

## **HISTORY & HERITAGE WEEK LECTURE – 23<sup>rd</sup> FEBRUARY 2017**

I am honoured by the invitation of UWI Open Campus to deliver this lecture as part of History & Heritage Week which coincides with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the attainment of Associated Statehood by St. Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla on 27<sup>th</sup> February 1967.

History and Heritage Week is held to focus the attention of the community on the importance of its history and heritage to the life and development of our country and its people. We all know the very wise saying that a nation that forgets its past has no future. We should be ever conscious of our history, ancient and modern, we should be recording it for posterity and teaching it to our youth. We are not doing very well at that. I urge UWI, the Heritage Society, the Brimstone Hill Society, the CFB College and the business community to knock heads together urgently to rectify this societal deficiency.

I owe my love of history to two great teachers. The first is Sir Probyn Inniss to whom I pay tribute this evening as a patriot of the highest order and an example to be followed in his humble and dignified contribution to our society in so many ways- as a teacher, a Civil Servant, a Governor, a man of the Church, a historian, a lawyer and a leader of Brimstone Hill Society and other heritage causes. The second outstanding history teacher who influenced me greatly was Mr. J.B.C Haynes of blessed memory who made history an enthralling subject and whose command of the language was brilliant. Mr. Haynes once wrote on the history essay of a student who shall be nameless “mental constipation verbal diarrhea”.

I also pay tribute to Mrs. Victoria O'Flaherty for the excellent work she does at the National Archives in her quiet and unassuming manner. She is a treasure to this country which should not be taken for granted.

The theme of “Statehood: a milestone to freedom” is a challenging one. It recognizes the importance of Statehood on which I will focus in the first part of my lecture. It also recognizes that the country is proceeding along a road to freedom on which road Statehood was but one milestone. The question is what freedom. I will in the second part of the lecture seek to address that question and the journey from 1967 to 2017.

### **PART ONE**

Before I speak in detail of Associated Statehood I think it important to note some significant prior historical landmarks. The first was the end in 1838 of slavery the most horrendous crime against humanity ever perpetrated. Another was the decision of the British in 1882 to lump Nevis and Anguilla against the wishes of their people, with St. Kitts. We are still 135 years later feeling the impact of that decision. One hundred years after the abolition of slavery working and living conditions for the masses of the people were still outrageously bad. In the mid 1930s the laborers on the sugar estates decided they had had enough and actively resisted their exploitation. The Buckleys uprising in 1935 was a significant landmark in that struggle. The murderous cruelty of the colonialists in the face of the uprising reverberated throughout the Caribbean and helped to embolden the working classes and the labor movement. The labor movement in various forms culminating in the St. Kitts and Nevis Trades and Labour Union and the associated Labour Party, became the catalyst for the march towards workers rights and towards political self-rule here.

Then came the Second World War which I note because it seriously weakened Britain and hastened the progress towards self determination. The next milestone in that struggle became universal adult suffrage introduced here by the Constitution and Elections Ordinance 1952 which led to

the first elections by popular vote in that year. In 1956 for the first time elected representatives were given Ministerial positions the first being Robert Bradshaw (the first National Hero of St. Kitts and Nevis), Paul Southwell (also a National Hero) and F. T. Williams.

The British then took the wise (I think) decision to bring the West Indian colonies together in the West Indies Federation with the ultimate intention of creating a single independent nation comprising the 10 territories. That Federation was created in 1958 but was short lived because in 1962 Jamaica withdrew followed by Trinidad whose leader Eric Williams famously explained that one from ten equals nought. It is worthy to recall that Robert Bradshaw was the first Minister of Finance of the Federal Government. When the Federation failed Bradshaw, who had been a devout federalist, returned to the post of Chief Minister of St. Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla.

Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados and Guyana moved to full independence between 1962 and 1966. The British created an interim status called Associated Statehood for the smaller territories of the Leeward and Windward Islands- Grenada, St. Vincent and The Grenadines, St. Lucia, Dominica, Antigua and St. Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla. Under that system implemented in 1967 the states were internally self-governing and Britain was responsible for defence and external affairs. Each state had a constitution with fundamental rights, the separation of powers and a democratically elected government.

Also in 1967 a single court called the West Indies Associated States Supreme Court was established for the six Associated States. That court is also now celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary as the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court. That was undoubtedly a sound decision. I have nightmares sometimes thinking what our islands would be like if we each had a separate court system. We have of course

benefited immensely from having the Privy Council as our final court. It is however time to move to the Caribbean Court of Justice.

Now to the lead up to and aftermath of Statehood. Bradshaw led the discussions with the British. His Labour Party held the majority of the 10 elected seats. Labour had virtually no support in Nevis and Anguilla and was unmoved by the concerns in those islands. Despite clear warnings in London the British were more concerned about getting the six States to Statehood. Peter Adams who represented Anguilla misjudged his own people and the intensity of their opposition to the continued association with St. Kitts. That opposition had become even more intense after 1960 when Anguilla was devastated by Hurricane Donna, a category 4 hurricane, and the Anguillans got little help from St. Kitts. The opposition was vociferously expressed by the de facto leader Ronald Webster and a growing cadre of secessionists. When the constitutional arrangements were documented between Bradshaw and the British and a date set for Statehood, the provisions for local Governments for Nevis and Anguilla had still not been finalized. That created even greater fear among the Anguillans who then took to open resistance. In January 1967 a British representative who visited Anguilla was effectively chased off the island by an agitated crowd. There was violence before Statehood. A week after Statehood the official residence of the Warden, the Government representative on Anguilla, was burned to the ground. More violence ensued and the pronouncements were clear that Anguillans were prepared to die for the cause. I did not hear of any Kittitians who were likewise committed to oppose them. The few police stationed in Anguilla certainly did not show any such commitment when thrown off the island on May 29<sup>th</sup> 1967.

Then came the act which brought the struggle to St. Kitts. On 10<sup>th</sup> June 1967 a group of Anguillans sailed to St. Kitts. Some

landed and fired shots at the Defence Force HQ at Springfield, the Police HQ at Cayon Street and the Electricity Power Plant at Needsmust. No one was killed and the violence petered out. However, there began the political tribalism which still racks St. Kitts. Bradshaw was convinced that the Anguillans were supported by the recently formed Peoples Action Movement headed by Dr. William Herbert.

In May a State of Emergency had been declared throughout the State in response to the violence in Anguilla. A curfew was declared and 22 members and supporters or perceived supporters of PAM were detained at the Basseterre Prison under the emergency powers. Four Anguillans were arrested and charged with offences relating to what Bradshaw called an attempted coup. Dr. Herbert and Michael Powell were charged with treason. Several non-belongers including citizens of Caribbean countries who had lived here for years, were deported. Most of the detainees were in August released by Order of the Court. The trials of those charged proceeded in October and November. Lawyers came from all over the Caribbean to defend the accused and the detainees. There was high tension throughout the island. There were threats against the Judge, jurors too were threatened and there was an illegal demonstration in Basseterre against the Court. The House of Assembly debated and passed a Motion of No Confidence in the Court which was broadcast on ZIZ Radio. The Chief Justice of the newly established West Indies Associated States Supreme Court Sir Allen Lewis flew from St. Lucia to St. Kitts, convened the Court and reminded Bradshaw and his Government in no uncertain terms of the separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary. His speech is a landmark in our history.

None of the accused was convicted on any of the charges. The highest profile of the trials, that trial of Herbert and Powell, began but was discontinued by the prosecution. Bradshaw took instead to his media repeating his

accusations against PAM of organizing a coup and he threatened to convene a Commission of Inquiry. The political battle between PAM “cats” and Labour “dogs”, as they call each other, has not stopped since.

Anguilla never returned to rule from St. Kitts. Anguillans established a de facto government but really wanted to return to British rule. The British co-operated with Bradshaw for a while in the hope of brokering a reunification. They continued to misjudge the Anguillans. When a British Minister of Government was roughed up in Anguilla in 1969 they decided to invade Anguilla by paratroopers from the air, expecting resistance. They were perplexed to be greeted with open arms and the British soldiers enjoyed like tourists the Anguilla beaches and hospitality. Anguilla has been ruled by the British since and in December 1980 was by British Order in Council legally separated from St. Kitts and Nevis. That paved the way for independence. By then Bradshaw had died and Labour lost the 1980 General Election to the PAM/NRP coalition. I have covered the Anguilla revolt in a chapter of my book and the legal cases in another chapter. I recommend four other books – *Whither Bound St. Kitts-Nevis* by Sir Probyn Inniss; *Revolutionary Leader* by Ronald Webster; *Anguilla’s Battle for Freedom* by Colville L. Petty and A. Nat Hodge both prominent Anguillians and *Under an English Heaven* by Donald E. Westlake about the British invasion of Anguilla.

No sooner had Anguilla formally left in 1980 than Nevis, which had been unhappy from 1882 and seething from 1967, seized its opportunity given by the 1980 election, of which I spoke, to right past wrongs done it by the British and St. Kitts. Like Anguillans, Nevisian opposition to St. Kitts had been galvanized by a disaster, the sinking of the overcrowded Government ferry MV Christena with the loss of over 240 lives mainly Nevisians. As part of its secession campaign, the Nevis Reformation Party held an informal

referendum in 1977 with 99 per cent voting in favour of secession. Nevis had its outstanding leader in Simeon Daniel (now a National Hero). He did not have to revolt. The electorate gave him the opening which he skillfully took. Nevis has changed dramatically for the better since albeit more recently being infected by the political tribalism of St. Kitts.

The country proceeded to independence on 19<sup>th</sup> September 1983 under Prime Minister Kennedy Simmonds (the most recent National Hero). Suffice it to say in passing that the constitution is a strange compromise overly weighted in favour of Nevis with Nevis having its own government and the right to secede but St. Kitts being governed by a Federal Government including representatives of Nevis and having no right to secede. We have seen Nevis activate the secession clause with a formal secession referendum in 1998 which almost succeeded with 61.83 per cent of the vote in favour. The independence arrangements between the two islands did nothing to alleviate the political divisions in St. Kitts. If anything they were exacerbated. As with Associated Statehood independence was therefore achieved with continued disunity.

## **PART TWO**

I now turn to the freedom towards which Statehood was a milestone. I use the word “freedom” to describe the collective goals or national objectives of St. Kitts and Nevis as an independent nation as described in the preamble to the Independence Constitution as follows:

**“WHEREAS the People of Saint Christopher and Nevis-**

**a) declare that the nation is established on the belief in Almighty God and the inherent dignity of each individual;**

- b) assert that they are entitled to the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms;**
- c) believe in the concept of true democracy with free and fair elections;**
- d) desire the creation of a climate of economic well-being in the context of respect for law and order ; and**
- e) are committed to achieve their national objectives with a unity of purpose.”**

Several aspects of the freedom we seek can be extracted from this powerful statement: fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual, democratic freedoms, economic well-being and the rule of law. The statement ends with a commitment to achieve the national objectives with a unity of purpose which itself can be described as freedom from strife or freedom from disunity.

I begin with the fundamental rights and freedoms which are summarized in section 3 as follows:

**“Whereas every person in Saint Christopher and Nevis is entitled to the fundamental rights and freedoms, that is to say, the right, whatever his race, place of origin, birth, political opinions, colour, creed or sex, but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for the public interest, to each and all of the following, namely –**

- a) Life, liberty, security of the person, equality before the law and the protection of the law;**
- b) Freedom of conscience, of expression and of assembly and association; and**
- c) Protection for his personal privacy, the privacy of his home and other property and from deprivation of property without compensation.....”**

Time does not permit me to cover all the stated rights and



others granted by the constitution. I am sure you will permit me to be selective.

A brief comment first on the right not to be subjected to inhuman or degrading punishment. We ought to take a serious look at our prison in the context of this right.

I will say a lot more on what I call the conscience freedoms. Everyone knows the right of free speech. We have much more however than the right of free speech. I will list the conscience freedoms. They are freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom to hold opinions without interference, freedom to receive ideas and information without interference, freedom to communicate ideas and information without interference, freedom from interference with correspondence. How have we done in the exercise of those rights over the 50 years? A summary answer is we have a long way to go to be categorized as enlightened in this aspect of democracy but at least we no longer have to whisper in exercise of the right of free speech as many feared they did in the early days of Statehood.

I will list a few factors which have inhibited the growth of the conscience freedoms:

- the divisive politics
- the large size of government and the reliance of so many people on it
- the secrecy of government
- the woeful weakness of civil society
- the lack of respect by politicians on all sides for the conscience freedoms as evidenced by successive governments monopolizing and politicising the government owned media.

Until 20 years ago what passed for media consisted of two Saturday party political rag sheets and ZIZ. Despite the several pronouncements of the courts that there should be fair access for all to the government owned media successive governments have ignored the courts and the rights involved. The media is a critical organ of democracy. It is correctly referred to as the fourth estate. It informs and facilitates discourse and provides a platform to the citizen for the exercise of his conscience freedoms. It helps to counter the huge power of the state and to keep politicians in check. We are watching unfold before our eyes a fascinating example of the role of the media in confronting in the United States a President who would rather dominate the message. You know that the media is doing its job when politicians get mad at it.

The right to freedom of expression and the circumscription of that right have become all the more topical as the still new Information Age unfolds and communication technology becomes more prevalent. We see the debate taking place across the globe about what is cynically called fake news and alternative facts. Fake news is now a weapon of international relations bearing out Lenin's claim that if a lie is repeated often enough it becomes the truth. And he and the Nazi Goebbels did not, like the leaders of today, have the internet and social media to help them spout their propaganda. Our nation needs to begin the debate on countering the effects on our democratic processes of fake and distorted news. We have seen it affect an election in supposedly the most democratic country in the world. We can expect to see the same in our elections. We need to strategise about protecting ourselves individually and collectively from its dangers. It has its challenges but the most pleasing element of the Information Age is that it makes extremely difficult, nigh impossible, to suppress the conscience freedoms. With respect for democracy on all

sides the media can, however uncomfortable it may make life for the rulers, co-exist with government.

Before I leave the topic I comment on the exercise by our leaders of their right of free speech. They do not set a good example by the very low levels of discourse practiced as a norm in our Parliament and in much of the political discourse outside.

Another right that most surprisingly is rarely enforced is the right not to be discriminated against on grounds of political opinions or affiliation. As defined in the constitution this discrimination is committed by any public officer or authority who in the exercise of his duty affords different treatment to different persons for political reasons. I can't think of a right that has been more frequently breached over the last 50 years. And that is not a difficult breach to prove. I can only assume that the reason for the lack of enforcement of the right by legal action is that each side expects to be discriminated against when it is in opposition and waits to return the favour when the shoe is on the other foot. That has been a deep ditch on our road to freedom.

I now address free and fair elections for which we aim as part of a true democracy. The word "free" connotes in relation to elections that persons who are entitled to register as voters and to vote in elections are not unreasonably impeded in their exercise of those rights. Fairness is a more elusive concept but is generally accepted to connote that there are laws which reasonably provide for the conduct of elections, that there are genuinely equal opportunities for all competing candidates, that the electoral process is under control independent of the politicians and that there are transparent regulations as to how persons are registered to vote.

In a small country such as St. Kitts and Nevis, with a constituency and “*winner take all*” system and approximately 30,000 registered voters, a few votes can make the difference in deciding which political party gains the government in an election. The slightest abuse or distortion of or error in the system can therefore have a significant effect. By and large elections in St. Kitts and Nevis have been free but not fair. They are not fair mainly because of the porous system of qualification and registration of voters. The system of supervision and oversight are grossly inadequate leaving politicians with too much control of the process. These issues have been extensively ventilated over the past few years. I will repeat a summary of my criticisms and suggestions for reform:

1. The overseas vote is unfair in a constituency system and in a small country like this and it should be discontinued.
2. Registration to vote should be based on actual residence in a constituency. That residence should be proven by the voter. A person opposing the registration should not have to disprove a claim to residence. Documentary proof of residence is available in many official and business records and should be required in the process.
3. Disputes over residence should be determined by the courts not by a registration officer.
4. The electoral office should take an active role in verifying residence on an annual basis. St. Kitts and Nevis are small islands and lend themselves easily to this.
5. The Bryant clause and the dual nationality clause should be removed and any citizen resident in the country should be allowed to run for election.
6. Residence of seven years should be required for citizens of Commonwealth countries to qualify for registration as a voter.
7. The Supervisor of Elections should report only to the Electoral Commission. He should be appointed only after a debate in the National Assembly as to his qualifications.

8. The staff of the Electoral Office should be appointed by the Electoral Commission after the publication of the names of applicants and a process for objections to political activists.
9. The Electoral Commission should be expanded, it should have an office and staff including its own Legal Advisor and an adequate budget to enable it to perform its critical functions effectively. The Commission should issue a full report after each election.
10. The counting of votes should take place at each polling station promptly after the end of the poll subject to recount later in the evening at a central point in the constituency if necessary.
11. Campaign finance regulation is required to enable the public to ascertain who is pulling the strings of political parties.

I turn now to the climate of economic well-being which we seek as part of our freedom. The quality of living conditions has improved considerably over the past 50 years. A few examples:

1. Education- the system of secondary education was radically changed in 1966 with the conversion of the St. Kitts-Nevis Grammar School to the Basseterre High School. There followed the establishment of several other comprehensive secondary schools with the objective of universal free secondary education. This has been a major achievement of our country. In terms of Nevis it must be recorded that progress was unfortunately delayed until Nevis became internally self-governing after independence. The system is however now in need of another overhaul to meet the changing times. Too many children are being left behind by a system overly focused on exam results and not sufficiently on personal development of the student. I trust that the current review of the system in pursuit of the Education Policy

unveiled in March 2016 will include all levels and categories of education including adult education and tertiary level education.

2. Healthcare was very basic in 1967 with a few overworked doctors and limited midwifery and nursing care. It is much improved. However, as with education we need a long term plan to be created after genuine consultation across the society.
3. The growth and improvement of housing is another noteworthy achievement. Basic would be a generous description of much of the housing in the two islands in 1967. The change over the 50 years is obvious to the eye.
4. Social services- the expansion of available social services has been another important factor in the pursuit of economic freedom. St. Kitts and Nevis has been comparatively enlightened in expanding the safety net. Noteworthy in this regard was the establishment of the National Provident Fund which grew into the Social Security Scheme. Maintenance and further expansion of the system will require careful nurturing of the financial nest egg and wise decision making. There have also been a myriad of other social programmes which have contributed to improvement in the quality of living conditions across our islands.
5. The general infrastructure on both islands has been improved substantially over the 50 years including electricity, water, airports, seaports, roads, air transportation, inter island transportation and communication.
6. Sporting and recreational facilities are vastly improved.
7. Hopefully in a few years we will be able to say the same

about local food production.

The economy of St. Kitts and Nevis is vastly different today to that of 1967. Then there was a monoculture of sugar on St. Kitts and cotton production and subsistence farming on Nevis. Tourism was limited to a few tiny hotels on both islands. Light manufacturing was introduced in 1968 with the establishment of the Curtis Mathis TV Assembly plant at Bird Rock followed by electronic and garment factories in the early 1970s. In 1973 the sugar industry was dramatically changed when the government voluntarily took over the cultivation of sugar cane on the sugar estates whose owners could not get bank funding for the crop. There was no question then of the estates returning to private hands. Government sought to compulsorily acquire the estates but overreached in setting the amount of compensation in the legislation which was duly struck down by the courts. The estates and the sugar factory were eventually purchased from the private owners. World market conditions never allowed for its recovery and the industry was abandoned in 2005. But that left Government in ownership of most of the land on St. Kitts, a very significant national resource. If, given our history, there should be one issue addressed as a truly national issue, it is the use of this resource. But alas even that cannot escape the tribal politics.

The sugar industry in Nevis had collapsed in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century leaving Nevis in dire economic straits but as in St. Kitts much of the land fell into Government hands.

The development of tourism in St. Kitts began right after Statehood with the development of Frigate Bay and the construction in the 1970s of the Royal St. Kitts Hotel and Golf Course. It is worthy of note that the Frigate Bay Development Corporation sold its first lots at 68 cents EC per square foot. That price is now 40 times as much. When the housing development of Frigate Bay began it was

expected to attract mainly foreigners but to the credit of the local population most of the housing has been built by locals.

Tourism in Nevis took off with the opening in 1991 of the Four Seasons Resort. Nevis has since become a high-end tourist destination. St. Kitts at one time shared that ambition but that was put paid to by the low quality developments and ugly monstrosities built under the CBI programme. The development of the Marriott Resort and of Christophe Harbour have been the highlights of tourism development in St. Kitts in the past 15 years. The expansion of airline service principally from North America which followed the opening of the Marriott has been an important boost to the industry on both islands. The marina, Park Hyatt and other projects at Christophe Harbour should help grow the industry..

Cruise tourism became a major contributor to the economy with the development of Port Zante in the mid 1990s. This was the initiative of the Matalon family of Jamaica with incentivisation by Government who of course owned the seabed which was reclaimed to an extent of 34 acres.

The other current major industries are, like tourism, services namely offshore education on both islands and offshore financial services mainly from Nevis.

I record some important facts relating first to the offshore schools. This country owes a debt of gratitude to Dr. Robert Ross for founding Ross University School of Veterinary Medicine against heavy odds in 1983 and the International University of Nursing and University of Medicine and Health Sciences between 2004 and 2007. Dr. Ross put St. Kitts on the map of offshore education services. It is a sad omission that he was not in his lifetime and has not since his death been duly recognized for that contribution. There is still time to make up for that oversight. Just think of St. Kitts



without Ross University and the other offshore schools and you will realize what I am saying.

The growth of offshore financial services in Nevis but not in St. Kitts is due to the simple fact that the Nevis Government had the vision to entrust the development of the sector to experts from the private sector rather than trying to invent the wheel themselves as the Federal Government has done to little avail in St. Kitts.

Despite the real progress there are serious obstacles to future growth. Through whatever rose colored glasses we may see ourselves the world sees us with declining attractiveness for business and investment. We have declined 64 places in 7 years – from 70 in 2009 to 134 in 2016 – in the Ease of Doing Business Rankings of the World Bank. And to make it worse we are almost bottom – 184 out of 190 countries - in the ease of getting title to property, a business we rely on heavily for investment and government revenue. Nevis is miles ahead of St. Kitts in this area.

While there are some very professionally run Government departments too many are still affected by lethargy, politics and the power culture. Every Government since independence in 1983 has said it would modernize and professionalize the Civil Service. None has gotten anywhere. Too much power and control to give up?

While we can never catch up to Singapore which is first in the World Bank Rankings almost every year, we would do well to see where their focus is. Singapore is the size of St. Lucia and 50 years ago was an insignificant, troubled backwater. We boast about recent GDP growth. The GDP of Singapore has grown on average 6.72 per cent per annum over the past 40 years. Their focus is on strong social discipline, meritocracy, a business friendly environment, high productivity and work ethic, efficient government, zero

corruption and an education system to suit. We have a long way to go in all of those essential ingredients for economic success.

And finally on the economy to the CBI Programme which I mentioned previously in passing. There can be no doubt that the income and investment from that programme kept the economy afloat following the closure of the sugar industry and in the face of the worldwide recession from 2008. It is a great pity though that greed and politics caused the programme to damage the good name of the country. There should be a full accounting of the billions of dollars in public revenue generated by the programme and responsibility should be attributed for any wrongdoing. While, as we are told, it may not be the normal practice of nations to disclose the names of everyone given a diplomatic passport nor do nations normally sell their diplomatic passports. The people of St. Kitts and Nevis have the fundamental right to know who bought ours and how much and who they paid for them. This is one of the scars on our country that puts it at the crossroads.

We say that we desire economic well-being in the context of the rule of law. I think the easiest way to describe the rule of law is that it is the opposite of the rule of man. The people of this country know only too well what that means. Our constitution gives the Prime Minister enormous power and as we have seen the temptation to ignore the rule of law. The best description of that power was given by the late Sir Fred Phillips the first Governor of the Associated State of St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla and a leading constitutional law expert who said this very tellingly:

***“We must never forget that in small communities such as Caribbean States, it is easy for the Prime Minister wielding an all pervasive influence, to manipulate almost everything and everybody, especially since, in most***

***territories, he (or she) is the appointing authority in respect of almost every person on every board operating in the public domain”.***

The best way to check that temptation to autocratic rule is to introduce term limits, a maximum of two terms for any holder of that office.

Together the components of freedom set out in the constitution comprise an ideal destination for our country. The constitution also gives the preferred mode of travel to that destination, that is unity of purpose. That is where we have mostly faltered as a nation and as a people. We live in a tiny society which has prolonged for 50 years a political culture based on enmity over a turbulent birth in which no one was seriously hurt. The same society is unable to come to grips with the murder in 15 years of more than 300 of its young men. That is a telling indictment of dysfunction. Here are some other manifestations of that dysfunction:

1. A “win at all costs” mentality leading to consecutive governments failing to create a structure for fair elections.
2. A “my turn” mentality. That means that all the spoils of government must go to the supporters of the party in power. The opposition must suck salt.
3. An entitlements mentality with constituents expecting government largesse and governments squandering public money in pandering to them for votes. We know what that mentality did to the national debt. Also, it decimated the SIDF.
4. Low productivity has been the natural result. Politicians seem afraid to address this. But it is a reality which we continue to ignore at the peril of our economy.

5. Conflict resolution is rarely practiced. Animosity and hostility rule. The politicians lead the way and the public follows.
6. The inevitable decline in social discipline and crudeness in social interaction. Look around the streets and elsewhere in public and you will see the disorder. You see how public vending is uncontrolled. Littering is rampant in an island once acclaimed as the cleanest in the region. Everybody wants to do as they like.

On a more positive note I am pleased to acclaim the more prominent role that women are playing in business, in the professions and in the Civil Service and in every other area of society except politics. I must ask why aren't more women going into politics or speaking out more on national issues? Perhaps because politics has been a man's ego game for so long and they do not wish to play by its unpalatable rules. We should be debating this paradox.

We have a substantial resource of young, highly educated talent of both sexes in civil society. They are willing to make a non-partisan contribution to the national effort. However, the political culture frightens or turns them off from seeking any involvement that could expose them to the limelight and make them vulnerable to its vagaries. Civil society is a critical element of society, as important as the political element. Our society has suffered severely because of its inaction. Civil society must get its act together if we are to progress and to overcome the other deterrents.

The people of St. Kitts and Nevis do not suffer from disputes over race or ethnicity or religion or land or resources. The people have the same history, the same heritage and the same culture. Despite differences over the years the people of St. Kitts and Nevis are for the most part related by blood. The differences which impede progress are at root political.

They are surmountable. How do we put the past behind us and achieve the unity of purpose that we claim to be committed to? President Obama had the answer. He said this: “We long for unity, but we are unwilling to pay the price. But of course, true unity cannot be so easily won. It starts with a change in attitudes- a broadening of our minds and a broadening of our hearts”. We need to take President Obama’s words seriously. Our country needs direct and honest self-evaluation. The desire for unity of purpose does not mean that we must abandon the adversarial system of politics. Politics can be adversarial but issue based, strong but civil. But we must identify the issues on which there should be a truly national debate (for example land use, health, education, productivity, attitudes, crime) and engage in that debate putting country above political party and country above personal political or other ambition. We must put principles above men, the motto which the St. Kitts and Nevis Grammar School passed on to the Basseterre High School 50 years ago.

**Charles Wilkin QC**