage, the violence and tutelage of colonialism, the savagery of slavery and the bondage of indentureship involving a population mix of indigenous peoples, Anglo-Saxons, Africans, Portuguese, Indians, Chinese, Jews and Arabs have fashioned a distinctive society. No where else in the world does a society exist like the Caribbean with its particular geographic, historical, sociological and population admixture.

The Caribbean exists as an organic entity in which the whole is more than a summation of the individual parts from the indigenous, Europe, Africa and Asia. The very process, historical and otherwise, of all that coming together in a particular seascape and landscape has made our Caribbean civilisation distinct and distinctive.

Amazingly, although the vast majority of the English-speaking Caribbean peoples are of African descent or possessed of African heritage, there is hardly anyone who insists that this Caribbean is part of an African civilisation. Rather, there is an insistence by many, including presumably informed persons, that this Caribbean is part of the Atlantic or Western civilisation, even though only a small proportion of the population is of Anglo-Saxon, or even European, descent.

This insistence that we are part of Western civilisation stems from a preoccupation with certain visible or formal elements which have been claimed for that civilisation in our midst, namely:

- (i) A classical legacy including the influences of Greek philosophy and rationalism, Roman Law, Latin and Christianity;
- (ii) Western Christianity itself;
- (iii) European languages;
- (iv) The separation of spiritual and temporal authority;
- (v) The rule of law;
- (vi) Social pluralism and civil society;
- (vii) Representative government; and

(viii) Individualism.

But these values or features of Western civilisation do not manifest themselves to the same extent and in the same form or manner in the Caribbean as they do in Europe or North America or in other places for that matter. Indeed, the evolved Caribbean society has adopted and adapted these "western" values and elements in such a way as to make both their content and form very Caribbean.

By parallel reasoning, anyone who has seen the exhilarating batting of Vivian Richards or Brian Lara would no doubt realize that the relatively staid English game called cricket has been transformed by Caribbean hands. The rules of the game are identical in England and the Caribbean but the Caribbean people at cricket, on the field and in the stands, have turned the game into an amazing spectacle with a difference. It goes, too, "beyond a boundary", to use C.L.R. James' telling formulation. In the same way, the imitative Parliaments of the English-speaking Caribbean are but peculiar adaptations of the "Mother of Parliaments" at Westminster, London. Indeed, though similar,

Anglo-Caribbean Parliaments are in many ways so different that, at best, they are twisted versions of Westminster.

In any event, as Octavio Paz has reminded us, the civilisation's less visible side is what has emerged as elusive and peculiar, but which are most defining. Anyone who reads, for example, the novels of George Lamming and U.S. Naipaul or the poetry of Edward "Kamau" Brathwaite could hardly be in any doubt about the distinctive creolised nature of our Caribbean civilisation with its African (as emphasized and celebrated by Lamming and Brathwaite) and Indian (as highlighted, and perhaps scorned, by Naipaul) infusions and survivals. Anyone who has read Lloyd Best would know all this even more!

If we are an off-shoot of "western civilisation" or part of it, how is it that our culture life and living are so obviously different from that of Europe or North America despite cultural imperialism's bombardment to homogenise us in the image of North America but by way of the packaging of a so-called global or universal culture product?

The image that I hold of the Caribbean is that it has emerged, metaphorically, as roughly containing the songs of the Caribs, Arawaks and Amerindians; the rhythm of Africa; the chords of Asia; the melody of Europe; and the home-grown lyrics of the Caribbean itself. These various elements come together as a distinctive, organic whole.

I have identified eight core characteristics which mark out our Caribbean civilisation, namely:

- (i) Geographical and physical, environmental factors of the archipelago and seaboard Caribbean;
- (ii) A shared history of European conquest, settlement, colonialism and empire;
- (iii) A population mix derived from indigenous peoples, Anglo-Saxons, Portuguese, Africans, Asians, Jews and Arabs;
- (iv) A core of shared political values both adopted and adapted mainly from Western Europe and forged through the workings of the political process in the Caribbean;



- (v) A distinct cultural matrix fashioned substantially by, and from, the cultural milieu of the pre-Columbian Caribbean, Africa, Europe and Asia, but with-grown evolutions or developments;
- (vi) European languages spoken and written with distinctive Caribbean nuances, flair and usages;
- (vii) A productive and technological apparatus, though still developing and problematic, which sustains the Caribbean's social, economic and political viability; and
- (viii) A permanence of being in the Caribbean landscape and seascape which goes beyond energy, will and creative power.

Our Caribbean civilisation is of a small-island and seaboard type. The islands of the Caribbean and those washed by the Caribbean Sea constitute geographically the physical base of this civilisation. History, however, has intervened to cause us at times, to speak of our Caribbean civilisation in a narrower sense as comprising the chain of islands from the Bahamas to Trinidad and the countries on mainland South America, Belize and Guyana, which have shared a common British colonization. Politics and economic necessity have pushed the idea of "*our Caribbean*

*civilisation*" to embrace Surinam (a former Dutch colony on the South American mainland) and Haiti (a former colony of France and the first independent black nation-state in the Western Hemisphere), both of which are members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Still, the evolving political and economic necessity and desirability will in time lead us all to build on the existing geographic and historical bases and so prompt us to embrace a wider notion of "our Caribbean civilisation" to include the island-states of Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Dutch and French Antilles, and all the other Central and South American countries which are washed by the Caribbean Sea.

Our Caribbean civilisation can be easily contrasted with what has been termed "the American civilisation". To be sure, the American civilisation is peopled largely by descendants of migrants, voluntary and forced, plus a smattering of indigenous persons, just as in the Caribbean. But, in the United States of America, the population is overwhelming Caucasian; in the Caribbean, it is, by far, a creolised, non-white majority. In the Caribbean there is a process of creolisation; in America there are the contradictory pulls of assimilation into a dominant white

culture or separation. The Caribbean civilisation is of a "small-island and seaboard" type; the American civilisation is substantially continental. America's civilisation has emerged as a dominant global force, with neo-imperial manifestations; the Caribbean civilisation, lies in the hinterland of that neo-empire, daily and profoundly influenced by it.

Still, America's presence in the Caribbean's daily living and production, does not diminish our civilisation's unique or distinctive formation in a particular time and geographic space as a producing society, not a parasitic one, with an inter-connected and sophisticated social, cultural and political umbrella.

The Caribbean with a long and noble pre-Columbian history, was forcibly pushed by Europeans into the vortex of mercantile capitalism, then industrial capitalism and later monopoly capitalism, and shoved away from a path of autochthonous development. The social formations which evolved in the political economy in the Caribbean have been inextricably linked to the requisites of these external relations of exchange. These networks of production relations and exchange relations, which have underdeveloped the region, have, at the same time, provided

a productive base, pregnant with possibilities despite inherent contradictions and limitations, for the sustenance of our Caribbean civilisation. Indeed, the Caribbean's political economy, both in its historical evolution and contemporary manifestations, has fashioned substantially our very civilisation.

Our Caribbean civilisation has been very much shaped by the sea. The evidence of this in our region abounds from time immemorial: the peopling of our Caribbean; its trading; its economy and commerce, ancient and modern; its daily living and eating; its culture and its thinking. All these facets of life and production have been moulded, even determined, by the sea. The evocative poetry of our region's premier literary titan, Derek Walcott, draws substantially its meaning, thought, ideas and imagery from the sea.

The overwhelming presence of the sea in "small island and seabord civilisations" has been highlighted by Fernandez - Armesto:

*"The sea can shape island civilisations either by confining them or linking them to other islands. Either way, proximity*

*to the sea is such a powerful feature of any environment which includes it that it dwarfs all the others. Whatever the nature of the soil or temperature, the relief or biota, if the sea is at hand it has a shaping force. Nearness to the shore moulds one's outlook and affects the way one thinks. The sea is awesome because it is intractable, untrappable; it changes everything it touches without being easily changed in turn-----. It reshapes shorelines, erodes coasts, gulps swards and cities, and hews continents. At us land-creatures it flings weather systems which, after all our millennia of civilization, symbolise the continuing feebleness of our power over the environment. The sea has no appointed limits, except in the pious cravings of the prayerful. It is a part of the chaos that survived creation. It makes us feel small."*

Yet, strangely our Caribbean civilisation has yet to reflect in public policy the real value and significance of the sea which joins us all. To be sure, each country in the region has its own Ministry of Fisheries but each such ministry functions like an island unto itself with very little cooperative, much less integration of, effort. We still cannot yet fix properly "the problem" — if that

is what it is — of Barbadian fishermen who go in search of flying fish off Tobago or of all types of Caribbean fisherfolk trawling off the fishing grounds in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. There is still, too, no maritime delimitation agreements between contiguous Caribbean nation-states. Frankly, our Caribbean civilisation has done very little to exploit or command the resources of our seas. It is true that we do a little fishing; and our lovely beaches draw tourists whom we rightly seek and welcome. But, do we for example, know what truly lies under the waters of our seas? Is there oil in commercially-viable quantities beneath our sea bed from Trinidad going north through Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and St. Lucia and east to Barbados? Are we working on this issue jointly or separately? These and many other such vital public policy queries can be justifiably posed for practical answering!

Historically, small islands have been among the poorest places in the world. The great historian Fernand Braudel derisively labeled most of the islands of the Mediterranean in the sixteenth century as "hungry worlds" or "prisons of a precarious life". It is a perspective which finds resonance in the Naipaulian gloom of

our Caribbean's alleged lack of creativity and its presumed nothingness.

But we know, too, that many small islands, historically, have triumphed over their smallness and their "islandness", for example, Malta and Venice. In the modern era we can point to Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and, to a large extent, even our own Barbados. Is our Caribbean civilisation in the twenty-first century to succumb a gloomy Naipaulian future, become a prison of precarious living and bottom out as a wreck of a potential paradise? Or is it going to be on a path of further evolvment, advancement and development?

These are critical questions in this challenging epoch of an increasing globalised world in which there is undoubtedly a quest by certain powerful forces in the North Atlantic to impose a "new world order". Legitimate questions thus arise for our civilisation: "What's new?" "Which world"? and "Why our Caribbean civilisation does not combine, in political and economic terms, to meet more efficaciously the challenges of the new, globalised, world order?"

The future of our Caribbean civilisation hinges, in a large measure, on our provision of relevant and practical answers to the host of queries, among others, which I have been posing. The answers revolve around us acting together in solidarity, within our respective nations and across the region, in the interest of our own humanisation and the further ennoblement of our Caribbean civilisation. I say all this not for political effect, but with a solemnity and a profound seriousness, informed by a careful comparative study over many years, fashioned on the anvil of experience and forged in the cauldron of political struggle.

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A civilisation, and its prospects, are not to be assessed merely on the basis of the outstanding achievements of individuals within it.

But clearly an abundance of individual excellence in various fields of human endeavour is an indicator of the progress of a civilisation. In the Caribbean such individual excellence is extensive. We know the outstanding examples; there is thus no need to recite them here.

However, the true measure of our Caribbean civilisation is not in the individual efforts of these distinguished persons but in the



community and solidarity of the people as a whole in the process of nation-building:

- the ordinary workers in agriculture, industry, fisheries and tourism;
  - the professionalism and extra efforts of health personnel, educators, police officers and social workers;
  - the collective spirit and endeavours of the youths in tackling community problems;
  - the day-to-day travails of women in keeping their families together and guiding their off-spring;
- 
- the struggles of the poor in addressing their housing needs, with or without state assistance;
  - the daily grind of ordinary folk in their quest for greater democratic controls on the state administration and for justice;
  - the splendid dominance of the West Indies Cricket team and the Cuban baseball squad in their respective sports internationally for nearly two decades;
  - the fifty-odd years of tertiary education provided so far by the University of the West Indies and the over two hundred and seventy years of similar work by the University of Havana;

- the heroic battles of the Cuban people in defence and promotion of their sovereignty, national independence and internationalism;
- the striving of our sportsmen , sportswomen, cultural creators and writers of the creative imagination, professionals of all kinds, peasants and workers of excellence;
- the building of friendships internationally between peoples and nations; and
- generally the collective actions of our peoples in the arts, culture, production, architecture, religion, journalism, politics and sports.

All these endeavours, and more, of the civilised whole ennoble us. Contrary actions diminish our civilisation.

### THE INTEGRATIVE EFFORTS OF OUR CARIBBEAN CIVILISATION

Each civilisation possesses several apparatuses, including those lodged in the political and economic spheres. Indeed, the praxis-theory and practice-which manifests itself in a civilisation combines the social individual, the community, the

nation and the nation-state. The Caribbean, being a regional category with geographical, historical, social, cultural, economic and political dimensions, necessarily articulates the on-going quest for socio-economic and political integration regionally. All these are factors extant in our civilisation. The big query is: What is to be the nature of the institutionalised political expression of our Caribbean civilisation?

Currently, there are three concentric circles of integration in the Caribbean, each with points of contact and relevance to the others. The outermost concentric circle is the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) which consists of all countries washed by the Caribbean Sea, a Greater Caribbean so to speak, namely: the fourteen members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Spanish-speaking countries of Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Venezuela; and associate members form the French and Dutch Antilles. The ACS addresses four issues mainly: trade, tourism, transportation and technology.

The second concentric ring is the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) with its wide-ranging mechanisms for functional cooperation, its coordinated arrangements, more less, as a free trade area and customs union, and its aim to build a Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME).

The third, innermost concentric circle of regional intergration is the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) with membership, full and associate, of the independent states, former British dependent territories of Anguilla, British Virgin Islands and Montserrat. The Treaty of Basseterre, which established the OECS in 1981, lists eighteen areas of functional cooperation within a political-administrative superstructure which is proximately confederal

It is evident, though, that useful as these three concentric circles of integration are, they do not measure up to the challenges at hand for our civilisation. There are factors which overwhelmingly predispose and induce us to deeper union. Yet we are stalled. Devising more advanced models of regional integration is not the problem since creative thinkers

abound in our Caribbean civilisation to do so. The real issues are contained in the following three queries:

1. What is the most advanced model of regional integration that the political market nationally can bear?
2. Do the leaders of the region — political, economic, community and social — and the people themselves possess the political will and readiness to go beyond the parameters of the individual nation — states and embrace a union deeper than that which currently exists?

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3. What is to be done right now to construct, or prepare for the construction of, a deeper union between CARICOM countries, or at least between those who are ready and determined, to go forward?

Let us attempt to answer these and other ancillary questions. There is currently a paradox which grips the individual nation states of our region in the context of a deteriorating international economic situation which the British Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, has correctly depicted as the worst in thirty years. The paradox is this: the awful condition of the international political economy prompts the

political leaders and other elites in the region to look outwards from the bastions of their fragile nation-states in search of a deeper, though ill-defined and even inchoate, regionalism but, at the same time, the ever-growing and compelling domestic demands or requisites in the respective nation-states so pre-occupy these same leaders or elites that the regional becomes tangential or even marginal to their day-to-day work. Indeed, some may say, and not without some justification, that the sheer weight of the national travails immobilises or even paralyses the national leaders to such an extent that the regional departs from the core of their consciousness in their day-to-day decision-making. It is in this context that the initiative, nay, the clarion call, of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, my dear friend Patrick Manning, to cause the leaders of CARICOM to assemble here in Port-of-Spain to address the twin issues of governance and deeper union in the region, is of immeasurable significance. I applaud him for being a stalwart of regionalism. This is not a new persona for him. That was his commitment since first I knew him when we were both students at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica. Over the years, that commitment has evolved into an article

of faith for the further ennoblement of our Caribbean civilisation.

Every single Head of Government in the Caribbean is a committed regionalist though, too often, some of us can so easily be imprisoned by ghosts of the past or constrained by electoral imperatives arising from a narrow territorial nationalism or simply held back by a fear of the future without the institutional props of the individual nation-state, a category which is becoming increasingly anachronistic, save in a narrow juridical sense.

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The Martinican intellectual, Edouard Glissant, in his fascinating book, Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays, issues an admonishment to us which I believe we ought to heed:

*"As soon as we see a political program, no matter how radical, hesitate in the face of choosing a Caribbean identity, we can offer the certain diagnosis of a hidden desire to be restrained by the limits imposed by non-history, by a more or less shameful alignment with (metropolitan) values that one can never, and with good*

*reason, manage to control, by a fatal inability to have a sense of one's destiny"*

This Caribbean identity demands an institutional political expression of the deepest kind possible for it not to languish in inchoateness, and perhaps eventually wither and die. This is a great cause and great causes are not won by doubtful men and women.

I acknowledge as a practical man of affairs, that although the challenges in our region's political economy and society cannot be properly met without a maximalist approach to deeper union, the minds of men and women in the region are so fettered by considerations unconnected to this central reality, not a dream, that they will not at this time entertain maximalism in this regard. Still, the creeping minimalism which afflicts the regional integration movement currently will condemn us to a further thirty years of increasing irrelevance and worse. We act as though we do not see before our very eyes that some countries in the region are hurtling swiftly toward a condition of failed societies. It is true that an incidence of being a state is that it has the legitimate monopoly on physical coercion, yet in a growing



number of Caribbean countries the dons, the gangs, organised and non-organised criminals challenge this monopoly. In the process, ordinary right-thinking persons begin to question the very legitimacy and relevance of the state itself. What is the purpose of a nation-state if it cannot guarantee its citizens and visitors, in practice, a condition which protects their security and personal safety? That is a query which is increasingly posed in this region. And I am not an alarmist.

So, when individual nation-states find it increasingly difficult, or even unable, to address efficaciously the central concerns of people, they inevitably concentrate on side-shows. But the main event is where the action ought to be. The central questions can only be dealt with in a deeper union and reconstructed democratic governance.

I suggest that between the maximalist quest and the minimalist incoherence in regionalism is a large area for urgent activism. I advocate a sturdy, confederal political arrangement which, for short hand, I label EUROPEAN UNION PLUS. That is to say to move swiftly to an integrated whole similar, though not identical,

to that of the European union, plus other home-grown variations, additions or evolutions.

I do admit that for a variety of practical reasons some Caribbean countries may not at first be able to join in this deeper regional venture. But I feel sure that all or some of the countries of the eastern and southern Caribbean may find this a practical fit. Such a confederal union in which the centre does what can better be done there but in communion with the unit territories, and the individual nation-states focus mainly on those matters which give a better life and sustenance nationally to their communities and peoples. The details in such a confederal arrangement are not difficult to work out. But in whatever we do, the people must be fully and meaningfully involved, from start to finish.

To me, it makes little sense for us to proceed in fits and starts in the regional integration movement and dump into the CARICOM and the OECS Secretariats a host of additional functional cooperation tasks without the means or the political superstructure to match. Integration has never been, and will never be, a series of technical functions. It is a profoundly political exercise. It is escapism and irresponsibility not to so

acknowledge this in practice. It is for this reason basically why the CSME and other regional initiatives or mechanisms are faltering. But it does not have to be like this; we must correct all this and build immediately upon it. Despite the limitations, our condition is pregnant with possibilities.

Historically, one of the central problems of regional integration efforts in the Caribbean has been their tendency to integrate state systems, not peoples or the civilisation. The West Indies federation emphasised the establishment of formal governmental institutions which were isolated from the people; CARICOM has focused on trading arrangements and the efficacy of the Secretariat; and the OECS has as its *raison d'être*, eighteen areas of functional cooperation. All of these have been important and at the second remove touch, and connect with, the people but in none of these unity frameworks has the issue of the freedom of movement of peoples been favourably addressed or the travel of Caribbean people from one regional country to another been made hassle-free except recently in the OECS for OECS nationals. Indeed, while the technology and availability of regional transport, air and sea, have made it easier for intra-Caribbean travel, the contemporary states have put immigration

barriers in place which have made it more difficult than in colonial times for nationals of one Caribbean country to enter another. It even goes further than this: Guyanese visitors are, by and large, looked upon with grave suspicion by the immigration authorities of sister CARICOM countries; Americans and Canadians are welcomed with open arms in Barbados whilst St. Lucians and Vincentians are generally treated as unwanted strangers at the gates; Rastafarians are instinctively discriminated against by the immigration and customs officers in practically every country in the region, possibly save and except Jamaica; and Barbadians are caricatured as "smart men" who must be watched closely at ports of entry and beyond. All this is totally unacceptable. No federation or confederation or some lesser form of union can truly survive these indignities and irrationalities. To be sure, CARICOM governments have sought to lessen these hardships in the case of graduates of Caribbean universities and other selected categories of professionals. But, useful as this is, it has regrettably strengthened the impression in the minds of ordinary Caribbean folk that 'this integration business' is for the elite. Unless and until a thorough pro-active programme of encouraging intra-Caribbean travel and residence is devised by Caribbean governments, regional integration or political union would not

command the requisite degree of popular support as it should. To their credit, last year, the OECS countries relaxed some of the barriers to freedom of movement of their peoples.

The fears and prejudices which drive the immigration policies of many Caribbean states in relation to each other's citizens are without foundation. The notion that criminals would cross borders undetected ignores the huge potential in coordinating police activities and denies the fact that each Caribbean country has its own ballooning body of home-grown criminals. Roughly, in this regard, the practical effect of more open borders for each other's nationals in the region would be an equalization of travel by criminals. The same principle applies to the migration of unemployed persons. Indeed, easier migration of the unemployed in the region is likely to result in more employment since the tendency of migrants is to take any honest work in their adopted lands which they would not have taken in the land of their birth. Migration and initiative go hand in hand: That is the lesson of human civilisation the world over.

Two options face our Caribbean civilisation:

- [1] The well-beaten path of the post-independence period which is likely to lead to adsorption by the metropolitan centres, loss of independence, cultural domination, continued underdevelopment and, in all probability, increasing misery for our people; and
- [2] The creative alternative of the Caribbean as an independent, authentic civilisation which blossoms and bears fruits abundantly within a political union of the region.

If the first option is pursued, I predict that within fifty years the Caribbean could be working out an associate status with the United States of America or Europe. We would be offered some variant of the Platt Amendment of early twentieth century Cuba or some benign or not so benign twist to the current Puerto Rican model. If we remain independent, it would be in name only. Chatoyer, Toussaint L'Overture, Grantley Adams, the Manleys, Errol Barrow, Eric Williams, Maurice Bishop, Cheddi Jagan, Forbes Burnham, Robert Bradshaw, Milton Cato and thousands upon thousands of our patriotic forebears would have lived, worked and died in vain. Imagine the possible, even probable, scenario if we do not take appropriate stock and alter course: Within fifty years we would be voting in a referendum to

determine our status in relation to the United States of America or Europe.

Do not for one moment believe that I am dwelling in the realm of fantasy. Already in the United States of America, scholars and policy-makers, both liberal and conservative, are raising the imminent query: Are the countries of the Caribbean viable political and social entities in the new millennium?

The arrogance of this question can only be answered decisively by us if we pursue the second option which is grounded in the recognition of ourselves as a civilisation.

It is inescapable that in this new millennium that the Caribbean will be integrated as one. The relevant questions, however are: Who or what will direct the integration and on whose terms will the integration be consummated? It is either we the Caribbean people take control of the integration process in the interest of our own humanisation or regional integration will be driven and effected by others in their own interests. We must therefore keep our eyes on the ball and do not swipe outside the off-stump.

The second option demands a package of policies many of which have been detailed in official reports, some party manifestoes, academic publications and by the West Indian Commission headed by 'Sonny' Ramphal. It requires a population which is educated, skilled, and conscious in its Caribbeanness and which becomes imbued with new and more productive attitudes to work; a population which works hard and in a disciplined manner; and a population which avoids laziness, criminality and vagabondry. It calls, too, for high quality leadership of our Caribbean civilisation which eschews the debilitating political disease of a learned helplessness and studied pessimism.

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Let us shake off the bleak past of yesterday and become optimistic for tomorrow which Martin Carter of Guyana so beautifully and poetically mapped out for us in 1954:

*"I come from the nigger yard of yesterday  
Leaping from the oppressor's hate and the scorn  
of myself.*

*I come to the world with scars upon my soul  
Wounds on my body, fury in my hands.*

*I turn to the histories of men and the lives of the peoples.*



*I examine the shower of sparks and the wealth of the dreams.*

*I am pleased with the glories and sad with the sorrows, rich with the riches, poor with the loss.*

*From the nigger yard of yesterday, I come with my burden.*

*To the world of to-morrow I turn with my strength".*

This anthem for our civilisation, this pledge for our future, should inspire us and draw out of us that which is good and noble. In the process let us avoid the condition in which the best of us lack all conviction and the worst set the pace with the passionate intensity of territorial chauvinists.

*Thank you!*

Errol Barrow