

**University of The Bahamas
Charter Day & Inauguration of Rodney D. Smith as
First President**

**Thomas A. Robinson National Stadium
Thursday 10th November 2016**

Remarks by Alfred M. Sears, QC

George Lamming, the Barbadian novelist, captures the unique role and peculiar responsibility of the Caribbean intellectual and by extension the university in Caribbean society as follows:

“I do not think there has been anything in human history quite like the meeting of Africa, Asia, and Europe in this American Archipelago we call the Caribbean. But it is so recent since we assumed responsibility for our destiny, that the antagonistic weight of the past is felt as an inhibiting menace. And that is the most urgent task and the greatest intellectual challenge: how to control the burden of this history and incorporate it into our collective sense of the future.”

The the launch of the University of The Bahamas on this Charter Day, The Bahamas advances “this most urgent task and great intellectual challenge to control the burden of our history and forge our collective sense of a future made more purposeful, liberating and free through the excellent teaching, research and service of the University of The Bahamas.

It is not enough for us to do business as usual – a mere survival path. I say, on this Charter Day, that we should have the courage to define our collective sense of our preferred future. Though we must strive to maintain and protect the ordinary routines that flow from basic decency and social cohesion and the meaning of our daily lives, we must not allow ourselves to be content with the ordinary condition. And this is more than a call for us to take control of the forces and means of production using the tools of the academy, though, to find true economic empowerment we must. No, I am speaking to you from the heart about the elevation of our peoples' spirit and the further ennobling of the Bahamian character, which brings me to state what I believe is the grand potential of our beloved university – to be the principal instrument in our nation to unleash the creative imagination and intellect of our people through the effect of the expectation – if it be an expectation we truly embrace - that this is what a Bahamian university has the potential to achieve.

Undoubtedly, we will expect higher standards in teaching, research, innovation, entrepreneurship and advisory service and outreach, administration, and the student life experience that comes with taking the next step here before us in the evolution of the national academy – higher standards that we expect will expand our economy by creating more robust cultural, maritime, technology, agricultural sectors; more accountable governance structures and national culture of respect, tolerance and excellence. These bold steps will also create new streams of revenue for the University to secure its core values of autonomy, academic freedom and shared governance

But I want you to reach with me for something more, which, yes, you may regard as ethereal. However, I believe it is this

ethereal goal, which will make all the difference in *our* world. Our challenge then should be this: for the University to serve as a portal to the higher experience that accompanies rational and creative fullness – the ennobling experience that befalls a mind when that mind encounters itself from within fully intellectually engaged and freed from mental baggage and hegemonic barricades. Learning and the quest for new knowledge and ways of expression in the academy must be aimed at nothing short of switching on the full beam of the Bahamian intellect and imagination, for nothing less than the vibrancy of the life of our nation is at stake.

As ~~our~~ our national public university, with a rich reservoir of intellectual resources, you must help us to reconcile the legacy of our history of genocide of indigenous people, the Lucayans; centuries of enslavement of African peoples; indentureship of Asian peoples; and legally enforced apartheid and European supremacy, which has produced continuing self doubt, contempt and mutual suspicions amongst Caribbean peoples and mono-cultural economies dominated by foreign ownership and dysfunctional governance structures. I believe that the University of The Bahamas must, through its scholarship, teaching and intervention in civil society, challenge the euro-centric orthodoxies and help our societies to create new narratives, informed by the resistance of our people to maintain their humanity under difficult circumstances; and create new industries based on local imagination and ownership.

I can hear someone say, well it sounds like Mr. Sears wants to transport us to some elite place. Not the case. Indeed, the social transformative potential of the academy can only be realized through open access. The opportunity should be given to all. Not only should free tertiary education be embraced by

the Government and the Academy as a national strategic objective to rescue the country, but the entire educational system needs to be reconfigured to ensure that every citizen can meet the admission standards of the tertiary-education system. And in this regard, I commend the University and the Government for taking the initial steps in this direction with the successful implementation of the Summer Bridging Programme. But there is so much more we could be doing in this regard if we get serious about the transformative power of an enlivening education system. A high school leaving certificate should no longer be seen as the minimum requirement of an educated citizen. It must now be the tertiary-level qualification. And, ideally, in our tertiary education system, the function of animating the mind of the citizen will reinforce a similar objective of the primary and secondary school system when that system is revamped to achieve the objective of producing graduates whose mental effervescence is limitless.

I believe in the power of the Bahamian academy to produce citizens who will secure the national development agenda. Of this, I am sure. More importantly, however, once the mind of our people is switched into high gear, the experience itself will give direction, meaning and produce social attachment. Everyday I see around me the effects of wretched despair in the lives of citizens, especially the young, devoid of purpose. I cannot imagine a higher calling of the academy than to work to counter the forces of nihilism in our midst by enlivening the intellectual life of our community.

But, for the academy to work, to free the minds of our people, we must first free the academy. It must be given the space to be itself. It must become the protected refuge of critical self- and social reflection, experimentation, innovation, unbridled

thinking, intellectual rebelliousness, and the wild imagination if these are some of the conditions under which mental flourishing in our milieu must take place. No doubt the academy as intellectual and creative refuge will come under attack. Internal social, political, economic interests and external hegemonic cultural forces will aim at directing it, but we must work to strengthen and defend the autonomy of the academy for only then can it respond to the pressing conditions of our times and the needs of the society in which it is embedded as a catalyst for setting the intellectual and creative life of our beloved community on fire.

As the immediate past Chairman of the College of The Bahamas Council, it has been a privilege, beyond words, to help lead the academy to this point along the path to becoming a university. From the depths of my heart I thank all past and present Council members, faculty, students, staff members, administrators, transition committees, government officials, public servants, friends of the College and the citizen-tax payer who have brought us to this historic day. Let us embrace our sacred responsibility to extend this academy into the future to overcome the antagonistic weight of the past and build a global brand of self-affirming excellence of teaching, innovation, research and service.

Thank you.