

THE CHALLENGE FOR YOUTH IN A DEVELOPING BAHAMAS

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Greetings

In 1972, Prime Minister the Rt. Hon Lynden Pindling and his Government implanted a seed into our national consciousness, and a year later, on July 10, 1973, a country was born. It was a rough pregnancy. There were those who felt, rather strongly, that the baby should be aborted. But the proud parents of this experience insisted that this child should be carried to full term. The delivery was flawless.

Indeed, The Bahamas, although quite small, has proven to be a powerful baby. Now in its ninth year, the time has come for a pediatric checkup.

Results of the checkup are bitter-sweet. The baby's bones, tourist, shows increasingly good signs. Its brain, banking, shows signs of confidence; the country's limbs, wholesale/retail trade, is in fair condition; its kidneys, manufacturing, is significantly underdeveloped; its heart, agriculture and fisheries, is developing rapidly and shows enormous potential for further growth.

The country's pulse, peace and tranquility, shows abnormal signs given the alarmingly high crime rate. The nation's intestines, the family unit, shows signs of rupture. The country's lifeblood, the youth, that group of Bahamians aged 14-30, is for the most part moving purposefully within the system.

This nine year-old baby, contrary to what many earlier predicted, now has its own flag carrier, its own T.V. Station, its own College, its own Central and Development banks; its own Defence Force; its own Governor-General; its own people manning

the top posts in government, industry and banking.

Never before have Bahamians been as educated they are today; never before have we enjoyed the high affluence that we bask in today; never before have we been able to travel as we can today; never before have we had the ready means of mass communications that we have today.

Despite these vital signs to our national life, all is not well; there remains a poison disease. Never before have we been as alienated as we are today; never before have cults and subcultural movements challenged the very fiber of our national existence as is the case today; never before have we questioned the existence of God as we do today; never before have we lived in fear as we do today.

Surely, when we consider the crime rate and the changing complexion of crime, it's just cause for fear:

- a crime occurs in The Bahamas approximately every 1.3 hours.
- roughly 33 crimes occur in the Bahamas every day.
- a crime against the person is committed roughly three times a day.
- a crime against property is committed roughly 26 times a day.
- roughly one out of every 72 Bahamians will be the victim of theft this year.
- about one out of every 18 houses will be broken into this year.

- close to one out of every 300 Bahamians will be the victim of burglary this year.
 - one out of every 1,000 Bahamians will be seriously wounded this year.
 - roughly one out of every 6,000 Bahamians will be the victim of a crime this year.
 - about seven out of every ten crimes are committed by a youth.
- Youths are increasingly turning away from hands-on trades and professions. Many, perhaps most of the young people seated here tonight, refuse to see dignity or prestige in becoming butchers, bakers and candlestick makers. The youth of this country are caught up in the white-collar syndrome. They all want to become doctors, lawyers, teachers, accountants, managers, and politicians.

As if the abovementioned statistics are not frightening enough, it must be remembered that in 1978 - 79, 800,000 pounds of marijuana were seized in The Bahamas, valued at \$160 million. When you add to this the fact that 1,247 pounds of cocaine were also seized in The Bahamas, it can be easily deduced that \$200 million worth of drugs were seized in The Bahamas that year. If it is true that the amount of drugs seized in The Bahamas that year accounted for a mere 25% of the drugs that passed through The Bahamas, then it is easy to conclude that the value of the drug trafficking market in The Bahamas far exceeds that of the national budget. Talk about frightening! Now that's frightening, even scary!

Yes friends, if the present crime trend continues, one out of every two of you seated here will be the victim of a crime between now and 1992.

There are, of course, other serious social problems that grip this nation in this, its ninth year of Independence:

- roughly one out of every three young ladies seated here tonight and throughout The Bahamas will have a child by the time she is twenty; and then of course, there is perhaps an even greater problem:

- Finally, there is the problem of over-dependence on the Government; indeed this may be the most serious problem of all. We depend on government to solve the crime problem, yet we purchase "hot" merchandise; we depend on Government to solve the unemployment problem, yet we are not prepared to go into fishing, farming and light industries although there is virtually 100% employment opportunities in these fields; we blame government for a decline in tourism without considering the state of the U.S. economy or our nasty attitudes toward tourists who come to these shores; we depend on government to solve the garbage problem, yet we heave cans and bottles from our cars almost without thinking about it. We blame government for the educational problem and the fact that some high school graduates cannot read, yet we, as parents, do not insist on our children doing their homework every night. We blame government for the demise of moral authority among youth, yet the youth see religious leaders and parents lead contradictory lives every day. In short, we want the government to solve problems that can only be solved through the united efforts of a proud and patriotic citizenry.

Against the backdrop of these pressing national concerns, youths are being challenged to carve out a noble, purposeful, contributory existence. Yes, the new generation is challenged to make this country a saner, calmer, cleaner, richer place. The new generation is being called upon to view Government not as the big problem solver but rather as the entity that provides the atmosphere for the new generation to solve its own problems.

The term "New Generation" has become a cliché because it has not been analyzed and explored for its proper meaning. There is nothing unusual or unique, as such, about a new generation. It is simply the end product of a generation of young people who, by timing of birth, have come of age. So, each "new generation" is new by birth and without effort. It is something with which they had nothing to do and about which they can do nothing.

The uniqueness of each generation lies in what it does - what responsibilities it either assumes or shirks. The greatness of a generation is determined by the real needs that are served. Everybody cannot be famous, because everybody cannot be well-known. But everybody can be great, because everybody can serve. Serving the needs of its day will make this generation not just a new but a greater generation. The challenge of this generation is to protect the gains of the past and close the moral, educational and economic gaps in our beloved society. In the process of closing these gaps, I see eight challenges:

1. THE FIRST CHALLENGE IS THAT OF INNOVATION

I mentioned earlier that far too many young Bahamians are grooming themselves and/or deluding themselves into thinking that white-collar jobs constitute the path to success.

Little do these youth realize that over the next ten years, there will only be 100 new professionally qualified accountants; there will only be nine hundred new teachers; there will only be 100 new lawyers; there will only be 50 new professional engineers; and there will only be about 60 new medical doctors. So when you add these white-collar, status-oriented professions together, you arrive at a figure of 1,210 new job placements over the next ten years. During this same period, 1982 - 1992, an estimated 45,000 young Bahamians will have completed high school or college. What will be the fate of the remaining 44,000 youth who are not among the doctors, teachers, professional accountants, engineers and lawyers?

Roughly 4,000 will enter the work force as secretaries, clerks, junior accountants and bookkeepers.

About 2,000 young Bahamians will be absorbed over the next ten years in the helping professions as nurses, social workers, police officers and librarians. About 3,000 young Bahamians will be absorbed in the direct sales field and another 4,000 will be absorbed in the tourism related sector. We have now accounted for 14,200 or 30% of the youth who will have moved from the ranks of high school or college student to worker over the next ten years. But you ask "what about the remaining 70%, what happens to them?"

Well, the construction trade will absorb roughly 3,000 new workers over the next ten years, another 4-6,000 youths will enter the work force engaged in all manner of jobs from cashiers to cooks to semi-professional workers both in the private and public sectors. And then, of course, 5-7,000 young Bahamians will be unemployed in 1992 thus leaving some 15,000 high school and college graduates unaccounted for. Many of these youths will be absorbed into Government's proposed National Youth Service, but the point is that about one out of every three youths in this country will not find a job in traditional areas during the years leading up to the 1990's.

What will these young people do? Where will you fit in this jigsaw puzzle? Is there any hope? Former U.S. President, Franklin Roosevelt said that "there is a mysterious cycle in human events. To some generations, much is given, of other generations, much is expected." Ours, my dear friends, is a generation of which both are true - we were given much, and of us much is expected. We do not have, and we must not promise instant answers. We do not have, and we must not promise cures without cost. We do not have and we must not promise success without sacrifice.

If we are to effectively prepare ourselves today for leadership tomorrow, we must be innovative. We must realize that we all cannot be bankers, lawyers, doctors, accountants, engineers, and teachers. There is ample room in the employment sector for young farmers, fishermen and manufacturers. Last year, tourists spent \$600 million in The Bahamas but because our manufacturing and production levels are so low, we pumped about 70% of this sum, or some \$402 million back into foreign countries in order to provide the goods and services tourists require. How long can this go on?

We now import 80% of our food and at least 60-70% of our other vital products. To those youths who are innovative, the economic potentials in this country are staggering. If we can reduce imports by 50% we will save \$200 million a year. If a group of youths were to pool their resources and decide to go into manufacturing linens they stand to make \$3 million a year. If a group of youths pooled their resources and decided to manufacture toothpicks they can earn \$¼ million a year. I can go on. But you have gotten the point!

It is crystal clear that by 1992, one out of every three high school or college graduates must be engaged in work that today is either scarce or non-existent. Our economic future will depend largely on how innovative we become.

Really and truly, the brightest employment prospects for young Bahamians are in the light industries field, computer sciences and agriculture and fisheries. Either we prepare to enter these fields or we join the unemployment line. There is no other choice!

2. MOTIVATION - we must accept the fact that there are some things that technology just cannot do, or cannot do quickly or economically. Technology cannot change our habits or values for us. Those decisions lie in our hands. While the young pessimists see the difficulty in every opportunity, the majority of us, as young optimists, must see the opportunity in each difficulty. We must energize, mobilize

and organize ourselves such that we become prepared to meet the awesome challenges that beckon us. We must somehow inject into our veins a new sense of purpose, a new commitment to ourselves that will lead to a renewed commitment to the country.

3. ORGANIZATION - Young people must band together to achieve their goals. The establishment of youth agriculture and manufacturing cooperatives would be a good way to begin.
4. UNIFICATION - Black and white youths, rich and poor youths, educated and illiterate youths, must unite; they must come together for the common good, in order to agree upon and pursue common goals. The racial and class divisions in this society must be tackled head-on by those youths who envision a nobler Bahamas.
5. EDUCATION - Educated youths must humbly hold their knowledge out and let others light their candles to it. Young Bahamians must know that they are not so dumb that they cannot learn if they study, but they are not so smart that they will learn if they do not study. The purpose of life is to develop one's potential to his/her highest capacity. Young Bahamians must learn that if they sow short-term pleasure they will reap long-term pain. But if they sow short-term pain, they can reap long-term pleasure.

The young generation must convince itself that if their minds can conceive it and their hearts believe it, then they can achieve it. They must know that it is not their aptitude but their attitude that will determine their altitude. They must learn that their minds are pearls and they can learn anything in the world. They must learn that if they want to get a good job or enter college, they must pass an aptitude, not a "rapititude" test.

Young Bahamians must know that in The Bahamas today, there is one Bahamian dentist for every 11,000 Bahamians; one Bahamian Medical Doctor for every 4,000 Bahamians, and one Bahamian Ph.D. for every 12,000 Bahamians. So the need for highly

educated Bahamians is enormous. Despite this need for highly trained Bahamians, we must ensure that the fields we enter are relevant to the nation's needs. By 1992 a Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science, Agriculture Science, Engineering, Accounting, or Oceanography will be more valuable than a Master's Degree in Education, Business Administration or Political Science.

6. RELOCATION - The youth of this country must commit themselves to building the whole Bahamas. This means that many of us will have to leave Nassau and go to the Family Islands to exploit the land and the sea. The Family Islands will not develop in a vacuum. Our generation must do all within its power to divert investments from Nassau to the other islands.
7. CONSERVATION - Youths must play an active part in keeping this country clean, and in preserving the natural beauty that this country affords. Schools and churches should establish voluntary student conservation corps programmes whereby students will play a vital part in keeping their surrounding communities clean. This will, no doubt, engender a new sense of national pride.
8. COOPERATION - I am concerned about the development of a national mood of withdrawal and even selfishness. There appears to be a preoccupation with private pursuits and private gains at the expense of public purposes. We have forgotten that mutual sacrifices for mutual benefit is the noblest act of all. The challenge to youth, then, is to re-instill the trust, replenish the pride and renew the faith that we once had in the power of our collective efforts.

In addition to these eight major challenges, there are certain specific issues that also clamour for our attention. Uppermost among these, is the question of crime. Crime in The Bahamas is a cancerous disease that must receive major corrective surgery. If we continue to apply bandaids to this national sickness rather than performing open heart surgery, we will all become victims of this scourge. We might all begin this surgery by refusing to purchase "hot" merchandise. We must never forget that if a

criminal steals from John to sell to you, he is just as prepared to steal from you to sell to John. If we were to stop purchasing "hot" merchandise, we will reduce the crime rate by about 30%.

And then, of course, the family must reassert and re-establish itself as the foundation of life, the foundation of attitudes, the foundation of habits, the foundation of morality, the foundation of self-respect. Surely, we live in increasingly materialistic times but unless we balance the pursuit after the almighty dollar with proper, time-consuming child-bearing practices, some of our young brothers will come to haunt us, not as ghosts and spirits but as warmblooded weapon-toting, violent criminals.

The responsibility for change lies with us. We, the youth, must begin with ourselves, teaching ourselves not to close our minds prematurely to new ideas. We must ignore the idea-assassins who rush forward to kill any new idea on the grounds that it won't work although they've never tried it. Our answer is the country's hope; if we do not have the answers, the country has no hope. The cruelties and obstacles of this swiftly changing society will not yield to obsolete dogmas and outworn slogans. It cannot be moved by those who cling to a present that is already dying, who prefer the illusion of security to the excitement and danger that come with even the most peaceful progress.

There is, said an Italian philosopher, nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success than introducing a new order of things. Yet this young generation of Bahamians is called upon to do just this. The road is strewn with many dangers.

First, there's the danger of futility, the feeling that there is nothing one person can do to improve things and make an impact. Those of you who feel this way should remember that youths have shone brightly throughout history.

- Thomas Jefferson wrote the U.S. Declaration of Independence at age 32.
- A young woman reclaimed the territory of France.
- A young Italian explorer discovered the New World.
- Alexander the Great ascended the throne at 20 and conquered the world at 33.
- Julius Caesar at age 30 captured 800 cities, conquered 300 nations and defeated 3 million men.
- Lafayette was made General of the French Army at 20.
- Charlamagne was Master of France and Germany at 30, and;
- Jesus Christ revolutionized the world at 33.

But say, they were not Bahamians, what have young Bahaminas done? Who among us can we look up to?

- Darrel Rolle became a Member of Parliament at 26 and a Cabinet Minister at 29.
- Franklyn Wilson became a Certified Public Accountant at 22.
- Alfred Sears, a Former Boys Industrial School inmate, is now, at 29, a University Professor.
- Cordell Thompson, at age 26, was editor of Jet Magazine.
- Dr. Leon Gibson, at 33, is consultant and Department Head at the largest Black Hospital in the U.S.
- Bernadette Christie became a Certified Public Accountant in her 20's.
- Margaret Stubbs became a professor at the University of Liberia at 30.
- Norris Stubbs, at 30, became professor of Physics at Columbia University.
- Lynden O. Pindling became leader of the P.L.P. at age 26.

These youths were movers and shakers, and that is our great challenge today. Other obstacles that challenge us include expediency, timidity and comfort. We must never allow these to get the better of us.

Our future may lie beyond our vision but it is not completely beyond our control. Only the work of our hands, matched to reason and principle will determine our destiny.

It was the generation of Lynden O. Pindling, Milo B. Butler and A.D. Hanna that gave birth to this young country. It's up to us, the young generation, to give this nation growth. To paraphrase Sir Winston Churchill, we must conduct ourselves such that when this country has its 1,000th Birthday, men will still say that it was during our generation that this country had its finest hour.

And so the challenges that face young Bahamians are gigantic. But,

If you can keep your head when life's temptations are bidding you to heed their beck and call,

If you can dream and have high expectations
Yet not mind working hard to win it all ...

If you can take advice from those who love you
Yet learn to make decisions for yourself,
If you can cheer as others pass above you,
And put your disappointments on the shelf ...

If you can work and not make toil your master,
If you gain and not make gold, your aim,
If, whether you meet triumph or disaster,
You can be proud of how you "played the game" ...

If you can smile when odds are all against you
Determined to try even harder still,
If when your friends have convinced you that you can't
You buckle down and say "I will"

If friends count more with you than wealth and power
And you're at home alike with great and small
If you can know success' finest hour
Yet place respect and honour over all...

If you can put your heart into attaining
The goal you seek, and do your best each day
Yet, without hesitating or complaining,
Help others gladly as you go your way ...

If you can live the Golden Rule each minute,
And shape your course according to God's
plan,
Yours is the world - and everything that's
in it
And, what is more - you'll really have a
plan.

Young people, the challenges are great. The road
is long, the cross is heavy but the reward is oh,
so sweet. The country needs young people that
will force it to develop. It needs young people
that will make it a cleaner, safer, bigger,
better Bahamas. John Kennedy said it best: the
question tonight is not what can The Bahamas
do for me; the question is what can I do for
The Bahamas? Where will you be in 1992?
Where will the country be in 1992? Can the
country count on you? If it can, please join
with me and say

I am somebody
I must get involved
It is my civic duty

I must contribute . . .
It is my calling

I must be of service . . .
It is my Christian duty

I must excel
It is my birthright

I must set an example
It is my moral obligation

I am somebody
I am somebody

WELL RIGHT ON!