

COVID OPPORTUNITY - RECOVERING THE SOUL OF OUR NATION-BUILDING PROJECT

*"Without culture, and the relative freedom it implies,
Society even when perfect, is but a jungle.
This is why all authentic creation is a gift to the future."
- Albert Camus*

Over the past 14 months, COVID restricted our socialisation and at the same time allowed many to get back in touch with our own space as escaping the borders to jaunt abroad became restricted by global restriction.

Many more families have been able to take a drive in the countryside or to places much less travelled allowing for exploration of several locations that are repositories of historical record and natural wonders.

We have come to appreciate more deeply our 'land of fairest beauty' hopefully.

Opportunities for similar expeditions have become more prominent with the online 'know your country' style virtual journeys facilitated by sites like the Angelo Bissessarsingh Virtual Museum of TT FB page or just being reminded by the posts of cultural activists like Rubadiri Victor's recent reminder of the Artists Coalition tadjah project display at the National Museum.

This week, I happened to have a chat with a school friend who lives and spreads Trini culture in Denmark. We shared the days of the last train rides to Tunapuna when we began high school in the capital in 1967.

As we chatted, we had to lament how a void has been allowed to develop in our collective memory as a society.

He mentioned that he saw plaques on street corners in London honouring Winnifred Atwell, but there is nowhere in Tunapuna (our hometown) named after or recording the history of this world-renowned piano virtuoso who came from this community.

He also shared his experience of lining up in Vienna, climbing a hot staircase among an enthusiastic crowd and paying \$5US to enter a little room to see where Mozart resided.

But sadly, we have no such 'attractions' for ourselves and tourists to visit the birthplaces or living spaces of our own cultural and other icons and achievers.

Instead, the home of CLR James, for example, another Tunapuna gift to the nation, crumbles in dereliction and neglect. Similarly, the birthplaces or residents of Sir Learie Constantine, Choy Aming, MP Alladin, A A Thompson, Lloyd Best and so many others just in this town remain obscure to the collective awareness of its present generations.

The failure to record our own history or to even read and share it when efforts are made to document it is so sad.

This virtual museum and the chronicling work of Angelo Bissessarsingh and so many others cannot be overstated in its importance to the formation of a real Trinbagonian nation and People with our distinct personality.

Perhaps one benefit of COVID is that it has slowed us down and allowed us to explore this collective past and present.

This moment of reflection and contemplation, its potential value to our future is threatened by those consumed by their fixation with office and power and self-serving agendas or perpetuating the narrative that Trinis are only about fete and lime.

In 1962, at a moment of great enthusiasm for almost every man, woman and child on our twin islands as the moment of taking responsibility for our own future and destiny had arrived.

In that moment, the appearance and work of Pegasus, founded by Geddes Granger (later Makandal Daaga) was “an attempt to move beyond the formalities and trappings of Independence. The recognition that the country “*was not Independent in spirit*” and the desire to create “*Nationhood driven by inner spirit*” motivated its founding”. (**Pegasus and the Making of Project Independence**, Clyde Weatherhead, 2020, ISBN: 9798647268457)

Let us, those in the family of Angelo’s virtual museum, in the Artists Coalition and among all concerned with the National Purpose and expanding a positive and uplifting culture to recapture the notion of infusing spirit in our Independence, let us all do our best to not allow this moment to go to waste.

Let us think about how we can continue this sharing once we are again to interact up close and personal.

Let us develop what kinds of activities and interactions we can make possible to facilitate this introspection to be a contribution to our shared future and create our Trinbago, the possibilities of which we were reawakened to by the energising and motivating strivings of the ’70 Revo.

Let us all embrace this fortuitous opportunity to get back on the road of “*the unshakeable belief that our choice of destiny is our own: the quest to liberate ourselves out of enslavement to inherited cultural divisiveness into a seamless aesthetic mosaic brought to life in the spirit of one nation, one people, one destiny ... from whence cometh our dream of Independence and Nationhood: aspiring and achieving together*” – (Foreword, **Pegasus and the Making of Project Independence**, op cit).

COVID is a paradox which in its confining restriction has provided us the liberating opportunity to move beyond the definitions, cultural and otherwise, of ourselves imposed on us and to define ourselves for ourselves.

Clyde Weatherhead

A Citizen Fighting for the
Realisation of Trinbago.

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