

Edward Oliver LeBlanc: A Rendezvous with History

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Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen,

I am happy to be here and I thank you for taking the time to be here.

I cannot reward you for your presence. I cannot offer you the pulsating sound of a Belé drum or the rhythmic beauty of poetry; or the dynamic movement of Quadrille; the humour of conte or the beauty of the Wob Dwiyet.

The writing of Dominica's history is not a plantation to which I hold a certificate of title or on which I have erected a sign saying: No Trespassers. I do not claim to hold a monopoly over the interpretation of Dominica's history. Neither do I believe that I have been anointed to chronicle our island's history. There are those who came before me and those who will come after me to add their own voice to the burgeoning literature about Dominica. All I can therefore offer you are a few words plucked from the landscape of my mind; filtered by my own bias and reflection over time.

I salute the writers who have worked hard to document Dominica's history; persons such as Father Jolly, Dr.

Honychurch, Mr. Lazare, Mrs Leevy, Polly Patullo, Dr. Polydore, Ian Jackson and others.

I also salute a special group of writers, sports commentators and columnists; Mr. Phillip Alleyne, Mr. Reginald St. Havis Shillingford and Mr. Ossie Lewis. I recently had occasion to do some research on Dominica's cricket and I am simply amazed that these three men have documented Dominica's sports history, particularly Mr. Alleyne, who has done so for almost fifty years.

I have been asked to give this address presumably because of my biography of Mr. LeBlanc which I wrote about a decade ago. I am fortunate to have authored or co-authored 17 books. I have personally financed the publication of fourteen of these books. Allow me, at this juncture, to publicly thank the three individuals who have financially contributed to the publication of three of my books. Let me also thank the hundreds of persons I have interviewed over the last two decades, the wonderful staff at the Archives Centre, and all those who have assisted me in so many ways. I also thank all the relatives, friends, colleagues of the subjects of my biographies all of whom have generously provided me with information over the past two decades.

There is no mystery why I have expended time, energy and money to write the biographies that I have written. Look no further than the following lines in Thomas Gray's *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*:

"Full many a flower is born to blush unseen/
and waste its sweetness on the desert air."

Or read the following lines of Derek Walcott's epic poem, "*Omeros*," Chapter 28, verse 3:

"Where, in which stones of the Abbey, are incised our names?/Who defines our delight?/Within whose palatable vault will echo the Saints' litany of our island people/Who will teach us a history of which we too, are capable?"

And if you need a more prosaic justification for my writings, turn the pages of the Dominica Hansard of October 26, 1967, page 14, and read the following profound lines of Edward Oliver LeBlanc:

"[T]he sum total of individual biographies constitute the history of a nation ...and it is by these little recognitions of certain individuals that we can teach the Dominican of today and posterity what it means to be living in a country.."

And so we must write objectively about slavery, the Kalinago people, Edward LeBlanc, Frank Baron, Dr. McIntyre, Elias Nassief, Charles Maynard, and Albert Cavendish Shillingford just as we write about Jean Rhys, Elma Napier and L. Rose and Co. Ltd. We must write and we will write about our lost sporting heroes, particularly those who have fallen into the crevasses of history; men like Merrill Anthony, the legendary fast bowler from Newtown, Alec Reid, the brilliant wicketkeeper from Pottersville who was robbed in the 1950s of a place on the West Indies cricket team and Val Felix, extraordinarily gifted cricketer of the 1950s who only two weeks ago, was inducted into the Ryerson University Hall of Fame for his excellence on the soccer field. We must write about Bishop Bowers, Cardinal Felix and yes, Father Clement Jolly. We must write about C.E.A. Rawle, Cosey Harris, Ashton Piper and Telford Georges. We must write because we have reached a stage in our maturity where we are not consumed by self-hatred, paternalism, condescension or insecurity about the achievements of others. We must write because of our belief

that we too, in the words of Derek Walcott, are worthy of occupying a place in the Abbey.

My responsibility as an amateur historian is not to remain silent or cherry pick what may be distasteful but to confront it and, where appropriate, to say it is wrong. I remind myself that I cannot hide behind a Shroud of Turin and write about perceived wrongs of some persons in the past while maintaining a perpetual silence about more egregious acts which may be happening under my very nose. I remind myself that I am not the only one who has been baptized in the redemptive waters of fairness. I also remind myself that I must approach the shrine of scholarship with the humility of a penitent, rather than with the haughtiness of a Pharoah or Pharisee.

Let me repeat an admonition from the former Princeton University Professor, Dr. Cornel West, at the commencement of every speech:

I intend to say something in this speech which unsettles you.

But before I do, allow me to thank the University of the West-Indies for asking me to address you.

Among us are a few distinguished educators, members of the LeBlanc family, members of the government and of the Official Opposition and members of the public. Thank you all for coming.

Where do I start in my assessment of the life of Edward Oliver LeBlanc? Do I begin with the details of his life; his humble upbringing; his desire for a successful life; his creativity; his poetry; his painful awareness of the limitations which thwarted his hopes for higher education in 1950s and his resolute

determination to forge a society on the anvil of a meritocracy and social equality?

Or do I start with a conception of the man; his place in this political or historical firmament; the attributes of greatness that hold us in awe of the man and the fact that today, more than fifty seven years after his major political victory in 1957, the life and values of Edward Oliver LeBlanc speak to us with a clarity and poignancy which resonate as much today as it did half a century ago.

Let me get one thing out of the way. The life and legacy of Edward Oliver LeBlanc should not be treated as if it was a prized piece of China or silverware, to be taken out of the cabinet and dusted for display purposes, only to be put back out of sight and out of mind until the following National Day. The life and values of this man should renew and reinforce the values of every patriot, giving them the conviction and courage that honesty and integrity in governance is the legal tender that will ensure the productivity and prosperity of our island nation.

How can we define the life of Edward Oliver LeBlanc and his contribution to Dominica? We can well borrow the following words of Booker T. Washington which LeBlanc dutifully recorded:

"I have learnt that success is to be measured, not so much by the position one has reached in life, as by the obstacles which he or she has overcome while trying to succeed".

Or we may reflect on the memorable words of Cassius in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar:

" Why man, he doth bestride the narrow world, Like a colossus, and we petty men Walk under his huge legs and peep about, To find ourselves dishonourable graves".

Make no mistake about it; the passage of time; more than forty years after Edward LeBlanc resigned from political office, has cemented his status as having been a colossus who walked the length and breadth of his "scepter'd isle" and transformed it in a fashion that today, we can look back with great nostalgia and sadly, much regret.

An assessment of Mr. LeBlanc's contribution inevitably involves a consideration of the true dimension of the "greatness" in political leadership. You see, "greatness" is oftentimes associated with transformative political figures such as Abraham Lincoln, Sir Winston Churchill, John F. Kennedy and of course Nelson Mandela.

And yet in the assessment of the greatness of these leaders, the inevitable question must be asked: What degree of human perfection; or should I say, imperfection, qualifies or disqualifies an individual for the designation of greatness.

Abraham Lincoln liberated African slaves during the American War of Independence. He is considered great despite the fact that he owned slaves and was not particularly interested in offering them equality with their fellow Americans.

Sir Winston Churchill is considered great largely because he embodied the indomitable spirit of defiance and determination that ultimately led to the defeat of the Nazi forces during WWII. And yet his shortcomings; such as his enduring fondness for libation and his resolute desire not to preside over the break-up the British Empire have not diminished the high esteem in which he continues to be held.

Nelson Mandela was prepared to sacrifice his life for his ideals and yet in some quarters of the globe, he is still dismissed as a terrorist and communist.

In defining the greatness of Edward Oliver LeBlanc, I will focus on the qualities that place him solidly within the pantheon of leaders for whom the term "greatness" has been richly deserved.

The first of these qualities I would identify is a degree of altruism bordering on messianism; an incredible belief in the justness of his cause.

Edward Oliver LeBlanc's obsession to change his society was born of an awareness from an early age, of the daily degradation of life which the labouring population, oftentimes dismissed as "those country people," "vieux negre" endured throughout their lives. The sale of their produce for a few yards of khaki cloth; the dismissive attitude exhibited towards them by many of those fortunate enough to reside in Roseau; and the daily denial of opportunities for higher education affected this man in a fundamental way that propelled him into the political arena.

Phyllis Shand Allfrey, who founded the Dominica Labour Party in 1955, did not have to pay LeBlanc to become involved in the political process; by the time he joined the Labour Party, LeBlanc had already formed the decision to try to change his society from within.

When he was refused a scholarship for higher study and after his supervisor advised him that the reason for the slight was that he had not "enjoyed the atmosphere of a secondary school," LeBlanc became resolute. He did not descend into an abyss of despair. He decided to change the system where opportunities continued to be defined by the insidious combination of class and complexion.

Allow me to digress at this point. Edward Oliver LeBlanc was denied an opportunity for higher education because he had not benefitted from a secondary school education. Today, more than sixty years later, similar barriers are being erected to disqualify certain individuals from aspiring to leadership positions in Dominica.

But we must place this snobbery; this misguided perception, in its historical context. Before 1951, Dominica's electoral process was based on limited adult suffrage. The ownership of a certain quantum of property bestowed on an individual the right to vote. The assumption underlying this was that persons who did not own that quantum of property were not competent or sufficiently intelligent to exercise the right to vote.

This business of not having worn a tie; a code for not having the social pedigree to exercise the freedom of choice to vote; was not limited to the right to vote or to hold elective office. It extended to other spheres of life. In 1967, the very year Dominica attained Associated Statehood, Mr. Phillip Alleyne, one of our most respected umpires, was the President of the Dominica Amateur Sports Association. Over the objections of a few members of the association's executive, he and others appointed Augustus Gregoire, the late batsman and wicketkeeper, as captain of Dominica's national cricket team.

What objections did they raise to Gregoire's captaincy of the team? They stated that he had not worn the tie. He allegedly did not possess the redeeming graces of a "gentleman" to lead the Dominican side. And yet under Gregoire's leadership, the Dominica cricket team decimated its regional opponents in 1968 and 1969.

We live in an age of virtual education. We live in an age where never in the annals of world history has information been more

readily available than it is today. We live in an age when a university dropout is the richest man in the world. We live in an age when an enterprising man from Louisiana successfully studied to take the State Bar examinations on the Internet, and became a practicing lawyer despite never having set foot in a law school.

The point is this. The technology and information revolution today has significantly diminished the necessity of attaining higher education in the form that we traditionally know it.

This is not to suggest that a university education is not worth pursuing. Far from it. But human intelligence has long existed and will continue to exist outside the perimeter of a university or college.

Edward Oliver LeBlanc did not wear the tie, let alone, earn a university degree. That however, did not handicap him in any way since the degree that mattered for effective and transformational leadership was the degree of his commitment to create a society based on a meritocracy, the extraordinary degree to which he was an honest custodian of the state's resources and the degree to which he provided opportunities for Dominicans to become productive citizens. In this respect, Edward Oliver LeBlanc had all the degrees that mattered for the good governance of his island. In his final speech in 1974, he stated that "the status symbols of the past, such as family connections, colour, religious affiliation, dress and attendance at secondary school... exist no more to restrict or circumscribe the inherent right of the individual." Those who today denigrate persons who have not attended or completed secondary school are woefully ignorant of the struggle waged so valiantly by Edward Oliver LeBlanc.

This leads me to the second aspect of Mr. LeBlanc's greatness. It is this:

He possessed an unmitigated desire to change his island for the better, despite overwhelming odds.

It is not by coincidence that Edward Oliver LeBlanc became known as the "Little Rebel." He did not initiate the process of social change in Dominica. Frank Baron, the astute politician leader who dominated the 1950s, played a significant role in the transformation of Dominican society. However, Mr. LeBlanc accelerated it significantly in the 1960s. He did so by defying the social and political conventions of his time. He provided opportunities for advancement in the civil service. He engendered opportunities for rural banana growers and opened up possibilities for them to send their children to secondary schools. He built a vast network of feeder roads and increased opportunities for employment in the colonial civil service. He made our institutions of learning more accessible to working class Dominicans. He advanced the frontiers of democratic governance by nurturing the growth of village councils all over the island. He scrupulously maintained the integrity of the electoral process. He instituted land reform measures although, quite frankly, not comprehensive enough in places such as Grand Bay.

This brings me to the third aspect of his extraordinary leadership.

Edward Oliver Leblanc embraced and in so doing, embodied the hopes and aspirations of his people to a degree hitherto unknown.

The man who had an intimate relationship with poverty in his youth fostered a deep sense of pride in persons who had been

traditionally dismissed as less than equal. He was an unapologetic proponent of the equality of all; the equal treatment of all without regard to race, colour, class or creed. He sought to dismantle the institutions of colonial rule not to feather his own political or financial nest but because they had subjugated the majority of Dominica's working population for decades.

He articulated the aspirations of his constituents with a clarity and perspicacity which endeared him to Dominicans as no other leader could.

He rejected the cynical and capricious Machiavellian belief that in politics, the ends justified the means; that a leader must be deceitful when it suits his purpose.

He did not talk about change while manifesting a slavish subservience to those who stood as the main bulwark against change.

And this takes me to one central aspect of my biography of Edward LeBlanc which seems to have generated some controversy.

In it I wrote that at one point in Portsmouth, during the 1966 visit of Queen Elizabeth II, LeBlanc had stood on a podium and suddenly raised his right hand with the clenched fist of a Black Power salute. I went on to say that without violating any of the archaic rules of protocol, or uttering anything disrespectful about his distinguished guests, LeBlanc had signaled to all assembled that the true rulers in Dominica were the representatives of the labouring population.

Dr. Honychurch, in his Edward Oliver LeBlanc lecture last November, suggested that this interpretation was nothing short

of blasphemy. He stated that I had merely looked at a picture and wrongly interpreted Le Blanc's actions. He noted that it seemed to him that the poor man was merely shouting: "Hip, Hip, Hooray: God Save the Queen."

With the greatest of respect, this interpretation is simplistic and does not reflect an appreciation of the complexities of LeBlanc the individual leader, or the history of struggle of those LeBlanc represented.

Let me first respond to Dr. Honychurch by borrowing Shakespeare's admonition in Hamlet that: "I know not seems!" Neither Dr. Honychurch nor I know what was in LeBlanc's mind when he raised his fist in the presence of the Queen in Portsmouth. As Shakespeare cautioned in Macbeth:

"There's no Art to find the mind's construction in the face."

All we can do is to look at the context in which LeBlanc acted or spoke and draw any reasonable inferences from the facts.

Dr. Honychurch complained that I cannot look simply at a photograph. Fine. Well, let us look at the evidence and see what reasonable inferences we can draw from it.

ONE, from 1957 when he was first elected to political office, Edward Oliver LeBlanc manifested a complete disdain for the colonial administration in Dominica.

TWO, one of the first things he did after taking office in 1961 was to instruct his Permanent Secretaries to invite local Dominicans to official functions rather than white English expatriates. Listen to his explanation for doing so in a speech in the House of Assembly in October 1973:

Why should I belong to a black country to go to a cocktail party given by the government of the people and I see only white people instead of black people?

THREE, in 1962, his government deported Mr. Hopkins, a white master at the Dominica Grammar School who had reportedly kicked a schoolboy.

FOUR, in October 1965, he changed the annual November 3rd celebrations and called them Dominica Day rather than Discovery Day with an emphasis on indigenous song rather than songs praising the British Empire. He invited Pan Africanist and World War II RAF pilot Edward Scobie, to come to Dominica to organize the festivities.

FIVE, the Queen came to Dominica within a month of LeBlanc winning the most lopsided political victory in Dominica and after he had defeated the last remaining political giant who he regarded as an integral part of this exclusive and discriminatory world of colonial privilege.

SIX, Edward Oliver LeBlanc, according to Dame Eugenia Charles' biographer, Janet Highbie, refused to wear a tie to work and justified his actions by telling an EBONY magazine reporter, "We have been acting like white men long enough."

SEVEN, as Mr. Rupert Sorhaindo wrote in a March 22, 1974, article in the Star, at page two, paragraph five: "Mr. LeBlanc told listeners in Colihaut that they should take down the picture of the Queen in their village and replace it with that of "Congo Ray."

Ladies and Gentlemen, is this the same man, who, it is claimed, was so titillated by the presence of the Queen that he

succumbed to an overwhelming urge to shout, "Hip, Hip, Hooray, God Save The Queen?"

We should resist the temptation of trying to recreate Edward Oliver LeBlanc in our own image.

There are two other reasons why Edward Oliver's LeBlanc's actions defy this simplistic explanation. First, it ignores the whole history of African reaction to subjugation and the distinction between what seems and the reality that lurks beneath. This is a consistent theme not only in the history of slave rebellion but also in the literature spawned by such rebellion. As C.L.R. James has shown in his classic, *The Black Jacobins*, even privileged slaves like Toussaint L'Overture, who danced minuets and quadrilles for the delight of their masters, masked his deep desire to break the handcuffs of subjugation.

It is not by coincidence that this duality resonates throughout the literature of freedom.

Consider for example, the following lines in Paul Dunbar's poem, "We Wear the Mask."

"With torn and bleeding hearts we smile And hides with myriad subtleties".

Consider, the following lines from Edward Brathwaite's poem, *The Arrivants*:

"beneath the docile smile, lies this unbridled monster's breath..."

Consider the anti-hero in Ralph Ellison's classic *Invisible Man*, who wears a mask of docility which hides an apocalyptic interiority.

The second reason reflects another aspect of Edward LeBlanc's greatness that makes him exceptional among his regional counterparts. It is this:

His determination to effect social change was not overpowered by any ambivalence towards the colonial power or obsession with the trappings of power.

We are all familiar with Lord Action's observation that power corrupts but absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Many twentieth century political leaders in the Eastern Caribbean suffered from one or two maladies; an obsession with the trappings of power and a craving for acceptance by the colonial power.

In 1932, leaders like C.E.A. Rawle, J.B. Charles, Howell Shillingford, and J.R.H. Casimir organized the West-Indian conference to agitate for a West-Indies Federation. With the exception of trade unionist Albert Marryshow from Grenada, they all opposed the immediate granting of universal adult suffrage for the West-Indian people. CLR James later wrote the epitaph of this generation of leaders in his 1932 book, *The Case for West-Indies Self Government*. They were motivated by one overarching concern - acceptance by the white society. In 1942, Dr. Eric Williams, in *The Negro in the Caribbean* wrote the following about these leaders; "a government appointment for one; an invitation to Buckingham Palace for the other and the radicals vanished into thin air."

Of Albert Marryshow, who was the sole supporter of universal adult suffrage in 1932, historian Gordon K. Lewis wrote in his book, *The Growth of the Modern West-Indies* that:

"Marryshow's vanity, his enjoyment of Buckingham Palace garden parties and parliamentary receptions at Westminster and his comic pursuit of royal personages all made it impossible for him to lead that open fight (for democratic change.)"

Phyllis Shand Allfrey made a tremendous contribution to Dominica with the founding of the Dominica Labour Party in 1955, with her newspaper, *The Star*, and with her works of fiction. However, Allfrey's biographer, Lisabeth Paravisini-Gebert, in her excellent book, corroborates Lewis and even noted that Allfrey once described her daughter at a public meeting as "a princess from England". Lewis observed that "Fabian Socialism" had not stifled in Allfrey an obvious pride in belonging to the "Royal Family of Dominica."

During the Queen's visit to Dominica in 1966, Allfrey's newspaper was saturated with story after story about the Queen's couriers, the Royal Coat of Arms, the Imperial State Crown and a story about why the Queen wore a hat.

Edward Oliver LeBlanc, among these "small island" leaders, stood alone in his indifference to either fraternizing with royalty, or courting or craving the attention of royalty.

The other trait of contemporary leadership of which Edward Oliver LeBlanc was entirely bereft was an obsession with the trappings of power.

Again, we can appreciate this aspect of LeBlanc's greatness by comparing his life with that of his West-Indian contemporaries.

Here is V.S. Naipaul's brutal but candid assessment of Robert Bradshaw, in his 1972 book, *The Overcrowded Barracoon*:

"Bradshaw is now a legend, for the gold swizzle-stick he is reputed to bring out at parties to stir his champagne, the gold

brush for his moustache, the formal English dress, even the silk hose and buckle shoes on some ceremonial occasions, the vintage yellow Rolls Royce".

Here is the assessment of Tony Thorndyke, in an essay entitled "Revolution, Democracy, and Regional Integration in the Eastern Caribbean," in the book, *Modern Caribbean Politics* ed. by Anthony Payne and Paul Sutton:

"Antigua over two decades acquired the regrettable image of being the most corrupt society in the Commonwealth Caribbean, hosting a notorious amorality from top to bottom".

Thorndyke noted further that an Inquiry headed by the eminent British lawyer, Louis Bloom-Cooper recommended that Vere Bird Sr. never again hold public office.

Archie Singham's, *The Hero and the Crowd in a Colonial Polity*, describes the political leader who emerged in the terminal stage of colonial rule; personified in the figure of Eric Gairy. The hero relied on populist measures to appease his political base. These measures however, masked Gairy's Caesarist tendencies as he, like a python, choked the life from his island's fledgling democracy. Hence in Gairy's Grenada we had an unprecedented abuse of the public purse, dignified by the word, Squandermania. Gairy and his ministers helped themselves to the coffers of the state with the energy, enthusiasm and etiquette of hyenas feasting on a carcass.

Gairy was not so much a political leader but a Mafia Don; a Godfather. His cultivation of a heroic persona, aided and abetted by his ruthless secret police, the Mongoose Gang, ultimately led to politically motivated death in the 1970s and his eventual overthrow in 1979.

There are those who would suggest that LeBlanc manifested a great deal of prejudice towards white persons. Nothing could be further from the truth. One of his closest friends was Father Monpetit from Vieille Case, the Roman Catholic priest who taught the young men of the village the rudiments of carpentry. Another was the American secular humanist, author Warren Smith, who once wrote that Edward LeBlanc should be spoken about in the same breath as Pericles, Thomas Paine and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. When LeBlanc enacted the Aid to Pioneer Industries Act in 1962, it benefitted all Dominican businessmen; white, black blue and brown.

One may conclude that by embracing his African heritage while embracing Caucasian friends, LeBlanc was, to paraphrase Winston Churchill, an enigma wrapped in a conundrum within a paradox. But the reason for this apparent contradiction is clear. Edward Oliver LeBlanc detested policies and philosophies which held one race superior, rather than persons of a different racial background or station in life.

There are those who suggest that LeBlanc was not entirely free from the corrupting influence of absolute power. Indeed, they point to the passage of the Seditious and Undesirable Publications Act in 1968, his 1971 attempt to dissolve the opposition dominated Roseau Town Council, his declaration of a state of emergency in 1973 and the placing of union leaders under house arrest as evidence that LeBlanc did not manifest this clinical disinterest in absolute power which is the hallmark of a great leader.

Without doubt, the so-called "Shut Your Mouth" Bill was bad legislation designed to silence or control the voices of dissent in Dominica. But this legislation cannot be viewed in a vacuum. Rightly or wrongly, LeBlanc felt that his attempts to achieve

democratic reform were being stymied by the agents of privilege in Dominica.

In any event, one piece of bad legislation does not a dictator make. We must therefore consider other legislation enacted by the LeBlanc government to get a true measure of the man and the cloth from which he was sewn.

Recall his 1966 Beach Control Legislation which vested ownership of all beaches in Dominica to the Crown, thereby ensuring that the Dominican people would always have access to their beaches.

Recall his words that "government will send a caterpillar to open a road to the beach because the beach belongs to the people of Dominica and so we want the land to remain."

Recall his Alien Landholding Act which restricted foreign ownership of land in Dominica.

Recall his October 1967 legislation; an Act to Exempt Ex-servicemen from the payment of land and house taxes. The young men who had volunteered to fight in World War Two. The young men who had to make their wills at aged nineteen, twenty or twenty-one. Men like Mr. Glenworth Emanuel. Edward Oliver Leblanc sought to ensure that for their sacrifice, they enjoyed sanctuary in their own homes.

Recall his establishment of a National Provident Fund to provide a pension to eligible Dominicans.

Recall also LeBlanc's enactment of the Christopher Loblack Pensions Act in 1967 which conferred a pension on Mr. Loblack for his tremendous contributions to the Trade Union Movement.

Recall his enactment of the Lawrence Clarisaint Didier Pension Act in 1970 to grant Mr. Didier, a former political ally of Leblanc' political opponent Franklin Baron, a pension at the age of 81 years.

These latter two points lead to a consideration of another significant aspect of the man's greatness:

Mr. LeBlanc's magnanimity towards those over whom he had triumphed politically. The Labour Party expelled Phyllis Shand Allfrey and Mr. Emanuel Loblack in 1962. It is reasonable to infer that this action had the endorsement of Mr. LeBlanc. Thenceforth, Phyllis Allfrey conducted a relentless and hate-filled campaign against LeBlanc with the blessings of Loblack.

And yet despite this, LeBlanc did two things to assist this humble man who had helped to accelerate social and political changes in Dominica. He granted him a pension in 1967 and presented him with the Meritorious Service Award in the same year.

And now we move to another component of Mr. LeBlanc's greatness. It is this:

He did not marinate his unparalleled charisma and populism in narcissism or desire for self aggrandizement.

Recall Thorndyke's indictment of the bankruptcy of political leadership in Antigua. The entire converse is true of Edward Oliver LeBlanc. Examples abound of the conscientiousness of this man and his adamant refusal to enrich himself from the coffers of the state. He did so because unlike many contemporary leaders, he did not suffer from any moral malnutrition.

Let me give you a few examples. He repeatedly declined gifts of kind from well established persons during his tenure in office. He once sacked a minister for accepting gifts from certain individuals. When his government opened the Canefield housing scheme in the 1960s, he refused to allow members of his own family to purchase lots to avoid even the appearance of preferential treatment. He guarded every penny of the nations' purse and expected his ministers to do the same.

There is another dimension to the extraordinary lengths to which the Premier went to avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest in state business. He ensured that all his children attended secondary school. They all acquitted themselves very well in their studies. I can personally attest to this since one of them, who is now an accountant working for a Fortune 500 company in the United States, taught me the rudiments of Accounting.

Mind you, I didn't fare too well in the subject but that is not a reflection on him.

Edward LeBlanc scrupulously ensured that not a single one of his children benefitted from a scholarship administered by his government, for post-secondary education.

In this regard we see yet another quality of greatness which we can attribute to Edward Oliver LeBlanc.

He subjugated any desire to perpetuate himself in power for the overall good of his community.

The Chief Minister fervently believed that democracy must be nourished and re-invigorated by a regular turnover of political leadership and the ability of the population to effect new leadership.

Today, we can appreciate the rarity of this condition. LeBlanc believed that he should serve as the leader of his island for two successive terms. He did not believe that he should rule Dominica by proxy or decrees and hence he scrupulously refused to groom any of his sons to continue his legacy. He walked away from power and turned down the offer of the island's presidency when Dominica became an independent state in 1978.

Which West-Indian leader can you name who literally strolled away from the portals of power? Which of them left political office with an overdraft balance of \$465 in his savings account, \$56.33 at one bank and \$25.07 in another? He had the keys to the vault! Today, forty years after the departure of Mr. LeBlanc we can marvel at the unprecedented honesty of this man.

Why do our objective observers maintain a deafening silence about these qualities exhibited by Mr. LeBlanc?

Mr. LeBlanc did nothing to perpetuate himself in power. He did not rely on bloated electoral lists; neither did he resurrect Santa Claus or Lazarus on the eve of a general election. He did not prorogue Parliament for the sole reason of avoiding a democratic vote of No Confidence as has happened in St. Kitts. Indeed, in 1970, he sacked three ministers and then daringly called general elections which he won resoundingly.

And here we come to my final point.

The English poet, John Keats, selected the following epitaph which endures as the epitome of self effacing humility:

"Here lies one whose name is writ in water".

Mr. LeBlanc manifested a clinical disinterest in recording his place in history or contributing towards documenting it. He

refused to see many professionals who travelled to his residence to interview him.

By sheer happenstance, I was spared this rejection.

Before I wrote a biography of Mr. LeBlanc in 2004, I was haunted by reports of the great man's disinterest in recording his life's work and contributions.

And so one Sunday, I had visited Mr. LeBlanc and his wonderful wife Ethel thanks largely to my mother who was his first cousin. My brother had negotiated the serpentine road to Vieille Case with ominous sounding names like "Casse Cou." We had borne witness to the richness of the landscape; the angry agitation of the Atlantic, the procession of villagers, some with the ubiquitous cutlass in their hands and a bunch of bananas on their heads, and had understood the incredible hold of the rural landscape on the sensibility of this man.

His house stood on the right, next to a bay. A small neck of land extended behind it into the sea. Misshapen almond trees, tormented by the wind, bent inwards, as if in homage to the man who reposed within the residence.

There were no tinted SUVs lazing around. No security detail. No pretension. No ostentation. Just a modest concrete house which we had entered.

In beholding this modest abode, where the waves at Au Trou in the background resonated within its walls and the surrounding area, I was confronted with another facet of the man's greatness.

Edward Oliver Leblanc vacated political office with his values intact.

His philosophy of success was not based on the acquisition of material things, mansions, investments or foreign bank accounts, Swiss Chalet or Savanne Paille chalets for that matter. Rather, it reflected the retention of those core values, honesty, simplicity and family which defined this exceptional man to his very core.

This is a rare quality which very few leaders possess. Mandela, Mahatma, Martin Luther, easily comes to mind. Recently, Manmohan Singh, India's former Prime Minister, was voted out of office. This former World Bank economist with a Ph.D. from Oxford, retired earlier this year, to a simple bungalow and a \$1000 monthly pension. He famously declared:

"I owe everything to this country, this great land of ours where I, an underprivileged child..., was empowered enough to rise and occupy high office. It is both a debt that I will never be able to repay and a decoration that I will always wear with pride."

Edward Oliver Leblanc has earned a place in this pantheon of exemplary leaders. Holding public office was merely a debt to his country he was unable to pay and one that he wore with pride.

He delighted in those things on which a proud and independent Dominica is based: farming, reaping what he sowed; teaching a grandson to fish; giving a son an autographed book of his poems. In short, he focused on building character; rather than bank accounts.

There is a central paradox in the life and departure of this man from political office. Edward Oliver LeBlanc manifested a perpetual distrust towards organized religion throughout his life. I will not bore you with the words he used to describe certain members of the established church in 1957. Indeed, the Roman

Catholic Church warned its members during the 1957 general elections not to vote for Phyllis Shand Allfrey and the other members of the Labour Party. And yet this man exemplified one of the most profound teachings of the established church to an extent significantly greater than a few members of that very church.

What doth it profit a man who gains the whole world but loses his soul?

I know that we live in an age where religious teachings are often based on a self serving doctrine called the Prosperity Gospel.

I know that we live in an age where success is sometimes measured by the amount of money church members contribute to their preacher's birthday party.

I know that we live at a time when many persons embrace a self serving, reductionist logic which holds that our past leaders, including Frank Baron, Edward LeBlanc and Dame Eugenia Charles were all corrupt so therefore there is no need to worry about corruption in public office. We should soundly reject this cynical conception of Dominican history which essentially holds that corruption will be with us always. We have produced great jurists in the likes of Sir Brian Alleyne, medical practitioners, business persons, great professors and distinguished statesmen. We can therefore produce honest leaders.

I also know that Edward Oliver LeBlanc' refusal to profit from public office has attracted the derision and ridicule of some of our present day Scribes and Pharisees. They ridicule him for not coveting gifts of land. They ridicule him for not having backhoes making money in Dos Dane. They ridicule him for not having bank accounts in Switzerland.

And so Edward LeBlanc's humble abode was not a monument or citadel of greed: it stood as a symbol of honest service and the humble abode of a man who resolutely resisted the seduction or obsession to advance one's station in life at the expense of taxpayers or of the treasury.

Walk with me from the outside porch to the area within. In the living room, stood a table and chairs made from local wood. There were no mementos of the thirteen years spent as Chief Minister or Premier of Dominica. No framed photographs with the political giants in the region; Dr. Eric Williams, Sir Grantley Adams, Norman Washington Manley. No pictures depicting the two years he spent in the Federal Legislature. None of foreign leaders, or of Her Majesty the Queen; no gilded cages; no delicate China or prized silverware, no framed awards, citations or certificates. No MBEs, OBEs or other titles. No mementos of a glorious past; no delicate embroidery or burnished mahogany.

What kind of man was this?

Rather, there were simple words he had etched on the surface of his children's minds. One read: Manners Maketh Man. Reading Maketh a Full Man.

He forced his children to memorize the following lines of Rudyard Kipling's poem, IF:

" If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue, Or walk with kings-nor lose the common touch; If neither foe nor loving friends can hurt you; If all men count with you, but none too much; If you can fill the unforgiving minute With sixty seconds worth of distance run- Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it, And-which is more-you'll be a Man my son".

Aurundell Thomas has similarly forced us to ask the following:

"If Edward Oliver LeBlanc could talk/ What would he say/If he saw us today/ Where a procession of small businessmen and women, farmers and fishermen, hoteliers and their workers,/ members of village councils/All of whom he embraced and promoted/ Now dressed in Sackcloth and Ashes/ As if they were masqueraders in a Peter Minshall band/ Deprived of their dignity, self respect and livelihood/ But moving; with leaden feet and heavy hearts/ Chained and shackled to a future/ not of their own choosing".

Enough of this!

Let us move more purposefully through the portals of the great man's humble abode. In an adjoining room, with a window overlooking the bay, Mr. LeBlanc had sat a few feet away from a television. Beyond him was a bookcase some four feet high stocked with books, pamphlets and other reading materials. Here was a man who had obviously reflected on the words of Marcus Tullius Cicero that a room without books is like a body without a soul.

He had addressed my mother by her first name. They had then engaged, if I may quote St. Lucian author, Garth St. Omer, in his *Nor Any Country*, "in the superficiality of jest; the comfort of reminiscence."

He had made an offer of a glass of brandy. His wife had retrieved some from a glass decanter.

At a certain point, his conversation with my mother had subsided. Mrs. LeBlanc had looked at me as if to signal that now was the time to broach the subject of a biography with her husband.

I gulped the rest of the brandy down! I saw a few stars in the deep recesses of my mind.

I had rehearsed how I would approach the subject. Should I deploy an academic tone seasoned in flattery by telling him that I desired to research the extraordinary details of his life, blah, blah blah? Or should I employ a more down to earth tone by saying: "As though I want to write something about you."

Fortuitously, my mother had intervened. She had asked him if he remembered her son. He replied yes. He admitted to having read a couple of my books.

He had then paused. The moment of truth had arrived. He wasn't opposed. But he stated simply, "I was just doing my job." He kept repeating this simple sentence. "I was just doing my job."

The humility of this man. Had I been in his position I would have recited all my accomplishments, real or imagined.

I sighed in relief. It was a small victory but a victory nevertheless. It was the opening I had needed.

We had departed the house a couple of hours later. I subsequently benefitted from the generosity of his family, friends and former colleagues and even those with whom he had bitterly parted company. Without the contributions of these persons, the biography of Edward Oliver LeBlanc would not have been written.

And so today we stand on the "bank and shoals of time," the proud beneficiaries of this Great Man who sought to build character rather than chalets, and to unleash the productive capacity of his people, rather than increase their dependency.

One year before he left office, he was preoccupied with the growing evidence of lawlessness in Dominica. He was preoccupied with the disrespect for law and order, the disregard for property, the false sense of entitlement and the increasing incidence of gratuitous violence which culminated in murder in February 1974 and the burning down of Geneva Estate and Elias Nassief's flagship store in April 1974. Concerned that the genie of intolerance and racial hatred had been let loose from the bottle, Edward Oliver LeBlanc retreated, to use George Lamming's metaphor, within the castle of his skin and penned a memorable poem, "Nom Nwer," "Black Man", in which he poetically addressed his Dominican brethren:

"Although your hands are still tied behind your back, Your mind is free! But liberty has its price! Your race and roots are not things to play with Love all, but love your own much more Work hard Forgive And Pray Your horizon is plain, cut YOUR OWN road With courage your destiny to mould."

Edward Oliver LeBlanc, the man who never wore the tie, the man who never benefitted from a tailwind of privilege, or secondary education, the man derided as a pretender to the office of political leadership in Dominica, has left us an extraordinarily profound definition of the true meaning of self-liberation and Nationhood.

Ladies and Gentlemen. You have been a lovely audience. I thank you for listening.

(Justice Dr. Irving Andre's UWI Open Campus Third Annual E.O. Leblanc Memorial Lecture delivered on Tuesday, October 28 2014 at the Fort Young Hotel Conference Room, Roseau. His presentation was entitled: "E. O. Leblanc: A Rendezvous with History."

Justice Andre is Senior Judge of the Superior Court of Justice in Canada. He has also authored several books about Dominicans and important events.