

A NATIONAL DAY OF SHAME

(Nov. 03/02)

At age thirteen (13) I was already a veteran member of the Dominica work force. Every Saturday I earned one E.C. dollar behind the counter of E.A.L. Georges, later Marie Karam. I carried it home intact to my family of orientation. I never considered changing it and keeping some fraction for myself. That was not in the culture of those times. Such behaviour would have been considered devious and deviant and would not have been tolerated.

Not long before, I had placed first in the Common Entrance, then the "Free Entrance" Examinations of 1955. My parents were share-croppers on the Curry's Rest Estate, Parish of St. Paul. Of course they were proud of me. But they were not foolish enough to allow my first place scholarship status to convey on me the privilege of not assisting them in the garden. So, at the same age, I had already acquired the simple but appropriate technology of weaving a wad from dried banana leaves, and heading a banana bunch to Mahaut, crossing the same river at least three times in the process.

That manner of upbringing may not engender pride, but it cannot generate guilt either. It is in this spirit that I advise our youth who seem to believe that attendance at high school or beyond is a passport to do nothing productive. If this, their current day attitude was the attitude of yesteryear, those smart youths could not have gone to school. Their parents would scarcely have been able to afford it.

Parents, of course, must take plenty of responsibility for the garbage that is threatening to overwhelm us. But this is a related subject that should be considered later. Let me limit this to my perception of the alternative(s) to helping the family, financially and otherwise:

- *Abuse of narcotics, e.g. alcohol, ganja, cocaine*
- *Accessing teenage sex by internet*
- *Formation of gangs whose stock in trade is violence.*

Our youth -- especially the male-- plagued by one or any combination of the above problems, adopt a culture that the world owe them something which they must enjoy without effort and without pain. They complain that they have been "marginalized".

Economically, we have had seven years of famine followed by seven years of more famine. That is clearly manifested, for instance, in the heavy haemorrhage by means of out migration that has been with us for decades; change in political leadership notwithstanding.

I have a hypothesis:

Those who migrate remit back home here the "invisible income" that provides this country with its highest foreign exchange earnings. I believe it is greater than the contributions of DCP and of Bananas combined.

One other facet of the "marginalized" is their propensity to resent the limited employment opportunities that the country has the capacity to provide. But they want the drug, the Nike, the TV, the VCR, the expensive perfume, the automobile, the CD player, the big-name brand

clothing, the money, the woman. The unemployed may have to steal to enjoy such. Long ago, however, I heard that a thief is a potential killer.

Sociologists and apologists can show a lot of justifications for deviant behaviour. They plead that there are extenuating circumstances for such behaviour. Valid as some of their submissions may be, a recent dangerous trend in Dominica is evident. I refer to our tendency of sympathy for the criminal at the expense of "his" victim. Poverty is a popular apology. Yet I cannot conceive my parents --because they were poor-- giving approval for their progeny to go robbing and stabbing and looting and shooting.

As I pen this - at 10.45 p.m., October 30,2002, the power goes off. It does often. And each time I get infuriated with ALL our Parliamentarians. None of them seem to care enough to take a strong people-position on this unacceptable situation. Public relations excuses and apologies are substituted for electric power. And we pay higher power rates than any other English speaking Caribbean country. The reason for that deafening and ungolden silence on this issue is not known.

It is unclear when the love affair with criminals and callousness to victims crept into our culture. Mr. Henzie Wilson, hard-worker, entitled to enjoy his rest, is startled by an intruder in his house at dead of night. We make excuses why such intruder should not be dealt with; as if we would have preferred Mr. Wilson and his family be harmed by the intruder.

Mr. Roy Moses goes bathing about his legitimate business. A group of thieves shoot him in the stomach. The first motorist that comes by refuses his appeal for help. He does not take the wounded victim to hospital. This culture is uncivil and uncivilized. It is un-Dominican.

At Mahaut, a driver passes on the foot of seven year-old Jael Henry and runs away. The child has to be hospitalized. Such run-away practice is becoming a culture. How does that contrast with our National Day cultural pronouncements? What are you and I doing about it?

At about 6.30 p.m. Friday, October 25, 2002, in the middle of Roseau, a couple of armed men rob Mr. John J. Lewis of his wallet and hard-earned cash takings for that day. Somebody must know one or both criminals but will not cooperate with the authorities. Where did that culture come from? When did it start displacing the culture we used to know? Far from being isolated incidents the incidence of such crime is disturbing.

In the circumstances:

- 1. The Police must get motivated, and*
- 2. The society cannot afford NOT to provide the Police with the equipment necessary to do the job.*

*Most of us are unable to enjoy national independence since these matters are not effectively addressed. We must take back our country, or **a national day of shame will replace the independence celebrations.***

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