Caribbean Education and the Third Millenium

Opening Remarks by ECCB Governor
K Dwight Venner

In introducing Professor Rex Nettleford to you tonight as the first presenter of the Sir Arthur Lewis Memorial Lecture, I am profoundly struck, in fact almost awestruck, by the hands of FATE in the affairs of men.

Twenty-five years ago, responding to the thoughts of Sir Arthur Lewis as expressed in his booklet entitled The Agony of the Eight, a group of students and lecturers at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, came together to form the Windwards-Leewards Students Association, with the objective of bringing us all closer together on the campus and putting forward the view of Sir Arthur that good governance and the economic development of these islands were contingent upon political and economic union.

We appealed to the then Director of Extra Mural Studies. Rex Nettleford, for support through his outreach programmes. Nettleford did not hesitate and we were given assistance to travel to each island from St Kitts in the north to Grenada in the south so that we could interview and interact with a broad cross section of the communities in the day and give public lectures in the evenings to make the case for Integration.

Professor Nettleford went even further by publishing the papers written for the project in a special edition of Caribbean Quarterly, Volume 18 No 2, June 1972 entitled **Essays on Caribbean Unity - The Case for Integration of the Windward and Leeward Islands.**

There were three members who formed the team which made that historic tour twenty-five years ago and who are present in this audience. They are:-

1. The Prime Minister of St Lucia -Dr The Hon Vaughan Lewis
2. The Director General of the OECS -Mr Swinburne Lestrade
3. The Governor of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank

It is therefore with great pleasure that I introduce our colleague, friend and mentor, Rex Nettleford, who has supported our intellectual and integration efforts over the years and who is largely responsible for us being here, as were the ideas and policies of the man who inspired us and who we honour tonight.

THE HON REX NETTLEFORD -OM

Caribbean Education and the Third Millenium

Lecture

By Professor Rex Nettleford

I have deliberately chosen the theme of education for this first Arthur Lewis Memorial Lecture because we are too willing to forget that this eminent economist and Nobel Laureate was in the final analysis a great educator, a great teacher and guru to his people both in the Caribbean and the Third World. For he perceived their future and any hope of redemption to rest firmly on the exercise of their intellect and their imagination.

He left the metropole to give service to this region through his work as Principal of the then University College of the West Indies and later as the first Vice Chancellor of an independent University of the West Indies. To this great institution of growth and development he brought a vision, the energy and sanity of which still serve us, as is evident in the University's recent attempts to re-engineer itself for relevance and continuing usefulness in the 21st century. Thirty-five years ago Sir Arthur saw the university as a prime agent of service underpinning its intellectual pursuits in the unending quest for knowledge.

If the university is built in the bush, and isolates itself as a self-contained community, he said in 1961, *it misses a tremendous opportunity of service. The opportunities for participation are immense: membership of public boards and committees; contribution to professional societies; guidance of teacher training colleges; availability for consultation by administrators and business people; membership of musical, dramatic, artistic and other groups, journalism and radio work, adult education classes.*

The Arthur Lewis vision, it is safe to say, lives on and has found re-enforcement in the Strategic Plan recently devised for the new University of the West Indies for the period 1997 to 2002. The UWI now seeks to enhance its *role as a development resource for the peoples and the countries of the region through training more of the young people in disciplines which are critical for achieving international competitiveness [and] by upgrading the professional capability of the graduates in the workforce through offering opportunities for postgraduate training and Continuing Education.* In the spirit of Sir Arthur the University, under the leadership of Sir Alister McIntyre, has downsized itself from an elitist indulgence precariously perched at the apex of a stolid solid hierarchy to a hub in a network of tertiary institutions. The Sir Arthur Lewis Community College in St Lucia, as it turns out, has been a flagship entity in this new network of higher education facilities designed to meet the changing need of a complex and demanding region.

Today, the vision of a future dedicated to the development of education towards a more resourceful, constructive and creatively dynamic Caribbean is regarded as a given in the region. It is now universally understood that education is the key to economic success. For Sir Arthur it was the key, as well, to cultural certitude (a **sine qua non** for a civilised society) and to community development. It is therefore easy to assume, and I so do, that

Caribbean Education and the Third Millenium

anyone endowed with a natural love of learning in what has been described as a knowledge culture would equally want to address the question "**learning to what end**".

That question continues to plague us all who are in the field; and the University of the West Indies, as part of a groping but determined tertiary sector, has purposefully set out to try and make sense of the contradictions and complexities that girdle its remit. For while we can boast that *every public service, all the independent professions, all the industrial, agricultural and commercial sectors of the region have been irrevocably transformed by the work of the University of the West Indies over the past four decades,* [Lawrence Carrington -*Challenges for a Regional University in a Zone of Uneven Development,* unpublished 1995], the uncertainty of where we go and how we make the journey down the decade into the third millennium continues to haunt us.

It continues to haunt all the political directorates of the region as well, despite their expressed commitment to education as a priority instrument in development strategy, both as medium and long-term initiatives. The importance of trained human resources to the process has long been recognised by both State and Church, from colonial times to this day, resulting in the relatively peaceful and in some countries even an imaginative transition from dependency to the present state of existence predicated on the assumption that we West Indians can be the creators of our own destiny.

Allocations to education as a percentage of national budgets throughout the region have been quite respectable even if deemed inadequate. Barbados has over the very recent past headed the list with some 17-18 per cent equalled by St Lucia and St Vincent and the Grenadines, with Grenada and Trinidad and Tobago at the lower end at 12 and 10 per cent respectively. Jamaica has itself declined from a high of 18 per cent in the memorable past to 10 per cent for the past year; and in all cases extra-budgetary funds have been attracted from international lending agencies to invest in the human resource which has progressively taken over the central focus of the development strategy. One must warn about these figures, however, since they have to be seen in some cases against both the massive debt-service burdens that eat into every dollar earned and the new cost sharing mechanisms which have served to fill the gap. Jamaica was able to gross about $400m from school fees in a year for direct recurrent expenditure in the education sector.

Primary schools have expanded since Independence and the tertiary sector, including the UWI, has taken on a new dynamic over the past decade, mirroring developments elsewhere in the region where the thirst for education and training, albeit with eyes glued on instant job placement in the short term, has had such institutions bursting at the seams. In its 1992 ten year development plan, the UWI's targets for access by students have already been reached long before the projected date. And in the field of continuing studies, in two territories alone, enrolment of some 30,000 working people pursuing courses on a part-time basis lasting from six months to two years, has long been realised.

The empowerment of women through the educational system is also a fact of life. The University campuses recorded over 60 per cent of graduands as women each year and a

higher percentage is to be found among part-timers in the outreach programmes of the University. The rest of the tertiary sector reflects this new gender differential, giving many people grave concerns about the future of the male population in a society that has inherited a world-view that turns on a tenacious commitment to the control management and direction of life by men. Yet even the crassest feminist among us would prefer balance to an inversion of old-fashioned hegemony in favour of one gender as against another.

Way back in 1963 a report on common entrance performance in Jamaica prompted the following comment:

Although much progress has been made in recent years, it is still largely true to say that success in the primary school depends upon qualities such as rote memory, docility and industry rather than originality, imagination and initiative. The child does not win favour by having original ideas or by asking intelligent questions but by keeping quiet and remembering what is told. It may well be that girls are much more likely to survive the authoritarian regime than the more spirited and less tractable boys, especially in a situation where boys are not compelled to adjust to classroom conditions, but can in the last analysis escape the problem by simply dropping out of school altogether. Thus it may be that the atmosphere in primary school classrooms induces boys to withdraw at a more rapid rate than girls. [Douglas Manley *Mental Ability in Jamaica,* Social and Economic Studies, Vol. 12, No 1, p. 69].

To suggest that girls are more psychologically attuned to authoritarianism and regimentation cannot be the whole explanation for things as they have developed. Today one can report without contradiction that women have *turned the tables on men* not only in the University but in *CXC passes and even in winning places in the Common Entrance Examinations. **[The Sunday Observer].***

Professor Errol Miller has other views about the marginalisation of the male. They turn on structural shifts in the teaching profession which has progressively favoured the training of women over men since the turn of the 20th century and on the tendency of parents to favour education for their girl offspring rather than their boys. The discourse is apace and should not detain us here.

What is obvious is that by whatever gender the cards are played, education is required of output and throughput - concentrated, resourceful and relative human beings to face the harsh realities of existence by small-island developing communities in a world said to be increasingly globalised in the face of the communications technology revolution and the parallel rapid changes in world views and world order.

Policy options for governments, still the major players in the provision of infrastructural imperatives for the shaping of their individual societies, are nowhere as many as they were once felt to be. And the search for new, appropriate and viable modalities for ensuring easy access by the mass of the population to education, the one tool that can

guarantee the individual safe passage into life and living, is understandably intense at this stage.

The cry for an articulated educational system that can take the West Indian from cradle to grave, affording different points of entry and reentry and with undiminished capacities for coping with the vicissitudes of human existence, is a necessary and timely one. Such vicissitudes, governments and governed both need to remember, constitute not only the acquisition of a job, but also the sustaining of employment in times when rapid change in the post industrial age will guarantee security and tenure to less and less people who may wish to hold the same job or remain on the same career path from the time of entry into the workforce up to the time of retirement. That is why any government policy which ties education and training narrowly to one specific job is likely to be short-sighted and counter- productive in the medium and long term. The preparation of the young to be able to think his/her way through changed and changing circumstances within a given skill-area and beyond, can be the only meaningful aim of education preparation.

Vocational schools teaching auto-mechanics, for example, must take the learner beyond moving nuts and bolts to his/her knowing why he/she removes, adjusts, replaces this or that nut or bolt, the 'know-why'. Otherwise, the region will merely continue to produce the hewers of wood and drawers of water which West Indian colonies were required exclusively to produce in another dispensation against which the region struggled to liberate itself. Independence with the lower case "i" is integral to Independence with the capital "I". We ignore this point at our peril.

The universities of the region (including the UWI) are similarly endangered, and are likely to be of little use to the region in the next fifty years if they ignore the implications of such short-sightedness. The University dare not yield to the temptation of churning out Management Studies graduates bereft of knowledge of the deeper forces of Caribbean society or of any society, for that matter. For such forces take on ideal, form and purpose precisely at the point where people spend most of their waking lives - the workplace. The training of the engineer must produce more than a technical wonder. He or she ends up, after all, "engineering" situations involving human beings. Their emotional quotient may indeed figure more than the IQ expected in any given set of circumstances. This is as true for the civil engineer called upon to construct a bridge on terrain where the soil structure is unsuitable but which must be erected at a certain spot because of the political interests of a particular MP who must deliver to his constituents or lose the next elections. The trained lawyer without an inkling of jurisprudence or of the sociological/political/cultural realities of his arena of practice (the wider society) is likely to become the jackass many say the law already is. The education of such key skills for Caribbean development requires more than other specialised technical training.

Jamaica's College of Arts Science and Technology has been transformed into the University of Technology but it is the hope of many who understand the challenges of education that the " A " in the old CAST will not be abandoned in the transformation.

Caribbean Education and the Third Millenium

The region will have to join other forces in the world and look at education in ways that make sense for the foreseeable future.

The contradictions of a world in transition, after all, are merely echoing the contradictions that the Caribbean has always faced ever since the beginning of encounters in the Americas of myriad souls from diverse cultures on foreign soil. The region's responses over time have unfortunately been ignored in favour of those demanded by colonial dictates which persist under different guises to this day. The Commonwealth Caribbean is more than well placed and equipped to contribute to the global discourse on the role of education in human development in preparation for the 21st century. Yet in their self-doubt and lack of confidence, Caribbean people still tend to follow what the North Atlantic has done, is doing or is likely to do, ending up usually a generation behind erstwhile masters in their own explorations and experimentations in the field.

Yet, closer examination of the Commonwealth Caribbean's experience and contemporary reality, especially of the problematique with respect to the development of the region's human resources through the educational process, confirms that the search for appropriate modalities must be projected against the background of the demands of *economic growth and the aim of sustainable development, the transition from individual isolated membership of a society to democratic collective participation, and the relationship between the grass-roots community and world society* [DeLors Commission Report, UNESCO, 1995].

The notion of *learning throughout life* is very germane to the topic of the presumed gap that exists between educational development and cultural reality, which is itself a lifelong reality, between education and the community, the cradle of culture, this lifelong reality! It is a topic that Sir Arthur Lewis understood to be significant to development of the human resource. In an address to a convocation at the Cave Hill Campus of the UWI did he not declare that *A Society without the creative arts is a cultural desert?* And with avuncular wisdom he added with feigned 'matter-of-factness', *I would commend to our statesmen that they put a lot more money into the creative arts departments of our secondary schools*.

But before addressing this directly it is important to stress that as a key to equality of opportunity, this concept of *education throughout life* depends on the realisation that the process involves a range of actors who must function in the fullest understanding of what is expected of them in the process. There are first of all the **parents** of the child. Then there are the **teachers**. Throughout youth and adulthood the arena of learning takes different forms: at school, in community life, through the family, via leisure pursuits, in associations and civic life. This in itself is a complex configuration within which each actor must locate himself/herself, building on the four pillars of the learning process.

A range of available information technologies as part of the communication revolution must also be taken into account, from the simple audio-cassette and transistor radio

through distance education teleconferencing mechanisms to CD-rom, E-mail and Internet.

But none of this can or will replace the teacher who must continue to play a crucial role in maintaining the vigour of the system of learning and deliver the central message that must be forged *concerning the type of citizens a society wishes to educate or to ensure the continuity and progress of knowledge* [DeLors Commission Report, UNESCO 1995]. Teachers, then, should not only be well paid, they should also be well educated throughout their professional working lives.

It has to be understood, as well, that whatever the constraints faced by nations in the region, whatever the seductive sounds coming from the free market camp, it remains the *responsibility of public policy, of government, to propose the direction to be followed, and to enlist the greatest possible number of actors in order to succeed in a strategy that masters change, both deliberate and inevitable* [DeLors Commission Report, UNESCO 1995].

As I have said elsewhere, this kind of leadership by the State does not mean a monopoly of the functions employed to move education forward; least of all for the field to be hijacked by Ministries of Education, served by unimaginative pedestrian technocrats who forget that there are a certain number of human values that need to be activated and kept alive in human-scale communities like ours - values such as the dignity and responsibility of the individual, the freely chosen participation of individuals in communities, equality of opportunity and the search for a common good and cultural certitude, all of which can be realised through the field of education.

It is here that a sense of daring is badly needed in any plan or strategy for the way forward. All the actors in the system need to be more alert in the creative response to the challenge that is already upon the region. The factor of culture and its role in education has apparently given bureaucrats and teachers more difficulty than it has the very politicians who are frequently bashed and often unjustifiably vilified for being philistine and myopic.

The neglect of culture as integral to education persists among many in the public bureaucracy and the teaching profession of the region, despite some of the clearest evidence that many of the people who have had anything of value to say about this region are those who have exercised their creative imagination to make sense of the Caribbean and human historical experience and existential reality.

The names of Bob Marley, Jimmy Cliff and Peter Tosh, of the Mighty Sparrow, David Rudder, and Lord Kitchener; of Louise Bennett, Mutabaruka and other such public poets; of George Lamming, Samuel Selvon, Vidia Naipaul, Lorna Goodison, Merle Collins, Kamau Brathwaite and Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott, all come easily to mind.

Caribbean Education and the Third Millenium

The educational system, with the help of those who are charged with directing it (especially the governments), should take full responsibility for the promotion of dynamic interaction and co-ordination between artistic creativity and other policy domains such as education itself, working life, urban planning, and industrial and economic development strategies for the benefit of all. Annual National Economic Reports should stop listing culture in the 'non-productive category'.

A child learns the meaning of process and is better able to relate outcome to effort, if he is encouraged to create a poem or a song, act in a play, make up a dance, sing in a choir or play an instrument in an orchestra, as a normal part of his/her education. The discipline that underpins the mastery of the craft, the demands made on continuous recreation of effort and application, the challenges encountered on the journey to excellence, the habits of realistic self-evaluation, the capacity for dealing with diversity and the dilemma of difference whether in the performing arts or in key branches of sports (themselves belonging to the family of performing arts) constitute excellent preparation for **learning to be** (the stuff of ontology), **learning to know** (the substance of epistemology), and **learning to live together** (the essence of the creative diversity which characterises Caribbean existence and is about to overtake the entire world) - all of which must serve the individual throughout his or her life.

It is the opportunity to exercise the creative imagination from an early age that is likely to ensure safe passage throughout that life. And the educational process in all its modes - formal and informal, curricular and co-curricular - provides an excellent channel through which all this can flow. Adaptability, flexibility, ready code- switching, innovativeness, and capacity to deal with the complexity of complexity are all attributes of the creative imagination which provide yet another route to cognition other than the Cartesian rationalism we have inherited. For if we are because we think, we also exist because we feel.

The separation of these two states of experience into irreconcilable wholes is part of the binary syndrome of a tradition of intellectual discourse and epistemological reductionism which constitute an expensive luxury for people in the Caribbean who have survived these past five hundred years on the basis of their creative diversity and a multi-sourced reality in everyday living.

Caribbean educators need to take a look at the long haul of human history and locate the region where it appropriately belongs - that is on the trajectory of human "becoming" through social interaction.

From the semi-schooled geniuses among the popular musicians to the poets and novelists of what some would mistakenly call high culture, one will find that they are "children of the community" where the sense of coordinated social action is informed by integrated modes of operation involving school, workplace, church, recreational programmes seen as leisure-time gap-fillers or as the first step on a hobby-to-income trajectory. To a former generation which has left a rich legacy for those now growing up and those yet

unborn, the school and the school-teacher were essential to their socialisation and their life-long learning. But so was the "community" lending the kind of support - psychic and material which are essential to growth and development. Teachers were of course part of the community - moving spirits, icons when they were old enough to be guides and care-givers along with parents and the extended family that every village or urban neighbourhood became. The strengthening of bonds between education and community makes eminent sense for it speaks to the basics of civil society rooted in trust, mutual respect, the harnessing of collective will and the fostering of that sense of fellowship without which sociability and capacity to join forces to achieve greater ends for the good of all cannot be attained. An educational system which does not inculcate this, which does not foster this, is not likely to be of much use.

That this has to be done in large measure by the fellowship of professionals taking leadership in cementing the partnership that must exist between the State (political directorate and bureaucrats), the private sector, professional educators out in the field and the community, is impatient of debate. It is a real challenge for the entire teaching profession at whatever level of the educational system it functions.

Another challenge is the strengthening and rationalisation of the institutional and operational networking mechanisms between the different levels and categories of educational delivery systems so that the young of this country can become the true beneficiaries of an articulated system of education by the end of this century. From basic school to university through primary, secondary, post-secondary, one should be able to climb each mountain, ford every stream, follow every rainbow, till he/she finds that dream. It is still true to say that if one drops out of the system at 14 years of age, it is difficult to re-enter. Outward migration once helped, and still does, but foreign doors are being shut even while foreign cultures penetrate us via the galactic spheres.

Yet another challenge is for the entire profession to put more energy to their own continuing education through continuous upgrading with a view to coping with the changes in what has been described as the knowledge economy. What you teach, how you teach, the impact of both on the individual student, on yourself as teacher and on the wider society all fall into the remit of intellectual renewal. But the honing of sense and sensibility is of no less importance. Failing to appreciate this is likely to leave teachers trailing their students in the grasp of the realities in the wider world which for many is increasingly meaning the streets and what is picked up through the sound bytes of foreign radio and television, especially the latter. An understanding of the social milieu and its tendency to nuanced shifts is essential.

The lines between urban and rural are becoming even more blurred - communications technology, if not ease of mobility via motorised transport and better roads, has seen to this. The gang leader on the corner may well be the latter-day urban substitute for the elder in the village, the gang may well be providing the sense of community that an earlier era offered, complete with extended family and a code of relating which emphasised group loyalty, commitment and dedication. The guarantee for survival rooted

in land ownership (however minuscule the plot of ground) may well be finding new form in the fight over a slice of concrete turf. The use of the gun in ensuring this and to make a living replaces the expending of energy to produce for the market for earnings or to make the best of a job (assuming it is available) through sustained application and hard work. The education of self in order to cope with the new and changing order - contradictory, confusing in the mixed signals it sends, irritatingly challenging - must be a priority for every member of the teaching profession in this country at this time.

Part of that self-education has to do with acquainting self with the substance and impact of science and technology. Subject content and pedagogical implications are far reaching. The computer and all related technologies are obviously vital in all this. Hopefully this will not be at the expense of the cultivation of the mind - the finest computer ever invented - so fine, it has been able to invent artificial intelligence and subvert it in equal measure. Computer literacy while useful and vital is no basis for a social vision. What matters, indeed, is not that all pupils have access to a laptop but how they use them. "*…technology is not an end itself*" warned a London *Times* editorial of October 6, 1994, "*but one means among many*". The celebration of technology is no excuse for teachers or politicians not to spell out plans and principles underpinning that social vision which is critical to the aims and objects of sound education. As that *Times* editorial concluded, *The hardware is important; but it is the software that counts.*

My final challenge to the fellowship of teachers throughout our region is their obligation to help shape that social vision which may well be the software that counts. That must take logical priority over the hardware. What kind of society does one want for our Caribbean in the foreseeable future? A society tenanted by citizens whose yields in the production of goods and services are high? This may well be; but seeing the output from schools and colleges as mere statistical units in the production process is the clearest sign that the all-important emancipation from mental slavery is yet to be achieved. And yet high productivity remains a critical variable in the equation of development. But productivity for what and for whom? A lopsided society which makes nonsense of social justice for the mass of the population has not a ghost of a chance eking out of that population which is made to feel less than good in the scheme of things, the dedication and commitment to country and society that high productivity demands.

That sense of self-worth, that self-esteem which bolsters the confidence in self, leading to giving of self to the growth and development of society through trust in coordinated action is necessary. It is possible only when we are able to discover and to keep rediscovering who we really are, how our lives have been forged from that textured history of the past half a millennium and how our place is determined in the world - a complex, textured groping world, itself in search of certitude and ways of coming to terms with the physical environment which we have all despoiled and degraded. The anxiety is the result clearly of an acute sense of crisis about the future of self and society. The anxiety is universal. Let me quote a recent assessment of the state of affairs by a well known policy studies expert and a United States corporate analyst, Francis Fukuyama: *the decline of trust and sociability in the United States is evident in any number of*

Caribbean Education and the Third Millenium

changes in American society: the rise of violent crime and civil litigation, the breakdown of the family structure, the decline of a wide range of intermediate social structures like neighbourhoods, churches, unions, clubs and charities; and the general sense among Americans of a lack of shared values and community with those around them. He could have been writing about Jamaica, or Trinidad, couldn't he?

A creative response to this constitutes the social vision which I am challenging our educators at all levels to help shape and implement. For as I have had reason to say recently, I see governments, teachers and the institutions of learning *as major contributors to, and principal facilitators of, the cultivation of that kingdom of the mind with rank shoots of creativity sprouting from the exercise of both intellect and imagination, and these in turn working in tandem to produce a self-reliant, self-respecting, tolerant,* [peaceful and far less violent-prone] *enterprising and productive community of souls* strategically placed at points of the compass that is education, charting the course round the cycle of civilisation which is the cycle of creativity. The task for the teacher and educators in all this is self-evident - awesome, frightening, challenging and irritatingly satisfying. Sir Arthur Lewis would, I think, agree.

Caribbean Education and the Third Millenium

Opening Remarks by ECCB Governor
K Dwight Venner

In introducing Professor Rex Nettleford to you tonight as the first presenter of the Sir Arthur Lewis Memorial Lecture, I am profoundly struck, in fact almost awestruck, by the hands of FATE in the affairs of men.

Twenty-five years ago, responding to the thoughts of Sir Arthur Lewis as expressed in his booklet entitled The Agony of the Eight, a group of students and lecturers at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, came together to form the Windwards-Leewards Students Association, with the objective of bringing us all closer together on the campus and putting forward the view of Sir Arthur that good governance and the economic development of these islands were contingent upon political and economic union.

We appealed to the then Director of Extra Mural Studies. Rex Nettleford, for support through his outreach programmes. Nettleford did not hesitate and we were given assistance to travel to each island from St Kitts in the north to Grenada in the south so that we could interview and interact with a broad cross section of the communities in the day and give public lectures in the evenings to make the case for Integration.

Professor Nettleford went even further by publishing the papers written for the project in a special edition of Caribbean Quarterly, Volume 18 No 2, June 1972 entitled **Essays on Caribbean Unity - The Case for Integration of the Windward and Leeward Islands.**

There were three members who formed the team which made that historic tour twenty-five years ago and who are present in this audience. They are:-

1. The Prime Minister of St Lucia -Dr The Hon Vaughan Lewis
2. The Director General of the OECS -Mr Swinburne Lestrade
3. The Governor of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank

It is therefore with great pleasure that I introduce our colleague, friend and mentor, Rex Nettleford, who has supported our intellectual and integration efforts over the years and who is largely responsible for us being here, as were the ideas and policies of the man who inspired us and who we honour tonight.

THE HON REX NETTLEFORD -OM

Caribbean Education and the Third Millenium

Lecture

By Professor Rex Nettleford

I have deliberately chosen the theme of education for this first Arthur Lewis Memorial Lecture because we are too willing to forget that this eminent economist and Nobel Laureate was in the final analysis a great educator, a great teacher and guru to his people both in the Caribbean and the Third World. For he perceived their future and any hope of redemption to rest firmly on the exercise of their intellect and their imagination.

He left the metropole to give service to this region through his work as Principal of the then University College of the West Indies and later as the first Vice Chancellor of an independent University of the West Indies. To this great institution of growth and development he brought a vision, the energy and sanity of which still serve us, as is evident in the University's recent attempts to re-engineer itself for relevance and continuing usefulness in the 21st century. Thirty-five years ago Sir Arthur saw the university as a prime agent of service underpinning its intellectual pursuits in the unending quest for knowledge.

If the university is built in the bush, and isolates itself as a self-contained community, he said in 1961, *it misses a tremendous opportunity of service. The opportunities for participation are immense: membership of public boards and committees; contribution to professional societies; guidance of teacher training colleges; availability for consultation by administrators and business people; membership of musical, dramatic, artistic and other groups, journalism and radio work, adult education classes.*

The Arthur Lewis vision, it is safe to say, lives on and has found re-enforcement in the Strategic Plan recently devised for the new University of the West Indies for the period 1997 to 2002. The UWI now seeks to enhance its *role as a development resource for the peoples and the countries of the region through training more of the young people in disciplines which are critical for achieving international competitiveness [and] by upgrading the professional capability of the graduates in the workforce through offering opportunities for postgraduate training and Continuing Education.* In the spirit of Sir Arthur the University, under the leadership of Sir Alister McIntyre, has downsized itself from an elitist indulgence precariously perched at the apex of a stolid solid hierarchy to a hub in a network of tertiary institutions. The Sir Arthur Lewis Community College in St Lucia, as it turns out, has been a flagship entity in this new network of higher education facilities designed to meet the changing need of a complex and demanding region.

Today, the vision of a future dedicated to the development of education towards a more resourceful, constructive and creatively dynamic Caribbean is regarded as a given in the region. It is now universally understood that education is the key to economic success. For Sir Arthur it was the key, as well, to cultural certitude (a **sine qua non** for a civilised society) and to community development. It is therefore easy to assume, and I so do, that

Caribbean Education and the Third Millenium

anyone endowed with a natural love of learning in what has been described as a knowledge culture would equally want to address the question "**learning to what end**".

That question continues to plague us all who are in the field; and the University of the West Indies, as part of a groping but determined tertiary sector, has purposefully set out to try and make sense of the contradictions and complexities that girdle its remit. For while we can boast that *every public service, all the independent professions, all the industrial, agricultural and commercial sectors of the region have been irrevocably transformed by the work of the University of the West Indies over the past four decades,* [Lawrence Carrington -*Challenges for a Regional University in a Zone of Uneven Development,* unpublished 1995], the uncertainty of where we go and how we make the journey down the decade into the third millennium continues to haunt us.

It continues to haunt all the political directorates of the region as well, despite their expressed commitment to education as a priority instrument in development strategy, both as medium and long-term initiatives. The importance of trained human resources to the process has long been recognised by both State and Church, from colonial times to this day, resulting in the relatively peaceful and in some countries even an imaginative transition from dependency to the present state of existence predicated on the assumption that we West Indians can be the creators of our own destiny.

Allocations to education as a percentage of national budgets throughout the region have been quite respectable even if deemed inadequate. Barbados has over the very recent past headed the list with some 17-18 per cent equalled by St Lucia and St Vincent and the Grenadines, with Grenada and Trinidad and Tobago at the lower end at 12 and 10 per cent respectively. Jamaica has itself declined from a high of 18 per cent in the memorable past to 10 per cent for the past year; and in all cases extra-budgetary funds have been attracted from international lending agencies to invest in the human resource which has progressively taken over the central focus of the development strategy. One must warn about these figures, however, since they have to be seen in some cases against both the massive debt-service burdens that eat into every dollar earned and the new cost sharing mechanisms which have served to fill the gap. Jamaica was able to gross about $400m from school fees in a year for direct recurrent expenditure in the education sector.

Primary schools have expanded since Independence and the tertiary sector, including the UWI, has taken on a new dynamic over the past decade, mirroring developments elsewhere in the region where the thirst for education and training, albeit with eyes glued on instant job placement in the short term, has had such institutions bursting at the seams. In its 1992 ten year development plan, the UWI's targets for access by students have already been reached long before the projected date. And in the field of continuing studies, in two territories alone, enrolment of some 30,000 working people pursuing courses on a part-time basis lasting from six months to two years, has long been realised.

The empowerment of women through the educational system is also a fact of life. The University campuses recorded over 60 per cent of graduands as women each year and a

higher percentage is to be found among part-timers in the outreach programmes of the University. The rest of the tertiary sector reflects this new gender differential, giving many people grave concerns about the future of the male population in a society that has inherited a world-view that turns on a tenacious commitment to the control management and direction of life by men. Yet even the crassest feminist among us would prefer balance to an inversion of old-fashioned hegemony in favour of one gender as against another.

Way back in 1963 a report on common entrance performance in Jamaica prompted the following comment:

Although much progress has been made in recent years, it is still largely true to say that success in the primary school depends upon qualities such as rote memory, docility and industry rather than originality, imagination and initiative. The child does not win favour by having original ideas or by asking intelligent questions but by keeping quiet and remembering what is told. It may well be that girls are much more likely to survive the authoritarian regime than the more spirited and less tractable boys, especially in a situation where boys are not compelled to adjust to classroom conditions, but can in the last analysis escape the problem by simply dropping out of school altogether. Thus it may be that the atmosphere in primary school classrooms induces boys to withdraw at a more rapid rate than girls. [Douglas Manley *Mental Ability in Jamaica,* Social and Economic Studies, Vol. 12, No 1, p. 69].

To suggest that girls are more psychologically attuned to authoritarianism and regimentation cannot be the whole explanation for things as they have developed. Today one can report without contradiction that women have *turned the tables on men* not only in the University but in *CXC passes and even in winning places in the Common Entrance Examinations. **[The Sunday Observer].***

Professor Errol Miller has other views about the marginalisation of the male. They turn on structural shifts in the teaching profession which has progressively favoured the training of women over men since the turn of the 20th century and on the tendency of parents to favour education for their girl offspring rather than their boys. The discourse is apace and should not detain us here.

What is obvious is that by whatever gender the cards are played, education is required of output and throughput - concentrated, resourceful and relative human beings to face the harsh realities of existence by small-island developing communities in a world said to be increasingly globalised in the face of the communications technology revolution and the parallel rapid changes in world views and world order.

Policy options for governments, still the major players in the provision of infrastructural imperatives for the shaping of their individual societies, are nowhere as many as they were once felt to be. And the search for new, appropriate and viable modalities for ensuring easy access by the mass of the population to education, the one tool that can

guarantee the individual safe passage into life and living, is understandably intense at this stage.

The cry for an articulated educational system that can take the West Indian from cradle to grave, affording different points of entry and reentry and with undiminished capacities for coping with the vicissitudes of human existence, is a necessary and timely one. Such vicissitudes, governments and governed both need to remember, constitute not only the acquisition of a job, but also the sustaining of employment in times when rapid change in the post industrial age will guarantee security and tenure to less and less people who may wish to hold the same job or remain on the same career path from the time of entry into the workforce up to the time of retirement. That is why any government policy which ties education and training narrowly to one specific job is likely to be short-sighted and counter- productive in the medium and long term. The preparation of the young to be able to think his/her way through changed and changing circumstances within a given skill-area and beyond, can be the only meaningful aim of education preparation.

Vocational schools teaching auto-mechanics, for example, must take the learner beyond moving nuts and bolts to his/her knowing why he/she removes, adjusts, replaces this or that nut or bolt, the 'know-why'. Otherwise, the region will merely continue to produce the hewers of wood and drawers of water which West Indian colonies were required exclusively to produce in another dispensation against which the region struggled to liberate itself. Independence with the lower case "i" is integral to Independence with the capital "I". We ignore this point at our peril.

The universities of the region (including the UWI) are similarly endangered, and are likely to be of little use to the region in the next fifty years if they ignore the implications of such short-sightedness. The University dare not yield to the temptation of churning out Management Studies graduates bereft of knowledge of the deeper forces of Caribbean society or of any society, for that matter. For such forces take on ideal, form and purpose precisely at the point where people spend most of their waking lives - the workplace. The training of the engineer must produce more than a technical wonder. He or she ends up, after all, "engineering" situations involving human beings. Their emotional quotient may indeed figure more than the IQ expected in any given set of circumstances. This is as true for the civil engineer called upon to construct a bridge on terrain where the soil structure is unsuitable but which must be erected at a certain spot because of the political interests of a particular MP who must deliver to his constituents or lose the next elections. The trained lawyer without an inkling of jurisprudence or of the sociological/political/cultural realities of his arena of practice (the wider society) is likely to become the jackass many say the law already is. The education of such key skills for Caribbean development requires more than other specialised technical training.

Jamaica's College of Arts Science and Technology has been transformed into the University of Technology but it is the hope of many who understand the challenges of education that the " A " in the old CAST will not be abandoned in the transformation.

Caribbean Education and the Third Millenium

The region will have to join other forces in the world and look at education in ways that make sense for the foreseeable future.

The contradictions of a world in transition, after all, are merely echoing the contradictions that the Caribbean has always faced ever since the beginning of encounters in the Americas of myriad souls from diverse cultures on foreign soil. The region's responses over time have unfortunately been ignored in favour of those demanded by colonial dictates which persist under different guises to this day. The Commonwealth Caribbean is more than well placed and equipped to contribute to the global discourse on the role of education in human development in preparation for the 21st century. Yet in their self-doubt and lack of confidence, Caribbean people still tend to follow what the North Atlantic has done, is doing or is likely to do, ending up usually a generation behind erstwhile masters in their own explorations and experimentations in the field.

Yet, closer examination of the Commonwealth Caribbean's experience and contemporary reality, especially of the problematique with respect to the development of the region's human resources through the educational process, confirms that the search for appropriate modalities must be projected against the background of the demands of *economic growth and the aim of sustainable development, the transition from individual isolated membership of a society to democratic collective participation, and the relationship between the grass-roots community and world society* [DeLors Commission Report, UNESCO, 1995].

The notion of *learning throughout life* is very germane to the topic of the presumed gap that exists between educational development and cultural reality, which is itself a lifelong reality, between education and the community, the cradle of culture, this lifelong reality! It is a topic that Sir Arthur Lewis understood to be significant to development of the human resource. In an address to a convocation at the Cave Hill Campus of the UWI did he not declare that *A Society without the creative arts is a cultural desert?* And with avuncular wisdom he added with feigned 'matter-of-factness', *I would commend to our statesmen that they put a lot more money into the creative arts departments of our secondary schools*.

But before addressing this directly it is important to stress that as a key to equality of opportunity, this concept of *education throughout life* depends on the realisation that the process involves a range of actors who must function in the fullest understanding of what is expected of them in the process. There are first of all the **parents** of the child. Then there are the **teachers**. Throughout youth and adulthood the arena of learning takes different forms: at school, in community life, through the family, via leisure pursuits, in associations and civic life. This in itself is a complex configuration within which each actor must locate himself/herself, building on the four pillars of the learning process.

A range of available information technologies as part of the communication revolution must also be taken into account, from the simple audio-cassette and transistor radio

through distance education teleconferencing mechanisms to CD-rom, E-mail and Internet.

But none of this can or will replace the teacher who must continue to play a crucial role in maintaining the vigour of the system of learning and deliver the central message that must be forged *concerning the type of citizens a society wishes to educate or to ensure the continuity and progress of knowledge* [DeLors Commission Report, UNESCO 1995]. Teachers, then, should not only be well paid, they should also be well educated throughout their professional working lives.

It has to be understood, as well, that whatever the constraints faced by nations in the region, whatever the seductive sounds coming from the free market camp, it remains the *responsibility of public policy, of government, to propose the direction to be followed, and to enlist the greatest possible number of actors in order to succeed in a strategy that masters change, both deliberate and inevitable* [DeLors Commission Report, UNESCO 1995].

As I have said elsewhere, this kind of leadership by the State does not mean a monopoly of the functions employed to move education forward; least of all for the field to be hijacked by Ministries of Education, served by unimaginative pedestrian technocrats who forget that there are a certain number of human values that need to be activated and kept alive in human-scale communities like ours - values such as the dignity and responsibility of the individual, the freely chosen participation of individuals in communities, equality of opportunity and the search for a common good and cultural certitude, all of which can be realised through the field of education.

It is here that a sense of daring is badly needed in any plan or strategy for the way forward. All the actors in the system need to be more alert in the creative response to the challenge that is already upon the region. The factor of culture and its role in education has apparently given bureaucrats and teachers more difficulty than it has the very politicians who are frequently bashed and often unjustifiably vilified for being philistine and myopic.

The neglect of culture as integral to education persists among many in the public bureaucracy and the teaching profession of the region, despite some of the clearest evidence that many of the people who have had anything of value to say about this region are those who have exercised their creative imagination to make sense of the Caribbean and human historical experience and existential reality.

The names of Bob Marley, Jimmy Cliff and Peter Tosh, of the Mighty Sparrow, David Rudder, and Lord Kitchener; of Louise Bennett, Mutabaruka and other such public poets; of George Lamming, Samuel Selvon, Vidia Naipaul, Lorna Goodison, Merle Collins, Kamau Brathwaite and Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott, all come easily to mind.

Caribbean Education and the Third Millenium

The educational system, with the help of those who are charged with directing it (especially the governments), should take full responsibility for the promotion of dynamic interaction and co-ordination between artistic creativity and other policy domains such as education itself, working life, urban planning, and industrial and economic development strategies for the benefit of all. Annual National Economic Reports should stop listing culture in the 'non-productive category'.

A child learns the meaning of process and is better able to relate outcome to effort, if he is encouraged to create a poem or a song, act in a play, make up a dance, sing in a choir or play an instrument in an orchestra, as a normal part of his/her education. The discipline that underpins the mastery of the craft, the demands made on continuous recreation of effort and application, the challenges encountered on the journey to excellence, the habits of realistic self-evaluation, the capacity for dealing with diversity and the dilemma of difference whether in the performing arts or in key branches of sports (themselves belonging to the family of performing arts) constitute excellent preparation for **learning to be** (the stuff of ontology), **learning to know** (the substance of epistemology), and **learning to live together** (the essence of the creative diversity which characterises Caribbean existence and is about to overtake the entire world) - all of which must serve the individual throughout his or her life.

It is the opportunity to exercise the creative imagination from an early age that is likely to ensure safe passage throughout that life. And the educational process in all its modes - formal and informal, curricular and co-curricular - provides an excellent channel through which all this can flow. Adaptability, flexibility, ready code- switching, innovativeness, and capacity to deal with the complexity of complexity are all attributes of the creative imagination which provide yet another route to cognition other than the Cartesian rationalism we have inherited. For if we are because we think, we also exist because we feel.

The separation of these two states of experience into irreconcilable wholes is part of the binary syndrome of a tradition of intellectual discourse and epistemological reductionism which constitute an expensive luxury for people in the Caribbean who have survived these past five hundred years on the basis of their creative diversity and a multi-sourced reality in everyday living.

Caribbean educators need to take a look at the long haul of human history and locate the region where it appropriately belongs - that is on the trajectory of human "becoming" through social interaction.

From the semi-schooled geniuses among the popular musicians to the poets and novelists of what some would mistakenly call high culture, one will find that they are "children of the community" where the sense of coordinated social action is informed by integrated modes of operation involving school, workplace, church, recreational programmes seen as leisure-time gap-fillers or as the first step on a hobby-to-income trajectory. To a former generation which has left a rich legacy for those now growing up and those yet

unborn, the school and the school-teacher were essential to their socialisation and their life-long learning. But so was the "community" lending the kind of support - psychic and material which are essential to growth and development. Teachers were of course part of the community - moving spirits, icons when they were old enough to be guides and care-givers along with parents and the extended family that every village or urban neighbourhood became. The strengthening of bonds between education and community makes eminent sense for it speaks to the basics of civil society rooted in trust, mutual respect, the harnessing of collective will and the fostering of that sense of fellowship without which sociability and capacity to join forces to achieve greater ends for the good of all cannot be attained. An educational system which does not inculcate this, which does not foster this, is not likely to be of much use.

That this has to be done in large measure by the fellowship of professionals taking leadership in cementing the partnership that must exist between the State (political directorate and bureaucrats), the private sector, professional educators out in the field and the community, is impatient of debate. It is a real challenge for the entire teaching profession at whatever level of the educational system it functions.

Another challenge is the strengthening and rationalisation of the institutional and operational networking mechanisms between the different levels and categories of educational delivery systems so that the young of this country can become the true beneficiaries of an articulated system of education by the end of this century. From basic school to university through primary, secondary, post-secondary, one should be able to climb each mountain, ford every stream, follow every rainbow, till he/she finds that dream. It is still true to say that if one drops out of the system at 14 years of age, it is difficult to re-enter. Outward migration once helped, and still does, but foreign doors are being shut even while foreign cultures penetrate us via the galactic spheres.

Yet another challenge is for the entire profession to put more energy to their own continuing education through continuous upgrading with a view to coping with the changes in what has been described as the knowledge economy. What you teach, how you teach, the impact of both on the individual student, on yourself as teacher and on the wider society all fall into the remit of intellectual renewal. But the honing of sense and sensibility is of no less importance. Failing to appreciate this is likely to leave teachers trailing their students in the grasp of the realities in the wider world which for many is increasingly meaning the streets and what is picked up through the sound bytes of foreign radio and television, especially the latter. An understanding of the social milieu and its tendency to nuanced shifts is essential.

The lines between urban and rural are becoming even more blurred - communications technology, if not ease of mobility via motorised transport and better roads, has seen to this. The gang leader on the corner may well be the latter-day urban substitute for the elder in the village, the gang may well be providing the sense of community that an earlier era offered, complete with extended family and a code of relating which emphasised group loyalty, commitment and dedication. The guarantee for survival rooted

in land ownership (however minuscule the plot of ground) may well be finding new form in the fight over a slice of concrete turf. The use of the gun in ensuring this and to make a living replaces the expending of energy to produce for the market for earnings or to make the best of a job (assuming it is available) through sustained application and hard work. The education of self in order to cope with the new and changing order - contradictory, confusing in the mixed signals it sends, irritatingly challenging - must be a priority for every member of the teaching profession in this country at this time.

Part of that self-education has to do with acquainting self with the substance and impact of science and technology. Subject content and pedagogical implications are far reaching. The computer and all related technologies are obviously vital in all this. Hopefully this will not be at the expense of the cultivation of the mind - the finest computer ever invented - so fine, it has been able to invent artificial intelligence and subvert it in equal measure. Computer literacy while useful and vital is no basis for a social vision. What matters, indeed, is not that all pupils have access to a laptop but how they use them. "*…technology is not an end itself*" warned a London *Times* editorial of October 6, 1994, "*but one means among many*". The celebration of technology is no excuse for teachers or politicians not to spell out plans and principles underpinning that social vision which is critical to the aims and objects of sound education. As that *Times* editorial concluded, *The hardware is important; but it is the software that counts.*

My final challenge to the fellowship of teachers throughout our region is their obligation to help shape that social vision which may well be the software that counts. That must take logical priority over the hardware. What kind of society does one want for our Caribbean in the foreseeable future? A society tenanted by citizens whose yields in the production of goods and services are high? This may well be; but seeing the output from schools and colleges as mere statistical units in the production process is the clearest sign that the all-important emancipation from mental slavery is yet to be achieved. And yet high productivity remains a critical variable in the equation of development. But productivity for what and for whom? A lopsided society which makes nonsense of social justice for the mass of the population has not a ghost of a chance eking out of that population which is made to feel less than good in the scheme of things, the dedication and commitment to country and society that high productivity demands.

That sense of self-worth, that self-esteem which bolsters the confidence in self, leading to giving of self to the growth and development of society through trust in coordinated action is necessary. It is possible only when we are able to discover and to keep rediscovering who we really are, how our lives have been forged from that textured history of the past half a millennium and how our place is determined in the world - a complex, textured groping world, itself in search of certitude and ways of coming to terms with the physical environment which we have all despoiled and degraded. The anxiety is the result clearly of an acute sense of crisis about the future of self and society. The anxiety is universal. Let me quote a recent assessment of the state of affairs by a well known policy studies expert and a United States corporate analyst, Francis Fukuyama: *the decline of trust and sociability in the United States is evident in any number of*

Caribbean Education and the Third Millenium

changes in American society: the rise of violent crime and civil litigation, the breakdown of the family structure, the decline of a wide range of intermediate social structures like neighbourhoods, churches, unions, clubs and charities; and the general sense among Americans of a lack of shared values and community with those around them. He could have been writing about Jamaica, or Trinidad, couldn't he?

A creative response to this constitutes the social vision which I am challenging our educators at all levels to help shape and implement. For as I have had reason to say recently, I see governments, teachers and the institutions of learning *as major contributors to, and principal facilitators of, the cultivation of that kingdom of the mind with rank shoots of creativity sprouting from the exercise of both intellect and imagination, and these in turn working in tandem to produce a self-reliant, self-respecting, tolerant,* [peaceful and far less violent-prone] *enterprising and productive community of souls* strategically placed at points of the compass that is education, charting the course round the cycle of civilisation which is the cycle of creativity. The task for the teacher and educators in all this is self-evident - awesome, frightening, challenging and irritatingly satisfying. Sir Arthur Lewis would, I think, agree.