

The Antigua and Barbuda Youth Enlightenment Academy

Launch and Dedication Ceremony

July 16, 2015

The Founder Address

By Lawrence A. Jardine

Over the past few months, whenever I heard our Executive Director, Brother Mali Olatunji on the radio stating that the Antigua and Barbuda Youth Enlightenment Academy (ABYEA) is the vision of Lawrence Jardine, I am humbled by that monopoly. For in fact, a number of events and persons - for all my life - have conspired: positively, negatively, wittingly and unwittingly, to nudge me to this concept, to this place; and at this time.

Foremost on my mind is that evening, many years ago, when Leonard Tim Hector reminded me that the first responsibility of leadership is to create new leadership.

Reflecting on Tim's incisive reminder, the Antigua and Barbuda Youth Enlightenment Academy seeks to create new, effective and pervasive leadership. And that is not a one-man's mission.

As such, I am seeking the committed support of everyone here today, and of course that of the entire nation. ABYEA is a critical national project to rescue our youth. A mission that must not fail. Whereas the current education system sets out primarily to make our youth educated, ABYEA's goal is to make them intelligent and wise; a tailored wisdom that is essential for our economic survival, among other things, in this age of Information and electronic gadgetry.

When one hears about enlightenment, one is inclined to think about the movement in Western Europe starting in the 17th century or the French

Revolution of the 18th century. Historically, enlightenment is disruptive to the status quo. It is at minimum an incremental transformation of minds and society, and therefore it may offend some conservatives, who have deeply rooted and outdated traditions and institutions to protect.

And certainly, ABYEA will oppose those who profit from a youth culture of ignorance and ethical indifference. Sadly, I was informed that generally the average youth, in Antigua and Barbuda, is consuming a week's sugar per day by drinking too much soda. Now, at fetes of all colors, our youth are adding rum to their diet - at an alarming rate. Consequently, juvenile diabetes is at an all time high.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me assure you that I take no pleasure in bashing our youth. Actually, the blame is on us; the adults - delinquent as a whole.

However, today, I will speak with an emphasis on TEAMWORK and PERFORMANCE, which are fundamental pillars of the Antigua and Barbuda Youth Enlightenment Academy.

Frankly speaking, my comparative observations and experiences - working with foreigners, expatriates, family, friends, political parties and business partners - have brought me to the conclusion that our shortfall, in TEAMWORK and PERFORMANCE, which are essentials for our collective and societal advancement, is our major human resource problem in Antigua and Barbuda.

To me: this problem is worrying, it should be taken seriously, and it should be vigorously and systematically corrected, starting with our youth.

Therefore, it is the mission of the Antigua and Barbuda Youth Enlightenment Academy to transform Antigua and Barbuda into a nation of TEAMWORK, and a PERFORMANCE powerhouse - from the basement upwards.

Ladies and gentlemen - please allow me to underscore TEAMWORK, in relation to the raising of our youth.

Our ancestors, hundreds of years ago, concluded and practised that it took a village to raise a child. Implicitly, they recognized the necessity of a network of adults to monitor a child as she left her home and traversed the village. Imagine an entire village of enlightened adults converging to raise every child.

That, in my view, is the most profound example and requirement of societal teamwork. In today's society the word village should be seen as the metaphor for all of our institutions: parents, schools, churches, businesses, etc. – all inclusive.

Back then it was easy, since our ancestors did not see the youth as a market: to prey upon; to hypnotize with subliminal advertisements; to deafen their innocence with corruptive lyrics; to sell booze, bikinis, war games and cell phones.

It was perhaps a simpler time when the value of a teenager was more important than the market and profiteering. Currently, the predominant focus of the education system is to prepare our children for the market; not emphatically to become enlightened human beings, innovators, problem solvers, and the collective architects of our economic destiny.

In this loose, laid-back and consumptive culture, our innocent youth, with distorted values, become fodder, and grist for other people's exploitive commercial mills.

Consequently and increasingly, we have LOL – Lots of Liquor; LOP – Lots of Pregnancies; LOB – Lots of Bleaching; and LOF – Lots of False Hair. Our

beautiful black teenage daughters, with all their natural hair intact – with every hair follicle in place and without a single grey hair, are wearing false hair. Our daughters are being cultivated to dislike themselves, and to become somebody's market.

And our boys are so benighted that they expose their underwear - a contradiction to its very name; perhaps not knowing why underwear was invented in the first place.

Ladies and gentlemen, once again, let me assure you that I take no pleasure in bashing our youth. Actually, the blame is on us; the adults - delinquent as a whole.

On an island of approximately 40, 000 males, about 400 are in prison. That is, about 1% of our sons are in prison; they are out of circulation.

This nation cannot afford to have 1% in Jail; 1% dropout; 1% diabetic; 1% drunk; 1% on drugs; 1% hooked on computer games; 1% teenage parents; etc., etc. These 1% add up, and bear down on our social institutions and retard our country's growth – to say the least. The youth is our future – we must lookout for them and protect their innocence!

Talking about 1% - please allow me to shift gear:

The 1 (one) cent that will be out of circulation is 1% of a dollar. 1% is important. I hope to convince the young people here today – because generally we throw away the 1 cent. That very act may cause a contagion called inflation.

My dear youth, small things can cascade to larger things. For example, if you knew how to steal 1 cent per hour from every human being, approximately 7

billion, you could have stolen 1.68 billion dollars per day. Some Europeans, during the African Slave Trade, were doing at least that: stealing 1 (one) cent per hour from millions of Africans for hundreds of years.

I am shifting to another gear:

Ladies and gentlemen, let me read to you the hypothetical CV, modus operandi and business plan of a new Christopher Columbus in the Information Age:

My name is **Neo Christopher Columbus**. I am landless. In fact, land is not important to me anymore. I don't need Italy, Spain, Isabella and Ferdinand, ships, maps, compasses or crew anymore. I travel alone. My voyages, which are virtual through cyberspace, require very little overhead and supplies. An inexpensive computer system will do. I am a computer programmer and Apps developer. During my virtual travels, I discovered a virgin market in the West Indies. I will develop a telephone app that I will call Powder. I will charge 99 cents per hour for Powder, but the indigenous people do not place much value on 1 cent; so they will send 1 dollar anyway. I will net 10 million dollars in the first year. The winner, at the end of the year, will receive a trophy, 100,000 dollars, and a scholarship to study Theology. As you may have noticed, the prize money is the very extra 1 cents that they would have given me. Powder is an App for West Indian teenagers only. The teenagers will play Powder to see who can drink the most virtual rum in a year.

Ladies and gentlemen it is our responsibility to say never again, and protect our youth from this new kind of Christopher Columbus.

But it is already happening, some of our youth are awake - before dawn – using smart phones to travel to virtual farms to feed virtual cows and clean virtual dung.

ABYEA will stimulate our youth to have a sense of justice and self-worth, to see and understand the aforementioned past, present and future connections. They will understand concepts of scale, magnitude and the multiplier effect: for example, they will understand that 1% of indifference and carelessness today may cause a 100% indebtedness and misery for themselves or their children tomorrow.

I am shifting again:

Daily, I hear a number of persons in our society talking about getting our youth to think out of the box: to think analytically and critically. Ladies and gentlemen, do we really understand what analytical and critical thinking means in some developed, industrialized, and technological societies?

Teaching the youth to be rational, analytical, critical, observant and innovative is not a piecemeal subject. The teacher must have the knowledge and commitment to unlock and release the student's mind from sacrilegious fear.

The liberated science students may see that in the midst of the drought, the acacia or "cassi" tree flourishes; while the farmers are grieving. They, the students working as a team, may innovate by training the "cassi" tree to bear food. That team would have performed - for the benefit of our society.

Permit me to tell you of a disruptive moment of enlightenment in my life. In the 1970's, I was a teenager and an Anglican choir boy. I left Antigua for Canada to study electronics. One day an instructor walked into the classroom and shouted with fearless assertion: "If God is all powerful, ask Him to make a rock so huge

that He, Himself cannot move it. Today, students, I will teach you the concept of exclusive opposites.”

No one can reverse a vehicle and move it forward at the same time. The opposing directions are mutually exclusive. Conversely, lots of liquor, lots of hangovers, lots of tardiness, lots of un-productivity, lots of bad decisions are mutually inclusive, and these are blatant indicators of a failing society and a falling people. We will know ourselves by our fruits...

Ladies and gentlemen we have a societal responsibility to make our youth wiser; sooner: **To Produce the Better Citizen.**

Finally, I am inviting every adult here to be an ABYEA charter member, to make **The Academy** a hub and meeting place for discussions, to share ideas, and to proactively assist to elevate our youth.

I would like to thank all persons, including Malcolm, Tadius and Byron, who are working behind the scenes to make the Antigua and Barbuda Youth Enlightenment Academy possible.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for coming...