Diaspora, Culture and Community: Ideas from the Washington Metropolitan Area

Preamble

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is an honour, and a pleasure, to be speaking today to this founding Diaspora conference here in Grenada. I speak from the diaspora in the metropolitan Washington DC area. I acknowledge the presence of others here today from that area and the active participation of June Lendore, who couldn”t be here today, in the preparation of the paper and discussion of ideas for this conference. Other metropolitan Washington area individuals saw and commented on the paper, so, although it”s necessarily the work of a small group, the process of broader consultation has begun. We want this process to be as inclusive as possible. However, there are many who have not yet been consulted about it. We think of this as
The term diaspora has come to be used to define people who live away from their homelands. So, today we are having a conference named a “diaspora” conference. The word “diaspora” was first used as a way to describe the historic experience of the Jewish people, and then, in the fifties and sixties, scholars used it to define the experience of African people, so that the Caribbean, for example, was described as (partly comprising) an African diaspora. Gradually, the term has been used to describe the experience of peoples away from their homelands, and so there are Indian, Irish and other diasporas, and now, Caribbean diasporas, that is, Caribbean people living away from their homelands. Diaspora scholar Joseph Harris explains it like this, “The concept of the African diaspora as a mode of study gained momentum from 1965 when the International Congress of African Historians convened in Tanzania and included in its program a session entitled „The African Abroad or the African diaspora”.¹ Since then, he notes, UNESCO has been using the term

¹ Joseph Harris, Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora. Howard University Press, 1993, 4
in its *General History of Africa*. Another researcher, Elliott Skinner, notes that, “the concept of diaspora – derives from the historic experience of the Jewish people”. So we owe the use of the word *diaspora* to that history and to the scholars who explained and extended use of the word.

Yet, scholars theorize about an already existing experience and, here in the Caribbean, more specifically for this conference, in Grenada, we have had the experience of diaspora all around us, even before we named it that. We, people of Grenada, are a diaspora people, from Africa, Asia, Europe, the Levant. Our cultures are cultures shaped by a diasporic experience. Research the history of almost any Grenadian and you find one or more of other countries and peoples: to name a few, Dominica, Barbados, Trinidad & Tobago, Jamaica, Haiti, St. Lucia, Ghana, Nigeria, India, Lebanon, Palestine, Ireland, Scotland, Mali, England. So even before we factor in the 20th and 21st century migrations to the United Kingdom and Panama and Cuba and Canada and the United States, we are a diasporic people, a global people, and it is important for culture, politics, and everything.

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else that we understand, research and appreciate that. The Grenada
culture, that we live and experience every day, is a diasporic culture,
comprising elements that are English, French, Twi, and Yoruba.
There is also Big Drum, with its influences from a variety of African
nations; saracca or salacca, with elements that are Muslim and
influenced by the Yoruba, Ewe and other peoples, and a variety of
other influences. All these multicultural influences today comprise
what we know as the culture of Grenada, Carriacou and Petite
Martinique.

Let us think not only of what our culture in Grenada, Carriacou &
Petite Martinique can be to tourists but what it means to us. Even if
we want to sell our culture as a tourism product, we first need to
understand and be proud of it. Why educate the tourists if we are
ignorant of the story ourselves? In fact, how can we educate others if
we don"t know? So, who are we? Edward B. Tylor writes that
culture is “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art,
law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired
by man as a member of society”. ³ He was writing in 1871, and for “man” we will read “man and woman”.

Themes and Issues

Among themes that are important to the Grenada diaspora in Washington DC as we consider how to involve ourselves creatively and usefully in the development of culture in Grenada are the following:

(1) preservation of artefacts – archives, archaeology, slave pens, Amerindian heritage sites, etc.

(2) research into customs and traditions – Carriacou Big Drum; Carriacou Maroon Festivals; rituals involved in weddings; stone feasts; saracca/salacca in River Sallee, La Poterie, and Carriacou; orisha (shango); Indian communities and traditions; Maypole and other cultural performances.

(3) The cemetery at Thibaud, Carriacou, with the gravesite of Fort Mache and the identification of other historical sites.

(4) Proper research and preservation of archaeological sites at Pearls, St. Andrew’s, Grand Bay, Carriacou and other places to be identified within Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique. (Some of us recall doing archaeological digs, as children, at Calivigny Island. If such sites and other similar sites exist and are available to us, they are our national patrimony and every effort should be made to excavate them and preserve existing material. (Possible funding source and source of technical advice: UNESCO).

(5) Designation of sites in Carriacou and Grenada as cultural heritage sites.

(6) Research on boatbuilding traditions in Carriacou and Petite Martinique

(7) The Grenada vernacular and influences from West African (Twi, Yoruba) and European (French and English) languages.

(8) Identification of artefacts such as slave pens in sites throughout Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique
(9) Research, documentation, location and proper identification of artefacts related to the history of Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique – for example, the mausoleum of Louis La Grenade at Morne Jaloux, artefacts related to the Fedon Rebellion, at Gouyave and/or other locations.

These are interests that could be pursued over time, because we recognize that it would be impossible to do it all at once. From these interests, we have developed the following ideas and plan of action:

1. **Preservation of our Archives**

   (a) **Resources at the Archives of the Grenada Public library.**

   At the archives, there are newspapers and other documents from the 19th century – 1807, end of the slave trade, 1833, Act of Emancipation, and other such documents - papers that can help us reconstruct Grenadian history and better understand the colonial and postcolonial periods. We refer to documents that are important to our understanding of the period of enslavement and the later periods of Indian and African indentureship. They are invaluable to students of
history, culture and politics. Many of these papers are now falling apart because they have not been properly stored. They are not on microfiche, have not been preserved in other ways, and so our archival material is literally turning to dust before our eyes.

(b) Other archival sources – preservation of material from 1979 to 1983. We propose to approach similar sources to ensure preservation of this material.

After the 1983 implosion and the collapse of the Grenada Revolution, some libraries in Britain and the United States charged significant fees - (one dollar or one pound per page, perhaps not unusual for their library charges) to photocopy information about Grenadian culture and politics early in the nineteenth century or about Grenadian culture and politics between 1979 and 1983. Some documents taken out of the country in 1983 have allegedly been returned, and no matter what side of the political spectrum you are on, these documents are important. They don’t belong to any of us individually. They belong to the country, to our future, and to our children and grandchildren who will try to understand our
mistakes so that they don"t repeat them. They belong to the history and story of the country and the region. With our interest in preservation of our heritage, we ask, where are they? How do we preserve those materials? When the U.S. had them, they were at one time housed at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. Now that the originals have been returned, copies are allegedly in microfiche at the National Archives in Maryland. Surely the original documents, held by Grenada, are even more important. The history and the stories of those who fought on every side of the conflict, though painful to us, are important to the world but even more important to us. Whatever we think, we have to claim our stories, and designate areas in which we preserve documentation about our recent history, or researchers will continue to go to colonial powers, old and recent, to uncover the story of our lives.

2. Cultural Heritage Sites

There are certain areas that could be designated cultural heritage sites. We draw attention to the following:
(a) *Carriacou*

The island itself is a site of tremendous interest. Certainly particular areas, but perhaps also the island itself, may be designated a cultural heritage site. Among cultural practices of interest are Big Drum Nation, traditional weddings and tomb stone feasts. Throughout the years, several researchers have done work on Carriacou. As we continue, it is important to assemble the work done by such researchers, and have it all housed at every library in the country. To name a few, the work of the USA folklorist Allan Lomax, of Michael Garfield Smith, on Kinship and Community in Carriacou, of Lorna McDaniel on the Big Drum Ritual of Carriacou, of Christine David, on the Folklore of Carriacou, the several interviews and explanations that Winston Fleary and others have given on the culture of Carriacou, the fiction of Paule Marshall. Carriacou is the only place in the Caribbean where you have what is called a Big Drum Nation Dance, celebrating various nations of Africa. This is of tremendous cultural and historical significance, not only to Grenada and the Caribbean, but also to Africa, the African diaspora and all those interested in culture and society. The State of Grenada has to value what Carriacou has so carefully preserved. Designated areas in Carriacou
– or perhaps the island – should be named a cultural heritage site, with care being taken to preserve and restore these sites throughout Carriacou. Recently, Angus Martin's work on the Temne peoples has had interesting intersections with work already done and with the store of knowledge about the Temne and other peoples of Carriacou. We acknowledge the value of this and other research work to our efforts to establish a base of information about Carriacou. For material on both Carriacou and Grenada, there should be acknowledgement of the work of and discussions/interviews with those who already have valuable information. In Carriacou, there is the Carriacou Historical Society and individuals such as Ms. Christine David, Mr. Winston Fleary and others. Additionally, in every community, it should be recognized that people in their 80s, 90s and older are also valuable resources, elders who can help us re-create community histories.

(b) St. George’s Market

The St. George’s Market is an important historical site. Among information of interest to our reconstruction of the Market Square is the fact that, according to historical accounts, an enslaved man known as John Bull was hanged at the market square in St. George’s
in the early nineteenth century. That is only one of the many stories that can help us to reconstruct our history.

© Buildings

Some buildings in St. George”s provide an example of the sedan chair portico (further detailed below in “Research and Recording”. These buildings should be identified and designated cultural heritage sites.

There are other buildings identifiable throughout the country. In Carriacou and Petite Martinique there are old wooden houses that some suggest may be of cultural and historical interest. We suggest a partnership or collaboration with the Carriacou Historical Society, the St. George”s Heritage Society, and other interested individuals and private sector organizations to restore or otherwise preserve old buildings of cultural interest and, where necessary, have them designated cultural heritage sites.

(d) Other sites throughout the State

Throughout Grenada are sites important to our culture and history. Some of these are on land privately owned but it is hoped that there could be cooperation to have these sites identified and designated as
cultural heritage sites. Examples include the tomb of Louis LaGrenade at Morne Jaloux, the slave pen at Hermitage and the Carib Stone at Mt. Rich. We should work toward a comprehensive listing of such sites. We should also ensure that they are designated heritage sites and restored where necessary.

Research and Recording:

In order to better understand our culture and to be able to more effectively explain it to others both local and foreign, we propose research and documentation through print and/or DVD production. There is a need for such research in several areas. These include:

(c) The story of the Limlair and Mt. Pleasant Maroons, the role of women and the way in which communities participated in the Maroon.

(d) Research and recording (in Carriacou and Petite Martinique) of a wedding event featuring the traditional dancing of the cake.
(e) Research of the “Sedan chair portico” on Church Street, St. George’s and cooperation with the St. George’s Heritage Society to prominently display information about these sites of historical interest in St. George’s. They tell a story about class and the organization of society in 19th century Grenada. On Church Street there are three buildings that can be identified with sedan chair porticos. What is a “sedan chair portico”? It is an architectural structural attachment to a building (the Guyana and Trinidad Mutual Insurance building on Church Street is one example). The portico was used by women who went to transact business in St. George’s. They were lifted from their horse carriages in sedan chairs and brought into the sedan portico so their feet never touched the street. The chairs remained in the sedan portico and they went to do their visits or transact other business. On leaving the building they sat in their chairs and were taken outside to the street and placed in their carriages for their return home.

Churches
The Anglican, Roman Catholic and Presbyterian (and possibly other) churches in St. George’s, have stories important to our understanding of the colonial period. Documents held by the Presbyterian Church are/were invaluable for the reconstruction of the Indian historical experience in Grenada. The present site of the Anglican Church in St. George’s was the site of the Roman Catholic Church during the French colonization until 1783 with the Treaty of Versailles between the French and British. The Catholic Church was moved to its present site up on the opposite hill. Before Hurricane Ivan struck Grenada, all these churches housed private documents that were important historical records helping us to reconstruct Grenada society and understand its race and class organization. Working with the Heritage Society, the Grenada Government and the Willie Redhead Foundation, we propose proper research of these churches with a view to identifying funds to erect plaques explaining their colonial and postcolonial stories.

As we consider all of this, we speak from our own interest in the culture of Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique, using what
knowledge we have and trying to consider where we might be effective. We are aware that others may be more informed about particular sites and situations and that those who have done earlier research may have the knowledge needed to develop projects and make suggestions about funding. We consider this a proposal and welcome further suggestions for development and implementation.

**Proposed Plan Of Action:**

- We propose to devise a plan for preservation of archival documents – at the library and other sites - and for establishment of proper archives. We hope that such a plan could be completed with the cooperation of the Government of Grenada, archivists at the Grenada Public Library and others with expertise in this area for presentation to UNESCO, the OAS or other similar organizations. The plan should be aimed both at training of individuals to work in the archives and at the actual preservation of material to be housed in an appropriate space at the Grenada Public Library, the Carriacou Historical Society and/ or a similar site to be determined.
• Work with the St. George’s Heritage Society and other interested individuals to research sedan chair porticos and for placement of plaques detailing the historical and cultural significance of these buildings.

• Research the market at St. George’s with a view to placing a plaque detailing early history and significant historical incidents.

• Similar plaques detailing the historical significance of churches in Grenada.

• Work with the Carriacou Historical Society and other interested people in Carriacou to develop plans for designation of Carriacou as a cultural heritage site and, possibly, to create a museum in the Great House at Craigston or at Belair Park in Carriacou.

• Identification of slave pens and sites of historical interest throughout the State.

Here we have listed some of the programmes to be developed as a collaboration between home and diaspora, based on our discussion of culture and society. We see this as a beginning and look forward to working cooperatively to adjust proposals where necessary, and to
identify the funds necessary for implementation of the plan. Since this project proposal is coming from the diaspora, it is important to note that living in the diaspora (as, indeed, also living in Grenada) are people with a variety of skills acquired over the years. As discussions continue, people will recognize where they can contribute and will assuredly come forward with their suggestions for active participation in development of the project.

Paper prepared by Merle Collins and June Lendore
Washington Metropolitan Area, July 2011

Addendum

Grenada Cultural Heritage (Information from an online source\(^4\))

We would like to note that one online source, after listing various cultural sites that are part of Grenada’s cultural heritage, states that:

“from a legal standpoint to date we can safely report that only two sites have official recognition; namely, the Amerindian Site at the Pearls Airport and the Louis la Grenada Mausoleum at Morne Jaloux.”

Other pertinent information is given here as a direct quotation from the source. This can be useful to guide our future discussion (only detail given is the site address, included here as a footnote):

“Other than this, recently as late 2007, Cabinet approved a list of 22 sites to be considered for declaration (please find attached.)

Under the Natural and Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee (NCHAC), of the Physical

Planning Unit, over three hundred (300) buildings within the Town of St. George, were identified for listing as historical buildings. Despite this however, today there is no official or National Inventory of heritage sites. At the same time, what ever has been done in this regard has been the efforts of organizations such as the Grenada National Trust and the Willie Redhead Organisation.

List of Proposed Sites To be Declared as National Heritage Landmarks/Monuments in Grenada.

1. The Fortified System of fortification of St. George’s and adjoining sites – hospital compound etc.
   - Fort George built on an old battery from the 1660s; regarded as the smallest fort on the Island however, it is the most important military establishment having played a part in every aspect of Grenada’s military and political history. Expanded from 1706 – 1710, it is now within its Tricentennial (300 years) of expansion. Regarded as one of the classical examples of early Bastion Tracer Forts.

2. Fort Matthew, Frederick and Adolphus Complex which includes the Home for the Aged and Prisons, Richmond Hill Tennis Court
   - between 800 – 1500 yards of Fortification built from 1779 – 91, as a siege fort to withstand an invading army for a period of 6 months. Considered to be a major break through in military architecture
   - Government House Compound – bought in 1790 and established as part of the fortified complex with the Government Battery decommissioned in 1850.

3. Fort and Underground Tunnel Network at Old Fort/Hospital Hill Redoubts – part of the fortification network and best tunnel system built by the French during 1779

4. Portic Point and Ruin at Point Salines - *NPPA Act. 1990 could be considered also – Site of old Medieval Leather Tannery last remaining of its kind on the Island

5. Financial Complex Carenage – to be considered as part of the core historic district of St. George’s. Established in 1822 it was one of the best Commissariat and Ordinance Complex in the Caribbean

6. National Museum Compound including the Drill Yard and open space leading up to the Old St. James Hotel – Museum
   Compound was established as the French Garrison when they relocated the Old Town of Fort Louis to the New town of Fort Royal. It was also the site of the Goal and later the first Hotel on the Island. The open spaces were the Foso/Glacis of the Fort.

7. Knox House – built by the French and also used by the British as former Governor’s Compound, Chief Guard Huts, Legislature, Supreme
Court and library - * privately owned by the Presbyterian Church
8. The Market Square – established as part of the early grid system for the town during the 1730s, it was used as the chief military parade square for the troops. Was also designated as the public market square in 1791.
9. Louis La Grenade Mausoleum at Morne Jaloux - built by the Legislature in honour of Louis La Grenade a French Coloured who fought with the British against the French during the Fedon Rebellion - PPDC Act 25 of 2002
11. White Lime Kiln Mt. Rodney Sauteurs – old kiln used for burning the natural deposits of lime found in that area and used for the construction of the town - PPDC Act. 25
12. The Piton at Levera – hill overlooking Levera and Bathway with main access from Rose Hill - NPPA Act. 42 of 1990
13. Telescope Point – site of 1795 coastal battery that saw action during the Fedon’s Rebellion, was important for the protection of the Grenville Harbour - National Parks and Protected Areas Act. 42 of 1990
14. Remains of Old Town Marquis – first town in St. Andrew’s raised/burn to the ground during the Fedon’s Rebellion - PPDC ACT. 25 of 2002 - *site privately owned
15. Amerindian Stone Mount Rich – with approximately 60 petroglyph drawings, stone regarded as important Caribbean Amerindian Site - National Heritage Protection ACT. 1990 – 9(1)
16. Duquesne Petroglyph Drawings – largest Petroglyph drawings on Island - NHP ACT. 1990 – 9 (1)
17. Old Water Cistern at Paddock – first started during the 1730s as the old water system to serve shipping in the harbour, hence the spout at ballast ground - PPDC ACT 25 of 2002 - 40.
18. La Sagesse Pond and Standing Stone – a small wet land area known for a rich bird life – the standing stone is on the site of the first built town in Grenada, Megrin Settlement established by the British in 1609: 2009 will mark 400 years of this attempted British settlement – potential NPPA ACT. 42 of 1990 – ownership needs to be sought out
19. Pearls Airport – Amerindian Site? Airport building? – already identified under the National Heritage Protection ACT. 1990- extent of site to be demarcated
20. Paradise Bridge – 1811 – 13, PPDC ACT 25 of 2002- built by Gentle Men Apprentices is the only Georgian Bridge of its type on the island
22. Dumfries, Carriacou – once considered to be the best agriculture plot on the Island – cultivation ran from sugar, cocoa and finally limes. Was site of agricultural experiment such as the growing of mauby and animal husbandry – black belly sheep. Rich in early French and British history
N.B. The following three pieces of Legislations will have to be taken into consideration:-
a. National Parks and Protected Areas Legislation of 1990
b. Physical Planning and Development Control Act 2002
c. NationalHeritageProtectionActNO.18 of 1990
**From numbers 1 – 8 to be considered under the Physical Planning and Development Control Act 25 of 2002.
Marine Protect Sites (MPA) for example Molinere MPA, are under the Department of Fisheries, **Ministry of Agriculture thus have their own legislation and management systems.

Major Policy Decision
Government/Cabinet will have to decide on reviving the Grenada National Parks System including the National Parks Advisory Council due to the absence of the adequate management structure.
Sites listed, are ones, which are mainly owned and maintained by Government, except The Knox House Complex and Marquis Old Town. It should be pointed out also, that the listing and declaration of sites would have consequences both from a financial and legal standpoint for Grenada. Hence, the emphasis to date, has been on those more or less controlled by Government. Such considerations are being guided by the Physical Planning and Development Control Act 2002 : Part VI – Conservation of the Natural and Cultural Heritage.
A system of listing and categorization is presently being developed by the Physical Planning Department as part of the establishment of the Conservation Zone for St. George’s”
PARTNERING WITH THE DIASPORA
FOR NATION-BUILDING

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