

OUR PATRIMONY: THROUGH THE PRISM OF OUR OWN EYES

By

Unity Labour Party

THE FRAME

On March 14, 2025, SVG again celebrates and commemorates National Heroes Day as it has done even before its formal declaration by way of the passage of the Order of National Heroes Act in February 2002 and the elevation of the Right Excellent Joseph Chatoyer, Paramount Chief of our Garifuna forebears as our first, and thus far our only, National Hero, on March 14, 2002.

This entry of Chatoyer, formally, into our pantheon of National Heroes is a vital part of our patrimony, which is understood to mean our heritage, our inheritance, our birthright, our historical riches, our legacy.

Two of SVG's revered poets Daniel Williams and Ellsworth "Shake" Keane, both deceased, encapsulate the wider frame of this discourse on our patrimony, our heritage. In his poem "We are the Cenotaphs", Daniel Williams teaches that:

*"We are all time
Yet only the future is ours to desecrate,
The present is the past,
And the past,
Our fathers' mischief."*

The past, the present, and the future are central to our lives, living, patrimony, and production. "Shake" Keane in his poem "Private Prayer" advises us on these matters, thus:

*"To understand
How the whole thing run
I have to ask my daughter and son.
"To understand the form
Of compromise I am
I must in my own voice ask
How the whole thing run.
"To ask
Why I don't dream
In the same language I live in
I must rise up*

*Among the syllables of my parents
In the land which I am
And form
A whole daughter and a whole son
Out of the compromise
Which I am.
“To understand history
I have to come home.”*

So, in coming home to ourselves, we must view ourselves through the prism of our own eyes. In this way we get to understand our history, “how the whole thing run”; we must interrogate our forebears and ask questions of each other and even our daughters and our sons to grasp the compromise which the fever of history has made us. In this quest, our central purpose is to “form a whole daughter and a whole son”, not perfect ones, out of the compromise that we are.

But in our arrival at the “compromise” which history has made us, we ought never to compromise our core affirmations. Central to this exercise is the Preamble of our nation’s Constitution: That we Vincentians “have affirmed that the Nation is founded on the belief in the supremacy of God and the freedom and dignity of man and woman.” Further, we desire that our society be so ordered as to express our recognition of the principles of democracy, free institutions, social justice and equality before the law. Moreover, we realise that the maintenance of human dignity pre-supposes safeguarding the right of privacy, of family life, of property, and the fostering of just economic rewards for labour. Our affirmation, desire, and realisation of these freedoms, principles, and ideals are enshrined and reflected in our nation’s foundation document (our Constitution) and our active governance.

OUR CARIBBEAN CIVILISATION

Our history, geography, migration, population mix, landscape, seascape, material production, culture, contemporary inter-connectedness, and more, have helped to shape our island or seaboard Caribbean civilisation and its valued Vincentian component. As our Prime Minister, Comrade Ralph, has oft-repeated that through the fever of history and the process of creolisation within our especial landscape and seascape, our Caribbean civilisation emerged and coalesced as a metaphoric symphony: We are the songs of the indigenous people (Callinago, Garifuna, Amerindian); we are the rhythm of Africa; we are the melody of Europe, the chords of Asia; and the home-grown lyrics of the Caribbean. Like all symphonies, dissonances do occur, but we have evolved formal institutions and informal mechanisms or codes to correct or mute these dissonances.

Our Caribbean civilisation has arrived at a mature realisation that although we are not better than anyone, nobody is better than us. Our ownership or permanent sense of belonging to our landscape and seascape grounds us with

an enduring social solidarity and uplifting values. We eschew a debilitating atomised individualism, inclusive of a rank selfishness. In us resides “the genius of our people”, that submerged, imprecise and invisible side that cements, uplifts, enhances production, and even defines us; oft-times it erupts in an undefined or ill-defined sense of celebration that we are “Second to None”. This genius of our people contains “hidden rationalities” of resources and abilities which are available to facilitate enhanced, inclusive prosperity; better living, quality cultural outpourings; and the embrace of the nobility and goodness of our heritage, our patrimony. These “hidden rationalities” resident in our people’s genius are the resources and abilities that are expressly hidden, scattered, badly or insufficiently utilised.

The further ennoblement of our Caribbean civilisation, inclusive of its magnificent Vincentian component, this making of “the whole daughter and the whole son” out of the compromise which history, in part, has made us, demands the construction of an appropriate, viable, and sustainable economic base. The ULP government is clear in its focus that this economic base requires the fulfillment of the quest to build a modern, competitive, many-sided, post-colonial economy that is at once local, national, regional, and global. This paradigm shift from the colonial/amended colonial economy which has existed for some 237 years (1763 to the declining days of the 20th century) must be effected for our civilisation’s enhancements; indeed that economic base is what the ULP government has been seeking to build for the last 24 years amidst all the external and internal challenges and contradictions.

AS CREOLISATION AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION ADVANCE

The process of creolisation and social integration in our Caribbean (including SVG) society has had hard roads to travel; and there are many more rivers to cross. But we have achieved success in moving from the social divisiveness and separateness in a culturally plural society, through heterogenous transitions towards a more or less integrated or homogenous society, though suffused with social stratification (class, status, power relations), but still solidified with a core of shared, uplifting values.

During the slave epoch (enslaved African bodies) of our Caribbean history, subsequent years of indentureship (Madeirans and East Indians) and the following decades well into the first 40 or so years of the 20th century, to a greater or lesser degree there was a culturally plural society in which the respective racial, ethnic or cultural sections had its own relatively distinct pattern of socio-cultural integration, kept together largely by colonialism’s coercion and imposed Anglo-Saxon verities. Over time, through the fever of history, inclusive of economic alterations, and the integrative force of human biology, the barriers of the plural society dissolved and a heterogeneity set in en-route to a more homogenous society in cultural terms but enwrapped nevertheless in a social

stratification based on class, status, and power though still overlaid with the ethnic/cultural scars of the earlier periods.

Our sociologists and writers of the creative imagination have repeatedly pronounced on this process of creolisation and the challenges therein. Our Nobel Prize winning poet Derek Walcott of St. Lucia highlighted one aspect of this in his poem “A Far Cry from Africa”:

*“I am who am poisoned with the blood of both,
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
I who have cursed
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
Betray them both, or give back what they give?”*

Similarly, in “The Schooner Flight”, Derek Walcott’s Shabine muses:

*“I’m just a red nigger who love the sea,
I had a sound colonial education,
I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,
and neither I’m nobody or I’m a nation.”*

This matter of identity and belonging becomes even more complicated among Caribbean people who migrate to North America and Britain. A powerful female poetic voice on these twin subjects comes from an educator and poet, Grace Nichols (a Guyanese who migrated to Britain and lives there), in her “Wherever I Hang”:

*“To tell you de truth
I don’t really know where I belong
“Yes, divided to de ocean
Divided to de bone
Wherever I hang me knickers — that’s my home.”*

SPECIFIC ULP INITIATIVES ON OUR PATRIMONY/HERITAGE

In the broad area of the defence and promotion of our patrimony and our uplifting legacy, the ULP government has taken the following, and other, initiatives since 2001:

- ✚ Passage of several legislative measures including those relating to National Heroes; the National Flag; National Coat of Arms and National Anthem; Emancipation Day (August 1st); Indian Arrival Day; Spiritual Baptists Recognition Day/National Holiday; Carnival Development Corporation;
- ✚ Repealing the law on the selling of our citizenship and passports;

- ✚ Revamping and strengthening the Department of Culture;
- ✚ Saving steelband music; reviving Panorama after 4 years of NDP neglect; building out Pan Against Crime; Pan in schools and the communities;
- ✚ Taking Carnival to an unprecedented higher level in all areas of cultural activity;
- ✚ Restoring Peace Memorial Hall as a cultural centre; developing other locales for cultural performances (Learning Resource Centres; auditorium at SVGCC; redeveloping Victoria Park for cultural events; current plans for cultural centres in North Central Windward and North Leeward;
- ✚ Enhancing markedly culture in schools (dance, drama, choral speaking, pan, music);
- ✚ Commissioning a comprehensive history of SVG;
- ✚ Building awareness of cultural contributions of Garifuna, Callinago, Africa, India, Europe to SVG; Balliceaux has been acquired by the State as part of our vital patrimony; the acquisition was effected on March 4, 2025;
- ✚ Leading the regional quest at CARICOM, for reparations for native genocide and the enslavement of African bodies; establishment of National Reparations Commission;
- ✚ Encouraging in practical terms young novelists, poets, and other authors;
- ✚ Building links with Africa and India globally; official visits to Africa by government ministers and officials; Prime Minister addressing the African Union on three occasions (in Ethiopia, Libya, Uganda); awards granted by African entities to Comrade Ralph; building the A3 Plus One (African 3 plus SVG) at the United Nations Security Council; work at the UN General Assembly with Africa, India, Latin America; Pro-Tempore Presidency of CELAC; Advancing Africa-CARICOM relations; Proposal advanced for the ABCD Commission (Africa, Brazil, Caribbean, Diaspora Commission); Prime Minister's visit to India; multiple visits to Africa: African and Indian leaders' visits to SVG;
- ✚ Welcoming Nigerian and other African medical students to SVG; Scholarships in nursing granted by SVG to students from Ghana.

- ✚ Educating the population on an ongoing basis of the history of SVG, the Caribbean, Africa, India, Europe, Latin America, and elsewhere.
- ✚ Encouraging the use of the UWI, Global Campus, SVG, to advance public education on culture and the arts; the government of SVG services the EC\$16 million debt of UWI to the Caribbean Development Bank for the Global Campus, SVG;
- ✚ Providing a high-quality passport for our citizens and refusing to sell our patrimony (passports and citizenship) to foreigners for the proverbial “mess of pottage”.

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