ERIC WILLIAMS MEMORIAL ADDRESS

Fifty Years of Jamaican Independence: A Manley Perspective

It is a great honor, but also a moment of huge personal sentimental pleasure for me to be invited here this evening for the annual Eric Williams Memorial Lecture, in the afterglow of our celebrations for Trinidad and Jamaica's fiftieth anniversary of our islands' independence last year.

My late father Michael said to me once, after many failed marriages, that he had finally stumbled upon the missing key to good parenting! Good heavens, I said, at last! I was by then over thirty and probably irretrievably ruined.

"Continuity!" he said with satisfaction.

I must commend the Central Bank – Governor Rambarran and Deputy Hilaire, Mrs. Nicole Crooks and Ms Charlene Ramdhanie and their team, and the infinitely patient, resourceful and lovable Betty McComie who I am stealing to take away with me - - for providing the necessary continuity in preserving the legacy of Eric William's with this annual lecture. Legacy is powerful - but it is also vulnerable and fragile like our children. It is our essential DNA and we must always know its intricate web of singular ingredients.

So I cannot begin without saying a few words about the remarkable job Erica has done to preserve her father's legacy not just with the lectures here and in Florida, but with The Eric William's Memorial Collection Research Library, Archives and Museum.

Over the years her untiring efforts have served as both an inspiration and a call to conscience when it comes to my own grandfather's legacy.

Erica always quotes the late academic, Edward Said:

“Memory is a powerful collective instrument for preserving identity. It is one of the main bulwarks against historical erasure. It is a means of resistance.”

How utterly moved I was two years ago when I first saw the permanent exhibition of Eric William’s papers and mementos at the library in St. Augustine. I felt so many memories flood over me. Federation had been like a magical kingdom when I was a child. I always wondered if Uncle Eric as I called him ever knew how its eventual demise broke my grandfather’s heart…his sense that he had failed history and that brave band of national pioneers who each in their own territory would go on to establish our new and separate futures.

I want to publicly thank Erica for doing this for Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean…for our history…for her beloved and precious father. He was a historian. He would have been so proud; well he was always proud of her!

As I looked through that wonderful room of commemoration that so evoked the life and work and time of Eric Williams, I was again reminded how necessary it is for a people to know their past.

We have been planning for ages to have a lasting memorial for Norman Manley. He has been named a National Hero and the old Palisados Airport in Kingston is named after him, the famous William Barthe head of NW displayed there, and yes there are highways and buildings named after him. In fact, only a few months ago the restoration of Norman Manley’s birthplace at Roxborough was completed, a moving site in the heart of Jamaica’s central mountains in Porus. All around its walls a pictorial and written account of his life is featured, but seeing what Erica had done with that quiet room I realized how much the flesh and bones of legacy reside in the evidence of a person’s thoughts as words.

As many of his letters and papers and photographs as we could collect are in the National archives. But in our case, after independence, when he was forced to sell our home, Norman Manley, who I knew as Pardi, burnt most of his private papers. That, I suspect, symbolized a far more profound heartbreak of personal

disappointment then either the loss of our home or elections or his papers might convey.

Many of the public documents that illustrate Norman Manley's most important years and achievements were shared both intellectually and politically in a common vision with your extraordinary leader, Eric Williams. In fact, my grandfather, Norman, my father, Michael, and Eric Williams shared a regional vision tailored by the measurements of possibility.

I shall leave here again with renewed determination to get the Manley Memorial Center – - which has been in the planning for decades -- to finally get underway.

I was only 15 when the Union Jack came down at midnight on August 2nd, 1962 and the Jamaican Flag went up. It was fifty years ago, and the ceremony took place at our new national stadium in Kingston amidst the wildest joy. The Jamaican flag, black green and gold, the flag that has become so famous last year through Jamaica's track and field victories at the London Olympics, rose up the flag-pole and unfurled in our island's typically turbulent sky.

It was just cause for jubilation.

I am of a transitional generation – the last to experience colonialism and the first to come of age in an independent Jamaica. In many ways my generation has the sense we were reborn with our country, sharing its initial fifty years, which in human years is likely more than half a lifetime, but in the long sweep of history is just the blink of an eye.

I lived at the heart of the struggle, but as a young, bemused witness, never part of it, and yet it all felt like a huge part of me. Please bear in mind that though I have lived close to history, I am not a historian; and though I lived embroiled in my family's politics, I am not a politician. And I am not here speaking to you as an academic.

I am a writer. So all I can offer as Jamaica turns 50 are the musings of an artist; a granddaughter's and daughter's biased view of the years.

I can't tell the story without speaking of the generations of my family who came before. What Jamaican story can be told without grandmothers and grandfathers? And in my case, they seem to have been so near the heart of our country's growth both politically and culturally.

And to gauge our progress, we must consider where we are coming from.

In the 1920's, long before I was born, when my grandparents Norman and Edna Manley - by the way, they were cousins…their mothers were sisters…disembarked from a banana boat in Jamaica – he a Jamaican returning from Oxford University and years as a soldier in the Great War, she -- a half-Jamaican born in Cornwall who studied art in London – then there was nothing complex about Jamaica.

It was a country that had been established in the most radical, artificial and ruthless manner. The 95% black population had been sold into slavery by rival tribes in Africa and brought through arguably the most brutal journey of history to provide the plantations in the Caribbean with a free workforce. The history of Jamaica -- the history of the other islands in the Caribbean -- will be forever characterized by the barbaric evil of slavery, the middle passage symbolizing a nightmare crossing whose waters like Lethe would wipe away all memory - family, country, history, language, religion and tradition.

Britain ruled through the small minority of colonial whites. The brown middle class, which emerged over time from the planters' rapes or indiscretions, were a product of these transplants. Most of these cross-bred "brownings" spent their lives imitating and ingratiating themselves to their white rulers and distancing themselves from the reality of their black roots.

There was little artistic or intellectual life in Jamaica at that time.

In school children learned Scottish songs about Scottish lakes and English nursery rhymes; they sang European protestant hymns. They were taught the King's English, the colonizer's religion, the colonizer's manners and rituals and habits. Paintings featured snow. Local writers used foreign themes, imagery of daffodils and lions in their prose and poetry.

"Where are the artists?" asked my astounded grandmother, Edna, herself a sculptor.

She searched for signs of an original voice from the Jamaican people who lived in this richly verdant and stunningly beautiful land, with its majestic mountains, self-willed rivers and waterfalls, its endless embrace of an energetic Caribbean Sea.

Any original voice was only there marginally, almost like a refugee, in small rituals like Pocomania or obeah, in Mento music or Kumina and Jonkanoo. But it wasn't considered authentic, just patronized as something distasteful or charming – a curiosity - but in the end, inconsequential.

I believe that art is inspired by a search for answers. It interprets. It commemorates. It reflects. It proposes. It defines. It protects. It protests. It searches for insight. It looks in and behind the mirror. It begins with the curious urge to investigate and experiment, like a child who touches all it sees, putting everything in its mouth. Curiosity leads to insight.

It isn't as though we have been there as a Jamaican or a Trinidadian people from the beginning of time. Ours was either an opportunist or forced migration. We were stranded societies all unhappy on unfamiliar shores -- both the planters and the slaves, and the indentured laborers, all longing for a motherland.

And in 1922 Jamaica was indeed an unhappy home.

Its society was stagnant; its people frozen in assumed roles. An atmosphere only good for the festering of history's sores. New generations born of slaves were later emancipated, inheriting a system that had long rooted out their voice. They remained stranded with no language or means or map of indigenous memory with which to go back to what became an eviscerated concept of home.

And of course -- no sense of self.

Curiosity and insight, the two great motivations of art, evolve from that quest for self. This was the denuded landscape that confronted my grandparents when they arrived in 1922.

After World War I, nationalistic intellectuals in colonial territories, unable to persuade European nations to give up power, concluded that they could achieve their liberation only through protest or confrontation. And in the case of the English speaking Caribbean, the memory of slavery, Garveyism, black pride, the back to Africa movement and in many cases the general resentment over the way black soldiers were mistreated by the mother-country during the war, fuelled anti-colonial agitation.

And then came 1938.

And the Jamaica sugar workers strike in Frome, which spread nationwide and became, for many, a flashpoint for nationalism. My grandparents were deeply embroiled in that struggle, one that would inspire the birth of a great democratic party in Jamaica, the Peoples National Party, a counterpart to the PNM, both in a sense part of the world movement against colonialism. At home something had stirred in the hearts of Jamaicans. Some quickening flame had spontaneously emerged.

I would arrive in their lives 10 years later, in 1950. By then the quest for national and cultural independence was well underway in my new home. This was all part of a search for our own voice. "What is Jamaica? Who are Jamaicans?" "Who am

I?" It is hard to believe this now with Jamaicans so self-assured and distinct, but these were the questions being posed. Art classes had begun at the Institute; Edna had already edited two volumes of Jamaican writing in Focus, our version of Trinidad's Beacon, Barbados' Bim, and British Guiana's Kyk Over Al. Though each effort was parochial, each was similar in its quest for its own nascent voice.

A whole new world was emerging around me. As a young child I was always told when my grandparents disappeared for days campaigning for various elections, that they were "building a nation". I imagined them like carpenters on a roof banging nails into shingles.

My home, Drumblair, became a microcosm of my country's early development. As a child I used to think of my grandparents each as an arm of this giant twin "being" whose job it was to create a nation.

On the front verandah my grandmother presided over the painters and sculptors, the living room she kept for the writers – near to the liquor cabinet. They were great fun, always getting drunk and falling in love. On the back verandah Pardi presided over the political nationalists. It seemed logical to me that politics and culture were evolving side by side.

The verandahs were also used as offices, each week the streams of Jamaica's poverty would inch their way in a queue around the wide circular driveway for help of one sort another. I remember in 1952 when hurricane Charlie hit, Edna's art studio took on a new role. She made it available to the homeless. Among them were many Rastafarians. After most of the victims had been relocated, the Rastafarians decided to stay on and lived with us for a while longer on Old Church Road.

They liked her studio in the long grass. They started to grow their own vegetables and ganja there beside her studio. In those days everyone who wasn't actually a Rasta or studying Rastafarianism, was terrified of Rastas who they considered crazy. My grandmother was not. She was fascinated by the fact that they chose

not to follow a religion brought over from Europe but opted instead for one from Africa. She loved Pocomania for the same reason and had already celebrated their cult in her art.

All the neighbors were complaining about this new cult that they feared – for their hair was long and they smoked the holy weed, which made their eyes red. My grandmother explained to me that they had found a religion that was their own, and which was a comfort for them. She said they needed to feel nurtured from the now silent roots of the past in Africa. She loved their creed of peace and she didn't see any harm in them smoking their holy weed... after all every British man had HIS holy pipe!!! Soon she was working up at the house and they were settled in the studio. We could hear them beating their drums some evenings, and they would bring vegetables they had grown, and carved walking sticks they had whittled for my grandparents.

They found my grandmother's sculpting tools in the studio which they used to create unusual carvings of their own. This made my grandmother really sentimental and she ceded the studio as long as they wanted it.

My grandmother's explanations seemed perfectly plausible to me as a young child; these were good neighbors. I wondered why all our other neighbors and my friends at school were so scared of them. I liked the fact my grandparents were inclusive rather than exclusive. In fact Edna, ever resourceful, eventually put on an exhibition of the Rasta's work in the studio and lots of curious people came and bought their work and I think she changed many hearts. We were very sad when one day she went down and found the studio all cleanly swept and tidy and empty. The Rastas had gone. And it was strange; the only thing they took with them was a sculpted head of Sampson with his long hair my grandmother had made many years before…they had separated the sleeping head on the log of wood from Delilah to keep him forever safe.

And when you think of it, Jamaica is now known for its music and its culture – even for its no problem laid back ganja smoking “cool” which evolved from the very band of dreads that so scared people all those 50 odd years ago!

So these were my earliest memories - - in their home Drumblair. That was life as I knew it.

Since then, in 50 years, short for the long march of history, we have come into our own in so many ways. Where many countries have failed in their goal of democracy, ours has thrived. In fact, in Jamaica’s case, sometimes the national argument becomes so virulent we need to tone it down.

Enough cannot be said for the pioneer courage, sensitivity and imagination it took to fight for the touchstone of our own culture, to reflect our landscape, our values and realities separate from that of England.

We had to work in their language as did you. But the language of Shakespeare is the language of Dylan Thomas in Wales and James Joyce in Ireland. It is suited to protest and self-definition. Look at the writers the Caribbean have produced!

And you really do have to stop to think and wonder about our history, to understand how we went from such an artistic emptiness in 1922 to such a fullness today -- 90 years later, 50 years after our Independence.

In Jamaica the work of the 40’s and 50’s was critical to this.

Our writing and fine arts, our music and theatre exploded onto the scene not just at home but around the world. It’s a wonderful feeling to see that light of recognition in a stranger’s eyes when I say I am a Jamaican. When we identify ourselves as people from the Caribbean.

Now they know who we are.

Trinidad and Tobago are very fortunate to have had the Doc to lead them into independence. He understood as no other, his island's unique culture and its national personality. And he was a man who was not afraid to question the status quo, an independent thinker for whom law and rules had to make sense. Reading Inward Hunger I was amazed by his tireless diligence in this regard.

In Jamaica, I believe it was our great misfortune not to have had Norman Manley at the helm as the shackles of colonialism were loosed and we threw open the doors to independence.

In those first years we seemed to be more interested in the trappings of the venture than in the visionary institute building required for this transition. That's my opinion anyway. So by the 70's we seemed independent only in name.

Socially, little had changed since 1962.

Although the 1970's government of my late father Michael has been harshly criticized for economic failures, I think relevant, critical and irreversible strides were made in that decade in an effort to define beyond the cultural and political, who we are socially. Without that, Independence doesn't mean a great deal.

Certainly the 1970's saw us as a third world leader calling for a new Economic World Order to level the terms of trade between the first and third world nations, a call that is probably just as relevant today.

We helped to fight apartheid politically, while Bob Marley's music spread the message of protest through Africa on the Afro-centric soul of Rastafari.

At home, the government began to make real strides towards a socially just society. We passed laws for free education all the way to university level to reduce illiteracy, opening doors of opportunity wide for a whole new generation of Jamaicans.

There were laws for equal pay for women and paid maternity leave, the abolition of the bastard act; a national minimum wage law with an 8-hour day, and worker's rights for domestic staff.

Even the language of labor changed to reflect a new respect for all workers. Until that time we still aped a cruelly classist society invented by the British – And a genuine effort was made to bridge the economic gap between the rich and the poor.

These things changed the face - if not all the facts - of Jamaica forever.

It was the decade that saw the Caricom agreement signed in 1973 by Barrow, Burnham, my father, and Eric Williams (on July 4th, my grandfather's birthday, a tribute Eric Williams would insist on), in an intensified effort to connect the islands again in an economic relationship of free trade. And let us not forget that one of the tenets of Caricom's charter was regional co-operation on foreign policy. A fact I will return to.

But of all the legacies of our colonial past, the economic one has been the hardest to break. Our economy was invented to supply England with our natural resources for their enormous enrichment.

In return we took our slim earnings and imported their goods, instead of investing in our agricultural and industrial possibilities at home. A win-win situation for England designed of course by the British.

One of the central tenets of that 70's government was self-sufficiency, and who knows how different history might look today if our economy hadn't been struck by the effects of the OPEC rise by 400 per cent of fuel costs in 1973.

Programs like operation land-lease made land available for small farmers, rural electrification, and the national housing trust, the electoral commission of

Jamaica that registers voters and vouchsafes the integrity of our electoral system.  And the list goes on.

We have slowly shed a lot of the bigotry and prejudice and bias inherited from colonialism. Sports analysts endlessly discuss the question of Jamaicans speed, our ability to move explosively. Is it in our genes or our disposition…our yams?

So we are halfway there. We know who we are, and we are fast.

But insight and speed are not enough.  There is one important aspect of nationhood, the cornerstone of independence that so far has eluded us. And that is the question of economic independence.

Economically we have not been successful. It's the things that I see when I go back to my country -- school houses debilitated -- education funding inadvertently now withdrawn -- people still carrying water in buckets. I read that we have accumulated over a trillion and half Jamaican dollar debt. A small band of millionaires account for a large portion of our wealth. Like the rest of the western world, our middle class is struggling, and the poor characterize our landscape in humiliating urban ghettos, hillside barrios and rural backwaters that tourists may find quaint, but which scream of frustrations of poverty and lack of opportunity. And so, on that count, let's not pretend. In my country, difficult challenges need to be faced, hard questions asked and solutions found. And now more than ever I think we must look to visionary economic thinking on a regional basis. We need to rethink our question of debt which can only plunge future generations into deeper poverty. We need to address this problem of debt as a region and approach our debtors with new ideas towards debt forgiveness which would give us the opportunity to re-develop vibrant economies. And I know I am speaking to the right audience, for Trinidad is the rich uncle, and right here in the Central Bank is a man with the vision and heart and practicality to lead this charge and make it happen. This will avert the chaos that our present course of debt in the Caribbean  is headed for. It can be done. It HAS to be done. And if we think as a

region instead of as units, it can be done. And this would be following the charter of Caricom that bears the signature of Eric Williams.

Fifty years later I applaud the wonder of that moment in 1962, when we broke free from hundreds of years of colonial rule. And yet …as I watched the ceremony with my grandparents all those years ago, I simply remember my heavy heart.

The years leading up to independence were, for me anyway, characterized by the excitement of the federal dream. Almost from the start, the idea of national sovereignty for the English speaking Caribbean had been set in the context of regionalism and a federation. Eric Williams had seen to that. My grandfather's trips to England were now interspersed with trips up and down the Caribbean as he shared his quest with his liked-minded counterpart in Trinidad.

Both men had risen to prominence not on money, but on education, graduating from Oxford. Manley studied law and Williams, history, and as such both brought valuable gifts as they shared their ideas and ideals and cobbled together solutions.

On federation I often hear that there were basic disagreements between them, mostly on the subjects of taxation and migration. There must have been. Jamaica and Trinidad had far different needs and expectations of the potential union. It wasn't till I read Williams' Inward Hunger, (what a sad thing that NW likewise didn't finish his memoir), and Reggie Dumas own forthcoming account that I realized how divergent the needs of the two territories were. Not only geography made that inevitable. My grandfather was dealing with opposition not only from Bustamante and the JLP but from within his own party. It seems to me it is to their credit that mutual respect allowed them to hammer out any sort of compromise at all. Despite the disappointing outcome, they maintained a significant respect for each other, hence the date of Caricom.

Looking back to those early Drumblair years, I don't know what they discussed in the dining room around the large mahogany table that Pardi had appropriated for his federal meetings with the visiting leaders like Eric Williams, Grantley Adams, Vere Byrd, Bradshaw and Marryshow. The first time I met the great Uncle Eric, he was seated at our table beside Grantley. I was a mischievous child, and I crawled under the table and tied the shoelaces of these two leaders together, quite unaware of either its symbolism or what in fact was taking place at the table above me. My grandfather was particularly amused because he DID know what was going on, and Eric and Grantley certainly weren't in a mood to be tied to each other!

We live in a world of celebrity now, where personal fame is a goal, and public service too often a means to a personal end. Perhaps, for all our modern griping, life has become easier for us, and those things past heroes like Williams and Manley fought for, are now taken for granted. But in those days, fighting for independence, for our right to our island, our right to our own traditions and religion and cultures, our right to an educational system that reflects our values and goals, our right to something as natural to us now as our vote – these things were hard-won freedoms that wise and selfless men, men who could have amassed vast personal fortunes with their brains and aptitude, made huge personal sacrifice to secure for us.

I remember Pardi explaining federation to me -- as though he was introducing me to my family. I was an only child in Drumblair, so the thought of all these brother and sister islands was indeed a romantic notion.

When he showed me this necklace of islands on the hurricane map, the same map on which we had tracked Charley, I was fascinated by their names, the saints Vincent and Lucia and Kitts (my grandmother loved to say Kittitians, but always got stumped by what to call those from Tobago...Tobagons or Tobagonians?) Montserrat, Trinidad, Antigua, Grenada, Dominica…and then the larger cousins with their French names, their Spanish and Dutch names, Cuba,

Haiti, Guadeloupe, Martinique Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Aruba. They all sounded like music to me, exotic and glamorous. He made this map a magical kingdom.

But for Jamaica this feeling of family didn't exist. We are too far away and separated by geography. Divide and rule - the English had kept us mostly ignorant of each other. Although history had made us natural siblings with bonds of common experience, it was easy to stir suspicion and negativity in the national psyche.

I have often wondered whether being introduced to an idea through simple family affection and loyalty as I was, is not an easier road to a sense of regional belonging than all the arguments about politics and economics. I mean if you think of those who want to marry, isn't love the connection first? But I guess in the case of federation, it was a marriage without a pre-nuptial agreement. And any form of future union will have to be pragmatic.

So--I watched those celebrations with very mixed feelings, for the flag that I had hoped to see inching its arduous way up that flagpole was lying in a cupboard at my home Drumblair. It was a blue flag with white strips of undulating water and an orange/yellow sun at its center. It was the flag of the West Indies Federation.

But the West Indies Federation, only two years old, had just been dismantled, and with it my grandfather's dream.  Independence felt to me like a consolation prize.

My grandfather had lost two national elections and it seemed to me so wrong that the man who was my hero and who had written our country's new constitution would not be leading the nation into its independence. To me, it *was* PERSONAL.

Today few young people realize that for two years before independence, the islands of the English speaking Caribbean were in fact federated in a full political

union, with the federal headquarters in Trinidad, and Grantley Adams from Barbados as its first Prime Minister.

We had a federal flag that flew over the government buildings.

After and despite all the conferences and commissions over a hundred years trying to envisage a future for the region, we were now at the point of becoming an entity in the United Nations. May 31st 1962 was the scheduled date of our federation's independence.

The story of Jamaica's referendum is history. Eric William's famous arithmetic was painfully wise and true. March 31st 1962 would become, instead, the dark day of federation's formal demise.

Reggie Dumas describes with haunting practicality how, after the federal government had been dismantled, the actors on that stage made the confused transition back to their then unknown and separate futures.

I would like to pause here to read a brief piece that I wrote in my book Drumblair that best describes my own sense of aftermath late that evening when the results had come in from the old Rediffusion set at our home.

Reading… (Reading from Drumblair - a short memory about the night NW lost the referendum.)

Perhaps I am just as much a Pollyanna dreamer as the doomed Friends of the Federation who endeavored for a while to keep hope of integration alive after the union had ended.

But the way I see it, the federation had not had time to establish a track record. It hadn't had time to succeed or fail. In Jamaica, the opposition had been able to play on the fears of people of a larger, at the time resource-richer, island who believed they would be subsidizing the smaller islands of the region.

Our two great joint ventures, the University of the West Indies - which Eric Williams played such a huge role in conceiving - and the West Indies cricket team, remain our flagships and remind us what we can achieve together. Perhaps our Central banks will get together and be able to influence the political will to find strength through a regional voice to solve the problems which, call them what we will, will ultimately be regional problems.

But, you know, here is a great reason for hope…the other day I visited our Jamaican Prime Minister – we call her Sister P - in her office in Kingston. I was intrigued to see a steel pan in the far corner of the room. I asked her about its presence there.

"Rachel," she said excitedly, "When everyone is giving me trouble, I go over there and I take those two little hammers and I let go a rumble in the office so every single soul in here can hear. That's what I do!"

A Trinidadian solution to a Jamaican problem. That's what integration was always meant to be about. So as I say, maybe there is big reason for hope now.

Just last August, look at the array of islanders on that field at the London Olympics. Can you imagine if we were all wearing Caribbean colors! The Caribbean would have been awash with gold and silver, just like Columbus and the conquistadors had hoped!

But perhaps an even stronger argument for a federation lies in the example of 1982 when, as separate entities, we were faced with the conundrum in Grenada that led to the US invasion.

No matter what side of the ideological dispute you came down on, I believe Grenada happened because it was a tiny island in trouble and alone.

Had Grenada been part of a federation, maybe a solution could have been found to the political crisis, and the bloody events and subsequent US invasion could have been avoided. If you blamed Cuba's influence, you have to consider Cuba wouldn't have had that influence if Grenada had its place in a federated family of our islands. If you blamed America for arriving opportunistically or not, I believe the United States would NOT have arrived if we were a federated region.

But there is reason more compelling than economics or trade, foreign policy and regional defense, the centralizing and economizing of government. There will always be parochial concerns – then they were questions of taxation and migration, and there would certainly be a multitude more now.

That subterranean urge that invisibly links the archipelago behind the years and beneath the seas -- it is simply that instinct of family. I feel it as I walk into a room here or in Barbados or Montserrat. Even in Bermuda and Belize. We are family.

If not always blood, history has made siblings of us. Why would we resist a union so compelling? A union in which the laws of loyalty and common cause, of giving and taking, of guarding each other's backs, of being not as weak as our weakest link, but as strong and as wise and as successful as the best of our tribe. We would face the world strengthened by our various contributions, regardless of size, knowing that together, as family, the glory as well as the failures and sorrows are shared.

CARICOM has survived for over 30 years, making it one of longest integration movements among developing countries. An achievement indeed.

It has not necessarily met the expectations of the founding fathers, but it survives despite limited resources while grappling with the wide range of social and economic issues which bedevil so many countries today.

The EC dollar has proved itself to be the most stable dollar in the region and it has been so for fifty years. It has made some progress in the area of functional co-operation, especially in the area of health and education. It has rolled out one of the more successful HIV-AIDS programs globally. Freedom of movement is now supposed to be in place and a regional assembly is to begin shortly. So it is economic, social and now to some extent even political.

Although we are sailing through frustratingly choppy waters at the moment - governments preoccupied with critical problems arising out of the global economic crisis - there is so much at stake to compel us to build on what we have.

Beyond a global economy, there are modern concerns of climate change, international crime, food security, health and global security that make our unity imperative to our survival. Big as the biggest of us thinks we are, we can *no longer* go it alone. Call me delusional, but I have to believe a generation will yet emerge again who will set aside island machismo or personal ambition, putting our region's fate ahead of our sole selves.

Over the years I have held onto this dream. And maybe at last we are seeing a first move. In an email exchange with Brian Meeks late last year, he wrote about the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, all members of CARICOM…. deciding to move towards deeper integration. He told me how they were in the process of putting in place their new treaty, moving towards a new Federal arrangement.

And I quote Brian: "The irony is that the 'little eight' who suffered the most from the break-up of Federation, may, if their new efforts are successful, set the example and lead the rest of us back into a new era of integration beyond the limitations of CARICOM."

I suspect both Brian and I are to varying degrees romantic optimists in this, but someone has to be. That's what keeps the flame.

In closing this evening, I am reminded of a poem by Martin Carter:

*My course is set, I give my sail the wind*

*To navigate the islands of the stars*

*Till I collect my scattered skeleton*

*Till I collect"*

Maybe one day we will… and in so doing, retrieve the dreams of Eric Williams and Norman Manley.