

**Keynote Address**

**Delivered by  
Cordel Green  
Executive Director  
of  
the Broadcasting Commission - Jamaica**

**At  
The Launch of the Charles Hyatt Foundation  
The Pantry Playhouse  
March 21, 2011  
(These views are not necessarily those of the Broadcasting Commission)**

***“A portrait of Jamaican Culture, Creativity and Values”***

Members of the Hyatt family, trustees and supporters of the Charles Hyatt foundation, specially invited guests, uninvited guests, ladies and gentlemen, good evening. When I received the invitation to be guest speaker at the launch of the Charles Hyatt Foundation, I did not hesitate to accept. After all, Charles Hyatt was one of my childhood heroes. Only a few days after did I get the harrowing feeling that I might have made a mistake in accepting, because I, being amongst the least experienced of the many distinguished persons gathered here, would be expected to say something sensible about the arts to dons and doyennes of the arts.

At first, all I could come up with was, “get up and say, in as feeble a voice as you can muster and with a shaking movement “I am not well this evening” and then sit down”. But practise as I did, I could not perfect the act such that it could convince Leonie Forbes and Fae Ellington. So, I abandoned that option.

I will instead rely on the tacit knowledge of someone who created art, the late Rex Nettleford, who said “it is the creative mind that has plumbed the depths of our anguish and celebrated our possibilities, producing words and music...to define, discover and articulate our humanity.”

So, it is accurate to say that our creative industries are popular culture is really an internal narrative about ourselves. So, what are we saying about ourselves?

Well, in the latest theatrical production “Manatt”, we are confirming that Jamaican culture is shaped by a dance of two opposing forces: memory and forgetfulness.

“Memory gives us context while forgetfulness provides an opening for invention and originality”.

If we take our popular music, on the other hand, then we are compelled to agree with Edward Seaga’s observations in last Sunday’s Gleaner: “...culture is the most powerful force in shaping people and branding nations.” In that regard, I have identified 5 discordant principles in our popular music; which make the brand irresistibly schizophrenic:

1. Love thy neighbour! But you can also be conceited and self-absorbed!
2. Discipline yourself! But also take risks in order to enjoy yourself!
3. The people are poor and must be uplifted! But the people should consume and live with abundance, outside their means!

4. Do your duty! But blame everybody else!

5. Fight for your rights, justice and social equality! But exploit women and oppress men who are different!

Beyond that, as we have seen from several recent incidents, nowadays it is quite difficult to draw a firm line between artistic creative imagination and "real life" activities of artistes.

In that regard, it has to be understood that the right to creative expression is not simply the right to say anything we want. Saying anything we want is not "creative" expression, it is simply "expression." One gets "creative" when there is the capacity to adapt what is created to specific circumstances or to create for specific circumstances. So, we can create for the dancehall, the stage, the bedroom, the classroom, the radio or the go-go club but not as one and the same!

To the creative person, I say, it is not the themes themselves, but often the context in which they are portrayed which can make the difference between "learning about" and "learning to be".

Where have we gotten this warped notion, for example, that to manifest our true identity as Jamaicans we must use our Jamaican language in what Carolyn Cooper describes as a "brawling register"? Where have we gotten the idea, as Carolyn Cooper observes, that "our mother tongue is seen primarily as the language of "bruckin out", "leh go" and "vicious quarelling"? Why have we descended into a kind of recklessness which is characterized by endless tracing matches? (within and outside our Parliament)

Why are we embarked on a betrayal of Garvey? Why did he teach elocution? Was it not that he understood that the black man, the poor man, should be able to rise to high levels on any stage using any language of power?

So, therefore, I say to all who have ears, when it is that we begin to argue about the direction of our country and the role of culture, here is how we should do it. We don't go JLP, we don't go PNP, we don't go english, we don't go patois, we don't go uptown, we don't go downtown...we should go deeper. We go for depth not division.

In his 2006 book (Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny) Nobel Laureate Professor Amartya Sen warns against being too narrow in our definitions of self. Adapting his argument, I submit that when we allow definitions of ourselves as one thing "ghetto people" vs. "uptown people", it becomes too easy to be opposed or hostile to

one another, than if were to define ourselves more inclusively as Jamaicans and citizens of the world.

As brother Bertram Johnson reminded a small gathering of persons at the Half-way Tree Transportation centre on July 17, 2010; Jamaica is specially blessed and chosen by God, evidenced in Isaiah 60 verse 22 “a few shall be a thousand and a little nation shall be great.” “We”, brother Johnson said, “have already conquered the world with our music; we cannot afford to lose our weapon”.

It is against this background that I am here today to identify with the mission of this foundation which Charles Hyatt Jr. describes as “to bring understanding of this small island of ours to other places around the world and the wider public” (The Gleaner, March 18, 2011).

That is a very important mission because we must remind ourselves and the world about our pedigree as Jamaicans. Our internal narrative must recall and celebrate the fact that we are members of the Caribbean Community from which has come three Nobel laureates (Derrick Walcott for literature, Sir Arthur Lewis for economics and Professor Anthony Chen for climate change; and that Trinidad’s steel pan has been declared by the American Institute of Physics as one of the most important acoustic instruments to be invented in the last century; A Jamaica from which has come Rex Nettleford, late Vice-Chancellor Emeritus, who was one of only four Rhodes scholars in the world honoured by Oxford University at the Rhodes Centenary celebrations; our narrative must speak eloquently about the fact that we created “Exodus”, named album of the 20th century by Time magazine and “One Love”, named the best song of the 20th century by the BBC; that our cultural heritage and intellectual history are world-class and we have made an international footprint that bears no relation to our size, age and global ranking.

My wish is that such a narrative will constitute the over-arching philosophy behind everything that is done by this foundation, and I wish it a very long and successful tenure.

I conclude by commending to us the words of Marcus Garvey as a clarion call in this initiative to reinforce our cultural identity.

“ Man is the individual who is able to shape his own character, master his own will, direct his own life and shape his own ends. When God breathed into the nostrils of man the breath of life, he never intended that the individual should descend to the level of a peon, a serf, or a slave, but that he should be

always man in the fullest possession of his senses and with the truest knowledge of himself.

If only we get to know ourselves, then in twenty four hours we would have a new nation, an empire – resurrected, not from the will of others to see us rise- but from our own determination to rise, irrespective of what the world thinks.” Thank You.