

Beyond Independence in Trinidad and Tobago

Fifty six years ago, Trinidad and Tobago moved from a position of powerlessness under British rule to one of empowerment, as our twin island achieved independence. We were no longer dependent on a first world country to decide our fate. Since 1962, how much have we attained as we strive towards achieving economic, social and political stability? Are we proud of our accomplishments?

Britain, and other countries such as Spain, France, and Russia are first world countries who do not have an Independence Day. These countries have never been under any other nation's rule, were not subjugated or stripped of their riches or had its peoples enslaved for economic gain. First world indeed! Trinidad and Tobago continues to be titled with third world status, presumably until we are deemed socially and economically 'fit' to join this merry band of thieves.

As I continue to muse on the word independence, I think of all of our bright young people who have migrated to richer climes in search of their pot of gold, seeking independence and preferring to contribute to and work in other global territories, rather than looking within their native country for meaning and purpose. Our political leaders, businessmen and affluent citizens reinforce these myopic standards as they themselves emulate Eurocentric ideals of bigger houses, fancy cars, shopping in supermarkets overflowing with foreign goods, out of touch with the poverty and desperation that currently pervades some of our households.

3 Canal's *Everybody talking, nobody listening* hints at those dedicated citizens who have toiled in the vineyards for decades, hoping to inform policy and telling their story to leaders who seem not to care or to hear – Dr. Bratt and his push for inclusivity for the disabled, David Abdulah for social justice issues, TTAP (Trinidad and Tobago Association of Psychologists) for a Trauma Centre which may have helped those many persons who are still suffering from the psychological

aftershocks of the recent earthquake, with symptoms of depressive episodes and bouts of crying and insomnia. Where can they go for help?

Independence and its subtle variables of individualism and capitalist ideology of survival of the fittest has not been successful for the many in this country. The paradigm needs to be shifted. We need to move *beyond independence to interdependence*, that is, to a vision where people matter, where the 'collective' is more important than the negative self-focus of entitlement and accumulation of goods, this in the face of families living out of cars, or mothers living in outhouses with their babies.

Interdependence suggests pathways that foster social scripts where persons can depend on each other for their health and well-being, feeling safe as they interact with each other in their daily lives. These scripted patterns of engagement have to come from our leaders as they put more systems and more personnel in place to respond to the social and economic needs of the less fortunate, the elderly and the young, with minimal conflict and tension. Those who have served this country well – in all phases of life, especially in the Arts – must be honored without having to plead for monies or dying penniless on our streets. Feeling safe is a primary concern for many. According to David Rudder, '*If crime can't solve, is a madman's rant the only resolve?*'

Let us strive to make social harmony, feelings of respect and the well-being of our citizens, some of our goals beyond Independence. **With boundless faith in our destiny, let us stand side by side with each other. May God bless our Nation.**