

## **REMEMBERING NEW YORK - Conclusion**

*Aug. 22, 2003 -First, one or three other event(s) merit mention. "Those who talk don't know; those who know don't talk," Gilles Kepel testified before the National Commission on the September 11 Terrorist Attacks. Within the strict context and meaning of those words only, Kepel could have been referring to Dominica. But that is a different story.*

*His testimony was broadcast on July 9,2003 on C-Span. He gave a wise anecdote to illustrate the powerful emotions that emanate from race, class, creed and sex in the Middle East. The following story, he said was very popular in Egypt.*

*A woman entered a male toilet. Several excited voices drew that fact to her notice. Unruffled, she asked them whether Osama bin Laden was in there. They answered "No." " So what does it matter?" She assured them; "there are no other men left."*

*While I was writing my reminiscences of New York last week, news came that Idi Amin had died at 80 in Saudi Arabia. You may recall that he was an ex-boxing champion, a British trained soldier who overthrew Milton Obote in 1971 and became President of Uganda. Like so many others who do not adhere to the rule of law, Amin in turn was overthrown 8 years later in 1979.*

*The media everywhere portrayed him as a tyrant, mass murderer, buffoon and even cannibal. But in those days there were a few men and women left who refused blindly to accept all things published by big media. They were determined always to add some reach, depth and analysis into the popular view. They did their best to show the other side. And the Amin story had another side, well rooted in Uganda's colonial past.*

*The colonists appeared to have left Africa but remained affectively in control through some of their numbers, their servants and agents. Meanwhile, the population of Uganda included an important minority of Asian immigrants and their early generation(s), especially of Indian origin.*

*There were allegations that the colonists who controlled banking and other important facets of commercial activity, discriminated against the native peoples in favour of the Asians. Perhaps even more important were the allegations that the Asians themselves discriminated against the local Ugandans.*

*At the time of independence, the Asians were given the option and the opportunity to acquire Ugandan passports and become citizens of Uganda. To what extent they were aided and abetted by the British was not known. But, according to the other side, the Asians refused and opted for British citizenship.*

*When Idi Amin seized power, he confronted the Asians with the circumstances, as he understood then, especially the discrimination and their deliberate refusal of Ugandan citizenship. A quarrel ensued. Amin eventually asked the British government to "take responsibility for your citizens here." He ordered the Asians to leave with no more than 50 units of currency per person. It is of little consequence whether it was pounds or dollars.*

*This side is offered because no one else tells it. There is no suggestion that any aberration on his part ought to be condoned. If black leaders kill irrationally, I will not allow them the excuse that white leaders, even while I write, send young people to kill and to die with even more blatant lack of rationale.*

*I can almost hear you thinking that this column is as controversial as usual. Perhaps it is simply the TV that we watch: say, the party animals on BET, or CNN - most trusted name in news - which statement I do not believe. Perhaps I watch more BBC, and C-Span, or PBS; or even HBO where a (non-black) comedian was on show on August 10, 2003.*

*Joker that he was, he nonetheless made a number of serious and profound statements worth remembering:*

- 1. The genius of marketing and the stupidity of the American people make them forget why the Bush administration really went to war in Iraq.*
- 2. "Please Mr. President, when you have those joint press conferences, let Tony Blair do all the talking."*
- 3. He recalled that the Republican Party Convention of 2000 had a higher than usual number of blacks present. So, he commented: "The last time the Republicans had so many black people on a stage they were selling them!"*

*If anybody reading this has gotten the name of that fine comedian, kindly tell me so I can give him due credit.*

*Meanwhile, my contribution in the issue of August 8, elicited some response from Hon. Edison James. Our discussion was frank and amicable. Politicians may not always respect one another, but I respect them and they tend to return the favour. He assured me:*

- The \$21m received for the sale of shares in Domlec was not bettered by EDF, the sole competing potential purchaser.*
- The CDC business plan/forecast was always considered as a part of the agreement with government. He is unclear where or when opinion to the contrary originated.*
- Government's willingness to guarantee certain Domlec debts implied government would enjoy interest rates lower than commercial rates. Such advantages would benefit the Dominica public.*
- CDC/Domlec did renege on some of their obligations in the agreement and government should cause CDC/Domlec to comply.*
- Related to (d) above, he did not look favourably on Domlec's recent \$16 million write-off.*

*From the above it was clear to me and I told Mr. James so, that government and opposition, toute monde can find common ground. Continuing division on the issue will provide comfort and more to CDC and not to the consumers of Dominica. Let us begin to find common ground by withdrawing hyperboles like "Treason."*

*Meanwhile, I promised (August 15, 2003) that I would continue to pen my remembrances about New York; matters more pleasant than 9/11 and sometimes very tragic.*

*With other staff members at the United Nations I watched with shock and disbelief, as CHALLENGER burned and disintegrated, killing all on board. That was early 1986. A couple of months before, a MAFIA boss and his body-guard were murdered. Some years later his rival John Gotti was condemned for the murders.*

*I would not have remembered that if the FBI had not stopped me at random on the day following the murder. I was on my way from work at 2nd Avenue, walking to catch the "F" train at 53rd Street. The agent showed me his i.d., asked me whether I used that route frequently; and did I observe anything re the assassination of the day before.*

*I remember one rush hour at 53rd Street that could more appropriately be described as the crush hour. Four or five trains had come and gone and I failed to get in. Eventually I entered, hands and feet every which-way. A woman began protesting that my briefcase was on her back. I counter-protested: I could move to nowhere. I was being pilloried. "The whole damn train is on my back. If it's only my small briefcase on your back, madam, you're lucky!"*

*I recall when New York was Democratic. Consistent with the big American way of doing things, there was that massive banner screaming at everyone to "KEEP THE MAYOR, MAYOR." And Mr. Koch boasted, "I will win in Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, Bronx and Staten Island." This was to say he would win in every borough. He did.*

*One day a blind man kept tapping his cane in manner I interpreted to mean he needed help. Everyone seemed afraid. Without intention to play hero, I gave him a hand and guided him to the upper level. I received a round of applause from some who must have wanted to assist the blind but were too petrified to offer.*

*I actually was lucky enough one day when a woman - driver (none-black), stopped her car without I requesting, and giving me a ride from Long Island University to Long Island Rail where I could catch the train.*

*I had a notion that most Caribbean folks resident in New York did not enjoy what I loved most about the city: a show on Broadway, or a game at Madison Square Garden. But they flocked to the latter for a calypso show that included Kitch and Arrow and Sparrow and Tobago Crusoe as M.C.*

*On that occasion Crusoe told an improbable story:*

*That woman wanted the priest to preside over a funeral for her desist pet dog. The padre was adamant; not even a little blessing. After all, he could not allow funerals to go to the dogs. The woman finally resigned saying that she had reserved a little US\$5000 for the funeral. She would go seek the blessing of the Anglican priest... There was an instant change of heart: "Come on! ... Why didn't you tell me it was a Catholic dog?"*

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