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**WHAT  
INDEPENDENCE  
MEANS  
TO YOU**

GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE, TRINIDAD, W.I.—1962

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## HISTORY

It is impossible to understand the full meaning of Independence, to appreciate the seriousness of this new status of ours, or to see clearly the road we must take in the future, if we do not pause and look back at the past, and see the weary road that we have walked since our ancestors came to these shores.

So this little glimpse into our history will show our strengths, our weaknesses, our trials and tribulations, what forces have kept us down or buoyed us up till now we, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, have come into our own and are ready to march boldly forward into the future—united, courageous, determined.

The West Indian islands were discovered by Columbus at the end of the fifteenth century, but because they lacked gold and silver, they were for 150 years little more than convict settlements, small estates, and bases from which the French and British raided the wealthy Spanish galleons and mainland ports. The Dutch introduced and fostered sugar cultivation in the 17th century and this was developed on the plantation system with Negro slave labour.

The wealth from the sugar and slave trades made these islands extremely valuable. To own West Indian islands gave prestige to European powers. The West Indies were valuable markets for European manufactures and a source of raw materials. These considerations influenced the cause and course of many European wars in the 18th century. Tobago passed through Dutch, French and British hands before 1800. Trinidad was captured by the British from the Spaniards in 1797.

The owners of the plantations were called planters, most of them being European. They controlled much power in the Legislative Assemblies and made the laws. The slaves had few rights in Spanish colonies, less in the French and least of all in English colonies. The Spanish and French grew cocoa and coffee as well as sugar, the British cultivated mainly sugar. Many French refugees from the Haitian revolution of the 1790's flocked to Trinidad.

The West Indies, however, were declining rapidly in importance by the end of the 18th century. Sugar was not paying as well as previously because the traditional bad agricultural techniques and practices could not produce it at a sufficiently low price to enable it to compete successfully against the newer sugar lands of Brazil and Cuba. The British nation was undergoing a "religious revival". Its Christian missions to the West Indies were finding slavery and the planters an obstacle to their evangelical work and so supported Wilberforce and Buxton who were seeking Emancipation. Parliament abolished the slave trade in 1808 and emancipated the slaves in 1834.

Emancipation was a milestone in many ways. As British subjects, the ex-slaves enjoyed the protection of the law and were entitled to the fundamental rights of free men. They were no longer responsible to an owner for their conduct, they were responsible to the law; they could choose their employers (or work for themselves); they could seek wages for their labour, redress for grievances, and education for themselves and children. In England many people doubted whether the Negroes could be trusted to work and to behave themselves when they became free: The Church, which controlled education, was not primarily concerned with the political advancement of the people; the British Government had lost interest in the West Indies and certainly did not want the Negroes in control of politics. Hence it left the planters still in control of legislation in Tobago. In Trinidad, where the Crown made the laws, planters were most influential as advisers. They persuaded the Crown to import labour from Portugal, China, Africa and India into Trinidad for their plantations out of public funds. Social change was slow throughout the 19th century—a period of decline in the West Indian sugar industry. By 1899, when Tobago became united with Trinidad, the masses of the people were still excluded from, and were indeed untrained for, high posts in Government, commerce, and industry; they were not admitted to, and could not afford to go to many of the better secondary schools, and the gulf between the largely white upper class and the largely coloured lower classes was very wide indeed.

Oil was discovered in Trinidad early in the twentieth century. This stimulated industrial and economic growth. The working class movement, led by persons like Cipriani and Uriah Butler, gained strength in the 1930's underlining the need for political change. The period after World War II saw, too, a fundamental change in attitudes towards colonies as the coloured peoples increasingly asserted their right to independence. Opportunities for education were widened, and the people as a whole were gradually introduced to political (and social) privileges—adult suffrage and elective seats in the Council—until by 1962 the Territory was fully self-governing.

This then has been the historical background of our growth towards independence. We can observe certain directions of political, social, economic and cultural change. For the first time the people of Trinidad and Tobago have full power to shape their own destiny. The task which faces us is great. The contribution of each one of us is needed; it will be a contribution to the common good. It deserves our best efforts to weld this society into a nation. If we succeed the glory will belong to each one of us.

## CULTURE

CULTURE is a word that you use all the time without really knowing exactly what it means, isn't it? You speak of a cultured person meaning someone who is well-educated, well-mannered, interested in music, drama, art and that sort of thing. But what do you mean when you speak of the culture of a whole people? It is very difficult to define; but the culture of a nation is the total expression of the way of life of the people. This expression finds form in the art, music, literature, institutions and attitudes to life which characterise the people and distinguish them from other peoples.

Let us consider the culture of our own people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Since culture is a development of society it is intimately bound up with history, and our rich and exciting history is giving rise to a rich and exciting culture. "Is giving rise" and not "has given rise" because we are a relatively new people, and our history is a short one, and the process is a continuous never-ending one.

As you know we are descendants of peoples from all parts of the earth: Europeans (British, Spanish, French, Portuguese), Indians, Africans, Chinese, Syrians. All these influences have been at work, blending and fusing, to create something new and distinctive, something peculiar to Trinidad and Tobago. In addition, though there are extremely few descendants of the original natives of these islands today, a few Carib and Arawak influences are still at work among us, and our geographical position brings us into close contact with various North and South American influences.

In the past there were drawbacks to the full expression of the natural instincts and creative talents of our people. Our language is not originally our own for one thing, and our history encouraged us to look to Europe instead of to ourselves for guidance and inspiration. Thus much of our culture was imitative and not genuinely native, while much of what was native tended to be looked down on as inferior. We tended to be ashamed of ourselves.

In recent years all this has changed. More and more we have begun to realise our identity and be proud of it. Though English is our language, we have come to understand that we can add to the English language words and expressions of our own creating. (This is not to say that we must be slovenly and slack in our speech). Our writers have learned to look around them at home and to think and feel and write about the sights and sounds and people of our homeland.

Our painters and sculptors, our architects and all our other creative workers are doing the same in their fields.

We do not reject outside influences—that would be fatal—but we take them and adapt them.

The same movement can be seen in our music, our dress, our food. The Calypso and the Steelband which some of our own people had doubts about before are now proud examples of our culture and give us a distinction in the eyes of other peoples of the world. We no longer imitate blindly European fashions in dress but adapt them to reflect our diverse racial origins, our love of colour, our spirit of gaiety and *joie de vivre*. Chow mein, roti, float and accra are not confined to any one section of the community but belong to all and are enjoyed by all.

Cricket was originally an English game, but look at what we have done to it and for it. We have added a distinctive touch which only these islands could have given birth to. Learie Constantine would not have been Learie Constantine, Sonny Ramadhin would not have been Sonny Ramadhin if they had been born and nourished anywhere else. This is true too of Jeffrey Stollmeyer and Rupert Tang Choon.

We are now a new nation, free and independent. This must give an added impetus to the process of fulfilling ourselves and our destiny as a people. To accomplish this we must continue to fashion and form all influences which we are heir to in our own distinctive mould so that all our actions, our thoughts, our attitudes, our creations, will maintain the highest standards and, like our food, have the distinctive flavour of Trinidad and Tobago.

## DISCIPLINE

WE are now an independent nation because we are fit to govern ourselves. What do you think is the meaning of this phrase "fit to govern ourselves"? It means that we have grown up, that we are no longer attached to our mother's apron strings, but that from now on, in our own way, as we think fit, we will decide what the people of Trinidad and Tobago are going to do and how we are going to do it.

This is a very pleasant thought and very easy to say, but difficult to put into practice successfully unless we are a disciplined people. It will be exactly the same with you when you grow up and have to make your own way in life. You will look forward to the day when you are free to make your own decisions without your parents having to tell you what to do and what not to do.

But unless you are well-disciplined you will find it very difficult to organise your life in a way that will bring you any real happiness or success.

In your own private life good discipline means self-discipline. That is, you will do what is right, not because you are made to do it, but because you know it is right and want to do what is right. Similarly, you will avoid what is wrong, not because somebody prevents you from doing it, but because you know it is wrong and freely choose to do nothing that is wrong.

But you are not merely a private individual, you are at the same time a citizen—a member of the community. And the success of the community, of our new independent nation of Trinidad and Tobago, will depend on the extent to which you and every other citizen is disciplined.

The citizens of a well-disciplined community have respect for authority. They know, for example, that laws are made for the good of all and must be obeyed at all times. A well-disciplined person will stop at a red traffic light at midnight when there is no other traffic on the road. He will not ride a bicycle at night without a light, even if he feels he can get away with it. He is disciplined because he is prepared to put up with small inconveniences to himself in order to observe the laws made for the good of all.

This is the secret of self-discipline, and this is why it is so important to the community. Success and happiness can come to a nation as it can come to a family if each individual is unselfish and thinks of the other members as well as of himself.

You can train yourself along these lines to improve your behaviour in public; in queueing to buy tickets for a show; at a meeting, cinema show or football match; the way in which you accept a referee's or an umpire's decision. All these things are important, and if you realise the importance now, you will be playing your part in helping to make our new nation a noble one which will be respected by all others in the great family of nations.

## PRODUCTION

WHEN we as a people accept "Production" as one of the three watchwords of our new nation, we tell the world that here is a community in which every individual gives of his best at all levels of activity. We indicate that for us there is no acceptable effort but maximum effort; no acceptable output but maximum output; no acceptable attainment but the highest.

Production in this sense involves all our activities; it encompasses our work and our play; it is meant to include our children and our senior citizens; it is to be our way of life, for only by such efforts will our independent nation develop as quickly as it must.

Maximum effort in work must, other things being equal, result in more efficient production and consequent lower costs. This effort prescribes that labour should receive its reward, and just as important, it gives to labour the dignity it deserves.

When we give of our best at play and at work, we reap the benefits of greater personal satisfaction and higher attainment. Our moments of leisure, therefore, add to the fullness of our own lives and the life of our whole nation.

The theorists propose principles on which wages and pensions should be based and they all seem to seek some justification for their proposals in ideas of what is "fair" or what is "just". "Fairness" and "justice" depend on many factors. They depend on our needs, on the value of the duties performed, on the ability of those concerned to pay, and very important too—they depend on the level of one's production. When we extend our productive capacity to its fullest therefore, we are at the same time laying the foundation for a reward that is adequate for our needs and which meets the demands of society.

Increased satisfaction of our personal needs, and fulfillment of the aspirations of society are expressions of our ever rising standard of living. The comfort and security of our homes, the effectiveness of our schools, and the general conditions of labour, illustrate that we in Trinidad and Tobago are in step with the most advanced thought and best experience in the civilized world. Moreover, these benefits should be more deeply enjoyed in the pride of knowing that we have played a full part in the production of this better life for our nation.

When the Idea of Production is sufficiently embedded in our thinking and our daily activities; when this Idea is reflected in our whole lives, then can we hold up our heads high, knowing that no one can do better, for we have done our best.

## TOLERANCE

TOLERANCE is another virtue which is indispensable in the citizens of a nation such as ours, who are of many different racial origins or hold different religious or political beliefs.

Now, to practise tolerance does not mean that you must shrug your shoulders and accept moral standards or forms of behaviour which your religious training or your conscience tells you are wrong. It does not mean that you must tolerate slackness or slovenliness in any form. You must, at all times, have a clear idea of right and wrong, good and bad, and must at all times accept only the right and the good and reject the wrong and the bad.

But at the same time, you must remember that the essence of democracy is the right of each individual to hold whatever religious faith he wishes and to practise it ; to hold whatever political opinion he wishes and to express it.

Each member of the community is equal in the sight of the law to each other member, regardless of social class, racial origin, political or religious persuasion.

It follows then that though you may feel strongly that your own views and opinions are right, another is as entitled as you are to feel the same way about his own views and opinions. You may consider him foolish, you may disagree completely with him, but you must remember always that he is entitled to find your views foolish and to disagree completely with them.

To be tolerant means to agree to disagree. This is normal behaviour among members of a family, and must be normal behaviour among members of a community if it is to be a healthy and a happy one.

In a family some may prefer Dougla to Sparrow, or Casuals to Malvern, but this does not prevent them from living together harmoniously.

In a community the same thing applies, but it is a much more difficult affair, especially in a community such as our new nation. This is so because there is much more scope for disagreement than among members of one family. There is bound to be more room for different shades of opinion and of colour, different religious beliefs and different opinions on political and social problems.

That is why we must all make a conscious effort to be tolerant of the views of others, so that we can all pull together in spite of any differences, so that we can all live together as one healthy, happy and harmonious family.

In this way, by exercising tolerance, we can set an example to older and bigger nations. We can show the world how one nation, consisting of peoples of various origins and religions can be a healthy and happy nation.

Let us be that guiding light,