

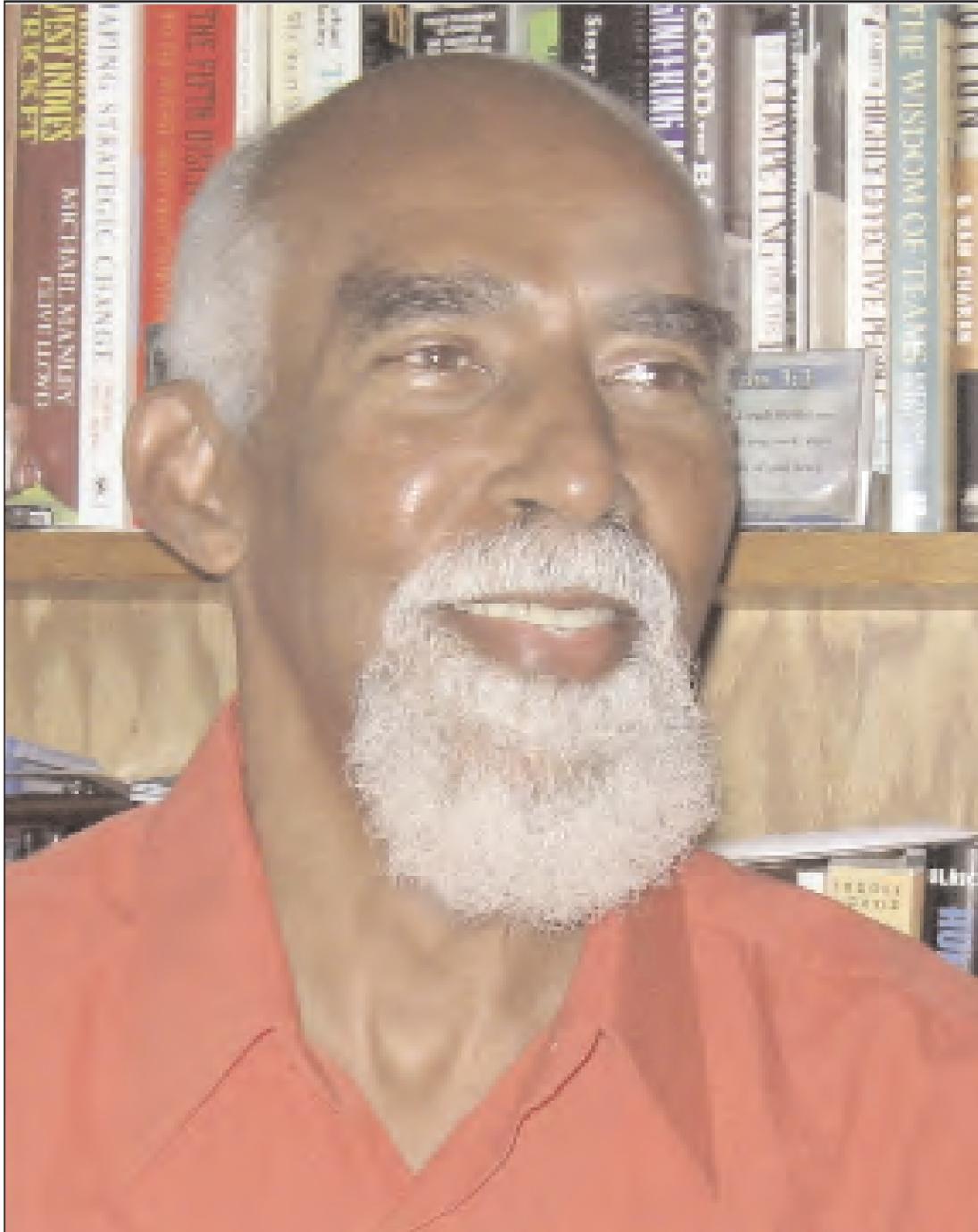
The West Indian American

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Jim Z. Daniels

Reflections

When I met Dr. Edgar Johnson in 1991, I had already resided in the Hartford area 23 years. He called my office at The Hartford and asked to meet with me. I cannot remember what reason he offered to justify our getting together, but whatever it was, we met.

As we sat in the company's cafeteria, he explained he was leading an effort to launch a newspaper directed at the English-speaking residents in the Greater Hartford area. I remember him saying it was an attempt to respond to a feeling within the Caribbean community that the West Indians were not leveraging their potential in seeing to it that their interests and needs were receiving the requisite attention by the city's leadership that was warranted.

As I sat and listened to his rationale, I remember thinking that this was nothing short of a pipe dream. Not because I believed his plan was half-baked, or that he needed to spend more time in getting to know the community. He, in my mind was on a pathway that would lead to his days buried in frustration.

It was Fidel Castro who said at a time when Jamaica had just received its independence from Great Britain and its leaders were playing with Marxist philosophy, that one reason he did not pursue co-opting the Jamaican people was because it would be like herding cats. And while I am conscious of the risk of stereotyping, it is a suitable description. But the good man along with his wife,

Carol, and their first child, Crista persisted. Gretchen and Joette came later.

To this day, I have never asked Edgar Johnson how he came to identify me as someone who he could approach with the proposal he presented to me in the cafeteria. I had been involved publicly in various ventures in the Hartford Area.

While I was with the Travelers Insurance Company, I was the first loaned executive to the city of Hartford. At that time, the senior corporate leadership believed the city needed help to achieve a certain satisfactory level of efficiency and effectiveness. I had prior to this assignment, received the Master of Public Administration degree from the University of Hartford.

At the end of a two-year stint, I was hired by Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute at Hartford as their first Registrar and Director of Student Services. But before I left the Travelers, they invited me to pose for a series of photographs they intended to include in a national advertising campaign. I was the first person of color to be so presented to the public by the company.

Edgar Johnson asked me if I would help his ambition to see the people from the Caribbean acting with vitality and a sense of common interest because much good would flow from such an achievement. They had made the Hartford area their home.

After much thought and consideration, I later suggested I would write a column on aspects of corporate life here in the US and directed to the Caribbean folks that would be helpful as they transitioned to life in the US. The column was

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Barbados Becomes A Republic And Parts Ways With The Queen

By John Perkins

After 396 years, in a midnight ceremony on November 30, 2021, a new era began in Barbados after the official removal of Queen Elizabeth II as its head of state. Barbados' transition to a Republic means the Queen remains head of state in just 15 nations: Australia, Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Canada, Grenada, Jamaica, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Solomon Islands, The Bahamas, Tuvalu, and the UK.

Dame Sandra Mason, 72, the island's first female Governor-General since 2018, was named as President-elect of the nation following a vote in parliament in October 2021. She now replaces the Queen as the head of state. "Our country must dream big dreams and fight to

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In an overnight ceremony in the capital, Bridgetown, Dame Sandra Mason, fourth from right, was sworn in as President. Prime Minister Mia Mottley, Sir Garfield Sobers, Barbadian singer Rihanna and the Prince of Wales, attended the event, which coincided with the country's 55th anniversary of Independence.

Reflections

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called, "The Workplace and You." As the months ticked on into years, I realized that a new need was emerging and so the column morphed into tackling issues that were receiving some national prominence that may impact the Caribbean community

here in the US and even in the Caribbean region. The newspaper became the organizing medium and Edgar began to see his hope for the community coalesce around what was achievable.

It coincided with the rise in influence of the Puerto Rican

residents and eventually there emerged a sense of common purpose, as Johnson became increasingly the go-to person on all things West Indian. I was often amazed at the names of people he carried around in his head whenever a source or a contact was requested but nothing was of more importance than raising a standard of educational services of excellence. It was his enduring mantra and as he persisted,

and vigorously so, the West Indian community came to believe and accept his leadership.

Johnson's leadership emerged and was sustained within an organization named the Center for Urban Research, Education and Training with *The West Indian America* as its voice and the cement within the West Indian American community.

It was a fitting attribute paid him by former superintendent of Bloomfield's Public School System, Dr. Paul Copes, that Johnson's credibility was built around his advocacy for a quality educational experience for all children in the region and not just the Johnson children, on whose behalf was a mightily advocate, and not just the West Indian children. He, however, placed first things first and that meant the Johnsons would lead by example.

The three Johnson children, Crista, Gretchen, and Joette have achieved stellar accolades in academic and professional spheres

and that by parental example with Carol Johnson, attaining the Doctor of Educational Leadership from the University of Hartford as a bookend to Edgar's PhD from Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. My voluntary contribution over the 30 years of this enduring community's voice and presence was kept going and has been exceptionally rewarding because of the examples I saw in how with persistence, purity of purpose and prayer, the Greater Hartford community is a richer and more vibrant region because of the Johnsons. It has been of inestimable satisfaction for me to travel down this road today.

Kudos Jim. Thanks for your extraordinary dedication in contributing monthly articles in *The West Indian American*. Over the years, you have drawn quite a readership and have made quite a difference in changing lives. Thanks from the bottom of our hearts. Our prayers are always with you.

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realize them," the former Governor-General told those gathered for the ceremony.

Buckingham Palace says it respects the decision of Barbados, but beneath the public statements emphasizing enduring friendships; there will be some unease. The Prince of Wales flew into Barbados for the handover ceremony in National Heroes Square as a representative of the Queen but also in his role as her successor as head of the Commonwealth. Barbados will remain in the Commonwealth.

In his speech, Prince Charles acknowledged the "appalling atrocity of slavery" Barbados suffered. The new era for Barbados ends Britain's centuries of influence, including more than 200 years when the island was a hub for the transatlantic slave trade.

Speaking as the guest of honor at the event, Prince Charles reiterated the continuing ties between the two nations despite the constitutional status change. He described the moment as a new beginning before being awarded the prestigious Order of Freedom of Barbados by the new president. The 95-year-old Queen sent the island her "warmest good wishes" for "happiness, peace and prosperity in the future" and said the nation holds a "special place" in her heart.

Rihanna, Barbados's most famous citizen, in 2018 was appointed an official ambassador for culture and youth. She has never softened her Bajan accent and her music while tapping into pop, R&B and dance music. She has remained connected to her Caribbean heritage, and is declared a national hero of Barbados, as the country celebrates its transition to an Independent Republic. "May you continue to shine like a diamond," Prime Minister Mia Mottley said at an investiture ceremony for the pop singer, fashion icon and entrepreneur, in reference to her 2012 hit

Diamonds.

There are no plans to change the national symbols: the flag, the coat of arms, the national pledge, and the national anthem. But the terms "royal" and "crown" will be removed from official terminology. The Royal Barbados Police Force will be the Barbados Police Service: "crown lands" will become "state lands."

On October 20, 2022, in a joint sitting of parliament, Prime Minister Mia Mottley described the move to a republic as a "seminal moment," which will see Barbados fully leave its colonial past behind." She declared: "We have reached the day that this becomes a reality, as Barbados embarks on its new path, cutting the umbilical cord that bound it to its former colonial master, the United Kingdom."

Barbados was one of England's first slave colonies. English settlers first occupied the island in 1627, and under British control became a sugar plantation economy using enslaved people brought in from Africa. Slavery was abolished in Barbados in 1834 and the island became fully independent in 1966. The birth of the republic, 55 years to the day since Barbados declared independence, unclasps almost all the colonial bonds that have kept the tiny island tied to England since an English ship claimed it for King James I in 1625.

Barbadian leaders had mooted a Republic since the run-up to independence in 1966, when the island's first Prime Minister Errol Barrow told a British Minister his nation would "not loiter on colonial property past closing time."

But in a world still shaped by colonialism that has proved to be a fraught task that successive Barbadian governments have avoided, seeing it either as divisive, a distraction, or a source of potential disquiet in Britain from where more than a third of tourists to the island hail. It took until October 2020 for Mottley's government to announce



To signify the official change of power, a final salute was made to the British monarchy and the Royal Standard flag was lowered and replaced

the transition, shortly before she presided over a ceremony to remove a statue of the British naval hero Horatio Nelson from a city square, over his defense of the colonial slave trade.

But some Barbadians argue there are more pressing national issues, including economic turmoil caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exposed over-reliance on tourism and which is dependent on British visitors. Unemployment is at nearly 16 percent up from nine percent in recent years, despite sharply increased government borrowing to fund public sector projects and create jobs.

As part of the transition, there were ceremonial activities in National Heroes Square in the capital city, Bridgetown, but one notable absence was Lord Nelson. For 208 years his statue stood in that square but in 2020 it was ceremoniously removed. As a result of the *Black Lives Matter* movement and the reawakening of the citizens consciousness.

During the ceremonies, the culture, history, and achieve-

ments of Barbados were celebrated with music, dance, and a number of poets and activists who criticized the island's colonial past, and a call for Barbados to embrace the opportunities of becoming a republic.

Barbados will remain within the Commonwealth despite becoming a Republic. This means that it is a sovereign state run by governments

where the power is held by the people and elected representatives. These countries tend to either be run by democracy or a mixture of democracy with oligarchy or autocracy. Modern republics have no monarch or head of state, and the country is considered a public matter rather than being the property of a ruler.



Statue of Nelson stands with its plinth vandalized after the Barbados government said it wished to become a republic



Women dancing during a cultural presentation at the official opening of the Golden Square Freedom Park in Bridgetown, Barbados on November 27, 2021



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